



# Spotlight on Iran and the Shiite Axis

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## Highlights<sup>1</sup>

- The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson criticized the White House announcement regarding the establishment of a “Peace Council” for the Gaza Strip, noting that any solution that ignores the Palestinian people’s right to self-determination is doomed to fail.
- The Iraqi foreign minister visited Tehran and met with senior Iranian officials. The senior advisor to Iran’s Supreme Leader held a conversation with former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, a leading candidate to form Iraq’s next government. These contacts took place amid growing Iranian concerns over a possible US attack and progress toward forming a new Iraqi government.
- The Houthi leader threatened that the movement would not hesitate to strike any “permanent Zionist presence” in Somaliland.
- Reports indicate that the Houthi leadership has raised its security alert level in light of events in Iran.
- Pro-Iranian militias in Iraq expressed full support for the Iranian regime and threatened retaliation in the event of an American attack against the Islamic Republic.

## Iran and the Palestinian Arena

- Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmaeil Baghaei addressed the White House announcement on establishing a “Peace Council” for the Gaza Strip during his weekly press briefing. He said that from the very moment the issue of a ceasefire was raised, Iran had warned against so-called “peace” processes that marginalize the Palestinian people’s right to self-determination. He stressed that this right is the most important issue and must be at the center of any international initiative, and that any process that ignores it in any way will fail and only prolong the problem. He added that the fact that the “Zionist regime” itself, despite being part of the process, announced that it does not accept it, is significant in itself. According to him, this demonstrates that the “Zionist regime” insists on denying “Palestine” as a people and has no intention of cooperating with any process (Iranian Foreign Ministry Telegram channel, January 18, 2026).

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

## Iran and the Iraqi Arena

► Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi met in Tehran with his Iraqi counterpart Fuad Hussein. Araghchi referred to the evacuation of the Ayn al-Asad base in Iraq by US forces and its transfer to Iraqi control, saying this was another expression of Iraq's strengthened independence, stability, and sovereignty. He emphasized Iran's support for a stable and independent Iraq. The Iranian foreign minister added that the border between the two countries has now become one of friendship and cooperation across various fields. He thanked the Iraqi government for its support for the Iranian people and expressed satisfaction with the continued progress in bilateral relations. According to Araghchi, the volume of trade between Iran and Iraq is at a good level, with many opportunities for expansion. He pointed to growing ties in higher education, tourism, and pilgrimage, noting that tens of thousands of Iraqi students currently study at Iranian universities and that approximately seven million Iranians and Iraqis visit each other's countries annually as tourists and pilgrims. The Iraqi foreign minister declared that Iran's security is vital to regional security and to Iraq, and stressed the need for non-interference in the internal affairs of other states. He highlighted the need to form a new government in Baghdad as soon as possible to properly address internal and regional challenges (snn.ir, January 18, 2026).



**Meeting of the foreign ministers of Iran and Iraq (snn.ir, January 18, 2026)**

► During his visit to Tehran, the Iraqi foreign minister also met with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and Ali Larijani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council. Pezeshkian said that the strong and historic relations between the Iranian and Iraqi peoples have remained stable to this day and will continue in the future. He emphasized the need for unity within the Muslim nation, stating that such unity would prevent any power from threatening it. The Iraqi foreign minister said Iraqi leaders have been closely monitoring recent developments in Iran and view Iran's security as inseparable from the security of Iraq and the entire region (Iranian President's Telegram channel, January 18, 2026).



**Meeting of the Iranian President with the Iraqi Foreign Minister (snn.ir, January 19, 2026)**

► Ali Akbar Velayati, senior advisor for international affairs to Iran's Supreme Leader, held a telephone conversation with Iraqi Shiite politician and former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, who is considered one of the leading candidates to form Iraq's next government. The two discussed regional and international developments and relations between Iraq and Iran. Velayati congratulated the Iraqi people on their victory in the recent parliamentary elections and on their broad participation, saying this had strengthened Iraq's position regionally and internationally. Referring to recent developments in Iran, Velayati told al-Maliki that the defeat of the United States in the wave of protests in Iran was a continuation of previous failures by the United States and the "Zionist regime" in the 12-day war. He stressed that the Iranian people had thwarted the enemy's plot, but that this was not enough and that the United States must be held accountable for its actions. He added that the struggle against the "Zionist regime" and the United States would continue with greater determination, and that the enemy's plot was directed not only against Iran but against the entire region. With Allah's help, he said, Iran, Iraq, Hezbollah, "Palestine," and the Houthis in Yemen would stand up to all arrogant powers, particularly the "Zionists." Velayati also expressed support for the Iraqi government's and people's determination to expel US and NATO forces from Iraq and put an end to what he termed the country's "occupation." He emphasized that preserving Iraq's territorial integrity, ensuring the welfare of its citizens, and promoting its development are top priorities on Iran's regional agenda. Al-Maliki thanked Velayati and stressed that every event in Iran has a direct impact on Iraq and the region as a whole (Tasnim, January 20, 2026).



**Telephone conversation between the advisor to the Supreme Leader of Iran and the former prime minister of Iraq (Tasnim, January 20, 2026)**

## The Houthis in Yemen

### Threats against Israel

► Houthi movement leader Abd al-Malik al-Houthi commented on Israel's recognition of Somaliland, stating that "what is happening in Somalia is of great importance to Yemen because it poses a threat to Yemen and the peoples of the region, and this is an issue we can never remain silent about." In a speech marking the anniversary of his brother Hussein Badr al-Din al-Houthi's death, he accused the "Israeli enemy" of constantly trying to achieve its objectives in Somalia, given its geographic location opposite the Gulf of Aden and Bab al-Mandab. He claimed that Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar's visit to "Somalia" was conducted secretly via Ethiopia, due to fear of Yemen's stance. Al-Houthi emphasized that they are monitoring Israeli movements in Somaliland and are "serious about striking" any Israeli presence there, whether a military base or similar facility. He added: "We will not hesitate to strike militarily any permanent Zionist presence that becomes available to us" (Saba, January 15, 2026).



**Houthi poster threatening to damage Israeli assets in Somaliland (Telegram channel of the Houthis' combat media arm, January 16, 2026)**

## Impact of events in Iran on the Houthis

- Reports claimed that the Houthis are in a state of “panic and deep confusion” in light of the protests in Iran. According to the report, the Houthis are concerned about the possible political and security implications of developments in Iran for the organization’s future. “Sources close to the Houthis” said strict instructions were issued to raise security readiness to the highest level and to reinforce deployments on main streets and around government and security institutions. It was also reported that senior Houthi figures have not appeared in public for months since the ceasefire in the regional conflict, apparently due to continued fears of possible strikes (*Asharq al-Awsat*, January 14, 2026).
- “Houthi sources” said that American escalation against Iran would be perceived by the Houthis as part of US support for Israel, obliging them to become “part of the new regional equation.” They added that Sana'a might increase its level of support for Tehran, ranging from backing its right to self-defense to participation in confrontation as part of efforts to deter “new American aggression.” In this context, it was noted that the Houthis raised their alert level and initiated missile tests in the Red Sea (*Al-Akhbar*, January 15, 2026).
- Houthi leader Al-Houthi stated that “what the enemies did in the Islamic Republic of Iran was an American-Israeli attack using criminal gangs,” claiming that the Americans “send criminal gangs to serve as the spearhead of these problems, with the ultimate goal of controlling Iran” (Saba, January 15, 2026).
- Houthi political bureau member Mohammed al-Farah claimed that events in Iran constitute a “fabricated revolution led by Israel under US patronage.” He said Iran is paying the price for opposing “American hegemony and Israeli aggression” and for standing alongside oppressed peoples, foremost among them “Palestine.” He added that any attack on Iran would pave the way for attacks on other Islamic regimes (*Al-Mayadeen*, January 14, 2026).

## International activity against the Houthis

- The US Treasury Department announced sanctions against 21 individuals, entities, and one vessel for involvement in transferring petroleum products, procuring weapons and equipment, and providing financial services to the Houthis. The statement said they were involved in transferring petroleum products to Houthi-controlled ports after humanitarian exemptions expired, constituting a violation of trade restrictions on a terrorist organization. The designated actors were also involved in attempts to smuggle military equipment and provide financial services to the Houthis. The announcement revealed that some of these actors worked with the Houthis to establish civilian

airlines, through which the Houthis attempted to acquire aircraft for smuggling operations and to generate revenue via Sana'a airport (US Treasury Department, January 16, 2026).

## The Pro-Iranian Militias in Iraq

### The militias and developments in Iran

- A “European military source and an Iraqi security source” reported that approximately 5,000 Iraqi militia fighters entered Iran in recent weeks via two border crossings to assist the regime in suppressing protests. Additionally, around 800 “Shiite fighters” reportedly entered Iran under the cover of pilgrimage for the same purpose. According to a European military assessment, the fighters belong to Kata’ib Hezbollah, Harakat al-Nujaba, Kata’ib Sayyid al-Shuhada, and the Badr Organization, operating under the framework of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF). The assessment said the use of non-Iranian fighters is another indication of the regime’s fragility and its determination to survive despite the high human cost of the protests so far (CNN, January 15, 2026).
- “Sources in Kata’ib Hezbollah” said that American military bases in Iraq and across the region would become targets if the United States were to launch military action against Iran. A “senior militia figure” added that the “resistance’s” missiles and drones were ready, confirming that the militia is part of the conflict between the United States and Iran and will not remain neutral. He noted that the group had refrained from involvement in the 12-day war in June 2025 following instructions from Iran’s Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, but stressed that “the situation now is completely different” (Shafaq News, January 16, 2026).
- Kata’ib Sayyid al-Shuhada also declared its “full alignment with the Camp of Truth, represented by the Islamic Republic, against the Camp of Evil and Hegemony led by the American-Zionist occupation with all its tools, mouthpieces, and servants.” The group called on Iraqi authorities to prevent the use of Iraqi airspace for attacks against a neighboring Muslim state (Kata’ib Sayyid al-Shuhada Telegram channel, January 16, 2026).



**Supporters of the militias at a demonstration in support of Iran in Baghdad (Sabrin News Agency Telegram channel, January 17, 2026)**

## The militias and the American presence in Iraq

► Abu Alaa al-Wala'i, the secretary-general of the Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada militia, referred to the departure of American forces from the Ayn al-Asad Air Base, claiming that "this could not have happened without our brave resistance fighters, the ones who wrote the first chapter of this story, along with our wise religious leadership, our noble people, our Iraqi government, and its courageous negotiators" (Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada Telegram channel, January 18, 2026).

## The Militias in Syria

► The Islamic Resistance Front in Syria – Possessors of Might (Uli al-Baas, or UAB) issued a statement amid the continued Israeli military presence in the Syrian Golan Heights and reports of contacts between the Syrian regime and Israel aimed at reaching security understandings. The statement read: "We, the Islamic Resistance Front in Syria – Possessors of Might, vow that you will not succeed in imposing your reality, not on the battlefield, not through shameful deals, and not through humiliating agreements with the so-called 'de facto government' in Damascus. You will not build your security at the expense of our dignity, nor will you turn our villages into settlements and our land into testing grounds for your arrogance. All this noise will not change a well-established and unalterable truth: you are a transient entity, and we are the enduring people of this land. So, wait for what is to come – not through written statements or visual publications, but through realities imposed by time and the barrels of our rifles. Our promise is a promise that will be fulfilled" (Telegram channel of the Islamic Resistance Front in Syria, January 18, 2026).



**Poster issued by the Islamic Resistance Front in Syria against the Israeli presence in the Syrian Golan Heights (Telegram channel of the Islamic Resistance Front in Syria, January 18, 2026)**