

# Iran Update



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*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.*

**Iranian Supreme Leader International Affairs Adviser Ali Akbar Velayati discussed the threats that Iran perceives to its regional influence in an interview on August 9 that underscored Iran’s commitment to its strategic goals despite recent setbacks.**[1] Velayati’s statements demonstrate significant continuity between Iran’s pre- and post-war approach to the region and its use of the Axis of Resistance. Velayati reiterated Iran’s support for the Axis of Resistance but notably highlighted the Houthis as a “gem” within the Iranian proxy and partner network.[2] Velayati said that Iran will oppose US-supported efforts to disarm Hezbollah in Lebanon and Iranian-backed Iraqi militias. The Lebanese government, which the United States has pressured to disarm Hezbollah, agreed on August 7 to disarm Hezbollah.[3] The United States has similarly pressured the Iraqi government to pass legislation that would disarm or reform the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), which has been opposed by Iran’s Iraqi allies.[4] Velayati held a phone call with the Iraqi State of Law coalition head and Iranian ally in Iraq, Nouri al Maliki, on August 8, in which Maliki emphasized that Iraq will not allow the United States to disarm the PMF, which suggests the pair discussed recent US efforts to undermine the PMF.[5] Velayati also suggested that resistance groups will form in Syria to resist Israel.[6] Khamenei and other Iranian officials have previously framed the post-Assad Syrian landscape as an opportunity for Iran to shape events in Syria through grassroots mobilization, which is consistent with Iranian hopes before the Israel-Iran War.[7]

It remains unclear how Iran will attempt to oppose any of these US-supported efforts, but Velayati’s interview highlights the increased importance of the Houthi Movement within Iran’s Axis of Resistance. The Houthis remain the most unified and capable member of the Axis of Resistance after two years of war, having suffered relatively little damage compared to Hezbollah or Hamas.

**Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Ali Larijani appears to be trying to secure Iranian interests in Iraq and Lebanon during planned visits to each country this week, amid Iranian concern about its regional influence.** Larijani’s visits appear to be an effort to actualize the policy priorities outlined by Velayati. Larijani met separately with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani and National Security Advisor Qassim al Araj on August 11.[8] Iranian anti-

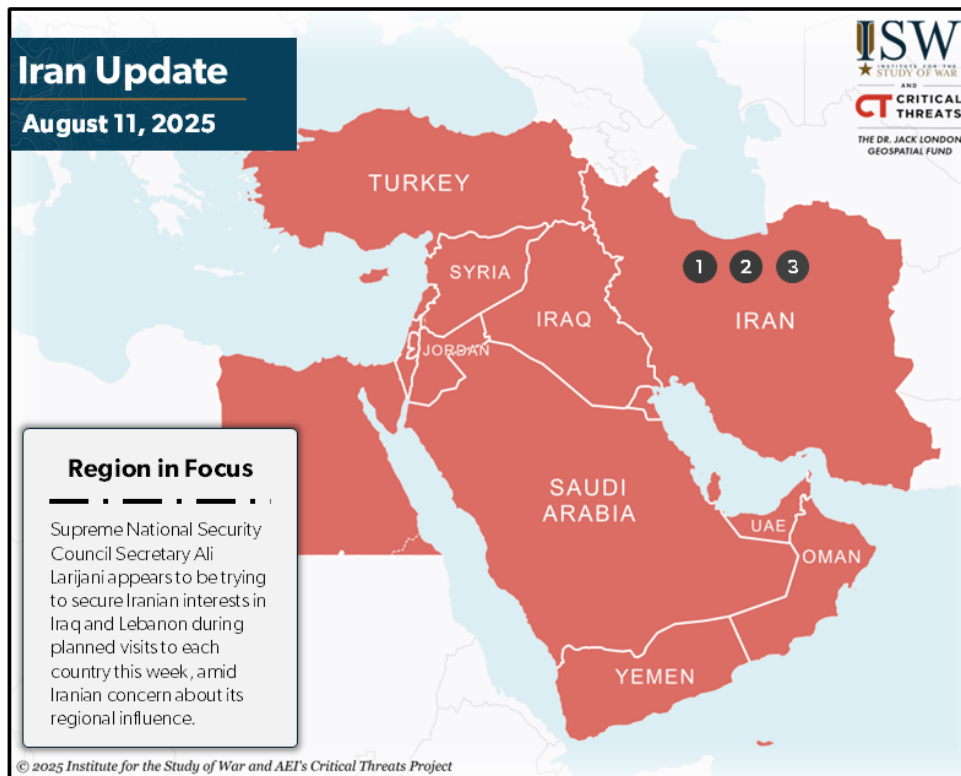
regime media reported on August 11 that Larijani will encourage unidentified Shia parties to pass the Popular Mobilization Authority Law during his visit.[9] CTP-ISW assessed on August 6 that this law, on which the Iraqi Parliament is yet to vote, would likely increase Iran's influence in the Iraqi political and security spheres by formalizing the PMF's structures and responsibilities.[10] Larijani will reportedly also discuss coalition formation ahead of the upcoming November 2025 Iraqi parliamentary elections with unspecified Iraqi officials.[11] Iran has previously encouraged Iranian-backed Iraqi parties to unite ahead of the elections to improve the likelihood that the parties will maintain control of the Iraqi parliament.[12] Larijani and Arajii also signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to "develop" the 2023 Iran-Iraq security agreement that required Iraqi authorities to disarm and relocate members of Kurdish opposition groups from the Iran-Iraq border.[13] This is probably an extension of Iran's focus on internal security because Iran views Iraqi Kurdistan as a rear area from which anti-regime Kurdish groups can operate in Iran, which threatens the Iranian regime's stability.[14] Iran has previously pressured the Iraqi federal government to remove Kurdish opposition groups from the Iran-Iraq border and may be concerned about the threat of Israel using these Kurdish groups to infiltrate Iran and transport materiel.[15] Larijani will visit Beirut later this week to discuss "regional affairs" with unspecified Lebanese officials.[16] Multiple Iranian officials have expressed their discontent with the Lebanese government's initial steps to disarm Hezbollah over the last several weeks.[17]

**Larijani's diplomatic efforts in Iraq and Lebanon strongly suggest that Larijani will take a more active approach toward implementing Iranian foreign policy in the region as SNSC secretary compared to his predecessor.** Larijani's visits after his appointment as SNSC secretary on August 5 suggest that his approach will be more hands-on compared to his predecessor, Ali Akbar Ahmadian, who served as a coordinator of Iran's security apparatus rather than an executor.[18] Pragmatic hardliner Larijani's active role further suggests that moderate and pragmatic elements of the Iranian regime may begin to increase their engagement in Iranian foreign policy, particularly with its regional partners and proxies. Larijani has considerable experience engaging in Iranian foreign policy from his previous roles. [19]

**Iran has taken steps to protect its nuclear scientists following the 12-day Israel-Iran War.** Israel killed at least 14 nuclear scientists during the war.[20] The Telegraph reported on August 11 that Iran has sent its remaining nuclear scientists to safe houses in northern Iran, citing a senior Iranian official.[21] The official said Iran has replaced all the nuclear scientists teaching at universities with individuals who have no connection to Iran's nuclear program. Iran reportedly assigned each key nuclear scientist at least one deputy in order to try to ensure knowledge continuity.[22] Israeli sources are concerned that some of these deputies have replaced the scientists whom Israel killed during the war. Some of the replacement scientists reportedly have expertise in explosives and warhead design. An Israeli intelligence and defense analyst stated that Iran still has scientists who have previously worked on nuclear weapons delivery systems, including efforts to adapt Shahab-3 missiles to hold nuclear warheads.[23] The senior Iranian official also said Iran has assigned multiple agencies to protect nuclear scientists as opposed to the single Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) unit that handled the scientists' protection previously.[24]

Iran likely assigned multiple agencies to protect its nuclear scientists to address counterintelligence concerns following the war.[25] The existence of multiple agencies providing security for the scientists enables each agency to ensure the compliance of the other agencies, but it will contribute to siloed

organizations that hinder information sharing. Iranian authorities executed an Iranian nuclear scientist on August 6 for reportedly providing Israel with information about another nuclear scientist whom Israel killed during the war.[26]



- 1 **TEHRAN, IRAN.** Iranian Supreme Leader International Affairs Adviser Ali Akbar Velayati discussed the threats that Iran perceives to its regional influence in an interview on August 9 that underscored Iran's commitment to its strategic goals despite recent setbacks.
- 2 **TEHRAN, IRAN.** Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Larijani appears to be trying to secure Iranian interests in Iraq and Lebanon during planned visits to each country this week, amid Iranian concern about its regional influence. Larijani's diplomatic efforts in Iraq and Lebanon strongly indicate that Larijani will take a more active approach toward implementing Iranian foreign policy in the region as SNSC secretary compared to his predecessor.
- 3 **TEHRAN, IRAN.** Iran has taken steps to protect its nuclear scientists following the 12-day Israel-Iran War.

## Key Takeaways

- **Iran:** Iranian Supreme Leader International Affairs Adviser Ali Akbar Velayati discussed the threats that Iran perceives to its regional influence in an interview on August 9 that underscored Iran's commitment to its strategic goals despite recent setbacks.

- **Iran:** Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Larijani appears to be trying to secure Iranian interests in Iraq and Lebanon during planned visits to each country this week, amid Iranian concern about its regional influence. Larijani's diplomatic efforts in Iraq and Lebanon strongly indicate that Larijani will take a more active approach toward implementing Iranian foreign policy in the region as SNSC secretary compared to his predecessor.
- **Iran:** Iran has taken steps to protect its nuclear scientists following the 12-day Israel-Iran War.
- **Yemen:** The Houthis and Iran are using an extensive smuggling network involving personnel in Iran, Somalia, and Yemen to bypass the UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism in Djibouti, according to smugglers detained by a pro-Yemeni government faction.

## Iran

**Nuclear negotiations continue to increase tensions between hardliners and moderates in Iran.** Norway reportedly may host a sixth round of nuclear talks between Iran and the United States.[27] This comes after Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister Andreas Kravik and Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi held a meeting on August 5 to discuss the nuclear negotiations.[28] Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian stated on August 10 that Iran risks further conflict with the United States unless diplomacy is pursued, which is likely a response to the hardliner anti-negotiation camp within Iran.[29] Ultra hardliner Saeed Jalili implicitly criticized Iranian officials who support renewed talks with the United States.[30] Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister for Political Affairs Majid Takh Ravanchi expressed willingness on August 9 to engage in nuclear negotiations but reiterated Iran's refusal to accept zero uranium enrichment. CTP-ISW previously assessed that Iran's continued rejection of the US demand for zero uranium enrichment after the conflict suggests that Iran is unlikely to make concessions during the reported upcoming talks.[31]

**Unspecified fighters tried to enter a police station in Saravan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province, on August 10, and clashed with Iranian security forces.[32] Three fighters and one Iranian police chief were killed.[33]** News outlets reported that the militants were part of Jaish al Adl, the Baloch Salafi-Jihadi group that has frequently attacked Iranian security forces in the region.[34] The initial police report did not make an assessment.[35] 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.[36]

## Iraq

**Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani issued several directives on August 9 targeting Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) command and control issues.** The PMF is an Iraqi state security service primarily comprised of militias that, on paper, report to the Prime Minister but in reality often report to a parallel command that sometimes takes orders from Iran.[37] A government committee formed by Sudani to investigate clashes between several Kataib Hezbollah members and Iraqi Federal Police officers on July 27 offered recommendations to Sudani.[38] Iraq's Joint Operations Command arrested 14 members of the Kataib Hezbollah-controlled 45th and 46th PMF brigades in response to their suspected involvement in the July 27 attack on an Agriculture Department building in Baghdad and the engagement that followed. Kataib Hezbollah fighters killed a

civilian and a federal police officer in the engagement. Kataib Hezbollah commands the 45th and 46th PMF Brigades.

Sudani's special investigative committee confirmed on August 9 that Kataib Hezbollah members in the 45th and 46th PMF brigades conducted the attack and added that there are unspecified command and control issues within the Kataib Hezbollah formations.[39] Such command and control issues are unsurprising because Kataib Hezbollah does not answer to the formal chain of command and instead takes its orders from the IRGC Quds Force.[40] Sudani dismissed the commanders of the 45th and 46th PMF Brigades on August 9 and formed a council to investigate the commander of the PMF's Jazeera Operations Command for neglecting his command and control duties.[41] The PMF Jazeera Operations Command is primarily composed of Kataib Hezbollah members.[42] Sudani's decision to dismiss the commanders of the 45th and 46th PMF Brigades comes as the United States pressures the Iraqi government to dissolve the PMF.[43]

Previous Iraqi governments have conducted similar spasmodic and limited crackdowns against PMF activities, but have failed to follow through with convictions or jail time. Former Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhimi twice arrested Iranian-backed Iraqi militia members for illegal activity, but militia pressure secured their release in both cases.[44] Sudani's orders could begin to limit Iranian influence within the Iraqi government, but it is unclear whether the Iraqi government will follow through with its announced actions.

## **Syria**

**Statements by the Syrian transitional government and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) after a political conference in Hasakah, Syria, demonstrate a lack of trust on both sides that will undermine Syrian integration efforts.** The Syrian Foreign Ministry's director of US Affairs, Qutaiba Idlibi, said that the transitional government condemned the August 8 "Unity of Position" conference.[45] Idlibi announced on August 9 that the transitional government withdrew from the scheduled Paris negotiations in response to the Hasakah conference and asked international mediators to move future talks to Damascus.[46] Idlibi said that the conference's decision to host "separatist figures involved in hostile acts" is a clear "violation" of the March 10 agreement. The March 10 agreement is a framework for integrating SDF-controlled territory into the rest of Syria.[47] Idlibi stated that the Syrian transitional government viewed the Hasakah conference as an attempt to "internationalize a Syrian issue, invite foreign interference, and reimpose sanctions," and that the government holds the SDF fully accountable for the conference.[48] The SDF released a statement on August 9 following the transitional government's withdrawal from the scheduled Paris negotiations.[49] The statement accused Turkish-backed factions operating under the Ministry of Defense (MOD) of repeated ceasefire violations across multiple provinces, urged an immediate halt to attacks, called for international monitoring, and reaffirmed readiness for dialogue while holding Damascus fully responsible for ceasefire violations.[50] One notable ceasefire violation occurred on August 2 after SDF forces allegedly attempted to advance toward MOD positions near al Kayariya village in Aleppo Province.[51] The SDF, Syrian transitional government, France, and the United States were previously scheduled to meet in Paris on an unspecified date to negotiate the integration of the SDF into the Syrian Defense Ministry.

The Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) decision to invite Druze Sheikh Hikmat al Hijri to the Hasakah conference on August 8 likely provoked the transitional government to withdraw from integration negotiations with the SDF in Paris.[52] Hijri formed a committee that announced an autonomous government for Suwayda Province on August 6.[53] The transitional government likely views cooperation between the SDF and Hijri as a threat to its ability to establish control over all of Syria. Both the SDF and the Syrian transitional government are responsible for failures to uphold the March 10 agreement, however. The transitional government has failed to ensure minority representation, which is a key stipulation within the March 10 agreement.[54] Very few government officials and no military commanders or government officials in senior security positions are from minority communities.

The extreme distrust between Damascus and the SDF could trigger a resumption in fighting if a minor ceasefire violation spirals out of control due to distrust and poor communication between the two sides. A relatively minor robbery, exacerbated by distrust between local communities, spurred widespread intercommunal violence in Suwayda Province, for example.[55]

**A Suwaydawi news outlet released a video on August 10 that shows Syrian security forces executing a hospital worker at the Suwayda National Hospital on July 16.[56]** Suwayda 24 released footage that shows Ministry of Defense (MoD) and Ministry of Interior (MoI) members executing a medical volunteer after he resisted their assault.[57] The MoI condemned the execution and said that it would investigate the footage on August 10.[58] The MoI appointed Security Affairs Deputy Minister Major General Abdul Qader al Tahhan on the same day to investigate the execution and arrest perpetrators.[59] This investigation is separate from the broader inquiry committee created by the transitional government on July 31 to investigate government violations in Suwayda Province.[60] Whether or how the Syrian transitional government holds its forces accountable for the atrocities that they commit will influence the government's legitimacy and perception among minority groups. If the investigation fails to deliver credible accountability, it will likely reinforce perceptions among minority groups that the transitional government tolerated or enabled such abuses.

### **Arabian Peninsula**

**The Houthis launched three drones targeting Ben Gurion Airport and "vital sites" in Ashkelon and Beer Sheva in southern Israel on August 7.[61]** The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Air Force intercepted two Houthi drones outside of Israeli territory.[62] 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.[63]

**The Houthis and Iran are using an extensive smuggling network involving personnel in Iran, Somalia, and Yemen to bypass the UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM) in Djibouti, according to smugglers detained by a pro-Yemeni government faction.** UNVIM is a UN-established inspection mechanism based at Djibouti Port designed to facilitate the import of commercial goods to Yemen while preventing the smuggling of weapons and military equipment to the Houthis.[64] The Yemeni National Resistance Front (NRF) published interviews on August 9 from Yemeni crew members of a vessel that the NRF intercepted on July 16.[65] The ship was carrying over 750 tons of military equipment bound for the Houthis, including

Iranian-made cruise and anti-ship missiles, drone engines, air defense components, and communication equipment.[66]

IRGC and the Houthis operate an extensive network of smuggling routes encompassing maritime and overland pathways, according to the crew's testimonies.[67] The maritime operations include direct shipments from Bandar Abbas Port in southern Iran to the Houthi-controlled al Salif and Hudaydah ports in western Yemen. The network also includes operations via the Somali coast, where IRGC operatives are stationed. The network also bypassed UNVIM using locally-recruited Djiboutians and by disguising ostensibly commercial shipping traveling through Djibouti Port.[68] The network sends smugglers on overland routes, including flights between Houthi-controlled Sanaa Airport and Jordan, and then flights from Jordan to Lebanon or over land crossings to Syria and Iraq before reaching Tehran and then ultimately to Bandar Abbas for maritime smuggling operations.[69] The smugglers also utilize routes through the Omani-Iranian border.[70] Omani border customs have previously intercepted weapons shipments bound for the Houthis.[71] Several shipments contained "sensitive chemicals" disguised as medicine, which Iran reportedly uses for ballistic missile fuel production.[72]

The crewmembers also disclosed the names and roles of six Houthi officials responsible for the Houthi-Iranian smuggling network:[73]

- **Houthi Deputy Defense Minister Brigadier General Abu Jaafar al Talbi:** responsible for military logistics and procurement, coordinates with the IRGC directly to oversee weapon transfers, and arranges for smugglers to travel to Tehran and stay at Houthi camps.[74]
- **Houthi - IRGC Liaison Officer Mostafa al Sharifi:** coordinates with Yemeni sailors arriving in Iran and manages container shipping logistics.[75]
- **Houthi General Authority for Fishing in the Red Sea head Hussein al Attas:** recruits sailors to facilitate weapons shipments and oversees smuggling operations from Somalia and Djibouti.[76]
- **Houthi General Authority for Fishing in the Red Sea deputy head Eyad Atini:** supports Attas in recruitment and coordination activities and manages fishing operations at al Salif and Hudaydah ports.[77]
- **Houthi Recruitment and Smuggling Coordinator Yahya Jiniya:** manages recruitment operations for smuggling networks and coordinates smuggling activities.[78]
- **Houthi Financial Operations Manager Ibrahim al Moayad:** oversees financial operations for the smuggling network and manages salary payments for operatives.[79]

**Yemeni security forces in al Houta, Lahj Governorate, intercepted a shipment of cranes, possibly for offloading and loading containers on vessels bound for Houthi-controlled Hudaydah Port on August 10, according to a Yemen analyst.[80]** US and Israeli airstrikes targeting Hudaydah Port between March and July 2025 destroyed most of the loading infrastructure, including cranes, making it harder for the Houthis to import and export goods.[81] The Houthis rely on Hudaydah Port for oil exports to generate revenue and to import commercial goods.[82]

### **Palestinian Territories and Lebanon**

**Anti-Hezbollah parliamentarians expressed discontent over Iranian Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Larijani's upcoming visit to Beirut by claiming that Iran is interfering in Lebanese affairs.**[83] Larijani is expected to visit Beirut this week for a three-day visit to discuss "regional issues" with unspecified Lebanese officials.[84] Several anti-Hezbollah parliamentarians have criticized Larijani's upcoming visit to Beirut. Lebanese Forces Party parliamentarian Ziad Hawat claimed on August 11 that Iran has blatantly interfered in Lebanese politics through arming Hezbollah and inciting "resistance" in Lebanon, stating that "Iran should stay in Iran." [85] Kataeb Party parliamentarian Elias Hankach similarly stated that Iran is encouraging Hezbollah to "refuse to hand over its weapons, start more wars," and "destroy Lebanon." [86]

Several Iranian officials have expressed support for Hezbollah since the Lebanese government took early steps to disarm Hezbollah. The Lebanese government tasked the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) with creating a plan to establish a state monopoly on arms on August 5 and agreed to the objectives of the US proposal to disarm Hezbollah on August 7.[87] Supreme Leader Advisor Ali Akbar Velayati said that Iran is "certainly" opposed to disarming Hezbollah on August 9.[88] Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on August 6 that Iran would support "from afar" any decisions that Hezbollah made in response to the Lebanese cabinet's disarmament plan.[89] Araghchi noted that the Lebanese government's plan is unrealistic and "doomed." [90] Deputy Commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Quds Force Iraj Masjedi also noted on August 7 that Hezbollah would never be disarmed.[91]

**Hezbollah officials and parliamentarians rejected calls for Hezbollah to disarm and called the Lebanese government's decision illegitimate, which could complicate the Lebanese government's ability to implement plans to disarm the group.**[92] Hezbollah Political Council deputy head Mahmoud Qamati said on August 11 that the Lebanese government "would not be able to disarm [Hezbollah]." [93] Several Hezbollah parliamentarians similarly pledged that Hezbollah would not hand over any weapons and that the government's plan would fail.[94] Hezbollah parliamentarian Hassan Ezzedine noted that the group "could not" disarm when Israel is continuing its operations in Lebanon.[95] Hezbollah has long used continued Israeli operations and the Taif Agreement to justify retaining its weapons.[96] Hezbollah officials and parliamentarians' statements suggest that Hezbollah will resist any LAF and Lebanese government plan to establish a state monopoly on arms. Hezbollah has long used its military capabilities and political influence within other state institutions to sway the Lebanese government's decision-making, and could attempt to do so again.[97]

**The Lebanese government has reportedly been under financial pressure to form and implement a plan to disarm Hezbollah.** Unspecified sources told Bloomberg on August 9 that the Gulf states previously informed Lebanese President Joseph Aoun and Prime Minister Nawaf Salam that reconstruction and investment funds to Lebanon are contingent upon the Lebanese government adopting a plan to fully disarm Hezbollah that includes a timetable.[98] The unspecified sources did not specify when Gulf officials told Aoun and Salam about this requirement. The sources noted that Gulf countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates, want Lebanon to restructure its banking sector and to crack down on corruption to control Lebanon's vast cash-based informal economy.[99] Gulf funding is crucial for Lebanon's ability to recover from the Israel-Lebanon War and to address its ongoing financial struggles.[100] The World Bank estimated in March 2025 that

Lebanon would need approximately \$11 billion to address its reconstruction and recovery needs following the war.[101] Lebanon's recovery needs and the Gulf states' stipulation that the government disarm Hezbollah likely contributed to the Lebanese government's decision to approve the US proposal objectives on August 7.[102] The United States' proposal objectives included that Lebanon would secure reconstruction funding from unspecified countries within 90 days.[103] The proposal objectives also stated that the United States, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, France, and other unspecified countries would organize an economic conference to support the Lebanese economy within 120 days.[104]

**Both the LAF and the Hezbollah-allied Amal Movement have issued statements warning civilians against protesting the Lebanese government's decision to disarm Hezbollah.**[105] Hezbollah and Amal Movement supporters previously held protests in 16 locations across Lebanon on August 7 in response to the Lebanese government's support for disarming Hezbollah.[106] The LAF warned citizens against "endangering the country's security through actions with unpredictable consequences" on August 9 in response to social media calls to protest the government's decision.[107] Amal executive body head Mostafa Fouani also responded to the August 7 protests and issued a directive prohibiting Amal party members from participating in "any provocative popular movement that contradicts the movement's leadership directives." [108] The Amal Movement has long supported Hezbollah's retention of its arms, but its leadership has also continuously called for internal unity as "the best form of resistance" and stressed that its members respect the privacy of all Lebanese civilians across all sects and regions.[109] Fouani threatened "organizational accountability" and expulsion for violators of the directive.[110]



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# Iran Update



**Ben Schmida, Ria Reddy, Avery Borens, Katherine Wells, Nidal Morrison, Ben Rezaei, Carolyn Moorman, Henry Jenks, Parker Hempel, Johanna Moore, and Brian Carter**

**August 12, 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.*

**Likely Hezbollah sources threatened to incite protests in Lebanon against US Special Envoy Thomas Barrack’s upcoming visit to Beirut if senior Lebanese officials do not meet with Iranian Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Larijani’s visit to Beirut on August 13.**[1] Lebanese officials have reportedly attempted to pressure Lebanese President Joseph Aoun and other Lebanese officials not to meet with Larijani. Lebanese media reported on August 12 that Prime Minister Nawaf Salam suggested that Lebanese officials should boycott Larijani’s visit.[2] Lebanese Foreign Minister Youssef Rajji is reportedly continuing his “domestic and foreign contacts” in an attempt to cancel Larijani’s visit or force Iran to “offer an apology” to the Lebanese government for its recent statements in support of Hezbollah.[3] Lebanese media also reported that anti-Hezbollah Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea is exerting “major pressure” on Salam to convince Aoun not to receive Larijani.[4] Aoun has reportedly declined these requests, stating that such a move would “violate all diplomatic norms.”[5] Several anti-Hezbollah parliamentarians similarly expressed discontent and criticized Larijani’s upcoming visit.[6] Lebanese Forces Party parliamentarian Ziad Hawat claimed on August 11 that Iran has blatantly interfered in Lebanese politics through arming Hezbollah and inciting “resistance” in Lebanon, stating that “Iran should stay in Iran.”[7]

Unspecified informed sources told Hezbollah-aligned media on August 12 that any attempt to prevent Larijani from visiting Beirut would be an “explosive step” that could be met with a “broad popular response” against the visits of “other envoys.”[8] Larijani is expected to visit Beirut on August 13 to reportedly meet with Aoun, Salam, and Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, only five days before US Envoy Thomas Barrack is expected to visit Beirut on August 18.[9] The “informed sources”--likely Hezbollah officials or close Hezbollah allies, given that they are speaking to a Hezbollah-aligned outlet--are implying that Hezbollah will mobilize protesters against Barrack. Hezbollah previously mobilized protesters on August 8 after the Lebanese government approved a plan to disarm Hezbollah.[10] Hezbollah-aligned media reported that Larijani will also meet with unspecified Hezbollah leaders.[11] Iranian Ambassador to Lebanon Mojtaba Amani posted on X on August 12 and said that Larijani’s visit seeks to express “Iran’s perspective and vision.”[12]

**Salam and Rajji's willingness to entertain an effort to spurn Larijani during his visit demonstrates the degree to which this Lebanese government is willing to challenge inordinate Iranian influence in Lebanon.** Previous Lebanese governments would have been unlikely to even entertain such a public challenge to Iran and its ally Hezbollah.

The Lebanese government has recently expressed discontent over Iranian officials' statements in support of Hezbollah since the Lebanese government took early steps to disarm Hezbollah. The Lebanese government tasked the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) with creating a plan to establish a state monopoly on arms on August 5 and agreed to the objectives of the US proposal to disarm Hezbollah on August 7.[13] Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi noted on August 6 that the Lebanese government's plan to disarm Hezbollah is unrealistic and "doomed." [14] International Affairs Advisor to the Iranian Supreme Leader, Ali Akbar Velayati, said on August 9 that Iran is "certainly" opposed to disarming Hezbollah.[15] The Lebanese Foreign Ministry called Velayati's statement a "flagrant and unacceptable interference" by Iran.[16]

**Iranian officials have strongly criticized the US proposal to oversee a transit corridor in the southern Caucasus due to Iranian fears that its adversaries and competitors seek to use the corridor to undermine Iranian security and economic interests.** Armenia and Azerbaijan signed a declaration of intent on August 8 on a US-brokered peace deal that grants the United States exclusive development rights to a 27 mile corridor through southern Armenia that connects Azerbaijan to its exclave, the Nakhchivan Autonomous Region.[17] The agreed upon corridor is fundamentally the actualization of the Zangezur Corridor—a Turkish and Azerbaijani-proposed transit route that would connect Azerbaijan to Nakhchivan. Iran has historically opposed the Zangezur Corridor and viewed it as an effort to economically sideline Iran and limit Iranian regional influence.[18] A senior adviser to the Supreme Leader emphasized Iran's strong opposition to the proposed transit corridor on August 9 and referred to it as a "political conspiracy" against Iran.[19] An Iranian analyst close to the regime similarly characterized the proposed transit corridor as an Iranian "containment belt" meant to isolate Iran and threaten Iran's security.[20] The corridor runs along Iran's only shared border with Armenia and would sever Iranian land access to Russia and Europe via Armenia, which could exclude Iran from a new international transit route and hinder Iranian efforts to become a major transit hub. The corridor would enable Azerbaijan to circumvent Iran to access the Nakhchivan Autonomy Republic, which will likely deprive Iran of political leverage and any associated revenue along the transit corridor. Azerbaijan currently accesses its exclave and Turkey through Iran.

This proposed agreement would be an additional victory for Iranian adversaries at a time when Iran's relative ability to project power in its near abroad has diminished.[21] Iranian officials have expressed concern about Turkey's expanding influence as a rival in the Middle East and around Iran's borders, especially after Turkey replaced Iran as the primary backer of the new Syrian government following Assad's fall in December 2024. Turkey currently uses routes through Iran to trade with Central Asia, but a new route directly from Turkey to Azerbaijan through Armenia means that Turkey may be able to use the corridor to reach the Caspian Sea while circumventing Iran completely. Iran has similarly found itself at odds with Azerbaijan, which has taken steps to strengthen ties with Israel in recent months. Iran has historically accused Israel of using Azerbaijani territory to conduct operations in Iran, including during the Israel-Iran War.[22] Israeli government officials have recently called for including Azerbaijan in the Abraham Accords.[23]

**Iran has taken some steps to deter the corridor from being established.** Iranian President Masoud Pezeskhian warned Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan during a phone call on August 11 to be wary of foreign attempts to use the agreement as a way to achieve “hegemonic goals,” likely referring to the United States.[24] Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi separately held a phone call with Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan on August 12 to discuss the US-brokered peace deal and the proposed transit corridor.[25] Pezeshkian is scheduled to visit Armenia on August 18.[26] The Iranian National Security and Foreign Policy Commission held a meeting with defense, military, and foreign policy officials on August 11 to discuss Iranian diplomatic and military efforts to block the passage of the transit corridor.[27] Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps-affiliated media stated on August 12 that Iran will be forced to adopt a "multi-layered and measured response" to the corridor.[28] Iran has previously threatened to take military action to prevent the development of the Zangezur Corridor.[29] Iran has also previously conducted numerous provocative military exercises along the border designed to discourage the development of the corridor.[30]

## The Zangezur Corridor Through Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Armenia



**Turkey pressured Syria to withdraw from the US- and French-brokered integration negotiations in Paris and encouraged Syria to strengthen ties with Russia to counterbalance US and partner influence in Syria, which undermines US policy objectives in Syria.[31]** Unspecified Turkish sources told *Syria in Transition* that Turkey pressured the Syrian transitional government to withdraw from scheduled Paris negotiations with the United States, France, and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), due to fears that the transitional government would be forced to concede to Kurdish autonomy demands because of its poor handling of security in Suwayda.[32] This demonstrates that Turkey's primary concern about the Syrian government's behavior in Suwayda is whether the Syrian government's behavior will strengthen the SDF, not the behavior itself or the crimes committed by government forces. However, the SDF's decision to invite prominent Druze leader Hikmat al Hijri to a political conference in Hasakah City on August 8 likely

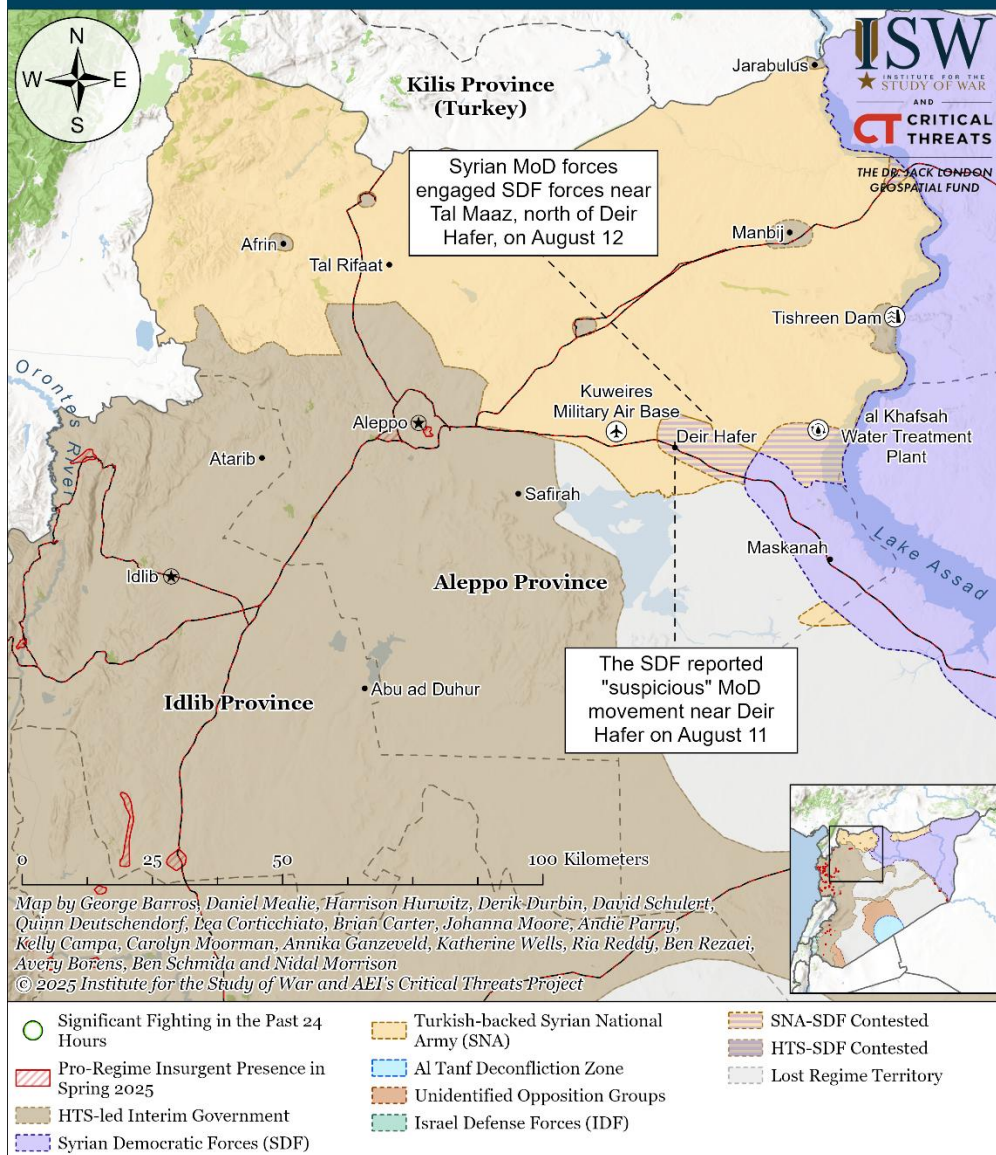
made it easier for Turkey to successfully pressure Syria to abandon the talks in Paris and demand that the SDF negotiate in Damascus.[33] Hijri's political movement declared an autonomous Suwaydawi government, and fighters close to Hijri have broken multiple ceasefires by attacking government forces and other Druze factions.[34] Turkey is simultaneously attempting to help Russia retain influence in Syria by encouraging the Syrian transitional government to strengthen diplomatic ties with Russia. Turkish sources said that the Turkish government had advised President Ahmed Shara to strengthen relations with Russia so that Russia, Turkey, and Syria can counterbalance US, European, Israeli, and Saudi interests in the country.[35]

These Turkish efforts undermine key US policy objectives, including maintaining Syrian stability and preventing Russia from re-establishing itself in Syria. The US effort to integrate the SDF into Syria would prevent future rounds of conflict between the Kurdish-dominated SDF and Turkish-backed factions, which could seriously imperil Syrian stability and provide openings for ISIS to resurge. Increased Russian military influence in Syria would be similarly deleterious to Syrian stability. Russian state media reported on August 11 that the Syrian transitional government sought renewed Russian military police patrols in southern Syria to curb Israeli activity, citing a Russian source at an August 1 meeting between Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad Shaibani and the Syrian diaspora in Moscow.[36] The Russian military conducted a patrol in SDF-controlled Qamishli, Hasakah Province, on August 4 shortly after Syrian diplomats returned from Moscow to negotiate Russian basing in Syria.[37] Russian military operations in Syria, particularly in southern Syria, did not contribute to lasting stability during the civil war and, in some cases, supported Iranian operations in Syria.[38]

**The SDF and the transitional government have nonetheless continued to make progress in negotiations over the integration agreement despite Turkish interference.** *Al Jazeera* reported on August 11 that an SDF delegation arrived in Damascus to renew integration talks with the transitional government, but no updates have followed.[39] The SDF and the Syrian transitional government likely desire to avoid any major fighting between the government and SDF, given that major military operations would risk significant destabilization of Syria that could imperil the political positions of both sides.

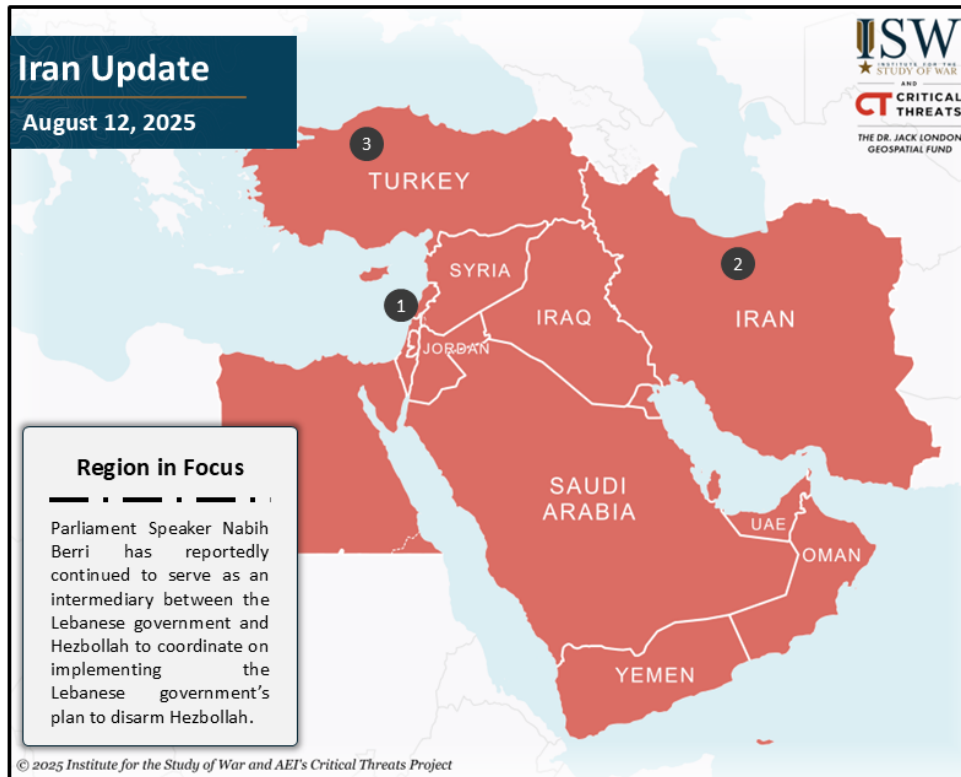
## Assessed Control of Terrain around Aleppo

August 12, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



**Recent ceasefire violations amid heightened tensions between the SDF and transitional government forces could threaten progress to negotiate the March 10 agreement, however.** Syrian Ministry of Defense (MoD) forces reportedly made “suspicious movements” near Deir Hafer, Aleppo Province, and nearby villages, on August 11.[40] These movements occurred in relatively open farmland dotted by small villages, crisscrossed by dirt roadways and small agricultural canals. The only notable defensive line outside of the small villages is a 30 meter wide east-west canal that runs south of Tal Maaz, 8 km northwest of Deir Hafer. The MoD engaged SDF forces near Tal Maaz on August 12 after the SDF advanced toward MoD positions there..[41] The precise MoD-SDF frontlines in Aleppo Province are unclear, but the reports of “suspicious movements” and the engagement near Tal Maaz suggest that both sides may be executing reconnaissance operations, which seek to “obtain

information about the activities and resources of an enemy or adversary [and] secure data concerning...characteristics of a particular area.”[42]



- 1 **BEIRUT, LEBANON.** Likely Hezbollah sources threatened to incite protests in Lebanon against US Special Envoy Thomas Barrack's upcoming visit to Beirut if senior Lebanese officials do not meet with Iranian Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Larijani's visit to Beirut on August 13.
- 2 **TEHRAN, IRAN.** Iranian officials have strongly criticized the US proposal to oversee a transit corridor in the South Caucasus due to Iranian fears that its adversaries and competitors seek to use the corridor to undermine Iranian security and economic interests. This proposed agreement would be an additional strategic victory for Iranian adversaries at a time when Iran's relative ability to project power in its near abroad has diminished.
- 3 **ANKARA, TURKEY.** Turkey pressured Syria to withdraw from the US- and French- brokered integration negotiations in Paris and encouraged Syria to strengthen ties with Russia to counterbalance US and partner influence in Syria, which undermines US policy objectives in Syria. Negotiations have continued despite this interference, but recent ceasefire violations threaten to derail this.

## **Key Takeaways**

- **Lebanese Hezbollah:** Likely Hezbollah sources threatened to incite protests in Lebanon against US Special Envoy Thomas Barrack's upcoming visit to Beirut if senior Lebanese officials do not meet with Iranian Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Larijani's visit to Beirut on August 13. Salam and Rajji's willingness to entertain an effort to spurn Larijani during his visit demonstrates the degree to which this Lebanese government is willing to challenge inordinate Iranian influence in Lebanon.

- **Iran in the Caucasus:** Iranian officials have strongly criticized the US proposal to oversee a transit corridor in the South Caucasus due to Iranian fears that its adversaries and competitors seek to use the corridor to undermine Iranian security and economic interests. This proposed agreement would be an additional strategic victory for Iranian adversaries at a time when Iran's relative ability to project power in its near abroad has diminished.
- **Turkey in Syria:** Turkey pressured Syria to withdraw from the US- and French-brokered integration negotiations in Paris and encouraged Syria to strengthen ties with Russia to counterbalance US and partner influence in Syria, which undermines US policy objectives in Syria. Negotiations have continued despite this interference, but recent ceasefire violations threaten to derail this.

## **Iran**

**Senior Iranian defense officials discussed strengthening Iranian-South African bilateral relations and, through BRICS, with South African National Defense Force Commander General Rudzani Maphwanya in Tehran on August 12.**[43] Maphwanya met with Defense and Armed Logistics Minister Brigadier General Aziz Nasir Zadeh, who oversees the Iranian defense-industrial complex and manages Iranian arms sales and purchases. [44]Maphwanya separately met Armed Forces General Staff Chief Major General Abdol Rahim Mousavi and Artesh Commander Major General Amir Hatami.[45] Iran and South Africa signed a memorandum of understanding to increase economic cooperation in August 2023.[46] The specific terms of economic cooperation between Iran and South Africa remain unclear.

**Iranian “Enjoining the Good and Forbidding the Evil” Headquarters Spokesperson Ali Khan Mohammadi claimed on August 12 that Iran plans to unveil a new missile, the Rastakhiz (Resurrection).**[47] The headquarters is an Iranian state body that promotes Islamic duties as defined by Islamic law through policy-making, promotional campaigns, oversight, support activities, and coordination between state and religious institutions.[48] Khan Mohammadi claimed the Rastakhiz could mount a tactical nuclear warhead and generate an electromagnetic pulse (EMP).[49] Other Iranian missiles could be equipped with nuclear warheads, but Iran does not possess the technological know-how to miniaturize a nuclear weapon for use on a ballistic missile. Any nuclear explosion would cause an EMP wave. He claimed that the Rastakhiz measures 14 meters in length and weighs 27 tons.[50] It is not clear how Khan Mohammadi would have access to this information, given his position outside of Iranian security institutions.

**International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Deputy Director General Massimo Aparo visited Iranian officials on August 12 to discuss Iran's cooperation with the IAEA.**[51] This visit marks the first IAEA visit to Iran since the Israel-Iran War and since all IAEA inspectors left Iran due to safety concerns.[52] Iran approved on June 26 a bill that suspended cooperation with the IAEA. Iranian officials repeatedly stated ahead of Aparo's visit that the IAEA delegation would not inspect Iranian nuclear facilities during the visit.[53] The IAEA's visit comes ahead of the E3's (the United Kingdom, France, and Germany) end-of-August deadline for Iran to make progress towards a nuclear deal before the E3 triggers the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) snapback mechanism.[54] The E3 reportedly aims to engage Iran and secure verifiable steps, such as restoring

Iranian cooperation with the IAEA and the removal of Iran's 60 percent enriched uranium stockpile, before the snapback deadline takes effect.[55]

## **Iraq**

**Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Ali Larijani continued to meet with Iraqi political actors on August 11 and 12 in an attempt to secure Iranian interests in Iraq.**[56] Larijani met with Najaf Province Governor Youssef Kinawi in Najaf on August 12.[57] Larijani has met with various Iraqi state officials during his two-day inaugural trip to Iraq following his appointment as SNSC chairman.[58] Conservative Iranian newspaper *Qods Online* claimed on August 12 that Larijani's visit to Iraq is an attempt to stabilize the Axis of Resistance.[59] Unspecified political sources told Iraqi media on August 12 that Larijani's visit to Iraq is linked to Iranian government concerns that the Iraqi government will succumb to US pressure to dissolve the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF).[60] The United States has pressured the Iraqi federal government to disarm the PMF, which is an effort that Iran and its Iraqi allies oppose.[61]

**Iraqi Oil Minister Hayyan Abdul Ghani discussed the restoration of the Kirkuk-Baniyas pipeline with Syrian Energy Minister Mohammed al Bashir in Baghdad on August 12.**[62] Syrian Energy Ministry Oil Affairs Deputy Ghiath Diab also attended the meeting. The ministers agreed to form a joint technical committee to assess the pipeline's current status.[63] Syria and Iraq agreed to reopen the Kirkuk-Baniyas pipeline in 2007, but closed the pipeline in 2010 after it sustained damage during the war in Iraq.[64] An Iraqi delegation discussed the potential reopening of the pipeline with Syrian officials in late April 2025.[65] CTP-ISW assessed on April 25 that the Syrian transitional government may seek to reopen the pipeline to compensate for a reduction in Iranian oil exports to Syria after the fall of the Assad regime.[66]

## **Syria**

**US, Syrian, and Jordanian officials met in Amman, Jordan, on August 12 and released a joint statement about consolidating the ceasefire in Suwayda Province and fully integrating the province into the Syrian state.**[67] Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al Shaibani, Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi, and US Special Envoy to Syria Thomas Barrack agreed to establish a tripartite "working group" to strengthen the Suwayda ceasefire and to provide additional international humanitarian support to Suwaydawis.[68] The joint statement said that Suwayda is an "integral part of Syria," and also called for the Syrian transitional government to ensure Suwaydawi rights and political representation in the Syrian state.[69] Druze spiritual leader Hikmat al Hijri established a temporary "autonomous Suwayda government on August 6.[70] The United States and Jordan commended the Syrian transitional government for initiating investigations into perpetrators of violence in Suwayda.[71] The Syrian Ministry of Justice (MOJ) formed a committee to investigate the violence in Suwayda on July 31.[72] The Syrian transitional government's ability to rebuild trust with the Suwaydawi community is contingent upon the MOJ committee producing tangible results through convictions and punishment, however.

**The United States is attempting to broker a deal that would establish a humanitarian corridor between Suwayda City and Israel to deliver aid to the Druze community there, according to US and Israeli officials speaking to Axios.**[73] US Special Envoy to Syria Thomas

Barrack is expected to meet with Israeli Strategic Affairs Minister Ron Dermer and Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al Shaibani in Paris in the coming week to negotiate an agreement on the corridor.[74] The United States previously brokered talks between the Syrian transitional government and Israel on July 24 in Paris after Israel conducted airstrikes on the Syrian MoD and Bedouin tribal militias in response to intercommunal violence in Suwayda.[75] Suwaydawis have repeatedly demanded that the transitional government lift a "siege" on Suwayda that has caused food, fuel, and water shortages in the province.[76]

### **Arabian Peninsula**

**The IDF Air Force intercepted a Houthi drone outside of Israeli territory on August 12.**[77] The Houthis did not claim an attack on Israel as of the time of writing. 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.[78]

### **Palestinian Territories and Lebanon**

**Parliament Speaker and Hezbollah ally Nabih Berri has reportedly continued to serve as an intermediary between the Lebanese government and Hezbollah to coordinate on implementing the Lebanese government's plan to disarm Hezbollah.** Unspecified sources close to Berri told Lebanese media on August 11 that Berri has continued to mediate between the Lebanese government and Hezbollah "in a calculated attempt to address concerns on both sides." [79] Berri has previously served as a key interlocutor between Hezbollah, the Lebanese government, and the international community, such as in the recent negotiations to disarm Hezbollah.[80] Berri also served as a mediator between Hezbollah and the United States during the November 2024 Israel-Hezbollah ceasefire negotiations. [81] The sources did not specify the Lebanese government or Hezbollah's concerns but did state that Berri is reportedly concerned with reining in possible protests that could descend "into chaos." [82] Hezbollah orchestrated protests on August 8 and threatened on August 12 to trigger protests again (see topline).[83] The sources noted that Berri is also simultaneously "coordinating" with the LAF and Hezbollah.[84] Berri's efforts to mediate and resolve outstanding concerns between the Lebanese government and Hezbollah are crucial for the LAF to implement the government's plans to disarm Hezbollah. The Lebanese government previously tasked the LAF on August 5 with creating a plan to establish a state monopoly on arms across Lebanon by the end of 2025, which will include LAF deployments.[85] Hezbollah's continued rejection of calls to disarm, if unaddressed, would complicate the Lebanese government's ability to implement these plans.[86]

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# Iran Update



**Avery Borens, Andie Parry, Ben Rezaei, Katherine Wells, Carolyn Moorman, Adham Fattah, Kelly Campa, and Brian Carter**

**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.*

**Iranian Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Ali Larijani's visit to Beirut likely reflects Iranian efforts to recover Iranian influence in Lebanon and in the Levant after Hezbollah's degradation and the collapse of the Assad regime.** Larijani met with Lebanese President Joseph Aoun, Prime Minister Nawaf Salam, and Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri on August 13.[1] Aoun and Salam are currently leading the state's efforts to disarm Hezbollah, and Berri is Hezbollah's highest-ranking ally in the Lebanese government. An Iranian analyst close to the regime stated on August 13 that Larijani's visit aimed to "prevent a complete shift in Lebanon's internal power balance to the detriment of Hezbollah." [2] Larijani likely seeks to meet with anti-Hezbollah Lebanese politicians as part of a broader strategy to halt the implementation of a Hezbollah disarmament plan. The Lebanese government tasked the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) with creating a plan to establish a state monopoly on arms on August 5 and agreed to the objectives of the US proposal to disarm Hezbollah on August 7.[3] The United States and Israel also decided on August 13 to renew the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)'s contract and expand UNIFIL's authority to stage raids, arrest individuals, and erect checkpoints.[4] UNIFIL has previously rarely taken steps to challenge Hezbollah in southern Lebanon, but expanded activities may allow UNIFIL to challenge Hezbollah in some way.[5]

**Larijani also reaffirmed Iranian support for Hezbollah during his visit, likely in an attempt to bolster Iran's declining credibility as a reliable partner.** Larijani reaffirmed Iran's support for Hezbollah and called on Lebanese civilians to "preserve the resistance" during a press conference following his meeting with Berri.[6] Hezbollah is also referred to as the Islamic Resistance in Lebanon by pro-Iran actors.[7] Larijani stated that Iran will stand by Lebanon in the case of "any

Israeli escalation.”[8] Larijani is likely attempting to reaffirm Iran’s support for Hezbollah after Iran failed to support Hezbollah during the Israeli campaign in Lebanon and after the damage Iran suffered in the Israel-Iran War.[9] Iran also failed to act quickly enough to defend its Syrian ally, the Bashar al Assad regime, from an HTS-led offensive that led to the regime’s collapse.[10] Iran likely needs to take efforts to bolster its credibility with Hezbollah and regionally. Iranian support for its proxies and partners in the Levant has long served as a form of Iranian deterrence against Israel.

**Larijani’s statements vowing support for Hezbollah are largely performative, given that Iran’s current constraints will likely severely limit any Iranian effort to meaningfully support Hezbollah.** The fall of the Assad regime in Syria and the Lebanese state’s crackdown on Iranian smuggling through Lebanese airports and border crossings have rendered any Iranian effort to resupply Hezbollah relatively slow and inefficient.[11] Iran’s inability to smuggle weapons and money to Hezbollah forces has forced Iran to rely on sending Hezbollah cash transfers rather than large shipments of weapons.[12] Lebanon has been able to interdict some of these cash transfers.[13] Iran’s need to rebuild and re-focus its domestic strategy after the Israel-Iran War will likely further constrain available Iranian financial support for Hezbollah.[14] Iran may seek to retain its influence in Lebanon, but could struggle to provide real support. Larijani notably made no explicit comments about the exact types of support Lebanon or Hezbollah could expect beyond reaffirming Iran’s solidarity with Hezbollah and rejecting calls for the group to disarm.[15]

**Turkey is likely encouraging the Syrian government to increase military and political pressure on the Kurdish-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to integrate into Syria.** Turkey has become increasingly disillusioned with integration negotiations between the SDF and the Syrian transitional government. Turkey pressured Syria to withdraw from the US- and French-brokered integration negotiations in Paris with the SDF, which undermines US policy objectives in Syria.[16] Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan also likely discussed the SDF and integration efforts with Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al Shaibani during their meeting on August 13.[17] Fidan said that Turkey is observing behavior from the SDF in Syria that “we find hard to tolerate.”[18] Fidan and Shaibani probably did not discuss military planning, but it is nonetheless notable that a pro-government Turkish columnist said on August 13 that the Syrian government is preparing a military operation against the SDF.[19] The Syrian transitional government aims to bring all of Syria under its control and has its own motives to integrate the SDF—militarily or diplomatically—regardless of Turkish encouragement. Such an operation would, however, likely require Turkish approval due to the degree of Turkish influence in Syria and its government. Another Turkish journalist who has previously written for government outlets claimed that Turkish sources said that US officials told the SDF that the United States may not be able to support the SDF against the Syrian army or Turkey.[20] Turkish armed forces would reportedly provide indirect support for a “limited operation” against the SDF by the transitional government.[21] Turkey is motivated to fully dismantle the SDF because it sees the continued existence of the SDF as a threat to its regional ambitions and domestic stability.

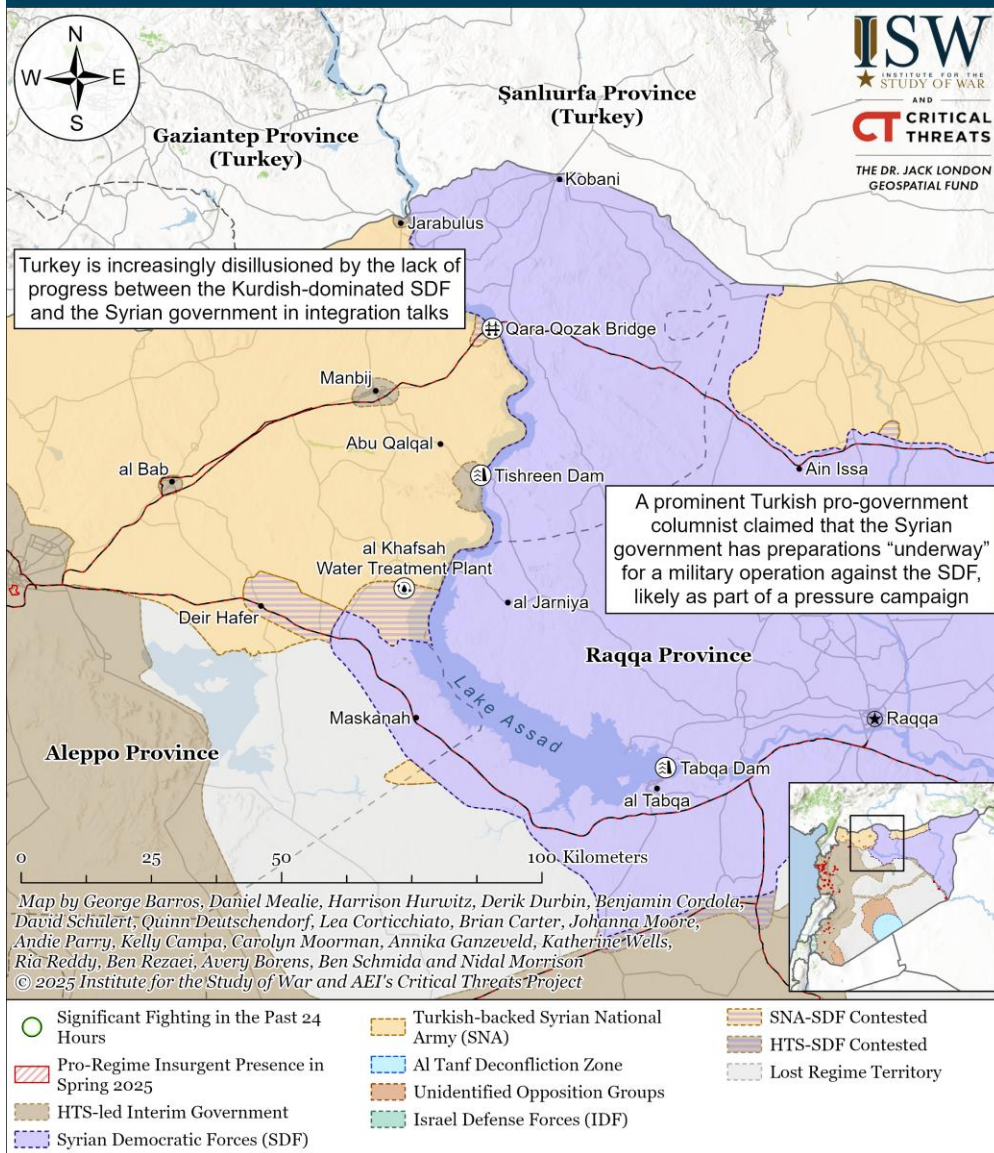
Turkish influence continues to grow within the Syrian military amid this pressure effort. Turkish and Syrian defense officials signed a military training and “consultation” agreement in Ankara on August 13 after Syria requested Turkish military support to strengthen its counterterrorism capabilities on July 23.[22] The Turkish Defense Ministry will provide training programs and technical support to strengthen the Syrian army and “reform the security apparatus comprehensively.”[23] This agreement

could give Turkey additional leverage over the Syrian government, amid additional Turkish avenues of influence. Turkey has continued to provide salaries for elements of the Syrian army, such as the Syrian National Army (SNA).[24] Turkey also holds economic sway over the Syrian government through recent energy and trade deals.[25]

**Additional Turkish defense cooperation with the Syrian government may discourage the SDF from integrating into the Syrian army because of the relations between Turkey and the Kurds.** Kurds in northeastern Syria have come under threat from Turkish-backed forces that are now affiliated with the government throughout the civil war. Some Turkish-backed militias in the SNA are made up of Turkish ethno-nationalists who have committed atrocities against Kurds in northern Syria.[26] The Kurdish-dominated SDF may feel reticent to enter a command structure trained by these former adversaries, particularly if the SDF is not allowed to maintain a Kurdish force to defend Kurds in northeastern Syria. Kurdish communities have repeatedly called for autonomy and voiced their opposition to centralized rule because they view the transitional government as majoritarian and are skeptical of the government's ability and willingness to protect their communities.[27] 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 unsafe. This challenge exemplifies the barriers that the transitional government faces in reaching a comprehensive integration agreement through diplomacy.

## Assessed Control of Terrain around Manbij

August 13, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



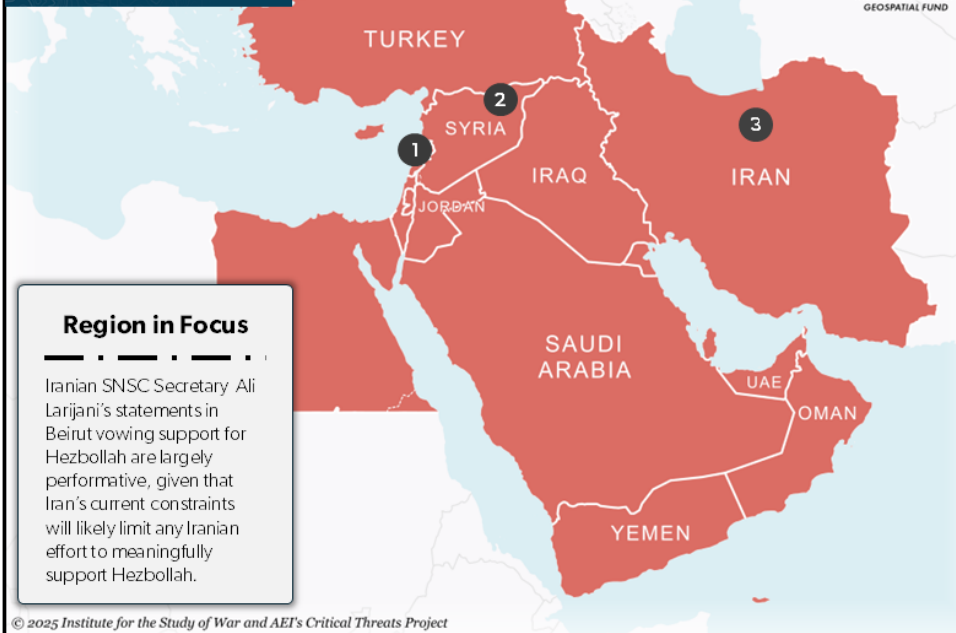
**Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told Israeli media on August 12 that Iran still holds about 400 kilograms of enriched uranium, though Iran may still be unable to access this stockpile.[28]** The size of the stockpile is consistent with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)'s estimate in June 2025 that Iran retained about 408.6 kilograms of 60 percent enriched uranium. The IAEA reported in May that Iran possessed a total enriched uranium stockpile of 9,247.6 kilograms, though this estimate includes uranium enriched to lower levels.[29] Netanyahu stated that Israel "knew in advance" the strikes would not destroy the uranium, which is logical because uranium is an element and therefore cannot be destroyed, only scattered.[30] Netanyahu also argued that the stockpile alone is "insufficient to produce a nuclear weapon" without other key elements of Iran's nuclear program.[31] Netanyahu is likely referring to assets damaged by Israel during the 12-day war, including research and development facilities, explosives manufacturing sites, and knowledge

from key nuclear scientists.[32] Netanyahu said the strikes eliminated two “cancerous” threats to Israel’s existence: Iran’s nuclear weapons program and its planned production of 20,000 ballistic missiles.[33]

It is unclear whether Iran can access its 60 percent enriched uranium because some of the stockpile may be buried under rubble at Fordow or Esfahan.[34] US and Israeli airstrikes on Fordow and other enrichment facilities may have buried enriched uranium underground, which would limit access to the material.[35] Iran cannot begin further enrichment or weaponization until it regains physical access to it. Western media reports after the initial strikes suggested that Iran may have transferred part of its enriched uranium from nuclear facilities to other sites before the Israeli and US strikes.[36] Senior Israeli officials have repeatedly warned that Israel would “almost certainly” detect any Iranian attempts to recover the material and conduct renewed strikes to prevent Iran from accessing the material.[37] Netanyahu stated that Israel continues to monitor Iran’s nuclear weapons program in coordination with the United States and will act with or without US approval.[38] Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian acknowledged on August 10 that Israeli strikes had damaged nuclear capabilities and warned that rebuilding them could prompt further attacks.[39]

## Iran Update

August 13, 2025



### Region in Focus

Iranian SNSC Secretary Ali Larijani's statements in Beirut vowing support for Hezbollah are largely performative, given that Iran's current constraints will likely limit any Iranian effort to meaningfully support Hezbollah.

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- 1 LEBANON.** Iranian Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Larijani's visit to Beirut likely reflects Iranian efforts to recover Iranian influence in Lebanon and in the Levant after Hezbollah's degradation and the collapse of the Assad regime. Larijani reaffirmed Iranian support for Hezbollah during his visit, likely in an attempt to bolster Iran's declining credibility as a reliable partner.
- 2 SYRIA.** Turkey is likely encouraging the Syrian government to increase military and political pressure on the Kurdish-dominated SDF to integrate into Syria. The Syrian transitional government aims to bring all of Syria under its control and has its own motives to integrate the SDF—militarily or diplomatically—regardless of Turkish encouragement.
- 3 IRAN.** Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told Israeli media on August 12 that Iran still "holds" about 400 kilograms of enriched uranium, though Iran may still be unable to access this stockpile. Iran cannot begin further enrichment or weaponization until it regains physical access to it.

## Key Takeaways

- Iranian Regional Influence:** Iranian Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Larijani's visit to Beirut likely reflects Iranian efforts to recover Iranian influence in Lebanon and in the Levant after Hezbollah's degradation and the collapse of the Assad regime. Larijani reaffirmed Iranian support for Hezbollah during his visit, likely in an attempt to bolster Iran's declining credibility as a reliable partner. Larijani's statements vowing support for Hezbollah are largely performative, given that Iran's current constraints will likely limit any Iranian effort to meaningfully support Hezbollah.

- **Turkey and Syria:** Turkey is likely encouraging the Syrian government to increase military and political pressure on the Kurdish-dominated SDF to integrate into Syria. The Syrian transitional government aims to bring all of Syria under its control and has its own motives to integrate the SDF—militarily or diplomatically—regardless of Turkish encouragement.
- **Iranian Nuclear Program:** Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told Israeli media on August 12 that Iran still “holds” about 400 kilograms of enriched uranium, though Iran may still be unable to access this stockpile. Iran cannot begin further enrichment or weaponization until it regains physical access to it.

## **Iran**

**Iran failed to respond to an offer from the E3—United Kingdom, France, and Germany—to extend the August 31 deadline for Iran to return to nuclear negotiations with the E3 before the E3 trigger snapback mechanism.**[40] This “limited extension” would grant Iran more time to commit to a new nuclear agreement that would address the E3’s concerns before the snapback mechanism expires in October 2025.[41] The E3 has expressed that Iran needs to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and to remove their 60 percent enriched uranium stockpile to avert the imposition of snapback sanctions.[42] Iran is unlikely to reverse its June 26 decision to officially ban cooperation with the IAEA. This continued ban leaves Iran-E3 negotiations at a standstill.[43] Iran notably did not allow an IAEA delegation to inspect Iranian nuclear facilities during its visit to Tehran on August 12.[44] Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi separately told reporters on August 11 that Iran has not set a date for further talks with the E3.[45] The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) snapback mechanism—which re-imposes UN sanctions—requires up to 30 days to complete, which requires the E3 to start the process by September 2025 before the snapback mechanism expires in October.[46]

**Iranian officials met with Armenian officials on August 13 to discuss their opposition to the proposed Zangezur Corridor.**[47] Iranian Supreme Leader International Affairs Adviser Ali Akbar Velayati met with Armenian Deputy Foreign Minister Vahan Kostanyan on August 13 to discuss the recent US-brokered peace deal between Armenia and Azerbaijan.[48] The deal grants the United States exclusive development rights to the Zangezur Corridor, which is a Turkish- and Azerbaijani-proposed transit route that would connect Azerbaijan to its exclave, the Nakhchivan Autonomous Region. Iran opposes the proposed corridor because it would sever Iranian land access to Russia and Europe via Armenia.[49] Velayati warned against foreign intervention in the region in the meeting and stated that any threats to Iran’s national security on its borders would prompt an Iranian response.[50] Kostanyan also met with Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi.[51] Araghchi separately met with the Russian Foreign Ministry’s Special Representative for the Caucasus, Igor Khayev, to emphasize the importance of Russo-Iranian cooperation over the corridor.[52] Iranian officials have expressed concern in recent years that Russia’s preoccupation with its invasion of Ukraine has enabled Turkey, Israel, and the United States to increase their influence in the southern Caucasus.[53]

## **Iraq**

**US State Department Spokesperson Tammy Bruce stated on August 12 that the United States opposes any Iraqi legislation that would turn Iraq into an “Iranian satellite state,”**

**referencing the Popular Mobilization Authority Law and a recent Iran-Iraq Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) regarding border security.[54]** The Popular Mobilization Authority Law, on which the Iraqi Parliament is yet to vote, is likely to increase Iran's influence in the Iraqi political and security spheres by formalizing the Iranian-backed Popular Mobilization Authority (PMF)'s structures and responsibilities.[55] Iranian SNSC Secretary Ali Larijani and Iraqi National Security Advisor Qassim al Araj signed an MoU on August 11 to "develop" the 2023 Iran-Iraq security agreement that requires Iraqi authorities to disarm and relocate members of Kurdish opposition groups from the Iran-Iraq border.[56] An unspecified senior security source told Iraqi media on August 13 that the MoU includes mechanisms for joint patrols and intelligence exchanges to address dual threats from the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and Iranian opposition groups based in northern Iraq.[57] The signing of this MoU is probably an extension of Iran's focus on internal security because Iran views Iraqi Kurdistan as a rear area from which anti-regime Kurdish groups can operate in Iran, which threatens the Iranian regime's stability.[58] The Iranian Embassy in Baghdad and the Iraqi Embassy in Washington, DC, both condemned Bruce's comments.[59]

## **Syria**

*See topline section.*

## **Arabian Peninsula**

**The Houthis launched six drones targeting "vital sites" in Haifa, the Negev Desert, Eilat, and Beer Sheva in Israel on August 12.[60]** The IDF Air Force intercepted a Houthi drone outside of Israeli territory on August 12.[61] 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.[62]

## **Palestinian Territories and Lebanon**

*See topline section.*

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# Iran Update



**Avery Borens, Katherine Wells, Ben Rezaei, Kelly Campa, Ben Schmida, Nidal Morrison, Carolyn Moorman, and Annika Ganzeveld**

**August 14, 2025      Information Cutoff: 2:00 PM ET**

**Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has reportedly approved the resumption of nuclear negotiations with the United States because the Iranian regime views negotiations as necessary for the regime’s survival, according to three Iranian insiders speaking to Reuters on August 14.[1]** One source stated that Iranian leaders support negotiations because they have “seen the cost of military confrontation” and seek to prevent further escalation with Israel and the United States. Moderate and pragmatic officials in the regime have recently signaled openness to resuming negotiations.[2] Moderate Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, for example, stated on August 10 that resuming negotiations with the United States “does not mean we intend to surrender.”[3] The Iranian regime continues to reject the US demand for Iran to halt uranium enrichment, which was the main sticking point in negotiations before the Israel-Iran War.[4] Iranian Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister for Political Affairs Majid Takht Ravanchi recently told Japanese media on August 11 that Iran could agree to limit its uranium enrichment levels but will not agree to halt enrichment altogether.[5]

**A senior Iranian official told *The Telegraph* on August 13 that Iran would not be able to “endure” the reimposition of UN Security Council sanctions on Iran if the E3 (the United Kingdom, France, and Germany) triggers the snapback mechanism.[6]** Iran’s concern about potential snapback sanctions could push Iran to resume negotiations with the United States, although it is very unlikely that Iran would accept a new nuclear agreement with the United States that requires it to halt uranium enrichment on Iranian soil. *The Telegraph* report comes after the E3 warned on August 13 that it would trigger the snapback mechanism unless Iran shows a commitment to negotiations before August 31.[7] The E3 has offered to postpone the expiration of the snapback mechanism, which is currently set to expire in October 2025, in order to provide Iran more time to negotiate with the United States. The senior Iranian official also told *The Telegraph* that the Iranian Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) instructed the Iranian Foreign Affairs Ministry in July to revive negotiations with the United States.[8] The official added that the SNSC asked the Iranian presidential office at an unspecified time to pursue nuclear negotiations with the United States before the window for talks closes.[9] It is unclear if the SNSC contacted the presidential office before or after President Masoud Pezeshkian appointed pragmatic hardliner Ali Larijani as SNSC secretary on August 5.[10] Larijani has historically supported negotiations and could accelerate the SNSC’s push for negotiations with the United States. Larijani supported the 2015 nuclear deal, also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and defended it against hardliners in parliament while he was parliament speaker in the mid-2010s.[11]

**Former Iranian President Hassan Rouhani called on the Iranian regime to implement reforms and make concessions to the Iranian people to increase popular support for the regime, strengthen societal resilience, and reduce tensions with the West.[12]** Rouhani argued on August 13 that “new circumstances,” including Iranian setbacks in the region and a perceived gap between the Iranian regime and people, encouraged Israel and the United States to attack Iran.[13] Rouhani expressed support for reducing tensions and negotiating with the United States and expanding relations with European and neighboring countries.[14] Rouhani called for the formation of strong political parties and implicitly criticized the Guardian Council for disqualifying electoral candidates. The Guardian Council is a 12-member regime body that is responsible for supervising elections, vetting candidates, and approving legislation.[15] Rouhani stated that Iranian leaders must prioritize Iran over other countries and only provide support to other countries to the extent that the Iranian public approves.[16] Rouhani was likely referring to public demands for the regime to focus on domestic issues rather than sending money and resources abroad, particularly to the Axis of Resistance.[17] Rouhani also stressed that the Iranian armed forces must focus on their inherent duties and not intervene in the economy, propaganda, and domestic and foreign policy.[18] Rouhani has previously criticized the involvement of the armed forces in the economy.[19]

Rouhani’s speech is consistent with his apparent effort to reenter Iran’s political scene by presenting the post-war period as an opportunity to reform governance, restore public trust, and recalibrate the regime’s trajectory. Rouhani and other moderate and pragmatic officials have sought to use the Israel-Iran War and its aftermath to try to reassert themselves in the Iranian political sphere. Opposition media reported on June 21 that Rouhani had met with senior clerics in Qom, including Mousa Shobeyri, Hossein Vahid Khorasani, and Nasser Makarem Shirazi, to encourage them to persuade Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei to concede to key US and Israeli demands, including the suspension of uranium enrichment.[20] Rouhani framed his efforts as a bid to “save the Islamic system,” while Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC)-affiliated media warned that “suspicious” insiders sought to compromise with Israel.[21] Rouhani was also reportedly considered for a “key role” in a contingency plan to govern Iran without Khamenei if he were killed or informally sidelined during the conflict.[22] Rouhani, Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Ali Larijani, and Expediency Discernment Council Chairman Sadegh Amoli Larijani also reportedly tried to contact Khamenei during the war to encourage him to accept a ceasefire.[23]

**Iranian Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Ali Larijani and Hezbollah Secretary General Naim Qassem overstated the degree of Iranian support to Hezbollah during a meeting in Beirut on August 14.[24]** Hezbollah reported that Qassem thanked Larijani for Iran’s “continuous support” for Lebanon and Hezbollah.[25] Iranian Ambassador to Lebanon Mojtaba Amani claimed that Qassem and Larijani’s meeting underscored Iran’s continued support for Lebanon and Hezbollah.[26] Larijani also told Hezbollah supporters during his visit to former Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah’s shrine in Lebanon that Iran “will always and forever stand by your side.”[27]

**Larijani and Qassem’s statements regarding Iranian support for Hezbollah are largely performative, given that Iran has struggled to provide meaningful support to Hezbollah and other members of the Axis of Resistance in recent months.** Iran failed to meaningfully support Hezbollah during and after the Israeli campaign in Lebanon in late 2024.[28] Iran also failed

to intervene to defend its Syrian ally, the Bashar al Assad regime, from the Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS)-led offensive that overthrew the regime in December 2024.[29] The fall of the Assad regime in Syria and the Lebanese state's crackdown on Iranian smuggling through Lebanese airports and border crossings have hindered Iran's ability to reconstitute Hezbollah.[30] Iran's reduced ability to smuggle weapons and money to Hezbollah has forced Iran to send Hezbollah cash instead of large weapons shipments.[31] Lebanon has been able to interdict some of these cash transfers.[32] Iran will also likely seek to reverse the damage that Israel inflicted on its nuclear, missile, and drone programs during the Israel-Iran War in the near future, which may further constrain Iran's support for its proxies and partners, including Hezbollah.[33]

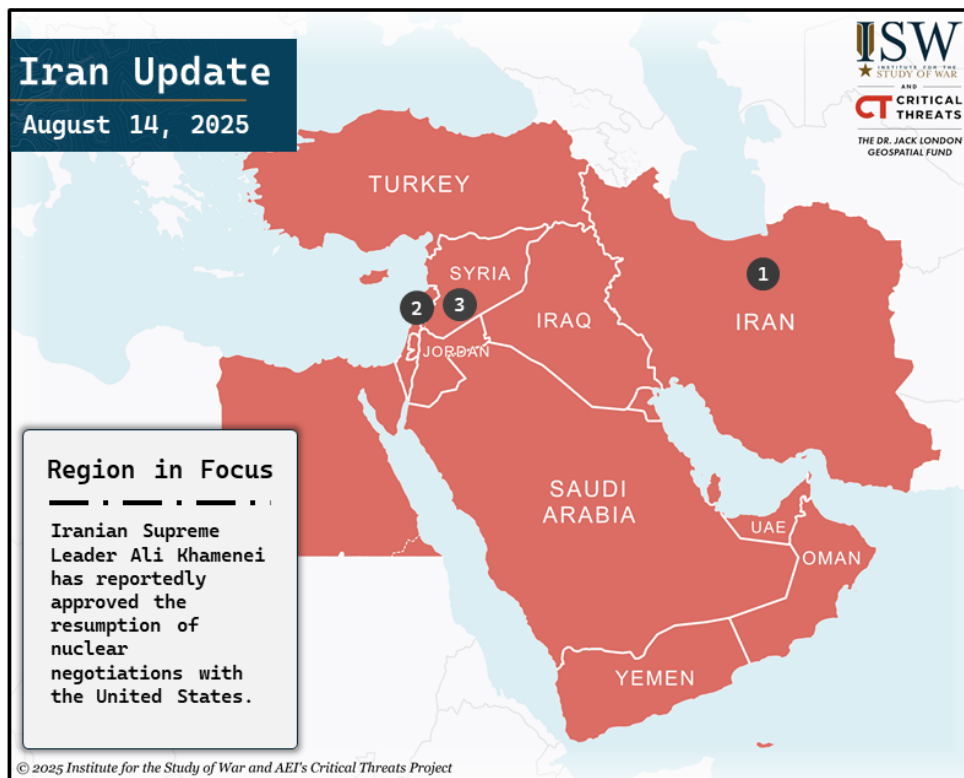
**Iran's failure to meaningfully support its proxies and partners in recent conflicts may have weakened the Axis of Resistance's trust in Iran as a reliable partner.** Hezbollah notably did not participate in the Israel-Iran War, stating that it would "not unilaterally launch an attack on Israel in support of Tehran." [34] An unspecified Israeli military official told Saudi media on August 13 that Hezbollah ignored calls from the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Quds Force to respond militarily to Israel.[35] CTP-ISW cannot independently verify this claim. Hezbollah's reported decision not to enter the Israel-Iran War may reflect that Hezbollah calculated that the cost of supporting Iran in the war outweighed the benefit of doing so. Hezbollah's response to the Israel-Iran War differed from its response to the October 7 War, when Hezbollah joined Hamas in attacking Israel on October 8, 2023.[36] Iran's other partners and proxies in the Axis of Resistance, excluding the Houthis, similarly did not intervene to support Iran during the war.[37]

**Al Qaeda (AQ)-aligned groups in Syria will likely not be able to meaningfully influence the direction and policies of the Syrian government given Hayat Tahrir al Sham's (HTS) historic and continued suppression of these groups.** Al Monitor reported on August 11 that Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) officials told a Pentagon official in June 2025 that some AQ-aligned groups, including Hurras al Din, continue to operate with "some degree of autonomy" under the new Syrian government, citing a recent DIA assessment.[38] The DIA officials noted that these groups' autonomy enables former Hurras al Din fighters' "freedom of movement." [39] Hurras al Din is a Syrian AQ affiliate comprised of former Jabhat al Nusra fighters who opposed the group's split from AQ in 2016 and defected to form Hurras al Din. HTS gradually sidelined and dismantled Hurras al Din and its operations room between 2017 and 2020 and has been accused of working with the United States to target remaining Hurras al Din fighters in Syria.[40] Hurras al Din formally dissolved itself in January 2025. Some former Hurras al Din fighters have since joined HTS-aligned, AQ-affiliated factions, such as Ansar al Islam. Ansar al Islam is an AQ-affiliated faction that formally operated in a Hurras al Din-led operations room before HTS pressured the faction to end its affiliation with Hurras al Din during HTS's crackdown on the latter group. Ansar al Islam continues to operate "freely" in Syria, according to the United Nations (UN). A UN Sanctions Committee report from July 2025 stated that senior Hurras al Din leaders are working with HTS defectors in northwestern Syria to form new factions.

The DIA assessed that AQ will probably seek to influence the Syrian government's formation and policies, according to Al Monitor.[41] There are few means through which Salafi-jihadists, particularly from HTS's longtime former rival Hurras al Din, could meaningfully influence the direction of the Syrian state, however. Many Salafi-jihadi ideologues have distanced themselves from Syrian President Ahmed al Shara in recent months in protest against his moderate governance and cooperation with the

West.[42] Shara has appointed former AQ fighters and Salafi-jihadists to key posts in his government and military, but these men have remained allied with Shara since he disavowed the Islamic State in 2013 and AQ in 2016.[43] AQ-affiliated civil war-era factions have limited influence within Shara's HTS-dominated coalition. The United Nations reported that the Syrian government has not yet "asserted full control" over several of these groups, including Ansar al Islam, Ansar al Tawhid, and Central Asian and Caucasian armed groups Katibat al Tawhid wa Jihad and Ajnad al Kavkaz.[44] The non-Syrian groups are known for their extreme loyalty to HTS, and Ansar al Islam and Ansar al Tawhid have operated under HTS oversight in recent years.[45]

**Sunni hardliners' presence in the ruling coalition places some constraints on the Syrian government's ability to pursue its objectives, however.** Shara has consolidated a coalition of former HTS allies and adversaries, many of whom subscribe to hardline, but not necessarily Salafi-jihadist, views. The Syrian government faces a challenge of appeasing both hardliners and those who support moderate governance in order to maintain this fragile coalition. The Syrian government's need to retain Sunni hardliners' loyalty places constraints on the government. The Defense Ministry has reflagged AQ-affiliated Ansar al Tawhid as the 82nd Division. Recent footage that circulated on social media showed that 82nd Division fighters executed a medical volunteer at Suwayda National Hospital on June 16.[46] Such extrajudicial killings severely erode the Syrian population's trust in government forces, which limits the Defense Ministry's ability to deploy forces to respond to future threats. A Washington, DC-based analyst noted that the Defense Ministry arrested the 82nd Division perpetrators but did not publicize their arrest out of concern over potential backlash from Sunni hardliners.[47] How the Syrian transitional government holds its forces accountable for the atrocities that they commit will influence the government's legitimacy and perception among minority groups. The government's failure to hold forces accountable for abuses would likely reinforce perceptions among minority groups that the transitional government tolerates or enables such abuses.



- 1 IRAN. Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has reportedly approved the resumption of nuclear negotiations with the United States because the Iranian regime views negotiations as necessary for the regime's survival.
- 2 LEBANON. Iranian Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Ali Larijani and Hezbollah Secretary General Naim Qassem overstated the degree of Iranian support to Hezbollah during a meeting in Beirut on August 14.
- 3 SYRIA. Al Qaeda (AQ)-aligned groups in Syria will likely not be able to meaningfully influence the direction and policies of the Syrian government given Hayat Tahrir al Sham's (HTS) historic and continued suppression of these groups.

## Key Takeaways

- **US-Iran Nuclear Negotiations:** Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has reportedly approved the resumption of nuclear negotiations with the United States because the Iranian regime views negotiations as necessary for the regime's survival. Iran is very unlikely to accept a new nuclear agreement with the United States that would require it to halt uranium enrichment.
- **Iran-Hezbollah Relations:** Iranian Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Ali Larijani and Hezbollah Secretary General Naim Qassem overstated the degree of Iranian support to Hezbollah during a meeting in Beirut on August 14. Larijani and Qassem's statements regarding Iranian support for Hezbollah are largely performative given that Iran has struggled

to provide meaningful support to Hezbollah and other members of the Axis of Resistance in recent months.

- **Government Formation in Syria:** Al Qaeda (AQ)-aligned groups in Syria will likely not be able to meaningfully influence the direction and policies of the Syrian government given Hayat Tahrir al Sham’s (HTS) historic and continued suppression of these groups. Sunni hardliners’ presence in the ruling coalition places some constraints on the Syrian government’s ability to pursue its objectives, however.

## **Iran**

*See topline section.*

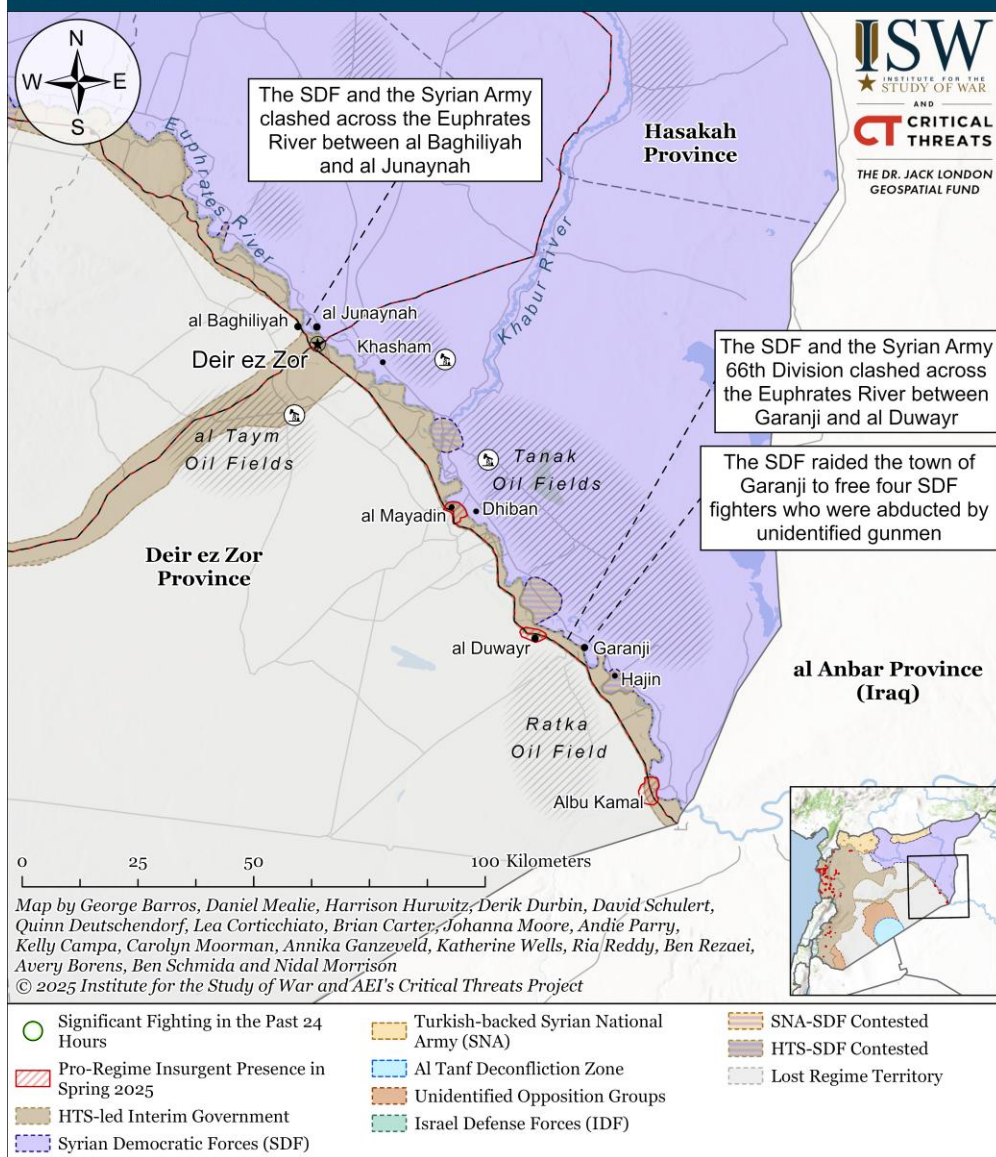
## **Iraq**

**Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba Secretary General Akram al Kaabi released a statement on August 14 warning the United States, the United Kingdom, and Israel against “taking steps against Iraq.”**[48] Kaabi stated that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias are ready to “respond harshly” to any “blatant transgression.”[49] Kaabi reaffirmed his support for the Popular Mobilization Authority Law.[50] The Popular Mobilization Authority Law, which the Iraqi Parliament has not yet voted on, would likely increase Iran’s influence in the Iraqi political and security spheres by formalizing the structure and responsibilities of the Iranian-backed Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF).[51] Kaabi’s statement comes after the US State Department spokesperson reiterated on August 12 that the United States opposes the law.[52] UK Ambassador to Iraq Irfan Siddiq separately emphasized in an interview with Iraqi media on August 8 that Iraq no longer needs the PMF after the defeat of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).[53]

**An unidentified “informed source” told Iranian anti-regime media on August 14 that Iran would target unidentified sites in Iraqi Kurdistan if Israel attacks Iran again.**[54] An Erbil-based opposition source claimed that the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) warned Kurdish opposition groups following Iranian Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Ali Larijani’s recent visit to Iraq that Iran could target these groups if Israel attacks Iran again. CTP-ISW cannot independently verify this report. The report comes after Larijani signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Iraqi National Security Adviser Qassem al Araj on August 11 to address the dual threats of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) and Kurdish opposition groups based in Iraqi Kurdistan.[55] Iran views Iraqi Kurdistan as a rear area from which anti-regime Kurdish groups can operate against Iran.[56] Iran has long accused Kurdish opposition groups of helping Israel facilitate attacks on Iran and has previously pressured the Iraqi federal government to remove Kurdish opposition groups from the Iran-Iraq border.[57]

## **Syria**

## Assessed Control of Terrain around Deir ez Zor August 14, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



**The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) clashed with Syrian Ministry of Defense (MoD) forces across the Euphrates River between al Baghiliyah and al Junaynah, Deir ez Zor Province, on August 14.**[58] An anonymous MoD source told Syrian media that the clash took place after SDF fighters fired at MoD forces.[59] The SDF and MoD forces clashed with small arms and rocket-propelled grenades (RPG), which injured a local fisherman but caused no SDF or MoD casualties.[60] The Syrian Army's 66th Division separately clashed with the SDF across the Euphrates River between al Duwayr and Garanji, Deir ez Zor Province, on August 14.[61] These clashes follow similar clashes between the SDF and MoD forces in Tal Maaz, Aleppo Province, on August 12, that killed one Syrian Army soldier.[62] The recent increase in clashes between the SDF and MoD forces comes amid disagreements between the SDF, the transitional government, and Turkey over the SDF's integration into the MoD.[63] Current negotiations between the SDF and the transitional government

in Damascus have stalled, according to Syrian media.[64] Distrust and poor communication between Damascus and the SDF could cause a minor clash to escalate into renewed conflict, similar to how a small robbery fueled widespread intercommunal violence in Suwayda Province in July.[66]

**Unidentified gunmen abducted four off-duty SDF fighters in Garanji, Deir ez Zor Province, on August 13. The SDF claimed that the gunmen were affiliated with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), but local sources reported that the gunmen were likely recently mobilized Arab tribal fighters.**[67] The SDF stated on August 14 that a group affiliated with ISIS abducted four off-duty SDF fighters in Garanji.[68] The SDF raided Garanji to free the abducted SDF fighters. The SDF killed one of the abductors and wounded three others during the raid.[69] It is unclear whether the SDF fighters have been freed at the time of this writing. Local Syrian media rejected the SDF's claim that the abductors were affiliated with ISIS and claimed that the abductors were recently mobilized Arab tribal fighters.[70] This incident comes after several Arab tribes have mobilized against the SDF in recent days. Sheikh Faraj al Hamoud al Salama of the al Nasser "al Bu Shaaban" clan announced a general mobilization against the SDF on August 11. Salama announced the mobilization in response to a conference organized by the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria in Hasakah on August 8.[71] Sheikh Yasser bin Aloush al Mashaal of the al Saab clan separately announced a general mobilization against the SDF on August 11.[72] Five additional Arab tribes have announced their mobilization against the SDF as of August 14.[73] The SDF previously clashed with Arab tribal forces in 2023 after it attempted to remove the head of the Deir ez Zor Military Council.[74]

**A pro-government Turkish journalist claimed that a joint military offensive by Turkey and the Syrian transitional government against the SDF is imminent, likely to put pressure on the SDF to integrate into the Syrian state.**[75] The journalist stated that "[Turkish] troops that have been successful in [previous cross-border military operations] have been readied for the operation against the [SDF]...Four divisions are awaiting orders." [76] The journalist also claimed that the SDF has increased its "armed sabotage attempts" in Deir Hafer, Hasla, Manbij, Deir ez Zor, and the Sheikh Maqsoud neighborhood of Aleppo City. CTP-ISW previously assessed on August 12 that both the SDF and MoD forces may be executing reconnaissance operations near Deir Hafer.[77] The Turkish journalist claimed that a military operation against the SDF would be conducted jointly by Turkey and the transitional justice. [78] The journalist did not provide evidence for his claims and it is unclear which Turkish Army divisions he was referring to. Turkey is likely applying pressure on the SDF as it has become increasingly disillusioned with the integration negotiations between the SDF and the Syrian transitional government. Turkey recently pressured Syria to withdraw from the US- and French-brokered integration negotiations in Paris with the SDF, which undermines US policy objectives in Syria.[79]

### **Arabian Peninsula**

**The Houthis launched a ballistic missile targeting Ben Gurion Airport in Israel on August 13.**[80] The Israeli Air Force intercepted a missile outside Israeli territory on August 13.[81] 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.[82]

**The Houthis continue to pose a credible threat to international shipping, which has caused transit levels through the Red Sea to remain below pre-October 2023 levels despite a reduction in Houthi attacks against international shipping in 2025.[83]** 944 vessels transited the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden in July 2025, according to data from maritime intelligence firm Lloyd's List.[84] Lloyd's List reported approximately 905 transits through the Bab el Mandeb in July 2024 compared to around 2,200 transits before October 2023.[85] The Houthis have only attacked two vessels in 2025, compared to over 100 attacks on vessels in 2024.[86]

### **Palestinian Territories and Lebanon**

**Hezbollah is reportedly restructuring its payment system to “ensure its continued organizational resilience.”[87]** A Hezbollah-focused analyst told Saudi media on August 13 that Hezbollah recognizes that any decline in its ability to pay salaries and provide services to Lebanese civilians “pose[s] an existential threat” to Hezbollah because these activities are part of “its current justification for existence.”[88] Hezbollah, therefore, has implemented a “rationalization” policy and reduced the salaries of Hezbollah supporters who do not hold official positions in the group.[89] Unspecified informed sources told Saudi media that these salary cuts affected thousands of Hezbollah-affiliated workers across various sectors.[90] Hezbollah similarly reduced its financial support for an unspecified allied political party and Hezbollah members who recently returned from Syria.[91] Hezbollah has also reduced its coverage of school and university tuition fees.[92] The analyst noted that Hezbollah has reportedly continued to pay the salaries of unspecified groups “considered central to its ideological structure.”[93]

The unspecified informed sources said that Hezbollah’s decision to restructure its payment system comes amid “internal financial pressures.”[94] Hezbollah has struggled to maintain its financial commitments to its fighters and Shia support base following the Israel-Hezbollah conflict in late 2024. Hezbollah’s main financial institution, al Qard al Hassan, temporarily froze compensation payments to fighters in February 2025 and later indefinitely suspended payments to fighters in June 2025.[95] Hezbollah’s financial struggles have caused its Shia support base to grow increasingly frustrated with the organization. Hezbollah supporters have demanded answers from Hezbollah about when they will receive reconstruction funds and have raised concerns over the group’s ability to maintain its financial commitments.[96] Hezbollah has historically used financial benefits, including pensions for the families of deceased fighters and compensation for individuals who lost their homes or property, to retain its support base among Lebanese Shia.[97] 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.

**Lebanese officials have taken steps to prevent clashes between the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and Hezbollah during the implementation of the LAF’s plan to disarm Hezbollah.** Unspecified informed sources told pro-Hezbollah Lebanese media on August 13 that the LAF will form a “joint liaison committee” with Hezbollah as part of its four-stage plan to disarm the group.[98] The Lebanese government previously tasked the LAF on August 5 with creating a plan to establish a state monopoly on arms across Lebanon by the end of 2025.[99] The committee will reportedly identify and document Hezbollah arms depots to prepare for Hezbollah to hand over its weapons to the LAF “without force.”[100] Pro-Hezbollah media reported on August 13 that Lebanese

officials have discussed ways to prevent any confrontation between the LAF and Hezbollah during the disarmament process.[101] LAF Commander Brigadier General Rodolphe Haykal told Lebanese Parliament Speaker and Hezbollah ally Nabih Berri on August 12 that the LAF will not “clash with a key component of the country.”[102] Unspecified sources also reported that Haykal told Hezbollah that the LAF’s disarmament plan “cannot be implemented by force.”[103]

Hezbollah’s allies have indicated that they also seek to prevent clashes with the LAF. Hezbollah-allied Amal Movement minister Tamara al Zein told Lebanese media on August 14 that Berri “will try until the end to prevent Lebanon from reaching a clash or tensions.”[104] Lebanese media previously reported on August 11 that Berri continues to mediate between the Lebanese government and Hezbollah to resolve outstanding concerns.[105] Zein noted that “it is totally impossible to witness inter-Lebanese fighting.”[106] Hezbollah, however, has continued to reject calls to disarm and emphasized that it will ignore the government’s decision to disarm the group.[107] Hezbollah’s continued refusal to disarm will likely complicate the Lebanese government and LAF’s ability to implement the disarmament plan.[108]

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# Iran Update



**Avery Borens, Nidal Morrison, Ben Schmida, Katherine Wells, Ben Rezaei, Adham Fattah, Carolyn Moorman, Adam Jacoff, and Annika Ganzeveld**

**August 15, 2025 Information Cutoff: 2:00 PM ET**

**Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Hezbollah Secretary General Abu Hussein al Hamidawi published a statement on August 15 in which he called for strengthening Iranian-backed Iraqi militias, likely in response to recent US efforts to weaken the Axis of Resistance.**[1] Hamidawi underlined the necessity of “supporting” Iranian-backed Iraqi militias with advanced weapons, enhanced technical capabilities, and improved “defensive and destructive capacities.”[2] Hamidawi’s statement comes as the United States pursues various lines of effort to weaken Iran and its Axis of Resistance.[3] The Lebanese government agreed on August 7 to a US proposal to disarm Hezbollah.[4] The United States has also pressured the Iraqi government to dissolve the Iranian-backed Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), which is an Iraqi state security service that includes a large number of Iranian-backed militias.[5] State of Law Coalition head Nouri al Maliki emphasized the importance of the PMF’s existence in the face of US and Israeli efforts to disarm Hezbollah in a phone call with Iranian Supreme Leader International Affairs Adviser Ali Akbar Velayati on August 8.[6] Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba separately warned the United States on August 14 against “taking steps against Iraq,” referring to US pressure to dissolve the PMF.[7]

Hamidawi was presumably asking both Iran and the Iraqi federal government to provide Kataib Hezbollah with advanced weapons and technical capabilities. Iran has historically provided Iranian-backed Iraqi militias, including Kataib Hezbollah, with weapons and training.[8] Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Quds Force Commander Esmail Ghaani reportedly told PMF leaders to pressure the Iraqi government for funding to modernize their weapons systems during his July 28 visit to Baghdad.[9]

**Iranian Supreme Leader International Affairs Adviser Ali Akbar Velayati emphasized Iranian support for the Houthis during a meeting with the Houthi representative to Iran on August 14.** Velayati denied that the Axis of Resistance has weakened and underlined the Houthis’ pivotal role in the Axis of Resistance’s war against Israel in a meeting with Houthi Representative to Iran Ibrahim al Dailami.[10] The Houthis are the only Axis of Resistance member that still regularly conducts attacks targeting Israel. The Houthis also continue to threaten international shipping.[11] Velayati separately criticized US pressure to disarm Lebanese Hezbollah and the Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq.[12] This meeting comes after Iranian Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Larijani reaffirmed Iranian support for the Axis of Resistance during his visits to Iraq and Lebanon between August 11 and 14.[13]

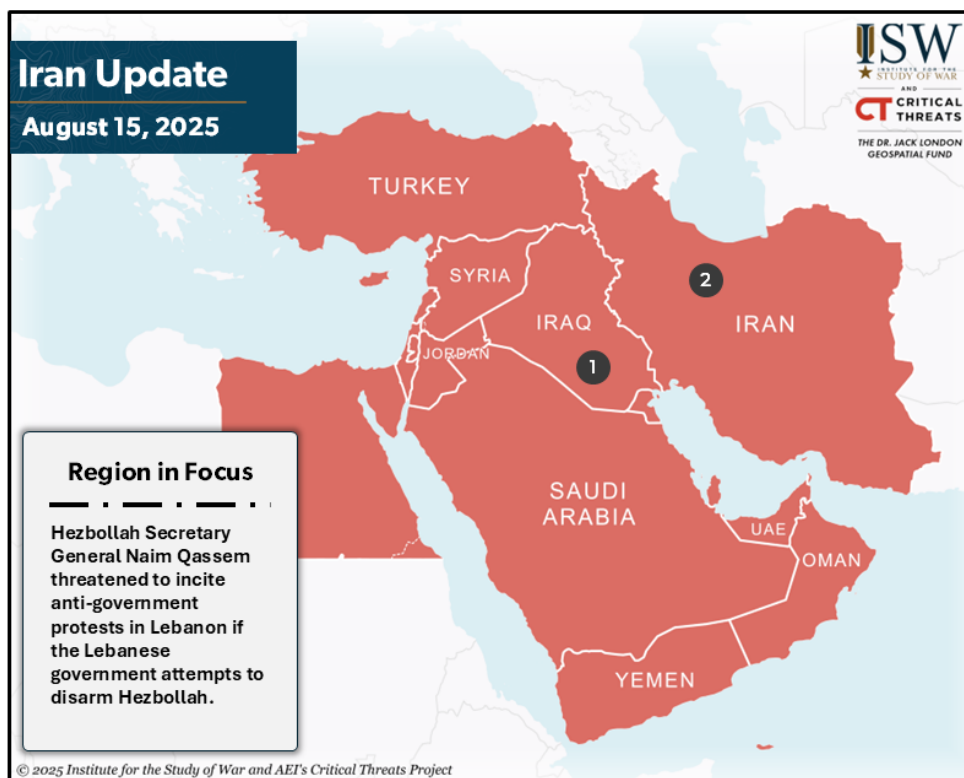
**Hezbollah Secretary General Naim Qassem threatened to incite anti-government protests in Lebanon if the Lebanese government attempts to disarm Hezbollah during a**

**speech on August 15.[14]** Qassem claimed that the Lebanese government is carrying out an “American-Israeli order” to disarm Hezbollah, even if it leads to civil war and internal strife. [15] The Lebanese government agreed on August 7 to the objectives of US Special Envoy Thomas Barrack’s proposal to disarm Hezbollah.[16] Hezbollah mobilized some protestors on August 8 after the Lebanese government approved the US proposal.[17] These protests did not gain traction or expand beyond Hezbollah support zones, however.[18] Qassem stated that Hezbollah is prepared for confrontation and will incite protests if “confrontation is imposed on Hezbollah.”[19]

The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and Hezbollah-affiliated officials have recently taken steps to try to prevent clashes between the LAF and Hezbollah during the disarmament process.[20] The disarmament proposal tasks the LAF with disarming Hezbollah.[21] LAF Commander Brigadier General Rodolphe Haykal and Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri have discussed ways to prevent any confrontation between the LAF and Hezbollah during the disarmament process.[22] Berri is Hezbollah’s highest-ranking ally in the Lebanese government and is currently mediating between the Lebanese government and Hezbollah to resolve outstanding issues.[23]

**Qassem also reiterated that Hezbollah will not surrender its weapons until Israel halts its operations and withdraws from southern Lebanon.[24]** Qassem called on the Lebanese government to hold a meeting to plan to “confront” Israel and added that Hezbollah will confront “the Israeli-American project no matter the cost.”[25] Hezbollah has long used continued Israeli operations and the 1989 Taif Agreement, which called for the disarmament of all Lebanese militias except Hezbollah, to justify retaining its weapons.[26] Hezbollah will likely continue to use Israeli operations in Lebanon and the Taif Agreement to reject the government’s decision to disarm the group.[27] Hezbollah’s refusal to disarm will likely complicate the Lebanese government and the LAF’s ability to implement the disarmament plan.

Several Lebanese officials rejected Qassem’s statements on August 15. Prime Minister Nawaf Salam criticized Qassem’s speech for containing “a veiled threat of civil war.”[28] Salam rejected Qassem’s claims that the Lebanese government is implementing an “American-Israeli project,” stating that the government’s decision to disarm Hezbollah was “purely Lebanese.”[29] Anti-Hezbollah Lebanese Justice Minister Adel Nassar similarly stated that the Lebanese government had been working on a plan to disarm Hezbollah prior to US Special Envoy Thomas Barrack’s presentation of the US proposal to the Lebanese government in June 2025.[30] Nassar added that the issue of the state’s monopoly on arms is “not open to debate.”[31]



- 1 **IRAQ.** Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Hezbollah Secretary General Abu Hussein al Hamidawi published a statement on August 15 in which he called for strengthening Iranian-backed Iraqi militias, likely in response to recent US efforts to weaken the Axis of Resistance. Hamidawi underlined the necessity of “supporting” Iranian-backed Iraqi militias with advanced weapons, enhanced technical capabilities, and improved “defensive and destructive capacities.”
- 2 **IRAN.** Iranian Supreme Leader International Affairs Adviser Ali Akbar Velayati emphasized Iranian support for the Houthis during a meeting with the Houthi representative to Iran on August 14. Velayati denied that the Axis of Resistance has weakened and underlined the Houthis' pivotal role in the Axis of Resistance's war against Israel in a meeting with Houthi Representative to Iran Ibrahim al Dailami.

## **Key Takeaways**

- **PMF Dissolution:** Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Hezbollah Secretary General Abu Hussein al Hamidawi published a statement on August 15 in which he called for strengthening Iranian-backed Iraqi militias, likely in response to recent US efforts to weaken the Axis of Resistance. Hamidawi underlined the necessity of “supporting” Iranian-backed Iraqi militias with advanced weapons, enhanced technical capabilities, and improved “defensive and destructive capacities.”
- **Iran-Houthi Relations:** Iranian Supreme Leader International Affairs Adviser Ali Akbar Velayati emphasized Iranian support for the Houthis during a meeting with the Houthi

representative to Iran on August 14. Velayati denied that the Axis of Resistance has weakened and underlined the Houthis' pivotal role in the Axis of Resistance's war against Israel in a meeting with Houthi Representative to Iran Ibrahim al Dailami.

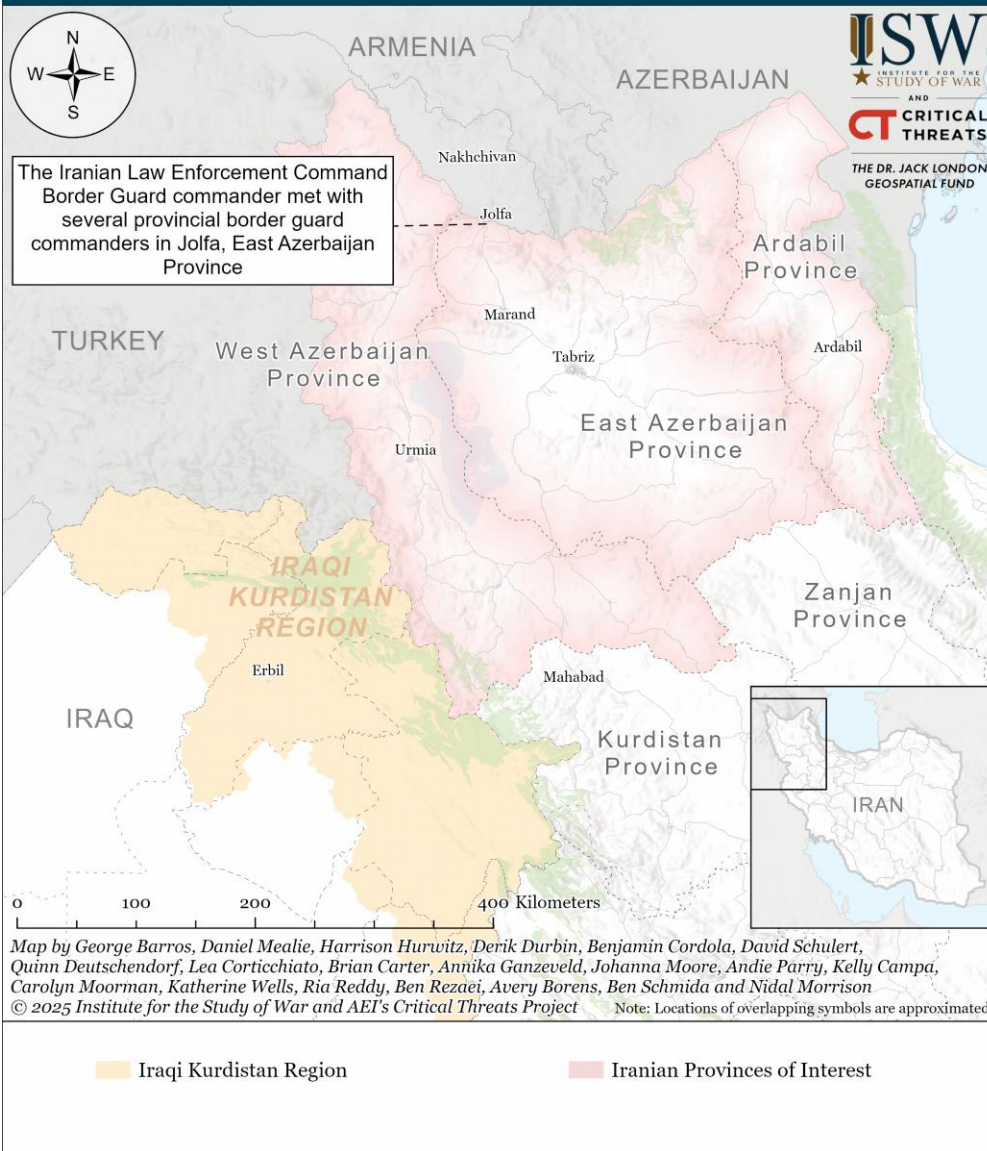
- **Hezbollah Disarmament:** Hezbollah Secretary General Naim Qassem threatened to incite anti-government protests in Lebanon if the Lebanese government attempts to disarm Hezbollah during a speech on August 15. Qassem reiterated that Hezbollah will not surrender its weapons until Israel halts its operations and withdraws from southern Lebanon.

## **Iran**

**The Iranian, Chinese, and Russian permanent representatives to the UN met in Vienna on August 14, likely to continue coordinating diplomatic efforts in response to the E3's (the United Kingdom, France, and Germany) warning that it may trigger the snapback mechanism by the end of August.[32]** Russian Permanent Representative to the UN Mikhail Ulyanov stated that the three officials coordinated “their positions and actions on the Iranian nuclear dossier.”[33] This meeting comes after the E3 warned on August 13 that it would trigger the snapback mechanism unless Iran shows a commitment to negotiations before August 31.[34] The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) snapback mechanism allows JCPOA signatories to reimpose UN Security Council sanctions on Iran in the event of “significant non-performance” of JCPOA commitments.[35] The snapback mechanism expires on October 18, 2025.[36] CTP-ISW previously assessed that it is unlikely that the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Russia could prevent the reimposition of UN Security Council sanctions on Iran if the E3 triggers the snapback mechanism.[37]

**Iran is trying to strengthen border security in northwestern Iran amid concerns over the threat that Kurdish opposition groups in Iraqi Kurdistan pose to Iranian security and tensions with Azerbaijan over the proposed Zangezur Corridor.[38]** Iranian Law Enforcement Command Border Guard Commander Brigadier General Ahmad Ali Goudarzi met with the provincial border guard commanders of East Azerbaijan, West Azerbaijan, and Ardabil provinces in Jolfa, East Azerbaijan Province, on August 15 to strengthen operational cohesion, intelligence sharing, and readiness to counter border threats.[39] Goudarzi called for greater coordination among the three provinces.[40] This meeting comes after Iranian Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Ali Larijani signed a memorandum of understanding with Iraqi officials on August 11 to “develop” the 2023 Iran-Iraq security agreement that requires Iraqi authorities to disarm and relocate members of Kurdish opposition groups from the Iran-Iraq border.[41] Iran has long accused Kurdish opposition groups of helping Israel facilitate attacks on Iran and has previously pressured the Iraqi federal government to remove Kurdish opposition groups from the Iran-Iraq border.[42] It is also noteworthy that the meeting took place in Jolfa, which is located across the border from the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic.[43] Iranian officials have recently strongly opposed a US-brokered peace deal between Armenia and Azerbaijan that would grant the United States exclusive development rights to the Zangezur Corridor.[44] The Zangezur Corridor is a Turkish- and Azerbaijani-proposed corridor that would connect Azerbaijan to the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic and cut off Iranian land access to Russia and Europe via Armenia.[45]

## Iranian Border Guard Commander's Visit to Northwestern Iran on August 15, 2025



**Iranian First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref stated that Iran seeks to increase trade with Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) member states at an EAEU meeting in Kyrgyzstan on August 14 and 15.[46]** Pursuing increased trade with EAEU member states aligns with Iran's "neighborhood policy," which focuses on increasing Iran's bilateral relations with regional countries to alleviate the pressure of international sanctions on the Iranian economy.[47] The EAEU granted Iran observer status in 2024 and signed a free trade agreement with Iran in May 2025.[48] Aref announced at the EAEU meeting that Iran seeks to become a full EAEU member.[49] Aref and Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin discussed the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) on the sidelines of the EAEU meeting.[50] The INSTC is a proposed regional trade route that would connect Russia and India via Iran.[51]

### Iraq

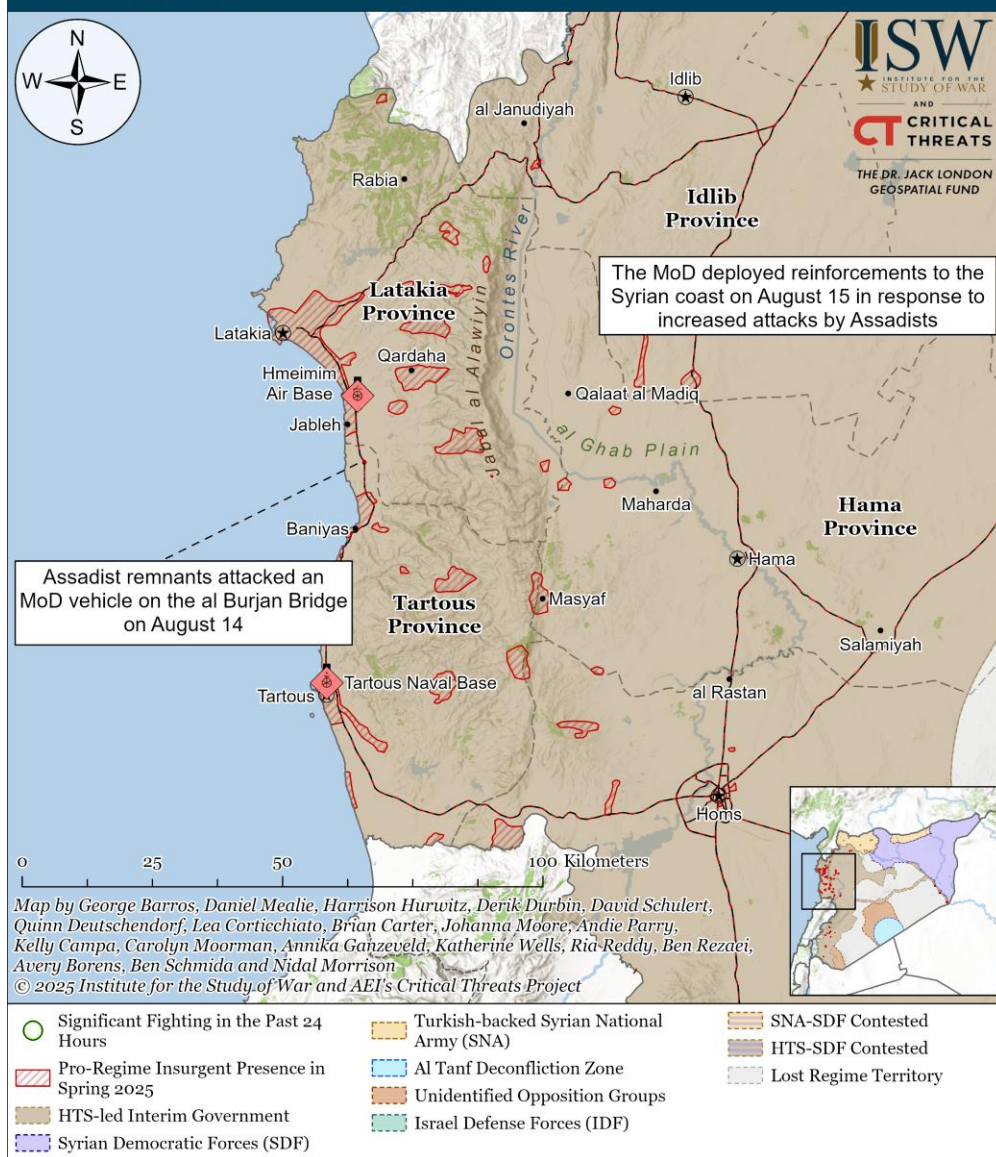
**Sunni Azm Alliance head Muthanna al Samarraï requested on August 13 that the Iraqi electoral commission disqualify former Parliament Speaker and Progress Party head Mohammad al Halbousi from competing in the November 2025 Iraqi parliamentary elections.[52]** Samarraï argued that the November 2023 Federal Supreme Court ruling that removed Halbousi as parliament speaker makes him unfit to compete in the elections.[53] The Baghdad Court of Appeals dismissed the charges against Halbousi in late April 2025.[54] Halbousi’s party announced in May that it will compete independently in the elections.[55] Samarraï is a long-time political rival of Halbousi and a competitor for political influence among Sunni Iraqis.[56] Samarraï and some of Halbousi’s other historic rivals are members of the United Sunni Leadership Coalition, which was established in early January 2025 and has advocated for long-held Sunni political demands.[57] Samarraï discussed the elections and “support for the executive parties” with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani two days after Samarraï submitted this request.[58]

## **Syria**

**Assadist remnants have reportedly increased attacks targeting Syrian transitional government forces on the Syrian coast in recent days, which underscores the continued threat that Assadist remnants pose to Syrian security.** The Syrian Ministry of Defense (MoD) stated on August 15 that Assadist attacks targeting MoD forces in Latakia and Tartous provinces have increased over the past three days.[59] Assadist remnants attacked an MoD vehicle on the al Burjan Bridge in Latakia Province on August 14.[60] The MoD deployed significant reinforcements, including armored units, to the Syrian coast on August 15 in response to the increase in attacks.[61] Transitional government forces previously arrested Assadist remnants who likely attempted to conduct a false flag attack on a church in Tartous Province on August 6.[62]

## Assessed Control of Terrain in Western Syria

August 15, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



**Reuters reported on August 15 that foreign Islamists have petitioned the Syrian transitional government to acquire Syrian citizenship.[63]** The foreign Islamists claimed that they deserve Syrian citizenship after helping Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS) oust the Assad regime.[64] Bilal Abdul Kareem, an Islamist journalist, submitted the petition to the Syrian Ministry of Interior (MoI). Kareem has lived in Syria since 2012 and is a prominent voice among foreign Islamists in Syria.[65] HTS imprisoned Kareem in 2020 for six months after he reported on HTS's torture of detainees in prisons under its control.[66] The petition would benefit thousands of foreigners from more than a dozen nations, most of whom lack documentation and face lengthy prison sentences or death if they return to their countries of origin.[67] The United States has accepted the Syrian transitional government's integration of foreign fighters into the new Syrian army to prevent foreign fighters from joining Salafi-jihadi groups in Syria. The petition for citizenship does not concern foreign

fighters' integration into the Syrian army but is instead intended to allow former Islamist foreign fighters and their families, aid workers, and journalists to live and work in Syria. A decision to grant Islamist foreigners Syrian citizenship would likely alienate Syrian minorities.[68] Syrian minorities largely view foreign Islamists as extremists and oppose their naturalization in Syria.[69] A Reuters investigation revealed in June 2025 that foreign fighters participated in atrocities during the coastal massacres against Alawites in March 2025.[70]

### **Arabian Peninsula**

*See topline section.*

### **Palestinian Territories and Lebanon**

*See topline section.*

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