



Spotlight on Iran and the Shiite Axis

March 12—19, 2025

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Highlights¹

- ▶ The Iranian Supreme Leader reiterated Iran's support for the "resistance" in the region and stressed that there is a consensus among senior Iranian regime figures on the issue.
- ▶ Iran and the Shiite militias strongly condemned the renewal of Israeli attacks in the Gaza Strip. The Houthis launched a ballistic missile at Israel, for the first time since the start of the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip in January 2025, and threatened escalation if the Israeli attacks continued.
- ▶ Senior Iranian officials expressed dissatisfaction with the recent developments in Syria: The chairman of the Majles National Security Committee declared that the violent incidents in the Syrian coastal area had exposed the true face of Syria's new rulers, and the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman noted that Israel is the only beneficiary of the clashes that took place on the Syria-Lebanon border.
- ▶ The United States launched a large-scale military offensive against the Houthis in Yemen and threatened to take action against Iran if aid to the Houthis continued. The Houthis announced dozens of deaths and claimed to have carried out at least four attacks against the American aircraft carrier in the Red Sea. Senior Iranian officials strongly condemned the American attacks and denied Iranian involvement in Houthi activity.

Iran and the militias in light of developments in the Palestinian arena

Iran

- ▶ Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei strongly condemned the resumption of Israeli attacks in the Gaza Strip. He stated the attacks constitute a continuation of the

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

“genocide and ethnic cleansing in Palestine” and that the US government is directly responsible. He emphasized the responsibility of all governments and the UN to stop the “crimes against humanity” in Gaza and called on Muslim countries to act through the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to prevent the continuation of “genocide” in “Palestine,” support the Palestinian people, expedite the handling of Israeli “crimes” in international courts, and stop the shipment of weapons and all economic aid to Israel (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, March 18, 2025). Previously, Baghaei condemned Israel’s cutting of electricity to the Gaza Strip. He noted that Israel’s decision is an example of a “crime against humanity” and the continuation of “genocide” in the Gaza Strip. He called on the Security Council and other international institutions to act against the “crimes of the Zionist regime” in the Gaza Strip (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, March 13, 2025).

► Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei said in a speech at a meeting of students on the occasion of Ramadan that the deaths of senior members of the “resistance front,” including Ismail Haniyeh, Yahya al-Sinwar, Muhammad al-Deif, and Hassan Nasrallah, had not harmed the Palestinian and Lebanese resistance, but only strengthened its motivation. He noted that this was evident in Hamas’ success in imposing its conditions on Israel in the negotiations for a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. Khamenei stressed that Iran would continue to support the “resistance” in “Palestine” and Lebanon with all its capabilities and that there is a consensus on the issue among senior regime figures in Tehran (Iranian Supreme Leader’s website, March 12, 2025).



The Supreme Leader of Iran (Iranian Supreme Leader’s website, March 12, 2025)

► Ramazan Sharif, head of the “Headquarters for Commemorating the Intifada and Jerusalem Day” and former IRGC spokesman, said at a meeting of the Central Headquarters ahead of the World Jerusalem Day rallies, which will be marked on the last Friday of Ramadan, that the “Al-Aqsa Flood” had led to the collapse of the myth of the invincibility of the “Zionist regime,”

revived the spirit of the “resistance,” led to internal divisions and an identity crisis in the “occupied territories” (i.e., Israel), and the failure of normalization between the “Zionist regime” and the Arabs (Mehr, March 15, 2025).



Meeting of the Central Headquarters of the World Jerusalem Day events (Mehr, March 15, 2025)

The Houthis

► On March 18, 2025, the Houthis’ military spokesman, Yahya Saria, claimed responsibility for launching a Palestine-2 ballistic missile at the Israeli Nevatim Air Force Base, in response to the “massacres carried out by the criminal Zionist enemy” against “our people” in the Gaza Strip. He threatened that the Houthi forces would expand the scope of their targets in “occupied Palestine” in the coming hours and days if the “aggression” against the Gaza Strip continued (Yahya Saria’s X account, March 18, 2025). The IDF Spokesperson stated that a missile launched from Yemen was intercepted before it penetrated Israeli territory (IDF Spokesperson, March 18, 2025). It was the first Houthi claim of responsibility for an attack against Israel since the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas went into effect on January 19, 2025.

► Shortly after the Houthis claimed responsibility for launching the missile at Israel, Abd al-Malik al-Houthi, the leader of the Houthi movement, delivered his daily Ramadan speech and referred to the resumption of Israeli attacks in the Gaza Strip. He claimed that the “criminal and malicious Israeli enemy” had been violating the ceasefire agreement for more than two weeks by halting the entry of aid into the Gaza Strip and had now resumed its “aggression” in the Gaza Strip and “had killed hundreds of Palestinians, mostly women and children.” According to al-Houthi, along with the full backing that the United States provides to Israel, the Arab silence is not helpful and contributes to the “terrible crimes.” He accused that “the enemy has no red lines” and that Israel is “trying in its insolence” to pressure Hamas to complete the “prisoner” exchange procedures without entering the second stage agreed upon in the deal and wants to continue the fighting. Al-Houthi stressed that Hamas could not compromise,

change its demands, or release its strongest card, and then risk watching the “enemy” attack in the Gaza Strip again (Al-Masirah, March 18, 2025).

► The Houthis’ Supreme Political Council condemned the resumption of the aggression of the “Zionist enemy” in the Gaza Strip and the attack on “defenseless civilians” in the Strip. It was emphasized that [Houthi] Yemen would continue its support for the Gaza Strip and intensify the confrontation. The Council noted that the “Zionist and American enemy” are fully responsible for the violation of the ceasefire agreement in the Gaza Strip and are responsible for the re-militarization of the sea and its consequences. The Council also called on all “free people” in the world to reject the “aggression” against the Gaza Strip and stand by the Palestinian people by all means. It also called on the international community and international organizations to condemn the “Israeli aggression and massacre” against the Palestinian people (the Houthi Movement’s media center X account, March 18, 2025).

► The Houthi Political Bureau stated that “the aggression of the Zionist entity” is based on unlimited American support at the military, logistical, and political levels. It was noted that the purpose of the coincidence of the “Zionist” escalation in the Gaza Strip with the American aggression in Yemen is to impose a policy that will eventually result in a *fait accompli*. The Political Bureau stressed that Yemen, with its armed forces, will continue its military escalation in support of the Gaza Strip and the Palestinian people until “the aggression ceases and the siege is lifted” (X account of the Houthi forces media arm, March 18, 2025).

The militias in Iraq

► The pro-Iranian militias in Iraq condemned the renewed Israeli attacks in the Gaza Strip, but did not threaten to resume the attacks which they stopped in November 2024:

◆ The Nujaba Movement stated that “the declaration of the American-backed Zionists of the war of extermination in the Gaza Strip and the deepening of the crimes is a clear picture of the disregard for all human values.” The militia called on the Islamic and Arab nations to take a firm stance because the Gaza Strip “will be removed from the map by war criminals.” It was also reported that the strength of the Gaza Strip “has not been broken and will not be broken” and that “the gates of hell will swallow the perpetrators of the crimes and all those who supported and helped them” (Nujaba Movement Telegram channel, March 18, 2025).

◆ Kata’ib Hezbollah stated that “Palestine” and its people are being subjected to “a new massacre in an attempt to uproot the people from their land.” The militia blamed the

United States for “the ongoing Zionist murders due to its support for the entity.” It stressed that the steadfastness of the Palestinian people would not be broken despite the “massacres, killings, and destruction,” and that the Iraqi people would remain committed to supporting the Palestinians (Kata’ib Hezbollah Telegram channel, March 18, 2025).

Iran in the face of events in Syria

► Ebrahim Azizi, chairman of the Majles National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, said that the recent events in Syria have exposed the true face of the country’s current leaders. He noted that Syria’s neighbors must help the country’s residents solve their problems and prevent incitement by terrorist groups that attack defenseless residents. He stressed that Iran strongly condemns the incidents against the Alawites that took place in Syria and is confident that in the future, we will witness the success and victory of “Syria’s Muslim residents and the resistance” (Defa Press, March 15, 2025).



Ebrahim Azizi (Defa Press, March 15, 2025)

► Seyyed Mojtaba Abtahi, chairman of the Palestinian Committee of the Iranian Majles, said at a meeting of the Central Committee of the World Jerusalem Day that the blood of the fighters of the “resistance front” who stood by the Palestinian people was not spilled in vain and that Syria would also return to the “axis of resistance” (Mehr, March 15, 2025).

► At his weekly press conference, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei referred to the clashes on the Syria-Lebanon border, saying that they are very unfortunate. He noted that the only beneficiary of these developments is the “Zionist regime,” which he claimed is interested in dividing Syria and weakening its neighbors and the countries of the region. According to Baghaei, Iran hopes that the Syrian rulers will notice that the “Zionist regime” is seeking to take advantage of every opportunity to stir up internal disagreements among

Muslim countries and therefore, they will manage the situation and avoid a recurrence of the events (SNN, March 17, 2025).

US strikes against the Houthis in Yemen

► On March 15, 2025, the US began an extensive series of air and sea strikes against Houthi targets in Yemen. It was reported that the strikes were intended to restore freedom of navigation in the Yemeni region and restore US deterrence and that they would end when the Houthis committed to stopping their attacks on American ships and aircraft. According to the statement, the first wave of attacks included hitting 30 targets at various sites in Houthi territory, including command and control centers where drone operators were also present, training facilities, infrastructure for operating drones, weapons development facilities, and weapons depots. According to the statement, the strikes will continue until their objectives are achieved (US Department of Defense, March 17, 2025).

► US President Donald Trump warned the Houthis, saying: “Your time is up, and your attacks must stop, starting today. If they don’t, hell will rain down upon you like nothing you have ever seen before.” He also addressed Iran, saying that its support for the Houthis must end immediately or the US will hold it responsible for what is happening (Donald Trump’s Truth Social account, March 15, 2025). In another statement, Trump said that the source of the attacks carried out by the Houthis was Iran, which provides the Houthis with weapons, money, and intelligence. He threatened that any further attack by the Houthis would be met with “tremendous force and there is no guarantee that this force will stop there.” He said any shot fired by the Houthis will be considered a shot fired by Iran and Iran will bear the consequences for carrying it out (Donald Trump’s Truth Social account, March 17, 2025).

► The Houthi Ministry of Health reported that at least 53 people were killed in the American strikes and about a hundred were wounded. “Sources in Yemen” reported that targets were attacked in many provinces, including the central provinces of Sana’a, Saada, and Al-Hudaydah. It was also reported that the homes of senior Houthi officials had been attacked, but the Houthis denied the reports of the deaths of six senior officials (Al-Masirah TV and Arab media, March 15-19, 2025).



Right: US cruise missiles being launched during the strikes (US Central Command X account, March 16, 2025). Left: Destruction in the Houthi areas (Houthi movement Telegram channel, March 16, 2025)

► In light of the attacks, it was reported that some of the Houthi leaders had left Sana'a for Saada and Amran and that they had been instructed not to stay in government buildings and headquarters that could be attacked. In addition, it was reported that the Houthis had emptied some of their missile depots after the American attacks (Al-Hadath, March 16, 2025).

► Since the beginning of the US strikes, the Houthis' military spokesman, Yahya Saria, has claimed responsibility for four attacks on the US aircraft carrier Harry S. Truman and other US warships in the Red Sea using ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and drones. It was claimed that the attacks succeeded in thwarting American strikes against Yemen (Yahya Saria's X account, March 16-19, 2025). The US Department of Defense did not confirm the Houthis' claims.

► The leaders of the Houthi regime reacted strongly to the American attacks and promised a harsh response by the Houthi forces to the "American-British aggression." They also stressed that the attacks would not cause the Houthis to stop their "support" for the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. The following are prominent statements:

◆ Houthi leader Abd al-Malik al-Houthi said in his daily Ramadan speech that the American "aggression" began after the Houthis declared their support for the Palestinian people against Israel's "acts of starvation" against them. He stressed that the United States would not achieve its goals of destroying their military capabilities and pushing them to retreat from their position, and that "escalation will be met with escalation." He noted the attacks against the American aircraft carrier and vessels, and warned that "if the aggression continues, we will move on to further escalation options" (Al-Masirah Telegram channel, March 16, 2025). In another speech, he claimed that the aircraft carrier had "fled" to a distance of 1,300 kilometers, adding that if the US continued its

“aggression,” it would push the Houthis to confront it with “additional escalation options that will be more painful” (Al-Masirah Telegram channel, March 17, 2025).

- ◆ The Houthis’ Supreme Political Council issued a statement condemning the “blatant American aggression” against Yemen, which is considered full support for the “Israeli entity” and proves the inability of the United States to confront the movement. They called on the international community to intervene and take responsibility for the issue, warning that “aggression will not only harm us, everyone will be affected by it” (the Houthi Yemeni Presidency X account, March 16, 2025).

- ◆ The Houthi Political Bureau said that the “American-British aggression” targeting residential neighborhoods in the capital, Sana’a, was “treacherous and sinful aggression.” It was also noted that the focus of the attacks on civilians is further evidence of “American terrorism” against peoples and countries that oppose it. The announcement claimed that the “American-British aggression” confirms that America was and still is fighting on behalf of the “Zionist entity,” and that the use of “aggression” against Yemen comes against the background of Yemen’s support for the Palestinian people. The bureau stressed that the “aggression” would not deter Yemen from continuing to support “Palestine” and fulfill its obligations in support of the Gaza Strip and that it would not go without a response (Al-Masirah TV, March 15, 2025).

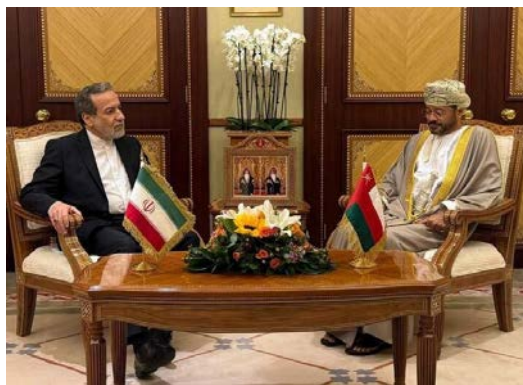
- ◆ Houthi Foreign Minister Jamal Amer said Houthi forces would not reduce their actions against Israel as a result of American strikes or pressure from allies such as Iran. The minister’s remarks came against the backdrop of reports that two senior Iranian officials had conveyed to the Houthis a message asking them to “calm the situation” and another similar message conveyed to the Houthis by the Iranian foreign minister through Oman. Amer claimed that Iran does not interfere in Houthi decisions and does not dictate their steps. He added that Yemen is now at war with the United States and has the right to defend itself, and therefore “escalation is likely to occur” (Reuters, March 18, 2025).

- ▶ Senior Iranian regime officials condemned the American attacks in Yemen and expressed support for the Houthis. Tehran also denied that the Houthis were acting in accordance with the instructions of the Iranian regime. The following are prominent reactions:

- ◆ Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei stated that the Yemeni people are winning and that the only way is “resistance.” He added that what has confused America and its allies

today is the steadfastness of the Muslim peoples, and it will bear fruit (Iranian Supreme Leader's X account, March 16, 2025).

◆ Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi referred to President Trump's demand that Iran stop supporting the Houthis. He noted that the United States has no right to dictate Iranian foreign policy, adding: "Stop supporting Israel's genocide and terrorism, stop killing the Yemenis" (Iranian Foreign Minister's X account, March 16, 2025). Araghchi also met with his Omani counterpart, Badr Albusaidi, and discussed with him the latest developments in the region, including the American strikes in Yemen (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, March 16, 2025).



**Meeting of the foreign ministers of Iran and Oman
(Iranian Foreign Ministry website, March 16, 2025)**

◆ IRGC Commander Hossein Salami said that Iran has always declared that the Yemenis are an independent and free nation with an independent policy and that the Ansar Allah [Houthis] movement makes strategic and operational decisions on its own. He stressed that Iran does not make decisions for any faction in the "resistance front," including the Houthis in Yemen and that wherever it operates, it takes responsibility for it, as was the case with its attacks against Israel (ISNA, March 16, 2025).

◆ Ali-Akbar Velayati, advisor to Iran's Supreme Leader and secretary-general of the World Islamic Awakening Association, condemned the US strikes in Yemen, noting that they once again exposed the "aggressive and arrogant nature" of the US. He added that this "criminal aggression" is doomed to failure, like other historical failures of the US and Zionism in the region, and that belief in "resistance" cannot be eliminated through "bombings and crimes." He called on the Muslim peoples and freedom lovers of the world to stand up against the acts of oppression, stressing that the future belongs to the "resistance" and that the aggressors will have no fate other than defeat (ISNA, March 16, 2025).