



# Spotlight on Iran

April 3-11, 2024

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## Highlights<sup>1</sup>

- ▶ World Jerusalem Day rallies were held across Iran on April 5, 2024, like every year on the last Friday of Ramadan. This year's rallies were marked by the war in the Gaza Strip and the attack attributed to Israel in Damascus on April 1, 2024. The rallies were attended by senior Iranian officials, headed by President Raisi, as well as the secretary-general of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and the chief of staff of the Shiite pro-Iranian militias in Iraq. At events marking Jerusalem Day and the end of Ramadan, senior Iranian officials, led by the Supreme Leader, the president, and the commander of the IRGC, declared that Israel was defeated in Gaza and was unable to realize any of its objectives in the war.
- ▶ The New York Times reported that Iran operated clandestine weapons smuggling routes through Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan to Judea and Samaria. According to the report, Iran uses organized crime gangs, activists in extremist organizations, soldiers, intelligence agents, and Bedouin smugglers.
- ▶ This week, the Iranian foreign minister made a round of visits to Oman and Syria. During his visit to Syria, he met with the Syrian president and foreign minister to discuss developments in Gaza, bilateral relations, and the attack in Damascus. He also inaugurated a new building of the Iranian consulate to replace the one damaged in the attack attributed to Israel. During his visit to Oman, he met with the Houthi spokesman.
  - ◀ The Iranian president spoke with Ismail Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau, to offer his condolences over the death of his three sons in an IDF attack in the Gaza Strip.

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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.

- ▶ A Syrian news channel reported that the IRGC had transferred a shipment of suicide UAVs from Albukamal in eastern Syria to the south of the country.
- ▶ The Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed responsibility for attacking numerous military and strategic targets in Israeli territory. In practice, these incidents were not identified, except for one suspicious aerial target intercepted by IDF forces. This week, senior militia figures made many statements amid World Jerusalem Day, the killing of IRGC operatives in Syria, and the expected Iranian response.
- ▶ The Houthis in Yemen carried out several attacks against vessels in the Red Sea. Houthi leader Abd al-Malik al-Houthi noted that so far, they had attacked 90 ships, with 34 operations using 125 missiles and UAVs in the past month alone.

## Iranian threats against Israel

- ▶ Ali Khamenei, Iran's Supreme Leader, speaking during the Eid al-Fitr prayer, said that an attack on the consulate and embassy of any country was considered an attack on its territory, and an attack on the Iranian consulate in Damascus by the "Zionist regime" was tantamount to an attack on Iranian territory. He said Israel had made a mistake in attacking Damascus, had to be punished, and would be punished (Tasnim, April 10, 2024).
- ▶ Mohammad Bagheri, chief of staff of the Iranian armed forces, said at the funeral ceremony of Mohammad Reza Zahedi, the commander of the Qods Force in Syria and Lebanon, held in Esfahan, that the attack in Damascus, attributed to Israel, would not go unanswered, and that Iran would determine the time and manner of operation and respond at the appropriate time, carefully and in a manner that would cause the enemy the heaviest damage and make them regret their actions. He noted that the "Zionist regime," which wanted to rule from the Nile to the Euphrates, had sunk into a swamp in an area smaller than that of a city, and had not succeeded in realizing any of its goals in the war. Bagheri added that the United States bore responsibility for the attack in Damascus and for "Israel's crimes" and had to be held accountable, regardless of whether it admitted its involvement or denied it (Tasnim, April 6, 2024).



**Bagheri speaking at Zahedi's funeral (Tasnim, April 6, 2024)**

- ▶ Yahya Rahim Safavi, a senior military advisor to the Supreme Leader of Iran, said at a memorial ceremony for the IRGC officers killed in the attack in Damascus that their deaths increased motivation among the IRGC and the resistance front to fight the United States and the “Zionist regime.” He said the resistance axis had won the war in the Gaza Strip and would determine the fate of the future of the region under Iranian leadership, and that the war in the Gaza Strip marked major changes in regional trends and strategies. He added that none of Israel’s embassies were safe anymore and that the resistance front was ready (Tasnim, April 7, 2024).
- ▶ Ali Fadavi, the deputy commander of the IRGC, said at a memorial ceremony for Zahedi that Iran would severely avenge “the blood of the shaheeds in the Zionist aggression on the Iranian consulate in Damascus” (Nour News, April 10, 2024).
- ▶ Ali Reza Tangsiri, the commander of the IRGC’s navy, said in an interview with the al-Mayadeen network on April 10, 2024, that Iran would respond to the attack in Damascus at the appropriate time, as instructed by the Supreme Leader, and that it was in no hurry to respond. He also said in the interview that the only way to fight the Zionists was by forming a coalition of Muslim armies.
- ▶ CNN reported, according to “intelligence sources in the United States,” that the Iranian response to the attack in Damascus attributed to Israel would probably be through its proxies in the Middle East and not directly by Iran itself. This is because Iran fears being dragged into a dramatic escalation in the conflict in the region and a direct attack by the United States and its allies on Iran itself. For the same reason, the attack will be directed only against Israel and not against US forces in the Middle East. However, the sources noted that since Iran did not have perfect control and command over its proxies, American targets could be hit as well. The

sources also claimed that the attack would probably be carried out in the near future through extensive use of UAVs and missiles (CNN, April 9, 2024).

## Iranian involvement in the Palestinian arena

World Jerusalem Day rallies were held throughout Iran on April 5, 2024, like every year on the last Friday of Ramadan. At the same time as the rallies, funeral ceremonies were held in Tehran for IRGC officers killed in the attack attributed to Israel in Damascus on April 1, 2024. The events were attended by senior Iranian officials, headed by President Ebrahim Raisi, and senior IRGC commanders. Also participating in the rallies were Ziad al-Nakhalah, the PIJ secretary-general, and Abu Fadak al-Mohammedawi, chief of staff of the Popular Mobilization (the umbrella organization of the Shiite pro-Iranian militias in Iraq) (ISNA, April 5, 2024).



**Right: World Jerusalem Day marches in Tehran (ISNA, April 5, 2024). Left: Esmail Qaani, commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, at the Jerusalem Day marches in Tehran (ISNA, April 5, 2024)**



**Ziad al-Nakhalah at the Jerusalem Day marches in Tehran (ISNA, April 5, 2024)**

Hossein Salami, the IRGC commander, said in his speech during the Jerusalem Day rally in Tehran that the “Zionist regime” was currently between life and death, was living only thanks to artificial respiration by the United States, and its collapse was very close. He said the Zionists could not choose between war and life and that the only way they were facing was

surrender. According to him, Israel will be defeated whether it continues to fight or retreats. Salami warned that no action against Iran by any enemy would go unanswered (Fars, April 5, 2024).

▶ Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, meeting with senior regime officials on the occasion of Ramadan on April 3, 2024, said the defeat of the “Zionist regime” in the Gaza Strip would continue and that its collapse was imminent. He noted that Israel’s desperate efforts, including the attack in Syria, would not save it from defeat, and it would certainly be dealt a blow for that operation. Khamenei added that Israel had suffered two major defeats: the first was the al-Aqsa Flood on October 7, 2023, from which it would not be able to recover, and the second was the defeat of the past six months, during which it failed to realize any of its goals despite the military, political, and economic support of the United States (website of the Supreme Leader of Iran, April 3, 2024).



**Khamenei meets with senior regime officials (Tasnim, April 3, 2024)**

▶ Meeting with senior regime officials and foreign ambassadors on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr, Khamenei said that the Palestinian issue had become the top concern of the nations, despite the Zionists’ long-term control of the world’s media. He noted that, unfortunately, the governments were not fulfilling their obligations and some Muslim countries were assisting the “Zionist regime” at the height of its crimes against women and children. He stressed that Iran expected the Muslim governments to sever their political and economic ties with the “Zionist regime,” at least temporarily and as long as it continued its crimes (ISNA, April 10, 2024).

▶ Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi said in a speech marking World Jerusalem Day that it was clear to everyone today that the “Zionist regime” was weaker than a spider’s web and that Israel was committing war crimes and genocide to compensate for the strategic blow it suffered. He said there was no doubt that the United States was fully complicit in the “crimes of the Zionist regime in the Gaza Strip.” He added that the patience and steadfastness of the

residents of the Gaza Strip and the “resistance forces” over the past six months had led to the fact that the “Zionist enemy” had not achieved any of its strategic goals in the war. According to him, no one can rehabilitate the face of Israel, which was defeated in the al-Aqsa Flood and was closer than ever to internal collapse (Iranian president’s website, April 3, 2024).

► Ibrahim Raisi spoke by phone with Ismail Haniyeh, head of Hamas’ political bureau, and expressed condolences over the death of his three sons in an Israeli Air Force airstrike in the Gaza Strip. Haniyeh told Raisi that killing his sons would only strengthen the determination of the Palestinian people to continue jihad and resistance. Before that, Raisi sent a letter of condolence to Haniyeh, stating that “this crime” had once again exposed the cruel and “child-murderer” nature of the “Zionist regime” and proved that it did not adhere to any moral principles to save itself from collapse and cover up its failure vis-à-vis the “resistance front” (Iranian president’s Telegram channel, April 10, 2024). Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian, senior advisor to the Supreme Leader of Iran for international affairs Ali-Akbar Velayati, and IRGC commander Hossein Salami also sent letters of condolence to Haniyeh (Fars, April 10, 2024).

► Hossein Amir Abdollahian, the Iranian foreign minister, spoke by phone with his Qatari counterpart to discuss regional developments and the situation in the Gaza Strip. Abdollahian stressed the need to end the war and send humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip. He also spoke with the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Iraq. The talks were apparently also intended to discuss the escalation between Iran and Israel and the possibility of an Iranian attack on Israel (ISNA, April 10, 2024).

► According to a New York Times report (April 9, 2024), Iran operates clandestine smuggling routes throughout the Middle East and uses intelligence agents, militiamen, and criminal gangs to transfer weapons to the Palestinians in Judea and Samaria. According to three Iranian officials, Iran’s goal is to stir up unrest against Israel by flooding Judea and Samaria with weapons. According to the report, Iran transports the weapons through two routes from Iran through Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel, using members of organized crime gangs, activists in extremist organizations, soldiers, intelligence agents, and Bedouin smugglers, who transfer the weapons along the border between Jordan and Israel. One Iranian government official told The New York Times that smuggling through Jordan has become more difficult since the beginning of the war in the Gaza Strip due to increased security by Israel and Jordan around the shared border. Most of the weapons smuggled in are small arms, such as



handguns and assault rifles, but also advanced weapons, including anti-tank missiles and RPGs.

## Iranian involvement in Syria

▶ On April 8, 2024, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian arrived in Damascus for a visit, where he met with Syrian President Bashar Assad and Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad. During the visit, Abdollahian also inaugurated a new consulate to replace the building damaged in an attack attributed to Israel in Damascus on April 1, 2024. In his meetings with the Syrian president and foreign minister, the Iranian foreign minister discussed the bilateral relations, developments in Gaza, and the attack in Damascus. Abdollahian stressed the need to implement the agreements signed between the two countries. At a press conference with his Syrian counterpart, the Iranian foreign minister said that the United States was responsible for the Israeli attack in Damascus and had to be accountable alongside Israel. He said Israel had failed in the war in the Gaza Strip and was unable to expand its aggression to other fronts (IRNA, April 8, 2024).



**The new Iranian consulate in Damascus, inaugurated by the Iranian foreign minister (Tasnim, April 8, 2024)**

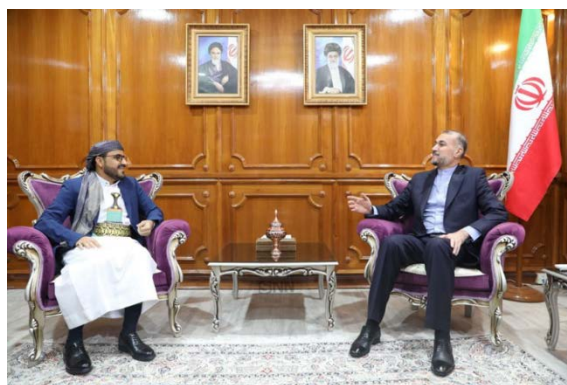
▶ A Syrian news channel reported that the IRGC had transferred a shipment of suicide UAVs from Albukamal to southern Syria. According to the report, the shipment included about ten UAVs manufactured in Albukamal that were transported in closed trucks from the industrial zone in south al-Mayadeen, east of Deir ez-Zor. The trucks were escorted by military vehicles and are supposed to be deployed in various areas in southern Syria, including Daraa, Quneitra and Suwayda. According to the report, this is the first shipment of locally manufactured UAVs to be delivered to southern Syria (Ayn al-Furat, April 6, 2024).

## Iranian involvement in Iraq and Yemen

▶ Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi spoke with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia' al-Sudani and discussed developments in the Palestinian arena and the attack attributed to Israel in Damascus. Raisi stressed that all Muslim countries had to adopt the position of Iran and Iraq in supporting the Palestinians (Fars, April 4, 2024). On April 9, 2024, Raisi spoke by phone with his Iraqi counterpart, Abd al-Latif Rashid, to discuss bilateral relations and the latest developments in the Gaza Strip. The Iranian president stressed the need for cooperation between Muslim countries to “stop the crimes and killings of the Zionist regime in Gaza and Palestine” (Tasnim, April 9, 2024).

▶ Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian met at the Iranian embassy in Muscat, Oman, with Houthi spokesman Mohammad Abdeslam. Abdollahian praised Houthi support for the Palestinian people. He stressed Houthi support for the Palestinians, saying that if the “Zionist regime” won the war in Gaza, it would severely harm Arab and Islamic national security. He expressed his appreciation for Iran’s support for the Palestinians and the “axis of resistance” (snn.ir, April 7, 2024).

▶ The Houthis reported that during the meeting, Mohammad Abdeslam expressed the Houthis’ full solidarity with Iran amid the attack attributed to Israel in Damascus. Abdeslam noted that the Houthis fully supported Iran’s right to respond and deter the “enemy” and stressed the importance of continuing to support the Gaza Strip on all levels (Mohammad Abdeslam’s X account, April 7, 2024).



**The Iranian foreign minister meets with the Houthi spokesman (snn.ir, April 7, 2024)**



## Pro-Iranian militias

### Iraq

► This week, the Islamic Resistance in Iraq reported numerous attacks carried out by its operatives against targets in Israel, mainly by UAVs. Among the targets mentioned were a “vital target” in Ashkelon, Ashkelon’s oil port, and Hatzetim base in the Negev; Haifa Port; “Yonatan Base” in southern Israel; Elifelet base above the Sea of Galilee; the Jordan base in the Golan Heights; “Essential target” in Eilat; oil refineries in Haifa; Ramat David Air Force Base; a vital target in Ashdod; and a military target in the Golan Heights (Telegram channel of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, April 7, 2024)



**Right: Attacking a “vital target” in Ashkelon, apparently with an al-Arqaab missile (Telegram channel of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, April 9, 2024) Left: UAV being launched at Eilat (Telegram channel of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, April 7, 2024)**



**Right: UAV being launched at the Haifa refineries (Telegram channel of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, April 6, 2024). Left: UAV being launched at the Ramat David base (Telegram channel of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, April 4, 2024)**

► In practice, except for the IDF Spokesperson’s report on April 9, 2024, referring to the identification of a suspicious aerial target that crossed into Israeli territory and was successfully intercepted (IDF website, April 9, 2024), no attacks reported by the Islamic Resistance were detected on the ground.

► The Islamic Resistance reported that in their attacks against Israel, they had begun to increase the use of the al-Arqaq missile. It is a type 351 Iranian cruise missile. Referred to as “Quds” by the Houthi movement in Yemen, this missile’s purpose, as suggested by its name, is to hit targets in Israeli territory. The range of cruise missiles of this type is up to 1000 kilometers (hizbo313allaa X account, April 9, 2024). Sharbal Abu Zayd, who was presented on al-Mayadeen TV as a “military expert,” previously noted in an interview on the channel that the al-Arqaq missile was a GPS-guided low-altitude cruise missile, but due to the ability of the United States, Israel, and Canada to disrupt GPS systems, they are capable of intercepting it or deflecting it from its course. He noted that the missile was first launched at Haifa on January 7, 2024. According to him, the missile may have employed the Iranian Nur satellite system. He suggested that the Islamic Resistance in Iraq might be using the Russian GLONASS satellite navigation system or the Chinese Compass satellite navigation system (al-Mayadeen, January 11, 2024).



**Right: Al-Arqaq cruise missile (hizbo313allaa X account, April 9, 2024) Left: Al-Arqaq cruise missile against the background of Haifa (al-Mayadeen, January 7, 2024)**

## Statements by senior militia officials

► Senior figures in the pro-Iranian militias in Iraq issued quite a few statements this week amid World Jerusalem Day, the killing of IRGC operatives in Syria, and the expected Iranian response. The following are the main statements:

- ◆ Abu Alaa al-Wala’i, the secretary-general of the Iraqi Kataeb Sayyid al-Shuhada militia, said that the Islamic Resistance in Iraq had chosen the most difficult task and the most sacred duty, setting itself the goal of striking at Israel’s bases, ports, airports, and power plants. According to him, the countries that support Israel have begun to feel that the costs of defending it have become much more than the benefits they

derive from it. This is because their interests are threatened in the Red Sea and other sea crossings (al-Ahed Network, April 8, 2024).

◆ Hossein al-Mousawi, the spokesman for the Iraqi Nujaba militia, referred to reports according to which the Iranian response to the attack in Damascus may come from the countries of the “resistance axis,” saying that Iran has the military capabilities and experience that enable it to achieve its goals without interfering in the internal affairs of other countries. Al-Mousawi said that Israel’s crime in Damascus would not go unpunished and that the Iranian response would not be limited in time or place (al-Akhbar, April 8, 2024).

◆ Akram al-Kaabi, the secretary-general of the Nujaba militia, said they were standing by their brothers in the Gaza Strip until the end, along with the resistance in Lebanon and Yemen. In a message he conveyed “to the Israeli enemy and its American partner,” he said that so far, the resistance had used only a small part of its capabilities (Saberin News Telegram channel, April 3, 2024).

◆ Hadi al-Amiri, the secretary-general of the Badr militia, said that during the al-Aqsa Flood, the Palestinian issue had returned to the forefront and that the resistance had brought Israel (the “occupying entity”) to the brink of defeat, as admitted by its leaders, who say they face existential challenges (Saberin News Telegram channel, April 3, 2024).

## Jerusalem Day events

► Popular Mobilization operatives and civilians in Iraq marked World Jerusalem Day with festive parades in the cities of Basra, Kirkuk, and other places. The Kataeb Hezbollah (Hezbollah Brigades) militia, prominent in the events, was joined by supporting civilians. Flags of the Popular Mobilization and Kataeb Hezbollah were waved, as well as posters calling for the liberation of Palestine. Photos of Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei were also visible. Israeli and American flags were placed on the ground so that marchers would step on them (Abu Zahra al-Aboudi’s X account; al-Kataebi al-Muqawim’s X account, April 5, 2024).



**Right: Fighters of the 41st Popular Mobilization Brigade at a parade in the Basra Governorate (Abu Zahra al-Aboudi's X account, April 5, 2024). Waving Kataeb Hezbollah flags and posters calling for the "liberation of Palestine" at an event in Kirkuk (al-Kataebi al-Muqawim's X account, April 5, 2024)**

► Abd al-Aziz al-Mohammedawi, codenamed Abu Fadak, the Popular Mobilization commander, participated in the World Jerusalem Day march in Tehran. Speaking during the march, he said their forces were an essential part of the battle of the Gaza Strip and the Palestinians. He added that they were waiting for Supreme Leader Khamenei's decision to see what the response would be to Israel's attack near the Iranian embassy building in Damascus. He noted that what was happening now on the resistance axis – Yemen, Iraq, Palestine, and Iran – was actually a declaration of Israel's fall (al-Mayadeen, April 6, 2024). In a photo posted on social media, Abu Fadak is seen next to PIJ secretary-general Ziad al-Nakhalah, who also attended the event (Dr. Saud al-Qaisi's X account, April 5, 2024).



**Abu Fadak (right) next to PIJ secretary-general Ziad al-Nakhalah (Dr. Saud al-Qaisi's X account, April 5, 2024)**

## Expressions of condolences over the death of Ismail Haniyeh's sons

► Senior figures in the pro-Iranian militias expressed their condolences over the death of the sons of Ismail Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau, who were killed in an airstrike in the Gaza Strip.

- ◆ Akram al-Kaabi, the secretary-general of the Nujaba movement, said the death of Haniyeh's children was a mark of honor and pride for them (Nujaba movement Telegram channel, April 10, 2024).
- ◆ Hadi al-Amiri, chairman of the al-Fatah Alliance (affiliated with the pro-Iranian militias in Iraq), offered their condolences over the death of his sons "from Zionist fire," saying that the blood of the shaheeds would soon be a victory (Saberin News Telegram channel, April 10, 2024).
- ◆ The Kataeb Sayyid al-Shuhada militia issued a condolence message saying they congratulated Haniyeh on his sons' joining the group of shaheeds by the "coward Zionist enemy" (Kataeb Sayyid al-Shuhada militia Telegram channel, April 10, 2024).

## Yemen

► According to the US Central Command (CENTCOM), during the past week, Houthi forces carried out six attacks against vessels in the Red Sea using five anti-ship missiles and four UAVs. The launches, referred to as a threat, were intercepted by US-led coalition forces, and no damage or casualties were reported. In addition, CENTCOM reported that in recent days, coalition forces had carried out several attacks against Houthi military targets on Yemeni soil, which they said posed an immediate danger to vessels in the area (CENTCOM X account, April 4-9, 2024). On April 6, 2024, the European Union Red Sea Task Force reported that the German warship Hessen had intercepted a missile launched at a vessel in the area (EU Task Force EUNAVFOR Aspides X account, April 6, 2024).

► Yahya Saria, the spokesman for the Houthi armed forces, announced that Houthi naval forces had attacked a British ship (Hope Island) with several missiles and that a direct hit had been identified. In addition, Saria claimed that their naval forces had attacked two Israeli ships in the Arabian Sea (MSC GRACE F) and in the Indian Ocean (MSC GINA). The ships, which were en route to Israeli ports, had been attacked by ballistic and cruise missiles and were both hit. He also claimed that the Houthi air forces had attacked several US Navy ships and managed to

hit them (Yahya Saria's X account, April 7, 2024). It should be noted that CENTCOM did report that the Hope Island was attacked by an anti-ship ballistic missile on April 7, 2024, and that it suffered no damage. Saria's claim about the attack on the Israeli ships has not been confirmed by any other sources.

► Mahdi al-Mashat, chairman of the Houthi movement's Supreme Political Council, emphasized that their operations at sea were carried out with the objectives of stopping the Israeli aggression and siege of the Gaza Strip and bringing aid into the Gaza Strip. He called on all the free people and people of the Islamic nation to act actively and contribute to supporting the Palestinian people on all levels. He also warned the United States and Britain of the consequences of their "aggression" against Yemen and held them fully responsible. He condemned "the Zionist aggression at the Iranian consulate in Damascus, which is a blatant violation of the sovereignty of Syria and Iran" (Houthi Movement Telegram channel, April 10, 2024).

► In a speech given by Abd al-Malik al-Houthi, the leader of the Houthis in Yemen, on the occasion of World Jerusalem Day, he noted that this year's Jerusalem Day was different from previous years, in light of six consecutive months of "genocide" in the Gaza Strip and that its importance is increasing in light of the continued aggression. He claimed the IDF's actions in the al-Shifaa hospital compound in Gaza had been an example of "a terrible crime and genocide" and that the position of the countries of the foreign workers killed in the recent Israeli attack had been too patient with Israel. Al-Houthi noted that so far, they had attacked 90 ships, with 34 operations using 125 missiles and UAVs recorded in the past month alone (al-Masirah, April 6, 2024).

► The Jordanian news agency Ammon reported, citing eyewitnesses, that the remains of a missile from an unknown source fell near the Mujib Bridge between the Madaba and the al-Karak governorates, in western Jordan, near the Dead Sea. A "security source" told the news agency that a security investigation had been opened into the source of the missile and the circumstances of the incident (Ammon News Agency, April 7, 2024). Apparently, it was a missile or UAV launched from Iraq or Yemen.





**Part of the missile or UAV that landed in Jordan (Ammon News Agency, April 7, 2024)**