



# Spotlight on Iran and the Shiite Axis

November 13—20, 2024

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## Highlights<sup>1</sup>

- ▶ This week, senior Iranian officials resumed their threats to retaliate for the Israeli attack on Iran on October 26, 2024. They stressed that Iran is committed to taking revenge on Israel and would do so at the time and in the manner it saw fit.
- ▶ High-level reciprocal visits between Iran and Syria: Ali Larijani, advisor to the Supreme Leader of Iran, visited Syria and Lebanon and met with senior government officials in Damascus and Beirut. The Iranian defense minister also visited Syria and met with senior government officials, headed by President Assad. The Syrian foreign minister also visited Tehran and met with his Iranian counterpart.
- ▶ It was reported that Iran had informed Hezbollah of its commitment to rebuild southern Lebanon, the Dahiyeh in Beirut, and the destruction caused in the Beqaa Valley after the war. The IRGC deputy commander and the Iranian foreign minister emphasized Iran's continued commitment to supporting Hezbollah and the “resistance front” in the region.
- ▶ The Islamic Resistance in Iraq issued 17 statements claiming responsibility for drone attacks against targets in Israel. The Saraya Awliya al-Dam militia claimed responsibility for four more attacks.
- ▶ The IDF Spokesperson announced the interception of at least five drones, some of them in Syrian territory. Israel reportedly conveyed a message to the Iraqi government that if militia attacks did not stop, it would attack Iraq. “Elements” in the militias threatened to respond by expanding attacks against Israel if it acted against them, and the Iraqi government claimed that it was working to prevent the use of Iraqi territory to carry out attacks.

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

- ▶ The pro-Iranian militias continued their attacks against American bases in Syria. US forces in Syria were reportedly reinforced in preparation for the entry of the Trump administration.
- ▶ The Houthis claimed responsibility for two drone attacks against Israel. The IDF Spokesperson said drones were intercepted, and there were no casualties.
- ▶ The Houthis claimed responsibility for an attack on a ship in the Red Sea and continued their threats to act against American aircraft carriers and warships in the Red Sea. A senior Pentagon official acknowledged that Houthi military capabilities “are getting scary.”

## Iranian threats against Israel

▶ Senior Iranian regime officials resumed their threats that Tehran would respond to the Israeli attack on Iran on October 26, 2024, but did not explicitly address the date and nature of the response:

- ◆ IRGC commander Hossein Salami stressed that Iran would definitely take revenge on Israel and deal it painful blows (Mizan, November 14, 2024).



**The commander of the IRGC (Mizan, November 14, 2024)**

- ◆ Ali Fadavi, deputy commander of the IRGC, speaking at a ceremony marking the death of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, said that over the years, the Islamic Republic had not left any aggression unanswered and that it would definitely respond to the Israeli attack, in a way that would make Israel regret it (Tasnim, November 14, 2024).
- ◆ Abdolrahim Mousavi, commander of the Iranian army, meeting with the family of one of the air defense soldiers killed in the Israeli airstrike on Iran, said Iran would determine the timing and manner of its response and that when necessary, it would not be delayed and its response would be decisive (Mehr, November 14, 2024).
- ◆ Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi told IRGC commanders that Operation “True Promise 3” (another Iranian attack on Israel) would be carried out at the

appropriate time. He said Iran had informed the world that the Israeli attack on Iran was a new assault that would be responded to at the right moment (ISNA, November 19, 2024).

## Iranian involvement in Lebanon and Syria

▶ IRGC commander Hossein Salami said Israel thought that Hezbollah could be removed from the battlefield by eliminating its leaders and commanders or killing its soldiers by detonating the pagers, but Hezbollah is a huge stream that cannot be stopped or terminated. He added that Iran would continue to fight to the end and would not allow Israel to determine the fate of the Muslims (Mizan, November 14, 2024).

▶ Ali Fadavi, deputy commander of the IRGC, speaking at a ceremony marking Hassan Nasrallah's death, said Iran would continue to support Hezbollah and the "axis of resistance" more strongly and faster than in the past (Tasnim, November 14, 2024).

▶ Iran reportedly informed senior Hezbollah officials that it was committed to rebuilding southern Lebanon, the Dahiyeh in southern Beirut, and the ruins in Baalbek and al-Hermel in the Bekaa Valley, near the border with Syria, after the war. This announcement followed the visit of the Iranian Majles speaker, Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, to Beirut, during which he had pledged that Iran would only rebuild the Dahiyeh. According to the report, the message was intended to emphasize Iran's support for Hezbollah to prevent its defeat and collapse (al-Anbaa, November 13, 2024).

▶ Iran condemned the killing of Hezbollah's media chief Mohammad Afif in an Israeli airstrike in Beirut on November 17, 2024. Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei said the action showed the immoral nature of the "Zionist regime." He described the assassination of media personnel as a war crime aimed at advancing the "plan of annihilation of Palestine" and deterring the media from reporting on the "crimes of the Zionist regime" and called on the UN and the International Court of Justice to prosecute and punish Israel's leaders (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, November 18, 2024). The IRGC stated that the killing of a senior Hezbollah operative would not weaken the "resistance" or Hezbollah's capabilities but would instead deepen the hatred among "resistance fighters" in Lebanon (Tasnim, November 18, 2024).

▶ Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said that when he visited regional countries last month, conditions of crisis prevailed in the region, and he tried to demonstrate Iran's

support for the “resistance front” in Lebanon and “Palestine,” stressing that Hezbollah would continue its activity despite Nasrallah’s death. He added that fortunately, Hezbollah had returned to its strong position on the battlefield (Iranian TV, November 16, 2024).

▶ Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei met with Mojtaba Amani, the Iranian ambassador to Lebanon, who was wounded in the pager attack in Beirut in September 2024, and was updated on his health (Tasnim, November 17, 2024).



**The Supreme Leader meets with the Iranian ambassador to Beirut  
(Supreme Leader’s website, November 17, 2024)**

▶ Ali Larijani, advisor to the Supreme Leader, arrived in Damascus on November 14, 2024, and met with senior Syrian government officials, headed by President Bashar Assad. In his meeting with Assad, the two discussed developments in the region, especially the war in the Gaza Strip and Lebanon, and relations between the two countries. Larijani stressed Iran’s support for Syria and Syria’s central role in the region (ISNA, November 14, 2024).



**Larijani meets with President Assad (ISNA, November 14, 2024)**

▶ After visiting Syria, Larijani went on a visit to Lebanon, during which he met with the interim prime minister, Najib Mikati, and the speaker of the Lebanese parliament, Nabih Berri, to discuss developments in the region in general and Lebanon in particular. At a press conference in Beirut, Larijani stressed Iran’s support for Lebanon, the Lebanese army, and the “resistance,” and said he had conveyed a message from the Supreme Leader to the speaker of

the Lebanese parliament. Asked whether Iran supports Lebanon’s position on the implementation of Resolution 1701, Larijani said Iran supports every important issue acceptable to senior officials and the “resistance” in Lebanon and that Hezbollah is a strong faction that knows how to conduct itself (ISNA, November 15, 2024).



**Larijani meets with the Lebanese prime minister (ISNA, November 15, 2024)**

► In an interview with the al-Mayadeen network, which is affiliated with the “axis of resistance,” Larijani said the American draft for a ceasefire, on some of its points, could bring about a solution in the future if the United States and Israel did not sabotage it. He said Hezbollah is a reasonable and sensible party that does not need anyone’s advice and that Iran trusts the organization and its decisions (al-Mayadeen, November 15, 2024).

► On November 16, 2024, Iranian Defense Minister Amir Aziz Nasirzadeh visited Syria. Upon his arrival in Damascus, he stressed Syria’s importance to Iran, saying that Syria is a major supporter of the “axis of resistance” and that Iran is prepared to provide it with all means of support (al-Watan, November 16, 2024). Nasirzadeh met with Syrian President Bashar Assad, Syrian Defense Minister Ali Abbas, Syrian Chief of Staff Abd al-Karim Mahmoud Ibrahim, and Kifah Moulhem, the director of Syria’s National Security Office, to discuss regional developments and strengthening security and military cooperation between the countries (Tasnim, November 17, 2024).



**The Iranian minister of defense meets with President Assad (ISNA, November 17, 2024)**

▶ On November 19, 2024, Syrian Foreign Minister Bassam Sabbagh paid an official visit to Tehran, where he met with his Iranian counterpart. The Iranian foreign minister said at the joint press conference that they discussed regional developments, including the war in the Gaza Strip and Lebanon, and the “strategic ties” between the two countries. Araghchi noted that Iran would continue its support for Syria and the “resistance,” and praised Syria’s role in supporting Lebanon and the “resistance.” He added that Iran also supports expanding relations between Syria and the Arab countries (ISNA, November 19, 2024).

▶ Iranian Foreign Minister Araghchi met with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov. He noted that the instability in the region was caused by “Zionist aggression” and warned against expanding the scope of the conflict to the entire region. Previously, Ali Asghar Khaji, senior advisor to the Iranian foreign minister, met with Bogdanov to discuss the latest developments in the Gaza Strip, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen. They called for an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and Lebanon (ISNA, November 19, 2024).

▶ Ali Asghar Khaji, senior advisor to the Iranian foreign minister, said in an interview with the Russian news agency RIA that Iran had not made any decision on changing the number of its advisors in Syria due to regional tensions. He added that Iran would exercise its legal right to defend itself against Israel at the appropriate time and in the appropriate manner (Jamaran, November 14, 2024).

## Activities of the Shiite militias

### Iraq

#### Militia activity against Israel

▶ This past week (November 13-20, 2024, as of 3:30 p.m.), the Islamic Resistance in Iraq issued 17 claims of responsibility for drone attacks against ten targets in Israel (Islamic Resistance in Iraq Telegram channel, November 13-20, 2024). In addition, the Saraya Awliya al-Dam militia issued two statements claiming responsibility for drone attacks against four targets in Eilat (Saraya Awliya al-Dam Telegram channel, November 17-20, 2024). The IDF Spokesperson reported the interception of at least five drones outside Israeli territory, two of them in Syrian territory. There were no casualties (IDF Spokesperson, November 13-20, 2024).



**Saraya Awliya al-Dam operatives launch a drone from a boat  
(Saraya Awliya al-Dam Telegram channel, November 19, 2024)**

- ▶ “A source close to the militias” said a decision had been made to increase the attacks against Israel and that all the special units had been ordered several weeks ago to begin logistical preparations to improve capabilities at all levels. According to him, four to five attacks against the “occupying entity” within 24 hours are the beginning of a course that will intensify as time passes, and in the near future, the escalation will continue. He added that the “resistance” had not yet used all the weapons at its disposal and that decisions would be made before the events in real time and according to the policy outlined by the leaders (baghdadtoday.news, November 14, 2024).
- ▶ According to “three sources close to the Islamic Resistance in Iraq,” the militias’ latest attacks were not carried out from Iraq, but from Syria, the Rutba Desert and the al-Qaim area, in the tri-border area between Iraq, Jordan, and Syria. One of the “sources” noted that the reason is that Syria is closer to Israel, and therefore there is a higher probability that the drones will reach their target (al-Araby al-Jadeed, November 17, 2024). In this context, the militias in Iraq have reportedly increased their coordination along the Iraq-Syria border and have been instructed to prepare for any emergency (1news-iq.com, November 17, 2024).
- ▶ A “source close to the militias” noted that several decisions had been made in case the “Zionist entity” attacked Iraq. According to him, the most notable decision is to expand the scope of the attacks deep inside Israel, with a list of thirty targets, most of them strategic from the economic and military aspects. In addition, the militias will move into a “new phase of escalation” (baghdadtoday.news, November 18, 2024).
- ▶ A “senior source” in the Nujaba Movement referred to a letter sent by Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa’ar to the president of the UN Security Council, in which he demanded that the Iraqi government take action against the militias and stressed that Israel has the right to

self-defense. According to the “source,” the Israeli threats are an excuse to expand the scope of the war, and the militias are prepared to respond to any attack against Iraq. He added that Israel’s complaint was “ridiculous, considering the terrible crimes it was committing” (al-Akhbar, November 20, 2024).

▶ According to a “source close to Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia’ al-Sudani,” the American mission in Baghdad warned the Iraqi government that the country would be subject to direct attacks by Israel if the militia attacks were not stopped. According to the message, this is the last opportunity Israel gives the Iraqi government to deal with the militias on its own (1news-iq.com, November 17, 2024). In this context, it was reported that a message conveyed by Israel through the Americans stated that in light of the continued attacks by the Iraqi militias against Israel, and in light of the information that the upcoming Iranian attack against Israel may originate from Iraqi territory, Israel will begin attacking Iraq instead of attacking Syria (mc-doualiya.com, November 18, 2024). The Council of Ministers for National Security Affairs in Iraq, headed by Prime Minister al-Sudani, held an emergency meeting and stressed that the government continues to act to prevent the use of Iraqi territory to carry out any attack and that it will pursue those who participate in activities that threaten state security (Telegram channel of the Iraqi prime minister’s spokesman, November 19, 2024).

▶ A “senior officer” in the Iraqi security forces said that in the past two weeks, US forces had stepped up inspection using drones in the Iraq-Syria border area. According to the officer, the drones focus on desert areas to identify the sites from which launches are carried out towards Israel. He added that the objective of these sorties is to monitor the activities of the “resistance factions” present in Ramadi, al-Qaim, and the border strip with Syria, for fear of carrying out attacks against American bases or against Israel as part of the Iranian chain of response. He noted that the international coalition forces in general and the American forces in particular are also concerned about smuggling weapons to Syria and Hezbollah in Lebanon via Iraqi convoys (al-Akhbar, November 19, 2024).

### **Attack attributed to a pro-Iranian militia in Saudi Arabia**

▶ The Islamic Resistance from the Land of the Two Holy Mosques (*al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya fi Bilad al-Haramayn*), a pro-Iranian militia ostensibly operating from Saudi Arabia, claimed responsibility for a drone attack against a “target” in Tel Aviv (al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya fi Bilad al-Haramayn Telegram channel, November 17, 2024). This is the militia’s



fourth claim of responsibility since October 26, 2024. However, there has been no confirmation of the alleged attacks, nor any verified evidence of the militia's actual existence.

## **Militia attacks against American targets in Syria**

▶ According to a report from November 15, 2024, the American base in the Conoco gas field in Syria was attacked by the militias with drones (Saberin Telegram channel and al-Mayadeen channel, November 15, 2024). It was reported that the air defense systems had intercepted three drones near the base and that the drones had not reached their targets (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, November 15, 2024).

▶ On November 19, 2024, explosions were reported in the US al-Shadadi base area in al-Hasakah in northeastern Syria (al-Mayadeen, November 19, 2024). According to another report, the air defense systems of the US forces shot down a missile two kilometers from the base (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, November 19, 2024).

▶ “Sources” reported that the US had reinforced its forces at bases in Syria to prevent harm to military forces until the new administration of President-elect Trump formulated its military plans in the region. The “sources” noted that the “resistance” is aware of the security sensitivity during the transition period between the administrations, and therefore it is working to escalate the attacks to show that it is willing to act to force the Americans to withdraw (al-Akhbar, November 17, 2024).

## **Yemen**

### **The direct confrontation between Israel and the Houthis**

▶ This past week, Houthi forces spokesman Yahya Saria announced two attacks against Israel:

◆ November 16, 2024 – An attack against an “important target” in Eilat using several drones. According to Saria, the attack was successful and achieved its objectives (Yahya Saria’s X account, November 16, 2024). The IDF Spokesperson said that one launch had been identified from the east towards the Eilat area, that it had not crossed into Israeli territory, and that there were no casualties (IDF Spokesperson, November 16, 2024).

◆ November 17, 2024 – An attack against several “military and important” targets in the area of the cities of Jaffa (Tel Aviv) and Ashkelon using several drones. According to Saria, the attacks achieved their objective (Yahya Saria’s X account, November 17, 2024). According to the IDF Spokesperson, a drone that entered Israeli territory from the east

was intercepted by the Israeli Air Force in the Shfela region (IDF Spokesperson, November 17, 2024).

► Hezam al-Assad, member of the Houthi political bureau, threatened that the Yemeni front would cause the “enemy” greater pain and regret in the coming days. According to him, the Houthis will not be satisfied with missiles and drones, and the geographical distance will not be an obstacle for the Yemeni fighters, who will kill the “enemy soldiers” at point-blank range (Shehab, November 14, 2024).

### **Additional Houthi military activity**

► On November 19, 2024, Houthi forces spokesman Yahya Saria claimed responsibility for an attack on the ship Anadolu S in the Red Sea using several ballistic missiles and “naval missiles.” Saria claimed the hit on the ship was accurate (Yahya Saria’s X account, November 19, 2024). On November 17, 2024, the UK Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) reported that it received a report from the ship when a missile fell nearby while it was sailing in the Red Sea. The next day, the ship reported another missile landing near it in the Gulf of Aden. The ship continued on its way, and no casualties were reported (UKMTO X account, November 17-18, 2024).

► Dr. William LaPlante, current US Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment, acknowledged that the Houthis are succeeding in obtaining increasingly sophisticated means and that their capabilities “are getting scary.” Speaking at a security conference, LaPlante said he was amazed at what the Houthis had managed to do in the past six months (Axios, November 14, 2024).

### **Statements by senior Houthi officials**

► Mohammad al-Bukhaiti, a member of the Houthis’ political bureau, said they would be willing to welcome senior Hamas figures in Sana’a if the movement was forced to close its offices in Qatar. He added that “the Zionist entity” and its supporters are responsible for the bloodshed in the Gaza Strip and the failure of efforts to achieve a ceasefire and clarified that the Houthis’ military operations would continue until “the aggression ceases, and the siege is lifted” (Muhammad al-Bukhaiti’s X account, November 19, 2024).

► Senior Houthi officials referred to the escalation vis-à-vis the United States amid increased American airstrikes in Yemen and the combined attack carried out by the Houthis with missiles and drones against American warships in the Red Sea on November 12, 2024:

- ◆ Abd al-Malik al-Houthi, the leader of the Houthi movement, claimed in his weekly speech that the attack on the aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln “forced it to flee hundreds of miles away,” while the attack on the destroyers Stockdale and Spruance thwarted “aggressive” American air activity that was about to be carried out in Yemen (al-Masirah, November 15, 2024). It should be noted that the US Department of Defense confirmed that two of its destroyers managed to thwart the attack but denied that the aircraft carrier was attacked.
- ◆ Houthi Defense Minister Mohammad Nasser al-Atifi threatened that they would continue to attack “enemy” aircraft carriers and warships with ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and drones. He made it clear that they would continue to support the Palestinian people and the Lebanese people and that they would not be deterred by pressure and threats (al-Masirah, November 13, 2024).
- ◆ Houthi supreme political council member Mohammad Ali al-Houthi said the Yemeni people do not care about the weapons used by the Americans in the attacks, insisting that “the only thing the United States has not used in its Saudi-funded war in Yemen is nuclear weapons.” According to him, the Houthis managed to defeat the US Navy and neutralize its battleships “with the help of God, the culture of the Quran, and the close connection to His holy book” (al-Masirah X account, November 17, 2024).
- ◆ Houthi political council member Hossein al-Azi noted that although America has entered a “complicated situation,” it can still emerge from it “at low cost.” According to him, additional American involvement in Yemen will pave the way for the “defeat” of America everywhere (Hossein al-Azi’s X account, November 15, 2024).



**Houthi posters praising the alleged attack on the aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln (the Houthi forces media arm X account, November 13-14, 2024)**