

# Iran Update



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

**Iran’s highest national security and foreign policy decision-making body, the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), established a Defense Council on August 3 to streamline decision-making during wartime.**[1] The establishment of this body, which will operate under the SNSC, likely reflects Iranian leaders’ recognition of systemic operational failures during the Israel-Iran War. Iranian media emphasized that this body will be responsible for taking “rapid, balanced, and coordinated” steps to confront threats to Iran.[2] Iranian media added that the SNSC formed the Defense Council in response to “fragmentation in decision-making” and a “lack of sufficient coordination between different institutions.”[3] The composition of the Defense Council is notably similar to the composition of the SNSC, but, unlike the SNSC, the Defense Council includes the Khatam ol Anbia Central Headquarters commander and excludes the Iranian foreign affairs and interior ministers.[4] The Khatam ol Anbia Central Headquarters is responsible for joint and wartime operations.[5] The inclusion of the Khatam ol Anbia Central Headquarters commander in the Defense Council creates a more direct link between this military institution and Iranian leaders. It is unlikely, however, that this council will enable the Iranian regime to respond more quickly and effectively to future threats so long as Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei does not empower the senior military commanders in this council to make and implement decisions without his approval.

**The formation of the Defense Council indicates that Iranian leaders are concerned about potential future conflicts and are trying to develop a more proactive and efficient decision-making process to respond to future conflicts.** The Defense Council that the SNSC established is notably similar to the “Strategic Command Center” that an Iranian outlet affiliated with former SNSC Secretary Ali Shamkhani proposed on July 29.[6] The outlet stated that the “Strategic Command Center” would have “cross-sectoral authority” to rapidly respond to evolving threats.[7] Iranian leaders have frequently warned about the potential for future conflicts since the end of the Israel-Iran War and likely seek to reform Iran’s decision-making structure in preparation for these potential conflicts. Iranian Artesh Commander Major General Amir Hatami warned on August 3, for example, that “[Iran] should not underestimate the enemy and consider its threats over.”[8]

**Moderate and pragmatic elements in the Iranian regime appear to be leading the restructuring of Iran’s decision-making apparatus.** Moderate President Masoud Pezeshkian, who chairs the SNSC, will head the Defense Council and appoint its secretary.[9] An outlet affiliated

with pragmatic hardliner Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf suggested that Pezeshkian will appoint Ghalibaf as the Defense Council secretary.[10] A political analyst close to the regime similarly suggested that Ghalibaf had a significant role in establishing the Defense Council.[11] The establishment of the Defense Council comes as Iranian media outlets have speculated that pragmatic hardliner former SNSC Secretary and Supreme Leader Adviser Ali Larijani could return to his former role as SNSC secretary.[12] Iranian media has framed Larijani's potential return to the SNSC as a shift to a more pragmatic approach in the Iranian regime. Some Iranian media outlets have speculated that Larijani could replace ultrahardliner Saeed Jalili as one of Khamenei's representatives to the SNSC.[13]

Ghalibaf's reported important role in the establishment of the Defense Council comes as the Iranian Parliament has also played a prominent role in influencing Iranian internal and external security policy following the Israel-Iran War. Parliament has supported and approved an anomalous amount of security-related legislation, including legislation that would further suppress internal dissent, since the end of the Israel-Iran War.[14]

## Composition of the Iranian SNSC and Defense Council

SNSC		Defense Council	
			
President Masoud Pezeshkian	Minister of Intelligence Esmail Khatib	President Masoud Pezeshkian	Minister of Intelligence Esmail Khatib
			
AFGS Chief Abdol Rahim Mousavi	Minister of Foreign Affairs Abbas Araghchi	AFGS Chief Abdol Rahim Mousavi	Khatam ol Anbia Central Headquarters Commander Ali Abdollahi Ali Abadi
			
IRGC Commander Mohammad Pak Pour	Minister of Interior Eskander Momeni	IRGC Commander Mohammad Pak Pour	Artesh Commander Amir Hatami
			
Speaker of the Parliament Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf	Supreme Leader Representative (SNSC Secretary) Ali Akbar Ahmadian	Speaker of the Parliament Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf	Supreme Leader Representative
			
Judiciary Chief Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejei	Supreme Leader Representative Saeed Jalili	Judiciary Chief Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejei	Supreme Leader Representative
			
Artesh Commander Amir Hatami			



**Unprecedented and growing discontent among Hezbollah’s Shia support base could weaken Hezbollah’s political leverage to resist disarmament.** Much of the Lebanese Shia community has fervently backed Hezbollah since the 1980s.[15] The *New York Times* reported on August 4 that the Lebanese Shia community is in “shock, despair,” and angry with Hezbollah, however.[16] An anonymous Hezbollah supporter told the *New York Times* that Hezbollah “promised us a victory but instead destroyed our villages, destroyed our homes.”[17] Hezbollah, which quickly rebuilt Lebanon and provided a social safety net for Lebanese civilians after the 2006 war, is struggling to reconstruct damaged infrastructure and reconstitute its forces following the Israel-Hezbollah conflict in late 2024.[18] Hezbollah has struggled to maintain its financial commitments to fighters following the conflict in late 2024, which has contributed to the Shia community’s growing

frustration.[19] Frustrated Hezbollah supporters have demanded answers from Hezbollah about when they will receive reconstruction funds to rebuild businesses and homes destroyed in the war.[20] Hezbollah has historically used financial benefits, including pensions for the families of deceased fighters and compensation to those who lost their homes or property, to retain its support base among Lebanese Shia.[21]

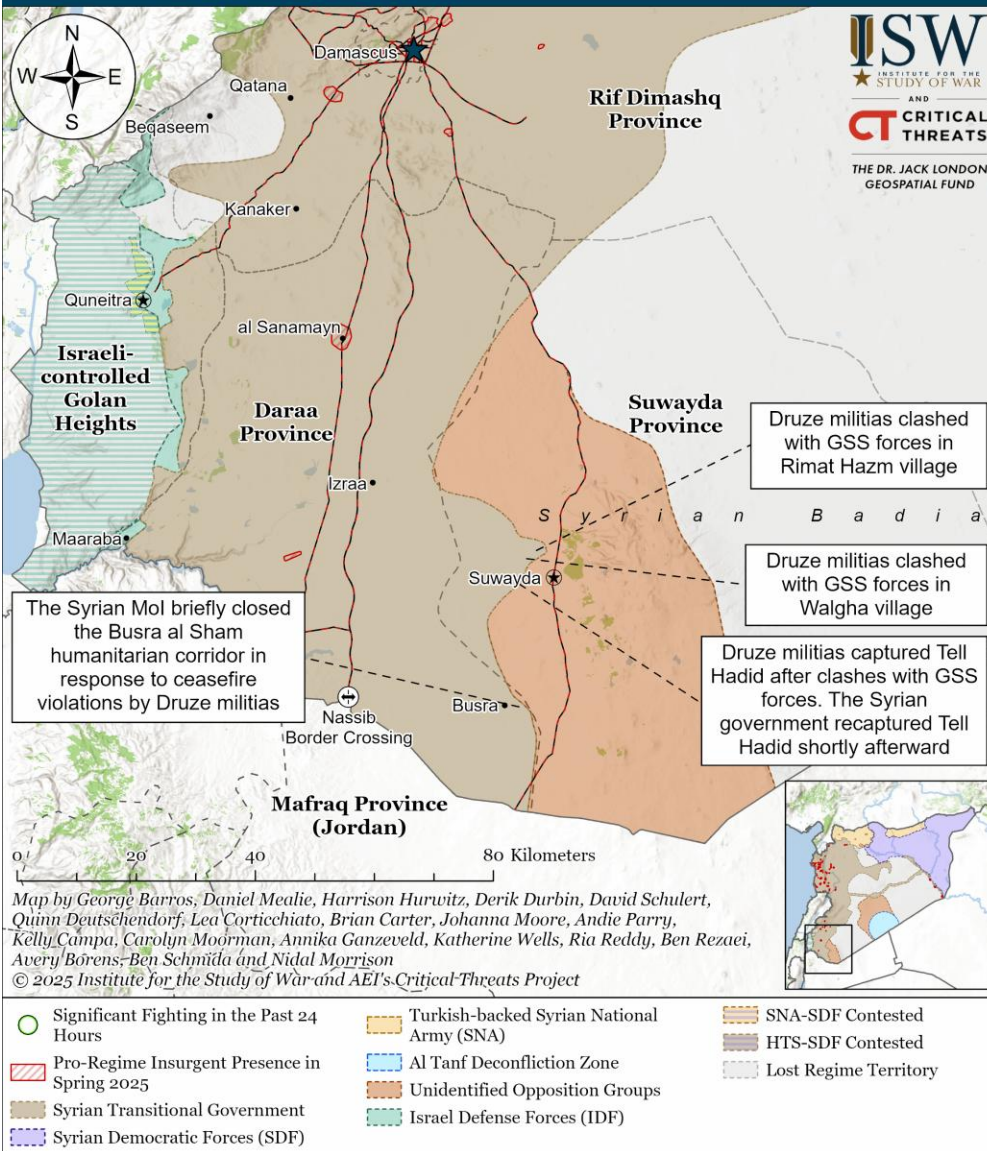
The Lebanese government reportedly hopes that frustration among southern residents toward Hezbollah will pressure Hezbollah to disarm.[22] Frustration among Hezbollah's Lebanese Shia support base comes amid six weeks of negotiations between the United States and Lebanon about disarming Hezbollah.[23] Hezbollah Secretary General Naim Qassem has persistently rejected calls to disarm, while some Hezbollah allies have recently shifted their positions and expressed support for the state's monopoly on arms.[24] Lebanese media reported on July 28 that Lebanese Parliament Speaker and Hezbollah ally Nabih Berri is "in agreement" with Lebanese President Joseph Aoun and Prime Minister Nawaf Salam "on the approach toward the weapons file." [25] Both Aoun and Salam have publicly called on Hezbollah to disarm.[26] Lebanese media reported that Hezbollah "is in a state of shock over its allies' public calls for the monopolization of weapons" by the state.[27] Lebanese media also stated that Aoun's speech on July 31, in which he called on Hezbollah to disarm, has "created a popular and political momentum supportive of the state." [28] Continued frustration among Hezbollah's Shia support base and growing momentum for the Lebanese government's position could weaken Hezbollah's political leverage and ability to maintain support for its retention of weapons.

**A brief breakdown in the ceasefire in Suwayda Province, Syria, on August 3 underscores the lack of trust between the Syrian transitional government and the Druze community. This distrust extends to other Syrian minority groups as well.** Druze militias launched a preplanned attack on August 3 to capture the strategically important Tell Hadid hill from the Syrian General Security Service (GSS).[29] Tell Hadid overlooks Suwayda City and serves as a government-controlled buffer between Druze militias and Sunni Bedouin fighters who are in the process of implementing a three-phase ceasefire agreement after intercommunal violence swept the province in mid-July.[30] The Israeli Air Force fired flares over neighboring Daraa Province as Druze militias captured the hill.[31] The Syrian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and Sunni Bedouin fighters recaptured Tell Hadid on August 3 after engaging with Druze militias.[32] The GSS also recaptured the villages of Walgha and Rimat Hazm on August 3 after Druze militias advanced toward the villages.[33] All parties agreed to a ceasefire, and Druze fighters returned to their original positions on August 3.[34] Syrian sources claimed that the new ceasefire calls for the withdrawal of all Syrian government and affiliated forces from Suwayda Province.[35] CTP-ISW cannot independently verify this claim. The Syrian Ministry of Interior (MoI) reopened a key humanitarian corridor into Suwayda Province on August 4 after closing it due to the fighting.[36] Parties were in the process of implementing the second phase of the previous July 18 ceasefire agreement, which includes the delivery of aid, provision of services, and repair of infrastructure, when fighting broke out on August 3.[37] It remains unclear how or if the July 18 ceasefire will progress to its third phase, which calls for activating state-run institutions, gradually deploying government forces to Suwayda Province, and integrating Suwaydawi institutions into the Syrian state, after the recent ceasefire violation and new ceasefire agreement.[38]

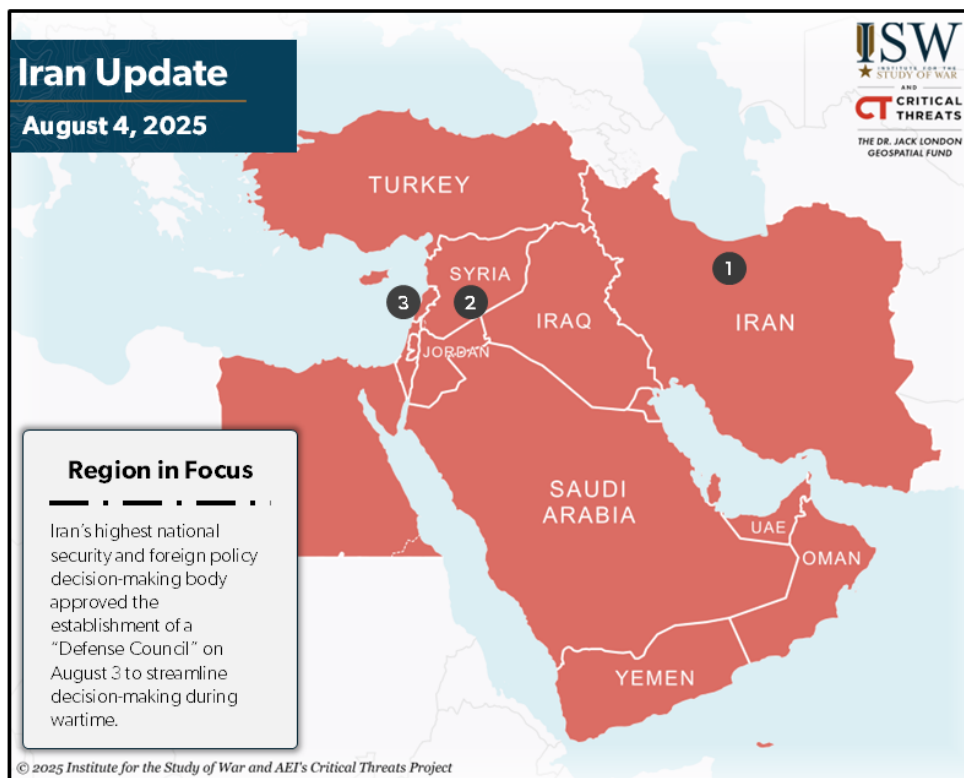
A Sheikh al Karama Druze militia member outlined the Druze community's irreconcilable grievances toward the Syrian transitional government a day before Druze militias attacked Tell Hadid.[39] Sheikh al Karama previously negotiated with the Syrian transitional government about security issues and integration before the outbreak of intercommunal violence in Suwayda in mid-July.[40] The militia member stated on August 2 that "after the grievous violations committed against the minorities [in Suwayda Province]...it has become impossible to remain under a centralized state that prevents the minorities from participating in it." The militia member added that an "autonomous administration or separation is the sole solution." [41] This sentiment is not unique to the Druze. Kurdish and Alawite communities have repeatedly called for autonomy and voiced their opposition to centralized rule because they view the transitional government as exclusionary and are skeptical of the government's ability and willingness to protect their communities.[42] The Syrian transitional government's repeated failure to protect minority communities has reinforced the perception among minority communities that integration under the current government framework is unviable.

# Assessed Control of Terrain in Southwestern Syria

## August 4, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST







- 1 **TEHRAN, IRAN.** Iran's highest national security and foreign policy decision-making body, the Supreme National Security Council approved the establishment of a "Defense Council" on August 3 to streamline decision-making during wartime. The formation of the Defense Council indicates that Iranian leaders are concerned about potential future conflicts and are trying to develop a more proactive and efficient decision-making process to respond to future conflicts.
- 2 **SUWAYDA, SYRIA.** A brief breakdown in the ceasefire in Suwayda Province, Syria, on August 3 underscores the lack of trust between the Syrian transitional government and the Druze community. This distrust extends to other Syrian minority groups as well. The Syrian government's repeated failure to protect minority communities has reinforced the perception among minority communities that integration under the current government framework is unviable.
- 3 **BEIRUT, LEBANON.** Unprecedented and growing discontent among Hezbollah's Shia support base could weaken Hezbollah's political leverage to resist disarmament. The population's frustration comes amid six weeks of negotiations between the United States and Lebanon about disarming Hezbollah.

## **Key Takeaways**

- **Iranian Defense Apparatus:** Iran's highest national security and foreign policy decision-making body, the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), approved the establishment of a "Defense Council" on August 3 to streamline decision-making during wartime. The formation of the Defense Council indicates that Iranian leaders are concerned about potential future conflicts and are trying to develop a more proactive and efficient decision-making process to respond to future conflicts.
- **Syria Ceasefire:** A brief breakdown in the ceasefire in Suwayda Province, Syria, on August 3 underscores the lack of trust between the Syrian transitional government and the Druze

community. This distrust extends to other Syrian minority groups as well. The Syrian government's repeated failure to protect minority communities has reinforced the perception among minority communities that integration under the current government framework is unviable.

- **Hezbollah Disarmament:** Unprecedented and growing discontent among Hezbollah's Shia support base could weaken Hezbollah's political leverage to resist disarmament. The population's frustration comes amid six weeks of negotiations between the United States and Lebanon about disarming Hezbollah.

## **Iran**

**Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Ground Forces Commander Brigadier General Mohammad Karami appointed Brigadier General Ahmad Akhavan Mahdavi as the new IRGC Ground Forces coordination deputy.**[43] Mahdavi replaced Mohammad Taghi Osanlou.[44] Coordination deputies in Iran serve in a similar capacity to a chief of staff in the US military. Mahdavi previously served as the deputy commander of the IRGC Ground Forces Combat Medical Unit.[45] Colonel Rasoul Sadegh was appointed as the new IRGC Ground Forces Combat Medical Unit deputy commander.

**Iran is continuing to try to position itself as a regional transportation hub.** An Iranian delegation led by President Masoud Pezeshkian visited Pakistan on August 2 and 3 to discuss bilateral economic and security cooperation.[46] Iran and Pakistan agreed to establish a joint border gate at the Mirjaveh-Taftan border crossing in Sistan and Baluchistan Province to facilitate bilateral trade.[47] Iranian media reported that 70 percent of Iran and Pakistan's bilateral trade goes through the Mirjaveh-Taftan border crossing.[48] IRGC-affiliated media argued that Iran could use this border crossing to increase Iran's role in China's Belt and Road Initiative by connecting the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor to Europe via Iran..[49] Iran and Pakistan also reached a preliminary agreement to establish a free trade zone at the Rimdan-Gabad border crossing in Sistan and Baluchistan Province to strengthen bilateral economic relations and encourage regional economic integration.[50] Iranian First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref separately emphasized Iran's readiness to connect regional landlocked countries to open waters ahead of his visit to Turkmenistan to attend the Third UN Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries.[51]

Iranian Defense and Armed Forces Logistics Minister Brigadier General Aziz Nasir Zadeh separately spoke with Pakistani Defense Minister Khawaja Asif on August 2, possibly to discuss efforts to confront anti-regime militant groups along the Pakistan-Iran border.[52] Iran has placed a growing emphasis on border security in southeastern Iran following an uptick in anti-regime militant attacks in the region since December 2023. Most of the attacks have been committed by Jaish al Adl, which is a Baloch, Salafi-jihadi militant group.[53] Jaish al Adl most recently attacked the Sistan and Baluchistan Provincial Courthouse in Zahedan on July 26.[54]

## **Iraq**

**Iraqi State Oil Marketing Organization (SOMO) Director Ali Nizar al Shatri responded on August 2 to reports that SOMO admitted that Iranian oil smuggling occurs in Iraqi territorial waters.**[55] Iraqi media reported on July 28 that SOMO had issued a document calling

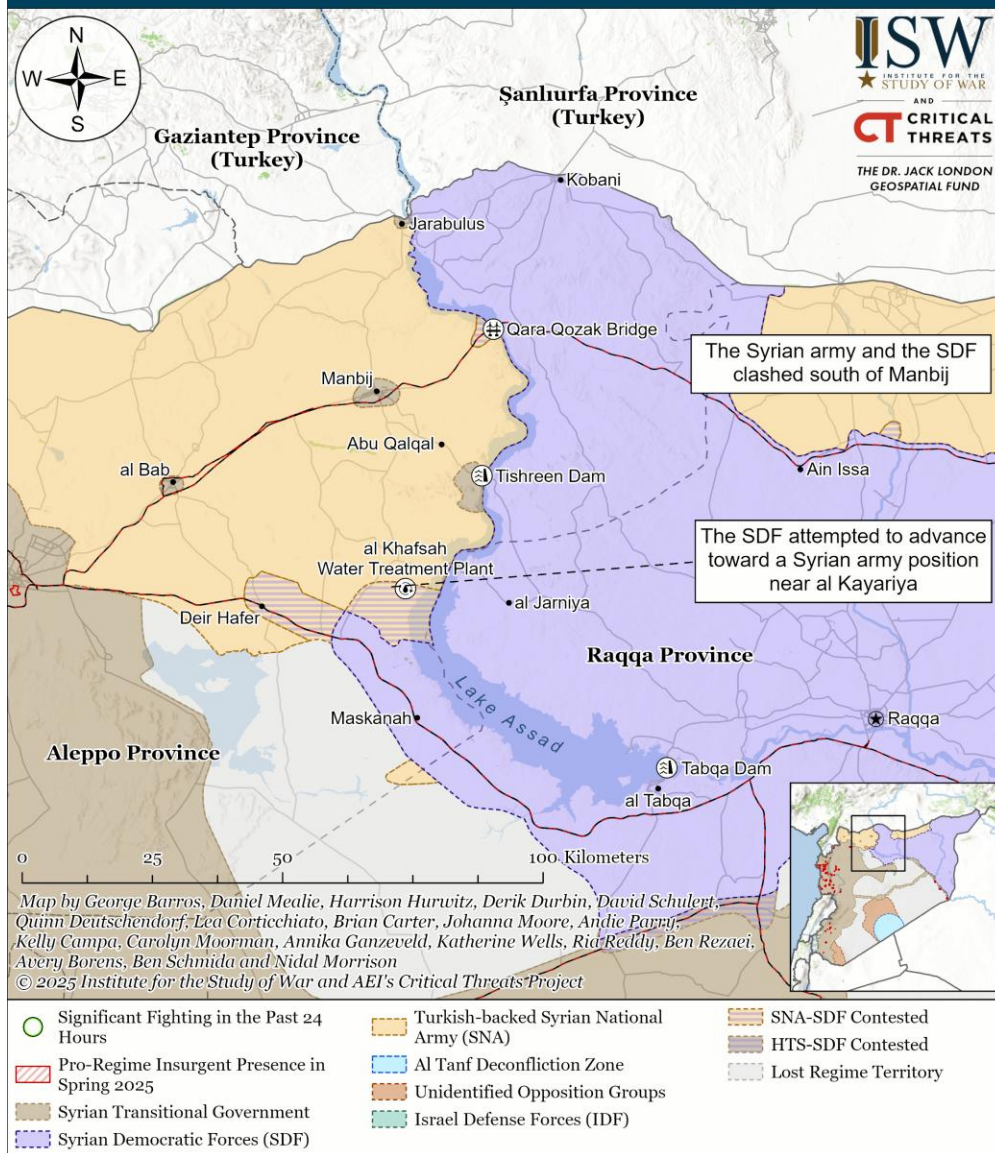


on Iraqi authorities to halt “widespread” oil smuggling in Iraqi territorial waters.[56] Shatri denied on August 2 that the SOMO document constituted an admission that oil smuggling takes place in Iraqi territorial waters.[57] The publication of the document and Shatri’s response come after the United States reportedly threatened in July 2025 to sanction SOMO and therefore block \$350 million of Iraqi oil revenue if the Iraqi federal government failed to prevent Iranian crude oil smuggling.[58] Iran and Iranian-backed Iraqi actors oversee an oil smuggling network in Iraq that generates around a billion dollars annually for Iran and its Axis of Resistance.[59] The United States sanctioned six entities and four vessels involved in smuggling Iranian oil, including a network of companies run by an Iraqi businessman, on July 3.[60]

## **Syria**

**The Syrian army and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) clashed south of Manbij, Aleppo Province, on August 2.[61]** Syrian media reported that the Syrian army and the SDF clashed after the SDF attempted to advance toward a Syrian army position near al Kayariya in the Manbij countryside along the Syrian army-SDF frontline.[62] Syrian state media reported that the SDF launched rockets and mortars at al Kayariya.[63] The attack injured at least four Syrian army personnel and three civilians.[64] The Syrian army and SDF’s engagement comes amid ongoing SDF-Syrian government negotiations to integrate the SDF into the Syrian Ministry of Defense.[65] It is unlikely that this isolated engagement will disrupt these negotiations, given that similar isolated incidents have not affected the talks.[66]

## Assessed Control of Terrain around Manbij August 4, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



## Arabian Peninsula

**The Houthis claimed that they conducted three drone attacks and one ballistic missile attack targeting Israel between August 1 and 3.**[67] The Houthis launched a ballistic missile targeting Ben Gurion Airport on August 1.[68] The Houthis launched three drones targeting Jaffa, Ashkelon, and Haifa Port on August 3.[69] The Israeli Air Force intercepted a Houthi drone near Bnei Netzarim, southern Israel, on August 3.[70] 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.[71]

## Palestinian Territories and Lebanon

**An unspecified Israeli security official said on August 1 that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Northern Command has shifted to a “forward defense” posture in southern Lebanon.**<sup>[72]</sup> The IDF Northern Command is responsible for IDF operations in southern Lebanon, where it maintains five outposts.<sup>[73]</sup> The unspecified official said that the posture shift aims to maintain Israel’s “strategic superiority” in southern Lebanon.<sup>[74]</sup> Recent IDF operations in Lebanon demonstrate this posture shift. Israeli forces conducted several raids in southern Lebanon on July 9, which were rare instances of Israeli troops operating beyond Israel’s five permanent positions.<sup>[75]</sup> The official noted that the IDF operates from its five permanent positions in southern Lebanon to target Hezbollah’s ability to reconstitute capabilities that would pose a threat to northern Israeli towns.”<sup>[76]</sup> This stated objective mirrors the IDF’s objective in its campaign against Hezbollah in late 2024, in which one of Israel’s primary concerns was a potential Hezbollah ground incursion into northern Israel.<sup>[77]</sup> The Israel-Hezbollah ceasefire agreement in November 2024 included an addendum that ensures the Israeli right to self-defense against any future threat that Hezbollah may pose.<sup>[78]</sup> The IDF has acted on this addendum and continued to operate against Hezbollah since November 2024, such as by conducting airstrikes and raids targeting Hezbollah infrastructure that poses a threat to Israel.<sup>[79]</sup>

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