



Iran Summary

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Executive Summary: The Iran-backed Assad regime in Syria [collapsed](#), and Israel carried out strikes that [destroyed](#) an estimated 70-80 percent of the country's military capabilities to prevent them from falling into the hands of Iran's proxies and other extremists. The Office of the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) [said](#) that Iran now has enough fissile material to make more than a dozen nuclear weapons but has not yet decided to do so. Iran [carried out](#) at least 883 executions in 2024, the highest number in a decade, according to the U.S.-based Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA). Iran's currency, the rial, [fell](#) to its lowest level in history. Hezbollah [launched](#) two mortars at an Israeli army outpost on December 2, violating the 60-day truce agreement that went into effect on November 27. Pro-Hezbollah Lebanese newspaper *Al-Akhbar* [reported](#) that Iran-backed militias in Iraq have reached an agreement with the Iraqi government to cease their attacks on Israel. Iran [detained](#) Italian journalist Cecilia Sala, likely in [ret-ribution](#) for the arrest of an Iranian man the day prior by Italian police in connection with the January drone attack that killed 3 U.S. soldiers in Jordan; an Iranian-American dual citizen living in Massachusetts was also [arrested](#) in connection with the attack.

Collapse of the Iran-backed Assad Regime in Syria:

- On December 8, the Assad regime in Syria [collapsed](#) after armed rebels took the Syrian capital of Damascus and forced the country's authoritarian leader, Bashar al-Assad, to flee the country, ending more than 50 years of rule by the Assad family.
 - » Iran, with Russia, had [propped](#) up Assad while Syria had been embroiled in more than 13 years of civil war. However, when the rebel offensive began in late November, neither country intervened to maintain the Assad regime's control over the country.
 - » Upon the Assad regime's fall, Israel [carried out](#) airstrikes which destroyed most of Syria's strategic weapons stockpiles, in an effort to prevent them from falling into the hands of Iran's proxies and other extremists.
 - On December 10, the IDF [said](#) it had carried out more than 480 strikes in Syria over the previous two days, [destroying](#) an estimated 70-80 percent of Syria's military capabilities.
 - Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [said](#), "The collapse of the Syrian regime is a direct result of the severe blows with which we have struck Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran. The axis has not yet disappeared but as I promised – we are changing the face of the Middle East."

Nuclear:

- On December 16, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Chief Rafael Grossi [said](#) that it “is no longer useful” to try to revive the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) agreement with Iran since “It has uranium at 60 percent—90 percent is military grade—and is thus practically at the same level as nuclear-armed states.”
- On December 12, Iran [agreed](#) to stricter monitoring by the IAEA at its underground nuclear facility in Fordow.
 - » The IAEA wrote in a confidential report to member states, “Iran agreed to the Agency’s request to increase the frequency and intensity of the implementation of safeguards measures at FFEP [Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant] and is facilitating the implementation of this strengthened safeguards approach.”
- On December 6, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) [released a report](#) indicating that Iran now has enough fissile material to make more than a dozen nuclear weapons but has not decided yet to do so.
- On December 6, IAEA Director Rafael Grossi [said](#) Iran stands poised to “quite dramatically” increase its stockpile of near weapons-grade uranium by significantly expanding its use of advanced IR-6 centrifuges.
 - » Grossi warned, “I think it is very concerning. They were preparing and they have all of these facilities sort of in abeyance and now they are activating that. So we are going to see. If they make them turn— all of them— it’s going to be a huge jump.”
- On December 6, Iran [said](#) it conducted a successful space launch with its heaviest payload ever, using a Simorgh rocket. The launch, if indeed successful, would represent an advance in Iran’s ability to ultimately develop intercontinental ballistic missiles.

Domestic/Human Rights:

- On December 26, the U.S.-based Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) [reported](#) that Iran has carried out 883 executions in 2024, the highest number in a decade and an increase from 853 executions last year.
 - » The report said that 94 percent of these executions were carried out in secret without public notice.
 - » Of those executed, 772 were men, 26 were women, and 5 were juvenile offenders at the time of their alleged crimes.
- On December 24, Iranian authorities [lifted](#) a ban on WhatsApp and Google Play after more than two years. The regime had implemented harsher internet and social media restrictions to squash dissent during the 2022 nationwide protests.
- On December 19, police in Tehran [detained](#) Italian journalist Cecilia Sala, who works for *Il Foglio* newspaper and Chora Media podcast company.
 - » On December 27, Iranian officials [confirmed](#) Sala’s detention and said she was arrested for allegedly “violating the laws of the Islamic Republic of Iran.”
 - » Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani said, “We still don’t know the charges,” for which she was detained.
 - » According to several reports, her arrest may have been [retribution](#) for the arrest of Mohammad Abedini Najafabadi, who was taken into custody by Italian police at the behest of the United States the day before Sala was detained.

- On December 28, the Italian daily *La Repubblica* [reported](#), “The subject of Italy’s negotiations with Iranian officials has been the release of Mohammad Abedini Najafabadi in exchange for Cecilia Sala.”
- On December 18, Iran’s currency, the rial, [fell](#) to its lowest level in history relative to the U.S. dollar.
 - » The currency has lost more than 10 percent of its value since President Donald Trump won the U.S. presidency, trading at 777,000 rials to the dollar.
- On December 18, Reuters [reported](#) that Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) now controls up to half of the country’s oil exports, up from about 20 percent three years ago.
- On December 16, Iran [closed](#) government offices and shifted school classes online due to freezing temperatures amid the country’s ongoing natural gas shortage. Iranian officials called on citizens to lower their thermostats by two degrees Celsius to conserve energy, as Iran’s aging and overtaxed infrastructure struggles to meet demand.
- On December 14, a revolutionary court in Tehran [sentenced](#) Iranian-American journalist Reza Valizadeh to 10 years in prison.
 - » Valizadeh, who was detained by Iranian authorities in November, previously worked at U.S. government-funded Radio Farda, an outlet under Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. In February, Valizadeh wrote on X that his family had been detained by Iran’s regime to pressure him to return to Iran. In August, he wrote on X that he had returned to Iran “without any security guarantee, even a verbal one.”
- On December 14, *Iran International* [reported](#) that Iran postponed the implementation of new hijab laws after widespread backlash.
 - » The new laws impose severe penalties on women and girls who don’t comply with new veiling requirements, including heavy fines, prison terms, flogging, and the death penalty.
 - » According to the report, the new law criminalizes “nudity, indecency, unveiling, and bad dressing,” without fully or explicitly defining these terms, leaving them open to subjective interpretation and arbitrary enforcement.
- On December 2, Iranian rapper Toomaj Salehi was [released](#) from prison after being held for over two years for his support for the Women, Life, Freedom protests that erupted across Iran after Mahsa Amini’s murder at the hands of the morality police in the fall of 2022.

The Iran-Backed Houthis and Maritime Aggression:

- On December 30 and 31, U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) [conducted](#) multiple precision strikes against Houthi targets in Sana’a, including the international airport, and coastal locations in Houthi-controlled territory in Yemen.
- On December 30, the IDF [said](#) it had intercepted a ballistic missile launched from Yemen. No injuries were reported, but a large fragment fell in Beit Shemesh.
- Overnight on December 27, Israel [activated](#) the U.S. THAAD system for the first time, using it to intercept a ballistic missile fired by the Houthis. The missile was intercepted outside of Israeli airspace, and no injuries were reported.
- On December 26, the IDF [carried out](#) strikes against Houthi targets in Sana’a and Al Hodeidah, which killed at least four people and injured 21 others.
- On December 26, the IDF [said](#) it had intercepted a missile launched from Yemen.

- On December 25, the IDF [said](#) a drone launched from Yemen had crossed into Israeli territory and landed in an open area.
- On December 24, Israeli air defenses successfully [intercepted](#) a missile fired by the Houthis. No injuries or damage were reported.
- On December 21, CENTCOM [conducted](#) precision airstrikes against a Houthi missile storage facility and a command and control facility in Sana'a.
- On December 19, the Houthis [launched](#) a missile towards Israel, which was partially intercepted by Israeli air defenses, damaging a school in Ramat Gan. At least three people were injured by broken glass.
- On December 16, CENTCOM [conducted](#) a precision airstrike against a key Houthi command and control facility in Sana'a.
- On December 14, the Houthis [launched](#) a missile that struck a playground in Tel Aviv. At least 16 people were lightly wounded by shattered glass in nearby buildings.
- On December 10, CENTCOM [said](#) that two U.S. Navy destroyers, the USS *Stockdale* and USS *O'Kane*, "successfully defeated a range of Houthi-launched weapons while transiting the Gulf of Aden, Dec. 9-10." The destroyers intercepted multiple one-way attack uncrewed aerial systems and one anti-ship cruise missile. No injuries or damage were reported.
- On December 1, CENTCOM [said](#) that the USS *Stockdale* and USS *O'Kane* "successfully defeated a range of Houthi-launched weapons while transiting the Gulf of Aden, Nov. 30 – Dec. 1." The destroyers intercepted three anti-ship ballistic missiles, three one-way attack drones, and one anti-ship cruise missile. No injuries or damage were reported.

Israel's Northern Front:

- On December 23, the pro-Hezbollah Lebanese newspaper *Al-Akhbar* [reported](#) that Iran-backed militias in Iraq have reached an agreement with the Iraqi government to cease their attacks on Israel.
- On December 18, Ibrahim Al-Sumaidaie, an advisor to the Prime Minister of Iraq, [said](#) that the U.S. demanded Iraq dismantle the Iran-backed militias operating within its borders, saying, "This time, unfortunately, implementation of the demand will be imposed in a different way. If we do not comply, it most certainly will be imposed by force."
 - » Al-Sumaidaie's statement came after U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani in Baghdad.
 - » In a statement, Blinken [said](#), "I think this is a moment as well for Iraq to reinforce its own sovereignty as well as its stability, security and success going forward."
- On December 2, Reuters and *The Algemeiner* [reported](#) that hundreds of fighters from Iran-backed Iraqi militias crossed into Syria to help the government fight rebels who seized Aleppo in late November.
- On December 2, Hezbollah [launched](#) two mortars at an Israeli army outpost, violating the 60-day truce agreement that went into effect on November 27.
 - » In response, Israel carried out a wave of airstrikes against Hezbollah operatives, rocket launches, and facilities in Lebanon.
 - » Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu said, "Hezbollah's firing at Mount Dov constitutes a serious violation of the ceasefire, and Israel will respond forcefully...We are determined to continue to enforce the ceasefire, and to respond to any violation by Hezbollah—a minor one will be treated like a major one."

Attacks on U.S. Troops and Personnel in the Region:

- On December 3, CENTCOM [destroyed](#) several weapons systems in the vicinity of Military Support Site Euphrates in Syria that it said posed an imminent threat to U.S. and coalition forces, including three truck-mounted Multiple Rocket Launchers, a T-64 tank, an armored personnel carrier, and mortars.
 - » Pentagon spokesperson Maj. Gen Patrick Ryder [said](#), “The self-defense strike occurred after multiple rocket launchers fired rockets that landed in the vicinity of MSS Euphrates and mortars were fired toward U.S. forces... We’re still assessing who is operating these weapons but do know that there are Iranian-backed militia groups in the area.”
 - Three U.S. service members were [evaluated](#) for possible traumatic brain injuries after the attack.

Malign Activities Abroad:

- On December 30, *The Times of Israel* [reported](#) that the IRGC had plotted to kidnap an Iranian-Israeli journalist by luring him to Turkey and then smuggling him to Iran. According to the report, the plan to kidnap Babak Itzhaki, the Israeli correspondent for *Iran International*, failed when an intermediary the IRGC had recruited refused to participate in the plot.
- On December 18, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian [traveled](#) to Egypt to attend an economic summit. This was the first time a sitting Iranian president visited Cairo in over a decade.
- On December 16, two men were [arrested](#) in connection with the drone attack in January that killed three U.S. soldiers and injured more than 40 others at Tower 22 in Jordan.
 - » The U.S. Department of Justice said two men were [charged](#) with “conspiring to export sophisticated electronic components from the United States to Iran in violation of U.S. export control and sanctions laws.”
 - » One of the men, Mahdi Mohammad Sadeghi, is an Iranian-American dual citizen [living](#) in Massachusetts. The other, Mohammad Abedini Najafabadi, was [arrested](#) by Italian police in Milan at the request of the United States.

Russia/China Ties:

- On December 31, the United States [imposed](#) new sanctions on entities in Iran and Russia, accusing them of attempting to interfere in the 2024 U.S. elections.
 - » The U.S. Department of Treasury’s Acting Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, Bradley Smith, said, “The Governments of Iran and Russia have targeted our election processes and institutions and sought to divide the American people through targeted disinformation campaigns.”
- On December 23, a Russian delegation [met](#) with Iranian President Pezeshkian in Tehran as the two countries prepared to sign a comprehensive cooperation agreement. The Russian delegation invited Pezeshkian to visit Russia in early 2025, according to Iranian media reports.

- On December 4, President Pezeshkian [met](#) with Chinese Vice-Premier Zhang Guoqing in Tehran, where they discussed implementation of a 25-year cooperation agreement and how to counter the “unilateralism” of the United States.
- On December 2, President Pezeshkian [spoke](#) with Russian President Vladimir Putin on the phone to discuss the situation in Syria and express their mutual support for the now-fallen Assad regime.

Cyber:

- On December 4, *Semafor* [reported](#) that Kash Patel, President-elect Donald Trump’s nominee to head the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), was recently the target of an Iranian cyberattack. According to the report, it is unclear what, if any, material was compromised.
- On December 2, Israel’s Shin Bet security service [said](#) it had identified more than 200 Iranian phishing attempts targeting senior Israeli officials, including senior security officials, political figures, academics, media personnel, and journalists.
 - » Hackers approached Israelis via WhatsApp, Telegram, and email, and tried to persuade them to download an app that would grant hackers access to their devices and personal information such as home addresses and frequent locations.

Recent JINSA Publications on Iran:

- December 28: “[The Iranian Regime Is Crumbling – Time for Max Pressure](#),” *RealClearDefense*, VADM Robert Harward, USN (ret.)
- December 20: “[Israel-Houthi Escalation Projectile Tracker: 12/20/24 Update](#),” Ari Cicurel
- December 19: “[A Day 1 Priority: Strategy for the Next Administration to Prevent a Nuclear Iran](#),” JINSA Iran Policy Project Task Force
- December 6: “[October Missile Attack Proves Costly for Iranian Regime](#),” Ari Cicurel and Yoni Tobin
- December 5: “[Monthly Iran Projectile Tracker: November 2024](#),” Ari Cicurel
- December 4: “[Iran’s Dominoes Are Falling; Why Are We Pulling Back?](#)” *Algemeiner*, Lt Gen Richard Mills, USMC (ret.) and Yoni Tobin
- December 4: “[Northern Ceasefire Projectile Tracker: 12/3 Update](#),” Ari Cicurel
- December 2: “[A Fundamental Reset in the Approach to Hezbollah](#),” *JNS*, VADM Colin Kilrain, USN (ret.) and Yoni Tobin