



# Spotlight on Iran and the Shiite Axis

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## Highlights<sup>1</sup>

- ▶ Tensions between Iran and Lebanon continue: The Iranian foreign minister expressed surprise at his Lebanese counterpart's decision not to accept an invitation to visit Tehran and announced his intention to visit Beirut. The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson expressed hope that a new ambassador would be stationed in Lebanon soon, despite the report that the Lebanese foreign minister was preventing his appointment.
- ▶ The Iranian ambassador to Beirut met with Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri to discuss developments in Lebanon and the region. At the same time, the Supreme Leader's senior advisor for international affairs met with Hezbollah's representative in Tehran.
- ▶ The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson said that the events in Syria, including the killing of two American soldiers and an American interpreter, should not come as a surprise, given the growing instability caused by Israeli strikes and the "occupation" of territories by foreign actors.
- ▶ Iran's ambassador to Iraq met with senior officials from the Kurdish region in northern Iraq. The visit reflects a growing Iranian effort following the parliamentary elections in Iraq to influence the process of forming a new government in the country.
- ▶ The Houthis condemned Israel's "violations" in the Gaza Strip, particularly the targeted killing of senior Hamas military wing commander Raed Saad.
- ▶ According to an internal Houthi report, forty percent of their naval and rocket capabilities damaged by American and British strikes have been restored.
- ▶ The Iraqi foreign minister protested the US opposition to the inclusion of Shiite militias in the next government amid reports of increasing pressure from the US administration and threats of sanctions.

## Iran and the Developments in the Lebanese Arena

- ▶ **Tensions between Iran and Lebanon continue**, with Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi announcing his intention to visit Beirut. After Lebanese Foreign Minister Youssef Rajji rejected his

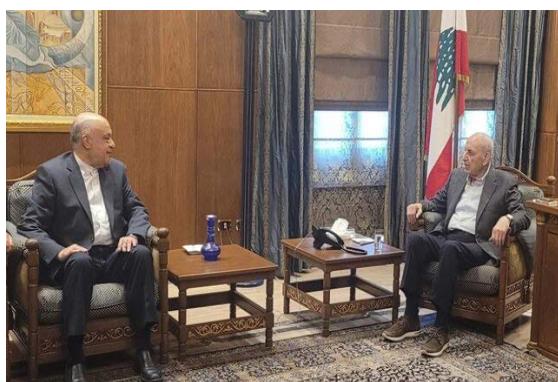
<sup>1</sup>The weekly study includes the activities of Iran, the Shiite militias in Iraq, and the Houthis in Yemen.

invitation to visit Tehran, Araghchi wrote that Rajji's decision not to accept Iran's "warm hospitality" was surprising. He added that foreign ministers of countries with full diplomatic relations do not need a neutral place to meet. However, he noted that given the "Israeli occupation of Lebanon" and Israel's violation of the ceasefire, he fully understands why his Lebanese counterpart is not willing to come to Tehran, and therefore he gladly accepts his invitation to visit Beirut. According to him, Iran is also interested in a "new chapter" in bilateral relations with Lebanon, based on the principles emphasized by the Lebanese foreign minister (Araghchi's X account, December 11, 2025).

- ▶ The reformist Iranian daily *Shargh* commented on the recent developments in Lebanon and the exchange of letters between the foreign ministers of Iran and Lebanon, and assessed that Lebanese Foreign Minister Rajji's letter to Iranian Foreign Minister Araghchi reflects the entirety of the internal, regional, and international considerations facing him, as well as the unprecedented political and security pressures exerted by Arab countries, the United States, and Israel on the Lebanese government to disarm Hezbollah and change the internal balance of power in Lebanon. According to the daily, developments in Lebanon and their results are likely to have a significant impact on the future of relations between Iran and Lebanon. If the pressure from the United States and the Western-Arab axis leads to redefining the role of the Lebanese army and limiting Hezbollah's room for maneuver, Tehran-Beirut relations will enter a more sensitive and restrained phase. On the other hand, if Lebanon succeeds in balancing its external pressures, security needs, and internal balance, it will be possible to maintain and even strengthen its strategic cooperation with Iran (*Shargh*, December 11, 2025).
- ▶ The Tabnak news website claimed that Lebanon is in a very sensitive situation as the expiration date of the Israeli-American ultimatum to disarm Hezbollah approaches. The website added that the Lebanese leadership believes that the key to dismantling Hezbollah lies in Tehran, and therefore it links this issue to continued relations with Iran. The website warned that in the event of another war against Hezbollah, it is not unreasonable that the Lebanese government will go so far as to sever diplomatic ties with Iran (Tabnak, December 13, 2025).
- ▶ At his weekly press conference, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei referred to a report in the Lebanese newspaper *Al-Akhbar* that the Lebanese foreign minister is preventing the appointment of Iran's new ambassador to Beirut. He expressed hope that the process would proceed naturally and that the Iranian ambassador would be stationed in Beirut in the near future. He added that the relations between the two countries are long-term, and that it is better to avoid statements

that might divert Lebanon's attention from focusing on preserving its national sovereignty and territorial integrity in light of the continued "crimes of the Zionist regime" (Mehr, December 14, 2025).

► Iran's ambassador to Beirut, Mojtaba Amani, met with Nabih Berri, the Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament, to discuss the latest political developments in Lebanon, the relations between the two countries, and regional developments. At the end of the meeting, Amani said the meeting took place as part of his ongoing consultations and dialogue with senior Lebanese officials. According to him, they discussed in particular the repeated violations of the ceasefire agreement by the "Zionist regime." He stressed that the Islamic Republic supports Lebanon's independence and the preservation of its unity and territorial integrity. He also said that in the meeting, they discussed options for Iranian participation in the process of rebuilding Lebanon and support for the Lebanese people. Amani also discussed with Berri the renewal of direct flights between the two countries via Iranian or Lebanese airlines, stating that such a step could facilitate the movement of tourists, students, and businesspeople between the two countries (ISNA, December 16, 2025).



**The Iranian ambassador to Lebanon meets with the Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament  
(ISNA, December 16, 2025)**

► Ali-Akbar Velayati, the Supreme Leader's senior advisor for international affairs, met with Hezbollah's representative in Tehran, Seyyed Abdollah Safi al-Din, who presented a report on the developments in Lebanon and stressed that Hezbollah is stronger than ever and will not lay down its arms under any circumstances. Velayati noted that Hezbollah is one of the most important pillars of the "resistance front" and plays a central role in the struggle against Zionism. He emphasized that Iran would continue to resolutely support the organization (Tasnim, December 14, 2025).



**Velayati's meeting with Safi al-Din (Tasnim, December 14, 2025)**

## Iran and the Developments in the Syrian Arena

- ▶ Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei referred to the recent developments in Syria, including the incident in Palmyra, in which two US soldiers and an American interpreter were killed. He noted that these developments should not surprise anyone. According to him, in recent years, and especially in the past year, Syria has been subjected to continuous attacks by the “Zionist regime,” and the Syrian people cannot tolerate a reality in which the “occupying regime” repeatedly attacks its land. Iran has always warned that Syria will become an arena for the strengthening and spread of terrorism, and that the continuation of the “crimes of the Zionist regime” and the attacks it carries out against Syria, along with the continued occupation of large parts of the country’s territory by various actors, including the United States, could prevent the restoration of stability and security in Syria (Mehr, December 14, 2025).
- ▶ Political commentator Saadallah Zarei addressed the anniversary of the collapse of the Assad regime in an editorial in *Kayhan*. According to him, the current reality in Syria reflects a series of failures. The main points of the article are as follows:
  - ◆ The country is divided into different regions, each of which is administered differently: part of the territory is under the control of the regime, another part is under Israeli control, and other parts are under the control of the American army, the Turkish army, the Kurds, armed terrorist groups, or armed Arab tribes operating outside the framework of the central government. Thus, today’s Syria lacks the most important political component –territorial integrity – and has fallen victim to plans imposed on it from outside its borders (*Kayhan*, December 14, 2025).
  - ◆ According to Zarei, between 2012 and 2018, the Syrian people, with the help of the “axis of resistance,” succeeded in defeating the enemies of the state. However, the developments in the past year took place without the involvement of the Syrian people and without the

involvement of the “axis.” He stressed that without them, Syria’s sovereignty and territorial integrity would not be restored. He also argued that Syria could not rely on a “puppet government” to restore its sovereignty and territorial integrity, and that it could not seek independence from aggressive states occupying parts of its territory.

- ◆ Zarei accused the weak government of Abu Muhammad Julani (President Ahmed al-Shara) of making every “treacherous concession” imaginable in the past year in an attempt to unite Syria under one flag, saying that it failed because the parties it appealed to, including Turkey, the Arab Gulf states, the United States, and the “Zionist regime” are not interested in a united and strong Syria. It was also noted that the Syrian people have lost their land, the citizens are exposed to terrorism, the state of the economy has not improved, and there is no horizon for improvement.
- ◆ The article assesses that these developments will lead the Syrian people to rethink, since Syrians know how to distinguish between those who stood by them in difficult times and occupiers and warmongers. In conclusion, it is argued that the Syrian people are capable of establishing a strong, advanced state with a “resistance” identity and that the occupiers are contributing – even if unintentionally – to the ripening of the Syrian people's realization regarding the necessity of independence and “resistance.”

## Iran and the Iraqi Arena

- Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian met with Iraqi President Abdullatif Rashid on the sidelines of the International Peace and Trust Forum in Turkmenistan. Pezeshkian welcomed the holding of parliamentary elections in Iraq and expressed hope that the establishment of a strong parliament and government would contribute to the development of Iraq. He noted that Iran is determined to strengthen and expand relations between the countries in all fields, including trade, academia, and industry. He stressed the need to connect the railways between the two countries and complete the Basra–Shalamcheh railway project. In addition, the Iranian president referred to Israel’s regional activity, calling it a “cancerous tumor,” and said that the only way to neutralize its efforts to prevent closer ties between Muslim countries and to provoke sectarian and religious wars in the region is to expand cooperation, joint investments, and ties between the countries in all fields (Iranian president’s website, December 12, 2025).



**Meeting between the presidents of Iran and Iraq (Iranian president's website, December 12, 2025)**

► Iran's ambassador to Baghdad, Mohammad Kazem Aal-e Sadeq, met in Erbil with the president of the Kurdistan region in northern Iraq, Nechirvan Barzani, to discuss relations between Iran and the Kurdish region. The two emphasized their desire to strengthen ties based on good neighborly relations and common interests, especially in the economic and commercial fields. They also discussed the situation in Iraq, the relations between the Kurdish region and the central government in Baghdad, and regional developments. During his visit to the Kurdish region, the Iranian ambassador also met with Kurdistan Regional Government Prime Minister Masrour Barzani to discuss political developments following Iraq's parliamentary elections and efforts to form a new government, as well as promoting economic, commercial, and cultural ties between Iran and the region (Tasnim, December 15, 2025).



**The Iranian ambassador to Iraq meets with the president of the Kurdistan region in northern Iraq (Tasnim, December 15, 2025)**

## The Houthis in Yemen

► The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Houthi regime accused Israel of “violating” the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and failing to fulfill its commitments to provide humanitarian aid and to stop the attacks and the “siege” on the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip. It also warned of continued Israeli escalation in the West Bank. The statement emphasized that Yemen’s leadership, government, and

people continue to support and assist the Palestinian people and their “just struggle” (sa24 news site, December 15, 2025).

- ▶ The Houthis’ political bureau condemned the assassination of senior Hamas military wing commander Raed Saad in Gaza, claiming it is a “violation” of the ceasefire agreement. It expressed condolences over Saad’s killing and confidence that the “great loss will not undermine the determination of the heroic fighters in Gaza but will grant them greater steadfastness and unity.” The bureau stressed that Houthi-controlled Yemen will remain alongside “Palestine and its resistance until the liberation of the occupied land” (Houthi movement Telegram channel, December 15, 2025).
- ▶ “Senior Yemeni military sources” said that an internal report prepared by the Houthis showed that 40 percent of their naval and rocket capabilities had been restored after being hit by American-British attacks. According to the sources, the report was passed on to the inner circle of Houthi leader Abd al-Malik al-Houthi and reflects growing confidence in their ability to overcome the international campaign against the regime. “Informed sources” added that the Houthis are working to reduce the number of attacks while increasing their quality. In this context, a “Yemeni military source” admitted that the Houthis had lost important assets in the Red Sea but was quick to stress that they “have not lost the ability to cause trouble,” and that although they are less powerful than last year, they are better prepared for fighting (Aram News, December 11, 2025).
- ▶ During the week, Houthi leader Abd al-Malik al-Houthi made anti-Semitic statements and blood libels against Israel and the Jews:
  - ◆ In a speech marking International Muslim Women’s Day, al-Houthi claimed that “the Zionist Jews in Palestine have murdered, humiliated and raped thousands of Muslim women in Palestine.” He added that the “crimes of the Israeli occupation” created “bloody scenes” that moved the human conscience throughout the world, while most Arab and Muslim countries remained without a genuine position. Al-Houthi asserted that support for the “Zionist entity” by Arab regimes is among the clearest exposures of the severe damage afflicting the Islamic nation, and claimed that the “Zionist enemy,” with American cooperation, seeks to force submission upon the Islamic nation (*Al-Masirah*, December 10, 2025).
  - ◆ In another statement responding to an incident in which a US Senate candidate attempted to burn a Quran, al-Houthi accused it of being a “heinous crime” and part of an ongoing “Zionist-Jewish war” led by the United States, Britain, the “Zionist enemy,” and their allies in East and West, whom he described as “allies of Satan,” aimed at corrupting and enslaving human societies. He added that the hatred of the “Zionist Jews” and their supporters exposes

their “darkness,” and that the insults and war waged by “Zionism” with all its branches constitute a “blatant act of hostility” against Islam and Muslims (Telegram channel of the Houthi movement, December 16, 2025).



**Al-Houthi's announcement following the attempted burning of the Quran**  
**(Telegram channel of the Houthi movement's media center, December 16, 2025)**

## The Pro-Iranian Militias in Iraq

- ▶ “Prominent Iraqi sources” said that in recent weeks, the authorities in Baghdad have received direct warnings from the US administration that the United States will not cooperate with any leader, minister, or official affiliated with the militias operating in the country in the future government that will be formed following the parliamentary elections. An “Iraqi government source” said that the threats of economic sanctions against Iraq pose significant challenges in the selection of the new government. He said the sanctions could be aimed at key Iraqi figures, companies, and influential entities, as well as government institutions. He admitted that the economic situation in Iraq is very sensitive, and therefore, it is very difficult to resist American pressure. According to the source, so far there has been no Iranian involvement in selecting prime ministers, and no signals have been received from Tehran on this issue (*Al-Araby Al-Jadeed*, December 11, 2025).
- ▶ Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein said Iraqi militias are represented in parliament and play an important role there, but the US administration refuses to allow their participation in government. He stated that imposing conditions on government formation by any country is inappropriate, adding that while several countries prefer certain sides in government, the final decision rests with Iraq (*Al-Hadath*, December 16, 2025).
- ▶ Abu Ali al-Askari, spokesman for Kata’ib Hezbollah, attacked US envoy to Iraq Mark Savaya, stressing that Washington will not achieve its “malicious objectives” in the country. He said the militia would not confront Savaya because “our youth are sufficient to humiliate him.” Al-Askari called on all Iraqi politicians and figures, especially Muslims, not to cooperate with the US envoy,

warning that anyone who does so will be regarded by the people as “traitors and tools in the hands of President Trump” (Abu Ali al-Askari’s Telegram channel, December 14, 2025).