



Spotlight on Iran and the Shiite Axis

January 29 – February 5, 2025

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Highlights¹

- ▶ Senior Iranian officials have reiterated their emphasis on the “Palestinian victory” achieved following the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. Iran’s Supreme Leader declared that this “victory” serves as an example of achieving the impossible, and the Iranian foreign minister congratulated the delegation of senior Hamas figures in Qatar on the “historic victory of the Palestinian people.”
- ▶ Iran and the militias loyal to it issued statements of mourning following Hamas’ announcement of the death of the head of its military wing, Mohammed al-Deif.
- ▶ The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman dismissed Israel’s claims that Iranian diplomats are transferring tens of millions of dollars to Hezbollah in suitcases via flights landing at Beirut airport.
- ▶ Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei authorized Hezbollah secretary-general Naim Qassem as his religious representative in Lebanon.
- ▶ The IRGC commander admitted that Iran’s enemies had achieved certain results in Syria but declared that the situation would not remain the same. Iranian media published a video documenting renovation work at a Sunni mosque in Damascus that could allegedly damage the Tomb of Sayyida Zaynab, the holy site for Shiites.
- ▶ Sources in the pro-Iranian militias in Iraq denied that talks were underway for a deal that would lead to the release of the kidnapped Israeli researcher, Elizabeth Tsurkov.
- ▶ The Houthis reported an increase in ship traffic in the Red Sea since the beginning of the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip.

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

References to developments in the Palestinian arena

Iran

► Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, speaking at a meeting with participants in an international Quran competition in Tehran, referred to the war in the Gaza Strip, saying that the “victory” of the residents of the Gaza Strip over the “Zionist regime” and the American regime serves as an example of the realization of the impossible. He said that if they had said that the residents of the small area of the Gaza Strip would fight a great power like the United States and win, no one would have believed it, but it was achieved by God’s will (Tasnim, February 2, 2025).



The Supreme Leader of Iran (Tasnim, February 2, 2025)

► Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi arrived in Qatar on January 30, 2025. During his visit, he met with Qatari Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Muhammad bin Abdulrahman Al Thani and a delegation of senior Hamas figures led by Muhammad Ismail Darwish, head of Hamas’ Shura Council, and discussed developments in the region and the Palestinian issue. Meeting with the Hamas delegation, the Iranian foreign minister conveyed the congratulations of the Supreme Leader and the Iranian president on the “historic victory of the Palestinian people,” especially of the residents of the Gaza Strip and the “resistance” groups, and for their steadfastness against the “Zionist regime,” which was forced to accept the terms of the “resistance” in the ceasefire agreement. He also stressed Iran’s support for the “resistance” until the rights of the Palestinian people are realized and “Palestine is liberated from the occupation.” The senior Hamas leaders expressed their appreciation for the Islamic Republic’s support for the Palestinians and presented the foreign minister with the latest developments in the Gaza Strip and Judea and Samaria after the ceasefire (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, January 30, 2025).



**The Iranian foreign minister meets with the Hamas delegation
(Hamas official Telegram channel, January 30, 2025)**

- ▶ Foreign Minister Araghchi said that the “Al-Aqsa Flood” of October 7, 2023, had turned the Palestinian issue into the number one issue in the region and the world and that Iran is committed to helping the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip (Al-Jazeera, January 31, 2025).
- ▶ Speaking at a conference on the media and the war in the Gaza Strip held in Tehran, Araghchi said the enemies of the “resistance” had failed to make any significant gains in the war and that the “Zionist regime” was now more isolated in the international arena than ever before. He said that while Israel had succeeded in achieving successes on the battlefield, they were limited to demolishing houses in the Gaza Strip, and it had not succeeded in achieving its goals or eliminating the “resistance.” Araghchi added that the Palestinians had achieved a victory in the Gaza Strip because Israel had not been able to release the hostages militarily and eliminate Hamas and was forced to agree to a ceasefire. He noted that there is concern in the international arena that the sense of defeat in Israel could lead to the ceasefire not being extended and that this is possible in light of the “criminal nature of the Zionist regime.” He stressed that the “resistance” had to rebuild its forces and implement the lessons it had learned from the war (IRNA, February 4, 2025).
- ▶ Following Hamas’ official announcement of the death of its military leader, Mohammed al-Deif, the IRGC released a statement mourning his loss and praising his legacy. The statement described al-Deif as a legendary, courageous, and inspiring commander on the battlefield against the “Zionist regime.” It proclaimed that his legacy of jihad would serve as a guiding light for fighters of the “Islamic Resistance” in their struggle to liberate Jerusalem and eliminate the “Israeli cancerous tumor.” According to the IRGC, the announcement of al-Deif’s martyrdom, along with that of the other commanders of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, will invigorate the “Resistance” fighters in “Palestine.” It will strengthen the resolve and willingness of the Palestinian people to continue the fight for the liberation of Jerusalem and raise the

Palestinian flag across the Holy Land. The statement concluded by emphasizing the support of the Islamic nation, especially the “axis of resistance,” in this struggle (Tasnim, January 31, 2025).

The Houthis

► Houthi leader Abd al-Malik al-Houthi expressed his condolences to the Palestinian people and Hamas over the official announcement of Mohammed al-Deif’s death. He added that the “resistance in Palestine” and Lebanon is on the verge of achieving a historic and complete victory over the “enemy” as long as support for this “resistance” is maintained. According to al-Houthi, the Houthi forces are prepared for the event that the “enemy” will violate the ceasefire agreements and return to fighting in the Gaza Strip and Lebanon, as well as for the event that the Houthis will have to resume their attacks against Israel. Referring to US President Donald Trump’s remarks regarding the evacuation of the Palestinians from the Gaza Strip, al-Houthi said that the goal of the United States and Israel is “the annihilation, total control and complete expulsion” of the Palestinians from the Gaza Strip, while the “Palestinian resistance” has prevented it so far (al-Masirah, February 3, 2025).

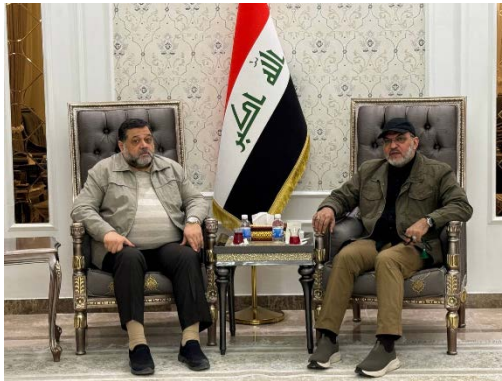
► The Houthis’ political bureau condemned Israel’s actions in “the West Bank and the Jenin refugee camp,” including “murder, arrests, destruction of buildings, and transfer.” The statement said that the political bureau also condemned “the continued violations of the Zionist enemy in southern Lebanon” and the recent statements by the US government aimed at “expelling the Palestinian people from the Gaza Strip and realizing the goals that the enemy army has failed to achieve” (Al-Masirah X account, January 29, 2025).

► Mohammed Ali al-Houthi, a member of the Houthis’ Supreme Political Council, said that President Trump’s remarks were “condemnable arrogance and a provocative statement.” He stressed that they support the Arab position that advocates faith, dignity, and brotherhood, and call on the Arab nation to take a united position on this matter (Mohammad Ali al-Houthi’s X account, January 25, 2025).

The pro-Iranian militias in Iraq

► The cover militia of the Nujaba Movement, Kata’ib Sarkhat al-Quds (the Jerusalem Cry Brigades), said in a statement following Hamas’ announcement of Mohammed al-Deif’s death that they are committed to maintaining “the unity of the arenas” until “the liberation of Jerusalem” and the removal of the “Zionist cancerous gland” from the face of the earth (Ashab al-Kahf Telegram channel, January 30, 2025).

► Abu Alaa al-Wala'i, secretary-general of Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada, hosted senior Hamas figure in Lebanon Osama Hamdan. The two reportedly discussed the security and political situation in the region and the results of the battle of the Al-Aqsa Flood. Hamdan said that support from the “unity of the arenas” was a key factor in achieving the “victory.” Al-Wala'i stressed that the principle of “unity of the arenas” must be maintained and that the level of readiness for the next stage must be increased as needed (Abu Alaa al-Wala'i's Telegram channel, February 1, 2025). Hamdan also met with the head of the Justice and Charity Movement, as well as with the leaders of the Jihad and Construction Movement (Movement websites, February 1, 2025). In a meeting with the head of Iraq's Supreme Islamic Council, Hamdan discussed the common visions and challenges of the “axis of resistance.” He said that the battle of the Al-Aqsa Flood is an achievement of the entire Arab nation (Hamas X account, February 1, 2025).



Meeting between Hamdan (left) and al-Wala'i
(Abu Alaa al-Wala'i's Telegram channel, February 1, 2025)

Iran's involvement in Lebanon

► The Iranian media published a decree issued by Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei authorizing Hezbollah secretary-general Naim Qassem as his religious representative in Lebanon (Tabnak, February 4, 2025).



The Supreme Leader's decree (Tabnak, February 4, 2025)

► Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Consular and Parliamentary Affairs Vahid Jalalzadeh visited Lebanon and met with senior Lebanese government officials, including Lebanese Foreign Minister Abdallah Bou Habib and Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri. Jalalzadeh expressed Iran’s willingness to assist Lebanon in dealing with Syrian citizens of Iranian origin who left for Lebanon after the fall of the Assad regime. The deputy minister visited the Dahiyeh compound in Beirut where Hezbollah secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah was killed. He stressed the importance of the “resistance” and Iran’s support for it (snn.ir; Al-Manar, February 1, 2025).



The Iranian deputy foreign minister at the compound where Nasrallah was killed in Beirut (snn.ir, February 1, 2025)

► Iran’s ambassador to Lebanon Mojtaba Amani stressed that Iran’s support for the “resistance” would continue despite all the statements against Iran. The ambassador noted that Iran had made an unequivocal decision to support the “resistance” forces in the region and that this policy would continue unchanged. He also said that the “Zionist regime” would achieve nothing through its “crimes” and that its actions only strengthen Iran’s power (snn.ir, February 1, 2025).



The Iranian ambassador to Lebanon (snn.ir, February 1, 2025)

► At his weekly press conference, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei addressed the allegations that Iran is transferring money to Hezbollah. He dismissed these

allegations as rumors spread by the Zionists to hinder Lebanon's reconstruction efforts (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, February 3, 2025). Baghaei's remarks came in response to a report that Israel had lodged a complaint with the committee overseeing the implementation of the ceasefire in Lebanon. According to the complaint, Iranian diplomats are transferring tens of millions of dollars to Hezbollah in suitcases via the Beirut International Airport (Wall Street Journal, January 31, 2025).

Iran amid the changes in Syria

► Iranian Foreign Minister Araghchi stated that Iran would support any Syrian government that won the support of the Syrian people. He emphasized Iran's commitment to preserving Syria's stability and territorial integrity (Al-Jazeera, January 31, 2025). Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei said that Iran is closely monitoring the developments in Syria and hopes the transitional phase will lead to the establishment of an inclusive government representing all segments of Syrian society. He stressed the need to help maintain security and stabilize the situation in Syria (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, February 3, 2025).

► The Iranian media published a video titled "The Beginning of the Activity to Demolish the Tomb of Zaynab," documenting renovation work carried out by the Syrian authorities at the Omar Ibn al-Khattab Mosque in Damascus, which could damage the compound of the Tomb of Sayyida Zaynab, the holy site of the Shiites located near the mosque (Tabnak, January 31, 2025). The release of the video is an expression of increasing efforts by the Iranian media to highlight attacks on Shiite holy sites in Syria, the takeover of Alawite mosques to spread extremist Sunni Islamic ideas, and deliberate attacks against Alawites and Shiites, including arrests and executions, following the fall of the Assad regime. These efforts are intended to assist Iran in its political and diplomatic campaign against the new regime in Damascus, as well as to strengthen and encourage destabilizing trends in the country.



Renovation work at a Sunni mosque in Damascus (Tabnak, January 31, 2025)

► IRGC commander Hossein Salami spoke at an IRGC ceremony about the situation in Syria, saying that the enemies had achieved certain results due to matters that this was not the time to elaborate on, but that the situation would not remain the same. He also referred to developments in other arenas in the region, saying that the Palestinians fighting with stones continue to show great strength against Israel even after 16 months of war and that Hezbollah stands firm despite the severe blows it has suffered (Tasnim, February 3, 2025).



The IRGC commander (Tasnim, February 3, 2025)

Iran's involvement in Iraq

► Iraqi Parliament Speaker Mahmoud al-Mashhadani visited Tehran and met with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and Majles Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf. The Iranian president said at the meeting that the Islamic countries should avoid internal disputes and unite with each other to achieve common goals. The president also stressed the need for continued cooperation between the countries in various fields. During the meeting, the two also discussed the latest developments in the region, especially in Syria. In a meeting with the speaker of the Majles, the two discussed cooperation between the countries in various fields, the security situation on the border between them, and developments in the region. Ghalibaf said that Iran and Iraq are determined to support the “resistance” to defend Islam and the honor of the Islamic nation, as well as to expand political and economic relations between the countries (IRNA; Tasnim, February 3, 2025).



The Iranian president meets with the speaker of the Iraqi parliament (IRNA, February 3, 2025)

Iraq and the pro-Iranian militias

The issue of the abductee Elizabeth Tsurkov

► “Senior officials in the Shiite Coordination Committee” reported that Elizabeth Tsurkov, the Israeli-Russian researcher who was kidnapped by Kata’ib Hezbollah in Iraq in March 2023, is not a spy for the Israeli Mossad, as was initially suspected, and that after months of interrogation by Iranian intelligence officers, she was found innocent. According to the “officials,” Tsurkov is treated “with respect” (AnbaAllIraq X account, February 2, 2025).

► “Three sources close to the leadership of the pro-Iranian militias” denied that talks were underway to implement a deal between Iraq and Israel, in which Tsurkov would be released. One of the “sources” questioned the Iraqi government’s official statements that efforts were being made to promote the release of Tsurkov and wondered if the government knew where she was (Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, February 2, 2025).

Negotiations on the dismantling of the militias

► An “Iraqi source” said that the Iraqi government is negotiating with the leadership of the armed militias to resolve the issue of dismantling them or merging them with the Popular Mobilization Forces. However, a “senior official” in the Nujaba Movement stressed that they would not disarm unless the highest religious authority in Iraq, Ali al-Sistani, ordered it. He added that they had met with Prime Minister Muhammad Shia’ al-Sudani, along with other senior officials in the government and the Shiite Coordination Committee, and stressed that they were not willing to give up their weapons. A “senior official” in the Iraqi government admitted that the negotiations with the militias were difficult because they refused to disarm and had made demands that the leadership of the Shiite Coordination Committee would not agree to, such as turning them into political factions that would assume important and central roles in the government and in the security and counterterrorism apparatuses (arabicpost.com, February 3, 2025).

The Houthis in Yemen

- ▶ “Sources overseeing maritime traffic in al-Hudaydah” have reported an increase in merchant ship traffic in the Red Sea during the last week of January 2025. This rise in activity is attributed to a halt in Houthi attacks due to the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. The “sources” noted that all vessels traversing international shipping lanes “were careful to comply with the conditions” set by the Sana’a maritime forces. These conditions include the proper activation of identification data, refraining from falsification, and transparently disclosing their destinations. The “sources” also indicated that Houthi naval patrols are providing protection for ships passing by the al-Zubayr Islands (approximately 85 km northwest of al-Hudaydah), which are close to international waters. This protection is reportedly in accordance with Yemen’s maritime law (al-Akhbar, January 30, 2025).
- ▶ In this context, the chairman of the Suez Canal Authority, Osama Rabia, stated that the current conditions in the Red Sea indicate positively the beginning of the restoration of stability in the region. He added that it is an opportunity to take practical steps to gradually return navigation to its normal route (Al-Quds Al-Arabi, January 30, 2025).