



Visit of Chinese Military Delegation to Iran

OE Watch Commentary: While China has traditionally taken a hands-off approach in the Middle East, its growing energy reliance on Middle East oil and desire to compete globally, instead of just regionally, against the United States and its allies have contributed to warming ties with Iran. The accompanying excerpted article from *Tasnim News Agency*, which is affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), documents the visit of a 16-member Chinese military delegation. With regard to Special Forces, China and Iran are not equals: China has much more to contribute to Iran in terms of equipment, training, and tactics than the reverse.

While a single visit in and of itself does not signify a change in relations, growing Sino-Iranian military ties suggest that Tehran and Beijing are serious about augmenting their ties (for more information, see “Iran Navy Enters Pacific,” *OE Watch*, April 2013; “Iran-China Air Force Cooperation on Horizon?” *OE Watch*, December 2015). Outreach to China would also conform to a traditional Iranian pattern of seeking to bolster strategic and military partnerships with countries deemed in Tehran to be otherwise uninterested in internal Iranian affairs. When Great Britain and Russia competed for influence inside Persia (as Iran was then known) in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Iranian authorities turned first to Austria and then to Belgium before seeking a greater partnership with the United States. While Russo-Iranian ties have had an unprecedented rapprochement, many Iranians remain distrustful of Russia and skeptical of Moscow’s ultimate intentions (See “Special Essay: Iran-Russia Relations,” *OE Watch*, July 2016). Therefore, outreach to China makes strategic sense. Simply put, it is Tehran’s way of not putting all its eggs in one basket.

Should China and Iran cooperate on special operations, the second-order impact could be significant. The IRGC remains the chief patron not only of Hezbollah and the Houthis, but also equally dangerous militias in Iraq. Tactics learned by the IRGC from Chinese Special Forces might therefore migrate quickly into the strategic environment in Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

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Ground Force Commander Brig. Gen. Kiyumars Heydari meets visiting Chinese delegation.
Source: Tasnim, goo.gl/ZSR7Nm, CC 4.0.

Source: “Didar-e ‘Uza-ye Hayat-e Nezam-e Chin ba Farmandeh Niru-ye Zamini Artesh (Chinese Military Delegation Meeting with Ground Forces Commander),” *Tasnim News Agency*, 3 July 2018. <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1397/04/12/1767123/>

According to Tasnim, this delegation consisted of 16 military men from the Chinese Air Force and Navy with experience in the field of Special Operations. Tomorrow, the Chinese military delegation will also tomorrow see General Ghadir Nezami, Armed Forces General Staff deputy for International Affairs and will also visit the 65th Special Forces Airborne Brigade of the Navy. Gen. Heydari, in this meeting, welcomed the Chinese military delegation and said the two countries have a long historical record, and noted, “Iran and China are two great countries, effective in the region and the world, and both countries face common threats around the region and the world. “The biggest threat to humanity is the United States,” said the commander of the Army’s ground forces.