



Spotlight on Iran

June 8-22, 2022

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Overview

- ▶ In mid-June 2023, a Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) delegation, headed by Ziyad al-Nakhalah, the organization's secretary general, visited Iran and met with senior Iranian officials, including supreme leader Khamenei, President Raisi and the secretary of the Supreme National Security Council. They discussed the latest round of Israeli-Palestinian fighting in the Gaza Strip and the situation in the Palestinian arena. Simultaneously, a delegation of senior Hamas figures headed by Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau, also arrived in Tehran for a visit.
- ▶ The Iranian and Syrian foreign ministers held a phone conversation to discuss the outcomes of the Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi's visit to Damascus in May, as well as regional developments, including the improvement in Syria's foreign relations with the Arab states.
- ▶ The Iranian shipping company announced the launch of a new, permanent container transportation line between Iran and Syria to expand bilateral commercial ties.
- ▶ An Iraqi news website reported that the commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps' Qods Force visited Baghdad and met with leaders of the Shi'ite "coordination framework" to discuss recent political and security developments in Iraq.
- ▶ The head of Iran's Strategic Foreign Relations Council visited Baghdad and met with senior members of the Iraqi government to discuss the expansion of bilateral relations.

Iranian Intervention in the Palestinian Arena

- ▶ On June 14, 2023, Iranian supreme leader Ali Khamenei met in Tehran with a delegation of the PIJ leadership headed by Ziyad al-Nakhalah, the organization's secretary general. At the meeting, Khamenei claimed that "the Zionist enemy is currently in a passive and reactive position," and the might of the Palestinian "resistance groups" was increasing from day to day, as evident from the recent defeat of the "Zionist regime" in the Gaza Strip confrontation. He

added that the PIJ had successfully passed the test in the most recent combat in Gaza, indicating a shift in conditions for the "Zionist regime" compared with 70 years ago.

He said the Zionist leaders are right to be concerned that they may not see their regime's 80th anniversary. Khamenei also said that the Palestinian "resistance groups" had found the key to "struggling" with the "Zionist regime," its great strength in the West Bank was the main key to bringing the "Zionist enemy" to its knees, and the path of "resistance" had to continue. Al-Nakhalah thanked Iran for its support of the Palestinians and briefed Khamenei on recent developments in the Palestinian arena and the most recent round of fighting in the Gaza Strip (Fars, June 14, 2023).



Khamenei (right) with the PIJ delegation, al-Nakhalah sitting closest to him (Fars, June 14, 2023).

► While in Tehran al-Nakhalah also met with Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, the speaker of the Iranian Majlis (Parliament), Hossein-Amir Abdollahian, Iranian foreign minister, and Ali Akbar Ahmadian, the secretary of the Supreme National Security Council. Al-Nakhalah and Ahmadian discussed developments in the region and in the Palestinian arena. Ahmadian expressed his appreciation for the continuation of the Palestinian "resistance," stating that it was the only way to realize the principles of the Palestinian people and "liberate Jerusalem from the clutches of the Zionist occupation regime." Ahmadian further added that the most recent round of fighting in the Gaza Strip demonstrated the weakening of the "Zionist regime" while highlighting the growing strength of the "resistance" groups. He stressed Iran's continuing support for the Palestinians and the PIJ, and said that sowing the "seeds of resistance in Palestine" would lead to the collapse of the "Zionist regime." He added that the "resistance groups" had to prevent Israel from creating a schism within the "Islamic resistance" (Noor News, June 17, 2023). Meeting with al-Nakhalah, Iranian President Raisi praised the Palestinian people and the "resistance," and called for the Palestinians to close ranks in the "resistance forces" (Fars, June 18, 2023). In an interview with Iranian al-Alam TV in

Arabic on June 19, 2023, al-Nakhalah said that during his visit he had met with operatives in the IRGC's Qods Force.

► On June 19, 2023, a Hamas delegation led by Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau, arrived in Tehran for a visit. The delegation included Saleh al-'Arouri, deputy head of Hamas' political bureau, Khalil al-Haya, Muhammad Nasr and Nizar Awadallah. They met with Ali Akbar Ahmadian, the secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, who called the "resistance" the most effective strategy to end over 75 years of occupation in Palestine. He claimed that Palestine was the most important issue for the Muslim world and stressed the need to strengthen unity among Muslims, especially among the regional "resistance" actors. He added that the most recent round of fighting in Gaza had foiled the "Zionist enemy's" plot to divide the groups. He also said that the "Palestinian resistance," which had previously fought in the Gaza Strip to defend itself, was currently establishing its presence in the West Bank. Isma'il Haniyeh expressed his gratitude for the role played by Iran in strengthening unity and cooperation in the Muslim world and among the "Palestinian resistance groups." He briefed Ahmadian on political and military developments in the Palestinian arena and presented the "resistance" plans for keeping and reinforcing the initiative vis-à-vis Israel (Mehr, June 19, 2023).

► Meeting with the Hamas delegation on June 20, 2023, Iranian President Raisi said the "resistance's" victory proved the Zionist claims of deterrence to be baseless, and emphasized that the "resistance" had not only begun to change the balance of power in Palestine, but also regionally and internationally. He added that the normalization of relations between Arab states and the "Zionist entity" was a betrayal of Palestine and a stab in the back for the "resistance." Haniyeh said that the "resistance" had increased its strength in all the territories occupied in 1948, adding that ongoing coordination meetings were being held with all the "resistance front" groups, including Hezbollah and the PIJ (Fars, June 10, 2023).



The Hamas delegation meets with the secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (right). Haniyeh sits facing him (Mehr, June 19, 2023).

► On June 21, 2023, the Hamas delegation met with Hossein Salami, the IRGC commander. They discussed political developments in the Palestinian, regional and international arenas. They both stressed that Palestinian and Islamic unity was the only way to defeat the Zionist occupation, and that they would continue cooperating in a way that would serve every aspect of the "resistance" (palinfo.com, June 21, 2023).



Isma'il Haniyeh (left) and Hossein Salami (Palinfo, June 21, 2023).

► On June 21, 2023, the Hamas delegation met with Iranian supreme leader Ali Khamenei (IRNA, June 21, 2023). Khamenei said at the meeting that Palestine is the center of the "resistance," but it is the West Bank that will bring the enemy to its knees. He highlighted the positive progress made in this area, pointing out the recent events in Jenin and the siege imposed by the Palestinian youth on the "Zionist soldiers" signify a bright future that will be accompanied by a resounding victory. Khamenei also emphasized that the liberation of Palestine is a religious duty for all Muslims (Fars, June 21, 2023).

Iranian Intervention in Syria

- ▶ On June 10, 2023, Hossein-Amir Abdollahian, Iranian foreign minister, held a phone conversation with Faisal al-Mikdad, the Syrian foreign minister. They discussed the outcomes of the recent May visit of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi to Damascus and the need to implement the signed bilateral agreements. They also discussed regional developments, including the improved relations between Syria and the Arab states, and the participation of President Assad in the Arab League conference (ILNA, June 10, 2023).
- ▶ On June 12, 2023, Ali-Asghar Khaji, Hossein-Amir Abdollahian's senior advisor, met with Syrian President Bashar Assad to discuss bilateral relations, regional development and the Astana peace process. Khaji said Tehran was satisfied with developments in Syria's foreign relations, including its détente with the Arab world. He said that without the "resistance" and the Syrian struggle against terrorism, it would have been impossible to reach the current stage in regional developments. While in Damascus, Khaji met with Ayman Sousan, deputy Syrian foreign minister (ISNA, June 12, 2023). On June 20, 2023, the deputy foreign ministers of Russia, Syria, Turkey and Iran convened in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan, as part of the Syrian peace process (IRNA, June 20, 2023).



President Assad meets with the Iranian foreign minister's senior advisor (ISNA, June 12, 2023).

- ▶ The Syrian news channel Ayn al-Furat reported that the pro-Iranian militias had begun extensive excavations in the al-Haydaria region south of the town of al-Mayadin in eastern Deir ez-Zor, apparently in preparation for establishing another military facility in the area. According to the report, Hajj Maysar, commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) in the al-Mayadin area, instructed an operative named Hajj Abbas to oversee the construction of warehouses and tunnels in coordination with Mohammad Rasoul, responsible for the jihad al-binaa foundation in al-Mayadin. The construction is being performed by 30 workers who specialize in building warehouses and tunnels, all of them Shi'ites from the village

of Hatla near Deir ez-Zor. According to the same report, the construction work is being carried out secretly under the strict guard of the Afghan Fatemiyoun Battalion. It takes place in the evening to avoid attracting attention, and the vehicles used are hidden during the day (eyeofeuhrates.com, June 8, 2023).

► The Iranian national shipping company, IRISL, announced the launch of a permanent container line between Iran and Syria, in line with the Iranian government's policy to expand commercial relations between the two countries. According to the report, during the past Iranian calendar year (March 2022 – March 2023), the line operated 14 times between Iran and Syria. In the upcoming year there are plans for at least one monthly voyage to export Iranian goods to Syria (Fars, June 7, 2023).

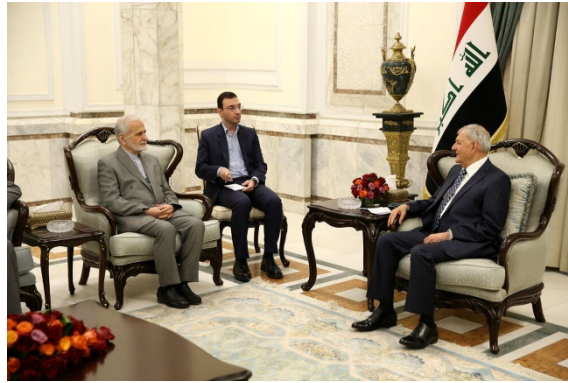
Iranian Intervention in Iraq

► On June 8, 2023, the Iraqi news website Baghdad al-Yawm reported that Esmail Qaani, commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, had arrived in Baghdad to meet with the leaders of the Shi'ite "coordination framework" to discuss recent Iraqi political and security developments. On June 8, 2023, the Saber News Telegram channel reported that a high-ranking delegation, including Qaani and Mohammad Kazem Al-e Sadegh, the Iranian ambassador to Baghdad, had met with a senior Iraqi political official and discussed topics related to the military presence of the Iranian opposition in Iraqi territory.

► On June 14, 2023, the Council for Development Policy of the relations between Iran and Iraq met in the Iranian commerce center in Tehran. Yahya Al-e Eshaq, the head of the commerce center, stressed the importance of economic diplomacy for Iran, including strengthening economic ties with Iraq. He said that Iranian exports to Iraq had reached a total of \$10 billion in the past year and expressed the potential for further growth. He also emphasized the importance of expanding joint commercial ventures. He added that bilateral relations had an impact not only on the economy but also on national security (Fars, June 14, 2023). The meeting was held against the background of reports that the American administration had granted the Iraqi government a waiver from sanctions on Iran, allowing for \$2.7 billion of Iranian funds held in Iraqi banks to be unfrozen.

► On June 19, 2023, Abdul Latif Jamal Rashid, president of Iraq, met in Baghdad with Kamal Kharazi, the head of Iran's Strategic Council on Foreign Relations, to discuss the expansion of bilateral relations. Kharazi stressed his country's support for Iraq's security and stability, and

expressed his gratitude for Iraq's efforts to improve relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia (IRNA, June 19, 2023). While in Baghdad, Kharazi also met with Muhammad Shia al-Sudani, the Iraqi prime minister, and with Fuad Hussein, the Iraqi foreign minister, to discuss bilateral strategic cooperation. He stated that Iran regarded the development of Iraq as its own development, and that the two countries could contribute to stability and development in the entire region. The Iraqi prime minister acknowledged that Iraq still faced many challenges and suggested that improving the country's relations with Iran could help overcome them (IRNA, June 20, 2023).



The president of Iraq (right) meets with the head of Iran's Strategic Council on Foreign Relations (IRNA, June 20, 2023).