

# Iran Update



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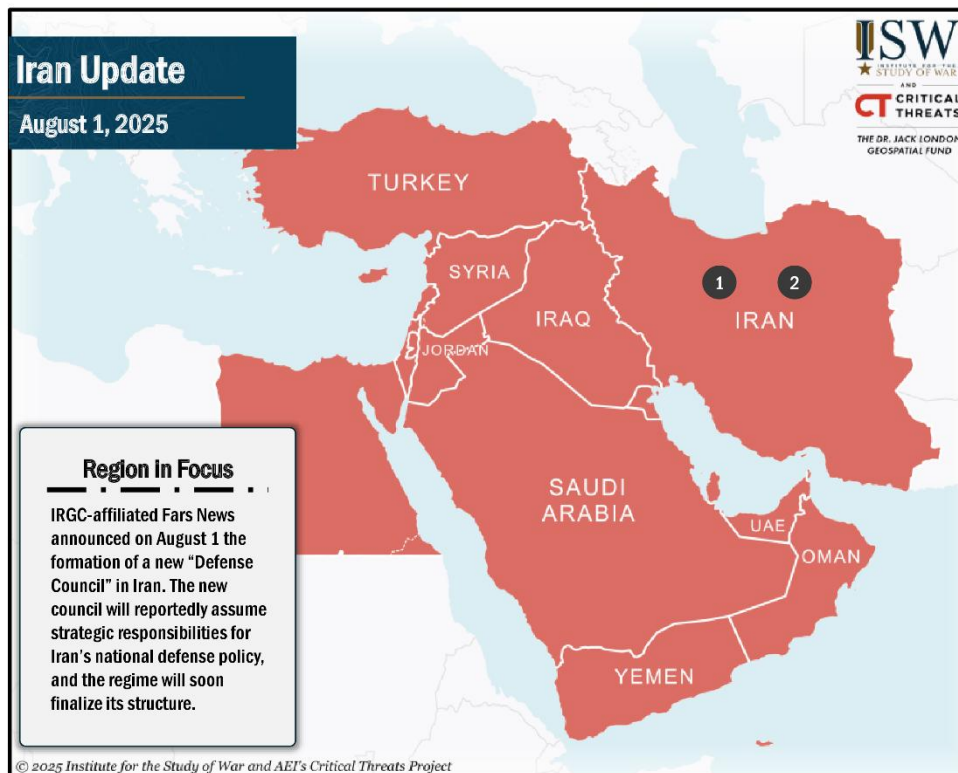
**Information Cutoff: 2:00 PM ET**

**Former Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif proposed the creation of a regional nuclear body called the Middle East Network for Atomic Research and Advancement (Menara) in an op-ed in the Guardian on July 31.[1] Iran would almost certainly demand to maintain domestic enrichment capabilities under such a proposal.[2]** Zarif stated that Menara would promote “peaceful nuclear cooperation” among member states.[3] Zarif added that countries would have to reject nuclear weapons and agree to verification mechanisms to be admitted to the regional body.[4] Zarif stated that Menara member states would “benefit from peaceful nuclear technology” and conduct “joint ventures,” including uranium enrichment, waste management, nuclear fusion, and medicine.[5] Zarif stated that a board of representatives from member states would monitor compliance and suggested that the International Atomic Energy Agency and the UN Security Council could support the regional body.[6]

Zarif suggested that Menara member states would share enrichment facilities.[7] The United States previously sought, before the Israel-Iran War, to establish a regional nuclear consortium outside of Iran that would provide Iran with uranium for civilian nuclear purposes but would not allow enrichment on Iranian soil.[8] Iranian officials stated that Iran was open to the consortium model, but only if the consortium's enrichment facilities were located in Iran.[9] Iran would similarly likely only support Menara if it allowed Iran to continue enriching uranium on Iranian soil. An Iranian expert close to the regime stated that Menara cannot succeed without support from global powers such as the United States.[10] The United States has repeatedly insisted that Iran must halt domestic uranium enrichment.[11] The expert also stated that Israel would likely refuse to join this new nuclear body, which he stated would turn the Menara plan into “unilateral disarmament for Iran and Arab states.”[12]

**Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC)-affiliated Fars News announced on August 1 the formation of a new “Defense Council” in Iran.** The new council will reportedly assume strategic responsibilities for Iran’s national defense policy, and the regime will soon finalize its structure.[13] Fars News stated that the Defense Council will be part of Iran’s “new” defense and security structure.[14] Fars News also announced that the regime will likely appoint Ali Larijani as the new Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) secretary in the coming days.[15] Some Iranian media outlets and social media users have speculated in recent weeks that Larijani may soon be appointed as SNSC secretary.[16] Fars News reported that current SNSC Secretary Ali Akbar Ahmadian would take responsibility for “several special and strategic files.”

This announcement follows a Nour News report from July 30 that there will likely be "imminent changes" in high-ranking Iranian security institutions after "necessary...structural reforms have been implemented." [17] Nour News has historically been affiliated with the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) broadly, but has recently increasingly aligned itself with former SNSC Secretary Ali Shamkhani. Iran previously established the "Supreme Defense Council" following the 1979 Islamic Revolution to oversee the Iranian armed forces and manage defense-related matters, including coordinating the armed forces and overseeing national security during the Iran-Iraq War. [18] This announcement also follows a July 29 Nour News op-ed that called on the regime to restructure its decision-making system and establish a "Strategic Command Center" with "cross-sectoral authority" to coordinate security, economic, and diplomatic responses to threats. [19]



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## **Key Takeaways**

- **Iranian Nuclear Program:** Former Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif proposed the creation of a regional nuclear body called the Middle East Network for Atomic Research and Advancement (Menara) in an op-ed in the Guardian on July 31. Iran would almost certainly demand to maintain domestic enrichment capabilities under such a proposal. The United States has repeatedly insisted that Iran must halt domestic uranium enrichment.
- **Iranian Defense Establishment:** Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC)-affiliated Fars News announced on August 1 the formation of a new “Defense Council” in Iran. The new council will reportedly assume strategic responsibilities for Iran’s national defense policy, and the regime will soon finalize its structure. Fars News also announced that the regime will likely appoint Ali Larijani as the new Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) secretary in the coming days.

## **Iran**

**A CBS News investigation published on July 31 found that 12 ship-to-ship oil transfers took place in the Riau Archipelago off the coast of Malaysia in a single day as part of Iran’s illicit oil trade with the People’s Republic of China (PRC).[20]** Iran and the PRC use ship-to-ship transfers to obfuscate the origin of Iranian oil. The investigation found that the vessels involved in ship-to-ship transfers used tarps and nets to cover their names and identification numbers. All the vessels also turned off their transponders. The publication of this investigation comes after the United States sanctioned dozens of vessels on July 30 for facilitating Iranian and Russian oil trade.[21] Over 92 percent of Iranian crude oil exports in June 2025 went to China.[22]

**The United States sanctioned five entities and one individual based in Iran, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and China on July 31 for procuring technology for the Iran Aircraft Manufacturing Industrial Company (HESA).[23]** HESA is a subsidiary of the Iranian Defense and Armed Forces Logistics Ministry and manufactures Ababil and Shahed-series drones.[24] Several of the sanctioned entities procured computer numerical control (CNC) machines for HESA. This equipment is used “to create precise and durable components for commercial and military aircraft,” according to the US Treasury Department.[25]

**An unspecified attacker stabbed Ali Reza Mohammadi, the prosecutor of Rafsanjan, Kerman Province, on July 31.[26]** Kerman Province Judiciary Chief Ebrahim Hamidi said that the attacker stabbed Mohammadi at his home and fled.[27] The Law Enforcement Command (LEC) is investigating the case and trying to identify the attacker’s motive.[28] This incident follows similar attacks targeting Iranian judiciary officials, including the killing of the head of the Shiraz Criminal Court in Fars Province in May 2025 and the killing of two Supreme Court judges in Tehran in January 2025.[29]

**Iran is continuing to face severe water shortages.** Director of the United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment, and Health Kaveh Madani told CNN on July 31 that Tehran Province could run out of water within weeks.[30] Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian warned on July 31 that dams in Tehran will become empty by September or October if Iranians do not reduce water consumption.[31] The CEO of the Tehran Provincial Water and Wastewater Company said on July 17

that citizens in Tehran must reduce water consumption by 20 percent to “overcome” the water crisis, and that there was a seven percent decrease in consumption so far.[32]



**The Iranian regime will likely not be able to meaningfully improve this water crisis if it does not address underlying issues, such as mismanagement and unsustainable development.** President Pezeshkian met with regime officials, including Energy Minister Abbas Aliabadi and Interior Minister Eskandar Momeni, on July 31 to discuss potential solutions for the water shortages.[33] The Iranian government shut down municipal offices in Tehran on July 23 and is considering further shutdowns to conserve water resources.[34] Pezeshkian stated on July 30 that closures are not enough to solve Iran’s water crisis and emphasized the importance of implementing sustainable development practices.[35] The head of the Iranian Environmental Protection Organization told state media on July 31 that the lack of sustainable water management practices caused the water crisis.”[36]

## Iraq

**Iranian-backed Badr Organization head Hadi al Ameri confirmed on July 31 that the Badr Organization will run independently in the November 2025 Iraqi parliamentary elections.**[37] The Badr Organization ran with other Iranian-backed Iraqi militias in the Fatah alliance in the 2018 and 2021 elections.[38] Ameri's announcement follows IRGC Quds Force Commander Brigadier General Esmail Ghaani's recent meetings with several Shia Coordination Framework leaders, including Ameri, to discuss coalition building ahead of the elections.[39] The Shia Coordination Framework is a loose coalition of Shia political parties, some of which Iran backs. Iran has encouraged Shia Coordination Framework leaders to unite ahead of the upcoming elections to improve the likelihood that Iranian-backed parties maintain control of the Iraqi parliament.[40] Iran has reportedly encouraged Iranian-backed Iraqi militias to run as a single party.[41] Iranian-backed Iraqi parties lost a significant number of seats in the 2021 elections due to inter-party competition that advantaged the more unified opposition.[42]

## **Syria**

**The Syrian transitional government's ability to hold its forces accountable for abuses committed during the recent intercommunal violence in Suwayda Province will likely impact its ability to rebuild trust with the Druze community.** The Syrian Ministry of Justice (MoJ) formed an inquiry committee on July 31 to investigate the recent intercommunal violence in Suwayda Province.[43] The committee will investigate the violence and refer individuals involved in abuses and atrocities to the judiciary.[44] The committee is comprised of judges, lawyers, and officers from the MoJ and will submit periodic reports and present the committee's findings to President Ahmed al Shara within three months.[45] The committee includes:

- Hatem al Naasan: Naasan is a judge and legal adviser at the Court of Cassation in al Rai, a Turkmen-majority city in northern Aleppo Province.[46] Naasan served as a judge in the Assad regime and was appointed as the Civil Affairs Directorate Assistant Director in September 2016.[47]
- Hassan al Hamwi: Judge Hamwi was appointed as the public prosecutor for Rif Dimashq Province in August 2023.[48] Hamwi was a vocal critic of Assad early in the civil war.[49]
- Maysoun al Tawil: Judge Tawil is a Suwaydawi Druze judge counselor from Shahba and the first female judge from Suwayda.[50] Tawil presided over the Assad regime courts in Suwayda, Damascus, and Rif Dimashq provinces during the civil war.[51]
- Jamal al Ashqar: Judge Ashqar was the president of the Syrian National Coalition Military Court during the civil war and a member of the opposition Free Syrian Lawyers Association.[52]
- Mohieddin Harmoush: Harmoush served as the Political Security Commander for Deir ez Zor and Hama provinces under Assad before he defected to the Syrian opposition in 2012.[53] Harmoush later became the interior minister for the Syrian interim government in exile in 2019.[54]
- Tariq al Kurdi: Kurdi is a lawyer and the former head of the opposition Syrian Negotiation Commission's Legal Office.[55]



- Ammar Ezz al Din: Al Din is a lawyer and member of the Homs Bar Association's Transitional Justice Committee.[56] Al Din served as the opposition Free Syrian Lawyers Association's Operations Director.[57]

Retaliatory kidnappings between local Druze and Bedouin factions began in Suwayda Province on July 13 after Bedouin militias beat and robbed a Suwaydawi Druze man.[58] The Syrian transitional government deployed Ministry of Defense and Interior (MoD and MoI) forces to Suwayda Province on July 14 to end the intercommunal violence, but they were ambushed by Druze militias.[59] MoD and MoI forces committed atrocities against Druze fighters and civilians after they regained control of parts of Suwayda Province on July 15.[60] Druze militias and Bedouin fighters committed atrocities against one another.[61] The United States mediated a three-phase ceasefire agreement between Syria and Israel on July 18.[62] The violence has forced thousands of Bedouin civilians to leave Suwayda Province out of fear of retaliation from Druze militias.[63] The Syrian transitional government vowed to hold MoD and MoI members involved in atrocities accountable on July 22.[64] It is unclear how the transitional government's committee will conduct its investigation, as Druze militias maintain control over most of Suwayda Province.

The committee investigating atrocities in Suwayda may seek to absolve the transitional government of responsibility for the recent violence, similarly to how a separate government committee distanced the government from the March 2025 coastal violence. The Syrian National Inquiry Commission investigated the March Alawite massacres and presented its findings to President Ahmed al Shara on July 13.[65] The commission determined that the massacres were not centrally organized and emphasized the role of Alawite insurgents in the atrocities.[66] The committee investigating atrocities in Suwayda may similarly downplay MoD and MoI atrocities in Suwayda by accusing Druze militias of initiating the violence. Civilians in Suwayda Province protested the transitional government's plan to establish a committee to investigate the violence on August 1 and demanded an international investigation instead.[67] The Syrian transitional government will have to investigate, prosecute, and punish perpetrators to achieve meaningful accountability.

**The Syrian Interior Ministry announced on July 31 that it will assign every General Security Service (GSS) officer a body camera and identification number to increase accountability for violations.[68]** The ministry is investigating GSS violations, such as the recent torture and death of a young Syrian man in Damascus.[69] These incidents have likely pushed the GSS to equip its officers with body cameras to mitigate these violations. The use of body cameras could help prevent GSS extortion and restore trust between security forces and civilians. Body cameras could also improve discipline among GSS forces. Some GSS forces ignored commanders' orders during the March 2025 coastal violence, which led to sectarian and revenge killings.[70] It is unclear how the Syrian Interior Ministry plans to fund this initiative at this time. The Syrian Interior and Defense ministries have struggled to pay soldiers' salaries across multiple provinces.[71]

**Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al Shaibani met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow on July 31 to strengthen bilateral cooperation and likely to continue negotiations over Russian basing rights in Syria.[72]** Shaibani stated that Putin aims to improve bilateral relations and "transform the historical [Russo-Syrian] relationship." [73] Putin expressed interest in supporting Syrian reconstruction efforts and enhancing Syria's

stability.[74] Russia has negotiated with the Syrian transitional government on Russian basing rights since January 2025.[75] CTP-ISW previously assessed that Russia may leverage economic cooperation and Russian reconstruction aid as part of its negotiations on Russian basing rights in Syria.

### **Arabian Peninsula**

**The Houthis are reportedly fortifying their coastal territory and conducting training exercises simulating attacks on international shipping in Houthi-controlled Hudaydah Governorate, according to local sources speaking to a regional news outlet on August 1.**[76] “Hundreds” of armed Houthi fighters have reportedly recently deployed to various areas in Hudaydah Governorate to reinforce unspecified military infrastructure and tighten security measures.[77] These areas include Houthi-controlled districts around Hudaydah City and the Houthis’ southwestern coastal frontlines. The United States and Israel heavily targeted these areas in their airstrike campaigns against Houthi leadership and military and port infrastructure from March to July 2025. [78]

Local sources reported that the Houthis have also recently conducted training exercises, including hijacking ships, on five islands west of Luhayyah City, northern Hudaydah Governorate.[79] The Houthis sank two oil tankers, the *Magic Seas* and *Eternity C*, and kidnapped the *Eternity C*’s crew in the Red Sea on July 6 and 7, respectively.[80] The Houthis have consistently threatened to attack vessels tied to Israel in the Red Sea as part of their campaign to pressure Israel to stop its war in the Gaza Strip.[81]

**The Houthis have reportedly continued to import oil and other commodities through Houthi-controlled ports that were damaged in recent Israeli airstrikes.**[82] The Houthis have reportedly attempted to fill in craters from US and Israeli strikes with containers and scrap metal to enable vessels to access these ports.[83] Commercially available maritime data confirmed that several cargo ships and oil tankers arrived at Houthi-controlled ports between July 17 and 31, including six cargo ships at Hudaydah Port, three cargo ships at Salif Port, and four oil tankers at Ras Issa Port.[84] The Houthis have also reportedly offloaded cargo from vessels onto small boats at night when vessels have been unable to dock at the ports.[85]

### **Palestinian Territories and Lebanon**

*Nothing significant to report.*

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