



# Spotlight on Iran and the Shiite Axis

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## Highlights<sup>1</sup>

- ▶ Iran presented the ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas as an Israeli defeat and a victory for Hamas and the “Palestinian resistance.” According to senior Iranian officials, Israel was forced to agree to the ceasefire after failing to realize its goals in the war even after 15 months. The Houthis and the pro-Iranian militias in Iraq also congratulated Hamas on the “victory.” The Iranian foreign minister spoke with senior Hamas and PIJ figures and congratulated them on the “victory of the resistance.” He stressed Iran’s continued support for the “resistance.”
- ▶ The Houthis claimed responsibility for six attacks against Israel using ballistic missiles, drones, and cruise missiles. The IDF Spokesperson reported the interception of two ballistic missiles. Senior Houthi officials announced a halt to direct attacks against Israel due to the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip but threatened to resume operations in the event of Israeli “violations.” However, they declared that attacks in the Red Sea against vessels connected to Israel would continue.
- ▶ The pro-Iranian militias in Iraq announced the suspension of their military operations against Israel due to the ceasefire between Hamas and Israel. In practice, they stopped the attacks as early as November 24, 2024.
- ▶ The Syrian authorities have instructed foreign airlines flying to the country not to allow the entry of Iranian citizens.
- ▶ The Syrian security and intelligence services announced the seizure of weapons on the Syrian-Lebanese border, including Iranian-made drones. Experience indicates that Iran

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

continues to make efforts to transfer weapons to Lebanon even after the collapse of the Assad regime.

## Reactions to the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip

### Iran

► **Senior Iranian officials presented the ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas as an Israeli defeat and a victory for Hamas and the “Palestinian resistance.”** The following are prominent reactions:

- ◆ Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei said the world understood today that the patience and steadfastness of the “Palestinian resistance” had forced the “Zionist regime” to retreat. He added that books would say that there was once a “Zionist group” that committed the most heinous crimes, killed thousands of women and children, and was eventually defeated (Supreme Leader’s X account, January 16, 2025).

- ◆ Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi spoke by phone with Khalil al-Hayya, the acting head of Hamas’ political bureau in the Gaza Strip, who headed the movement’s negotiating team, and discussed with him the developments in the Gaza Strip and the ceasefire agreement. Araghchi congratulated al-Hayya on the “victory of the resistance” and praised the Palestinians’ steadfastness in the face of the “unprecedented crimes of the Zionist regime.” He also emphasized Iran’s continued support for the Palestinian cause and its “legitimate resistance.” Al-Hayya expressed his appreciation for the support of Iran, Lebanon, Yemen, and Iraq for the Palestinian people, and stressed that the Palestinian people would continue their “resistance” to achieve all their rights (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, January 16, 2025). Araghchi also spoke with PIJ secretary-general Ziad al-Nakhalah. He congratulated the Palestinian people for their “unprecedented resistance to the genocide of the people and the heinous crimes of the Zionist regime” over the past 15 months, which forced them to surrender and accept the ceasefire agreement. The foreign minister also stressed Iran’s support for “the legitimate resistance of the Palestinian people against the Zionist occupiers.” Al-Nakhalah thanked Araghchi for Iran’s support for the residents of the Gaza Strip and declared that the Palestinian “resistance” would continue (IRNA, January 18, 2025).

- ◆ Araghchi also spoke separately with Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman and Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty and discussed the ceasefire agreement. He expressed satisfaction with the agreement and stressed the need to

mobilize the international community to improve the situation of the residents of the Gaza Strip by sending urgent humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip and reconstructing it. He also thanked his Qatari and Egyptian counterparts for their efforts in achieving the ceasefire (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, January 16, 2025).

◆ During a visit to Pakistan, Mohammad Bagheri, chief of staff of the Iranian armed forces, said that the “Zionists” had admitted that they had no choice but to surrender to the ceasefire, and that the Palestinian “resistance” had come out of this test with its head held high and had forced the ceasefire on the “enemy” (snn.ir, January 20, 2025).

◆ The IRGC said in a statement that the “Zionist regime,” which was supported by the United States and its European and regional allies, had failed to realize its goals of releasing the hostages through military action and eliminating Hamas, and had surrendered to the steadfastness and “resistance” of the residents of the Gaza Strip. It was also noted that the end of the war and the imposition of a ceasefire on the “Zionist regime” constitute a great victory for “Palestine” and a major defeat for the “Zionist regime,” which is facing military and social collapse, economic bankruptcy, negative emigration, and political isolation. The IRGC stressed that there was no doubt that, like the Al-Aqsa Flood, which inflicted an irreparable defeat on the “Zionists,” this great victory would also go down in history, and that months of crimes had not brought any achievement for the “Zionist regime” and that the “resistance” remained alive and steadfast and would make strong progress toward the liberation of Al-Aqsa Mosque and Jerusalem (Fars, January 16, 2025).

◆ IRGC commander Hossein Salami said at a ceremony honoring the medical staff who treated the Lebanese wounded in the pager attack that it is to be hoped that this time the “Zionist regime” will keep its promise and stop the fire in the Gaza Strip, and that this will constitute a “historic and decisive victory” and a historic lesson of the victory of truth over lies. He noted that the “Zionist regime” wanted to remove Hezbollah’s field commanders from the battlefield through the pager attack and to impose a total defeat. Qods Force commander Esmail Qaani said at the ceremony that the ceasefire exposed “the greatest defeat of the Zionist regime.” He said that the agreement had been imposed on Israel and that the negotiations in recent months had yielded the same results that Israel had refused to accept in the past and all the clauses that the Palestinians had demanded to be included in the agreement (Tasnim, January 19, 2025).



**The IRGC commander (Tasnim, January 19, 2025)**

◆ IRGC deputy commander Ali Fadavi said that the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and the victory of the “resistance” after 15 months were the result of the patience and resistance of the residents of the Gaza Strip. He said that all the “Zionists” had admitted defeat and that the divine promise had been fulfilled after 15 months of patience, steadfastness, and “resistance” (Tasnim, January 17, 2025).



**Ali Fadavi (Tasnim, January 17, 2025)**

◆ Mohammad Reza Naqdi, IRGC deputy commander for coordination, said at a conference at Tehran University that the fate of the “Zionist regime” was sealed. He noted that Israel’s infrastructure may not have been damaged (in the war), but its future has been destroyed. He added that the “Zionists” wanted to separate the northern Gaza Strip and therefore expelled the Palestinians from there, but the Palestinians stood firm and defeated them. Naqdi also said that Israel had committed crimes that even Hitler and Churchill had not committed (snn.ir, January 18, 2025).



**Mohammad Reza Naqdi (snn.ir, January 18, 2025)**

- ◆ The Iranian Foreign Ministry said in a statement that the ceasefire agreement is the result of the “resistance” and courage of the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip and a historic victory for the Palestinian people. It also stated that the Western countries that had supported Israel since the outbreak of the war must be held accountable for complicity in the “crimes” committed by the “Zionist regime,” and that the international community must act against violations of international law and human rights, the Israeli attacks in Judea and Samaria and the Al-Aqsa mosque, and prosecute Israel’s leaders for committing serious international crimes (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, January 16, 2025).
- ◆ Iran’s Ambassador to Beirut Mojtaba Amani said that after 15 months of “crimes in Gaza, Lebanon, and the West Bank,” the “Zionist regime” had been forced to sign an agreement that it had refused from the beginning. He noted that the organizational structure and fighting force of Hezbollah, Hamas, and the PIJ remained intact and that the “Zionists” knew that their killings and crimes during this period were a great motivation for the continuation of the “resistance” (Mojtaba Amani’s X account, January 16, 2025).
- ◆ Marches organized by the Iranian regime were held after Friday prayers throughout Iran to mark the “victory of the resistance” in the Gaza Strip. The marchers chanted slogans against Israel and the United States (ISNA, January 17, 2025).



Marches in Iran to mark the “victory in the Gaza Strip” (ISNA, January 17, 2025)

## The Houthis

► **The Houthis in Yemen also congratulated Hamas and the Palestinians on the ceasefire agreement, noting that it was a “victory” over Israel.** The following are prominent statements:

- ◆ Houthi leader Abd al-Malik al-Houthi said in his weekly speech that the announcement of the agreement is an important development. He said that the “Israeli enemy,” together with the United States, had been forced to reach an agreement in the Gaza Strip after months of “crimes” (Al-Masirah, January 16, 2025). In another speech on the occasion of the “victory of the Palestinian people,” al-Houthi congratulated all the Palestinian factions for their cooperation, noting that “this is a great historic victory.” He added that despite the great sacrifices experienced by the Palestinian people in the form of Ismail Haniyeh, Salah al-Arouri, and Yahya al-Sinwar, their will was not broken, and Hamas did not give in to the political pressures to accept a surrender deal, successfully withstanding the political confrontation against the United States and the West (Al-Masirah, January 20, 2025).
- ◆ Al-Houthi added that the movement carried out 1,255 operations in “support” of the Gaza Strip, including the use of ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, hypersonic missiles, drones, and naval vessels. He stressed that they would continue to monitor the stages of the implementation of the agreement and that if Israel withdrew or carried out “massacres,” they would be ready immediately to support the Palestinian people militarily (Al-Masirah, January 16, 2025). In another speech on the occasion of the “victory of the Palestinian people,” al-Houthi warned again that they were ready to return to escalation at any stage if the “Israeli enemy” violated the agreement. He claimed that if regional regimes had allowed the Houthis safe passage, they would have

sent hundreds of thousands of fighters to participate in the fighting alongside the Palestinian people (Al-Masirah, January 20, 2025).

◆ Muhammad Ali al-Houthi, a member of the Houthis' political bureau, said that they were monitoring the implementation of the agreement in the Gaza Strip, adding that preparations would be made for the next rounds with the "entity." He stressed that they were prepared to confront and defeat any "plot" against Yemen and that they would not sit idly by if "aggression" was carried out against it (Muhammad Ali al-Houthi's X account, January 19, 2025).

◆ Mohammad al-Bukhaiti, a member of the Houthis' political bureau, said that as the ceasefire went into effect, they are committed to stopping the military operations in support of the Gaza Strip. He threatened that the "Zionist entity" and its allies must commit to the agreement and refrain from returning to military confrontations (Mohammad al-Bukhaiti's X account, January 19, 2025).

◆ The Houthis' Supreme Political Council stated that the agreement is a victory for "Palestine" and the "resistance" factions, headed by Hamas and the PIJ. The statement said that the victory thwarted all the public goals of the "entity," headed by the "criminal" Netanyahu. The Supreme Political Council also praised the Houthi forces, the Yemeni people, the support fronts in Lebanon and Iraq, and Iran's role in supporting and assisting "the efforts to liberate the Palestinian people from the occupation" (Al-Masirah, January 19, 2025).

◆ Houthi spokesman Mohammad Abd al-Salam said they proudly salute the steadfastness of the Gaza Strip in the "most cruel" confrontation with the Israeli "aggression" directed at the Palestinian people. Al-Salam stressed that the Yemeni people and army had succeeded in helping the Gaza Strip with "beneficial" military operations from the beginning of the war until the declaration of the ceasefire. He added that as this campaign came to an end, the Houthis continue to emphasize that the Palestinian issue was and remains a top priority (Mohammad Abd al-Salam's X account, January 15, 2025).

◆ Iranian Foreign Minister Araghchi spoke with his Yemeni counterpart, Jamal Ahmed Ali Amer, to discuss developments in the region. Araghchi said Yemen had played an important role in the "victory" of the Palestinians and that the ceasefire agreement in the Gaza Strip was the result of the steadfastness of the residents of the Gaza Strip and

the support of the “resistance,” including the support of the Yemeni people for the Palestinian people. The Iranian foreign minister underscored Iran’s support for the Yemeni government and people. Amer stressed Yemen’s intention to deal with any situation that would arise if Israel violated the agreement (Tasnim and the Yemeni Saba News Agency, January 19, 2025).

## The pro-Iranian militias in Iraq

► **The militias also congratulated Hamas and the Palestinians on the ceasefire agreement and the “victory,”** announcing they cease their attacks against Israel. In practice, the militias stopped their operations against Israel as early as November 24, 2024. The following are prominent statements:

- ◆ Abu Hussein al-Hamidawi, secretary-general of Kata’ib Hezbollah, said that the “Zionist entity” had failed to subdue the Palestinian people, despite the unlimited support of the United States. He stressed that the Palestinians are “our brothers,” that the issue of Jerusalem is also the issue of the militias in Iraq, and that the goal is to return the land of “occupied Palestine” from the sea to the river. He said that the jihad fighters must be fully prepared for the new stage of the confrontation against the “forces of evil” (Kaf Telegram channel, January 19, 2025).
- ◆ Akram al-Kaabi, secretary-general of the Nujaba Movement, congratulated the Palestinian people and the “people of freedom” around the world, led by Iran and the Islamic resistance in Lebanon and Iraq, on their “victory” (Akram al-Kaabi’s X account, January 16, 2025). In another videotaped speech, al-Kaabi said they salute the Palestinian “resistance” factions and the people of Haniyeh and al-Sinwar for their steadfastness that led to victory. He said that the negotiations had saved the “Zionist entity” from historic defeat and that despite all the sacrifices, the forces of the “axis of resistance” had emerged stronger from the battle and had gained experience and developed capabilities and skills. According to al-Kaabi, the “malicious entity” intends to start an intelligence battle against the “axis” that will include intelligence infiltrations, assassinations, and explosions (Telegram channel of the Nujaba Movement January 21, 2025).
- ◆ Additionally, al-Kaabi announced the suspension of military operations against the “entity” to continue the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. He threatened that “if the entity does anything stupid in Palestine,” there would be a harsh response, and warned that “the



finger is still on the trigger” (Akram al-Kaabi’s X account, January 16, 2025). In another videotaped speech, al-Kaabi reiterated that the actions against Israel had been suspended concurrently with the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and “in solidarity with them.” However, he stressed that if the fighting resumed, they would also resume their operations (Telegram channel of the Nujaba Movement, January 21, 2025).

◆ The Saraya Awliya al-Dam militia stated that while they are proud to take part in “this clear victory,” they are announcing the suspension of their military operations “deep in the occupied Palestinian lands.” The militia stressed that it is ready to support the Palestinian “resistance” whenever needed (Saraya Awliya al-Dam Telegram channel, January 19, 2025).

## Iran and the new regime in Syria

► A “source at the Damascus airport” said the authorities instructed the airlines operating in Syria that they cannot allow Iranian and Israeli citizens to board their flights to the country. A “source in a travel company” confirmed that the company received instructions from Qatar Airlines that it is currently not possible for Iranians to book flights to Damascus (Agence France-Presse, January 17, 2025). Turkish Airlines, which announced that it was resuming its flights to Damascus airport after a hiatus of more than a decade, also updated that due to Syrian government directives, Iranian and Israeli citizens will not be allowed to fly to Syria (Daily Sabah, January 16, 2025).<sup>2</sup>

► The Syrian Interior Ministry announced that the Public Security Directorate in Tartus, in cooperation with the province’s intelligence service, had succeeded in thwarting an attempt to smuggle weapons to Lebanon through illegal border crossings. According to the announcement, the confiscated shipment included weapons and missiles, but the published footage also showed parts of Iranian-made Shahed-101 drones (Telegram channel of the Syrian Interior Ministry, January 17, 2025).

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that Israeli citizens cannot travel to Syria in accordance with Israeli law, and therefore could not travel to Syria during the Assad regime, as opposed to Iranian citizens, who could visit Syria without restrictions during the Assad regime.



Weapons seized in Syria (SANA, January 16, 2025)

## The Houthis in Yemen

### The direct confrontation between the Houthis and Israel

- ▶ Last week, the military spokesman for the Houthi forces, Yahya Saria, claimed responsibility for six attacks against Israel in two days – two by drones, two by the Dhu al-Fiqar ballistic missile, and two by cruise missiles. According to Saria, all the attacks achieved their objectives (Yahya Saria’s Telegram channel, January 17-18, 2025). The IDF Spokesperson stated that two missiles had been intercepted before they penetrated Israeli territory (IDF Spokesperson, January 18, 2025).
- ▶ The Houthis reportedly conveyed a message through their “Humanitarian Coordination Room” to shipping companies and other entities, stating that they would limit their attacks “in the Red Sea corridor” to vessels connected to Israel only. According to the announcement, these “sanctions” will be stopped with the full implementation of all phases of the ceasefire agreement (AP, January 20, 2025).
- ▶ The Houthis released a video documenting shooting training by one of the graduates of their military sniper courses, which was “dedicated to Gaza.” In the exercise, the snipers trained on targets presenting senior figures from Israel, the United States, and Britain, including Prime Minister Netanyahu, former Defense Minister Gallant, and outgoing US President Biden (Telegram channel of the Houthi media arm, January 15, 2025).



**Footage from the completion of a Houthi sniper course  
(Telegram channel of the Houthi media arm, January 15, 2025)**

## The confrontation with the United States

► During the week, the military spokesman for the Houthi forces, Yahya Saria, claimed responsibility for three large-scale attacks on the US aircraft carrier Harry S. Truman and other ships of the US Navy in the northern Red Sea using drones and cruise missiles. He claimed that all the attacks achieved their objective (Yahya Saria's Telegram channel, January 15-19, 2025). The US Central Command (CENTCOM) did not confirm the alleged attacks.

► Since the Houthis' attacks in the Red Sea began in November 2023, the US Navy has reportedly repelled about 400 drones and missiles launched by the Houthis, using more than 200 missiles. US Navy commander Vice Admiral Brendan McLane said that the means used by the US to repel these attacks cost the US Navy hundreds of millions of dollars (Stars and Stripes, January 16, 2025).

## Iraq and the pro-Iranian militias

### The issue of dismantling the militias

► According to Iraqi Prime Minister Muhammad Shia' al-Sudani, the government continues to work to integrate the militias into Iraq's constitutional and institutional frameworks (Iraqi News Agency, January 21, 2025).

► A "source close to the militias" said that there is Western pressure, led by the US, to dismantle the pro-Iranian militias, but they will not succeed. According to the source, the militias are not a regular army but a national force, and they represent the will of the people. He claimed that the Iraqi "resistance" is run by the national leadership and is an integral part of the Iraqi community and that the claims in the West that it belongs to external elements (i.e., Iran) are intended to mislead public opinion (Baghdad Today, January 18, 2025).

► Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada spokesman Kadhim al-Fartousi said that no government official had contacted them about the possibility of dismantling the armed militias. He added that there may be a dialogue with other militias, but it does not exist in Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada (Al-Jazeera, January 20, 2025).