



Spotlight on Iran and the Shiite Axis

April 29—May 6, 2026

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Highlights¹

- ▶ The Iranian foreign minister spoke with the Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament and discussed developments in Lebanon amid ongoing ceasefire violations between Israel and Hezbollah.
- ▶ Iran canceled the visa exemption for Lebanese citizens in response to the Lebanese government's decision to take a similar step.
- ▶ The commander of the Qods Force and the Houthis condemned the IDF's seizure of the flotilla to the Gaza Strip.
- ▶ Iran welcomed the appointment of Ali Faleh al-Zaidi as Prime Minister of Iraq on behalf of the Coordination Framework of the pro-Iranian Shiite militias in Iraq. It was reported that one of the American conditions for cooperation with the new government will be the disarmament of the Iranian militias.
- ▶ The US administration offered a \$10 million reward for information on the secretary-general of Harakat al-Nujaba, one of the most powerful pro-Iranian militias in Iraq.

Iran's Involvement in Lebanon

- ▶ Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi spoke with the Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament, Nabih Berri, and discussed the latest regional developments with him. Araghchi said that "stopping the aggression of the Zionist regime against Lebanon" was part of the ceasefire understandings between Iran and the US and that this issue will remain a priority for the Islamic Republic in any future process (ILNA, April 29, 2026).
- ▶ Iran canceled the visa exemption for Lebanese citizens in response to the Lebanese government's decision to take a similar step in March 2026. The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Esmail Baghaei, stated in his weekly press conference that the visa exemption agreement for citizens of both countries had been in effect for a long time and facilitated their travel. However, following the Lebanese government's decision to unilaterally cancel the exemption for Iranian citizens, it was decided to take a similar step. He noted that Iran will allow special facilitations, including the possibility of issuing an immediate visa at the country's entry points. Regarding the claims of

¹ The weekly study includes the activities of Iran, the Shiite militias in Iraq, and the Houthis in Yemen.

Hezbollah’s critics in Lebanon that the “Axis of Resistance” dragged Lebanon into war, Baghaei said that Hezbollah and the “resistance” in Lebanon are a source of pride for the country, the Arab world, and the Islamic nation, and there is no doubt that they are struggling against the “Zionist regime” for the dignity and independence of Lebanon (Iranian Foreign Ministry Telegram channel, May 4, 2026).

► The director of the religious seminaries in Iran and senior cleric, Ayatollah Ali-Reza Araf, expressed the support of the Iranian Shiite religious establishment for Hezbollah in a message to the organization’s secretary-general, Naim Qassem. Araf noted that the unity of the “Axis of Resistance” across various arenas has become a stable reality and that the Lebanese people presented the world with an unprecedented example of standing and steadfastness, until its popular resistance became a symbol of dignity and a source of inspiration for all peoples aspiring for freedom and dignity. Araf added that southern Lebanon has turned into a “graveyard for Merkava tanks” of the IDF and that Hezbollah presented the world with a shining image of an invincible will and a people capable of shattering military myths, exposing the fragility of the occupier, and collapsing its “spider web.” He emphasized that the religious seminaries and senior clerics stand alongside the “resistance,” support it – particularly the “resistance” in Lebanon – and are ready to provide any spiritual and practical assistance for the “path of justice and truth” (Mehr, May 4, 2026).



Ayatollah Araf (Mehr, May 4, 2026)

Iran and the Militias amid Developments in the Palestinian Arena

Iran

► Qods Force commander Esmail Qaani condemned the Israeli Navy’s seizure of the flotilla to the Gaza Strip. In a statement he published, Qaani wrote that the seizure of the ship “by Zionist criminals” constitutes an example of international terrorism and that “the efforts of the freedom activists to break the siege on the oppressed people in Gaza and save Palestinian children and women from the claws of the Zionists” constitute an escalation of the global struggle movement

against “the Zionist child-killers”. He added that the “cowardly crimes of the Zionists” will further strengthen the determination of the “freedom activists” around the world “to break the siege on the oppressed people in Gaza” (Nour News, May 2, 2026).

► Iran’s permanent representative to the UN, Amir-Saeid Iravani, stated in a Security Council discussion on the situation in the Middle East that any solution for the Gaza Strip must ensure a permanent ceasefire and a full withdrawal of the “occupying forces.” He noted that the Strip continues to suffer widespread destruction and remains under siege, and that Israel continues to “violate” the ceasefire and prevent the delivery of humanitarian aid. According to him, the expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank constitutes a “flagrant violation” of international law and exacerbates instability (snn.ir, April 29, 2026).



Iran’s ambassador to the UN (snn.ir, April 29, 2026)

The Houthis

► The Houthi Ministry of Foreign Affairs strongly condemned the “Israeli aggression against the Global Freedom Flotilla,” which included dozens of boats aimed at “breaking the Israeli siege on the Gaza Strip.” The ministry stated that this “aggression” is a “flagrant violation” of international law and norms that prohibit the interception of civilian vessels in international waters. In addition, the ministry praised in its statement the “courage” of the participants of the flotilla who “embody the highest ideals of human solidarity without being deterred.” Finally, the ministry called on the international community to fulfill its legal and moral responsibility and compel Israel to end its “aggression,” remove the “siege,” and ensure the safety and security of the flotilla participants (Houthi Ministry of Foreign Affairs Telegram channel, April 30, 2026).

Iran’s Involvement in Iraq

► Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi published a message of congratulations to the Shiite Coordination Framework in Iraq and the newly elected Prime Minister of Iraq, Ali Faleh al-Zaidi. In the statement, Araghchi wrote that he welcomes the Coordination Framework’s choice to present a

candidate for the premiership, congratulates al-Zaidi on his appointment, and wishes him success in forming the government and serving the Iraqi people. He emphasized Iran's commitment to maintaining Iraq's sovereignty and its support for political stability, development, and the strengthening of cooperation between the two countries for the interests of both peoples (Abbas Araghchi's X account, May 1, 2026).

The Houthis in Yemen

- ▶ It was reported that the security forces in Sana'a announced the dismantling of a "spy network" linked to the US, Israel, and Saudi Arabia. According to the report, this was the fifth network uncovered by the Houthis since the end of 2024, and it was considered particularly significant because its members belonged to the Yemeni army, most of them as officers. As with two other networks uncovered in recent months, it was claimed that the current network operated from a joint operations room for the three countries based in Saudi Arabia (Al-Akhbar, April 30, 2026).
- ▶ The Houthi Foreign Ministry declared that the "Zionists" suffered an "utter failure" in the recent campaign against Iran. The statement claimed that evidence of this failure is the rise in oil prices and clarified that the continuation of "American-Israeli aggression" will exacerbate the damage to the global economy. The ministry added that the US and Israel must understand that the "Axis of Jihad and Resistance" cannot be broken and that the "Zionist project" in the region has fallen thanks to the sacrifices, patience, and struggle of the members of the axis (Houthi Ministry of Foreign Affairs Telegram channel, May 4, 2026).

The Pro-Iranian Militias in Iraq

Disarming the militias

- ▶ According to conflicting reports, two of the pro-Iranian "factions" in Iraq, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq and the Imam Ali Brigades, handed over their weapons to the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), the umbrella organization of the militias, against the backdrop of the appointment of Ali al-Zaidi as Prime Minister of Iraq and American pressure to disarm the pro-Iranian militias in the country. It was noted that the militias, most of which are organized under the "Coordination Framework," are divided regarding the handover of weapons, as earlier, Harakat al-Nujaba and Kata'ib Hezbollah refused to do so. At the same time, "sources close to the PMF" stated that they are not aware at this stage of a "serious move" to disarm the militias or to hand over their weapons, and that at the moment, it is only a "theoretical framework" that might later be translated into a possible compromise on the issue (Asharq Al-Awsat, May 2, 2026).

► A “senior member within the Coordination Framework” stated that one of the main conditions set by the US for cooperation with the next Iraqi government is that the pro-Iranian militias operating in Iraq be disarmed and integrated into the country’s official security mechanisms, and that they will not have a direct role in the next government. In addition, the “senior official” noted that the importance of this was illustrated to the members of the “Coordination Framework” by the newly elected Prime Minister of Iraq, Ali al-Zaidi, who warned that in such scenarios, Iraq might be economically damaged. Furthermore, another “political source” stated that most of the “Coordination Framework” leaders support de-escalation and avoiding a confrontation with the US, and that their current disputes relate to the representation of the militias in the government (Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, May 4, 2026).

American activity against the militias

► The US Department of State announced a \$10 million reward for information on Akram al-Kaabi, the secretary-general of Harakat al-Nujaba. The statement said that the militia attacked US diplomatic facilities in Iraq and US military facilities in Iraq and Syria and is responsible for the killing of an American contractor and the wounding of service members. Harakat al-Nujaba is one of the most powerful and leading pro-Iranian militias within the “Islamic Resistance in Iraq,” and al-Kaabi is considered one of the most important leaders of the “Axis of Resistance” and is close to the Hezbollah leadership.² The move is part of the increased US pressure on the militias against the backdrop of the effort to bring about their disarmament. In recent weeks, similar rewards were placed on three other leaders of armed militias, including Kata’ib Hezbollah.

Reward announcement for al-Kaabi (Awards for Justice website, May 5, 2026)

Militias’ involvement in the campaign against Iran

► A “senior official in the US Department of State” revealed that the various US facilities located in Iraq were attacked more than 600 times during the recent campaign between the US and Iran. He

² For further information, see the ITIC’s study from May 14, 2023, “[The Nujaba Movement – the Movement of the Noble Ones: One of the dominant pro-Iranian militias in Iraq.](#)”

called for “deeds and not just words” regarding the separation between the militias in the country and the state institutions (CNN Arabic, May 6, 2026).