



Spotlight on Iran and the Shiite Axis

September 4—11, 2024

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Highlights¹

- ▶ Amid the ongoing delay in Iran's response to the killing of Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, senior Iranian military officials have stepped up their statements concerning Iran's commitment to retaliate against Israel at the appropriate time, albeit with different characteristics than the Iranian attack on Israel in April 2024.
- ▶ The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman referred to the IDF's activity in Judea and Samaria and accused Israel of a "scorched-earth policy."
- ▶ The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman condemned the attacks attributed to Israel against a weapons development center in Syria and denied that the site was linked to Iran.
- ▶ The IRGC commander claimed that Iran had attacked 12 Israeli vessels in recent years in response to 14 Israeli attacks on Iranian vessels in the Red Sea and the Mediterranean.
- ▶ The Iranian president went on a visit to Iraq. This is his first visit outside Iran since he was elected.
- ▶ Kata'ib Hezbollah in Iraq and the Houthis in Yemen praised the shooting attack at the Allenby crossing.
- ▶ A senior official from the Islamic Resistance in Iraq questioned the announcement of an agreement concerning the withdrawal of American forces from the country.
- ▶ The Houthis announced they had intercepted two American drones in the past week. The Houthi leader reiterated that a response against Israel was imminent and emphasized that support for the Palestinians would continue afterward.

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

Iran's retaliation for the killing of Ismail Haniyeh

►Ali Abdollahi, the Iranian deputy chief of staff for coordination, said Iran's retaliation for the killing of Ismail Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau, was certain and absolute, but its date had not yet been determined. He said Israel had to bury the thought that Iran would not retaliate for its crimes (Fars, September 4, 2024).



Iranian deputy chief of staff (Fars, September 4, 2024)

►IRGC commander Hossein Salami said Iran's revenge for the killing of Haniyeh would be different this time. He noted that the looming threat of Iran's response haunts the "Zionist enemy" day and night, warning that Israel will experience Iranian revenge and learn the lesson that it can no longer challenge Iran (Nur News, September 9, 2024).

►Saeed Farajian Zadeh, deputy for coordination to the Supreme Leader's representative in the Revolutionary Guards, said Iran would respond to Haniyeh's killing at the appropriate time, with precision and careful calculation. The senior Iranian official also said the "resistance front" of Hamas, Ansarullah in Yemen (the Houthis), and Hezbollah in Lebanon had learned resilience and steadfastness from Iran. As a result, he asserted, Israel had already tasted defeat, and this would eventually lead to the final victory over Israel and its allies (Mehr, September 3, 2024).



The deputy representative of the Supreme Leader in the IRGC (Mehr, September 3, 2024)

- ▶ Mohammad Jaafar Asadi, head of the inspection division at the central headquarters of the Iranian armed forces, said that Iranian leader Ali Khamenei’s call for avenging Ismail Haniyeh’s blood was obligatory and would certainly be executed at the appropriate time with precision. He emphasized that the nature of the response should allow Iran to achieve its objectives concerning “Zionist crimes,” avenge Haniyeh’s blood, and inflict the greatest blow on the “Zionist criminals” (Defa Fars, September 4, 2024).
- ▶ Mohammad-Reza Naqdi, head of the IRGC’s coordination division, said revenge for Haniyeh’s killing was certain and there was no doubt about it. However, he stressed that it had to be carried out at the appropriate time so that its impact would be greater (Khabar Online, September 7, 2024).
- ▶ Iran’s ambassador to Iraq, Mohammad Kazem Al-e Sadeq, said the Iranian response was inevitable, as a guest of Tehran had been killed on its soil, demanding revenge. He noted that the response would come at a time and place determined by Iranian commanders and would differ from the previous Iranian retaliation in April 2024 (al-Rashid TV, September 7, 2024).



Iran’s ambassador to Iraq in an interview with al-Rashid TV (September 7, 2024)

The maritime arena between Iran and Israel

►During a visit by the Iranian president to the Khatam al-Anbiya Construction Command (the IRGC’s economic arm), IRGC commander Hossein Salami referred to the maritime arena between Iran and Israel in recent years. He noted that when Iran realized who was behind 14 covert attacks against Iranian vessels in the Red Sea and the Mediterranean intended to stop its oil exports, it responded by attacking 12 Israeli vessels in the northern Indian Ocean and elsewhere. According to him, these attacks forced Israel to cease its attacks (ISNA, September 7, 2024).

Iranian involvement in the Palestinian arena

►Mohammad Jaafar Asadi, head of the inspection division at the central headquarters of the Iranian armed forces, said that the “Zionist regime” was committing crimes against the Palestinian people with the approval of the United States and that the Palestinians were stronger today than in the past and had support all over the world (Defa Fars, September 4, 2024).



Mohammad Jaafar Asadi (Defa Fars, September 4, 2024)

►Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani accused Israel of employing a “scorched-earth policy” in Judea and Samaria. Referring to reports of the IDF’s withdrawal from Jenin and Tulkarm at the end of its operations in these cities, Kanani claimed the destruction of municipal infrastructure and services in the Gaza Strip, as well as in Jenin and Tulkarm, indicated that “the Israeli regime is frustrated by its failure to defeat the resistance and the Palestinian people, and is now pursuing a scorched-earth strategy.” He called on the international community to intervene and prevent “a recurrence of war crimes in the West Bank by the Israeli regime” (Nasser Kanani’s X account, September 7, 2024).

Iranian involvement in Lebanon and Syria

►The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman strongly condemned the attacks attributed to Israel in Syria on the night of September 9-10, 2024, claiming that they proved that Israel’s “crimes” were not directed solely against the Gaza Strip and knew no bounds. He stressed that there was no basis for reports that Israel had attacked Iranian-linked centers in Syria. He noted that supporters of Israel should stop their military aid and the UN should take significant steps against Israel (al-Alam, September 9, 2024).

►On September 5, 2024, Tehran and Damascus signed a Twin Cities Agreement. The agreement, signed in the presence of the mayor of Tehran and the governor of the Damascus Governorate, focuses on cooperation in various fields, including transportation, municipal waste recycling, automation, and electronic systems (al-Watan, September 5, 2024). During his visit to Damascus, Tehran Mayor Ali-Reza Zakani met with Syrian Economy and Foreign Trade Minister Mohammad Samer al-Khalil to discuss enhancing economic and trade cooperation between the two sides (SANA, September 4, 2024).



The mayor of Tehran meets with the Syrian minister of economy (SANA, September 4, 2024)

Iranian involvement in Iraq and Yemen

►On September 11, 2024, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian went on a visit to Iraq. This is his first visit outside Iran since he was elected on July 5, 2024. After landing, he visited the monument in memory of Qods Force commander Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the deputy chairman of the Popular Mobilization and commander of the pro-Iranian Kata’ib Hezbollah militia, who were killed in a US airstrike near the Baghdad airport in January 2020. During his visit, the Iranian president is expected to meet with senior Iraqi government

officials and sign cooperation agreements between the two countries (ISNA, September 11, 2024).



Pezeshkian received by the Iraqi prime minister upon arrival (al-Alam TV, September 11, 2024)

- ▶ Iranian Ambassador to Iraq Mohammad Kazem Al-e Sadeq said Iran did not need agents in Iraq because the “resistance” organizations had the freedom and independence to act on their own.
- ▶ On September 7, 2024, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi spoke with Jamal Amer, minister of foreign affairs and immigration in Yemen’s Houthi government, to discuss bilateral issues and developments in the region. Araghchi praised the positions of the Yemeni government and people on the “war crimes of the Zionist regime.” Amer noted that the escalation of the confrontation with the United States and Britain would not change the Houthis’ position in supporting the Palestinian people (Iranian Foreign Ministry website and al-Masirah, September 7, 2024).

Activities of the Shiite militias

Iraq

Praise for the attack at the Allenby crossing

- ▶ Kata’ib Hezbollah praised the shooting attack in which a Jordanian terrorist killed three Israeli workers at the Allenby crossing on September 8, 2024. In its announcement, the militia congratulated the “jihad fighters of the axis of truth” (the “axis of resistance”) for the “courageous operation of the Islamic Resistance in Jordan.” It was also noted that the attack stressed that “the support of the free peoples of the region for the oppressed Palestinian people has not ceased” (Kaf Telegram channel, September 8, 2024).

The presence of US forces in Iraq

► On the night of September 10, 2024, an explosion was reported at an International Coalition compound at Baghdad International Airport. “Security sources” reported that two rockets fell near US forces stationed at Camp Victory near the airport and that there were no casualties, but damage was caused (Reuters, September 11, 2024). The head of Iraq’s security information department, Tahsin al-Khafaji, confirmed the explosion in the advisers’ area but noted that the Iraqi security forces had not been able to determine its nature and the reasons that caused it. It was also reported that the security and intelligence units were working to determine the circumstances of the incident (Tahsin al-Khafaji’s X account, September 11, 2024). Kata’ib Hezbollah spokesman Ja’far al-Husseini said that “suspicious hands” were behind the attack, which, he claimed, was intended to disrupt the Iranian president’s visit to Baghdad. He called on the security services to reveal the identities of those involved (Kaf Telegram channel, September 11, 2024).

► Iraqi Defense Minister Thabet Mohammad al-Abbasi reported that the joint US-Iraq Supreme Military Committee had reached an agreement on the withdrawal of the International Coalition forces from Iraq over the next two years and on the transition of relations between the countries to a stable security partnership. Al-Abbasi noted that it had been agreed to end the coalition’s mission in two stages, with the first phase beginning this year until 2025 and the second phase ending in 2026 (al-Arabiya, September 8, 2024). “Sources” noted that according to the understandings that were formulated, which still require the approval of the US and Iraqi administrations, hundreds of soldiers are supposed to leave Iraq by September 2025 and the rest will leave by the end of 2026 (Reuters, September 6, 2024). Pentagon Press Secretary Maj. Gen. Patrick Ryder noted that there are still no updates on the matter and that talks with Iraq are ongoing (US Department of Defense website, September 10, 2024).

► Ali al-Ta’i, a senior figure in the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, said he did not believe reports about the Americans’ intention to withdraw from Iraq. He added that the statements about the approaching date of the withdrawal of the international coalition forces were a complete lie on the part of the United States since the United States would not withdraw as long as it had interests, including support for Israel. He stressed that the militias would not give up their position opposing the American “occupation.” He also quoted a senior Kata’ib Hezbollah official as saying that US Ambassador to Iraq Alina Romanowski had met with several senior Iraqi officials and made it clear to them that the withdrawal that the Iraqi government is talking

about is different from the one the Americans are talking about (raad_arabi X account, September 9, 2024).

Attack on a truck carrying weapons on the Syria-Iraq border

► On September 5, 2024, it was reported that a UAV attacked a refrigerated truck carrying weapons for the pro-Iranian militias near the militias' military headquarters in Albukamal in eastern Syria, on the border with Iraq. According to the report, a Syrian civilian working for the militias, a man who was not Syrian, and a child were killed in the attack (Euphrates Post, September 5, 2024; al-Hadath, September 6, 2024).” Sources” reported that after the attack, the militias raised the alert level in the Albukamal area (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, September 6, 2024).

Yemen

Houthi military activity

► Over the past week, Houthi armed forces spokesman Yahya Saria reported that Houthi forces had shot down two American MQ-9 drones in Yemeni airspace, over Houthi-controlled territory. On September 7, 2024, a drone was shot down over the Marib Governorate. On September 9, 2024, the second drone was shot down over the Saada Governorate. Saria said that since the war in the Gaza Strip began in October 2023, nine American MQ-9 drones had been shot down (Yahya Saria's X account, September 4-11, 2024).

► The US Central Command (CENTCOM) reported that over the past week, its forces destroyed eight drones, six missile systems, and two support vehicles in attacks carried out in Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen. The forces also intercepted a Houthi drone over the Red Sea (CENTCOM X account, September 4-11, 2024).

Statements by senior Houthi officials

► On September 5, 2024, Abd al-Malik al-Houthi, the leader of the Houthi movement in Yemen, delivered his weekly speech, in which he stressed that the Houthis continue to prepare to retaliate against Israel for the attack on the port of al-Hudaydah on July 20, 2024. He made it clear that even after carrying out their response, the Houthis would continue their activities against Israel and would not abandon the Palestinians. He also threatened that “our enemies will be surprised on the ground as they were surprised at sea” (al-Masirah, September 6, 2024).

► At a meeting held at the Houthi Defense Ministry on September 7, 2024, Houthi Defense Minister Mohamed al-Atifi said the “strong” response against Israel was coming “without hesitation or concern.” He added that the Houthis would continue to develop their military

capabilities, both in quantity and quality (Houthi forces' media arm X account, September 7, 2024).

►The Houthis' political bureau issued a statement praising the attack at the Allenby crossing. According to the announcement, the operation demonstrates the courage that accompanies the Palestinian cause and its fighters, and stresses that “the Zionist enemy is likely to experience difficult days as long as it continues its aggression and crimes against the Palestinian people” (al-Masirah X account, September 8, 2024).

►During the past week, Hezam al-Asad, a member of the Houthi political bureau, issued several posts in Hebrew. They read, “Congratulations to the hands ... the East Bank supports the West Bank and Gaza;” “That’s why we say: There is no security for the Zionists on our land, they must return to their countries of origin, and whoever lost his way – the United States will welcome him. The land of Palestine belongs to its people and will remain so” (Hezam al-Asad’s X account, September 8, 2024).