



# Spotlight on Iran

June 13-19, 2024

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## Highlights<sup>1</sup>

- ▶ The traditional pilgrimage ceremonies to Saudi Arabia as part of Eid al-Adha were exploited by Iranians to chant slogans against Israel and the United States.
- ▶ The IRGC is reportedly working to acquire properties in the Albukamal area in eastern Syria to hide the drug smuggling business in which they are involved.
- ▶ Acting Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri-Kani visited Iraq and met with senior Iraqi government officials and senior officials in the Kurdish region in northern Iraq. Bagheri once again warned Israel against expanding the campaign to other fronts.
- ▶ Iran's mission to the UN stressed Iran's commitment to continued support for the Houthis.
- ▶ The Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed responsibility for carrying out four attacks against Israel. The IDF Spokesperson reported the interception of a suspicious aerial target approaching from the east.
- ▶ The Houthis continued to report attacks against civilian and military vessels in the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea. Two ships were severely damaged in the strikes - one of them sank and the other is in danger of sinking.

## Iranian involvement in the Palestinian arena

▶ Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei wrote in a letter to Iranian pilgrims ahead of the pilgrimage ceremonies to Mecca, Saudi Arabia (Hajj) as part of the Muslim festival of Eid al-Adha that this year in particular, the ceremonies of "dissociation [of the infidels]" (Bara'ah), customary among Shiites during the annual pilgrimage, should be directed against Israel and the United States. He noted that the "dissociation" had to continue beyond the time and place

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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.

of the pilgrimage to all Islamic countries and all over the world. Khamenei stressed that the “dissociation” of the “Zionist regime” and its supporters, especially the American administration, had to be expressed in words and deeds by the nations and governments, while supporting the residents of the Gaza Strip in every possible way (website of the Supreme Leader of Iran, June 15, 2024). At a ceremony held by the Iranian delegation for the Hajj, Iranian pilgrims chanted “Death to America” and “Death to Israel” (IRNA, June 15, 2024).



#### **Iranian pilgrims chant slogans against Israel and the United States (IRNA, June 15, 2024)**

- ▶ Acting Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri-Kani spoke with UAE Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed to discuss developments in the region and the Gaza Strip. Bagheri said the Muslim countries had to use all the means at their disposal to stop the “genocide” in the Gaza Strip as soon as possible and provide aid to the residents of the Gaza Strip (Fars, June 16, 2024).
- ▶ Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant noted that Iran was attempting to smuggle weapons into the Jenin area. He said Israel was making every effort to block them (Israeli defense minister’s media, June 17, 2024).

## Iranian involvement in Syria and Lebanon

- ▶ A Syrian news channel reported that the IRGC was working to buy houses and shops in the Albukamal area in eastern Syria. According to the report, the organization employs intermediaries to purchase the properties, which were intended to establish a commercial project to hide drug smuggling businesses. The report stated that the commander of the IRGC in the region, Haj Askar, had opposed the project in the past because pro-Iranian militias had headquarters in the area. However, after he returned to Iran due to an injury, activity to promote the project resumed (Deir ez-Zor24, June 15, 2024).

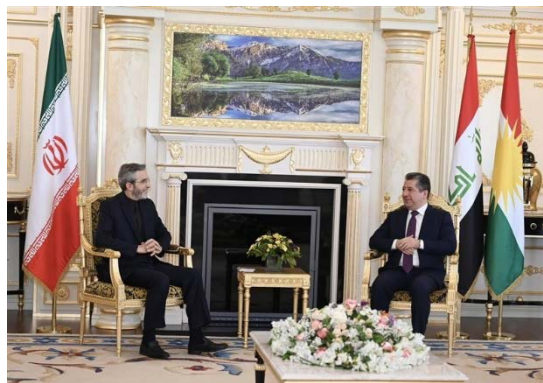
## Iranian involvement in Iraq and Yemen

► On June 13, 2024, Acting Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri-Kani arrived in Iraq for a two-day visit. He met with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia' al-Sudani, Iraqi President Abdullatif Rashid, Foreign Minister Fouad Hussein, and National Security Advisor Qassem al-Araji and discussed bilateral, regional, and international issues, including the war in the Gaza Strip. At a joint press conference, Bagheri stressed the importance Iran attached to strengthening ties between the two countries, saying Iran and Iraq bear responsibility for strengthening peace and stability in the region. Bagheri stressed the need to stop Israel's "war crimes" in the Gaza Strip and warned that in light of the failure of the "Zionists" in the Gaza Strip, they might make "another mistake" and expand their "aggression" (Tasnim, June 13, 2024).



**The meeting between the acting Iranian foreign minister and the Iraqi foreign minister (Tasnim, June 13, 2024)**

► On June 14, 2024, Bagheri visited the Kurdish region of northern Iraq. He met with senior regional officials, including President Nechirvan Barzani; Prime Minister Masrour Barzani; chairman of the Kurdish Democratic Party, Masoud Barzani; and the chairman of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), Bafel Jalal Talabani (Tasnim, June 14, 2024).



**Bagheri meets with Masrour Barzani (Tasnim, June 14, 2024)**

►Iran’s mission to the UN responded to allegations of Iranian military, intelligence, and economic support for Houthi operations in Yemen against vessels in the Red Sea and stressed the Islamic Republic’s commitment to continued support for the Houthis. According to the mission’s statement, the United States believes it can defeat the “resistance movement in Yemen” using its military power and political control of the UN Security Council to intimidate Iran and make it sever its ties with the Houthis. However, Iran knows how to defeat this American strategy in a way that will both strengthen the Houthis and will not violate Security Council resolutions (ISNA, June 15, 2024).

## Activities of the Shiite militias

### Iraq

#### Activities on the ground

►The Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed responsibility for carrying out **four attacks** between June 13-19, 2024 (as of 12:00), compared with nine attacks the previous week (Islamic Resistance in Iraq Telegram channel, June 13-19, 2024). The following were the targets of the attacks:

- ◆ A “target” in Haifa (June 15, 2024) using an “advanced” al-Arqaab cruise missile. The IDF Spokesperson said that a suspicious aerial target en route from the east had been intercepted. The target did not cross into Israeli territory, and there were no casualties (IDF Spokesperson’s Telegram channel, June 15, 2024).
- ◆ Ramat David base (June 14, 2024) using UAVs. The report has not been verified.
- ◆ Haifa Port (June 14, 2024) using UAVs. The report has not been verified.
- ◆ “Israeli Air Force base for surveillance and espionage” in the Golan Heights (June 14, 2024) using UAVs. Saraya Awliya al-Dam claimed responsibility for the attack. The report has not been verified.



**Cruise missile being fired at a “target” in Haifa  
(Islamic Resistance in Iraq Telegram channel, June 15, 2024)**

## Threat against Israel

► The Nujaba Movement released a propaganda video with Hebrew subtitles, entitled “Unity of Fronts,” documenting drone launches into Israeli territory. The video threatened that “a bigger operation would come.” Akram al-Kaabi, the movement’s secretary-general, declared that the militia’s operations would be “broader and more significant.” Houthi leader Abd al-Malik al-Houthi also appeared in the video with a similar threat. The video was released against the backdrop of announcements by the Islamic Resistance in Iraq and the Houthis about the beginning of joint operations against Israel (Nujaba Telegram channel, June 15, 2024).



Excerpts from the “Unity of Fronts” video (Nujaba Telegram channel, June 15, 2024)

## Yemen

### Anti-vessel activity

► During the past week, the Houthis continued to report attacks against civilian and military vessels in the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea. Houthi Armed Forces spokesman Yahya Saria reported on the attacks (Yahya Saria’s X account, June 13-19, 2024):

◆ **June 13, 2024:** Missile attack against the M/V Verbena in the Arabian Sea. A precise hit was identified that caused a fire on the ship. On June 15, 2024, Saria said the ship was sinking in the Gulf of Aden. The US Central Command (CENTCOM) confirmed that the Ukrainian-owned and Palau-flagged cargo ship M/V Verbena had been hit by two anti-ship cruise missiles in the Gulf of Aden. The crew reported damage and a fire that broke out on board. One of the crew members was seriously injured and was evacuated for medical treatment by a vessel from the US Navy ship USS Philippine Sea (CENTCOM X account, June 13, 2024). On June 16, 2024, CENTCOM reported that the crew had sent a distress message about the abandonment of the ship after sailors failed to control the

fires. A cargo ship that arrived on the scene evacuated all crew members. CENTCOM noted that a nearby Iranian naval frigate had ignored the distress call, calling it “malicious and irresponsible behavior” (CENTCOM X account, June 16, 2024). On June 18, 2024, the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) reported that the ship had sunk, and debris and fuel had been identified where it was last seen (UKMTO X account, June 18, 2024).



**Damage caused to the M/V Verbena (Ahmed Fawzi’s X account, June 17, 2024)**

◆ **June 13, 2024:** Two attacks in the Red Sea against the SeaGuardian and the Athina using ballistic missiles and drones. It was claimed that there were direct hits. However, these attacks have not been verified by other sources.

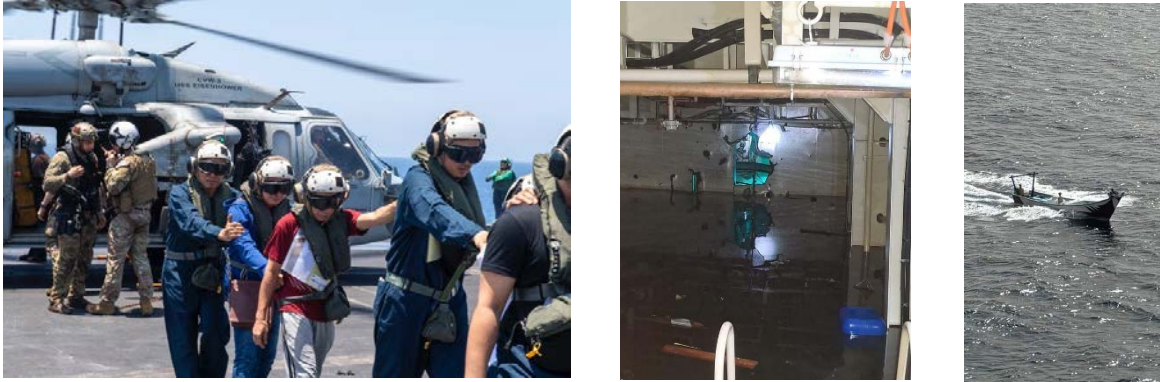
◆ **June 16, 2024:** A ballistic missile attack against an unidentified American destroyer in the Red Sea; a missile attack against the ship Captain Paris using “suitable” naval missiles; and a drone attack against the ship Happy Condor in the Arabian Sea. It was claimed that all the attacks achieved their objectives. However, these alleged attacks have not been verified by other sources.

► According to CENTCOM reports, during the week, US and coalition forces intercepted three UAVs and three unmanned surface vehicles (USVs) launched by the Houthis into the Red Sea and a UAV launched into the Gulf of Aden. In addition, two anti-ship ballistic missiles were launched at the Red Sea, causing no casualties or damage. CENTCOM forces continued their airstrikes in Yemen, destroying eight UAVs, 11 radars, an air defense sensor, and two patrol boats (CENTCOM X account, June 13-19, 2024).

► On June 15, 2024, CENTCOM reported that one of the crew members of the M/V Tutor, which had been severely damaged by a USV and an “unidentified airborne object” on June 12, 2024, was missing following the attacks and was believed to have been killed. All crew members were evacuated by helicopter to the cruiser USS Philippine Sea and then to the aircraft carrier



Eisenhower (CENTCOM X account, June 15-16, 2024). On June 16, 2024, Saria announced that the Tutor was about to sink (Yahya Saria's X account, June 16, 2024).



**Right: Houthi USV before hitting the ship; center: The flooding on the ship (IMGUR, June 16, 2024); left: Crew members being evacuated to the aircraft carrier Eisenhower (Fifth Fleet X account, June 16, 2024)**

► In a message issued by Houthi leader Abd al-Malik al-Houthi in honor of Eid al-Adha, he said that the Yemeni people would spare no effort in implementing their sacred jihadi duty of supporting the Palestinian people and their jihad fighters and that attacks against ships belonging to “enemies” would continue. He added that the Yemeni people “feel the suffering” of the Palestinians and share their pain and hopes. According to al-Houthi, every Muslim has a religious obligation to help the Palestinians “by all legitimate means,” in the military, economic, political, and media spheres, and those who do not are helping Israel (al-Masirah TV X account, June 15, 2024).

► On June 13, 2024, the US Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) published a report on the impact of Houthi activity on maritime trade. According to the report, which covers December 2023–February 2024, Houthi activity caused a 90% drop in container traffic in the Red Sea during the period surveyed. It also noted that the Houthi attacks affected at least 65 countries and forced 29 energy and shipping companies to change their shipping lanes (DIA, June 13, 2024).

► Rear Adm. Marc Miguez, commander of a US task force that includes many of the ships operating in the Red Sea region, said the US was confident that Iran was providing the Houthis with intelligence support, and that there was certainty that the Houthis had been trained to strike US naval vessels and ships. Rear Adm. Miguez also revealed that the US Navy had taken out one underwater bomb-carrying drone launched by the Houthis (AP, June 14, 2024).

## Houthi armament efforts

► Western sources have reportedly revealed that in addition to the direct route from Iran, the Houthis are using other ways to transfer Iranian equipment intended for them. According to

the report, the equipment is transported from Iran to ports in Djibouti in East Africa, and loaded onto civilian ships that transfer it to Houthi-controlled ports in Yemen. The report also claimed that the Houthis are using Lebanon as a hub to purchase drone spare parts from China (al-Arabiya, June 17, 2024).

### **Exposing the “spy network”**

►Houthi Political Council member Mohammed Ali al-Houthi referred to the Houthis’ exposure of an “American-Israeli spy network.” He said Yemeni security services would be willing to share the evidence with Russia or China if both countries wanted to present it to the UN Security Council. In another statement, al-Houthi claimed that there was “concrete evidence” proving the network’s “crimes.” He added that the Houthis condemned the US for establishing a spy network disguised as UN employees (Mohammad Ali al-Houthi’s X account, June 15-17, 2024).

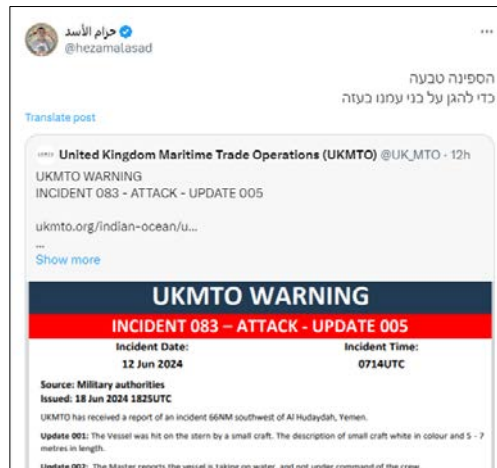
►On June 14, 2024, the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand issued a statement condemning Houthi detentions of staff from a UN diplomatic, non-governmental organization. They referred to the detentions as an “escalation” and an “affront to international law and security” and demanded the immediate release of the detainees (US Department of State website, June 14, 2024).

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

►On June 18, 2024, Mohammed Ali al-Houthi posted a photo purportedly showing a lapel on the uniform of an IDF soldier with the Hebrew inscription “Promised Land of Israel” alongside a map that includes the State of Israel and other territories in Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. In the post, al-Houthi claimed that it was the uniform of an Israeli soldier in the Gaza Strip and that the map aroused rage on Egyptian social networks (Mohammed Ali al-Houthi’s X account, June 18, 2024).

►On June 18, 2024, Houthi Political Council member Hezam al-Asad issued a post in Hebrew alongside the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) report on the sinking of the M/T Tutor. The post read, “The ship sank to protect our people in Gaza” (Hezam al-Asad’s X account, June 18, 2024).





**Hezam al-Asad's tweet in Hebrew (Hezam al-Asad's X account, June 18, 2024)**

## American activity against the Shiite axis

- ▶ The US State Department announced the designation of Harakat Ansar Allah al-Awfiya (HAAA) as Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGT). It also designated its secretary-general, Haydar Muzhir Ma'lak al-Sa'idi, aka Haydar al-Gharawi, as SDGT. The statement noted that the militia, which belongs to the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, was involved in the drone attack that killed three American soldiers at a military facility in Jordan in January 2024. It was also noted that the militia threatened to attack American interests in the region and terrorized the Iraqi people (US Department of State website, June 17, 2024). In response, the militia said that the announcement was a “recognition of the power of our influence” and that it was “a badge of honor that confirms that we are on the right path” (HAAA Telegram channel, June 18, 2024). Kataeb Hezbollah issued a statement congratulating HAAA on its inclusion on the list of the “Great Satan.” According to the announcement, it is a “recognition of our heroic struggle and defense of the submissive peoples” (al-Sumaria, June 18, 2024).
- ▶ The US Treasury Department has imposed sanctions on individuals and entities that help the Houthis purchase weapons and obtain financial gain. The sanctions were imposed on a Yemeni citizen living in China and on two companies he operates to purchase materials that enable the Houthis to manufacture advanced weapons in Yemen; on two companies in China that help procure materials for the production of UAVs and other weapons; on a Yemeni citizen staying in Oman and a company he operates to purchase components for cruise missiles and other dual-use equipment; on a UAE shipping company that transports goods for the Houthis, on the company's oil tanker and its captain, a Ukrainian citizen (US Treasury Department website, June 17, 2024).