



Spotlight on Iran and the Shiite Axis

January 8 – 15, 2025

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Highlights¹

- ▶ Senior Iranian officials continued to glorify the power of Iran and the “resistance front” even amid the developments in the region. Iranian Supreme Leader Khamenei stressed Iran’s support for the “resistance” in the Palestinian arena, in Lebanon, and in Yemen. IRGC commander Salami declared that developments in the region have no impact on Iran’s deterrence capability and that it is stronger than ever.
- ▶ The Iranian foreign minister appointed his envoy to the Middle East, Mohammad-Reza Sheibani, as his special representative for Syria. He stressed that decision-making regarding the future of Syria depends on the Syrian people.
- ▶ A former senior IRGC officer in Syria admitted that Iran had suffered a severe defeat in Syria and criticized the Assad regime’s lack of commitment to Iran and the “resistance,” as well as Russia’s conduct in Syria. His remarks are a clear deviation from the official Iranian line, which tries to downplay the importance of developments in Syria for Iran and the pro-Iranian axis in the region.
- ▶ Iran welcomed the election of Joseph Aoun as president of Lebanon, stressing that his election was made possible by Hezbollah’s support and does not pose a threat to the interests of Iran or Hezbollah.
- ▶ In a meeting with the Iraqi prime minister, who visited Tehran, the Supreme Leader stressed that the pro-Iranian Shiite militias are one of the most important components of the government in Iraq and must be strengthened even more. His remarks were made amid reports regarding the possibility of integrating the militias into the Iraqi armed forces.

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

- ▶ The Houthis claimed responsibility for six attacks against Israel using ballistic missiles, drones, and cruise missiles. The IDF Spokesperson said two missiles and four drones were intercepted. The Israeli Air Force carried out another attack against Houthi targets in Yemen. Senior Houthi regime officials made it clear that they would continue the attacks as “support” for the Gaza Strip and promised “surprises.”
- ▶ The Houthis claimed responsibility for two attacks on the American aircraft carrier in the Red Sea, but the claims have not been verified. The US Central Command reported attacks against underground facilities for storing advanced Houthi weapons.

The Impact of developments in the region on the “resistance front”

- ▶ In a speech in Tehran, Iran’s Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei said that senior officials and decision-makers should completely ignore the demands and positions of the United States and the “Zionists” and take into account only the interests of the Islamic Republic. He praised Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian’s “clear and courageous” stances toward the “Zionist regime” and US support for it. Referring to the recent developments in the region, Khamenei said that the recent events in Iran and the region must not diminish the importance of the Palestinian issue. He noted that the “resistance” to the “Zionist regime” must remain alive and strengthen day by day. He stressed Iran’s support for “resistance in the West Bank, Lebanon, Yemen” and anywhere there is opposition to the actions of the “Zionist regime” (Supreme Leader’s website, January 8, 2025).



The Supreme Leader of Iran (Supreme Leader’s website, January 8, 2025)

- ▶ Hossein Salami, the IRGC commander, said during the IRGC’s ground arm exercise that although the “enemy” had an absolute air advantage in the Gaza Strip, it was stopped and defeated on the ground. He noted that in Lebanon as well, the “enemy” enjoyed complete air

superiority, but when the operations expanded to the ground, it was halted because Hezbollah has strength, tactics, and weapons in ground warfare (Tasnim, January 10, 2025).

► In another speech, Salami claimed that developments in the region have no impact on Iran's deterrence capability. He stressed that Iran has not weakened and is stronger today than ever thanks to its technology and advanced missile and UAV capabilities, which it used in attacks on Israel. He noted that the Iranian public is demanding the implementation of "True Promise 3" (another attack on Israel) to demonstrate Iran's strength. He added that Israel is a weak country capable only of killing innocents and not fighting and that without the support of the United States, it would not survive even a single day (ISNA, January 11, 2025).

Iranian reactions to developments in Syria

► Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi appointed his special envoy to the Middle East, Mohammad-Reza Sheibani, as his special representative for Syria. The announcement of the appointment stated that Syria is an important country in the region. It further stated that Iran recognizes the importance of stability in that country and the need to preserve its territorial integrity and respect the will of the Syrian people to determine its fate without foreign interference and presence. Araghchi stressed that decision-making regarding the future of Syria depends on the Syrian people and that Iran would regulate its relations with any governmental system based on the will of the Syrian people, mutual interests, and international law (ISNA, January 12, 2025).

► Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei said that Iran is doing everything in its power to ensure that Syria does not become a base for terrorism. He stressed that it must be ensured that the security and stability of the region are not affected by the lack of security in Syria. He added that Iran is prepared to help stabilize the situation in Syria and would support any process that would prevent the violation of Syria's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and unity (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, January 13, 2025).

► In a speech at a mosque in Tehran, the contents of which were published in the Iranian media, Behrouz Esbati, a former senior IRGC officer in Syria, admitted that Iran had suffered a severe defeat in Syria. He sharply criticized Russia, accusing it of collaborating with Israel and claiming that it was one of the causes of the collapse of the Assad regime. He also said that Bashar al-Assad's wife wanted the Arab countries to replace Iran in Syria and that in the three months preceding the collapse of the regime, the Syrian government exerted increasing pressure on the Iranians, and Iranian planes could not land in Syria. He added that Assad's definition of

“resistance” was different from that of Iran and that his commitment to the “resistance” was limited (Didehban, January 9, 2025).



Behrouz Esbati (Didehban, January 9, 2025)

► According to a report in Turkey, Iran has agreed with the Kurdish organizations in Turkey and Syria (PKK/YPG) to supply 1,500 suicide drones to destabilize Syria and deal with Turkey’s military activity in the region. According to the report, the reliability of which is unclear, Iranian representatives held a secret meeting in Iraq with representatives of the Kurds, who asked for 2,000 drones. The Iranian representatives made it clear that Iran would only be able to supply 1,500 drones, but the delivery of the drones has been delayed due to close supervision by Turkey in the Syrian-Iraqi border area and its intention to intercept any attempt to transfer drones into Syrian territory (Yeni Şafaq, January 12, 2025). Farhad Shami, head of the media department of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), denied the publication and accused the media close to the Turkish government of fabricating news (Farhad Shami’s X account, January 14, 2025).

Iranian reactions to political developments in Lebanon

► Iran welcomed the election of the commander of the Lebanese army, General Joseph Aoun, as the new president of Lebanon:

◆ Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian issued a letter of congratulations in which he expressed hope that Aoun’s election would bring political stability, economic development, and calm in Lebanon. He noted that strengthening stability and unity would defeat the ambitions of the “Zionist enemy” against Lebanon. He stressed Iran’s willingness to expand cooperation between the countries in various fields (ISNA, January 9, 2025).

◆ Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi emphasized Iran’s support for a stable, independent Lebanon without occupation and external threats (Mehr, January 10, 2025).

◆ The Iranian embassy in Beirut wished the president-elect success. According to the statement, Iran expects to strengthen relations between Iran and Lebanon and to cooperate in various fields, in a way that will ensure the common interests of the two countries and strengthen stability in the region (Iranian embassy in Beirut X account, January 9, 2025).

► Iran’s Ambassador to Lebanon Mojtaba Amani said in an interview with Lebanese television that Aoun would not have been elected president of Lebanon without the “resistance.” He noted that the United States and Israel wanted to appoint as president the leader of the Lebanese Forces party, Samir Geagea, who he claimed was completely connected to Israel, but when they failed to force his appointment, they had to make do with Aoun. Ambassador Amani noted that Hezbollah representatives had reached an agreement with Aoun which preserves the organization’s interests and had voted in favor of him based on this agreement. Amani stressed that Aoun is not anti-Iranian and that he respected Hezbollah when he served as army commander and even allowed the transfer of weapons to the organization. The ambassador added that Hezbollah, the Amal movement, and some of the Sunni and Christian representatives in Lebanon regard the “resistance” as a necessary condition for Lebanon’s existence, especially in light of the recent events in Syria. He stressed that the “resistance” in Lebanon cannot be eliminated (IRNA, January 10, 2025).



Mojtaba Amani (IRNA, January 10, 2025)

The Houthis in Yemen

The direct confrontation between the Houthis and Israel

► In the past week, the Houthis’ military spokesman, Yahya Saria, claimed responsibility for six attacks against Israel – three by drones, two by a Palestine-2 hypersonic ballistic missile, and an attack on a “power plant” in the Eilat area using a cruise missile. According to Saria, all the

attacks achieved their objectives (Yahya Saria’s Telegram channel, January 8-15, 2025). The IDF Spokesperson reported the interception of four drones in the past week, two of them over the Mediterranean Sea. In addition, two ballistic missiles were intercepted before they penetrated Israeli territory. Fragments of one of the missiles caused damage to property in the Jerusalem area. There were no casualties (IDF Spokesperson, January 8-15, 2025).

► On January 10, 2025, Israeli Air Force fighter jets attacked Houthi targets in the western coastal strip of Yemen and deep inside the country. Among other things, infrastructure at the Haziz power plant and infrastructure in the ports of Ras Issa and Al-Hudaydah were attacked. It was reported that the attacks were carried out in parallel with attacks attributed to the US-led coalition, concurrently with the weekly mass demonstration in support of the Gaza Strip that was held in the center of Sana’a (IDF Spokesperson and Israeli media, January 10, 2025).



Clouds of smoke from the attacks as the demonstration takes place in Sana’a (Al-Masirah, January 10, 2025)

► Senior Houthi regime officials made it clear that they would not stop the military attacks against Israel as “support” for the Gaza Strip despite the continued attacks on their territory. The following are prominent statements:

- ◆ Houthi leader Abd al-Malik al-Houthi stressed in his weekly speech that the attacks against Israel have a great impact on the “enemy,” especially in light of its “failure” in intercepting the missiles. He claimed that the actions also harm the Israeli economy because as a result, “the enemy” is forced to cancel flights (Al-Masirah, January 9, 2025).
- ◆ The Houthis’ Supreme Political Council accused the Israeli “aggression” on the capital during the million-man rally in Al-Sabeen Square, which was claimed to have also targeted the presidential palace, as a blatant violation of Yemeni sovereignty and a dangerous escalation. The statement noted that the Yemeni people are not frightened by such raids and regard them as provocation and escalation. The council also addressed Prime Minister Netanyahu, whom it called a “war criminal,” stressing that he

would gain nothing from the United States, and also called on the “Zionist herds” to return to the countries from which they came to “desecrate Palestine” (the Houthi media wing X account, January 10, 2025).

◆ Mahdi al-Mashat, the head of the Houthi Movement’s Supreme Political Council, said in a speech on the occasion of the “anniversary of the American aggression against Yemen” that the Houthis would not stop their “support” attacks for the Gaza Strip and claimed that they do not pose a danger to anyone, only to those who pose a danger to Yemen and the Gaza Strip. He noted that the Houthis’ position regarding the Gaza Strip would not change or be influenced despite the pressures and threats (Al-Masirah, January 11, 2025). In another speech, he said that the continued actions of the “Israeli occupation” were bringing it “closer to the day of judgment and its inevitable end” (Telegram channel of the Yemeni presidential office, January 12, 2025).

◆ Mohammad Ali al-Houthi, a member of the Houthis’ political bureau, warned that the movement would not tolerate cooperation with the “Israeli enemy” and would act decisively against anyone who crossed this line. He added that the Houthis were preparing to reveal “big surprises” in the sea and land arenas and called on the Arab countries to take a more aggressive stance against Israel, beyond statements of condemnation, saying that “they must sever ties with the Zionist entity” (Al-Mayadeen, January 11, 2025).

◆ Hezam al-Asad, a member of the Houthis’ political bureau, issued a statement saying that the “Israeli enemy” had no choice but to stop its “aggression,” lift the siege on the Gaza Strip, release the “prisoners” and withdraw completely from the Gaza Strip. He warned that otherwise, the “enemy” would face more hypersonic missiles and precision drones, a naval blockade, and the continued closure of the port of Eilat while its soldiers are exhausted in the Gaza Strip (Hezam al-Asad’s X account, January 13, 2025).

The confrontation with the United States

► The spokesman for the Houthi forces, Yahya Saria, claimed responsibility for two large-scale attacks against the US aircraft carrier Harry S. Truman and other US Navy ships in the northern Red Sea using drones and cruise missiles. He claimed that the Houthi attacks thwarted American airstrikes in Yemen and forced the aircraft carrier to move away from the area (Yahya Saria’s Telegram channel, January 10-11, 2025). There has been no American verification of the claims of the attacks.

► Over the past week, there have been reports of attacks in Yemen attributed to the US-led coalition against military targets in the area of Sana'a, Al-Hudaydah, and the Amran province (Yemeni and Arab media, January 8-13, 2025). The US Central Command (CENTCOM) confirmed that its forces attacked two Houthi underground depots of advanced weapons. According to the announcement, the Houthi forces used these means to attack US Navy ships and commercial vessels in the southern Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden (CENTCOM X account, January 8, 2025).

► Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei condemned the attacks by Israel, the United States, and Britain in Yemen. He noted this was a blatant violation of Yemeni sovereignty and international law, and proof of the US and Britain's support for the "crimes of the Zionist regime" against the Palestinians. He also condemned the inaction of the UN Security Council in light of Israel's continued "genocide" in the Gaza Strip and the military attacks on vital infrastructure in Yemen. He called on the international community, and especially the Muslim countries, to act to end the occupation, the "genocide," and the aggression of the "Zionist regime" and its supporters against the peoples of the region (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, January 10, 2025).

◄ Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi met with the UN envoy to Yemen, Hans Grundberg, and condemned the American, British, and Israeli attacks in Yemen. He stressed that this was a blatant violation of Yemen's sovereignty and a threat to peace and security in the region (ISNA, January 12, 2025).



The Iranian foreign minister meets with the UN envoy to Yemen (ISNA, January 12, 2025)

Iraq and the pro-Iranian militias

Iraqi prime minister's visit to Iran and dismantling the militias

► On January 8, 2025, Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia' al-Sudani visited Tehran and met with Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian.

Khamenei said that the Popular Mobilization Forces (the pro-Iranian Shiite militias in Iraq) are one of the most important components of the government in Iraq and must be preserved and strengthened even more. He noted that the presence of American forces in Iraq is illegal and contrary to Iraq's interests and warned against US efforts to establish and expand its presence in the country (Supreme Leader's website, January 8, 2025).

► President Pezeshkian said at a joint press conference with Al-Sudani that Iraq is a strategic and important partner for Iran. He said he had discussed with Al-Sudani the latest developments in the region and the cooperation between the two countries, and that Iran and Iraq are concerned about the possibility of renewing the activity of terrorist cells in the wake of the recent events in Syria. He stressed the need to implement the security agreements signed between the two countries and to promote economic and commercial cooperation between them (Mehr, January 8, 2025).



**Joint press conference between the Iranian president and the Iraqi prime minister
(Mehr, January 8, 2025)**

► An “Iranian knowledgeable source” reported that Al-Sudani had not been able to obtain Iranian support for the initiative to dismantle the Popular Mobilization and hand over its weapons to the Iraqi security forces. According to the source, Al-Sudani explained to his hosts that the continuation of Iranian influence in Iraq in its current format exposes the country to external and international threats (1news-iq.com, January 9, 2025).

► A “source close to the Iranian presidency” said that during the Iraqi prime minister's talks with senior Iranian officials, the two sides discussed three main issues: the status of the Popular Mobilization, the postponement of the American withdrawal from Iraq, and the possibility that Iraqi Intelligence Service chief Hamid al-Shatri would mediate between Iran and Syria's de facto leader, Ahmad al-Shara. The “source” noted that the Iranians claimed that the issue of the Popular Mobilization Forces concerns the Iraqis themselves and that they are the ones who will decide on the issue (Baghdadtoday.news, January 9, 2025).

►Qais al-Khazali, secretary-general of Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq, said the Iraqi "resistance" is mature and appreciates the interests of the political system, the Iraqi state, and the Iraqi people. He expressed support for Prime Minister Al-Sudani's efforts to remove the foreign forces from Iraq but made it clear that it was unacceptable for the factions to hand over the weapons used to fight the "enemy." He added that the source of religious authority in Iraq (Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani) also supports the "resistance" (Al-Ahed, January 11, 2025).

►A "political source in Iraq" said that operations had begun to integrate the armed militias into the security establishment. According to the report, there are discussions about integrating the Nujaba Movement, Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada, and Kata'ib Hezbollah as they are considered the first line of containment of the "resistance." According to the source, as part of the conditions, the militias are required to accept Prime Minister al-Sudani's decisions, expose their weapons and operational bases, and reposition themselves in accordance with the prime minister's instructions. The "source" noted that the Nujaba Movement had already given preliminary consent and that discussions are underway about the militia's future roles (Shafaq News, January 9, 2025).