

# Iran neither has nor needs proxy forces in region: *Leader*

## International Desk

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has dismissed claims that Iran has been cut off from its "proxy forces" in the region, asserting that the Islamic Republic neither has nor needs such forces to achieve its objectives. He made the remarks on Sunday during a meeting with a group of religious eulogists on the occasion of the birthday anniversary of Lady Fatima (PBUH), the be-

loved daughter of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The Leader asserted that the resistance fighters in Yemen, and groups such as Lebanon's Hezbollah, and the Palestinian Hamas and Islamic Jihad, are fighting because of their faith. "They (the enemies) consistently say that the Islamic Republic has lost its regional proxies—this is yet another mistake! The Islamic Republic does not have any proxy forces," Ayatollah Khamenei said.

Resistance fighters, he explained, "are driven by their beliefs; they fight because of their convictions, not on our behalf." He also noted that should Iran ever decide to take action, it would not require a proxy force to do so. Concerning the situation in Syria, the Leader foresaw the emergence of a "strong and honorable establishment." The United States' plot to dominate countries involves establishing a dictatorship or foment-

ing chaos and riots, with the latter being the case in Syria, he added. "The Americans, the Zionist regime, and their allies mistakenly believe they have emerged victorious, leading them to make absurd statements," he said, referencing comments from a US official that appeared to promise support for anyone inciting unrest in Iran. "The Iranian nation will trample under its strong feet anyone who assumes a mercenary role for the US in this matter."

Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei speaks in a meeting with a group of religious eulogists in Tehran, Iran, on December 22, 2024.

● khamenei.ir



## Israel's opposition leaders accuse Netanyahu of sabotaging Gaza cease-fire talks

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Political opponents of Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accused him of sabotaging negotiations to reach a captive-prisoner exchange deal with Palestinian group Hamas. Opposition leader Yair Lapid, a former prime minister and leader of the Yesh Atid party, said the Netanyahu's cabinet has imposed new conditions. "We have nothing left to achieve in Gaza; we need to start preparing for the day after the war and bring back 100 hostages," he told the public broadcaster Kan. "Once the war ends, we can return to Gaza and do what we need to do," he said. "Now, we need to stop the war and finalize a deal to bring all the hostages back." Lapid said Netanyahu, who is wanted by the International Criminal Court for alleged war crimes in Gaza, does not want to end the war, fearing that it would lead to his cabinet's collapse.

Avigdor Lieberman, a former defense minister and leader of the Yisrael Beiteinu party, also criticized Netanyahu. He told the Maariv newspaper that "the deal can be done".

### Cease-fire talks

Talks to reach a Gaza cease-fire and captive release deal between Israel and Hamas are 90% complete, but key issues remain that need to be bridged, a senior Palestinian official involved in the talks told the BBC. One of the main sticking points is the



● OLIVIER FITOUSSI/FLASH90

continued Israeli military presence in the Philadelphi corridor, a strategically important strip of land in southern Gaza along the border with Egypt. Despite efforts by international mediators, Israel continues its deadly attacks on the besieged territory. Gaza Health Ministry said on Sunday that Israeli attacks killed at least 32 Palestinians and wounded 54 others across the Gaza Strip in 24 hours. More than 45,000 Palestinians – mostly women and children – have been killed in the Israeli strikes on Gaza.

### 'Cruelty' of Israeli attacks

For the second time in as many days, Pope Francis denounced the "cruelty" of the Israeli attacks on Gaza. "And with pain I think of Gaza, of so much cruelty, of the children being machine-gunned, of the bombings of schools and hospitals. What cruelty," he said after his weekly Angelus prayer. On Saturday, the pope had referenced the bombardment of children and said: "This is cruelty. This is not war. I wanted to say this because it touches the heart."

## US launches airstrike on Yemen Yemen warns countries supporting Israel

### International Desk

The United States said it struck targets in Yemen's capital, hours after a missile attack by Yemen's Armed Forces wounded people in Israel's commercial hub Tel Aviv.

The missile, which wounded 16 people, was the second such attack in two days. Yemen's foreign minister condemned the US airstrikes in Sana'a, asserting that any nation supporting Israel's aggression shares responsibility for its atrocities. "Any country that supports the Zionist regime in any way in its aggression against Sana'a is a partner in this aggression, and must assume responsibility for the repercussions of such conduct," Jamal Ahmed Ali Amer wrote in a post on X (formerly Twitter) on Sunday.

He also warned Western countries of the disastrous consequences of their support for Israel's ongoing aggression against the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, saying they will have to pay a heavy price and must brace themselves for a strong response. "The terrified Zionist regime,

which speaks of a bank of targets inside Yemen, has demonstrated its failure and defeat by bombing facilities that have already been struck," the senior Yemeni diplomat pointed out.

The US Central Command (CENTCOM) said in a statement that among the targets of US forces was a missile storage center and a "command-and-control facility." American forces also shot down multiple Yemeni drones and an anti-ship cruise missile over the Red Sea, it said, shortly after the Al-Masirah TV channel reported that an "aggression" had targeted the Attan district of Sana'a, blaming Western forces.

American and British forces have repeatedly struck targets in Yemen this year in response to attacks by Yemeni Armed Forces on Israel-bound ships, which Yemen says are in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza.

Israel has also previously struck back, including against ports and energy facilities.

The Ansarallah resistance movement claimed responsibility for the Saturday strike on Israel, saying they direct-



● BBC

ed a ballistic missile at "a military target of the Israeli enemy".

The Israeli military said it failed to intercept the missile, forcing many residents to leave their homes in the early hours.

Yemenis have declared their open support for Palestine's struggle against the Israel since Israel launched a devastating war on Gaza on October 7, 2023, after the territory's resistance movements carried out Operation Al-Aqsa Storm against the occupying entity.

### Friendly fire

Meanwhile, two US Navy pilots were shot down over the Red Sea early Sunday in "an apparent case of friendly fire," the American military

said. Both pilots were recovered alive but "initial assessments indicate that one of the crew members sustained minor injuries," the United States Central Command said late Saturday local Florida time – where CENTCOM is headquartered.

"This incident was not the result of hostile fire, and a full investigation is underway," CENTCOM said the guided missile cruiser USS Gettysburg "mistakenly fired on and hit the F/A-18" fighter aircraft, which was flown by the Navy pilots off another ship, the USS Harry S. Truman.

The potentially disastrous mistake underscores the dangers of a mission the United States has been involved in for more than a year.

## Iran protests US arrest of its nationals on 'baseless accusations'

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Tehran formally protested the arrests of two Iranians in Italy and the United States on allegations of transferring sensitive US technology to Iran.

US prosecutors on December 16 charged Mahdi Mohammad Sadeghi and Mohammad Abedini Najafabadi with "conspiring to export sophisticated electronic components from the United States to Iran in violation of US export control and sanctions laws", according to a statement from the US Department of Justice.

The statement claimed that the exported technology was used in a January drone attack that killed three US servicemen in Jordan. Iran denied any involvement in the attack, dismissing the claims as "baseless accusations."

"We consider both the cruel and unilateral US sanctions against Iran and these arrests to be contrary to all international laws and standards," Foreign Ministry official Vahid Jalalzadeh told the Tasnim

News Agency late Saturday. Jalalzadeh said the ministry had "invited" the Italian chargé d'affaires and the Swiss ambassador to Tehran – who represents US interests in the country – to "declare its protests to the arrests".

Abedini Najafabadi, 38, was arrested on December 16 in Italy by Italian authorities at the request of the United States, the US Department of Justice said. Meanwhile, Mahdi Mohammad Sadeghi, 42, a US resident, was arrested in Massachusetts around the same time.

According to reports, the arrests of the two individuals are allegedly linked to a January 28 drone attack carried out by Iraqi armed groups against a US military outpost in Jordan known as Tower 22. The attack killed three American soldiers and injured 47 others. The FBI claims that the equipment used in the drone attack was supplied by these two individuals.

A university peer of Abedini Najafabadi said that he is an Iranian national and the CEO of Sanat Danesh Rahpooyan

Aflak (SDRA), a company in Iran specializing in precision measurement equipment.

The company's products have diverse applications, including medical and sports technologies.

Abedini Najafabadi also headed a Swiss-based company, Illumove SA, which focused on motion capture equipment manufacturing. All activities of these companies were conducted under the legal and financial oversight of the Swiss government.

The unnamed source explained that due to their advanced technology, the equipment produced by these companies has multipurpose uses. Once legally sold in Iranian markets, the products can be purchased and utilized by any individual or entity.

However, the US government has fabricated charges, claiming the equipment was used in drones involved in the aforementioned attack, leading to the arrest and prosecution of these individuals.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi  
Cartoonist

