



Spotlight on Iran and the Shiite Axis

October 9-15, 2024

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Highlights¹

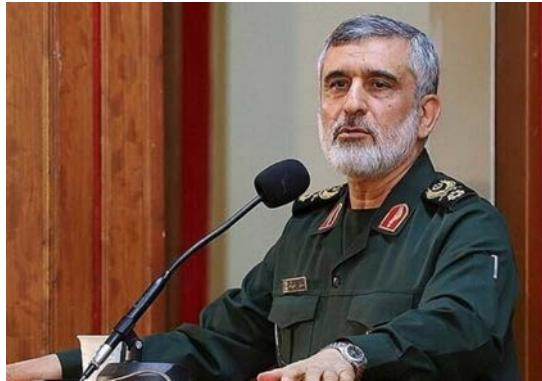
- ▶ Iranian officials continued to threaten that they would retaliate for any possible Israeli attack on Iran following the Iranian missile attack on Israel on October 1, 2024.
- ▶ Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi visited Qatar, Iraq, and Oman this week as part of his diplomatic trip to the region amid the recent developments in Lebanon and the fear of an Israeli response to the Iranian missile attack.
- ▶ Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, speaker of the Iranian Majles, visited Lebanon and toured Beirut's Dahiye. The visit reflects Iran's increasing efforts to maintain its influence in Lebanon amid the severe blow to Hezbollah's leadership and Israel's ongoing military moves in Lebanon.
- ▶ The IRGC announced that the body of IRGC's Qods Force Lebanon Corps commander Abbas Nilforoushan had been recovered. Nilforoushan was killed in an Israeli Air Force airstrike against the Hezbollah headquarters in Beirut, in which Hezbollah secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah was also killed. At the reception ceremony for his body in Tehran, Qods Force commander Esmail Qaani also attended after he did not appear in public for more than ten days.
- ▶ The pro-Iranian militias in Iraq claimed responsibility for 15 drone attacks against targets in Israel. The militias are preparing for a possible Israeli attack in Iraq and have threatened to retaliate against Israel and American interests in the event of an attack on Iran. In addition, the militias threatened to carry out suicide bombing attacks against IDF forces in southern Lebanon if approval for such actions was obtained. Attacks attributed to the United States hit targets of pro-Iranian militias in Syria.

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

► The Houthis claimed responsibility for two attacks against vessels in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. There were no casualties. Senior Houthi leaders congratulated Hezbollah for the drone attack that hit an IDF base near Binyamina.

Iran's threats ahead of Israeli attack

► Amir-Ali Hajizadeh, commander of the IRGC's aerospace arm, wrote in a letter sent following the Iranian attack on Israel on October 1, 2024, that the attack was "the minimum punishment for the criminal Zionist regime." He noted that the operation was fully supported by all the country's senior officials and approved by the Supreme National Security Council, with the support of the president and the commander of the armed forces. Hajizadeh added that members of the IRGC's aerospace arm and the other Iranian armed forces were on high alert and ready to respond decisively to any mistake by the enemy (Tasnim, October 13, 2024).



IRGC's aerospace arm commander Hajizadeh (Tasnim, October 13, 2024)

► Majles speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf said Iran had declared many times that it did not want to expand the war but would respond strongly and appropriately to any kind of attack against it. He added that Iran does not know what Israel's response to the Iranian attack will be, but there is no doubt that it will respond (al-Mayadeen, October 12, 2024).

Iranian involvement in the Palestinian arena

► Iran's mission to the UN denied the New York Times report that Iran was aware of the planning of the October 7, 2023, attack. According to a report based on secret documents found by the IDF in Khan Yunis, Yahya al-Sinwar, then Hamas leader in the Gaza Strip and now head of the movement's political bureau, and other senior Hamas figures tried to persuade Iran and Hezbollah to join the attack. In response to a question from The New York Times about the documents, the mission said that the planning, decision, and management of the October 7 operation were the sole responsibility of Hamas' military wing in the Gaza Strip and that any

claim linking the operation partially or fully to Iran or Hezbollah was baseless (ISNA, October 13, 2024).

Iranian involvement in Lebanon and Syria

- ▶ Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said during his visit to Qatar that Iran is not interested in war or escalation but is prepared for any scenario. He said Iran would determine the nature of its response in accordance with the Israeli attack. He also said that Iran’s support for the “resistance” is not limited to political and diplomatic support and that Iran would not stop supporting it and would provide it with all its needs. Referring to his visit to Lebanon, the Iranian foreign minister said his meetings in Beirut were serious and good and that Iran would support the decisions of the Lebanese government and the “resistance.” He added that Iran is holding consultations with Qatar to stop the war (al-Jazeera, October 10, 2024).
- ▶ During his visit to Qatar, Araghchi met with Qatar’s prime minister and foreign minister, Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, to discuss regional developments and efforts to promote a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and Lebanon (ISNA, October 10, 2024).



The meeting of the foreign ministers of Iran and Qatar (ISNA, October 10, 2024)

- ▶ Iranian Ambassador to Lebanon Mojtaba Amani, who was wounded in the pager explosions in Lebanon, said that “Hezbollah is alive.” He said the “Zionist regime” cannot destroy Hezbollah by damaging the organization’s body and that all Hezbollah commanders choose their successors before they die (Iranian TV, October 10, 2024).



The Iranian ambassador to Lebanon (Iranian TV, October 10, 2024)

► The IRGC announced that the body of IRGC’s Qods Force Lebanese Corps commander Abbas Nilforoushan had been recovered. Nilforoushan was killed in the Israeli Air Force airstrike against Hezbollah headquarters in Beirut’s Dahiyeh on September 27, 2024, in which Hezbollah secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah was also killed. According to the IRGC announcement, his body will be transferred to Iran for burial (ISNA, October 11, 2024). The reception ceremony for Nilforoushan’s body at Tehran’s Mehrabad Airport was attended by Qods Force commander Esmail Qaani after he did not appear in public for more than ten days amid reports of his disappearance (Tasnim, October 15, 2024).



The Qods Force commander at the reception ceremony for Nilforoushan’s body (Tasnim, October 15, 2024)

► Iran’s mission to the United Nations in New York denied allegations about the transfer of military aid from Iran to Lebanon via Iran Air. According to the announcement, Iran is transferring humanitarian aid to Lebanon in various ways and is prepared to transfer medical aid and receive Lebanese wounded, but Lebanon does not need military aid (IRNA, October 11, 2024).

► Majles speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf visited Lebanon. Upon arriving in Beirut, he said he arrived in Lebanon on his way to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) meeting in Geneva to

convey to the Lebanese people Iran's message of support for the Lebanese people, government, and "resistance." During his visit, Qalibaf met with Lebanese interim Prime Minister Najib Mikati and Lebanese Parliament speaker Nabih Berri, stressing Iran's willingness to provide assistance to Lebanese citizens. He toured Beirut's Dahiyeh and declared that Iran would help rebuild Beirut (Tasnim, October 12, 2024).

► Iranian Ambassador to Lebanon Mojtaba Amani noted that the Majles speaker's visit to Lebanon proved once again Iran's seriousness and determination in supporting Lebanon and the "resistance front." He added that the trips of senior Iranian officials, especially Foreign Minister Araghchi, to countries in the region during this difficult period indicate a serious move by Iran to stop Israel's operations. Amani stressed that Iran would continue to support the "resistance front" and Hezbollah on all levels and that "victory is imminent" (Mojtaba Amani's X account, October 12, 2024).



Qalibaf on a tour of the Dahiyeh (Tasnim, October 12, 2024)

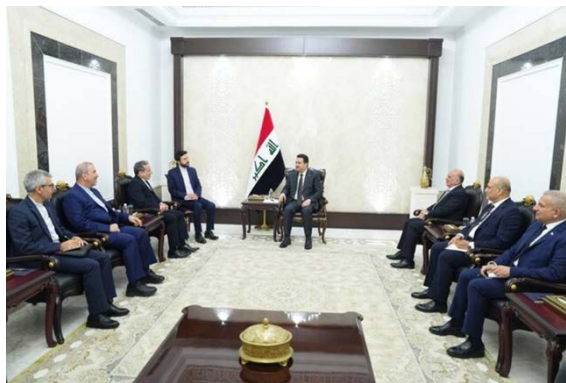
► Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian spoke with French President Emmanuel Macron discussed regional developments, particularly in Lebanon. The Iranian president noted that Iran seeks a secure zone without wars and welcomes any ceasefire, but the "Zionists" are proving, through the intensification of bombings and "crimes" in the Gaza Strip and their expansion into Lebanon, that they are not committed to any humanitarian framework or international laws. Pezeshkian called on France and other European countries to continue their efforts to force Israel to stop its "genocide and crimes" in Gaza and Lebanon. He expressed appreciation for France's recent positions condemning Israel's recent actions in Lebanon and for halting the shipment of weapons to Israel (ISNA, October 13, 2024).

► Another Iranian aid plane carrying humanitarian and medical supplies arrived at Latakia International Airport in Syria as part of Iran's efforts to provide aid to Lebanese displaced

persons in Syria. Airport officials supervised the unloading of the cargo of the aid plane, in cooperation with Russian forces operating there (SANA, October 13, 2024).

Iranian involvement in Iraq and Yemen

► Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi arrived in Iraq as part of his regional visits amid the latest regional developments. During his visit to Baghdad, Araghchi met with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia' al-Sudani; Iraqi President Abdullatif Rashid; and Iraqi Foreign Minister Fouad Hussein, discussing bilateral relations and regional developments. At a joint press conference with his Iraqi counterpart, Araghchi said Iran is not interested in war and is striving for a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and Lebanon but is not afraid of war and is prepared for any scenario. He said the region is facing very serious and dangerous challenges and that there is a possibility of further escalation that could lead to an all-out war in the region (ISNA, October 13, 2024).



The Iranian foreign minister meets with the Iraqi prime minister (ISNA, October 13, 2024)

► An “Iraqi government source” said Araghchi met in Baghdad with “prominent Iraqi Shiite officials,” without specifying their identity. According to the source, several Iraqi militia leaders informed Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia' al-Sudani before Araghchi’s arrival that they did not intend to stop military operations against Israel and the United States, and that the militias had taken this position separately from Iran. Mohammad Shukr, a senior official in Iraq’s Shiite Coordination Committee, said the position of the “resistance” is united and intended to harm the enemy by confusing it, while the government’s position is to bring calm and not favor the possibility of war. However, he admitted that Araghchi and al-Sudani were influencing the militias to temporarily refrain from harming the interests of the “occupation.” He assessed that the visit of the Iranian foreign minister would have a positive effect on reducing regional tension and would help efforts to get the United States to pressure Israel to “stop its crimes against the Palestinians and in Lebanon” (al-Akhbar, October 14, 2024).

► At the end of his visit to Iraq, Foreign Minister Araghchi continued to Oman. During the visit, the minister met with his Omani counterpart, Badr bin Hamad Al Busaidi, and discussed regional developments with him. Araghchi also met in Muscat with Yemeni Houthi spokesman Mohammed Abdulsalam (snn.ir, October 14, 2024).



The Iranian foreign minister meets with the Houthi spokesman in Yemen (snn.ir, October 14, 2024)

Activity of the Shiite militias

Iraq

Attacks by Iraqi militias against Israel

► This past week, the Islamic Resistance in Iraq issued 14 claims of responsibility for 15 drone attacks against targets in Israel. The claim of responsibility for an attack against “a vital target in the eastern part of the occupied lands” asserted that it was carried out by an “aircraft with developed capabilities” but no details were provided (Islamic Resistance in Iraq Telegram channel, October 9-15, 2024). The IDF Spokesperson reported that three drones heading towards Israel from the east were intercepted on two separate occasions (IDF Spokesperson, October 9-15, 2024).



Drone being launched at the Golan Heights with a picture of Nasrallah and the flags of Iraq, Lebanon, and “Palestine” (Islamic Resistance in Iraq Telegram channel, October 10, 2024)

► Jordan’s General Security said that “an object containing explosives fell in the city of Aqaba without causing any injuries” and that “the Corps of Engineers dealt with the debris of the fallen object” (Jordanian General Security Facebook page, October 10, 2024).

► It was reported that one of the drones had been launched from the Syrian Desert and was even seen flying towards the Golan Heights and that an attempt by the US forces at the al-Tanf base in Syria to intercept it failed (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, October 12, 2024).

Militias preparing for an Israeli response in Iraq

► Kata’ib Hezbollah spokesman Abu Ali al-Askari threatened that any attack against Iraq and an attack on Iran from Iraqi territory would lead to an “unlimited” response against Israel and a “cruel” response against American bases and interests in Iraq and the region. He noted that “we will not start an energy war... However, what our Yemeni brothers will do in Bab al-Mandeb and what our Iranian brothers will do in the Strait of Hormuz, only Allah knows” (Kaf Telegram channel, October 10, 2024).

► The pro-Iranian militias in Iraq have reportedly begun to evacuate some of their headquarters in Baghdad and reduce the presence of operatives in some of the headquarters due to fear of an Israeli attack (al-Hadath, October 9, 2024). According to another report, the militias evacuated their headquarters in the governorates of Diyala, Salah al-Din, and Nineveh (1News.com, October 11, 2024).

► Sheikh Nazem al-Saeedi, chairman of the planning council of the Nujaba Movement, confirmed that the militias were taking seriously the Israeli threats to attack Iraq and therefore their bases had been evacuated. He added that there is a joint operations room for the entire “axis of resistance,” in which they determine targets for attack on Israel and the fronts from which they will attack. According to him, the “axis of resistance” has a variety of weapons, and the joint operations room decided to escalate the use of the weapons because “the Israeli enemy must be fought before it reaches our homes.” Al-Saeedi threatened that “all options are open” to the Iraqi resistance if the region enters an all-out war, saying it would attack the energy centers of anyone who attacks Iranian oil sources (al-Sumaria, October 12, 2024).

► According to a “source close to the militias,” senior members of the Shiite Coordination Committee recently met with senior militia officials and told them that the attacks against Israel pose a threat of airstrikes on Iraq and that it is unacceptable. It was also reported that during the meeting between the sides, senior militia officials demanded that the Iraqi government “not interfere in their matters” (al-Sumaria, October 14, 2024).

Threats by Iraqi militias over the escalation in Lebanon

- ▶ A “source close to the Iraqi militias” threatened that the militia fighters are preparing to carry out suicide bombing attacks in the Lebanese arena as soon as they receive the green light to implement them. According to the source, the attacks, which he called the “weapons icon” (Ayunat al-Asliha), will be a “turning point” in the fighting and will cause losses to the “enemy.” He added that “the resistance factions are preparing many surprises on the battlefield” (baghdadtoday.news, October 14, 2024).
- ▶ “A source close to the Iraqi militias” said they would send fighters to Lebanon in accordance with Hezbollah’s real needs. However, he noted that Hezbollah “completely controls all the outposts and managed to thwart a series of direct enemy actions despite the fire,” and therefore there is no need to send fighters (baghdadtoday.news, October 12, 2024).
- ▶ There were reports of reinforcement of the pro-Iranian militias in Syria, in the administrative tri-border area of the governorates of the Damascus rural area, Daraa, and Quneitra. However, it is estimated that they are insignificant (alhal.net, October 10, 2024).

Demonstration in support of the Palestinians

- ▶ Pro-Iranian militia operatives held a demonstration in support of the Palestinians to mark one year since Hamas’ attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, and in memory of Hezbollah secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah. Kata’ib al-Shuhada secretary-general Abu Alaa al-Wala’i, speaking at the rally, praised the “Palestinian resistance” for its “repeated attacks against Tel Aviv” and claimed that the “Zionist entity” had not achieved its goals of destroying Hamas. He added that “those who are steadfast in the battles of truth, despite their low numbers and equipment,” succeeded in confronting “the most barbaric and brutal entity” despite its technological and military superiority and American and Western support. He also claimed that the losses that the “Zionist enemy” recognized as a result of these actions “are just a drop in the ocean” (Iraqi News Agency, October 11, 2024).



Right: Al-Wala'i speaking at the rally (Almoqawm X account, October 11, 2024).

Left: Militia operatives at the rally (Iraqi News Agency, October 11, 2024)

The confrontation between the Americans and the pro-Iranian militias

- ▶ On the evening of October 14, 2024, it was reported that the pro-Iranian militias attacked with rockets and a drone the International Coalition base in the Conoco oil field in Deir ez-Zor in eastern Syria, where US forces are stationed. The rockets and drone were intercepted and there were no casualties. Four civilians were allegedly wounded as a result of retaliatory artillery fire by the US forces at the village of Marat (al-Mayadeen, October 14, 2024; MenchOsint X account, October 14, 2024).
- ▶ Between October 10 and 14, 2024, airstrikes attributed to US forces stationed at the Conoco base in eastern Syria against targets of pro-Iranian militias were reported daily, mainly in the Deir ez-Zor area. In some of the airstrikes, militia operatives were reportedly killed and wounded (the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights and the Ayn al-Furat Telegram channel, October 10-14, 2024). No confirmation was received from the US Central Command or the International Coalition.
- ▶ “Informed sources” reported that the US threats against the pro-Iranian militias in Iraq are real because if they attack the American bases in Iraq, the US will retaliate against them. In this context, a senior Pentagon official warned that the response against the militias would be “brutal” (1News.com, October 12, 2024).
- ▶ “A source close to the Iraqi militias” claimed that the militias decided to stop the attacks against American bases in Iraq completely and focus on attacking deep inside Israel. According to him, the armed groups in Iraq are not interested in opening a front against the United States and Israel together, so they are trying to avoid a confrontation with the United States, which can attack targets in Iraq directly (eremnews.com, October 11, 2024).

Yemen

Houthi military activity

► On October 10, 2024, Houthi forces spokesman Yahya Saria claimed responsibility for two attacks against vessels (Yahya Saria's X account, October 10, 2024): an attack on an "American" oil tanker in the Red Sea using 11 ballistic missiles and two drones. The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) confirmed that the tanker reported damage from an unknown weapon, but there were no casualties and the tanker continued on its way (UKMTO X account, October 10, 2024); An attack against a ship in the Indian Ocean using a cruise missile. There has been no verification of the claims.

► "Houthi sources" reported that Houthi forces were preparing to expand their operations and attack Israeli and American targets in the eastern Mediterranean with missiles and drones. According to the report, Hezbollah and the Islamic Resistance in Iraq may also take part in this activity. The sources reported that the Houthis see the preparations being made in Israel and the United States for an attack on Iran as a new escalation in the regional conflict of which Yemen will also be a part. In addition, the Houthi forces reportedly threaten that any US participation in the attack on Iran will lead to an attack on American bases in the Middle East by members of the "axis of resistance" (al-Akhbar, October 12, 2024).

Statements by senior Houthi officials

► Houthi chief of staff Mohammad Abdel Karim al-Ghamari and Houthi Defense Minister Mohammad al-Atifi threatened that the Houthis had "the capabilities to inflict the most painful blows and attack the most sensitive places." They made it clear that they would continue to support the Gaza Strip and Lebanon with missiles and drones and that "the flood of Yemen and the Islamic nation will continue until victory." They also announced that they would take revenge for "the enemy's crimes against the commanders of the resistance" (the Houthi forces' media arm X account, October 13, 2024).

► Senior Houthi figures congratulated Hezbollah for the drone attack that hit an IDF base near Binyamina, killing four soldiers and wounding dozens more. The following are notable statements:

- ◆ Mahdi al-Mashat, head of the Houthi supreme political council, praised Hezbollah for "a high-quality operation against a military base that led to the death and injury of dozens of Zionist soldiers" (Mahdi al-Mashat's X account, October 13, 2024).

- ◆ The Houthis' political bureau said the operation "proved the readiness of Hezbollah's forces and the success of the heroic mujahideen in creating equations of deterrence and balance of terror." According to the announcement, the continuation of the attacks from various support fronts "deep within the enemy entity will succeed in stopping the aggression and lifting the siege on the Gaza Strip" (the Houthi forces' media arm X account, October 13, 2024).
- ◆ Hezam al-Asad, a member of the Houthi political bureau, issued a post in Hebrew following the drone attack, along with alleged footage from the scene. The message reads, "While you are killing children, women, and civilians in Gaza and Lebanon, our heroes are attacking your camps and bases, killing your soldiers and giving the world lessons in military morality" (Hezam al-Asad's X account, October 14, 2024).