

Iran Update Special Report, August 9, 2026



Adham Fattah, Nidal Morrison, Benjamin Schmida, Brian Carter

Analyst Notes: Data Cutoff: 2:00 PM ET

The Institute for the Study of War (ISW) and The Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute are publishing daily updates to provide analysis on the war with Iran. The updates cover events from the past 24-hour period.

Note: *ISW-CTP has revised its update structure due to the resumption of war between the United States and Iran. Iran is currently engaged in an information effort to frame its attacks on US bases and regional states as retaliatory and defensive. Iran is not merely responding to US strikes on Iran, however, but is engaged in proactive military operations to achieve discrete objectives. The revised update structure reflects some of these key objectives.*

Key Takeaways

1. Iranian Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei appointed his former senior military adviser, Major General Mohsen Rezaei, as the new Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) secretary on August 9.
2. The Iranian regime has continued to threaten regional states against assisting US efforts to undermine Iran's control of the Strait of Hormuz while simultaneously refusing to negotiate with the United States. Iranian Parliament Deputy Speaker Hamid Babai stated on August 9 that Iran will attack "any country that wants to assist the United States" in its efforts to restore freedom of navigation in the strait.
3. The Houthis conducted a drone attack that struck a Saudi Aramco refinery in Jizan, Saudi Arabia, on August 8.

Toplines

Iranian Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei appointed his former senior military adviser, Major General Mohsen Rezaei, as the new Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) secretary on August 9.[1] The SNSC is Iran's highest national security and foreign policy decision-making body.[2] Mojtaba appointed previous SNSC Secretary Mohammad Bagher Zolghadr as the supreme leader's political adviser shortly after, which is effectively a demotion.[3] Rezaei is a long-term senior regime insider who has held multiple senior positions in the regime, including Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) commander and Expediency Discernment Council secretary.[4] Rezaei

The Iranian regime has continued to threaten regional states against assisting US efforts to undermine Iran's control of the Strait of Hormuz while simultaneously refusing to negotiate with the United States. Iranian Parliament Deputy Speaker Hamid Babai stated on August 9 that Iran will attack “any country that wants to assist the United States” in its efforts to restore freedom of navigation in the strait.[7] Iran and its partners in the region have repeatedly attacked regional states to deter them from assisting US efforts in the strait.[8] Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi reiterated on August 9 that Iran will not engage in talks with the United States while the United States is in violation of the Memorandum of Understanding signed in June and that talks between Iran and Oman are in the “final stages” but will not reopen the strait.[9]

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Nothing significant to report.

Iranian Strike Campaign

Nothing significant to report.

Assessed Iranian War Aims:

- *Secure international recognition of Iranian control over the Strait of Hormuz*
- *Degrade the US ability and willingness to continue the war*
- *Restore deterrence vis-à-vis the United States and its regional partners*
- *Divide the United States and Israel from the Arab states*

US-Iran Negotiations

See topline section.

Iranian Domestic Affairs

Nothing significant to report.

Lebanon

Nothing significant to report.

Iraq

Nothing significant to report.

Arabian Peninsula

See topline section.

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Endnotes

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Iran Update Special Report, August 10, 2026



Adham Fattah, Carolyn Moorman, Nidal Morrison, Benjamin Schmida, Annika Ganzeveld

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The Institute for the Study of War (ISW) and The Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute are publishing daily updates to provide analysis on the war with Iran. The updates cover events from the past 24-hour period.

Note: *ISW-CTP has revised its update structure due to the resumption of war between the United States and Iran. Iran is currently engaged in an information effort to frame its attacks on US bases and regional states as retaliatory and defensive. Iran is not merely responding to US strikes on Iran, however, but is engaged in proactive military operations to achieve discrete objectives. The revised update structure reflects some of these key objectives.*

Key Takeaways

1. The Iranian armed forces are undergoing an extensive reorganization that reflects lessons that the regime learned from the June 2025 and Spring 2026 wars. Iranian Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei instructed Armed Forces General Staff (AFGS) Chief Major General Ali Abdollahi Aliabadi on August 10 to “complete the process” of merging the AFGS and the Khatam ol Anbia Central Headquarters.
2. The regime likely calculates that merging the AFGS and KOACH will help streamline coordination between the Artesh and Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), reduce institutional redundancies, and enable military leaders to make wartime decisions more quickly and effectively.
3. Iranian Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei appointed several Iranian officials to senior military positions on August 10. These appointments largely formalize the structure of the armed forces that has existed for several months and consolidate both Mojtaba and his inner circle’s authority.
4. Republic of Yemen Government (ROYG) forces and the Houthis exchanged fire across multiple Yemeni governorates between August 7 and 10. Houthi and ROYG forces have fought at low levels since 2023, but the recent fighting follows reports that Saudi Arabia is preparing for a naval and possible land offensive to end the Houthi “chokehold” on Saudi Red Sea oil exports.
5. The Iraqi federal government appears to be taking limited steps to prevent further Iranian-backed Iraqi militia attacks against Saudi Arabia and other regional states in order to avoid further strikes on Iraq. Iraqi officials who met with a Saudi intelligence delegation on August 8 pledged to prevent the use of Iraqi territory for attacks against Saudi Arabia and asked for information to help prevent future attacks.
6. A Shia Coordination Framework source told Iraqi media on August 9 that Iraqi militias will hand over

their weapons to the PMF before the Iraqi federal government's September 30 disarmament deadline, which corresponds with the planned withdrawal of US-led coalition forces from Iraq. The PMF contains many Iraqi militias that answer to Iran and is led by Iranian-backed Iraqi actors. Transferring militia weapons to the PMF would thus harm US interests by transferring weapons to an organization that Iran has heavily infiltrated.

7. Iranian-backed Iraqi militias may have conducted a drone strike that destroyed shells for US-provided Iraqi tanks and armored vehicles at Camp Taji, north of Baghdad, on August 2, according to security and intelligence sources speaking to Saudi media on August 10. An unspecified official stated that the attack indicates that some militias opposed to disarmament are attempting to strip the Iraqi military of military assets that it could use against the militias.
8. US-funded Arabic-language media reported on August 8 additional details of the IRGC's role in directing Iraqi militia attacks on Iraqi Kurdistan and neighboring countries. The IRGC reportedly operates small cells of between five and ten Iraqi fighters from the main Iraqi militias who maintain a "lower profile" and "bypass" Iraqi militia leadership, according to unspecified sources.

Toplines

The Iranian armed forces are undergoing an extensive reorganization that reflects lessons that the regime learned from the June 2025 and Spring 2026 wars. Iranian Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei instructed Armed Forces General Staff (AFGS) Chief Major General Ali Abdollahi Aliabadi on August 10 to "complete the process" of merging the AFGS and the Khatam ol Anbia Central Headquarters (KOACH).[1] The AFGS is responsible for developing strategic guidance and military policy while the KOACH is responsible for joint and wartime operations.[2] The two organizations previously operated as a single institution, but former Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei separated them in 2016.[3] ISW-CTP has reported indicators over the past year that suggested that the regime was considering merging the AFGS and KOACH. ISW-CTP reported in December 2025 that Khamenei was considering merging the AFGS and KOACH, citing unverified social media reports.[4] ISW-CTP also assessed on June 23 that Abdollahi may have been serving as the AFGS deputy chief and KOACH commander simultaneously, given that AFGS-affiliated media had begun referring to Abdollahi as the AFGS deputy chief.[5]

The regime likely calculates that merging the AFGS and KOACH will help streamline coordination between the Artesh and Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), reduce institutional redundancies, and enable military leaders to make wartime decisions more quickly and effectively. The United States and Israel successfully conducted decapitation campaigns that targeted senior Iranian leaders during the June 2025 and Spring 2026 wars, which likely degraded Iranian forces' ability to coordinate and respond effectively.[6] A *New York Times* report from late March noted that US-Israeli combined force strikes against Iranian commanders had fractured the regime and complicated its ability to coordinate retaliatory strikes, for example.[7] The regime made initial efforts to improve coordination after the June 2025 War by forming the Defense Council in August 2025 to streamline wartime decision-making.[8]

Iranian Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei appointed several Iranian officials to senior military positions on August 10.[9] These appointments largely formalize the structure of the armed forces that has existed for several months and consolidate both Mojtaba and his inner circle's authority.

- **Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Commander Major General Ahmad Vahidi** has de facto led the IRGC since US-Israeli combined force strikes killed his predecessor, Major

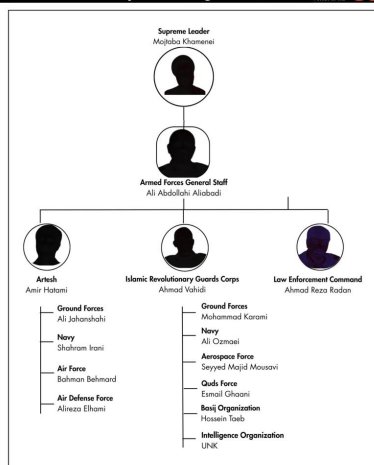
General Mohammad Pakpour, on February 28.[10] ISW-CTP has assessed since March 2026 that Vahidi and his inner circle are playing an outsized role in regime decision-making.[11] Vahidi has played a significant behind-the-scenes role in US-Iran negotiations and supported using force against the United States and Israel on multiple occasions to achieve Iranian objectives. Vahidi reportedly advocated for striking Israel in June, two months after the United States and Iran had agreed to a ceasefire, in order to condition a US-Iran deal on the cessation of Israeli operations against Hezbollah, for example.[12] Vahidi has held multiple senior roles in the regime, such as IRGC Quds Force commander, defense and armed forces logistics minister, interior minister, AFGS deputy chief, and IRGC deputy commander.^[13] The United States sanctioned Vahidi in October 2022 for his role in directing the Law Enforcement Command (LEC), which nominally operates under the Interior Ministry, during the 2022-2023 Mahsa Amini protests.[14] Vahidi is also implicated in the 1994 AMIA bombing in Argentina, which killed 85 people.[15] He remains the subject of an Interpol Red Notice.[16]

- **IRGC Deputy Commander Major General Mostafa Izadi** served in senior IRGC command positions during the Iran-Iraq War.[17] Izadi subsequently served as the IRGC Ground Forces commander from 1989 to 1992 and has held multiple senior roles in the AFGS.[18] Izadi has most recently served as the head of the KOACH Cyber and Emerging Threats Headquarters since 2017, where he focused on “addressing modern warfare challenges.”[19] Izadi is notably one of only nine Iranian commanders who hold the rank of major general.[20]
- **Basij Commander Hossein Taeb** helped Mojtaba engineer the 2005 presidential election in favor of hardline candidate Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.[21] Taeb later led the Basij’s suppression of the 2009 Green Movement, which broke out in response to Ahmadinejad’s rigged reelection as president.[22] The United States sanctioned Taeb in 2010 for his involvement in suppressing the 2009 protests.[23] Taeb subsequently served as the head of the IRGC Intelligence Organization from 2009 to 2022 and then served as an adviser to the IRGC commander.[24] Former Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei dismissed Taeb in 2022 for incompetence.[25] Taeb’s appointment as Basij commander therefore reflects Taeb’s deep personal ties to Mojtaba. Taeb has known Mojtaba since the Iran-Iraq War, when he and Mojtaba served together in the Habib Ibn Mazahir Battalion under the IRGC 27th Mohammad Rasoul Ollah Division.[26]
- **AFGS Chief Major General Ali Abdollahi Aliabadi** has commanded the AFGS since March 2026.[27] Aliabadi replaced Major General Abdol Rahim Mousavi, who was killed during the Spring 2026 War.[28] Aliabadi fought in the Iran-Iraq War and later served as the IRGC Air Force deputy commander from 1997 to 2001 under then-IRGC Air Force Commander Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf.[29] The IRGC Air Force was later renamed the IRGC Aerospace Force in 2009.[30] Aliabadi also served as the LEC deputy commander under Ghalibaf in the early 2000s, governor of Gilan and Semnan provinces from 2005 to 2009, and deputy interior minister for security and law enforcement from 2009 to 2014.[31] Aliabadi’s LEC and Interior Ministry positions highlight his experience in Iran’s internal security apparatus. Aliabadi served as the AFGS coordination deputy—the third most senior position in the AFGS—for nine years prior to becoming the KOACH commander in July 2025.[32] It is therefore not surprising that Mojtaba appointed Aliabadi to head this institution. Anti-regime media reported in April that President Masoud Pezeshkian had criticized both Vahidi and Aliabadi for “unilaterally” escalating strikes against Gulf states and steering Iran into “a huge catastrophe,” highlighting the central role Aliabadi has played in recent months.[33]
- **AFGS Deputy Chief Brigadier General Kiomars Heydari** served under Aliabadi as the KOACH deputy commander.[34] Heydari began his military career as a Basij volunteer during the Iran-Iraq War.[35] Heydari has extensive experience in the Artesh Ground Forces, initially serving in the 81st Armored Division in Kermanshah and later serving as the Southwestern Regional Headquarters commander.[36] Heydari was appointed as the Artesh Ground Forces commander in 2016 and warned in November 2022 at the height of the Mahsa Amini Protest Movement that protesters

would “no longer have a place” in Iran if then-Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei ordered a more brutal crackdown on them.[37] Heydari’s comment confirmed the Artesh Ground Forces’ role in protest suppression, a role that has historically been assumed primarily by the LEC, Basij, and IRGC Ground Forces.

- **IRGC Navy Commander Rear Admiral Ali Ozmaei** previously served as deputy commander of the IRGC’s First and Fifth Naval Regions.[38] Ozmaei replaced Rear Admiral Alireza Tangsiri on July 4.[39]

Iranian Leadership as of August 10, 2026 ISW CTP



These appointments follow Mojtaba’s appointment of his former senior military adviser, Major General Mohsen Rezaei, as the new Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) secretary on August 9. Rezaei replaced Mohammad Bagher Zolghadr, whom Mojtaba appointed as a political adviser.[40] Mojtaba may have conducted the recent flurry of appointments to strengthen his hold over the SNSC and other major organizations.[41] ISW-CTP cannot independently confirm that Mojtaba actually made the recent appointments, however. Rezaei and Zolghadr are ideologically aligned and served together in the IRGC, which suggests that the reshuffling was not done to change the policy posture of the SNSC.[42] Mojtaba’s appointments reinforce the regime’s current maximalist and hardline positions, including absolute Iranian control of the Strait of Hormuz, the removal of US troops from the region, and the development of Iran’s nuclear program, among others. ISW-CTP assessed on March 8, when Mojtaba became supreme leader, that he would likely pursue hardline domestic and foreign policies similar to those of his father.[43]

The recent appointments underscore that the Iranian regime is reconsolidating the upper echelons of its leadership structure after the US-Israeli decapitation campaigns. This new cadre of Iranian leadership will come with its own prerogatives and desires to shape Iranian decision-making. It is unclear at this time how and to what degree these figures will be able to do so.

Republic of Yemen Government (ROYG) forces and the Houthis exchanged fire across multiple Yemeni governorates between August 7 and 10.[44] ROYG Armed Forces Spokesperson Colonel Majed Nuzaili announced on August 8 that unspecified ROYG units targeted Houthi positions on several fronts in retaliation for Houthi attacks on ROYG military camps and civilian areas in Marib and Hadramawt governorates on August 6 and 7.[45] The ROYG-affiliated, Saudi-backed National Resistance Forces said it shelled Houthi command and control centers and positions in southern Hudaydah Governorate on August 8 in response to Houthi attacks in Marib and Hadramawt Governorates.[46] The Houthis responded to these attacks by conducting a drone and missile attack targeting Saudi “mobilization” and weapons depots at the ROYG-controlled Mocha Port in Taiz Governorate on August 9, which killed four ROYG soldiers and three civilians.[47] ROYG forces also conducted several drone attacks on Houthi positions and vehicles in Marib Governorate on August 10 following the Houthi attack on Mocha Port.[48] The

backed Iraqi militias.[64] The PMC's claim that it closed the offices as part of the state's efforts to register weapons, instead of the state's efforts to disarm the militias, could be an attempt to distance the PMF and the militias within it from accusations of conducting kinetic activity outside of the state, as is implied in the Interior Ministry's statement.

Iranian-backed Iraqi militias' transfer of weapons to the Iranian-backed PMF would harm US interests in Iraq by strengthening Iranian influence in the Iraqi security establishment. A Shia Coordination Framework source told Iraqi media on August 9 that Iraqi militias will hand over their weapons to the PMF before the Iraqi federal government's September 30 disarmament deadline, which corresponds with the planned withdrawal of US-led coalition forces from Iraq.[65] The framework source added that the PMF will supervise the inventory and storage of the militia weapons it receives.[66] Some Iraqi government officials have suggested that the militias will avoid disarmament by handing over weapons to the PMF.[67] The PMF contains many Iraqi militias that answer to Iran and is led by Iranian-backed Iraqi actors.[68] Over half of the PMF's brigades either conducted or supported militia attacks against US and foreign targets in Iraq and the region in March and April.[69] Transferring militia weapons to the PMF would thus harm US interests by transferring weapons to an organization that Iran has heavily infiltrated. Badr Organization head Hadi al Ameri met with several unspecified PMF brigade commanders on August 9, according to Iraqi media.[70] Ameri reportedly discussed distributing militia fighters among PMF brigades to build more integrated formations that are less connected to previous religious and political leadership.[71] The integration of fighters into different PMF units would not reduce Iranian influence in the PMF if the units continued to answer to Iran. Ameri also reportedly discussed including military officers within the PMF's structure and a new structure for ranks and leadership positions.[72] The 2016 PMF Law is currently the only Iraqi legislation that covers the PMF.[73] Multiple Iraqi administrations, including under former Prime Minister Haider al Abadi, have attempted to regulate the PMF via executive orders but the PMF has only implemented some of the provisions.[74] Iranian-backed actors have attempted since 2025 to pass new legislation to formalize key PMF structures.[75]

It is unclear if Iraqi militias would be willing to hand over their weapons to the PMF. Multiple Iraqi militias, particularly Kataib Hezbollah, Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba, and Kataib Sayyid al Shuhada, continue to refuse to disarm.[76] Kataib Sayyid al Shuhada leader Abu Alaa al Walai sarcastically offered on August 8 to buy weapons from any militia that sells them.[77] The militias are using a variety of excuses to remain armed and will likely continue to do so.[78] A Kataib Hezbollah-affiliated parliamentarian suggested on August 8 that Iraq would normalize relations with Israel if the PMF disarmed.[79] The militias have consistently circumvented the disarmament process, including by handing over inoperable weapons.[80]

Iranian-backed Iraqi militias may have conducted a drone strike that destroyed shells for US-provided Iraqi tanks and armored vehicles at Camp Taji, north of Baghdad, on August 2, according to security and intelligence sources speaking to Saudi media on August 10.[81] ISW-CTP has not observed further information to corroborate the Saudi report at the time of this writing. Iraqi authorities previously attributed an explosion at Camp Taji to a fire caused by high temperatures at an Iraqi Army 9th Armored Division ammunition depot.[82] Two Iraqi officers told Saudi media on August 10 that thermal footage showed an object approaching from south of the base before the ammunition depot and tank shells exploded.[83] One of the officers said the explosion destroyed all of the 9th Armored Division's unloaded shells and the majority of its tank equipment.[84] A security source said that the attack occurred while 9th Armored Division forces were deployed to secure the Arbreen Pilgrimage.[85] An intelligence official said that the drone was launched from an unspecified site south of Baghdad.[86] Iranian-backed Iraqi militias control multiple areas south of Baghdad and have previously launched drone attacks from those areas.[87] The official added that the attack indicates that some militias opposed to disarmament are attempting to strip the Iraqi military of military assets that it could use against the militias as part of pre-emptive plans for "friction" with Iraqi authorities.[88] An

unspecified political official quoted a militia leader who said the militias are prepared to confront the Iraqi government or the United States if they use force to try to disarm them.[89]

US-funded Arabic-language media reported on August 8 additional details of the IRGC's role in directing Iraqi militia attacks on Iraqi Kurdistan and neighboring countries.[90] The IRGC reportedly operates small cells of between five and ten Iraqi fighters from the main Iraqi militias who maintain a "lower profile" and "bypass" Iraqi militia leadership, according to unspecified sources.[91] The sources added that the cell members wear civilian clothing with no insignia and launch drones from different areas in Iraq to make their operations harder to track by the Iraqi federal government.[92] The cells have reportedly conducted drone attacks against unspecified targets in Iraqi Kurdistan and neighboring countries.[93] Unspecified actors have launched multiple drones against US targets in Iraqi Kurdistan in recent weeks.[94] Iraqi militias have also launched recent attacks on Gulf countries, such as the July 27 attacks on Saudi oil infrastructure.[95] The sources added that the cells report directly to Haji Hamed, the head of the IRGC's advisory mission in Iraq, and that the IRGC established the cells over the past several months as Iraqi militias began to hand over weapons to the Iraqi federal government.[96] Iraqi militias Asaib Ahl al Haq and Kataib al Imam Ali both announced their willingness to disarm on July 2.[97] The August 8 report follows a similar June 19 Reuters report that the IRGC formed militia cells to report directly to the IRGC and attack Gulf countries between late April and mid-May.[98] The IRGC may have decided to reactivate or create new cells similar to the ones it used in April and May in reaction to Asaib Ahl al Haq and Kataib al Imam Ali's announcement. Iran may have also maintained the militia cells the entire time. Iraqi government Spokesperson Haider al Aboudi appeared to confirm on August 9 that the PMF is working with foreign advisers, almost certainly from Iran.[99] Recent US-Saudi airstrikes on militia positions killed at least 4 IRGC Quds Force officers.[100]

US and Partner Military Operations

Nothing significant to report.

Iranian Strike Campaign

Assessed Iranian War Aims:

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- *Restore deterrence vis-à-vis the United States and its regional partners*
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US-Iran Negotiations

Nothing significant to report.

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Lebanon

Nothing significant to report.

Iraq

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Arabian Peninsula

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CORRECTION: As of August 11, ISW-CTP made a minor update to the Iranian leadership organizational chart.

Iran Update Special Report, August 11, 2026



Carolyn Moorman, William Doran, Ben Rezaei, Nidal Morrison, Bailey Pasternak, Parker Hempel, Brian Carter

Analyst Notes: Data Cutoff: 2:00 PM ET

The Institute for the Study of War (ISW) and The Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute are publishing daily updates to provide analysis on the war with Iran. The updates cover events from the past 24-hour period.

Note: *ISW-CTP has revised its update structure due to the resumption of war between the United States and Iran. Iran is currently engaged in an information effort to frame its attacks on US bases and regional states as retaliatory and defensive. Iran is not merely responding to US strikes on Iran, however, but is engaged in proactive military operations to achieve discrete objectives. The revised update structure reflects some of these key objectives.*

Key Takeaways

1. Some observed indicators suggest that the Iraqi federal government is considering a major crackdown on Iranian-backed Iraqi militias, including by entering and retaking militia-controlled strongholds. Such an effort would require major mobilization, and the militias would likely be aware of any pending crackdown.
2. Previous Iraqi administrations, particularly under former Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhimi, have conducted limited crackdowns on militia activity, but the combination of the Iranian infiltration of Iraqi government institutions and the strength of the Iraqi militias has limited the scale of such efforts.
3. The US pressure on Zaydi to disarm the militias could compel him to act against the militias despite these limitations. US efforts to compel Baghdad to disarm the groups have only increased due to militia attacks against US and foreign targets in Iraq and the region in March and April, as well as in recent months.
4. Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Quds Force Commander Brigadier General Esmail Ghaani warned Iraqi militia leaders against armed confrontation with the Iraqi government and to reach a settlement to avoid handing over militia weapons to the state during an August 10 visit to Baghdad, according to informed sources speaking to Iraqi media. Ghaani likely discussed Iranian-backed Iraqi militias' recent attacks on Gulf states, namely Saudi Arabia, during his visit to Baghdad.
5. Iranian leaders, including Ghaani, are likely attempting to draw the Iraqi government away from developing alternative oil export corridors to the Strait of Hormuz. Iranian leaders also almost certainly intend to preserve Iran's leverage over regional states, the United States, and the global economy by promoting an arrangement that would offer Iraq short-term economic relief and reduce Iraq's incentive to develop alternative oil export corridors to the Strait.

6. A sustained US naval blockade could increase economic and political pressure on Iran and may eventually compel at least some regime officials to accept greater concessions in negotiations. The Iranian regime's recent appointments suggest that the officials who currently dominate decision-making may be less responsive to that pressure and more inclined to maintain maximalist positions, however.

Toplines

Some observed indicators suggest that the Iraqi federal government is considering a major crackdown on Iranian-backed Iraqi militias, including by entering and retaking militia-controlled strongholds. Such an effort would require major mobilization, and the militias would likely be aware of any pending crackdown. Saudi media reported on August 11 that Iraqi Prime Minister Ali al Zaydi is considering two options for disarming the militias as part of the federal government's efforts to restrict arms to the state.[1] The Iraqi state could either reach agreements with the militias or take more "decisive measures," such as sending security forces to control Jurf al Sakhr, south of Baghdad.[2] Kataib Hezbollah has refused to allow the Iraqi government to exercise sovereignty over Jurf al Sakhr for over a decade and has used the area to store weapons and launch attacks against US and foreign targets in Iraq and the region, including in March and April.[3] The Iraqi government is also taking other steps to rein in the militias. The Iraqi Interior Ministry has reportedly closed 71 "fake" Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) offices throughout Iraq as part of federal efforts to gain control over militia arms.[4] The PMF claimed that it had closed these offices itself, however.[5] The Interior Ministry closed two more offices in al Dora, Baghdad, on August 11.[6] The Iraqi Counter-Terrorism Service—a premier, US-trained force that has been increasingly penetrated by the militias in recent years—conducted other counter-militia raids in Baghdad in recent weeks.[7]

The Iranian-backed Iraqi militias are responding to these developments by threatening the Iraqi government. Iranian-backed Iraqi militias likely conducted a drone strike that destroyed shells for US-provided Iraqi tanks and armored vehicles at Camp Taji, north of Baghdad, on August 2.[8] ISIS is inactive in Iraq and lacks the technical know-how to conduct a drone strike, and there are no other plausible culprits currently operating in Iraq other than Iranian-backed or Iranian actors. An unspecified intelligence official also assessed that the attacks indicate that some militias opposed to disarmament are conducting spoiling attacks to slow or stop the crackdown.[9]

Previous Iraqi administrations, particularly under former Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhimi, have conducted limited crackdowns on militia activity, but the combination of the Iranian infiltration of Iraqi government institutions and the strength of the Iraqi militias limited the scale of such efforts. Kadhimi opposed the militias but failed repeatedly to crack down on them. He reformed the Iraqi intelligence and security forces (a process undone by the Iranian-backed actors under the Sudani administration), which placed him in opposition to the militias.[10] Kadhimi repeatedly attempted to hold Iranian-backed militias, including Kataib Hezbollah, responsible for actions in Iraq that subverted Iraqi sovereignty.[11] Kataib Hezbollah repeatedly attacked the US Embassy and assassinated their Iraqi critics close to the government and protest movement.[12] Iraqi authorities in each Kadhimi-initiated crackdown would arrest several militia members but later release them in each instance under militia pressure.[13] Sudani—Kadhimi's successor—did launch an investigation into Kataib Hezbollah clashes with the Federal Police in July 2025 that ultimately led to the removal of two Kataib Hezbollah PMF brigade commanders.[14] Sudani likely had more flexibility in pursuing Kataib Hezbollah given his backing from other militia factions, however. His effort was not part of a cohesive anti-militia strategy.

The US' pressure on Zaydi to disarm the militias could compel him to act against the militias

despite these limitations. US efforts to compel Baghdad to disarm the groups have only increased due to militia attacks against US and foreign targets in Iraq and the region in March and April, as well as in recent months.[15] The United States temporarily limited the Iraqi federal government's access to its oil revenue in the initial months of the war.[16] Oil accounts for over 90% of the Iraqi state's budget.[17] Western, regional, and Iraqi media have reported on the United States conditioning additional US support for and investment in the Iraqi state on Zaydi's lessening of Iranian influence in Iraq, including via disarming the militias.[18] Iraqi media reported on August 11 that Zaydi is reportedly considering making "sweeping" leadership changes to the PMF, which is almost certainly related to US pressure against the militias.[19] Zaydi is reportedly considering appointing figures from the Iraqi army and the Counter-terrorism Service to leadership positions within the PMF, which would be unlikely to blunt the Iranian influence within the organization.[20] This is especially the case given indications that Baghdad may either integrate the militias into the PMF or have the militias give their weapons to the PMF.[21] None of these options would necessarily address the allegiance of the Iraqi militias to Iran and their willingness and ability to attack US and foreign interests in Iraq and the region, both issues being vital to secure US interests in Iraq.

Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Quds Force Commander Brigadier General Esmail Ghaani warned Iraqi militia leaders against armed confrontation with the Iraqi government and to reach a settlement to avoid handing over militia weapons to the state during an August 10 visit to Baghdad, according to informed sources speaking to Iraqi media.[22] Ghaani reportedly also met with political and security officials and Shia Coordination Framework officials, including Badr Organization leader Hadi al Ameri.[23] Ghaani's reported emphasis on avoiding conflict with the Iraqi government could indicate Tehran's concern over such a scenario. Iraqi, Western, and regional reports in recent months have described both Iranian pressure on some Iraqi militias to pursue politics over military activity as well as Iran's refusal for the militias to give their weapons to the federal government.[24] It is plausible that Iran may support the disarmament of Iraqi militias that Iran has had less control over in recent years, such as Asaib Ahl al Haq. The group played a role in the assassination attempt against Kadhimi and announced its willingness to disarm on June 2.[25]

Ghaani likely discussed Iranian-backed Iraqi militias' recent attacks on Gulf states, namely Saudi Arabia, during his visit to Baghdad. Iraqi militias initially warned that they would attack US and Saudi interests in response to US-Saudi strikes on militia positions in Iraq on July 28.[26] The Islamic Resistance in Iraq, which is a coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias, later announced on August 7 that it would postpone its planned attacks following mediation from Ameri.[27] The IRGC has coordinated Iraqi militias' attacks on Gulf states throughout the war, and Reuters reported on June 19 that the IRGC Quds Force formed cells within Iraqi militias to report directly to Iran and attack Gulf states under IRGC orders as early as April.[28] Iranian state media also reported that US-Saudi strikes in Iraq on July 28 also killed four IRGC Quds Force officers, which indicates that the IRGC and the Quds Force, which is specifically responsible for maintaining Iran's Axis of Resistance, play an outsized role in determining Iraqi militia attacks on Gulf states.[29] Publicly reported information from Ghaani's meetings in Baghdad provided no indication of what stance, if any, Ghaani may have expressed on recent Iraqi militia threats to attack Saudi Arabia, however.

Iranian leaders, including Ghaani, are likely attempting to draw the Iraqi government away from developing alternative oil export corridors to the Strait of Hormuz. An unspecified informed source told Iraqi media on August 10 that Ghaani also discussed prospects for Iran to permit Iraqi oil tankers to transit the Strait of Hormuz with militia leaders and Shia Coordination Framework leaders in Baghdad.[30] Iraqi media did not report whether Ghaani discussed any mechanism through which Iran would ensure safe passage for Iraqi vessels through the Strait or whether Iran intends to charge Iraqi vessels with transit fees.[31] Iran's offer to provide safe passage for Iraqi tankers would

require Iraq to recognize Iranian control over the Strait, and thereby lend legitimacy to Iran's illegal efforts to codify its domination of the waterway. The arrangement would also cement Iraq's economic and political dependence on Iran because Iraq would need to rely on Iranian terms to export its oil, which accounts for up to 90 percent of the Iraqi government's revenues.[32]

Iranian leaders also almost certainly intend to preserve Iran's leverage over regional states, the United States, and the global economy by promoting an arrangement that would offer Iraq short-term economic relief and reduce Iraq's incentive to develop alternative oil export corridors to the Strait. Iraq is currently facing a liquidity crisis, primarily because of its inability to export oil through the Strait, and is unable to pay government employees as a result.[33] Ghaani's discussion also comes amid Iraqi consultations with the United States and regional partners in recent weeks to develop pipelines and overland transit corridors through Iraq that could export oil to the Mediterranean and Red Seas, amid Iran's ongoing attempts to control the Strait of Hormuz.[34] The Iraqi Oil Ministry announced plans on August 10 to develop a new pipeline that will extend from Basra to the Syrian Mediterranean port of Baniyas with investment from US corporations, for example.[35] These projects challenge Iran's leverage over the global economy by creating alternatives for major oil-producing regional states to export fuel through the Strait, thereby reducing the waterway's importance to global commerce. Iranian leaders also likely intend to undercut regional rivals and adversaries, including Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Syria, that are collaborating with Iraq to develop pipelines that would draw economic activity and oil exports away from the Strait.[36]

A sustained US naval blockade could increase economic and political pressure on Iran and may eventually compel at least some regime officials to accept greater concessions in negotiations. The *Wall Street Journal* reported on August 10 that US President Donald Trump has settled, "at least for now," on allowing sanctions and the naval blockade time to impose economic costs on Iran, according to unspecified US officials.[37] The sources added that administration officials argued that sustained pressure could eventually force the regime to change its position.[38] The Iranian regime's recent appointments suggest that the officials who currently dominate decision-making may be less responsive to that pressure and more inclined to maintain maximalist positions, however.[39] Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian previously pressured Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei to approve the US-Iran memorandum of understanding as the first US naval blockade between April and June 2026 worsened Iran's economic conditions.[40] Mojtaba's reported willingness to accept Pezeshkian's resignation if Pezeshkian again tried to use that threat to influence policy suggests that Mojtaba may be less willing to accept pressure from pragmatist officials over deteriorating economic conditions.[41] Mojtaba's recent appointment of former IRGC Commander Major General Mohsen Rezaei as Supreme National Security Council secretary and his elevation of other hardline security officials further separately indicate that the regime is consolidating decision-making around officials who are less inclined to quickly compromise.[42] Rezaei stated on August 11 that Iran will not reopen the Strait of Hormuz until the United States ends the war and naval blockade, releases Iran's frozen assets, and agrees to a region-wide ceasefire, including in Lebanon and Gaza.[43]

US and Partner Military Operations

Nothing significant to report.

Iranian Strike Campaign

Assessed Iranian War Aims:

- *Secure international recognition of Iranian control over the Strait of Hormuz*
- *Degrade the US ability and willingness to continue the war*
- *Restore deterrence vis-à-vis the United States and its regional partners*
- *Divide the United States and Israel from the Arab states*

US-Iran Negotiations

See topline section.

Iranian Domestic Affairs

Iran is continuing to expand military pressure on Iranian Kurdish opposition groups in Iraqi Kurdistan Region. Iran launched three missile strikes against Komala’s headquarters near Erbil on August 11, according to a Komala Party official.[44] Komala claimed that Iran has now fired more than 103 missiles and drones at opposition camps since the war began.[45] Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) head Bafel Talabani agreed on August 11 to strengthen the existing security coordination along the Iran-Iraq border and cooperate against “threats” under the existing Iran-Iraq security agreement.[46] Iran and Iraq signed a border security agreement in March 2023 aimed primarily at tightening security along the frontier with the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, including an Iraqi commitment to prevent armed Kurdish groups from using Iraqi territory to launch cross-border attacks against Iran.[47]

Lebanon

Nothing significant to report.

Iraq

See topline section.

Arabian Peninsula

IRGC officers are “supervising” the Houthis’ military operations in Yemen, according to unspecified Yemeni sources speaking to UK-based, Saudi-owned media on August 11.[48] The sources stated that Iran’s envoy to Yemen, Ali Mohammad Rezaei, reportedly supervises an “operations room” that monitors field developments and promotes media narratives about a Saudi “siege” on Yemen.[49] The Houthis have cited an alleged Saudi blockade on Houthi-controlled ports and airports to justify their blockade on Saudi ports and attacks on Saudi vessels in the Red Sea since late July.[50] Reuters reported on July 23 that Iran previously transported IRGC commanders, military advisers, and missile and drone-related equipment to the Houthis in Yemen on July 13.[51] Reports of IRGC supervision

of Houthi activity in Yemen follow a recent *New York Times* report that the IRGC used the US-Iran ceasefire in April 2026 to coordinate with the Houthis and other members of the Axis of Resistance to expand the conflict against the US-Israel combined force.[52] ISW-CTP previously assessed on July 21 that the Houthis likely decided to impose their blockade on Saudi Arabia to advance their own interests, though Iran probably encouraged them to impose the blockade for Tehran's own purposes.[53]



The Houthis attacked the Tanzania-flagged, Egyptian-owned cargo ship *TIHAMAH* in the Red Sea off the coast of Mokha, Yemen, on August 11, and killed four crew members.[54] United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations confirmed on August 11 that unspecified actors fired an unknown projectile at an unnamed stationary cargo vessel near Mokha.[55] The ROYG Transport Ministry also stated on August 11 that the Houthis fired three ballistic missiles at the cargo ship and a fourth at the ROYG Coast Guard vessel that arrived to support the ship.[56] The Houthis claimed on August 11 that they targeted a cargo ship transporting "Saudi military equipment" in the Bab al Mandeb Strait and posted images of the *TIHAMAH* following the attack.[57] This attack comes after the Houthis have attacked several vessels transiting the Red Sea since July 22 as part of their effort to enforce their blockade on Saudi ports.[58] It also comes amid a recent escalation in fighting between Houthi and ROYG forces.[59]



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Iran Update Special Report, August 12, 2026



Ria Reddy, William Doran, Bailey Pasternak, Nidal Morrison, Ben Rezaei, Kelly Campa, Brian Carter

Analyst Notes: Data Cutoff: 2:00 PM ET

The Institute for the Study of War (ISW) and The Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute are publishing daily updates to provide analysis on the war with Iran. The updates cover events from the past 24-hour period.

Note: *ISW-CTP has revised its update structure due to the resumption of war between the United States and Iran. Iran is currently engaged in an information effort to frame its attacks on US bases and regional states as retaliatory and defensive. Iran is not merely responding to US strikes on Iran, however, but is engaged in proactive military operations to achieve discrete objectives. The revised update structure reflects some of these key objectives.*

Key Takeaways

1. Iran is adapting its tactics based on lessons from recent conflicts, such as the Russia-Ukraine War. Iran deployed a swarm of drones into an area that US fighter jets had entered before downing the US F-15E with MANPADS in April 2026. The drones reportedly transmitted the jet's GPS location, speed, and direction to Iranian commanders, which helped them successfully target the aircraft.
2. The Houthis are attempting to compel Saudi Arabia to abandon its military campaign against the Houthis by threatening to attack Saudi oil infrastructure unless Saudi Arabia negotiates a settlement. The Houthis also seek to coerce Saudi Arabia into accepting negotiations, likely because the group sees diplomatic engagement as a means to halt Saudi kinetic activity in Yemen and codify a Saudi surrender to Houthi demands.

Toplines

Iran is adapting its tactics based on lessons from recent conflicts, such as the Russia-Ukraine War. A senior US military official described to the *New York Times* the conditions under which Iran downed a US F-15E in April 2026.[1] The official said that Iran deployed a swarm of drones into an area that US fighter jets had entered before downing the US F-15E with a man-portable air defense system (MANPADS).[2] US military officials added that the drones transmitted the jet's GPS location, speed, and direction to Iranian commanders, which helped them successfully target the aircraft.[3] This account aligns with the US fighter pilot's report that he saw multiple Iranian drones hovering nearby before Iran shot down the aircraft.[4] Iran reportedly adopted this tactic from the Russia-Ukraine war.[5] Iran has sought to learn and implement important lessons about the modern battlefield since Russia invaded Ukraine, and Russia has directly assisted Iranian attacks on US forces and bases in this war by providing

advanced drone tactics.[6] Reports about Iran's tactical adaptations are also likely part of a broader Iranian effort to improve targeting by incorporating lessons from its own wars in June 2025 and Spring 2026. US officials have warned that Iran has fired advanced, maneuverable missiles to target US bases in recent weeks, for example.[7]

US and Partner Military Operations

Nothing significant to report.

Iranian Strike Campaign

Assessed Iranian War Aims:

- *Secure international recognition of Iranian control over the Strait of Hormuz*
- *Degrade the US ability and willingness to continue the war*
- *Restore deterrence vis-à-vis the United States and its regional partners*
- *Divide the United States and Israel from the Arab states*

US intelligence services identified an unknown individual armed with a MANPADS near the NATO summit in Ankara on July 8 before US President Donald Trump switched to a more secure aircraft for his return flight.[8] Sources briefed on the matter previously told the *New York Times* that a “credible threat” from “Iranian proxy forces” prompted Trump to change planes.[9]

US-Iran Negotiations

See topline section.

Iranian Domestic Affairs

Nothing significant to report.

Lebanon

The implementation of “pilot zones” to disarm Hezbollah in southern Lebanon under the June 26 Trilateral Framework Agreement remains delayed. The agreement stipulates that the LAF will be responsible for disarming Hezbollah in the “pilot zones” after the IDF withdraws from these areas.[10] The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) complained to Military Coordination Group for Lebanon Head Lieutenant General Joseph Clearfield (USMC) that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) is obstructing LAF deployments in southern Lebanon on August 12.[11] The agreement's security annex stipulates that Clearfield's coordination group will deconflict between IDF and LAF units in southern Lebanon and verify that both militaries implement the agreement's terms.[12] Neither the IDF nor the United States publicly responded to reports about the LAF's claims. The two sides appear to be making limited diplomatic progress in ongoing talks. Reuters reported that Israel and Lebanon agreed on a monitoring mechanism comprised of military officials from third countries to verify Hezbollah disarmament in the “pilot zones” on August 12, which negotiators reportedly failed to agree on during talks in Rome between August 4 and

6.[13] An unspecified US State Department official told UK-based, Saudi-owned media on August 11 that US, Israeli, and Lebanese delegations are expected to resume direct negotiations in Rome in September 2026.[14]

Iraq

Iraqi Prime Minister Ali al Zaydi's reported plan to send security forces into Jurf al Sakhr, Babil Province, reportedly prompted Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Quds Force Commander Brigadier General Esmail Ghaani's recent visit to Baghdad.[15] Shia Coordination Framework source told US-funded regional media on August 11 that unspecified Iranian-backed Iraqi militia leaders previously told Ghaani that the Iraqi government was preparing to enter Jurf al Sakhr at "any moment," which prompted Ghaani's visit to Baghdad on August 10.[16] Informed sources told Iraqi media on August 11 that Ghaani warned Iraqi militia leaders against armed confrontation with the Iraqi government during his August 10 visit. Ghaani also told militia leaders to reach a settlement to avoid handing over militia weapons to the state.[17] Zaydi's reported plan to retake militia strongholds is consistent with an earlier Saudi media report that Zaydi is considering two approaches to disarm the militias as part of the federal government's efforts to restrict arms to the state. One of these reported plans would entail deploying Iraqi security forces to take control of Jurf al Sakhr.[18] Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Hezbollah has refused to allow the Iraqi government to exercise sovereignty over Jurf al Sakhr for over a decade and has used the area to store weapons and launch attacks against US and foreign targets in Iraq and the region, including in March and April.[19]

An Iraqi security delegation will visit Saudi Arabia on August 13 to discuss measures to prevent future Iranian-backed Iraqi militia attacks on Saudi territory, according to a senior Iraqi government source speaking to Iraqi media on August 12.[20] Iraqi National Intelligence Service chief Hamid al Shatri and Iraqi Armed Forces Commander-in-Chief Office Director Lieutenant General Abdul Amir al Shammari will lead the delegation.[21] The source stated that the delegation will discuss strengthening security and intelligence coordination with Saudi Arabia to prevent repeated attacks.[22] This visit comes after the Iraqi government recently took several security precautions on August 7 to thwart Iraqi militia attacks on Saudi Arabia.[23]

Arabian Peninsula

The Houthis are attempting to compel Saudi Arabia to abandon its military campaign against the Houthis by threatening to attack Saudi oil infrastructure unless Saudi Arabia negotiates a settlement with the Houthis. Houthi media warned on August 11 that the Houthis will expand their attacks on Saudi oil infrastructure if Saudi Arabia continues to "stall" diplomatic efforts and mobilize for further kinetic activity against the Houthis.[24] The Houthi-affiliated threats come amid Saudi Arabia's current efforts to organize a multinational maritime coalition to ensure safe passage through the Red Sea and reports that Saudi Arabia is concentrating forces for a possible combined ground and maritime offensive against the Houthis.[25] The Houthis have attacked Saudi Aramco facilities since July 24, including terminals and storage units at the Red Sea ports of Yanbu and Jizan, to force Saudi Arabia to abandon its blockade on Houthi ports and airports.[26] ISW-CTP has assessed that Houthi attacks on Saudi oil infrastructure since July 24 primarily seek to raise Saudi political and economic costs to an untenable level and force Saudi leaders to terminate the military operations against the Houthis in Yemen.[27]

The Houthis also seek to coerce Saudi Arabia into accepting negotiations, likely because the group sees

diplomatic engagement as a means to halt Saudi kinetic activity in Yemen and codify a Saudi surrender to Houthi demands. Houthi media urged Saudi leaders on August 10 to accept diplomacy and emphasized that the Houthis are prepared to negotiate an end to the current Houthi-Saudi conflict.[28] Houthi officials argued on August 11 and 12 that Saudi capitulation to Houthi demands under a negotiated settlement would "not be costly" to Saudi Arabia.[29] Such messaging could also be aimed at Saudi partners, such as the United States, to inflame ongoing concerns about global energy disruptions and increase pressure on Saudi Arabia to abandon its campaign in Yemen.[30]



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Iran Update Special Report, August 13, 2026



Nidal Morrison, Adham Fattah, Benjamin Schmida, Adi Glazer, Carolyn Moorman, Kelly Campa, Annika Ganzeveld

Analyst Notes: Data Cutoff: 2:00 PM ET.

The Institute for the Study of War (ISW) and The Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute are publishing daily updates to provide analysis on the war with Iran. The updates cover events from the past 24-hour period.

Note: *ISW-CTP has revised its update structure due to the resumption of war between the United States and Iran. Iran is currently engaged in an information effort to frame its attacks on US bases and regional states as retaliatory and defensive. Iran is not merely responding to US strikes on Iran, however, but is engaged in proactive military operations to achieve discrete objectives. The revised update structure reflects some of these key objectives.*

Key Takeaways

1. There are additional indicators that the Iraqi federal government is considering using force to disarm Iranian-backed Iraqi militias if they fail to disarm by September 30. Iraqi sources told Saudi media on August 12 that the Iraqi federal government has a plan to deploy the Iraqi Army, Counter Terrorism Service, and other “elite” units around Iraqi militia operation centers to restrict the militias’ freedom of movement and supplies after the September 30 disarmament deadline.
2. Iran and some Shia Coordination Framework members are concerned about Zaydi’s preparations to use force against the militias in order to directly disarm them or compel them to disarm. An Iraqi security source told Iraqi media on August 13 that the Iraqi federal government and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) are engaging in intensive talks about the disarmament process.
3. Iranian Armed Forces General Staff (AFGS)-affiliated media interpreted Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei’s appointment decree of Basij Commander Hossein Taeb as an indicator that the regime plans to strengthen its ability to monitor and repress the Iranian population. Mojtaba appointed Taeb as Basij commander on August 10 and tasked Taeb with making “every Iranian a Basiji,” using the people to “confront enemy threats,” and protecting the Islamic Revolution.
4. The Houthis deployed fiber-optic first-person view (FPV) drones to attack the Republic of Yemen Government (ROYG) forces in Yemen for the first time on August 11. Two Yemen analysts published footage on August 12 that showed a Houthi fiber-optic FPV drone that ROYG forces captured in Marib Governorate on August 11.

Toplines

There are additional indicators that the Iraqi federal government is considering using force to

disarm Iranian-backed Iraqi militias if they fail to disarm by September 30. Iraqi sources told Saudi media on August 12 that the Iraqi federal government has a plan to deploy the Iraqi Army, Counter Terrorism Service, and other “elite” units around Iraqi militia operation centers to restrict the militias’ freedom of movement and supplies after the September 30 disarmament deadline.[1] This plan as rendered in Saudi media is consistent with how US military doctrine describes an isolation mission, in which “a unit seals off an enemy, physically and psychologically, from sources of support and denies it freedom of movement.”[2] It is unclear if and how efforts to isolate Iranian-backed Iraqi militias would ultimately contribute to the militias’ full disarmament, however. Iraqi sources’ discussion of this plan to Saudi media may intend to encourage Iranian-backed Iraqi militias to acquiesce to the federal government and willingly disarm. This report also suggests that Iraqi security forces are preparing to enact such a plan if the militias do not oblige, however.

It is also unclear precisely which militias and areas of operation the Iraqi federal government would target under this plan, but this report comes after Saudi media previously reported on August 11 that Iraqi Prime Minister Ali al Zaydi is considering two approaches to disarm the militias as part of the Iraqi government’s efforts to restrict arms to the state. One of the plans that Zaydi is reportedly considering would include deploying Iraqi security forces to take control of Jurf al Sakhr in Babil Province.[3] Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Hezbollah has refused to allow the Iraqi government to exercise sovereignty over Jurf al Sakhr for over a decade and has used the area to store weapons and launch attacks against US and foreign targets in Iraq and the region, including in March and April 2026.[4]

Iran and some Shia Coordination Framework members are concerned about Zaydi’s preparations to use force against the militias to directly disarm them or compel them to disarm. An Iraqi security source told Iraqi media on August 13 that the Iraqi federal government and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) are engaging in intensive talks about the disarmament process.[5] It is unclear which Iraqi government actors are participating in talks with the IRGC, but Iraqi and regional media have reported on an active IRGC presence in Iraq.[6] The Iraqi government spokesperson appeared to confirm that Iranian advisors work with the PMF on August 9, for example.[7] Iran continues to firmly oppose militia disarmament. IRGC Quds Force Commander Brigadier General Esmail Ghaani swiftly traveled to Baghdad on August 10 in response to the Iraqi federal government’s reported plan to send security forces to Jurf al Sakhr, for example.[8]

Some members of the Shia Coordination Framework, which is a coalition of Iraqi Shia parties that includes some with close ties to Iran, also continue to oppose disarmament. Informed sources separately told Saudi media on August 12 that unspecified Shia Coordination Framework leaders are concerned that Zaydi risks provoking an armed confrontation with the militias following Zaydi’s merger of several security offices into the Office of the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces.[9] The office, which is directly under Zaydi’s control, will now oversee the interior and defense ministries, the Counter Terrorism Service, the Iraqi National Intelligence Service, the Iranian-backed Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), border crossings, and military manufacturing.[10] The PMF is an Iraqi state security service comprised of many Iranian-backed Iraqi militias that answer to Iran instead of the Iraqi prime minister.[11] Unspecified framework actors are reportedly working on a settlement between Zaydi and the Iraqi militias that will provide Zaydi a “symbolic victory” and “save face” for militia leaders who refuse disarmament, according to Saudi media.[12]

Zaydi is also weighing using legal measures to disarm Iranian-backed Iraqi militias.[13] Iraqi media reported on August 11 that Zaydi reportedly directed the preparation of a draft law to restrict weapons to the state according to “constitutional procedures” during a meeting with Parliamentary Security and Defense Committee members.[14] The content of the draft law and how it would differ from

the existing Iraqi constitutional prohibition on non-state armed groups is unclear.[15] It is also unclear if this potential law would successfully pass through Iraqi Parliament and if Iraqi authorities would implement it.

The Iraqi government is also considering disarming Iranian-backed Iraqi militias by requiring them to hand over their weapons to the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF). A Shia Coordination Framework source told Iraqi media on August 9 that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias will hand over their weapons to the PMF before the September 30 deadline.[16] The spokesperson for Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Asaib Ahl al Haq's political wing claimed on August 12 that the militia handed over its medium and heavy weapons, including drones and missiles, to unspecified PMF brigades.[17] Asaib Ahl al Haq controls three PMF brigades.[18] It remains unclear if other Iraqi militias would willingly give their weapons to the PMF, given the continued rejection of the government's calls to disarm by groups like Kataib Hezbollah, Kataib Sayyid al Shuhada, and Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba.[19]

Reports of militias potentially transferring their weapons to the PMF come as Zaydi is considering "sweeping" leadership changes to the PMF, which could include appointing Iraqi Army and Counter Terrorism Service officers to PMF leadership positions.[20] High-ranking Iraqi Army officers integrated into the PMF would reportedly assist with redistributing PMF fighters across brigades and provinces, according to Iraqi sources speaking to UK-based Qatari media on August 12.[21] The PMF has previously resisted Iraqi government attempts to reform the organization, particularly under the Haider al Abadi administration, and it is unclear if Iranian-backed actors in the PMF would accept these changes.[22] Any changes to the PMF that fail to curb Iranian influence within the organization or address the allegiance of many of its members to Iran and their willingness and ability to attack US interests in Iraq and the region will not support US interests in Iraq.[23]

Iranian Armed Forces General Staff (AFGS)-affiliated media interpreted Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei's guidance to new Basij Commander Hossein Taeb as an indicator that the regime plans to strengthen its ability to monitor and repress the Iranian population. Mojtaba appointed Taeb as Basij commander on August 10 and tasked Taeb with making "every Iranian a Basiji," using the people to "confront enemy threats," and protecting the Islamic Revolution.[24] AFGS-affiliated media outlet Defa Press Agency interpreted the decree as instructing Taeb to use the Iranian people as "the vigilant eyes of society" to collect information for the regime to combat internal security threats.[25] Defa said that mosques will be "local security command center(s)" and called Iranian neighborhoods the "smallest security unit in the country" where religious leaders and the people "form a local threat monitoring network." [26] Defa also emphasized that Iranian security services can use technology to analyze "threat patterns" and that the regime can deploy a combination of "human alertness" and "machine precision" to defend Iran from enemy hybrid warfare. Iran defines "hybrid warfare" as "hostile actors using all domains of power, including information, electronic, cultural, social, and military operations, to destabilize Iran." [27] The security strategy that Defa outlined is not necessarily new. Iran has for years sought to develop a "neighborhood-based security" strategy to confront threats. The Defa report is nevertheless noteworthy given that it indicates that Taeb may seek to use regime loyalists at the local level to combat internal threats.[28]

Mojtaba's appointment of Taeb reflects Taeb's decades of experience in repressing counter-regime activities as a former Basij commander and the head of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Intelligence Organization.[29] Taeb led the Basij's brutal suppression of the 2009 Green Movement, for which the United States sanctioned him in 2010.[30] Taeb also served as the IRGC Intelligence Organization chief for 13 years, which strengthens his background and experience in Iran's internal security apparatus. Taeb is notably the only Basij commander who has also served as the head of the IRGC Intelligence Organization. Taeb's significant experience in suppressing protests and repressing anti-

regime activity is notable given that the recent Winter 2025-2026 protest wave was the largest wave of protests in Iran in recent years. It is possible that Taeb's appointment as Basij commander reflects a renewed focus by the regime on internal security issues, particularly during the current pause of kinetic conflict with the United States. Mojtaba may have appointed Taeb as Basij commander for other reasons beyond his experience, including the two men's personal ties. Taeb and Mojtaba served together during the Iran-Iraq War in the Habib Ibn Mazahir Battalion under the IRGC 27th Mohammad Rasoul Ollah Division.[31]

The Houthis deployed fiber-optic first-person view (FPV) drones to attack the Republic of Yemen Government (ROYG) forces in Yemen for the first time on August 11.[32] Two Yemen analysts published footage on August 12 that showed a Houthi fiber-optic FPV drone that ROYG forces captured in Marib Governorate on August 11.[33] Both analysts noted that this marked the first recorded instance of the Houthis deploying fiber-optic FPV drones.[34] The recovered Houthi FPV drone appears to utilize commercially available fiber-optic cable that is sold on People's Republic of China (PRC) e-commerce platforms.[35] The Houthi FPV drone does not appear to have an explosive payload, which indicates that the Houthis may have used the drone for reconnaissance.[36] ROYG forces may also have disarmed the drone's payload before filming the video, however.[37] A Yemen-based think tank previously reported in 2025 that the ROYG-affiliated, Saudi-backed National Resistance Forces' (NRF) seizure of commercially available FPV drones intended for the Houthis indicated that the Houthis intended to deploy FPV systems in combat in Yemen.[38]

The capture of the Houthi fiber-optic FPV drone on August 12 comes amid the recent proliferation of FPV drone technology, including fiber-optic systems, among Iran's Axis of Resistance partners in the region. Lebanese Hezbollah and Iranian-backed Iraqi militias have deployed fiber-optic FPV drones to attack Israeli and US targets in Lebanon and Iraq since March 2026, respectively.[39] Syrian security forces recently seized an Iranian shipment of FPV drones intended for Hezbollah on July 16. The shipment included fiber-optic cable similar to the cable sold on PRC e-commerce platforms.[40]

US and Partner Military Operations

Nothing significant to report.

Iranian Strike Campaign

Assessed Iranian War Aims:

- *Secure international recognition of Iranian control over the Strait of Hormuz*
- *Degrade the US ability and willingness to continue the war*
- *Restore deterrence vis-à-vis the United States and its regional partners*
- *Divide the United States and Israel from the Arab states*

Nothing significant to report.

US-Iran Negotiations

Nothing significant to report.

Iranian Domestic Affairs

Newly appointed Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Mohsen Rezaei met with PRC Ambassador to Iran Cong Peiwu on August 11 to discuss regional affairs and the expansion of PRC-Iranian relations.[41] IRGC-affiliated outlet Tasnim News Agency reported on August 13 that Rezaei's decision to meet a Chinese official in his first official meeting as SNSC secretary signals the Iranian regime's intent to deepen strategic ties with the PRC, including deeper "security ties." [42] Both the official Iranian and PRC readouts of Rezaei and Cong's meeting include vague, boilerplate language that likely does not reflect what was discussed in the meeting, however. [43] Iran has directly benefitted from its military partnership with the PRC in this conflict. The PRC reportedly sold Iran an advanced reconnaissance satellite that Iran used to target US military bases across the region during the war, for example. [44] The PRC also supported Iran's ballistic missile program by sending Iran missile fuel precursors during the conflict. [45] ISW-CTP noted in July 2026 that Iran is attempting to bolster its air defense capabilities with assistance from the PRC. [46]

Lebanon

Nothing significant to report.

Iraq

See topline section.

Arabian Peninsula

The Houthis continued to attack Saudi oil infrastructure on August 13.[47] A Houthi military source told Houthi media on August 13 that two Houthi drones struck the Saudi Aramco refinery in Jizan, Saudi Arabia. [48] The source added that the strike was in response to Saudi "violations" of Houthi airspace in Yemen and recent Saudi attacks in Yemen's Saada and Hajjah governorates. [49] Saudi officials and media have not confirmed the Houthi attack on Jizan at the time of this writing, however. This would mark the third attack targeting the Jizan refinery that the Houthis have conducted since July 24. [50] ISW-CTP continues to assess that the Houthis are attacking Saudi oil infrastructure in order to force Saudi Arabia to end its blockade of Houthi ports and airports and cease military operations in Yemen by imposing political and economic costs on Saudi Arabia. [51]



Saudi-backed NRF naval forces reportedly sank two Houthi vessels in the Red Sea over the past two days.[52] NRF-affiliated media reported that NRF naval forces engaged three Houthi vessels and sank one. NRF forces fired an anti-tank guided missile that sank a Houthi vessel that functioned as a one-way drone attack platform. [53] The reports did not specify the locations of the vessels. The NRF's targeting of Houthi vessels may have been intended to destroy assets that the Houthis could use to support their blockade on Saudi vessels and ports in the Red Sea. The Houthis have attacked several vessels transiting the Red Sea since July 22 as part of their effort to enforce their blockade on Saudi ports, including an attack on an allegedly Saudi-linked cargo ship on August 11. [54]



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Iran Update Special Report, August 14, 2026



Ben Rezaei, William Doran, Kelly Campa, Adham Fattah, Carolyn Moorman, Emily Neuwirth, Aidan Skidds, Julia Minassian, Annika Ganzeveld

Analyst Notes: Data Cutoff: 2:00 PM ET

The Institute for the Study of War (ISW) and The Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute are publishing daily updates to provide analysis on the war with Iran. The updates cover events from the past 24-hour period.

Note: *ISW-CTP has revised its update structure due to the resumption of war between the United States and Iran. Iran is currently engaged in an information effort to frame its attacks on US bases and regional states as retaliatory and defensive. Iran is not merely responding to US strikes on Iran, however, but is engaged in proactive military operations to achieve discrete objectives. The revised update structure reflects some of these key objectives.*

Key Takeaways

1. Several Iraqi sources have described in recent days that Iraqi Prime Minister Ali al Zaydi is planning a possible operation to retake one of Kataib Hezbollah's strongholds as part of a broader crackdown on Iranian-backed Iraqi militias. Zaydi reportedly ordered a study of the security and logistical conditions in Kataib Hezbollah's stronghold of Jurf al Sakhr in Babil Province, according to unspecified Iraqi political sources on August 14.
2. Iraqi sources' discussions of plans for an operation against the militias may intend to encourage Iranian-backed Iraqi militias to acquiesce to the federal government and voluntarily disarm by September 30. Zaydi's reported preparations for such an operation suggest that Iraqi security forces are preparing to enact such a plan if the militias do not oblige, however.
3. Republic of Yemen Government (ROYG) customs authorities seized two caches of electronic components that could be used for first-person view (FPV) drones at Yemeni ports and land crossings on August 13. ROYG authorities seized 23 fiber-optic cable spools at the Wadiyah crossing in Hadramawt Governorate, on the Yemen-Saudi Arabia border, according to Yemeni media.

Toplines

Several Iraqi sources have described planning in recent days by Iraqi Prime Minister Ali al Zaydi for a possible operation to retake one of Kataib Hezbollah's strongholds as part of a broader crackdown on Iranian-backed Iraqi militias. Zaydi reportedly ordered a study of the

security and logistical conditions in Kataib Hezbollah’s stronghold of Jurf al Sakhr in Babil Province, according to unspecified Iraqi political sources on August 14.[1] The sources told UK-based, Qatari-owned media that this study intends to develop mechanisms for Iraqi security forces to deploy near all entrances to Jurf al Sakhr and evacuate some Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) headquarters in the area as well as headquarters of groups operating under the guise of the PMF.[2] The PMF is an Iraqi state security service that includes multiple Iraqi militias that answer to Iran instead of the prime minister.[3] Iraqi military, security, and counterterrorism authorities—as well as “disciplined” PMF brigades—would then enter Jurf al Sakhr to assert control.[4] It is unclear which “disciplined” PMF brigades the Iraqi sources were referring to. An Iraq analyst noted in June 2026 that over half of the PMF brigades either attacked or supported attacks on US and foreign targets in Iraq and the region during the war.[5] Saudi media first reported that Zaydi was considering deploying Iraqi security forces to take control of Jurf al Sakhr on August 11.[6] Kataib Hezbollah has refused to allow the Iraqi government to exercise sovereignty over Jurf al Sakhr for over a decade and has used the area to store weapons and launch attacks against US and foreign targets in Iraq and the region, including in March and April 2026.[7] Conducting an operation to retake Jurf al Sakhr on the scale described by these sources would require significant planning, mobilization, and coordination among Iraqi security forces.

Iraqi sources’ discussions of plans in recent days to use force against the militias may intend to encourage Iranian-backed Iraqi militias to acquiesce to the federal government and voluntarily disarm by September 30.[8] Iraqi political sources claimed on August 14 that the Iraqi government prefers to reassume control over Jurf al Sakhr through diplomacy and calibrated pressure on the militias rather than deploying Iraqi security forces to “storm” the town.[9] Zaydi’s reported preparations for such an operation, including by studying local security and logistical conditions, suggest that Iraqi security forces are preparing to enact such a plan if the militias do not oblige, however.[10]

US and Partner Military Operations

Nothing significant to report.

Iranian Strike Campaign

Assessed Iranian War Aims:

- *Secure international recognition of Iranian control over the Strait of Hormuz*
- *Degrade the US ability and willingness to continue the war*
- *Restore deterrence vis-à-vis the United States and its regional partners*
- *Divide the United States and Israel from the Arab states*

Iran continues to use force against commercial shipping to impose costs on regional states and enforce its claimed control over the Strait of Hormuz. The United Arab Emirates accused Iran of attacking two Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) tankers transiting the strait with drones on August 13.[11] United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations separately reported on August 14 that two vessels—likely the ADNOC tankers—sustained minor damage from drone strikes in the strait.[12] ADNOC has disabled vessel transponders, staggered secretly timed transits, and used ship-to-ship transfers off the coast of Fujairah to move its tankers through the strait undetected.[13]

US-Iran Negotiations

Nothing significant to report.

Iranian Domestic Affairs

Some clerics close to the Supreme Leader's office appear to be trying to contain intra-regime polarization over negotiations with the United States. Supreme Leader Political-Ideological Office head Ali Saeedi warned on August 14 that framing Iran's choices as "negotiation or war" could deepen political polarization.[14] Saeedi stressed that negotiations can serve Iran's interests if conducted under Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei's supervision and alongside continued "resistance and steadfastness." [15] Saeedi's remarks suggest that some officials close to Mojtaba's office may be trying to keep intra-regime debates over negotiations from developing into a broader political confrontation. Tehran Interim Friday Prayer Leader Ahmad Khatami similarly rejected both an "only war" and "only peace" approach on August 14, arguing that Iran should combine "active resistance" with "intelligent diplomacy," including ceasefires when they serve Iran's interests.[16]

Lebanon

Nothing significant to report.

Iraq

Likely Iranian-backed Iraqi militias fired drones targeting unspecified targets in Erbil, Iraqi Kurdistan, on August 14. An Iraqi security source told Saudi media that air defense systems in Erbil intercepted six drones that unspecified actors launched from Ninewa Province.[17] Iranian-backed Iraqi militias repeatedly launched attacks from positions in Ninewa Province targeting US interests in Iraqi Kurdistan in Spring 2026.[18] Informed sources told Iraqi media in late July 2026 that Iran has pressured the Iraqi federal government not to identify the militias responsible for recent attacks in Iraqi Kurdistan and regional countries.[19]

A member of Iranian-backed militia Asaib Ahl al Haq's political wing stated on August 14 that no actor within or outside of Iraq should be able to prosecute Iraqi militias under Iraq's Anti-Terrorism Law.[20] The Sadiqoun member's comments follow reports that Iraqi Prime Minister Ali al Zaydi is planning to present a new draft law to parliament that would support restricting arms to the state.[21] It remains unclear how this draft law would differ from existing laws that limit militia activity outside of the state, including Article Nine of the 2005 Iraqi Constitution.[22] The Sadiqoun member additionally argued that there are unspecified justifications for the militias to possess weapons and that the Iraqi government should not set a deadline for disarming the militias until US forces withdraw from Iraq.[23] Iranian-backed Iraqi militias have continued to use a variety of excuses to retain their arms. The Sadiqoun member also claimed that the militias have strong popular support.[24] Iranian-backed Iraqi militias have engaged in human rights violations in numerous instances, however. The militias helped the Iraqi state suppress the 2019 Tishreen Uprising protests and have refused to allow residents to return to multiple areas of Iraq, including Jurf al Sakhr, after helping the Iraqi government free these areas from Islamic State in Iraq and al Sham (ISIS) control.[25] The Sadiqoun member's comments notably conflict with other Asaib Ahl al Haq-affiliated figures' previous statements supporting efforts to restrict arms to

the state.[26] The member's statement is an indicator of possible internal fissures within Asaib Ahl al Haq on the issue of disarmament.

A member of former Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani's coalition claimed on August 13 that all militias, including Iranian-backed Kataib Hezbollah and Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba, agreed to restrict weapons to the state during a State Administration Coalition meeting.[27] Kataib Hezbollah and Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba have continuously refused to disarm.[28] These militias are among the most closely tied to Iran, and Iranian officials have also consistently opposed militia disarmament efforts.[29] ISW-CTP has not observed any indicators that Kataib Hezbollah or Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba have changed their stance on disarmament.

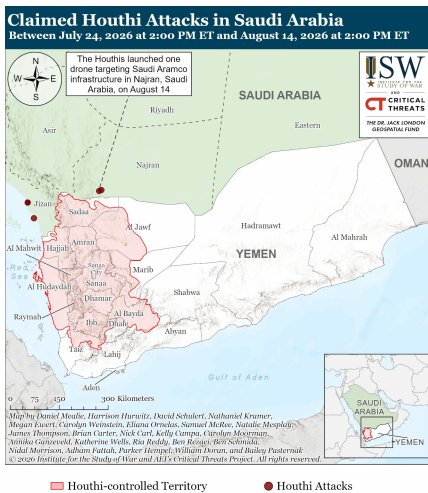
The member of Sudani's coalition also claimed that the militias' only disagreement at this time is over the mechanism for handing over weapons to the state.[30] It is unclear if the militias are expected to hand over their weapons to the PMF or another Iraqi state institution. A Shia Coordination Framework source told Iraqi media on August 9 that the militias will hand over their weapons to the PMF before the September 30 disarmament deadline.[31] It is also unclear which weapons the militias would hand over to the state. Unspecified Shia Coordination Framework sources and sources close to the militias have previously told Iraqi and regional media that some militias intend to surrender small arms and inoperable weapons while keeping operational heavy weapons.^[32] Such a reality would effectively circumvent efforts to disarm the militias.

Arabian Peninsula

Republic of Yemen Government (ROYG) customs authorities seized two caches of electronic components that could be used for first-person view (FPV) drones at Yemeni ports and land crossings on August 13.[33] ROYG authorities seized 23 fiber-optic cable spools at the Wadiah crossing in Hadramawt Governorate, on the Yemen-Saudi Arabia border, according to Yemeni media.[34] Yemeni media also reported that ROYG authorities confiscated nearly 3,700 "dual-use" electronic components at the port of Aden, which authorities claimed could be used to assemble drones or for other illicit purposes.[35] A US-based Yemen analyst suggested that the Houthis were responsible for the smuggling attempt and reported that the equipment was intended to be used to assemble fiber-optic FPV drones.[36] ISW-CTP cannot confirm whether the Houthis were responsible for the smuggling attempt or what the intended use of the equipment was, however. Houthi-affiliated smugglers have previously used the Wadiah crossing to traffic drugs and other contraband into Saudi Arabia.[37]

The smuggling incidents follow the Houthis' recent first deployment of a fiber-optic FPV drone in combat, which ROYG forces captured in Marib Governorate on August 11.[38] Members of Iran's Axis of Resistance, including Hezbollah and Iranian-backed Iraqi militias, have adopted and proliferated FPV drones as strike platforms to attack US and Israeli forces and military assets in the region since March 2026.[39]

A Houthi military source told Houthi media on August 14 that the Houthis launched a drone targeting Saudi oil infrastructure in Najran, near the Yemen-Saudi Arabia border.[40] The source claimed that the Houthis attacked Saudi Aramco facilities in Najran in retaliation for Saudi aircraft overflights in Houthi-controlled Saada Province, in northwestern Yemen.[41] A Houthi military source previously told Houthi media on August 13 that Houthi drones targeted and struck the Saudi Aramco refinery at the Red Sea port of Jizan.[42] ISW-CTP continues to assess that the Houthis have threatened and attacked Saudi oil infrastructure in order to raise the political and economic costs of the Saudi blockade on Houthi ports and vessels and compel Saudi Arabia to cease its kinetic activity in Yemen.[43]



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There was no report on August 15, 2026