

Iran Update



Avery Borens, Katherine Wells, Nidal Morrison, Ria Reddy, Ben Schmida, Carolyn Moorman, and Brian Carter

Information Cutoff: 2:00 PM ET

Some senior Lebanese officials are attempting to propose a Hezbollah disarmament plan that would seek to “buy time” for Lebanon, thereby increasing the risk that Hezbollah could reconstitute itself in the interim and make it more difficult to disarm Hezbollah. Lebanese ministers and high-level officials have reportedly proposed various plans to disarm Hezbollah but remain split on a decision. Two unspecified Lebanese sources told Reuters on August 5 that Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, President Joseph Aoun, and Prime Minister Nawaf Salam have been working to agree on a cabinet decision that would appease the United States and “buy Lebanon more time.”[1] It is unclear what length of time this decision seeks. Berri’s proposed wording would commit Lebanon to forming a national defense strategy and maintaining a ceasefire with Israel, but would avoid an explicit pledge to disarm Hezbollah across Lebanon.[2]

Hezbollah would likely agree to Berri’s proposal because Hezbollah Secretary General Naim Qassem has repeatedly called for the Lebanese government and Hezbollah to coordinate on a national defense strategy.[3] Berri’s proposal comes amid Lebanese media reporting that Aoun and Berri both aim to “prevent any domestic political clash that would torpedo” future cabinet sessions.[4] Lebanese officials have also raised concerns that a decision explicitly calling for Hezbollah to disarm could spark communal tensions in Lebanon.[5]

Some Lebanese ministers appear to have rejected Berri’s proposal, however. Anti-Hezbollah Lebanese Forces Party-affiliated Minister Kamal Shehadi told Reuters that other Lebanese ministers plan to propose a formulation that commits Lebanon to a deadline to disarm Hezbollah.[6]

Hezbollah would benefit significantly from Berri’s proposal as it would give the group time to reconstitute and reestablish itself domestically. Hezbollah Secretary General Naim Qassem emphasized on August 5 that Hezbollah would not agree to any timetable to hand over its weapons, which is likely an attempt to delay talks further and secure more time for reconstitution.[7] The lack of a disarmament deadline would hinder the Lebanese government’s ability to disarm Hezbollah because it would give the group time to entrench itself domestically and increase the risk of a military confrontation that the government is unlikely to accept. Israeli operations remain focused on efforts to maintain Hezbollah’s degradation, however.

Hezbollah Secretary General Naim Qassem threatened Israel directly for the first time in months during his televised speech on August 5.[8] Qassem threatened to launch missiles targeting Israel if Israel engages in a “large-scale aggression” against Lebanon.”[9] It is unlikely that

Hezbollah possesses the capabilities to launch any large-scale attacks against Israel, given that it was severely degraded during the Israel-Lebanon conflict in late 2024.[10]

Qassem acknowledged that Hezbollah suffered a 45% casualty rate during the Israeli campaign in Lebanon, which almost certainly rendered Hezbollah combat ineffective. Hezbollah suffered 12.5% killed in action from its total force during the war. Qassem noted that Israel killed 5,000 Hezbollah fighters and wounded 13,000 others, which marks the first time that Hezbollah has provided an official death toll.[11] Hezbollah had 40,000 total fighters before the war, according to US intelligence, which means that 32.5% of its total force was wounded and 12.5% of its total force was killed.[12] Qassem said that Hezbollah still has fighters who are ready to make “the harshest sacrifices” if needed.[13] The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) has killed nearly all of the top Hezbollah commanders, degraded the Radwan Force, destroyed kilometers of offensive tunnels, and demonstrated the Israeli ability to rapidly inflict massive casualties upon Hezbollah at relatively little cost.[14]

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian appointed Supreme Leader Adviser Ali Larijani as Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) secretary.[15] **Larijani's appointment comes as moderate and pragmatic hardline elements in the Iranian regime have sought to play a more influential role in Iran's security policy following the Israel-Iran War.** Larijani is replacing Ali Akbar Ahmadian, who had served as SNSC secretary since May 2023.[16] Ahmadian will reportedly assume a new, unspecified deputy position within the government.[17] Some Iranian media outlets and social media users have speculated in recent weeks that the regime would soon appoint Larijani as SNSC secretary and have praised Larijani as an effective, trusted, and moderate leader.[18] These characterizations of Larijani as a “moderate” official are consistent with reports that Larijani tried to contact Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei during the Israel-Iran War to advocate for a ceasefire.[19] Larijani previously served as SNSC secretary from 2005 to 2007 before he resigned due to disagreements with hardliner former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.[20] Larijani was the speaker of the parliament from 2008 and 2020 and oversaw the passage of the 2015 nuclear deal, also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).[21] Larijani repeatedly expressed his support for the deal and defended it against hardliners in parliament.[22] Media affiliated with former SNSC Secretary Ali Shamkhani stated on August 5 that Larijani’s appointment will impact Iran’s engagement with the West.[23]

Larijani has played an important role in developing Iran's relations with Russia, China, and the Axis of Resistance in addition to engaging in diplomacy with the West. Western media reported in January 2025 that Larijani had made secret trips to Russia to gain Russian assistance on Iran’s nuclear program.[24] Larijani also discussed the Iranian nuclear program with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow on July 20.[25] Larijani has also held a long-standing role overseeing the Iranian strategic partnership with China, including the 25-year cooperation agreement signed in 2021.[26] Larijani met with senior Lebanese officials in Beirut following the Israel-Hezbollah conflict to reinforce Iran’s regional stance.[27] Some Iranian media have characterized Larijani as an effective communicator and diplomat.[28]

Larijani's appointment comes amid a broader effort to restructure and reshape Iran's decision-making apparatus, likely in order to prepare for potential future conflicts.

This restructuring effort appears to be led by moderate and pragmatic hardline elements within the regime. The SNSC established a "Defense Council" on August 3 to streamline decision-making during wartime.[29] An outlet affiliated with pragmatic hardliner Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf suggested that moderate Iranian President Pezeshkian will appoint Ghalibaf as the Defense Council secretary.[30] A political analyst close to the regime similarly suggested that Ghalibaf had a significant role in establishing the Defense Council.[31] CTP-ISW previously assessed that the establishment of this body, which will operate under the SNSC, likely reflects Iranian leaders' recognition of systemic organizational and operational failures during the Israel-Iran War.[32] Other Iranian media outlets have recently called on the Iranian regime to alter its internal and external strategy following the war.[33] Media affiliated with former SNSC Secretary Ali Shamkhani published an op-ed on July 29 that urged Iran to "rearrange the country's decision-making system" to adapt to evolving threats.[34]

Iran has sought Russian support for its nuclear weapons program.[35] The *Financial Times* reported on August 4 that four Iranian nuclear scientists and an Iranian counterintelligence officer traveled to Moscow in August 2024 to visit Russian research institutes specializing in dual-use technologies that can be used in nuclear weapons development.[36] These nuclear scientists were affiliated with the Iranian Defense and Armed Forces Logistics Ministry (MODAFL)'s Organization of Defensive Innovation and Research (SPND), which played a leading role in the Iranian nuclear weapons research program before 2003.[37] MODAFL reportedly requested one of the scientists to use his technology consulting firm, likely as a guise, to lead an Iranian delegation to Moscow.[38] One of the other scientists runs a US-sanctioned company that procures dual-use technology for nuclear weapons development for SPND.[39] The other two scientists specialize in radiation testing and neutron generators that trigger nuclear explosions.[40]

The delegation visited two research facilities run by a Russian scientist with nuclear weapons testing expertise, specifically in vacuum technology for implosion mechanisms.[41] Such visits would reportedly require Russian intelligence approval.[42] The United States sanctioned an SPND-affiliated company, Ideal Vacuum, in May for trying to "procure from foreign suppliers and indigenously fabricate equipment that could be applicable in nuclear weapons research and development." [43] One of the nuclear scientists tried to purchase three nuclear isotopes, including tritium, which increases the yield of nuclear warheads, from a Russian nuclear isotope supplier in May 2024.[44] The *Financial Times* was unable to confirm if the scientist completed the sale of these isotopes. Iran has historically pursued nuclear cooperation with Russia through various diplomatic channels, likely including the Russo-Iranian Strategic Comprehensive Agreement signed in January.[45] Newly-appointed SNSC Secretary and Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's senior advisor Ali Larijani attempted to muster up support for the Iranian nuclear program in several covert meetings with Russian officials in 2025.[46]

Recent Islamic State (IS) propaganda has attempted to exploit recent fighting between Druze and Sunni Bedouin fighters to recruit new fighters from hardline elements of Shara's coalition. The effort may also seek to recruit local Sunni Bedouin in Suwayda Province. IS released an editorial on July 31 that criticized the Syrian government and Shara's actions during the intercommunal violence in Suwayda Province in mid to late July.[47] IS accused Shara of dragging Sunni Bedouin fighters into "his political game and then leaving them alone" to face "siege, betrayal,

and displacement” during the Suwayda violence.[48] IS said that Shara “suddenly played the role of the deliverer of the Druze.”[49] IS’s hardline ideology maintains that the Druze are apostates who should be killed.[50] IS similarly criticized Syrian government forces for assisting the United States in a raid targeting an ISIS cell in al Bab, Aleppo Province, on July 25.[51] IS called on “confused jihadists” who do not believe that Shara’s cooperation with the United States is “clear apostasy and support for the ‘Zio-Crusader’.”[52] These arguments very likely seek to generate recruits among the hardline Salafi-jihadists in Shara’s orbit who similarly believe that the Druze are apostates.

IS likely aims to exploit hardliners’ anger over these recent events and stoke further disillusionment among IS sympathizers. A BBC Salafi-jihadi analyst reported on August 4 that Islamist hardliners are dissatisfied with Shara’s failure to take a strong stand against the Druze and support Sunni Bedouin tribes in Suwayda.[53] IS has frequently referenced ISIS’s 2018 violence against the Druze in Suwayda to appeal to hardliners and portray itself as the only force willing to act decisively against the Druze.[54] Several ISIS-linked social media accounts also claimed that ISIS supporters were active in Suwayda Province and participated in the conflict “discreetly and independently” alongside Sunni Bedouin tribes.[55] There has been no definitive proof that ISIS took part in attacks on the Druze in any organized manner, which suggests that these posts are likely an attempt to create the illusion that ISIS fighters support the Bedouin tribes and that Shara does not. The BBC analyst also reported that IS is exploiting Islamist and jihadist anger over the Syrian government forces cooperating with the US on the al Bab raid.[56] Prominent hardline clerics began engaging in theological debates regarding whether Shara and his forces had committed an act of disbelief or apostasy by “cooperating” with the “enemies of Islam.”[57] IS has reportedly recently shown renewed optimism about the group’s appeal and recruitment potential in Syria.[58]

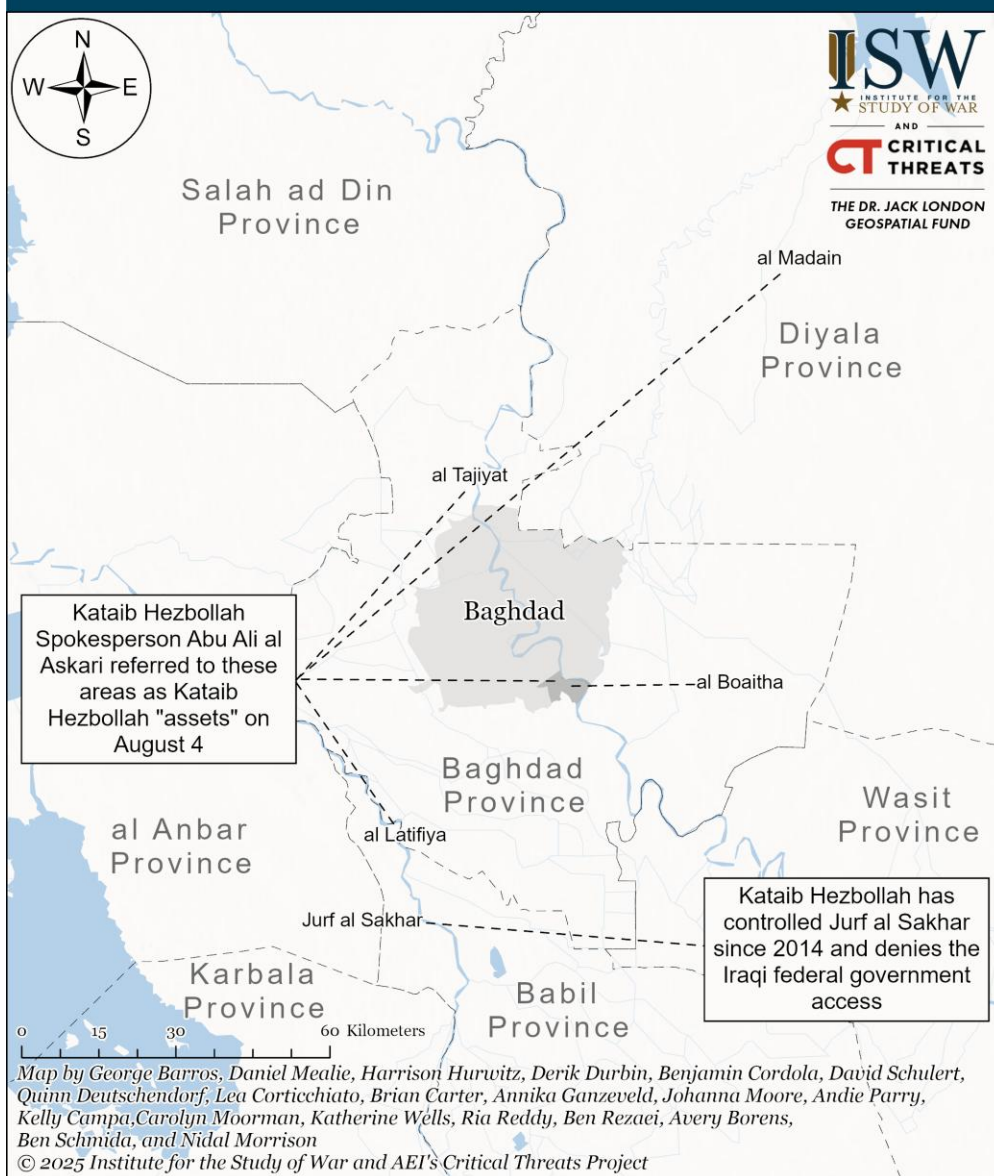
The IS propaganda effort will also likely contribute to increased distrust in southwestern Syria, especially if ISIS conducts any attacks targeting the Druze. The ISIS claims that it participated in the recent fighting will give more credence to Druze militia claims that the Sunni Bedouin sought to exterminate Druze communities, regardless of whether that was the actual intent.[59] ISIS has long sought to wipe out groups it deems apostates, and the IS propaganda will enable some Druze leaders to mobilize their communities with greater ease.[60] Increased Druze mobilization could lead to further fighting and further Sunni Bedouin communal mobilization, especially if ISIS does become more involved. A course of action that results in more Sunni Bedouin and Druze mobilization and fighting would create significant recruitment opportunities for ISIS. IS and its affiliates, including ISIS, have long sought to create intercommunal strife in target areas in order to exploit the ensuing chaos.[61]

Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Hezbollah offered on August 4 to cede control of unspecified areas within the Baghdad Belts to the Iranian-backed Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF).[62] The Baghdad Belts are residential, industrial, and agricultural areas that encircle Baghdad.[63] Kataib Hezbollah Spokesperson Abu Ali al Askari did not explicitly identify the areas that Kataib Hezbollah was willing to cede but referred to al Latifiya, al Buaitha, al Madain, and al Tajiya as areas with a Kataib Hezbollah presence.[64] It is similarly unclear which PMF unit Askari is offering control of these areas to. The specific PMF units that the Iraqi government gave control of the areas to would matter because Kataib Hezbollah commands the 45th and 46th PMF brigades. A

hypothetical decision that gave control of these areas to these PMF brigades would represent no change, for example.[65]

Askari said that Kataib Hezbollah spreads "security, justice, and peaceful coexistence among sects" in areas under its control, which is false.[66] Kataib Hezbollah and other militias committed acts of sectarian cleansing in Jurf al Sakhr, south of Baghdad, during the anti-ISIS fight. Kataib Hezbollah has used areas under its control for assassinations, rocket attacks, weapons storage, and extortion of local businesses.[67] Askari's statement comes after several Kataib Hezbollah members engaged Iraqi Federal Police officers in Dora, Baghdad, on July 27 and killed one civilian and a Federal Police officer.[68] Kataib Hezbollah and other Iranian-backed Iraqi actors have tried to distance themselves from this incident, which occurred amid policy discussions over restricting arms to the Iraqi state and dissolving the PMF. Askari's statement probably aims to present Kataib Hezbollah as a responsible actor that is a net positive in order to undermine efforts to disarm the militias.

Areas with Significant Kataib Hezbollah (KH) Presence in Iraq, According to KH Spokesman Abu Ali al Askari

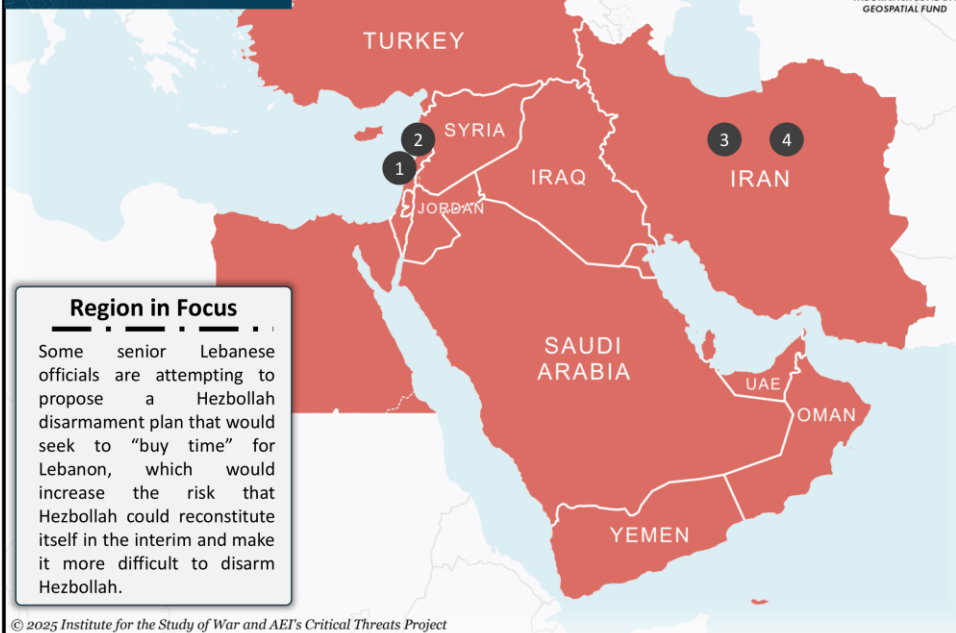


Askari also called Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al Sudani an ineffective leader on August 4.[69] He described Sudani as a "manager" instead of a leader. He called on the Shia Coordination Framework to assume their "historical responsibilities," likely in reference to the removal of US forces from Iraq and other policy concerns that Askari raised in his statement.[70] The Shia Coordination Framework is a loose coalition of Shia political parties, some of which Iran backs. Kataib Hezbollah's Haqq Movement is a member of the Shia Coordination Framework. Askari's comments regarding Sudani could reflect increasing disillusionment among elements of the Shia Coordination Framework with Sudani ahead of the November 2025 Iraqi parliamentary elections.

Iran Update

August 5, 2025

ISW
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- 1 **LEBANON.** Some senior Lebanese officials are attempting to propose a Hezbollah disarmament plan that would seek to “buy time” for Lebanon, which would increase the risk that Hezbollah could reconstitute itself in the interim and make it more difficult to disarm Hezbollah.
- 2 **LEBANON.** Hezbollah Secretary General Naim Qassem threatened Israel directly for the first time in months during his televised speech on August 5. Qassem acknowledged that Hezbollah suffered a 45% casualty rate during the Israeli campaign in Lebanon, which almost certainly rendered Hezbollah combat ineffective.
- 3 **IRAN.** Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian appointed Supreme Leader Adviser Ali Larijani to Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) secretary. Larijani's appointment comes as moderate and pragmatic hardline elements in the Iranian regime have sought to play a more influential role in Iran's security policy following the Israel-Iran War.
- 4 **IRAN.** Iran has sought Russian support for its nuclear weapons program. The *Financial Times* reported on August 4 that four Iranian nuclear scientists and an Iranian counterintelligence officer traveled to Moscow in August 2024 to visit Russian research institutes specializing technologies that can be used in nuclear weapons development.

Key Takeaways

- **Lebanese Hezbollah Disarmament:** Some senior Lebanese officials are attempting to propose a Hezbollah disarmament plan that would seek to “buy time” for Lebanon, which would increase the risk that Hezbollah could reconstitute itself in the interim and make it more difficult to disarm Hezbollah.
- **Israel-Hezbollah:** Hezbollah Secretary General Naim Qassem threatened Israel directly for the first time in months during his televised speech on August 5. Qassem acknowledged that Hezbollah suffered a 45% casualty rate during the Israeli campaign in Lebanon, which almost

certainly rendered Hezbollah combat ineffective. Hezbollah suffered 12.5% killed in action from its total force during the war.

- **Iranian Defense Apparatus:** Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian appointed Supreme Leader Adviser Ali Larijani to Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) secretary. Larijani's appointment comes as moderate and pragmatic hardline elements in the Iranian regime have sought to play a more influential role in Iran's security policy following the Israel-Iran War.
- **Iranian Nuclear Program:** Iran has sought Russian support for its nuclear weapons program. The *Financial Times* reported on August 4 that four Iranian nuclear scientists and an Iranian counterintelligence officer traveled to Moscow in August 2024 to visit Russian research institutes specializing in dual-use technologies that can be used in nuclear weapons development.
- **Iraq:** Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Hezbollah offered on August 4 to cede control of unspecified areas within the Baghdad Belts to the Iranian-backed Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF). It is unclear which PMF unit Kataib Hezbollah is offering control of these areas to. Kataib Hezbollah commands the 45th and 46th PMF brigades. Kataib Hezbollah also called Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al Sudani an ineffective leader, which could reflect increasing disillusionment among elements of the Shia Coordination Framework with Sudani ahead of the November 2025 Iraqi parliamentary elections.
- **ISIS in Syria:** Recent Islamic State (IS) propaganda has attempted to exploit recent fighting between Druze and Sunni Bedouin fighters to recruit new fighters from hardline elements of Shara's coalition. IS released an editorial on July 31 that criticized the Syrian government and Shara's actions during the intercommunal violence in Suwayda Province in mid to late July. IS likely aims to exploit hardliners' anger over these recent events and stoke further disillusionment among sympathizers.

Iran

Chinese imports of Iranian crude oil decreased by 0.4 million barrels per day (bpd) from June to July, according to oil market intelligence firm Kpler.[71] Iranian crude oil exports to Chinese teapot refineries decreased from 1.7 million bpd to 1.3 million bpd in July.[72] CTP-ISW previously reported that Iran increased crude oil exports to China from 1.7 million bpd in June to 1.8 million bpd in the first half of July.[73] This increase probably occurred because Iran loaded a larger-than-normal amount of oil into floating storage vessels prior to the Israel-Iran War in early June to avoid the destruction of oil in onshore facilities, according to Vortexa.[74] A Kpler analyst assessed that the Iranian crude oil export rate to China likely fell in the second half of July because demand from Chinese teapot refineries fell as they reached their oil quota in June with the surplus from the July supply.[75]

Iraq

See topline section.

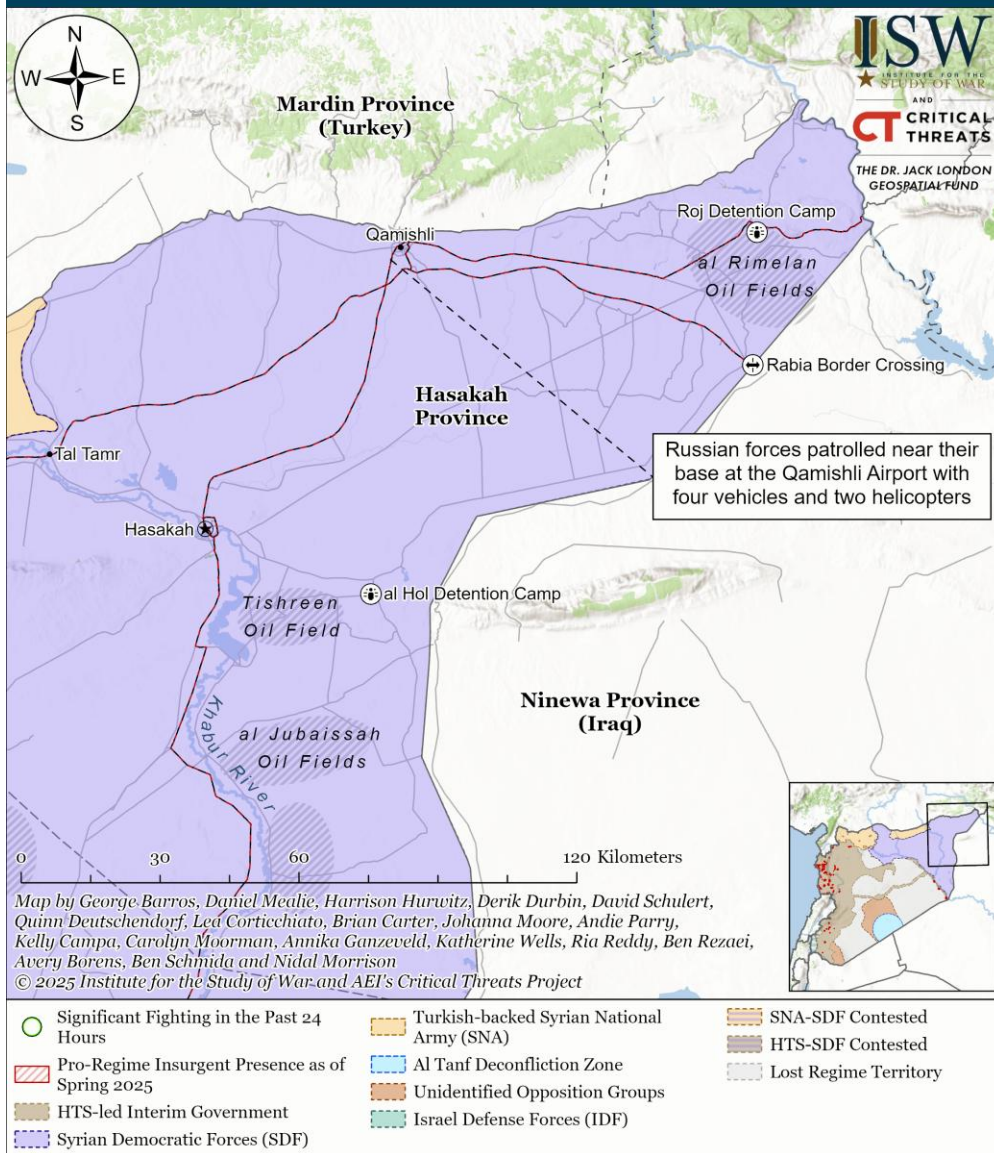
Syria

Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) commander Mazloum Abdi told Kurdish media on August 5 that the SDF seeks to conduct combined counter-ISIS operations with the United States and the Syrian transitional government.[76] Abdi stated that the US-led International Coalition's withdrawal from some positions in northeast Syria has not impacted the SDF's counter-ISIS operations or mission.[77] Abdi emphasized that the Syrian transitional government is obligated to join the counter-ISIS mission, given the Syrian government's relationship with the United States.[78] Syrian transitional government forces recently assisted a US ground raid targeting an ISIS cell in al Bab, Aleppo Province, on July 25.[79] The United States has previously shared intelligence with the Syrian transitional government--and before the fall of Assad, shared intelligence with Ahmed al Shara's Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS) organization--to target ISIS and Hurras al Din, a Salafi-jihadi militant group allied to al Qaeda that threatened HTS.[80] Abdi stated that the SDF has also begun sharing counter-ISIS tactics and experience with the transitional government as part of this effort.[81] The SDF, Syrian transitional government, France, and the United States are scheduled to meet in Paris soon to negotiate the integration of the SDF into the Syrian Ministry of Defense (MoD).[82]

Russian forces patrolled near their base at the Qamishli Airport in Hasakah Province with four vehicles and two helicopters on August 4 for the first time since the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024.[83] The SDF currently controls the town of Qamishli.[84] Russian forces reportedly prevented the SDF from participating in the patrol.[85] Russian forces reestablished their presence at the Qamishli Airport in March when they relocated troops and equipment from Hmeimim Airbase via cargo flights.[86] Russian transfers of troops and equipment to Qamishli intensified between April and June.[87] Russia upgraded the base's infrastructure, security, and defense capabilities in June.[88] Russian activity in Qamishli follows recent meetings between senior Syrian and Russian officials in Moscow on July 31 to negotiate Russian basing in Syria.[89]

Assessed Control of Terrain around Hasakah

August 5, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



Arabian Peninsula

The Houthis launched a ballistic missile targeting Ben Gurion Airport on August 4.[90]

The Israeli Air Force intercepted a Houthi missile before it crossed into Israeli territory on August 4.[91] 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.[92]

Palestinian Territories and Lebanon

See topline section.



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