



# Spotlight on Iran and the Shiite Axis

April 2—9, 2025

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## Highlights<sup>1</sup>

- ▶ Iran condemned the continued IDF activity in the Gaza Strip. The Iranian president raised the issue in his talks with the King of Jordan and the Saudi Crown Prince. The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson condemned the IDF attacks in the Gaza Strip and called for international action to stop them.
- ▶ The IRGC's Qods Force reportedly began using a sea route to Lebanon to smuggle weapons for Hezbollah following air restrictions and the ban on Iranian planes landing in Beirut.
- ▶ The advisor to the Supreme Leader of Iran strongly attacked the regime in Syria, accusing it of indifference in the face of the continued Israeli attacks in the country.
- ▶ It was reported that for the first time, the IRGC transferred long-range surface-to-surface missiles to the pro-Iranian Shiite militias in Iraq. The militias and the Iraqi government denied a report that claimed that the militias had agreed to disarm.
- ▶ The Houthis claimed responsibility for two drone attacks against Israel. The IDF Spokesperson stated that all the drones were intercepted before they penetrated Israeli territory.
- ▶ The United States continued its attacks against Houthi military targets, but it was reported that the strikes had not yet significantly damaged the capabilities of the Houthis, who continued to claim attacks against the American aircraft carrier in the Red Sea. Iran denied that members of the Revolutionary Guards were killed in attacks in Yemen.

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

## Iran in light of developments in the Palestinian arena

- ▶ Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian spoke with Jordan's King Abdullah and expressed concern over Israel's violations of the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and "the renewal of the Zionist regime's cruel crimes against the defenseless residents of Gaza." Pezeshkian also condemned the proposals for the "forced displacement" of Palestinians from the Gaza Strip and called for increased unity among Muslim nations in the transfer of aid to the Palestinian people and the Gaza Strip (snn.ir, April 2, 2025). In a conversation with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr, President Pezeshkian said that Muslim countries can ensure peace and security in the region at the highest level by strengthening unity and solidarity between them. He said that if the Muslims united, they would be able to stop "the crimes of the Zionist regime against the residents of the Gaza Strip" (Tasnim, April 3, 2025).
- ▶ Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei strongly condemned "the continued attacks and crimes of the racist Israeli regime against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank," especially on Eid al-Fitr, as well as the deliberate attacks against aid forces and medical centers and the attacks by "extremist Zionist settlers" on the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Baghaei expressed regret over the indifference of some Western countries to the "violation of human rights in occupied Palestine." He stressed the responsibility of all governments to fight against "the genocide and war crimes of the Zionist regime." He called on the countries of the world, especially the Islamic countries, to support the Palestinian people, both in words and deeds, and to prevent the continuation of "the killing of defenseless Palestinian women and children" (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, April 3, 2025).
- ▶ IRGC Commander Hossein Salami spoke about the regional developments of the past year and emphasized the successes of the "resistance front" vis-à-vis Israel. Speaking at a conference of senior IRGC officials on the occasion of the Iranian New Year, he noted that despite the difficult conditions in the Gaza Strip, it was able to stand up to Israel thanks to faith and that the other components of the "resistance front" in Yemen, Lebanon, and Iraq did not surrender and succeeded in inflicting defeat on their enemies. He stressed that Israel would not have been able to hold out even for a single day without arms shipments from the United States and that the IRGC can defeat it despite American support. Salami added that if the "resistance front" had been weakened, the "enemy" would not have been stopped in Lebanon

and would not have agreed to a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip [in January 2025] (Tasnim, April 5, 2025).



**The IRGC commander (Tasnim, April 5, 2025)**

## Iranian aid to Hezbollah

► According to a “Western security source,” the IRGC’s Qods Force has begun using the sea route to smuggle weapons for Hezbollah. According to the report, the use of this route began following the air restrictions and the ban on Iranian planes landing at Beirut International Airport. The “source” noted that Iran smuggles the weapons directly to Lebanon or through an intermediary country and that the responsibility for this activity lies with Units 190 and 700 of the Qods Force. The “source” added that Hezbollah uses collaborators working in customs and control mechanisms at the port of Beirut to receive the smuggled equipment, and that the network of collaborators is managed by Wafiq Safa, Hezbollah’s security official (Al-Hadath, April 8, 2025).

## Iran in the face of events in Syria

► Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei strongly condemned the Israeli attacks in Syria. He noted that Iran had been holding consultations with the countries of the region for several months regarding Israel’s activity in Syria and had warned them against the “Zionist regime’s” abuse of the situation in Syria. He stressed Iran’s support for the need to defend Syria’s sovereignty and territorial integrity and called on the international community, especially the countries of the region, to take immediate and effective steps to stop Israel’s attacks (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, April 3, 2025).

► Ali-Akbar Velayati, advisor to the Supreme Leader of Iran for international affairs and secretary-general of the World Islamic Awakening Association, strongly attacked the regime in Syria, accusing it of indifference in the face of continued Israeli attacks in the country. In a statement issued in response to Israel’s attacks in Syria, Lebanon, and the Gaza Strip, Velayati

said that the current regime in Syria lacks any sense of responsibility and only thinks about maintaining its rule. It does not respond to the “Zionist aggression” against Syria’s territorial integrity, does not fire a single shot, and refrains from condemning it. Velayati added that the developments in Syria provide proof that “a group that lacks legitimacy and has a poor record of killing Muslims” has come to power in Syria. He said that on the one hand, it is fighting fiercely against innocent civilians and carrying out anti-national actions without any legitimate excuse, while on the other hand, Israel freely attacks all over Syria, killing innocent people and destroying billions of dollars’ worth of infrastructure. He added that the events in Syria prove that if the “cancerous tumor” (i.e., Israel) is not removed from the region, the countries of the region and the Muslim world will not be immune to the danger it poses to them (Jamaran, April 4, 2025).



**Ali-Akbar Velayati (Jamaran, April 4, 2025)**

► Tasnim News Agency, which is affiliated with the IRGC, claimed in a commentary article discussing Israeli activity in Syria since the fall of the Assad regime that Israel’s strategy toward Syria is intended to continuously weaken Syria and is based on two main pillars: preventing its regional rivals from entering Syria to allow it to maintain its control over Damascus, and consequently over the entire Levant region (Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine); and the creation of a buffer zone in southern Syria. The article claimed that the changes in the political regime and the dominant ideology in Syria had not succeeded in changing Israel’s outlook and that the conciliatory signals from the new Syrian regime had not succeeded in reducing the “hostility of the Zionists towards Syria” (Tasnim, April 3, 2025).

## Iran's involvement in Iraq

► Last week, Iran reportedly transferred long-range surface-to-surface missiles to the pro-Iranian militias in Iraq for the first time. According to the report, which is based on a regional intelligence apparatus, the IRGC also transferred Quds-351 cruise missiles and Jamal-69 ballistic missiles to Iraq (The Times, April 8, 2025).

► “Ten senior Iraqi officials and commanders in the militias of Kata’ib Hezbollah, the Nujaba movement, Kata’ib Sayyid al-Shuhada, and Ansar Allah al-Awfiya” said that several militias in Iraq are ready to disarm for the first time, to avoid escalation in the conflict with the Trump administration. According to the “sources” in the militias, since the Trump administration took office, senior American officials have warned the Iraqi administration that if it does not act to dismantle the militias in its territory, the United States may attack them from the air. A senior Kata’ib Hezbollah official was quoted as saying, “We know that Trump is willing to lead the war against us to bad scenarios, and we want to avoid that.” The “sources” also reported that the IRGC in Iran had authorized the militias to make any decision they deemed necessary to avoid being dragged into a destructive conflict with the United States and Israel (Reuters, April 7, 2025). The report aroused denials by the militias and the Iraqi government. In response to this report, several sources denied the claims:

- ◆ Kata’ib Hezbollah said that the report had nothing to do with the militia’s principles and positions. The announcement stressed that the militia’s statements are limited only to its official spokesman and military spokesman and that statements made in a different framework are “false” (Kata’ib Hezbollah Telegram channel, April 7, 2025).

- ◆ According to a “senior command source in the Nujaba movement,” they have never discussed the possibility of giving up their weapons and they have no intention of giving up their “resistance” presence as long as the “American occupation” is present in Iraqi territory. The “source” added that reports of Iranian pressure to reduce the militias’ activities are not true and that Tehran “does not interfere in their affairs.” He said they are willing to engage in dialogue with the Iraqi government only on the condition that it recognizes the importance of the presence of “resistance” factions in the national security equation (Al-Akhbar, April 8, 2025).

- ◆ An Iraqi political source said that the militias refused to disarm but are committed to calm. According to him, the militias’ main headquarters in Nineveh and Al-Anbar remain

in place and security measures have been taken to avoid direct attacks (Al-Arabiya, April 7, 2025).

◆ “A prominent Iraqi political source” said that the cessation of the militias’ activities in the country came following increasing international pressure and direct threats from Washington to attack the militias’ sites, in parallel with the demand to disarm. According to the “source,” the Iraqi government has conveyed clear messages to the militias that their continued activity could lead to a broad military response from the United States. It was also reported that a few weeks ago, following Trump’s threats against Iran’s proxies, the militias began a process of repositioning and evacuated most of their large headquarters in various areas of Baghdad and the southern provinces of Iraq for fear of attacks (Al-Akhbar, April 8, 2025).

► Iraqi National Security Advisor Qassem al-Araji met with Mohammadi Golpayegani, the head of the office of the Supreme Leader of Iran. The two discussed developments in the region and the cooperation between the two countries and stressed the need to expand relations between them (ABNA News Agency, April 3, 2025).



**The Iraqi national security advisor meets with the head of the Supreme Leader’s office (ABNA, April 3, 2025)**

## The Houthis in Yemen

### Houthi activity against Israel

► This past week, the Houthis’ military spokesman, Yahya Saria, claimed responsibility for two attacks against “military targets” in Israel using a “Jaffa”-type drone. However, in both announcements, Saria did not address the results of the attacks (Yahya Saria’s X account, April 5 and 7, 2025). The IDF Spokesperson reported two separate incidents of interception of a drone that made its way into Israeli territory from the east (IDF Spokesperson, April 4 and 7, 2025).

## US attacks against the Houthis

► Over the past week, US forces have continued their attacks against Houthi military targets in areas controlled by the movement in Yemen. “Yemeni sources” reported that the airstrikes were aimed at targets in many provinces, including the central provinces of Sana’a, Saada, and Hudaydah, and included military installations, airports, missile and drone facilities, weapons depots, and civilian infrastructure (Arab and Houthi media, April 2-9, 2025). It was reported that among those killed in the attacks were senior members of the Houthi regime and security forces, including the head of the Houthi intelligence service, Abd al-Nasser Sarhan al-Kamali. It was also reported that the deputy head of the security and intelligence service, Abd al-Qader al-Shami, was arrested on suspicion of providing information about al-Kamali’s location that made it possible to eliminate him (Al-Arabiya and Al-Hadath, April 7-8, 2025).



**Damage caused by US airstrikes in Saada (Al-Arabiya X account, April 7, 2025)**

► “Sources in the US Congress,” based on information received from “sources in the US Department of Defense,” reported that the American operation, which began on March 15, 2025, had so far achieved only limited success in destroying the Houthis’ stockpiles of missiles, drones, and launchers. This is in contrast to President Donald Trump’s statement that there has been “extraordinary” progress in the operation. According to the “sources,” the “limited” success of the attacks, which used munitions worth a total of \$200 million, stemmed from the Houthis’ reinforcement of bunkers and other sites that were attacked. The “sources” added that the cost of the operation is expected to reach more than \$1 billion within days and that the attacks could last about six months. A “senior Pentagon official” denied the allegations and said that the attacks “achieved their goal and more.” According to him, the attacks disrupted the communication capabilities of the Houthi leaders, limited their attack capabilities, and created the conditions for the next stages (New York Times, April 4, 2025). In this context, it was reported that it is estimated that about 80 Houthi military officers have been killed since the

US attacks began. However, the movement's leadership has not been harmed, as have at least some of the Houthi forces' missile launch sites (CNN, April 6, 2025).

► “Knowledgeable sources in Sana’a” said that the Trump administration had offered the Houthis, through regional diplomatic channels, to halt its airstrikes in Yemen in exchange for an end to Houthi attacks on American ships in the Red Sea. According to the “sources,” the Houthis responded negatively, claiming that the cessation of their operations depends on stopping the “crimes of mass destruction committed by the Israeli occupation army” using American weapons in the Gaza Strip, and on the entry of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip. According to “media sources close to the Houthi government in Yemen,” a few days ago, Washington, through Saudi Arabia, conveyed a proposal for a mutual cessation of naval attacks and a promise to continue efforts to end the war in Gaza and bring in aid through international mediators, but the Houthis resumed attacking vessels (Al-Akhbar, April 9, 2025).

► Last week, the Houthis' military spokesman, Yahya Saria, claimed responsibility for several attacks on the US aircraft carrier Harry S. Truman and other American warships in the Red Sea using ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and drones (Yahya Saria's X account, April 2-9, 2025). In addition, Saria announced two incidents of shooting down an American MQ-9 drone in the skies of al-Hudaydah and al-Jawf provinces. Since the beginning of the war in the Gaza Strip in October 2023, the Houthis have claimed responsibility for shooting down 18 MQ-9 drones in the skies of Yemen (Yahya Saria's X account, April 3 and 9, 2025). The US military has not released any comments on the Houthis' claims.

► Saria also claimed responsibility for the first downing of a Giant Shark F360 reconnaissance drone, which he claimed was operated by the “American-Israeli enemy” in the skies of the Saada province (Yahya Saria's X account, April 5, 2025). However, it should be noted that this is a drone developed by a Chinese company for civilian purposes and it is not operated by the US or Israeli militaries (Russian news agency TASS, April 5, 2025).

► Houthi leader Abd al-Malik al-Houthi said that the United States had begun attacking Yemen because of its cooperation with the Israeli “enemy” in its “aggression” against the Palestinian people and that it was escalating its attacks. According to him, the American “aggression” has failed and has no effect on the Houthis' military capabilities, nor has it succeeded in stopping the Houthis' actions in “support” of the Palestinian people and is unable to provide protection for Israeli maritime traffic in the Red Sea. Al-Houthi also claimed that no leaders of the



movement had been killed and promised that they would continue to confront the American “enemy” and continue to support the Palestinians (Al-Masirah Telegram channel, April 4, 2025).

► Muhammad al-Bukhaiti, a member of the Houthis’ political bureau, assessed that the region is advancing toward escalation due to the continued Israeli “aggression” in the Gaza Strip and the American reinforcements being sent to the region, and made it clear that they are ready for escalation. Al-Bukhaiti also claimed that they are causing the “occupation” a lot of damage, both militarily and economically, and that their actions are a means of pressure in favor of the Palestinian side in the ceasefire negotiations. He said that the end of the war in the Gaza Strip would restore calm to the region and that they would stop their activities only with the implementation of an agreement to stop the fighting in the Gaza Strip. He stressed that the movement should not negotiate, directly or indirectly, with the Americans (Al-Jazeera Telegram channel, April 4, 2025).

### **US sanctions against Houthi collaborators**

► The US Department of the Treasury announced the imposition of sanctions against four Russian citizens, a Turkish citizen, and four Russian “entities” engaged in the transfer of weapons and other goods to the Houthis. According to the announcement, these individuals and entities maintained a network of transferring weapons and stolen Ukrainian grain and laundering millions of dollars in cooperation with Sa’id al-Jamal, a senior Houthi figure backed by the IRGC’s Qods Force (US Department of the Treasury, April 2, 2025).

### **Iranian involvement**

► Iran reportedly ordered its military advisors to leave Yemen for fear that they would be harmed by the American attacks on the Houthis in Yemen. The report, whose reliability is unclear, quoted a senior Iranian official as saying that the move was intended to prevent a direct confrontation between Iran and the United States in the event that an Iranian military person is killed. It also stated that Iran is changing its strategy and reducing its support for its network of regional proxies to focus on direct threats from the United States (The Telegraph, April 3, 2025).

► Iranian President Pezeshkian spoke with Mahdi al-Mashat, the head of the Houthis’ Supreme Political Council in Yemen, on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr and said that if Muslims unite, enemies will not be able to suppress any of the Islamic countries. Al-Mashat expressed appreciation for the Islamic Republic’s support for Muslim unity, noting that the situation on the ground in

Yemen is completely different from “enemy propaganda” and that Muslims are capable of overcoming their differences of opinion and overcoming their enemies (Tasnim, April 3, 2025).

► Tasnim News Agency, which is affiliated with the IRGC, denied the announcement by the Minister of Information, Culture, and Tourism in the Western-recognized Yemeni government, Muammar al-Eryani, that about 70 commanders of the movement and IRGC experts were killed in the American airstrikes against the Houthis on April 1, 2025. The Iranian news agency claimed that its investigation showed that it was a lie and that no Iranian was killed in Yemen. According to Tasnim, the “false” announcement was intended for psychological warfare and dragging the region into an all-out war, while senior Iranian officials have declared several times that the Houthis in Yemen operate against the United States and Israel independently (Tasnim, April 5, 2025).