



Spotlight on Iran and the Shiite Axis

August 19 - 26, 2026

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Key Trends

- ▶ **Iranian efforts to increase assistance to Hezbollah and reinforce the IRGC presence in Lebanon.**
- ▶ **Iran continues its efforts to thwart the Iraqi government's attempts to disarm the pro-Iranian Shiite militias.**
- ▶ **The Houthis continue their attacks against Saudi targets at sea and on land.**

Highlights¹

- ▶ The Qods Force Commander issued two statements in support of the Palestinians.
- ▶ Iran is working to reinforce the presence of commanders and fighters affiliated with the IRGC in southern Lebanon to assist Hezbollah.
- ▶ The Iranian Parliament Speaker visited Baghdad and met with senior Iraqi government officials.
- ▶ The Houthi military spokesman stated that the Houthis had established three equations in the confrontation with Saudi Arabia: "blockade for blockade"; attacks on all concentrations of Saudi troops and their allies in Yemen; and a response to every Saudi incursion into Yemeni territory.
- ▶ The Islamic Resistance Front in Syria – Possessors of Might, responding to a statement by one of the Druze leaders in Syria, said that collaborators with Israel are now legitimate targets for the organization.

Iranian Involvement in the Palestinian Arena

- ▶ Qods Force Commander Esmail Qaani wrote in a statement posted on social media that the "usurpers of Palestine in the occupied territories have been afflicted with a social cancer," and that their collapse from within is their inevitable fate. He added that even the "savage and unrestrained terrorists in the West Bank" cannot marginalize the global Palestinian cause, that annexation has been taken off the agenda, and that collapse is certain (Tasnim, August 19, 2026).

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



Qods Force Commander (Tasnim, August 19, 2026)

► In another statement issued by Qaani, he said that the expansion of the settlements and the “crimes of the Zionists” are an attempt to escape the crisis and the military, security, political, and social deadlock in the “occupied territories,” but this attempt cannot conceal the strategic failures the Zionists have suffered since October 7, 2023. Qaani added that Palestine is a living and unchanging ideal that, with God’s help, will endure until the victory of justice is achieved (Tasnim, August 23, 2026).

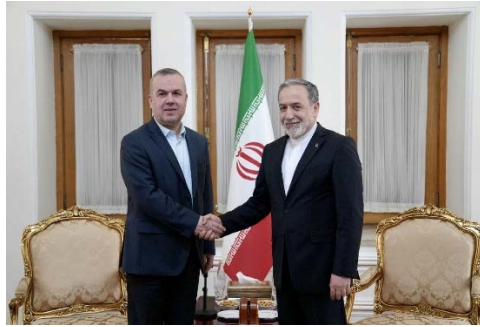
Iranian Involvement in Lebanon

► Senior Lebanese security sources claimed that Iran is attempting to send fighters, experts, and military technicians to Lebanon to reinforce the front in the south of the country. According to the sources, inspection and monitoring measures at air and land border crossings have recently been tightened following information about attempts to infiltrate IRGC personnel into Lebanon using Lebanese passports containing the personal details of deceased citizens and photographs of the individuals actually using them. The sources also reported that information held by the Lebanese security services indicates the presence in southern Lebanon of commanders, fighters, and professionals affiliated with the IRGC and operating at various levels. Part of this presence is connected to an operations room operating around the Ali al-Taher ridge. According to the security information, Tehran is seeking to reinforce additional locations in southern Lebanon with experts and other personnel following the losses suffered by Hezbollah in Israeli attacks in recent months (Erem News, August 19, 2026).

► An Israeli security official reported that there had recently been an increase in attempts by the IRGC Qods Force to expand weapons smuggling into Lebanon across the Syrian border. The Iranian effort is intended to assist in rebuilding Hezbollah (N12, August 24, 2026).

► Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi met on August 23, 2026, with Lebanese MP Hassan Fadlallah of the Loyalty to the Resistance bloc. Fadlallah conveyed the greetings of Hezbollah Secretary-General Sheikh Naim Qassem, praised the “heroic defense by the courageous Iranian people in the face of American-Zionist military aggression,” and reviewed the latest developments in Lebanon and the continuation of the “aggression and occupation by the Zionist regime” against

the country. He thanked the Islamic Republic for its support for the Lebanese people, particularly the Iranian Foreign Minister's efforts to support the Lebanese people and the "resistance" through diplomatic initiatives. Araghchi, for his part, praised the "resistance and the steadfast and honorable stand of the Lebanese people in the face of the barbaric aggression of the Zionist regime" and stressed Iran's full support for the Lebanese people in defending Lebanon's territorial integrity, dignity, and national sovereignty (Iranian Foreign Ministry Telegram channel, August 24, 2026).



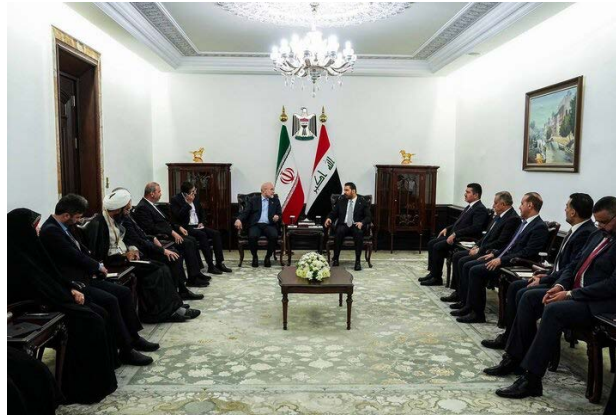
**The Iranian Foreign Minister's meeting with the Lebanese MP
(Iranian Foreign Ministry Telegram channel, August 24, 2026)**

► Lebanese sources reported that Iran's designated ambassador to Lebanon, Mohammad Reza Sheibani, had applied for a six-month residence permit with permanent-resident status in the country following the expiration of his current visa. The application was intended to allow him to remain in Lebanon like any foreign national without diplomatic status, after the Lebanese government decided in March 2026 to revoke his appointment, declare him persona non grata, and demand that he leave Lebanon (Al Arabiya, August 24, 2026)

Iranian Involvement in Iraq

► Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf arrived in Baghdad on August 19, 2026, at the head of a senior parliamentary delegation. During the visit, he met with senior Iraqi government officials, including Prime Minister Ali Faleh al-Zaidi; President Nizar Amidi; Iraqi Parliament Speaker Haibat al-Halbousi; and National Security Advisor Qassem Hassan al-Aboudi. Qalibaf also visited the memorial to former Qods Force Commander Qassem Soleimani near Baghdad International Airport. During his meeting with al-Zaidi, the two discussed political, economic, and security issues of mutual concern. Qalibaf said that Iran and Iraq share geographic, historical, religious, and sectarian ties, as well as common friends and enemies, and stressed that Iran had stood alongside Iraq in the campaign against ISIS. During his meeting with Amidi, Qalibaf said that the greatest problem and the main cause of all the region's ills are the United States and the "Zionist regime," which have caused the recent wars in the region. He noted that past experience showed that Islamic countries need one another more than ever and that the United

States does not protect them but seeks to plunder their resources. Qalibaf stressed the need to develop the railway between Shalamchah and Basra and expand markets along the countries' shared border to strengthen economic relations between them (icana.ir, August 19, 2026).



Qalibaf's meeting with the Iraqi Prime Minister (icana.ir, August 19, 2026)

- The hardline newspaper Khorasan addressed the visits to Iraq by Qods Force Commander Esmail Qaani and Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf in a commentary article (August 20, 2026), claiming that the purpose of the visits was to prevent the removal of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) from Iraq's security structure. The article, titled "The Architecture of the New Order from Beirut to Baghdad," stated that Iran seeks to establish an order in which the "resistance" forces in Lebanon and Iraq will not be regarded as temporary actors that can be removed, but will instead be recognized as part of the countries' future security structure and deterrence apparatus. According to the newspaper, Qalibaf's visit to Baghdad was part of Tehran's efforts to translate its achievements on the battlefield into stable political and security arrangements and establish a security order favorable to the "resistance." His visit was not intended to discuss the very existence of the "resistance," but rather how its relations with the Iraqi government would be regulated, for example, through a model in which some weapons would be placed under official supervision and independent operations by the Shiite militias would be restricted, while their deterrence capability would be preserved. In return, Iran would agree to reduce the economic pressure on Iraq resulting from the closure of the Strait of Hormuz.
- Iraqi sources told Asharq Al-Awsat (August 20, 2026) that during his visit to Baghdad, Qalibaf discussed proposals to prevent a confrontation between the government and the pro-Iranian Shiite militias, primarily by freezing or concealing the militias' heavy weapons. According to the sources, Qalibaf also discussed with senior Iraqi officials the possibility of temporarily transferring a large portion of those weapons to Iran until an arrangement regarding their future could be reached.

The Houthis in Yemen

► Houthi military spokesman Yahya Saree stated that, as part of the confrontation between the Houthis and Saudi Arabia, the Houthis have established three equations: “blockade for blockade” – a complete blockade of all Saudi vessels and prevention of their passage through the Red Sea, the Arabian Sea, and the Indian Ocean; attacks on all concentrations of Saudi troops and their allies in Yemen; and a response to every Saudi incursion into Yemeni territory. Saree reported that since the beginning of the current campaign against the Saudis, Houthi forces had attacked eight Saudi oil tankers (five in the Red Sea and three in the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea) and had caused another 48 vessels to alter their routes and avoid the Red Sea, Arabian Sea, and Indian Ocean. In addition, Houthi forces carried out nine attacks against oil infrastructure in Saudi territory and 14 attacks against “concentrations of Saudi troops” in Yemeni territory, as well as against vessels that provided logistical support to those forces. In summary, Saree claimed that the attacks had killed and wounded hundreds of “Saudi soldiers,” destroyed numerous depots and pieces of equipment belonging to those forces, and sunk more than 12 Saudi vessels (Yahya Saree’s Telegram channel, August 19, 2026). In this context, it should be noted that Saudi soldiers are not officially deployed on Yemeni soil, and the Houthi statements apparently refer to Yemeni forces supported by Saudi Arabia.

► In addition, during the past week (August 19–26, 2026), Saree reported several attacks by Houthi forces against targets in Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and the Red Sea region (Yahya Saree’s Telegram channel, August 20–24, 2026):

◆ Two drone attacks against a “sensitive target” at the airport in Najran in southern Saudi Arabia and against an Aramco facility in the city, in response to Saudi Arabia’s violation of Yemeni airspace (August 20, 2026).

◆ Three separate operations: an attack on the Saudi oil tanker Azman in the northern Red Sea near the port city of Yanbu in western Saudi Arabia using a ballistic missile, which damaged the tanker; an attack on a convoy of “Saudi forces” in the al-Abr and al-Wadiah districts in Yemen using ballistic missiles and drones; and an attack on “Saudi forces” and weapons depots in the al-Kanais area in Yemen using ballistic missiles and drones. In this context, the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) reported that a tanker west of Yanbu had been attacked by an unidentified object. It was also reported that the strike caused a fire on the vessel’s main deck, but there were no casualties, and the vessel continued on its way (UKMTO X account, August 24, 2026).



On August 25, 2026, Houthi movement leader Abdul Malik al-Houthi delivered a speech marking

► In a letter issued by Houthi Defense Minister Mohammad Nasser al-Atifi and Houthi Chief of Staff

Activity of Pro-Iranian Militias in Iraq and Syria

- ▶ Iraqi and Arab media reported that senior Iraqi government officials, including the Prime Minister's military advisor and the government spokesman, said that the deadline for dismantling the pro-Iranian militias and transferring their weapons to the Iraqi security forces would not be September 30, 2026, as the Iraqi government had previously stated. The officials claimed that this date was the deadline for the departure of United States-led coalition forces from the country, rather than for dismantling the militias and transferring their weapons. The officials did not elaborate on the circumstances behind the change in the timetable, but it was reported that it was apparently the result of pressure and contacts by Iran, which seeks to preserve the militias' ability to respond to moves by the United States, Israel, and their allies in the Middle East (Iraqi and Arab media, August 24, 2026).
- ▶ On August 19, 2026, several "regional sources" reported that Saudi Arabia was pressuring the Iraqi government to take action against the pro-Iranian militias in the country that were behind the attacks against Saudi Arabia in recent months. According to the sources, Saudi Arabia wants those responsible for the attacks to be arrested and punished, stressing that it is referring to the senior officials who gave the orders for the attacks rather than those who carried them out (Al-Monitor, August 19, 2026).
- ▶ On August 20, 2026, PMF Chairman Faleh al-Fayyad gave an interview to Iraqi media and revealed that more than 100 of the organization's "headquarters" had been attacked and more than 100 of its operatives had been killed since the confrontation in the region began in October 2023. He further claimed that the region was suffering from instability and Iraq was facing severe economic difficulties as a result of the "American-Zionist war," and that the Americans' departure from Iraq in September 2026 would be a glorious day and a cause for joy and celebration. Regarding the future of the weapons held by the pro-Iranian militias, al-Fayyad said there is a need to formulate a new equation capable of protecting Iraq's sovereignty and airspace. To that end, the issue of weapons must be addressed responsibly in a manner that meets everyone's needs, since everyone is responsible for maintaining the country's stability, and placing all weapons under the control of a single body would be a catalyst for confrontations (PMF Telegram channel, August 20, 2026).
- ▶ The Islamic Resistance Front in Syria – Possessors of Might (Uli al-Ba's, UAB) issued a statement amid reports of a meeting between Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shaibani and Israeli Mossad Director Roman Gofman. In the statement, the militia's spokesman, "Naqib Miqdad," declared that the organization completely opposes those secret contacts between Israel and official Syrian

elements, which he described as “meetings of betrayal.” The spokesman also addressed the “tribes of southern Syria,” calling on them to reject those contacts and choose the path of armed resistance to thwart them (Islamic Resistance Front in Syria Telegram channel, August 24, 2026).

► In another statement by the organization, issued in response to remarks by one of the Druze leaders in Syria, Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri, who said that “we are an inseparable part of Israel” and that the Druze in Syria share Israel’s principles, adding that they are “awaiting developments soon” (Syrian media, August 24, 2026), the Islamic Resistance Front condemned the remarks and “completely” rejected al-Hijri’s “destructive project” to link the Druze to Israel, which it described as “a treacherous stab in the back of history” in light of the many “crimes” committed by Israel in the Syrian Golan. At the same time, the organization said that it distinguishes between the Druze community as a whole and the faction loyal to al-Hijri, which collaborates with Israel and had agreed “to sell its national identity.” The organization warned that in light of this betrayal, the “collaborators” are now legitimate targets for its operations (Islamic Resistance Front in Syria Telegram channel, August 25, 2026).



Poster published by the Islamic Resistance Front in Syria under the headline “In Response to the Enemy’s War Minister: We Will Cross.” The reference is apparently to the border between Syria and Israel, amid remarks by Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz regarding the continued presence of IDF forces in Syrian territory (Islamic Resistance Front in Syria Telegram channel, August 25, 2026)