

Iran Update



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August 4, 2025 Information Cutoff: 2:00 PM ET

Iran’s highest national security and foreign policy decision-making body, the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), established a Defense Council on August 3 to streamline decision-making during wartime.[1] The establishment of this body, which will operate under the SNSC, likely reflects Iranian leaders’ recognition of systemic operational failures during the Israel-Iran War. Iranian media emphasized that this body will be responsible for taking “rapid, balanced, and coordinated” steps to confront threats to Iran.[2] Iranian media added that the SNSC formed the Defense Council in response to “fragmentation in decision-making” and a “lack of sufficient coordination between different institutions.”[3] The composition of the Defense Council is notably similar to the composition of the SNSC, but, unlike the SNSC, the Defense Council includes the Khatam ol Anbia Central Headquarters commander and excludes the Iranian foreign affairs and interior ministers.[4] The Khatam ol Anbia Central Headquarters is responsible for joint and wartime operations.[5] The inclusion of the Khatam ol Anbia Central Headquarters commander in the Defense Council creates a more direct link between this military institution and Iranian leaders. It is unlikely, however, that this council will enable the Iranian regime to respond more quickly and effectively to future threats so long as Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei does not empower the senior military commanders in this council to make and implement decisions without his approval.

The formation of the Defense Council indicates that Iranian leaders are concerned about potential future conflicts and are trying to develop a more proactive and efficient decision-making process to respond to future conflicts. The Defense Council that the SNSC established is notably similar to the “Strategic Command Center” that an Iranian outlet affiliated with former SNSC Secretary Ali Shamkhani proposed on July 29.[6] The outlet stated that the “Strategic Command Center” would have “cross-sectoral authority” to rapidly respond to evolving threats.[7] Iranian leaders have frequently warned about the potential for future conflicts since the end of the Israel-Iran War and likely seek to reform Iran’s decision-making structure in preparation for these potential conflicts. Iranian Artesh Commander Major General Amir Hatami warned on August 3, for example, that “[Iran] should not underestimate the enemy and consider its threats over.”[8]

Moderate and pragmatic elements in the Iranian regime appear to be leading the restructuring of Iran’s decision-making apparatus. Moderate President Masoud Pezeshkian, who chairs the SNSC, will head the Defense Council and appoint its secretary.[9] An outlet affiliated

with pragmatic hardliner Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf suggested that Pezeshkian will appoint Ghalibaf as the Defense Council secretary.[10] A political analyst close to the regime similarly suggested that Ghalibaf had a significant role in establishing the Defense Council.[11] The establishment of the Defense Council comes as Iranian media outlets have speculated that pragmatic hardliner former SNSC Secretary and Supreme Leader Adviser Ali Larijani could return to his former role as SNSC secretary.[12] Iranian media has framed Larijani's potential return to the SNSC as a shift to a more pragmatic approach in the Iranian regime. Some Iranian media outlets have speculated that Larijani could replace ultrahardliner Saeed Jalili as one of Khamenei's representatives to the SNSC.[13]

Ghalibaf's reported important role in the establishment of the Defense Council comes as the Iranian Parliament has also played a prominent role in influencing Iranian internal and external security policy following the Israel-Iran War. Parliament has supported and approved an anomalous amount of security-related legislation, including legislation that would further suppress internal dissent, since the end of the Israel-Iran War.[14]

Composition of the Iranian SNSC and Defense Council

SNSC		Defense Council	
			
President Masoud Pezeshkian	Minister of Intelligence Esmail Khatib	President Masoud Pezeshkian	Minister of Intelligence Esmail Khatib
			
AFGS Chief Abdol Rahim Mousavi	Minister of Foreign Affairs Abbas Araghchi	AFGS Chief Abdol Rahim Mousavi	Khatam ol Anbia Central Headquarters Commander Ali Abdollahi Ali Abadi
			
IRGC Commander Mohammad Pak Pour	Minister of Interior Eskander Momeni	IRGC Commander Mohammad Pak Pour	Artesh Commander Amir Hatami
			
Speaker of the Parliament Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf	Supreme Leader Representative (SNSC Secretary) Ali Akbar Ahmadian	Speaker of the Parliament Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf	Supreme Leader Representative
			
Judiciary Chief Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejei	Supreme Leader Representative Saeed Jalili	Judiciary Chief Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejei	Supreme Leader Representative
			
Artesh Commander Amir Hatami			



Unprecedented and growing discontent among Hezbollah’s Shia support base could weaken Hezbollah’s political leverage to resist disarmament. Much of the Lebanese Shia community has fervently backed Hezbollah since the 1980s.[15] The *New York Times* reported on August 4 that the Lebanese Shia community is in “shock, despair,” and angry with Hezbollah, however.[16] An anonymous Hezbollah supporter told the *New York Times* that Hezbollah “promised us a victory but instead destroyed our villages, destroyed our homes.”[17] Hezbollah, which quickly rebuilt Lebanon and provided a social safety net for Lebanese civilians after the 2006 war, is struggling to reconstruct damaged infrastructure and reconstitute its forces following the Israel-Hezbollah conflict in late 2024.[18] Hezbollah has struggled to maintain its financial commitments to fighters following the conflict in late 2024, which has contributed to the Shia community’s growing

frustration.[19] Frustrated Hezbollah supporters have demanded answers from Hezbollah about when they will receive reconstruction funds to rebuild businesses and homes destroyed in the war.[20] Hezbollah has historically used financial benefits, including pensions for the families of deceased fighters and compensation to those who lost their homes or property, to retain its support base among Lebanese Shia.[21]

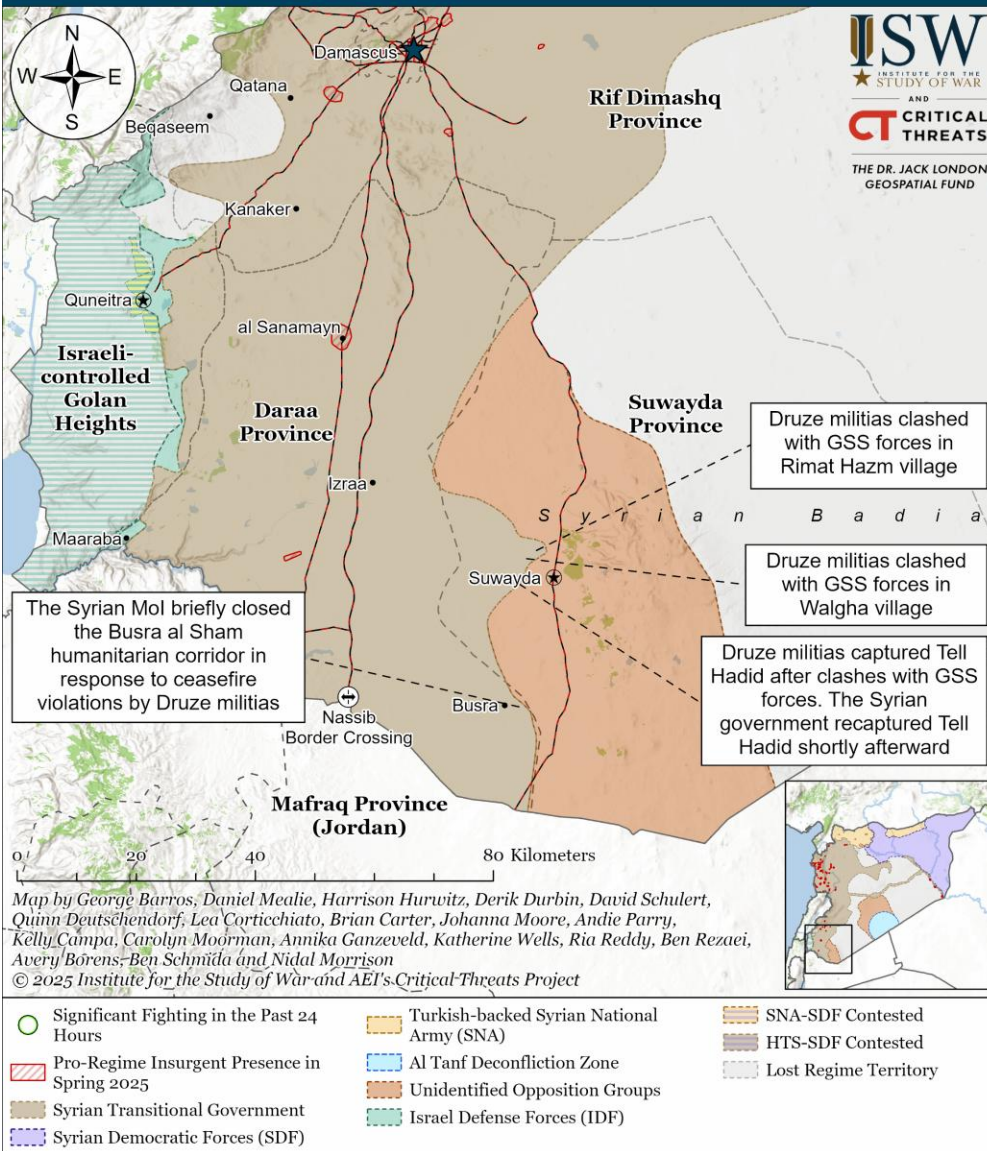
The Lebanese government reportedly hopes that frustration among southern residents toward Hezbollah will pressure Hezbollah to disarm.[22] Frustration among Hezbollah's Lebanese Shia support base comes amid six weeks of negotiations between the United States and Lebanon about disarming Hezbollah.[23] Hezbollah Secretary General Naim Qassem has persistently rejected calls to disarm, while some Hezbollah allies have recently shifted their positions and expressed support for the state's monopoly on arms.[24] Lebanese media reported on July 28 that Lebanese Parliament Speaker and Hezbollah ally Nabih Berri is "in agreement" with Lebanese President Joseph Aoun and Prime Minister Nawaf Salam "on the approach toward the weapons file." [25] Both Aoun and Salam have publicly called on Hezbollah to disarm.[26] Lebanese media reported that Hezbollah "is in a state of shock over its allies' public calls for the monopolization of weapons" by the state.[27] Lebanese media also stated that Aoun's speech on July 31, in which he called on Hezbollah to disarm, has "created a popular and political momentum supportive of the state." [28] Continued frustration among Hezbollah's Shia support base and growing momentum for the Lebanese government's position could weaken Hezbollah's political leverage and ability to maintain support for its retention of weapons.

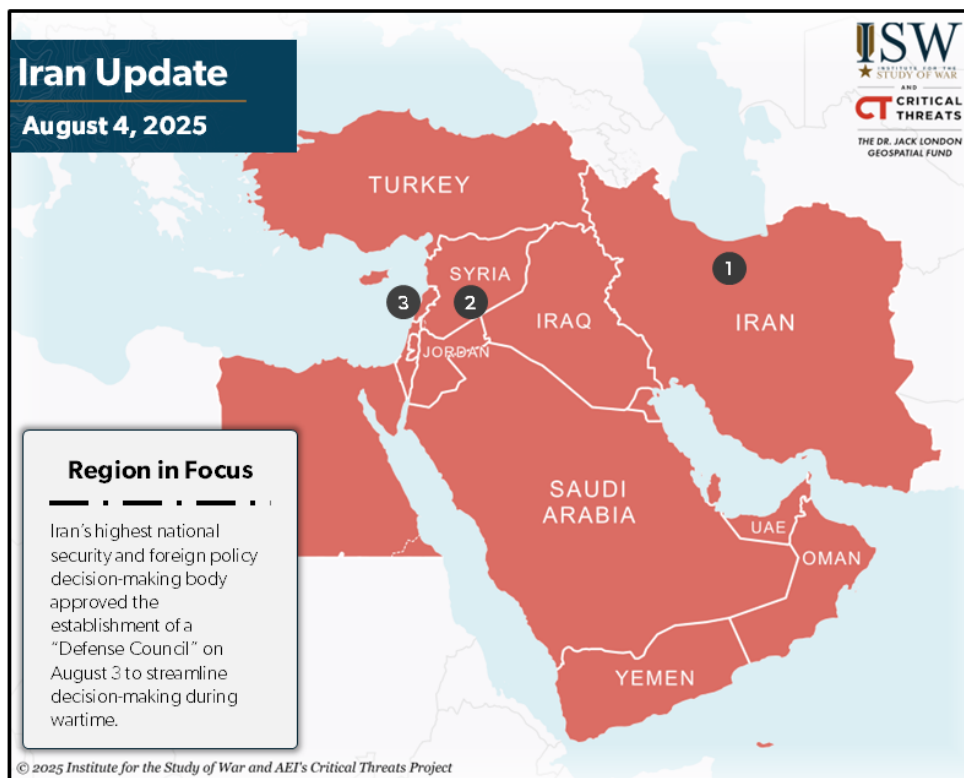
A brief breakdown in the ceasefire in Suwayda Province, Syria, on August 3 underscores the lack of trust between the Syrian transitional government and the Druze community. This distrust extends to other Syrian minority groups as well. Druze militias launched a preplanned attack on August 3 to capture the strategically important Tell Hadid hill from the Syrian General Security Service (GSS).[29] Tell Hadid overlooks Suwayda City and serves as a government-controlled buffer between Druze militias and Sunni Bedouin fighters who are in the process of implementing a three-phase ceasefire agreement after intercommunal violence swept the province in mid-July.[30] The Israeli Air Force fired flares over neighboring Daraa Province as Druze militias captured the hill.[31] The Syrian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and Sunni Bedouin fighters recaptured Tell Hadid on August 3 after engaging with Druze militias.[32] The GSS also recaptured the villages of Walgha and Rimat Hazm on August 3 after Druze militias advanced toward the villages.[33] All parties agreed to a ceasefire, and Druze fighters returned to their original positions on August 3.[34] Syrian sources claimed that the new ceasefire calls for the withdrawal of all Syrian government and affiliated forces from Suwayda Province.[35] CTP-ISW cannot independently verify this claim. The Syrian Ministry of Interior (MoI) reopened a key humanitarian corridor into Suwayda Province on August 4 after closing it due to the fighting.[36] Parties were in the process of implementing the second phase of the previous July 18 ceasefire agreement, which includes the delivery of aid, provision of services, and repair of infrastructure, when fighting broke out on August 3.[37] It remains unclear how or if the July 18 ceasefire will progress to its third phase, which calls for activating state-run institutions, gradually deploying government forces to Suwayda Province, and integrating Suwaydawi institutions into the Syrian state, after the recent ceasefire violation and new ceasefire agreement.[38]

A Sheikh al Karama Druze militia member outlined the Druze community's irreconcilable grievances toward the Syrian transitional government a day before Druze militias attacked Tell Hadid.[39] Sheikh al Karama previously negotiated with the Syrian transitional government about security issues and integration before the outbreak of intercommunal violence in Suwayda in mid-July.[40] The militia member stated on August 2 that "after the grievous violations committed against the minorities [in Suwayda Province]...it has become impossible to remain under a centralized state that prevents the minorities from participating in it." The militia member added that an "autonomous administration or separation is the sole solution." [41] This sentiment is not unique to the Druze. Kurdish and Alawite communities have repeatedly called for autonomy and voiced their opposition to centralized rule because they view the transitional government as exclusionary and are skeptical of the government's ability and willingness to protect their communities.[42] The Syrian transitional government's repeated failure to protect minority communities has reinforced the perception among minority communities that integration under the current government framework is unviable.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Southwestern Syria

August 4, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST





- 1 **TEHRAN, IRAN.** Iran's highest national security and foreign policy decision-making body, the Supreme National Security Council approved the establishment of a "Defense Council" on August 3 to streamline decision-making during wartime. The formation of the Defense Council indicates that Iranian leaders are concerned about potential future conflicts and are trying to develop a more proactive and efficient decision-making process to respond to future conflicts.
- 2 **SUWAYDA, SYRIA.** A brief breakdown in the ceasefire in Suwayda Province, Syria, on August 3 underscores the lack of trust between the Syrian transitional government and the Druze community. This distrust extends to other Syrian minority groups as well. The Syrian government's repeated failure to protect minority communities has reinforced the perception among minority communities that integration under the current government framework is unviable.
- 3 **BEIRUT, LEBANON.** Unprecedented and growing discontent among Hezbollah's Shia support base could weaken Hezbollah's political leverage to resist disarmament. The population's frustration comes amid six weeks of negotiations between the United States and Lebanon about disarming Hezbollah.

Key Takeaways

- **Iranian Defense Apparatus:** Iran's highest national security and foreign policy decision-making body, the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), approved the establishment of a "Defense Council" on August 3 to streamline decision-making during wartime. The formation of the Defense Council indicates that Iranian leaders are concerned about potential future conflicts and are trying to develop a more proactive and efficient decision-making process to respond to future conflicts.
- **Syria Ceasefire:** A brief breakdown in the ceasefire in Suwayda Province, Syria, on August 3 underscores the lack of trust between the Syrian transitional government and the Druze

community. This distrust extends to other Syrian minority groups as well. The Syrian government's repeated failure to protect minority communities has reinforced the perception among minority communities that integration under the current government framework is unviable.

- **Hezbollah Disarmament:** Unprecedented and growing discontent among Hezbollah's Shia support base could weaken Hezbollah's political leverage to resist disarmament. The population's frustration comes amid six weeks of negotiations between the United States and Lebanon about disarming Hezbollah.

Iran

Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Ground Forces Commander Brigadier General Mohammad Karami appointed Brigadier General Ahmad Akhavan Mahdavi as the new IRGC Ground Forces coordination deputy.[43] Mahdavi replaced Mohammad Taghi Osanlou.[44] Coordination deputies in Iran serve in a similar capacity to a chief of staff in the US military. Mahdavi previously served as the deputy commander of the IRGC Ground Forces Combat Medical Unit.[45] Colonel Rasoul Sadegh was appointed as the new IRGC Ground Forces Combat Medical Unit deputy commander.

Iran is continuing to try to position itself as a regional transportation hub. An Iranian delegation led by President Masoud Pezeshkian visited Pakistan on August 2 and 3 to discuss bilateral economic and security cooperation.[46] Iran and Pakistan agreed to establish a joint border gate at the Mirjaveh-Taftan border crossing in Sistan and Baluchistan Province to facilitate bilateral trade.[47] Iranian media reported that 70 percent of Iran and Pakistan's bilateral trade goes through the Mirjaveh-Taftan border crossing.[48] IRGC-affiliated media argued that Iran could use this border crossing to increase Iran's role in China's Belt and Road Initiative by connecting the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor to Europe via Iran..[49] Iran and Pakistan also reached a preliminary agreement to establish a free trade zone at the Rimdan-Gabad border crossing in Sistan and Baluchistan Province to strengthen bilateral economic relations and encourage regional economic integration.[50] Iranian First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref separately emphasized Iran's readiness to connect regional landlocked countries to open waters ahead of his visit to Turkmenistan to attend the Third UN Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries.[51]

Iranian Defense and Armed Forces Logistics Minister Brigadier General Aziz Nasir Zadeh separately spoke with Pakistani Defense Minister Khawaja Asif on August 2, possibly to discuss efforts to confront anti-regime militant groups along the Pakistan-Iran border.[52] Iran has placed a growing emphasis on border security in southeastern Iran following an uptick in anti-regime militant attacks in the region since December 2023. Most of the attacks have been committed by Jaish al Adl, which is a Baloch, Salafi-jihadi militant group.[53] Jaish al Adl most recently attacked the Sistan and Baluchistan Provincial Courthouse in Zahedan on July 26.[54]

Iraq

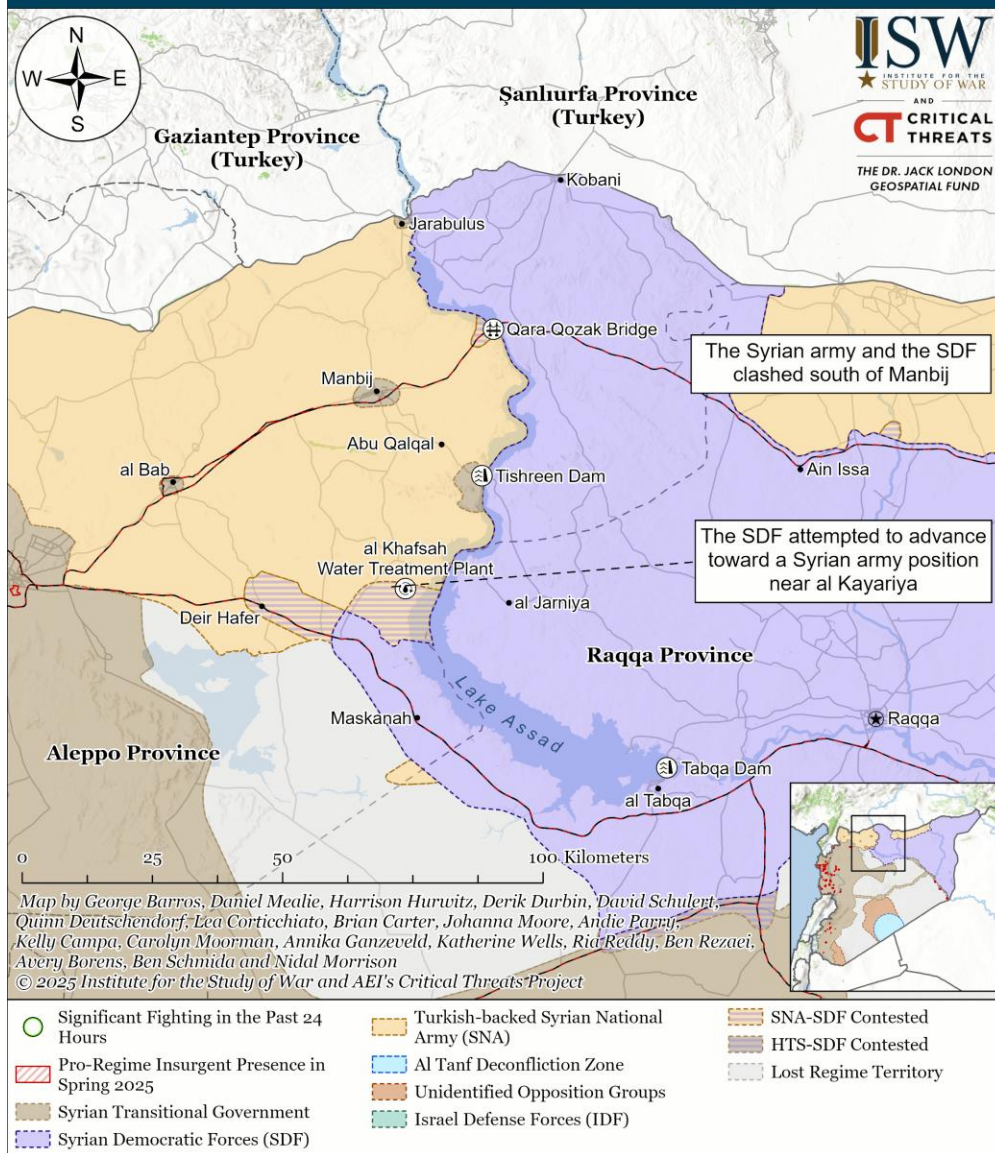
Iraqi State Oil Marketing Organization (SOMO) Director Ali Nizar al Shatri responded on August 2 to reports that SOMO admitted that Iranian oil smuggling occurs in Iraqi territorial waters.[55] Iraqi media reported on July 28 that SOMO had issued a document calling

on Iraqi authorities to halt “widespread” oil smuggling in Iraqi territorial waters.[56] Shatri denied on August 2 that the SOMO document constituted an admission that oil smuggling takes place in Iraqi territorial waters.[57] The publication of the document and Shatri’s response come after the United States reportedly threatened in July 2025 to sanction SOMO and therefore block \$350 million of Iraqi oil revenue if the Iraqi federal government failed to prevent Iranian crude oil smuggling.[58] Iran and Iranian-backed Iraqi actors oversee an oil smuggling network in Iraq that generates around a billion dollars annually for Iran and its Axis of Resistance.[59] The United States sanctioned six entities and four vessels involved in smuggling Iranian oil, including a network of companies run by an Iraqi businessman, on July 3.[60]

Syria

The Syrian army and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) clashed south of Manbij, Aleppo Province, on August 2.[61] Syrian media reported that the Syrian army and the SDF clashed after the SDF attempted to advance toward a Syrian army position near al Kayariya in the Manbij countryside along the Syrian army-SDF frontline.[62] Syrian state media reported that the SDF launched rockets and mortars at al Kayariya.[63] The attack injured at least four Syrian army personnel and three civilians.[64] The Syrian army and SDF’s engagement comes amid ongoing SDF-Syrian government negotiations to integrate the SDF into the Syrian Ministry of Defense.[65] It is unlikely that this isolated engagement will disrupt these negotiations, given that similar isolated incidents have not affected the talks.[66]

Assessed Control of Terrain around Manbij August 4, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



Arabian Peninsula

The Houthis claimed that they conducted three drone attacks and one ballistic missile attack targeting Israel between August 1 and 3.^[67] The Houthis launched a ballistic missile targeting Ben Gurion Airport on August 1.^[68] The Houthis launched three drones targeting Jaffa, Ashkelon, and Haifa Port on August 3.^[69] The Israeli Air Force intercepted a Houthi drone near Bnei Netzarim, southern Israel, on August 3.^[70] The Houthis have launched hundreds of drones and ballistic missiles targeting Israel since the Houthis began their campaign to enforce an economic blockade on Israel in October 2023.^[71]

Palestinian Territories and Lebanon

An unspecified Israeli security official said on August 1 that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Northern Command has shifted to a “forward defense” posture in southern Lebanon.^[72] The IDF Northern Command is responsible for IDF operations in southern Lebanon, where it maintains five outposts.^[73] The unspecified official said that the posture shift aims to maintain Israel’s “strategic superiority” in southern Lebanon.^[74] Recent IDF operations in Lebanon demonstrate this posture shift. Israeli forces conducted several raids in southern Lebanon on July 9, which were rare instances of Israeli troops operating beyond Israel’s five permanent positions.^[75] The official noted that the IDF operates from its five permanent positions in southern Lebanon to target Hezbollah’s ability to reconstitute capabilities that would pose a threat to northern Israeli towns.”^[76] This stated objective mirrors the IDF’s objective in its campaign against Hezbollah in late 2024, in which one of Israel’s primary concerns was a potential Hezbollah ground incursion into northern Israel.^[77] The Israel-Hezbollah ceasefire agreement in November 2024 included an addendum that ensures the Israeli right to self-defense against any future threat that Hezbollah may pose.^[78] The IDF has acted on this addendum and continued to operate against Hezbollah since November 2024, such as by conducting airstrikes and raids targeting Hezbollah infrastructure that poses a threat to Israel.^[79]

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Iran Update



Avery Borens, Katherine Wells, Nidal Morrison, Ria Reddy, Ben Schmida, Carolyn Moorman, and Brian Carter

August 5, 2025 Information Cutoff: 2:00 PM ET

Some senior Lebanese officials are attempting to propose a Hezbollah disarmament plan that would seek to “buy time” for Lebanon, thereby increasing the risk that Hezbollah could reconstitute itself in the interim and make it more difficult to disarm Hezbollah. Lebanese ministers and high-level officials have reportedly proposed various plans to disarm Hezbollah but remain split on a decision. Two unspecified Lebanese sources told Reuters on August 5 that Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, President Joseph Aoun, and Prime Minister Nawaf Salam have been working to agree on a cabinet decision that would appease the United States and “buy Lebanon more time.”[1] It is unclear what length of time this decision seeks. Berri’s proposed wording would commit Lebanon to forming a national defense strategy and maintaining a ceasefire with Israel, but would avoid an explicit pledge to disarm Hezbollah across Lebanon.[2]

Hezbollah would likely agree to Berri’s proposal because Hezbollah Secretary General Naim Qassem has repeatedly called for the Lebanese government and Hezbollah to coordinate on a national defense strategy.[3] Berri’s proposal comes amid Lebanese media reporting that Aoun and Berri both aim to “prevent any domestic political clash that would torpedo” future cabinet sessions.[4] Lebanese officials have also raised concerns that a decision explicitly calling for Hezbollah to disarm could spark communal tensions in Lebanon.[5]

Some Lebanese ministers appear to have rejected Berri’s proposal, however. Anti-Hezbollah Lebanese Forces Party-affiliated Minister Kamal Shehadi told Reuters that other Lebanese ministers plan to propose a formulation that commits Lebanon to a deadline to disarm Hezbollah.[6]

Hezbollah would benefit significantly from Berri’s proposal as it would give the group time to reconstitute and reestablish itself domestically. Hezbollah Secretary General Naim Qassem emphasized on August 5 that Hezbollah would not agree to any timetable to hand over its weapons, which is likely an attempt to delay talks further and secure more time for reconstitution.[7] The lack of a disarmament deadline would hinder the Lebanese government’s ability to disarm Hezbollah because it would give the group time to entrench itself domestically and increase the risk of a military confrontation that the government is unlikely to accept. Israeli operations remain focused on efforts to maintain Hezbollah’s degradation, however.

Hezbollah Secretary General Naim Qassem threatened Israel directly for the first time in months during his televised speech on August 5.[8] Qassem threatened to launch missiles targeting Israel if Israel engages in a “large-scale aggression” against Lebanon.”[9] It is unlikely that

Hezbollah possesses the capabilities to launch any large-scale attacks against Israel, given that it was severely degraded during the Israel-Lebanon conflict in late 2024.[10]

Qassem acknowledged that Hezbollah suffered a 45% casualty rate during the Israeli campaign in Lebanon, which almost certainly rendered Hezbollah combat ineffective. Hezbollah suffered 12.5% killed in action from its total force during the war. Qassem noted that Israel killed 5,000 Hezbollah fighters and wounded 13,000 others, which marks the first time that Hezbollah has provided an official death toll.[11] Hezbollah had 40,000 total fighters before the war, according to US intelligence, which means that 32.5% of its total force was wounded and 12.5% of its total force was killed.[12] Qassem said that Hezbollah still has fighters who are ready to make “the harshest sacrifices” if needed.[13] The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) has killed nearly all of the top Hezbollah commanders, degraded the Radwan Force, destroyed kilometers of offensive tunnels, and demonstrated the Israeli ability to rapidly inflict massive casualties upon Hezbollah at relatively little cost.[14]

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian appointed Supreme Leader Adviser Ali Larijani as Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) secretary.[15] **Larijani's appointment comes as moderate and pragmatic hardline elements in the Iranian regime have sought to play a more influential role in Iran's security policy following the Israel-Iran War.** Larijani is replacing Ali Akbar Ahmadian, who had served as SNSC secretary since May 2023.[16] Ahmadian will reportedly assume a new, unspecified deputy position within the government.[17] Some Iranian media outlets and social media users have speculated in recent weeks that the regime would soon appoint Larijani as SNSC secretary and have praised Larijani as an effective, trusted, and moderate leader.[18] These characterizations of Larijani as a “moderate” official are consistent with reports that Larijani tried to contact Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei during the Israel-Iran War to advocate for a ceasefire.[19] Larijani previously served as SNSC secretary from 2005 to 2007 before he resigned due to disagreements with hardliner former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.[20] Larijani was the speaker of the parliament from 2008 and 2020 and oversaw the passage of the 2015 nuclear deal, also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).[21] Larijani repeatedly expressed his support for the deal and defended it against hardliners in parliament.[22] Media affiliated with former SNSC Secretary Ali Shamkhani stated on August 5 that Larijani’s appointment will impact Iran’s engagement with the West.[23]

Larijani has played an important role in developing Iran's relations with Russia, China, and the Axis of Resistance in addition to engaging in diplomacy with the West. Western media reported in January 2025 that Larijani had made secret trips to Russia to gain Russian assistance on Iran’s nuclear program.[24] Larijani also discussed the Iranian nuclear program with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow on July 20.[25] Larijani has also held a long-standing role overseeing the Iranian strategic partnership with China, including the 25-year cooperation agreement signed in 2021.[26] Larijani met with senior Lebanese officials in Beirut following the Israel-Hezbollah conflict to reinforce Iran’s regional stance.[27] Some Iranian media have characterized Larijani as an effective communicator and diplomat.[28]

Larijani's appointment comes amid a broader effort to restructure and reshape Iran's decision-making apparatus, likely in order to prepare for potential future conflicts.

This restructuring effort appears to be led by moderate and pragmatic hardline elements within the regime. The SNSC established a "Defense Council" on August 3 to streamline decision-making during wartime.[29] An outlet affiliated with pragmatic hardliner Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf suggested that moderate Iranian President Pezeshkian will appoint Ghalibaf as the Defense Council secretary.[30] A political analyst close to the regime similarly suggested that Ghalibaf had a significant role in establishing the Defense Council.[31] CTP-ISW previously assessed that the establishment of this body, which will operate under the SNSC, likely reflects Iranian leaders' recognition of systemic organizational and operational failures during the Israel-Iran War.[32] Other Iranian media outlets have recently called on the Iranian regime to alter its internal and external strategy following the war.[33] Media affiliated with former SNSC Secretary Ali Shamkhani published an op-ed on July 29 that urged Iran to "rearrange the country's decision-making system" to adapt to evolving threats.[34]

Iran has sought Russian support for its nuclear weapons program.[35] The *Financial Times* reported on August 4 that four Iranian nuclear scientists and an Iranian counterintelligence officer traveled to Moscow in August 2024 to visit Russian research institutes specializing in dual-use technologies that can be used in nuclear weapons development.[36] These nuclear scientists were affiliated with the Iranian Defense and Armed Forces Logistics Ministry (MODAFL)'s Organization of Defensive Innovation and Research (SPND), which played a leading role in the Iranian nuclear weapons research program before 2003.[37] MODAFL reportedly requested one of the scientists to use his technology consulting firm, likely as a guise, to lead an Iranian delegation to Moscow.[38] One of the other scientists runs a US-sanctioned company that procures dual-use technology for nuclear weapons development for SPND.[39] The other two scientists specialize in radiation testing and neutron generators that trigger nuclear explosions.[40]

The delegation visited two research facilities run by a Russian scientist with nuclear weapons testing expertise, specifically in vacuum technology for implosion mechanisms.[41] Such visits would reportedly require Russian intelligence approval.[42] The United States sanctioned an SPND-affiliated company, Ideal Vacuum, in May for trying to "procure from foreign suppliers and indigenously fabricate equipment that could be applicable in nuclear weapons research and development." [43] One of the nuclear scientists tried to purchase three nuclear isotopes, including tritium, which increases the yield of nuclear warheads, from a Russian nuclear isotope supplier in May 2024.[44] The *Financial Times* was unable to confirm if the scientist completed the sale of these isotopes. Iran has historically pursued nuclear cooperation with Russia through various diplomatic channels, likely including the Russo-Iranian Strategic Comprehensive Agreement signed in January.[45] Newly-appointed SNSC Secretary and Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's senior advisor Ali Larijani attempted to muster up support for the Iranian nuclear program in several covert meetings with Russian officials in 2025.[46]

Recent Islamic State (IS) propaganda has attempted to exploit recent fighting between Druze and Sunni Bedouin fighters to recruit new fighters from hardline elements of Shara's coalition. The effort may also seek to recruit local Sunni Bedouin in Suwayda Province. IS released an editorial on July 31 that criticized the Syrian government and Shara's actions during the intercommunal violence in Suwayda Province in mid to late July.[47] IS accused Shara of dragging Sunni Bedouin fighters into "his political game and then leaving them alone" to face "siege, betrayal,

and displacement” during the Suwayda violence.[48] IS said that Shara “suddenly played the role of the deliverer of the Druze.”[49] IS’s hardline ideology maintains that the Druze are apostates who should be killed.[50] IS similarly criticized Syrian government forces for assisting the United States in a raid targeting an ISIS cell in al Bab, Aleppo Province, on July 25.[51] IS called on “confused jihadists” who do not believe that Shara’s cooperation with the United States is “clear apostasy and support for the ‘Zio-Crusader’.”[52] These arguments very likely seek to generate recruits among the hardline Salafi-jihadists in Shara’s orbit who similarly believe that the Druze are apostates.

IS likely aims to exploit hardliners’ anger over these recent events and stoke further disillusionment among IS sympathizers. A BBC Salafi-jihadi analyst reported on August 4 that Islamist hardliners are dissatisfied with Shara’s failure to take a strong stand against the Druze and support Sunni Bedouin tribes in Suwayda.[53] IS has frequently referenced ISIS’s 2018 violence against the Druze in Suwayda to appeal to hardliners and portray itself as the only force willing to act decisively against the Druze.[54] Several ISIS-linked social media accounts also claimed that ISIS supporters were active in Suwayda Province and participated in the conflict “discreetly and independently” alongside Sunni Bedouin tribes.[55] There has been no definitive proof that ISIS took part in attacks on the Druze in any organized manner, which suggests that these posts are likely an attempt to create the illusion that ISIS fighters support the Bedouin tribes and that Shara does not. The BBC analyst also reported that IS is exploiting Islamist and jihadist anger over the Syrian government forces cooperating with the US on the al Bab raid.[56] Prominent hardline clerics began engaging in theological debates regarding whether Shara and his forces had committed an act of disbelief or apostasy by “cooperating” with the “enemies of Islam.”[57] IS has reportedly recently shown renewed optimism about the group’s appeal and recruitment potential in Syria.[58]

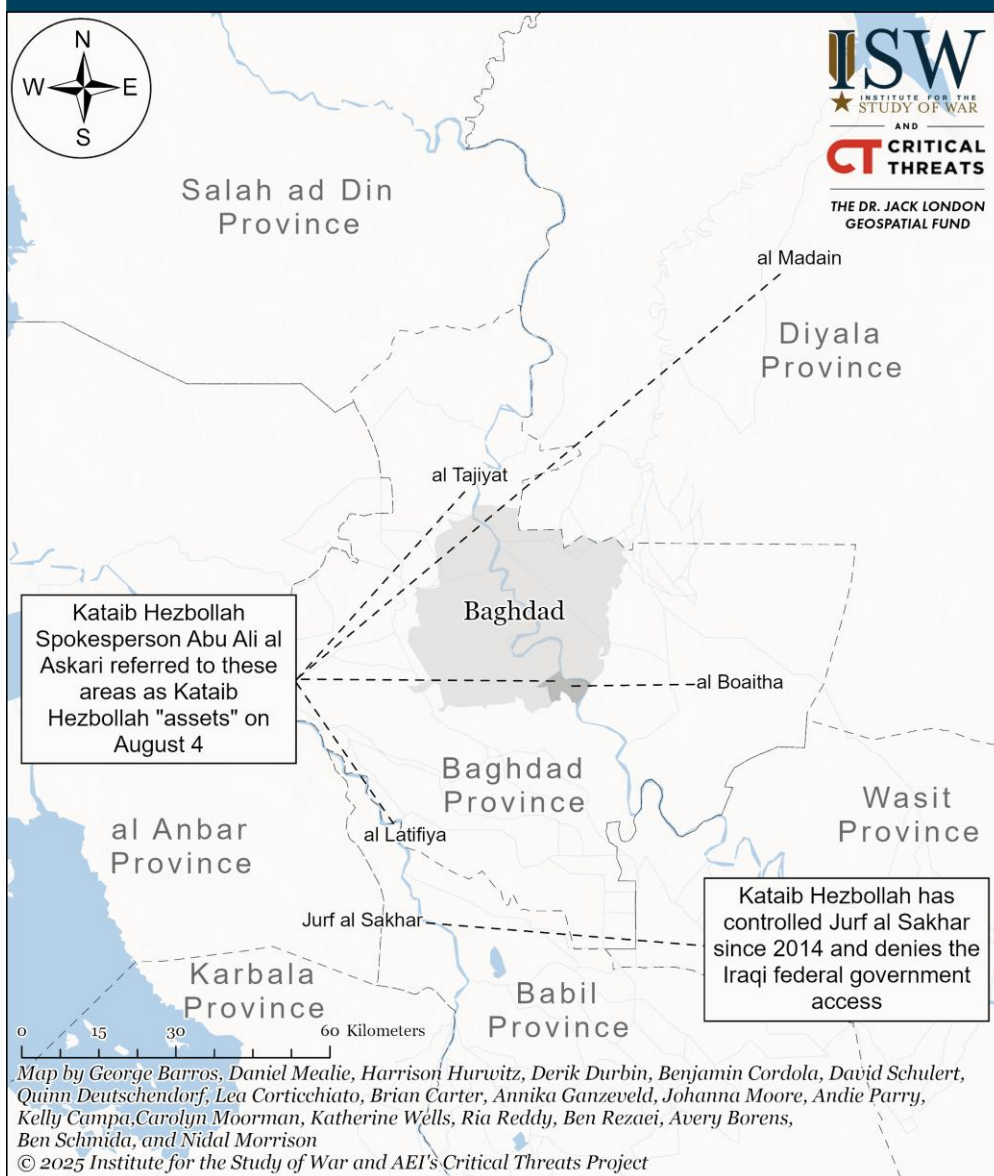
The IS propaganda effort will also likely contribute to increased distrust in southwestern Syria, especially if ISIS conducts any attacks targeting the Druze. The ISIS claims that it participated in the recent fighting will give more credence to Druze militia claims that the Sunni Bedouin sought to exterminate Druze communities, regardless of whether that was the actual intent.[59] ISIS has long sought to wipe out groups it deems apostates, and the IS propaganda will enable some Druze leaders to mobilize their communities with greater ease.[60] Increased Druze mobilization could lead to further fighting and further Sunni Bedouin communal mobilization, especially if ISIS does become more involved. A course of action that results in more Sunni Bedouin and Druze mobilization and fighting would create significant recruitment opportunities for ISIS. IS and its affiliates, including ISIS, have long sought to create intercommunal strife in target areas in order to exploit the ensuing chaos.[61]

Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Hezbollah offered on August 4 to cede control of unspecified areas within the Baghdad Belts to the Iranian-backed Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF).[62] The Baghdad Belts are residential, industrial, and agricultural areas that encircle Baghdad.[63] Kataib Hezbollah Spokesperson Abu Ali al Askari did not explicitly identify the areas that Kataib Hezbollah was willing to cede but referred to al Latifiya, al Buaitha, al Madain, and al Tajiya as areas with a Kataib Hezbollah presence.[64] It is similarly unclear which PMF unit Askari is offering control of these areas to. The specific PMF units that the Iraqi government gave control of the areas to would matter because Kataib Hezbollah commands the 45th and 46th PMF brigades. A

hypothetical decision that gave control of these areas to these PMF brigades would represent no change, for example.[65]

Askari said that Kataib Hezbollah spreads "security, justice, and peaceful coexistence among sects" in areas under its control, which is false.[66] Kataib Hezbollah and other militias committed acts of sectarian cleansing in Jurf al Sakhr, south of Baghdad, during the anti-ISIS fight. Kataib Hezbollah has used areas under its control for assassinations, rocket attacks, weapons storage, and extortion of local businesses.[67] Askari's statement comes after several Kataib Hezbollah members engaged Iraqi Federal Police officers in Dora, Baghdad, on July 27 and killed one civilian and a Federal Police officer.[68] Kataib Hezbollah and other Iranian-backed Iraqi actors have tried to distance themselves from this incident, which occurred amid policy discussions over restricting arms to the Iraqi state and dissolving the PMF. Askari's statement probably aims to present Kataib Hezbollah as a responsible actor that is a net positive in order to undermine efforts to disarm the militias.

Areas with Significant Kataib Hezbollah (KH) Presence in Iraq, According to KH Spokesman Abu Ali al Askari

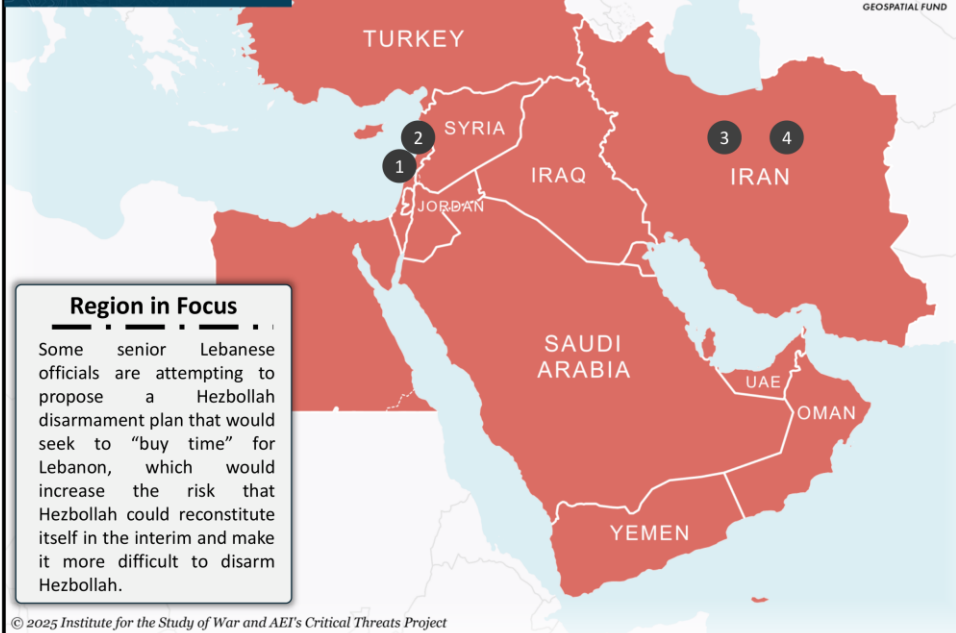


Askari also called Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al Sudani an ineffective leader on August 4.[69] He described Sudani as a "manager" instead of a leader. He called on the Shia Coordination Framework to assume their "historical responsibilities," likely in reference to the removal of US forces from Iraq and other policy concerns that Askari raised in his statement.[70] The Shia Coordination Framework is a loose coalition of Shia political parties, some of which Iran backs. Kataib Hezbollah's Haqq Movement is a member of the Shia Coordination Framework. Askari's comments regarding Sudani could reflect increasing disillusionment among elements of the Shia Coordination Framework with Sudani ahead of the November 2025 Iraqi parliamentary elections.

Iran Update

August 5, 2025

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- 1 **LEBANON.** Some senior Lebanese officials are attempting to propose a Hezbollah disarmament plan that would seek to “buy time” for Lebanon, which would increase the risk that Hezbollah could reconstitute itself in the interim and make it more difficult to disarm Hezbollah.
- 2 **LEBANON.** Hezbollah Secretary General Naim Qassem threatened Israel directly for the first time in months during his televised speech on August 5. Qassem acknowledged that Hezbollah suffered a 45% casualty rate during the Israeli campaign in Lebanon, which almost certainly rendered Hezbollah combat ineffective.
- 3 **IRAN.** Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian appointed Supreme Leader Adviser Ali Larijani to Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) secretary. Larijani's appointment comes as moderate and pragmatic hardline elements in the Iranian regime have sought to play a more influential role in Iran's security policy following the Israel-Iran War.
- 4 **IRAN.** Iran has sought Russian support for its nuclear weapons program. The *Financial Times* reported on August 4 that four Iranian nuclear scientists and an Iranian counterintelligence officer traveled to Moscow in August 2024 to visit Russian research institutes specializing technologies that can be used in nuclear weapons development.

Key Takeaways

- **Lebanese Hezbollah Disarmament:** Some senior Lebanese officials are attempting to propose a Hezbollah disarmament plan that would seek to “buy time” for Lebanon, which would increase the risk that Hezbollah could reconstitute itself in the interim and make it more difficult to disarm Hezbollah.
- **Israel-Hezbollah:** Hezbollah Secretary General Naim Qassem threatened Israel directly for the first time in months during his televised speech on August 5. Qassem acknowledged that Hezbollah suffered a 45% casualty rate during the Israeli campaign in Lebanon, which almost

certainly rendered Hezbollah combat ineffective. Hezbollah suffered 12.5% killed in action from its total force during the war.

- **Iranian Defense Apparatus:** Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian appointed Supreme Leader Adviser Ali Larijani to Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) secretary. Larijani's appointment comes as moderate and pragmatic hardline elements in the Iranian regime have sought to play a more influential role in Iran's security policy following the Israel-Iran War.
- **Iranian Nuclear Program:** Iran has sought Russian support for its nuclear weapons program. The *Financial Times* reported on August 4 that four Iranian nuclear scientists and an Iranian counterintelligence officer traveled to Moscow in August 2024 to visit Russian research institutes specializing in dual-use technologies that can be used in nuclear weapons development.
- **Iraq:** Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Hezbollah offered on August 4 to cede control of unspecified areas within the Baghdad Belts to the Iranian-backed Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF). It is unclear which PMF unit Kataib Hezbollah is offering control of these areas to. Kataib Hezbollah commands the 45th and 46th PMF brigades. Kataib Hezbollah also called Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al Sudani an ineffective leader, which could reflect increasing disillusionment among elements of the Shia Coordination Framework with Sudani ahead of the November 2025 Iraqi parliamentary elections.
- **ISIS in Syria:** Recent Islamic State (IS) propaganda has attempted to exploit recent fighting between Druze and Sunni Bedouin fighters to recruit new fighters from hardline elements of Shara's coalition. IS released an editorial on July 31 that criticized the Syrian government and Shara's actions during the intercommunal violence in Suwayda Province in mid to late July. IS likely aims to exploit hardliners' anger over these recent events and stoke further disillusionment among sympathizers.

Iran

Chinese imports of Iranian crude oil decreased by 0.4 million barrels per day (bpd) from June to July, according to oil market intelligence firm Kpler.[71] Iranian crude oil exports to Chinese teapot refineries decreased from 1.7 million bpd to 1.3 million bpd in July.[72] CTP-ISW previously reported that Iran increased crude oil exports to China from 1.7 million bpd in June to 1.8 million bpd in the first half of July.[73] This increase probably occurred because Iran loaded a larger-than-normal amount of oil into floating storage vessels prior to the Israel-Iran War in early June to avoid the destruction of oil in onshore facilities, according to Vortexa.[74] A Kpler analyst assessed that the Iranian crude oil export rate to China likely fell in the second half of July because demand from Chinese teapot refineries fell as they reached their oil quota in June with the surplus from the July supply.[75]

Iraq

See topline section.

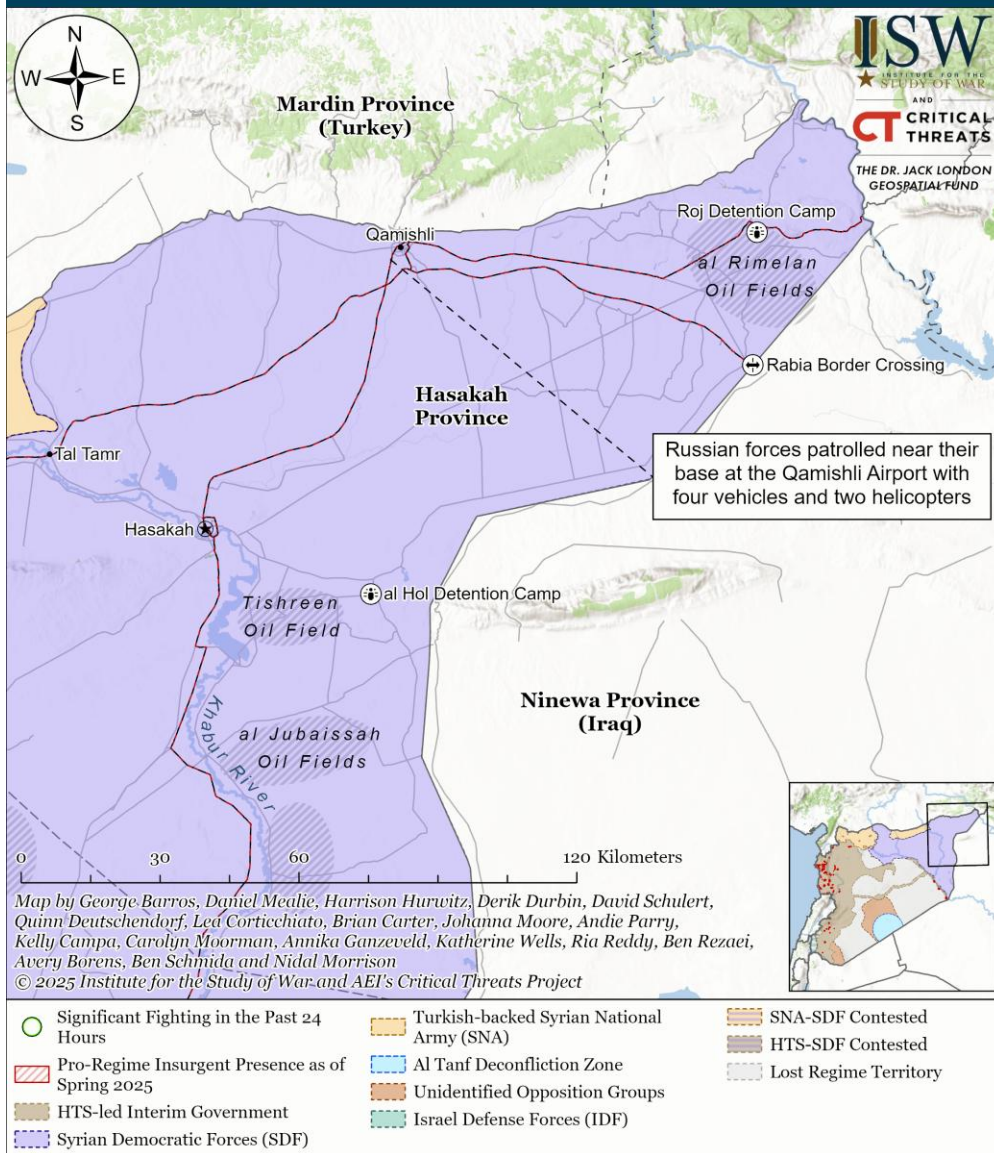
Syria

Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) commander Mazloum Abdi told Kurdish media on August 5 that the SDF seeks to conduct combined counter-ISIS operations with the United States and the Syrian transitional government.[76] Abdi stated that the US-led International Coalition's withdrawal from some positions in northeast Syria has not impacted the SDF's counter-ISIS operations or mission.[77] Abdi emphasized that the Syrian transitional government is obligated to join the counter-ISIS mission, given the Syrian government's relationship with the United States.[78] Syrian transitional government forces recently assisted a US ground raid targeting an ISIS cell in al Bab, Aleppo Province, on July 25.[79] The United States has previously shared intelligence with the Syrian transitional government--and before the fall of Assad, shared intelligence with Ahmed al Shara's Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS) organization--to target ISIS and Hurras al Din, a Salafi-jihadi militant group allied to al Qaeda that threatened HTS.[80] Abdi stated that the SDF has also begun sharing counter-ISIS tactics and experience with the transitional government as part of this effort.[81] The SDF, Syrian transitional government, France, and the United States are scheduled to meet in Paris soon to negotiate the integration of the SDF into the Syrian Ministry of Defense (MoD).[82]

Russian forces patrolled near their base at the Qamishli Airport in Hasakah Province with four vehicles and two helicopters on August 4 for the first time since the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024.[83] The SDF currently controls the town of Qamishli.[84] Russian forces reportedly prevented the SDF from participating in the patrol.[85] Russian forces reestablished their presence at the Qamishli Airport in March when they relocated troops and equipment from Hmeimim Airbase via cargo flights.[86] Russian transfers of troops and equipment to Qamishli intensified between April and June.[87] Russia upgraded the base's infrastructure, security, and defense capabilities in June.[88] Russian activity in Qamishli follows recent meetings between senior Syrian and Russian officials in Moscow on July 31 to negotiate Russian basing in Syria.[89]

Assessed Control of Terrain around Hasakah

August 5, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



Arabian Peninsula

The Houthis launched a ballistic missile targeting Ben Gurion Airport on August 4.[90]

The Israeli Air Force intercepted a Houthi missile before it crossed into Israeli territory on August 4.[91] The Houthis have launched hundreds of drones and ballistic missiles targeting Israel since the Houthis began their campaign to enforce an economic blockade on Israel in October 2023.[92]

Palestinian Territories and Lebanon

See topline section.



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Iran Update



Avery Borens, Katherine Wells, Ben Schmida, Carolyn Moorman, Nidal Morrison, Ria Reddy, Kelly Campa, Parker Hempel, Ali Fishman, Avery Bernstein, Joe Clark, and Annika Ganzeveld

August 6, 2025 Information Cutoff: 2:00 PM ET

The Lebanese Council of Ministers took an early step on August 5 to attempt to disarm Hezbollah. Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam announced on August 5 that the Lebanese Council of Ministers tasked the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) with creating a plan to establish a state monopoly on arms across Lebanon by the end of 2025.[1] The Lebanese Council of Ministers is Lebanon's executive body that sets and implements Lebanese government policy.[2] This plan would require Hezbollah to disarm. The LAF will submit the plan to the Council of Ministers by August 31 for the council to discuss and approve.[3] It is unclear whether this review period will provide opportunities for Hezbollah and its allies to push back against and postpone the approval of the proposed plan. Lebanese Foreign Minister Youssef Rajai posted on X on August 6 that the Lebanese government's decision to establish a state monopoly on arms is final and that there will be "no turning back." [4]

Hezbollah released a statement on August 6 that condemned the council's decision and deemed it a "major sin." [5] Hezbollah asserted that the decision is "a clear violation" of the Lebanese government's February 2025 ministerial statement, which states that the Lebanese government is committed to the 1989 Taif Agreement and adopting a domestic national defense strategy.[6] Hezbollah has consistently called for the implementation of the 1989 Taif Agreement, which calls for the disarmament of all Lebanese militias except Hezbollah.[7] Hezbollah Secretary General Naim Qassem has repeatedly called on the Lebanese government and Hezbollah to coordinate a national defense strategy.[8] Hezbollah noted in its August 6 statement that it is open to dialogue and is prepared to discuss a strategy with the government, but not until Israel concludes its operations in Lebanon.[9] The Amal Movement, which is a close ally of Hezbollah, released a similar statement on August 5 condemning the council's decision.[10]

Hezbollah's inability to delay or veto the council's decision reflects Hezbollah's relative loss of political leverage within the Lebanese government. Several Hezbollah and allied Amal Movement ministers symbolically walked out of the council session on August 5, but neither group was able to prevent the council from tasking the LAF to establish a state monopoly on arms.[11] The council was rarely able to pass legislation without Hezbollah's approval between 2008 and 2019, given that Hezbollah held enough seats to have de facto veto power.[12] Hezbollah and the Amal Movement currently only hold five seats in the Council of Ministers, which is insufficient to veto a council decision.[13] Hezbollah has recently struggled to maintain its support base in the Lebanese government and Lebanese society, which has likely contributed to its waning political leverage. Notable Hezbollah allies have recently shifted their positions and expressed support for the state's monopoly on arms.[14]

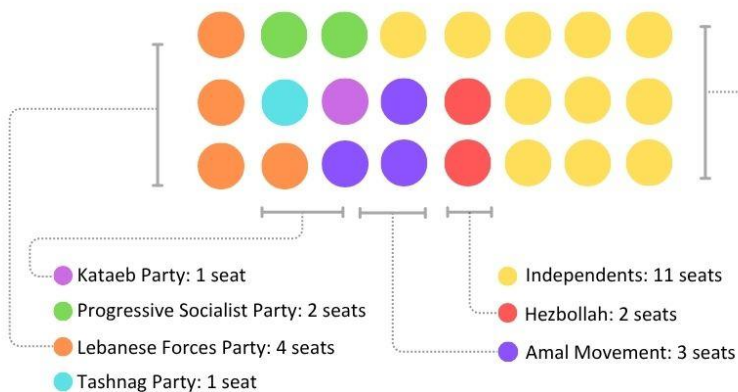
Lebanese media reported on July 28 that Lebanese Parliament Speaker and long-time Hezbollah ally Nabih Berri is “in agreement” with Lebanese President Joseph Aoun and Prime Minister Nawaf Salam on the state’s “approach toward the weapons file.”[15] The Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) and the Marada Movement, which are two Lebanese political parties that have historically supported Hezbollah’s retention of weapons, have also publicly declared their support for the state’s monopoly on arms.[16]



The Lebanese Council of Ministers

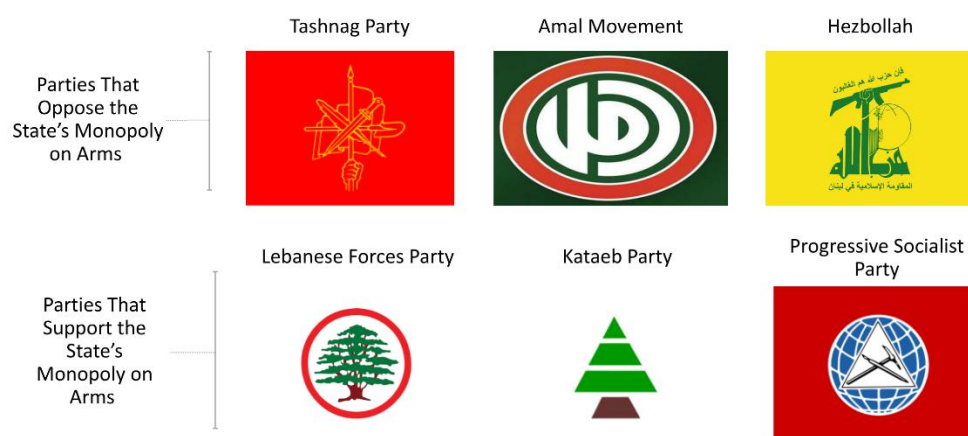
The 24-seat Council of Ministers is Lebanon’s executive body that sets and implements Lebanese government policy. Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam heads the council.

Prime Minister Nawaf Salam appointed the 11 independent ministers.



Note: This information is based on open-source reports.

The Positions of Lebanese Political Parties on the State's Monopoly on Arms



Note: This graphic represents political parties that have seats in the Council of Ministers. This information is based on open-source reports.

Hezbollah's recent political losses and declining political leverage are unlikely to prevent Hezbollah from attempting to block efforts by the state to disarm it, however. Hezbollah has long used its military capabilities and political influence within other state institutions to sway the Lebanese government's decision-making.[17] Hezbollah has continued to reject calls to disarm, which suggests that it will oppose and challenge any LAF plan to establish a state monopoly on arms.[18]

Iranian media outlet Nour News suggested on August 6 that Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian instructed newly appointed Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Ali Larijani to adopt a comprehensive security approach to counter hybrid threats. Nour News, which is affiliated with former SNSC Secretary and Supreme Leader Adviser Ali Shamkhani, suggested on August 6 that Pezeshkian instructed Larijani to "monitor and prioritize emerging and technological threats" and "redefine security concepts with a people-based approach." Nour News stated that the "emerging" threats that Iran faces include cyberattacks, the spread of misinformation and disinformation exacerbated by artificial intelligence, international sanctions, climate-induced migration, and the "collapse of social capital and public trust." [19] These threats are consistent with the regime's understanding of hybrid warfare, which the regime defines as the use of all domains of power—including information, electronic, cultural, social, and military operations—by hostile actors to destabilize Iran. Nour News previously proposed on July 29 the creation of a "Strategic Command Center" to accelerate the Iranian regime's responses to hybrid threats in wartime.[20]

Pezeshkian's emphasis on a "people-based" security approach and Nour News's call for increasing social capital and public trust are consistent with recent calls by moderate and pragmatic regime officials to increase societal resilience and resolve disputes between the regime and the Iranian people. Shamkhani

called on the regime to resolve “disputes” with the Iranian population through a “process of understanding” in an interview on June 28.[21] Supreme Leader International Affairs Adviser Ali Akbar Velayati separately stated on July 21 that preserving national cohesion may require “revising social policies” and prioritizing public satisfaction.[22] Pezeshkian recently noted during a meeting with reformists on July 22 that the regime must engage in dialogue, not confrontation, to solve its problems.[23]

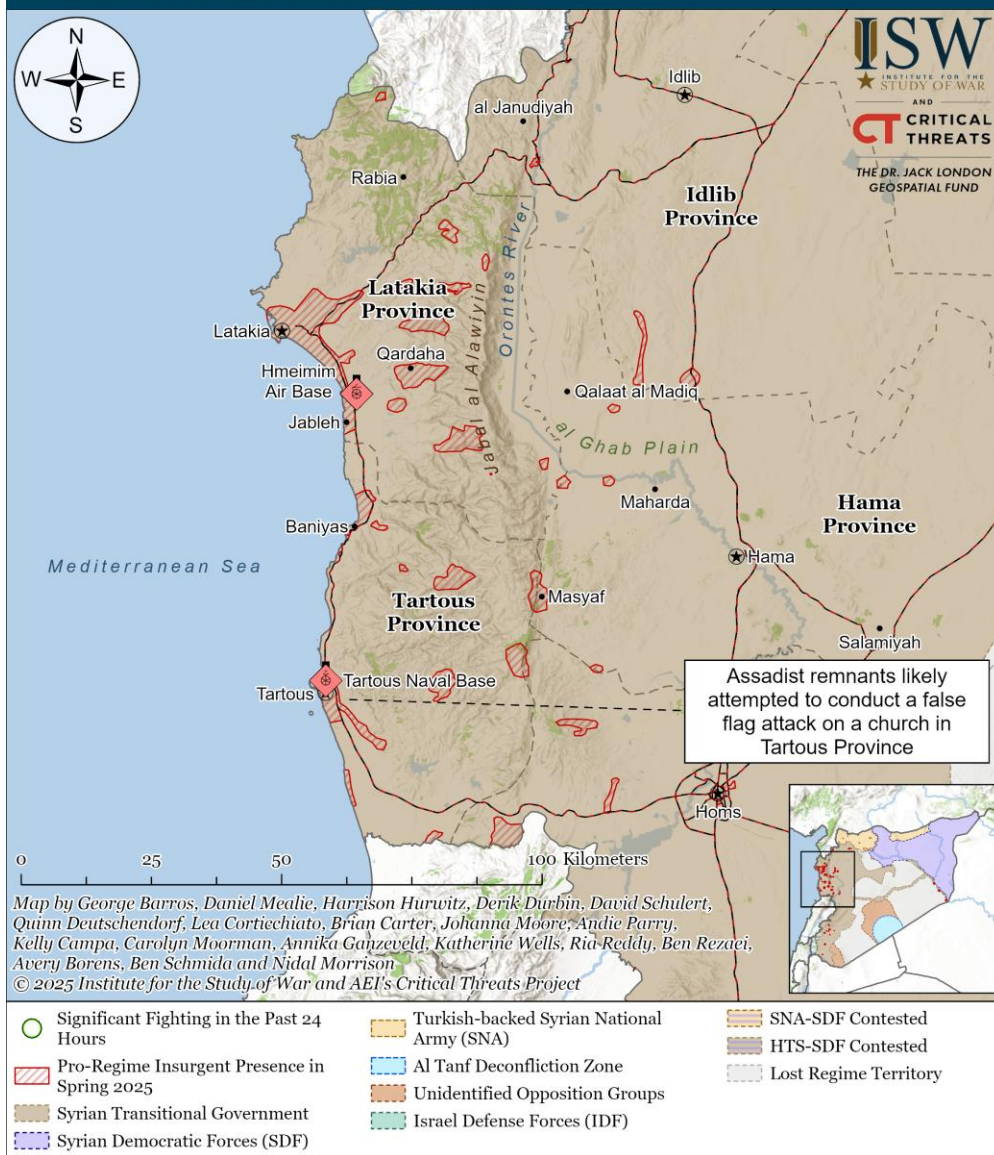
Some regime officials welcomed Larijani’s appointment as a necessary shift for Iranian national security. Velayati stated on X on August 5 that Larijani’s appointment demonstrates the regime’s “foresight” and described his appointment as an “effective step.”[24] Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi separately expressed his willingness to cooperate with Larijani.[25] Defense and Armed Forces Logistics Minister Brigadier General Aziz Nasir Zadeh praised Larijani as a seasoned politician who will prove transformative in his new role.

Ultrahardliners criticized Larijani’s appointment as SNSC secretary, which likely reflects their broader dissatisfaction with the recent resurgence of moderates and pragmatists in the Iranian political sphere. Ultrahardline Paydari Front leader and Supreme Leader Representative to the SNSC, Saeed Jalili, criticized supporters of negotiations with the United States on August 6.[26] Larijani defended Iran’s agreement to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with the United States against hardliners’ criticism while serving as parliament speaker in 2015.[27] Larijani also reportedly tried to contact Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei during the Israel-Iran War to advocate for “opening talks” with the United States.[28] A Larijani-affiliated outlet characterized Jalili’s criticism as resentment over his “diminished role” in the SNSC, highlighting the factional tensions surrounding Larijani’s appointment.[29] Jalili’s adviser, Amir Hossein Sabeti, also expressed pessimism about Larijani’s appointment on August 6, stating that Larijani’s approach to solving problems is “not fundamentally different” from those of moderate President Masoud Pezeshkian and former reformist President Hassan Rouhani.[30]

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian appointed former Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Ali Akbar Ahmadian as the President’s Special Representative and Head of the Headquarters for National and Strategic Projects Development.[31] Pezeshkian stated that the new headquarters led by Ahmadian will help Iran accomplish its strategic goals and remove obstacles to domestic and foreign investors, including by mobilizing the Iranian public and Iranian intellectuals.[32] Pezeshkian said that Ahmadian’s role as the head of the “Progressive People’s Organization” will enable him to pursue these objectives. Ahmadian reportedly established the Progressive People’s Organization when he led the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Strategic Center between 2007 and 2023.[33] The organization was established to implement national projects outlined in the Iranian government’s seventh five-year development plan.[34]

Assessed Control of Terrain in Western Syria

August 6, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST

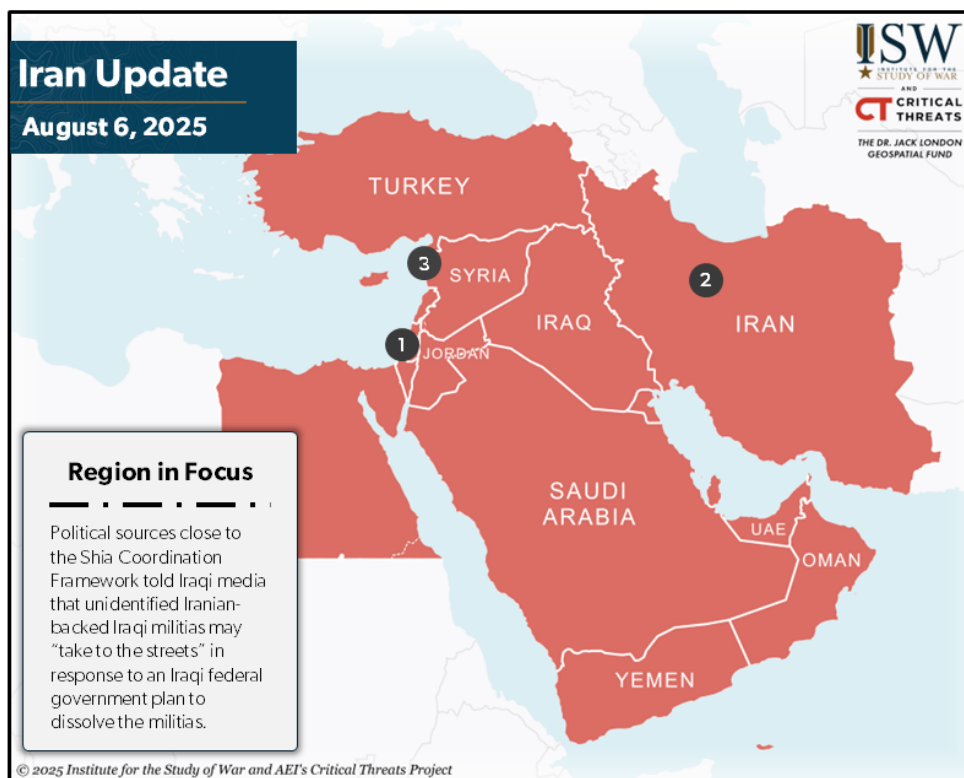


Assadist remnants likely attempted to conduct a false flag attack on a church in Tartous Province on August 6 to heighten fears in the local community and incite sectarian tensions in coastal Syria. The Syrian government announced on August 6 that the General Security Service (GSS) thwarted an attempt by two Assadist remnants to detonate a large improvised explosive device (IED) at the Mar Elias Maronite Church in al Khreibat, east of Tartous City.[35] The GSS also seized leaflets with threatening sectarian messages, a black flag commonly affiliated with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), and weapons in the attackers' vehicle.[36]

The Assadist remnants likely intended to frame an attack on the church as an ISIS attack to incite sectarian strife. It is unlikely that the perpetrators were members of ISIS, despite the presence of an ISIS flag in their vehicle, given that the attackers were reportedly Alawite and ISIS has not historically sustained a presence in coastal Syria.[37] Unknown actors recently left threatening leaflets at a church

in Tartous on July 6 that claimed to be from ISIS-aligned Salafi-jihadi group Saraya Ansar al Sunnah.[38] Saraya Ansar al Sunnah denied placing the leaflets at the church, and local priests attributed the leaflets to Assadist remnants.[39]

The Assad regime often conducted false flag operations before it was overthrown in December 2024 to try to portray the Syrian opposition as jihadists.[40] The two regime remnants may have sought to employ a similar tactic to try to heighten fears in the local community, increase recruitment, and spread anti-government sentiment. Pro-Alawite insurgents, many of whom support the former regime, have participated in a low-level insurgency since the fall of the Assad regime to try to destabilize the Syrian transitional government.[41] The attempted attack resembles a recent ISIS-linked suicide bombing in a church in Damascus in June 2025 that instilled considerable fear in the Christian community.[42] Many prominent Syrian Christians criticized the transitional government's response to the attack.[43]



- 1 **BEIRUT.** The Lebanese Council of Ministers tasked the LAF with creating a plan to establish a state monopoly on arms across Lebanon by the end of 2025, which is an early step to attempt to disarm Hezbollah. Hezbollah's inability to delay or veto the council's decision reflects Hezbollah's relative loss of political leverage within the Lebanese government.
- 2 **TEHRAN.** Iranian media outlet Nour News suggested on August 6 that Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian instructed newly appointed Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Ali Larijani to adopt a comprehensive security approach to counter hybrid threats.
- 3 **COASTAL SYRIA.** Assadist remnants likely intended to frame a planned attack on a church in Tartous Province on ISIS in order to heighten fears in the local community and incite sectarian tensions in coastal Syria. It is unlikely that the perpetrators were members of ISIS, given that the attackers were reportedly Alawite and that the Assad regime has historically used false flag operations to generate sectarian tensions.

Key Takeaways

- **Hezbollah Disarmament:** The Lebanese Council of Ministers tasked the LAF with creating a plan to establish a state monopoly on arms across Lebanon by the end of 2025, which is an early step to attempt to disarm Hezbollah. Hezbollah's inability to delay or veto the council's decision reflects Hezbollah's relative loss of political leverage within the Lebanese government.
- **Iranian Defense Apparatus:** Iranian media outlet Nour News suggested on August 6 that Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian instructed newly appointed Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Ali Larijani to adopt a comprehensive security approach to counter hybrid threats.

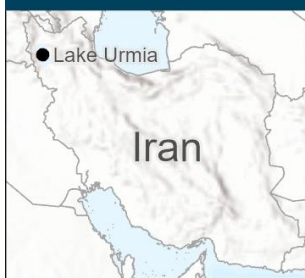
- **Security in Syria:** Assadist remnants likely intended to frame a planned attack on a church in Tartous Province on ISIS in order to heighten fears in the local community and incite sectarian tensions in coastal Syria. It is unlikely that the perpetrators were members of ISIS, given that the attackers were reportedly Alawite and that the Assad regime has historically used false flag operations to generate sectarian tensions.

Iran

Iran continues to contend with a severe water and energy crisis. Iran's Water Resources Management Company reported on August 3 that Iran's total water reserves have decreased by 26 percent in the last year.[44] The CEO of the Tehran Provincial Water and Wastewater Company said on August 4 that the dams that supply water to Tehran Province are only 12 percent full and urged Iranians to decrease their water consumption.[45] An official from Iran's Environmental Protection Organization told reporters on August 5 that Lake Urmia's water volume decreased from two billion cubic meters in August 2024 to half a billion cubic meters in August 2025, which marks Lake Urmia's lowest ever recorded water volume.[46] Lake Urmia, which is in northwestern Iran, was once the largest lake in the Middle East before it started to dry up.[47] The CEO of Iran's Electricity Network Management Company separately announced on August 4 that Iranians' electricity consumption has surpassed 77,000 megawatts.[48] Iran has a maximum production capacity of 62,000 megawatts.[49] The Iranian Energy Ministry has implemented daily electricity blackouts in cities across Iran for four hours to reduce energy consumption.[50] Iran closed public offices, government buildings, and banks in over 20 provinces on August 6 to reduce water and energy consumption amid a severe heatwave.[51]

It is unlikely that the regime will be able to improve the water and energy shortages without meaningfully addressing underlying issues that exacerbate these shortages, such as poor infrastructure and mismanagement. A Tehran City Council member stated on August 5 that nearly 30 percent of Tehran's water is wasted due to outdated infrastructure.[52] Iranian state media reported on August 5 that agriculture wastes 24 billion cubic meters of water per year.[53] State media reported on August 4 that Iranian parliamentarians submitted a motion to impeach Energy Minister Abbas Aliabadi for mismanaging water resources and failing to address structural corruption within the Energy Ministry.[54]

Drought at Lake Urmia, Iran August 7, 2024



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Imagery Courtesy of Planet Labs PBC

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Iranian authorities executed Iranian nuclear scientist Rouzbeh Vadi on August 6 for reportedly providing Israel with information about another nuclear scientist whom Israel killed during the 12-day Israel-Iran War.[55] Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC)-affiliated media claimed that Israel recruited Vadi online and that Vadi met with Mossad officers in Vienna five times.[56] Vadi reportedly received instructions to leak classified technical information and identify nuclear scientists in exchange for money.[57] Israel killed at least 14 nuclear scientists during the war.[58] Vadi's execution reflects the Iranian regime's ongoing concerns about Israeli infiltration.[59]

Iraq

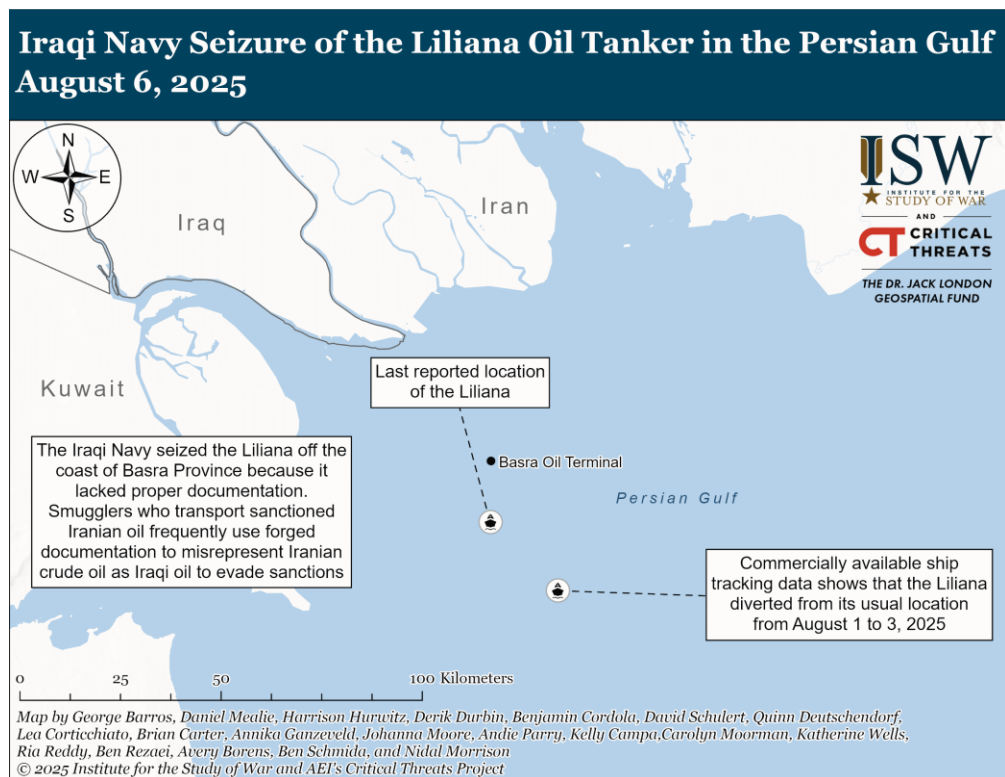
Political sources close to the Shia Coordination Framework told Iraqi media on August 6 that unidentified Iranian-backed Iraqi militias may “take to the streets” in response to an Iraqi federal government plan to dissolve the militias.[60] The Shia Coordination Framework is a loose coalition of Shia political parties, some of which have armed wings. Unidentified “informed sources” stated that the Iraqi federal government intends to soon implement a 2022 plan to dissolve Iranian-backed militias.[61] CTP-ISW cannot verify the details of this reported plan. A Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP)-affiliated journalist reported on July 20 that the Iraqi government drafted a new plan to dissolve the militias, integrate militia members into the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), and offer militia leaders key leadership positions in the next Iraqi cabinet.[62] The report about Iranian-backed Iraqi militias threatening to organize protests comes amid ongoing Iraqi discussions regarding the dissolution of the Iranian-backed Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), which includes many Iranian-backed Iraqi militias.

Political sources close to the Shia Coordination Framework also told Iraqi media on August 6 that some Iranian-backed Iraqi militias are “almost at odds” with the Shia Coordination Framework.[63] This report likely refers to the disillusionment of some Iranian-backed Iraqi militias toward elements of the Shia Coordination Framework, rather than toward all of the parties that comprise the framework. This report comes after Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Hezbollah Spokesperson Abu Ali al Askari implicitly criticized Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani and called on the Shia Coordination Framework to assume its “historical responsibilities.” These responsibilities likely include efforts to remove US forces from Iraq, among other policy issues.[64] Sudani recently delayed a vote on a law from the parliamentary agenda that likely would have increased Iran's influence in the Iraqi political and security spheres by formalizing the structure and responsibilities of the PMF.[65] Iranian-backed Iraqi militias may also oppose other members of the Shia Coordination Framework. National Wisdom Movement head Ammar al Hakim and former Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al Abadi are both members of the framework despite attempting to form a political party in 2020 that would have opposed Iranian-backed groups.[66] The Iranian-backed Badr Organization recently announced that it will run independently in the November 2025 parliamentary elections, which may reflect current divisions in the Shia Coordination Framework.[67]

The Iraqi Navy seized the Liberian-flagged oil tanker *Liliana* in the Persian Gulf off the coast of Basra Province on August 6 because it lacked proper documentation.[68] An unspecified security official told Iraqi and Arab media on August 6 that the Iraqi Navy seized the vessel near the Basra Oil Terminal after its crew failed to provide official documents verifying the origin and ownership of its cargo. The vessel was transporting 250,000 tons of crude oil of unknown origin.[69] Smugglers who transport sanctioned Iranian oil frequently use forged documentation to misrepresent Iranian crude oil as Iraqi oil to evade sanctions.[70] Iran oversees an oil smuggling network in Iraq that generates about one billion dollars annually for Iran and its Axis of Resistance.[71]

An unidentified senior Iraqi Oil Ministry official told *al Araby al Jadeed* on August 6 that the seizure was part of a broader Oil Ministry effort to combat Iranian oil smuggling.[72] The seizure comes after the Iraqi State Organization for Marketing Oil (SOMO) issued a document on July 28 calling on Iraqi authorities to halt “widespread” oil smuggling in Iraqi territorial waters.[73] The United States threatened in July 2025 to sanction SOMO and thereby block \$350 million of Iraqi oil revenue if the Iraqi federal government failed to prevent Iranian oil smuggling.[74] The United States sanctioned six

entities and four vessels on July 3 that are involved in smuggling Iranian oil, including a network of companies run by an Iraqi businessman.[75]



Syria

Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al Shaibani met with US Special Envoy to Syria Thomas Barrack in Damascus on August 6.[76] The Syrian Ministry of Interior reported that the two officials discussed recent Syrian political and security developments and ways to advance the Syrian “political process” to ensure Syria’s “territorial integrity.”[77] The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the Syrian transitional government, France, and the United States are scheduled to meet in Paris soon to negotiate the integration of the SDF into the Syrian Defense Ministry.[78]

Arabian Peninsula

Nothing significant to report.

Palestinian Territories and Lebanon

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) killed a Hezbollah fighter in the Bekaa Valley on August 6 who oversaw attacks against Israel from Syria.[79] The IDF said that the Hezbollah fighter directed cells in Syria to launch rocket attacks targeting the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights.[lxxx] Hezbollah fighters operated openly and in large numbers in Syria under the Assad regime.[80]

The LAF has continued to dismantle Hezbollah-linked smuggling networks along the Syria-Lebanon border. The LAF engaged and killed three Hezbollah-linked smugglers in Baalbek, northeastern Lebanon.[82] The LAF killed a smuggler named Ali Zaiter (Abu Sala), who was a prominent member of the al Zaiter clan.[lxxxiii] The al Zaiter clan has reportedly been involved in drug

and weapons smuggling and reportedly has ties to Hezbollah.[84] The LAF has shut down several known smuggling routes and increased its presence along the Lebanon-Syria border to curb Hezbollah-linked smuggling in recent months.[85]

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BABEL STREET

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Iran Update



Avery Borens, Katherine Wells, Carolyn Moorman, Andie Parry, Ben Schmida, Adham Fattah, and Brian Carter

August 7, 2025 Information Cutoff: 2:00 PM ET

The Lebanese Council of Ministers agreed on August 7 to the objectives of US Envoy Thomas Barrack’s proposal to disarm Hezbollah.[1] The proposal’s objectives include a phased plan to completely disarm Hezbollah by December 31, 2025, and to ensure an Israeli withdrawal from its five permanent positions in southern Lebanon.[2] The objectives also include the deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) to key border areas, the commencement of indirect Israel-Hezbollah talks to facilitate prisoner exchanges, and the permanent demarcation of Lebanon’s borders with Israel and Syria.[3] The Lebanese Council of Ministers did not agree on all details included in the proposal, but it did agree to the overall objectives.[4] The United States submitted the proposal to the Lebanese government on June 19.[5] The United States and the Lebanese government have negotiated the details of this agreement over the past six weeks, but had not previously reached an agreement.[6] Hezbollah has not released any official statements on the Lebanese government’s agreement on the US proposal. Three unspecified political sources told Reuters on August 7 that Hezbollah and its allies symbolically withdrew from the cabinet session during discussions on the US proposal.[7]

The United States' Phased Plan to Disarm Hezbollah

As approved by the Lebanese Cabinet on August 7, 2025

Timeline	Actions
Phase 1: Within 15 Days	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Lebanese government will issue a decree that commits the government to fully disarm Hezbollah by December 31, 2025• Israel will cease ground, air, and sea military operations in Lebanon
Phase 2: Within 60 Days	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Israel will begin to withdraw from its five permanent positions in southern Lebanon• Israel will release Lebanese prisoners in coordination with the International Committee of the Red Cross• Lebanon will begin to disarm Hezbollah, according to a Lebanese government-approved and detailed plan that will include Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) deployments and specify disarmament targets
Phase 3: Within 90 Days	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Israel will withdraw from the final two of its five permanent positions in southern Lebanon• Lebanon will secure funding for reconstruction
Phase 4: Within 120 Days	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The United States, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, France, and other unspecified countries will organize an economic conference to support the Lebanese economy and to implement US President Donald Trump's vision of a "prosperous and viable" Lebanon



Note: This information is based on open-source reports.

Iranian officials and Axis-affiliated media recently reported that Hezbollah has begun to reconstitute its command structure, but it is very unlikely that Hezbollah could rebuild its units to the level of proficiency the units had before the war. Hezbollah also faces several significant challenges that will complicate its ability to reconstitute. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on August 6 that Hezbollah is restructuring itself and appointing new commanders.[8] Axis-affiliated media echoed this statement. Araghchi added that Iran will continue to support the group.[9] Araghchi noted that Hezbollah will remain a “dominant force” that Iran will continue to support.[10] Axis-affiliated media claimed that Hezbollah has not exhibited any internal disarray and has continued its political and regional “presence.”[11] Hezbollah Secretary

General Naim Qassem also noted on August 5 that Hezbollah still has fighters who are ready to make “the harshest sacrifices” if needed.[12]

These statements ignore that Hezbollah units reconstituted from the remaining Hezbollah cadres will be less effective than their predecessor units due to a lack of experienced commanders. The IDF has killed nearly all of the top Hezbollah commanders and inflicted a 45 percent casualty rate on Hezbollah.[13] The casualty rates in units in southern Lebanon may be higher because the IDF focused much of its campaign there. A representative of Hezbollah’s Association of the Wounded noted on August 6 that none of the individuals injured in the pager attack against Hezbollah devices have recovered.[14] Over 3,000 individuals were injured in the attack, many of whom were presumably Hezbollah officials and fighters.[15] The extremely high casualty rate, combined with the deaths of top commanders, means that Hezbollah will have a much less experienced command cadre around which it will need to build units composed mostly of green, inexperienced fighters. These units will be far less effective than the experienced, veteran units led by 40-year veterans of Hezbollah prior to the war.

The post-war units will have the added challenge of needing to replenish their weapons arsenal under many more constraints than Hezbollah experienced before the war, as well. Israel destroyed much of its heavy weapons and short-range missile stockpile during and after the war.[16] The fall of Syria and the crackdown by the Lebanese government on weapons and money smuggling through Lebanese airports and border crossings will make any Iranian effort to resupply Hezbollah relatively slow and inefficient.[17] Hezbollah could attempt smuggling efforts through Lebanese ports, as it has already set conditions to do so. An unspecified Western official told Saudi media in April 2025 that Hezbollah had begun to reassert its control over the port through a network of collaborators, including dock workers and customs agents.[18] The official noted that Iran has relied on the maritime route to support Hezbollah after the closure of smuggling routes via Syria.[19] Lebanese officials denied these claims and stated that Lebanese authorities had implemented “serious” security measures at the port.[20] Maritime smuggling through the ports will be relatively more challenging than the land border crossings that were controlled by the pro-Hezbollah Assad regime on the Syrian side before 2024.

Hezbollah’s continued weakness is exemplified by increasingly confident Lebanese authorities and United Nations forces in Lebanon, which have not previously challenged Hezbollah at scale. Lebanese authorities have taken steps to curb Hezbollah smuggling. Lebanese airport authorities fired several Hezbollah-affiliated employees at the Beirut Rafic Hariri International Airport in May 2025 and began to inspect all planes and passengers that arrive at the airport.[21] Iran has tried to use the Beirut airport to smuggle funds to Hezbollah since the loss of its weapons smuggling routes through Syria due to the fall of the Assad regime.[22] The LAF has shut down several known smuggling routes and increased its presence along the Lebanon-Syria border to curb Hezbollah-linked smuggling in recent months.[23] The LAF and UN are reinforcing the counter-smuggling effort with relatively more significant operations in southern Lebanon as well. The LAF announced in May 2025 that it had dismantled over 500 Hezbollah military positions and weapons depots in southern Lebanon.[24] United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) forces have also taken previously rare steps to degrade Hezbollah infrastructure in southern Lebanon, such as by dismantling a likely

Hezbollah tunnel network and several weapons caches in southern Lebanon on August 7.[25] These efforts will need to be sustained to be successful, however.

Iranian media outlet Nour News proposed on August 7 that the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) will likely increase its focus on domestic security, while still prioritizing foreign policy.[26] Nour News, which is affiliated with Supreme Leader adviser Ali Shamkhani, concluded that newly appointed SNSC Secretary Ali Larijani would also “speak more to the public,” compared to his predecessor, Ali Akbar Ahmadian.[27] This follows Nour News’ July 29 and August 6 recommendations that the SNSC form a “Strategic Command Center” and adopt a more comprehensive security approach to counter emerging “hybrid threats.”[28] These “hybrid threats” include misinformation and disinformation campaigns targeting the Iranian public and the “collapse of public trust.”[29] The Nour News proposals align with President Masoud Pezeshkian’s call for Larijani to “prioritize emerging threats” and take a “people-based approach” to national security.[30] The SNSC has subsidiary councils that address internal security.[31] The increased focus of the SNSC on domestic security likely reflects regime concerns about regime destabilization in the wake of the 12-day Israel-Iran War. Pragmatic voices on the SNSC, such as Pezeshkian and Larijani, favor public engagement over tighter security measures to bolster national security. Larijani’s appointment signals the SNSC’s shift toward addressing emerging threats that impact trust between the government and the people through public engagement rather than purely security-focused measures, which represents a rebalancing almost certainly directed by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.

Khamenei officially replaced Ahmadian with Larijani as his representative on the SNSC on August 6.[32] The SNSC Secretary has historically been one of two Supreme Leader representatives on the SNSC.

Khamenei also appointed Ahmadian and Shamkhani on August 6 as his representatives to the new Defense Council, which the SNSC established on August 3 to address emerging national security threats.[33] Shamkhani, who is also a pragmatic hardliner, notably called on the regime to resolve “disputes” with the Iranian people through a “process of understanding,” during an interview on June 29.[34]

Composition of the Iranian Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) and Defense Council

SNSC		Defense Council	
			
President Masoud Pezeshkian	Minister of Intelligence Esmail Khatib	President Masoud Pezeshkian	Minister of Intelligence Esmail Khatib
			
AFGS Chief Abdol Rahim Mousavi	Minister of Foreign Affairs Abbas Araghchi	AFGS Chief Abdol Rahim Mousavi	Khatam ol Anbia Central Headquarters Commander Ali Abdollahi Ali Abadi
			
IRGC Commander Mohammad Pak Pour	Minister of Interior Eskander Momeni	IRGC Commander Mohammad Pak Pour	Artesh Commander Amir Hatami
			
Speaker of the Parliament Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf	Supreme Leader Representative - SNSC Secretary Ali Larijani	Speaker of the Parliament Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf	Supreme Leader Representative Ali Akbar Ahmadian
			
Judiciary Chief Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejei	Supreme Leader Representative Saeed Jalili	Judiciary Chief Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejei	Supreme Leader Representative Ali Shamkhani
			
Artesh Commander Amir Hatami			



Nour News attributed Larijani's appointment to the SNSC as well as the SNSC's formation of the Defense Council in its August 7 op-ed to the "current security conditions," including "the possibility of a renewed enemy [Israeli or US] attack" on Iran.[35] Iranian officials have continued to express their concern about the potential for future conflicts with Israel and the United States. Iranian Artesh Commander Major General Amir Hatami warned on August 3, for example, that "[Iran] should not underestimate the enemy and consider its threats over." [36] Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Intelligence chief Brigadier General Majid Khademi also declared on August 7 that "the war has not ended" and that Iran is just "in a state of temporary pause." [37] Khademi asserted that the West is continuing to try to stoke internal instability in Iran.[38]

Nour News suggested in its August 7 op-ed that pragmatic hardliner Larijani may bring the SNSC closer to Iran's Foreign Affairs Ministry to coordinate on nuclear negotiations with the United States and Europe, which "cannot be ruled out."[39] Nour News referenced Larijani's past engagement in nuclear negotiations with the West during his first term as SNSC secretary between 2005 and 2007.[40] Larijani separately defended Iran's agreement to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with the United States against hardliner criticism while serving as parliament speaker in 2015.[41] More recently, Larijani reportedly tried to contact Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei during the Israel-Iran War to advocate for "opening talks" with the United States.[42] Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi separately expressed his optimism about working with Larijani, noting his "deep and realistic insight into both domestic and foreign policy," in an interview on August 6.[43] Araghchi added that Iran's diplomats are "fully prepared to engage in coordinated cooperation" with Larijani.[44]

Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Hezbollah is attempting to use the Shia Coordination Framework as a vehicle to sideline the Sudani administration ahead of the November 2025 Iraqi parliamentary elections. The Shia Coordination Framework is a loose coalition of Shia political parties, some of which Iran backs. Kataib Hezbollah announced on August 6 that Kataib Hezbollah Secretary General Abu Hussein al Hamidawi urged unidentified Shia Coordination Framework leaders during a meeting on August 2 to "block" Sudani's decisions ahead of the upcoming elections after recent unspecified decisions by Sudani have "contradicted the fundamental positions," presumably of the framework.[45] "Fundamental positions" may refer to policy issues such as efforts to remove US forces from Iraq, which was a policy issue that Kataib Hezbollah Spokesperson Abu Ali al Askari mentioned in a statement on August 4.[46] Hamidawi also called for the creation of a specialized Shia Coordination Framework committee to investigate events surrounding clashes between Kataib Hezbollah members and Iraqi Federal Police officers in Dora, Baghdad, on July 27 that killed one civilian and a Federal Police officer.[47] Hamidawi's request to use a Shia Coordination Framework committee appears to undermine Sudani's previous order for the formation of a high-level committee to investigate the clashes using standard Iraqi judicial mechanisms.[48] Kataib Hezbollah and other Iranian-backed Iraqi actors have tried to distance themselves from the incident in Dora, which occurred amid policy discussions over restricting arms to the Iraqi state and dissolving the Iranian-backed Popular Mobilization Forces.[49]

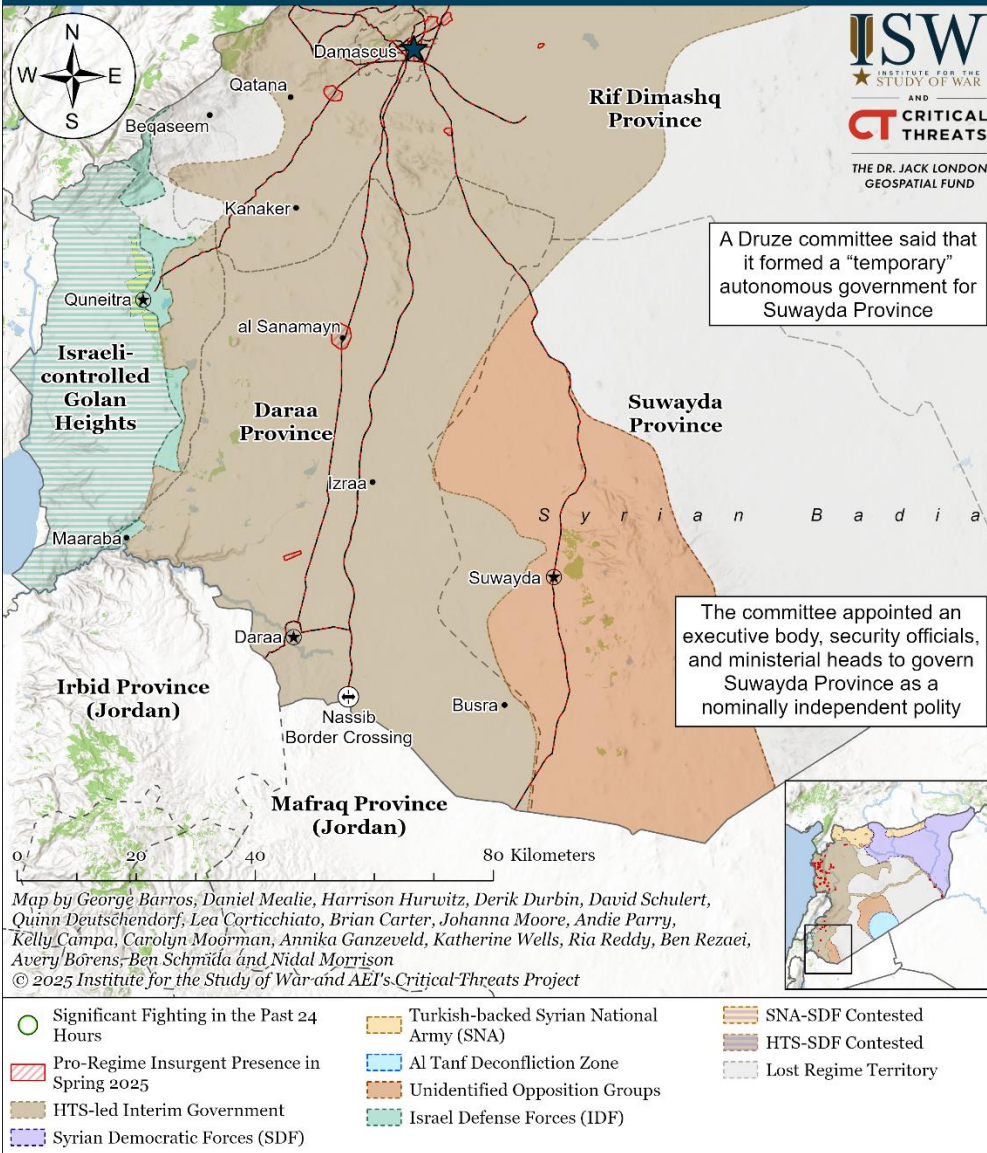
The Shia Coordination Framework groups are now in increasing competition with one another ahead of the November 2025 Iraqi parliamentary elections, which will make it more difficult for Kataib Hezbollah to build a political coalition to sideline Sudani. Kataib Hezbollah's attempts to obstruct Sudani's influence follow an August 6 Iraqi media report that some Iranian-backed Iraqi militias are "almost at odds with the Shia Coordination Framework." [50] CTP-ISW assessed on August 6 that this report likely refers to the disillusionment of some Iranian-backed Iraqi militias towards elements of the Shia Coordination Framework, such as Sudani.[51] The Shia Coordination Framework currently plans to run across multiple lists in the upcoming elections, which likely reflects divisions amongst the coalition.[52]

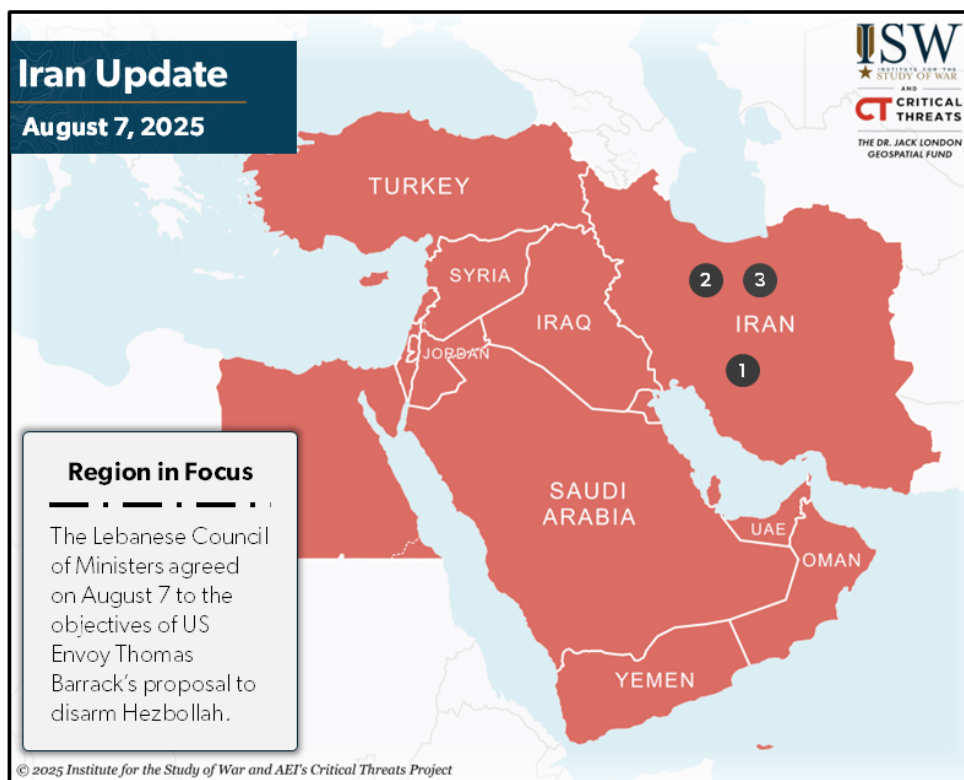
Druze rhetoric and actions that are hostile to the Syrian government demonstrate the deep barriers to reconciliation and lack of trust between the transitional government and the Druze community. A committee formed by prominent Druze Sheikh Hikmat al Hijri

announced the formation of a “temporary” autonomous government for Suwayda Province on August 6.[53] Judges on the “Supreme Legal Committee” within the new “autonomous government” appointed an executive body, security officials, and ministerial heads to govern Suwayda instead of the Damascus-based transitional government.[54] A member of the Syrian Ministry of Justice said that the judiciary would investigate the committee judges for “engaging in political works” that conflict with Syrian national interests.[55] Two Assad-era brigadier generals, formerly responsible for coastal Syria and accused of committing war crimes, command the new Suwaydawi government’s internal security forces.[56] A militia spokesperson unaligned with Hijri said on August 6 that the only way to “make proper amends and regain trust” would be to execute Syrian President Ahmed al Shara and Suwayda General Security Service (GSS) leader Ahmed al Dalati in Suwayda for crimes against the Druze.[57] The Liwa al Jabal spokesperson also said that there was “no longer space for dialogue or discussion” with the transitional government.[58] Such strong rhetoric from Druze militias that previously collaborated with the transitional government demonstrates the level of distrust that has grown since intercommunal violence erupted in Suwayda Province in mid-July.[59] This rhetoric makes it unsurprising that the Druze have begun to implement alternative governance structures while refusing to collaborate with the transitional government. This new autonomous government and the strong rhetoric from Druze militias reduce the likelihood that the July 18 ceasefire between the transitional government and Druze militias will progress to its third phase. The third phase calls for activating state-run institutions, gradually deploying government forces to Suwayda Province, and integrating Suwaydawi institutions into the Syrian state.[60]

Assessed Control of Terrain in Southwestern Syria

August 7, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST





- 1 **IRAN.** Iranian media outlet Nour News proposed on August 7 that the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) will likely increase its focus on domestic security, while still prioritizing foreign policy.
- 2 **IRAN.** Nour News also attributed Larijani's appointment to the SNSC as well as the SNSC's formation of the Defense Council to the "current security conditions," including "the possibility of a renewed enemy [Israeli or US] attack" on Iran.
- 3 **IRAN.** Nour News also suggested in its August 7 op-ed that pragmatic hardliner Larijani may bring the SNSC closer to Iran's Foreign Affairs Ministry to coordinate on nuclear negotiations with the United States and Europe, which "cannot be ruled out."

Key Takeaways

- **Hezbollah Disarmament:** The Lebanese Council of Ministers agreed on August 7 to the objectives of US Envoy Thomas Barrack's proposal to disarm Hezbollah.
- **Hezbollah Reconstitution:** Iranian officials and Axis-affiliated media recently reported that Hezbollah has begun to reconstitute its command structure, but it is very unlikely that Hezbollah could rebuild its units to the level of proficiency the units had before the war. Hezbollah also faces several significant challenges that will complicate its ability to reconstitute.

- **Iranian National Security Appointments:** Iranian media outlet Nour News proposed on August 7 that the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) will likely increase its focus on domestic security, while still prioritizing foreign policy. Nour News also attributed Larijani's appointment to the SNSC, as well as the SNSC's formation of the Defense Council, to the "current security conditions," including "the possibility of a renewed enemy [Israeli or US] attack" on Iran.
- **Iraqi Militia Political Maneuverings:** Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Hezbollah is attempting to use the Shia Coordination Framework as a vehicle to sideline the Sudani administration ahead of the November 2025 Iraqi parliamentary elections. The Shia Coordination Framework groups are now in increasing competition with one another ahead of the November 2025 Iraqi parliamentary elections, which will make it more difficult for Kataib Hezbollah to build a political coalition to sideline Sudani.
- **Druze-Syrian Government Relations:** Druze rhetoric and actions that are hostile to the Syrian government demonstrate the deep barriers to reconciliation and lack of trust between the transitional government and the Druze community. A committee formed by prominent Druze Sheikh Hikmat al Hijri announced the formation of a "temporary" autonomous government for Suwayda Province on August 6.

Iran

The United States sanctioned 18 entities and individuals on August 7 for their involvement in Iranian efforts to circumvent sanctions and generate revenue for the regime.[61] The sanctioned entities include the RUNC Exchange System Company, which has developed Iran's bank messaging system. The sanctions target banks created by the Central Bank of Iran to evade existing sanctions, such as the Cyrus Offshore Bank. The sanctions also target the Pasargad Arian Information and Communication Technology Company (FANAP), which is owned by a major Iranian financial institution that was sanctioned on October 8, 2020.[62] FANAP has strong links to the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence and Security.[63]

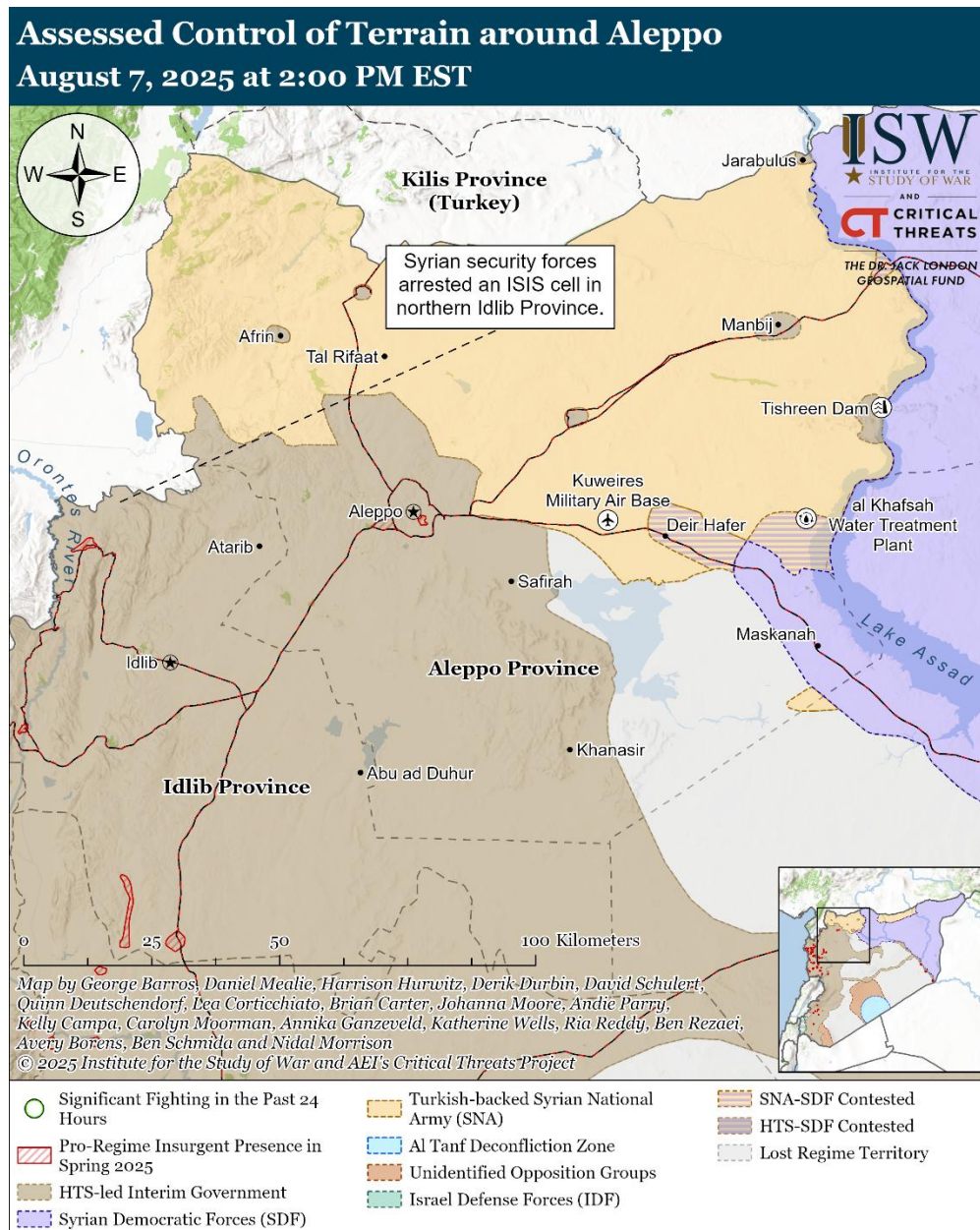
Iraq

See the topline section.

Syria

The Syrian Ministry of Interior (MoI) arrested a large Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) cell in northern Idlib Province on August 7. The Syrian MoI arrested nine ISIS members during a raid in the town of Harem, Idlib Province, on August 7 near the Syria-Turkey border.[64] The MoI seized the ISIS cell's cache, which included suicide vests, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), anti-materiel rifles, explosive materials, and grenades.[65] The MoI stated that the cell was responsible for targeting and killing five Iraqi nationals in three prior attacks in the towns of Salqin, Azmarin, and Kaftin in Idlib Province.[66] This included the assassination of a former Iraqi Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS) commander in Azmarin on June 7.[67] The arrests in Idlib province come after the Islamic State criticized the Syrian government for assisting a US counter-ISIS ground operation in al Bab, Aleppo Province, that targeted an ISIS official on July 25.[68] The most

recent arrests in northern Idlib Province are the eleventh counter-ISIS operation the transitional government has publicly conducted since the fall of Assad in December 2024.[69] The United States shared intelligence with HTS before the fall of the Assad regime to target ISIS and other al Qaeda-linked Salafi-Jihadi militant groups.[70]



Syrian President Ahmed al Shara and Foreign Minister Asaad al Shaibani discussed recent clashes between the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the transitional government with Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan in Damascus on August 7.[71] A Turkish Foreign Ministry source told Reuters that Shara, Shaibani, and Fidan also discussed bilateral relations, Syria-Israel tensions, counter-terrorism cooperation, and Syrian reconstruction efforts.[72] The source also told Reuters that "talks are expected to assess Turkey's national security concerns stemming from northeast Syria[...] at a time when preserving Syria's territorial integrity and

unity is more important than ever.”[73] A Turkish Defense Ministry official told Reuters on August 7, prior to Fidan’s visit, that the SDF has failed to adhere to the March 10 framework agreement and that recent clashes between the SDF and transitional government forces damage Syria’s unity.[74] The Syrian transitional government and SDF signed an eight-point integration framework on March 10 but have yet to negotiate the framework’s exact terms.[75] The Turkish Defense Ministry official also said the SDF has become “empowered by clashes in Syria’s south” in reference to the recent intercommunal violence in Suwayda Province.[76] The Syrian Army and the SDF clashed south of Manbij, Aleppo Province, on August 2 after the SDF attempted to advance toward a Syrian army position.[77] The Syrian transitional government has previously condemned the SDF’s references to the violence in Suwayda Province as a justification for refusing to integrate into the Syrian state.[78] The SDF, Syrian transitional government, France, and the United States agreed to meet in Paris to negotiate the integration of the SDF into the Syrian Defense Ministry.[79] The date of the meeting has not yet been announced, however.[80]

Arabian Peninsula

Yemeni government-affiliated forces intercepted a shipment of drone components, radios, and other unspecified weapon parts to the Houthis on August 6.[81] Government forces reported that the shipment was en route to Houthi-controlled Hudaydah Port from China.[82]

Palestinian Territories and Lebanon

See the topline section.

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Iran Update



Avery Borens, Ben Schmida, Carolyn Moorman, Adham Fattah, and Annika Ganzeveld

August 8, 2025 Information Cutoff: 2:00 PM ET

The Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute and the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) publish the Iran Update, which provides insights into Iranian and Iranian-sponsored activities that undermine regional stability and threaten US forces and interests. CTP-ISW publishes the Iran Update daily.

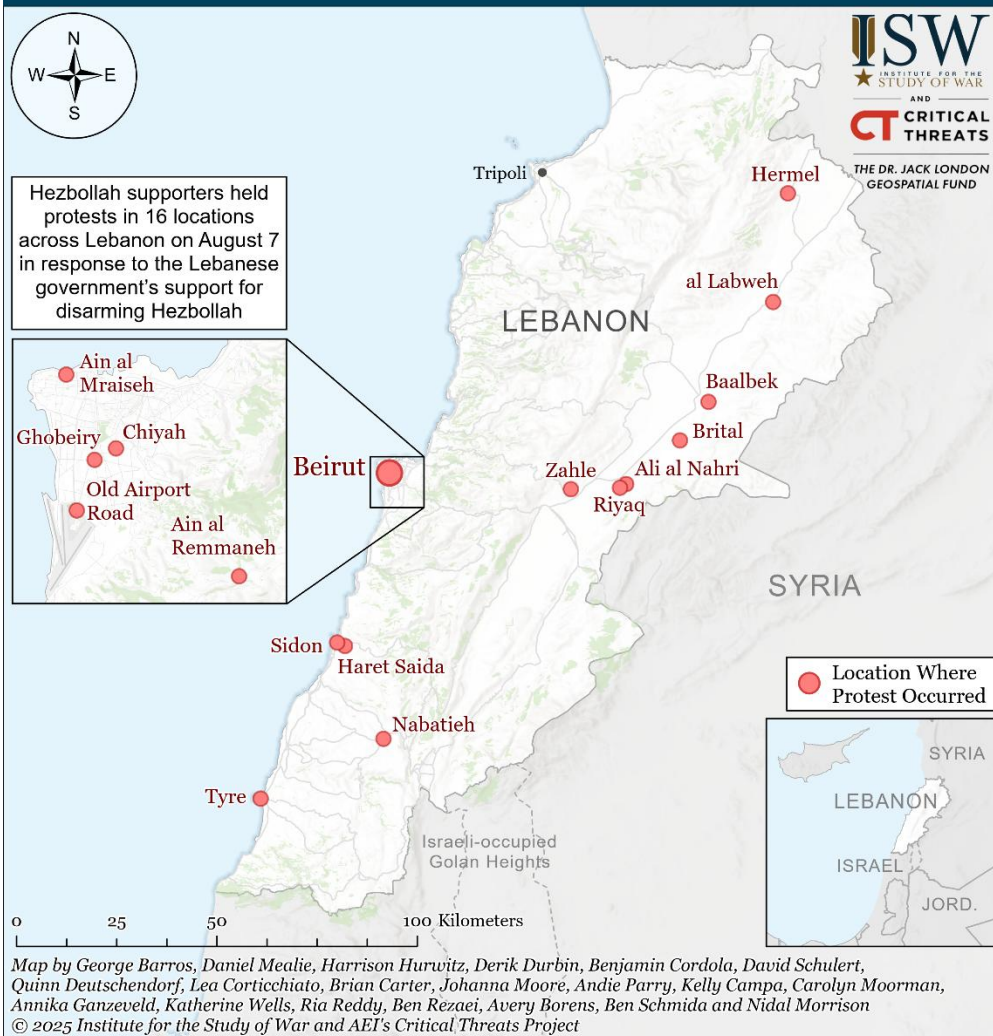
Click here to see CTP and ISW's interactive map of assessed control of terrain in Syria, and here to see CTP and ISW's interactive map of Israeli ground operations. The Syria map is updated daily alongside the static Syria maps in this report. CTP-ISW ended daily maps of Israeli ground operations in February 2025.

Click here to see ISW-CTP's interactive map showing the total strikes in Iran since June 12, as well as an interactive timelapse showing the strikes day-by-day.

Hezbollah supporters held protests in 16 locations across Lebanon on August 7 in response to the Lebanese government's support for disarming Hezbollah.[1] Public support for Hezbollah presents a significant obstacle to decreasing Hezbollah's influence in Lebanon in the short term. The Lebanese Council of Ministers agreed on August 7 to the objectives of US Special Envoy Thomas Barrack's proposal to disarm Hezbollah by December 31, 2025.[2] Hezbollah supporters protested in several Beirut suburbs, southern Lebanon, the Bekaa Valley, and other Hezbollah strongholds in Lebanon.[3] The majority of these areas are largely comprised of Lebanese Shia civilians, who have fervently backed Hezbollah since the 1980s.[4] Hezbollah has long exploited the Lebanese government's shortcomings to deeply entrench itself in Lebanon.[5] Hezbollah was able to assuage domestic discontent and gain widespread support and influence following the 2006 Israel-Lebanon War despite suffering military losses.[6] Hezbollah has used financial incentives, including pensions for families of deceased fighters and compensation for individuals who lost their homes or property, and social services to retain its support base among Lebanese Shia civilians.[7]

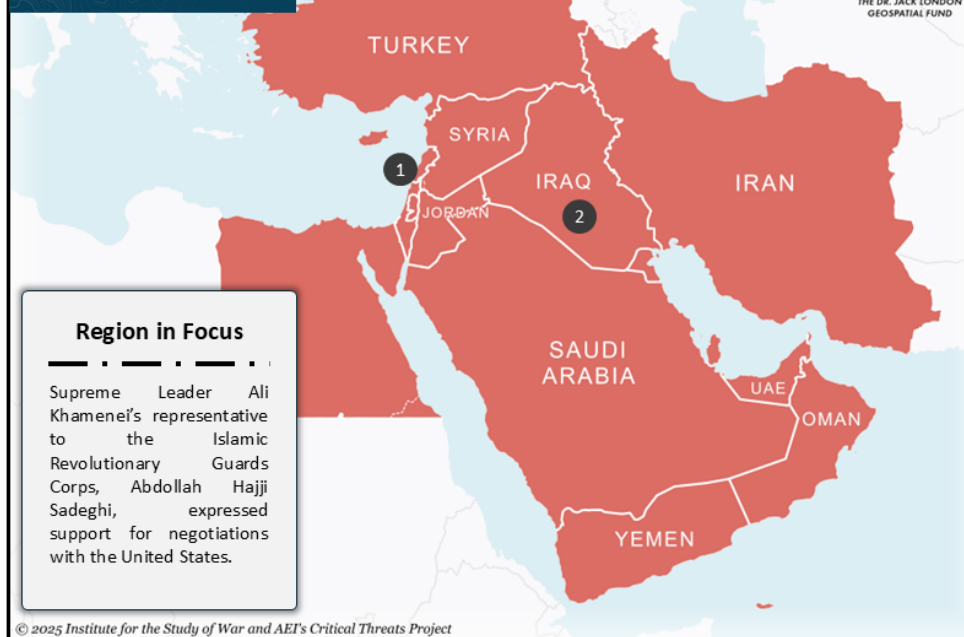
The Lebanese government has undertaken steps to inhibit Hezbollah's ability to provide financial benefits to its supporters, which could decrease support for Hezbollah in the mid- to long-term. The Lebanese government and the United States have taken steps to restrict the flow of money to Hezbollah to prevent its reconstitution since the end of the Israel-Hezbollah conflict in November 2024.[8] Hezbollah, which quickly rebuilt Lebanon and provided a social safety net for Lebanese civilians after the 2006 war, is struggling to reconstruct damaged infrastructure and reconstitute its forces following the conflict in late 2024.[9] Hezbollah has also struggled to maintain its financial commitments to fighters. Hezbollah's primary financial institution, Al Qard al Hassan, claimed that it would continue to provide financial resources to its supporters despite restrictions placed on it by the Lebanese Central Bank. Al Qard al Hassan has not resumed payments to fighters since June 2025.[10] Disruptions to Hezbollah's ability to provide its support base with promised benefits may not have an immediate effect on the population's support for Hezbollah, but could diminish support for Hezbollah over time.

Protests in Lebanon on August 7, 2025



Iran Update

August 8, 2025



Region in Focus

Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's representative to the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, Abdollah Hajji Sadeghi, expressed support for negotiations with the United States.

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- 1 **HEZBOLLAH.** Hezbollah supporters held protests in 16 locations across Lebanon on August 7 in response to the Lebanese government's support for disarming Hezbollah. Public support for Hezbollah presents a significant obstacle to decreasing Hezbollah's influence in Lebanon in the short-term.
- 2 **IRAQ.** State of Law Coalition head Nouri al Maliki told Iranian Supreme Leader International Affairs Adviser Ali Akbar Velayati during a phone call on August 8 that Iraq will not allow the United States or Israel to disarm the Iranian-backed Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF).

Key Takeaways

- Hezbollah supporters held protests in 16 locations across Lebanon on August 7 in response to the Lebanese government's support for disarming Hezbollah. Public support for Hezbollah presents a significant obstacle to decreasing Hezbollah's influence in Lebanon in the short term.
- State of Law Coalition head Nouri al Maliki told Iranian Supreme Leader International Affairs Adviser Ali Akbar Velayati during a phone call on August 8 that Iraq will not allow the United States or Israel to disarm the Iranian-backed Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF).

Iran

Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's representative to the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, Abdollah Hajji Sadeghi, implicitly expressed support on August 8 for negotiations with the United States.[11] Sadeghi stated that “wise negotiations under the supervision of the Supreme Leader” could support Iran’s fight against Israel. Iran has not softened its stance on domestic uranium enrichment, which was the main sticking point between Iran and the United States in negotiations before the Israel-Iran War. Multiple Iranian officials, such as Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi and Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister for Political Affairs Majid Takht Ravanchi, have insisted that Iran will continue domestic uranium enrichment despite the war.[12] The United States has maintained that domestic uranium enrichment is a non-starter in negotiations.[13]

Iraq

State of Law Coalition head Nouri al Maliki told Iranian Supreme Leader International Affairs Adviser Ali Akbar Velayati during a phone call on August 8 that Iraq will not allow the United States or Israel to disarm the Iranian-backed Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF).[14] Velayati expressed Iranian support for the Axis of Resistance. The phone call occurred amid ongoing discussions about restricting arms to the Iraqi state and dissolving the PMF.[15] The Iraqi parliament is yet to vote on a law that would likely increase Iran’s influence in the Iraqi political and security spheres by formalizing the PMF’s structure and responsibilities.[16] Maliki and Velayati’s phone call also comes after the Lebanese Council of Ministers agreed on August 7 to disarm Hezbollah.[17] Maliki emphasized the importance of the PMF’s existence in the face of US and Israeli efforts to disarm Hezbollah.[18] CTP-ISW assessed on July 29 that Iran likely seeks to preserve the strength of its Iraqi partners in the Axis of Resistance in the wake of almost two years of conflict, which has severely weakened Iran and other Axis of Resistance members.[19]

The Ya Ali Popular Formations, which is likely an Iranian-backed Iraqi militia, announced on August 7 that it met with Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Sarkhat al Quds to discuss the presence of US forces in Iraq.[20] The Ya Ali Popular Formations stated that it has “adopted the file” of US bases in Iraq. The Ya Ali Popular Formations announced its establishment in March 2025 and attacked individuals accused of being affiliated with Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS) in Baghdad amid the March 2025 Syrian coastal violence.[21] The Ya Ali Popular Formations did not provide any evidence that the individuals it attacked were affiliated with HTS. The Ya Ali Popular Formations and Kataib Sarkhat al Quds released a joint statement on August 7 that discussed a variety of issues, including these militias' support for the Popular Mobilization Forces.[22]

Syria

The Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) held a conference on August 8 in which it reaffirmed its goal to establish a decentralized system under the Syrian transitional government. AANES is the governing authority in northeastern Syria and is affiliated with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). AANES held the “Unity of Position for the Components of Northeastern Syria” conference in Hasakah City on August 8, which was attended by over 400 AANES representatives, tribal leaders, and religious figures.[23] The participants released a statement calling for a new democratic constitution to guarantee political pluralism, the equal participation of all Syrian communities in the government, and a decentralized governance system that respects northeastern Syria’s cultural and geographic differences.[24] The Syrian transitional government and SDF signed an eight-point framework agreement in March 2025 that outlined principles for the SDF’s integration into the Syrian state, but have not made meaningful progress toward integrating the SDF into the government.[25] The Syrian transitional government continues to demand that the SDF dissolve prior to integrating into

the Syrian state, unlike other armed factions that have joined the Syrian Defense Ministry without adjusting their command structures.

The participation of Druze and Alawite leaders in the August 8 conference highlights that these communities share many of the demands and grievances that the Syrian Kurdish community has toward the Syrian transitional government. Druze spiritual leader Hikmat al Hijri and Alawite leader Ghazal Ghazal attended the conference remotely.[26] Hijri emphasized in a pre-recorded statement that "Syria's future can only be achieved through dialogue among its components." [27] The Druze, Kurdish, and Alawite communities have a shared distrust of the transitional government given that they are skeptical of the government's willingness and ability to protect their respective communities. This distrust, compounded by the transitional government's failure to hold its forces accountable for abuses against minority communities, has deterred Druze militias and Kurdish groups from disarming and integrating into the Syrian state. Hijri has rejected unification with the Syrian transitional government and established a "temporary" autonomous government in Suwayda Province on August 6.[28] The participation of Druze and Alawite leaders in the AANES conference may be meant to try to place pressure on the Syrian transitional government to accept these communities' demands.

Arabian Peninsula

Nothing significant to report.

Palestinian Territories and Lebanon

See topline section.

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