



Spotlight on Iran

May 1-8, 2024

Editor: Dr. Raz Zimmt

Highlights¹

- ▶ Senior Iranian officials continued to present the Iranian attack on Israel on April 13-14, 2024, as an Iranian success and a defeat for Israel. The IRGC commander declared that the attack on Israel proved that Iran was not afraid of enemy reactions and that in the event of another wave of attacks, Israel's ability to defend itself would be significantly reduced. A senior official in the Iranian armed forces declared that the attack had changed the strategic balance in Iran's favor and that without the assistance of Western countries and some countries in the region, it would have been possible to completely destroy the military bases attacked by the IRGC.
- ▶ Iran welcomed Hamas' announcement that it agreed to the ceasefire proposal in Gaza. The Iranian foreign minister spoke with the head of Hamas' political bureau, and the spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry praised the "political wisdom of the resistance." At the same time, Iran condemned the Israeli military operation in Rafah. During his visit to Gambia as part of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation summit, the Iranian foreign minister discussed developments in the Palestinian arena with some of his counterparts in the Muslim world and stressed the need to sever economic ties with Israel.
- ▶ The Saudi newspaper al-Hadath reported that several weeks ago, Qods Force commander Esmail Qaani had visited Beirut and discussed future military measures with Hezbollah's secretary-general in light of developments on the Gaza Strip and Lebanese fronts. In early May 2024, sources in Iraq and Iran reported Qaani's visit to Baghdad for consultations with the heads of the pro-Iranian Shiite militias.
- ▶ Nechirvan Barzani, the president of the Kurdish region in northern Iraq, arrived in Tehran on May 5, 2024, for a visit where he met with senior Iranian government officials, headed by the

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

Supreme Leader of Iran. The Iranian officials stressed Iran's demand that the Iraqi authorities and the Kurdish region prevent Israeli activity from their territory against Iran.

►The Islamic Resistance in Iraq continued to claim responsibility for attacks on “vital targets” in Israeli territory using drones and cruise missiles, also claiming that they had carried out an attack on Tel Aviv for the first time. The IDF confirmed interceptions of two aircraft from east Israel and another in the Eilat area.

►The Houthis in Yemen announced the opening of the fourth phase of fighting in the conflict and threatened to attack vessels sailing to Israel in the Mediterranean Sea as well.

Iranian involvement in the Palestinian arena

►Meeting with teachers in Tehran, Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei said that the Gaza Strip had now become the world's foremost issue and that the “Zionists” and their American and European allies could not remove the issue from the agenda of world public opinion. He added that the pressure on the “Zionist regime” had to be increased day by day. Khamenei also said that “Palestine” had to return to its original owners and that normalization with the “Zionist regime” would not solve the regional problem (Fars, May 1, 2024). Meeting with workers in Tehran, Khamenei said the events in the Gaza Strip, the “cruel Zionist” attacks on the one hand, and the resistance of the residents of the Gaza Strip on the other, were a great indicator that would remain in history and pave the way forward. He added that without American support, the “Zionist regime” would not have had the ability and courage to act in such a barbaric manner (Tasnim, May 6, 2024).

►IRGC commander Hossein Salami said at a conference at the IRGC headquarters in Tehran that the “Zionist regime” had suffered an intelligence defeat in the al-Aqsa Flood on October 7, 2023, and a defeat of its deterrence in the Iranian attack on Israel on April 13-14, 2024. He said the attack proved that Iran was not afraid of Israel's reactions and that the decision to attack Israel was based on great courage and deep wisdom and was a highly unusual decision that no other regime in the world could have made. He added that if Iran had carried out another wave of attacks, the capability of Israel's air defense systems would have been reduced by at least 50 percent. Salami also said that the desire to launch missiles into Israel was likely to repeat itself and that it was an unprecedented force (Tasnim, May 1, 2024).



IRGC commander Salami (Tasnim, May 1, 2024)

►Speaking at a ceremony marking 40 days since the attack attributed to Israel near the Iranian consulate in Damascus, Salami said that the “global arrogance” led by the United States sought to take over the Muslim world, including Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen, and that it was the Qods Force’s responsibility to close the enemy’s ways of influence in Islamic countries, thereby protecting both the security of Muslim countries and Iran. Salami added that the al-Aqsa Flood had been a complete defeat for the “Zionist regime,” and that the Iranian attack on Israel on April 13-14, 2024, had dealt a blow to the regime’s deterrence and proved that its end was near (ISNA, May 7, 2024).

►Major General Gholam-Ali Rashid, commander of the Iranian armed forces’ air defense command, Khatam al-Anbiya, said in an interview with the government newspaper Iran (May 5, 2024) that the Hamas attack on October 7, 2023, had exposed Israel’s vulnerability and proved that Israel was an artificial and weak entity whose existence depended on the West. He noted that Israel was a very small country with an area similar in size to the one Iran managed to conquer during one operation in the Iran-Iraq War. Referring to the Iranian missile and drone attack against Israel on April 13-14, 2024, Rashid said the attack had led to the failure of Israeli deterrence and changed the strategic balance in Iran’s favor. He noted that the number of missiles that hit their targets was of lesser significance and that without the assistance of the United States, Britain, France, and several other countries, Israel’s military bases could have been destroyed. Rashid stressed that Iran had used only 20 percent of its offensive capability because Iranian commanders believed it was enough to punish Israel for attacking Damascus. According to him, Israel did not dare to present the damage caused by the Iranian attack.



Khatam al-Anbiya commander Gholam-Ali Rashid (Iran, May 5, 2024)

► Hossein Amir Abdollahian, the Iranian foreign minister, met with his Egyptian counterpart, Sameh Shoukry, on the sidelines of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) summit in Gambia. The two discussed bilateral relations, developments in the region and the Palestinian arena, and efforts to bring about a ceasefire in Gaza. Abdollahian thanked Egypt for its efforts to stop the “genocide in the Gaza Strip” and expressed his country’s willingness to send humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip. Shoukry expressed hope for an end to the war and stressed Egypt’s desire to prevent the escalation of the situation in the region. Abdollahian also met with Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan and Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan to discuss bilateral relations and developments in the region and the Gaza Strip. Abdollahian praised Turkey’s decision to sever its trade relations with Israel (Iranian Foreign Ministry website, May 4, 2024). In his speech at the OIC summit, the Iranian foreign minister called for the severing of diplomatic, economic, and commercial ties with Israel, an immediate and full ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, an exchange of prisoners, a full withdrawal of the IDF from the Gaza Strip, and the prosecution of Israel (Fars, May 4, 2024).



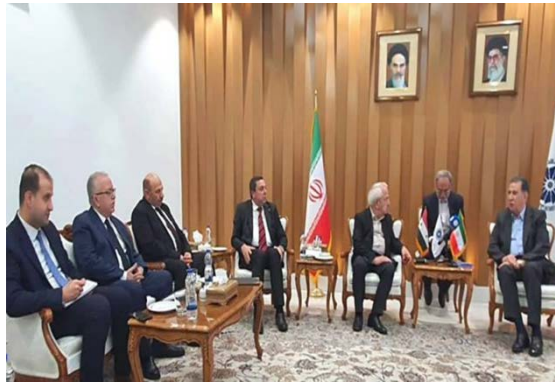
The meeting of the foreign ministers of Iran and Egypt (Tasnim, May 4, 2024)

►Iranian Foreign Minister Abdollahian spoke with Ismail Haniyeh, head of Hamas’ political bureau, who updated him on the details of the proposed ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. In a tweet on his X account, Abdollahian wrote that Haniyeh had expressed his appreciation for Iran’s support for Palestine and the Gaza Strip, informed him of Hamas’ agreement to the ceasefire proposal of Egypt and Qatar, and told him that the ball was now in Israel’s court (Iranian foreign minister’s X account, May 6, 2024).

►Nasser Kanani, the spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry, praised Hamas’ announcement regarding the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, saying it was another expression of the political wisdom of the “resistance” and its might on the battlefield. He said Iran supported the proposal, which included an immediate and permanent cessation of the “attacks and crimes of the Zionist regime,” lifting the siege on the Gaza Strip, releasing the Palestinian prisoners, completely and unconditionally withdrawing the “Israeli occupation forces” from the Gaza Strip, and rebuilding the ruins of the war (Tasnim, May 7, 2024). At the same time, Kanani condemned Israel’s military operation in Rafah, saying it was intended to thwart international efforts to end the war in the Gaza Strip and protect the “personal and group interests of the Zionist criminals.” He added that Israel and the United States were responsible for the “crimes” in Rafah (ISNA, May 7, 2024).

Iranian involvement in Syria and Lebanon

►Shafiq Dayoub, the Syrian ambassador to Tehran, and Muhammad Abu al-Huda al-Laham, the head of the Association of Syrian Chambers of Commerce, met in early May 2024 with Samad Hassanzadeh, the head of Iran’s Chamber of Commerce. Ambassador Dayoub said at the meeting that the volume of trade between Iran and Syria was unsatisfactory and stressed the need to expand economic ties between them through cooperation between the private sectors of the two countries. He said Syria was prepared to provide exemptions to Iranian investors. The head of the Iranian Chamber of Commerce said that Iran’s private sector was prepared to cooperate in rehabilitating Syria’s infrastructure, industry, and investments. He added that there was a need to remove barriers in the fields of transportation and finance to expand economic cooperation between the countries (SANA, May 2, 2024).



**The meeting of the heads of the Iranian and Syrian chambers of commerce in Tehran
(SANA, May 2, 2024)**

- ▶ The Saudi newspaper al-Hadath reported (May 6, 2024) that several weeks ago, Esmail Qaani, commander of the Qods Force, had visited Beirut and met with Hezbollah secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah to discuss future military measures in light of developments vis-à-vis Israel on the Lebanese and Gaza fronts. Meanwhile, a senior official in the IDF's Northern Command said following Hezbollah's launch of a drone at Metula, in which two IDF reservists were killed, that the IDF identified Iranian involvement and assistance to Hezbollah operatives in operating the drones against Israel (Israeli news website Mako, May 7, 2024).
- ▶ Citing sources in the Iranian opposition, the British Daily Telegraph revealed that Iran was training Hezbollah fighters to carry out drone attacks against northern Israel at a secret facility located about 5 km from the city of Qom. According to the report, the facility has tripled since it began operations in 2006, and the length of its runway reached 1.5 km in 2020. In 2021, a new hangar adjacent to the runway was built in the complex (The Telegraph, May 5, 2024).

Iranian involvement in Iraq

- ▶ Qods Force commander Esmail Qaani arrived in Iraq in early May 2024 for consultations with the heads of the Shiite pro-Iranian militias in the country. According to several reports, the visit took place amid a demand by some of the Shiite militias in Iraq, including Kataeb Hezbollah (Hezbollah Brigades), to resume their activity against the American forces in the region. The said activity was suspended following the incident in which three American soldiers were killed at a base in northern Jordan at the end of January 2024 (@Muhallell Telegram channel, May 5, 2024).
- ▶ On May 5, 2024, Nechirvan Barzani, the president of the Kurdish region in northern Iraq, arrived in Tehran at the head of a senior delegation of the region's leadership. During the

visit, the delegation met with senior Iranian government officials, headed by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. The other participants were President Ebrahim Raisi, Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali-Akbar Ahmadian, Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian, IRGC commander Hossein Salami, and Majles Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf. They discussed bilateral issues and regional developments (Iranian news agencies, May 5-7, 2024). Meeting with Barzani, President Raisi said the Iraqi government and the Kurdish region had to prevent any misuse of Iraqi territory by the “Zionist regime” and “counter-revolutionary” groups to act against Iran (Iranian government website, May 6, 2024).



The president of the Kurdish region meets with the Supreme Leader of Iran (Supreme Leader’s website, May 6, 2024)

Activities of the Shiite militias

Iraq

Activities on the ground

► The Islamic Resistance in Iraq stepped up its activity this week, claiming responsibility for 12 attacks against targets in Israel between May 1-7, 2024.² Half of the attacks were carried out on May 6-7, 2024, possibly in response to the entry of IDF forces into Rafah. According to Resistance reports, the attacks were carried out using cruise missiles, drones and what they called “suitable weapons” (Telegram channel of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, May 1-7, 2024). Attacks included in the list:

- ◆ A “vital target” in Eilat (May 7, 2024, in the evening). The IDF Spokesperson reported the interception of a suspicious target approaching the Eilat area from the east (IDF Spokesperson, May 7, 2024).
- ◆ The Leviathan gas field in the Mediterranean Sea (May 7, 2024) and Haifa Port.

² Throughout the two hundred days of the war, the Resistance claimed responsibility for 88 attacks.

- ◆ IDF bases in the Golan Heights.
 - ◆ Eilat Air Force Base. Haifa Port (May 4, 2024); a “vital target” at the Dead Sea (May 3, 2024).
 - ◆ An attack on a “vital target” in Beersheba and two “vital targets” in Tel Aviv (May 2, 2024). The attacks on Beersheba and Tel Aviv were reportedly directed at the IDF’s Southern Command base and the “Mossad intelligence center in Glilot.” The report noted that this was the first attack on Tel Aviv from Iraqi territory (Saberin News Telegram channel, May 3, 2024).
 - ◆ The attacks reportedly also included Kataeb Hezbollah, which fired missiles at a “vital target” in Eilat (May 2, 2024); and a “vital target” in the Golan Heights (May 1, 2024) (Saberin News Telegram channel, May 1, 2024).
- ▶The IDF Spokesperson reported two incidents of interception of aircraft approaching Israeli territory from the east (IDF Spokesperson, May 6-7, 2024).
- ▶Alwiyat al-Waad al-Haq (AWH, True Promise Brigades), a pro-Iranian Iraqi militia, announced that from now on the activities of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq would escalate and even use new advanced weapons (X account of al-Waad al-Haq, May 6, 2024).



**Al-Arqaab cruise missiles being launched at Beersheba and Tel Aviv
(Telegram channel of the main information unit of the resistance axis, May 3, 2024)**

Statements regarding Israel

- ▶ Abu Alaa al-Wala'i, the secretary-general of Kataeb Sayyid al-Shuhada, referred in a speech to the war in the Gaza Strip, noting that the fighting in the al-Aqsa Flood campaign had outlined two paths for the world: one of the resistance and the other of the “Great Satan,” the United States and its protégé, Israel (“the weak Zionist entity”). According to him, anyone who trusts in his religion, humanity, morality, and principles joins the “path of the resistance.” (al-Amid Telegram channel, May 3, 2024).

► Kataeb Hezbollah (Hezbollah Brigades) issued a statement calling on all Muslim clerics to oppose normalization projects with Israel, “which betray the entire Arab and Islamic world.” They also called for condemning the “Zionist-American killing machine and [for] working to erase the criminal Zionist entity” (Kaf Telegram channel, May 4, 2024).

Bahrain:

Shiite militia claiming responsibility for launching aircraft to Eilat

► The al-Ashtar Brigades (AAB),³ a pro-Iranian Shiite militia, claimed responsibility for launching drones at Israel for the first time. According to the announcement, they launched an aircraft at the headquarters of the Israeli company Trucknet in Eilat, which, according to the organization, is responsible for Israel’s ground transport. They said they would not stop their activities until the war in the Gaza Strip ceased (X account and Telegram channel of the Islamic Resistance factions’ combat information unit in Bahrain; al-Ibdal, May 2, 2024). On May 2, 2024, the al-Ashtar Brigades claimed responsibility for another drone attack against the offices of Trucknet in Eilat (Telegram channel of the Islamic Resistance factions’ combat information unit in Bahrain, May 4, 2024). There has not been any confirmation of whether aircraft were launched from Bahraini territory.



Right: Al-Ashtar Brigades announcement (X account of the Islamic Resistance factions’ combat information unit in Bahrain, May 2, 2024). Left: The launch of one of the UAVs (Saberin News Telegram channel, May 2, 2024)

³ The al-Ashtar Brigades act as an arm of Iran against the Bahraini regime and recruit Bahraini operatives of Shiite origin. Mortada al-Sanadi, the militia leader, has been in Iran since 2011 and openly calls for an Islamic revolution in Bahrain to overthrow the Sunni monarchy of the Al Khalifa family.

Yemen

Coalition activity against the Houthis

►According to reports from the US Central Command (CENTCOM), during the past week, the Houthi forces carried out two attacks against vessels in the Red Sea using UAVs and an anti-ship ballistic missile. The launches were intercepted by US-led coalition forces and no significant damage or casualties were reported. In addition, CENTCOM reported that in recent days, coalition forces had carried out several airstrikes in Yemeni territory against Houthi military targets (CENTCOM X account, May 1-8, 2024). On May 6, 2024, the Italian frigate ITS *Virginio Fasan*, part of the European Union Red Sea Task Force, intercepted a UAV launched at a vessel in the area. No casualties or damage were reported (X account of the European Union Task Force EUNAVFOR *Aspides*, May 7, 2024).

►The German newspaper *Der Spiegel* reported that Commodore Vasilios Griparis, the Greek commander of the European Union Red Sea Task Force (EUNAVFOR *Aspides*), told his superiors that he was unable to fulfill his mission due to a shortage of warships. He claimed that he would have only three ships at his disposal in the coming months to secure the vessels sailing in the area. According to Griparis, since the start of the operation in February 2024, the task force escorted 96 vessels sailing in the Red Sea area and intercepted 12 UAVs and one missile. He reported that in an incident that took place at the end of April 2024, the Houthis managed to hit a ship secured by the European force by using a drone swarm that penetrated the warships' air defenses (*Der Spiegel*, May 5, 2024).

Statements by senior Houthi officials regarding the continuation of the activity

►On May 2, 2024, Abd al-Malik al-Houthi, the leader of the Houthi movement, released a video in which he claimed that the Houthi forces were preparing to launch the fourth stage of the escalation with Israel if it did not cease its activities in the war in Gaza. In addition, he confirmed that even if negotiations for a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip succeeded, it did not mean that the conflict with Israel was over and that it would only be the end of the current round of the conflict. He claimed that the confrontation against Israel would end only when “all the lands of Palestine are cleansed of the Israeli enemy” (*Rai al-Youm*, May 2, 2024).

►Accordingly, Yahya Saria, spokesman for the Houthi armed forces, announced the beginning of the fourth phase of the conflict between the Houthis and Israel and its allies. According to Saria, from now on, any ship that violates the prohibition on sailing to and from Israel in

Mediterranean waters will be a target for attack. In addition, he warned that if Israel launched an operation in Rafah, the Houthi forces would impose “sanctions” on all ships and companies involved in transferring supplies to Israel or entering its ports, regardless of their nationality. According to the statement, Houthi forces will prevent these ships from passing through the Houthis’ “areas of activity,” regardless of their destination. Saria ended his statement with a warning that the Houthi forces would not hesitate to use broader and stronger measures until the “aggression” and siege against the population of the Gaza Strip ceased (Yahya Saria’s X account, May 3, 2024).

Addressing the internal situation in Israel

► Hizam al-Assad, a member of the Houthi political council, posted a video documenting a demonstration by ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel against their enlistment in the IDF. He added a text in Hebrew saying, “Due to a great loss in the number of their soldiers after the killing of many of them in Gaza and northern Israel, they are trying to force the ultra-Orthodox into compulsory conscription. Many ultra-Orthodox believe that the Israeli entity is temporary” (Hizam al-Assad’s X account, May 2, 2024).

Spying network exposed

► The Houthi security forces reported that they had uncovered and dismantled a cell of operatives engaged in espionage and sabotage on behalf of the United States, Britain, and Israel. According to the report, the detainees were recruited by members of an “intelligence entity” called Force 400. The “spies” were engaged in monitoring and documenting sites of the Houthi forces, especially the naval and missile forces responsible for attacks against vessels and Israeli territory, in preparation for attacking them by the US-led coalition forces. According to the report, the operatives admitted that they had also planned to carry out assassination and sabotage operations against Houthi forces personnel and facilities (al-Masirah, May 6, 2024).

Houthi collaboration with al-Qaeda

► The British Daily Telegraph reported that according to findings of intelligence and terrorism experts, the Houthi movement is collaborating with the al-Qaeda branch in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which operates in Yemen. According to the experts, the Houthis provide AQAP with drones and release AQAP operatives from prisons. The report states that the collaboration between the sides is taking place with the aim of gaining control of southern

Yemen, which is currently controlled by the UAE-backed Transitional Council (The Telegraph, May 4, 2024).