



# Spotlight on Iran

May 29—June 5, 2024

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## Highlights<sup>1</sup>

- ▶ In view of Israel's continued operation in Rafah, senior Iranian officials reiterated their support for the Palestinians. The supreme leader of Iran declared that Israel would not be able to recover from the Hamas attack on October 7, 2023, and that Operation al-Aqsa Flood had foiled the plan of the "enemies" to take over the region and the Muslim world. The Qods Force commander said that the end of Israel was near and that it was on the verge of extinction.
- ▶ Acting Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri-Kani continued to promote Iran's political-diplomatic campaign after the death of Foreign Minister Abdollahian. This past week, Bagheri held a series of telephone conversations with foreign ministers around the world and discussed developments in the region and the Palestinian arena. Bagheri also made his first visit to Syria and Lebanon, during which he met with senior Syrian and Lebanese government officials, Hezbollah's secretary-general, and representatives of the Palestinian factions.
- ▶ An IRGC officer was killed in an attack attributed to Israel in the Aleppo area of Syria. He is the first Iranian officer killed in Syria since the targeted killing of the IRGC commander in Syria and Lebanon on April 1, 2024, attributed to Israel, which led to the Iranian attack on Israel in mid-April 2024.
- ▶ The Syrian president paid a condolence visit to Tehran following the deaths of the senior Iranian officials and met with senior Iranian government officials, headed by the Iranian supreme leader and the acting president.
- ▶ The Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed responsibility for carrying out five drone attacks against Israel, most of them towards Haifa. The IDF reported that a cruise missile had been intercepted in the Golan Heights.

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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 Houthis claimed responsibility for attacks against military and civilian vessels in the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, the Indian Ocean, and the Mediterranean, including two attacks on the US aircraft carrier Eisenhower. The US Central Command denied any damage to its ships. The Houthis also claimed responsibility for launching a ballistic missile at Israel, and the IDF confirmed that an interception had been carried out in the Eilat area.

## Iranian involvement in the Palestinian arena

►Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei sent a letter to pro-Palestinian students at American universities thanking them for their support for the Palestinians. According to his letter, they stand on the right side of history and are part of the “resistance front” designed to put an end to the “oppression by the Zionist terror network” against the Palestinian people. According to the supreme leader, the “global Zionist elite,” which he claims controls most of the American and European media corporations or influences them through funding and bribes, calls “this human resistance” “terrorism,” even though it supports the Palestinians defending themselves from the “crimes of the Zionists” (the supreme leader’s website, May 30, 2024).

►At a ceremony marking the anniversary of the death of Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic revolution, Iranian Supreme Leader Khamenei said Operation al-Aqsa Flood had put the “Zionist regime” on a course of collapse and dealt it a decisive blow from which it would not be able to recover. He noted that even Western commentators admitted that Israel was defeated by Hamas and did not achieve any of its goals after eight months. Khamenei added that the operation had foiled the grand plan of the “enemies” to take over the region and the Muslim world and that despite the support of the United States and Western countries for Israel, they knew it could not be saved (Tasnim, June 3, 2024).



**Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei (Tasnim, June 3, 2024)**

►On May 28, 2024, Qods Force commander Esmail Qaani visited Hamas’ office in Tehran and declared that the end of the “Zionist regime” was near. He noted that Operation al-Aqsa Flood

had caused Israel to taste a defeat it would never forget and that it was currently at its weakest stage and on the verge of extinction. During his visit, Qaani met with Khaled Qaddoumi, Hamas' representative in Tehran, and praised the "resistance" of the Palestinian people against "the Zionist enemy and its aggression that has been going on for eight months." Qaddoumi stressed that the Palestinian "resistance" in the Gaza Strip had inflicted a "terrible defeat" on Israel during the past eight months. He thanked Iran for standing by the Palestinian people (Nour News, May 29, 2024).



**Qods Force commander visits Hamas' office in Tehran (Nour News, May 29, 2024)**

► On May 31, 2024, Iranian Acting Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri-Kani spoke with Mohammad bin Abdulrahman, Qatar's prime minister and foreign minister, to discuss bilateral relations and developments in the Gaza Strip. Bagheri called for continued cooperation between Muslim countries to protect the Palestinian people, noting that "the Zionists must know that the continuation of the crimes in Gaza will have a price." They also discussed the proposal to hold a special meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to discuss the latest developments in the Palestinian arena, especially in Rafah (Iranian Foreign Ministry Telegram channel, June 1, 2024). Bagheri also discussed developments in the Palestinian arena in telephone conversations with the foreign ministers of Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Pakistan (Iranian Foreign Ministry Telegram channel, June 1-2, 2024).

► Acting Iranian Foreign Minister Bagheri said at a conference on the Gaza Strip held in Tehran that the issue of the Gaza Strip had become extremely important among the Muslim world and world public opinion. He said Operation al-Aqsa Flood had been a turning point in the history of the Palestinian people and of the "Zionist regime," which, he claimed, was in a process of continuous decline, and that its situation vis-à-vis the "resistance" was getting worse by the day. Bagheri added that the Iranian attack on Israel on April 13, 2024, eliminated the "imagined deterrence of the Zionists" and proved that they could not defend their "illegitimate

existence.” He stressed Iran’s support for the “resistance,” saying that support for the faction was no longer limited to Iran alone, and that it had become an important, significant, and stabilizing factor in the region, which no one could remove. Bagheri also said that all political, propaganda, and diplomatic means had to be used to support the Palestinians against Israel and its supporters everywhere in the world (ISNA, June 1, 2024).



**Ali Bagheri at a conference on Gaza in Tehran (ISNA, June 1, 2024)**

►Amir Ali Hajizadeh, commander of the IRGC’s Aerospace Force, said in an interview to al-Mayadeen TV that the “resistance” in Palestine was changing history. He noted that the Palestinian issue had become global and that its importance had grown compared to the past. Iranian Defense Minister Mohammad Reza Ashtiani also gave an interview to al-Mayadeen, in which he said that the Palestinian issue was paramount for freedom seekers in the world and that an independent Palestinian state would soon be established (yjc.ir, June 3, 2024).

## Iranian involvement in Syria and Lebanon

►According to Iranian media reports, Saeed Abyar, an “IRGC military advisor” in Syria, was killed in an attack attributed to Israel on June 3, 2024, in the Aleppo area, Syria (snn.ir, June 3, 2024). He is the first IRGC officer killed in Syria since the alleged Israeli targeted killing of Mohammad Reza Zahedi, the IRGC commander in Syria and Lebanon, in a building near the Iranian consulate in Damascus on April 1, 2024. IRGC commander Hossein Salami warned in response that Israel should expect a response (Tasnim, June 5, 2024). At least 17 members of pro-Iranian militias, including three Hezbollah operatives and two Iranians, including Abyar, were killed in an airstrike attributed to Israel against a copper factory in the town of Hayyan, about 10 km northwest of Aleppo (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, June 3, 2024). An independent Syrian news website quoted a “military source” as saying that the factory was under direct Iranian supervision and was used for the production of missiles (North Press Agency, June 3, 2024)



**Saeed Abyar, IRGC officer killed in Syria (snn.ir, June 3, 2024)**

► Syrian President Bashar Assad arrived in Tehran to express condolences over the death of the senior Iranian officials, headed by President Raisi, in the helicopter crash. During his visit, the Syrian president met with Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and Acting President Mohammad Mokhber. Meeting with President Assad, Khamenei said that the “resistance” distinguished Syria’s identity and that it had to preserve it. He stressed the need to strengthen the ties between the two countries, which were pillars of the “axis of resistance,” and noted that cooperation between them had to be increased to overcome the political and economic pressures from the United States and Europe. President Assad described Iranian-Syrian relations as strategic and praised the supreme leader for his support of the “resistance” in the region and in Syria (IRNA, May 30, 2024).



**The meeting between the supreme leader of Iran and the Syrian president (IRNA, May 30, 2024)**

► Meeting with the Syrian president, the acting Iranian president said Iran would continue in the footsteps of President Raisi, stressing its continued support for the “axis of resistance.” Mokhber also stressed the need to expand economic cooperation between the two countries and implement the agreements signed between them during Raisi’s visit to Damascus in May 2023 (IRNA, May 30, 2024).

►On June 2, 2024, the Syrian news channel Ayn al-Furat reported on the transfer of a shipment of drones to IRGC forces and pro-Iranian militias in the Albukamal area in eastern Syria. According to the report, the aircraft used for attacking and intelligence gathering were transferred in the first half of May 2024 under the supervision of Hajj Sajjad, deputy commander in charge of the IRGC in the Albukamal area, and using Hezbollah members. The aircraft were moved to underground warehouses on the northern outskirts of Albukamal.

►On June 3, 2024, Acting Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri visited Lebanon and Syria, his first visit since the death of Foreign Minister Amir Hossein Abdollahian in the crash of the Iranian president's helicopter last month. During the visit, Bagheri met with senior Lebanese government officials, including interim Prime Minister Najib Mikati, Foreign Minister Abdallah Bou Habib, and Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, to discuss regional and Palestinian developments (ISNA, June 3, 2024). At a press conference with the Lebanese foreign minister, Bagheri said the Islamic "resistance" in Lebanon was an anchor of stability and peace in the region. He noted that during his meeting with the Lebanese foreign minister, he discussed developments in the Gaza Strip, especially in Rafah, and agreed that all countries should take joint action to combat "Zionist aggression." Bagheri warned Israel against launching an all-out confrontation with Hezbollah in Lebanon (Tasnim, June 3, 2024).

►During his visit to Beirut, Bagheri also met with Hezbollah secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah and discussed developments in the Gaza Strip and Lebanon. He also met with senior figures in the Palestinian organizations, including senior Hamas leader Khalil al-Haya and PIJ secretary-general Ziad al-Nakhalah. Bagheri stressed that Iran would continue to support the "resistance" in the Palestinian territories and the region (al-Alam; IRNA, June 4, 2024).



**Bagheri meets with Nasrallah (Tasnim, June 4, 2024)**

►At the end of his visit to Lebanon, Bagheri continued to Damascus and met with Syrian President Bashar Assad, Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad, and representatives of the Palestinian organizations in Damascus. At a press conference with the Syrian foreign minister, Bagheri said



he had come to Syria to consult on the latest developments in the Gaza Strip and Rafah and to formulate a joint strategy to stop “Zionist aggression.” He said his visit conveyed the message that Iran would continue to stand by the “resistance” as in the past (Tasnim, June 4, 2024). Meeting with President Assad, Bagheri said that the ties between Iran and Syria would remain deep and strategic because they were based on stable foundations and common interests (ISNA, June 4, 2024).



**Bagheri meets with President Assad (ISNA, June 4, 2024)**

## Iranian involvement in Iraq

►A website exposing information about the IRGC’s Qods Force activity revealed the details of Mohammad Sattari, a senior Qods Force operative responsible for supplying drones to the pro-Iranian Shiite militias in Iraq. According to the website, Sattari, whose real name is Mohammad Javad Lotfi, is responsible for coordinating the supply of UAVs for Shiite militia operatives in Iraq and for training them. Among those militias are Asaib Ahl al-Haq, Kataeb Hezbollah, and the Badr Organization. As part of his activity, Sattari visited Iraq several times, and apparently Syria as well (www.vsquds.info, May 30, 2024).



**Photos of Mohammad Sattari (www.vsquds.info, May 30, 2024)**

## Activities of the Shiite militias

### Iraq

#### Activities on the ground

►The Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed responsibility for carrying out **five attacks**, most of them towards Haifa, between May 29, 2024, and June 5, 2024 (as of 12:00), using drones. For the first time, the pro-Iranian militia Saraya Awliya al-Dam (Battalion of the Blood Redeemers)<sup>2</sup> claimed responsibility for carrying out attacks (Islamic Resistance in Iraq Telegram channel, May 29 – June 4, 2024; Saraya Awliya al-Dam Telegram account, May 30, 2024). The targets of the attacks were as follows:

- ◆ Two “targets” at Haifa Port (May 30, 2024) using drones. This is Saraya Awliya al-Dam’s first claim of responsibility since the beginning of the current conflict. According to the IDF Spokesperson, a cruise missile coming from the east was shot down in the Golan Heights, with no casualties or damage (IDF website, May 30, 2024).
- ◆ A “vital target” in Eilat (June 2, 2024) using a drone.
- ◆ Two “vital targets” in Haifa – the refinery and port (June 2, 2024) using Saraya Awliya al-Dam drones.
- ◆ A “vital target” in Haifa (June 3, 2024) using drones.
- ◆ A “vital target” on the Dead Sea coast (June 4, 2024) using drones.



**Right: Launch of a drone at Eilat (Islamic Resistance in Iraq Telegram channel, June 2, 2024). Left: Saraya Awliya al-Dam operatives before the first launch into Haifa (Saraya Awliya al-Dam Telegram channel, May 30, 2024)**

#### Preparations for the “third stage” of escalation against Israel

►A meeting was reportedly held in Tehran between leaders of Iraqi pro-Iranian militias and senior officials of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards and Qods Force. According to the report,

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<sup>2</sup> The Saraya Awliya al-Dam militia is identified as part of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, but it may be a name intended to keep the pro-Iranian militias on a low profile.



the participants discussed the militias' escalation against Israel and the use of more advanced weapons in the "third stage" of the escalation of the "Iraqi resistance," such as ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and launching more drones simultaneously (DrRebin93's X account, May 31, 2024).

► Abu Alaa al-Wala'i, secretary-general of Kataeb Sayyid al-Shuhada, said that the al-Aqsa Flood campaign had exposed Israel's confusion and embarrassment. He added that there was a third stage of escalation of the "Islamic resistance" in Iraq, which would be launched soon and would surprise Israel greatly in terms of the quality of the weapons to be used (al-Amid Telegram channel, May 31, 2024).

## Attacks on US businesses for supporting Israel

► On June 3, 2024, American restaurants were attacked on Palestine Street in Baghdad. The attackers are suspected of belonging to pro-Iranian Iraqi militias (al-Arabiya, June 4, 2024). In addition, demonstrations were held near American businesses in Baghdad, al-Basra, and other cities as part of a campaign to boycott American businesses that support Israel (Saberin News Telegram channel, June 4, 2024). In this context, Kataeb Hezbollah spokesman Abu Ali al-Askari called for boycotting and expelling American companies in Iraq and denying them freedom of action (Ali al-Askari's Telegram channel, June 3, 2024).



**Demonstration calling for boycotting American businesses in al-Basra**  
(Saberin News Telegram channel, June 4, 2024)

## Yemen

### Anti-vessel activity

► Over the past week, the Houthis escalated their attacks against military and civilian vessels, claiming attacks in the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, the Indian Ocean, and the Mediterranean, including claiming responsibility for two attacks on the US aircraft carrier Eisenhower. Houthi Armed Forces spokesman Yahya Saria reported on the attacks (Yahya Saria's X account, May 29-June 5, 2024):

◆ May 29, 2024: Three attacks in the Red Sea against the ships Laax, Morea, and Sealady using ballistic missiles and UAVs. Saria claimed that the Laax had been directly hit and severely damaged. The French navy reported that it had provided assistance to the ship, which was reportedly carrying grain to Iran, and that damage was caused on board and in the bottom of the ship, but no casualties were reported (Account X of the French forces in Djibouti, May 29, 2024; AP, May 30, 2024); Two attacks in the Arabian Sea against the “American” ships Alba and Maersk Hartford using missiles and UAVs. No casualties or damage were reported; An attack in the Mediterranean against the Minerva Antonia with cruise missiles. This claim has not been corroborated and there have been no reports of casualties or damage.



**Documentation of the damage caused to the Laax (X account of the French forces stationed in Djibouti, May 29, 2024)**

◆ May 31, 2024: Attack on the American aircraft carrier Eisenhower in the Red Sea with ballistic missiles and cruise missiles in response to American and British airstrikes that caused casualties in Yemeni territory. According to Saria, the strikes were “accurate and direct,” but the US Central Command (CENTCOM) denied it (Voice of America, June 2024).

◆ June 1, 2024: Another attack on the American aircraft carrier Eisenhower, north of the Red Sea, with missiles and UAVs, and a UAV attack on an American destroyer in the Red Sea. Saria claimed direct hits, but CENTCOM said two ballistic missiles fired at the destroyer USS Gravelly had been intercepted, with no casualties or damage, and that the aircraft carrier had not been attacked; two attacks against the ship MAINA in the Red Sea and the Arab Sea; attack on the ship ALORAIQ in the Indian Ocean; attack on the ship ABLIANI in the Red Sea. According to Saria, the attacks were carried out in response to

violations of the prohibition on entry to Israeli ports and there were accurate hits, but there has been no corroboration of the claims.

►According to CENTCOM reports, during the past week, the Houthi forces carried out ten attacks against vessels in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden using eight anti-ship ballistic missiles and 19 UAVs. According to CENTCOM, all the attacks missed their targets or were intercepted without causing damage or casualties (CENTCOM X account, May 29-June 5, 2024).

### **Ballistic missile fired at Israel**

►On June 3, 2024, Yahya Saria announced that a ballistic missile had been fired at Umm Rashrash (Eilat) and that the operation had “achieved its goal.” According to Saria, the missile was called “Filastin” (“Palestine”) and was first exposed in this attack by the Houthis (Yahya Saria’s X account, June 3, 2024). The IDF Spokesperson said the air defense fighters had successfully intercepted a surface-to-surface missile en route to Israeli territory from the Red Sea area in the Eilat area, using the Arrow system, and that there had been no casualties (IDF X account, June 3, 2024)



**Launch of the missile “Filastin” (al-Masirah TV X account, June 5, 2024)**

### **Interception of American drone**

►On May 29, 2024, Yahya Saria reported the downing of an American MQ9 drone and published documentation of its downing. This is the sixth downing of such aircraft by the Houthis since the beginning of the current conflict in Yemen (Yahya Saria’s X account, May 29, 2024).

### **Attacks on Yemeni soil**

►On May 31, 2024, Yahya Saria reported that extensive US and UK airstrikes had been carried out on Yemeni territory. Sites in the capital Sanaa, the city of al-Hudaydah, and other areas were bombed, including a radio station building and a coast guard facility. According to Saria, 16 people were killed and 41 others were wounded in the airstrikes (Yahya Saria’s X account, May 31, 2024). CENTCOM reported that its forces had attacked 13 targets in Houthi-controlled

areas on Yemeni soil (CENTCOM X account, May 31, 2024). A few days later, the Yemeni Saba news agency reported that burial ceremonies had been held for 15 officers of ranks equivalent to major, captain, and lieutenant who were killed as a result of coalition bombings (Saba News Agency, June 3, 2024). It was also reported that among those killed in al-Hudaydah were operatives of Hezbollah and the Iranian Revolutionary Guards (al-Arabiya Telegram channel, May 31, 2024).

## **Cooperation between the militias in Iraq and the Houthis**

►The umbrella organization of the pro-Iranian militias in Iraq and the Houthis reportedly held training exercises with the participation of the operatives and leadership of the organizations. Yemeni sources reported that more than 80 Houthi operatives had been transferred to Iraq for training in the Jarf al-Sakhr area, south of Baghdad, and that the Houthi representative in the Popular Mobilization (the umbrella framework of the Iraqi militias) coordinated visits by the Houthi leaders in Tehran. It was also reported that senior Houthi and Iranian officials met with Popular Mobilization operatives after the opening of the airport in Sanaa (al-Hadath, June 2, 2024).

►The Kataeb Hezbollah militia claimed that the United States and Britain were attacking Yemen because the world had not succeeded in breaking Yemen's naval blockade against the "supporters of crimes" in the Gaza Strip. The Iraqi militia has made it clear that it would not hesitate to provide "our Yemeni brothers" with "all kinds of support" (Kataeb Hezbollah official Telegram channel, June 1, 2024).

## **Statements by senior Houthi officials**

►On May 30, 2024, Abd al-Malik al-Houthi, the leader of the Houthi movement, gave his weekly speech. He accused the Israeli operation in Rafah of being a "crime directed against civilians" and said the Rafah operation, the Israeli takeover of the Gaza side of the Rafah crossing, and the shooting incident between IDF soldiers and Egyptian forces in the Rafah area violated Egyptian sovereignty and threatened Egypt's national security. In addition, he praised the actions of the other members of the "resistance front" in Lebanon and Iraq against Israel (X account of the Houthi forces, May 30, 2024).

►Houthi political council member Hezam al-Asad continued issuing posts in Hebrew, this time about the fires in northern Israel, some of which broke out because of Hezbollah drones and missiles. The posts read, "The country is burning, this is the end of the eighth decade;" "When Hezbollah is angry;" "The lights in the north of the country fill the heart with joy;" "Eilat in the

south and the Galilee in the north are on fire, this country can no longer bear the presence of foreigners” (with a link to an article on the Haaretz website about the war); “From Mr. Abu Jibril, dear commander of Yemen: In the name of Allah who breaks tyrants” (along with a photograph of a Houthi missile launch); “Good laugh about your disaster. Even worse on the way;” “As the fire spreads and everything burns, the North seems to change into an action movie—and this time, as soon as we have aerial access, we’ll hit anyone who tries to help!;” “This is not the eruption of Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines, but divine lights ignited by Hezbollah in northern Israel” (Hezam al-Asad’s X account, June 2-4, 2024).



Hebrew posts from Hezam al-Asad’s X account (Hezam al-Asad’s X account, June 2-4, 2024)