

# Iran Update



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**August 18, 2025 Information Cutoff: 2:00 PM ET**

**Syrian security forces told Emirati media on August 16 that the Syrian Ministry of Defense (MoD) is preparing a three-pronged offensive to seize Raqqa and Deir ez Zor provinces. This report and others are likely part of an effort by Turkey and some elements of the Syrian transitional government to coerce the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to surrender to the transitional government.[1]** The Syrian security sources told Emirati media that the MoD has assembled 50,000 troops near the city of Palmyra, Homs Province, to capture Deir ez Zor and Raqqa provinces with support from local Arab tribes if the SDF refuses to hand over these provinces to the transitional government by October 2025.[2] A separate Syrian source said that the MoD is preparing staging grounds for the offensive in Rusafa, Raqqa Province, and Sukhnah, Homs Province, which are 70 kilometers northeast and 166 kilometers northeast of Palmyra, respectively.[3]

It is unlikely that the Syrian transitional government is preparing for a major offensive at this time. Local Syrians would almost certainly observe and publicize the movements of 50,000 personnel. The much smaller mobilizations towards the Syrian coast in March 2025 and southwestern Syria in July 2025 garnered significant media attention both within Syria and in the West. Satellite imagery shows no prepared staging areas in any of the locations mentioned by the sources. Some of the locations make little military sense as staging areas, moreover. Sukhnah is a less optimal staging area for a major offensive against the SDF compared to other areas closer to the Euphrates River. Deir ez Zor City and its surroundings have a significant amount of military infrastructure left over from the Assad regime, including Deir ez Zor Airport, which would be far more suitable than the remote desert town of Sukhnah.[4] Sukhnah is also 135km by road from Deir ez Zor City, and any force staged in Sukhnah would need to travel 135km to reach its point of departure. Palmyra is even further to the west. Forces travelling from the staging grounds to the point of departure would also have to travel to areas frequently attacked by small ISIS cells. These cells could not stop a large Syrian force, but they could disrupt the movement and make an already challenging operation even more complex.

Rusafa presents a more viable staging ground for the MoD than Sukhnah. MoD forces in Rusafa would be positioned at the rear of SDF forces based in Deir Hafer and could try to cut off the ground line of communication between Deir Hafer and SDF-controlled Raqqa Province. Rusafa is located 26 kilometers south of two hydroelectric dams controlled by the SDF. The MoD would have to capture these towns in order to stage an assault to capture Raqqa City. An unspecified source told Emirati media that newly-integrated Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) units would advance on SDF positions near Tishreen Dam, which is located northeast of Deir Hafer.[5] This force would be canalized

by the Tishreen Dam crossing, the eastern side of which is surely guarded by SDF units. Tishreen Dam is the only intact Euphrates River crossing between Lake Assad and the Turkish border.

This report comes amid similar reports in Turkish media that Turkey and the Syrian transitional government are preparing for an offensive against the SDF. Turkish media recently claimed on August 14 that a joint offensive by Turkey and the Syrian government against the SDF is imminent.[6] These reports likely seek to pressure the SDF to integrate into the Syrian state and surrender its territory by threatening a military operation against it.

**An adviser to Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani announced on August 17 that US forces will withdraw from Ain al Asad Airbase and Baghdad International Airport in September 2025.**[7] A spokesperson for the US Embassy in Baghdad separately told Iraqi media on August 18 that the US-led international coalition's mission in Iraq will transition to a "more traditional bilateral security partnership." [8] The United States and Iraq agreed in September 2024 that hundreds of US-led international coalition forces would withdraw from Iraq by September 2025 and that remaining forces would withdraw by the end of 2026.[9] Iranian-backed Iraqi militias have repeatedly threatened to attack US forces if the United States postpones its military withdrawal from Iraq.[10]

**Senior Lebanese officials called on the United States to pressure Israel and Syria to agree to the US proposal to disarm Hezbollah during US Special Envoy Thomas Barrack's visit to Beirut on August 18.**[11] Lebanese President Joseph Aoun told Barrack that Israel and Syria must commit to the contents of the US proposal, which the Lebanese government approved on August 7.[12] Aoun told Saudi media on August 17 that the US proposal will not become effective until all relevant parties approve it.[13] Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam separately told Barrack that the United States must fulfill its responsibilities by pressuring Israel to cease hostilities, withdraw from its five permanent positions in southern Lebanon, and release Lebanese prisoners held in Israel.[14] Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri similarly called on Israel to commit to the proposal during his meeting with Barrack.[15] Barrack told Lebanese reporters following his meeting with Aoun that the United States has discussed the potential for a long-term ceasefire with Israel but has not shared the Hezbollah disarmament proposal with Israel.[16] Barrack suggested that Israel would take unspecified steps in the coming weeks.[17]

Barrack also reportedly told Aoun that Syria has not responded to the US proposal to disarm Hezbollah.[18] The US proposal includes provisions to increase joint Lebanese-Syrian border operations and demarcate unspecified areas of the Lebanon-Syria border.[19] Lebanese and Syrian officials signed an agreement in March 2025 to demarcate the border and increase border security coordination.[20] Lebanese officials have recently expressed willingness to discuss issues with Syrian officials that have complicated relations between the two countries, including the issue of imprisoned and displaced Syrians in Lebanon.[21] The Syrian government has consistently called on the Lebanese government to release Syrian prisoners and allow them to serve their sentence in Syria, but Lebanese judicial officials have denied these requests.[22]

# The United States' Phased Plan to Disarm Hezbollah

As approved by the Lebanese Cabinet on August 7, 2025

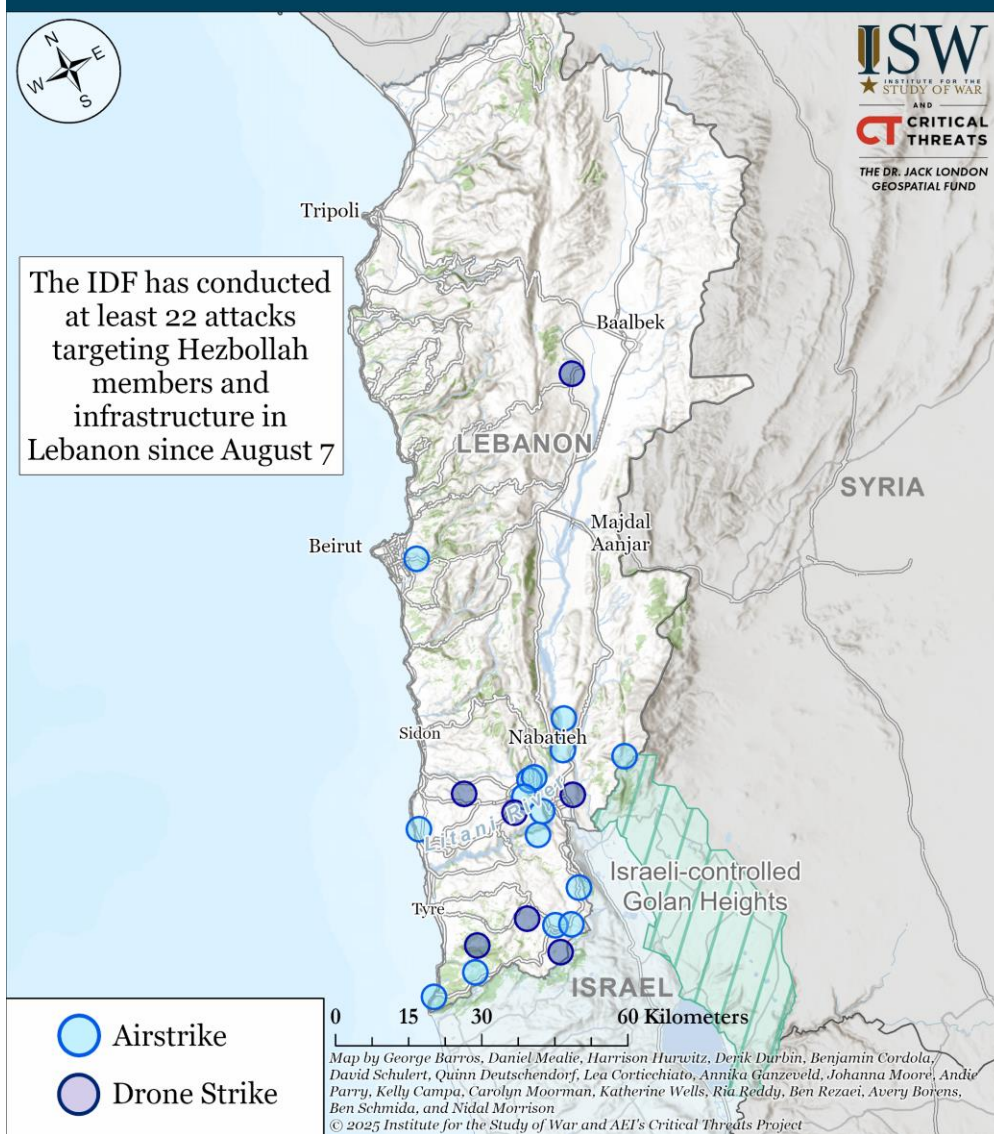
Timeline	Actions
Phase 1: Within 15 Days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Lebanese government will issue a decree that commits the government to fully disarm Hezbollah by December 31, 2025</li> <li>Israel will cease ground, air, and sea operations in Lebanon</li> </ul>
Phase 2: Within 60 Days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



Note: The phased plan will not be implemented until all parties agree to the proposal. This information is based on open-source reports.

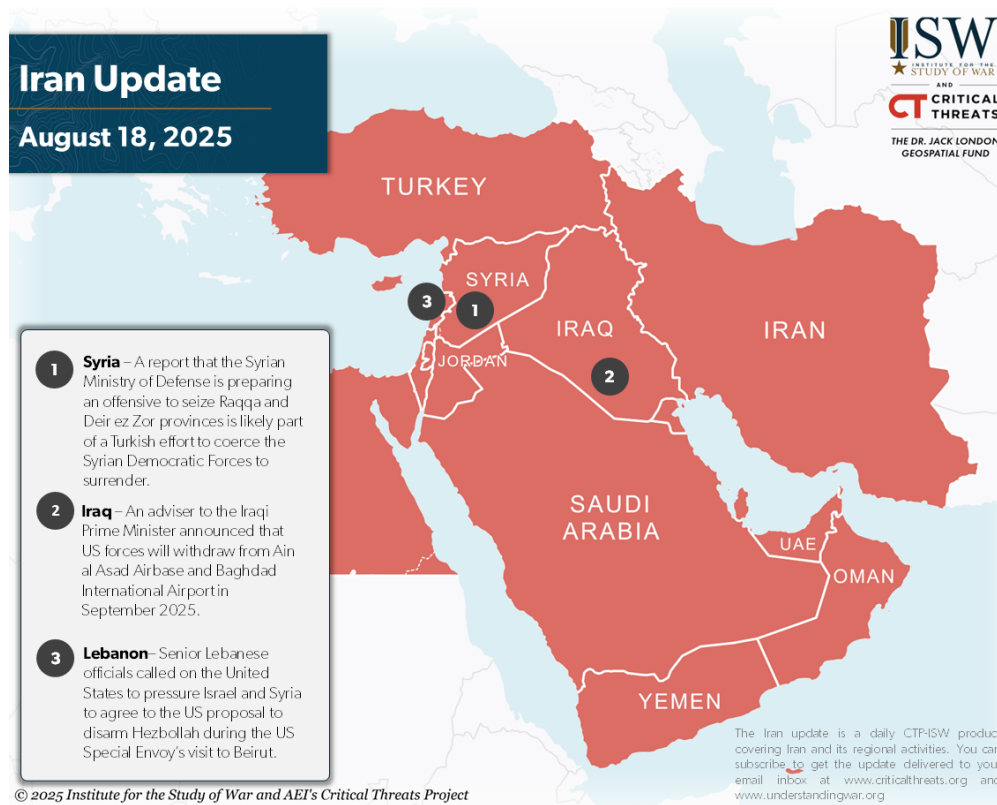
**Israel has maintained that it will continue to operate in Lebanon until Hezbollah has been disarmed.[23]** Israel previously rejected Berri's July 2025 demand that Israel halt all airstrikes in Lebanon prior to the Lebanese government's disarmament of Hezbollah.[24] An unspecified Israeli official told Saudi media on August 18 that Israel will "play its part" in the US proposal when Lebanon takes unspecified "concrete steps."[25] The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) recently shifted to a "forward defense" posture on August 1 to maintain Israel's "strategic superiority" in southern Lebanon and prevent Hezbollah from reconstituting capabilities that could pose a threat to northern Israeli towns.[26] Recent IDF operations, including ground raids, airstrikes, and drone strikes, demonstrate this posture shift.[27] The IDF had a similar objective in its campaign against Hezbollah in late 2024 due to Israel's concern about a potential Hezbollah ground incursion into northern Israel.[28] The Israel-Hezbollah ceasefire agreement in November 2024 included an addendum that ensures the Israeli right to self-defense against any future threat that Hezbollah may pose.[29] The IDF has acted on this addendum and has continued to operate against Hezbollah since November 2024, including via airstrikes and raids targeting Hezbollah infrastructure.[30]

## Reported Israeli Operations in Lebanon Between August 7, 2025 and August 18, 2025



**Hezbollah would likely use any delay in the implementation of the US disarmament plan to reconstitute its forces, increase its weapons stockpiles, and bolster its domestic support base, which would increase Hezbollah's relative strength vis-à-vis the Lebanese government and thus make it more challenging for the government to disarm Hezbollah.** Iranian officials and Axis-affiliated media recently reported that Hezbollah began appointing new commanders to reconstitute its command structure.[31] Hezbollah reportedly began prioritizing domestic drone production in June 2025 to reduce its reliance on Iranian weapons.[32] The IDF destroyed approximately 70 percent of the drones of Hezbollah's primary aerial unit, Unit 127, during the Israel-Hezbollah conflict in late 2024.[33] Hezbollah is also restructuring its financial system to confront challenges to its ability to pay salaries and provide services to Lebanese civilians.[34] 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.[35] These actions highlight how Hezbollah is actively trying to reconstitute itself as a military organization and maintain its domestic support base. Any delay in the implementation of the US proposal would give Hezbollah more time to try to achieve these objectives.



## Key Takeaways

- **Turkish Pressure Campaign:** Syrian security sources told Emirati media on August 16 that the Syrian Ministry of Defense (MoD) is preparing a three-pronged offensive to seize Raqqah and Deir ez Zor provinces. This report and others appear to be an effort by Turkey and some elements of the Syrian transitional government to coerce the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to surrender.
- **US Withdrawal from Iraq:** An adviser to Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani announced on August 17 that US forces will withdraw from Ain al Asad Airbase and Baghdad International Airport in September 2025. A spokesperson for the US Embassy in Baghdad separately told Iraqi media on August 18 that the US-led international coalition's mission in Iraq will transition to a "more traditional bilateral security partnership."
- **Hezbollah Disarmament:** Senior Lebanese officials called on the United States to pressure Israel and Syria to agree to the US proposal to disarm Hezbollah during US Special Envoy Thomas Barrack's visit to Beirut on August 18. Israel has maintained that it will continue to operate in Lebanon until Hezbollah is disarmed.



## Iran

**The Iranian Reformist Front issued a statement on August 17 that called for political reforms and foreign policy shifts, which highlights how reformists in the Iranian regime may feel emboldened in the post-war environment to call for change.[36]** The statement warned that Iran's fragile economy and potential E3 (the United Kingdom, France, and Germany) snapback sanctions could cause Iran to enter a deeper economic crisis.[37] The Reformist Front outlined eleven demands, including lifting restrictions on reformist leaders, freeing political prisoners, excluding the armed forces from non-military fields, allowing free elections, reforming women's rights laws, lifting censorship, and suspending uranium enrichment under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) oversight in exchange for sanctions relief.[38] Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC)-affiliated Tasnim News Agency condemned the statement on August 18, criticizing the Reformist Front's call to suspend uranium enrichment and accusing reformists of pursuing policies that weaken Iran in favor of Iran's adversaries.[39] The Reformist Front statement comes after former President Hassan Rouhani urged the regime on August 13 to implement reforms, ease tensions with the West, and limit the Iranian armed forces' involvement in politics and the economy.[40] Rouhani framed the post-war period as an opportunity to restore public trust and recalibrate Iran's trajectory.[41] The emergence of reformist and moderate elements in the Iranian regime likely reflects a political opening created by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's absence from the public view and the loss of hardliner leadership during the Israel-Iran War.[42]

**Iranian security forces raided a house near Enghelab Square in central Tehran on August 17, where unspecified individuals were reportedly constructing drones for Mossad.[43]** Iranian security forces seized several drones during the raid [44] This incident highlights Iranian officials' heightened concern about Israeli infiltration following the Israel-Iran War.[45] Israel clandestinely built a one-way attack drone base in Iran that it used to strike Iranian ballistic missile launchers at the beginning of the war.[46] This operation hindered Iran's ability to immediately respond to Israel.[47]

**Iranian security forces continue to conduct counterterrorism operations against Salafi-jihadi militant group Jaish al Adl in Sistan and Baluchistan Province, southeastern Iran.[48]** The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Ground Forces Quds Operational Base dismantled two Jaish al Adl cells in Sistan and Baluchistan Province on August 17.[49] The Quds Operational Base stated that it killed six fighters, detained an unspecified number of others, and seized 25 kilograms of explosives and other military equipment during an operation in Chabahar.[50] The IRGC Ground Forces separately dismantled a safe house and killed several armed militants in northern Sistan and Baluchistan Province.[51] These operations came after Jaish al Adl fighters shot at a vehicle in Sistan and Baluchistan Province on August 15, killing an Iranian Law Enforcement Command (LEC) officer and wounding another.[52] Senior Iranian security officials have recently met with Pakistani officials to discuss how to address Jaish al Adl attacks.[53]

## Iraq

**The Iraqi Accountability and Justice Commission is investigating Shia Coordination Framework electoral candidates for alleged ties to the Baath Party, according to leaked documents published in Iraqi media on August 18.[54]** The Shia Coordination Framework is a

loose coalition of Shia political parties, some of which Iran backs. The Accountability and Justice Commission is reportedly investigating between 250 and 400 candidates. The candidates represent “most” Shia Coordination Framework parties.[55] Iraqi media noted that the individuals under investigation include a senior official of Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Sayyid al Shuhada in Kirkuk Province, Bassem Ghazi al Amerli. This report comes after State of Law Coalition head and former Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki emphasized on August 8 the need for the Accountability and Justice Commission to take action against Baathists.[56] Shia political parties have long manipulated the Accountability and Justice Commission to target political opponents.[57] The commission has barred several candidates in recent months from competing in the November 2025 parliamentary elections due to alleged Baathist ties.[58]

**An unidentified Iraqi official told Fox News on August 14 that US Treasury Department officials pressured Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein in March 2025 to prevent Iraq’s largest bank from engaging in financial transactions with the Houthis.[59]** The US officials called for the Sanaa branch of Rafidain Bank to relocate to internationally recognized Yemeni government-controlled territory. The Iraqi Embassy in Washington, DC, denied the Fox News report and claimed that Rafidain Bank has not operated in Sanaa since 2017.[60] The Fox News report comes as Rafidain Bank signed a “professional partnership agreement” with US-based financial consulting firm K2 Integrity on August 15 to combat money laundering and terrorist financing.[61] The Iraqi federal government has previously used Rafidain Bank to process and distribute salaries to members of the Iranian-backed Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF).[62] Iraqi media reported in July 2025 that US pressure on Rafidain Bank caused a multi-week delay in the distribution of PMF salaries in June 2025.[63] Iranian-backed Iraqi militias have historically exploited loopholes within the Iraqi financial system to commit fraud and obtain funds to support Iranian and militia operations, including attacks on US forces and allies.[64]

**Sunni Azm Alliance head Muthanna al Samarraï discussed cooperation between “political forces” with Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) head Masoud Barzani on August 16.[65]** Samarraï and Barzani’s meeting is notable given that these parties allied following the 2021 Iraqi parliamentary elections.[66] This meeting follows Samarraï’s request on August 13 for the Iraqi electoral commission to disqualify former Parliament Speaker and Progress Party head Mohammad al Halbousi from competing in the upcoming elections.[67] Samarraï also discussed the elections and “support for the executive parties” with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani on August 15.[68]

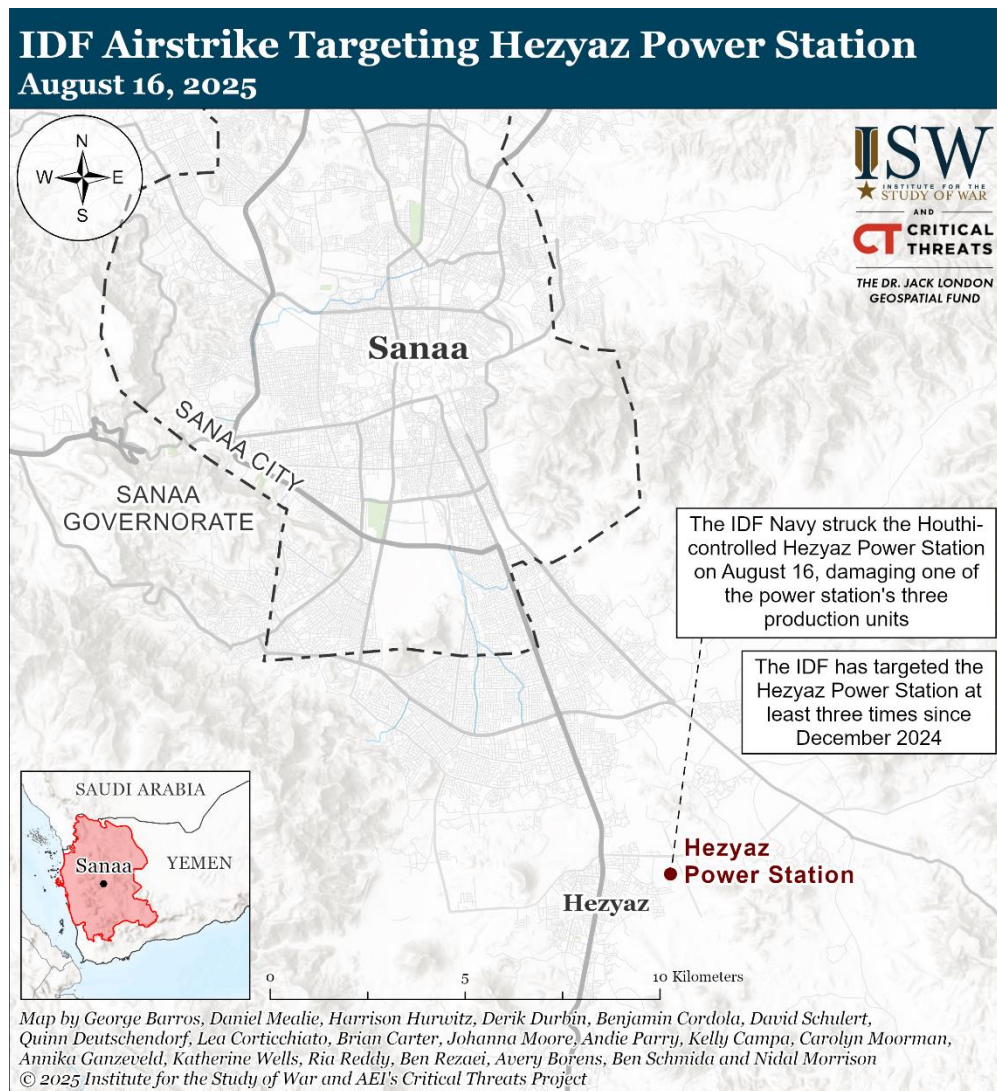
## **Syria**

**The General Security Service (GSS) arrested an MoD member whom the Syrian National Inquiry Commission accused of involvement in the March 2025 coastal massacres.[69]** This arrest marks the Syrian transitional government’s first publicized arrest of an MoD member for their involvement in the atrocities on the Syrian coast.[70] The Syrian National Inquiry Commission referred 298 individuals to the Syrian judiciary on July 22 for their attacks on Alawite civilians in March.[71] The Syrian judiciary must prosecute, try, and punish the individuals involved in atrocities against Alawites in order to be able to rebuild minority trust in the government.

## **Arabian Peninsula**



**The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Navy struck the Houthi-controlled Hezyaz Power Station, south of Sanaa City, on August 16 in response to Houthi drone and missile attacks targeting Israeli civilian and military sites.[72]** The IDF Navy struck a generator at one of the power station's three production units, damaging the unit, according to an Israeli open-source analyst.[73] The IDF previously targeted the Hezyaz Power Station in December 2024 and May 2025.[74]





**The Houthis launched a ballistic missile targeting Ben Gurion Airport in Israel on August 17 in response to the Israeli attack on the Hezyaz Power Station.[75]** The IDF intercepted the missile outside Israeli territory.[76] 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.[77]

### **Palestinian Territories and Lebanon**

*See topline section.*

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# Iran Update



**Carolyn Moorman, Avery Borens, Ben Rezaei, Adham Fattah, Ben Schmida, Katherine Wells, William Doran, Ria Reddy, and Brian Carter**

**August 19, 2025      Information Cutoff: 2:00 PM ET**

**The Shia Coordination Framework is reportedly divided over US efforts to dissolve the Iranian-backed Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF).** The Shia Coordination Framework is a loose coalition of Shia political parties, some of which Iran backs. A source close to the Shia Coordination Framework told Iraqi media on August 19 that Shia Coordination Framework members are divided into two “camps,” with the first in support of challenging US objections to the PMF and the latter concerned about the threat of US sanctions and strikes targeting Iraq.[1] The United States has repeatedly pressured the Iraqi federal government to dissolve the PMF and reportedly threatened to sanction PMF leaders.[2] The PMF is an Iraqi state security service that includes many Iranian-backed Iraqi militias.[3] This report of Shia Coordination Framework divisions comes amid a broader debate within Iraq about limiting the transfer of arms to the Iraqi state and efforts by Iranian-backed Iraqi political actors to pass the Popular Mobilization Authority Law.[4] CTP-ISW assessed on August 6 that this law, which the Iraqi Parliament has yet to vote on, would likely increase Iran’s influence in the Iraqi political and security spheres by formalizing key PMF structures, like the al Muhandis General Company, as part of the Iraqi government.[5] This company is controlled by Iranian-backed factions and acquired land along the Iraq-Saudi Arabia border that Iraqi groups used to launch drones targeting Saudi Arabia.[6] The law nominally subordinates the PMF to the defense minister via the head of the future Popular Mobilization Authority, but the PMF has officially answered to the prime minister since 2016 without answering to the prime minister in reality.[7] The US State Department spokesperson confirmed on August 12 that the United States opposes the law.[8]

## Major Proposals in the Popular Mobilization Authority Law

As of July 2025

### Major Proposals

- Creates a body called the Popular Mobilization Authority that is “considered part of” the Iraqi armed forces and ultimately subordinate to the Iraqi Prime Minister
- Tasks the Popular Mobilization Authority with equipping its forces and conducting military operations as assigned by the Iraqi Prime Minister
- Makes the head of the Authority a cabinet-level position but makes him subordinate to the Iraqi Minister of Defense
- Clarifies the experience and education required to hold high-ranking positions within the Authority
- Outlines the departments affiliated with the Authority, which include the Muhandis General Company, the Popular Mobilization Authority Academy, and the Martyrs, Wounded, and Honorees Fund
- Prohibits “affiliates” of the Authority from engaging in any political activity or belonging to any political party
- Replaces the 2019 PMF Commission Law that formalized the PMF as an independent entity reporting directly to the Iraqi Prime Minister, separate from the Iraqi Defense and Interior Ministries



Source: Rudaw and Observer Iraq. This is not a comprehensive list of every proposal in the law.

The Shia Coordination Framework source did not specify which Shia Coordination Framework parties support challenging US pressure to dissolve the PMF, but many Shia Coordination Framework parties with affiliated armed groups likely support passing the Popular Mobilization Authority Law.[9] Iranian-backed Badr Organization head Hadi al Ameri and Asaib Ahl al Haq’s Sadiqoun bloc have expressed willingness to wear the PMF uniform during the next Parliament session to induce a vote on the PMF law.[10] CTP-ISW assessed on July 16 that some Iraqi parliamentarians, including Shia Coordination Framework-aligned Deputy Parliament Speaker Mohsen al Mandalawi, have previously threatened to remove Parliament Speaker Mahmoud al Mashhadani, likely in an effort to force Mashhadani to put

the law on the Parliamentary agenda.[11] Mashhadani has so far not placed the law on the agenda for a vote. Over 120 parliamentarians submitted a petition on August 5 to amend the agenda for the August 5 parliament session to include a vote on the law.[12] Mandalawi, the deputy speaker, chaired the session, which ended early due to a lack of quorum.[13] Mashhadani accused Mandalawi of violating the Parliamentary bylaws by chairing the session and called the session invalid.[14] Parliament reportedly did not discuss the law during the session.[15]

There is domestic opposition to the law among Kurdish and Sunni parties. Parliament read the law for a second time on July 16, but Kurdish and Sunni parliamentarians left parliament to protest the law because it was raised without prior "political consensus" or discussion in committee.[16] A Shia Coordination Framework parliamentarian told Iraqi media on August 18 that over 100 parliamentarians have signed a petition to vote on the law in the next Parliament session, but added that no Sunni or Kurdish parliamentarians have signed the petition.[17]

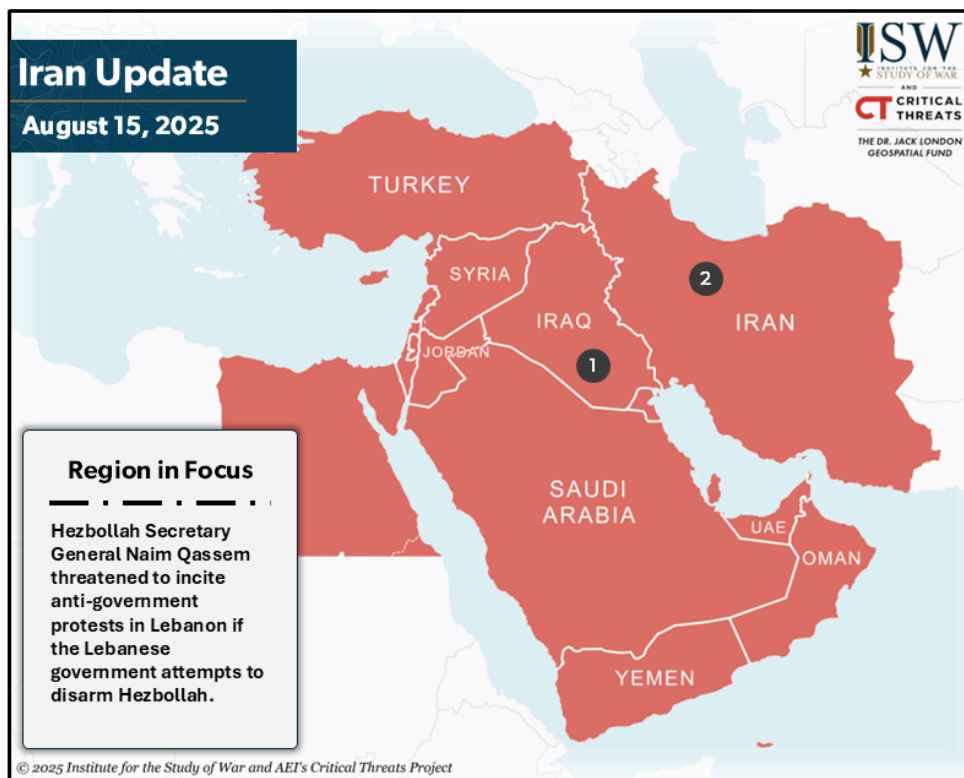
Iraqi media similarly did not specify which Shia Coordination Framework parties are concerned about the threat of US sanctions or military action in response to US pressure to dissolve the PMF.[18] Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein stated in a recent interview that he objected to the "timing" of the Iraqi Parliament's efforts to pass the law.[19] Hussein emphasized the importance of convincing Iranian-backed Iraqi militias to disarm rather than forcing them to do so, however. Iranian-backed militias in Iraq, some of which refuse to disarm before the return of the "mahdi," are very unlikely to be "convinced" to disarm.[20] A State of Law Coalition parliamentarian and member of the Shia Coordination Framework separately told Iraqi media on August 7 that unspecified actors submitted a proposal to Mashhadani to postpone the approval of the law until after the elections to allow time for discussion with the United States about the law's "controversial provisions." [21] Division among the Shia Coordination Framework is notable ahead of the elections due to the way that factional infighting between Iranian-backed groups advantaged other Iraqi parties over Iranian-backed parties in the 2021 Iraqi parliamentary elections.[22]

**Hardline media and officials are negatively responding to recent reformist calls for change within the Iranian regime, which highlights how the post-war environment has deepened existing fissures between reformists and hardliners over how to govern Iran and engage the West.** Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's official website said in an August 18 article that recent remarks by reformists were similar to a "quiet multimedia influence campaign" conducted by the United States and Israel, and alleged that the reformists seek to promote division within Iran over issues such as nuclear policy and uranium enrichment specifically.[23] The article indicates that the Supreme Leader continues to reject any zero uranium enrichment demands.[24] This statement from the Supreme Leader's office comes after reformists have called for political reform and foreign policy shifts. The Reformist Front published a statement on August 18 outlining eleven demands, including lifting restrictions on reformist leaders, allowing free elections, reforming women's rights laws, lifting censorship, and suspending uranium enrichment in exchange for sanctions relief.[25] Former President Hassan Rouhani advocated on August 13 for reducing tensions with the West and expanding relations with European and neighboring countries.[26] Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC)-affiliated Tasnim News Agency claimed on August 19 that reformists are conceding to Western pressure, and Tasnim warned that "trusting the enemy" could threaten regime stability.[27] Another IRGC-affiliated outlet dismissed the Reformist Front's statement as a "blueprint"

for selling Iran's independence and accused reformists of spreading American and Israeli propaganda.[28] Assembly of Experts Secretary Abbas Kaabi similarly said that the statement repeated "the enemy's narrative" and focused too narrowly on internal problems rather than external threats.[29]

**The Lebanese government and the World Bank will reportedly sign a 250 million USD loan agreement early next week that seeks to support Lebanon's reconstruction.[30] This loan agreement is likely part of the Lebanese government's efforts to use reconstruction fronts to decrease support for Hezbollah.** Lebanese Finance Minister Yassin Jaber announced on August 13 that the Lebanese cabinet authorized him to sign the agreement, which the World Bank previously approved in June 2025.[31] The loan agreement is dedicated to rebuilding infrastructure and clearing the remaining rubble in Lebanon from Israeli operations since September 2024.[32] Lebanon has reportedly received an initial installment of 75 million euros from France and 20 million USD from Iraq, which the Lebanese Finance Ministry has started to allocate to reconstruction efforts in Beirut's southern suburbs and southern Lebanon, which were heavily damaged during the Israeli campaign in Lebanon.[33] The 250 million USD loan will serve as the initial funding for a 1 billion USD financing program that aims to launch reconstruction and recovery efforts in Lebanon.[34] International organizations and entities will reportedly provide the remaining 750 million dollars in grants.[35] The Lebanese Parliament will vote on the loan in early September 2025.[36]

The Lebanese government has taken early steps to begin reconstruction in Lebanon following the Israel-Hezbollah conflict in November 2024. The Lebanese government has secured several foreign donations, appointed individuals to focus on reconstruction efforts, started clearing debris, and taken steps to reform government policies to address corruption and economic issues that may deter foreign investors.[37] Hezbollah previously led such reconstruction efforts and provided a social safety net for the Lebanese population after the 2006 war, but Hezbollah has recently struggled to reconstruct damaged infrastructure following the conflict in late 2024.[38] Hezbollah has similarly struggled to maintain its financial commitments to fighters, which has contributed to growing frustration among Hezbollah supporters.[39] Frustrated Hezbollah supporters have demanded answers from Hezbollah about when they will receive reconstruction funds to rebuild businesses and homes destroyed in the war.[40] Hezbollah has historically used financial benefits, including pensions for the families of deceased fighters and compensation to those who lost their homes or property, to retain its support base among Lebanese Shia.[41] The Lebanese government's recent reconstruction efforts amid growing frustration among Hezbollah's Shia support base could weaken Hezbollah's ability to maintain its domestic support base. These efforts will need to be sustained to be successful, however.



- 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**

- **Iraqi Domestic Politics:** The Shia Coordination Framework is reportedly divided over US efforts to dissolve the Iranian-backed Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF). Division among the Shia Coordination Framework is notable ahead of the elections due to the way that factional infighting between Iranian-backed groups advantaged other Iraqi parties over Iranian-backed parties in the 2021 Iraqi parliamentary elections.
- **Iranian Internal Fissures:** Hardline media and officials are negatively responding to recent reformist calls for change within the Iranian regime, which highlights how the post-war



environment has deepened existing fissures between reformists and hardliners over how to govern Iran and engage the West.

- **Lebanon's Reconstruction:** The Lebanese government and the World Bank will reportedly sign a 250 million USD loan agreement early next week that seeks to support Lebanon's reconstruction. This loan agreement is likely part of the Lebanese government's efforts to use reconstruction fronts to weaken Hezbollah's ability to maintain its domestic support base.

## Iran

**Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian met with Armenian officials in Yerevan, Armenia, on August 19 to discuss concerns about the US proposal to oversee a transit corridor in the southern Caucasus.**[42] Pezeshkian emphasized Iran's concerns about "the presence of third-party forces" near the Iran-Armenia border during his meeting with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.[43] Armenia and Azerbaijan signed a declaration of intent on August 8 for 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. Senior Iranian officials have strongly criticized the proposal due to Iranian fears that its adversaries and competitors could use the transit corridor to undermine Iranian security and economic interests. The Iranian Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee visited Iran's northwestern border on August 19 to "ensure decisions reflect national security interests." [44]

Iranian officials emphasized the importance of expanding bilateral relations with Armenia during the visit, likely as part of a broader Iranian effort to try to hedge against future US influence in the region.[45] Iranian ministers signed ten memorandums of understanding (MOU) focused on bilateral trade and transportation relations.[46] Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs Abbas Araghchi stated on August 19 that Iran and Armenia agreed to finalize a comprehensive strategic cooperation agreement soon.[47] Iranian Minister of Transport and Urban Development Farzaneh Sadegh discussed the reopening of the Jolfa–Yerevan–Georgia rail link with the Armenian territorial administration minister and mentioned the role the link could play in boosting regional transit.[48]

## Iraq

**Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Ansar Allah al Awfiya spokesperson Adel Garawi told Iraqi media on August 18 that Israel may attack Iranian-backed Iraqi militias, which suggests that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias continue to fear imminent Israeli attacks in Iraq.**[49] Garawi did not provide further details. Israel last struck PMF bases in Iraq in 2019, but there have been unexplained explosions in Iraq since then.[50] An Israeli airstrike killed a senior member of the Iranian-backed Iraq militia Kataib Sayyid al Shuhada (KSS) on the Iran-Iraq border on June 21.[51]

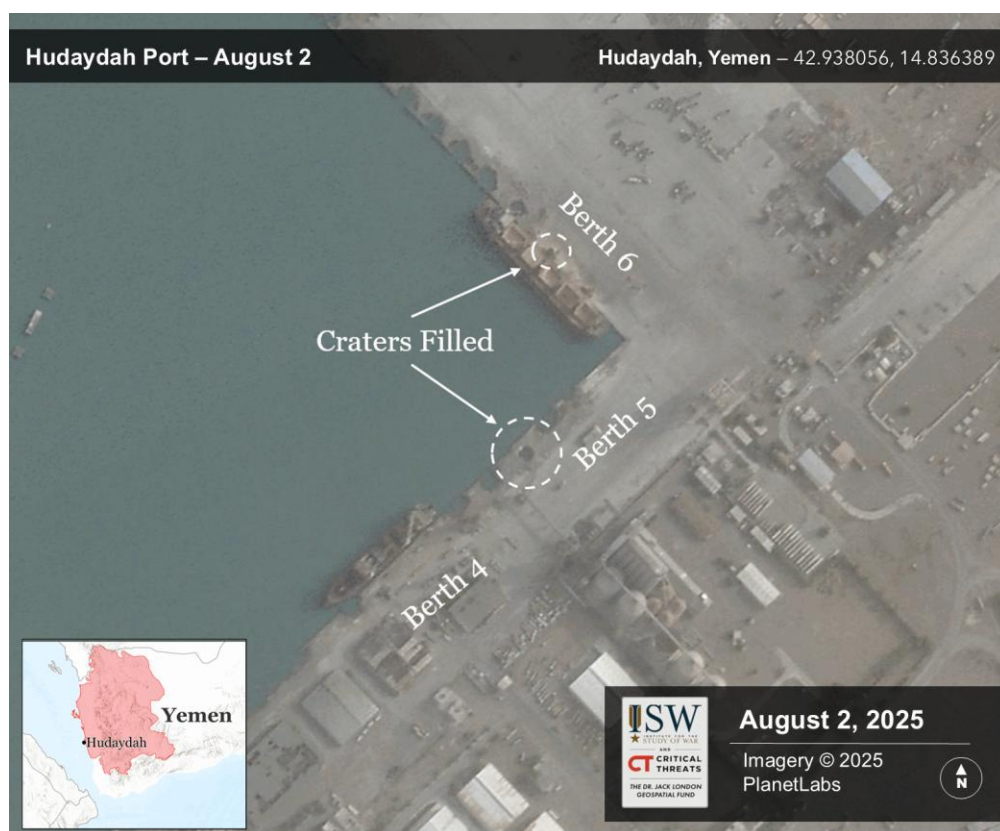
## Syria

**Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al Shaibani met with Israeli Strategic Affairs Minister Ron Dermer and US Special Envoy to Syria Thomas Barrack in Paris on August 19.**[52] The meeting focused on security arrangements for the Israel-Syria border, which includes an Israeli proposal to establish a humanitarian aid corridor spanning over 40 miles from the Israeli border to Suwayda City, according to Israeli media.[53] Barrack, Dermer, and Shaibani previously met during

US-brokered peace talks in Paris on July 24 after Israel conducted airstrikes in Syria in response to intercommunal violence in Suwayda.[54] Israeli officials said that the Israeli government seeks to deliver humanitarian supplies to the Suwaydawi Druze population.[55]

### Arabian Peninsula

**The Houthis continued to conduct repairs at Hudaydah Port after Israeli airstrikes damaged the port between May and July.[56]** Commercially available satellite imagery captured between August 2 and 16 showed that the Houthis filled in craters at berth six and between berth four and five at Hudaydah Port. Satellite imagery from August 15 showed that the Houthis had moved containers near the filled-in crater between berth four and five. A Yemen analyst reported that only berths four and six were fully operational, while berth eight was partially operational.[57] Local sources reported that the Houthis were filling in the craters so that they could resume shipping operations at the port.[58] Commercially available maritime data confirmed that several cargo ships and oil tankers arrived at Houthi-controlled ports in June and July.[59]



### Palestinian Territories and Lebanon

**Neither Israel nor Lebanon has changed its position on the timeline for disarming Hezbollah, which could further delay the implementation of the US disarmament plan.** Lebanese Deputy Prime Minister Tarek Mitri told Qatari media on August 18 that the Lebanese government would not be bound to its responsibilities outlined in the US proposal if Israel does not commit to the proposal.[60] Mitri noted that the Lebanese government would not implement the US plan to disarm Hezbollah until Israel commits to ending its military operations in Lebanon.[61]

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun similarly told Saudi media on August 17 that the US proposal will not become effective until all relevant parties approve it.[62] Israel has maintained that it will continue to operate in Lebanon until Hezbollah has been disarmed.[63] Israel previously rejected Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri's July 2025 demand that Israel halt all airstrikes in Lebanon before the Lebanese government disarms Hezbollah.[64] US Special Envoy Thomas Barrack told Lebanese reporters after he met with Aoun on August 18 that the United States has discussed the potential for a long-term ceasefire with Israel but has not shared the Hezbollah disarmament proposal with Israel.[65] Barrack suggested that Israel would take unspecified "steps" in the coming weeks.[66] Barrack did not make clear whether the steps would be the steps outlined in the proposal.

**The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) discussed on August 18 a French resolution to extend the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)'s mandate until August 31, 2026.[67] The UNSC is expected to vote on the proposed resolution on August 25.[68]** UNIFIL, which patrols Lebanon's southern border, operates under an annually renewed mandate that is set to expire on August 31, 2025.[69] The French resolution reportedly states that the UNSC would indicate its intention to gradually withdraw UNIFIL forces from Lebanon with the aim of making the Lebanese government the sole security provider in southern Lebanon.[70] This intention is contingent upon the Lebanese government's full control of all Lebanese territory and that all parties agree on an unspecified comprehensive political arrangement.[71] Unspecified US officials noted that the draft resolution includes a one-year extension of UNIFIL's mandate, followed by a withdrawal period of six months.[72] A previous extension resolution from August 2024 notably did not include any details about UNIFIL's withdrawal.[73]

Lebanese and European officials have supported extending UNIFIL's mandate, while Israel and the United States have expressed reservations about the resolution.[74] Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar reportedly recently sent a letter to US Secretary of State Marco Rubio opposing the renewal of UNIFIL's mandate, arguing that UNIFIL has failed its core mission.[75] US officials stated that the United States would require the resolution to explicitly identify a date for UNIFIL's withdrawal.[76] Lebanese President Joseph Aoun met with UNIFIL Commander Major General Diodato Abagnara on August 19 to express his support for renewing UNIFIL's mandate.[77] Aoun reportedly told Abagnara that Lebanon needs UNIFIL to help maintain security and support the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF)'s deployment to southern Lebanon.[78] UNIFIL's presence and familiarity with southern Lebanon may be needed to conduct a successful relief-in-place/transfer of authority in southern Lebanon.[79] UNIFIL has largely failed to undertake the tasks given to it under its mandate. UNIFIL is present in southern Lebanon to monitor the implementation of UN Resolution 1701 and to "take all necessary action" to prevent the area from being used for hostile activities, which would include Hezbollah's extensive development of military infrastructure.[80] UNIFIL has previously taken only rare and very limited steps to degrade Hezbollah infrastructure in southern Lebanon.[81]

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# Iran Update



**Nidal Morrison, Avery Borens, Ben Schmida, Ria Reddy, Adham Fattah, Katherine Wells, Ben Rezaei, Kelly Campa, and Brian Carter**

**August 20, 2025    Information Cutoff: 2:00 PM ET**

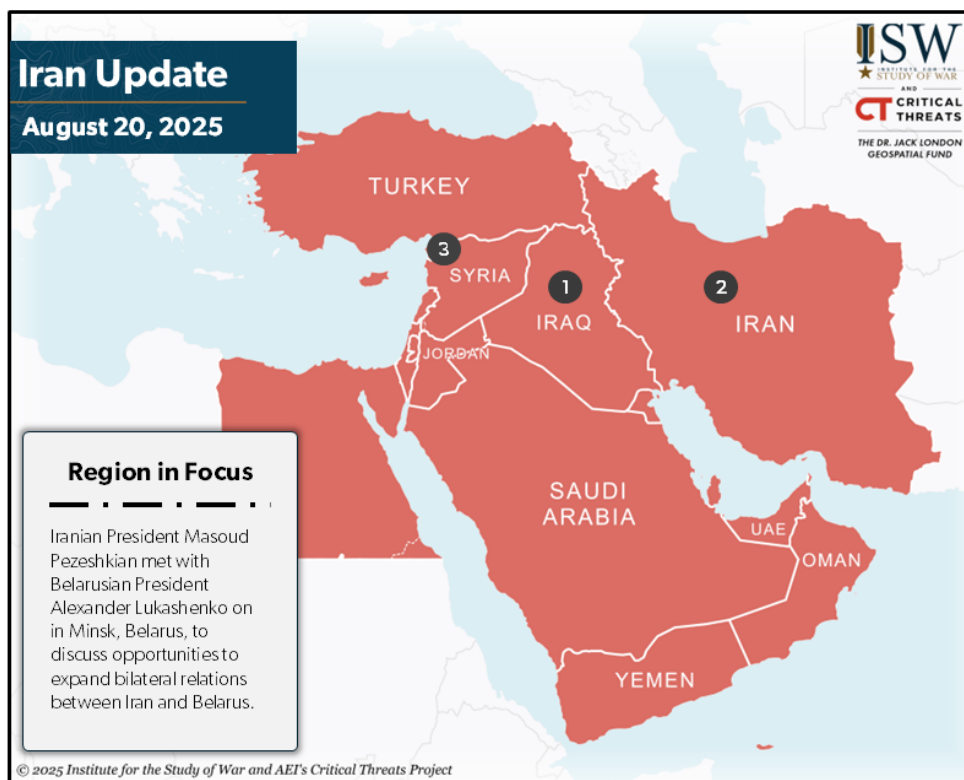
**Former Prime Minister and State of Law Coalition leader Nouri al Maliki may be using the Accountability and Justice Commission (AJC) to sideline political opponents ahead of the November 2025 elections.** Iraqi media reported on August 20 that the AJC has so far barred 33 candidates affiliated with Shia Coordination Framework parties for alleged Baath party ties.[1] The Shia Coordination Framework is a loose coalition of Shia political parties, some of which Iran backs. The AJC reportedly barred eight members of Asaib Ahl al Haq's Sadiqoun Movement, seven Badr Organization candidates, five members of Kataib Hezbollah's Hoquq Movement, six members of the Imam Ali Brigade's Services Alliance, the head of Kataib Sayyid al Suhahda in Kirkuk, one member of Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani's Reconstruction and Development bloc, and three candidates from Labor Minister Ahmed al Asadi's Jund al Samaa bloc.[2] Asadi is aligned with Sudani.[3] Shia political parties, but particularly Maliki, previously used the AJC ahead of elections in 2010 to bar candidates opposed to him, and could be weaponizing the commission again.[4] It is highly unlikely that seven Badr Organization members, for example, have real Baathist ties due to Badr's history. Badr Organization is the rebranded Badr Corps. The Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) founded the Badr Corps as an Iraqi Shia formation to fight Saddam Hussein's Iraqi Army during the Iran-Iraq War.[5] The AJC only excluded three candidates aligned with Maliki for suspected Baath party ties, according to leaked documents published by Iraqi media on August 13.[6] Candidates from political parties and coalitions that are competing with Maliki's State of Law Coalition, meanwhile, constitute a disproportionate number of those barred due to alleged Ba'ath party links. This report comes after Maliki's Dawa Party released a statement on August 13 affirming its support for the Commission's measures.[7] Maliki also emphasized on August 8 the need for the AJC to take action against Baathists.[8] Former Prime Minister Haider al Abadi, once a member of Maliki's former Dawa Party, criticized on August 20 the weaponization of the AJC for political purposes.[9] Shia political parties, particularly Maliki, have long manipulated the Accountability and Justice Commission to target political opponents.[10]

The Accountability and Justice Commission's investigation and exclusion of candidates tied to Shia Coordination Framework parties reflects ongoing tensions among Shia parties within the Framework. Iraqi media reported on August 19 that Shia Coordination Framework members are divided over US pressure to dissolve the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF).[11] Political sources close to the Shia Coordination Framework told Iraqi media on August 6 that some Iranian-backed Iraqi militias are "almost at odds" with some elements of the Shia Coordination Framework.[12] Division among the Shia Coordination Framework is notable ahead of the elections because factional infighting between Iranian-

backed groups before the 2021 Iraqi parliamentary elections ultimately advantaged other Iraqi parties over Iranian-backed parties in the elections.[13]

### **Key Takeaways**

- **Iraqi Parliamentary Elections:** Former Prime Minister and State of Law Coalition leader Nouri al Maliki may be using the Accountability and Justice Commission (AJC) to sideline political opponents ahead of the November 2025 elections. Iraqi media reported that the AJC has so far barred 33 candidates affiliated with the Shia Coordination Framework parties for alleged Baath party ties.
- **Damage at Fordow:** The *New York Times* reported on August 20 that conclusive damage assessments of US strikes on Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant require more time, which is consistent with previous reporting. Several technical experts told the *New York Times* that a precise damage assessment requires advanced computer simulations, exact details of the bombs, and extensive knowledge of the geology of Fordow.
- **US Counter-ISIS Operations:** The United States conducted an operation reportedly targeting senior Iraqi ISIS leader Salah Noman in Atmeh, Idlib Province, on August 20. The US ground operation in Atmeh occurs amid ongoing counter-ISIS efforts in northern Syria near the Turkish border, including a recent ground operation in al Bab in July 2025.



- 1 **IRAQ.** Former Prime Minister and State of Law Coalition leader Nouri al Maliki may be using the Accountability and Justice Commission (AJC) to sideline political opponents ahead of the November 2025 elections. Iraqi media reported that the AJC has so far barred 33 candidates affiliated with Shia Coordination Framework parties for alleged Baath party ties.
- 2 **IRAN.** The New York Times reported on August 20 that conclusive damage assessments of US strikes on Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant require more time, which is consistent with previous reporting. Several technical experts told the New York Times that a precise damage assessment requires advanced computer simulations, exact details of the bombs, and extensive knowledge of the geology of Fordow.
- 3 **SYRIA.** The United States conducted an operation reportedly targeting senior Iraqi ISIS leader Salah Noman in Atmeh, Idlib Province, on August 20. The US ground operation in Atmeh occurs amid ongoing counter-ISIS efforts in northern Syria near the Turkish border, including a recent ground operation in al Bab in July 2025.

## Iran

**The New York Times reported on August 20 that conclusive damage assessments of US strikes on Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant require more time, which is consistent with previous reporting.[14]** The United States dropped twelve 30,000lb GBU-57 bunker buster bombs on Fordow in June 2025, targeting ventilation shafts at the site that led to a centrifuge cascade hall located at least 250 feet underground.[15] An unspecified US Department of Defense official said that the United States aimed to destroy the centrifuges with shock waves and other effects of the blasts because the bombs would probably not make direct contact with the centrifuge chamber itself.[16] International Atomic Energy Agency Director Rafael Grossi previously stated that the Fordow



centrifuges are “no longer working” and emphasized that even small vibrations can destroy them.[17] The US bombs would have generated a blast wave far more significant than small vibrations. Several technical experts told the *New York Times* that a precise damage assessment requires advanced computer simulations, exact details of the bombs, and extensive knowledge of the geology of Fordow.[18] Iranian officials have emphasized that Iran cannot access the nuclear sites struck by US and Israeli airstrikes yet, which also prevents conclusive battle damage assessments.[19]

Several factors may have impacted the effectiveness of the US strikes on Fordow. A US defense official familiar with US decision-making said that the main targeted ventilation shafts had bends near the shaft entrances, which means the path to the underground facility through the shaft was not straight.[20] Several geologists also stated that the geology of Fordow almost certainly had an impact on the extent of damage. One expert said that Iran likely built Fordow using volcanic tuff, which may have helped cushion the site from the bombs due to its porosity.

**Iran secured loans against tankers transporting Iranian and Iranian allies’ oil exports to the People’s Republic of China (PRC) to circumvent Western sanctions between 2019 and 2023, according to the *Financial Times* on August 20.[21]** A US-sanctioned Iranian broker set up one billion dollars’ worth of mortgages in Switzerland against at least 34 oil tankers, according to Panama Maritime Authority documents.[22] The United States has sanctioned 20 of these 34 tankers.[23] The Iranian broker used these mortgages as collateral, which allowed the broker to take ownership of the tanker if the buyer did not complete the payment once the oil arrived at its destination.[24] Buyers traditionally require official bank documents to prove their credit to traders.[25] These mortgages allow buyers to circumvent bank involvement in the process. Many banks have increasingly refused to work on transactions related to Iran’s illicit oil trade since the United States began to impose strict sanctions targeting Iranian oil exports in 2019.[26] Iran’s illicit oil export network has moved at least 130 million oil barrels worth \$9.6 billion using mortgages to circumvent detection between 2019 and 2023. This network transferred sanctioned Iranian oil as well as sanctioned Russian and Venezuelan oil. The network exported the vast majority of this oil to the PRC, according to a research group focused on illicit networks.[27]

Iran’s use of mortgages on tankers to evade US sanctions is only one of the many strategies that Iran employs to obfuscate illicit Iranian and Russian oil trade to the PRC. Many companies affiliated with Iranian oil tankers use fake addresses and conduct ship-to-ship transfers.[28] The multi-national network controlled by Senior Supreme Leader Adviser Ali Shamkhani’s son, Mohammad Hossein Shamkhani, frequently changes vessel operators and managers to obscure ownership, falsifies cargo information, and turns off automatic identification systems (AIS) during loading. The United States sanctioned Shamkhani on July 30.[29]

**Iran is deepening its economic and military cooperation with Belarus.** Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian met with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko on August 20 in Minsk, Belarus, to discuss opportunities to expand bilateral relations.[30] Pezeshkian stated that Iran and Belarus share common interests and want to combat US and European efforts to “push unilateralism” in the region.[31] Pezeshkian emphasized that both countries can cooperate to mitigate the effects of international sanctions.[32] Iranian and Belarusian officials signed 12 memorandums of understanding (MoU) focused on increasing bilateral trade, military-tech cooperation, and mutual investment during

Pezeshkian's visit.[33] Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs Abbas Araghchi stated on August 20 that Iran plans to sign a comprehensive strategic partnership with Belarus.[34] Iran and Belarus have increased defense and security cooperation over the past few years.[35] Iran showcased military equipment at a Belarusian military exhibit in May 2025.[36] Iran has reportedly worked to establish a drone factory in Belarus since May 2023 to support the Russian invasion of Ukraine.[37]

## **Iraq**

*See the topline section.*

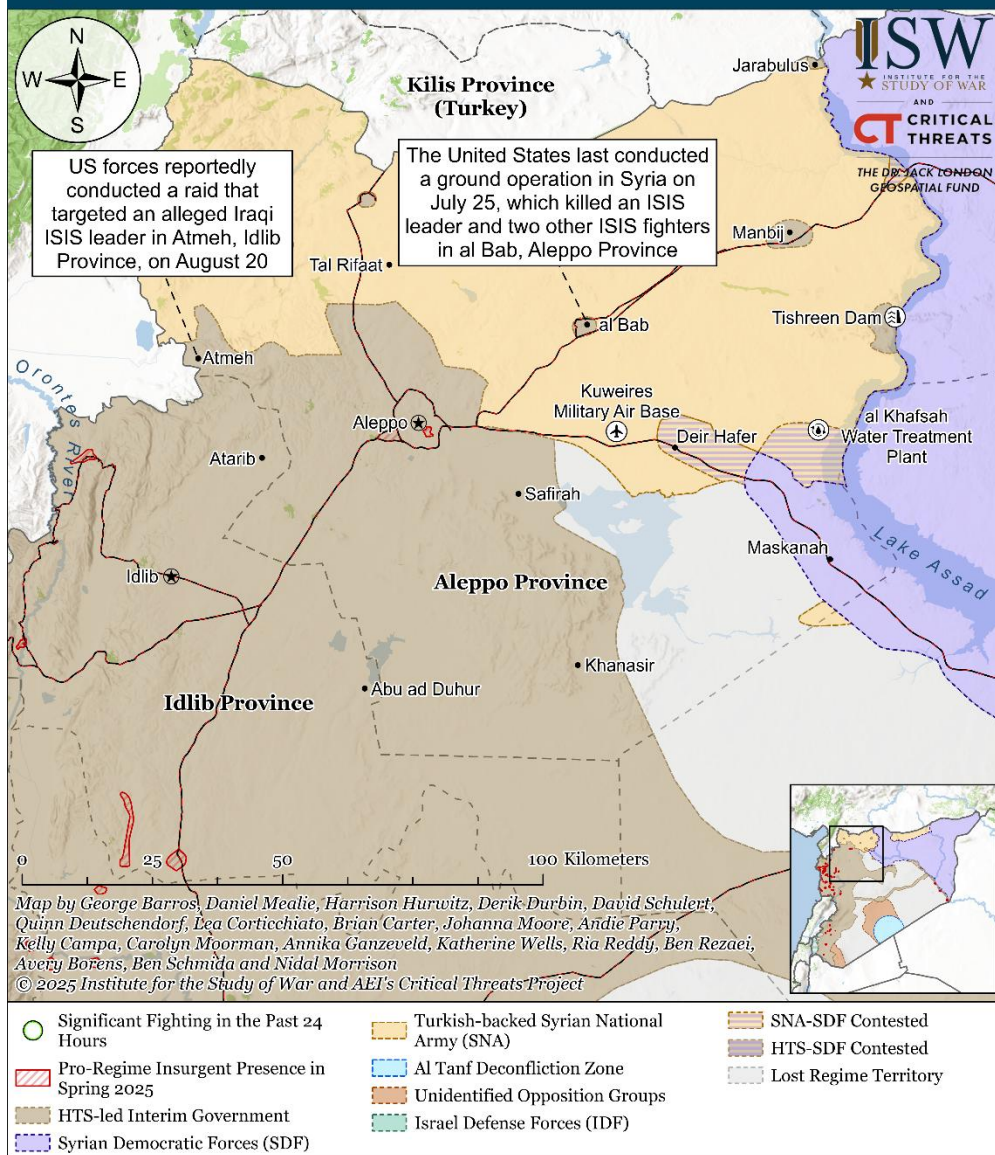
## **Syria**

**The United States conducted an operation reportedly targeting an Iraqi Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) leader in Atmeh, Idlib Province, on August 20.[38]** A Syrian security source and Syrian residents told Reuters that local Syrian forces cordoned off the neighborhood, but that only US forces participated in the raid.[39] A US official confirmed to Reuters that the operation targeted a “suspected high-value target.”[40] US Central Command (CENTCOM) has not acknowledged the operation or its outcomes as of this writing. Syrian state-owned outlet Al Ekhbariya reported that senior Iraqi ISIS leader Salah Noman was killed during the operation, citing an unspecified security source.[41] The source said that Noman was responsible for activating ISIS cells in Syria.[42] The General Security Service (GSS) had pursued Noman from Dana, in the Idlib countryside, to Atmeh.[43] Noman is also known as Abd al Nayif al Jabouri and previously operated with the Islamic State (IS) in Salah al Din Province, Iraq.[44]

The US ground operation in Atmeh occurs amid ongoing counter-ISIS efforts in northern Syria near the Turkish border. Syrian Interior Ministry forces arrested nine members of an ISIS cell in Harem, near the Turkish border, on August 7.[45] Syrian government forces also participated in a recent US counter-ISIS ground operation that targeted and killed senior ISIS leader Dhiya Zawba Muslih al Hardani in al Bab, Aleppo Province, on July 25.[46]

## Recent US Counter-ISIS Operations in Northern Syria

August 20, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



**Anti-government Druze militia Liwa al Jabal announced on August 19 that it has joined a “unified army” that is aligned with Druze Sheikh Hikmat al Hijri, which indicates that some anti-government forces in Suwayda Province seek to form a more unified armed force to support Hijri’s new autonomous project.[47]** Liwa al Jabal is a prominent Suwayda-based Druze militia that has an estimated 5,000 fighters.[48] The faction’s August 19 statement claimed that the group’s recent defense of Suwayda Province from “dark militias supported by government forces” has led the group to conclude that it must “unify efforts and close ranks” to defend Suwayda Province and Syria.[49] Liwa al Jabal said that its new participation in this “unified army” is “under the blessing” of Hijri, who is the most prominent anti-Damascus Druze leader in Suwayda Province.[50] Hijri’s political movement declared an autonomous Suwaydawawi government on August 6.[51] Judges on the “Supreme Legal Committee” within the new “autonomous government” appointed an executive

body, security officials, and ministerial heads to govern Suwayda instead of the Damascus-based transitional government.[52] Liwa al Jabal's announcement of its participation in a new Hijri-aligned force suggests that Hijri or his political allies may be uniting Suwayda's anti-government militias under a single command or structure to support the new autonomous government.

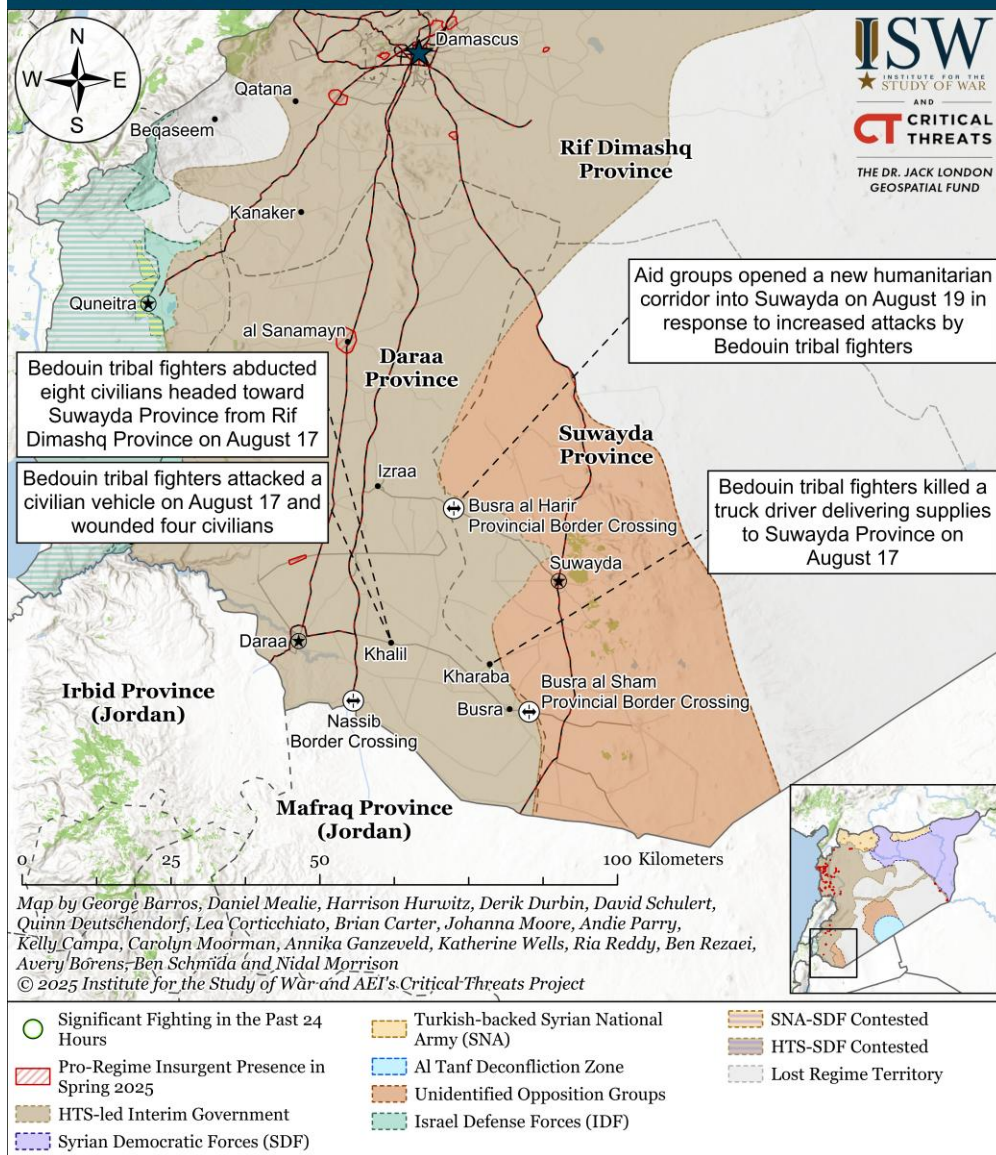
CTP-ISW has not observed any other Druze militias discuss membership in a new force under Hijri's autonomous government, but Liwa al Jabal is not the only Druze militia that has expressed its support for Hijri's political aspirations. A group of Druze militias have long opposed Shara's government, and several other militias, including Liwa al Jabal, have turned against the government in recent months after government forces committed abuses against Druze during the violence in Suwayda in July 2025. Liwa al Jabal, for example, participated in the December 2024 offensive on Damascus as a member of the Southern Operations Room and emerged as an initial supporter of President Ahmed al Shara and the new Syrian government soon after the fall of the regime.[53] A spokesperson more recently wrote an op ed on August 9 in support of an alliance to stand up to the "terrorist [Shara] government" and restore "consideration" for minorities and moderate Sunnis, highlighting the significant breakdown in trust between some Druze militias and the transitional government.[54] The breakdown in trust is at least partially motivated by political divisions (not just intercommunal divisions). Another Southern Operations Room faction, the Eighth Brigade, was subverted and suppressed by Shara's government. It is possible that Liwa al Jabal and others seek to avoid a similar fate. The formalization of the alliance between anti-government Druze militias under the term "unified army" would represent a significant hurdle to the Syrian government's efforts to work with Druze parties with the aim of gradually incorporating Suwayda into state institutions.

**Humanitarian aid providers opened a new humanitarian corridor that leads into northern Suwayda Province due to repeated attacks by Sunni tribal fighters and unknown gunmen along the previous southern corridor.** Sunni tribal fighters have attacked civilians four times on the outskirts of Suwayda Province since August 15.[55] Unknown gunmen previously attacked a Syrian Red Crescent convoy headed toward the corridor on August 8.[56] These attacks have prevented humanitarian workers from distributing aid via the Busra al Sham corridor.[57] Humanitarian organizations have since adapted by opening a new humanitarian corridor that enters northern Suwayda Province near Busra al Harir on August 19.[58] It is not clear if the government or humanitarian agencies will reopen the Busra al Sham corridor.[59] The General Security Services (GSS) lack the strength to guard the full 90-kilometer border of Suwayda Province and cannot reinforce their positions in the event of an attack, according to a Syrian journalist.[60]



## Assessed Control of Terrain in Southwestern Syria

August 19, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



The attacks along the humanitarian corridor may suggest that tribal fighters are attempting to disrupt Suwaydawis' evacuations from Suwayda Province, the provision of humanitarian aid to Suwayda, or both. Tribal fighters reportedly feel neglected by the Syrian transitional government because the government continues to send aid to Suwayda Province, but has done little to address Sunni Bedouin displacement in Daraa Province.[61] It remains unclear why the Sunni tribal fighters have attacked civilian vehicles, however. The civilians subjected to these attacks are not solely Druze, which suggests that the attacks are not entirely motivated by intercommunal tensions.

### Arabian Peninsula

*Nothing significant to report.*

### Palestinian Territories and Lebanon

**Senior Lebanese officials have continued diplomatic efforts to generate support for the French-drafted resolution to extend the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)’s mandate.[62]** UNIFIL, which patrols Lebanon’s southern border with Israel, operates under an annually renewed mandate that is set to expire on August 31, 2025.[63] The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is expected to vote on a French-proposed resolution on August 25 to extend UNIFIL’s mandate until August 31, 2026 (see graphic below).[64] Lebanese President Joseph Aoun, Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, and Prime Minister Nawaf Salam each met with US Senator Markwayne Mullin and a delegation of other unspecified US officials in Lebanon on August 20 and discussed UNIFIL’s role supporting the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF).[65] The United States has reportedly opposed an automatic renewal of UNIFIL’s mandate and raised concerns over the French resolution’s lack of an explicit withdrawal date for UNIFIL.[66] Salam emphasized that UNIFIL provides critical support to LAF efforts to assert state authority over southern Lebanon.[67] UNIFIL’s presence and familiarity with southern Lebanon may be needed to conduct a successful transfer of authority in southern Lebanon.[68] Berri stated that Lebanon was surprised by US opposition to UNIFIL’s mandate extension and questioned how the United States “can target its own efforts.”[69] Berri is suggesting that US opposition to the resolution goes against US sponsorship and leadership in the Israel-Lebanon ceasefire monitoring committee, which contains UNIFIL forces in its structure and tasks.[70]

## The French-Drafted Resolution to Extend the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)’s Mandate

As of August 20, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST

### Major Components of the Proposed Resolution:

- UNIFIL’s mandate will be extended until August 31, 2026.
- The UN will demand the full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1701. UNSCR 1701 ended the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah War and calls for the removal of Hezbollah forces south of the Litani River and an end to the supply of arms to entities in Lebanon without government authorization.
- The UN will call on the Israeli government to withdraw its remaining forces from Lebanon and lift its buffer zones located north of the Blue Line. The UN will call on the Lebanese government to backfill Israeli positions and extend control over all Lebanese territory to implement the state’s monopoly on arms.
- The UN will intend to gradually withdraw UNIFIL forces from Lebanon with the aim of making the Lebanese government the sole security provider. This intention is contingent upon the Lebanese government’s ability to maintain full control over Lebanese territory and that the “two parties” agree on an unspecified political arrangement. The mandate does not include an explicit withdrawal date.
- The UN will urge the international community to increase support to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) to ensure the LAF’s “effective and sustainable” deployment to southern Lebanon.
- The UN will request that the Secretary General adapt UNIFIL activities (within the UNIFIL mandate) to support the LAF in establishing a state monopoly on arms in southern Lebanon.



Source: Asharq al Awsat. This is not a comprehensive list of every component in the proposed resolution.

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**Several other UNSC members, including Russia and the PRC, have opposed extending UNIFIL’s mandate.** Unspecified diplomatic sources told Lebanese media on August 20 that the PRC and Russia informed Lebanon that they reject the proposed UNIFIL resolution.[71] The PRC and Russia said that they will not oppose any proposals to end UNIFIL’s mission in Lebanon, according to the source.[72] The PRC and Russia have consistently expressed their discontent with UNIFIL by abstaining from previous UNIFIL mandate renewals.[73] The PRC and Russia’s opposition to UNIFIL is also unsurprising given Russia and the PRC’s ongoing political support for other members of Iran’s Axis of Resistance, such as the Houthi Movement.[74] The PRC and Russia both abstained from the July 15 vote on UN Security Council Resolution 2787, which condemned the Houthi strikes against international shipping as acts of terrorism, for example.[75]





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# Iran Update



**Nidal Morrison, Ben Schmida, Avery Borens, Katherine Wells, Ben Rezaei, Adham Fattah, and Brian Carter**

**August 21, 2025      Information Cutoff: 2:00 PM ET**

## **Iraqi Popular Mobilization Committee (PMC) Chairman Faleh al Fayyadh defended the Popular Mobilization Authority Law against domestic critics during an interview with Iraqi media on August 20.[1]**

This law, which Parliament has yet to vote on, would likely increase Iran's influence in the Iraqi political and security spheres by formalizing key structures of the Iranian-backed Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) within the Iraqi security apparatus.[2] The PMF is an Iraqi state security service comprised of many militias, some of which report to Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Quds Force Commander Esmail Ghaani instead of Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani.[3] Fayyadh denied Iranian-backed Iraqi militia involvement in the law's creation and added that the law has been in development for years with Iraqi Ministry of Defense support.[4] CTP-ISW is unable to verify Fayyadh's claims about the militia's role in the law's creation. The Council of Ministers, which is headed by Sudani and includes the Minister of Defense, approved the law and submitted it to Parliament in February 2025, which implies Ministry of Defense involvement, however.[5] Fayyadh also claimed that the political debate over the Popular Mobilization Authority Law does not relate to the law's "substance" but rather to his leadership.[6] This law would elevate Fayyadh's role as head of the PMC to a cabinet-level position within the newly-created Popular Mobilization Authority, which surely, in part, explains Fayyadh's support for the law.[7]

Fayyadh's interview comes as US political and economic pressure on the Iraqi government to curb Iranian influence in Iraq has sparked debate on the future and potential dissolution of the PMF.[8] The US State Department spokesperson confirmed on August 12 that the United States opposes the Popular Mobilization Authority law.[9] The law also faces domestic opposition from Sunni and Kurdish parliamentarians, who walked out of a July 16 parliamentary session to protest the reading of the law.[10] A Shia Coordination Framework parliamentarian told Iraqi media on August 18 that over 100 parliamentarians have signed a petition to vote on the law in the next Parliament session, but added that no Sunni or Kurdish parliamentarians have signed the petition.[11] The votes of these parliamentarians and the support of the Iraqi voters they represent are critical to passing the law.

Fayyadh attempted to portray the PMF as a responsible actor to defend it from critics. He noted that the Popular Mobilization Authority law would strengthen the separation between the PMC and unspecified armed groups, in reference to Iranian-backed Iraqi militias that operate outside of the PMF.[12] The PMC is formally responsible for ensuring that militias in the PMF answer to the Iraqi federal government, but has failed to enforce this requirement. Fayyadh added that the PMF maintains a "high level of discipline," which is false.[13] Some PMF groups have conducted attacks without orders from any government chain of command.[14] Militias within the PMF have explicitly rejected Iraqi government oversight.[15]

Fayyadh also said that the PMF has no "hostility towards any party," which ignores attacks that militias within the PMF have conducted targeting US forces in Iraq and Syria and the attempted assassination of former Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhimi by elements of a militia that is part of the PMF.[16] Fayyadh said that the PMF provides security to Iraqis, but he ignored the PMF's efforts to commit sectarian cleansing in Sunni areas.[17] The PMF has prevented the return of residents who fled from al Awja, Salah al Din Province, in 2014 during the anti-Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) fight, which is an act of sectarian cleansing.[18] Fayyadh claimed that the PMF is in the process of resolving the al Awja issue.[19]

Fayyadh also attempted to obfuscate the relationship between the IRGC and the PMF. He described the PMF as an "Iraqi force" with "no connection" to the IRGC, which is false.[20] Militias that comprise PMF brigades conducted hundreds of attacks that targeted US forces in Iraq and Syria between October 2023 to January 2024.[21] Those militias immediately stopped that campaign following direct intervention by IRGC Quds Force Commander Esmail Ghaani.[22] Fayyadh himself has also advanced Iranian objectives in Iraq. Fayyadh was part of a PMF "crisis cell" formed in late 2019 to suppress mass Iraqi protests with the IRGC's support.[23] Then-IRGC Quds Force Commander Qassem Soleimani supported this crisis cell.

Fayyadh tried to justify the PMF's continued role as a security force by asserting that the PMF would adhere to orders to dissolve by the Shia religious authority, despite having previously rejected such orders.[24] Ayatollah Ali al Sistani, Iraq's highest religious figure, said in November 2024 that arms should be confined to the Iraqi state.[25] Some Iranian-backed Iraqi militias, including Kataib Sayyid al Shuhada, denied that Sistani's call was directed at the militias.[26]

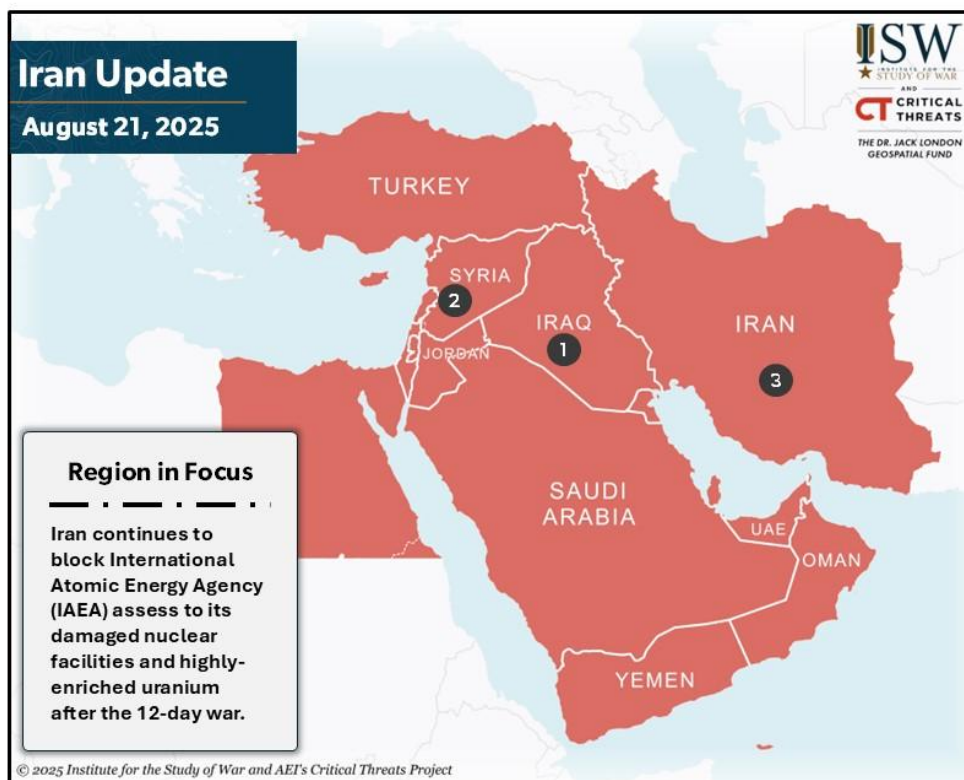
**The continued survival of Assad-era Captagon smuggling networks, which helped Assad's economy, demonstrates the economic interests that continue to animate internal conflict in Syria. These networks have the potential to destabilize Syria, as demonstrated in violent flare-ups throughout 2025.**[27] Captagon and other smuggling networks long helped sustain the Assad regime during the war. The regime profited 3 to 5 billion USD annually from the Captagon trade.[28] Many of these networks continue to survive in Syria because, while Assad's collapse destroyed the regime, it did not destroy many of the disparate networks that helped the regime survive for as long as it did. The transitional government began a counter-narcotics campaign in January 2024 that has naturally spurred a violent reaction from many of these networks.[29] This campaign has reduced Captagon production by approximately 80%, according to the *Financial Times* on August 21.[30]

The Captagon trade and other Assad-era criminal enterprises are almost certainly driving some—but not all—of the violence in Syria. Some of the violence along the Syria-Lebanon border and in western Syria in early 2025 appeared to be part of efforts by smuggling networks to defend their ratlines.[31] Not all of these criminal enterprises were allied with Assad, of course. Local reporting suggests that three key groups—the Bedouin Sunni tribes, Druze militias, and networks loyal to the Assad regime—have competed for control of the smuggling networks in southwestern Syria.[32] The divisions between the three groups are not purely identity-based, but competition over economic interests can rapidly take on an intercommunal bent as Bedouin Sunni fighters kill Druze or vice versa. Many Assad-era Captagon smuggling networks persist, however, in areas that have little to no transitional government control, including within Suwayda Province, the Kurdish-controlled northeast, the Syrian coast, and the Syria-Lebanon border.[33] The *Financial Times* reported that Assad-linked criminal networks and Bedouin tribes sustain the drug trade in Suwayda Province by exploiting local poverty and the continued employment of Assad-era border guards on the Jordanian border.[34]

## **Key Takeaways**



- **Captagon Networks in Syria:** The continued survival of Assad-era Captagon smuggling networks, which helped Assad's economy, demonstrates the economic interests that continue to animate internal conflicts in Syria. These networks have the potential to destabilize Syria, as demonstrated in violent flare-ups throughout 2025.
- **Justifications for the PMF:** Iraqi Popular Mobilization Commission head Faleh al Fayyadh defended the Popular Mobilization Authority Law against domestic critics during an interview with Iraqi media on August 20. This law, which Parliament has yet to vote on, would likely increase Iran's influence in the Iraqi political and security spheres by formalizing key structures of the Iranian-backed Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) within the Iraqi security apparatus.
- **IAEA Inspections in Iran:** Iran continues to block International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) access to its damaged nuclear facilities and highly enriched uranium (HEU) stockpile after the 12-day war. Iran's 409 kg HEU stockpile remains in one or several unspecified locations, and Iran's access to the stockpile is unclear.



- 1 **IRAQ.** Popular Mobilization Commission head Faleh al Fayyadh defended the Popular Mobilization Authority Law against domestic critics during an interview with Iraqi media on August 20. This law, which Parliament is yet to vote on, would likely increase Iran's influence in the Iraqi political and security spheres by formalizing key structures of the Iranian-backed Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) within the Iraqi security apparatus.
- 2 **SYRIA.** The continued survival of Assad-era Captagon smuggling networks, which helped Assad's economy, demonstrate the economic interests that continue to animate internal conflicts in Syria. These networks have the potential to destabilize Syria, as demonstrated in violent flare-ups throughout 2025.
- 3 **IRAN.** The Iranian Artesh Navy conducted its first military exercise since the Israel-Iran War in the northern Indian Ocean and Sea of Oman on August 21. The Artesh Navy tested multiple anti-ship cruise missiles, including the Nasir, Ghadir, and Ghadeer cruise missiles, during the exercise.

## Iran

**Iranian Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Ali Larijani and Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Majid Takht Ravanchi discussed Iranian nuclear issues with Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs' International Security Division Head Ambassador Gabriel Lühinger in Tehran on August 2.[35]** Switzerland traditionally facilitates diplomatic communication between Iran and the United States because the United States does not maintain a diplomatic presence in Iran.[36] An unspecified US official rejected an August 20 report from Hezbollah media claiming that Lühinger conveyed a message from US Special Envoy to the Middle East and lead nuclear negotiator Steve Witkoff to the Iranian government.[37]

**Iran continues to block International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) access to its damaged nuclear facilities and highly enriched uranium (HEU) stockpile after the 12-day war. Iran's 409 kg HEU stockpile remains in one or several unspecified locations, and Iran's access to the stockpile is unclear.** Unspecified diplomats told Bloomberg on August 21 that IAEA officials will confer with US officials next week after IAEA inspectors failed to secure Iran's approval to resume monitoring.[38] The unspecified diplomats added that Iranian officials told IAEA Deputy Director General Massimo Aparo during meetings in Tehran on August 12 that inspections could potentially occur at undamaged sites like Bushehr while Iran's main nuclear-fuel complex would remain closed.[39] Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi stated on August 20 that the SNSC will decide whether inspections can resume.[40] Araghchi emphasized that Iran cannot cut cooperation entirely because activities like fuel replacement at Bushehr require IAEA oversight.[41] Araghchi stressed that any new cooperation must account for safety and security concerns after the recent strikes, however.[42] Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu previously told Israeli media on August 12 that Iran retains about 400 kilograms of enriched uranium.[43] This amount is consistent with the IAEA's June estimate that Iran retains 408.6 kilograms of 60 percent enriched uranium, though Iran may not have physical access to all of the uranium, which could be buried at Fordow or Esfahan.[44]

**The Iranian Artesh Navy conducted its first military exercise since the Israel-Iran War in the northern Indian Ocean and Sea of Oman on August 21.[45]** The Artesh Navy tested multiple anti-ship cruise missiles, including the Nasir, Ghadir, and Ghadeer,[46] during the exercise.[47] The "Bavar-5," which is an Iranian drone that can be launched from naval vessels, reportedly destroyed a target after traveling 400 kilometers.[48] The naval exercise also included surface and subsurface vessels, aerial units, and electronic warfare units.[49]

**The United States imposed additional sanctions targeting Iranian oil trade networks and their international facilitators on August 21.[50]** The US Treasury Department sanctioned Greek national Antonios Margaritis and five Marshall Islands-registered companies in Margaritis' shipping network for facilitating the trade of Iranian oil products for "many years." [51] The US Treasury Department previously sanctioned three shipping companies in Margaritis' network in December 2024.[52] The United States separately sanctioned six entities and eight affiliated vessels outside of Margaritis' network for transporting Iranian oil to China and conducting ship-to-ship transfers with vessels already sanctioned by the United States.[53]

## **Iraq**

*See topline section.*

## **Syria**

**A Syrian transitional government source denied any plans for a humanitarian corridor across Syria's borders, which represents an implicit rejection of a humanitarian corridor between Suwayda City and Israel.[54]** The source stated that the Syrian transitional government will coordinate the delivery of all humanitarian aid, including to areas beyond Suwayda Province.[55] 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 on August 12.[56] An unspecified source separately told Saudi media that Israel and Syria agree on "80 percent of the points" after talks between Israeli and Syrian officials in Paris on August 19, which may indicate that both countries have agreed to continue negotiations.[57] The source also said that unspecified security arrangements between Israel and Syria regarding southern Syria "are almost complete." [58] Saudi media claimed that Israel and Syria reached an agreement during

the meeting in Paris on August 19 to de-escalate tensions and for Israel to refrain from interfering in internal Syrian affairs.[59] Saudi media added that Israel and Syria agreed to continue to stabilize and monitor the July 18 ceasefire between the transitional government and Druze militias within Suwayda Province.[60] An agreement between Israel and Syria was reportedly reached to reactivate the 1974 disengagement treaty between Israel and Syria.[61] Israel previously declared the disengagement treaty void after the Assad regime collapsed in December 2024.[62]

## **Arabian Peninsula**

*Nothing significant to report.*

## **Palestinian Territories and Lebanon**

**Palestinian leaders in the Burj al Barajneh refugee camp in Beirut and the al Bass refugee camp in Tyre turned over the first collection of medium and heavy weapons to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) on August 21.[63]** Saudi media reported on August 21 that the collected weapons belong to the security unit of the Palestinian Authority (PA)-controlled embassy in Lebanon.[64] CTP-ISW cannot independently verify this claim. The office of Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam stated that this weapons handover marks the start of a broader effort to disarm all armed groups in Lebanon.[65] Lebanese-Palestinian Dialogue Committee Head Ambassador Ramez Dimashqieh noted that the LAF will receive additional batches of weapons from the Burj al Barajneh camp and other Palestinian camps in the coming weeks.[66] Palestinian militias have long operated with relative autonomy in the 12 Palestinian refugee camps throughout Lebanon.[67]

Salam and PA President Mahmoud Abbas previously agreed in May 2025 to disarm all Palestinian militias in Lebanon.[68] Saudi media reported on August 21 that members of Abbas's Fatah and the Palestine Liberation Organization are handing over their weapons.[69] Fatah is the dominant political party in the PA, which governs the West Bank.[70]

Other Palestinian factions, like Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), are unlikely to turn over their weapons. These Palestinian groups are not beholden to Abbas. Hamas and factions closely aligned to it have continued to reject any disarmament.[71] An unspecified Hamas spokesperson, speaking on behalf of "the Palestinian factions in Lebanon," stated on August 21 that this weapons handover only applied to Fatah.[72] Hamas' statement added that the unspecified "Palestinian factions in Lebanon" will keep their weapons as long as Israeli operations in the Gaza Strip continue.[73] Disagreements among Palestinian militias in Lebanon regarding the mechanism to hand weapons over to the LAF have previously delayed the Lebanese government's attempts to disarm these groups.[74]

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[59] [https://www.alhadath\\_dot\\_net/syria/2025/08/20/%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%81%D9%82-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-80-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B7](https://www.alhadath_dot_net/syria/2025/08/20/%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%81%D9%82-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-80-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B7)

[60] [https://www.alhadath\\_dot\\_net/syria/2025/08/20/%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%81%D9%82-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-80-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B7](https://www.alhadath_dot_net/syria/2025/08/20/%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%81%D9%82-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-80-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B7)

[61] [https://www.alhadath\\_dot\\_net/syria/2025/08/20/%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%81%D9%82-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-80-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B7](https://www.alhadath_dot_net/syria/2025/08/20/%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%81%D9%82-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-80-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B7) ;  
<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v26/d88>

[62] <https://x.com/netanyahu/status/1865757924594786810> ; [https://www.timesofisrael\\_dot\\_com/un-slams-violation-of-1974-disengagement-deal-as-israel-acts-in-syria-buffer-zone/](https://www.timesofisrael_dot_com/un-slams-violation-of-1974-disengagement-deal-as-israel-acts-in-syria-buffer-zone/)

[63] <https://x.com/nawafsalam/status/1958560091428249977> ; [https://aawsat\\_dot\\_com/-العالم-العربي/المشرق-5177683](https://aawsat_dot_com/-العالم-العربي/المشرق-5177683) ; <https://apnews.com/article/lebanon-palestinian-refugees-camp-weapons-disarmament-e5f4158261635c2ce54e2cd196198758>

[64] [https://aawsat\\_dot\\_com/-العالم-العربي/المشرق-5177683](https://aawsat_dot_com/-العالم-العربي/المشرق-5177683) -انطلاق-عملية-تسليم-السلاح-الفلسطيني-إلى-الجيش-اللبناني

[65] <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/lebanon-says-it-is-beginning-disarmament-palestinian-factions-refugee-camps-2025-08-21/>

[66] <https://x.com/nawafsalam/status/1958560091428249977> ;  
<https://x.com/grandserail/status/1958512728605438255>

[67] [https://thisisbeirut\\_dot\\_com.lb/articles/1316380/what-are-the-12-palestinian-camps-in-lebanon#:~:text=Following%20the%20creation%20of%20Israel,%2C%20spread%20across%20the%20country.](https://thisisbeirut_dot_com.lb/articles/1316380/what-are-the-12-palestinian-camps-in-lebanon#:~:text=Following%20the%20creation%20of%20Israel,%2C%20spread%20across%20the%20country.) ; <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/lebanon-says-it-is-beginning-disarmament-palestinian-factions-refugee-camps-2025-08-21/>

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[69] <https://aawsat dot com/-/العربي/المشرق-العربي/5177683-انطلاق-عملية-تسليم-السلاح-الفلسطيني-إلى-الجيش-اللبناني>

[70] <https://understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/iran-update-january-31-2025>

[71] <https://aawsat dot com/-/العربي/المشرق-العربي/5177683-انطلاق-عملية-تسليم-السلاح-الفلسطيني-إلى-الجيش-اللبناني>

[72] <https://apnews.com/article/lebanon-palestinian-refugees-camp-weapons-disarmament-e5f4158261635c2ce54e2cd196198758>

[73] <https://apnews.com/article/lebanon-palestinian-refugees-camp-weapons-disarmament-e5f4158261635c2ce54e2cd196198758>

[74] <https://apnews.com/article/lebanon-palestinian-refugees-camp-weapons-disarmament-e5f4158261635c2ce54e2cd196198758>

# Iran Update



Ben Rezaei, Avery Borens, Ben Schmida, Johanna Moore, Carolyn Moorman, Katherine Wells, Adham Fattah, William Doran, and Brian Carter

August 22, 2025 Information Cutoff: 2:00 PM ET

**Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Ali Larijani gave an interview on Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's website on August 22 in which he discussed Iran's post-war defense and considerations for future conflicts.**<sup>1</sup> Larijani warned that adversaries may seek new opportunities to attack Iran and that Iran must correct its defensive flaws and rebuild deterrence.<sup>2</sup> Israel's strikes during the 12 Day War severely damaged Iranian nuclear and military facilities and killed nuclear scientists and senior commanders.<sup>3</sup> The Israeli campaign and US strikes demonstrated Iran's defensive gaps and inability to deter its adversaries. Larijani stated that the Defense Council works as a subsidiary body tasked exclusively with military readiness and fixing deficiencies in the armed forces.<sup>4</sup> The SNSC established the Defense Council on August 3 to address systemic operational failures during the Israel-Iran War and to take "rapid, balanced, and coordinated" steps against future threats.<sup>5</sup> Larijani stated that Iran is focusing on improving air defense and radar systems and strengthening its missile force. Larijani added that Iran relies mainly on domestic production but also buys some military equipment from abroad.<sup>6</sup> Iran previously sought to strengthen defense cooperation with China following the war, including by showing interest in acquiring PRC systems such as the J-10 fighter jet and AWACS to compensate for wartime losses and upgrade air defense capabilities.<sup>7</sup> Larijani also highlighted that Iran must recognize the war has not ended but has only paused.<sup>8</sup>

**Larijani reaffirmed Iran's commitment to support the Axis of Resistance and framed resistance groups as natural responses to "foreign aggression."**<sup>9</sup> Larijani stressed that Iran considers the Axis of Resistance a genuine and strategic asset.<sup>10</sup> Iran previously used the Axis as a key deterrent against the United States and Israel, but the Axis of Resistance has been badly degraded over the past two years of fighting with Israel. Larijani compared Iran's support for regional allies to US support for Israel and warned that abandoning them would be "political insanity."<sup>11</sup> Larijani rejected the idea that Hezbollah or other groups burden Iran and insisted that they both assist Iran and rely on Iranian support.<sup>12</sup> Larijani characterized the relationship with Hezbollah and other partner groups as "brothers" rather than "subordinates." This is consistent with CTP-ISW's longstanding assessment that the Axis of Resistance is an unconventional alliance that Iran leads. Some groups in the Axis are proxies, while Iran exerts more limited influence over other groups.<sup>13</sup> Larijani's inaugural visits to Lebanon and Iraq attempted to demonstrate that Iran has not abandoned its partners in the Axis, but Larijani offered very little visible, tangible support during those visits.<sup>14</sup>

**Larijani criticized international pressure on Iran from Western countries and accused the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) of "partisanship" against Iran during the 12 Day War.** Larijani accused IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi of giving a "blank check" to the United States and Israel during the 12 Day War.<sup>15</sup> Larijani claimed that Grossi "completely gave up and surrendered" and called the agency's silence after Israeli strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities "truly disgraceful."<sup>16</sup> Larijani questioned the value of continued cooperation with the IAEA but stopped short of calling for withdrawal from the NPT, saying instead that the treaty has had "no value" for Iran. Iranian officials repeatedly threatened to withdraw from the NPT if the E3 (the United Kingdom, France, and Germany) triggers the snapback sanction mechanism at the end of August.<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup> The snapback mechanism expires on October 18, 2025, but the E3 would need to initiate the snapback process at the end of August in order to meet the October 18 deadline.<sup>19</sup> Iran and the E3 previously discussed extending the snapback

deadline during a July 25 Istanbul meeting.<sup>20</sup> An extension would require a new UNSC resolution with at least nine votes in favor of the resolution and no vetoes from permanent UNSC members. Larijani rejected European proposals to extend the UN Security Council snapback deadline, however. He said that the JCPOA fixed a ten-year limit to the snapback sanctions that cannot be altered. He added that any extensions are a form of “cheating.”<sup>21</sup> Larijani added that Iran will never abandon diplomacy but stressed that negotiations must be “real” and not a pretext for pressure. He also warned that Iran will not accept “submission.”<sup>22</sup> Iranian officials previously demanded preconditions, including assurances of no further strikes, to continue nuclear talks with the West.<sup>23</sup>

Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi echoed Larijani’s position during a phone call with the foreign ministers of the E3 and European Union Foreign Policy Chief Kaja Kallas on August 22.<sup>24</sup> Araghchi insisted that only the UN Security Council can decide on an extension.<sup>25</sup> Araghchi stated that Iran will consult Russia and China on the implications of snapback sanctions.<sup>26</sup> Both sides agreed that Iran and the E3 will continue discussions at the deputy foreign minister level on August 26.<sup>27</sup> CTP-ISW assessed that Iran is very unlikely to accept any arrangement that restricts enrichment, even if the E3 extends the deadline.<sup>28</sup>

Larijani called on the regime to prioritize solving people’s basic problems to preserve resilience in future conflicts. Larijani said citizens must have a minimum standard of living even in wartime so they can endure and remain steadfast, stressing that the state must meet essential needs in both war and peacetime. Larijani warned that energy shortages in electricity and gas, and factory closures, are unacceptable because they erode national wealth and weaken resilience. The regime may fear that if citizens grow dissatisfied, they will be less likely to support the regime in the next conflict. A recent energy shortage has forced Iran to shut schools, universities, and government offices across most provinces as authorities cut electricity and water amid extreme heat and war damage to infrastructure.<sup>29</sup> Larijani’s remarks follow a large protest in Shiraz, Fars Province, on August 21, where residents gathered outside the provincial governor’s office to denounce repeated water and power outages and chanted “Not Gaza, not Lebanon - my life is for Iran.”<sup>30</sup> These chants are a criticism of the regime’s decision to funnel resources to its regional partners while neglecting basic services for Iranians.<sup>31</sup> Energy shortages have triggered repeated unrest in recent months, including the May strike by iron market traders in Tehran and a large July demonstration in Gilan Province over water and electricity outages.<sup>32</sup>

**The United States reportedly asked Israel on August 21 to significantly reduce “non-urgent” military operations and withdraw from one of its five permanent positions in Lebanon, according to two unspecified sources speaking to Axios.**<sup>33</sup>

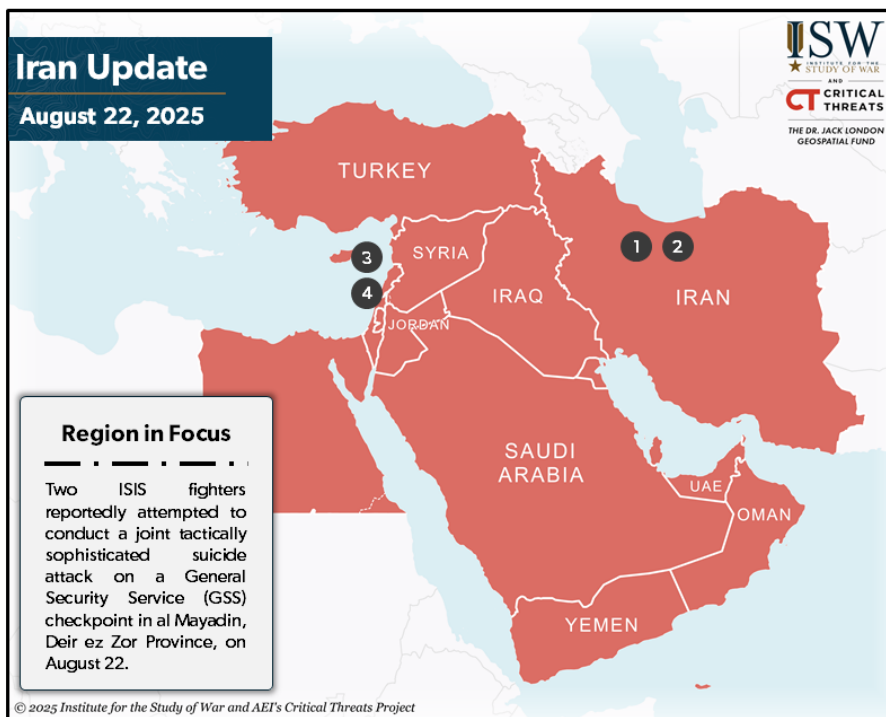
The sources said that US Special Envoy Thomas Barrack and Israeli officials recently discussed steps that the Israeli government could take while the Lebanese government disarms Hezbollah.<sup>34</sup> Barrack proposed a temporary pause of Israel’s “non-urgent” airstrikes for a “few weeks” and a phased plan for Israel to withdraw from its five permanent positions.<sup>35</sup> The sources noted that this temporary pause could be extended if the Lebanese government takes further action to prevent Hezbollah reconstitution in southern Lebanon.<sup>36</sup> The sources stated that the United States also envisions implementing an “economic zone” in southern Lebanon.<sup>37</sup> This economic zone would address Israeli concerns of Hezbollah reconstitution on its northern border by reportedly making it difficult for Hezbollah to reconstitute in southern Lebanon.<sup>38</sup> The sources did not provide any further information on the details of this economic zone. Qatar and Saudi Arabia have reportedly agreed to invest in the reconstruction of southern Lebanon once Israel’s withdrawal from southern Lebanon is complete.<sup>39</sup>

Israel and the United States have reportedly made progress on the US proposal to disarm Hezbollah, according to the same Axios sources.<sup>40</sup> The sources did not provide any further details on Israel and the United States’ talks on the US proposal. The source noted that Israel did not reject the US proposal and “is willing to give it a chance.”<sup>41</sup> One of the sources noted that Israel has not yet made a final decision on the US proposal, however.<sup>42</sup> Senior Lebanese officials previously called on the United States to pressure Israel to agree to the US disarmament proposal during Barrack’s visit to

Beirut on August 18.<sup>43</sup> Lebanese officials have also stated that the Lebanese government would not implement the US proposal until Israel agrees to the US proposal.<sup>44</sup>

**Hezbollah officials have continued to warn the Lebanese government about potential confrontation if the Lebanese government attempts to disarm Hezbollah, which is likely an effort to leverage the government's concerns about internal conflict in Lebanon to delay or reverse the government's plan to disarm Hezbollah.** Hezbollah Executive Council Head Ali Damoush said on August 22 that Hezbollah has acted calmly so far but that this approach will “not last long.”<sup>45</sup> Lebanese media recently reported on August 20 that Hezbollah vowed not to resort to protests and to keep things calm at least until the end of August.<sup>46</sup> Damoush added that Hezbollah may resort to escalation if the Lebanese government insists on implementing its decision to disarm Hezbollah.<sup>47</sup> Hezbollah Secretary General Naim Qassem also made an earlier threat on August 15 to “confront” the government and incite protests against it.<sup>48</sup> Prime Minister Nawaf Salam criticized Qassem’s speech on August 15 for containing “a veiled threat of civil war,” which he stated no one in Lebanon wants.<sup>49</sup>

Other elements of the Lebanese government have not replied with as much confidence as Salam, which suggests that Hezbollah’s efforts to prevent its disarmament by threatening the government may be experiencing some success. A pro-Hezbollah media outlet reported on August 22 that the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) had rhetorically responded to this pressure, however, by telling senior Lebanese officials and Hezbollah that it will not take any action that could undermine internal stability.<sup>50</sup> LAF Commander Brigadier General Rodolphe Haykal previously told Lebanese Parliament Speaker and Hezbollah ally Nabih Berri that the LAF will not “clash with a key component of the country.”<sup>51</sup> The LAF’s recent statements underscore the Lebanese government’s ongoing concerns about internal conflict arising between the Lebanese state and Hezbollah.<sup>52</sup> Lebanese officials have raised concerns that the government’s decision to disarm Hezbollah could spark communal tensions in Lebanon.<sup>53</sup> A delay or reversal of the Lebanese government’s decision to disarm Hezbollah would provide Hezbollah with the time needed to reconstitute its forces and re-establish itself domestically.<sup>54</sup> Hezbollah is very unlikely to disarm on its own accord because it believes that its arms are central to its ability to challenge and ultimately destroy the Israeli state.<sup>55</sup>



- 1 **Tehran, Iran:** Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Ali Larijani gave an interview on Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's website on August 22 in which he discussed Iran's post-war defense and considerations for future conflicts.
- 2 **Tehran, Iran:** Larijani criticized international pressure on Iran from Western countries and accused the IAEA of "partisanship" against Iran during the 12 Day War.
- 3 **Beirut, Lebanon:** The United States reportedly asked Israel on August 21 to significantly reduce "non-urgent" military operations and withdraw from one of its five permanent positions in Lebanon, according to two unspecified sources speaking to Axios.
- 4 **Beirut, Lebanon:** Hezbollah officials have continued to warn the Lebanese government about potential confrontation if the Lebanese government attempts to disarm Hezbollah, which is likely an effort to leverage the government's concerns about internal conflict in Lebanon to delay or reverse the government's plan to disarm Hezbollah.

### Key Takeaways

- **Iran:** Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Ali Larijani gave an interview on Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's website on August 22 in which he discussed Iran's post-war defense and considerations for future conflicts.
- **Iran:** Larijani criticized international pressure on Iran from Western countries and accused the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) of "partisanship" against Iran during the 12 Day War.
- **Lebanon:** The United States reportedly asked Israel on August 21 to significantly reduce "non-urgent" military operations and withdraw from one of its five permanent positions in Lebanon, according to two unspecified sources speaking to Axios.



- **Lebanon:** Hezbollah officials have continued to warn the Lebanese government about potential confrontation if the Lebanese government attempts to disarm Hezbollah, which is likely an effort to leverage the government's concerns about internal conflict in Lebanon to delay or reverse the government's plan to disarm Hezbollah.

## Iran

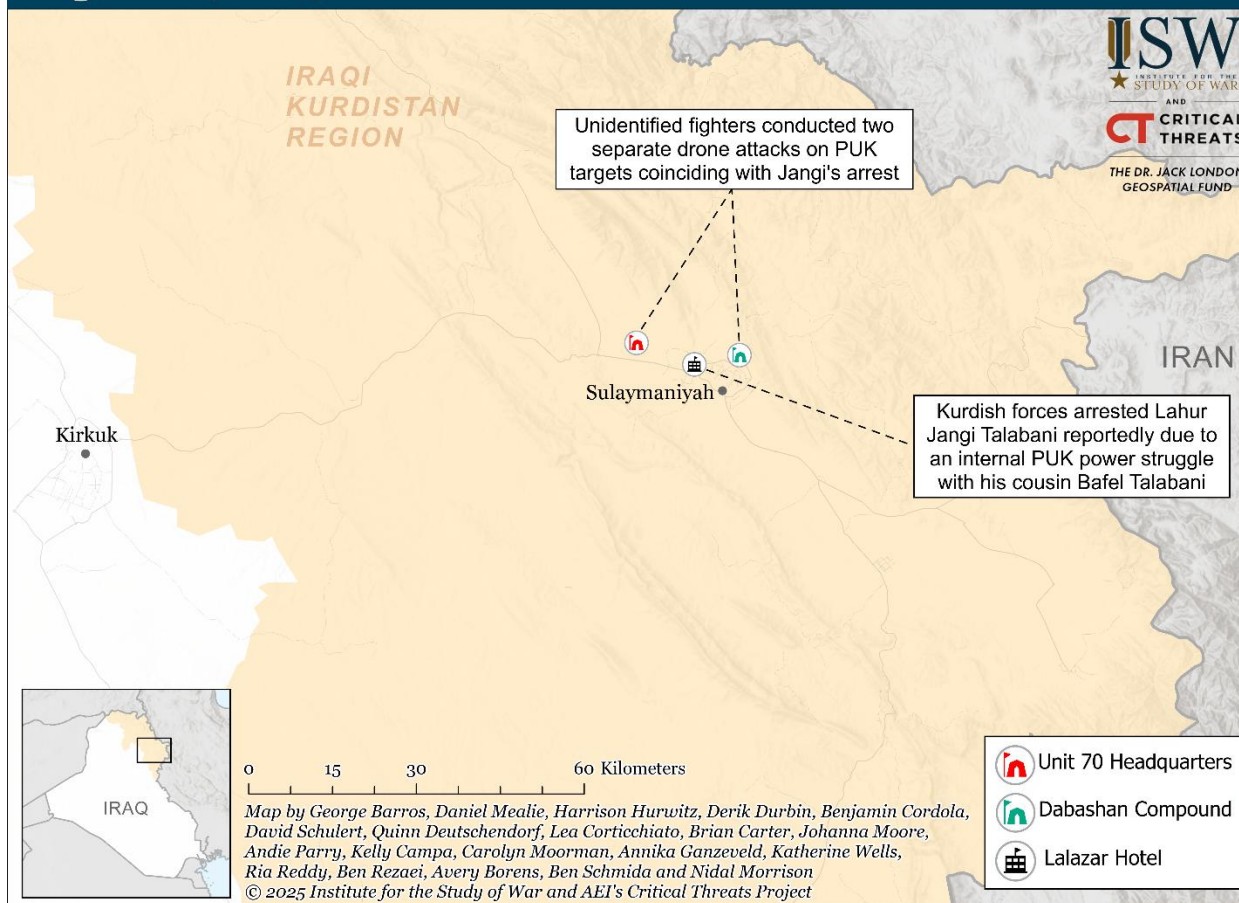
**Jaish al Adl conducted an attack targeting Iranian security forces in Iranshahr, Sistan and Baluchistan Province, on August 22.**<sup>56</sup> Iranian police announced that unspecified fighters attacked two patrol units on the Khash-Iranshahr road, killing five police officers.<sup>57</sup> Jaish al Adl later claimed the attack.<sup>58</sup> Jaish al Adl is a Baloch, Salafi-jihadi militant group that frequently attacks Iranian security forces in southeastern Iran.<sup>59</sup> The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Ground Forces Quds Operational Base recently destroyed two Jaish al Adl cells in Sistan and Baluchistan Province on August 17.<sup>60</sup> The Quds Operational Base conducted the counterterrorism operation after Jaish al Adl fighters killed an Iranian Law Enforcement Command (LEC) officer in the province on August 15.<sup>61</sup>

## Iraq

**The Islamic Resistance Coordination Committee warned on August 22 that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias are “on the trigger in defense” of the Iranian-backed Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF).**<sup>62</sup> Recent US political and economic pressure on the Iraqi government to curb Iranian influence in Iraq has sparked a debate in the Iraqi political space on the future and possible dissolution of the PMF.<sup>63</sup> The committee also reiterated its demand for US forces to withdraw from Iraq.<sup>64</sup> The United States is expected to complete the first phase of a withdrawal from Iraq to the Iraqi Kurdistan Region by the end of September 2025.<sup>65</sup> Remaining US forces are expected to withdraw to the Kurdistan Region by the end of 2026.<sup>66</sup> Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani separately discussed the US withdrawal from Iraq with Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Asaib Ahl al Haq head Qais al Khazali on August 21.<sup>67</sup>

**Kurdish security forces executed a warrant for the arrest of the head of the People's Front, Lahur Jangi Talabani, and his two brothers on August 22 in Sulaymaniyah City, Iraqi Kurdistan Region.**<sup>68</sup> Kurdish security forces raided the Lalazar Hotel, which is where the People's Front is headquartered.<sup>69</sup> Jangi resisted arrest, which led to fighting between Jangi's private security force and Kurdish government forces. Kurdish news reported that at least four security personnel died in the fighting. Security forces arrested Jangi and several of his family members after the fighting ended.<sup>70</sup>

## Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) Factional Conflict August 22, 2025



The Sulaymaniyah City Court announced on August 22 that the court charged Jangi under Article 56 of the Iraqi Penal Code for criminal conspiracy and the Anti-Terrorism Law.<sup>71</sup> A senior advisor to KRG President Nechirvan Barzani claimed that the arrest was driven by an internal PUK power struggle.<sup>72</sup> Jangi served as the co-chair of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and head of the PUK's Zanyari intelligence service before being dismissed by Bafel Talabani, the leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and Jangi's cousin, in July 2021 because of a power struggle between the two.<sup>73</sup> Jangi subsequently founded the People's Front, which won two seats in the 2024 Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) parliamentary elections.<sup>74</sup> He also reportedly established his own special forces and has acquired significant financial interests in the region.<sup>75</sup> Jangi has also reportedly reached out to the PUK's rival, the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), and attempted to establish ties with the Iraqi federal government and Iran. PUK sources cited by Kurdish news claimed that Jangi attempted a coup and wanted to destabilize Sulaymaniyah and PUK control there.<sup>76</sup>

Kurdish media circulated footage reportedly showing one-way drone attacks on PUK targets that coincided with Jangi's arrest on August 22.<sup>77</sup> One drone attack struck Bafel Talabani's residence at the Dashaban compound, and a second drone struck the headquarters of the PUK's Unit 70.<sup>78</sup>

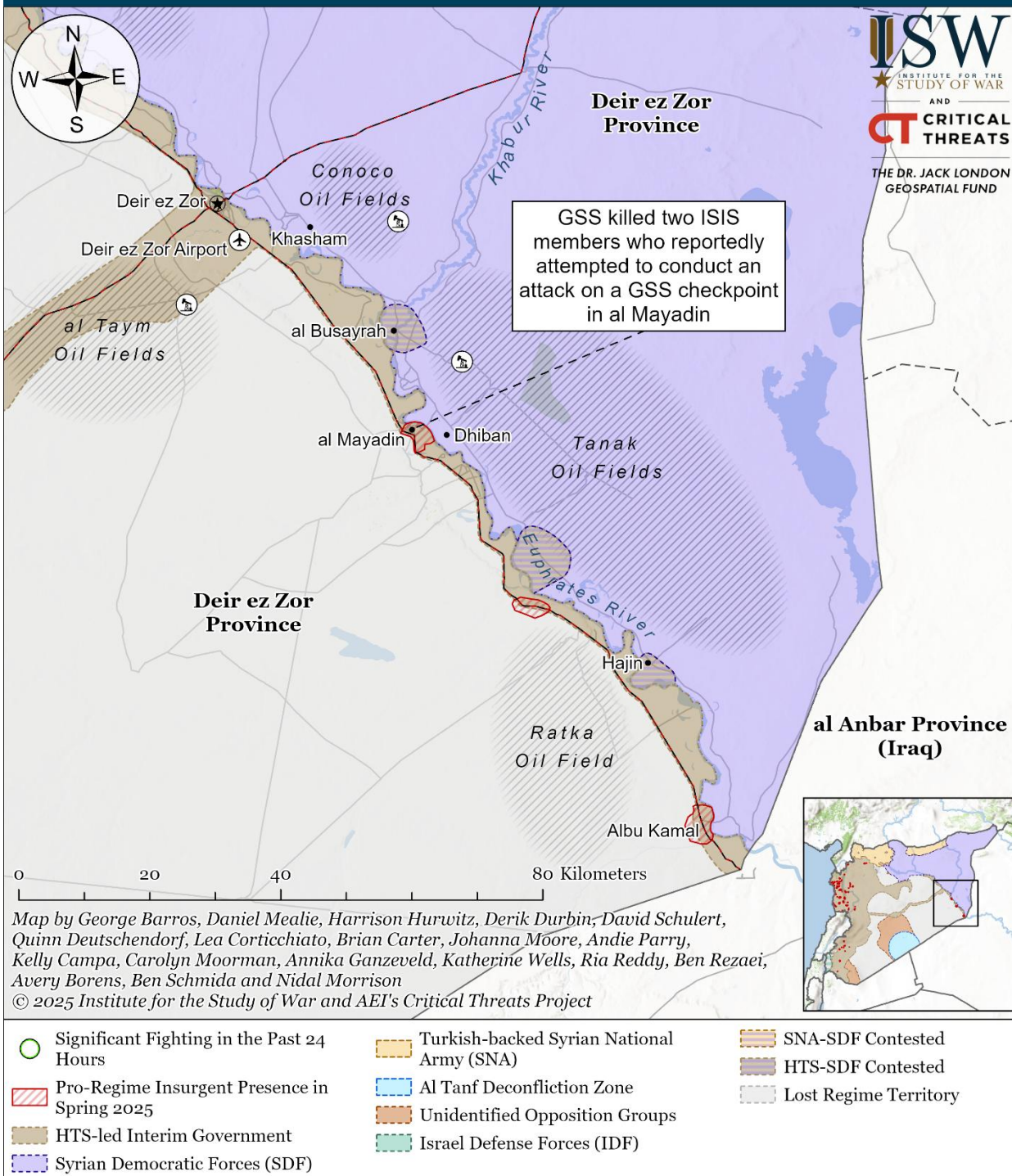
### Syria

**Two ISIS fighters reportedly attempted to conduct a tactically sophisticated but poorly executed suicide attack on a General Security Service (GSS) checkpoint in al Mayadin, Deir ez Zor Province, on August 22.<sup>79</sup> Local Syrian media**

reported that two ISIS suicide bombers on a motorcycle attacked a GSS checkpoint in al Mayadin's al Taybeh neighborhood.<sup>80</sup> The ISIS fighters planned to use the first suicide attacker to breach the checkpoint and kill or disorient the first line of GSS personnel while the second attacker entered the checkpoint and detonated his vest surrounded by the remaining GSS personnel. The GSS commander of Deir ez Zor Province reported that one fighter attempted to rush the checkpoint but was killed before he was able to detonate his vest.<sup>81</sup> Imagery posted by Syrian media showed that the fighter wore a plate carrier, which could have been packed with explosives.<sup>82</sup> The second fighter used his rifle to engage the checkpoint, but he was unable to detonate his vest before he was shot and critically wounded.<sup>83</sup> The theory behind this attack demonstrated a degree of tactical sophistication compared to the small arms attacks commonly conducted by ISIS against SDF and GSS checkpoints, but the attack's execution was poor and amateurish. An armed man approaching a checkpoint in fatigues on a motorcycle was unlikely to get close enough to the checkpoint to detonate his vest, especially in daylight.

The construction of a suicide vest and other more advanced weapons systems and the cultivation of suicide attackers requires extensive and relatively security logistical networks in support zones that are inaccessible to counter-ISIS forces. ISIS also recently conducted a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) attack in al Mayadin.<sup>84</sup> Both VBIEDs and suicide vests require areas in which ISIS can build the vests or VBIEDs, as well as safehouses for suicide attackers for suicide vest attacks. The attack and attempted attacks using these systems near and in al Mayadin suggest that ISIS has developed a support zone near al Mayadin from which it can launch these attacks.

## Reported ISIS Attack on a GSS Checkpoint in al Mayadin August 22, 2025



US Central Command (CENTCOM) confirmed on August 21 that US forces conducted a ground raid which killed an Iraqi Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) leader and financier in Atmeh, Idlib province, on August 19.<sup>85</sup> CENTCOM did not confirm the ISIS leader's identity but said that he planned attacks in Iraq and Syria.<sup>86</sup> CTP-ISW reported on August 20 that

Syrian media identified the ISIS leader as Salah Noman, also known as Abd al Nayif al Jabouri, who previously operated in Salah al Din Province, Iraq.<sup>87</sup>

### Arabian Peninsula

**The Israel Defense Force (IDF) Air Force intercepted one Houthi drone attack and a separate Houthi missile attack outside of Israeli territory on August 22.**<sup>88</sup> The Houthis have not claimed either attack on Israel at 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.<sup>89</sup>

### Palestinian Territories and Lebanon

*See topline section.*

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