

Iran Update



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Information Cutoff: May 26, 2025, 2:00 pm ET

CTP-ISW is publishing an abbreviated Iran Update on May 26, 2025, due to the Memorial Day holiday. We will provide resume our normal coverage on May 27, 2025.

Truck drivers across Iran have launched a nationwide strike over rising insurance and maintenance costs and worsening economic conditions.^[1] The truck drivers are protesting the government's plan to cut the amount of subsidized diesel allocated to truckers.^[2] Strikers also cited unaffordable insurance premiums, stagnant freight rates, and deteriorating road infrastructure.^[3] The government-subsidized insurance premium for truck drivers increased by approximately 45 percent earlier this year.^[4] The strike began in Bandar Abbas, Hormozgan Province, which is Iran's primary shipping hub, on May 18 and has since spread to other major Iranian cities.^[5] Economic-related protests and strikes have the potential to escalate into anti-regime protests similar to how demonstrations against increasing gas prices morphed into anti-regime protests in 2017 and 2018.^[6]

The ongoing strikes will likely worsen Iranian freight transport issues, especially after a recent explosion at a major port in Bandar Abbas. The Shahid Rajaei port in Bandar Abbas, which handles 85 percent of Iran's container traffic and a significant share of oil exports, suffered a major explosion on April 26 that has disrupted container traffic and cost Iran an estimated 25 million US dollars per day.^[7] The ongoing strike has reportedly strained domestic freight transport, particularly agricultural distribution during the harvest season.^[8] Iranian officials rejected claims that fruit and vegetable prices increased by 50 percent and stated that only a few staples saw "temporary" increases due to recent transport issues.^[9] An Iranian judiciary official reported on May 26 that Fars Province security forces arrested and prosecuted individuals who blocked the movement of freight trucks on roads.^[10] Iranian Law Enforcement Command (LEC) forces separately clashed with strikers in Sanandaj, Kurdistan Province, on May 25 with pepper spray.^[11]

Key Takeaways:

- **Internal Unrest in Iran:** Truck drivers across Iran have launched a nationwide strike over rising insurance and maintenance costs and worsening economic conditions. The ongoing strikes will likely worsen Iranian freight transport issues, especially after a recent explosion at a major port in Bandar Abbas.

Iranian Decision-Making, Internal Dynamics, and Foreign Policy

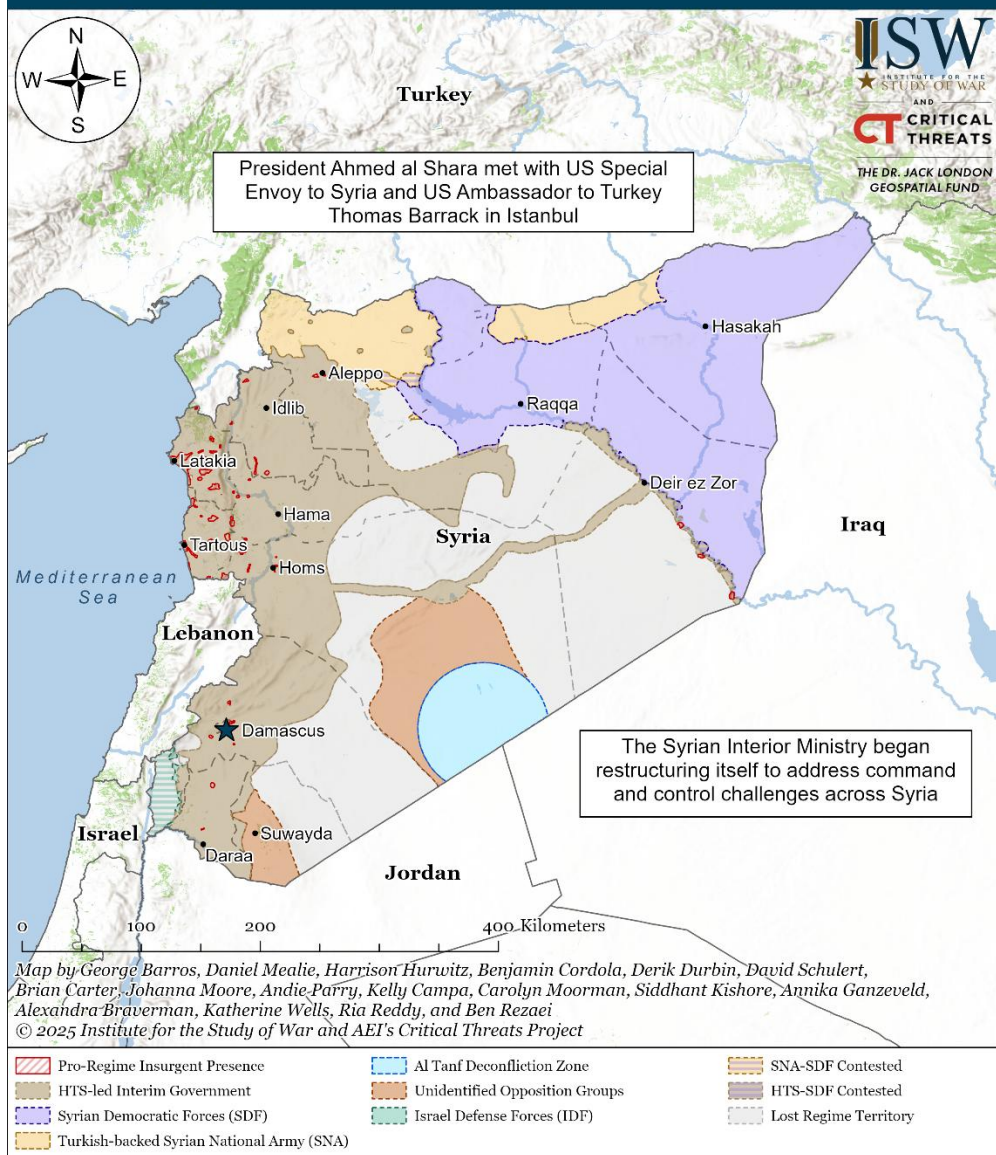
The Iranian rial appreciated from 828,500 rial to one US dollar on May 23 to 821,500 rial to one US dollar on May 26.^[12]

Syria

The Syrian transitional government's Interior Ministry announced a series of organizational changes on May 25 to improve effective command over security issues across Syria.^[13] The Interior Ministry will merge police and General Security Services (GSS) under the Provincial Interior Security Command.^[14] Unspecified sources told Syria24 on DTE that the Interior Ministry planned to adopt a regional command structure to improve the Interior Ministry's command and control throughout the country.^[15] The Interior Ministry has not yet announced a regional command structure, but the Provincial Interior Security Command could fill a similar role to the rumored regional command structure. Provincial-level commanders will report directly to the national-level head of the Provincial Interior Security Command.^[16] Provincial-level commands will oversee policing and intelligence operations within their respective provinces.^[17] The Interior Ministry appointed commanders of provincial security on May 25 to 11 of the 13 Syrian provinces.^[18] The Interior Ministry and Defense Ministry will coordinate to establish a Border Security Guard and Road Security Department.^[19] CTP-ISW will provide further analysis on the new provincial commanders over the coming days.

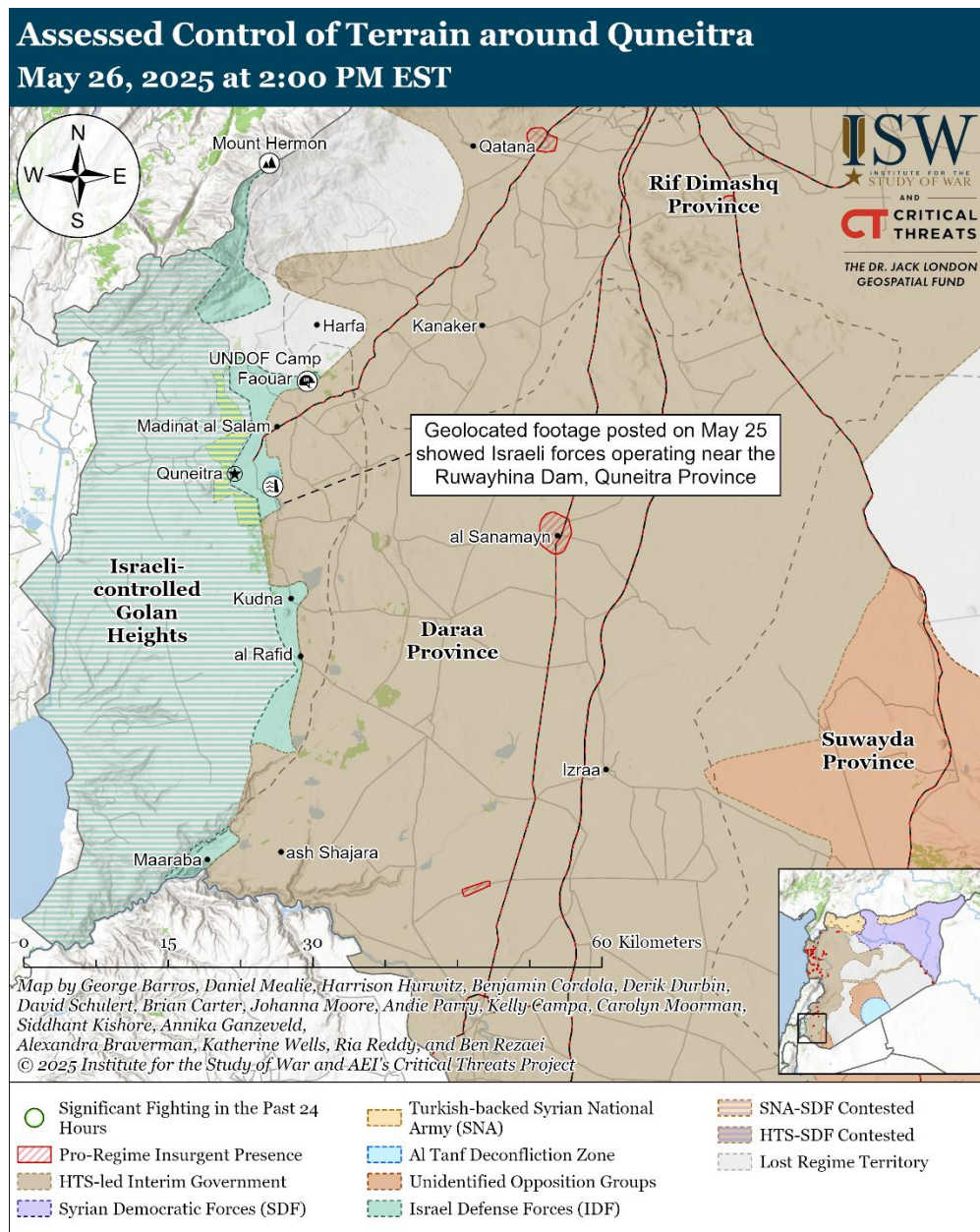
Assessed Control of Terrain in Syria

May 26, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



Syrian Transitional President Ahmed al Shara met with US Special Envoy to Syria and US Ambassador to Turkey Thomas Barrack in Istanbul on May 26.^[20] Shara probably discussed a variety of issues with Barrack, including sanctions relief, counterterrorism efforts, and the detention centers and IDP camps holding ISIS fighters and supporters in northeastern Syria. The US State Department previously issued a six-month waiver for the 2019 Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act, and the Treasury Department lifted sanctions that banned US citizens and companies from conducting financial transactions with Syrian entities on May 23.^[21] President Shara welcomed the State and Treasury Departments' decisions to provide sanctions relief to Syria.^[22] Barrack praised Shara for taking steps to meet US demands for sanctions relief, which include the removal of foreign terrorist fighters, counter-Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) measures, diplomatic engagement with

Israel, and maintaining ISIS prison camps and detention centers in northeast Syria.[23] The Syrian transitional government has taken steps to expel Palestinian and Iranian-backed armed groups in Syria, some of which are US-designated foreign terrorist organizations, but the government has continued to integrate foreign fighters into the Ministry of Defense (MoD).[24] The United States is also currently negotiating with the Syrian government to transfer control of detention facilities and camps holding ISIS fighters and supporters to the government.[25] Shara and Barrack committed to further dialogue between the US and Syria in order to develop private sector investment in Syria to rebuild the nation's economy.[26]



Geolocated footage posted on May 25 showed Israeli forces operating near the Ruwayhina Dam, Quneitra Province.[27]

Iraq

Nothing significant to report today.

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

The Houthis conducted a ballistic missile attack on Ben Gurion Airport in central Israel on May 25 as part of the Houthi campaign to enforce an economic blockade on Israel.[28]

The IDF intercepted the missile.[29] Some international airlines have temporarily suspended flights to Israel through July 2025 due to concerns about Houthi attacks on Ben Gurion Airport.[30]

The Palestinian Territories and Lebanon

Nothing significant to report.

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.

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BABEL STREET

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