



# Spotlight on Iran

May 22—29, 2024

Editor: Dr. Raz Zimmt

## Highlights<sup>1</sup>

- ▶ The deaths of the senior Iranian officials, first and foremost President Raisi and Foreign Minister Abdollahian, provided Iran with an opportunity to demonstrate the cohesion of the “resistance front” and to emphasize its continued adherence to the strategy of supporting its proxies in the region despite the sudden political upheaval. Following the funeral of the senior Iranian officials, senior Iranian government officials, headed by the Supreme Leader of Iran, the acting president, and the foreign minister, and senior IRGC officials, held meetings with senior members of the “resistance front,” in which they stressed their commitment to continued support for Iran’s network of proxies in view of the ongoing campaign in the Gaza Strip and other battlefields. On the sidelines of the Iranian president’s funeral, representatives from the “resistance front” and the IRGC met in Tehran to discuss the continuation of the regional campaign.
- ▶ Iran strongly condemned the incident in Rafah, in which dozens of Palestinians were killed in a displaced persons camp during an IDF operation, and called for a practical response from the international community against Israel.
- ▶ According to a Syrian news channel, the IRGC’s Qods Force commander in charge of the pro-Iranian militias in eastern Syria returned to the Albukamal area. This follows an absence of several weeks, apparently due to his injury in an airstrike at the end of March 2024. At the same time, there were reports of security measures taken by the militias and the IRGC to prepare for the possibility of additional airstrikes.

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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 Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed responsibility for eight attacks against targets in Israeli territory using UAVs and cruise missiles. The IDF confirmed that six UAVs had been intercepted on three occasions en route to Eilat and northern Israel.
- ▶The Houthis claimed responsibility for attacks against civilian and military vessels in the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the Indian Ocean, as well as in the Mediterranean. The US Central Command confirmed that a Greek-owned ship had been damaged but continued on its way without casualties.
- ▶A report in Iran confirmed that Iran had provided the Houthis with Iranian technology that made it possible to develop precision anti-ship missiles. In addition, a US investigation presented evidence indicating a direct involvement of the Iranian regime in supporting the Houthis and their activities.

## Iranian involvement in the Palestinian arena

- ▶On May 22, 2024, Ali Khamenei, Iran's Supreme Leader, met with Ismail Haniyeh, the head of Hamas' political bureau, who had arrived in Tehran to attend the funeral of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi. Khamenei said that Allah's promise to erase the "Zionist regime" would be fulfilled just as Allah's promise to Moses' mother had been fulfilled, and that the day would come when "Palestine from the river to the sea" would be established. He said no one would have believed that the day would come when pro-Palestinian slogans would be heard and Palestinian flags would be waved at American universities, and the slogan "Death to Israel" would be heard at pro-Palestinian demonstrations in Japan. Khamenei stressed that Raisi's replacement, Mohammad Mokhber, would continue the former president's policy regarding "Palestine" in the same spirit and motivation (ISNA, May 22, 2024).



**Khamenei meets with Haniyeh (ISNA, May 22, 2024)**

- ▶On the sidelines of Raisi's funeral, a meeting of representatives from the "resistance front" was held in Tehran. The meeting was attended by IRGC commander Hossein Salami, Qods

Force commander Esmail Qaani, and representatives of Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), Hezbollah, and the Houthis. The sides discussed the situation in the Gaza Strip and the role of the “resistance front” and stressed the need to “continue jihad and struggle until a complete victory is achieved in the Gaza Strip with the participation of all the resistance groups in the region.” In addition, a meeting was held between officials of the Iraqi Shiite militias and senior IRGC and Qods Force officials (Tasnim; al-Mayadeen, May 23, 2024).



**Meeting of representatives of the “resistance front” in Tehran (Tasnim, May 23, 2024)**

► Ali Bagheri-Kani, the acting Iranian foreign minister, met on the sidelines of the funerals of the senior Iranian officials with the heads of the Palestinian organizations, including Ismail Haniyeh, Mohammad al-Hindi, deputy secretary-general of the PIJ, and Jamil Mazhar, deputy secretary-general of the PFLP. Bagheri thanked the “resistance” organizations for their solidarity with Iran and praised the “courageous resistance of the Palestinian people against the Zionist regime.” He noted that the “Zionists” had suffered an unprecedented defeat not only on the battlefield but also in the global political, legal, and diplomatic arenas, and even the United States could not find a way to save them. He stressed that Iran would invest all its efforts to defend the Palestinian people and the “resistance” and stop the “crimes of the Zionist regime” against the Palestinians (Mezan, May 23, 2024). Bagheri also met in Tehran with Badr Albusaidi, the Omani foreign minister. At a joint press conference, Bagheri said the two countries had agreed to increase their efforts and cooperation to “stop the crimes in the Gaza Strip” and send humanitarian aid to the residents of the Strip (ISNA, May 27, 2024).



**Bagheri meets with the heads of the Palestinian organizations in Tehran (Mezan, May 23, 2024)**

►Esmail Qaani, the commander of the IRGC, met with Ali Bagheri-Kani, the acting Iranian foreign minister. Qaani praised Amir Hossein Abdollahian, the foreign minister killed in the crash of the Iranian president’s helicopter, and his support for the “resistance” and the Palestinian people. Bagheri said the “resistance” was not only a stream of struggle against oppression, aggression, and occupation but also a successful model of government (al-Alam, May 28, 2024).



**Qaani (left) meets with Bagheri (al-Alam, May 28, 2024)**

►Mohammad Mokhber, acting president of Iran, spoke with PIJ secretary-general Ziad al-Nakhalah, who expressed condolences over the deaths of the Iranian president and foreign minister. Nakhalah stressed the important and prominent role played by the two in the international and regional arenas, especially their support for the Palestinian people and the “resistance,” and noted that their deaths were a great loss for the Islamic Republic and the Palestinian people. Mokhber stressed that the Iranian strategy based on support for the “resistance,” especially the Palestinian “resistance” groups, would not change following the changes in the top echelons of the Iranian government (al-Quds News, May 25, 2024; ISNA, May 26, 2024).

► Seyyed Abbas Araghchi, secretary of Iran's Strategic Council on Foreign Relations (SCFR), said at a conference on the war in the Gaza Strip and its regional implications held in Qatar that Iran's support for the Palestinians was full and permanent and that it would provide the "resistance" with all its needs. He said Iran opposed normalizing relations with Israel and regarded it as a betrayal of "Palestine." According to him, Iran also opposes the two-state solution, because it will not lead to any result and Israel will never agree to the establishment of a Palestinian state or the two-state solution. He added that Iran's solution was the establishment of one state by holding a referendum among the original residents of Palestine. He said it might seem impossible, but the "resistance" had made what was impossible possible (ISNA, May 26, 2024). Nasser Kanani, the spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry, also stressed Iran's continued support for the Palestinians. At his weekly press conference, Kanani said that the deaths of Iranian officials in the helicopter crash would not lead to any change in Iran's support for the Palestinians. He said support for the "resistance front" and the Palestinian "resistance" was a policy of principle and a moral obligation for all countries (Fars, May 27, 2024).

► The government daily Iran stressed Iran's continued support for the "resistance front" despite the deaths of the senior Iranian government officials. A commentary article said that not only did the "resistance front" maintain its steadfastness and unity after their deaths, but it would also increase its strength and continue to advance its strategic goals. According to the daily, the issue of the "resistance" is much deeper than the policy of one government or another, and Israel's continued existence as a regional destabilizing power will strengthen the "resistance" even after the death of the senior Iranian officials (Iran, May 27, 2024).

► Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Kanani strongly condemned the incident in Rafah, in which dozens of Palestinians were killed in a displaced persons camp during an IDF operation. Kanani called the IDF's action a "war crime" that required a practical response from the international community and a blatant violation of the temporary order issued by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague (ISNA, May 27, 2024).

## Iranian involvement in Syria and Lebanon

► Syrian President Bashar Assad spoke with Mohammad Mokhber, the acting president of Iran, and expressed condolences over the death of the senior Iranian officials. Assad noted that, like Qassem Soleimani, Raisi was an influential figure in the region and the international arena, and that the "resistance front" would always remember him. The Syrian president also said he

would visit Iran at the earliest opportunity to extend his condolences and strengthen relations between the countries. Mokhber told Assad that Syria was a strategic partner of the Iranian people. He stressed that all Iranian institutions were continuing to carry out their missions as in the past and that Iran was committed to continuing its support for the “resistance front,” especially Syria (IRNA, May 23, 2024).

►A Syrian news channel reported that al-Haj Askari, who is the Qods Force commander in charge of the pro-Iranian militias in the Albukamal area, recently returned to Albukamal after being forced to return to Iran for medical treatment following his injury in an airstrike on March 26, 2024. According to the report, concurrently with his return to Syria, the pro-Iranian militias took a series of security measures, including moving his office to the “security square” belonging to the Syrian regime in Albukamal. In addition, at a secret meeting of IRGC officers with commanders of the pro-Iranian militias, it was decided to take additional security measures, including removing senior IRGC commanders from their military positions, raising security alert in view of the possibility of additional airstrikes on Albukamal positions, and increasing security tightening on land routes to transfer aid between Iraq and Syria (Ayn al-Furat, May 23, 2024).

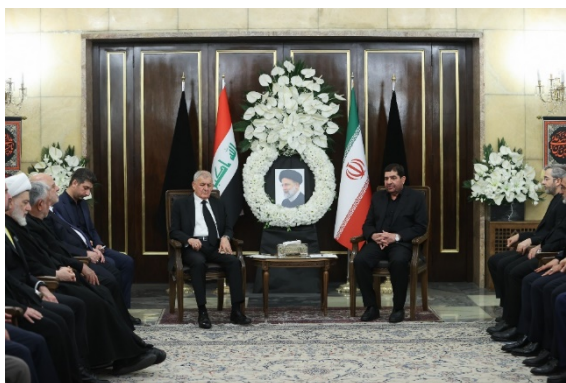
►Senior Iranian government officials, headed by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, expressed condolences on the death of Nahdia Hashem Safi al-Din, the mother of Hezbollah secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah, on May 25, 2024 (Tasnim, May 27, 2024). Mohammad Mokhber, the acting president of Iran, and Esmail Khatib, minister of Iranian intelligence, visited Hezbollah’s main office in Tehran to extend their condolences (ISNA, May 28, 2024).



**Mokhber and Khatib at Hezbollah’s office in Tehran (ISNA, May 28, 2024)**

## Iranian involvement in Iraq

► Iraqi President Abdullatif Rashid met with Mohammad Mokhber, the acting president of Iran. Rashid arrived in Tehran at the head of an Iraqi delegation to express condolences over the deaths of the Iranian president and other senior Iranian officials in the helicopter crash. Mokhber said Raisi had played a significant role in strengthening the “resistance axis” and that Iran, led by the Supreme Leader, would continue its regional strategy and policy towards Iraq (ISNA, May 25, 2024).



The meeting between Rashid and Mokhber (ISNA, May 25, 2024)

## Activities of the Shiite militias

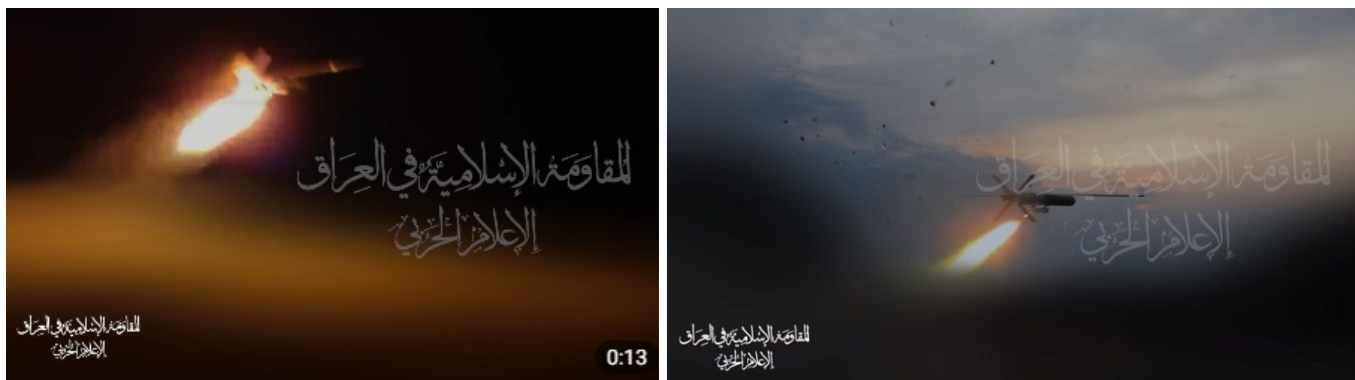
### Iraq

#### Activities on the ground

► The Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed responsibility for carrying out eight attacks against targets in Israel, most of them using UAVs. The attacks focused on Eilat (Telegram channel of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, May 16-21, 2024). The targets were the following:

- ◆ “Military targets” in Eilat (May 27, 2024, in the evening) using three UAVs. The IDF Spokesperson said fighter jets and air defense fighters had successfully intercepted two UAVs that were making their way into Israeli territory from the east and did not cross into Israeli territory. There were no casualties (IDF Spokesperson’s website, May 28, 2024).
- ◆ A “vital target” in Eilat (May 23, 2024, in the evening) using two UAVs. According to the IDF Spokesperson, fighter jets intercepted two suspicious aerial targets en route from the east towards Eilat. The targets did not enter Israeli territory (IDF Spokesperson’s website, May 24, 2024).
- ◆ Three more attacks against a “vital target” in Eilat (May 23, 2024, in the morning; May 24, 2024, in the evening; May 27, 2024) using a UAV.

- ◆ Haifa Port (early morning of May 24, 2024) using a UAV. According to the IDF Spokesperson, fighter jets intercepted two UAVs en route to northern Israel from the east. The UAVs did not enter Israeli territory (IDF Spokesperson’s website, May 24, 2024).
- ◆ Haifa Port (early morning of May 23, 2024) using two al-Arqaab cruise missiles. The event has not been verified.
- ◆ A “military target” in the Golan Heights (May 23, 2024, in the morning) using a UAV. The event has not been verified.



**Right: The launch of an aircraft at Eilat on May 28, 2024. Left: The launch of an aircraft at Haifa Port on May 24, 2024 (Islamic Resistance in Iraq Telegram channel, May 24 and 28, 2024)**

## The militias are examining the resumption of attacks against American targets

►Kataeb Hezbollah commanders reportedly informed Iraqi Prime Minister Muhammad Shia’ al-Sudani that they were reexamining the agreement with the Iraqi government regarding the renewal of attacks against American targets. According to a senior Kataeb Hezbollah official, the militia has stepped up its operations against Israel instead of attacks against American targets in Syria and Iraq (al-Akhbar, May 25, 2024; al-Hadath, May 26, 2024). The Iraqi pro-Iranian militias almost completely stopped their attacks on American bases in Syria and Iraq after the American attack on Kataeb Hezbollah targets in early February 2024. The cessation of the attacks against the American bases occurs amid contacts being held between the Iraqi government and the American administration regarding the withdrawal of American forces from Iraq.

## The militias welcome the ICC orders in The Hague

►Qais al-Khazali, the secretary-general of Asaib Ahl al-Haq, praised the decision of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague to issue orders regarding the IDF’s activity in Rafah. Al-Khazali said he appreciated the court’s decision to prevent and stop all forms of “Zionist aggression” against Rafah. He added that it was a positive decision that showed a clear



change in the position of the entire world on the issue of Palestine and a direct result of Operation al-Aqsa Flood (Qais al-Khazali's X account, May 25, 2024).

## Coordination between the militias in Iraq and the Houthis in Yemen

► Ahmad al-Hamidawi, the secretary-general of Kataeb Hezbollah, spoke with Abd al-Malik al-Houthi, the leader of the Houthis in Yemen. Al-Hamidawi stressed that the preparedness and coordination between the Axis forces, especially between Iraq and Yemen, had to be maintained to support the Palestinian people. He added that the military actions of the Yemeni forces had contributed significantly to the imposition of the ban on Israeli maritime navigation. Al-Houthi claimed that coordination between the Axis forces in the region would increase the impact of his actions against Israel (Kataeb Hezbollah Telegram channel, May 24, 2024).

## Yemen

### Anti-vessel activity

► After several days in which no attacks were carried out, the Houthis resumed operations against civilian and military vessels in the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the Indian Ocean, and according to them, also in the Mediterranean. Yahya Saria, the spokesman for the Houthi armed forces, reported on the attacks (Yahya Saria's X account, May 23-27, 2024):

- ◆ **May 24 – three attacks:** against the “Israeli ship” MSC Alexandria in the Arabian Sea with several ballistic missiles; The Greek ship YANNIS was attacked by naval forces, drones, and missiles while passing through the Red Sea; against the “Israeli ship” ESSEX using several missiles in the Mediterranean area. Saria did not elaborate on the results of the actions.

- ◆ **May 27 – five attacks:** against the American ship LAREGO DESERT (sic!) and the Israeli ship MSC MICHELA in the Indian Ocean, and against the MINERVA LISA in the Red Sea. According to the statement, “all actions have achieved their goal.” According to Saria, the ships were attacked by Houthi naval and missile forces. In addition, Saria announced that the Houthi Air Force had carried out two airstrikes on US Navy destroyers sailing in the Red Sea area. According to Saria, all the airstrikes achieved their goals, but his claims have not been verified.

► On May 28, 2024, the US Central Command (CENTCOM) reported that the Houthis had fired five ballistic missiles toward the Red Sea and that three of the missiles hit the Greek-owned M/V Laax, flying the Marshall Islands flag. There were no casualties, and damage was reported,

but the vessel continued on its way. According to CENTCOM reports, during the past week, the Houthi forces fired four more ballistic missiles at the Red Sea. American forces intercepted two more UAVs over the Red Sea. In all cases, there were no casualties and no damage was caused. CENTCOM reported that coalition forces had carried out several airstrikes against Houthi military targets in Yemeni territory (CENTCOM X account, May 22-29, 2024).

► On May 23, in a speech given by Houthi leader Abd al-Malik al-Houthi, he claimed that during the past week, the Houthi forces had carried out eight operations using 15 missiles and drones in the Red Sea, the Arabian Sea, the Gulf of Aden, the Indian Ocean, and the Mediterranean Sea (Houthi forces X account, May 23, 2024). It should be noted that during this period, there were reports of Houthi attacks in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden only.

### **Houthi statements against Israel**

► On May 26, 2024, the Houthi political bureau issued a statement condemning Israel's "massacres" against displaced persons in northwest Rafah following the incident in which several dozen Palestinians were killed in a fire at a tent camp.<sup>2</sup> According to the statement, the "Israeli Holocaust" against the displaced persons in the Gaza Strip reflects the level of cruelty of the Israeli "enemy," the level of its crimes, and its disregard for international law and ICC decisions. It added that full responsibility for the "massacres" in Rafah rested with the United States and its partners who support the "Zionist entity" (al-Amid Telegram channel, May 26, 2024).

► Hezam al-Asad, a member of the Houthi political council, issued several statements in Hebrew following claims made by Hamas' military wing that Israeli soldiers had been abducted in the Gaza Strip. The statements read, "The more Israel continues to attack and kill civilians in Gaza, the more of its soldiers will be killed;" "Netanyahu sacrifices dozens of his soldiers every day to keep his job and avoid trial, while at the same time lying to Israeli society as if he is making progress in having the prisoners released. How many prisoners did Netanyahu release and how many new prisoners were added to the previous ones?"; (Along with photos of Netanyahu, Gallant, and Gantz) "What are they still betting on? There is no security, and no stable life, because this is not their land. Will they return to their countries and leave the land of Palestine?"

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<sup>2</sup> According to the IDF's preliminary investigation, two small missiles targeted two senior Hamas operatives who were staying in a compound one kilometer from the tent camp. It is believed that Hamas ammunition was stored nearby, including a rocket launcher, which caused explosions and a fire that spread in the camp (IDF Spokesperson's website, May 28, 2024).

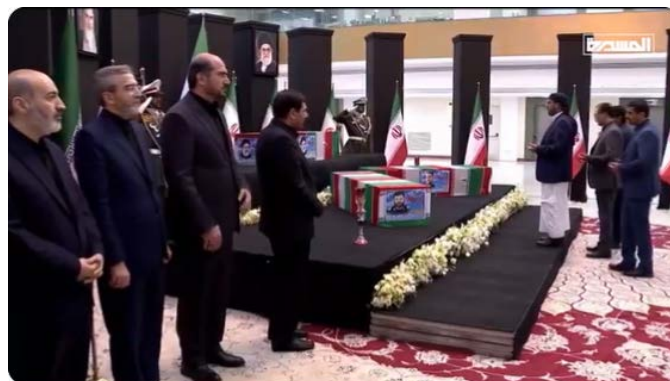
They have only two options: leave or perish;” “How long will the Ashkenazim continue to cause Sephardim to be thrown into the furnaces of Gaza?”; “POW records require frequent updating” (Hezam al-Asad’s X account, May 26, 2024). The statements attest to familiarity and understanding of the agenda and voices emerging from the Israeli public regarding the conduct of the war so far. In addition, the statements indicate familiarity with the composition of the Israeli population and the sectarian tensions within it.



Hezam al-Asad’s Hebrew posts (Hezam al-Asad’s X account, May 26, 2024)

## Houthi delegation attends funeral of Iranian president

►On May 22, 2024, a Houthi delegation led by Mohammad Abdeslam, the movement’s spokesman, visited Tehran to participate in the official funeral ceremonies of Iranian President Raisi, Foreign Minister Abdollahian, and the other senior figures killed in the helicopter crash (al-Masirah, May 22, 2024). Abdeslam also participated in a meeting of senior “resistance front” figures with the IRGC commander and the Qods Force commander.



Houthi delegation near the coffins of senior Iranian officials (al-Masirah, May 22, 2024)

## Iranian-Houthi Relations

►Tasnim News Agency reported that Iran had provided the Houthis with technology to develop advanced anti-ship ballistic missiles. According to the report, the Muhit (“Ocean”) missile, an anti-ship missile that the Houthis had displayed in military parades, is based on the technology of the Qadr-110, an Iranian ballistic missile with a range of 2,000 km, and includes an optical seeker designed to precise the impact capability. According to the report, the transfer of the technology proves that Iran successfully supported the “resistance front” throughout the region and succeeded in strengthening the “resistance” organizations, and that “such a policy led to the establishment of an integrated command and control center in the region, especially in the UAV and missile spheres” (Tasnim, May 29, 2024).



**The Muhit missile in a parade in Yemen (Tasnim, May 29, 2024)**

►Fox published an investigation on Iranian-Houthi relations, based on testimonies provided by elements affiliated with the Iranian opposition. It presented testimonies and evidence allegedly indicating a direct involvement of the Iranian regime in supporting the Houthis and their activities. According to the investigation, the Iranian Qods Force is transferring to the Houthis various weapons, such as UAVs, cruise missiles, ballistic missiles, anti-ship mines, radar equipment, and advanced communications systems. The weapons are transported directly from Iran to Yemen or through Africa to Yemen by “local boats” or by hiding them in large ships. In addition, according to the investigation, Iran trains the Houthis in the use of advanced weapons and provides them with military training. It was also reported that decision-making and strategic planning regarding assistance to the Houthis are made by the highest echelons of the Iranian regime and the Revolutionary Guards and approved by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei (Fox News, May 25, 2024).