



Spotlight on Iran

June 22 – July 6, 2023

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Overview

- ▶ Iran has condemned the IDF activity in Jenin. A spokesman for the Iranian foreign ministry called it "a criminal action and a clear example of state terrorism," and called on the international community to realize its responsibility towards the Palestinians and take action against Israel's activities.
- ▶ Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau, and Ziyad al-Nakhalah, PIJ secretary general, both of whom visited Iran at the end of June 2023, were interviewed by the Iranian media and discussed Iran's support for the Palestinians. Al-Nakhalah said the Palestinians were working to arm the West Bank in accordance with instructions from Iran's supreme leader. He praised Iran's assistance to the Palestinians, but said Iran's financial aid should not be overstated and its most important support for the Palestinians lay in the areas of security and military affairs.
- ▶ At the end of June, the Syrian prime minister met with a delegation headed by the Iranian ambassador to Damascus to discuss bilateral cooperation in various fields and to implement agreements signed during President Raisi's visit to Damascus in May 2023.
- ▶ The Israeli, Cypriote and American intelligence agencies prevented an Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) terrorist attack against Israelis in Cyprus. The head of the Iranian terrorist squad, who was interrogated by the Israeli Mossad in Iran, revealed that the foreign intelligence branch of the IRGC's intelligence organization was behind the attempted attack.
- ▶ The Israeli security forces exposed and dismantled a Hezbollah-Iran terrorist network which used digital currency for money laundering on behalf of the IRGC.
- ▶ A delegation of the Iraqi Shi'ite "coordinating framework" visited Tehran and met with senior Iranian officials. They discussed ways to form a coalition of the pro-Iranian Shi'ite militias in preparation for the upcoming municipal elections in Iraq.

Iranian Intervention in the Palestinian Arena

- ▶ At the end of the IDF activity in Jenin, Esmail Qaani, commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, stated that the "Zionist regime" had brought "all its forces" to the Jenin refugee camp, but the Palestinian youths had overcome them. He said that on some days the Palestinian "resistance" forces carried out more than 30 attacks against Israel in the West Bank (Tasnim, July 5, 2023.)
- ▶ Nasser Kanaani, a spokesman for the Iranian foreign ministry, condemned the IDF activity in Jenin. At his weekly press conference he referred to the activity as "a criminal action and a clear example of state terrorism." He claimed that the Palestinian people had not committed any crime but were merely defending their natural rights, and he expressed confidence that they would defeat the "Zionists." He emphasized the international community's responsibility to take action against Israel's crimes, adding that the "Zionist regime's" ongoing crimes continuously demonstrated the futility of compromise and normalization in "extinguishing the Zionist regime's war machine" (Fars, July 3, 2023).
- ▶ While visiting Iran, Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau, gave interviews to the Iranian English language TV network Press TV and to the Iranian Arabic language TV network al-Alam. He said that during the most recent campaign in the Gaza Strip [Operation Shield and Arrow], Hamas had mobilized all its networks to support the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). He claimed that the "resistance" had "defeated" Israel, stressing that the blood of the shaheeds would not have been shed in vain. He expressed gratitude for Iran's unconditional support of the Palestinians and said Iran was the greatest force standing behind the "Palestinian resistance." He also said that recent regional developments, including the reconciliation between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and the changing trends in the region favoring Syria, served their interests and harmed those of Israel (al-Alam, June 22, 2023).
- ▶ On July 2, 2023, Ziyad al-Nakhalah, PIJ secretary general, in an extensive interview with the government newspaper Iran, said the Palestinians were working to arm the West Bank with weapons which had been smuggled in and purchased from Israelis. He said they were following instructions from Iranian leader Ali Khamenei regarding the arming of the West Bank. He said that during his most recent visit to Tehran Khamenei had reiterated the need to extend the presence of weapons and to promote "resistance" activities in the West Bank. Al-Nakhalah praised the aid Iran provided to the Palestinians and the "resistance," saying Iran supported the Palestinians in many areas. He stressed, however, that Iranian financial aid should not be

overstated, and that the most important assistance from Iran was in the military-security domain. He added that the strong relations with the Islamic Republic persisted despite the targeted killing of Qassem Soleimani, commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, and that both Soleimani and Esmail Qaani represented the Islamic Republic's unwavering support for the Palestinians. He said the ties with Iran would remain strong despite pressures from the Arab governments to sever them.



Ziyad al-Nakhlah interviewed by the government newspaper Iran (July 2, 2023).

► On July 2, 2023, Hossein Akbari, the Iranian ambassador to Syria, met with a PIJ delegation headed by Nafez Azzam, secretary of the PIJ's political bureau. The meeting was held at the PIJ's general secretariat office in Damascus. Nafez Azzam thanked Iran for its support of Palestinian rights and the Palestinian "resistance." Akbari said Iran considered its support for Palestine as a religious obligation and would continue to do so until the realization of "Allah's promise of victory" (Paltoday, July 2, 2023). On July 4, 2023, Akbari and other diplomats met with a delegation of Palestinian Liberation Front members at the Iranian embassy in Damascus. In a statement, the embassy mentioned that they discussed the recent developments in Jenin and the Palestinian arena.

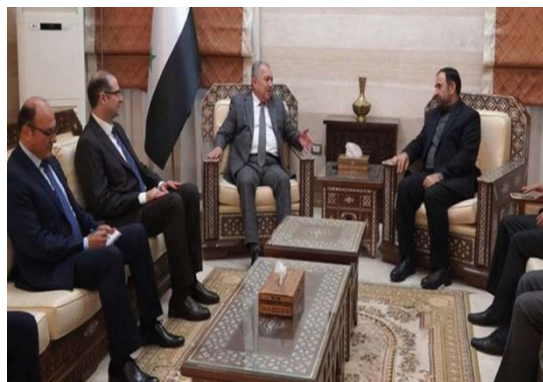


Members of the Palestinian Liberation Front meet with Iranian diplomats in the Iranian embassy in Damascus (ISNA, July 4, 2023).

Iranian Intervention in Syria and Lebanon Orchestrating an Attack in Cyprus

► On June 22, 2023, the Syrian news website Athrpress reported that Iran and Syria had reached new understandings for strengthening cooperation in the field of electricity. According to the report, Ghassan al-Zamil, the Syrian minister of electricity, met with senior Iranian officials, including Hassan Shamshari, the secretary general of the joint Iran-Syria Chamber of Commerce, and senior members of the Parsa Paydar company, which specializes in investing in hydroelectric projects. They discussed cooperation in the field of electricity production using alternative energy sources, such as solar panels, wind turbines and dams. In May 2023 Ali-Akbar Mehrabian, the Iranian minister of electricity, said Iran was prepared to participate in rebuilding Syria's electricity and water industry, which was damaged during the Syrian Civil War (IRNA, May 6, 2023).

► On June 27, 2023, Syrian Prime Minister Hussein Arnous met with an Iranian delegation headed by Hossein Akbari, the Iranian ambassador to Damascus. They discussed strengthening cooperation in the fields of energy, banking, technology, science, security and culture, and implementing agreements signed during Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi's visit to Syria. Arnous said conditions had been created for increasing trade between Iran and Syria. He stressed Iran's support of Syria, especially its economic support, and expressed the desire of Iranian companies to participate in the reconstruction of the Syrian economy, especially in the energy sector (Fars, June 27, 2023).



Meeting of the Syrian prime minister and the Iran ambassador in Damascus (Fars, June 27, 2023).

► On June 25, 2023, Hamid-Reza Esmati, the Iranian cultural attaché in Damascus, and Sumar Faisal Dhaher, chairman of the Baathist "Association of Syria's revolutionary youth," signed an

agreement for bilateral youth cooperation in the fields of culture, science, education, and higher education (IRNA, June 25, 2023).



Signing the agreement for bilateral youth cooperation (IRNA, June 25, 2023).

Orchestrating an Attack in Cyprus

► On June 27, 2023, Hossein Akbari, the Iranian ambassador to Damascus, met with Sevag Avedissian, the Cypriote chargé d'affaires in Syria, to discuss recent regional events and the EU's role in the Middle East (ISNA, June 27, 2023). The meeting was held following reports of IRGC plans to attack Israelis in Cyprus which had been prevented by the Cypriote security forces. According to the reports, coordination between the Cypriote, American and Israeli intelligence services successfully foiled the attack. On June 29, 2023, the Israeli Mossad said in a statement that during its activity in Iran, Yousef Shahbazi Abbasalilo, the head of the terrorist squad which planned to attack an Israeli businessman in Cyprus ,was interrogated and provided a full confession. As a result, the security services in Cyprus exposed and dismantled the network to which the terrorist squad belonged.

► Abbasalilo provided details about the attempted attack, including the individuals within the IRGC's intelligence organization who supported him, the operatives' work methods, the weapons they received, and their means of communication. According to the investigation, Unit 800, the foreign intelligence branch of the IRGC's intelligence organization, was behind the planned attack. The squad's direct handler was a senior Unit 800 operative named Hassan Shoshtarizadeh, who was in charge of special operations. Shoshtarizadeh is directly subordinate to a senior figure named Javad Saraei, and both of them are subordinate to the branch head, Reza Sarraj. While in Cyprus, Abbasalilo contacted Iranian, Pakistani and local operatives, who assisted him in acquiring a weapon and communications equipment, and drove him to the target's location. Following instructions from his Iranian handler, he surveilled the target's house several times, photographed it and collected information about

its security measures. When the international law organizations closed in on Abbasalilo, Shoshtarizadeh instructed him to immediately dispose of his weapon. He hid the gun in a pit in Limassol and escaped to Iran (Ynet, June 29, 2023).

► On June 27, 2023, at a conference held by the National Bureau for Counter Terror Financing, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Galant reported that the Israeli defense ministry had exposed and dismantled a Hezbollah-Iran terrorist network involved in laundering money for the IRGC through the use of digital currency. The operation resulted in the seizure of millions of dollars intended for terrorist organizations. He said that during the past year, operatives of Hezbollah, the Qods Force and groups in Syria had used digital currency to receive funds from third parties, mainly money-changers, with whom they had illegal dealings, and who had routinely been used by the terrorist organizations (National Bureau for Counter Terror Financing, June 28, 2023).

Iranian Intervention in Iraq

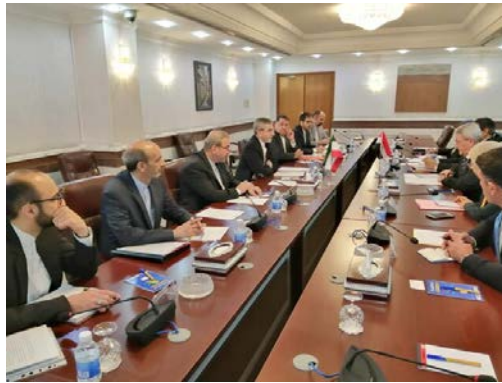
► A delegation of the Shi'ite "coordination framework" led by Qais al-Khazali, leader of the Asaab Ahl al-Haqq militia; Hadi al-Amiri, leader of the Badr Organization; and Falih al-Fayyadh, commander of the "popular mobilization," visited Tehran and met with senior Iranian officials to discuss efforts to form a pro-Iranian Shi'ite militia coalition in preparation for the provincial elections scheduled for December 2023 (Shafaq News, June 25, 2023).

► On June 28, 2023, Mohammad Kazem Al-e Sadegh, the Iranian ambassador to Baghdad, was interviewed by the Iraqi al-Ahd TV network. He discussed Iran-Iraq relations, saying the Iraqi ministry of electricity's debt to Iran had been transferred to the Iraqi Commercial Bank. However, due to the economic sanctions imposed on Iran, alternative methods to release the funds had to be explored. He also said Iran was interested in establishing Iranian universities in Iraq, and that a number of universities had applied to open branches, but the process of receiving permission was slow. He denied Iran's interference in Iraqi politics and referred to such claims as "media buzz." He added that he regretted that Muqtada al-Sadr, the leader of the Sadrist Movement, had retired from political life and expressed hope for his return to political activity. On July 3, 2023, Yayha Al-e Eshaq, head of the joint Iran-Iraq Chamber of Commerce, announced that Iraq's \$10 billion debt to Iran had been transferred to the Iraqi Commercial Bank, enabling Iran to use the funds to purchase commodities which were not subject to economic sanctions (Fars, July 3, 2023).



Mohammad Kazem Al-e Sadegh, the Iranian ambassador to Baghdad (al-'Ahed, June 28, 2023).

► On July 3, 2023, Ali Baqeri, the Iranian deputy foreign minister, left for Baghdad to attend the fifth Joint Iran-Iraq Political Conference and meet with senior Iraqi officials (ISNA, July 3, 2023).



Meeting of the Joint Iran-Iraq Political Conference (ISNA, July 4, 2023).