



Spotlight on Iran and the Shiite Axis

December 31, 2025 - January 7, 2026

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Highlights¹

- The Iranian ambassador to Beirut rejected claims recently voiced in Lebanon against Iran and Iran's Supreme Leader, arguing that the intensified media campaign is based on false accusations and lies.
- An Iranian commentary article claimed that Tehran seeks to strengthen Lebanon's sovereignty rather than weaken the central government in Beirut, despite its support for Hezbollah.
- Iran reportedly has tightened oversight of the transfer of funds to Hezbollah and is determining priorities in resource allocation.
- The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson criticized remarks by Syria's finance minister regarding Damascus' intention to demand compensation from Iran for damage incurred during the civil war and for Iran's assistance to the Assad regime.
- The commander of the IRGC's Qods Force reportedly paid a secret visit to Baghdad to meet with senior pro-Iranian Shiite militia figures.
- A senior Houthi official condemned the visit of Israel's foreign minister to Somaliland and warned that any "Zionist" presence on Somali soil constitutes a military target.
- Reports indicated that the Houthis carried out missile launches toward the sea in preparation for a new confrontation with Israel. "Yemeni security sources" said that Qods Force officers and senior Houthi officials discussed possible responses in the event of a new Israeli-American attack on Iran.
- Iraq's prime minister once again stressed the need to disarm the armed militias, but the militias' Coordination Committee issued a counter-statement declaring that "the resistance's weapons are sacred."

Iran and the Lebanese Arena

- Iran's ambassador to Lebanon, Mojtaba Amani, said the organized and intensified media campaign currently being waged in Lebanon against the Islamic Republic, and particularly against Iran's Supreme Leader, should be viewed as a collection of false accusations and lies claiming that

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

Iran has been harmed, whereas in reality these are mere illusions and figments of imagination. Amani added that in forty days, Iran will mark the 47th anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution and the establishment of the Islamic Republic, a regime whose downfall many had hoped for, but they passed away full of frustration and anger, without ever seeing their wish fulfilled. He emphasized that Iran is a strong and stable country, and that the experience of the past five decades has proven it is unaffected by plots, media hype, or propaganda wars, and continues on its blessed path without fear (Amani's X account, January 1, 2026).

► The Iranian ambassador to Beirut met with the head of the Chaldean Catholic community in Lebanon, Bishop Michel Kassarji, and conveyed his greetings to him on the occasion of Christmas (the ambassador's X account, January 2, 2026).



Iran's ambassador to Beirut and Bishop Kassarji (the ambassador's X account, January 2, 2026)

► A commentary article published by Iran's Mehr News Agency argued that the recent political tensions between Iran and Lebanon should not be seen as reflecting a unified position of the Lebanese government. Much of the tension, it claimed, stems from statements made by Lebanese Foreign Minister Youssef Rajji, which reportedly encountered reservations even within the government itself. The article added that amplifying Rajji's remarks in the media actually contributes to ignoring Hezbollah's real weight within Lebanese society and erodes one of its most important sources of social support. It further stated that Iran seeks to strengthen Lebanon's sovereignty rather than weaken the central government in Beirut, and that throughout the years in which Tehran stood alongside Hezbollah against external threats, it refrained from intervening in Lebanon's internal political struggles or shaping the internal balance of power. Even in light of the recent tensions and statements by some Lebanese officials, Tehran's response in recent weeks can be understood, including the positions and responses of Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, who stressed the need to respect Lebanon's sovereignty (Mehr, January 4, 2026).

► "Sources close to Hezbollah" said that a gradual but significant change is taking place in the organization's relationship with Iran. Tehran, once an "open financier" for Hezbollah, has become a

crisis manager that links the flow of funds primarily to priorities and strict oversight. According to these sources, recent discussions have focused less on the amount of money and more on what will be funded, what will be cut, and how the organization's commitments will be restructured, in light of growing economic pressure in Iran. The organization was reportedly informed that the era of unconditional support has ended, and that any additional assistance will be contingent on cost-cutting, particularly in welfare and compensation, alongside demands for precise accounting and detailed implementation plans. Although the scope of assistance is estimated at around \$900 million to \$1 billion, less than Hezbollah's demands, a large portion of rehabilitation and compensation needs remains unfunded. At the same time, Iranian involvement in management issues, resource allocation, and organizational structures has increased, based on the perception that Hezbollah has entered a phase of attrition and that harmful budgetary inflation must be curbed. Nevertheless, "sources close to the organization" stressed that the strategic relationship with Tehran remains stable, but within a "new equation": less money, tighter oversight, and decisions aligned with Iran's regional considerations (Aram News, December 31, 2025).

► Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei strongly condemned IDF strikes in southern Lebanon and the Beqaa Valley, stating that damage to residential and industrial areas and urban infrastructure constitutes a "blatant violation" of the UN Charter and international law. He stressed the need to put the leaders of the "Zionist regime" on trial and punish them for committing "war crimes." He also stressed the responsibility of the countries guaranteeing the ceasefire between Hezbollah and Israel to prevent Israel's continued "violations" of the agreement, and called for more serious action by the international community, the UN, and regional states to confront the "aggression of the occupying regime" (Tasnim, January 6, 2026).

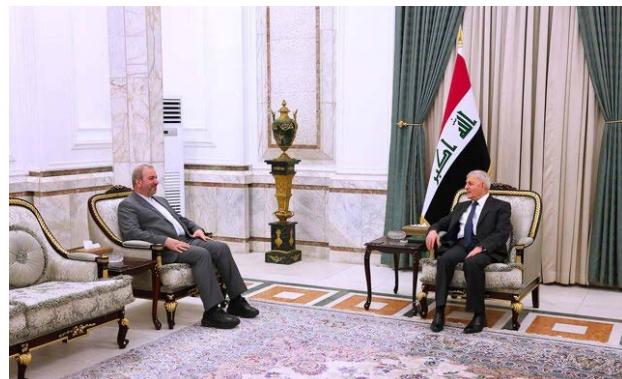
Iran and the Syrian Arena

► Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei addressed remarks by Syria's finance minister during his weekly press conference, according to which Syria would demand billions of dollars in compensation from Iran for killings, destruction of cities and infrastructure, and assistance provided to the Assad regime. Baghaei said there was no need to respond to every political statement that does not conform to international law, adding that financial claims should not change or be nullified due to a change in government or sovereignty. He added that even in cases where a state collapses, its economic claims and legal obligations do not disappear but are transferred to the state that replaces it (Fars, January 5, 2026).

Iran and the Iraqi Arena

► “A source close to the IRGC” revealed that Qods Force commander Esmail Qaani paid a secret visit to Baghdad. According to the report, Qaani arrived on a private aircraft as part of a sudden visit that was not officially announced by Iraq or Iran. His visit reportedly includes meetings with political figures and senior leaders of pro-Iranian militias, intended to discuss the issue of foreign military presence in Iraq and arrangements for the next stage in the Iraqi and regional arenas. The meetings also focus on recent security developments, regulating relations between the militias and the Iraqi state, and the prospects for a settlement or de-escalation in the coming months (*Baghdad Al-Youm*, January 6, 2026).

► Iran’s ambassador to Baghdad, Mohammad Kazem Al-e Sadeq, met with Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid, who stressed the importance of expanding bilateral relations and continued coordination to strengthen regional stability. They also discussed recent regional and international developments and emphasized the importance of cooperation between the two countries (ISNA, January 4, 2026).



The Iraqi President meets with Iran’s ambassador to Baghdad (ISNA, January 4, 2026)

► The Iranian ambassador also met with Iraq’s incoming parliament speaker, Hebat al-Halbousi, and congratulated him on his election. The meeting took place in the presence of outgoing Speaker Mohammed al-Halbousi, and the participants discussed bilateral relations, ways to strengthen them, and regional developments (ILNA, January 1, 2026).



The Iranian ambassador to Iraq meets with the incoming and outgoing speakers of the Iraqi parliament (ILNA, January 1, 2026)

The Houthis in Yemen

- Houthi Deputy Foreign Minister Abd al-Wahid Abu Ras condemned the visit of Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar to Somaliland, calling it a “blatant violation” of international law and an infringement on Somalia’s territorial integrity. He stressed that any presence of the “Zionist entity” on Somali soil constitutes a “red line” and a military target for Yemen’s armed forces. Abu Ras also called on Arab and Islamic states to firmly oppose “Zionist plans,” which he claimed threaten the security and stability of the entire region (Saba News Agency, January 6, 2026).
- It was reported that Houthi forces held drills involving the launch of missiles toward the Red Sea as part of preparations for a possible renewed confrontation with Israel. According to the reports, a salvo of five missiles was launched for the first time, and in addition, a missile of a new type was launched (Telegram channel of journalist Abu Jud, January 6, 2026).
- In this context, “well-informed Yemeni security sources” reported that secret high-level coordination talks were held between senior field officers of the Qods Force and senior Houthi military and security officials to discuss responses in the event of a direct Israeli-American attack on Tehran. According to the sources, the meetings produced operational conclusions indicating that the “axis of resistance” is moving from “verbal deterrence” to actual readiness and the establishment of joint monitoring rooms. It was noted that the talks began amid an assessment that the window of opportunity to prevent escalation is narrowing, and that prior to or alongside an attack on Iran, there would also be an attempt to neutralize Iran’s proxies, primarily Hezbollah, to prevent them from acting. In addition to the Red Sea and the Bab al-Mandeb Strait, the possibility of expanding operations to vital points in the Horn of Africa was raised, while avoiding direct responsibility and maintaining plausible deniability (Aram News, January 6, 2026).

► Houthi Chief of Staff Yusuf Hassan al-Madani sent condolences to Hamas and the Palestinians after Hamas' military wing announced the deaths of five of its senior figures on December 29, 2025. Al-Madani said that "the Palestinian people, who produced this group of great leaders, will continue to produce many more," adding that "no matter how the cruelty of the Zionist enemy intensifies, it is undoubtedly advancing toward its inevitable death and end." He stressed that the Houthis would continue to assist and support the Palestinian people and their "resistance," standing by them in every choice and on every battlefield until victory, full independence, and the expulsion of the last Zionist soldier from Palestinian land (Houthi movement Telegram channel, December 31, 2025).



**Letter of condolence sent by the Houthi chief of staff
(Telegram channel of the Houthi movement, December 31, 2025)**

► On January 1, 2026, the names of additional senior Houthi officials killed in a US strike in Yemen in March 2025 were revealed. Among them was Abd al-Malik al-Murtada, the Houthi representative in the "axis of resistance" joint operations room.²



**The Houthi officials killed in March 2025. Top right: Abd al-Malik al-Murtada
(ME24 X account, January 1, 2026)**

► On January 4, 2026, a meeting of the Houthi government was held. Footage released by the official Houthi news agency showed Defense Minister Mohammad Nasser al-Atifi and Deputy Prime Minister

² For further details, see the ITIC periodic publication "Spotlight on Terrorism – December 2025"

Jalal al-Rawishan. This marked their first public appearance since reports that they were seriously wounded in an Israeli attack on a gathering of senior Houthi officials on August 28, 2025, in which the Houthi prime minister and many ministers were killed (Saba News Agency, January 4, 2026; Defense Line, January 4, 2026).



Right: Minister of Defense al-Atifi. Left: Deputy Prime Minister Al-Rawishan (Saba, January 4, 2026)

The Pro-Iranian Militias in Iraq

- On January 4, 2026, an official ceremony was held in Baghdad to mark the sixth anniversary of the killing of former Qods Force commander Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, former leader of Kata'ib Hezbollah and deputy head of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF). Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani stressed in his speech that the decision to disarm armed militias is an internal one that will be made by broad parliamentary consensus. He also accused the “occupying Zionist entity” of attempting to drag Iraq into war and attack it starting on October 7, 2023 (INA, January 4, 2026). PMF Chairman Faleh al-Fayyadh said that cooperation between the PMF and the security forces has been and remains the foundation for safeguarding the state’s security, unity, and sovereignty, adding that “holding weapons in our hands is a strategic necessity given the military and technological superiority used to harm states” (PMF website, January 4, 2026).
- On the occasion, the Coordination Committee of the Iraqi Shiite militias issued a statement clarifying that “the resistance’s weapons are sacred,” which it said serve as a tool to defend the state. The committee opposed any discussion of disarmament by external actors or even by the government until the state achieves full sovereignty and is freed from “occupation and its threats.” The statement was signed by Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada, Ansar Allah al-Awfiya, and Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, which announced in December 2025 their agreement to limit weapons to state control, as well as Kata'ib Hezbollah and Harakat al-Nujaba, which issued statements opposing disarmament (Telegram channel of the Coordination Committee, January 4, 2026). “A source close to the Iraqi militias” said the statement had been conveyed to senior political figures several days before its

official publication, indicating the militias' clear position regarding the next stage (Baghdad Today, January 6, 2026).



From a video by Kata'ib Hezbollah titled “Resistance is a right, and its weapons remain in the hands of its fighters” (Kata'ib Hezbollah Telegram channel, January 1, 2026)

► A day later, however, Sanad al-Hamdany, director of the Al-Ahd network, the official media arm of Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, denied any connection to the Coordination Committee's statement (al-Hamdany's X account, January 5, 2026). In another statement, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq reaffirmed its support for limiting weapons to the state in accordance with the constitution and without foreign interference. Marking the 105th anniversary of the Iraqi army, the militia said it is necessary to preserve Baghdad's unity and strength and support state institutions, foremost among them the army and the PMF (Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq website, January 6, 2026).

The Militias in Syria

► The Islamic Resistance Front in Syria – Possessors of Might (*Uli al-Baas*, or UAB) reported that it had reorganized its ranks and resumed activities following the December 2025 death of its leader, Rida al-Hussein Abu Jihad. The statement said that alongside “our national partners from the various factions on the front,” they continue to be determined and committed to the struggle and the “resistance,” under the leadership of Abu Mujahed, who was described as “the good friend of our martyred leader, Abu Jihad.” The organization emphasized that those who “sought to sow weakness among us by striking him instead united our ranks and strengthened our resolve” (Telegram channel of the Islamic Resistance Front in Syria, January 6, 2026).