



Spotlight on Iran and the Shiite Axis

December 17-24, 2025

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Highlights¹

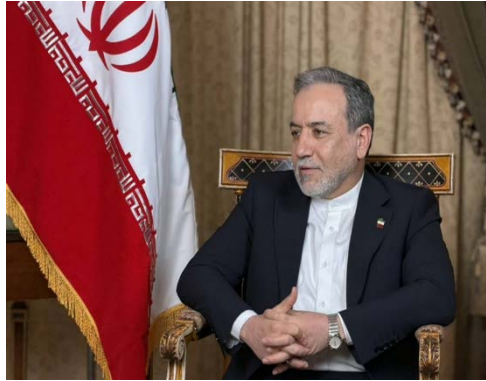
- The Iranian foreign minister stressed Iran's opposition to a two-state solution to the Palestinian problem.
- Senior Iranian officials continued to express opposition to Hezbollah's disarmament: Iran's deputy chief of staff declared that Israel does not dare to disarm the organization because it fears a ground campaign. According to a member of the Majles National Security Committee, if Hezbollah is disarmed, Israel will be able to do whatever it wants in Lebanon.
- Iran's ambassador to the UN said at a Security Council meeting on the situation in Syria that the Syrian residents' "resistance" to Israel's "aggression" exposes the inevitable consequences of an "ongoing occupation."
- Iran and Iraq have reached an agreement on the opening of a new border crossing between the two countries.
- Several pro-Iranian militias in Iraq expressed willingness to relinquish their weapons, but the major militias clarified that the issue is not open for negotiation. It is assessed that the change in the militias' position stems from a desire to integrate into a new government and in light of warnings of possible Israeli attacks.
- The Islamic Resistance Front in Syria announced the death of its leader, without specifying the circumstances.

Iran and the Palestinian Arena

- In an interview with the Russian television network Russia Today, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi referred to Iran's position on the Palestinian issue. He noted that as long as justice is not done to the Palestinians and they have no hope for the future and the realization of their right to self-determination, it will not be possible to achieve lasting peace. He added that Iran has always believed that the two-state solution is not the solution to the problem, and that the only way is to

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

move toward the establishment of a single democratic state in “Palestine” (Tasnim, December 22, 2025).



The Iranian foreign minister (Tasnim, December 22, 2025)

► Deputy Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Ahmad Vahidi said in a speech at the first international conference commemorating Saeed Izadi (Haj Ramazan), the head of the Palestine Corps of the IRGC’s Qods Force who was eliminated during the 12-day war against Israel, that the Palestinian ideal was and remains the most important ideal of the Islamic Revolution, and that the liberation of “Palestine” is a condition for the revolution’s progress toward a great and bright future. He stated that the liberation of “Palestine” constitutes the heart of the “resistance,” and that one cannot consider oneself a revolutionary without placing the issue at the top of one’s agenda. Vahidi added that the voice of “Palestine” and the Gaza Strip is now heard throughout the world, and that there is no person of conscience today who does not defend “Palestine,” in which justice, humanity, and steadfastness are embodied. He further claimed that Israel has failed to eliminate the “resistance” in the Gaza Strip despite its “inhuman actions,” that it is growing stronger by the day, and that the entire Palestinian people have now become Hamas (Tasnim, December 20, 2025).



Ahmad Vahidi (Tasnim, December 20, 2025)

Iran and the Lebanese Arena

► In the same speech, Ahmad Vahidi also addressed the issue of Hezbollah's disarmament, claiming that the "Zionist regime" lacks the courage to disarm Hezbollah. He stated that while Israel enjoys air superiority in Lebanon, it does not dare to enter a ground war because it knows such a move would serve Hezbollah (Tasnim, December 20, 2025).

► Former Iranian ambassador to Libya and Middle East commentator Jafar Qanadbashi noted that Lebanese Foreign Minister Youssef Rajji's reservations about bilateral talks with the Iranian foreign minister in Tehran reflect his personal position and do not represent Lebanon's national interests. He argued that if Rajji truly opposed the Israeli presence in Lebanon, he should strengthen ties with forces opposing Israel in the region, first and foremost Iran, rather than relinquishing a lever that could best serve Lebanon's national interests and security. Qanadbashi emphasized that the assumption that Israeli "aggression" can be prevented through negotiations is mistaken, and that Lebanon's willingness to negotiate with Israel stems primarily from Western and Arab pressure and from a miscalculation of the outcomes. He added that Iran has a clear strategy of supporting all "forces opposing the occupation." Regarding calls to disarm Hezbollah, Qanadbashi said this is impossible, since Israel is capable of operating from the air but is powerless on the ground, and because Hezbollah's standing among the Lebanese public remains strong. He stressed that demands and plans to disarm Hezbollah have been raised for 25 years, and it is time for Western countries to acknowledge their failure on this issue (Tabnak, December 20, 2025).

► Mohammad-Mahdi Shahriari, a member of the Majles Foreign Policy and National Security Committee, said in an interview that if it were not for Hezbollah, Lebanon would have become an Israeli colony. According to him, if Hezbollah is disarmed, Israel will be able to do whatever it wants in Lebanon. He noted that regional developments should not be ignored, especially after the assassination of Hezbollah secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah and the 12-day war between Iran and Israel. However, he stressed that the Islamic Republic can still act to protect the Shiite community in Lebanon and that Lebanon, which is considered Iran's front line, should not be abandoned. He added that it is necessary to examine how Iran could fulfill its role in Lebanon in a way that would protect the interests of the Shiites, while at the same time leading to the other groups in Lebanon cooperating with Hezbollah. He said that if the Lebanese government could truly defend the interests of the Shiites and stand up to Israel, Hezbollah would not object to disarming. However, it is clear that the Lebanese government is incapable of providing such protection (*Shargh*, December 22, 2025).

► Iran's ambassador to Lebanon, Mojtaba Amani, met with the deputy chairman of Lebanon's Supreme Shiite Islamic Council, Sheikh Ali al-Khatib, and discussed with him developments in Lebanon and the region (ISNA, December 22, 2025).

Iran and the Syrian Arena

► Iran's ambassador to the UN, Amir Saeed Iravani, said at a Security Council meeting on the situation in Syria that the increase in ISIS's activity in Syria, including the recent terrorist attacks, continues to pose a serious and immediate threat to Syria and the entire region. The Iranian ambassador strongly condemned the continued Israeli attacks in Syria, saying they constitute a "serious war crime." He stressed that the resistance of the local residents to the "aggression of the Israeli regime" with the support of the Syrian government clearly exposes the inevitable consequences of "prolonged occupation and ongoing acts of aggression." According to him, Israel's actions are part of a deliberate strategy aimed at consolidating the "occupation," dismantling Syria, and weakening its national cohesion by encouraging separatist tendencies among the country's minorities. He reiterated Iran's support for preserving Syria's sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity, noting that effective coping with the challenges in the country requires, first and foremost, an immediate cessation of "the aggression and occupation of the Zionist regime," the fight against terrorism, and the continuation of the Syrian authorities' activities to protect the rights of minorities and promote a political process that will enable the significant participation of all segments of Syrian society (Fars, December 19, 2025).



Iran's ambassador to the UN (Fars, December 19, 2025)

Iran and the Iraqi Arena

► Iran and Iraq have reached an agreement on the opening of a new border crossing between the two countries. Iran's ambassador to Iraq, Mohammad Kazem Aal-e Sadeq, head of Iraq's Border Ports Authority, Omar al-Waeli, and the governor of Iran's Ilam province in western Iran, Ahmad Karami, agreed on this at a meeting held at the Iranian embassy in Baghdad. During the meeting,

issues related to the common borders of Ilam province with neighboring provinces in Iraq were also discussed (Tasnim, December 20, 2025).



Meeting of the Iranian ambassador to Iraq, the head of the Iraqi Border Ports Authority, and the governor of Ilam (Tasnim, December 20, 2025)

The Houthis in Yemen

► “Informed sources” reported that Houthi elements are carrying out “increased activity” in Lebanon, especially in Beirut’s Dahiyeh, Hezbollah’s main stronghold. The activity reportedly includes the exchange of military and technical expertise with Hezbollah, as well as logistical and economic coordination with the organization due to the tightening of American supervision of Hezbollah’s sources of funding in the recent period and the disruption of the organization’s supply lines through Syria after the fall of the Assad regime (Erem News, December 22, 2025).

► “Sources in Yemen” reported that the new Houthi chief of staff, Youssef al-Madani, has prepared a plan to rebuild the Houthis’ military infrastructure, which includes the construction of military facilities and underground infrastructure in various areas of the capital Sana’a and in the provinces of Taiz, Ibb, and Dhammar, alongside the restoration and expansion of tunnels and weapons depots in Saada and Amran. According to the sources, the Houthis are working to disperse their strategic weapons by deploying them in sites in central and western Yemen and by converting underground spaces into facilities for the production and assembly of missiles and drones. It was also reported that the Houthi leadership gives priority to the plan and allocates considerable resources to it at the expense of civilian projects for the benefit of the population (Erem News, December 22, 2025).

The Pro-Iranian Militias in Iraq

The issue of disarming the militias

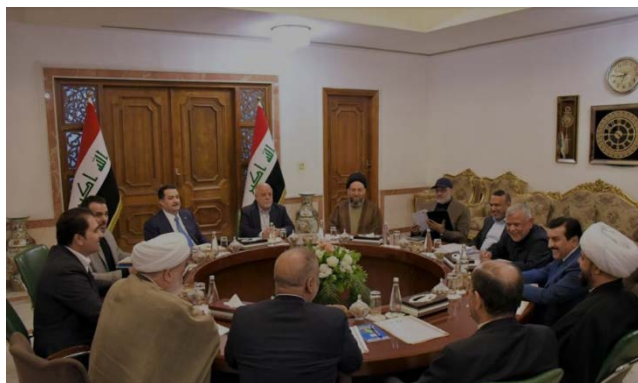
► Several armed Shiite militias have agreed to limit weapons to the state. Shibl al-Zaidi, head of the Imam Ali Brigades, was the first to stress that for the sake of national unity and sovereignty, weapons must remain solely in the hands of official institutions. Similar statements followed from Haidar al-Gharawi, secretary-general of Ansar Allah al-Awfiya; Qais al-Khazali, secretary-general of Asa’ib Ahl

al-Haqq; and Kazem al-Fartousi, spokesman for the Sayyid al-Shuhada Brigades (Ultra Iraq, December 20, 2025).

► By contrast, Kata'ib Hezbollah clarified that it still maintains the position that “resistance is a right and its weapons will remain in the hands of its fighters.” The statement said that sovereignty, security preservation in Iraq, and preventing foreign interference in all its forms are prerequisites for discussing a state monopoly on weapons (Kata'ib Hezbollah Telegram channel, December 20, 2025). The Nujaba Movement likewise stated that “resistance is a legitimate right of peoples whose sovereignty has been usurped and whose lands have been occupied,” and that it derives its legitimacy “from the pride and dignity of the Iraqi people who will not accept humiliation” (Nujaba Movement Telegram channel, December 20, 2025).

► Despite the support of the secretary-general of Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq for the state's monopoly on arms, the militia's military spokesman, Jawad al-Talibawi, issued a statement in which he clarified that the movement is still committed to the idea of “weapons and resistance” and that it is not a negotiable issue. He noted that “there is no place in our dictionary for giving up weapons, giving up resistance, or forgetting what the enemies are planning for us” (Shafaq News, December 22, 2025).

► The Coordination Committee of the Shiite parties, including the pro-Iranian militias, also issued a joint statement expressing support for the state's monopoly on weapons in accordance with “an integrated national project and a clear legal mechanism in such a way that the sovereignty of the state is strengthened, security and stability are maintained, and the best interests of the state are achieved” (Baghdad Today, December 22, 2025). Committee member Adi Abd al-Hadi said that the implementation of the state monopoly would be carried out in three stages: identifying the parties involved, organizing the procedures that would enable smooth implementation, and ultimately, gradual implementation of the plan (Baghdad Today, December 23, 2025).



Meeting of the Shiite Coordination Committee (Baghdad Today, December 22, 2025)

► A “knowledgeable political source” said that following the formation of the new government, a bill regulating weapons under state control will be submitted, and if approved, all militias will be disarmed, regardless of political affiliation and without exception. He added that a high-level committee with defined authorities would be established to oversee the process, including medium and heavy weapons, such as drones, and any party that fails to hand over its weapons will be dealt with in accordance with the law. According to the source, the Shiite militias demanded guarantees, including commitments that their leaders and bases would not be targeted as a result of disarmament (Shafaq News, December 23, 2025).

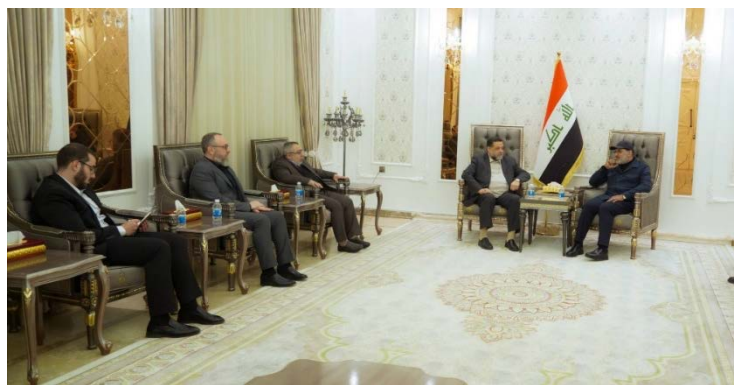
► “Observers and knowledgeable sources” assessed that the change in the militias’ position stems from political calculations ahead of the formation of a new government. After winning approximately ninety parliamentary seats, the militias are seeking to leverage their success to obtain key government positions, while also attempting to soften American opposition to their inclusion in government (*Al-Araby al-Jadeed*, December 20, 2025).

► At the same time, “informed sources” reported that the Iraqi government and other political parties had received two “exceptional” warning messages from an Arab country and a Western intelligence body regarding the possibility that Israel would soon carry out large-scale attacks against targets in Iraq. According to the report, the attacks are expected to focus, among other things, on government institutions linked to the militias and the Popular Mobilization Forces, the umbrella organization of the Shiite militias. “A senior official in the Coordination Committee of the Shiite Militias” admitted that the messages had changed the balance of power and pushed the leadership of the Shiite parties to take steps regarding the weapons of the militias (*Asharq Al-Awsat*, December 21, 2025). In response, the National Intelligence Service in Baghdad vehemently denied the report and called on the media to “be accurate regarding issues affecting our national security” (Iraqi News Agency, December 21, 2025).

► US Special Envoy for Iraq Mark Savaya welcomed the militias’ statements but stressed that it was not enough. Savaya said the disarmament process must include all militias and be irreversible and should be implemented through a “clear and binding national framework.” According to him, Iraq faces a decisive crossroads – progress on a path of stability and prosperity, or remain trapped in a cycle of insecurity, in which illegal armed groups exploit national resources for personal gain and external agendas, thereby weakening the authority of the state” (Mark Savaya’s X account, December 22, 2025).

The Militias' Ties with Hamas

► The secretary-general of Sayyid al-Shuhada Brigades, Abu Alaa al-Wala'i, met in Iraq with senior Hamas figures Osama Hamdan and Taher al-Nunu and discussed the efforts of the “resistance factions,” the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip, and the negotiation process. A statement issued after the meeting said that al-Wala'i stressed the importance of unity of arenas “as a firm approach to confronting the Zionist project,” and noted the support of Baghdad and the militias for the Palestinian cause, which he described as “a central issue for the nation.” Hamas officials praised the role of the “Iraqi resistance” as a support front for the Palestinians (Abu Alaa al-Wala'i's Telegram channel, December 21, 2025).



Al-Wala'i's meeting with senior Hamas figures
(Abu Alaa al-Wala'i's Telegram channel, December 21, 2025)

Smuggling on the Syria-Iraq Border

► The Syrian Interior Ministry announced the seizure of SAM-7 shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missile systems in the Albukamal area, near the Iraqi border. According to the announcement, the systems were intended for smuggling out of the country (Telegram channel of the Syrian Interior Ministry, December 22, 2025). A “security source in the Syrian Interior Ministry” later said that the systems were intended for smuggling into Iraq and Lebanon. He added that the weapons were seized without an exchange of fire (Shafaq News, December 23, 2025).



The shoulder-fired missiles seized in Syria, near the Iraqi border
(Telegram channel of the Syrian Interior Ministry, December 22, 2025)

► A video posted on Syrian social media showed a long tunnel used by pro-Iranian militias in the Albukamal area, on the Syria-Iraq border, during the Assad regime. The tunnel was discovered near the Imam Ali base, the center of activity of the IRGC and the militias in the border area (Deir ez-Zor 24 X account, December 20, 2025).



The entrance to the tunnel on the Syria-Iraq border (Deir ez-Zor 24 X account, December 20, 2025)

The Militias in Syria

► In the early morning hours of December 24, 2025, the Islamic Resistance Front in Syria – Possessors of Might (Uli al-Baas, UAB) issued a statement announcing the death of the organization’s leader (“commander-in-chief”), Abu Jihad Rida al-Hussein. The circumstances of his death were not disclosed, but he was presented as a shaheed who “walked the path of jihad in the midst of many sacrifices that testified to the greatness of his integrity and the depth of his faith in the cause for which he gave his life” (Telegram channel of the Islamic Resistance Front in Syria – Possessors of Might, December 24, 2025). It should be noted that Rida’s identity is unknown, but it was claimed in the past that he was discharged from the Syrian army about 25 years ago at a junior rank, was active in several Palestinian and Lebanese organizations, and left them in 2021 after developing a different political and military vision.²

² For further information of the organization, see the ITIC study from September 1, 2025, “Southern Syria as a ***terror threat to Israel: The Islamic Resistance Front in Syria as a Test Case”

