



Spotlight on Iran and the Shiite Axis

February 26 – March 5, 2025

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Highlights¹

- ▶ The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman stressed that the “resistance” in Lebanon is a factor that assists the Lebanese government and called on the guarantor countries of the ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon to force Israel to withdraw from the five outposts where it still remains in southern Lebanon.
- ▶ Lebanese customs authorities apprehended a Lebanese citizen who arrived from Turkey with a sum of \$2.5 million. In his interrogation, he admitted that the money originated in Iran and was intended for Hezbollah.
- ▶ Iran condemned the continued Israeli attacks in Syria and called for international intervention to stop Israel’s activity. Israel’s threats to retaliate in the event of an attack by the Syrian regime on the Druze aroused interest from the Iranian media, which accused Israel of trying to divide the Syrian state for its own interests.
- ▶ The Houthis threatened that if fighting between Hamas and Israel in the Gaza Strip resumed, they would resume attacking Israel and also threatened to strike American bases in the Middle East. The US administration officially added the Houthis to the list of terrorist organizations.
- ▶ The pro-Iranian militias in Iraq refused the Baghdad government’s proposals to disarm and merge with the security forces.

Iran’s involvement in Lebanon

- ▶ Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei said at his weekly press conference that Iran has very good relations with both Lebanese society and government, as well as close ties with the Lebanese “resistance.” He noted that Iran believes the “resistance” is an integral part and a supportive and strengthening factor for the Lebanese government. Referring to the ongoing Israeli presence in five outposts in Lebanese territory, Baghaei said that the Zionist

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

regime's violation of its promises was nothing new and that the guarantor countries of the ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon must force Israel to stop "violating" Lebanese sovereignty and withdraw from the territories it had "occupied" (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, March 3, 2025).

► On February 28, 2025, it was reported that a Lebanese citizen who arrived on a flight from Turkey was detained by the Lebanese customs authorities at Beirut International Airport with \$2.5 million in his possession, which according to investigations was intended for Hezbollah. The suspect reportedly admitted during interrogation that during his stay at Istanbul International Airport, he met an Iranian individual and received the suitcase of money from him. He subsequently returned to Beirut while the Iranian remained in Turkey. Lebanon and Turkey reportedly held high-level security contacts between them to strengthen security measures, especially at the airports (Asharq Al-Awsat, February 28, 2025; Nidaa al-Watan, March 3, 2025).

► The Iranian Supreme Leader's representative in Lebanon, Mohammad Hassan Akhtari, visited the homes of the families of senior Hezbollah operatives eliminated by Israel, including former secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah; his designated successor, Hashem Safieddine; Southern Front commander Ali Karaki; Hezbollah military commander Fuad Shukr; head of Operations Division Ibrahim Aqil; head of Intelligence Hussein Hazima; the commander of Hezbollah's headquarters in Beirut, Suhail Hussein Hussein; and the Hezbollah spokesman and head of its media relations department, Mohammad Afif. Akhtari conveyed the condolences of Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei to the families of Hezbollah fatalities, who expressed their appreciation and gratitude to the Supreme Leader of Iran (snn.ir, February 28, 2025).



The Supreme Leader's representative visits the families of Hezbollah fatalities in Lebanon (snn.ir, February 28, 2025)

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

Iran

► Hossein Salami, the IRGC commander, said during a military exercise in Arak that the men of the Gaza Strip and Hamas, through their faith, defeated both the United States and Israel, which he claims admits its own defeat (Tasnim, February 26, 2025).



The IRGC commander (IRNA, February 26, 2025)

The Houthis

► Amid the impasse surrounding the continued implementation of the ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip, senior Houthi regime officials in Yemen threatened to resume attacking Israel if the fighting in the Gaza Strip resumed. The following are prominent statements:

- ◆ Houthi leader Abd al-Malik al-Houthi said in a speech marking the beginning of Ramadan that Houthi forces are constantly monitoring the situation in the Gaza Strip and noticing how Israel is “evading” its full commitment to the agreement. He threatened that if the war in the Gaza Strip resumed, the Houthis would intervene in various military ways, and all of Israel, especially “Jaffa,” would be “under fire.” According to al-Houthi, Israel’s evasion of the withdrawal from the Philadelphi Corridor constitutes a very dangerous violation of the agreement and a turning away from commitments with US encouragement. Furthermore, Israel’s non-withdrawal from the corridor poses a dangerous threat to Palestinians and a threat to Egypt. Al-Houthi added that they must be ready to support the Palestinians, the Lebanese, or any people in the Arab nation, and be ready to deal with any aggression against Yemen (Al-Masirah, February 28, 2025).



**The Houthi leader in a speech on the occasion of the month of Ramadan
(Al-Masirah, February 28, 2025)**

- ◆ The head of the Houthis' Supreme Political Council, Mahdi al-Mashat, sent a letter to the participants of the Arab Emergency Summit on the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, which was held in Cairo on March 4, 2025. He noted that “Palestine” is the main issue of the Arab nation and that no one has the right to give up an inch of it. He reaffirmed Yemen’s support for “our brothers” in the Gaza Strip and Lebanon in any upcoming round of conflict. He also claimed that the correct and necessary choice on this issue is jihad and “resistance” and supporting them by all means, without relying on international resolutions and American promises, as the United States is Israel’s partner in all its actions. Al-Mashat asserted that there is a need for broad action to break the “siege” on the Gaza Strip and rebuild it as soon as possible, to support it in the face of the proposed “uprooting” plans, and to reject any decision that would allow recognition of “the sovereignty of the Zionist enemy over the West Bank.” He called on the Arab countries to cease normalization processes with Israel, revoke their recognition of Israel, and impose an economic boycott and oil embargo on it (Houthi forces’ media arm X account, March 4, 2025).
- ◆ The Houthi political bureau condemned Israel’s decision to halt the entry of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip, saying it is a dangerous escalation. The statement said that the Palestinian people have the right to “resist the Zionist arrogance” and all the “war crimes” committed with the support and encouragement of the US administration. It also noted that Yemen is steadfast in its support for “Palestine and its resistance forces” and that the Yemeni armed forces had declared their readiness to resume their activities in the face of the “Zionist violations” (Houthi forces’ media arm X account, March 4, 2025).

◆ “Sources close to the Sana'a government” report that the Houthis are monitoring the Gaza Strip ceasefire. These sources indicate a decision has been made to resume naval and aerial operations against the “enemy,” pending approval from Palestinian “resistance” factions. They also confirm ongoing coordination between the Houthis, Hamas, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). Furthermore, the sources assert that US bases in the Middle East will be targeted if the United States participates in “aggression” against the Gaza Strip or the “axis of resistance” (Al-Akhbar, March 5, 2025).

The militias in Iraq

► Qais al-Khazali, secretary-general of Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq, said in a speech at the Resistance Martyrs' Day conference that “the resistance against the occupier of the Palestinian lands” continues and that the “enemy” cannot say that it won the war in the Gaza Strip despite the temporary halt. He added that the killing of the leaders of the “resistance” in “Palestine” and Lebanon does not mean that the “usurping entity” is the victor (Shafaq News, March 4, 2025).

Iran in the face of events in Syria

► Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei condemned the Israeli attack south of Damascus and in the Daraa area on February 25, 2025, and warned against the continuation of the “aggressive actions of the Zionist regime” in Syria. He called on the international community, the UN Security Council, and Muslim countries to respond firmly, condemn, and act immediately to stop these actions, which, he said, constitute a clear violation of the UN Charter and international law, as well as a violation of Syria’s sovereignty and territorial integrity (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, February 27, 2025).

► The Iranian foreign minister’s special representative for Syrian affairs, Mohammad Reza Raouf Sheibani, referred to the convening of the National Dialogue Conference in Syria on February 25, 2025, and stated that Iran sees importance in the political developments in Syria. He noted that convening the conference is a move in the right direction and that the articles of the conference’s final statement, especially the call to end the “occupation of the Zionist regime” as soon as possible, reflect the urgent needs of the new Syria. He expressed hope that the dialogue would encompass broader groups of diverse Syrian society and that its results would secure the interests of the Syrian people (IRNA, February 26, 2025).



The Iranian foreign minister's envoy for Syria (IRNA, February 26, 2025)

- ▶ Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Baghaei addressed possible Russian mediation between Iran and Syria at his weekly press conference. According to him, the situation in Syria is one of the issues discussed between Iran and Russia. He stressed that Iran supports the preservation of Syria's territorial integrity and sovereignty (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, March 3, 2025).
- ▶ The Iranian news website Tabnak claimed in a commentary that Israel supports the Druze in Syria as part of a plan to split the country and establish an independent Druze state, in parallel with the "occupation" of territories in southern Syria by the IDF. Against the backdrop of clashes between Syrian regime forces and Druze living in the town of Jaramana south of Damascus and Israel's threats to respond in case of harm to them, the article claimed that Israel seeks to divide Syria into five parts, including two states for Sunni Arabs and three separate states for Kurds, Druze, and Alawites to prevent the establishment of a unified Syria that would pose a danger to Israel. It was also written that Israel is trying to incite the Druze in southern Syria against the Syrian regime to achieve its security goals even at the cost of civil war in the country. Moreover, Israel is striving, according to Tabnak, to transfer some of the Druze from southern Syria into Israel (Tabnak, March 3, 2025)

The Houthis in Yemen

The confrontation with the Americans

- ▶ On March 4, 2025, the US Department of State officially announced the designation of the Houthi movement (Ansarallah) as a Foreign Terrorist Organization, in accordance with an order signed by President Donald Trump upon taking office in January 2025. The official statement said that the Houthi actions threaten the security of American citizens and security personnel in the Middle East, the security of the closest regional partners, and the stability of global trade. It was also emphasized that the United States "will not tolerate any country engaging with terrorist organizations like the Houthis in the name of practicing legitimate

international business” (US Department of State website, March 4, 2025). At the same time, the State Department offered a reward of \$15 million for information on entities that fund the Houthis, the movement’s partners, or the movement’s financial networks (Rewards for Justice X account, March 4, 2025).

**Reward offer for information on those funding the Houthis
(Rewards for Justice X account, March 4, 2025)**

► Shortly after the US State Department’s announcement, the military spokesman for the Houthi forces, Yahya Saria, said that the Houthi forces had intercepted an American MQ-9 drone a day earlier in the skies over Yemen’s Al-Hudaydah province. According to Saria, the interception was carried out using an independently manufactured surface-to-air missile. This is the 15th American MQ-9 drone to be shot down over Yemen by the Houthis since the beginning of the war in the Gaza Strip in October 2023 (Yahya Saria’s X account, March 4, 2025).

The pro-Iranian militias in Iraq

The issue of the abductee Elizabeth Tsurkov

► Iraq’s National Security Advisor Qassem al-Araji said that Elizabeth Tsurkov, the Israeli-Russian researcher who was kidnapped by Kata’ib Hezbollah in Iraq in March 2023, had officially arrived in Iraq, with Russian citizenship. According to al-Araji, the government has no information regarding the identity of the kidnappers, and the government, the security services, and even Prime Minister Muhammad Shia al-Sudani himself are monitoring the issue. So far, there is no information regarding the location of Tsurkov or her abductors. He added that Iraq does not want the issue to harm its relations with the United States (Al-Sumaria TV, March 2, 2025).

The dispute over the dismantling of the militias

► “Informed sources” said that talks failed between the Iraqi government and the pro-Iranian militias, which refused to integrate into the country’s security forces or hand over their weapons to state supervision. A “senior member of the Resistance Coordination Committee”

said that secret talks had been held between the parties and that the government had sought to use the talks to get the militias to give up their weapons, but the militias made it clear that they were not ready to do so and clarified that they are not willing to integrate into the security establishment as long as there is “an American occupation and an Israeli threat” (Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, February 26, 2025).

► In another report, “informed sources” confirmed that there had recently been talks between government officials and the militias regarding the possibility of them handing over their weapons and merging into the security forces, but they announced their total refusal to do so, stressing that they would continue “on the path of resistance and in defense of Iraq and the axis.” The government reportedly said in response that the decision would cause the United States and Israel to take economic or military measures against the militias and lead to “unnecessary crises” (Shafaq News, March 4, 2025).

► Qais al-Khazali, secretary-general of Asa’ib Ahl al-Haqq, said that the calls for the armed factions to give up their weapons were an attempt to strip Iraq of its weapons reserves, which had been used to defend it since 2014 after the collapse of the army (following the ISIS offensive in the north of the country). He added that if there were security guarantees and if there was no future danger that would require the use of these weapons, he would be willing to accept the requests, but now the presence of the weapons in the hands of the militias gives a sense of security and is intended to protect the country. Al-Khazali also noted that if the state could make sovereign decisions without external pressure, the talks on dismantling the militias would be legitimate (Iraqi News Agency, March 2, 2025).