



Spotlight on Iran

August 7 – 14, 2024

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Highlights¹

- ▶ This week as well, senior Iranian officials continued to threaten a harsh response to the killing of Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran. They stressed Iran's right to attack Israel despite political messages to Tehran to refrain from a direct attack on Israel. At the same time, it seems that the Iranian leadership continues to hesitate about the desired response, especially due to concerns of deterioration into a direct, unwanted military confrontation with Israel, and possibly even with the United States.
- ▶ Senior Iranian officials sent congratulatory letters to Yahya Sinwar following his appointment as head of Hamas' political bureau, calling on him to continue the path of "resistance" against Israel.
- ▶ A Syrian news channel reported new appointments in the IRGC command in eastern Syria.
- ▶ A pro-Iranian militia senior official in Iraq said they were ready to send fighters to the Gaza Strip.
- ▶ Pro-Iranian militias attacked two American bases in Syria last week. The US Department of Defense confirmed that eight US soldiers had been wounded.
- ▶ The Houthis claimed responsibility for attacks against a cargo ship and two American destroyers in the Gulf of Aden. The claims have not been verified. The Houthi leader continued to threaten retaliation for the Israeli attack on the port of al-Hudaydah, noting that the response of the "axis of resistance" against Israel was delayed for tactical reasons.
- ▶ The US military has destroyed a "significant amount" of Houthi capabilities since the start of operations against the Houthis in November 2023.

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

Iran's reaction to Ismail Haniyeh's assassination

- ▶ There has been a report of disagreement between Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and senior IRGC officials over the nature of the Iranian response to the killing of Ismail Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau.² According to the report, Pezeshkian insists on not starting an all-out war with Israel for fear of repercussions for Iran and believes that the response should be directed against Israeli bases in countries neighboring Iran. On the other hand, senior IRGC officials believe that Tel Aviv and other cities in Israel should be attacked directly, focusing on military bases to avoid civilian casualties. According to the report, the final decision on the matter depends on Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei (The Telegraph, August 9, 2024)
- ▶ "Three senior Iranian officials" said that the only way that could delay Iran's direct response to the killing of Haniyeh was reaching a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip as early as this week.³ One of the "sources," described as a "senior Iranian security official," said Iran and its allies would launch a direct attack if ceasefire talks in Gaza failed or if they felt Israel was delaying negotiations. Two of the "sources" even said that Iran was considering sending a representative to be involved in the negotiations behind the scenes, to maintain a diplomatic line of communication with the United States during the discussions (Reuters, August 13, 2024). Iran's mission to the UN denied the report about Iran's intention to send a representative to the negotiations on the ceasefire (ISNA, August 13, 2024).
- ▶ Ali Fadavi, deputy commander of the IRGC, said the Supreme Leader's instructions on severely punishing Israel and avenging Haniyeh's blood were clear and explicit and would be implemented in the best possible way. He added that this was Iran's current duty. Fadavi noted that Sinwar's election as head of Hamas' political bureau meant that the line of "resistance" started by Hamas would continue until the end (al-Mayadeen, August 9, 2024).

² For further information, see the ITIC's study from August 4, 2024, "[Reactions to the Deaths of Fuad Shukur and Isma'il Haniyeh](#)"

³ On August 15, 2024, a meeting of the intermediary countries and Israel is scheduled to be held in Qatar regarding negotiations for a ceasefire and a hostage deal.



The deputy commander of the IRGC (yjc.ir, August 9, 2024)

► IRGC spokesman Ali-Mohammad Naeini said Haniyeh’s assassination was a blatant violation of the UN Charter and that the “Zionist regime” would receive a response to that “stupid act” at the appropriate time. He noted that Israel wanted to compensate for its defeat on the battlefield in the Gaza Strip by killing Haniyeh, but its existence was in even greater danger than in the past after the assassination. He added that the fear of Iran’s reaction had spread “throughout the occupied territories” (Tasnim, August 11, 2024).



The IRGC spokesman (Tasnim, August 11, 2024)

► Brigadier General Ali Shadmani, the deputy coordinator of the Khatam al-Anbiya Base in the Iranian armed forces, said that Israel had committed a more serious crime than in the past and that Iran would take severe revenge on it. He said Iran was examining the scope of the response and it would certainly take place (IRNA, August 11, 2024).

► Iranian Ambassador to the UN Amir Saeed Iravani told journalists that ending the war in the Gaza Strip was Iran’s top priority and that any agreement Hamas agreed to would also be recognized by Iran. He said the ceasefire had nothing to do with Iran’s right to defend itself. However, he expressed hope that Iran’s response to Haniyeh’s killing would be in a time and manner that would not disrupt the possible ceasefire (Fars, August 9, 2024).

► Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani condemned the joint call by the leaders of the United States, France, United Kingdom, Germany, and Italy for Iran to stand down its

threat to retaliate against Israel. According to Kanani, the call lacks any objection to the “international crimes” committed by the “Zionist regime,” lacks political logic and completely contradicts the principles of international law. He added that these are demands that provide public and practical support for “the source of crimes and international terrorism in the region” as well as encouragement for the perpetrators of the “genocide and war crimes against humanity.” Kanani stressed that Iran was determined to defend its sovereignty and national security and create deterrence against Israel, saying that Western countries had to stand against Israel and the continuation of the war in the Gaza Strip (Telegram channel of the Iranian Foreign Ministry, August 13, 2024).

Iranian involvement in the Palestinian arena

► Senior commanders in the Iranian armed forces sent congratulatory letters to Yahya Sinwar on his election as head of Hamas’ political bureau⁴:

- ◆ IRGC commander Hossein Salami wrote that the announcement of Sinwar’s election was a “reviving light” after the death of Ismail Haniyeh and sowed deep concern among the “criminal Zionist enemy” and its supporters. He called on Sinwar to continue the path of the shaheeds and fighters and fulfill the promise of the full liberation of “Palestine” with Jerusalem as its capital. Salami stressed that he and the IRGC would not hesitate to help Sinwar and the other “resistance fighters” and expressed hope for the elimination of the “Zionist regime” as soon as possible.
- ◆ Iranian Army Commander Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi wrote that Sinwar’s election as head of Hamas’ political bureau attested to the determination of the “resistance front” to continue Haniyeh’s path and the struggle against the “Zionist regime” until its elimination and the liberation of Jerusalem, as well as the defeat of Israel in assassinations of the leaders of the “axis of resistance.” He expressed hope for the success of Sinwar, the “resistance front,” and the residents of the Gaza Strip (Tasnim, August 7, 2024).
- ◆ Qods Force commander Esmail Qaani wrote that Hamas had proven by its election that it was handing over the movement’s proud flag to the most influential person on the battlefield and a fighter for Allah. He stressed that it was Iran’s duty to avenge

⁴ For further information, see the ITIC’s study from August 9, 2024, “Yahya al-Sinwar Named Head of Hamas Political Bureau: Reactions and Significance”

Haniyeh's death and that the effect of the punishment the "Zionist regime" would receive in response to Haniyeh's assassination would be greater than in the past and would lead to its disappearance as soon as possible (Tasnim, August 9, 2024).

► Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Kanani strongly condemned the Israeli attack on the school in Gaza City, where Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) headquarters operated.⁵ He claimed the attack was a clear example of committing a crime of genocide, a war crime, and a crime against humanity, saying it is proof that Israel does not adhere to international law and moral and humane principles. Kanani added that the only way to fight Israel was through decisive action by the Muslim and freedom-loving countries of the world in support of the Palestinian people. He called for immediate and effective action by the UN Security Council against Israel (ISNA, August 10, 2024).

► Ali Shamkhani, former secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, also commented on the Israeli attack on Gaza. He said Israel's only goal in the attack and killing of Haniyeh in Tehran was to provoke war and thwart ceasefire talks. He added that the legal, diplomatic, and media actions had prepared the necessary conditions for punishing Israel severely. He claimed Israel understood only force (Ali Shamkhani's X account, August 10, 2024).

► Acting Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani spoke with senior Hamas leader Khalil al-Haya and discussed recent developments, including the killing of Haniyeh in Tehran and the Israeli attack on the al-Tabi'een school in the Gaza Strip. Bagheri congratulated al-Haya on Sinwar's election as head of Hamas' political bureau and stressed the need for action by the international community and Muslim countries against Israel's "crimes" (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, August 11, 2024).

► Acting Iranian Foreign Minister Bagheri said at a memorial ceremony for Ismail Haniyeh at the Iranian Foreign Ministry that Haniyeh's blood would strengthen the "Islamic resistance" and that Iran had the right to respond to the assassination that violated its national security and sovereignty. He claimed that the "Zionist regime" was a cancerous tumor and an extension of

⁵The Israeli Air Force attacked a Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) military headquarters that operated in a mosque in the school compound which also served as a shelter for residents of Gaza City. According to the IDF, the identities of at least 31 terrorist operatives killed in the attack have been verified, contrary to Hamas' claims that more than 100 civilians were killed.

Western policy and plans. He said Israel had not realized any of its military objectives in the war in the Gaza Strip (ISNA, August 13, 2024).



The acting Iranian foreign minister at the ceremony in memory of Haniyeh (ISNA, August 13, 2024)

►Majles speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf said that the “Zionists” understood only the language of force and had to wait for harsh revenge from Iran for the assassination of Haniyeh. He noted that Iran saw it as its religious and national duty to avenge Haniyeh’s blood. Qalibaf also called on Muslim countries to actively support the Palestinian “resistance” to stop the “genocidal machine of the Zionist regime” (Khabar Online, August 11, 2024).

Iranian involvement in Lebanon and Syria

►Guardian Council member Ali-Reza Arafı sent a letter to Hezbollah secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah in which he wrote that Israel's assassinations of senior "resistance" figures in the region attested to the helplessness of the "enemy" and its defeat in the political, military, and security arenas and indicated significant and promising progress toward the elimination of the "Zionist regime." The senior cleric stressed that Iran's religious seminaries and senior clerics were standing alongside the "resistance front" in the region (IRNA, August 10, 2024).



Ali-Reza Arafı (right) and Hezbollah secretary-general (IRNA, August 10, 2024)

►The IRGC reportedly launched an extensive excavation project to build new warehouses at the Bley military airfield in the rural area of Damascus after the airfield had become a center for smuggling weapons. According to the report, the excavation work at three sites in the area

is being directed by a Qods Force commander codenamed Haj Nurollah and Iranian experts who recently arrived at the airfield from Iran and conducted feasibility studies. It was also reported that the work at the airfield was intended to enable the transfer of Hezbollah and Qods Force weapons from areas at Damascus International Airport to the new warehouses at the Bley airfield, which are better protected from airstrikes (Political Keys, August 7, 2024).

► New appointments to the IRGC command in eastern Syria were reported. According to the report, al-Haj Javad was appointed commander of the pro-Iranian militias in eastern Syria, replacing al-Haj Kamil. Al-Haj Mousavi al-Mousavi was appointed as his deputy. Al-Haj Javad was in charge of the pro-Iranian militias in Aleppo Province and was transferred to Deir ez-Zor Province in mid-2023 to supervise the Afghan Fatemiyoun Brigade in eastern Syria. According to the report, al-Haj Kamil has not yet left Deir ez-Zor Province, and the IRGC is expected to assign him more sensitive tasks, including direct supervision of land arms transfers from Iran to Lebanon via Iraq and Syria, or planning and supervising the establishment of cells in the eastern Euphrates region (Ayn al-Furat, August 12, 2024).



Al-Haj Javad (top), al-Haj Kamil (bottom right), and al-Haj Mousavi al-Mousavi (bottom left)
(Ayn al-Furat, August 12, 2024)

Activities of the Shiite militias

Iraq

► This week, the Islamic Resistance in Iraq did not claim responsibility for attacks against targets in Israel, as it did in the previous two weeks.

Nujaba movement ready to send fighters to the Gaza Strip

◀ Ali al-Assadi, head of the political council of the Nujaba movement, said that the movement would take part in “acts of blood revenge for the shaheeds of Palestine” and that it was also prepared to send fighters to the Gaza Strip to fight against the “occupiers.” He added that the “resistance” had realized that the “enemy” understood only force and therefore it was acting against it in the same way (al-Sumaria TV, August 13, 2024).

Congratulations on the appointment of Yahya Sinwar

►Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq secretary-general Qais al-Khazali and Ansar Allah al-Awfiya secretary-general Haidar al-Gharawi congratulated Hamas and the Palestinian people on the election of Yahya Sinwar as the new chairman of Hamas' political bureau. They said that choosing Sinwar was a wise choice that would help the Palestinian people continue their struggle against the "criminal Zionist occupation" (Haidar al-Gharawi's X account and Qais al-Khazali's X account, August 7, 2024).

►The Nujaba movement congratulated Hamas and the "axis of resistance" on Sinwar's appointment. The movement said it continued to support, assist, and cooperate with the "resistance" in the Gaza Strip (Nujaba X account, August 7, 2024). Militia member Mahdi al-Kaabi said the election of Sinwar was proof of the vision of the "resistance" and an important choice in the international and regional equation (al-Amid Telegram channel, August 7, 2024).

Condemnations following attack on terrorist headquarters in Gaza school

►Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq militia secretary-general Qais al-Khazali condemned the Israeli attack on the al-Tabi'een school in Gaza City on August 10, 2024. Al-Khazali said it was a "cruel crime" proving that Israel was not interested in a ceasefire and only wanted to continue its "aggression" against the Palestinian people and massacre as many innocent civilians as possible (Qais al-Khazali's X account, August 10, 2024).

◄Kata'ib Hezbollah condemned the Israeli attack, stating, "The crimes of the Zionist-American enemy against innocents in the Gaza Strip and Palestine continue repeatedly, revealing the true, cruel face of the United States to the world." The group also reported that the ongoing support of the United States for the "Zionist entity," including the provision of lethal tools to kill innocents in Palestine, had enabled the enemy to pursue its goals: the elimination of the Palestinian people or their forced emigration from their land" (Kaf Telegram channel, August 10, 2024).

Attacks against US bases

►On the night of August 13, 2024, it was reported that the American base in the Koniko oil field in the Deir ez-Zor area in eastern Syria had been attacked with rockets. According to a "source on the ground," the attack was carried out by launching a barrage of rockets from the border area between Iraq and Syria (al-Mayadeen, August 13, 2024). According to a "security source," a militia supported by Iran fired six shells at the base, they fell in the base area, and coalition

forces returned artillery fire. However, two “senior American officials” reported that there was no damage to the base and there were no casualties (Reuters, August 14, 2024).

► On the night of August 9-10, 2024, a UAV attack was reported against the American base of Kharab al-Jir in the al-Hasakah area in northeastern Syria (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, August 10, 2024). The Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed responsibility for the attack (al-Amid Telegram channel, August 10, 2024). According to an “American official,” several Americans and members of the international coalition sustained minor injuries in a drone strike (Reuters, August 11, 2024). The US Department of Defense spokesperson confirmed that eight US military personnel had been evacuated to another site for treatment due to smoke inhalation and traumatic brain injury. He noted that three of the wounded had already returned to service and the rest were under observation, but their lives were not in danger (Department of Defense website, August 13, 2024).



Attack on the American base of Kharab al-Jir (Qarrar Amer’s X account, August 10, 2024)

► The Iraqi Resistance Coordination Committee threatened that if American forces acted against the militias or exploited Iraq’s airspace to attack Iran, they would respond without restrictions. In its statement, the committee accused the “forces of arrogance” of supporting and funding the security of the “Zionist entity” at the expense of regional security, stressing that it is not subject to any restrictions (Telegram channel of the Iraqi Resistance Coordination Committee, August 12, 2024).

► According to a Popular Mobilization source, the area of Jarf al-Sakhr south of Baghdad, which was attacked by US forces on July 30, 2024, is under the control of the militias, and some non-Iraqis are there as “advisors,” including Iranians, Houthis, and Lebanese. Another source said that the “axis of resistance” had turned Jarf al-Sakhr into a center for training, guidance, command and control, and probably also for the manufacture of weapons and the assembly of Iranian UAVs. In addition, he noted that the area was a place for training militia fighters and commanders in Yemen, Bahrain, Syria, and Lebanon (al-Araby al-Jadeed, August 12, 2024). It

should be noted that a Kata'ib Hezbollah commander and three operatives as well as a Houthi coordination officer who were preparing to launch drones were killed in the attack.

Attack on pro-Iranian militias in Syria

► On August 11, 2024, it was reported that an unidentified UAV, apparently American, had attacked a military vehicle traveling between the villages of al-Kashma and al-Dweir in the Deir ez-Zor area near the Syria-Iraq border. According to the report, five Syrians who were members of the pro-Iranian militias were killed in the attack, and three other militia members reportedly died of their wounds afterwards (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, August 11-12, 2024). According to a Syrian source, an American drone carried out the attack (1news-iq.com, August 12, 2024).

Yemen

Houthi military activity

► On August 7, 2024, Houthi Armed Forces spokesman Yahya Saria claimed responsibility for three attacks: an attack on the ship Contship Ono in the Gulf of Aden using several ballistic missiles and drones; an attack in the Gulf of Aden against the American destroyer USS Cole using several drones; and an attack against the American destroyer USS Laboon using several ballistic missiles. According to Saria, the goals of the attacks were achieved, and the ships sustained accurate hits (Yahya Saria's X account, August 7, 2024). According to a US military source, the US has no reports to support the Houthis' claims about hitting American ships (Sky News in Arabic, August 8, 2024).

► On August 9, 2024, the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) agency reported that the oil tanker Delta Blue had been attacked three times at intervals of hours while in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. In the first attack, a missile exploded near the tanker; In the second attack, the tanker's crew neutralized an unmanned surface vehicle (USV) moving toward it; In the third attack, another missile exploded near the tanker. In addition, the day before, an RPG missile was launched from a boat and hit near the tanker. According to the report, the tanker sustained no damage and continued to its destination (UKMTO X account, 8-9 August 2024).

► On August 13, 2024, UKMTO reported an attack on the Delta Atlantica by a USV that was neutralized by the crew before hitting the ship. According to the agency, the attack was preceded by two explosions that occurred near the ship but did not damage it (UKMTO X account, August 13, 2024).

► On August 14, 2024, “Yemeni navigation sources” reported that Houthi naval forces had attacked a cargo ship attempting to pass through the northern Red Sea. According to the sources, there were “extensive” military clashes between the American forces that tried to help the ship continue on its way and the Houthi forces that attacked the ship again (al-Akhbar, August 14, 2024)

► The US Central Command (CENTCOM) reported that during the past week, they destroyed two UAVs, a USV, and two Houthi vessels in the Red Sea. In addition, airstrikes in Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen destroyed two UAVs, a USV, a missile launcher, five anti-ship cruise missiles, and two ground control stations (CENTCOM X account, August 7-14, 2024).

► CENTCOM reported that since the start of operations against the Houthis in November 2023, seven rounds of US airstrikes had been carried out against Houthi targets in Yemen, all with President Biden’s approval and with British participation, and that the strikes had destroyed a “significant amount” of Houthi capabilities, including dozens of weapons depots, command and control centers, air defense systems, and helicopters. It was also reported that during the nine months of deployment of the aircraft carrier Eisenhower in the Red Sea, US forces fired more than 135 Tomahawk missiles against Houthi targets in Yemen, as well as 155 missiles of various types against drones. In addition, the F-18 fighter jets stationed on the Eisenhower launched 60 air-to-air missiles and 420 air-to-surface missiles (Politico, August 7, 2024).

Statements by senior Houthi officials

► On August 8, 2024, Abd al-Malik al-Houthi, the leader of the Houthi movement in Yemen, gave his weekly speech, in which he said the response to the Israeli attack on the port of al-Hudaydah was inevitable. He stressed that the decision to respond against Israel was the decision of the entire “axis of resistance” and that the delay in its execution stemmed from tactical reasons only. He added that there was nothing that could prevent the attack, including threats or international pressure. According to him, the Houthi forces are developing military and technological capabilities that will overcome obstacles that will stand in the way of future Houthi attacks during the current phase, which has significantly expanded the Houthi forces’ range of operation after their success in preventing navigation “that supports Israel” in the Red Sea and the Arab Sea and in the Gulf of Aden (al-Masirah, August 8, 2024).

► On August 8, 2024, the Houthis held their weekly march in support of the Palestinian people. The organizers said they congratulated Hamas and the Palestinian people on the election of Yahya Sinwar as head of the political bureau in place of Ismail Haniyeh. They added that the

Yemeni people and the Houthi armed forces wanted to continue jihad and fighting the enemies. They also claimed that Israel's disappearance was “a divine promise sealed in the Book of Allah” and that the support of the United States and other countries in the West and the Arab world would not save it either (al-Masirah, August 8, 2024).



Photos of Yahya Sinwar at a demonstration in Sana'a (al-Masirah, August 8, 2024)

► On August 10, 2024, Houthi spokesman Mohammad Abdeslam issued a statement condemning the “massacre” at the al-Tabi’een school in Gaza City. He also condemned the continued support of the United States for Israel, which, he claimed, enabled the continuation of “mass crimes” against the residents of the Gaza Strip, and stressed that the Arabs and Muslims bore responsibility for the Gaza Strip and should not neglect their religious and moral duty, thereby encouraging the continuation of the crimes of the “Zionist enemy” (Mohammad Abdeslam’s X account, August 10, 2024).

► During the past week, Houthi political council member Hezam al-Asad issued several posts in Hebrew referring to the threats of the “axis of resistance” to retaliate against Israel. Here is a translation of some of those Hebrew posts: “They should care, watch, and hold their breath;” “When did they come out of the tunnels? Western colonialism brought them to our region with dreams of security and prosperity, and today, they live in fear in bomb shelters. And the worst is yet to come;” “Does the Israeli occupier still believe that America and the West will protect him forever?” (Hezam al-Asad’s X account, August 7-14, 2024).