IRANWATCH DAILY | December 10, 2025

NUFDI Launches IranWatch Podcast

NUFDI has relaunched its podcast series!

In the newly-rebranded IranWatch podcast's first episode, listen to Senior Policy Analyst Andrew Ghalili and Senior Research Analyst Khosro Isfahani unpack the myth that the Islamic Republic's enforcement of mandatory hijab enforcement is coming to an end.

Watch or listen on Youtube, Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and wherever else you get your podcasts!

Brief Notes

Four IRGC Members Killed in Sistan-Baluchestan Province Attack: Four members of the IRGC were killed in an attack carried out by what they described as "terrorist and hostile groups" in Iran's southeastern Sistan-Baluchestan Province, near the border with Pakistan. A statement from the IRGC Ground Forces' Quds Base said, the personnel were "martyred while carrying out a mission to protect the homeland's borders." A Baluch outlet has reported that armed individuals in the area targeted an IRGC vehicle convoy, killing several IRGC officers, including the IRGC's operational commander in the area. Since the 12-Day War, the province has seen an increased frequency and intensity of clashes between Islamic Republic forces and terrorist groups such as U.S.-designated Jaish al-Adl, which Tehran accuses of operating from across the border in Pakistan.

President Condemns U.S. Naval Presence, Boat Strikes Near Venezuela in Call With Maduro: President Masoud Pezeshkian condemned the increased U.S. naval presence in the Caribbean during a phone call with Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro. Pezeshkian called the moves "illegal," based on "false pretexts," and a "dangerous precedent threatening global peace and security." Pezeshkian reaffirmed Tehran's support for Venezuela "under all circumstances," while Maduro thanked the Islamic Republic for its continued backing. The two also pledged to further strengthen their strategic relations.

State Broadcasting Chief Admits Israeli F-35 Downings False, 'Damaged Credibility'

Peyman Jebeli, the head of the Islamic Republic's state broadcaster, IRIB, today admitted that the channel's reporting during the 12-Day War, which claimed the Islamic Republic had downed two Israeli F-35s, was false and "damaged [IRIB's] credibility."

He said IRIB had "simply relayed what an official military source told [us]" before later learning the information was unreliable.

Jebeli stressed that official media "should not allow their credibility to hinge on the credibility of other bodies or institutions."

Jebeli's remarks follow criticism from within parliament, including comments in November by MP Mohammad Bagheri, who accused IRIB of publishing "false news without official confirmation."

Addressing longer-term criticism, Jebeli acknowledged a decline in viewership and widespread complaints from viewers concerning biased coverage. He promised reforms under a new transformation plan, rejected allegations of political purges within the broadcaster, and reaffirmed IRIB's ideological mission of narrative control to bolster national "resilience."

Lebanese FM Rejects Invitation to Tehran, Suggests Neutral Meeting Place

Lebanon's Foreign Minister Youssef Rajji has rejected an invitation to Tehran for talks with his Islamic Republic counterpart Abbas Araghchi, suggesting instead that discussions take place in a "neutral" country.

Rajji, a staunch critic of Hezbollah and the Islamic Republic's interference in Lebanese affairs, framed the decision as upholding Lebanese sovereignty, stressing that "the building of any strong state can only be achieved if the state alone, through its national army, holds the exclusive right to bear arms and has sole authority over decisions regarding war and peace." He emphasized that his response does not equate to a refusal to engage.

The move follows a pattern of cautious engagement: Rajji previously avoided meeting Araghchi in Beirut in June but did hold a September meeting with him in Doha.

Rajji's response comes amid continued international pressure on Hezbollah to disarm, which the regime-aligned terror group claims it will refuse to do until Israeli forces withdraw from southern Lebanon.

Tehran has repeatedly rejected accusations of meddling in Lebanese affairs, insisting that Hezbollah is "free to make its own decisions" on security matters.

On the Radar

- Official state outlets largely ignored recent intra-coalition tensions among UAE-backed and Saudi-backed forces fighting against the Houthis in Yemen. While the reason for the silence from official mouthpiece's is not clear, these developments happened to coincide with Saudi Arabia's Deputy Foreign Minister Waleed al-Khareji visiting Tehran. Hardline newspaper coverage portrayed the in-fighting as the beginning of the "fate-making phase," claiming that the Saudi-backed Aden government is "on the verge of collapse," undermined by Emirati-backed Southern Transitional Council (STC) forces. A "moderate" daily newspaper argued that the tensions are part of a broader U.S.–Israeli plot to weaken "the Resistance," by "setting the area on fire…and disarming the Houthis."

- Tehran is highlighting expanded economic and transit cooperation with Minsk, with First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref calling for deeper trade ties during talks with the Belarusian Minister of Industry. State media emphasized momentum from recent high-level exchanges, including Pezeshkian's August visit to Minsk and cooperation within forums such as the SCO and the Eurasian Economic Union framework. Separate discussions focused on transit, with officials promoting Belarusian access to southern ports, the Aprin dry port, and the greater integration into the International North–South Transport Corridor.

- Parliamentarians from both Tehran and Moscow held talks in Moscow to underscore the "strategic and long-term" nature of bilateral ties under the two nations' comprehensive cooperation framework. Regime officials described Russia as a "friend and ally," stressing that relations are "not temporary or tactical." Russian lawmakers cast the West as a shared "main enemy" and promoted projects such as the North–South Transport Corridor as a way to "nullify" Western restrictions.

- The IRGC says it has carried out cloud-seeding operations in drought-hit areas, including the Lake Urmia basin, Yazd Province, and parts of northwestern Iran. Officials said "highly skilled" military pilots conducted multiple sorties over the past 48 hours with "satisfactory results," prioritizing regions facing acute water stress.

- Public criticism of the IRGC's economic footprint surfaced after an MP accused a senior commander of praising a carmaker run by "mafia and corrupt gangs," highlighting alleged links between the force and the automotive sector. IRGC-affiliated media pushed back forcefully, dismissing the claim as "pure lies" and accusing the MP of trying to defame both the commander and the organization.

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