

Iran Update



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Information Cutoff: 2:00 pm ET

Iran's refusal to accept US demands for zero uranium enrichment and the complete dismantlement of its nuclear program could stall US-Iran nuclear negotiations. The United States and Iran held their fourth round of nuclear talks in Oman on May 11.[1] US Special Envoy to the Middle East and lead US negotiator Steve Witkoff stated prior to the talks that Iran can "never" have an enrichment program.[2] Witkoff stated that Iran must dismantle its three enrichment facilities at Natanz, Fordow, and Esfahan and can no longer have centrifuges. Witkoff added that a new nuclear agreement would not include sunset provisions, which are provisions that expire after a certain period of time. The 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) included a sunset provision that restricted Iranian uranium enrichment for 15 years. Iranian officials, including Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi and President Masoud Pezeshkian, rejected Witkoff's statements and emphasized that Iran will not accept zero enrichment. Araghchi stated, for example, that Iran is willing to accept limits on its uranium enrichment but "the principle of enrichment itself is simply non-negotiable." [3] Iranian officials have recently stated that Iran would agree to reduce its uranium enrichment to 2015 JCPOA levels.[4] Anti-Iranian regime media previously reported on May 8 that the US-Iran nuclear talks were "faltering" over Iranian uranium enrichment restrictions and "fluctuating US demands prior to the fourth round of talks." [5]

Iran is also very unlikely to curtail its support for the Axis of Resistance. Witkoff stated on May 8 that the United States remains committed to ending Iranian support for its regional proxies but will address this issue in "later phases" of the negotiations.[6] Iranian officials have repeatedly rejected this demand. Iranian Parliamentarian Ebrahim Rezaei stated on May 12 that Iran's "regional power" is non-negotiable, almost certainly referring to Iran's support for the Axis of Resistance.[7] Iran has continued to support its regional proxies, including by sending missiles to Iraqi militias and supporting the financial reconstitution of Hezbollah, for example. [8]

Senior Iranian commanders appear to be preparing for potential US or Israeli strikes on Iran amid new implicit US threats. Iranian Armed Forces General Staff (AFGS) Chief Major General Mohammad Bagheri visited Artesh and Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) naval sites in Bandar Abbas, Hormozgan Province, on May 12 to inspect their operational readiness.[9] Other senior Iranian commanders, including IRGC Commander Major General Hossein Salami and Artesh Commander Major General Abdol Rahim Mousavi, accompanied Bagheri.[10] Bagheri stated that the AFGS reviewed all operational plans in southern Iran and claimed that the plans showed "full readiness to confront any potential threat." [11] Artesh Air Force Commander Brigadier General Hamid Vahedi

separately visited the Fifth Tactical Air Base in Khuzestan Province on May 11 to assess combat readiness and inspect facilities, including barracks and a weapons depot.[12] Senior Iranian commanders have conducted inspections of air defense sites and military bases across Iran in recent weeks, likely to ensure that units remain prepared for a potential strike.[13] The recent inspections come amid new implicit threats from US officials about potential military action against Iran if the current US-Iran nuclear negotiations do not result in an agreement. US Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff warned on May 9 that it would be "very unwise" for Iran to reject US demands.[14] Witkoff stated that if the May 11 talks with Iran were "not productive," then the United States would "take a different route." [15] Unspecified sources close to Witkoff similarly told Israel media on May 10 that if the May 11 talks with Iran did not yield "significant progress," then the United States would consider putting the "military option back on the table.[16] US President Donald Trump stated on May 12 that Iran is acting "intelligently and reasonably" in ongoing negotiations over the country's nuclear program.[17]

The United States and Iran have tentatively agreed to hold a fifth round of technical nuclear talks. An unspecified senior US official said that the US administration was "encouraged" by the outcome of the May 11 talks and confirmed that Iran and the United States agreed to continue technical negotiations.[18] Western media previously reported that the technical talks are focused on Iranian uranium enrichment levels and Iran's centrifuge stockpile.[19]

NOTE: A version of this text also appears in ISW's May 10 Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment.

Iran will reportedly deliver short-range ballistic missile launchers to Russia to support the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which highlights how Iran and Russia are continuing to bolster military cooperation at the expense of US allies. Reuters reported on May 10, citing two Western security officials and an unspecified regional official, that Iran is preparing to provide Russia with an unspecified number of Fateh-360 launchers in the near future.[20] Iran and Russia signed a contract in December 2023 to send Iranian Ababil close-range ballistic missiles and Fateh-360 short-range ballistic missiles to Russia.[21] A Ukrainian military source told *The Times* in September 2024 that Iran provided over 200 Fateh-360 ballistic missiles to Russia.[22] The Fateh-360 is a solid-fueled missile that has a range of around 120 kilometers and can carry a payload of 150 kilograms.[23] CTP-ISW has not observed reports of the Russian military launching Iranian-provided missiles against Ukraine. Iran began providing Russia with Shahed drones in fall 2022, and Russia began producing and using its own Shahed-131 and Shahed-136 analogues (which Russia calls Geran-1 and Geran-2, respectively) with imported Iranian components and using Iranian production licenses as early as summer 2023.[24] Russia continues to deepen military cooperation with Iran, North Korea, and the People's Republic of China (PRC), and Russia's use of Iranian missiles against Ukraine would mark a significant intensification of Russo-Iranian cooperation.[25]

The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) announced on May 9 that it will dissolve itself and "end its armed struggle" after forty years of militant activity.[26] The PKK is a left-wing Kurdish militant organization based in Kurdish-majority areas of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran that launched an insurgency against Turkey in 1984.[27] Turkey views the PKK as a terrorist organization.[28] The PKK announced on May 9 that it has "completed its historical mission" and will "dissolve its organizational structure." [29] The PKK made this decision during a two-day conference

between May 5 and 7 in Iraqi Kurdistan's Qandil Mountains. The PKK convened the meeting in response to imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan's call for the group to disarm in late February 2025.[30] Ocalan made this call after months of negotiations with the pro-Kurdish Turkish People's Equality and Democracy (DEM) Party and politicians allied with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.[31] The PKK statement declared that the organization's years of militancy have pushed the Kurdish issue to a point "where it can be resolved through democratic politics." [32] The statement called on PKK followers to "participate in the process of peace and democratic society," which suggests that PKK members will continue to try to achieve the group's objective of cementing greater Kurdish autonomy.[33] It is unclear how the group intends to accomplish this objective, but it may try to do so by engaging in political movements throughout the region rather than through military means.

The successful disarmament of the PKK may facilitate the integration of Kurdish fighters affiliated with the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) into the Turkish-allied Syrian transitional government. The PKK's historic ties to the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), which comprises the majority of the SDF, has led Turkey to launch multiple campaigns targeting the YPG in Syria since 2016.[34] The SDF, which has begun integrating into the Syrian state, has predicated its integration into the state on Turkey halting attacks targeting its fighters.[35] A successful PKK disarmament could remove a possible obstruction to the transitional government's ability to centralize state control over northern Syria. Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al Shaibani stated that the PKK's disarmament is an important step for the entire region during a press conference in Ankara on May 12.[36] The Turkish government welcomed the PKK's announcement and stated that it will "follow closely the practical steps to be taken." [37] It is unclear if all PKK fighters will heed their leaders' call to disarm. About 4,000 to 5,000 PKK fighters operate across Turkey, Syria, Iraqi Kurdistan, and Iran, according to a 2019 force estimate.[38] A spokesperson for Erdogan's Justice and Development (AKP) Party said that the group's dissolution must apply to "all branches and extensions of the PKK." [39] The refusal of certain PKK-linked elements to disarm could cause Turkey to resume attacks targeting alleged PKK targets in northern Syria.

Iran and the Axis of Resistance are likely conducting a coordinated disinformation campaign against the Syrian transitional government. A BBC investigation published on May 11 found that approximately 50,000 accounts on X appear to have coordinated the spread of sectarian rhetoric, hate speech, and disinformation since the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024.[40] Many of the accounts have usernames with randomly generated characters, which indicates that the accounts are bots.[41] BBC reported that approximately 60 percent of the posts originated from outside Syria and were concentrated in Iran and Axis of Resistance strongholds, including Iraq, Yemen, and Lebanon.[42] CTP-ISW previously assessed that Iran is attempting to inflame sectarian tensions in Syria, likely to destabilize the Syrian transitional government and thereby re-establish itself in Syria.[43]

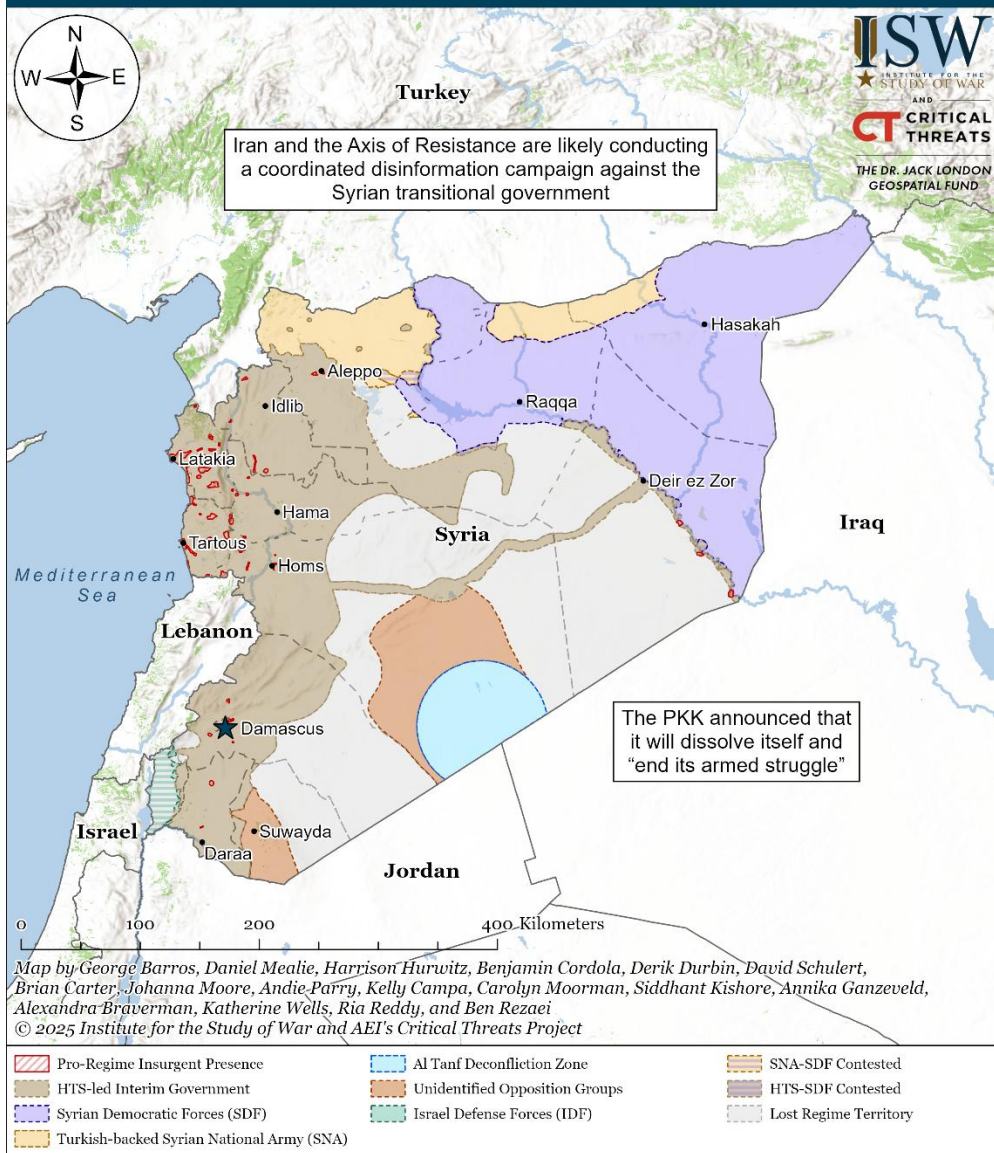
This disinformation campaign is likely intended to generate sectarian tensions and discontent with the transitional government within the Syrian population, which could enable Iran to re-entrench itself in Syria. BBC reported that the bot accounts flooded the information space with posts that **contained** sectarian language.[44] The accounts also posted old footage and imagery of sectarian violence and falsely portrayed the violence as recent sectarian events in Syria.[45] Iranian media has circulated reports of sectarian violence in Syria and has highlighted the

transitional government's alleged failure to address security concerns since the fall of the Assad regime.[46] Reports of sectarian violence in the information space, regardless of whether they are real or false, risk generating feelings of insecurity within the Syrian population and discouraging cooperation between the Syrian population and government. A fractured Syrian state could enable Iran and Iranian-backed actors to exploit security gaps to reestablish their influence in Syrian and rebuild ground lines of communication through Syria to members of the Axis of Resistance.

The disinformation campaign could drive Syrian communities to seek out alternative sources of security to the transitional government. The disinformation campaign supports pro-Alawite insurgent efforts to undermine confidence in the transitional government. Insurgents seek to exploit fear and grievances within a population to establish themselves as the primary security guarantor. The bot accounts, which intentionally spread reports of violence, generate an outsized perception of threats against a community and undermine confidence in the transitional government's ability to provide basic protection. CTP-ISW has observed a relative decline in insurgent activity since March 2025, but insurgent groups have not abandoned their objectives to eject government forces from Alawite areas and undermine the new Syrian government. There is no evidence that Iran is cooperating with the pro-Alawite insurgency at this time.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Syria

May 12, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



The Houthis are continuing to acquire military equipment from abroad, which the Houthis could use to rebuild their military capabilities following the recent US air campaign in Yemen.^[47] The southwestern Yemeni National Resistance Forces (NRF) intercepted 64 satellite communications devices and equipment that the Houthis could use to build improvised explosive devices (IED). The NRF seized the equipment on May 10 from two vessels in the Red Sea that were en route to the Houthi-controlled Ras Issa Port.^[48] The NRF is an armed anti-Houthi Yemeni faction that controls territory in southwestern Yemen near Mokha.^[49] The NRF published a video showing that the satellite communications devices were made by a UAE-based satellite technology company.^[50] The NRF also confiscated at least three million detonators and 3,500 kilometers of wire, which the Houthis could reportedly use to build explosive-laden boats, one-way attack drones, and

remotely or infrared-triggered IEDs.[51] The Houthis could use this equipment to attack commercial and military vessels transiting the Red Sea.[52] The Houthis have previously imported dual-use equipment from the international market, which they can repurpose to increase their domestic arms production. The Yemeni coast guard and Omani customs previously seized shipments of Chinese-made military equipment intended for the Houthis, such as hydrogen fuel cells for powering missiles and drone propellers, in August 2024 and March 2025, respectively.[53]

The Houthis are continuing to pursue their October 7 War objectives by attacking Israel in order to try to pressure Israel to stop operations against Hamas in the Gaza Strip.[54]

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) published evacuation orders for three Houthi-controlled ports—Hudaydah, Ras Issa, and al Salif—on May 11.[55] These orders follow the Houthi ballistic missile attack targeting Ben Gurion Airport on May 4.[56] An Israeli defense official told Israeli media on May 12 that a Houthi ballistic missile, likely aimed at Israel, landed in Saudi Arabia or off the coast of Saudi Arabia.[57] The Houthis have not claimed the ballistic missile attack at the time of this writing.

The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Organization (UKMTO) warned vessels near the Hudaydah Port on May 11 that they are at high risk of collateral damage because of “sustained kinetic activity” near the port since mid-March.[58] UKMTO published this warning before the IDF issued evacuation orders for Hudaydah Port.[59] US Central Command (CENTCOM) conducted numerous airstrikes targeting Houthi targets at and near the Hudaydah Port between March 17 and May 5.[60]

The Lebanese government and armed forces are taking a number of steps that may, in time, cement the successes that Israel achieved in its 2024 military campaign against Hezbollah.[61]

The *Wall Street Journal* reported on May 10 that Lebanese airport authorities have fired several Hezbollah-affiliated employees at Beirut Rafic Hariri International Airport and are inspecting all planes and passengers that arrive at the airport.[62] Iran has tried to use the Beirut airport to smuggle funds to Hezbollah since the loss of its overland transport route through Syria due to the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024.[63] The *Wall Street Journal* also reported that Lebanese authorities have arrested unspecified smugglers and are enforcing unspecified previously-unenforced laws.[64] These steps to prevent Iranian smuggling efforts to reconstitute Hezbollah via the Beirut airport come as the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) are simultaneously working to dismantle Hezbollah positions and destroy weapons stockpiles in southern Lebanon.[65] UNIFIL has identified over 225 weapons caches in southern Lebanon and “referred” them to the LAF since November 2024, for example.[66]

The Lebanese government and armed forces must continue to prevent Hezbollah’s reconstitution in order to cement the successes that Israel achieved against Hezbollah during the October 7 War. Israeli operations in Lebanon in late 2024 defeated Hezbollah.[67] Defeat is achieved when an enemy force “temporarily or permanently [loses] the physical means or the will to fight.”[68] Hezbollah maintains

the willingness to rebuild and has taken steps to reconstitute its forces since November 2024 despite Israel's defeat of the organization in the October 7 War.^[69] The Lebanese government and armed forces must therefore continue to take steps, such as those outlined by the *Wall Street Journal*, to prevent Hezbollah from reconstituting.

Key Takeaways:

- **US-Iran Nuclear Talks:** Iran's refusal to accept US demands for zero uranium enrichment and the complete dismantlement of its nuclear program could stall US-Iran nuclear negotiations. The United States and Iran held their fourth round of nuclear talks in Oman on May 11. US Special Envoy to the Middle East and lead US negotiator Steve Witkoff stated prior to the talks that Iran can "never" have an enrichment program. Iranian officials, including Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi and President Masoud Pezeshkian, rejected Witkoff's statements and emphasized that Iran will not accept zero enrichment.
- **Russo-Iranian Cooperation:** Iran will reportedly deliver short-range ballistic missile launchers to Russia to support the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which highlights how Iran and Russia are continuing to bolster military cooperation at the expense of US allies. Reuters reported on May 10, citing two Western security officials and an unspecified regional official, that Iran is preparing to provide Russia with an unspecified number of Fateh-360 launchers in the near future. Iran and Russia signed a contract in December 2023 to send Iranian Ababil close-range ballistic missiles and Fateh-360 short-range ballistic missiles to Russia.
- **PKK Dissolution:** The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) announced on May 9 that it will dissolve itself and "end its armed struggle" after forty years of militant activity. It is unclear if all PKK fighters will heed their leaders' call to disarm. About 4,000 to 5,000 PKK fighters operate across Turkey, Syria, Iraqi Kurdistan, and Iran, according to a 2019 force estimate. The successful disarmament of the PKK may facilitate the integration of Kurdish fighters affiliated with the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) into the Turkish-allied Syrian transitional government.
- **Iranian and Axis of Resistance Disinformation Efforts:** Iran and the Axis of Resistance are likely conducting a coordinated disinformation campaign against the Syrian transitional government. A BBC investigation published on May 11 found that approximately 50,000 accounts on X appear to have coordinated the spread of sectarian rhetoric, hate speech, and disinformation since the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024. This disinformation campaign is likely intended to generate sectarian tensions and discontent with the transitional government within the Syrian population, which could enable Iran to re-entrench itself in Syria.
- **Houthi Reconstitution:** The Houthis are continuing to acquire military equipment from abroad, which the Houthis could use to rebuild their military capabilities following the recent US air campaign in Yemen. The southwestern Yemeni National Resistance Forces (NRF) intercepted 64 satellite communications devices and equipment that the Houthis could use to build improvised explosive devices (IED). The NRF also confiscated at least three million detonators and 3,500 kilometers of wire, which the Houthis could reportedly use to build explosive-laden boats, one-way attack drones, and remotely or infrared-triggered IEDs.

- **Hezbollah Reconstitution:** The Lebanese government and armed forces are taking a number of steps that may, in time, cement the successes that Israel achieved in its 2024 military campaign against Hezbollah. The *Wall Street Journal* reported on May 10 that Lebanese airport authorities have fired several Hezbollah-affiliated employees at Beirut Rafic Hariri International Airport and are inspecting all planes and passengers that arrive at the airport. The Lebanese government and armed forces must continue to take steps, such as those outlined by the *Wall Street Journal*, to prevent Hezbollah from reconstituting.

Iranian Decision-Making, Internal Dynamics, and Foreign Policy

Iranian Law Enforcement Commander Brigadier General Ahmad Reza Radan visited Niger on May 8 to deepen security cooperation.^[70] Radan met with senior Nigerien officials, including Prime Minister Ali Lamine Zeine, Foreign Affairs Minister Bakary Yaou Sangare, and Police Chief Brigadier General Omar Tchiani. Iran and Niger signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) focused on counterterrorism, organized crime, and intelligence sharing. Radan stated that Iran is ready to transfer “policing experience” to Niger.^[71] Radan recently visited Ethiopia and Burkina Faso on May 6 to sign security cooperation agreements focused on counterterrorism, human trafficking, and law enforcement training.^[72] Iran could seek to export policing tools, including surveillance and protest suppression capabilities, to these countries while simultaneously building strategic partnerships that can help Iran evade sanctions and access critical resources.^[73]

Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi traveled to Saudi Arabia on May 10 as part of ongoing Iranian regional diplomacy efforts.^[74] Araghchi met with Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan in Jeddah to discuss expanding bilateral cooperation “across all sectors.” Araghchi briefed Saudi officials on the latest developments in the US-Iran nuclear talks. Araghchi also traveled to Doha on May 10 to participate in the fourth Iran–Arab World Dialogue Summit.^[75] Araghchi met with Qatari Foreign Minister Mohammad bin Abdul Rahman al Thani. The two officials discussed the US-Iran talks and ways to deepen bilateral ties.^[76]

The United States sanctioned several Iranian individuals and entities involved in Iranian nuclear-related research on May 12.^[77] The United States sanctioned three Iranian individuals and one Iran-based entity for their role in supporting Iranian nuclear research in association with the Iranian Organization of Defensive Innovation and Research (SPND).^[78] The SPND played a leading role in the Iranian nuclear weapons research program before 2003.^[79] The sanctioned individuals and entity include:

- **Sayyed Mohammad Reza Seddighi Saber:** Saber is the head of SPND’s Shahid Karimi Group, which is involved in explosives research.
- **Ahmad Haghighat Talab:** Haghighat Talab is a senior SPND official and former Amad Project nuclear scientist. The Amad Project refers to Iran’s nuclear weapons program prior to 2003. Haghighat Talab has conducted nuclear research that has potential military applications.
- **Mohammed Reza Mehdipur:** Mehdipur is the head of SPND’s Shahid Chamran Group, which conducts explosion and shock research.

- **Fuya Pars Prospective Technologists (Ideal Vacuum):** Fuya Pars Prospective Technologists is an SPND-affiliated company that has attempted to procure or produce equipment that Iran could use in nuclear weapons research and development.

The US Department of the Treasury stated that all of the sanctioned individuals and entities face secondary sanctions. These sanctions come amid a broader increase in US sanctions against Iran as part of US President Donald Trump’s “maximum pressure” campaign.

The Iranian rial appreciated from 840,000 rials to one US dollar on May 9 to 837,000 rials to one US dollar on May 12.[80]

Syria

Syrian President Ahmed al Shara met with People’s Republic of China (PRC) Department of West Asian and North Africa Affairs Director Chen Weiqing in Damascus on May 12.[81] This meeting marks Syrian officials’ third high-level meeting with PRC officials since February 2025.[82] It is not clear what Shara and Weiqing discussed. The Syrian government most recently hosted PRC officials in Damascus on March 27 to discuss “enhancing cooperation,” which CTP-ISW assessed was likely related to securing Chinese support for the government transition.[83] Several Chinese delegations met with Syrian officials in February and March 2025 to discuss enhancing trade cooperation and investment opportunities.[84] PRC officials have expressed concern about the Syrian government’s appointment of Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP)-affiliated Uyghurs to senior ranks in the Syrian army.[85]

Syrian President Ahmed al Shara conducted his first official visit to Bahrain on May 10 in effort to obtain economic assistance.[86] Shara and his accompanying delegation met with Bahraini King Hamad bin Isa bin Salman al Khalifa.[87] The Syrian delegation included Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al Shaibani and Syrian General Intelligence Director Hussein Salameh.[88] Shara, Shaibani, Salameh, and Khalifa discussed bilateral ties.[89] Shaibani stated after the meeting that Syria views Bahrain as “a strong partner in the reconstruction process and a significant contributor to the efforts to support the Syrian economy.”[90] Bahraini Foreign Minister Abdullatif bin Rashid al Zayani renewed his call for the international community to lift sanctions on Syria after the meeting.[91]

The Syrian Ministry of Defense (MoD) continued to disarm armed factions in Daraa Province and integrate them into the 40th Division. Syrian Defense Minister Marhaf Abu Qasra, 40th Division Commander Binyan al Hariri, and other unspecified military leaders from Daraa Province met on May 11 to discuss military arrangements and security.[92] Syrian media reported on May 10 that the 40th Division confiscated all weapons belonging to Daraa Province Central Committee factions.[93] The Central Committee was an alliance of local factions in southeastern Daraa that formed in July 2018 and included the recently-dissolved Eighth Brigade led by Ahmed al Awda.[94] The Central Committee reportedly recently agreed to dissolve and fully integrate into the 40th Division.[95] Syrian media also reported that 40th Division members recently completed a training course, and that a new course will take place in the near future.[96]

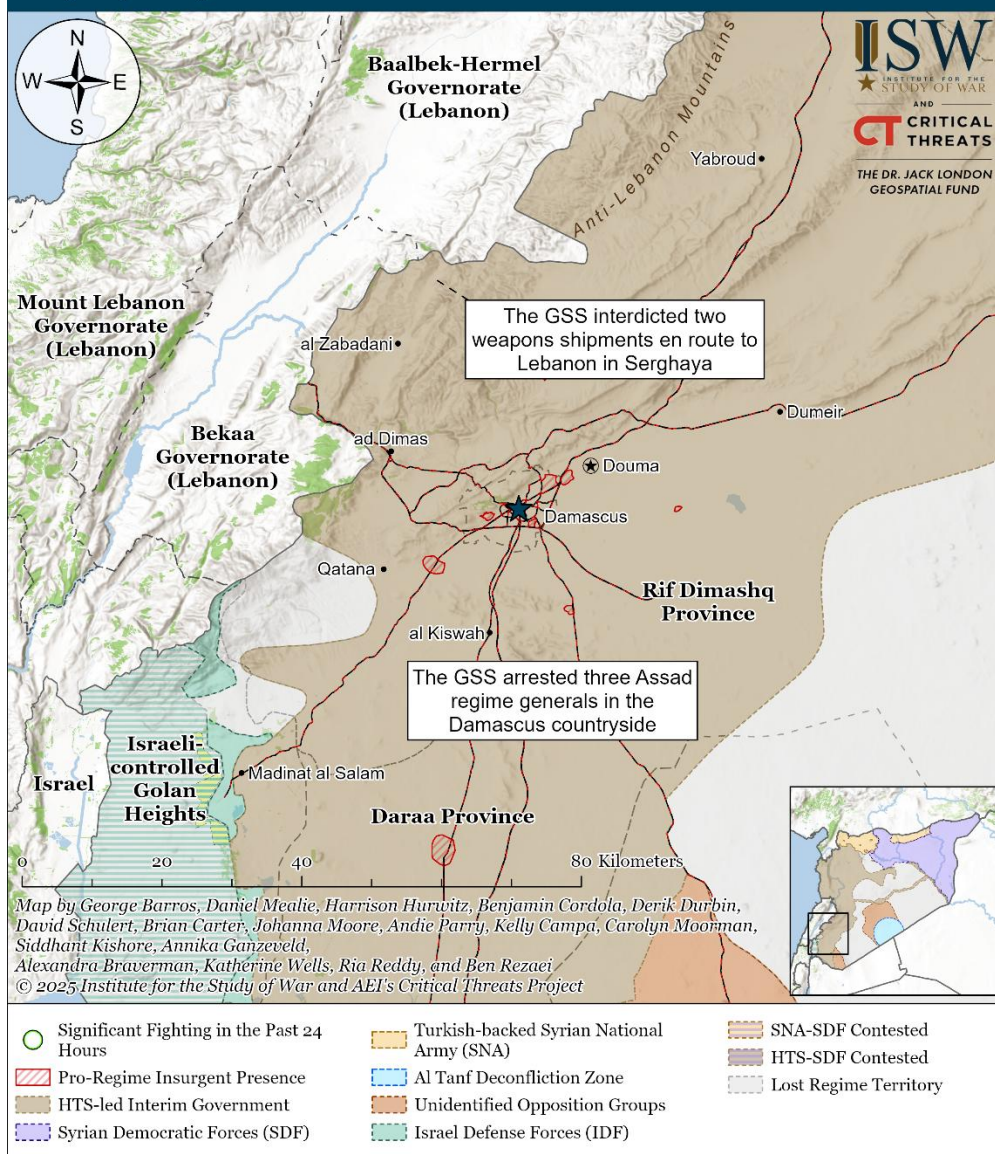
Syrian Deputy Defense Minister Fahim Issa met with several unspecified armed faction leaders near Tal Abyad, north of Raqqa, on May 12.[97] Issa previously commanded the Sultan

Murad Division, which is a faction in the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) and now reportedly oversees the "northern region" within the Syrian MoD.[98] Issa reportedly traveled to Tal Abyad to assess the size and equipment owned by the factions.[99] Issa is also expected to visit Ras al Ain, Hasakah Province.[100] The SNA currently controls Tal Abyad and Ras al Ain.[101] It is unclear which factions Issa met with, but several SNA factions are based in this area.[102] The SNA agreed to integrate into the Syrian MoD in January 2025.[103] Several SNA factions continue to operate in their previous formations and areas, however.[104]

The General Security Services (GSS) thwarted three separate attempts to smuggle weapons and counterfeit currency into Lebanon. The weapons and currency were likely intended for Lebanese Hezbollah. The GSS confiscated a shipment that included two Russian man-portable air-defense systems (MANPADS), grenades, and targeting components of an anti-tank guided missile launcher in Serghaya, Rif Dimashq Province, on May 10.[105] The GSS also confiscated a weapons, ammunition, and counterfeit currency shipment in Serghaya on May 12.[106] The GSS separately seized a shipment of 9 Uragan 220mm rockets at a warehouse in Homs Province on May 12.[107] The smugglers were likely attempting to smuggle these supplies to Hezbollah, which seeks to reconstitute following its defeat in the October 7 War. Serghaya lies on a road that travels northward into Lebanon's Bekaa Valley, which is a Hezbollah stronghold. The GSS recently seized weapons and narcotics en route to Lebanon in Serghaya on May 9.[108]

Assessed Control of Terrain around Rif Dimashq

May 12, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



The GSS destroyed an Iranian-made tunnel that connected Iraq and Syria in Albu Kamal, Deir ez Zor Province, on May 9.^[109] Unspecified Iranian-backed militias used the tunnel to smuggle weapons and drugs across the border.^[110] The security director of the Albu Kamal region stated that Syrian forces have recently found several Iranian tunnels linking Iraq and Syria and that GSS forces are in the process of destroying them.^[111] The destruction of the tunnel in Albu Kamal follows the discovery of a tunnel on April 30, which linked a former Iranian IRGC base in Syria to Iraq.^[112]

Unspecified individuals continue to conduct revenge killings and target Alawites across Syria. Unknown gunmen assassinated a former regime soldier in al Faraya, Hama city, on May 10.^[113] Revenge killings are caused in part by a lack of government-led transitional justice efforts to punish those responsible for crimes committed during the civil war. Unknown gunmen killed four

Alawite civilians, including a 14-year-old, near Ain al Sharqiyah, Latakia Province, on May 10.[114] These and similar instances of sectarian violence could risk reviving a sectarian-based insurgency against the Syrian transitional government.[115]

The GSS arrested three Assad regime generals and pilots in the Damascus countryside on May 12.[116] A Ministry of Interior (MoI) source told Syrian media that security forces arrested Major General Fayez Hussein al Ibrahim and brigadier generals Khaled Mohammad al Ali and Abdul Jabbar Halabiya.[117] Ibrahim previously served as the commander of the al Dumayr military airport in Rif Dimashq Province.[118]

Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al Shaibani met with the Turkish and Jordanian foreign ministers in Ankara, Turkey, on May 12 to discuss joint security and economic concerns.[119] Shaibani stated during a joint press conference that Syria is committed to strengthening military and security cooperation with Turkey and Jordan to confront cross-border threats, monitor armed groups, and prevent the "infiltration of extremists." [120] The three officials also discussed the return of Syrian refugees to Syria.[121] Shaibani announced that Syria will open an embassy in Ankara and a consulate in Gaziantep, Turkey.[122]

Iraq

An Iraqi Kurdish parliamentarian told Iraqi media on May 12 that the Shia Coordination Framework offered Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani a second term if Sudani's Euphrates Movement does not compete in the upcoming November 2025 Iraqi parliamentary elections.[123] The Shia Coordination Framework is a loose coalition of Shia political parties, some of which Iran backs. The Shia Coordination Framework reportedly plans to run on at least three separate lists in the elections, with opposing lists currently led by Sudani, State of Law Coalition head Nouri al Maliki, and Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Asaib Ahl al Haq leader Qais al Khazali.[124] Iran reportedly urged unity among Shia Coordination Framework members ahead of the elections, likely to improve the likelihood that the Shia Coordination Framework will maintain control of the Iraqi parliament.[125] Iranian-backed Iraqi parties lost a significant number of seats in the 2021 parliamentary elections, due to inter-party competition that advantaged more unified opposition parties.[126] The Shia Coordination Framework may seek to prevent the Euphrates Movement from participating in the upcoming elections in order to reduce divisions within the Shia Coordination Framework. Some Shia Coordination Framework members, such as Maliki, have also sought to reduce Sudani's political influence and oppose the participation of his party in the elections.[127]

Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al Shaibani will reportedly attend the Arab Summit in Baghdad on May 17 instead of Syrian President Ahmed al Shara.[128] Iraqi sources told Emirati media on May 12 that Shara decided not to attend the summit because some Iraqi political parties and coalitions oppose his participation. Iranian-backed Iraqi politicians and militias have repeatedly condemned Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani's invitation for Shara to attend the summit due to Shara's al Qaeda in Iraq past.[129]

Arabian Peninsula

Axis of Resistance objectives:

- Harden the Houthi regime against internal dissent in Houthi-controlled areas
- Destroy the anti-Houthi opposition in order to control all of Yemen
- Erode Israeli will to continue the war in the Gaza Strip

See the topline section.

The Palestinian Territories and Lebanon

See the topline section.

CTP-ISW will not be covering the new Israeli operation in the Gaza Strip. We have reprioritized our Middle East coverage to focus on Iran's nuclear program, Iranian domestic security, and Iranian efforts to rebuild its networks into the Levant, including the Palestinian Territories. Given that Israel and its partners have destroyed Hamas' military organization and severed the group's ability to resupply itself, we are now focused on how Iran seeks to rebuild its lines of communication with Hezbollah and Hamas through Syria.

The Iran Update provides insights into Iranian and Iranian-sponsored activities abroad that undermine regional stability and threaten US forces and interests. It also covers events and trends that affect the stability and decision-making of the Iranian regime. The Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute and the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) provides these updates regularly based on regional events.

CTP-ISW defines the “Axis of Resistance” as the unconventional alliance that Iran has cultivated in the Middle East since the Islamic Republic came to power in 1979. This transnational coalition is comprised of state, semi-state, and non-state actors that cooperate to secure their collective interests. Tehran considers itself to be both part of the alliance and its leader. Iran furnishes these groups with varying levels of financial, military, and political support in exchange for some degree of influence or control over their actions. Some are traditional proxies that are highly responsive to Iranian direction, while others are partners over which Iran exerts more limited influence. Members of the Axis of Resistance are united by their grand strategic objectives, which include eroding and eventually expelling American influence from the Middle East, destroying the Israeli state, or both. Pursuing these objectives and supporting the Axis of Resistance to those ends have become cornerstones of Iranian regional strategy.

POWERED BY:



BABELSTREET

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