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Brief Notes

Supreme Leader Calls for Cultural Crackdown: Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei delivered a speech yesterday, the text of which has been published today. Khamenei focused on what he described as a culture and media war against the Islamic Republic. Khamenei warned, "The enemy's objective in our country is to gradually turn people away from the [Islamic] Revolution, its goals and its memory." He called on regime supporters and institutions to recognize the adversaries' strategy and subsequently strengthen their cultural and media response.

IRGC Announces Deadly Clash in Kerman Province: The IRGC said four people were killed in a clash at a checkpoint near the city of Fahraj in Kerman Province today. The IRGC Quds Headquarters (different from the IRGC's extraterritorial branch, the Quds Force) in Kerman Province said three law enforcement officers and one civilian died during clashes with what it described as "armed elements" at the entrance of the city, located on the Zahedan–Fahraj road. Fahraj lies close to Sistan-Baluchestan Province, which has seen repeated security incidents in recent months.

Moscow Doubles Down on Strategic Alignment with Tehran

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has publicly reaffirmed Moscow's support for Tehran's nuclear program, defending what he called the "unconditional right" of the Islamic Republic to access nuclear energy as a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

In an interview aired by state broadcaster IRIB yesterday, Lavrov blamed the collapse of the 2015 nuclear deal on the U.S. withdrawal in 2018, accusing European states of "hostile and illegal actions" and describing their approach as a "stain on diplomacy." He said Russia would continue to act in support of Tehran under the two countries' strategic partnership agreement and confirmed that Moscow condemned Israeli and U.S. strikes during the 12-Day War.

The political messaging was reinforced by parallel economic coordination, as Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council Ali Larijani met Russian Deputy Prime Minister Vitaly Savelyev in Tehran yesterday to discuss accelerating the International North-South Transport Corridor.

Larijani said all executive and institutional obstacles to the project would be removed soon and that the state would acquire all required land by March 2026.

Tehran's Stance on TRIPP Draws Criticism from Baku, Yerevan

Pro-government Azerbaijani media have criticized what they described as Tehran's ambivalent and inconsistent policy toward Baku, accusing the Islamic Republic of speaking with "two voices" on regional issues after Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi's visit to Baku on December 8.

The criticism followed renewed remarks by Ali Akbar Velayati, senior advisor to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, reiterating Tehran's opposition to a U.S.-backed transit link between mainland Azerbaijan and its Naxcivan exclave via Armenia.

Armenian officials dismissed Tehran's concerns over U.S. involvement, saying the project is a commercial initiative and not extraterritorial. Deputy parliament speaker Ruben Rubinyan said Yerevan takes into account neighbors' vital interests, including those of the Islamic Republic, and stressed that Armenia's red line is the preservation of sovereignty and territorial integrity.

On the Radar

- The Islamic Republic may relocate missile sites deeper into its eastern regions to reduce exposure to Israeli and U.S. air power, according to a senior diplomat based in Tehran. Officials are reportedly also monitoring whether the regime will seek foreign assistance from Russia, China, and Pakistan to rebuild its military capabilities.
- Billboards across the Islamic Republic are calling on Hezbollah to attack the northern Israeli city of Nahariya, displaying messages such as "For the next war: Nahariya, be prepared." An IDF spokesperson described the messaging as incitement targeting a major civilian waterfront city.

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