

Spotlight on Iran and the Shiite Axis

June 17—24, 2026

Editor: Dr. Raz Zimmt

Key Trends

- ▶ Iran continues to demonstrate a deep commitment to Hezbollah and links the cessation of the campaign in Lebanon to the end of the war against the United States.
- ▶ Iran is working to establish its own military cells in Iraq instead of relying on the Shiite militias.

Highlights¹

- ▶ Senior Iranian officials reiterated warnings that continued IDF attacks in Lebanon would jeopardize the memorandum of understanding with the United States, harming negotiations and the attainment of a final agreement.
- ▶ The Iranian foreign minister spoke with a senior Hamas official, noting that his country is raising the issue of “Israeli violations” in the Gaza Strip during negotiations with the United States.
- ▶ The commander of the Qods Force warned Israel against a renewed escalation in the Gaza Strip.
- ▶ The IRGC reportedly established several small cells in Iraq, which carried out drone attacks against Gulf States during the war.
- ▶ The Houthis emphasized their continued stance alongside the Palestinians and warned that the “Axis of Resistance” would not remain silent in the face of an Israeli escalation in Lebanon.

Iran and the Lebanese Arena

- ▶ On June 17, 2026, US President Trump and Iranian President Pezeshkian signed a memorandum of understanding between the two countries, which entered into force immediately (Reuters, June 18, 2026). The first clause in the official text of the document stated that the United States, Iran, and their allies declare an “immediate and permanent cessation of all military operations on all fronts, including in Lebanon,” and that they commit “not to initiate any war or military action against one another, to refrain from the threat or use of force, and to ensure the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Lebanon” (CNN, June 17, 2026).² The Iranian leadership was careful to emphasize

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

² For further information, see the Amit Institute’s study from June 23, 2026, “[The American-Iran Memorandum of Understanding: Ceasefire in Lebanon and the Reactions of the Resistance Axis](#)”

what it views as the inseparable link between halting the campaign in Lebanon and the future of the negotiations with the United States:

- ◆ Majles Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf stated that Lebanon is part of the “Axis of Resistance” and thanked the Lebanese people, especially the Shiites and Hezbollah, for standing up against “American and Zionist aggression” during the war. He noted that when Israel attacked Beirut’s southern suburb (Dahiyeh), a threat was conveyed to the United States that Iran would respond, and as a result, Tehran managed to achieve everything it sought in the negotiations. He added that Iran had made it clear in advance to the mediators and to the US vice president that the Lebanon issue is of crucial importance to it, and that the American side ultimately accepted this position. According to him, even before taking off for talks in Pakistan, he stressed to his colleagues that the Lebanon issue must be settled before negotiations open (Iranian TV, June 17, 2026).



Majles Speaker Qalibaf (IRNA, June 17, 2026)

- ◆ The spokesperson for the Iranian Foreign Ministry, Esmail Baghaei, stated that the memorandum of understanding between Iran and the United States guarantees Lebanon’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, meaning a full Israeli withdrawal from Lebanese territory. He emphasized that if this is not realized, the memorandum of understanding will be canceled, and negotiations will not mature into a final agreement unless Israeli attacks cease completely and the occupation ends. He added that it is impossible to speak about the end of the war as long as parts of Lebanon’s territory remain under Israeli occupation. According to him, Iran closely monitored the Lebanese issue and worked to secure a ceasefire and an end to the occupation, which ultimately led to Lebanon being mentioned three times in the memorandum of understanding – a reflection of its paramount importance to Iran (Al-Akhbar, June 18, 2026).

- ◆ Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Baghaei strongly condemned the IDF attacks in Lebanon on June 19, 2026, warning of the severe and immediate consequences of continued

Israeli activity on peace and stability in the region. Baghaei noted that the United States bears responsibility in light of Clause 1 of the memorandum of understanding to end the war, which stipulates that halting the war in Lebanon is an integral part of ending the fighting on all fronts. He emphasized that Iran would take all necessary steps to ensure its interests, security, and rights (Mehr, June 19, 2026).

◆ On June 19, 2026, an “informed source” reported that Iran’s negotiating delegation, which was scheduled to depart for Switzerland to open a round of talks with the United States, suspended its trip following the continued Israeli attacks in southern Lebanon. According to the source, Tehran had previously informed the American side and the mediators that the issue of Lebanon is one of its key concerns in the negotiations and that the continuation or suspension of the talks is directly linked to developments in this arena. The source further emphasized that Iran warned that Israel’s continued activity and attacks up to a depth of ten kilometers inside Lebanese territory constitute a clear violation of the first clause in the memorandum of understanding between Iran and the United States and could directly affect the course of the negotiations (Al-Mayadeen, June 19, 2026). Following the opening of negotiations between Iran and the United States on June 22, 2026, negotiating team member Hossein Ghorbanzadeh emphasized that if an end to the war in Lebanon is not achieved, the negotiations will not continue (Tabnak, June 22, 2026).

◆ At the conclusion of the first round of talks in Switzerland, the speaker of the Majles and head of the Iranian negotiating team, Qalibaf, said that following the efforts made by Iran during the talks, the volume of fire in Lebanon decreased significantly, and after two days, it stopped completely. He noted that understandings were reached in the negotiations according to which both Iran and the United States must guarantee Lebanon’s territorial integrity. To this end, it was agreed to establish a coordination center to handle problem resolution, allow Lebanese citizens to return to their homes, and bring about the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanese territory (Tasnim, June 22, 2026).

► The online newspaper Seda-ye Iran (Voice of Iran), affiliated with the office of Iran’s Supreme Leader, published an editorial titled “The Lebanon Test,” emphasizing the link between the continuation of the ceasefire in Iran and the ceasefire in Lebanon. The newspaper argued that the continuation of Israel’s attacks in Lebanon constitutes a violation of the first clause in the memorandum of understanding between Iran and the United States, which discusses ending the war on all fronts, including Lebanon. According to the newspaper, the “unity of the arenas,” which until this war was a concept and perception discussed in planning and operational circles, was practically implemented during the current war, proved its effectiveness, and brought “the enemy” to a dead end. The article added that at this stage, Iran can test the seriousness of the United States regarding the understandings reached and see whether the American administration will restrain its “mad dog” in the region and return it to its place, or whether it believes it can exploit “its wildness and aggression” as leverage to extract concessions. It was further stated: “The enemy” must practically understand that the path of understandings and negotiations is not the only option available to Tehran, and that it holds other cards to play; the United States must decide whether it truly wishes to extract itself from the mud it created with its own hands, or whether it is about to pay an even heavier price this time and experience a greater defeat and humiliation; the Lebanon issue is the first serious test in this context (Seda-ye Iran, June 20, 2026).



“The Lebanon Test” (Seda-ye Iran, June 20, 2026)

Iran and the Palestinian Arena

► Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi spoke with the deputy head of Hamas’s Arab and Islamic relations office, Basem Naim, and discussed with him recent developments, progress in the negotiations between Iran and the United States, and the situation in the Palestinian arena, particularly in the Gaza Strip. Araghchi emphasized the Islamic Republic’s continued support for the Palestinian people and their struggle until the full realization of their legitimate national rights. He added that the Iranian leadership is raising the issue of continued Israeli operations in the Gaza Strip,

Israel's "ongoing violations," and "genocide" in all international forums, including with mediators and the American side within the framework of negotiations with the United States. He called for a broad international political move to support the Palestinian people and emphasized the need to force "the Zionist enemy" to stop its actions and plans, which he said were intended to eliminate the Palestinian presence on its land, particularly in the Gaza Strip (ISNA, June 24, 2026).

► Qods Force commander Esmail Qaani warned Israel against a renewed escalation in the Gaza Strip. In a statement he published, it was written that when Israel was warned about the possession of Mirsad drones by Hezbollah, it did not listen to the warnings and was hit. He added that the Gaza Strip also has a "flood," and if the Israelis act according to the wishes of their politicians, they will be trapped inside it (Tabnak, June 19, 2026).

Iran's Involvement in Iraq

► "Iraqi security and political sources" reported that the IRGC operated their own Iraqi units for attacks against Gulf States during the war between Iran and the United States and Israel ("Operation Roaring Lion"). According to the report, the IRGC established three or four small cells, each composed of about ten elite Iraqi Shiite fighters, who operated directly under the IRGC rather than through the Iraqi militias. These cells conducted several drone attacks between April and May 2026 targeting Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. The sources noted that the willingness of some of the major Shiite militias in Iraq to disarm and focus on internal politics encouraged the IRGC to establish new frameworks directly subordinate to them. It was further noted that the new groups operating under IRGC command are smaller, ideologically more rigid, and under tighter Iranian control (Reuters, June 19, 2026).

The Houthis in Yemen

► The Houthi armed forces (the General Mobilization Forces) praised the "major victories" achieved by Iran against the United States and Israel and hailed the principle of the "unity of the arenas." They also emphasized their "firm, principled stance" in supporting the Palestinian people and the unity among the components of the "Axis of Resistance." The statement noted that the Popular Mobilization Brigades operating under the armed forces number hundreds of thousands of fighters across hundreds of brigades (Houthi Military Media X account, June 22, 2026).

► The Houthi Foreign Ministry congratulated Iran on its "historical victory," emphasizing that the path of jihad and "resistance" against "forces of tyranny" is the optimal and most effective choice. The ministry explained that the principle of the "unity of the arenas" is firmly established and deeply rooted in the Islamic nation, and through it, all its rights will be reclaimed. The ministry further stated

that the Palestinian issue remains “the compass” for all “free forces, led by the Jerusalem Axis,” and that Israel must understand that it will not be able to isolate the Palestinians in any future confrontation (Houthi Foreign Ministry Telegram channel, June 18, 2026).

► The Houthi Foreign Ministry also emphasized that it views Israel’s activity in Lebanon as a “blatant violation” of international law and of the memorandum of understanding signed between the United States and Iran, which stipulated an immediate ceasefire “on all fronts.” The ministry further claimed that through this escalation, Israel is trying to thwart efforts to end the conflict and emphasized that the “Axis of Resistance” will not stand idly by in the face of Israeli escalation (Houthi Foreign Ministry Telegram channel, June 19, 2026).



A poster issued by the Houthi forces emphasizing their readiness for any “escalation or developments by the American and Israeli enemy targeting the region or seeking to isolate Gaza” (Houthi Military Media X account, June 22, 2026)

The Pro-Iranian Militias in Iraq

► Against the backdrop of the memorandum of understanding between Iran and the United States, Kata’ib Hezbollah stated that although another round of war ended in victory, the “enemies” cannot be trusted to keep their promises. The militia asserted that it is impossible to discuss matters with these enemies with an open mind after they caused the deaths of Iran’s Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, and Hezbollah secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah, in addition to many others. Finally, the militia praised Hezbollah, Iran, the Houthis, and the “sons of the resistance” throughout the region, congratulating them on the victory they achieved (Telegram channel of Kata’ib Hezbollah, June 17, 2026).

The Militias in Syria

► “The Islamic Resistance Front in Syria - Possessors of Might (Uli al-Ba’s, or UAB)” referred to “US attempts to push Syria to intervene militarily” in what is happening in Lebanon against the “Islamic Resistance” (Hezbollah). The militia claimed that these attempts correspond with secret and public negotiation channels between Syria and Israel within the framework of a “Zionist-American

conspiracy,” the purpose of which is to save the “crumbling occupation entity” and relieve the security pressure on it after the “humiliating defeats” it suffered at the hands of the “resistance.” In addition, the militia warned the Syrian regime against the consequences of continued cooperation with the United States and Israel, which constitutes a “betrayal,” and against any involvement in Lebanon, which will not be tolerated in silence (Telegram channel of the Islamic Resistance Front in Syria, June 18, 2026).