



Spotlight on Iran and the Shiite Axis

November 27 – December 4, 2024

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Highlights¹

- ▶ Iran and the militias of the “axis of resistance” presented the ceasefire in Lebanon as a “great victory” for Hezbollah and the “resistance front” and as a defeat for Israel. According to them, Israel was forced to agree to the ceasefire after it failed to defeat Hezbollah and realize its goals in the war. The militias made it clear that they would continue to operate even though the ceasefire violated the principle of “unity of the arenas.”
- ▶ Iran’s ambassador to Lebanon, Mojtaba Amani, who was wounded in the Hezbollah pager attack in September 2024, has returned to Beirut. The Iranian foreign minister and the IRGC commander stressed their country’s continued support for Hezbollah.
- ▶ The IRGC deputy commander warned that the residents of Israel should know that the events of the past year would be like a “walk in the park” for them compared to what awaits them in the future.
- ▶ An extensive Iranian cyber operation was uncovered that targeted hundreds of Israeli public figures and senior officials in preparation for an assassination operation.
- ▶ The Houthis claimed responsibility for three joint attacks with the Islamic Resistance in Iraq using drones against three targets in Israel, for the first time since July 2024. The IDF Spokesperson confirmed that three drones that did not penetrate Israeli territory had been intercepted.
- ▶ The militias in Iraq continued to refrain from issuing claims of responsibility for attacks against Israel. A senior member of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq denied that understandings had been reached with the Iraqi government on the cessation of attacks against Israel.

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

►The rebel offensive in Syria: A senior Iranian officer was killed in the rebel attack in Syria. Senior Iranian officials claimed that this is an “American-Zionist plot.” Tehran focused on political-diplomatic activity, emphasizing its support for the Syrian regime and its readiness to provide any necessary assistance. It has been reported that the pro-Iranian militias in Iraq have begun moving forces into Syria.

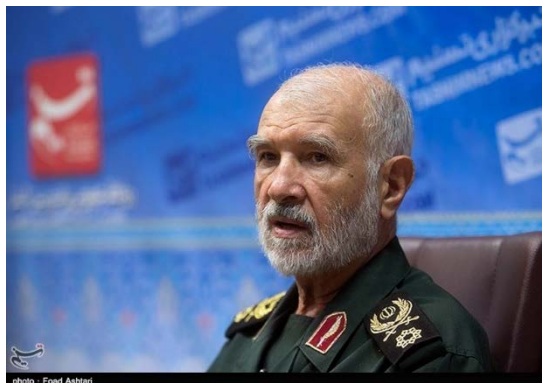
Reactions to the ceasefire in Lebanon

►Iran and the Shiite militias praised Hezbollah following the ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon, claiming that it was a victory for the “resistance” that had blocked Israel’s plans. They also made it clear that they are still committed to the concept of “unity of the arenas” and to continuing the struggle against Israel in support of the Palestinians. The following are prominent reactions:

- ◆ Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said Hezbollah had once again shattered the myth that Israel was invincible and that the time had come for Israel to accept its defeat in the Gaza Strip as well. He claimed that Prime Minister Netanyahu was forced to beg for a ceasefire after Israel suffered heavy losses in southern Lebanon, despite full military and political support from the United States at the expense of the American taxpayer (Abbas Araghchi’s X account, November 27, 2024). Araghchi also spoke with his Lebanese counterpart, Abdallah Bou Habib, and stressed Iran’s support for the government, the people, the army, and the “resistance” in Lebanon (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, November 28, 2024).
- ◆ IRGC commander Hossein Salami wrote in a letter to Hezbollah secretary-general Naim Qassem that the ceasefire in Lebanon was “a strategic and humiliating defeat for the Zionist regime,” which had not succeeded in achieving any of its goals and aspirations in the war against Hezbollah. He said Iran would continue to support the “Islamic resistance in Palestine and Lebanon” (Tasnim, November 28, 2024). In a speech at a conference in Esfahan, Salami declared that Israel’s plan was to eliminate the “resistance front” and defeat Hezbollah by eliminating its leaders. However, he argued that the martyrdom of the organization’s commanders revitalized it. He asserted that Israel did not know that the death of the organization’s leaders would be the beginning of its end and that the organization had proven that it could build its power under fire. He claimed that Hezbollah had forced Israel to accept a ceasefire after its extensive attacks on Tel Aviv and that the ceasefire was first and foremost a defeat for the United

States and its allies. Salami said that Israel would soon have to declare a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip because it no longer wanted to fight, and that its elimination was imminent (Tasnim, November 28, 2024).

◆ Mohammad-Ja'far Assadi, deputy commander of the Khatam al-Anbiya Command, said Israel had failed to achieve its objectives in the war against Hezbollah and Hamas. He noted that Israel wanted to compensate for its defeat on the battlefield by imposing conditions for a ceasefire, but Hezbollah rejected those terms and instead imposed its own. Assadi acknowledged that while the ceasefire was not entirely in line with Iran's preferences, Iran welcomed it as a victory for the "resistance front" in Lebanon and a significant defeat for the "Zionist regime." Regarding the situation in the Gaza Strip, Assadi said Israel must stop its aggression in the Gaza Strip and withdraw from the Gaza Strip, warning that if it continued its crimes, the "resistance front" would persist in its campaign against Israel (Tasnim, November 27, 2024).



Muhammad-Ja'far Assadi (Tasnim, November 27, 2024)

◆ A "source close to the pro-Iranian militias in Iraq" said that the leaders of the Coordination Committee of the militias in Iraq held a special meeting and agreed to continue the attacks against Israel in the next stage, despite the developments in Lebanon. According to the source, the Nujaba Movement, Kata'ib Hezbollah, Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada, and Ansar Allah al-Awfiya have agreed to continue their activities until the "Israeli aggression" ceases (Iraqi News Agency and Shafaq News, November 27, 2024).

◆ Kata'ib Hezbollah said in a statement that the ceasefire between Lebanon and Israel would not have been possible without the steadfastness of Hezbollah's jihad fighters and the inability of the "Zionists" to achieve their goals. The militia's announcement also accused the United States of being "an accomplice of the entity in all the treacherous

crimes” and that it would pay the price for it. Kata'ib Hezbollah stressed that they would not abandon “our people” in the Gaza Strip, that the cessation of hostilities would not affect “the unity of the arenas,” and that “new elements will strengthen the arena of the sacred struggle” (Kaf Telegram channel, November 27, 2024).

- ◆ Haidar al-Gharawi, secretary-general of Ansar Allah al-Awfiya, praised “the steadfastness of the Lebanese people and its resistance in the struggle against the Israeli enemy” and noted that Lebanon had achieved “yet another victory.” He said support for the Gaza Strip is “a religious and humanitarian obligation” (Haidar al-Gharawi’s X account, November 27, 2024).

- ◆ Qais al-Khazali, secretary-general of Asa’ib Ahl al-Haqq, thanked the members of the “Islamic resistance” who, he said, had withstood “the attacks and cruelty of the oppressive entity and its criminal forces” (Qais al-Khazali’s official X account, November 27, 2024).

- ◆ Houthi leader Abd al-Malik al-Houthi said in his weekly speech that Hezbollah had defeated Israel and that the conflict would continue even after the ceasefire. He stressed that the Houthis would continue their support for “Palestine” and that they would continue to act to prevent the isolation of the Gaza Strip. He added that it was important to continue the powerful and joint actions of the members of the “axis of resistance” against Israel (al-Masirah, November 29, 2024).

- ◆ At a meeting of senior Houthi government officials, Mahdi al-Mashat, the head of the Houthis’ Supreme Political Council, congratulated the Lebanese people and Hezbollah jihad fighters for the “great victory, for thwarting the plans of the Israeli enemy,” and for the return of thousands of displaced persons to their homes. He stressed that Yemen continues to stand by the Palestinian people and the “resistance” (the Houthi forces media arm X account, November 28, 2024).

Iran’s Involvement in the Lebanese arena

►Iran’s ambassador to Lebanon, Mojtaba Amani, who was wounded in the pager attack in Lebanon in September 2024, returned to Beirut and met with officials from Hezbollah, Amal, Palestinian groups, and Iranian institutions in Lebanon. The meeting was also attended by the Iranian foreign minister’s special envoy for West Asian affairs, Mohammad-Reza Rauf Sheibani (ISNA, December 1, 2024).



Mojtaba Amani in Beirut (ISNA, December 1, 2024)

►At the end of his mission in Lebanon, Sheibani also met with Nabih Berri, the speaker of the Lebanese parliament. Sheibani praised Lebanon for its “great victory” in the war with Israel and emphasized Berri’s decisive role in stopping the war and “thwarting the goals of the Zionist regime.” Berri expressed his appreciation for Sheibani’s efforts in Lebanon and for Iran’s support for the government, the people, and the “resistance” (snn.ir, November 29, 2024).



The meeting between Sheibani and Berri (snn.ir, November 29, 2024)

►On November 30, 2024, Nabih Berri spoke with Majles Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf and discussed developments in Lebanon and the region (Tasnim, November 30, 2024).

Iran’s threats against Israel

►Mohammad-Reza Naqdi, IRGC deputy commander for Coordination Affairs, said at a gathering of members of the Student Basij that the experience of the “al-Aqsa Flood” proved that one must not adopt a defensive approach vis-à-vis the “Zionist regime” and that Israel must be attacked all the way to Tel Aviv itself, stressing that this must continue until the liberation of Jerusalem. He said that the operation, which began with the Hamas attack on October 7, 2023, must continue until the end, and that the work must be completed so as not to allow Israel to force a ceasefire on the “resistance forces” through its crimes. He noted that Basij members are engaged in “al-Aqsa Flood 2” that will end the “Zionists” issue. He added that those in the

“occupied territories” (i.e., Israel) should know that a storm will hit their heads and that the past year will be like a walk in the park compared to what awaits them. According to him, the “resistance forces” in the region are free, independent, and make their own decisions, but they are inspired by the Islamic Revolution. Referring to the possibility of a “True Promise 3” (i.e., another Iranian attack on Israel), Naqdi said he was not concerned about that matter and that it is being handled by the country’s senior security officials (snn.ir, November 29, 2024).



The IRGC deputy commander (snn.ir, November 29, 2024)

Iranian cyberattacks against senior Israeli officials

► On December 2, 2024, the Israel Security Agency (ISA) revealed that Iran had carried out 200 attempted cyberattacks against senior officials and public figures in Israel as the first stage of a plan to carry out assassinations in Israeli territory. According to the ISA statement, the attackers sent personal messages to the targeted victims to get them to download a malicious app or enter a rogue website where they would have to enter email information. In doing so, the Iranians tried to gain access to the computers, smartphones, and e-mail accounts of the Israeli figures to locate their addresses, social connections, and websites visited by them, thus gathering intelligence in preparation for an assassination operation (Israeli media, December 2, 2024).

Operations of the Shiite militias

Joint attacks by the Iraqi militias and the Houthis

► On December 3, 2024, the Houthis’ military spokesman Yahya Saria claimed responsibility for three joint attacks with the Islamic Resistance in Iraq against targets in Israel using swarms of drones within 48 hours. According to Saria, two of the attacks were aimed at targets in northern Israel, and the third was aimed at a “vital target” in Eilat. He claimed all the attacks had successfully achieved their objectives (Yahya Saria’s Telegram channel, December 3, 2024). This is the first announcement of joint attacks by the Houthis and Iraqi pro-Iranian militias

since July 15, 2024. However, unlike the previous attacks, the Islamic Resistance in Iraq did not issue a parallel statement.² The IDF Spokesperson reported two interceptions of drones, one of them in the Mediterranean on November 30, 2024, and another interception of a drone in the Red Sea on December 2, 2024. In all cases, the drones did not penetrate Israeli territory (IDF Spokesperson, November 30-December 2, 2024).

► Mujib Shamsan, a military expert close to the Houthi Ministry of Defense, noted that this is the beginning of a new phase in the escalation by the Houthis and the Islamic Resistance in Iraq. He said the resumption of the joint attacks is intended to make it clear to the “Israeli and American aggression” that the support fronts of the Gaza Strip are still tight and the level of coordination between them is high, and that it is the implementation of new military tactics for large-scale operations of influence against the “entity” (al-Akhbar, December 4, 2024).

Iraq

Militia activity against Israel

► In the past week (November 26-December 4, 2024), the Islamic Resistance in Iraq did not issue any claims of responsibility. The last announcement by the pro-Iranian militias about an attack against Israel was issued on November 24, 2024.

► A “source close to the Iraqi militias” said that the militias had reached understandings with the Iraqi government to stop the attacks against Israel after they received orders from Iran. It was also noted that Iraqi Prime Minister Muhammad Shia’ al-Sudani had demanded that from Iran during his recent visit to the country, due to his concern about an Israeli attack in Iraq (1news-iq.com, December 1, 2024). On the other hand, Ali Hussein, a senior member of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, said all the militias were operating within the framework of the strategy of “unity of the arenas.” He said that as long as there were “killings and destruction” against the residents of the Gaza Strip, the militias would continue to “strike and bomb the Zionist entity with missiles” (1news-iq.com, December 1, 2024).

► In addition, “sources” in the Islamic Resistance in Iraq noted that the militias are ready to confront any attack by the “Zionist entity” against Iraq. According to the sources, at the meeting of the Coordination Committee, it was agreed that drone launches would continue

² For further information, see the ITIC’s study from August 5, 2024, “[Cooperation between the Shi’ite militias in Iraq and the Houthis in Yemen](#)”

until “the occupation completely stops attacking the Gaza Strip and threatening to bomb Iraq” (al-Akhbar, November 29, 2024).

► It was reported that the Nujaba Movement said a new strategy would be launched to implement the “unity of the arenas” in two tracks. In the first track, the “axis of resistance” will carry out attacks against Israel from Syrian territory. The second track will include attacks from territories in other countries in the region, including Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. However, it was not reported how these attacks would be carried out (Monte Carlo International website, November 28, 2024).

Syria

Militia attacks against American targets

► In the past week, there have been reports of additional attacks by pro-Iranian militias against American bases in Syria:

- ◆ On November 30, 2024, it was reported that the American al-Tanf base in Syria was attacked (Saberin News Telegram channel, November 30, 2024). The US-led international coalition forces reportedly thwarted the attack (Shafaq News, November 30, 2024).

- ◆ On December 1, 2024, it was reported that the pro-Iranian militias attacked the American base in the Conoco gas field in the Deir ez-Zor province in eastern Syria with rockets (Al-Araby al-Jadeed, December 1, 2024). In response, international coalition warplanes reportedly attacked militia positions in the al-Qoriya and al-Mayadeen deserts in the Deir ez-Zor province (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, December 2, 2024).

► On December 3, 2024, “American sources” reported that American drones attacked missile launchers of pro-Iranian militias in the Deir ez-Zor area. The attack was reportedly conducted in self-defense in response to threats against an American base (al-Jazeera, December 3, 2024). Pentagon spokesperson Pat Ryder confirmed that a self-defense strike had been carried out against weapons systems in eastern Syria. He said three mobile missile launchers and a T-64 tank were targeted after shells were fired at the American forces stationed at the al-Furat site. He added that the US military is investigating the source of the attack, noting that similar incidents in the area have previously been attributed to “Iranian-backed forces” (Reuters, December 3, 2024).

Yemen

The direct confrontation between Israel and the Houthis

◀ On December 1, 2024, Yahya Saria, the spokesman for the Houthi forces, claimed responsibility for an attack on a “vital target” in the city of Jaffa (Tel Aviv) with a Palestine-2 hypersonic ballistic missile. Saria claimed that the attack had achieved its goal (Yahya Saria’s X account, December 1, 2024). The IDF Spokesperson said that a missile launched at Israel’s central region was intercepted before it penetrated Israeli territory (IDF Spokesperson, December 1, 2024).

Houthi military activity

▶ On December 1, 2024, Houthi forces spokesman Yahya Saria announced an attack against an American destroyer and three supply ships “affiliated with the US military” – the Stena Impeccable ship, Maersk Saratoga, and Liberty Grace. Saria said the attacks were carried out using 16 ballistic and cruise missiles, and one drone, in the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Aden, and that the strikes were accurate (Yahya Saria’s X account, December 1, 2024). US Central Command (CENTCOM) reported that the two destroyers USS Stockdale and USS O’Kane had successfully intercepted three ballistic missiles, three drones, and a cruise missile while securing three US-flagged cargo ships in the Gulf of Aden on November 30-December 1, 2024. According to the report, there were no casualties, and no damage was caused (CENTCOM X account, December 2, 2024).

International activity against the Houthis

▶ On December 2, 2024, the Canadian government announced the inclusion of the Ansar Allah movement (the official name of the Houthi movement) on the list of terrorist organizations. The official statement said that the Houthis had contributed to the unrest in the Middle East with attacks on civilian and military vessels in the Red Sea and other sea routes, and with attacks against Israel. As part of the announcement, the country’s citizens are prohibited from knowingly having any contact with Ansar Allah, and Canadian banks can freeze any Houthi assets in Canadian jurisdiction. In addition, financial or material support for Ansar Allah constitutes a criminal offense (Canadian government website and CTV News, December 2, 2024).

The Shiite axis and the rebel offensive in Syria

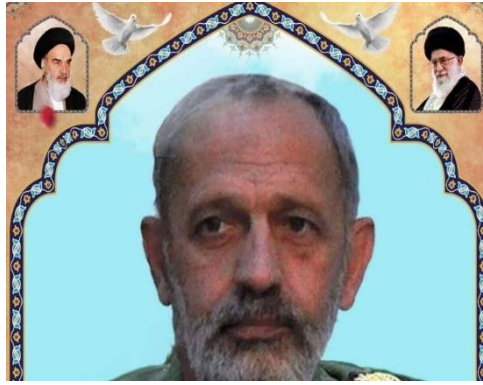
The offensive against the Syrian regime

► On November 27, 2024, several opposition groups operating with Turkish support launched Operation Deterrence of Aggression, targeting the Syrian army forces and their allies in northwestern Syria. The operation is led by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), an Islamist-jihadist organization previously affiliated with al-Qaeda. The following are the main developments (al-Arabiya, November 27-December 4, 2024, Institute for the Study of War, ISW, December 2024):

- ◆ The Syrian army forces retreated, allowing the rebels to capture dozens of villages, military airports, and security facilities, some of which had been under the control of Iran and Hezbollah. On November 30, 2024, the rebels took control of Aleppo, Syria's second-largest city, which had been under regime control since 2016.
- ◆ Afterwards, the rebels continued to advance towards the city of Hama. On December 4, 2024, it was reported that Syrian army forces carried out a counterattack with the assistance of the Russian Air Force and managed to repel the rebels up to 10 kilometers from Hama.
- ◆ On December 2, 2024, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a Kurdish-Arab militia supported by the United States, also launched an offensive against Syrian regime forces and pro-Iranian militias in the Deir ez-Zor province in eastern Syria. It was reported that they managed to capture seven villages on the west bank of the Euphrates River.

Iranian Involvement

► Kioumars Pour-Hashemi (Haj Hashem), a brigadier general in the IRGC in Syria, was killed in an attack by the Syrian rebels in western Aleppo (Tasnim, November 28, 2024). In a letter published following the death of Pour-Hashemi, IRGC commander Salami wrote that the losers in the campaign in the Gaza Strip and southern Lebanon are currently leading the attacks in Syria, following the strategic defeats suffered by the "Zionist regime" and its inability to achieve its goals (ISNA, November 30, 2024).



The IRGC officer killed in Aleppo (Tasnim, November 28, 2024)

► Senior Iranian officials described the events in Syria as an “American-Zionist plot,” which they claimed was intended to further weaken the pro-Iranian axis in the region following Israel’s “defeats” in Lebanon and the Gaza Strip. Iran focused on political-diplomatic efforts aimed at calming the situation in Syria and expressing support for the Syrian regime, along with preparations for active military involvement. The main developments are as follows:

- ◆ Following the rebel offensive in Syria, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei called for decisive and coordinated action between the countries of the region to prevent “the spread of terrorism in the region.” He said the attack was part of “the evil plan of the terrorist regime [Israel] and the US,” intended to destabilize the region (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, November 28, 2024). Baghaei also condemned the rebel attacks on the Iranian consulate in the city of Aleppo and reported that the Iranian consul and the other members of the consulate were completely safe (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, November 30, 2024).
- ◆ In recent days, Iranian Foreign Minister Araghchi held telephone conversations with his counterparts in Syria, Lebanon, and Russia to discuss developments in Damascus. He claimed that it was an “American-Zionist plan” and made it clear that Iran would continue to support Syria and its territorial integrity (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, November 28-30, 2024).
- ◆ On December 1, 2024, Araghchi paid a visit to Damascus. He met with President Bashar al-Assad and conveyed messages from Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and President Masoud Pezeshkian that Iran stands with Syria in its fight against terrorism, and stressed Iran’s support for Syria in the campaign against “the Zionist regime and terrorist groups” (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, December 1, 2024). A “source” in the Iranian Foreign Ministry noted that Khamenei stressed that Iran would not allow Syria to

fall into the hands of “terrorist groups motivated by the United States and the Zionist regime” and expressed readiness for Iranian military assistance to Syria. It was also reported that the IRGC would provide Syria with all kinds of support to conduct the campaign against the rebels (Baghdad al-Youm, December 2, 2024).

◆ At the end of his visit to Damascus, the Iranian foreign minister continued to Ankara and met with his Turkish counterpart, Hakan Fidan. Araghchi warned that all countries in the region, especially Syria’s neighbors, would be affected by the latest developments. He stressed Iran’s support for Syria and claimed that it was wrong to ignore Israel’s role in destabilizing Syria (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, December 2, 2024).



The Iranian foreign minister meets with the Syrian president (Tasnim, December 1, 2024)

◆ Foreign Minister Araghchi said that if the Syrian government asked Iran to send forces to Syria, it would consider that request (Al-Araby al-Jadeed, December 3, 2024). Esmail Kowsari, a member of the Majles National Security and Foreign Policy Committee and a former senior IRGC official, said that the redeployment of forces from Iran to Syria, as in the past, depended on the future conditions in Syria and the decision of senior officials, but that there was no doubt that the “resistance front” would be active in the current developments in Syria (Didban, December 1, 2024). In this context, unofficial reports in Syria and Iran claim that Javad Ghaffari (Seyyed Jawad), who served as commander of the Syrian Corps in the IRGC’s Qods Force until 2021, returned to Syria in recent days (Ensaf News, December 1, 2024). In 2022, Ghaffari was appointed head of the IRGC’s Special Operations Division (Division 4000).

◆ In a speech to the Majles, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian called on Muslim countries to intervene to prevent the United States and Israel from exploiting internal conflicts and to prevent the continuation of the crises (Tasnim, December 1, 2024). Pezeshkian also spoke with Syrian President al-Assad, warning that any violation of Syria’s sovereignty and territorial integrity undermines the stability of the entire region

and saying that Iran is ready to provide any kind of assistance to the Syrian government to help it overcome the current crisis. In his conversation with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Pezeshkian warned that the region was in a dangerous situation and expressed his country's willingness to cooperate with Russia in resolving the crisis in Syria (Tasnim, December 2, 2024).

- ◆ Mohammad Bagheri, chief of staff of the Iranian armed forces, held talks with the Russian Minister of Defense, the chief of staff of the Iraqi army, and the chief of staff of the Syrian army. Bagheri said the “attack by the terrorist groups” in Syria was the first step in a dangerous scenario for the region, and that its occurrence at the same time as the ceasefire in Lebanon was indicative of a “coordinated American-Israeli plot” to weaken Syria, its allies, and the “axis of resistance” (Mehr, December 3, 2024).

Involvement of the pro-Iranian militias

►The pro-Iranian militias accused Israel of responsibility for the rebels' activity in Syria. They made it clear that they would stand by the Syrian regime and began moving forces from Iraq to support the Syrian army forces. The main developments were the following:

- ◆ Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada spokesman Kadhim al-Fartousi said they would not remain indifferent to the situation in Syria, which he claimed Israel and the United States were behind, because Iraq would be the first to be affected. He did not rule out the possibility that the militias would decide on active involvement in events in Syria (Al-Araby al-Jadeed, December 1, 2024).

- ◆ Akram al-Kaabi, secretary-general of the Nujaba Movement, said that the “Zionist entity” had opened secondary fronts to divert the attention of the “axis of resistance” through its “collaborators” in Syria (al-Nujaba TV Telegram channel, December 3, 2024).

- ◆ Abu Ali al-Askari, a senior Kata'ib Hezbollah official, said that they had not yet decided whether to send forces to Syria to participate in restraining those “terrorist groups.” He called on the Iraqi government to send military forces because it was a threat to national security (Kaf Telegram channel, December 3, 2024).

- ◆ Yet, two Syrian “military sources” said that the pro-Iranian militias in Iraq had come to assist the Syrian forces in the fighting. In addition, a “high-ranking source” in the Syrian army reported that the factions entered Syria through the Albukamal border crossing (al-Sumaria, December 2, 2024). In addition, it was reported that armed factions and Iraqi elements had begun to deploy in areas around the city of Aleppo and were preparing for

an attack against the rebels (1news-iq.com, December 2, 2024). According to another report, several military vehicles belonging to the Popular Mobilization Forces, the umbrella organization of the pro-Iranian militias in Iraq, have crossed the Iraqi-Syrian border and are about to advance to the vicinity of the cities of Aleppo and Hama (OALD24 X account, December 2, 2024).