



Spotlight on Iran and the Shiite Axis

August 28 – September 4 , 2024

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Highlights¹

- ▶ Senior Iranian officials condemned the IDF's activity in Judea and Samaria and accused Israel of striving to expand the scope of the "killings and crimes" against the Palestinians.
- ▶ Senior Iranian officials continued to threaten to respond to the killing of Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran but stressed that the response would be calculated and would not play into Israel's hands.
- ▶ The defense ministers of Iran and Syria discussed expanding cooperation between the two countries, including against Israel.
- ▶ Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi met in Tehran with Hezbollah's representative in Iran. The meeting took place as part of the new foreign minister's ongoing efforts to reaffirm Iran's continued support for its proxies amidst the backdrop of the change of government in Tehran.
- ▶ The United Kingdom imposed new sanctions on Qods Force's Unit 700 and three IRGC members for their involvement in destabilizing activities in the region and Britain.
- ▶ The Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed responsibility for two drone attacks against targets in the Haifa area. The IDF Spokesperson reported the downing of UAVs approaching Israel from the direction of Syria and the east.
- ▶ The Houthis claimed responsibility for two attacks against vessels in the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea. Hits were reported, but there were no casualties. There are delays at the start of the rescue operation of the tanker *MV Sounion*, which is on fire in the Red Sea after being hit in a Houthi attack. According to the Houthi leader, preparations are ongoing for a retaliation

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

against Israel, and the Houthis also intend to increase their activities in support of the Palestinians.

Iranian involvement in the Palestinian arena

► Mohammad Bagheri, chief of staff of the Iranian armed forces, said at a ceremony to introduce the new deputy chief of staff that the “Zionist regime” is in existential danger and is therefore determined to continue its crimes. He noted that even the Americans are hesitant whether to support Israel in view of the dangerous conditions in which it finds itself. Referring to the killing of Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, Bagheri said Iran would definitely respond in a calculated manner to the “crimes of the Zionist regime” (snn.ir, August 28, 2024).



Iranian Chief of Staff Mohammad Bagheri (snn.ir, August 28, 2024)

► General Mohsen Chizari, IRGC Qods Force deputy operations chief, said the “waiting period” for retaliation for Haniyeh’s killing could be long and would occur “only when the conditions are right.” Chizari stressed that how the retaliation would be carried out “will depend on the circumstances that will lead to the achievement of the goal,” adding that “this time, the retaliation will be different, and we will not reveal its method” (al-Jazeera, September 4, 2024).

► Brigadier General Esmail Ahmadi-Moqaddam, the president of Tehran’s Supreme National Defense University and former commander of the law enforcement forces, referred to Iran’s possible response to Haniyeh’s killing, saying that Iran would respond wisely, taking into account the complex developments and equations and in a way that would not play into the hands of the “enemy.” Referring to Hezbollah’s retaliation for the killing of Fuad Shukur, the organization’s military commander, Ahmadi-Moqaddam said the organization had inflicted “lethal blows” on the “Zionist regime,” which it hid. He added that keeping the “Zionist regime” in fear was no less significant than a military attack and that it had negative strategic implications for Israel (Khabar Online, September 2, 2024).

► Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani condemned the IDF’s activity in Judea and Samaria.² He said the activity was a continuation of the “genocide” carried out by Israel in the Gaza Strip and proved that it sought to expand the scope of the killings and crimes against the Palestinian residents. Kanani praised the “steadfastness” of the Palestinian people and the “resistance groups” against “the killing machine of the criminal Zionist regime in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.” He called on the international community, especially the UN Security Council, to fulfill their responsibility and take immediate and effective action to stop the “genocide of the Palestinian people by the Zionist regime” (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, August 29, 2024).

► Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi spoke with his Jordanian counterpart, Ayman al-Safadi, to discuss bilateral issues and developments in the Palestinian arena. Araghchi accused Israel of being the main factor preventing a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and increasing tensions in the region and stressed the need for action by the international community to stop the “genocide” in the Gaza Strip. He added that Iran would support any agreement acceptable to the people and the “resistance” in “Palestine” (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, August 30, 2024).

► Iranian Foreign Minister Araghchi accused Israel of pushing the region to the brink of a dangerous crisis, continuing its “crimes” in the Gaza Strip and sending its “killing machine” to Judea and Samaria. He noted that if Prime Minister Netanyahu’s supporters in the West failed to curb the continuation of Israel’s “criminal provocations,” they would share responsibility for their consequences (Abbas Araghchi’s X account, September 2, 2024).

Iranian involvement in Lebanon and Syria

► Iranian Defense Minister Aziz Nasirzadeh spoke with Syrian Defense Minister Ali Mahmoud Abbas and stressed Iran’s support for Syria’s security and territorial integrity. He called for the implementation of the agreements signed between the two countries and the expansion of cooperation between them, which, he claimed, would lead to the defeat of the “Zionist regime.” The Syrian defense minister stressed the need for continued cooperation between Iran, Syria, and the “axis of resistance” against Israel (Fars, September 1, 2024).

² For further information, see the ITIC’s study from September 3, 2024, “[Escalation and Thwarting of Terrorism in Northern Samaria](#)”



The defense ministers of Iran (right) and Syria (Fars, September 1, 2024)

- ▶ The IRGC has begun constructing a network of tunnels around Damascus International Airport to link its headquarters to its weapons depots. According to a report by a Syrian news channel, over 50 IRGC members and around 30 members of the Syrian regime have been recruited to participate in the excavation operations on the outskirts of the airport. In addition, Iranian engineers specializing in tunneling and fortifications have been brought in to design the plans and oversee the work. The tunnels are reportedly being equipped with spaces designated for storing weapons and housing advanced air defense systems (Ayn al-Furat, August 31, 2024).
- ▶ On September 1, 2024, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi met in Tehran with Hezbollah’s representative to Iran, Abdullah Safieddine, to discuss the latest developments in the region, especially in Lebanon, the Gaza Strip, Judea, and Samaria. Araghchi stressed Iran’s continued support for the “resistance” and the struggles of the peoples of the region against the “Zionist occupation.” Safieddine conveyed to Araghchi the congratulations of Hezbollah secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah and other senior members of the organization on his appointment as foreign minister (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, September 1, 2024).



The Iranian foreign minister meets with Hezbollah’s representative in Tehran (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, September 1, 2024)

UK sanctions against the IRGC

► On September 2, 2024, the United Kingdom’s Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation (OFSI) and Treasury imposed new sanctions on individuals and entities linked to the Iranian government for hostile activities by Iran and its proxies in the region. The sanctions were imposed on the IRGC Qods Force’s Unit 700, which is responsible for transferring equipment and supplies to pro-Iranian militias in the region, as well as three IRGC members: Abdolfattah Ahvazian, Behnam Shahriari, and Mohammad Fazeli, accused of supporting actions by Iran and its proxies aimed at destabilizing Britain, Israel, Iraq, Yemen, and Lebanon (United Kingdom government website, September 2, 2024). Following the United Kingdom’s decision to impose the sanctions, the United Kingdom ambassador to Tehran was summoned for a reprimand at the Iranian Foreign Ministry (ISNA, September 3, 2024).

Activities of the Shiite militias

Iraq

Claims of responsibility of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq

► This week, the Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed responsibility for two attacks against targets in Israel (Islamic Resistance in Iraq Telegram channel, August 28-September 4, 2024). The targets of the attacks were the following:

- ◆ September 4, 2024 – Haifa Port, using UAVs. The IDF Spokesperson said air defense fighters had successfully intercepted a UAV that was making its way into Israeli territory from the east. The UAV did not cross into Israeli territory and there were no casualties (IDF Spokesperson, September 4, 2024).
- ◆ August 29, 2024 – “Alon Tavor power station in the Haifa area”, using UAVs. According to the IDF Spokesperson, air defense fighters successfully intercepted a UAV that was making its way into Israeli territory from the direction of Syria. The UAV did not penetrate Israel and there were no casualties (IDF Spokesperson, August 29, 2024).

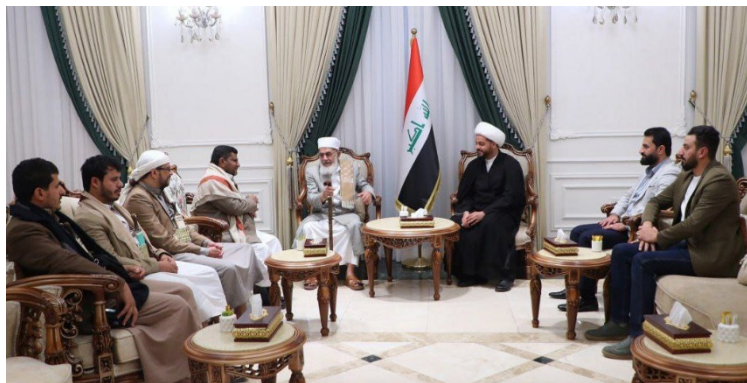
Attacks against American targets in Iraq

► A “source” in the Iraqi Resistance Coordination Committee said that the Islamic Resistance in Iraq would continue to attack American interests in Iraq. He reiterated the warning that the soldiers at the American bases “will soon return to the United States in coffins” (shahokurdy X account, August 31, 2024).

►According to a senior Iraqi militia official, the lull between the militias and the American forces in Iraq is temporary, and they are waiting for Iran’s retaliation for the killing of Ismail Haniyeh to continue operations against the American forces (1news-iq.com, August 30, 2024).

Coordination between the militias in Iraq and the Houthis

►Asa’ib Ahl al-Haqq’s secretary-general Qais al-Khazali met in his office in Baghdad with the Yemeni cleric Mohammed Abdul-Adhim al-Hassan al-Houthi al-Hasani. The meeting was also attended by Abu Idris al-Sharafi, the Houthi representative in Iraq. Al-Khazali expressed his great appreciation for the heroism and courage displayed by the Yemeni people and for the Houthis’ role in supporting the Palestinian people and standing up against “the massacres of the Zionists in the Gaza Strip.” Al-Hasani praised al-Khazali for “embodying the ‘resistance’ concept of the unity of the arenas” (Asa’ib Ahl al-Haqq website, September 1, 2024).



The meeting between Qais al-Khazali and Mohammed Abdul-Adhim al-Hassan al-Houthi al-Hasani (Hossein Ali al-Houthi’s X account, September 2, 2024)

►Hadi al-Amiri, secretary-general of the Badr Organization, said the United States was unable to stop Houthi operations in the Red Sea and that the path of the “Islamic resistance” was clear and honorable (Shafaq News, September 3, 2024).

Yemen Houthi military activity

►Over the past week, the Houthis continued to report attacks against vessels. Houthi armed forces spokesman Yahya Saria reported on the attacks (Yahya Saria’s X account, August 28 – September 4, 2024):

- ◆ August 31, 2024: An attack on the ship *Groton* in the Gulf of Aden. According to Saria, the hit was accurate. He said it was the second attack on the ship, which had already been attacked on August 3, 2024. The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) confirmed that the ship *Groton* reported that two missiles exploded near the vessel, but no damage or casualties were reported (UKMTO X account, August 31, 2024).

◆ September 2, 2024: An attack on the ship *Blue Lagoon 1* in the Red Sea, using several missiles and UAVs. Saria claimed the hit was accurate. The US Central Command (CENTCOM) stated that the Houthis attacked the Greek-owned *MV BLUE LAGOON 1* and Saudi-owned *MV AMJAD* oil tankers using two ballistic missiles and a UAV and hit both. CENTCOM warned that the hits on the tankers posed a threat to marine environmental systems, in addition to endangering the lives of sailors (CENTCOM X account, September 3, 2024). The company operating the tanker, Bahri, announced that it was not attacked but was near *Blue Lagoon 1* during the attack and was not damaged (Seatrade Maritime News, September 4, 2024). A “Houthi maritime source” also denied hitting a Saudi vessel (Al-Akhbar, September 3, 2024).

►CENTCOM reported that during the past week, they destroyed four UAVs, a USV, and four missile launch systems in Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen (CENTCOM X account, August 28-September 4, 2024).

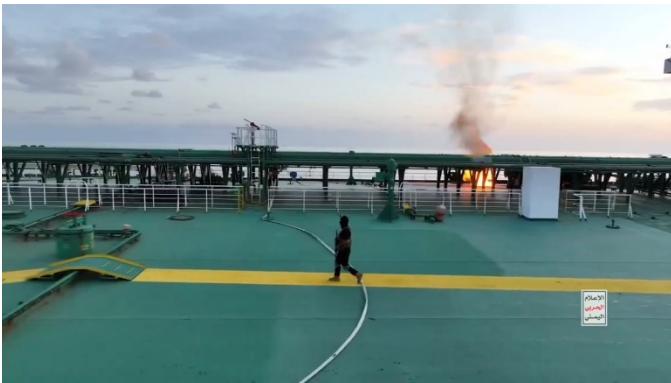
Attack on the oil tanker *MV Sounion*

►On August 29, 2024, Houthi forces released a video that they claimed documented a raid by Houthi fighters on the oil tanker *MV Sounion*, which was first attacked on August 21, 2024. The footage shows the tanker bridge from the inside and other rooms in the vessel, as well as planting explosive devices on board and detonating them from a distance. It should be noted that the documentation of the detonation of the IEDs is not the one released by the Houthis on August 23, 2024. In the new documentation, there appear to be fire sites on board the tanker, indicating that the fighters raided the tanker after it had already been severely damaged and abandoned in the previous days (the Houthi armed forces’ media arm X account, August 29, 2024).

►On August 28, 2024, Houthi spokesman Mohammad Abdeslam said that following requests from several “parties,” the Houthis approved towing the tanker to safety. He noted that the attack on the tanker was an example of “Yemen’s seriousness to attack any ship that violates Yemen’s decision to prevent the passage of ships destined for Israel” (Mohammad Abdeslam’s X account, August 28, 2024).

►Houthi political council member Mohammad Ali al-Houthi issued a statement saying, “We hold America and Britain responsible for any oil spill from the *Sounion*, even if it occurs while it is being towed, for reasons that we will explain if necessary” (Mohammad Ali al-Houthi’s X account, September 1, 2024).

►On September 2, 2024, the European Union Red Sea Task Force announced that private companies were involved in efforts to tow the *MV Sounion* from its location and that the operation would begin soon. It was also reported that the European task force would secure the towing operation. Regarding the condition of the tanker, it was reported that several fire sites were still burning on board, but it was not drifting and there was no oil spill (EU Task Force EUNAVFOR Aspides X account, September 2, 2024). However, on September 3, 2024, the task force reported that the private companies had concluded that the conditions required to tow the tanker had not yet been met and that it was not safe to move forward. Therefore, it was decided to examine alternative solutions (EU Task Force EUNAVFOR Aspides X account, September 3, 2024).



Photos from the video that allegedly documented the raid and the detonation of IEDs aboard the oil tanker Sounion (the Houthi armed forces' media arm X account, August 29, 2024)

Statements by senior Houthi officials

►On August 29, 2024, the leader of Yemen's Houthi movement, Abd al-Malik al-Houthi, delivered his weekly speech, in which he said that "preparations for a response against the Israeli enemy are continuing and the time will be a surprise." He added that they were also "working hard to increase operational activity supporting Palestine to a more significant level," and clarified that "we have no political ceiling and no other considerations that could affect the level of our actions supporting the Gaza Strip." Al-Houthi claimed that at least 40% of shipping traffic to Eilat had been halted due to the complete closure of the Bab al-Mandeb Strait to the "enemy." However, he also admitted that damage to vessels in the Red Sea had become rarer because the number of ships "linked to the enemies" had been greatly reduced. According to him, the shipping companies transported the vessels over vast distances from Yemen, bearing extremely high costs. Regarding the attack on the oil tanker *Sounion*, al-Houthi said it was a "daring and courageous operation" and that two different forces raided the tanker and detonated IEDs on board (al-Masirah, August 30, 2024).

►The Houthis' political bureau issued a statement expressing "great concern over the military escalation and aggression of the Israeli enemy in the West Bank and its invasion of refugee camps." The announcement also praised "the unity of the Palestinian resistance, which is in a period of perfection and coordination" (al-Masirah, August 31, 2024).