



Spotlight on Iran and the Shiite Axis

December 25, 2024 – January 1, 2025

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Highlights¹

- ▶ Iran rejected the claims regarding its alleged involvement in incitement and encouragement of sectarian riots in Syria and stressed its desire to establish stability and security in the country. In addition, Iran emphasized the need to end Israel's military presence in Syria.
- ▶ Senior Iranian officials reiterated that the recent events in the region do not herald the weakening of the "resistance front," especially of Hezbollah. The IRGC deputy commander declared that the "Zionist regime" would not exist within a few years.
- ▶ The IRGC commander praised the continued activity of the Houthis in Yemen against Israel. Iran's representative to the United Nations rejected Israel's claims of Iranian military involvement in Yemen.
- ▶ The Houthis claimed responsibility for seven attacks against Israel using missiles and drones. Three missiles were intercepted, and a drone fell in an open area. There were no casualties. The Israeli Air Force carried out another attack in Yemen, including at Sana'a International Airport. The United States also attacked Houthi targets in Yemen.
- ▶ The secretary-general of the Nujaba Movement confirmed that an agreement had been reached with the Iraqi government to stop attacks by pro-Iranian militias against Israel.

Iran's involvement in Syria

- ▶ Senior Iranian officials denied that Tehran was involved in attempts to destabilize Syria after the overthrow of the Assad regime amid clashes between the security forces of the new regime and the Alawite minority, and condemned the continued activity of IDF forces in Syrian territory:
 - ◆ Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei rejected the allegations of Iranian involvement in incitement and encouragement of sectarian riots in Syria. He said he was surprised by reports of Iranian intervention in Syria's internal affairs. He stressed that Iran supports the territorial integrity and national unity of Syria and the establishment of a

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

political system with the participation of all political, ethnic, and religious groups in the country, adding that the spread of insecurity and violence against various parts of Syrian society must be prevented and the security of civilians must be ensured (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, December 26, 2024).

◆ In an appeal to the Arab League, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi stressed that Iran wants to achieve stability and quiet and prevent chaos and unrest in Syria. He said Iran aspires to preserve the unity of Syrian territory and the integrity of its lands, to preserve the security of the holy sites, to prevent foreign intervention and the adoption of a dangerous policy of expansion by Israel, and to force it to withdraw from the “occupied territories.” The announcement was made following the claim of the assistant secretary-general of the Arab League that Iran was encouraging sectarian clashes in Syria (Abbas Araghchi’s X account, December 27, 2024).

◆ Foreign Minister Araghchi said at a joint press conference with Omani Foreign Minister Badr Albusaidi that Iran is interested in maintaining security in Syria and ending the occupation of its territory. He also stressed the need for an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and the introduction of humanitarian aid into the region and condemned the Israeli and American attacks in Yemen (Tasnim, December 30, 2024). During his visit to Tehran, the Omani foreign minister also met with the secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council, Ali Akbar Ahmadian. Ahmadian condemned Israel’s attacks in Syria, saying that not only had the “resistance” not weakened, but that with the occupation of Syrian territory by the “Zionist regime,” a new “resistance” had been born, which would manifest itself in the coming years (ISNA, December 30, 2024).



The foreign ministers of Iran and Oman (Tasnim, December 30, 2024)

◆ Iran’s armed forces issued a statement marking the fifth anniversary of the death of former Qods Force commander Qassem Soleimani, saying that there should be no doubt that what is happening in Syria is the result of a joint American-Zionist plan. According to

the announcement, the United States must understand that its ambitions will be thwarted by the Iranian nation, as it was in the past, and it will not achieve anything in Syria (Tasnim, December 28, 2024).

► Senior Iranian officials reiterated that the “resistance front” had not weakened, despite the recent events in the region:

◆ Iranian Defense Minister Aziz Nasirzadeh said at a memorial ceremony for the head of the Qods Force’s support office in Damascus, Seyyed Razi Mousavi, that those who claim that the “resistance” has weakened do not understand its meaning. According to him, the “resistance” in the Gaza Strip is so strong that the “Zionist regime” has not been able to achieve its goals in the war. Regarding the situation in Syria, Nasirzadeh said that when Iran was in Syria, it helped stabilize the country, and when it left Syria, the “Zionist regime” attacked the country’s infrastructure 500 times (Mehr, December 27, 2024).



Iranian defense minister (Mehr, December 27, 2024)

◆ IRGC spokesman Ali Mohammad Naeini said that the Iranian attack against Israel, along with the actions of Hezbollah and the Houthis, had demonstrated the strength of the “resistance front.” He said that when there is a desire to resist, the strongest and most invincible armies in the world will be defeated in the face of the “resistance.” Conversely, when there is no desire to resist—as was the case in Syria—the enemy becomes greedy and easily occupies territory. Naeini added that Hezbollah’s actions proved that the “Zionist regime’s” calculations regarding the organization’s strength were entirely wrong. He noted that Israel had “gone into a frenzy” because of the assassination of Hassan Nasrallah and Hezbollah commanders. However, the organization quickly recovered despite the damage it suffered. Referring to the Houthis’ actions, Naeini said that Yemen had become a strong axis of the “resistance front” and that it independently secures all its capabilities. He further said that Israel’s activities in Syria would not shift the balance of power in its favor and that the enemy does not understand the essence of

the “resistance,” which cannot be weakened by bombings or physical confrontations (Tasnim, December 29, 2024).

Iran’s involvement in the Palestinian arena

► Ali Fadavi, IRGC deputy commander, said during a visit to the IRGC’s Scientific Achievements Exhibition that with God’s help and given the process that has begun, the “Zionist regime” would not exist within a few years. He said that oppression was unsustainable and that during the past 15 months, the entire world had realized that the most oppressive government in the world was the “Zionist regime” (Tasnim, December 25, 2024).



The IRGC deputy commander (Tasnim, December 25, 2024)

► Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei strongly condemned the IDF’s activity at Kamal Adwan Hospital in the Gaza Strip. He accused Israel of burning the hospital and that it was a war crime, a crime against humanity, a violation of international law, and part of the “genocide in occupied Palestine” (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, December 28, 2024).

Iran’s involvement in Yemen

► In an interview with the Yemeni TV channel al-Masirah, IRGC commander Hossein Salami praised Yemen’s role in defending “Palestine.” He said the “resistance” had not weakened, emphasizing that everyone can now see how the Yemenis shine in their defense of “Palestine,” gathering every Friday to support the Gaza Strip (ISNA, December 28, 2024).



The IRGC commander (ISNA, December 28, 2024)

► In a letter to the UN secretary-general, Iran’s representative to the UN Amir Saeed Iravani rejected the claim of Israel’s ambassador to the UN, Danny Danon, that the Houthis are a terrorist army established by Iran. Iravani noted that it is Israel, not Iran, that poses a threat to peace and security in the region. He claimed that Iran is not violating the arms embargo on Yemen and does not intervene in conflicts in the country or in the Red Sea. The Iranian ambassador also condemned Israel’s attacks in Yemen. He claimed that Iran supports a political solution to the conflict in Yemen and called on the Security Council to act against Israel’s actions (ISNA, December 31, 2024).

Operations of the Shiite militias

Yemen

Military activity against Israel

► This past week, the Houthis’ military spokesman, Yahya Saria, claimed responsibility for seven attacks against Israel – three by drones, three by a Palestine-2 hypersonic ballistic missile, and one by a Dhu al-Fiqar ballistic missile. According to Saria, all the attacks achieved their objectives (Yahya Saria’s Telegram channel, December 25, 2024 – January 1, 2025). The IDF Spokesperson reported three instances of intercepting ballistic missiles launched from Yemen before they crossed into Israeli territory and one drone that fell in an open area. No casualties were reported (IDF Spokesperson, December 25, 2024 – January 1, 2025).

► The deputy head of the Houthi media authority, Nasr al-Din Amer, claimed on the Telegram channel that “the Yemeni missiles reached Israel’s skies without any resistance from the defense systems, including the American THAAD system.” He added that “failure haunts the Zionists, and despite the media censorship policy they implement, the effects of the attacks cannot be hidden.” He further stated, “We will continue our actions until the aggression against Gaza ceases. No Israeli-American escalation against us will change that.”

Israeli attack in Yemen

► On December 26, 2024, the Israeli Air Force carried out airstrikes against Houthi “terrorist targets” in Yemen’s western coastal strip and deep inside the country. Among other things, the international airport in Sana’a, the Haziz and Ras Khatib power plants, and infrastructure at the ports of Ras Khatib, al-Hudaydah, and al-Salif were attacked. It was noted that the infrastructure was used for the transfer of Iranian weapons and for the arrival of senior Iranian officials to the area (IDF Spokesperson, December 26, 2024).

► The Houthi government in Yemen condemned the “brutal Zionist aggression,” which resulted in the deaths of six civilians, the injury of forty others, and significant damage to essential civilian infrastructure. The government accused the “aggressors” of showing disregard for the United Nations, as the attack on the airport occurred while the director of the World Health Organization was present at the site. The government further stated that the international community’s silence is appalling, emphasizing the need for immediate and decisive action to prevent future “aggression” (al-Masirah, December 26, 2024).

► Houthi spokesman Mohammad Abd al-Salam said that the attack on Sana’a International Airport and civilian infrastructure was “a Zionist crime against the Yemeni people and a habit of the criminal enemy that murders millions of Palestinians and commits war crimes and mass destruction in Gaza.” He added that the Israeli idea that their “crimes” would stop Yemen from supporting the Gaza Strip was wrong and that Yemen would not abandon its religious and humanitarian principles (Mohammad Abd al-Salam’s Telegram channel, December 26, 2024).

► Houthi Finance Minister Abdul Jabbar Ahmed Mohammed and Transportation Minister Muhammad Qahim arrived at Sana’a International Airport to assess the extent of the damage. The two stressed that the “Zionist attacks” would increase the determination of the Yemeni people and its revolutionary leadership to help and support the residents of the Gaza Strip so that the “war of extermination” would end. It was also reported that the two praised the speed of the response of the technical teams to restore work at the airport and to return flights to normal in record time (Saba News Agency, December 30, 2024).



Right: The control tower at Sana'a International Airport after the Israeli attack on December 26, 2024. Left: The Ras Khatib power plant in the al-Hudaydah Governorate after it was attacked (al-Masirah, December 26, 2024)

The confrontation with the United States

- ▶ On December 31, 2024, the Houthi military spokesman, Yahya Saria, claimed responsibility for an attack on the US aircraft carrier Harry S. Truman using a “large number” of drones and cruise missiles. He claimed that the attack was carried out while the Americans were preparing for a large-scale airstrike against Yemen and that it had achieved its objectives and thwarted the American attack (Yahya Saria’s Telegram channel, December 31, 2024).
- ▶ Saria also claimed responsibility for shooting down two American MQ-9 drones within 72 hours. According to him, the drones were conducting “hostile missions” over the al-Bayda and Ma’rib governorates and were brought down using domestically produced surface-to-air missiles. Since the beginning of the war in October 2023, the Houthis have claimed responsibility for shooting down 14 MQ-9 drones (Yahya Saria’s Telegram channel, December 28, 2024, and January 1, 2025).
- ▶ The US Central Command (CENTCOM) said that its forces had carried out several precision strikes against Houthi targets in Sana’a and sites in the Houthi-controlled coastal area on December 30 and 31, 2024. According to the statement, a command-and-control facility, weapons development and storage facilities, and radar facilities located near the sea were attacked. In addition, seven cruise missiles and drones were intercepted over the Red Sea (CENTCOM X account, December 31, 2024).

Additional Houthi military activity

- ▶ On December 27, 2024, military spokesman Yahya Saria claimed responsibility for a drone attack on the Santa Ursula in the Arabian Sea, east of the island of Socotra. He claimed the ship’s owners had violated the ban on entering the ports of “occupied Palestine” (Yahya Saria’s Telegram channel, December 27, 2024). There has been no verification of the claim of the attack.

Statements by senior Houthi officials

►Senior Houthi regime officials praised the continued attacks against Israel and made it clear that they do not intend to halt the “support front” for the Gaza Strip, despite the continued attacks by Israel and the United States within Yemeni territory. Below are notable statements:

◆On December 26, 2024, Houthi leader Abd al-Malik al-Houthi delivered his weekly speech, during which the Israeli attack in Yemen was carried out. He praised the missile and drone launches at Israel, claiming that they were succeeding in penetrating Israel’s air defenses and that “this is a great and very important achievement.” Al-Houthi added that the “enemy attacks” were occurring in parallel with propaganda campaigns aimed at pressuring them to stop the operations from Yemen, but that they would not stop their support for the Gaza Strip (al-Masirah, December 26, 2024).

◆The deputy head of the Houthi media authority, Nasr al-Din Amer, dismissed Israel’s attack on Yemen, stating, “We did not even notice the Israeli aggression” because of the Houthi leader’s speech. He added that the “aggression” would not affect or stop the Houthis’ activities in support of the Gaza Strip (Nasr al-Din Amer’s X account, December 26, 2024).

◆Muhammad al-Bukhaiti, a member of the Houthis’ political bureau, referred to Israel’s threats to harm the Houthi leadership. His statement said: “We are not afraid of anyone but God, and we ask Him to die only as shaheeds. We say to America, Britain, and their Zionist entity that we have the ability and courage to respond in the same way and we will target your military and political leaders. We have a wide bank of targets, and the ball is in your court” (Muhammad al-Bukhaiti’s X account, December 28, 2024).

American-Israeli “spy network” exposed

►The Houthi security apparatuses announced that they had thwarted intelligence operations by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Israeli Mossad and that several “spies” had been arrested. According to the announcement, the detainees were tasked with monitoring the Houthis’ missile and drone systems, naval forces, and other military sites. Additionally, they were instructed to track and identify the locations of senior military, political, and security officials. The security apparatuses emphasized that they would act decisively against attempts by “American and Israeli enemies” to infiltrate Yemen and warned that those working for them would face the death penalty (al-Masirah, December 25, 2024)

Iraq

Stopping militia activity against Israel

► Akram al-Kaabi, secretary-general of the Nujaba Movement, said that the pro-Iranian Iraqi militias had reached an agreement with Iraqi Prime Minister Muhammad Shia' al-Sudani, which stipulates that the militias would halt all their military operations against Israel. It was also agreed that the militias would not interfere in Syria's internal affairs (Al-Arabiya, December 24, 2024).

► A "source close to the militias" said that as part of the negotiations between the militias and al-Sudani, the Iraqi prime minister stressed the need to reduce international pressure on the Iraqi government. According to al-Sudani, the militias' attacks against Israel expose Iraq to military attacks and heavy American sanctions, especially with the imminent entry of the Trump administration, which is expected to put further pressure on the Iraqi government to stop the militia activity and reduce Iranian influence in Iraq (Al-Arabiya, December 24, 2024)

► Yasser Watut, a member of the Iraqi parliament's security committee, said that the militias in Iraq had stopped using force against Israel due to pressure from the Iraqi government and political elements from the Shiite Coordination Committee, in addition to external pressure exerted on Iraq on the issue. He also said that threats by Israel and the United States due to the militias' attacks against Israel and the fall of the Assad regime were the main reasons for stopping the attacks. He stressed that the militias had used Syrian territory in attacks against Israel and that the fall of the al-Assad regime made it very difficult for the militias to carry out operations against Israel from Syria (Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, December 30, 2024).

► A "political source in Iraq" reported that Qais al-Khazali, secretary-general of the Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq militia, had reduced his presence in the political arena due to growing fears of an American or Israeli targeted elimination. The source added that al-Khazali's disappearance is an unusual development within the militias, which are losing their political influence amid the decline of the Shiite axis in the region. Additionally, it was reported that al-Khazali seeks to hold multiple meetings among various militia factions to establish a strong alliance to run collectively in the upcoming Iraqi parliamentary elections, aiming to maintain the pro-Iranian bloc's strength in Iraq. However, his fear of targeted assassination is preventing him from functioning effectively (1news-iq.com, December 25, 2024).

The issue of dismantling the militias

►An “Iraqi security source” said that senior American officials threatened the Iraqi government that the United States would use force if the government did not act to dismantle the pro-Iranian militias. The source added that Iraq is not interested in getting involved in the wars taking place in the region and is working to calm the situation. He stressed that the Iraqi government, especially Prime Minister Muhammad Shia’ al-Sudani, was working with the militias in the usual ways to reach agreements on stopping the tension with the United States and working for long-term quiet until the withdrawal of the American forces from Iraq at the end of 2026 (BBC, December 26, 2024).

►An “Iraqi political source” said that there is heavy pressure from the United States and some Western countries to dismantle the Popular Mobilization Forces (the umbrella organization to which the pro-Iranian militias in Iraq belong) to reduce the influence of Iran’s allies in the region. The source added that Iraq must manage the issue correctly, as it could be subject to severe sanctions from the West and the United States if it does not act to reduce Iranian influence in the region (1news-iq.com, December 29, 2024).

►Meanwhile, against the backdrop of the events in Syria, an “Iraqi security source” said that the al-Sudani government had instructed all military units not to allow any military element outside the framework of the security forces to cross the border between Iraq and Syria and not to transfer weapons into Syria. The source added that al-Sudani himself informed the militias that he would prevent any movement toward the Syrian side and that he would take strict measures against anyone violating his directives. The source also noted that al-Sudani is not interested in opening a new front against the new regime in Syria and prefers to pursue diplomatic measures to ensure Iraq’s security along the shared border (1news-iq.com, December 27, 2024).