



Spotlight on Iran and the Shiite Axis.

August 21-28, 2024

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Highlights¹

- ▶ The new Iranian foreign minister, Abbas Araghchi, spoke with a senior Hamas figure and stressed that Iran would support any agreement to end the war in the Gaza Strip that would be acceptable to the Palestinians and the “resistance.”
- ▶ Senior Iranian officials once again threatened to retaliate for the killing of Ismail Haniyeh, the head of Hamas’ political bureau, in Tehran. However, they stressed that Iran would respond in a time and manner that would not disrupt the talks to achieve a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. The Iranian chief of staff noted that Iran would decide how to respond on its own, and that the “axis of resistance” would operate separately and independently. Foreign Minister Araghchi also discussed the possible response with his counterparts in the region and in Europe.
- ▶ Qatar’s prime minister and foreign minister visited Tehran and met with President Pezeshkian and Foreign Minister Araghchi. During his visit, the sides discussed regional developments and efforts to reach a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip.
 - ◀ Iran praised Hezbollah's retaliation for the killing of Fuad Shukr in Beirut. The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman described Hezbollah's action as a clear indication of a shift in the strategic balance, now working against Israel.
 - ◀ The Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed responsibility for two drone attacks against “vital targets” in Haifa. The claims have not been verified. The pro-Iranian militias are preparing to escalate their attacks against Israel as well as against American bases in the region.

¹ The weekly study includes the activities of Iran, the Shiite militias in Syria and Iraq, and the Houthis in Yemen.

►The Houthis claimed responsibility for attacking two vessels in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. A Greek oil tanker caught fire following the attack and began leaking oil. All crew members were evacuated safely.

►Houthi sources reported that the preparation of the target bank for the expected attack against Israel due to the attack against the port of al-Hudaydah had been completed and that the Houthis were also expected to participate in the responses of the “axis of resistance” to the killing of Haniyeh and Shukr.

Iranian involvement in the Palestinian arena

►On August 27, 2024, the new Iranian foreign minister, Abbas Araghchi, spoke with senior Hamas official Khalil al-Haya to discuss the situation in the Gaza Strip and negotiations for a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. Araghchi praised the steadfastness of the residents of the Gaza Strip and the “resistance fighters,” stressing that Iran would support any agreement that would end the war in the Gaza Strip, acceptable to the Palestinian people and the “resistance groups” (Tasnim, August 28, 2024).

►Amir Saeed Iravani, Iran’s ambassador to the UN, said that the response to the killing of Ismail Haniyeh, the head of Hamas’ political bureau, would be carried out at the most surprising time for Israel. According to Iravani, it is possible that when the eyes of the “Zionist regime” are on the sky and radar screens, they will be surprised from the ground or from a combination of the two. According to him, the Iranian response should achieve two goals: punish Israel for violating Iran’s sovereignty and strengthen its deterrent power to prevent similar aggression in the future. He stressed that Iran had to respond in a way that would not adversely affect the possibility of achieving a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip (ISNA, August 21, 2024).

►Abolfazl Zahravand, a member of the Majles National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, said Iran’s retaliation for the killing of Haniyeh was certain and was on its agenda in accordance with the Supreme Leader’s instructions. He noted, however, that there might be tactical adjustments to the timing of the response to maximize the effectiveness of the retaliation. Zahravand also highlighted the psychological, social, and economic damage inflicted on Israel while it was waiting for Iran’s response (SNN, August 22, 2024).

►Mohammad Bagheri, chief of staff of the Iranian armed forces, said at the inauguration ceremony of the new defense minister, Aziz Nasirzadeh, that revenge by the “axis of resistance” and Iran for the killing of Haniyeh was certain. He said Iran would decide on revenge itself and

the “axis of resistance” would operate separately and independently, just as Hezbollah had retaliated against Israel² (Tasnim, August 26, 2024).



Iranian Chief of Staff Bagheri (Tasnim, August 26, 2024)

- ▶ Iranian Ambassador to Lebanon Mojtaba Amani noted that Iran’s retaliation for the killing of Haniyeh in Tehran was certain and that its date was to be decided by the Iranian armed forces (al-Alam, August 27, 2024).
- ▶ In a commentary article, the Iranian news website Khabar Online, which is affiliated with the pragmatic wing of the conservative camp, discussed the delay in Iran’s retaliation for Ismail Haniyeh’s assassination in Tehran, outlining six main reasons for the postponement: the need to assess the intelligence breach that enabled the assassination; ongoing negotiations for a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip; the Arbaeen ceremonies³; the necessity for precise planning of an attack on Israeli military and security targets that would enhance Iranian deterrence, as opposed to the attack on Israel on April 13, 2024, without causing civilian casualties; the American military presence in the region; and the need to choose a target that would fulfill Iran’s dual objectives of punishing Israel and strengthening Iranian deterrence (Khabar Online, August 24, 2024).
- ▶ The Iranian Diplomacy website, which is affiliated with the pragmatic wing of the conservative camp, referred to “Iran’s tactical withdrawal” in the context of its retaliation to Israel following Haniyeh’s killing. In a commentary article, the website provided three main reasons for the delay in the Iranian retaliation: the change of government in Tehran and the

² For further information, see the ITIC’s study from August 27, 2024, “[Reactions to Hezbollah’s Attack in Retaliation for the Killing of Fuad Shukur](#)”

³ Arbaeen: A day of mourning for the Shiites to mark forty days since the death of Imam Hussein bin Ali and many other members of Ali bin Abi Talib’s family in the Battle of Karbala in 61 Hijra (680 CE). On this day, it is customary to make a pilgrimage to the tomb of Imam Hussein in Karbala.

establishment of a new government; the need to maintain the safety of pilgrims during the Arbaeen ceremonies and ensure their ability to fly to Iraq to perform the ceremonies; and Iran's diplomatic superiority, which is reflected in the intensive international diplomatic activity to prevent Iran from retaliating against Israel that can be used by Iran to change the conditions in its favor (Iranian Diplomacy website, August 24, 2024).

► Muhammad Reza Falahzadeh, deputy commander of the Qods Force, said Operation al-Aqsa Flood had caused heavy damage to the “Zionist regime” and that the “resistance” had not allowed it to occupy the Gaza Strip, eliminate the “resistance,” and change the Middle East. He said the “enemy” could not guarantee its victory through assassinations, and that the “resistance” was growing stronger day by day and Islam would take over the world's key strongholds (snn.ir, August 22, 2024)



The deputy commander of the Qods Force (snn.ir, August 22, 2024)

► The new Iranian foreign minister, Abbas Araghchi, spoke with EU Foreign Minister Josep Borrell and German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock to discuss regional developments, including the war in the Gaza Strip (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, August 22, 2024). Araghchi also spoke with the foreign ministers of the United Kingdom and France. Araghchi said in his conversation with French Foreign Minister Stéphane Séjourné that Iran had the right to respond to the killing of Haniyeh in Tehran, which was a violation of its security and sovereignty. In a conversation with British Foreign Secretary David Lammy, the Iranian foreign minister said that Iran was not interested in expanding the war and increasing regional tensions (Tasnim, August 23, 2024). Speaking to journalists, Araghchi said that in his talks with his counterparts in France, Britain, and Germany, he had stressed that the “Zionist terrorist attack” that led to Haniyeh's killing would not go unanswered and that Iran would respond at the right time and in the right way, in a “precise, calculated and managed” manner while taking into account all the various aspects (Mehr, August 24, 2024).

►On August 24, 2024, Araghchi spoke with his Egyptian counterpart, Badr Abdelatty, about regional developments and efforts for a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. The Iranian foreign minister stressed Iran’s right to respond to Haniyeh’s killing in Tehran (Mehr, August 24, 2024). He also discussed regional and Palestinian developments in his conversation with Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan (ISNA, August 25, 2024).

►In an interview given to Iranian TV, Foreign Minister Araghchi discussed the foreign policy of the new government in Tehran, stressing that the “resistance front” would receive Iran’s support under all circumstances and that this was Iran’s fundamental policy. According to Araghchi, Iran’s support for all the “resistance” groups is a fixed principle that does not change (Tasnim, August 23, 2024).



Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (Tasnim, August 23, 2024)

►Araghchi told reporters that just as Iran succeeded in punishing the “Zionist regime” and avoiding expanding the war in the region with an attack against Israel in April 2024, so too will it be following the killing of Haniyeh in Tehran. He said diplomacy and the battlefield complemented each other, and that Iran would act in a way that would realize its national interests, security, and national honor (ISNA, August 24, 2024).

►On August 26, 2024, Qatar’s Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammad bin Abdulrahman Al Thani arrived in Tehran and met with Iran’s President Masoud Pezeshkian and Foreign Minister Araghchi. The foreign ministers of the two countries discussed the latest developments in the region and the Gaza Strip and efforts to reach a ceasefire. Araghchi said Iran would support any agreement accepted by the Palestinian “resistance” and Hamas (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, August 26, 2024). President Pezeshkian said in his meeting with the Qatari senior official that Islamic countries and other countries committed to

international law had to take joint action to force supporters of the “Zionist regime” to stop its crimes and the “genocide” in the Gaza Strip (Iranian president’s website, August 26, 2024).



The Iranian president meets with the prime minister of Qatar (Fars, August 26, 2024)

Iranian involvement in Lebanon and Syria

- ▶The Iranian Nour News Agency, affiliated with the Supreme National Security Council, referred to Hezbollah’s response against Israel following the killing of the organization’s military commander, Fuad Shukr. According to the statement, the al-Aqsa Flood proved that a security surprise is the main weakness of the Israeli regime and that the success of Hezbollah’s operation was made possible thanks to the renewed surprise of the “Zionists,” and this pattern of operation is expected to continue (Nour News X account, August 25, 2024).
- ▶Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani praised Hezbollah's response. He said that it demonstrated a fundamental shift in the strategic balance, now to Israel's detriment, that the myth of the invincible Israeli army had become a hollow slogan, and that the “Israeli terrorist army” had lost its effective offensive power. Kanani added that the “resistance” attacks had been extended deep into the “occupied territories,” Israel was required to defend itself from within, and despite the support of its allies, including the United States, it had lost its ability to predict the time and location, even of a limited and planned “resistance” operation (Nasser Kanani’s X account, August 26, 2024).
- ▶Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi spoke with his Syrian counterpart, Faisal Mekdad, who congratulated him on taking office and stressed the importance of strengthening the strategic ties between the two countries. Araghchi thanked Mekdad and stressed Iran’s support for Syria and countries supporting the “resistance against the Zionist regime.” According to a statement issued by the Iranian Foreign Ministry, the two stressed the need for

continued consultations and coordination between the countries to strengthen bilateral relations in various fields, confront the “crimes of the Zionist regime,” and support “Palestine.” The foreign ministers invited each other for reciprocal visits to Tehran and Damascus. Araghchi also spoke with Lebanese Foreign Minister Abdallah Bou Habib and discussed relations between the two countries and recent regional developments. Araghchi stressed the new Iranian government’s support for the government and “resistance” in Lebanon (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, August 23, 2024).

►The IRGC reportedly temporarily appointed Haj Seyyed Hosseini in charge of security and military affairs in the Albukamal region following the departure of the permanent commander, Haj Askar, and Haj Fajr al-Din on vacation in Iran to supervise the recruitment camps of IRGC members. It was also reported that the IRGC had recently issued updated instructions regarding the movement of IRGC commanders and operatives between Syria and Iran. According to these instructions, travel from Syria to Iran will be carried out through the international airport in Baghdad instead of through the airports in Damascus and Aleppo. The crossing between Syria and Iraq will be carried out through the Albukamal-al-Qaim land crossing, and from there by buses to Iraq. Travel to the other provinces in Syria will be carried out by buses intended for pilgrims to Shiite holy sites. These instructions are intended to increase the level of security of IRGC personnel during their movement to and from Syria (Ayn al-Furat, August 22-23, 2024).

Activities of the Shiite militias

Iraq

Claims of responsibility of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq

- ◀ The Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed responsibility for two drone attacks against Israel:
- August 27, 2024: Against a “vital target” in Haifa (Islamic Resistance in Iraq Telegram channel, August 27, 2024). The claim has not been verified.
- August 25, 2024: Against a “vital target” in Haifa. A video of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq documenting the launch, which took place on August 24, 2024, showed for the first time a map that allegedly showed the drone’s route from the al-Anbar Governorate in western Iraq towards the target in Haifa, marked on Mount Carmel (Islamic Resistance in Iraq Telegram channel, August 25, 2024). The claim has not been verified.



Right: The alleged launch zone in the al-Anbar Governorate in western Iraq. Left: The drone before the launch (Islamic Resistance in Iraq Telegram channel, August 25, 2024)

The militias prepare for escalation

- ▶ “A source in the Iraqi Resistance Coordination Committee” said the Committee had convened to coordinate positions on “recent events in the region.” According to the source, most of the participants agreed to end the truce with the United States and renew the attacks against American bases in the region. It was also reported that the “resistance” would engage in precise military planning to carry out “powerful attacks” against the Americans (al-Akhbar, August 27, 2024).
- ▶ According to a “source close to the Iraqi militias,” the militias in Iraq are an important part of the “axis of resistance,” but they depend on coordination at the highest level regarding the decision to carry out direct attacks, whether against American or “Zionist” targets, in accordance with a fixed principle in dealing with the “aggression” that harms Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and other Palestinian cities. The source added that the militias also reserved the right to respond to US strikes and that there was no ceasefire with “treacherous force,” but that the time and place of the response would be subject to specific conditions that would determine when it would take place. The source also noted that “five Iraqi forces,” whose identities were not disclosed, asked the militias to hold a temporary ceasefire due to the complex circumstances in the region, but the militias attacked “targets deep inside the occupying country” (Baghdad Today, August 25, 2024).
- ▶ On August 25, 2024, the Ashab al-Kahf militia announced that with the end of Arbaeen Day, it had been decided to resume military operations against the “terrorist Zionist enemy” as part of the “support front” for the Gaza Strip (Ashab al-Kahf Telegram channel, August 25, 2024).
- ▶ According to a “knowledgeable source,” the American forces at the Ain al-Assad airbase in western Iraq and the Harir airbase in northern Iraq raised the alert level to the maximum

following Hezbollah's retaliation attack on Israel, in the expectation that the Iraqi militias might also operate (Baghdad Today, August 25, 2024). According to another report, a "source" said that the US had reinforced its military base in the al-Omar oil field in Syria. According to the source, the US transported 15 ammunition trucks and five military vehicles to the base, and an American cargo plane with thirty American soldiers landed at Kharab al-Jir Airport in the Damascus region (Sputnik in Arabic, August 27, 2024).

► "Iraqi sources" reported that Iran had ordered militias loyal to it in Iraq not to attack American bases in the country and to concentrate on attacks against Israel, to prevent American counterattacks that could lead Iraq to deterioration into a regional war. In addition, the "sources" claimed that Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia' al-Sudani had worked to persuade the Americans not to respond to the attack on the Ain al-Assad base and also worked with the Iranians to convince the militias to stop the attacks against the American bases (1news-iq.com, August 22, 2024).

► Kadhim al-Fartousi, spokesman for the Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada militia, warned that if diplomatic efforts to end the American presence in Iraq failed, the militias would resume their activities to "liberate Iraqi lands." In addition, Haidar al-Lami, a member of the Nujaba Movement's political bureau, said "all options are open to attack all American bases within Iraq" (Asharq al-Awsat, August 21, 2024).

► Kata'ib Hezbollah spokesman Abu Ali al-Askari accused the United States and the United Kingdom of their "involvement in their unlimited military and political support in the war of genocide waged by the Zionist entity against the Palestinian people." Regarding Iraq, he added that "if the Iraqi government does not punish the US ambassador of evil in Baghdad, we will punish her in other ways," stressing that "we have no obligation to halt operations against American occupation forces in Iraq" (Abu Ali al-Askari's Telegram channel, August 21, 2024).

Yemen

Houthi military activity

► On August 22, 2024, Houthi armed forces spokesman Yahya Saria reported two attacks against vessels using UAVs, unmanned surface vehicles (USVs), ballistic missiles, and cruise missiles (Yahya Saria's X account, August 22, 2024):

- ◆ Against the oil tanker Sounion while it was sailing in the Red Sea. According to Saria, the hit was precise, leaving the tanker at risk of sinking. In addition, a video was released

allegedly documenting the attack on the tanker (Yahya Saria's X account, August 23, 2024).

◆ Against the ship North Wind 1 while it was sailing in the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea. According to Saria, the hit was precise (Yahya Saria's X account, August 23, 2024). The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) agency reported that the ship had been attacked by Houthi forces in the Gulf of Aden. According to its statement, the crew reported several explosions near the ship, followed by a USV attack that caused minor damage. The crew reported that the vessel was continuing on its way to its destination (UKMTO X account, August 21-23, 2024).



The alleged documentation of the Houthi attack on the Sounion tanker (the Houthi armed forces' media arm X account, August 23, 2024)

► On August 22, 2024, the European Union Red Sea Task Force (EUNAVFOR Aspides) reported that it had sent a ship to assist the Greek-flagged tanker MV Sounion after it was attacked on August 21, 2024, and its engine stopped working while in international waters in the southern Red Sea. The aid ship destroyed a threatening Houthi USV and evacuated the entire crew to Djibouti (Operation EUNAVFOR Aspides X account, August 22, 2024). The task force also said that on August 23, 2024, a fire broke out in a tanker carrying 150,000 tons of crude oil and that the tanker posed “a significant environmental threat that could lead to an ecological disaster with potentially devastating effects on biodiversity in the region” (Operation EUNAVFOR Aspides X account, August 24, 2024). On August 27, 2024, the US Department of Defense reported that the tanker was still stuck in the Red Sea, where it was on fire and there was an oil spill (US Department of Defense website, August 27, 2024).

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**Right: Rescue of the tanker’s crew (Operation EUNAVFOR Aspides X account, August 22, 2024).
Left: Documentation of the fires on board the tanker (Operation EUNAVFOR Aspides X account, August 26, 2024)**

►The US Central Command (CENTCOM) reported that during the past week, its forces had intercepted two drones over the Red Sea. In addition, CENTCOM forces destroyed a UAV, a surface-to-air missile, a missile system, and a radar station in airstrikes carried out in Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen (CENTCOM X account, August 21-28, 2024).

Houthi preparations for an attack against Israel

►Houthi sources in Sana’a confirmed that the process of marking strategic targets deep in Israel had been completed in preparation for the response to the Israeli attack on the port of al-Hudaydah on July 20, 2024.⁴ The “sources” noted that the response to the Israeli attack would be from Yemen, but that the Houthis also continued to coordinate with the other members of the “axis of resistance” the “joint response” to the killing of Ismail Haniyeh, the head of Hamas’ political bureau, in Tehran and the killing of Hezbollah’s military commander Fuad Shukr in Beirut. According to the “sources,” the Houthi drone attack in Tel Aviv on July 19, 2024, was the only one so far in the “fifth phase” of the escalation, and “the capabilities of the Houthi forces in the fifth phase are completely different from the previous stages, especially with regard to drones, ballistic missiles, and cruise missiles with new ranges.” The report also quoted “informed military sources” as saying that the Houthis discussed with the “axis of resistance” the damage to Israeli natural gas rigs in the Mediterranean, the supply of oil and fuel tanks at the ports of Ashdod, Haifa, and other areas, and that there was a possibility of joint action between the Houthis and the Islamic Resistance in Iraq (al-Akhbar, August 28, 2024).

►On August 25, 2024, senior Houthi military officials convened a meeting in Sana’a, during which Yemeni Defense Minister Mohammad al-Atifi declared that the Yemeni armed forces

⁴ For further information, see the ITIC’s study from July 24, 2024, “[Escalation of the Confrontation Between Israel and the Houthis – Background and Significance](#)”

were on the highest level of alert to inflict “painful blows” deep inside the “Zionist entity.” He added that the “Zionist entity” would pay a heavy price for the continued violation of Yemen’s sovereignty and the attack on al-Hudaydah. According to al-Atifi, the target bank includes “the most important points in enemy territory” and was defined “with maximum precision and underwent deep intelligence analysis.” According to him, the Houthis’ missile systems, drones, and navy possess capabilities that enable them to carry out “precise” operations (Houthi armed forces’ media arm X account, August 25, 2024).

► On August 23, 2024, the leader of the Houthi movement in Yemen, Abd al-Malik al-Houthi, delivered his weekly speech, in which he stressed the psychological effects of the delay in implementing the Houthi response to the Israeli attack on the port of al-Hudaydah and the retaliatory attacks carried out by Hezbollah and Iran in response to the assassinations attributed to Israel. According to al-Houthi, one of the reasons for the delay in these attacks is the planning process, but he noted that the delay also creates “anxiety” among the Israeli population, which expects “the inevitable response” (al-Masirah, August 23, 2024).