



# Spotlight on Iran

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Author: Dr. Raz Zimmt

## Overview

- ▶ The impact of the war in Ukraine on the deployment of pro-Iranian militias in Syria: the newspaper al-Sharq al-Awsat reported that forces of the militias backed by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) southeast of Homs recently increased the number of forces deployed there, following the withdrawal of Russian troops from the area. On the other hand, a pro-opposition Syrian outlet reported about the withdrawal of IRGC forces from the area of the T-4 military base in Homs, after Russian forces, which left the base following the start of the Russian war on Ukraine, returned to it.
- ▶ On the occasion of the start of the month of Ramadan, the Iranian president spoke with the Iraqi president and discussed developments in Iraq and bilateral cooperation. The Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs also spoke to his Iraqi counterpart and discussed developments in the region, bilateral relations, the talks concerning Iran's nuclear program and the war in Ukraine.
- ▶ The Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced the appointment of a new ambassador to Iraq.
- ▶ The website Nour News, which is affiliated with the Iranian Supreme National Security Council, published a commentary this week that expressed concern about the ongoing political instability in Iraq, in light of the failure to form a new government. The author stressed that without taking into account the Shia militias in Iraq, it would be impossible to reach a political agreement in the country.
- ▶ Iran praised the two-month humanitarian ceasefire that was agreed upon between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis in Yemen, owing to coordination of the United Nations.

►The speaker of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs praised the latest terror attacks in Israel, declaring that the struggle against the occupation is a legitimate, clear and natural right of the Palestinian people.

►The Iranian minister of foreign affairs met with the foreign minister of the Taliban on the sidelines of a conference of countries bordering Afghanistan, which was held in China. The minister of foreign affairs reiterated the need to form a widely representative government, with the participation of all ethnic groups in Afghanistan. He also called to protect the rights of women in the country following the limitations imposed on them by the Taliban since they took over Kabul. Meanwhile, the Iranian ambassador to the UN reported that in the past two months, Iran supplied over 30 shipments of humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan.

## Iranian Involvement in Syria

►In late March, a delegation headed by the Deputy Speaker of the Iranian Majlis, Ali Nikzad, paid a visit to Damascus. At the press conference at the end of his meeting with the Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Faisal Mekdad, Nikzad addressed the strategic relationship between the two countries, and proclaimed that if it were not for the blood spilled by Syrian and Iranian martyrs, it would have been impossible to eliminate ISIS, and Europe and the United States would not have been safe now. He stressed Iran's position, which opposes foreign intervention in Syria, and opposes unilateral American sanctions. He asserted that Iran will spare no effort in assisting Syria, particularly in the spheres of trade, the economy, and fuel. He added that the two countries are determined to promote Iranian participation in the reconstruction of Syria. The Syrian minister of foreign affairs highlighted the breadth of the relationship between the two countries in the political, economic and parliamentary sphere and called to further expand the trade relationship between the two (IRNA, March 30).



The meeting of the deputy speaker of the Majlis with the Syrian minister of foreign affairs. Source: SANA, March 30

► A Syrian pro-opposition media outlet reported on the establishment of a new militia, Fajr al-Islam (“the dawn of Islam”). According to this report, the new militia is made up of former fighters in the Shia Iraqi militia Harakat al-Nujabaa’ (“the movement of the noblemen”), the Afghan Fatemiyoun Brigade, Lebanese Hezbollah, and the Iraqi Shia militia, Asaab Ahl al-Haqq (“the bands of the men of truth”) and the core of the new militia is made up of a dozen of Shia and Alawi Syrians. The fighters of the militia was deployed in the area of the cities of Palmyra, al-Qariyayn and al-Sukha, and the intention is to expand their presence to other areas west of the Euphrates (al-Moharer Media, April 3).

► The Syrian pro-opposition outlet Ayn al-Furat reported (April 4) about the return of Russian forces to the T-4 Airbase east of Homs, and the withdrawal of IRGC forces from the area. According to this report, the return of the Russian forces and retreat of forces operating under IRGC guidance occurred in recent days, after the Russian forces cleared the area and several additional regions, following the start of the Russian war on Ukraine. The report also stated that a convoy of the IRGC, which included 15 military vehicles and logistics trucks, exited the T-4 Base toward the al-Shayrat Airbase, south of Homs, as part of the transfer anew of the T-4 Airbase to the control of the Russian forces. Meanwhile, the pan-Arab daily al-Sharq al-Awsat reported, based on local Syrian sources, about the deployment of pro-Iranian militias in central Syria, following the withdrawal of forces loyal to Russia, owing to the war on Ukraine. According to this report, the forces of the militias operating under the IRGC’s control were reinforced by about 40 armored vehicles from the strategic storage facilities in Mheen, southwest of Homs. This reinforcement of IRGC forces was made possible by the withdrawal of pro-Russian forces, including Wagner mercenaries and fighters of the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps of the Syrian Army from the area of Mheen (al-Hadash, April 5).

## Iranian Involvement in Iraq and Yemen

► On April 3, the Iranian President, Ebrahim Raisi, spoke on the phone with the President of Iraq, Barham Salih, on the occasion of the start of the month of Ramadan. Raisi stressed his country’s support of the unity, independence and security of Iraq, and called for expanding economic cooperation between the two nations. He stressed the need to establish peace and stability in the region, free of foreign intervention, and remarked that the United States does not care about the people of the region, but only its interests and imposing its hegemony. According to him, every country in the region that pays no heed to the nefarious goals of the

United States and the “Zionist regime,” is trampling on the interest of its own people and is arousing the anger of the Muslim nations. The president of Iraq stressed the need to bolster coordination and cooperation between the two countries to ensure their national interests and overcome the challenges the region is facing (Tasnim, April 3).

►The Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hossein Amir Abdollahian, spoke on the phone with his Iraqi counterpart, Fuad Hussein, on the occasion of the start of Ramadan. The two discussed bilateral relations, developments in the region, the talks concerning Iran’s nuclear program and the war in Ukraine. The two stressed the need to accelerate the implementation of all bilateral agreements reached by the two countries. The Iranian foreign minister also invited his counterpart to visit Tehran (ISNA, April 8).

►The spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced the appointment of a new Iranian Ambassador to Baghdad, Mohammad Kazem al-Sadegh, who will soon replace Iraj Masjedi. Masjedi, served as the ambassador to Baghdad since April 2017. The new ambassador, born in Najaf in Iraq, served as the deputy ambassador to Baghdad (al-Alam, April 11).

►In a commentary published by Nour News, a website affiliated with the Supreme National Security Council of Iran (April 4), the author expressed concerns about the ongoing political instability in Iraq, in light of the failure to form a new government. The commentary argued that the growing instability in Iraq is providing the United States with an opportunity to abuse the situation and delay the withdrawal of American forces from Iraq, and also increases the likelihood of renewal of terrorist attacks in the country. Addressing the statement of the leader of the Sadrist current, Muqtada al-Sadr, that he is suspending his efforts to form a government and giving his rivals a deadline of a month to try and form a new government, the author argued that if the Sadrist bloc remains outside the government, this will exacerbate instability in the country. The conclusion of the article argued that the latest developments show that without taking into consideration the position and role of the groups that support the resistance [the Iranian-backed Shia militias in Iraq], it would be impossible to reach any agreement.

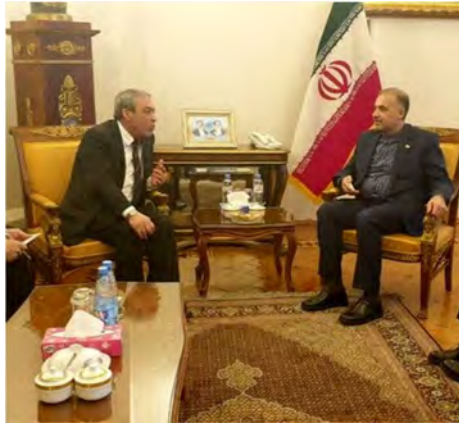
►The Spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Saeed Khatibzadeh, welcomed the two-months humanitarian ceasefire reached between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis in Yemen, through UN mediation. He expressed hope that the ceasefire will serve as a springboard for ending the siege and establishing a permanent ceasefire, and finding a political solution to the crisis in Yemen. He stressed Iran’s support for finding a political and humanitarian solution to

the ongoing war in Yemen. Khatibzadeh expressed hope that the ceasefire will lead to the improvement of the humanitarian situation in the country, and exchanges of prisoners and captives, which will pave the way for a political initiative to end the crisis (Fars, April 2).

## Iranian Involvement in the Palestinian Arena

►The Spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Saeed Khatibzadeh, stated in response to the terror attacks in Israel that the struggle against the occupiers is a legitimate, clear, and natural right of the defenseless Palestinian people, and is a reaction to the unyielding attacks of the Zionists on the holy places in Jerusalem, and the ongoing crimes of the “Zionist regime” against the Palestinian people. He stressed Iran’s support for the Palestinian cause and the struggle to liberate Palestine and called on the international community to ensure the security of the Palestinians, in light of the occupation and terror of the “Zionist Apartheid regime” and prevent the continuation of the crimes of the Zionists in Palestine. Khatibzadeh remarked that the only way to solve the crisis in Palestine is to hold a referendum among the original inhabitants of Palestine [in 1948] and that resistance is the only choice of the Palestinian people, which are living under a military occupation, to force the occupying regime to accept the democratic solution to the liberation of Palestine and determining its fate (Fars, April 9).

►On March 31, the Iranian Ambassador to Russia, Kazem Jalali, met with the Palestinian Ambassador to Russia, Abdel Hafiz Nofal), and discussed developments in the Palestinian, regional, and international arenas, including the war in Ukraine. Jalali praised the heroism of the Palestinian people and remarked that the only way to defeat enemies is through resistance and perseverance. The two ambassadors agreed to hold additional meetings in the future (ISNA, March 31).



The meeting between the Iranian and Palestinian ambassador to Russia. Source: ISNA, April 1

## Iranian Involvement in Afghanistan

► During a third conference of the foreign ministers of the countries bordering on Afghanistan, held in China, the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hossein Amir Abdollahian, met with the Foreign Minister of the Taliban Government, Amir Khan Muttaqi. During the meeting, Abdollahian stressed the need to establish a broad government, which the participation of all ethnic groups in Afghanistan [including the Shia Hazara] to ensure security and stability in the country. In addition, the Iranian minister of foreign affairs called for protecting the rights of women in Afghanistan, stressing their right to education and participating in public life. The Taliban's foreign minister stressed in the meeting that his country will not be a source of threats to the security of its neighbors (IRNA, March 31).



The meeting in China of the foreign ministers of Iran and the Taliban government. Source: IRNA, March 31

► The Iranian Special Envoy for Afghan Affairs, Hassan Kazemi Qomi, announced that through negotiations conducted between the Iranian and Afghan delegations at the sidelines of the conference of countries bordering on Afghanistan in China, the two sides reached an

agreement concerning the water dispute between the two nations. He remarked that the Afghan delegation announced that Afghanistan is willing to respect Iran's water rights in accordance with agreements previously signed by the two countries, and that the Taliban government intends to take this matter on after the return of the delegation to Kabul (al-Alam, April 3).

►The Iranian Ambassador to the UN, Majid Takht-Ravanchi, reported during an international conference to raise humanitarian support for Afghanistan, organized by the UN, Germany, Britain, and Qatar, that in the past two months, Iran supplied over 30 shipments of humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people. He remarked that the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan is deteriorating, and financial support by the international community is crucial to allow the country to overcome the current harsh conditions. Additionally, the Iranian ambassador called for immediately and without pre-conditions releasing all the funds of the Republic of Afghanistan that have been frozen in banks abroad (IRNA, March 31).