



Spotlight on Iran

September 26 - October 8, 2023

Author: Dr. Raz Zimmt

Overview

- ▶ With contacts aimed at promoting possible normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia in the background, Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi attacked Israel and warned against the normalization process. The Supreme Leader of Iran once again referred to Israel as a “cancer” and declared that normalizing relations with it would be a gamble on a losing horse. The Iranian president stated that the liberation of Jerusalem was a top priority for the Muslim nation and that normalizing relations with Israel would be a setback for any government in the Muslim world.
- ▶ The Syrian army reported an Israeli strike against several military targets in the Deir ez-Zor area in eastern Syria on the night of October 2, 2023. Iran did not comment on the attack, which, according to some assessments, targeted a convoy delivering weapons and components of Iranian air defense systems.
- ▶ Iran condemned the drone attack launched on October 5, 2023, from Idlib territory in northwestern Syria at the graduation ceremony of the officers’ course at the military college in Homs, killing dozens of people. A spokesman for the Iranian foreign ministry blamed the attack on “foreign supporters of the terrorist groups.”
- ▶ Iraq’s national security adviser visited Tehran in early October 2023 to discuss the completion of the implementation of the security agreement between the two countries. At the same time, a delegation of the Iranian Border Police met in northern Iraq with an Iraqi Border Police delegation to discuss the security situation on the border and the implementation of the security agreement between the two countries.
- ▶ In a first Iranian reaction to the developments in the Palestinian arena, Rahim Safavi, the senior advisor to the Iranian leader, stated that Iran supports the "commendable operation of Al-Aqsa Storm" and is confident that the 'Resistance Front' backs this cause. He congratulated

the 'Palestinian fighters' and affirmed that Iran would stand alongside those fighters until the 'liberation of Palestine and Jerusalem' (ISNA, 7 October 2023).

Iranian involvement in the Palestinian arena

► Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, speaking at the 37th Islamic Unity Conference in Tehran, said that drawing attention to the liberation of Jerusalem was the most crucial indicator for the Muslim nation. He said the option of surrender and compromise with the enemy no longer existed and that the only viable choice for the fighters in the occupied territories, including Lebanon and Palestine, was resistance against the occupiers. Raisi also said that normalizing relations with the “Zionist regime” would be a setback for any government in the Muslim world, stressing that Israel had not complied with any of the agreements signed with it, including the Camp David and Oslo Accords (IRNA, October 1, 2023). The annual International Conference on Islamic Unity has convened in Tehran since the early 1980s, coinciding with the week marking the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad, with the participation of Sunni and Shiite clerics from Iran and abroad.



Iranian President Raisi at the Islamic Unity Conference in Tehran (IRNA, October 1, 2023)

► Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei said in a speech given in the presence of senior regime officials, ambassadors from Islamic countries, and guests of the Islamic Unity Conference that normalizing relations with the “Zionist regime” would be akin to a gamble on a horse bound to lose because the Palestinian movement was more vibrant and active than ever, while the “oppressive regime” was dying and about to disappear. He stressed that the issue of Palestine was the foremost concern for the Muslim world and that young Palestinians were better prepared than ever before. He claimed the “Zionist regime,” which he referred to as a “cancer,” would be eliminated by the Palestinian people and the “resistance” forces in the entire region (Fars, October 3, 2023).



The speech of the Iranian Supreme Leader on October 3, 2023 (Supreme Leader’s website, October 3, 2023)

► Ihsan Ataya, a member of the Political Bureau of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and the organization’s representative in Lebanon, said in an interview with the Palestinian TV channel Filastin al-Yawm (September 28, 2023) that the PIJ’s relations with Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah were the basis for the organization’s military training and for developing its performance at all levels. Ataya also said that the ties between the organization and the Islamic Republic were “deep and strategic” and that Iran had provided it with financial and military aid and any other assistance it needed for the struggle against the occupation.

Iranian involvement in Syria and Lebanon

► According to Syrian military sources, on the night of October 2, 2023, Israel attacked several military targets in the Deir ez-Zor area in eastern Syria. According to a report by the official Syrian news agency (SANA, October 3, 2023), two Syrian soldiers were wounded in the attack, and infrastructure was damaged. Iran did not comment on the attack, which, according to some assessments, targeted a convoy delivering weapons from Iran to pro-Iranian militias in eastern Syria and components of Iranian air defense systems.

► Iran condemned the drone attack launched on October 5, 2023, from Idlib territory in northwestern Syria at the graduation ceremony of the officers’ course at the military college in Homs. Dozens of people were killed in the attack, and hundreds were wounded. Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Nasser Kanani expressed condolences to the government, army, and people of Syria and the families of those killed and wished a speedy recovery to the wounded. He blamed the attack on “foreign supporters of the terrorist groups” and called on international institutions, particularly the UN Security Council, to act on this matter (IRNA, October 5, 2023). Following the attack, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian

spoke with his Syrian counterpart, Faisal Mekdad, and expressed condolences (ISNA, October 5, 2023).

► Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Nasser Kanani reiterated Iran's demand for the withdrawal of American forces from Syria. At his weekly press conference, Kanani said that the military presence of the United States in Syria ran counter to the position of the Syrian government and international law and was illegal. He added that the US activity in Syria violated Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity (Mehr, October 2, 2023).

► According to a report by the Syrian news channel Ayn al-Furat (October 5, 2023), the IRGC and Iran's allies in the Syrian regime are preventing the promotion of projects to rehabilitate neighborhoods destroyed by the civil war in Deir ez-Zor in eastern Syria to maintain their control over the area and use houses in those neighborhoods as weapons depots and military headquarters. According to the report, the Nasr headquarters, located near the College of Education building on Port Said Street, is used as the central command headquarters of the Revolutionary Guards and pro-Iranian militias in Deir ez-Zor. The headquarters was established in early 2023 on the instruction of Hajj Kamil, the IRGC Commander in eastern Syria. It includes several headquarters located between civilian houses to prevent airstrikes. One headquarters is used by Hajj Kamil himself, a second headquarters adjacent to it serves the IRGC's support and supply officer, a third headquarters serves the Finance Bureau and the Legal Bureau, and a fourth one serves Hezbollah and the joint bureau of Hezbollah and the Revolutionary Guards.



Nasr headquarters used by the IRGC in Deir ez-Zor (Ayn al-Furat, October 5, 2023)

Iranian involvement in Iraq

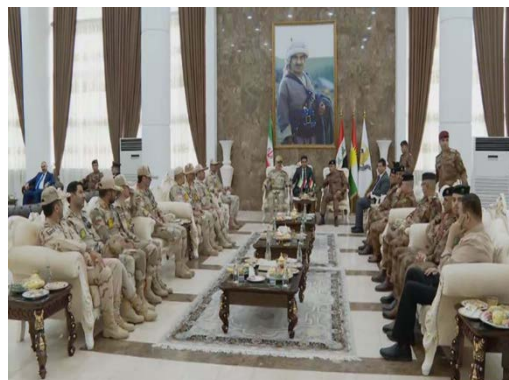
► On October 1, 2023, Iraqi National Security Adviser Qasim al-Araji visited Tehran to discuss the implementation of the security agreement between the two countries. As part of this agreement, Iraq recently removed Kurdish separatist groups operating in the Kurdish region in

northern Iraq from the border between the two countries, in accordance with Iran's demand to disarm these groups. On October 1, 2023, Al-Araji met with the secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, Ali-Akbar Ahmadian, to discuss bilateral issues and the full implementation of the security agreement. Ahmadian stressed that the agreement must be implemented accurately and fully and pointed out the need to promote relations between the two countries, including in the economic sphere. Al-Araji reiterated his country's commitment to implementing the security agreement with Iran and expanding ties between the countries (Fars, October 1, 2023).



The Iraqi national security advisor meets with the secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (Fars, October 1, 2023)

► On October 3, 2023, a delegation of the Iranian Border Police arrived in the Hajj Imran area on the Iran-Iraq border to hold talks with Iraqi Border Police representatives regarding the security situation in the border area and the implementation of the security agreement between the two countries. At the request of the Iranian representatives, the talks were held in the city of Erbil in northern Iraq (kurdistan24, October 3, 2023).



Meeting of delegations from the Iranian Border Police and the Iraqi Border Police (kurdistan24, October 3, 2023)

► On September 28, 2023, Daryoush Amani, Iranian Deputy Minister of Transportation and head of the Transportation and Road Maintenance Organization, met in Tehran with Iraqi Deputy Trade Minister Sattar Jabbar al-Jaberi. At the meeting, the sides discussed expanding commercial and transportation cooperation between the two countries. Amani noted that the volume of trade between the two countries had increased significantly in recent years and that the Iranian Transportation Organization was prepared to assist Iraq with technical knowledge and experience in road maintenance and smart transportation systems. The Iraqi Ambassador to Tehran, Naseer Abdul Mohsen Abdullah, who attended the meeting, said that the Iraqi government was ready for any cooperation in the fields of trade and transition between the two countries (Mehr, September 29, 2023).



The meeting of the Iranian deputy minister of transportation with the Iraqi deputy minister of commerce (website of the Iranian Ministry of Transportation, September 29, 2023)

► At the end of September 2023, Iraqi Justice Ministry Spokesman Kamel Amin announced the signing of a legal cooperation and prisoner exchange agreement between Iran and Iraq (ISNA, September 28, 2023).