



Spotlight on Iran and the Shiite Axis

March 19-26, 2025

Editor: Dr. Raz Zimmt



Highlights¹

- ▶ In a speech on the occasion of the Iranian New Year (Nowruz), the Supreme Leader praised the “resistance” against Israel and stressed Iran’s support for the Palestinian and Lebanese “resistance.”
- ▶ The Iranian foreign minister spoke with his counterparts in the region about regional developments and condemned Israel’s “aggression” in the Gaza Strip and the US actions in Yemen. Iran also condemned the IDF attacks in Lebanon and called for international intervention to stop them.
- ▶ The commander of the Qods Force visited Iraq and met with the commanders of the pro-Iranian Shiite militias amid the American attacks in Iraq, the renewed fighting in the Gaza Strip, and the ongoing American pressure on the Iraqi government to disarm the militias. He reportedly urged the militias not to carry out provocative actions to avoid American and Israeli attacks against them.
- ▶ The Houthis claimed responsibility for six attacks against Israel using missiles and drones, most of them against Ben Gurion Airport. The IDF Spokesperson stated that five launches from Yemen towards Israel were intercepted before entering Israeli territory.
- ▶ The United States continued its attacks against Houthi military targets. The Houthis, in response, claimed they had attacked the aircraft carrier Harry S. Truman in the Red Sea. The commander of the IRGC’s aerospace arm praised the Houthis’ activity in Yemen against the United States and Israel.

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

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

Iran

► In a message on the occasion of the Iranian New Year (Nowruz), Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei referred to the renewed fighting in the Gaza Strip, accusing Israel of a “very grave crime” and saying the United States shares responsibility for “this disaster” carried out with its approval. He noted that this issue concerns the entire Islamic nation, which must put aside its internal disputes, confront “this catastrophic step” alongside freedom-loving people around the world, and stop this tragedy. Khamenei also condemned the American attacks against the Houthis in Yemen (Iranian Supreme Leader’s website, March 20, 2025).

► In a speech on the occasion of the Iranian New Year, the Supreme Leader praised the “resistance” to Israel in the region and declared that Iran stands firmly with the “Palestinian and Lebanese fighters” and supports them. He noted that the steadfast stance would lead to the defeat of the enemies, especially “the corrupt and evil Zionist regime.” Addressing claims that Iran supports its regional proxies, Khamenei said Iran does not need proxies, and that they act against “the Zionists” based on their own motives and beliefs. He also referred to the anti-Israel demonstrations around the world, saying that Western politicians do not want to see this reality and therefore act against universities where pro-Palestinian students are demonstrating (Iranian Supreme Leader’s website, March 21, 2025).



Khamenei’s speech on the occasion of Nowruz
(Iranian Supreme Leader’s website, March 21, 2025)

► Iran’s mission to the UN issued a statement on the occasion of Nowruz, expressing hope that in the new year, “Palestine” would be liberated from the grip of the “occupying regime of Israel,” wisdom would prevail over power and threats, and wars would end in a just peace (X account of Iran’s mission to the UN, March 19, 2025).

► Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi spoke with his Emirati counterpart, Abdullah bin Zayed, to discuss the latest developments in the region, in particular the “genocide” in the Gaza Strip and the US attacks in Yemen. Araghchi condemned the “crimes of the Zionist regime” in the Gaza Strip, in complete violation of the ceasefire, and the American “aggression” against Yemen. He stressed the need for urgent action by the countries of the region and the Muslim countries to stop these “crimes” and prevent escalation in the entire region. He also warned of the consequences of the continued indifference of the Security Council and other governments in the face of the aggression of the United States and the “crimes of the Zionist regime” (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, March 21, 2025). Later, Araghchi discussed developments in the region, especially in the Gaza Strip and Yemen, with the foreign ministers of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Turkey (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, March 22-24, 2025).

The Houthis

► Over the past week, Houthi military spokesman Yahya Saria issued statements claiming responsibility for six attacks against Israel “in support of the oppressed Palestinian people and in response to the massacres perpetrated by the criminal Zionist regime against our people in the Gaza Strip.” According to Saria, the attacks were carried out using “hypersonic” missiles of the “Palestine-2” type, a “Zulfiqar” ballistic missile, and drones, all of which achieved their goals. In addition, it was claimed that four of the attacks were aimed at Ben Gurion Airport, and Saria warned all airlines that the airport had become unprotected for air activity and would remain so until the “aggression” against the Gaza Strip ended and the siege on it was lifted (Yahya Saria’s X account, March 20-26, 2025). The IDF Spokesperson said that five missiles launched from Yemen were intercepted before they penetrated Israeli territory (IDF Spokesperson, March 20-26, 2025). The drone launches have not been verified.



**Houthi poster warning airlines against arriving at Ben Gurion Airport
(Houthi Media Center X account, March 22, 2025)**

The militias in Iraq

► “A prominent member of the Coordination Committee of the Militias in Iraq” said some of the militias, including Kata’ib Hezbollah and the Nujaba Movement, intend to resume military operations against Israel if it continues its escalation against Gaza and Lebanon. He noted that the militias are committed to the unity of the fronts to exert pressure against “the military crime in the Gaza Strip.” The source added that the Iraqi government and political parties are exerting pressure on the militias to prevent them from resuming any military activity against Israel. It was also noted that these pressures stem from fear of Israeli or American military responses in Iraq against the militias and their leadership as part of the response. In this context, “three Iraqi sources close to the militias” said that the militias carried out extensive transfers and exchanges of key headquarters and weapons depots upon the start of the “renewed Israeli aggression.” A member of former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki’s party said that all the political parties in Iraq do not want the country to be part of the raging war in the region, and therefore they believe that the militias will act in accordance with the pressure and not carry out any new actions against the “entity” (Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, March 24, 2025).

Iran and the militias in the face of Israel’s activity in Lebanon

Iran

► Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei strongly condemned the IDF’s attacks in Lebanon in recent days. He noted that the repeated attacks in Lebanon and Syria, along with the increase in “genocide” in the Gaza Strip and Judea and Samaria, pose a threat to international peace and security. He added that the attacks in Lebanon provide further proof of Israel’s disregard for international legal norms, and stressed the responsibility of the

international community, especially the Security Council and the guarantors of the ceasefire in Lebanon, to take immediate and effective action to stop them. He expressed his condolences to the Lebanese government and people for the deaths of those killed in the Israeli airstrikes and wished a speedy recovery to the wounded (ISNA, March 24, 2025).

The Houthis

► Houthi leader Abd al-Malik al-Houthi referred to the IDF attacks in Lebanon, saying they are “cruel and unprovoked.” He stressed the Houthis’ support for “our brothers, Hezbollah and the Lebanese people” in the face of any major developments or “comprehensive Zionist escalation.” He turned to Hezbollah and emphasized: “You are not alone, and we are by your side. Under any circumstances that require us to intervene alongside our brothers in Hezbollah and the Lebanese people, we are prepared to do so” (Al-Masirah Telegram channel, March 23, 2025).

Iran in the face of events in Syria

► Ayatollah Alireza Arafī, a member of the Iranian Assembly of Experts and director of the religious seminaries, issued a communiqué strongly condemning “the killing of civilians in Syria by the armed groups of Tahrir al-Sham,” which he said contradicts Islamic principles and international law and causes division and harm to the Muslim community. The senior cleric demanded that all armed groups in Syria refrain from any kind of violence and the killing of innocents, especially in the sensitive conditions in which the “great Satan” America and the “child-killing Zionist regime” seek to harm Islam. Arafī also called on Muslim clerics around the world, senior figures of other religions, and international institutions to take serious and immediate steps to end “war crimes” in Syria and bring to justice those responsible for human rights violations in the country (Khabar Online, March 19, 2025).



Ayatollah Alireza Arafī (Khabar Online, March 19, 2025)

► Former Majles member Ali Motahari said that the fall of the Assad regime did not end in Iran’s detriment because it was clear that the situation could not last long and because Assad himself was not the kind of person who would enter into a confrontation with Israel. He added that Iran had paid a heavy price in Syria and that if it had intervened [during the collapse of the Assad regime], it would have sunk into the country for many years and paid a dear price for it (Entekhab news website, March 20, 2025).



Ali Motahari (Entekhab, March 20, 2025)

Iran’s involvement in Iraq

► On March 19, 2025, the commander of the IRGC’s Qods Force, Esmail Qaani, visited Iraq and met with senior members of the Shiite Coordination Committee, in the presence of militia commanders and the Popular Mobilization (the umbrella framework of the pro-Iranian Shiite militias) and the Iranian ambassador in Baghdad. It was reported that at the meeting, the militia leaders stressed their commitment not to interfere in Syria and to operate within the framework of the Iraqi state. The participants also discussed the American attacks against the Houthis in Yemen. The report also stated that Qaani conveyed messages to the Iraqi government that if Iraq was attacked by Israel, Iran would not remain silent and would support every position of the government in Baghdad and any response of the militias. The meeting took place against the backdrop of a phone call between US Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth and Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia’ al-Sudani, in which the Defense Secretary called for the dismantling of the Shiite militias and warned of an American response against them in the event of intervention by them following the American attacks in Yemen (Shafaq News, March 19, 2025).

► Subsequently, it was reported that during the visit, Qaani asked the commanders of the Shiite militias in Iraq to freeze any military activity and to keep a low profile “during this sensitive period.” According to the report, the Qods Force commander stressed Tehran’s

commitment to its allies in Iraq but conveyed instructions from the Iranian leadership to refrain from any action that could be considered a provocation against the United States or Israel. This was due to the fear that the militias' activity against the backdrop of the renewed fighting in the Gaza Strip and the American strikes against the Houthis in Yemen would lead to a military response against Iraq (Asharq Al-Awsat, March 21, 2025).

► Iranian Foreign Minister Araghchi spoke with his Iraqi counterpart, Fuad Hossein, and discussed regional developments, relations between the two countries, and US activity in the region, including the US sanctions on the Iranian oil industry (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, March 24, 2025).

Cooperation between the Houthis and the militias in Iraq

► “Secret sources” reported that Houthi forces are present in a training camp in Iraq in an area controlled by the Iraqi militia Kata’ib Hezbollah, where they are training in the operation of drones and explosives. It was also noted that there are indications that fighters of the Lebanese Hezbollah and the Shiite militias in Iraq had been sent to Yemen in recent months to train local operatives in advanced combat technologies to improve the military, tactical, and operational capabilities of the Houthis (Foreign Policy, March 20, 2025). In response, sources in the Iraqi security forces denied the report of the presence of Houthi fighters training in the country, calling it “completely incorrect” (Shafaq News, March 20, 2025).

► “Sources” reported that the Houthis evacuated their strategic headquarters in a prestigious area in central Baghdad, near the secure “Green Zone.” According to the “sources,” slogans and signs in support of Houthi leader Abd al-Malik al-Houthi were displayed there, and the headquarters was used for the movement’s commercial and media activities in Iraq, especially since the beginning of the Al-Aqsa Flood campaign. However, against the backdrop of the growing pressure following the American attacks against the Houthis, the Houthis were asked to close the office, with the “sources” noting that there is a consensus among the Shiites in Baghdad regarding the need to stop any provocative actions. It was also reported that the Houthis may also close two more offices in Baghdad and one in southern Iraq due to increasing pressure from the Coordination Committee of the Shiite militias (Asharq Al-Awsat, March 21, 2025).

► In this context, “informed sources” reported that during the recent visit of Qods Force commander Esmail Qaani to Baghdad, he sought to convey to the Houthis a message

emphasizing the need for calm and negotiations with the United States in light of the danger that the US attacks against the Houthis could expand to damage Houthi assets in Iraq. According to the “sources,” former Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abd al-Mahdi was the one who was chosen to deliver the message because he was in Sana’a to participate in a conference on the Palestinians (Shafaq News, March 23, 2025). “Sources close to al-Mahdi” reported that the main purpose of his visit was to discuss the Houthi presence in Iraq amid American pressure on the Iraqi government to close all Houthi representations in the country (Al-Akhbar, March 24, 2025).

US strikes against the Houthis in Yemen

► Over the past week, US forces continued their attacks against Houthi military targets in areas controlled by the movement in Yemen. “An official American source” said that dozens of attacks eliminated engineers, operators, and senior officials of the Houthi drone array. According to him, the activity against the Houthis will continue every day until they stop their attacks against vessels. He added that the Trump administration plans to reinforce American forces in the Middle East, including sending air defense systems (Al-Jazeera, March 20, 2025). According to a US State Department source, “US forces are focusing on Houthi military sites and preventing weapons smuggling (Asharq, March 25, 2025).

► An “official US source” said that US Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth ordered the aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson to be sent to the Middle East in April 2025, and also ordered that the aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman remain in the region for at least one more month. This is due to the intensification of attacks by the Houthis. It was also noted that this is the second time in the past six months that the United States has sent two aircraft carriers to the region (AP, March 21, 2025).

► US President Donald Trump reiterated his demand that Iran immediately stop providing military equipment and “general support” to the Houthis. Trump wrote on his Truth Social account that “tremendous damage has been inflicted upon the Houthi barbarians. Watch how it will get progressively worse – it’s not even a fair fight, and never will be. They will be completely annihilated!” (Donald Trump’s Truth Social account, March 19, 2025).

► “Sources in Yemen” reported that over the past week, US forces attacked targets in many provinces, including the central provinces of Sana’a, Saada, and al-Hudaydah. The targets included military installations, airports, missile and drone launch facilities, and weapons depots. It was also reported that dozens were killed and wounded as a result of the attacks

(most of them Houthi military personnel of various ranks), including the wounding of the Houthi Navy commander (Arab and Houthi media, March 19-26, 2025).

► Since the beginning of the American attacks, the Houthi military spokesman, Yahya Saria, has claimed responsibility for five attacks on the American aircraft carrier Harry S. Truman and additional American warships in the Red Sea using ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and drones. According to Saria, some of the attacks lasted for hours and succeeded in thwarting American attacks against Yemen (Yahya Saria's X account, March 19-26, 2025). The US Department of Defense has not verified the Houthis' claims.

► Despite the continuation and intensity of the American attacks, senior Houthi officials have made it clear that they are not willing to surrender and expressed their confidence that the Americans will not succeed in achieving their goals. The following are prominent statements:

◆ Houthi leader Abd al-Malik al-Houthi said in his daily speech during the month of Ramadan that the "American enemy" frightens others with aircraft carriers, but in the confrontation with Yemen, they may become a burden. He noted that the American announcement of sending a second aircraft carrier is evidence of the failure of the aircraft carrier Harry S. Truman. Al-Houthi added that the "American enemy" was content with one aircraft carrier that would threaten major powers, but in the confrontation with Yemen, it was witnessing its own failure (Al-Masirah Telegram channel, March 22, 2025).

◆ Mohammed Ali al-Houthi, a member of the Houthis' political bureau, said that the US announcement of sending reinforcements to support its "illegal terrorist activities" in Yemen is a reinforcement of "American terrorism" in the region, an act of lawlessness and evidence of the failure of its aircraft carrier Truman and its current forces. He expressed confidence that the US would not achieve its mission like its predecessors. Al-Houthi added that the cost of opening the crossings in the Gaza Strip and stopping the [Israeli] "aggression" was zero and did not require money from the American taxpayers (Mohammad Ali al-Houthi's X account, March 22, 2025).

► The commander of the IRGC's Aerospace Forces, Amir Ali Hajizadeh, praised the Houthis' activity against the United States and Israel. He said that there is no parallel to the Yemenis in

their support for the Gaza Strip and that they had succeeded in a great test and had stood firm without fear against the Americans and the Zionists (Khabar Online, March 21, 2025).



Amir Ali Hajizadeh (Khabar Online, March 21, 2025)