



Spotlight on Iran and the Shiite Axis

September 11 – 18, 2024

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Highlights¹

- ▶ Statements of support by senior Iranian officials for the Palestinians and the “resistance front.” The Iranian Supreme Leader emphasized that support for “Palestine” was the duty of all Muslims. The Iranian foreign minister affirmed that Iran would continue to support the “resistance front.”
- ▶ Iran strongly condemned the detonation of Hezbollah operatives’ pagers in Lebanon and offered assistance to the wounded. The Iranian ambassador to Lebanon has also been wounded in the series of explosions.
- ▶ Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian paid an official three-day visit to Iraq, during which he discussed expanding cooperation between the two countries, especially in the economic sphere.
- ▶ Qods Force commander Esmail Qaani met in Baghdad with commanders of the pro-Iranian Shiite militias.
- ▶ A ballistic missile launched by the Houthis exploded in the air in central Israel, causing no casualties. The Houthis claimed that it was a new hypersonic missile but stressed that it was part of the “fifth escalation phase” of activity against Israel and not a response to the Israeli attack on the port of al-Hudaydah.
- ▶ The Houthis announced the downing of another American UAV. A US official denied a senior Houthi official’s claim that the US would recognize the Houthi regime if the attacks against Israel stopped.
 - ◀ The Israeli Air Force intercepted a UAV launched from Iraq. There were no casualties. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed responsibility for two additional attacks against targets in

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

Israel. The claims have not been verified. A pro-Iranian militia leader said they were preparing to expand their activity against Israel in coordination with the “axis of resistance.”

Iranian involvement in the Palestinian arena

► IRGC commander Hossein Salami commented on the situation in the Gaza Strip, saying that it is difficult and heartbreaking to witness the resistance of its residents and their daily suffering and deaths. However, he said, the secret of the Palestinians’ survival stems from jihad, “resistance,” and steadfastness. He noted that the Palestinians would soon taste the sweet taste of victory, just as their enemies would soon taste the painful taste of revenge for their evil deeds (Tasnim, September 13, 2024). Asked by journalists about Iran’s reaction to the killing of Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, Salami said it was certain, would come at the appropriate time, and that its details could not be discussed (Tasnim, September 14, 2024).



The IRGC commander (Tasnim, September 13, 2024)

► Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said Iran’s policy was unlimited support for the “resistance.” He said the “Zionist regime” had so far failed to achieve its main goal of destroying Hamas. He added that Iran had wisely neutralized the traps that might have dragged it into war (Iranian TV, September 15, 2024).



Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (Tasnim, September 15, 2024)

►Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei said at a meeting with Sunni clerics on the occasion of Muslim Unity Week that support for the “oppressed of Gaza and Palestine” is one of the unequivocal obligations. He noted that anyone who disobeys this duty will be questioned by God (ISNA, September 16, 2024).



The Supreme Leader meets with Sunni clerics (ISNA, September 16, 2024)

Iranian involvement in Lebanon and Syria

►Iran’s ambassador to Lebanon, Mojtaba Amani, was wounded in one of the explosions of Hezbollah operatives’ pagers in Lebanon on September 17, 2024. The Iranian embassy in Beirut reported that he had been superficially wounded and that his general condition was good (Iranian embassy in Beirut X account, September 17, 2024). According to another report, the ambassador was injured in the explosion of one of his escorts’ pager (Tasnim, September 17, 2024). On the other hand, “sources” in Tehran reported that the ambassador sustained severe injuries, particularly to his eye (al-Mayadeen, September 18, 2024). However, the Iranian embassy denied the “rumors” about Amani’s physical condition and his eyesight (Iranian embassy in Beirut X account, September 18, 2024).



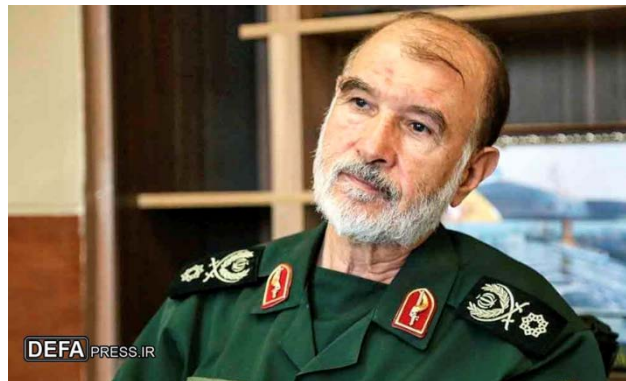
The Iranian ambassador to Beirut (Tasnim, September 17, 2024)

►Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi spoke with his Lebanese counterpart, Abdallah Bou Habib, and condemned the “terrorist action of the Zionist regime” in blowing up the pagers in

Lebanon. Araghchi said Iran was ready to help the wounded or transfer them for medical treatment in its territory (snn.ir, September 17, 2024).

►Nasser Kanani, the spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry, strongly condemned the “terrorist operation” in Lebanon, claiming that it was carried out following the combined actions of the “Zionist regime,” which contravene all moral and humanitarian principles and international law. Iranian Ambassador to the UN Amir-Saeed Irvani also condemned the operation in Lebanon and called for Israel to be put on trial (IRNA, September 17, 2024).

►Mohammad-Jaafar Asadi, head of the supervisory division of the Iranian armed forces’ Khatam al-Anbiya Central Command, addressed the attack attributed to Israel in the Masyaf area of Syria on the night of September 8-9, 2024. He said that the “crimes of the Zionists” in Syria would not go unanswered and they would receive a ringing slap in the face at the right time and place (Defa Press, September 11, 2024). A “senior Iranian source” denied the report that two Iranians had been captured in the operation, calling it a complete lie and insisting that no Iranian forces were present in the region (Tasnim, September 12, 2024).



Mohammad-Jaafar Asadi (Defa Press, September 11, 2024)

Iranian involvement in Iraq and Yemen

►On September 11, 2024, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian arrived in Iraq for a three-day visit. On the first day of the visit, he met with Iraqi President Abdullatif Rashid and Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia’ al-Sudani. In his meeting with the Iraqi president, Pezeshkian said that unity among the Islamic countries would be the key to “drying the root of Zionist terrorism.” At the end of the meeting, the two signed 14 documents for cooperation between the two countries in various fields, including economy, trade, education, culture, communications, tourism, free trade zones, and agriculture (al-Alam; snn.ir, September 11, 2024).

►At a joint press conference with the Iraqi prime minister, Pezeshkian stressed the importance of expanding relations between the two countries. According to him, the implementation of the security agreement between the two countries is essential to fight terrorists and enemies who endanger stability and security in the region. He said that through unity among the Islamic countries, it would be possible to prevent the continuation of the “crimes of the Zionist regime” (Mehr, September 11, 2024).



The Iranian president and the Iraqi prime minister (ISNA, September 11, 2024)

►Pezeshkian also met with the leaders of the Shiite pro-Iranian parties in Iraq in the presence of the Iraqi prime minister and Sayyid Ammar al-Hakim, chairman of the National Wisdom Movement. The president said that if the Islamic countries were united, the United States, Europe, and Israel would not so easily bomb Muslims and then claim to be defending human rights and democracy (ISNA, September 11, 2024).



The Iranian president meets with leaders of the Shiite parties in Iraq (ISNA, September 11, 2024)

►On the second day of the visit, President Pezeshkian visited Erbil and Sulaymaniyah in the Kurdish region and met with senior regional officials, headed by the region’s president, Nechirvan Barzani, and the leaders of the Kurdish parties. In his meeting with Barzani, Pezeshkian stressed the need to strengthen ties between Iran, Iraq, and the Kurdish region

(IRNA, September 12, 2024). The Iran president then went on to visit the Shiite holy cities of Najaf and Karbala (ISNA, September 12, 2024).



The Iranian president meets with the president of the Kurdish region (IRNA, September 12, 2024)

►On the third day of the visit, the Iranian president arrived in the southern Iraqi city of Basra and met with public figures, academics, and tribal representatives. This was the first visit by an Iranian president to Basra. During the meeting, Pezeshkian emphasized that divisions among Muslims benefit their enemies, and if Muslims stood United, Israel would not be able to commit its “crimes” in Palestine and the Gaza Strip. The president also said that Iran was committed to completing the railway project linking Shalamcheh in western Iran with Basra in southern Iraq (IRNA, September 13, 2024).

►According to a “political source,” Qods Force commander Esmail Qaani arrived in Baghdad on September 17, 2024, and held meetings with commanders of the pro-Iranian Shiite militias, including Hadi al-Ameri, secretary-general of the Badr Organization; Asa’ib Ahl al-Haqq secretary-general Qais al-Khazali; and Kata’ib Hezbollah commander Hussein al-Hamidawi (Shafaq News, September 17, 2024).

Activities of the Shiite militias

Yemen

Ballistic missile launched at Israel

►On September 15, 2024, a surface-to-surface missile was launched from Yemen at Israel. Air defense interceptors were launched at the missile, causing it to explode in mid-air, with debris falling in the Lod area. No casualties were reported, though there was some damage. The IDF stated that the missile was launched from northern Yemen and was tracked, clarifying that it was not a hypersonic missile (IDF Spokesperson and Israeli media, September 15, 2024).

►Houthi forces spokesman Yahya Saria confirmed that their missile force had launched a new hypersonic ballistic missile at a “military target” in the Jaffa area, stating that the missile hit its

target after all interception attempts failed. According to Saria, the missile traveled 2,040 kilometers in 11 1/2 minutes, causing “panic among the Zionists, two million of whom ran to bomb shelters for the first time in the history of the Israeli enemy.” He noted that the attack was part of the “fifth stage” of Houthi operations against Israel in support of the Gaza Strip (Yahya Saria’s X account, September 15, 2024).

►The Houthi armed forces also released purported footage of the launch of the missile called Filastin 2 (“Palestine 2”). They claimed it is a two-stage hypersonic missile capable of reaching speeds of Mach 16 and a range of 2,150 kilometers, with stealth capabilities that allow it to evade the world’s most advanced air defense systems, including the Iron Dome (Houthi forces’ media arm X account, September 16, 2024).



Left: Filastin 2 missile fired at Israel. Right: Technical characteristics of the missile (Houthi forces’ media arm Telegram channel, September 16, 2024)

►Senior Houthi leaders commented on the missile launch, and the following are key statements:

- ◆ Houthi leader Abd al-Malik al-Houthi, in a speech marking the Prophet Muhammad’s birthday, stated that the attack was carried out using a new ballistic missile with advanced technology, which he claimed had bypassed “all the defense belts of the Israeli enemy.” He stressed that the Houthis’ activities would persist as long as the “aggression and siege of the Gaza Strip” continued and that they would intensify their operations in coordination with “our brothers in Palestine and the axis of resistance” (al-Masirah, September 16, 2024).
- ◆ Houthi movement spokesman Mohammed Abdeslam said that “the long hand of the Yemeni people has successfully carried out a high-quality operation deep inside the territory of occupied Palestine.” He added that as part of the “fifth stage” of the escalation, “larger and more serious operations” would be carried out (Mohammed Abdeslam’s X account, September 15, 2024).

- ◆ Mohammad Ali al-Houthi, a member of the Houthi political council, said that “the strength of the Jews in the temporary entity is based on possession of warning weapons that they believe are untouchable, their morale is built on this, as are their criminal actions. The erosion of this principle of deterrence makes them afraid to commit their terrorist crimes, and here lies the importance of launching the Palestine 2 missile” (Mohammad Ali al-Houthi’s X account, September 16, 2024).
 - ◆ Nasr al-Din Amer, deputy head of the Houthi information authority, noted that the Houthi attacks were carried out in coordination with the Palestinian organizations and that when there is an escalation in the Gaza Strip, Judea, and Samaria, there would be an escalation on the part of the Houthis. **He stressed that the missile launch was not the response to the Israeli attack on the port of al-Hudaydah**, adding that the defense industries and research institutes in Yemen continue to work to improve Houthi capabilities to strike at Israel (Al-Jazeera, September 15, 2024).
 - ◆ “Sources close to the Houthi government in Yemen” noted that the ballistic missile launch was not related to the Houthis’ expected response to the Israeli attack on the port of al-Hudaydah on July 20, 2024. According to the sources, the launch was “the initiation of a new phase in Yemen’s operations” (al-Akhbar, September 17, 2024).
 - ◆ Commenting on the missile launch, Houthi political council member Hezam al-Asad issued several posts in Hebrew, reading as follows: “Whether you are in underground shelters or outside, you must listen attentively this afternoon to what this great leader will say, speaking the truth and acting honestly;” “The surprises are still coming” (Hezam al-Asad’s X account, September 15, 2024).
 - ◆ A day before the launch, Houthi Defense Minister Mohammad al-Atifi and Houthi Chief of Staff Mohammad Abd al-Karim al-Ghamari issued a statement congratulating Houthi leader Abd al-Malik al-Houthi and the Yemeni people on the occasion of the Prophet Muhammad’s birthday, while also issuing threats against the United States, the United Kingdom, and Israel. The statement warned that “what is coming will be stronger and more powerful than anything you have experienced so far” and promised that “in the coming days, we will bring you surprises you do not expect” (Houthi forces’ media arm X account, September 14, 2024).
- Iran and organizations affiliated with the “axis of resistance” welcomed the Houthi ballistic missile launch targeting Tel Aviv. The following are notable comments:

- ◆ Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian stated that while Iran possesses hypersonic missiles, it could not send missiles to Yemen without being detected. He claimed that the missiles in Yemen's possession were the result of local production (Tasnim, September 16, 2024).
- ◆ Hamas issued a statement praising the missile launch into “the heart of the Zionist entity,” calling it “a natural response to the entity’s aggression against the Palestinian people, our brothers in Yemen, and the Arab region.” Hamas also commended the supportive actions of the “resistance fronts” in Yemen, Lebanon, and Iraq, and urged all “forces, peoples, and those of free conscience” to continue their support (Hamas Telegram channel, September 15, 2024).
- ◆ Abu Obeida, spokesman for Hamas’ military wing, praised “the high-quality operation carried out by the Houthis from Yemen against a military target in the Tel Aviv area.” He expressed appreciation for the Yemeni people’s position in supporting the Palestinians, noting that the nature of the attack and the type of weapons used “indicates a substantial improvement in the quality of the attacks and will lead to a significant impact on the outcome of the Battle of al-Aqsa Flood” (Abu Obeida’s Telegram channel, September 15, 2024).
- ◆ The Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) praised the missile launch, which, it claimed, “exacerbated the enemy’s crises and proved its weakness.” The organization also praised “the courage shown by the Houthis in the face of Zionist and American tyranny” (PIJ Telegram channel, September 15, 2024).
- ◆ Hezbollah praised the Houthis’ “high-quality attack,” which achieved its objectives with great precision under complex military circumstances.” It was also stated that the Houthi leadership’s “courageous decision” was an expression of the “general and united” position of the “axis of resistance” in support of the Palestinians (Hezbollah’s combat information arm, September 16, 2024).
- ◆ Kata’ib Hezbollah in Iraq praised the attack, which “reached deep into the Zionist entity and thwarted the air defense systems.” According to the militia’s announcement, the operation “terrified more than two million Zionists and proved the failure of the Americans despite their massive power, arsenal of weapons, and the capabilities they are using to defend the criminal Zionists” (Kaf Telegram channel, September 15, 2024).

◆ Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada secretary-general Abu Alaa al-Wala'i praised the Houthis' "heroic operation." He noted that the launch was a new stage of operations, in accordance with the promise of the "axis of resistance," in which a new generation of weapons and missiles would be used for the first time (Abu Alaa al-Wala'i's X account, September 15, 2024).

Additional Houthi military activity

▶Houthi forces spokesman Yahya Saria reported that on September 15, 2024, Houthi forces shot down an American MQ9 drone over Yemen's Houthi-controlled Dhamar Governorate. According to Saria, the drone was brought down using a Houthi-made surface-to-air missile. He also noted that since the beginning of the war in the Gaza Strip, ten similar UAVs had been shot down, three of them in the past week (Yahya Saria's X account, September 16, 2024).

▶The US Central Command (CENTCOM) reported that during the past week, its forces destroyed three drones, two missile launch systems, and a support vehicle in attacks carried out in Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen (CENTCOM X account, September 11-18, 2024).

▶On September 16, 2024, the European Union Red Sea Task Force (EUNAVFOR Aspides) reported that the oil tanker MV Sounion, which was attacked by the Houthis on August 21, 2024, and abandoned after sustaining severe damage, was successfully towed to a safe area without causing an oil spill. Private companies are expected to continue the rescue operation under the protection of the European Task Force (the EU Task Force X account, September 16, 2024).

▶Mohammad al-Bukhaiti, a member of the Houthi political bureau, claimed that the movement had received messages from the United States and the United Kingdom, through intermediaries, that they would recognize the Houthi government in Sana'a if the Houthis stopped their attacks against Israel (Al-Jazeera, September 16, 2024). An "American official" denied the report, saying it was "a total fabrication" and that "Houthi propaganda is rarely true" (Reuters, September 17, 2024).

Iraq

Activity of the Shiite militias against Israel

▶On the morning of September 18, 2024, Israeli Air Force fighter jets intercepted a drone launched from Iraq that penetrated Israel near the Sea of Galilee. There were no casualties (IDF Spokesperson, September 18, 2024).

► This week, the Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed responsibility for two additional drone attacks against the Haifa port and a “target” in the Jordan Valley (Islamic Resistance in Iraq Telegram channel, September 15-16, 2024). The claims have not been verified.

► Kata’ib Sayyid al-Shuhada secretary-general Abu Alaa al-Wala’i was interviewed by Houthi TV and provided details about the militia’s involvement in the al-Aqsa Flood campaign. According to him, in the first stage, the militia took part in attacking American bases in Iraq; In the second stage, it began to participate in attacking targets within Israel; In the third stage, it began joint operations with the Houthis. He noted the militia was now preparing for the fourth phase, which is expected to involve coordination of operations in more than one arena. He added that the “Gaza Strip support fronts” had “additional cards,” saying their operations would not stop (al-Masirah, September 12, 2024).



Abu Alaa al-Wala’i in an interview (al-Masirah, September 12, 2024)

► The Alwiyat al-Waad al-Haqq militia threatened that “the occupying entity is about to receive a new blessed blow” (Alwiyat al-Waad al-Haqq X account, September 13, 2024).

► The Nujaba Movement published a letter allegedly sent by the head of Hamas’ political bureau, Yahya Sinwar, to the militia’s secretary-general, Akram al-Kaabi. Sinwar thanked al-Kaabi for his condolences following the killing of Ismail Haniyeh. He expressed his appreciation for the militia’s condolences over the death of Haniyeh, noting that Hamas would continue to fight “strongly” against Israel until its expulsion. Sinwar also stressed the need to preserve the unity of the Palestinian people “through jihad and resistance” and the unity of the Arab and Islamic nations (Nun Telegram channel, September 12, 2024).



The letter from Sinwar to al-Kaabi (Nun Telegram channel, September 12, 2024)

Activity of Hamas and Houthi offices in Iraq

- “Iraqi and Western officials” and “a member of an Iraqi armed group” have confirmed that Hamas and the Houthis have opened permanent official offices in Baghdad for the first time in June 2024 with the tacit approval of Iraqi authorities, from where they are working to develop ties within Iraq. According to the report, a Hamas office was opened in the al-Arasat area of Baghdad, which is under the control of Kata’ib Hezbollah, while the militia is also responsible for the security of Hamas representative in Iraq Muhammad al-Hafi. It has also been reported that since the arrival of Abu Idris al-Sharafi, the Houthi representative in Iraq, he has managed to meet with a large number of senior Iraqi officials (The New York Times, September 15, 2024). An advisor to the Iraqi prime minister claimed the publication was incorrect, saying it was an attempt to exert pressure on the government (@raad_arabi X account, September 16, 2024).
- State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller said allowing Hamas and the Houthis to operate in Iraq increases the risk of more armed groups with an interest in using violence and undermining the Iraqi government’s goals of achieving stability, preserving sovereignty, and bringing about economic growth. He added that the presence of these groups in Iraq could plunge Iraq into a deeper regional conflict and that the message had also been conveyed to the government in Baghdad (State Department website, September 16, 2024).

Activity of the Shiite militias against US forces

- On September 15, 2024, it was reported that the US base of Kharab al-Jir in the al-Hasakah area, in northeastern Syria, was attacked (Saberin News Telegram channel, September 15, 2024). According to another report, the attack was carried out using drones (Sputnik, September 15, 2024). According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), the US forces at the base intercepted at least three UAVs (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, September 15, 2024). According to another report, the attack was carried out using rockets (Naba News Agency, September 15, 2024). No casualties were reported.

► The US Embassy in Iraq stated there is evidence confirming that pro-Iranian militias in Iraq were responsible for the attack on the US Victory base near Baghdad International Airport on September 10, 2024. Although there were no casualties, the announcement emphasized that the United States reserves the right to self-defense. It also called on the Iraqi government to fulfill its obligation to protect American advisers, diplomats, international coalition partners in Iraq, and their facilities (Shafaq News, September 13, 2024).