



Spotlight on Iran

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Author: Dr. Raz Zimmt

Overview

- ▶ Speaking at a conference of IRGC commanders, Qods Force Commander Esmail Qaani said Israel is under difficult **conditions** both from within and without and is undergoing a process of decline and collapse. He said the “**resistance front**” had the upper hand.
- ▶ Ali-Akbar Velayati, senior advisor to the Iranian Supreme Leader, spoke by phone with the head of Hamas’s Political Bureau and the secretary general of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), stressing Iran’s continued support for the Palestinians and praising the “**resistance of the Palestinian people**,” especially in the West Bank. Velayati also spoke with Hezbollah’s deputy secretary general and congratulated him on the anniversary of the Second Lebanon War.
- ▶ The Israel Security Agency (ISA) **reported** that as part of a joint operation by the ISA, the Israel Police, and the IDF, several Israeli civilians from Kafr Qasim were detained in July 2023 in possession of Iranian-made IEDs and a large quantity of other weapons.
- ▶ A Syrian news channel reported on the ongoing increased activity of the IRGC and pro-Iranian militias in Deir ez-Zor in eastern Syria.
- ▶ Interviewed by an Iranian news agency, the secretary general of the joint Iranian-Syrian Chamber of Commerce said that no date had yet been set for the start of operations of the joint Iranian-Syrian bank. The remarks were made against the background of the meetings of the joint Iranian-Syrian economic committee held in Tehran at the end of July, during which it was reported that an Iranian bank would soon begin operating in Syria.
- ▶ Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah met with the advisor to the Iranian foreign minister and the Iranian ambassador to Beirut to discuss the latest developments in Lebanon and the region. Before that, the Iranian foreign minister’s advisor met with Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri.

► In mid-August, the commander of the IRGC's Qods Force visited Iraq and met with the prime minister and the heads of the Shiite Coordination Framework. The newspaper Al-Araby al-Jadeed reported that during the visit, Qaani demanded that the heads of the Shiite militias refrain from any military action against American targets in the country at this time.

Iranian involvement in the Palestinian arena

► Speaking at a conference of IRGC commanders, Qods Force Commander Esmail Qaani said that the “Zionist regime” is undergoing a process of decline and collapse and that Israel is under difficult conditions, both internally and externally. He noted that recently, the “resistance forces” in the West Bank had carried out between 15 and 30 attacks a day against the “Zionist regime.” He also said that the Axis of Resistance had the upper hand over the “Zionist regime” and that it had managed to regain its right to gas, which could not have been achieved without Hezbollah’s resistance (Tasnim, August 19, 2023).



Qods Force Commander Esmail Qaani (Tasnim, August 19, 2023)

► Ali-Akbar Velayati, the Supreme Leader’s senior advisor for international affairs, spoke by phone with Ismail Haniyeh, head of Hamas’s Political Bureau, and Ziad al-Nakhalah, secretary general of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). Velayati praised the “resistance of the Palestinian people,” especially in the West Bank, and stressed Iran’s continued support for the “resistance.” He said that the Palestinians’ steadfastness against the enemies was a source of pride and that there was no doubt about their victory. Haniyeh thanked Velayati for Iran’s support for the Palestinians and the Axis of Resistance, noting that the “resistance” in the West Bank will continue. Al-Nakhalah also expressed appreciation for the Islamic Republic’s support for the Palestinians. Velayati also spoke by phone with Hezbollah Deputy Secretary General Sheikh Na’im Qassem and congratulated him on the anniversary of the Second Lebanon War. Qassem noted that Iran’s support played an important role in

Hezbollah's victories and that the organization would not forget its support (ISNA, August 22, 2023).

► According to an Israel Security Agency (ISA) update from August 24, 2023, as part of a joint operation by the ISA, the Israel Police, and the IDF, several Israeli civilians from Kafr Qasim were detained in July 2023 on suspicion of receiving a large quantity of high-quality weapons. Two Iranian-made IEDs and a large quantity of other weapons were found in their possession. According to a senior ISA source, this illustrates once again the efforts of terrorist elements from Hezbollah and Iran to exploit Israeli Arab citizens for security activity against the state (ISA media, August 24, 2023).

Iranian Involvement in Syria and Lebanon

► On August 17, 2023, the Syrian news channel Ayn al-Furat reported on the ongoing increased activity of the IRGC and pro-Iranian militias in Deir ez-Zor in eastern Syria. According to the report, the IRGC brought heavy vehicles to eastern Deir ez-Zor to build a permanent Iranian building in the city. The IRGC commander in the region, Hajj Kamil, assigned the construction activity to the Iranian Jihad al-Bina Foundation. According to the report, the pro-Iranian militias have begun converting buildings in the area into weapons warehouses and establishing a training camp inside Deir ez-Zor.

► On August 21, 2023, shortly before midnight, an attack attributed to Israel was reported against targets in the Al-Kiswah and Al-Ghazlania area south of Damascus. According to Syrian sources, targets of Hezbollah and Iran were attacked (Syrian TV, August 21, 2023). Another attack attributed to Israel, on August 28, 2023, reportedly targeted sensitive military equipment delivered by Iran (Al-Hadath, August 28, 2023).

► Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Nasser Kanani criticized the continued US presence in Syria, saying it was illegal and contrary to international law. At his weekly press conference, Kanani claimed that the continued American presence in Syria was preparing the ground for increased activity of the "terrorist groups" in the country and that the Syrian government also demanded an end to the American occupation. The Foreign Ministry spokesperson added that Iran's presence in Syria is in line with the request of the legitimate, official government in Syria and within the framework of cooperation between the two countries in the fight against terrorism (Fars, August 21, 2023).

- ▶ Hassan Shamschadi, secretary general of the joint Iranian-Syrian Chamber of Commerce, said in an interview with an Iranian news agency that no date had yet been set for the start of operations of the joint Iranian-Syrian bank. He noted that opening such a bank was necessary for the Iranian private sector to carry out financial transactions with Syria and to expand trade and economic ties between the two countries. He added that the joint bank was in the process of being established. However, it was not yet officially established, and it was still not possible to make money transfers through it (iqna.ir, August 13, 2023). During the meetings of the joint Iranian-Syrian economic committee held in Tehran at the end of July, it was reported that an Iranian bank would soon begin operating in Syria.
- ▶ Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein-Amir Abdollahian said in a message sent to Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah on August 13, 2023, that “Iran will spare no effort to assist the Axis of Resistance until the occupation is completely removed and Zionism is completely destroyed.” The message was sent to mark the anniversary of the Second Lebanon War (Tasnim, August 13, 2023).
- ▶ On August 19, 2023, Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah met with Mehdi Shoushtari, advisor to the Iranian foreign minister and director general for West Asian and North African affairs at the Iranian Foreign Ministry. The meeting was also attended by Mojtaba Amani, the Iranian ambassador to Beirut. The Lebanese newspaper Al-Akhbar reported (August 19, 2023) that the two discussed the latest developments in Lebanon and the region. On August 18, 2023, Shoushtari met with Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri and discussed with him the situation in Lebanon and the region and Iranian-Lebanese relations (Fars, August 19, 2023).



Hassan Nasrallah meets with the advisor to the Iranian foreign minister (Fars, August 19, 2023)

Iranian involvement in Iraq

- ▶ On August 15, 2023, Shafaq News reported, citing a political source, that IRGC's Qods Force Commander Esmail Qaani arrived in Iraq to discuss with Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani and the heads of the Shiite Coordination Framework the relations between Iraq and the United States against the background of the Iraqi-American negotiations on the US presence in the country and the Coordination Framework's preparations ahead of the provincial elections. In June 2023, a delegation from the Coordination Framework visited Tehran and met with senior Iranian officials to discuss efforts to form a joint coalition of the pro-Iranian Shiite militias ahead of the provincial elections expected to be held in Iraq in December 2023 (Shafaq News, June 25, 2023). The newspaper Al-Araby al-Jadeed reported (August 16, 2023) that during his visit to Iraq, Qaani demanded that the heads of the Shiite militias refrain from taking any military action against US targets in the country at this time. The Qods Force commander also discussed the presence of Iranian Kurdish separatist opposition groups in northern Iraq in light of Iran's demand to disarm them.
- ▶ On August 22, 2023, Iranian Ambassador to Baghdad Mohammad Kazem Al-e Sadegh met with Satam Jadaan al-Dandah, the Syrian ambassador to Baghdad. In the meeting, held at the Iranian embassy in Baghdad, the two discussed regional and international developments as well as the internal situation in Iraq. The two ambassadors expressed concern over the US military activity on the Iraqi-Syrian border and its impact on regional destabilization. The two also discussed the possibility of multilateral cooperation in promoting infrastructure and transportation projects in Iraq and countries in the region (IRNA, August 22, 2023).



Meeting of the ambassadors of Iran and Syria in Baghdad (IRNA, August 22, 2023)