



Iran Summary

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Summary

As President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met at Mar-a-Lago, Iran's president declared his country is at "[total war](#)" with the United States, Israel, and Europe.

While Iran prioritized expanding its military capabilities, the country's economy collapsed, with the Iranian rial's value reaching an [all-time low](#) of 1.42 million per one U.S. dollar. The economic turmoil sparked a strike in Tehran's bazaars, which quickly evolved into ongoing [nationwide protests](#) against the regime's authoritarian rule—the largest demonstrations inside Iran since the 2022 "Women, Life, Freedom," movement. The U.S.-based *Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA)* [reported](#) that as of January 5, 29 people have been killed during the protests including two security personnel, at least 64 have suffered injuries, and over 1,203 have been arrested by government forces.

While failing to suppress internal dissent, Iranian agents recruited spies amongst, and carried out cyberattacks on, Israeli citizens and government sectors. Meanwhile, Israeli and Syrian authorities uncovered Iranian financial networks and smuggling operations throughout the Middle East.

With assistance from Russia, Iran also advanced its technological development by [launching](#) three satellites into space, mounted on a Russian Soyuz rocket, while leaders from both countries signed agreements to strengthen their cooperation in artificial intelligence and cybersecurity. Meanwhile, China helped Iran evade international sanctions and foster deeper diplomatic ties with Saudi Arabia.

Domestic/Human Rights

Large protests erupted across Iran as the country's currency value [fell](#) to 1.42 million rials per U.S. dollar. The regime violently responded to the demonstrations by firing into crowds and killing protestors. Mirroring its crackdown on dissent, Iranian officials boasted of [detaining](#) 2,000 alleged Israeli sympathizers while HRANA revealed that the regime executed at least 1,922 individuals throughout the year.

- On December 31, Iran [named](#) Abdolnasser Hemmati as the head of its Central Bank after Mohammad Reza Farzin resigned from the position two days prior in light of the country's collapsing economy.
- On December 28, large protests [erupted](#) in Tehran and quickly spread nationwide in response to the country's worsening economic crisis as the Iranian currency's value fell to an all-time low of 1.42 million rials to one U.S. dollar.

- » While the protests originated in Tehran's bazaars with merchants and shopkeepers sounding the alarm on the economic turmoil and staging a strike, the movement [gained traction](#) in Iranian universities with students storming government buildings and calling for the regime's collapse.
- » Instilling fear amongst the regime, Iranian authorities violently [cracked down](#) on protesters with police officers firing into crowds. As of January 5, 29 people have been killed during the protests including two security personnel, at least 64 have suffered injuries, and over 1,203 have been arrested by government forces.
- On December 27, Iran's "No to Execution Tuesdays" protest campaign, which seeks to end the death penalty in Iran, [reached](#) its 100th week.
- On December 26, HRANA [released](#) its 2025 Annual Report on Human Rights in Iran, highlighting that the regime executed at least 1,922 individuals between January 1 and December 20.
- On December 24, Iranian authorities [sentenced](#) Yaghoub Karimpour to death after accusing him of spying for Israel during the 12-Day War.
- On December 23, Iranian military spokesman Abdolfazl Shekarchi [stated](#) that Iran arrested over 2,000 people the regime claims to have collaborated with Israel during the 12-Day War, including a [dual Swedish-Iranian national](#).
 - » After reports that the individual faces the death penalty, Sweden [summoned](#) its envoy to Iran.
- On December 20, Iranian authorities [executed](#) 27-year-old Aghil Keshavarz for photographing Iranian military sites, accusing him of carrying out an Israeli espionage mission.
- On December 19, the France-based NGO Kurdistan Human Rights Network [reported](#) that Iranian security forces detained at least 51 Kurdish citizens over the past two weeks, denying them proper legal representation and withholding information about their conditions or locations.
- On December 14, Iranian authorities [detained](#) Shahin Mahmoudi, a dual Iranian-Norwegian national, after the Intelligence Ministry summoned her to its Saqqez office.
- On December 12, Iranian authorities violently [arrested](#) Narges Mohammadi, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, while she attended a memorial event for a human rights lawyer.
 - » Her family claims Iranian security forces beat her in detention, prompting two hospital visits.

Military

In an exclusive December 29 *Iran International* [report](#), unnamed defense sources told the outlet that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) is building chemical and biological warheads to mount onto their long-range ballistic missiles. This development came as Iranian forces conducted several military drills throughout the month, with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian [declaring](#) that Iran is at war with the United States and several other Western nations.

- On December 31, Iran [named](#) Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi as the IRGC's new deputy commander-in-chief. He is implicated by Argentinian authorities in the 1994 attack on the Argentine Israelite Mutual Association building in Buenos Aires, which killed 85 people and injured over 300 others.

- On December 30, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi [published](#) an op-ed in *The Guardian* calling for the United States to negotiate with the regime after Trump threatened renewed military action on Iran after a [meeting](#) with Netanyahu on December 29.
- On December 28, *Iran International*, citing anonymous military sources, [published](#) an exclusive report stating that the IRGC's Aerospace Force is constructing chemical and biological warheads to mount onto their long-range ballistic missiles.
 - » The sources claimed that Iran's military has recently advanced its production of these weapons and is relocating missile launchers to the country's eastern regions.
 - » The report came 20 days after an Israeli military official [informed](#) the Knesset that Iran has resumed rapidly producing ballistic missiles and could fire 500 to 1,000 missiles at one time if it chose to do so.
- On December 27, Pezeshkian [stated](#) in an interview that, "In my opinion, we are in a total war with America, Israel, and Europe. They want to bring our country to its knees."
- On December 22, eyewitnesses [reported](#) seeing Iran's military launch several missile tests across the country.
 - » However, Iranian state media quickly denied the reports, citing "informed sources" who claimed that instead of missiles, the eyewitnesses must have seen "planes flying at high altitudes."
- On December 21, former IRGC Navy commander Hossein Alaei [revealed](#) that Iran's intelligence structure cannot adequately predict Israeli threats to the regime's operations, citing Iranian military failures during the 12-Day War.
 - » His statements came just a few days after Pezeshkian [admitted](#) that Israeli missiles outperformed Iran's own missile stockpile during the June conflict.
- On December 15, Iran [named](#) Brigadier General Alireza Elhami as the new commander for its Army's Air Defense Force, replacing Brigadier General Alireza Sabahi Fard without explanation.
- On December 5, the IRGC Navy [conducted](#) ballistic and cruise missile tests during a military exercise in the Gulf of Oman.
- On December 1, IRGC ground forces [hosted](#) Shanghai Cooperation Organization members, including China, Russia, Belarus, India, and several Central Asian nations for "Sahand 2025"—the coalition's first-ever military drill inside Iranian territory.
 - » The five-day drill, centered on counterterrorism training, also [highlighted](#) Iran's deepening cooperation with China and Russia.

Nuclear

Iran's nuclear officials boasted of the country's ability to potentially build an atomic bomb while also barring the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) from inspecting damaged facilities bombed during the 12-Day War. While the regime stood firm against a deal that prohibits uranium enrichment, satellite imagery indicated [new activity](#) at the Natanz Pilot Fuel Enrichment Plant, a key nuclear site in Iran.

- On December 24, the head of the Iranian Atomic Energy Organization (IAEO) Mohammad Eslami [asserted](#) that Iran would not permit the IAEA to inspect nuclear sites bombed during the 12-Day War.

- On December 23, Iran's United Nations (UN) envoy Amir Saeid Iravani [refused](#) to adhere to U.S. nuclear demands on a zero-enrichment policy; stating during a UN Security Council meeting that, "Iran will not bow down to any pressure and intimidation."
- On December 20, IAEA spokesman Behrouz Kamalvandi [claimed](#) that Iran could easily build an atomic bomb if the regime decided to do so.
- On December 18, the Institute for Science and International Security [revealed](#) satellite images showing new activity at Natanz's Pilot Fuel Enrichment Plant.

Malign Activities Abroad

Several Iranian criminals carried out cyber campaigns targeting Israelis, including former prime minister Naftali Bennett, along with the Israeli government sectors and civilians. Meanwhile, Israeli authorities arrested several people for spying for Iran while also advising the public to not engage with suspicious text messages for Iranian espionage recruitment.

- On December 29, Israeli officials [warned](#) the public against engaging with suspicious messages from Iranian numbers seeking to recruit spies for the regime.
 - The announcement came 11 days after thousands of Israelis [reported](#) receiving texts from alleged Iranian agents on December 18, also soliciting spies.
- On December 24, Iranian state media [reported](#) that the IRGC had intercepted an oil tanker in the Persian Gulf as it was leaving Iranian waters and detained the ship's 16-person crew for allegedly smuggling fuel.
 - Iranian authorities have not disclosed any other details about the ship's origins or where it was sailing next.
- On December 21, *The Hacker News* [reported](#) that threat hunters identified recent malware activity originating from Infy, an old Iranian hacker group, following years of inaction.
- On December 19, Israeli authorities [revealed](#) they had arrested a Russian citizen who had photographed Israeli ports, accusing him of spying for Iran.
- On December 18, former Israeli prime minister Naftali Bennett's office [confirmed](#) that the Iran-backed cyber group Handala had hacked into his Telegram account.
 - The announcement came 10 days after Israeli authorities [arrested](#) a man from Rishon Lezion for allegedly filming Bennett's home for Iranian agents.
- On December 17, the Institute for National Security Studies and ColEven [published](#) a joint report detailing how Iran has constructed a covert aviation network to smuggle products, bypassing international sanctions.
- On December 8, Israeli authorities [announced](#) that they foiled an Iran-backed Hamas financial network operating out of Turkey.
- On December 4, Israeli authorities [indicted](#) a man they had arrested last month in Ashkelon for spying for Iran in exchange for cryptocurrency.
- On December 2, *The Hacker News* [reported](#) that the Iran-backed hacker group Muddywater launched cyberattacks against several Israeli sectors, including telecommunications and information technology, between late 2024 and early 2025.

Proxy Aggression

Hezbollah fighters continued to operate in Lebanon and abroad despite international pressure for the group to disarm. In December, Syrian and British authorities foiled the terror organization's attempts to smuggle weapons into Lebanon and recruit foreign fighters, respectively. However, Hezbollah continues to resist Lebanese authorities' efforts to disarm the terror group, including by soliciting billions of dollars from the Iranian regime.

- On December 22, Israeli media [reported](#) that Hezbollah and Iranian officials are at odds after the Iranian proxy group requested \$2 billion in military aid, double what Tehran allegedly promised to send it.
- On December 16, British police [announced](#) that they had arrested two members of Hezbollah in London who had traveled to Lebanon to attend terrorist training camps.
- On December 5, U.S. Central Command [stated](#) that Syrian authorities had recently intercepted several Hezbollah weapons smuggling operations.

Russia/China Ties

Moscow and Tehran deepened their technological partnership with Iran [launching](#) three satellites into orbit upon a Russian rocket and the countries' leaders agreeing to strengthen cooperation in artificial intelligence and cybersecurity development. Meanwhile, Chinese representatives attended a meeting between Iranian and Saudi leaders while also continuing to help Tehran evade international sanctions.

- On December 28, Iran [launched](#) three satellites mounted on a Russian Soyuz rocket into Earth's orbit from Russia's Vostochny Cosmodrome.
- On December 17, Araghchi and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov [signed](#) an agreement committing the two countries to mutual consultations between 2026 and 2028 without providing public details of the agreement.
 - » The announcement came after Iranian state media [reported](#) that Iran and Russia had agreed to broaden cooperation in artificial intelligence and cybersecurity on December 6.
- On December 12, *The Wall Street Journal* [revealed](#) that U.S. forces interdicted a ship in the Indian Ocean transporting illicit goods from China to Iran in November.
- On December 12, Iran and Russia's presidents [attended](#) a rare diplomatic forum in Turkmenistan where Russian President Vladimir Putin reaffirmed his commitment to supporting Iran at the UN while also acknowledging that both countries remain in close contact regarding Iran's nuclear program.
- On December 9, Iran [hosted](#) Chinese and Saudi leaders for a third trilateral meeting since 2023 in Tehran with both Iran and Saudi Arabia reaffirming their support for diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Recent JNSA Products on Iran

- December 30: "[Webinar - Netanyahu's Summit with Trump](#)," Elliott Abrams, IDF MG (ret.) Yaakov Amidror, John Hannah, and Jonathan Ruhe
- December 26: "[The Houthis Aren't Done—Are We?](#)" *Algemeiner*, VADM Michael J. Connor, USN (ret.) and Sarah Havdala

- December 8: “[Israel-Hezbollah Escalation Tracker](#),” Ari Cicurel and Lidia Bernd
- December 2: “[The US Needs More Than Troops at a Syrian Airbase to Constrain ISIS, Iran](#),” *Defense One*, Lt Gen Thomas W. Bergeson, USAF (ret.) and Jonah Brody