



Spotlight on Iran and the Shiite Axis

May 21-28, 2025

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Highlights¹

- ▶ The Supreme Leader of Iran reiterated his call for the Muslim world to mobilize to stop “Israel’s crimes in the Gaza Strip” and declared that the Palestinian issue is the most important in the Islamic world.
- ▶ The Iranian foreign minister noted that, at this stage, there are no relations between Iran and Syria, and stressed that his country has no urgency to establish such ties. A former Iranian diplomat acknowledged that the era of Iranian influence in Syria is over.
- ▶ The Iranian media praised the achievements of the joint lists of Hezbollah and the Amal movement in southern Lebanon in the fourth and final round of the country’s municipal elections.
- ▶ The secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council met with Iraq’s national security advisor and discussed the implementation of the security agreement between the two countries. The Iraqi official stressed that Iran is a strategic partner of his country.
- ▶ The Houthis claimed responsibility for six missile attacks against Israel, most of them at Ben Gurion Airport, and two drone attacks. The IDF Spokesperson reported six incidents of intercepting a ballistic missile launched from Yemen. In response, the IDF attacked Sana’a International Airport and destroyed the last Houthi airliner’s plane.

Iran amid events in the Palestinian arena

- ▶ Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei met in Tehran with Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and stressed the importance of cooperation between the two countries to stop “the crimes of the Zionist regime in the Gaza Strip.” He said that cooperation between the two countries could influence the Muslim world and correct the wrong conduct regarding the Palestinian cause. Khamenei stressed that the Palestinian issue is the primary issue in the

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

Islamic world. He added that the situation in the Gaza Strip is so grave that ordinary citizens in Europe and the United States are demonstrating against their governments. Unfortunately, however, some of the Islamic governments are still on the side of the “Zionist regime” (Iranian Supreme Leader’s website, May 26, 2025).



**The meeting between the Iranian Supreme Leader and the prime minister of Pakistan
(Iranian Supreme Leader’s website, May 26, 2025)**

► In a meeting with Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican Secretary of State, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi addressed the situation in the Gaza Strip and stressed “the legal and moral responsibility of all countries to express disgust and opposition to the crimes committed in Gaza” and to take immediate action to stop them and send humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip. He noted that “the occupation, apartheid, and the grave violation of the basic rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination, are the source of insecurity and problems in the region.” He added that while Israel is striving for the “colonialist elimination of Palestine,” Iran’s proposed solution is “the establishment of one democratic state in all of Palestine through the holding of a referendum with the participation of all its original inhabitants – Muslims, Jews and Christians” (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, April 24, 2025).

► Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei strongly condemned “the new crimes of the Zionist regime against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.” Referring to the deaths of the nine children during the IDF attack in the Gaza Strip and the attack on the Fahmi al-Jarjawi school in Gaza City², Baghaei said that the attacks against refugee camps and displaced persons’ centers constitute “clear war crimes” and part of a

² The IDF Spokesperson reported that a Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad command and control center operated in the school compound.

“colonialist genocide plot against the Palestinian people.” Baghaei condemned the lack of response from the international community and called for urgent action to protect the Palestinian people. He expressed his disgust at “the crimes of the extremist Zionists in the West Bank and Jerusalem,” including the riots by Jewish settlers in the village of Burqin in Samaria, and stressed the moral and legal obligation of the international community to act to “stop the crimes.” He added that the countries that support Israel — led by the United States, Britain, and other European countries — share responsibility for the continuation of the “massacres” in the Gaza Strip (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, May 26, 2025).

Iran amid events in Syria

► Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi responded to American President Trump’s decision to lift the sanctions on Syria, saying that Iran is happy with the lifting of the sanctions and hopes that Syria will move towards greater stability, greater territorial unity, an end to the occupation of the “Zionist regime,” and unity among all the communities in the country. Referring to relations between Iran and Syria, Araghchi said that, at present, there are no relations between the two countries and that Iran has no urgency to establish relations with Syria. According to Araghchi, when the Syrian government itself comes to the conclusion that relations with Iran can help the Syrian people, Iran will be willing to accede to its request (Tasnim, May 22, 2025).

► Former Iranian diplomat and political commentator Jalal Sadatian assessed that the era of Iran’s influence in Syria has come to an end. According to him, Iran’s heavy investments – both in human lives and economic resources – have not yielded the desired result and have not succeeded in establishing its status in the country. In practice, Iran has been excluded from the Syrian equation and has become a target of opposition from other countries, including Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the United States, which welcome its failure and are working to promote and strengthen the new regime in the country (Khabar Online, May 25, 2025).

► Mohammad Reza Rauf Sheibani, advisor to the Iranian foreign minister and special representative for Syrian affairs, presented a report on the situation in Syria at a meeting of the Majles National Security and Foreign Policy Committee and stated that Syria is interested in the return of Iranian contractors to the country and that this may be possible if the appropriate security conditions are established. Sheibani also said that there has been an increase in terrorist activity in Syria and that Israel cannot tolerate the existence of a strong government in the country. He noted that Iran supports the establishment of a broad government in Syria with the participation of all groups while preserving the rights of minorities and opposes any

attempt to destabilize or dismantle Syria. He added that Iran does not see any urgency in renewing full relations with Syria. According to committee spokesman Ebrahim Rezaei, during the discussion, the committee members stressed the need to strengthen the “axis of resistance” and to exploit Iran’s soft power in Syria (Tasnim, May 27, 2025).

Iran’s involvement in Lebanon

► The hardline media in Iran praised the achievements of the joint lists of Hezbollah and the Amal movement in the fourth and final round of municipal elections held in southern Lebanon. A commentary in the newspaper Vatan Emrooz, titled “The South of the Resistance,” said that the results of the elections attest to the defeat of “the internal and international conspiracies against the resistance in Lebanon.” It was also reported that the participation rate of the residents of southern Lebanon in the elections was high despite the difficult conditions and the continued Israeli attacks in the area and that this indicates the continued popular support for Hezbollah and Amal. The newspaper claimed that the victory of the Shiite factions would enable them to expand their services and projects in Lebanon, strengthen their direct contact with the citizens and the political status of Hezbollah and Amal, and increase their influence in national institutions. The article concludes that Hezbollah, led by figures such as Naim Qassem, has proven once again that the “resistance” in Lebanon is deeply rooted in Lebanon’s complex social fabric and is not just an armed group lacking public support (Vatan Emrooz, May 26, 2025).

► The Iranian Foreign Ministry issued a congratulatory message on the occasion of “Resistance and Liberation Day,” marking the 25th anniversary of the IDF’s withdrawal from southern Lebanon. Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei praised the memory of the “great leader of the resistance,” former Hezbollah secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah, and his “shaheed partners.” Iran’s ambassador to Lebanon, Mojtaba Amani, said that the Lebanese people extracted their freedom and independence from the “Israeli occupiers” without any conditions, raised the flag of honor and glory on the pure soil of the south, and exposed the illusion of “Greater Israel” and its expansion plan (IRNA, May 25, 2025).

► On the sidelines of the World Health Conference in Geneva, Iranian Health Minister Mohammad-Reza Zafarghandi met with Hezbollah-affiliated Lebanese Health Minister Rakan Nasser Eldine and discussed expanding cooperation between the two countries in the field of health. Zafarghandi expressed Iran’s willingness to cooperate with Lebanon in the fields of medicine and health and invited senior Lebanese health officials to visit Iran and examine

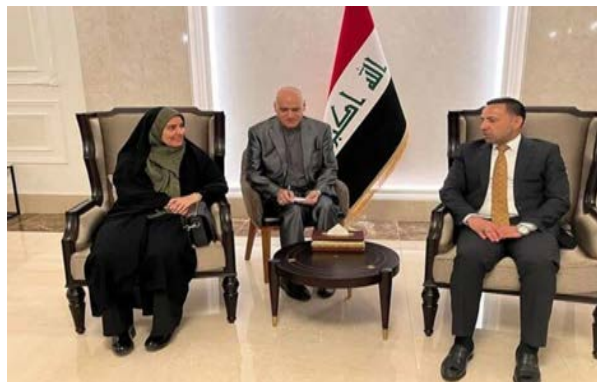
possibilities for expanding cooperation. The Lebanese minister of health noted at the meeting that the health system in Lebanon has been damaged in the war and that it is willing to cooperate with Iran in this field. He thanked Iran for its assistance in treating the wounded from the explosion of Hezbollah pagers in September 2024 (IRNA, May 22, 2025).



The meeting of the health ministers of Iran and Lebanon in Geneva (IRNA, May 22, 2025)

Iran's involvement in Iraq

► Iranian Minister of Transportation Farzaneh Sadegh arrived in Iraq for a visit. She met with senior Iraqi government officials, headed by the Iraqi prime minister and the ministers of transportation and interior, and discussed with them the promotion of cooperation in the field of transportation, including the promotion of the railway project between Shalamchah and Basra, and preparations for pilgrimage to the Shiite holy sites as part of the Arbaeen³ ceremonies expected in August 2025 (IRNA, May 25).



The Iranian minister of transportation meets with the Iraqi deputy minister of transportation (IRNA, May 25, 2025)

³ Arbaeen: A day of mourning for the Shiites marking the forty days since the death of Imam Hussein bin Ali and many other members of the Ali bin Abi Talib family in the battle of Karbala in 61 AH (680 CE). On this day, it is customary to make a pilgrimage to the grave of Imam Hussein in Karbala, Iraq.

► Ali Akbar Ahmadian, the secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, met in Moscow with Iraqi National Security Advisor Qassem al-Araji. The two reportedly discussed the implementation of the security agreement between the two countries. Ahmadian called to "beware the plots of the Zionist regime aimed at division" and stressed the need to stop "oppression and crimes in the occupied territories." Al-Araji stressed that Iran is Iraq's strategic partner and that the two countries are promoting common issues (Mehr News Agency, May 27, 2025).



The meeting between Ahmadian and al-Araji (Mehr, May 27, 2025)

The Houthi confrontation with Israel

► In the past week, the Houthis' military spokesman Yahya Saria claimed responsibility for six missile attacks, five of them against Ben Gurion Airport, and two attacks using Jaffa-type drones. According to him, all missile attacks achieved their objective, caused the cessation of activity at Ben Gurion Airport, and caused "millions of occupying Zionists" to run to shelters. Saria emphasized that the operations are part of a "siege" on Ben Gurion Airport and Haifa Port and threatened that the Houthis will not hesitate to expand and escalate their operations until "aggression" in the Gaza Strip stops, and the "siege" is lifted (Yahya Saria's X account and Telegram channel, May 21-28, 2025). The IDF Spokesperson reported six incidents of intercepting ballistic missiles launched from Yemen. The claims about launching drones have not been verified (IDF Spokesperson, May 21-28, 2025).

► In response to continued attacks, the IDF conducted an airstrike against Sana'a International Airport. The IDF Spokesperson reported that aircraft used by the Houthi regime to transport terrorists who promoted terrorist operations against Israel were attacked (IDF Spokesperson, May 28, 2025). Houthi media reported that four attacks were carried out against the airport runway and against an aircraft of Al-Yemenia Airways (Al-Masirah, May 28, 2025). Sana'a

International Airport director Khaled al-Shaif confirmed that the last aircraft of Al-Yemenia Airways was destroyed in the attack (Khaled al-Shaif's X account, May 28, 2025).



The aircraft attacked at the airport (Khaled al-Shaif's X account, May 28, 2025)

► On May 22, 2025, Arab media reported an explosion in a weapons warehouse belonging to the Houthis in the Sana'a area. It was further reported that there were 19 dead and more than 40 wounded in the explosion. The information minister of the Western-backed Yemeni government, Muammar al-Eryani, claimed that the explosion resulted from a failed launch of a Houthi missile in the Sana'a airport area. The Houthi regime did not comment on the incident (Arab media; Muammar al-Eryani's X account, May 22, 2025).

► The Red Sea Ports Corporation in Yemen, operated by the Houthis, published a report on the extent of damage caused to the ports of Al-Hudaydah, Al-Salif, and Ras Issa in the series of airstrikes by Israel and the US from July 2024 to May 2025. It was reported that damages are estimated at approximately \$1.387 billion, of which \$531 million in "direct" damages and another \$856 million in losses due to disruptions in port operations. It was further reported that six piers were destroyed, in addition to other facilities at the ports, including power stations and two "main" cranes (Saba News Agency, May 25, 2025).

► Senior Houthi regime officials continued to emphasize the "successes" of their attacks against Israel and made clear again that they would not stop "support" operations for the Gaza Strip despite Israeli attacks in Yemen as long as "crimes" in the Gaza Strip continued:

◆ Abd al-Malik al-Houthi, the leader of the Houthi movement, said in his weekly speech that the "Israeli aggression" on the seaports in Al-Hudaydah tried to deter them and make them stop their actions against Israel, but it failed. They would continue to support "our brothers in Gaza." He claimed that former senior Israeli officials "recognize Israel's failure" in the campaign in the Gaza Strip and even "clearly admit that crimes are taking place there." Al-Houthi also praised "the resistance fighters in Gaza who carry out

successful ambushes against the enemy,” noting that the “enemy’s attacks” in Lebanon and Syria continue, and the Arab world is silent. He also praised the criticism of Israel by European countries but added that they are not enough (Al-Masirah Telegram channel, May 22, 2025).

◆ After the Houthis announced the launch of two ballistic missiles at Ben Gurion Airport and two drones at Jaffa and Haifa on May 22, 2025, the deputy chairman of the Houthis’ media arm, Nasreddin Amer, said that the launches were carried out to cause “the Zionist war criminals to stop their crimes.” He said he warned that if they did not stop, what awaits the “Zionists” is “more than in the past.” He also threatened that Ben Gurion Airport and Haifa Port would be closed “just like the port of Umm al-Rashrash (Eilat) was closed.” In another statement, Amer called on foreign airlines and shipping companies to immediately stay away from Ben Gurion Airport and Haifa Port, as “these targets have joined the bank of targets of our forces, and they will attack them at any time.” He added that the Houthis’ actions would also be directed against “other important targets” until “the cessation of aggression and the lifting of the siege” (Nasreddin Amer’s Telegram channel, May 22-23, 2025).

◆ Mohammed al-Farah, a member of the Houthis’ political bureau, claimed that there are clear results from the military activity against Israel and that “no one is considering investing or touring there.” He emphasized that “the last military surprise was Haifa Port, and there are more surprises to come.” He added that “our priority is a confrontation with Israel” and warned elements that would try to provoke escalation inside Yemen (Al-Mayadeen, May 22, 2025).