



# Spotlight on Iran

April 11-17, 2024

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## Highlights<sup>1</sup>

- ▶ On the night of April 14, 2024, the IRGC launched hundreds of UAVs and missiles, including ballistic missiles, at Israel in response to the attack near the Iranian embassy in Damascus on April 1, 2024, in which Hassan Mahdavi, the senior IRGC commander in Syria and Lebanon, was killed. After the attack, senior Iranian officials stressed that Iran was not interested in further escalation and threatened an even harsher and wider response in the event of an Israeli response against Iran. The Iranian president and foreign minister held a series of telephone consultations to prevent an Israeli response.
- ▶ Rahim Safavi, the senior military advisor to the Supreme Leader of Iran, announced at a memorial ceremony for Hassan Mahdavi that a new Middle East, centered on Iran and the “resistance front,” would be created in the region against the plans and wishes of the United States and Israel.
- ▶ In Syria, precautionary measures were reportedly taken by the IRGC in eastern Syria for fear of airstrikes.
- ▶ On the eve of the Iranian attack on Israel, the Shiite militias in Iraq and Syria raised their alert. After the attack, Iraqi cities witnessed demonstrations of joy.
- ▶ This past week, the Houthis carried out four attacks against vessels in the Red Sea area, which were thwarted by coalition forces. In response to the Iranian attack, senior Houthi officials noted that the attack had proved that the equation in the region had changed, threatening that it could be the beginning of a broader campaign.

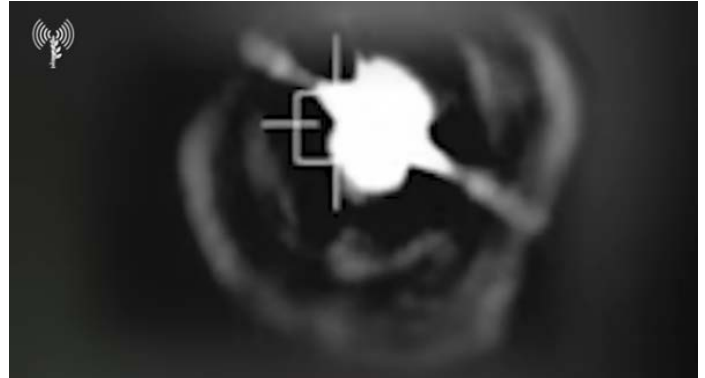
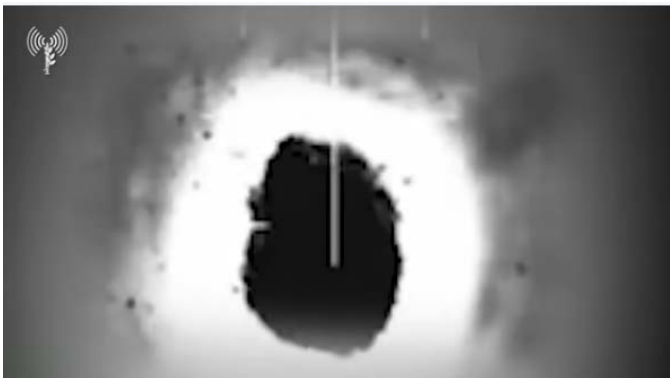
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<sup>1</sup> The weekly study includes the activities of Iran, the Shiite militias in Syria and Iraq, and the Houthis in Yemen.

►The Iranian president spoke by phone with Mahdi al-Mashat, head of the Houthis' Supreme Political Council, and praised the Houthis' activity aimed at exerting economic pressure on Israel.

## The Iranian attack on Israel

►On the night of April 14, 2024, the IRGC launched a UAV and missile attack on Israel. It included the launch of about 185 aircraft, 35 cruise missiles, and 110 ballistic missiles. According to the IRGC's announcement, the attack was carried out in response to "the Zionist regime's recent crimes of attacking the consular section of the Iranian embassy in Damascus." The statement did not specify the actual number of launches into Israeli territory, claiming that the attack included several "dozens of missiles and UAVs." This was apparently done to minimize the success of the interceptions. According to the announcement, any American or Israeli threat from the territory of any other country will be met with an appropriate response from Iran (Tasnim, April 14, 2024).



**UAVs being downed (IDF Spokesperson, April 14, 2024)**



**Right: Missile hit at the Israeli Air Force Nevatim base. Left: Hit on the Mount Hermon area (IDF Spokesperson, April 14, 2024)**

►According to the Iranian Foreign Ministry’s announcement, the Iranian armed forces exercised their legal right of self-defense under the UN Charter and responded to the repeated military attacks by the “Zionist regime” in Syria, especially the attack on the Iranian diplomatic compound in Damascus on April 1, 2024. The announcement stressed Iran’s determination to defend its sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national interests against any military aggression and illegal use of force (IRNA, April 14, 2024).

►Nour News Agency, which is affiliated with the Iranian Supreme National Security Council, noted that “Tehran’s successful operation against Israel is a legitimate response to the evil nature of the Zionist regime.” It added that if Israel and its allies wanted to test Iran’s determination when it came to protecting its interests, they would fall into a greater miscalculation than last time (Nour News X account, April 14, 2024).



**Ballistic missiles being launched from Iran into Israel (Khabar Online, April 15, 2024)**

►Mohammad Bagheri, the chief of staff of the Iranian armed forces, noted that Iran’s retaliatory operation had ended with complete success, severely damaging two important military bases of the “Zionist regime” that had been used to carry out the attack in Damascus, and that Iran had no intention of continuing the operation. However, he warned that if Israel retaliated, there was no doubt that Iran’s next response would be much more extensive. He added that Iran had sent a message to the United States, via Switzerland, that if it cooperated with Israel in its operations, American bases would not be safe. IRGC commander Hossein Salami also threatened Israel, saying Iran would attack the “Zionist regime” wherever it attacked Iran’s interests, senior figures, and citizens. He said Iran could have launched a broader operation, but it was limited to specific targets related to the attack in Damascus (Tasnim, April 14, 2024).



**Civilians in Tehran express support for the Iranian attack on Israel (Mehr, April 14, 2024)**

► Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi threatened that any new reckless response against Iran's national interests would be met with a stronger and harsher response. In a statement issued following the Iranian attack, Raisi wrote that the attack carried out by Iran was intended to defend its sovereignty and national interests, punish the aggressor, and establish regional stability. He added that the Iranian attack was smart and calculated and was intended to hit military bases in Israel (Iranian president's website, April 14, 2024).

► Meeting with ambassadors and representatives of foreign countries in Tehran on April 14, 2024, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian said Iran had conveyed a message to the White House, in which it made clear that its activities were limited and intended to punish the "Zionist regime." He warned that if the United States intervened and defended Israel from within the countries of the region, Iran would be forced to attack American military bases in those countries. Abdollahian said Iran had acted only against military bases and had not directed the attack at civilian or economic targets in Israel (IRNA, April 14, 2024).



**Abdollahian meets with foreign representatives in Tehran (IRNA, April 14, 2024)**

► Iranian Foreign Minister Abdollahian spoke with his Syrian counterpart, Faisal al-Miqdad, to discuss the Iranian attack on Israel. Abdollahian noted that the Iranian response was calculated and precise and that Iran would not hesitate to exercise its right to defend itself

against “any new Israeli aggression.” He added that Iran and Syria were standing in one trench alongside the Palestinian people and against the “Zionist entity” (SANA, April 14, 2024). He also discussed regional tension in his telephone conversations with the foreign ministers of Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, Russia, and the European Union (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, April 14-15, 2024). On April 15, 2024, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi spoke with the Emir of Qatar, Tamim bin Hamad, to discuss regional developments and regional escalation (al-Jazeera, April 15, 2024). Amid the reports about the possibility of an Israeli response to the Iranian attack, the Iranian foreign minister spoke with several of his counterparts, including the foreign ministers of China, Britain, and Oman, and the UN secretary-general, and warned against an Israeli attack on Iran (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, April 15, 2024). On April 16, 2024, Iranian President Raisi spoke with Russian President Vladimir Putin and stressed that the Iranian attack had been “limited” and that Iran did not want further escalation (Reuters, April 16, 2024).

► Saeed Iravani, Iran’s ambassador to the UN, addressed a Security Council meeting on the Iranian attack, saying that Iran had exercised maximum restraint and **attacked** with precision military targets to minimize the possibility of escalation and harm to civilians. He criticized the silence of the international community towards Israel, which made it bolder (Tasnim, April 14, 2024).

► Ali Bagheri-Kani, deputy Iranian foreign minister, warned Israel against an attack on Iran and threatened that the Iranian response would be stronger and broader. Interviewed by Iranian TV, the deputy foreign minister said that the “Zionists” should know that if they made another mistake, Iran would respond within a few seconds, not within 12 days (IRNA, April 15, 2024).

► Brigadier General Abolfazl Shekarchi, the spokesman for the Iranian armed forces, also threatened a strong Iranian response in the **event** of an Israeli attack. He noted that Iran was not interested in expanding the war but would respond to anyone who crossed the red lines more forcefully than in its previous response to Israel. He called on the leaders of the United States, Britain, France, and Germany to end their support for the “terrorist regime of Israel” (IRNA, April 16, 2024).

## Iranian involvement in the Palestinian arena

► Yahya Rahim Safavi, the senior military advisor to the Supreme Leader of Iran, said at a memorial ceremony for Hassan Mahdavi in Esfahan that the “Zionists” had been in complete

panic and alert for a week, had stopped the military operation in Rafah, and did not know what Iran wanted to do and where and when it would respond. According to Safavi, the psychological, media, and political war scares them more than the war itself because they wait every night for an attack and many of them have fled to bomb shelters. He added that the blood of the fallen, including Qassem Soleimani, those killed in the war in the Gaza Strip, and those killed in the “resistance front” from Lebanon to Yemen, from Iraq to Syria, would prepare the ground for the liberation of Jerusalem. He said the victory of the “resistance front” and the Palestinian people led by Iran was certain and that a new Middle East, centered on Iran and the “resistance front,” would be created in the region contrary to the plans and wishes of the United States and Israel (ISNA, April 12, 2024).



**Rahim Safavi at the ceremony in Esfahan (Tasnim, April 12, 2024)**

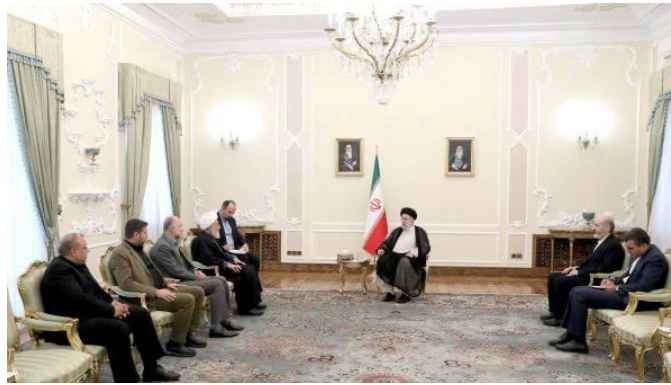
► On April 14, 2024, Ali Akbar Velayati, the senior advisor for international affairs to the Supreme Leader of Iran, spoke with Ismail Haniyeh, head of Hamas’ political bureau, and expressed his condolences over the death of his sons in an IDF attack in the Gaza Strip. Velayati said the Iranian attack against Israel had shattered the “false hegemony of the Zionists.” Haniyeh expressed his gratitude for Iran’s support for the Palestinians, saying that the Iranian attack was a turning point in the way and manner of managing the conflict with the “Zionist regime,” stressing that the era of “Zionist bullying in Palestine and the region” was over (IRNA, April 14, 2024).

## Iranian involvement in Syria and Lebanon

► On April 13, 2024, the Syrian news channel Ayn al-Furat reported on precautionary measures taken by the IRGC in eastern Syria for fear of airstrikes. According to the report, several houses and centers in the Albukamal area, which served as warehouses for storing military and logistical equipment, were evacuated and the equipment stored there was secretly transferred to alternative locations. It was also reported that the Iranian Jihad al-Bina Foundation,

affiliated with the IRGC, had prepared a protected farm for use by members of the Revolutionary Guards and pro-Iranian militias.

► Sheikh Ali al-Khatib, deputy chairman of Lebanon’s Supreme Shiite Council, visited Iran in mid-April 2024 and met with senior government officials in Tehran, headed by President Raisi and Foreign Minister Abdollahian. Raisi praised the support of Lebanon’s Shiite Supreme Council for the “resistance,” saying Lebanon was an important component in the resistance axis. He added that the al-Aqsa Flood was a strategic defeat for Israel, which changed the regional balance in favor of the Palestinians. He warned that if Israel responded to the Iranian attack, it would understand the significance of a real and extensive response (ISNA, April 16, 2024).



**President Raisi meets with deputy chairman of Lebanon’s Supreme Shiite Council (ISNA, April 16, 2024)**

## Iranian involvement in Yemen

► On April 15, 2024, the Iranian president spoke with Mahdi al-Mashat, head of the Houthi Supreme Political Council, who congratulated him on the attack on Israel and said Iran’s action was intended to defend its sovereignty. He stressed the unity of the “resistance front” in the struggle against the “Zionist regime” and in support of Iran. Raisi praised Yemen’s support for the Palestinians and Houthi activity aimed at exerting economic pressure on Israel (Khabar Online, April 16, 2024).

## Activity of the Shiite militias

### **The militias and the Iranian attack on Israel**

► According to “American intelligence sources,” Iran instructed the militias in Iraq, a few days before the attack, to carry out a large-scale attack against Israel, and the militias were

preparing to do so (CNN and Inews-iq.com, April 9, 2024). In practice, the militias did not carry out such an attack. “Sources” in Iraq reported that the day before the Iranian attack on Israel, the pro-Iranian militias in eastern Syria raised their alert level (Inews-iq.com, April 13, 2024).

► According to a “Shiite source” in Iraq, amid the escalation between Iran and Israel, the leaders of the pro-Iranian militias in Iraq agreed that the militias would not resume their attacks on American bases. The “source” added that the militias agreed to remove the Kurdish region from the list of targets as part of the Iranian response to Zahedi’s killing, because they feared that it would drive away Masoud Barzani, chairman of the Democratic Party of Kurdistan, from the political arena, which would create “internal complexity in Iraq” (Asharq Al-Awsat, April 10, 2024).

► After the attack, the Iraqi Kataeb Hezbollah (Hezbollah Brigades) militia issued a statement of support for the Iranian attack and congratulated Ali Khamenei, Iran’s Supreme Leader, for “detering the enemy in the face of its aggression.” The militia claimed that the defense provided by the American bases in Iraq and Syria to Israel (the “Zionist entity”) proved that one of the main roles of the United States in the region was “supporting the crimes of the entity.” The militia also attacked Jordan for its participation in intercepting the Iranian UAVs, claiming that “shame will continue to haunt its leaders throughout history” (Kataeb Hezbollah Telegram channel, April 15, 2024).

► People affiliated with the pro-Iranian Iraqi militias celebrated the attack with demonstrations of joy in Baghdad and Karbala. During the celebrations in Baghdad, which took place in front of the Iranian embassy, participants waved flags of Iraq, Kataeb Hezbollah, and the Popular Mobilization. In Karbala, participants waved flags of Iran and Kataeb Hezbollah (al-Sayyid Ali al-Husseini’s X account, April 14, 2024; al-Mayadeen, April 14, 2024; Jafar’s X account, April 14, 2024).





**Right: Flags of Iraq, Kataeb Hezbollah, and the Popular Mobilization waved in front of the Iranian embassy in Baghdad (Jafar's X account, April 14, 2024). Left: Flags of Iran and Kataeb Hezbollah waved in Karbala (al-Sayyid Ali al-Husseini's X account, April 14, 2024)**

## The activity of the militias from Syria

► According to a senior Iraqi official, the Shiite militias' attacks against Israel are not carried out from Iraqi territory, but from Syrian territory, near the Golan Heights. Therefore, the Iraqi government has nothing to do with the issue and does not even bother to respond to it (al-Araby al-Jadeed, April 9, 2024).

## Yemen

### Activities on the ground

► According to the US Central Command (CENTCOM), during the past week, Houthi forces carried out four attacks against vessels in the Red Sea area using three anti-ship missiles and three UAVs. The launches, referred to as a threat, were intercepted by US-led coalition forces, and no damage or casualties were reported. In addition, CENTCOM reported that in recent days, coalition forces had carried out several airstrikes against Houthi military targets on Yemeni soil, which, according to them, posed an immediate danger to vessels in the area (CENTCOM X account, April 10-17, 2024).

► Yahya Saria, the spokesman for the Houthi armed forces, reported that the Houthi forces had carried out four "operations" in which they attacked four American and Israeli vessels with missiles and UAVs. According to the statement, the ships attacked were the US-owned MV Yorktown, two "Israeli" ships, the MSC Darwin and the MSC GINA, and another US Navy ship (Yahya Saria's X account, April 10, 2024). CENTCOM did report an attack on the MV Yorktown by an anti-ship ballistic missile on April 9, 2024, noting that it suffered no damage (CENTCOM X account, April 10, 2024). Regarding the attack on the other ships, there has been no confirmation from other sources.

## Statements following the attack on Israel

► Following the large-scale attack carried out by Iran and its proxies against Israel on April 14, 2024, Houthi spokesman Mohammad Abdeslam declared that the action carried out by Iran against Israel was a “legitimate action” in response to Israel’s “crimes” against the Iranian consulate in Damascus (Mohammad Abdeslam’s X account, April 14, 2024). Yasser al-Houri, the secretary of the Houthis’ Supreme Political Council, said the attack had proved that the equation in the region had changed and that Israel had to recognize its loss and stop the attacks in the Gaza Strip. He went on to threaten that the attack carried out against Israel could be the beginning of a broader campaign if Israel carried out “additional stupid steps” (al-Amid Telegram channel, April 14, 2024).

► The Houthi Foreign Ministry in Yemen issued a statement saying Iran’s military attack against Israel (the “Zionist entity”) was legitimate and legal and in compliance with international law and the UN Charter. The ministry expressed its displeasure with support for Israel and the use of the veto in the UN to its advantage (Saba, April 15, 2024).

► On April 15, 2024, CENTCOM issued a statement regarding the attack against Israel, stating that US forces had successfully intercepted more than 80 UAVs and at least six cruise missiles launched at Israel from Iran and Yemen. In addition, as part of the American operation, a “launch vehicle” and seven aircraft were destroyed on Yemeni soil (CENTCOM X account, April 15, 2024). No information has yet been released on the number of weapons launched from Yemen during the attack. Houthi officials have not claimed direct responsibility for any launches.

## Launch at Eilat

► On April 14, 2024, the IDF Spokesperson reported that the Israeli naval forces and Air Force had identified a UAV en route to Israeli territory from the southeast. The target was reportedly intercepted in the Red Sea area by a missile ship using the “Sea Dome” system (IDF Spokesperson, April 14, 2024). Houthi forces did not officially claim responsibility for the launch. However, Hizam al-Assad, a member of the Houthi political bureau, posted on his X account that day the message “Eilat ‘Umm Rashrash” (Hizam al-Assad’s X account, April 14, 2024). A similar announcement was issued by al-Assad in similar cases in which there were launches at Eilat.



**Interception of the UAV (IDF Spokesperson, April 14, 2024)**

## **Security Council discussions**

► On April 15, 2024, a UN Security Council meeting was held on the situation in the Middle East in general and Yemen in particular. During the discussion, representatives of the United States, Britain, and France stressed (as they had done in previous Security Council discussions) that Iran continued to support and supply weapons to the Houthis, thereby increasing instability in the Red Sea and the entire region. They also condemned the attack on Israel by Iran and its proxies and demanded that Iran cease its activities that increased instability in the Middle East (UN website, April 15, 2024).