



Iran in the Face of Regional Developments: Challenges, Responses and Possible Courses of Action

January 23 ,2025

Highlights¹

- ▶ The dramatic developments in the Middle East in recent months, mainly Israel's military achievements vis-à-vis Hamas and Hezbollah and the collapse of the Assad regime in Syria, have significantly weakened Iran and the "resistance front" that it leads and pose significant challenges to it, first and foremost the damage to Tehran's ability to influence the region. These challenges join a series of other challenges facing the Islamic Republic, mainly the deepening of the economic crisis, the consequences of the Israeli attack at the end of October 2024, and the return of Donald Trump to the White House.
- ▶ In light of the recent regional developments, Iran is trying **to downplay the seriousness of the situation, emphasizing its capabilities and the capabilities of the "resistance front" to overcome the challenges and continue to act in light of the new circumstances**, thanks in part to the ability of Iran's regional proxies to produce weapons themselves; **Highlighting Israel's failure to realize its goals in the war**, both in the Gaza Strip and in Lebanon, and presenting the ceasefire in Lebanon and the Gaza Strip as a victory for the "resistance front" and a strategic failure for Israel; **Emphasizing Iran's continued support for the "resistance,"** as it is a central pillar of the Islamic Republic's policy.
- ▶ **In the ITIC's assessment, Iran has no intention of backing down from its efforts to maintain its regional status and continue its support for the "resistance front."** At the same time, it appears that Iran will examine how to make the necessary adjustments and find possible solutions to the limitations and constraints it faces in the main arenas in which it operates.
 - ◆ **In the Palestinian arena:** Iran is expected to accelerate its efforts to establish a terrorist infrastructure in Judea and Samaria and to increase its terrorist activity inside Israeli territory.

¹ Click <https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en> to subscribe and receive the ITIC's daily updates as well as its other publications.

- ◆ **In the Lebanese arena:** There is an Iranian effort to find alternative ways to overcome the loss of the strategic path in Syria to support Hezbollah, rehabilitate its military capabilities damaged in the war, and take part in the reconstruction efforts of the Lebanese state to preserve some of its influence.
- ◆ **In the Syrian arena:** Iran is working to establish channels of communication with the new regime, reopen its diplomatic missions in Damascus, and maintain its foothold in Syria by reinforcing trends of destabilization in the country over time. In addition, it continues its attempts to smuggle weapons through Syria to Lebanon and may take advantage of Israel's military presence in Syria to encourage the establishment of "resistance" cells in the south of the country.
- ◆ **In the Iraqi arena:** Iran opposes the disarming of the Shiite militias. However, under certain circumstances, Iran may accept the integration of the militias into the Iraqi armed forces and try to maintain its political, military, and economic influence through the institutions of the Iraqi state, while striving to maintain and increase its control over the pro-Iranian militias.
- ◆ **In Yemen:** Iran can maintain its limited influence through the Houthis and may also exploit **the Horn of Africa**, especially the ongoing civil war in **Sudan**, to re-establish influence and facilitate weapons transfers.

The impact of regional developments on Iran and the "resistance front"

- ▶ The dramatic events in the Middle East in recent months constitute a shock for Iran and the pro-Iranian axis in the region. Israel's military achievements vis-à-vis Hamas and Hezbollah and the collapse of the Assad regime in Syria have significantly weakened Iran and the "resistance front" it leads.



“The axis of resistance” (yjc.ir, December 17, 2024)

The Palestinian arena

► The war in the Gaza Strip severely damaged the military capabilities of Hamas, which is an important (though not the central) component of the “resistance front.” Iran saw the strengthening of its ties with Hamas as an opportunity to gain a foothold in the Gaza Strip, increase its influence in the Palestinian arena, and strengthen the cohesion of the “resistance front.” Hamas, for its part, saw Iran as a strategic, financial, and operational support, which helped it build up militarily to continue its armed struggle against Israel and to consolidate its rule in the Gaza Strip. Iran’s support for Hamas included military aid (means and training) and financial aid of hundreds of millions of dollars to the movement’s leadership and its military wing.² Although Hamas remains the dominant factor in the Gaza Strip, it has suffered unprecedented losses since the outbreak of the war, and Iran’s ability to continue to use it to consolidate its influence in the Gaza Strip has been severely limited.

The Lebanese arena

► The war between Israel and Hezbollah has severely damaged the organization, which is considered Iran’s preferred strategic arm in the region. The elimination of most of the organization’s leadership, headed by secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah, and the severe damage to its military and strategic capabilities posed a significant threat to the most important regional project that Iran has fostered for decades. The severe blow to Hezbollah has also largely deprived Iran of its ability to deter Israel and respond to it in the event of an attack on its nuclear facilities. Political developments in Lebanon also pose a growing challenge to Iran in its efforts to maintain its influence and rehabilitate Hezbollah after the war. The election of Joseph Aoun as president of Lebanon and Nawaf Salam as prime minister

² For further information, see the ITIC study, [“Captured Documents Show Iranian Support for Hamas in the Gaza Strip” \(November 18, 2024\)](#).

of Lebanon is a significant achievement for Hezbollah's opponents, reflecting the weakness of the organization, which has lost its ability to impose its candidates and has been forced to accept the election of Aoun and Salam.

The Syrian arena

- The overthrow of the Assad regime in December 2024 placed Iran and the pro-Iranian axis in unprecedented weakness. Iran saw Syria (along with Iraq) as its strategic depth. Therefore, it has supported the Assad regime since the beginning of the Syrian civil war in March 2011, providing various forms of assistance, including deploying thousands of IRGC and Hezbollah fighters, extending tens of billions of dollars in direct financial aid and credit, and recruiting foreign Shiite fighters to help regain control. The collapse of the Assad regime deprived Iran of its front line of defense against Israel and, to a large extent, its ability to rehabilitate Hezbollah's military capabilities by transferring weapons through Syria, which served as a major smuggling route for the organization.³
- The statements of Syria's de facto leader, Ahmad al-Shara (Abu Mohammad al-Julani), provide Iran with great cause for concern. Thus, for example, al-Shara accused Iran of turning Syria into a Captagon factory and said that the export of the Islamic Revolution affected the entire region, causing sectarian conflicts, wars, and corruption. He stressed that Iran must respect Syria's internal affairs and recalculate its involvement in the region (Al-Hadath, December 29, 2024). In a meeting with Lebanese interim Prime Minister Najib Mikati, al-Shara said that Iran had harmed Syria, and stressed that Syria would no longer serve as a conduit for the flow of Iranian weapons to Hezbollah (Al-Hadath, January 12, 2025).



“The Umayyad army in Syria” [the Umayyad dynasty in Syria is considered the enemy of the Shiites] (Fars, December 18, 2024)

³ For further information on the smuggling routes used by Iran to smuggle weapons into Syria, Lebanon, and Judea and Samaria, see the ITIC study, “Captured documents reveal how Iran smuggles weapons via Syria and Jordan” (December 22, 2024). <mailto:https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en/captured-documents-reveal-how-iran-smuggles-weapons-via-syria-and-jordan/>

The Iraqi arena

► Iran faces the possibility of dismantling the Popular Mobilization Forces (the umbrella organization to which the pro-Iranian Shiite militias in Iraq belong) and integrating the militias into the Iraqi armed forces. Since the occupation of Iraq in 2003, the IRGC's Qods Force has led Iran's cooperation with these militias to deepen Iranian influence in the country. The militias' involvement in the multi-front campaign, including their activity against American forces in the region and the launching of missiles and drones at Israel, increased pressure to disarm them in order to reduce Iran's influence in the region. Senior American officials even threatened the Iraqi government with the use of force if it did not act to dismantle the pro-Iranian militias (BBC, December 26, 2024). Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein said that Iraq was trying to persuade militias in the country that had acted against American and Israeli forces to lay down their arms or join the country's security forces (Reuters, January 16, 2025). In addition, "Iraqi sources" reported that in a meeting between the commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, Esmail Qaani, and the commanders of the pro-Iranian militias in light of the developments in Syria, the militia leaders stressed to him that Iraq is committed to neutrality in light of the situation and that they do not want to enter into war on other fronts (Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, December 12, 2024).

► **The challenges facing Iran in the various arenas join a series of other challenges (which will not be detailed in this document), chief among them the worsening domestic economic crisis, the consequences of the Israeli attack on October 26, 2024, and the return of Donald Trump to the White House, which is expected to lead to the renewal of the policy of "maximum pressure" against the Islamic Republic.**

Senior Iranian officials address the situation of the "resistance front" in the wake of regional developments

► Comments by senior Iranian figures about the status of the "resistance front" considering the recent regional developments convey several key messages:

An attempt to downplay the severity of the situation

► Emphasizing the ability of Iran and the "resistance front" to overcome the challenges and continue to act vis-à-vis the new circumstances. Senior Iranian regime figures admitted that **the recent developments in the region had harmed the "resistance front,"** but stressed

that Iran’s proxies, led by Hezbollah, are capable of producing their own weapons and are not dependent on Iran. The following are prominent statements:

- ◆ Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei said at a meeting in Tehran that the “enemies” imagined that the issue of the “resistance” had come to an end through the operation carried out in Syria and the “crimes of the Zionist regime” and the United States with the support of others, but they were wrong. He added that the spirit of Hassan Nasrallah and Yahya al-Sinwar is alive, and their path continues, and that the Gaza Strip faces daily attacks from the “Zionists” but continues to stand firm and resist, as does Lebanon (Supreme Leader’s website, December 17, 2024).
- ◆ In a meeting with religious preachers, Khamenei said that there is no basis for the claim that Iran has lost its proxies in the region. He noted that Iran does not have “proxy” forces and that Yemen, Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) are fighting on their own right and the strength of their beliefs, and not on behalf of Iran. He added that the “resistance” in the region is still alive, including Hezbollah, Hamas, and the PIJ, and that the peoples of the region will uproot the “Zionist regime” (Supreme Leader’s website, December 22, 2024).



The Supreme Leader of Iran (Supreme Leader’s website, January 1, 2025)

- ◆ IRGC commander Hossein Salami said at a conference in Bandar Abbas that Iran supports the “resistance front,” but that it produces weapons on its own (Tasnim, December 23, 2024).
- ◆ 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 significance (Mehr, December 27, 2024).

- ◆ IRGC spokesman Ali Mohammad Naeini said that the Iranian attack against Israel and the actions of Hezbollah and the Houthis proved the strength of the “resistance front.” He noted that Hezbollah’s actions proved that the “Zionist regime’s” calculations regarding the organization’s strength were completely wrong, and that Israel had “gone crazy” because of the killing of Hassan Nasrallah and Hezbollah commanders, but that the organization quickly recovered despite the damage it had suffered. Naeini added that the enemy does not understand the nature of the “resistance” and that it cannot be weakened by bombing and physical confrontations (Tasnim, December 29, 2024).
- ◆ The representative of Iran’s Supreme Leader in the Qods Force, Ali Mohammadi Sirat, said that the strength of the “resistance front” has not weakened and that the more the enemies continue their crimes, the more the power of the “resistance front” will only increase. He noted that throughout Muslim history there had been ups and downs, as well as during the Islamic Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War. However, in the end, the Muslim nation wins, and the “resistance front” will realize its goals and achieve its final victory through a combination of diplomatic and political planning and military measures (Jamaran, January 4, 2025).



The Supreme Leader’s representative in the Qods Force (Jamaran, January 4, 2025)

Highlighting Israel’s failure to realize its goals in the war

► **Senior Iranian officials stressed that Israel has failed to achieve its goals vis-à-vis Hamas in the Gaza Strip and Hezbollah in Lebanon, despite its military successes.** The following are prominent statements:

- ◆ Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said that although the “resistance” had recently been hit, the “enemy” had not been able to achieve its goals. It did not succeed in destroying Hamas in the Gaza Strip or Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the “resistance” will continue on its path and compensate for the blows it suffered (Tasnim, January 1, 2025).

- ◆ According to Iranian Defense Minister Aziz Nasirzadeh, the “resistance” in the Gaza Strip is so strong that the “Zionist regime” has not been able to achieve its goals in the war (Mehr, December 27, 2024).



The Iranian Defense Minister (Mehr, December 27, 2024)

- ◆ Mohammad Bagheri, chief of staff of the Iranian armed forces, said at a meeting of the commanders of the armed forces that despite the “crimes” Israel committed against civilians in Lebanon and the Gaza Strip, and despite the military and political support of the United States, it had not been able to achieve any of its goals in the war. He added that Israel had hoped to establish security in the north of the country and return the residents of the north to their homes; this goal was not only not achieved, but the insecurity also spread to large Israeli cities such as Haifa and Tel Aviv (ISNA, November 26, 2024).
- ◆ IRGC commander Hossein Salami said in a maneuver by the IRGC’s Basij militia in the southern Iranian province of Khuzestan that Israel is being defeated in the Gaza Strip and southern Lebanon, the “Zionists” are fleeing the battlefield, the “Zionist” authorities are helpless, their army is tired, and the “resistance” is growing stronger by the day (Tasnim, November 22, 2024).
- ◆ According to an IRGC statement issued following the ceasefire agreement in the Gaza Strip, the “Zionist regime” has not succeeded in realizing its goals of releasing the hostages through military action and eliminating Hamas; It surrendered to the steadfastness and “resistance” of the residents of the Gaza Strip. According to the IRGC, this “great victory” will go down in history; Months of crimes brought no achievement for the “Zionist regime;” and the “resistance” remains alive and steadfast and will make strong progress toward the liberation of Al-Aqsa Mosque and Jerusalem (Fars, January 16, 2025).

Emphasizing Iran's continued support for the "resistance"

► **The Iranians made it clear that they would continue to support the "resistance front" because it is a central pillar of the Islamic Republic's policy.** The following are prominent statements:

- ◆ Iranian Supreme Leader Khamenei declared that Iran would continue to stand by "the Palestinian fighters and Hezbollah fighters" and support them (Supreme Leader's website, December 17, 2024). Khamenei also said that Iran would continue to support "resistance in the West Bank, Lebanon, Yemen" and anywhere where there is "resistance" to the actions of the "Zionist regime" (Supreme Leader's website, January 8, 2025).
- ◆ Speaking with Khalil al-Hayya, head of Hamas' political bureau in the Gaza Strip, following the ceasefire agreement in the Gaza Strip, Iranian Foreign Minister Araghchi said that Iran would continue its support for the Palestinian cause and the "legitimate resistance" (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, January 16, 2025).
- ◆ In a speech marking the death of Hassan Nasrallah, Ali Fadavi, deputy commander of the IRGC, made it clear that Iran would continue to support Hezbollah and the "axis of resistance" stronger and faster than in the past (Tasnim, November 14, 2024).

Senior Iranian officials' comments on developments in Lebanon

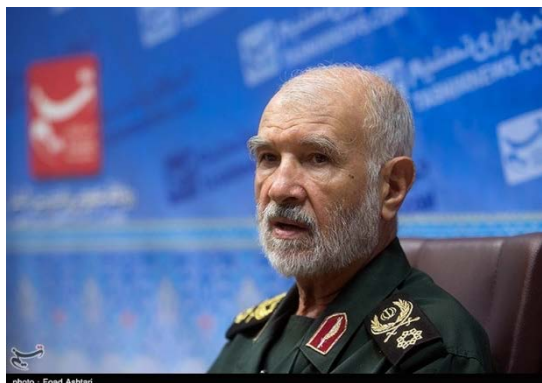
► After the ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon, senior Iranian officials presented the end of the fighting as a "great victory" for Hezbollah and the "resistance," and as a strategic failure and defeat for Israel, which, they claimed, was forced to agree to the ceasefire after failing to defeat Hezbollah and realize its goals in the war. The officials stressed that the blows suffered by Hezbollah in recent weeks would not stop the activity of the "resistance" and that the organization would be able to recover from the blows it had suffered and rehabilitate. The senior Iranian officials also stressed Iran's determination to continue supporting Hezbollah. Following the election of Joseph Aoun as president of Lebanon, senior officials in Tehran claimed that his election was made possible thanks to Hezbollah's support and does not pose a threat to the interests of Iran or Hezbollah. The following are prominent statements:

- ◆ Foreign Minister Araghchi declared that Hezbollah once again shattered the myth that Israel is invincible. He claimed that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had been forced to "beg" for a ceasefire after Israel suffered heavy losses in southern

Lebanon, despite full military and political support from the United States (Abbas Araghchi's X account, November 27, 2024).

- ◆ In a letter to Hezbollah secretary-general Naim Qassem, IRGC commander Hossein Salami wrote that the ceasefire in Lebanon was “a strategic and humiliating defeat for the Zionist regime,” which had not succeeded in achieving any of its goals and aspirations in the war against Hezbollah (Tasnim, November 28, 2024). In a speech at a conference in Esfahan, Salami declared that Israel planned to eliminate the “resistance front” and defeat Hezbollah by eliminating its leaders, but the martyrdom of the organization’s commanders resurrected it. He claimed that Hezbollah forced Israel to accept a ceasefire after its extensive attacks on Tel Aviv (Tasnim, November 28, 2024).

- ◆ Mohammad-Jafar Asadi, deputy commander of the Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters, said that Israel wanted to compensate for its defeat on the battlefield by setting conditions for a ceasefire, but Hezbollah did not accept these conditions and imposed its conditions on Israel. Asadi added that although the ceasefire was not 100% preferred by Iran, it welcomed it overall, because it was a victory for the “resistance front” in Lebanon and a major defeat for the “Zionist regime” (Tasnim, November 27, 2024).



Mohammad-Jafar Asadi (Tasnim, November 27, 2024)

- ◆ Ali Larijani, advisor to the Iranian Supreme Leader, said that Hezbollah had become a missile manufacturer itself, and that, contrary to Israel’s claims, it continues to maintain extensive weapons capabilities. He noted that Hezbollah plays a central role in Lebanon and that removing the organization from the political equation in the country is out of the question (Tasnim, November 24, 2024).

- ◆ Following Aoun’s election as president of Lebanon, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian issued a letter of congratulations, in which 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).

- ◆ 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 Samir Geagea, who is completely connected to Israel, as president, but when they were unable to force his appointment, they had to make do with Aoun. 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. He added that Hezbollah, the Amal movement, and some of the Sunni and Christian representatives in Lebanon see the resistance as a necessary condition for Lebanon's existence, especially in light of the recent events in Syria. The ambassador stressed that the "resistance" in Lebanon cannot be eliminated (IRNA, January 10, 2025).

Iranian comments on developments in Syria

► Senior Iranian officials presented the fall of the Assad regime as a "joint American-Zionist plan" and expressed concern about future developments in Syria. The officials admitted that the revolution in Syria had undermined Tehran's ability to support the members of the "axis of resistance." However, they claimed that the fall of the Assad regime would not have a significant negative impact on them because they were capable of producing the weapons themselves and were not dependent on Iran. The following are prominent statements:

- ◆ Supreme Leader Khamenei declared that there is no doubt that what happened in Syria is the result of a "joint American-Zionist plan." He said that the more pressure was exerted on the "resistance" and the more it was fought against, the more it would expand and become stronger (ISNA, December 11, 2024).

- ◆ At a ceremony marking the fifth anniversary of the death of former Qods Force commander Qassem Soleimani, Khamenei said that Syria belongs to the Syrian people and that there is no doubt that anyone who attacks this land will be forced to retreat in the face of the strength of the Syrian youth, and the American bases will be crushed under their feet (Supreme Leader's website, January 1, 2025).

- ◆ IRGC commander Salami acknowledged that all the roads (that could have been used to transfer Iranian forces to Syria) had been closed but claimed that the "resistance front" has become independent and is not dependent on Iran (ISNA, December 12,

2024). Speaking at an IRGC conference, Salami stressed that there are still ways to support the “resistance front” that are independent of Syria, and that things may change in Syria as well (ISNA, December 12, 2024).



The IRGC commander (ISNA, December 12, 2024)

- ◆ Hossein Taeb, former head of the IRGC intelligence Organization and advisor to the IRGC commander, said that it was undeniable that with the fall of Assad, the “resistance front” had suffered a loss and lost one of its allies. However, the incident not only failed to create opportunities for the Americans but also posed a new threat to the United States and Israel (snn.ir, December 18, 2024).
- ◆ Iranian Foreign Minister Araghchi expressed concern that Israel would take advantage of the situation in Syria, adding that it was natural for the “axis of resistance” to be affected by the events in Syria. However, he stressed that Hezbollah and the “axis” had already overcome greater challenges and that the “axis” would continue on its path. He said Syria had played an important role in the “resistance,” but that does not mean that the “resistance” will cease without Syria. Regarding Iran’s ability to continue supporting Hezbollah in view of the severance of the supply routes for weapons through Syria, Araghchi said that Hezbollah can provide its own needs, as is the case in the Gaza Strip and Yemen, and that it can find new ways to meet its needs (Iranian TV, December 8, 2024).
- ◆ Ali-Akbar Ahmadian, secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council, admitted that support for the “resistance” had become more difficult following the fall of the Assad regime, but stressed that Hezbollah, Hamas, and the PIJ are no longer dependent on Iran and have achieved the ability to produce weapons on their own. He added that Iran also has no direct land connection with the Gaza Strip and Yemen, but the Palestinians and Yemenis have the ability to develop advanced missiles. He stressed

that in any case, Iran’s connection with the “resistance” and Hezbollah would not be severed (Supreme Leader’s website, December 20, 2024).



**Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council
(Supreme Leader’s website, December 20, 2024)**

► In contrast to the official Iranian line, which tries to downplay the importance of developments in the region on Iran and the pro-Iranian axis in the region, **in recent weeks, other voices have been heard in Iran acknowledging the severe blow suffered by Iran and the “resistance front.”** The following are prominent statements:

- ◆ Behrouz Esbati, a former senior IRGC officer in Syria, admitted that Iran had suffered a severe defeat in Syria. He noted that in the three months preceding the collapse of the Assad 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 it was limited (Didehban, January 9, 2025).



Behrouz Esbati (Didehban, January 9, 2025)

- ◆ Hossein Marashi, former vice president of Iran and secretary-general of the Servants of Reconstruction party, which is affiliated with the pragmatic camp in Iran, recently admitted that Iran has lost several important cards in its hands, including Syria, Lebanon, and even Iraq, and that it cannot rely on the Houthis, who are under heavy

pressure. He compared Iran's current situation to that of Iraq after Iraq succeeded in recapturing the al-Faw Peninsula on the Persian Gulf coast in 1988 in a war between the two countries (Khabar Online, January 13, 2025).

◆ The daily Jomhuri Eslami also expressed a sober view of the recent developments in the region and called for recognition of the bitter reality in the region so that the consequences of the events could be successfully dealt with. A commentary article said that there is no denying the fact that the "Zionist regime," the United States, the "Takfiri terrorist groups" and their supporters have realized a significant part of their goals. According to the newspaper, the answer to the question of whether this is a temporary or permanent victory depends on the willingness of decision-makers on the "resistance front" to reexamine their policy. If the mistakes that led to the defeat in Lebanon and Syria are acknowledged, there is a possibility that the current successes of the "Zionist-American-regional triangle" will be temporary, but denying reality in light of the negative developments in Syria and Lebanon will not make it possible to resolve the situation (Jomhuri Eslami, January 11, 2025).

Possible courses of action for Iran in the region

► An examination of Iran's statements and conduct in recent weeks shows that Iran has no intention of withdrawing from its efforts to try to maintain its regional status and continue its support for the "resistance front." Over the past two decades, Iran has invested considerable efforts to consolidate its regional influence and strengthen its regional proxies, and it is not expected to abandon this policy, which is a central pillar of Iran's security doctrine despite the weakening of the regional axis it leads. However, it can be assumed that it will examine how to make the necessary adjustments and find possible solutions to the limitations and constraints it faces in the main arenas in which it operates.

The Palestinian arena

► Iran is expected to accelerate its efforts to establish and operate terrorist infrastructure in Judea and Samaria (as a possible partial replacement for the Gaza Strip) and to increase its terrorist activity inside Israeli territory. Since 2007, and especially in the past decade, Hamas has enjoyed massive Iranian military support, which is reflected in the supply of Iranian weapons, the training of its operatives in Iran, and the transfer of Iranian know-how and capabilities through various routes to the Gaza Strip and Judea and Samaria, as well as extensive financial support. In addition to supporting Hamas in the Gaza Strip, Iran has

intensified its efforts to smuggle weapons to terrorist operatives in Judea and Samaria. The Iranian instruction was made public when Supreme Leader Khamenei gave a speech marking World Jerusalem Day on June 23, 2014, calling for the arming of the “resistance” in Judea and Samaria. Since then, senior Iranian figures have stressed their duty to help the Palestinians in Judea and Samaria.⁴

► Since the beginning of the Swords of Iron War, Iranian efforts have intensified, especially with the aim of helping terrorist operatives in Judea and Samaria escalate their activities and open another arena of the “axis of resistance,” which will be closest to Israel’s population centers. Among other things, Iran attempted to smuggle “game-changing” weaponry, which, if it had reached its destination, could have improved the capabilities of the terrorist operatives to harm the security forces and carry out attacks, such as claymore mines (explosive charges), mortar shells, anti-tank mines, plastic explosives, and rockets, as discovered in shipments seized by the IDF in March and November 2024 (IDF Spokesperson, March 25, 2024 and November 27, 2024).

► In a document seized by the IDF in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank was defined as of great strategic importance for Iran and Hamas, since it is an arena designed to exert pressure on Israel. Accordingly, Iran is making intensive efforts to transfer weapons and money to this arena through all available means at its disposal. In these efforts, Jordan’s role stands out, as Hamas and Iran have used it to transfer weapons to Judea and Samaria. In the wake of the war in the Gaza Strip and Iranian attempts to spark a new front in Judea and Samaria, smuggling attempts have become more violent, especially on Jordan’s northern border. In the past year, Jordan has thwarted several attempts to smuggle weapons and drugs through the Syrian border, carried out by Iranian-backed militias.⁵

► An expression of the increasing efforts since the beginning of the war in the Gaza Strip to increase the transfer of weapons to Judea and Samaria can be found in an interview given by Qais al-Saadi, a commander in the armed factions in Jenin, in which he admitted that they receive support from Iran, although he claimed that they do not belong to Tehran or any other external party (CNN, December 23, 2024). On the other hand, Anwar Rajab, the spokesperson

⁴ For further information, see the ITIC study, [“Declarations of Senior Iranian Officials Concerning the West Bank Point to Intensifying Iranian Effort to Expand Its Influence in this Arena” \(February 13, 2023\)](#).

⁵ For further information on the smuggling routes used by Iran to smuggle weapons into Judea and Samaria, see the ITIC study, [“Captured documents reveal how Iran smuggles weapons via Syria and Jordan” \(December 22, 2024\)](#).

for the PA's security services, accused Iran of trying to spread "chaos and corruption" and weaken the PA by funding militants to promote its interests in the region (CNN, December 23, 2024). On December 19, 2024, the Israeli security forces eliminated four terrorist operatives in an airstrike in Tulkarm, among them Tareq al-Dosh, one of the heads of the local terrorist network who operated with Iranian funding and was in contact with terrorist operatives in Lebanon (Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades Telegram channel, December 20, 2024).

Lebanon

- ▶ There is an evident Iranian effort to look for alternative ways to overcome the loss of the strategic path in Syria and to rehabilitate Hezbollah's capabilities that were damaged in the war. It can be assumed that in light of the lessons of the multi-front campaign and Hezbollah's failure in the war, Iran will strive to increase its involvement and control in the organization, while rehabilitating its governmental, military, and organizational capabilities.
- ▶ Recently, it was reported that Iran is considering smuggling weapons and money to Hezbollah via flights to Lebanon. It was reported that Iran could turn Beirut into a new shipping center following the fall of the Assad regime in Syria and the disruption of the land routes through which weapons were transferred to Hezbollah. It was also reported that other options under consideration are the land transfer of weapons from Iran through Iraq, and from there to Jordan and Judea and Samaria, as well as maritime transfers (The Times, December 22, 2024).
- ▶ "Western intelligence sources" revealed that Iranian diplomats are using foreign airlines to transfer money to Hezbollah, in light of Israel's surveillance of Iranian airlines. According to the report, the diplomats fly from Iran to countries in the region with suitcases "full of cash," and from there continue to Beirut with foreign companies. Additionally, the "sources" confirmed that Hezbollah is in desperate need of Iranian funding following the severing of the funding route through Syria (Sky News in Arabic, January 22, 2025).
- ▶ According to flight tracking systems, the Iranian airline Mahan Air, which is linked to Iranian arms transfer by the IRGC, conducted 11 flights to Beirut Airport via Turkish airspace in the second half of December 2024. These flights continued during January as well (JNS, January 7, 2025). It therefore appears that Iran is considering alternative air routes through Turkey (despite the tension between Tehran and Ankara, especially after the fall of the regime in Syria) as a substitute for the land corridor from Iran through Iraq and Syria to Lebanon.

- ▶ On January 2, 2025, “Lebanese security sources” reported that an Iranian Mahan Air aircraft was inspected at Rafic Hariri International Airport in Beirut on suspicion of carrying funds intended for Hezbollah. According to the report, the Iranian delegation on the plane attempted to prevent a search of their luggage, claiming they were a diplomatic mission. Airport security services were called to conduct the search, during which nothing was found. In an update from the Iranian embassy in Beirut to the Lebanese Foreign Ministry, it was reported that two small diplomatic pouches carried by an Iranian diplomat on the flight contained documents and banknotes for covering the embassy’s operational expenses. Following this clarification, the two pouches were allowed entry (An-Nahar, January 2, 2025). Iranian Ambassador to Beirut Mojtaba Amani clarified that the airport authorities’ activity stemmed from a lack of knowledge, which was resolved following the intervention of the Lebanese Foreign Ministry, and that Iran protested the incident (Tasnim, January 3, 2025).
- ▶ In parallel with Hezbollah’s rehabilitation efforts, Iran is also striving to take part in the reconstruction efforts of the Lebanese state to maintain its influence in the country. Iran reportedly informed senior Hezbollah officials that it was committed to rebuilding southern Lebanon after the war, the Dahiyeh in southern Beirut, and the ruins in Baalbek and Hermel in the Bekaa Valley, near the border with Syria. The announcement was made after the Iranian Majles speaker, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, who was visiting Beirut, pledged that Iran would reconstruct only the Dahiyeh (Al-Anbaa, November 13, 2024). Sheikh Ali Damoush, deputy chairman of Hezbollah’s Executive Council, said that the funding needed for the reconstruction process in Lebanon would come from Iran. He thanked Supreme Leader Khamenei for his interest in Lebanon, noting that the process was being carried out thanks to the Iranian people, who agreed to support the cause and helped fund it (Al-Nashra, December 30, 2024).

Syria

- ▶ Following the collapse of the Assad regime, Iran is working to establish channels of communication with the new regime and to reopen its diplomatic missions in Damascus to re-ensure its ability to operate there. According to a “senior Iranian official,” even before the fall of the regime in Syria, Tehran had established direct channels of communication with several groups led by the Syrian opposition. He noted that Iran is open to direct dialogue with the new leadership in Syria to prevent a hostile path between the two countries, stabilize relations between them, and prevent further tension in the region (Reuters, December 9,

2024). At the end of December 2024, Iranian government spokeswoman Fatemeh Mohajerani said that Iran was holding diplomatic consultations aimed at bringing about the reopening of the Iranian embassy in Damascus (snn.ir, December 24, 2024).

► In January 2025, Iranian Foreign Minister 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 and that Iran recognizes the importance of stability in this 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. In the announcement of the appointment, Araghchi stressed that decision-making regarding the future of Syria is up to the Syrian people and that Iran will regulate its relations with any governmental system based on the will of the Syrian people, mutual interests, and international law (ISNA, January 12, 2025).

► At the same time, Iran is trying to maintain its foothold in Syria by strengthening and encouraging trends of destabilization in the country over time. Iran may act through various elements in Syria, especially the Alawites, Shiites, Kurds, and Palestinians in the refugee camps in southern Syria, to maintain channels of influence in the country and to try to smuggle weapons into Syria and Lebanon. Bakhshayesh Ardestani, a member of the Majles National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, estimated that the armed conflicts in Syria would continue and even intensify because the new government in Syria is not committed to democracy and the rights of minorities, and because the various groups operating in Syria, including the Kurds, Druze, Alawites, secular groups, and even Sunni Salafi groups, would not easily surrender their weapons. He added that there are still 130,000 Syrians, most of them Shiites and Alawites, who fought alongside the Assad regime as part of the “resistance” during the civil war and they can take action against the new government if it acts against them by force or discriminates against them. He stressed that the new Syrian government cannot deal with the many challenges it faces and that it will face significant security and economic problems in the future, which will lead to young Syrians acting on their own and establishing organizations to fight against the new government (Didehban, January 5, 2025).

► A possible expression of Iran’s intentions to destabilize Syria is evident in reports published in the Iranian media in recent weeks, which emphasized the instability in Syria and the clashes between the new regime in Damascus and the country’s religious minorities. For example, a conservative daily reported on clashes in Syria over the central government’s demand to

disarm the armed groups in the south of the country. According to the report, the ethnic diversity and the existence of armed groups in Syria will not allow Syria to return to normal (Vatan Emrooz, January 13, 2025). Another report referred to the increase in attacks and executions by the groups ruling Syria against civilians in Damascus, Homs, and Hama since the fall of the Assad regime and deliberate attacks against Alawites and Shiites, including arrests and executions (Al-Alam, January 11, 2025). Another report claimed that the Syrian regime was taking over Alawite mosques to spread extremist Sunni Islamic ideas. According to this report, the new regime's activity is causing growing concern among the various religious minorities in Syria (Mehr, January 12, 2025). Strategic affairs analyst Mehdi Kharatian estimated that the new regime's policy in Syria would arouse growing discontent among the Alawites, Shiites, and even some Sunnis and tribes. He raised the possibility of the formation of "resistance cells" by some of President al-Assad's former supporters (Tabnak, January 13, 2025).

► The Syrian regime has already accused Iran of involvement in the sectarian conflicts in the country. Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad Hassan al-Shibani warned Iran against spreading chaos in Syria (Al-Shibani's X account, December 25, 2024). In response, Iranian Foreign Minister Araghchi stressed in an appeal to the Arab League that Iran wants to achieve stability and quiet and prevent chaos and unrest in Syria. He noted that Iran aspires to preserve the unity of Syrian territory and the integrity of its territory (Abbas Araghchi's X account, December 27, 2024). Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei also denied the allegations of Iranian involvement in the incitement and encouragement of sectarian riots in Syria. He stressed that Iran supports Syria's territorial integrity and national unity and the establishment of a political system with the participation of all political, ethnic, and religious groups in the country. He added 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).

► On the ground, there is still evidence of Iran's efforts to continue smuggling weapons through Syria to Lebanon. According to the Tartus Internal Security Directorate, after coordination with the intelligence service in the province and through continuous surveillance and monitoring, an operation to smuggle weapons that made its way into Lebanon through illegal crossings was thwarted, and the weapons were confiscated before entering Lebanese territory. Photos published by the Syrian Ministry of the Interior showed

Iranian-made Shahed-101 drones as well as small arms (Syrian Ministry of the Interior Telegram channel, January 17, 2025).



Weapons seized in Syria (SANA, January 16, 2025)

► According to a report in Turkey, Iran has agreed with the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG), which belongs to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), 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 SDF, denied the publication and accused the media close to the Turkish government of fabricating news. He said that the purpose of the publications was to harm the Kurdish forces and arouse a hostile atmosphere against the residents of northern and eastern Syria in world public opinion. He stressed that the SDF developed independent military capabilities, including drones (Farhad Shami’s X account, January 14, 2025)

► Additionally, it is evident that Iran is seeking to take advantage of Israel’s military presence in Syria to encourage “resistance” cells in the south of the country. At the end of December 2024, Iran’s Supreme Leader Khamenei declared that the advance of the “Zionists” in Syria and the occupation of parts of it were made possible by the fact that no soldiers stood up to them. He said there was no doubt that the brave young Syrians would get them out of Syria (Supreme Leader’s website, December 22, 2024). IRGC commander Salami said that the situation in which the “Zionists” could look into the houses of Damascus with the naked eye

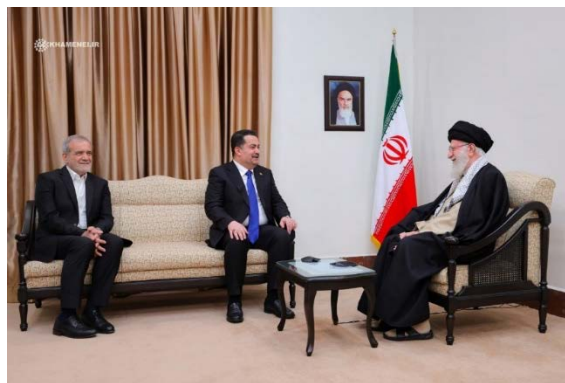
was intolerable and that they would pay a heavy price and be buried on Syrian soil (Tasnim, December 15, 2024). In a meeting with Omani Foreign Minister Badr Albusaidi, the secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council, Ali-Akbar Ahmadian, said that with the occupation of Syrian territory by the “Zionist regime,” a new “resistance” has been born, which will manifest itself in the coming years (ISNA, December 30, 2024).



“Syria’s oil for Washington and Syria’s water for Tel Aviv” (Fars, January 15, 2025)

The Iraqi arena

► At this stage, the Iranian leadership is publicly opposing the disarming of the pro-Iranian Iraqi Shiite militias and their integration into the Iraqi armed forces. In a meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia’ al-Sudani in Tehran, Khamenei stressed that the Popular Mobilization Forces are one of the most important components of the government in Iraq and must be preserved and strengthened even more. He also warned against US efforts to establish and expand its presence in the country (Supreme Leader’s website, January 8, 2025). According to an “Iranian source,” al-Sudani has not been able to receive Iranian support for the initiative to dismantle the Popular Mobilization and hand over its weapons to the Iraqi security forces (1news-iq.com, January 9, 2025). On the other hand, a “source close to the Iranian presidency” reported that during the talks with the Iraqi prime minister in Tehran, senior Iranian officials claimed that the issue of the Popular Mobilization concerned the Iraqis themselves and that they would be the ones to decide on the issue (Baghdadtoday.news, January 9, 2025).



**The Iraqi prime minister meets with the Supreme Leader and the Iranian president
(Supreme Leader's website, January 8, 2025)**

- ▶ Prior to al-Sudani's visit to Tehran, Qods Force commander Esmail Qaani paid a secret visit to Baghdad, during which he met with senior Iraqi government officials and several Iraqi militia commanders and discussed with them the reorganization of the Shiite militias and the possibility of disarming some of them in accordance with US demands (Shafaq News, January 5, 2025). "Iraqi political sources" noted that Qaani arrived in Iraq with a plan to assess the situation of the Shiite militias in light of international pressure on Iraq to solve the problem. According to the report, Iran is striving to implement a preliminary plan to resolve the issue of the future of the Shiite militias before the Iraqi army is forced to resolve this issue under pressure. Qaani's plan is based on the Iraqi prime minister's decision to merge the Popular Mobilization Forces into the Iraqi armed forces while subordinating the organization to the Iraqi forces in terms of management and command. The presentation of the plan is intended to reduce the American pressure on the Iraqi government regarding the pro-Iranian Shiite militias (Al-Arab, January 7, 2025). These reports may indicate that under certain circumstances, Iran will be willing to accept the integration of pro-Iranian militias (or some of them) into the Iraqi armed forces and try to maintain its political, military, and economic influence in Iraq through Iraqi state institutions.
- ▶ Given the preservation of the current status of the Shiite militias, Iran will strive to increase its control over the militias as much as possible. This is a lesson learned from the multi-front campaign, during which the militias sometimes adopted an independent line that threatened to drag Iran into an unwanted military confrontation with the United States or Israel, for example in the incident of the death of three American soldiers in Jordan as a result of an attack by an Iraqi Shiite militia at the end of January 2024.

Yemen and the Horn of Africa

► In Yemen, Iran can continue to maintain its influence through the Houthis, who in recent months have remained the main element in the “resistance front” that continued to act against Israel even after the ceasefire in Lebanon, the collapse of the Assad regime in Syria, and the cessation of attacks by pro-Iranian militias in Iraq. Since the beginning of December 2024, the Houthis have claimed responsibility for dozens of attacks against Israel using drones and ballistic missiles, despite Israeli and US attacks on civilian infrastructure, command and control facilities, and underground missile depots in Yemen. The Houthis have also escalated attacks on US military and civilian vessels in the Red Sea, while attacks on non-US vessels have decreased.⁶

► The Iranian Diplomacy website recently suggested that Iran would use the Houthis to threaten Israel and continue to exact a price from it in light of the difficulties in operating through Hezbollah and the Shiite militias in Iraq. The website stressed that the collapse of the Assad regime and the loss of the land corridor in Syria limit Iran’s ability to support Hezbollah, and that the “resistance” in Iraq is also subject to internal and external pressure to disarm and has been forced to stop launching missiles and drones at Israel. In contrast, the Houthis in Yemen remain the exception and continue to attack Israel in support of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. Therefore, in the event of a renewal of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah, they could be used to act against Israel (Iranian Diplomacy, January 14, 2025).

► In recent weeks, Iran has on several occasions condemned the attacks by Israel and the United States in Yemen. At the same time, senior Iranian officials expressed support and appreciation for the Houthis’ continued activity against Israel. For example, Iranian Foreign Minister Araghchi spoke with his Yemeni counterpart, Jamal Ahmed Ali Amer, and expressed his appreciation for Yemen’s support for the Palestinian people (Tasnim, December 22, 2024). However, it should be emphasized that the Houthis apparently carry out their activities independently and without the intervention of other parties. In addition, it appears that Iran’s influence over the Houthis is relatively limited, and they retain a great deal of autonomy in managing their territory, priorities, and strategic goals.

⁶ For further information, see the following ITIC studies: [“The Houthi Movement and the War in Yemen: Development and Significance” \(March 14, 2023\)](#); [“The Houthis and Operation Iron Swords” \(November 3, 2023\)](#); and [“Houthi-Israel-United States Escalation, December 2024”](#) (December 26, 2024).

► Iran may also use the Horn of Africa, especially Sudan, to consolidate its influence and to smuggle weapons. “Senior intelligence officials and diplomats” recently reported that Iran is transferring shipments of weapons, including drones, along with intelligence information to the Sudanese army to help it in the civil war against the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) militia. According to the report, Tehran wants the aid to provide them with access to the strategic port of Port Sudan in the Red Sea (Bloomberg, December 18, 2024). The continuation of the civil war and the instability in Sudan provide Iran with an opportunity to re-establish its influence in the Horn of Africa and exploit it for arms transfers to its proxies in the region.