



Spotlight on Iran and the Shiite Axis

March 5-12, 2025

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Highlights¹

- ▶ The Iranian foreign minister stressed the right of the Palestinians to continue their “resistance” against Israel, criticized President Trump’s proposal to transfer Palestinians from the Gaza Strip, and called for international sanctions on Israel. He also reiterated Iran’s opposition to the two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- ▶ Iranian media reported extensively on the clashes between the Syrian regime and its opponents in the Alawite coastal strip. The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson denied reports of Iranian involvement in the incidents.
- ▶ Iran’s ambassador to Lebanon claimed that Israel would eventually be forced to withdraw from the five points where it remains in Lebanese territory and that the funeral of former Hezbollah secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah demonstrated the extent of popular support for the organization.
- ▶ The Houthis announced the resumption of their naval operations against “Israeli” vessels after the expiration of the ultimatum set by the movement’s leader for reopening the border crossings into the Gaza Strip and bringing in humanitarian aid.
- ▶ Reports that the United States is increasing pressure on the Iraqi government to bring about the release of Israeli hostage Elizabeth Tsurkov.

Iran’s stance on developments in the Palestinian arena

- ▶ Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei said that US President Trump’s proposal to transfer the residents of the Gaza Strip is a continuation of “genocide” using political means, and that the meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation would prove that there are no differences of opinion among the Muslim countries regarding the need to

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

oppose plans to “uproot” the Palestinians. He said that Israel is “a racist and occupying entity and a colonial apartheid regime” that was created in the region following World War II and had operated in the past 80 years both through killing and ethnic cleansing and through political plans such as the American plan (Iranian TV, March 5, 2025).

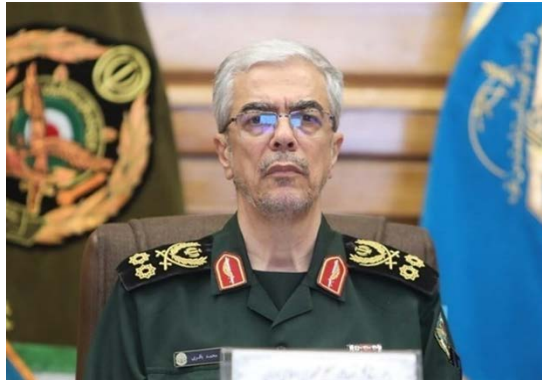
► Speaking at a meeting of the foreign ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Jeddah, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi expressed concern about the situation in the Gaza Strip and accused Israel of “committing war crimes, genocide and ethnic cleansing.” He said that President Trump’s proposal to relocate the residents of the Gaza Strip is a clear violation of international law and that the United States is complicit in the “war crimes” committed by Israel against the Palestinian people. Araghchi stressed the right of the Palestinians to defend themselves and resist the “occupation.” He called on the international community to recognize this right. The Iranian foreign minister also called for imposing collective sanctions on Israel to force it to “stop its crimes” against civilians in the Gaza Strip and other countries in the region. He called on OIC members to act to transfer immediate humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip and to help rebuild it, and to declare an international commemoration day in memory of those killed in the Gaza Strip. He expressed reservations about the two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and emphasized Iran’s position in favor of the establishment of a single Palestinian state with the participation of all the “original residents” of Palestine (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, March 7, 2025).



**The Iranian foreign minister at the conference in Jeddah
(Iranian Foreign Ministry website, March 7, 2025)**

► The Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces, Mohammad Bagheri, spoke to reporters on the sidelines of a meeting of senior regime officials with the Supreme Leader of Iran on the occasion of the month of Ramadan. Referring to the Trump plan, he said that those who stole “Palestine” must leave and that a nation whose roots are in “Palestine” cannot be expelled

from its land. He added that the Trump plan is not feasible and that the Palestinian people will remain steadfast in their country (snn.ir, March 9, 2025).



Iranian Chief of Staff Bagheri (snn.ir, March 9, 2025)

Iran's stance on events in Syria

► The Iranian media reported extensively on the clashes that broke out between the Syrian regime forces and its opponents in the Alawite coastal strip. Iran's Mehr News Agency, which is affiliated with the Islamic Ideology Dissemination Organization (IIDO), claimed in a commentary that the success or failure of the Alawite uprising in Syria's coastal areas depends on the response or lack of response of the Kurds, Druze, and Christians, who seek to establish a federal government in Syria. The article argues that any coordination between the Syrian minorities will increase their chances of success in the medium term and that if they want to gain a significant degree of political independence, they have no choice but to unite and cooperate (Mehr, March 8).

► Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei expressed concern over the violent clashes in Syria. He said that Iran is monitoring the internal developments in Syria, supports maintaining its security, stability, and territorial integrity, especially in light of "aggression and threats by the Zionist regime," and opposes any harm to innocent civilians. He stressed the responsibility of the Syrian government to ensure the security of all citizens in the country (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, March 7, 2025).

► Baghaei also dismissed allegations of Iranian involvement in the violence in Syria's coastal strip. At his weekly press conference, he said the accusation was ridiculous and unacceptable. He stressed that the killing of innocent Syrians must stop as soon as possible (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, March 10, 2025). Meanwhile, the Syrian regime's security official for the Syrian coast, Sajed al-Dik, was quoted as saying that according to his information, Assad regime

loyalists received indirect assistance and funding from Iran during the recent clashes with the forces of the new regime (Sky News in Arabic, March 9, 2025).

► Mohammad Reza Raouf Sheibani, the Iranian foreign minister's special envoy for Syria, stated that the intensity of the violence and the scale of the killing of innocents in the Syrian coastal strip are shocking. He condemned the violence and stressed that "the perpetrators of these crimes" must be held accountable for their actions. Sheibani also called on the Syrian government to end the violence, bring the perpetrators and initiators of these actions to justice, and punish them. He added that Iran supports the stability and territorial integrity of Syria and the security of the Syrian people of all groups and communities and that it believes that the insecurity and instability in Syria serves the "Zionist regime" and is liable to be exploited by the "terrorist and extremist groups" and threaten peace and stability in the region (Mohammad Reza Raouf Sheibani's X account, March 11, 2025).



Mohammad Reza Raouf Sheibani (Tasnim, March 11, 2025)

► Iran's ambassador to Lebanon, Mojtaba Amani, said that the violent clashes between the Syrian regime and its opponents prove that Syrian President Ahmad al-Shara is incapable of providing the security he promised and stopping the cycle of violence in the country. According to him, Israel, which he said has expansionist ambitions in the region, is striving to divide Syria into several parts and to annex parts of the country to create a security zone for itself inside Syrian territory. The ambassador also said the responsibility for the lives of the country's citizens lies with those who took over the government, and that if international institutions do not fulfill their duty to protect citizens' lives, we will witness additional crimes that will spread to other countries as well (Iranian TV, March 8, 2025).

► On March 6, 2025, Iranian Ambassador to Russia Kazem Jalali met with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister and Special Envoy to the Middle East Mikhail Bogdanov to discuss, among

other things, developments in the region, especially the situation in Syria (Tasnim, March 7, 2025).



Iranian ambassador to Moscow meets with the Russian deputy foreign minister (Tasnim, March 7, 2025)

Iran's involvement in Lebanon

► Iran's ambassador to Lebanon, Mojtaba Amani, said Hezbollah is not acting against Israel's violations of the ceasefire agreement in Lebanon because it wants to prove that if it disarms, Israel will be able to reach not only Beirut but also the north of the country, as no other party can prevent it from doing so. He said the killing of senior Hezbollah figures was not a victory for Israel and that the funeral of former Hezbollah secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah showed the extent of popular support for the organization and proved that the "resistance" in Lebanon, which has deep roots in the country, could not be eliminated. Referring to the continued Israeli presence at five points in Lebanese territory, Amani said that Israel was very concerned about the issue of the hundreds of thousands of its citizens who had been forced to leave their homes in northern Israel and were not willing to return, but that in the end, Israel would be forced to withdraw from Lebanese territory, as it had done in the past (Iranian TV, March 8, 2025).



Iran's ambassador to Lebanon (Iranian Broadcasting Authority website, March 8, 2025)

Iran's involvement in Iraq

► Iranian Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad met in Tehran with Iraqi Minister of Electricity Ziad Ali Fadel to discuss expanding cooperation between the two countries in the fields of oil, gas,



petrochemicals, and electricity (IRNA, March 5, 2025). The meeting took place against the backdrop of the Trump administration's decision to end the exemption from sanctions, which allowed Iraq to pay Iran for electricity.

The Iranian oil minister meets with the Iraqi electricity minister (IRNA, March 5, 2025)

The Houthis in Yemen

Resumption of military activity

► On March 7, 2025, Houthi leader Abd al-Malik al-Houthi announced that Houthi forces would give mediators a grace period of four days (until March 11) to continue their mediation efforts amid the impasse in promoting the ceasefire agreement and Israel's decision to halt the entry of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip. According to al-Houthi, if the "Israeli enemy" continues to prevent aid from entering the Gaza Strip and continues to completely close the crossings for food and medicine to enter the Gaza Strip at the end of the four days, the Houthi forces will resume their naval operations against the "Israeli enemy." He stressed that "we will deal with the siege with our own siege," saying they cannot stand idly by in the face of the "aggressive attitude of the Israeli enemy," which, he claimed, is causing the "starvation" of the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip (Al-Masirah, March 7, 2025).

► The Houthi Supreme Political Council (SPC) welcomed the ultimatum presented by the Houthis. An SPC statement said that the armed forces and all relevant agencies are ready to implement the directives if the grace period ends. It also stated that the naval operations against the "Zionist enemy" are designed to impose a blockade on it and prevent it from carrying out "genocide against" the Palestinian people. The SPC also condemned the weakness of the Arab countries and accused the United States, Britain, and Western countries

of collaborating with the “occupying entity” (the Houthi forces’ media arm X account, March 8, 2025).

► At midnight between March 11-12, 2025, Houthi military spokesman Yahya Saria announced that the period announced by al-Houthi had expired and that due to the “inability of the mediators” to open the crossings in the Gaza Strip, maritime operations against “Israeli” vessels are being resumed.² Saria reported that all Israeli vessels would be prohibited from passing through the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea, as well as the Strait of Bab al-Mandeb and the Gulf of Aden. He threatened that any attempt to violate the ban would lead to an attack and that the ban would continue until the crossings were opened and aid, food, and medicine were allowed to enter the Gaza Strip (Yahya Saria’s Telegram channel, March 11, 2025).



Official poster of the Houthis on the resumption of military operations in the maritime space against “Israeli” vessels (Al-Masirah Telegram channel, March 11, 2025)

► Hezam al-Asad, a member of the Houthis’ political bureau, issued a statement in Hebrew in which he threatened that “if the Zionist enemy continues its siege of the Gaza Strip, Yemen’s military operations will escalate into painful and shaking paths for the enemy” (Hezam al-Asad’s X account, March 11, 2025).

► The Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) congratulated the Houthis on the resumption of attacks and called on the other Arab and Muslim peoples to do the same (PIJ Telegram channel, March 11, 2025).

US activity against the Houthi movement

► The US Treasury Department imposed economic sanctions on seven senior figures in the Ansarallah movement (the official name of the Houthi movement). According to the announcement, the seven were involved in smuggling weapons and other military components into Houthi-controlled Yemen and were negotiating the purchase of weapons

² It should be noted that the Houthis halted military operations, including attacks against Israel and attacks on naval vessels, when the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip went into effect on January 19, 2025.

from Russia for the Houthi movement.³ Among the most prominent figures are the Houthi movement's spokesman, Mohammad Abdulsalam; the chairman of the Houthis' Supreme Political Council (SPC), Mahdi al-Mashat; and an SPC member, Mohamed Ali al-Houthi, who allegedly contacted officials in Russia and China to ensure that vessels from these countries are not attacked by Houthi forces. In addition, sanctions were imposed on Houthi operative Abdulwali Abdoh Hasan al-Jabri and his company for involvement in sending Yemeni civilians to fight in the ranks of the Russian army in Ukraine in exchange for money used to finance the Houthis' military operations (US Treasury Department website, March 5, 2025).

The pro-Iranian militias in Iraq

The issue of hostage Elizabeth Tsurkov

► “Two senior Iraqi officials” reported that the US administration asked Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani to resolve the crisis of hostage Elizabeth Tsurkov, the Israeli-Russian researcher who was kidnapped by Kata’ib Hezbollah in Iraq in March 2023, and to release her as soon as possible. The US administration also threatened that there would be political and economic consequences if the Iraqi government did not take action on the issue. The two confirmed that the al-Sudani government, with the assistance of Shiite political leaders, resumed its efforts to avoid American retaliatory measures. A “senior member of the National Security Council” said that the government and Shiite political leaders had resumed their efforts vis-à-vis Kata’ib Hezbollah and other factions to release Tsurkov as soon as possible. He claimed that the government had been working on the issue for months, but that the abductors had not responded in any way, and that their goal was not a ransom (Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, March 10, 2025).

► An “official Iraqi source” said that US Special Envoy for Hostage Affairs Adam Boehler visited Iraq in February 2025 to promote the release of Tsurkov. According to the report, Boehler tried to advance a plan for Tsurkov’s release in exchange for the release of six Hezbollah operatives imprisoned in Israel (Reuters, March 11, 2025).

³ Indications of closer cooperation between the Houthi movement and Russia were revealed in October 2024, when it was reported that Russia had provided the Houthi forces, through Iran, with target data that helped them attack vessels in the Red Sea. See the ITIC’s study from October 30, 2024, “[Spotlight on Iran and the Shiite Axis, October 15-30, 2024.](#)”