

The Iraqi Mediation and Zarif's visit to Baghdad

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The Iranian foreign minister Javad Zarif's visit to Iraq is concur with his leaked recording where he spoke on some sensitive issues and stirred fierce political debate in Iran. And amid this he visited Qatar and Iraq. Apart from the leaked tape, to understand Zarif's visit to Baghdad should we just look at his mouth or should look at other actors too?

The leaked tape is Zarif's conversation with Saeed Leylaz at the research centers of Iranian presidency which frankly talked about how Iranian military rules over diplomacy in Iran. "I have sacrificed diplomacy for the military field rather than the field servicing diplomacy." He also mentioned that most of the Iranian foreign ministry cadres came from the security agencies. Therefore if we want to more clearly understand his visit to Iraq we should understand Zarif and others. Because in the leaked audio he admits that the military is stronger than foreign ministry. Since 2003 Iran have had three Ambassadors in Iraq and they were openly affiliated or seen to be linked with the Iranian al-Quds force. In 2007 General David Petraeus said Hassan Kazmi Qumi Iranian Ambassador in Baghdad at the time is member of al-Quds force.^[1] After Qumi, Hassan Danaeifar ethnically Arab was was an officer with al-Quds force.^[2] And after him Iraj Masjedi became Ambassador which according to the media agencies in Iran he was advisor of former al-Quds force commander.^[3] Masjedi is also from the Arab dominated region of south Iran. Whatever issues are in between Iran's foreign ministry and army over foreign policy as the leaked tape of Zarif stirred debate, we have to watch both al-Quds force and Iranian Ambassador in Baghdad words on their policy in Iraq.

Zarif's visit reflects on deep relations between Iran and Iraq. Tehran is insist to build two railways with Iraq first Khoramshahr and Shalamcheh -Basra and other one is Kermansh railway through Khosravi border gate with Iraq.^[4] Iran has another project called Iran's free road to Najaf. This is from Chilat border crossing of Ilam province to Najaf which 250 kilometers length.^[5] Iran is working to be more connected with Iraq through railways and roads which have economic and political dimensions. The upcoming Iraqi elections also important for Iran and want to be clear that future of Iraq's political map is not against it. The Kurdistan region is also important for Iran over the issue of US forces presence, US-Iraq strategic dialogue, borders and trade, but more than that Iran sees its relations with Kurdistan region as balance factor for its relations with Baghdad. Although Zarif's visit has economic and deep bilateral relations aspect but what makes this trip more different is related to Iraq's recent mediation between Iran and Arab Gulf States.

Iraq's mediation

Currently Iraq is involved in three mediations, direct and indirect talks which Iran is part of it. The Iran-Saudi talks, US-Iraq strategic dialogue, nuclear dialogue and sanctions, and the fourth regional powers talks, Turkey, Egypt, Iran and Saudi Arabia!

It seems that Iraqi national security adviser Qasim al-Araji play key role in these talks because: After the meeting between Iran and Saudi Arabia on April 9th in Baghdad, and recent Washington-Baghdad strategic dialogue Araji on April 12 visited Tehran and on 20th met with Abdulaziz al-Shammari Saudi envoy to Baghdad. And on 27th met with Walid Mohammed Egyptian Ambassador to Baghdad and discussed understanding between Egypt, Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia.

Iraq's openness with Arab world and Iran-Saudi Arabia talks

Iran it said welcomes Iraqi mediation to help mend its ties with Gulf Arab states, in addition to Iraq-gulf relations the most critical proposal is the possible success of Kadhmi's project the new Mashreq between Egypt, Jordan and Iraq. And is interesting that in the same time Araji proposed the regional understanding and met with Egyptian Ambassador on this

matter. This raises that question whether Baghdad want to ensure Iran that its deal with these Arab countries won't go against it? This might be is the thing that Iraqi president has said indirectly: Iraq's political open door is to ease tensions.

Zarif in his visit to Baghdad thanked Iraq for its stability efforts in the region, Masjedi Iranian Ambassador to Iraq some days ago said that "the Islamic Republic (of Iran) supports Baghdad's mediation to bring Tehran closer to countries with which we have faced challenges or with which ties have cooled, and Iraqi officials have been notified of this".[\[6\]](#) This was indication for the Saudi Arabia-Iran talks which according to some sources the second round of these talks will take place end of this month or early next month.

Masjedi said that Iraq is making these mediations in order to ease tensions and said that we have not yet reached clear results and significant progress. Let us wait for the work to go forward and we can see practical results. This means he expects more meeting to take place. Iran at this stage agrees that talks with Saudi Arabia to take place in Iraq but the Saudis did not speak much on the talks yet. Therefore is possible that Zarif's visit to Baghdad, Araj and Saudi Ambassador's meeting is to held second round of talks which has been for more than 5 years the diplomatic ties severed between Tehran and Riyadh : So whether another round of talks were held that we will hear later about it or they make preparations for.

Baghdad-Washington Strategic dialogue and nuclear talks

The Washington, Baghdad and Tehran tripartite are matching in the US-Iraq strategic dialogue and issue of Iranian nuclear program. It was after recent Baghdad-Washington talks that Iraqi national security advisor Araj went to Tehran and according to Iranian Ambassador in Baghdad this was to discuss Iraq-US strategic dialogue with Iran. Araj said that US is committed to set a timetable for its troops withdrawal from Iraq, which Iran is in rush to see that happen. But more importantly than US forces presence in Iraq for both Iran and Iraq are issues of "Iran debts" and energy deal, especially the natural gas that in summer time is very important for Iraq because can event impact its national security. Iraq debts to Iran is an issue on the table. And this is linked with the US sanctions because if Iraq without US green light transfer dollars to Iran will face trouble. A while ago Hamid Hosseini member of the Iran-Iraq joint chamber of commerce said US has agreed to the release of \$3 billion in Iranian funds that have been frozen in Iraq, Oman and South Korea due to Washington's sanctions. After releasing seized South Korean ship some sources from foreign ministry of South Korea said that talks will be held over Iranian frozen funds.[\[7\]](#) And this without US approval is impossible. And this is true for Iraq as well.

Iranian Ambassador in Baghdad in a statement to the Iranian official media said that after Iranian labor's minister visit to Baghdad" the Iraqi finance ministry set a timetable to pay back debts to Iran." If this is true then Baghdad no doubt will not do so without Washington's approval.

Another issue is related to buying natural gas from Iran. As we are heading to summer so might be elections and heat scare Baghdad government that people return to the street. In the end of March Washington announced has renewed a waiver allowing Iraq to pay for electricity imported from Iran, this time giving Baghdad 120 days to reduce its energy dependence on neighboring Tehran . But Iran and Iraq signed two years deal on electricity[\[8\]](#) and is expected that Majid Mahdi Hantoush Iraqi electricity minister after Zarif's visit will visit Iran and sign new agreement.[\[9\]](#) And this is without US approval is not an easy move.

Although US secretary of state said that until Iran not fully return to its compliance to the nuclear deal will not lift sanctions but US presence in Iraq, resume energy and trade deals and possibility of pay back "debts" to Iran by Iraq which are coincides with Vienna talks are interconnected. Iraq might be is door to ease sanctions on Iran without that officially Washington lift all the sanctions but forgive it.

[1] <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-idUSL0759750920071007>

[2] -

<https://www.jamran.news/%D9%85%D8%A4%D9%84%D9%81-64-%D8%AD%D8%B3%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A7%DB%8C%DB%8C-%D9%81%D8%B1>

[3]

<https://www.isna.ir/news/95102616778/%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%AC-%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%AC%D8%AF%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%B9%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B3%D9%81%DB%8C%D8%B1-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%B4%D8%AF>

[4]

<https://www.mojnews.com/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%87%D8%A7-62/220080-%D8%A7%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%A2%D9%87%D9%86-%DA%A9%D8%B1%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B4%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%AE%D8%B7%D9%88%D8%B7-%D8%B1%DB%8C%D9%84%DB%8C-%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%AC%D9%87%D8%B4-%D8%A8%D8%B2%D8%B1%DA%AF-%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%DB%8C-%D8%B1%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D9%87%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AF#gsc.tab=0>

[5]

<https://www.mehrnews.com/news/4806242/%D8%A7%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%AC%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A8-%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%82-%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%BE%D8%A7-%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%86%D9%85%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AB-%D8%A2%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%87-%D9%86%D8%AC%D9%81-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA>

[6] -

<https://www.irna.ir/news/84300863/%D8%B3%D9%81%DB%8C%D8%B1-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D9%88%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%B7%D8%AA-%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%B4-%D8%B2%D8%AF%D8%A7%DB%8C%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B7%D9%82%D9%87-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%81%D9%82>

[7]

<https://www.dw.com/fa-ir/%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%86%D9%81%D8%AA%DA%A9%D8%B4-%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%82%DB%8C%D9%81-%D8%B4%D8%AF%D9%87-%DA%A9%D8%B1%D9%87-%D8%AC%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D8%B1%D8%A7-%D8%A2%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%AF-%DA%A9%D8%B1%D8%AF/a-57140021>

[8]

<https://www.aa.com.tr/ar/%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF/%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%82%D8%B9-%D8%B9%D9%82%D8%AF-%D8%AA%D8%B2%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D9%87%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%A1>

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[9] <https://www.mawazin.net/Details.aspx?jimare=150758>