



Spotlight on Iran

May 8-16, 2024

Editor: Dr. Raz Zimmt

Highlights¹

- ▶ The chief of staff of the Iranian army declared that the al-Aqsa Flood and the Iranian attack on Israel accelerated the process of eliminating Israel and brought about regional and global strategic changes. The commander of the IRGC's Qods Force said the Supreme Leader of Iran was the only one in the world who had the courage to decide to attack Israel. He added that Israel and the United States had been humiliated by the "resistance" in the Gaza Strip and could not stand up to the resistance front. According to him, the Palestinians' situation has hardly changed compared to their situation at the beginning of the war in the Gaza Strip seven months ago.
- ▶ Jordan thwarted two attempts to smuggle weapons from Syria to the Muslim Brotherhood in the country, with Hamas involvement, apparently directed by Iran.
- ▶ The deputy head of the Iranian Headquarters for the Development and Reconstruction of Shiite Holy Sites announced the completion of renovation work in the underground part of the Sayyida Zaynab Tomb compound in Damascus. The reconstruction activity reflects Iran's ongoing efforts to deepen its religious-cultural influence in Syria and Iraq.
- ▶ In an extensive interview with the Iranian news agency ISNA, the Iranian ambassador to Iraq said Iran had warned the Iraqi authorities against using their territory for activities against the national security of the Islamic Republic. According to the ambassador, the Shiite militias in Iraq operate independently and in accordance with their interests.
- ▶ The Islamic Resistance in Iraq continued to claim responsibility for UAV and cruise missile attacks on targets in Israeli territory, including IDF bases and energy facilities. The IDF confirmed that it had intercepted three UAVs east of Israel.

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

►The Houthis renewed their UAV and missile attacks against military and civilian vessels in the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the Indian Ocean. The Houthi leader threatened to expand the fighting against Israel if Israeli activity in Rafah was expanded.

Iranian involvement in the Palestinian arena

►Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian spoke by phone with UN Secretary-General António Guterres to discuss developments in the region and the Gaza Strip. Abdollahian praised Guterres' efforts to end the war in the Gaza Strip, saying that if the United States did not exert pressure on the Israeli prime minister to accept the ceasefire, there would be severe consequences for “supporters of the war.” He said Iran supported Hamas' response to the ceasefire proposal (Fars, May 9, 2024).

►Abdolrahim Mousavi, the chief of staff of the Iranian army, said at a military ceremony in the city of Mashhad that the al-Aqsa Flood on October 7, 2023, and the Iranian attack on Israel on April 13, 2024, accelerated the process of eliminating the “Zionist regime.” According to him, the state of the world and the region is divided between what happened before and after these two events. He said that just as the al-Aqsa Flood and the “resistance” in the Gaza Strip had led the world in a new direction, the Iranian attack on Israel had created a new strategic movement in the world (Tasnim, May 9, 2024).



Iranian Army Chief of Staff Mousavi (Tasnim, May 9, 2024)

►Esmail Qaani, the commander of the Qods Force, speaking at a memorial ceremony for Mohammad Hadi Haj Rahimi, a senior IRGC operative killed in an attack attributed to Israel in Damascus on April 1, 2024, said that the “Zionist regime” and the United States had been humiliated by the “resistance” in Gaza and that they admitted that they could not stand up to the resistance front. He noted that when the war in the Gaza Strip began, all the military analysts estimated that the Palestinians would not be able to hold out for more than two

months. Seven months later, however, the situation of the Palestinians had not changed much compared to their situation before the war. Referring to Iran's attack on Israel on April 13, 2024, he noted that the United States and NATO had used all their power to defend Israel and intercept the missiles and rockets. According to Qaani, seven or eight ships and more than 200 fighter planes participated in the interception. He added that the Supreme Leader of Iran was the only one in the world who had the courage to make such a decision [to attack Israel] (Tasnim, May 15, 2024).



Qods Force commander (Tasnim, May 15, 2024)

► Iraj Masjedi, appointed this week as the coordination deputy in the IRGC's Qods Force, said at the same ceremony that the normalization process with the "Zionist regime" had been marginalized by the war and that the resistance and the residents of the Gaza Strip were now a central axis in the region. He added that no political agreement in the region would be reached until the end of the war with Hamas' consent and acceptance of the conditions of the "resistance" (snn.ir, May 15, 2024).

► Ali-Akbar Velayati, the Supreme Leader's advisor on international affairs, met with Palestinian journalist, political activist and thinker Mounir Shafiq to discuss regional developments and the war in the Gaza Strip. Velayati noted that the residents of the Gaza Strip and "Palestine" had proven to the world that oppression could be defeated through steadfastness and resistance. He added that the "Zionist regime" would not survive and that the Palestinian people would win. Mounir Shafiq thanked Velayati for Iran's support for the Palestinians, saying that Iran was playing an important role in the currently emerging new world order (ISNA, May 12, 2024).



The meeting of the Supreme Leader’s advisor with Mounir Shafiq (ISNA, May 12, 2024)

►Nasser Kanani, the spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry, announced that Iran had taken several steps in accordance with its policy of support for the Palestinian people, one of which was the opening of a virtual Palestinian embassy in Tehran as part of the website of the Iranian Foreign Ministry. He said it was an experimental and preliminary stage in preparation for further steps (Tabnak, May 13, 2024).

►Reuters reported, citing two Jordanian “sources,” that in March 2024, Jordan had foiled two attempts to smuggle weapons from Syria to a Muslim Brotherhood cell in Jordan with ties with Hamas in the Gaza Strip. According to the sources, the smuggling attempts were directed by Iran and were intended to carry out acts of sabotage against the Jordanian regime. The cell operatives who were detained with weapons in their possession were Palestinian residents of Jordan. They were recruited by Saleh al-Arouri, deputy head of Hamas’ political bureau, who was killed in an attack attributed to Israel in Lebanon in January 2024 (Reuters, May 15, 2024). At the same time, it was reported that in March 2024, the Jordanian security forces had foiled an attempt to smuggle weapons into the kingdom by militias “supported by another country” (Jordanian News Agency, May 15, 2024).

Iranian involvement in Syria

►Majid Namjoo, the deputy head of the Iranian Headquarters for the Development and Reconstruction of Shiite Holy Sites, announced the completion of renovation work in the underground part of the Sayyida Zaynab Tomb compound, the Shiites’ holiest site in Damascus.² He noted that as part of the work, carried out by engineers and workers from Iran and Syria, more than 2,000 square meters had been added to the pilgrimage site (imna.ir,

² The Sayyida Zaynab Tomb, located south of Damascus, is considered the holiest site for Shiites in Syria.

May 13, 2024). In recent years, Iran has expanded its religious and cultural activities in Syria and Iraq and is investing great efforts in spreading Shiite teachings. It has been doing so, inter alia, through the reconstruction, expansion, and development of Shiite holy sites, including the compound of the Sayyida Zaynab Tomb on the southern outskirts of Damascus, which was damaged in the civil war in Syria.



Sayyida Zaynab Tomb compound in Damascus (imna.ir, May 13, 2024)

Iranian involvement in Iraq

► Mohammad Kazem Al-e Sadeq, the Iranian ambassador to Baghdad, said in an interview with the Iranian news agency ISNA (May 12, 2024) that the security agreement signed between Iran and Iraq included clauses regarding the Iraqi central government's control of the border between the two countries, the disarmament of the armed groups in northern Iraq, and the transfer of the forces operating against Iran from the border area deep into Iraqi territory. According to the ambassador's statement, a large part of the agreement has been implemented, but activity is still being carried out in Iraq that is contrary to the agreement. He said Iran had warned the Iraqi authorities several times in the past that Iran's national security was a red line for Tehran and that it would respond decisively against anyone who acted against it. He added that Iran was Iraq's main economic partner and that the volume of trade between them had increased significantly over the past year, estimated at \$12 billion. Referring to the American military presence in Iraq, the ambassador assessed that Iraqi Prime Minister Muhammad Shia' al-Sudani was serious about the need for the withdrawal of American forces from his country, saying that the government in Baghdad was working in cooperation with the Shiite militias to set a timetable as early as possible for the US withdrawal. Al-e Sadeq also referred to the activity of the pro-Iranian Shiite militias in Iraq,

saying that the “resistance” groups in the countries of the region were independent, making their own decisions and acting in their own interests.



The Iranian ambassador to Baghdad (ISNA, May 12, 2024)

Activity of the Shiite militias

Iraq

Activities on the ground

►The Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed responsibility for carrying out 13 UAV and cruise missile attacks against targets in Israeli territory between May 9-16, 2024 (Iraqi Islamic Resistance Telegram channel, May 9-16, 2024), including:

- ◆ A Haifa refinery (May 16, 2024), Leviathan Gas Platform (May 9, 2024), and Ashkelon Oil Port (May 9, 2024).
- ◆ “Vital targets” in the Jericho Valley (May 15, 2024).
- ◆ A military target in Eilat (May 14, 2024). The IDF Spokesperson reported the interception of two UAVs en route to Israel from the east (IDF Spokesperson, May 15, 2024).
- ◆ A “vital target” in Eilat (May 9, 13, and 16, 2024) and a “military site/post” in Eilat (May 10, 2024). On the evening of May 13, 2024, the IDF Spokesperson reported the interception of a UAV en route into Israeli territory from the east (IDF website, May 13, 2024).
- ◆ Ramon Air Force Base (May 11, 2024), Ovda Air Force Base (May 9, 2024), and Nevatim Air Base (May 9 and 15, 2024).
- ◆ Elifelet base north of the Sea of Galilee (May 9, 2024).



Right: Missile being launched at the Ramon base (Telegram channel of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, May 11, 2024). Left: Aircraft being launched at a “military target” in Eilat (Telegram channel of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, May 15, 2024)

- ▶ The al-Amid Telegram channel, affiliated with the “axis of resistance” and the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, reported that Shahed-136 drones³ had officially entered the use of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq in its operations against Israel (al-Amid Telegram channel, May 15, 2024).
- ▶ Mohammad al-Tamimi, secretary-general of al-Waad al-Sadeq, said that the Islamic Resistance in Iraq had no choice but to continue its attacks against the “Zionist entity” to support the factions of the Palestinian resistance and their war. Al-Tamimi said the Iraqi militias’ activities against Israel would not stop until Israel stopped the war in the Gaza Strip (Sputnik, May 10, 2024).
- ▶ At the same time as the attacks on targets in Israel, the US Department of Defense reportedly confirmed that pro-Iranian militias had attacked the al-Assad base in northern Iraq on April 21 and 22, 2024, the first attack against US forces in the Middle East since February. There were no casualties, and no damage was caused (Carla Babb’s X account, May 13, 2024).

Attacks against the Nujaba militia in Damascus

- ▶ Sayyid Mahmoud al-Mousawi, head of the media bureau of the Iraqi Nujaba pro-Iranian militia, accused Israel of attacking with American support a military base and a “cultural bureau” of the militia in the Damascus area on the morning of May 9, 2024. He added that they were prepared for that in the “resistance” movement and were ready to deal with such incidents (Nujaba Movement Telegram channel, May 9, 2024).

³ An Iranian suicide UAV with a range of 2,200 km carrying a warhead of 40 kg (Wikipedia and the Israeli Air Force website). Such drones were launched by Iran at Israel in the attack on April 13-14, 2024.

►Following the attack, the militia issued a statement saying that the “crimes of the Zionist entity” against the Nujaba’s buildings would not go unpunished and that “our response will be surprising, strong, effective and will reach deep into enemy territory” (Nujaba Movement Telegram channel, May 9, 2024). Mahdi al-Kaabi, a member of the Nujaba’s political bureau, threatened that the response would be very powerful and would take place at a place and time determined by the leadership on the ground and in coordination with the other arenas of the “resistance.” According to him, the equation with Israel has not changed following the attack in Damascus because all the headquarters are on alert, and civilians and military personnel have been evacuated (al-Mayadeen, May 9, 2024).

►Abu Alaa al-Wala’i, the secretary-general of Kataeb Sayyid al-Shuhada, announced that they would support any decision of the militia to respond to the Israeli attacks (Abu Alaa al-Wala’i’s X account, May 9, 2024).

►The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported airstrikes carried out against a Nujaba Movement cultural center south of Damascus and against a training camp of the militia. It was noted that the Syrian air defense failed to intercept the missiles, and apparently there were fatalities (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, May 9, 2024).



**Ruins of a Nujaba Movement building in the Damascus area
(Nujaba Telegram channel, May 9, 2024)**

Yemen

Activity against vessels

►After several days of relative quiet, the Houthis resumed their attacks against civilian ships as well as military ships of the coalition forces. Yahya Saria, the spokesman for the Houthi armed forces, reported on the attacks (Yahya Saria’s X account, May 9-15, 2024):

- ◆ Two “Israeli” ships, MSC DIEGO and MSC GINA, were attacked by ballistic missiles and UAVs in the Gulf of Aden (May 9, 2024). The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO), which monitors navigation in the Red Sea area, reported that the crew of the MSC DIEGO had told it that two explosions occurred near the ship while it was cruising the Gulf of Aden on May 7, 2024, but there were no casualties and no damage was caused (UKMTO X account, May 7, 2024).
 - ◆ Two separate attacks by Houthi missile forces against the MSC VITTORIA in the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea (May 9, 2024).
 - ◆ Houthi naval forces attacked the US Navy ship USS Mason with missiles in the Red Sea. In addition, Houthi navy, missile, and air forces attacked the ship Destiny in the Red Sea (May 15, 2024).
- ▶According to the US Central Command (CENTCOM), during the past week, Houthi forces carried out five attacks against vessels in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden using UAVs and an anti-ship ballistic missile. The launches were intercepted by US-led coalition forces and no casualties or significant damage were reported. In addition, CENTCOM reported that in recent days, coalition forces had carried out several airstrikes on Yemeni territory against Houthi military targets (CENTCOM X account, May 9-16, 2024).
- ▶The Hezbollah-affiliated Lebanese daily al-Akhbar quoted “knowledgeable military sources” as claiming that there had been naval clashes between the Houthis and American military ships and that the American vessels had been forced to change their route. According to the “sources,” the Houthis are carrying out their “legal role in protecting the international shipping lanes from the American and British presence” (al-Akhbar Telegram channel, May 10, 2024)
- ▶Abd al-Malik al-Houthi, the leader of the Houthi movement, warned in a speech that if Israel expanded its operations in Rafah, the Houthis would expand their operations against it. He also said that the Houthi forces were planning the fifth and sixth phases of their operations against Israel and that when a decision was made to start a new phase, it would confirm the capabilities that would enable the execution (Houthi forces’ media arm X account, May 9, 2024).

Expansion of Houthi tunnel network

- ▶According to a report by Iran’s IRNA news agency, the Houthis are expanding the system of underground tunnels they use for military purposes. According to the report, satellite

imagery recently revealed that the Houthis have developed their underground infrastructure significantly in the mountainous areas near the capital Sanaa, as well as near the city of Saada, known as a Houthi stronghold. According to the report, the tunnels serve as bases and shelters for military vehicles such as missile-carrying vehicles. It is possible that in the future, the infrastructure will be used to store missiles and other important means, as Iran did (IRNA, May 11, 2024).

Security Council meeting on Houthi activity

► On May 13, 2024, a UN Security Council meeting was held on the situation in Yemen. Hans Grundberg, the UN special envoy to Yemen, claimed that there had been a decrease in the frequency of attacks against military and commercial vessels from Yemeni territory, as well as in US and British airstrikes on Yemeni territory. According to US and British representatives, Houthi actions in the Red Sea, and now in the Indian Ocean, reduce the chances of a political solution between Yemen's various sides and exacerbate the country's economic and humanitarian crisis. In addition, the American representative claimed that there was clear evidence that Iran was transferring advanced weapons to the Houthis, such as ballistic and cruise missiles, thereby violating UN sanctions and encouraging regional instability (UN Security Council website, May 13, 2024).