



Spotlight on Iran and the Shiite Axis

January 22-29, 2025

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Highlights¹

- ▶ “Western intelligence sources” revealed that Iranian diplomats are using foreign airlines to transfer money to Hezbollah. Iran’s representative to the UN rejected Israel’s claim that Iran is transferring advanced weapons to Lebanon.
- ▶ Iran condemned the attack on Lebanese civilians who were trying to return to their villages in southern Lebanon. The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman called on the Security Council to take steps to end Israel’s military presence in southern Lebanon.
- ▶ Iran’s ambassador to Lebanon met for the first time with Lebanon’s new president, Joseph Aoun. No details were provided about the meeting.
- ▶ Senior Iranian officials continued to present the developments in the Palestinian arena as an expression of “Israel’s defeat.” The Supreme Leader of Iran declared that the Gaza Strip had brought Israel to its knees, while the speaker of the Majles asserted that the return of displaced Palestinians to the northern Gaza Strip demonstrates that Hamas remains active and resilient.
- ▶ The Iranian foreign minister expressed concern over reports of attacks on members of the Alawite and Shiite religious minorities since the fall of the regime in Syria.
- ▶ The Houthis released the crew of the Galaxy Leader, who had been detained since November 2023, “at the request of Hamas.” They made it clear that they would continue to monitor the implementation of the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and would respond to any Israeli violations.
- ▶ The Houthi regime condemned the Trump administration for its decision to return the movement to the list of terrorist organizations, accusing it of an attempt to prevent Yemen from helping the Palestinians.

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

Iran's involvement in Lebanon

- ▶ “Western intelligence sources” revealed that Iranian diplomats are using foreign airlines to transfer funds 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 airlines. 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).
- ▶ In a letter to the UN secretary-general and to the Security Council, Iran’s representative to the UN, Amir Saeed Iravani, rejected Israel’s claim that Iran is transferring advanced weapons to Lebanon. In the letter, he said that the claim was intended to serve as an excuse to justify Israel’s repeated “violations” of Resolution 1701 and its disregard for the ceasefire with Lebanon. Iran’s representative to the UN claimed that Israel had no intention of fulfilling its commitment to withdraw from southern Lebanon at the end of the 60-day ceasefire and that it was making baseless claims to justify its continued illegal “occupation” in Lebanon.² He called on the UN Security Council to take an unequivocal position and force Israel to fulfill its commitments (ISNA, January 25, 2025).
- ▶ Iran’s Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei referred to the attempt of the residents of southern Lebanon to return to their villages following the expiration of the 60-day ceasefire agreement. Khamenei noted that all political equations and material calculations had been shattered in the face of the faithful people of southern Lebanon, who disregarded the “Zionist” army and carried their spirits to the battlefield trusting the divine promise (Iranian Supreme Leader’s X account, January 26, 2025). In a meeting with senior regime officials, he said that both enemies and allies had believed that Hezbollah was finished. However, the organization had proven not only that it was far from defeated, but in some cases, its motivation had even increased, enabling it to confront the “Zionist regime” (Iranian Supreme Leader’s website, January 28, 2025).
- ▶ Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei strongly condemned the attack on Lebanese civilians who were trying to return to their villages in southern Lebanon. He accused Israel of committing hundreds of violations of the ceasefire over the past 60 days and blamed

² It should be noted that the 60 days set for Israel’s withdrawal from southern Lebanon, in accordance with the ceasefire agreement, ended on January 26, 2025, but it was agreed between Israel, Lebanon, and the United States that the agreement would be extended until February 18, 2025.

the United States and France for them. He also called on the UN Security Council to fulfill its responsibility and take the necessary steps to end Israel's military presence in southern Lebanon (IRNA, January 27, 2025).

► Iran's ambassador to Lebanon, Mojtaba Amani, met for the first time with Lebanon's new president, Joseph Aoun. The Iranian media did not publish details about the content of the meeting (IRNA, January 27, 2025).



The Iranian ambassador meets with the Lebanese president in Beirut (IRNA, January 27, 2025)

References to developments in the Palestinian arena

Iran

► Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei said at a meeting with senior regime figures on the occasion of a religious holiday that “Little Gaza” had brought the US-backed “Zionist regime” to its knees, and that this is the essence of the “resistance” (Iranian Supreme Leader's website, January 28, 2025).

► IRGC commander Hossein Salami said the resignation of senior Israeli military figures after the end of the war in the Gaza Strip is a sign of their defeat in the war. He noted that the United States, Israel, and Britain had united in an attempt to crush a defenseless nation, but the Palestinian people stood firm and emerged victorious. He added that the victory in the Gaza Strip means the victory of Islam and that the “resistance” is an inspiration for Muslims (ISNA, January 24, 2025).



The IRGC commander (Al-Alam, January 24, 2025)

- ▶ Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi referred to US President Donald Trump’s proposal to transfer Palestinians from the Gaza Strip to other countries. He said the Palestinians cannot be deported and mockingly suggested sending Israelis to Greenland instead. Araghchi admitted that the “resistance” had been damaged in the war, but was quick to explain that it was an idea and ideology that would continue to exist. He also admitted that Hamas and Hezbollah had been harmed in the war but stressed that they are rebuilding themselves (Sky News, January 28, 2025).
- ▶ Majles speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf stated that the release of Palestinian prisoners is a result of the solidarity and support of the residents of the Gaza Strip for Hamas, in response to “the plan to eliminate the Palestinian people and their forced displacement.” Ghalibaf added that Israel may be able to destroy homes, schools, and hospitals with American bombs weighing several tons, but it will never be able to break the will of the people or extinguish the flame of “resistance” in the hearts of the Palestinian people. He noted that the return of displaced persons in the Gaza Strip underscores that Hamas is alive, enduring, and continuing the “resistance,” and that the steadfastness of the Palestinians will be fulfilled with the complete withdrawal of the “Zionists” from the Gaza Strip and the return of the displaced to their homes (ISNA, January 27, 2025).



The speaker of the Majles (ISNA, January 27, 2025)

The Houthis

► Houthi leader Abd al-Malik al-Houthi said they are monitoring the progress of the implementation of the ceasefire agreement in the Gaza Strip and the developments in Judea and Samaria. He threatened that if the “Israeli enemy” was involved in violating the agreement, re-escalation, and “genocide,” they would respond “accordingly.” Al-Houthi also accused the United States of helping Israel “destroy” the Palestinian people, claiming that it was responsible for the destruction in the Gaza Strip. He stressed that they would maintain coordination with the “Palestinian resistance” and the “axis of jihad” regarding any development in the situation, stating that they are prepared to deal with any “American aggression” against Yemen (Telegram channel of the Houthi movement, January 26, 2025).

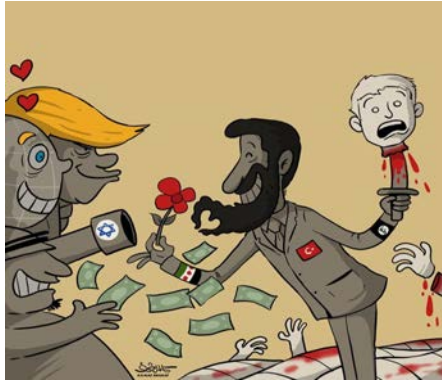
► Following the return of hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians to the northern Gaza Strip, Houthi spokesman Mohammad Abd al-Salam described this as a “loud popular message,” highlighting the resilience of the Palestinian people, their steadfast hold on their land, and their firm rejection of any emigration plans. He congratulated the “people of Gaza” on their victory against the “criminal enemy” and reaffirmed that “Yemen” would always stand by the Palestinian people until the full liberation of their land (Mohammad Abd al-Salam’s X account, January 27, 2025).

Iran amid the changes in Syria

► Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi spoke with his Turkish counterpart, Hakan Fidan, to discuss developments in Syria and relations between the two countries. Araghchi stressed Iran’s support for Syria’s sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the establishment of an inclusive government with the participation of all political streams and ethnic and religious groups in the country. He expressed concern about reports of armed groups operating against civilians in areas populated by Alawites and Shiites (Mehr, January 23, 2025).

► Former Majles member Ali Motahari estimated in an opinion piece in a reformist newspaper that developments in Syria would eventually play into Iran’s favor. He wrote that contrary to what appears to be the case, the ousted president, Bashar al-Assad, was not prepared for a confrontation with Israel, and the Syrian army was not prepared to fight with all its might. Therefore, the continuation of Assad’s rule would have led to the waste of the lives and property of the fighters and dragged Iran into the conflict in Syria for years. He estimated that although the new leadership in Syria declares positive attitudes toward Israel, the United States, and Europe, it would eventually find itself in a conflict with Israel over the Golan Heights

and other “occupied territories” and would even become dependent on Iran. Furthermore, he noted that HTS is a movement with roots in the Muslim Brotherhood, which is a militant and anti-Zionist movement, and that in the end, the Syrian youth, including some of the young members of HTS, will retake their country from the “occupiers” and the result will be that the “axis of resistance” will remain strong (Etemad, January 26, 2025).



“All supporters of Julani” (Fars, January 27, 2025)

Iran and the pro-Shiite militias

► A “senior Iranian official source” said that the Iranian regime had instructed its proxies in the region as well as its allies to “act with caution” due to an existential concern over Donald Trump’s return to power in the United States. According to the “source,” the Iranian regime has instructed its forces in Iraq and Yemen not to attack American interests, stressing “clearly” that if they do so, they must not use Iranian weapons. He added that discussions had been held in Iran on how to prevent war with the United States following Trump’s inauguration, as his threats are being taken seriously (The Telegraph, January 25, 2025).

The Houthis in Yemen

Galaxy Leader crew released

► On January 22, 2025, the Houthis’ Supreme Political Council officially announced the release of the crew of the Galaxy Leader, who had been detained on November 19, 2023, as part of the “war in support of the Gaza Strip and in support of the ceasefire agreement” (Saba News Agency, January 22, 2025). Senior Houthi leader Nasr al-Din Amer said that the crew of the “Israeli” ship would be released at the request of Hamas and following Omani mediation efforts (Nasr al-Din Amer’s X account, January 22, 2025).

► The Hamas representative in Sana’a, Mu’adh Abu Shamala, said at a press conference with representatives of the Houthi government that there has been ongoing coordination between Yemen and the Palestinian factions on various issues and that the release of the ship’s crew was an example. Jalal al-Ruwaishan, deputy for defense and security affairs of the Houthi

prime minister, stressed that Yemen's position is to help the Palestinian people and that they would remain in that position (Yemeni News Agency YPA, January 22, 2025).



Right: The Bulgarian captain of the Galaxy Leader, Lumir Chayvin, receives souvenirs in preparation for his release (Al-Masirah, January 22, 2025). Left: Hamas representative Abu Shamala at the press conference (Saba News Agency, January 22, 2025)

Returning the Houthis to the list of terrorist organizations

► US President Donald Trump has signed an order reinstating the Houthi movement to the US list of international terrorist organizations after the Biden administration removed them from the list in 2021. The statement noted that the Houthis' activity threatens the security of American citizens and crews in the Middle East, as well as the regional partners of the United States and the stability of global maritime trade. It was also reported that the policy of the United States, together with its regional partners, is to eliminate the capabilities of the Houthi movement and deprive it of its resources to stop its attacks (White House website, January 22, 2025).

► The Houthis' political bureau condemned the decision and warned of the consequences for the Yemeni economy and people and for the efforts to reach a peace agreement, which it claimed had reached an advanced stage. The statement noted that the military forces are highly prepared for any military escalation against Yemen and will fight against violations of the ceasefire agreement in the Gaza Strip. It was also stated that the United States seeks to increase the suffering of the Yemeni people in an attempt to divert Yemen and its armed forces from continuing aid to the Palestinian cause (Al-Masirah X account, January 23, 2025).

Iraq and the pro-Iranian militias

The issue of dismantling the militias

► Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid said during the World Economic Forum in Davos that the talk in Western countries about Iranian influence on the armed militias in Iraq is a "great

exaggeration.” He claimed that the militias are subject to government decisions (Iraqi News Agency, January 23, 2025).

► Iraqi National Security Advisor Qassem al-Araji said that the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), the umbrella organization of pro-Iranian militias, is a national institution and that dismantling the PMF holds no value. He added that the government is working to eliminate all weapons outside the framework of the state and integrate them under the Iraqi security forces, aiming to take advantage of the relative stability in the region following the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip (Shafaq News, January 23, 2025).

► A senior Ansar Allah al-Awfiya official, Ali al-Fatlawi, stated that reports claiming that factions of the “resistance” had agreed to hand over their weapons and dismantle were impossible and far from the truth and that it was a dream of some people and of the West that would not come true. He added that the militias are intended to fight the “American occupation” in Iraq, and as long as it continues, they will not give up their weapons and will continue the “resistance.” Al-Fatlawi further emphasized that the factions would not accept any delays or procrastination in negotiations regarding the withdrawal of US forces (Shafaq News, January 27, 2025).