



Spotlight on Iran and the Shiite Axis

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Highlights¹

- ▶ The Iranian foreign minister said at a conference commemorating Qassem Soleimani that the “Palestinian resistance” has become a decisive player. He made it clear that Tehran would continue its support for the “resistance,” which, he said, shapes the future order in the Middle East.
- ▶ The Iranian ambassador to Beirut met with the Lebanese defense minister and the commander of the Lebanese Army.
- ▶ The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson condemned the attack on a mosque in Syria, attributing it to the “illegal interference” in the country and the occupation of parts of its territory.
- ▶ The IRGC has reportedly begun recruiting former commanders in the 4th Division and the military intelligence of the ousted Syrian regime to undermine security in the country. According to another report, supporters of the Assad regime are undergoing training in Houthi camps in Yemen.
- ▶ Iran’s ambassador to Iraq said that the Shiite militias in the country operate and make decisions independently, and that the decision regarding whether Iraq’s prime minister will remain in office rests with the Iraqi public and political forces.
- ▶ The Houthi leader condemned Israel for the “violations” in the Gaza Strip and Lebanon, stressing that further rounds of fighting between Israel and the Houthis are “certain.”
- ▶ Israel’s recognition of Somaliland sparked outrage in the Houthi leadership, which accused it of being an “aggressive step” and threatened to take military action against any Israeli presence in the strategic area of the Horn of Africa.

Iran and the Militias amid Developments in the Palestinian Arena

Iran

- ▶ Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi stressed Tehran’s continued “political, moral, and legal” support for the “resistance” and noted that it is a “key force” in shaping the future order in the Middle East. Speaking at an international conference in Tehran to mark the sixth anniversary of the

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

assassination of former Qods Force commander Qassem Soleimani, he said that the “Palestinian resistance,” which relies on its independent capabilities, has gone from local and individual action to a decisive and influential actor capable of changing the security and political equations throughout the region and “shatter the illusion of the Zionist regime that it is invincible” (Tasnim, December 29, 2025).



**Araghchi with Qods Force commander Esmail Qaani on the sidelines of the conference
(Fars, December 29, 2025)**

► Foreign Minister Araghchi spoke by phone with Qatari Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammad bin Abdulrahman Al Thani and discussed regional developments. According to a statement by the Iranian Foreign Ministry, the two ministers expressed concern about the situation in “Palestine” and Lebanon amid “violations” of the ceasefire agreements by the “Zionist regime” and its continued attacks in the Gaza Strip and Lebanon. They stressed the need for the international community to exert pressure on the “Zionist regime” to fully fulfill its obligations and stop its policy of “genocide, occupation, and expansion” (Mehr, December 28, 2025).

► Esmail Ahmadi-Moghaddam, president of the Supreme National Defense University (SNDU) in Tehran and former commander of Iran’s internal security forces, said the most recent war failed to achieve the strategic objectives of the “Zionist regime”: “Palestine” was not eliminated, and the “axis of resistance” was not destroyed. At a ceremony marking the second anniversary of the killing of IRGC official Seyed Razi Mousavi by Israel in Syria, he said that during the First Lebanon War in 1982, Israel also committed “severe atrocities” in Palestinian refugee camps including Sabra and Shatila, aiming to eliminate the remnants of the “Palestinian resistance,” and even exiled remaining “resistance” groups to Tunisia. According to him, at the time, it was believed the “resistance” had reached its end, but it was precisely then that Hezbollah was born in Lebanon (Mehr, December 26, 2025).



Esmail Ahmadi-Moghaddam (Mehr, December 26, 2025)

The Houthis

► In his weekly speech, Houthi leader Abd al-Malik al-Houthi addressed the situation in the Gaza Strip and accused Israel of failing to meet its obligations under the ceasefire agreement, as it continues its “crimes against the Palestinians and the prevention of humanitarian aid by closing the crossings.” He claimed that “the enemies are openly operating in the Middle East and blatantly declaring their aspirations to change the face of the region,” adding that the discourse surrounding the weapons of the “resistance” in Lebanon and the Gaza Strip is intended to deprive the nation of the means to combat “Israeli and American aggression.” In addition, al-Houthi claimed that Israel, in cooperation with the United States, is preparing for an escalation and that further rounds of fighting against it are “certain.” He stressed that they are “on constant alert and readiness and are working day and night for the next round, as we are aware of the enemy’s ambitions” (*Al-Masirah*, December 26, 2025).

► The Houthis’ political bureau issued its “deep and sincere” condolences after the official announcement of the deaths of five senior figures from Hamas’ military wing, including its military commander Mohammad al-Sinwar and spokesperson Abu Obaida. The statement said that these “honorable shaheeds passed away on the road to Jerusalem, in the face of the oppressive and tyrannical Zionist-American aggression against the Palestinian people.” It also stated that “a nation that has sacrificed its leaders as offerings for God with complete faith and contentment cannot find its determination, steadfastness, and reliance on God diminished by the tyrants of our time.” The bureau stressed that they commit to follow in the footsteps of the martyred leaders and to carry the banner of truth they raised against the tyrants of the age, foremost among them America and Israel, until victory is achieved (Houthi movement Telegram channel, December 29, 2025).



**Letter of condolence from the Houthi leader on the death of senior members of Hamas' military wing
(Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades Telegram channel, December 30, 2025)**

Iran and the Lebanese Arena

► Mojtaba Amani, the Iranian ambassador to Beirut, met with Lebanese Defense Minister Michel Menassa. In a statement, the ambassador said he had discussed with the minister the recent developments in Lebanon, especially the ongoing Israeli attacks, as well as ways to strengthen cooperation and relations between the two countries (Mojtaba Amani's X account, December 29, 2025). The Iranian ambassador also met with Lebanese Army Commander Rudolf Heikal and thanked him for the Lebanese Army's contribution to maintaining stability and strengthening national unity in the country (ISNA, December 29, 2025).



**The Iranian ambassador meets with the Lebanese minister of defense
(the ambassador's X account, December 29, 2025)**

Iran and the Syrian Arena

► Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei strongly condemned the attack on the Imam Ali bin Abi Taleb Mosque in Syria's Homs Province. He stressed that the parties that harm Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, through their illegal intervention in the country and the occupation of parts of its territory, are preparing the ground for the continued existence, growth, and spread of terrorism. He also called on the Syrian government to identify and punish the perpetrators and those responsible for the attack (Iranian Foreign Ministry Telegram channel, December 26, 2025).

► “Security sources” reported that since early December 2025, Iran has been working to recruit former commanders from the 4th Division, which operated under Maher al-Assad, brother of deposed Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, and was linked to Iran. According to the report, Iran is being assisted by the division’s former commander, Ghiath Dalla, and two additional senior officers: Kamal Hassan, former head of military intelligence, and Ghassan Bilal, a former senior commander in the 4th Division. It was also reported that the IRGC, which in recent months held dozens of officers from the 4th Division and military intelligence in its camps along the Iraq border, in the Hermel area of Lebanon, and in areas under Kurdish control in eastern Syria, is working to return them to Syria to carry out “security operations” (Syria TV, December 29, 2025).

► Following that, “informed sources” reported that a group of Assad-regime supporters, including mid-ranking officers, are undergoing military training at a closed camp run by the Houthis in Sana’a, as part of an undeclared cooperation between the two Iranian-backed groups. The sources said that about 100 people were transferred in groups between March and October 2025 via non-commercial flights from Tehran’s international airport to Sana’a airport. They added that the training focuses on ground tactics, urban warfare, and developing small-scale combat plans. They said that the camp is under tight security, and that the presence of officers in the group reflects an internal organizational structure and clear command hierarchy. It was noted there is still no confirmed information about the group’s future missions inside or outside Yemen, but the timing of their deployment and the intensified training may indicate preparations for a later field role, within a project of regional military coordination between Tehran and its allies in Yemen, using remnants of the Assad regime as a “card to be used when needed” (Nahar Media, December 28, 2025).

Iran and the Iraqi Arena

► Iran’s ambassador to Iraq, Mohammad Kazem Al-e Sadeq, said the Shiite pro-Iranian militias in Iraq have reached a stage where they can make decisions independently and argued that defining the militias as “Iran’s proxies” is an insult to their history and sacrifices. He stressed that Iran’s support for them in the fight against ISIS does not mean Iran speaks or acts on their behalf. He added that Iran respects the decisions of the Iraqi government and views positively anything that protects the rights of the “resistance” and the country’s sovereignty. Regarding whether Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani will remain in office, Al-e Sadeq said it is a decision reserved exclusively for the Iraqi people and the country’s political forces. He also addressed intelligence collection against Iran carried out via American aircraft in Iraqi airspace, saying Iran is prepared to defend Iraq if Iraq makes an official request. Referring to the economic context, he said Iran-Iraq trade has

crossed the \$12 billion threshold, adding that Iran cannot withdraw its financial debts held in Iraqi banks due to American pressure. He stressed that high-level visits and coordination between the two countries will continue (ISNA, December 26, 2025).



The Iranian ambassador to Baghdad (ISNA, December 26, 2025)

The Houthis in Yemen

► Israel's decision to recognize Somaliland's independence in the Horn of Africa angered the Houthis, who warned they would act against any Israeli attempt to establish a presence in the area and to carry out military strikes against the movement in Yemen. The following are notable statements:

- ◆ Houthi leader Abd al-Malik al-Houthi said the Israeli recognition is “an aggressive step in the framework of the enemy’s plot against our Islamic nation,” adding that “this declaration is also directed at Yemen and the Red Sea” and that it must be “opposed at all levels.” According to al-Houthi, the “Israeli enemy” aspires to turn Somaliland into an outpost for “hostile activities” against Somalia, African countries, Yemen, and Arab countries, threatening the security of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. Al-Houthi made it clear that they consider any Israeli presence in Somaliland “a military target for our forces.” He called for the formulation of a firm and serious Arab and Islamic position to support Somalia and its people (*Al-Masirah*, December 28, 2025).
- ◆ The Houthi parliament expressed support for the movement leader’s remarks and authorized “taking steps” to preserve Yemen’s sovereignty, unity, security, and stability. It also called on Houthi armed forces to maintain full readiness and to treat Israeli actions in the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa as “hostile steps” (Houthi movement Telegram channel, December 29, 2025).
- ◆ Houthi political bureau member Hezam al-Asad continued the hardline message in a statement in Hebrew: “We reiterate and emphasize our consistent position alongside the brotherly Somali people and against the Israeli enemy, and we will take all possible supportive means to stand by them. In this framework, any Israeli presence in any area in the land of

Somaliland will be considered a military target of our armed forces, as it constitutes aggression against Somalia and Yemen and a threat to the security of the region, which requires taking firm measures. We will not accept under any circumstances turning any part of Somalia into a foothold for the Israeli enemy at the expense of Somalia's independence and sovereignty, the security of the Somali people, and the security of the region and the Red Sea" (Hezam al-Asad's X account, December 28, 2025).

► The deputy head of the Houthis' General Authority for the Care of the Families of "Shaheeds," Abd al-Salam Abdallah al-Talebi, announced the funerals of four movement operatives: Zakaria Abdallah Yahya Hajar, Ahmad Abdallah Yahya Hajar, Hussein Yahya Abdallah al-Hashemi, and Abdallah Yahya Abdallah Hajar. However, he did not specify when or under what circumstances they died (al-Talebi's X account, December 24, 2025). In this context, in May 2025, it was reported that it was not known what had happened to Zakaria Hajar, a senior figure in the Houthis' drone program who worked alongside Iranian experts, with assessments at the time that he was killed in an American strike on the Houthis' headquarters in the Sana'a area in March 2025 (Al-Arabiya, May 16, 2025).



Right: Poster of the death of Zakaria Hajar (Abd al-Salam Abdallah al-Talebi's X account, December 24, 2025). Left: The funeral of the four operatives (Saba, December 25, 2025)

► Iranian Foreign Minister Araghchi spoke with the acting Houthi foreign minister, Abd al-Awhad Abu Ras, to discuss developments among anti-Houthi forces in southern Yemen, specifically the power struggle between the Saudi-backed Presidential Leadership Council (PLC) and the UAE-backed Southern Transitional Council (STC). Araghchi praised the Houthis' support for the Palestinian people, stressed the need to preserve Yemen's territorial integrity and unity, and called on all parties and groups in Yemen to act through dialogue and mutual cooperation to thwart what he described as the plots of the region's enemies to weaken and partition Yemen (IRNA, December 28, 2025). Araghchi also discussed recent developments in Yemen in phone calls with his counterparts in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Oman (Iranian Foreign Ministry Telegram channel, December 28-29, 2025).

The Pro-Iranian Militias in Iraq

► Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani addressed the issue of “restricting weapons,” noting that weapons exist in Iraq in part because of the “terror threat of al-Qaeda and ISIS.” He said this is why a dialogue took place on ending the international coalition’s presence in the country, and that armed militias believe the coalition’s presence is “a kind of occupation.” He said the government’s desire is to end this mission peacefully. Al-Sudani further stressed that the country’s desire is not to be dragged into the war conflict and to avoid giving Israel justification to do so, since “it intended to expand the war” (*Al-Mayadeen*, December 27, 2025).

► The secretary-general of the Ansar Allah al-Awfiya militia, Haider al-Gharawi, harshly criticized Iraq’s Catholic patriarch, Louis Sako, who, in remarks at a Christmas ceremony in Baghdad, expressed hope that the new government would “consider advancing normalization,” without specifying with whom. Al-Gharawi said normalization is a violation of Iraq’s principles and religious and national values, and that it constitutes “an indecent act under Islamic law and a constitutional crime.” He said what is required is a decisive official stance and prosecution of anyone who promotes or disseminates it, because the sovereignty of the law is not negotiable (Ansar Allah al-Awfiya Telegram channel, December 25, 2025).