



Spotlight on Iran

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Overview

- ▶ On January 12, the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hossein Amir Abdollahian, arrived for a visit in Lebanon during which he met with senior Lebanese government officials, alongside the secretary generals of Hezbollah and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Following his visit to Lebanon, the foreign minister traveled to Syria, where he met with senior Syrian regime officials, chief among them President Assad, and with representatives of various Palestinian factions based in Damascus.
- ▶ On January 23, the chief of staff of the Armed Forces of Iran met in Tehran with the Syrian minister of defense. The two discussed the persistent Israeli strikes in Syria, regional developments, and the military cooperation between the two countries.
- ▶ Sources monitoring international maritime traffic reported that two Iranian oil tankers sailing from Iran are en route to the Banyas Port in Syria, having passed through the Suez Canal. Meanwhile, the Secretary General of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, declared that the United States is preventing the Lebanese government from agreeing to Iran's offer to provide fuel to Lebanon to assist it in solving the country's energy crisis.
- ▶ In mid-January, the commander of the Qods Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) arrived in Baghdad to participate in the funeral of the widow of a prominent Shia cleric. His visit occurred against the backdrop of the visit of the White House coordinator for Middle East and North African affairs to Baghdad, and an upcoming trip of the Iraqi prime minister to the United States.

Iranian Involvement in Syria and Lebanon

- ▶ On January 12, the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hossein Amir Abdollahian, arrived for a visit to Lebanon during which he met with senior Lebanese government officials, including the interim Prime Minister, Najib Miqati; the Speaker of Parliament, Nabih Berri;

and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Bu Habib. During a press conference with his Lebanese counterpart, Abdollahian reported that they discussed ways to bolster ties between the two countries in the sectors of trade, economy and tourism. The Iranian foreign minister stressed that Iran supports the “resistance in Lebanon and Palestine against the acts of aggression of the Zionist regime,” adding that Lebanon’s security and progress are an indispensable part of the security and progress of Iran and the entire region. Abdollahian claimed that Iran does not meddle in Lebanon’s domestic affairs and calls for dialogue between all political currents in Lebanon to allow the formation of a new government. Addressing the electricity crisis in Lebanon, the foreign minister stated that Iran is willing to build power stations in Lebanon, in coordination with the Lebanese government. Abdollahian added that Iran welcomes the dialogue between Syria and Turkey and believes that it will serve the interests of both countries (ISNA, January 13).



The joint press conference of the Iranian and Syrian ministers of foreign affairs. Source: ISNA, January 13, 2023

- ▶ While on his visit to Beirut, Abdollahian also met with the Secretary General of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah. During the meeting, the two discussed the latest developments and political situation in Lebanon, Palestine, and the region. Additionally, the two spoke about the threats emerging from the “formation of the government of the corrupt and extremists in the enemy entity [Israel]” and discussed the balance of power of the “resistance axis” considering regional and international developments (Tasnim, January 13).
- ▶ At the end of his visit to Lebanon, Abdollahian continued to Damascus. During his visit, he met with senior regime officials, chief among them President Bashar al-Assad. At a press conference with his Syrian counterpart, Faysal Mekdad, Abdollahian reported that he discussed with President Assad bilateral, regional and international matters, and that Assad invited the Iranian President, Ebrahim Raisi, for a visit to Damascus. The Iranian minister of

foreign affairs added that he discussed with the Syrian foreign minister ways to expand trade and economic ties between the two nations, and that both agreed to update, in the near future, the strategic cooperation agreement previously reached by Iran and Syria. He denied the existence of any disagreements between the two countries that are delaying the implementation of previously signed agreements, claiming that relations between Damascus and Tehran are at their all-time best, and that President Assad confirmed that the leadership of both countries is interested in expanding bilateral ties. Addressing the matter of talks between the Syrian regime and the Turkish government, Abdollahian stated that Iran has important relationships with both countries, and it will persist in its diplomatic efforts to bring Ankara and Damascus together and solve the problems between the two sides (Fars, January 14).

► The pro-regime Syrian newspaper al-Watan reported (January 16) based on Iranian sources, that Abdollahian's visit to Syria was positive and productive. These sources denied the report published by the American daily Wall Street Journal on January 15, claiming that Iran increased the price of Iranian oil exported to Syria. According to these sources, there is full cooperation between the two countries on the matter of oil, and Iran will continue to stand by Syria in the economic war waged against Damascus, just as Iran stood by Syria in the war waged against it by terrorists. The al-Watan report also claimed that Iran is serious in its desire to sign a long-term cooperation agreement with Syria.



The meeting between the Iranian minister of foreign affairs and the Syrian president.

Source: Tasnim, January 14, 2023

► On January 23, the Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces, Mohammad Bagheri, met in Tehran with the Syrian Minister of Defense, Ali Mahmoud Abbas. The two discussed the ongoing Israeli strikes in Syria, regional developments, and holding joint Iranian-Syrian military exercises. Bagheri praised Syria's support for the Palestinians, especially in light of

the normalization of some Arab countries with Israel. He stressed Iran's unyielding support for Syria and its commitment to maintaining the cooperation between the two countries, including providing Iranian assistance to restore the strength of the Syrian Arab Army (Fars, January 23). During his visit to Tehran, the Syrian minister of defense also met with Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and the Commander of the IRGC, Hossein Salami.



The meeting between the Syrian minister of defense and the chief of staff of the Armed Forces of Iran. Source: Fars, January 23

- ▶ Sources monitoring international marine traffic reported about the movement of two Iranian oil tankers Sirvan Sabou and Arman 114 from Iran via the Suez Canal toward the Port of Banyas in Syria (@istihbarat1800L on Twitter, January 21; VesselFinder.com, January 22). On November 10, 2022, the pro-Assad paper al-Watan reported, based on sources in Tehran, that Iran decided to increase the volume of oil it exports to Syria to three million barrels per month, to assist Damascus in overcoming Syria's crippling energy crisis. The paper remarked that the arrival of Iranian oil tankers to Syria is continuing apace since the movement of tankers between the two countries was resumed, after agreements were reached during the visit of President Assad to Tehran in May 2022, concerning problems related to the Iranian credit line offered to Syria.
- ▶ During an award ceremony for "resistance literature" in Beirut, Secretary General of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, claimed that the United States is preventing Lebanon from receiving Iranian fuel. He asserted that Iran offered to provide Lebanon with fuel for six months, to increase the daily supply of electricity to eight hours, and that this offer is still on the table. He called on the allies of the United States to utilize their ties with it to achieve its approval for bringing fuel from Iran (al-Mayadeen, January 17).

Iranian Involvement in Iraq

► On January 16, the Commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, Esmail Qa'ani, arrived for a visit to Baghdad. During his visit, Qa'ani participated in the funeral of the widow of the senior Shia cleric Ayatollah Seyyed Muhammad Baqr al-Hakim, who was killed in 2003 (Nour News, January 16). Qa'ani arrived in Baghdad during the visit to Iraq of Brett McGurk, the White House Coordinator for Middle East and North African Affairs. The daily al-Araby al-Jadeed reported (January 16) that the visit of the coordinator was intended to discuss various issues, including the future of the U.S. military presence in Iraq. This visit was also in preparation for an upcoming visit of the Iraqi Prime Minister, Muhammad al-Sudani, to the United States.



The commander of the Qods Force at the location of the assassination of Qasem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis. Source: Sabreen News, January 16, 2023

► On January 17, the Iranian Minister of Energy, Ali Akbar Mehrabian, met in Tehran with the Iraqi Minister of Electricity, Ziad Ali Fadhil, and discussed possible Iranian assistance to Iraq in the energy and electricity sectors, including the establishment of power plants by Iranian experts, and continued Iranian gas exports to Iraq. The Iraqi energy minister expressed interest in using the capabilities and know-how of Iranian experts to improve the electrical infrastructure in his country and remarked that many Iranian experts and companies in the electricity sector are already operating in Iraq today (Tasnim, January 17).



**The meeting between the Iraqi minister of electricity and Iranian minister of energy.
Source: ISNA, January 17, 2023**

Iranian Involvement in the Palestinian Arena

► On January 17, during an annual conference to mark the conclusion of the 2008-2009 Gaza War (known as “Operation Cast Lead”), the Deputy Commander of the IRGC, Ali Fadavi, declared that the Palestinian cause is the top priority for Muslims and that “the fake Zionist regime,” which has no connection whatsoever to the religion of Moses, will soon disappear, as will the United States, which supports it. He argued that what the Zionists wish will happen in Iran, will instead happen in Tel Aviv and Haifa. The conference was attended by representatives from various Palestinian factions, including the representative of Hamas in Tehran, Khaled al-Qodoumi (ISNA; al-Alam, January 17).



**The deputy commander of the IRGC during the “Gaza Conference” held in Tehran.
Source: ISNA, January 17, 2023**

► The Iranian Minister of Foreign, Hossein Amir Abdollahian, met during his visit to Damascus with representatives of Palestinian factions, including a Hamas delegation headed by Osama Hamdan. During the meeting, Abdollahian insisted that Iran will continue to support the Palestinian people and “the resistance”. The representatives of the Palestinian militant groups praised Iran’s support for the Palestinian cause (al-Watan,

January 15). Prior to this, during his stay in Beirut, Abdollahian met with the Secretary General of Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Ziad al-Nakhleh, and discussed with him developments in the Palestinian and regional arenas (ISNA, January 13).



The meeting between the Iranian foreign minister and Ziad al-Nakhleh in Beirut. Source: ISNA, January 13, 2023