

Iran Update



Ria Reddy, Katherine Wells, Kelly Campa, Avery Borens, Ben Schmida, Alexandra Braverman, Andie Parry, and Annika Ganzeveld

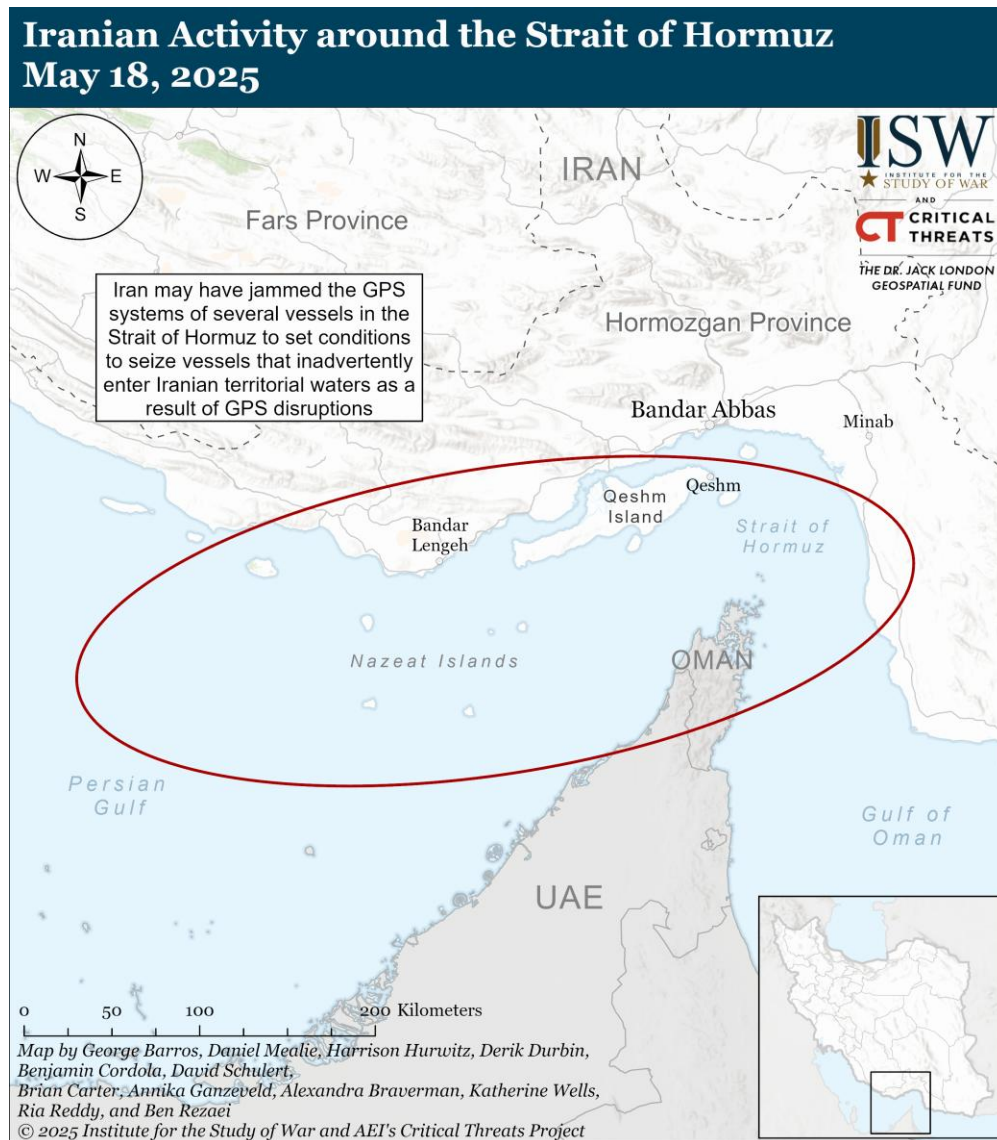
Information Cutoff: 2:00 pm ET

Iran may have jammed vessel navigation systems in the Strait of Hormuz in order to set conditions to seize vessels that inadvertently enter Iranian territorial waters as a result of navigation issues.^[1] The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) reported that several vessels experienced Global Positioning System (GPS) interference in the Strait of Hormuz for several hours on May 18.^[2] GPS interference disrupts ships' ability to navigate, and they may veer off course as a result. GPS interference around the Strait of Hormuz can cause vessels to inadvertently enter Iranian territorial waters, which Iran can then use to justify seizing vessels.^[3] Iran previously conducted GPS jamming in 2019 to try to lure vessels into Iranian waters.^[4] The GPS jamming in 2019 was part of a broader Iranian response to the US "maximum pressure" campaign that also included seizing and attacking vessels. The recent GPS interference incidents come after Iranian Armed Forces General Staff Chief Major General Mohammad Bagheri threatened on May 12 that Iran would retaliate by disrupting international commercial shipping, among other things, "if the US military makes a mistake."^[5] Bagheri was likely referring to a potential US strike on Iranian nuclear or energy facilities. Iran also deployed missile-capable fast attack craft (FAC) as well as geospatial intelligence and surveillance technology to Iranian islands in the Persian Gulf on May 12.^[6] Iran can use FAC to attack and harass ships.^[7]

A possible Iranian vessel recently harassed a commercial vessel in the Persian Gulf on May 10. The UKMTO reported on May 10 that a small craft collided with a merchant vessel and attempted to collide with other vessels about 80 nautical miles northwest of Jebel Ali, the United Arab Emirates (UAE).^[8] The UKMTO reported that the merchant vessel later received Very High Frequency (VHF) messages from unidentified individuals claiming to be "local authorities."^[9] Iran's partner, the Houthis, have similarly used GPS jamming and small boats to harass international shipping and have seized vessels in the Red Sea, specifically the Bab el Mandeb Strait, another important maritime trade chokepoint.^[10]

This recent series of events suggests that Iran may be in the very early stages of an escalation campaign against international shipping around the Strait of Hormuz. Iran previously threatened international shipping through this important waterway in 2019 in response to US President Donald Trump's "maximum pressure" strategy.^[11] Iran's preparations for its campaign in 2019 mirror actions that Iran is taking today.^[12] Iranian officials inspected Iranian military sites near the Persian Gulf in 2019 before Iran conducted attacks on vessels.^[13] Senior Iranian military commanders, including Bagheri and Artesh Navy Commander Rear Admiral Shahram Irani, have

recently visited Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) and Artesh Navy sites along the Persian Gulf coast.[14] Iran later used drones to harass vessels passing through the Strait of Hormuz and used GPS jamming to coax vessels into Iranian territorial waters.[15] IRGC-affiliated media recently published videos of Iranian drones following US naval vessels in the Persian Gulf. [16]It is unclear whether Iran is preparing for a campaign targeting international shipping in the Strait of Hormuz or trying to signal to the United States that it can threaten freedom of navigation through the Persian Gulf to try to deter a potential US strike on Iran.



The United States appears to have adopted a more cohesive position on Iran's uranium enrichment as zero uranium enrichment continues to be the main sticking point in the US-Iran nuclear negotiations. US Special Envoy to the Middle East and lead US negotiator Steve Witkoff stated on May 18 that enrichment is the Trump administration's "one very, very clear redline." [17] Witkoff said that the United States cannot allow Iran to retain "even 1 percent of an

enrichment capability." White House Spokesperson Karoline Leavitt reiterated Witkoff's comments and stated on May 19 that the United States is "100 percent committed to that red line."^[18] Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi called Witkoff's remarks "far from reality" and emphasized that Iran will continue to enrich uranium.^[19] Other senior Iranian officials stated that the US-Iran negotiations "will not yield results" if the United States continues to demand zero uranium enrichment.^[20] CTP-ISW previously assessed that Iran's rejection of the US demand for zero uranium enrichment may stall the talks or force negotiations toward a less expansive agreement than what the United States reportedly desires.^[21]

The Guardian reported on May 15 that mediators urged Iran to accept a deal in which Iran would suspend uranium enrichment for three years to "build trust" with the United States. The proposal reportedly stipulates that Iran would be allowed to resume uranium enrichment at 3.75 percent, similar to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) limit, after three years.^[22] Iranian Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister for Political Affairs Majid Takht Ravanchi claimed on May 19 that mediators never presented such a proposal to Iran.^[23] It is unclear if Iran would accept a temporary suspension of its uranium enrichment. It is also unclear if the reported proposal includes limits on Iran's centrifuge capacity. Former UN weapons inspector David Albright warned in April 2025 that Iran could make enough weapons-grade uranium in 25 days, even with a small low-enriched uranium stockpile, if it maintains all of its current centrifuges.^[24] Iran is developing new advanced centrifuges, such as the IR-8, which Iranian officials have claimed is "sixteen times" more capable than the IR-1 centrifuge.^[25]

Iranian Supreme Leader Adviser and former Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Ali Shamkhani appears to be playing a prominent role in the US-Iran nuclear negotiations. An Iranian expert close to the regime responded to criticisms of Shamkhani on May 16, emphasizing that Shamkhani is the "head of [Iran's] nuclear committee" and "guides negotiations."^[26] The Atomic Energy Organization of Iran and Iranian media previously identified Shamkhani as the "person responsible for Iran's nuclear case."^[27] These claims sparked a debate in Iran about whether responsibility for the Iranian nuclear file had been transferred from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to Shamkhani and the broader SNSC.^[28] It is possible that Shamkhani is overseeing and guiding the current negotiations while the MFA is conducting the negotiations. The MFA stated in February 2025 that the MFA is responsible for "conducting talks and negotiations on the nuclear issue" while the SNSC is responsible for "determining the negotiating strategy and coordinating between relevant agencies."^[29] Shamkhani's stated position on the nuclear negotiations has aligned with the Iranian negotiating team's position.^[30] Shamkhani told NBC News on May 14, for example, that Iran is ready to sign a deal with the United States and willing to limit enrichment to "civilian levels", which likely refers to the 3.67 percent limit set by the JCPOA.^[31]

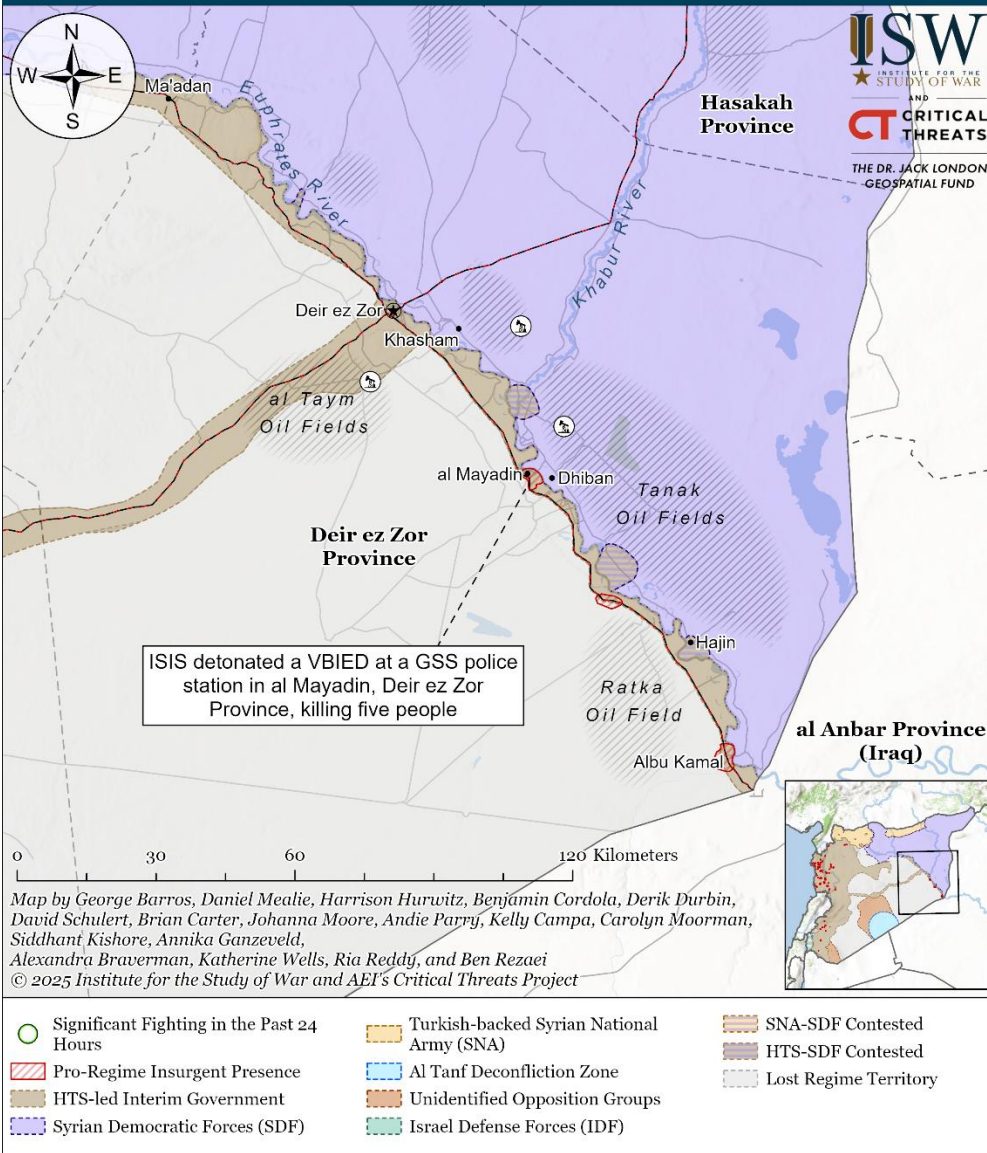
There appear to be tensions between Iran and the E3 (the United Kingdom, France, and Germany) regarding the US-Iran nuclear negotiations and the Iranian nuclear program.

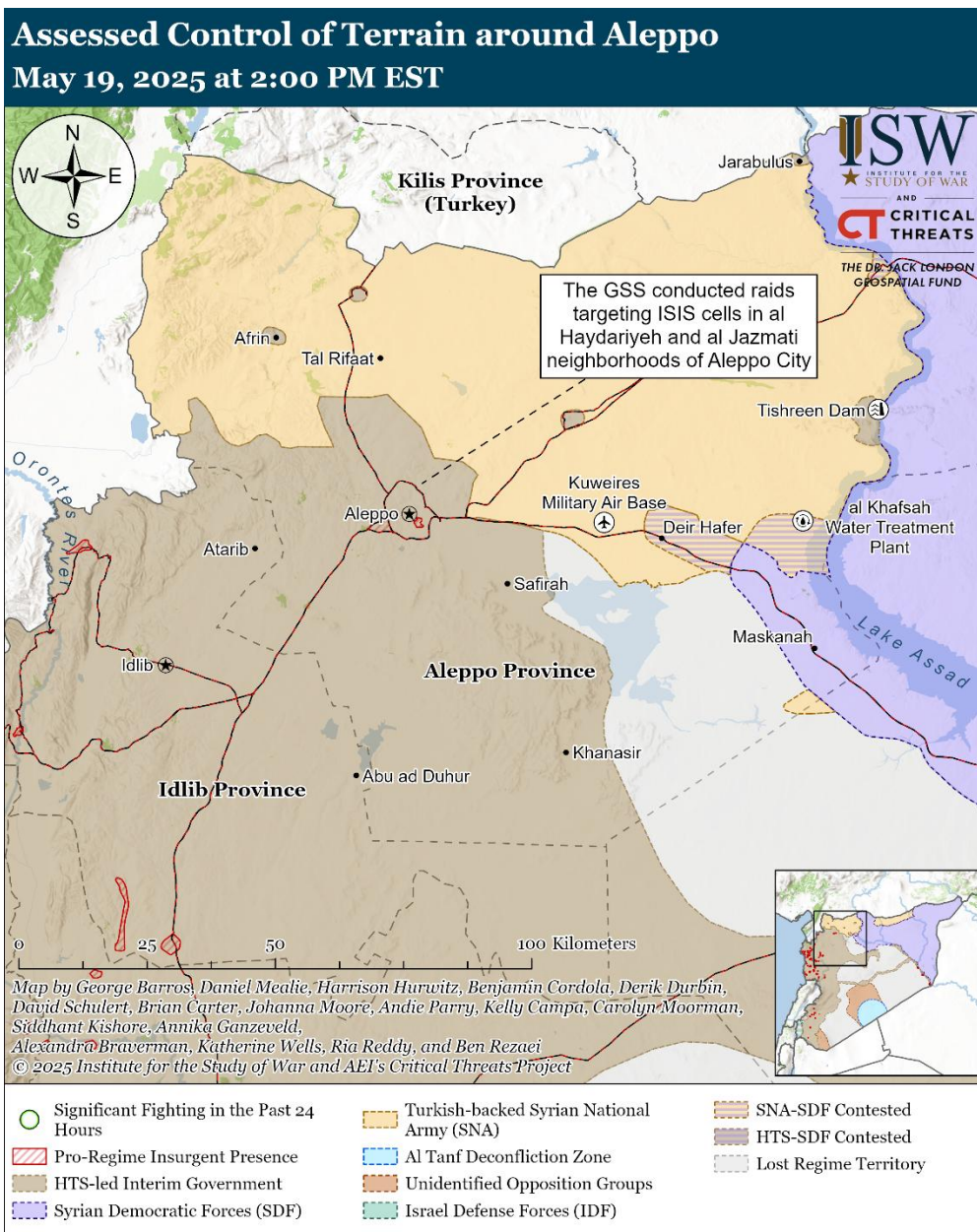
Iranian hardline outlet Farhikhtegan reported on May 18 that the Iran-E3 meeting on May 16 was “tense.”[32] The report stated that the E3 “raised sharp positions” and threatened to trigger snapback sanctions. The JCPOA snapback mechanism allows JCPOA signatories to reimpose UN Security Council sanctions on Iran in the event of “significant non-performance by Iran of JCPOA commitments.”[33] Unspecified diplomats similarly told Reuters on May 13 that the E3 may trigger snapback sanctions on Iran by August 2025 if Iran and the United States do not reach a “substantial deal” by then.[34] Farhikhtegan also reported that the E3 demanded that any future US-Iran nuclear deal include a snapback mechanism that would allow the E3 to reimpose UN sanctions on Iran, similar to the snapback mechanism in the 2015 JCPOA.[35] Iranian officials reportedly called the E3’s demand “illegal” and “inappropriately worded.” The E3 has notably not been included in the US-Iran nuclear negotiations for a new nuclear deal.

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has developed the ability to conduct attacks in the Middle Euphrates River Valley with logistically advanced vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED). ISIS attacked a General Security Service (GSS) police station with a VBIED in al Mayadin, Deir ez Zor Province, on May 18.[36] The attack killed at least four GSS members and one civilian and severely damaged the police station.[37] GSS forces implemented a curfew, deployed reinforcements, and searched the city in response to the attack.[38] This attack appears to be the first time that ISIS has attacked transitional government security forces in Deir ez Zor Province since the fall of the Assad regime. The VBIED attack in al Mayadin suggests that ISIS has developed the capability to produce VBIEDs to attack the transitional government as well as US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) positions in northeastern Syria. The production of a VBIED powerful enough to crater concrete and damage nearby cement buildings requires significant logistical capabilities, including the ability to procure and modify vehicles, manufacture explosives, and develop a detonation system that is either remote or vehicle-operated.[39] This attack indicates that ISIS has established a relatively sophisticated logistics network near al Mayadin to produce VBIEDs and is emblematic of ISIS’s continued presence in eastern Syria.

Syrian security forces raided ISIS cells in Aleppo City on May 17. The GSS killed two ISIS members and arrested four others during raids in al Jazmati and al Haydariyah, Aleppo City. A separate ISIS member detonated a suicide vest during one of the raids.[40] ISIS fighters killed two GSS members in small arms clashes during the raids.[41] The GSS captured weapons, improvised explosive devices (IED), and suicide vests.[42] These raids follow an Islamic State publication on May 14 that claimed that ISIS has a growing presence in the “countryside and [city] outskirts” in Syria.[43] Salafi-jihadi groups ideologically aligned to ISIS, such as Saraya Ansar al Sunnah, have conducted assassinations in Aleppo City as recently as May 8.[44] The Aleppo raids and ensuing clashes mark the first direct engagement between ISIS and the transitional government in western Syria since the fall of the Assad regime.

Assessed Control of Terrain around Deir ez Zor May 19, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



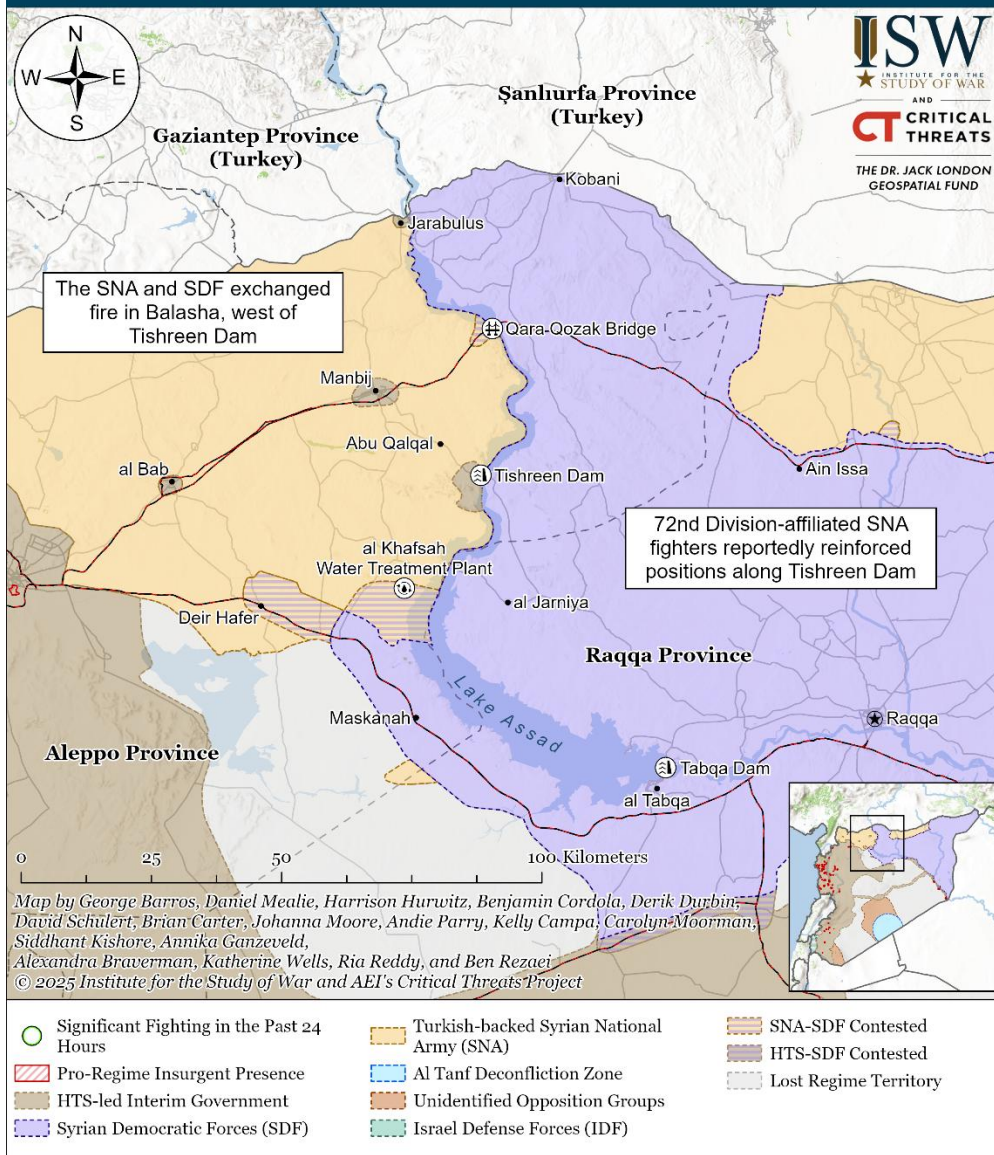


The Syrian transitional government's nominal integration of some armed groups into the Ministry of Defense (MoD) in order to rapidly assert state control over Syrian factions risks diminishing the government's command and control over these groups. Syrian Defense Minister Marhaf Abu Qasra announced on May 17 that armed groups that have not yet integrated into state security services must do so within 10 days or face unspecified penalties.^[45] The MoD began forming a new Syrian army comprised of former opposition factions in January 2025.^[46] Many Syrian opposition groups, particularly those affiliated with Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS) or HTS's former operations room, have "integrated" into the Syrian MoD since January.^[47] The Syrian MoD has effectively re-flagged several factions as divisions or brigades within the new army without requiring commanders to reform or restructure their forces.^[48] Syrian media reported on May 18 that the Syrian government re-flagged the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP) as the new 84th Division in the

Syrian army.[49] TIP is an al Qaeda-affiliated Uyghur jihadist group that has fought alongside HTS and its predecessor organizations since the mid-2010s.[50] The group is fully subordinate to HTS despite its al Qaeda affiliation, however, and will therefore likely follow HTS's chain of command.

Re-flagged Syrian National Army (SNA) factions are far less likely to adhere to the formal chain of command than groups that have subordinated themselves to HTS. These less responsive groups risk alienating minority groups, such as the Kurds, by conducting unsanctioned operations or attacks against these groups. Both anti-Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and pro-Kurdish media reported that the SDF and SNA factions advanced toward each other west of Tishreen Dam in the Manbij countryside on May 18 and briefly exchanged fire in the area on May 19.[51] The SNA also reportedly reinforced several of its positions west of the dam for the first time since late March 2025.[52] Syrian media reported that the SNA factions that engaged the SDF are affiliated with the Syrian army's 72nd Division, which is reportedly comprised of five SNA factions.[53] The MoD has allowed several SNA factions to join the MoD without restructuring their forces and many of the fighters in these factions are loyal to their faction commander rather than Syrian President Ahmed al Shara. It is unclear if Damascus sanctioned the SNA's recent activity near Tishreen Dam. The transitional government and SDF agreed to a ceasefire and reached a deconfliction agreement in April 2025.[54] The existence of SNA-dominated army units that do not answer to Damascus risks discouraging Kurdish militants from integrating into the state due to the SNA's historic abuses against the Kurdish population.[55] The Syrian government is unlikely to tolerate any lack of adherence to the chain of command in the long term and may take steps to gradually subordinate the factions over time, but it appears to be tolerating the presence of more independent SNA factions within the new Syrian army for the time being. Shara likely calculates that he needs the support of certain SNA commanders to avoid infighting among powerful factions. Shara also likely recognizes that the Syrian government does not yet have the manpower to attempt to subordinate the SNA by force.

Assessed Control of Terrain around Manbij May 19, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



Key

Takeaways:

- Iranian Activity in the Strait of Hormuz:** Iran may be in the very early stages of an escalation campaign against international shipping around the Strait of Hormuz. Iran may have jammed vessel navigation systems in the Strait of Hormuz in order to set conditions to seize vessels that inadvertently enter Iranian territorial waters as a result of navigation issues. The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations reported that several vessels experienced GPS interference in the Strait of Hormuz for several hours on May 18. GPS interference around the Strait of Hormuz can cause vessels to inadvertently enter Iranian territorial waters, which Iran

can then use to justify seizing vessels. Iran previously conducted GPS jamming in 2019 to try to lure vessels into Iranian waters. The GPS disruptions on May 18 come after a possible Iranian vessel recently harassed a commercial vessel in the Persian Gulf on May 10.

- **Iran-US Nuclear Negotiations:** The United States appears to have adopted a more cohesive position on Iran's uranium enrichment as zero uranium enrichment continues to be the main sticking point in the US-Iran nuclear negotiations. US Special Envoy to the Middle East and lead US negotiator Steve Witkoff stated on May 18 that enrichment is the Trump administration's "one very, very clear redline." Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi called Witkoff's remarks "far from reality" and emphasized that Iran will continue to enrich uranium. The Guardian separately reported on May 15 that mediators urged Iran to accept a deal in which Iran would suspend uranium enrichment for three years to "build trust" with the United States. The proposal reportedly stipulates that Iran would be allowed to resume uranium enrichment at 3.75 percent, similar to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) limit, after three years. It is unclear if Iran would accept a temporary suspension of its uranium enrichment.
- **ISIS Capabilities:** The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has developed the ability to conduct attacks in the Middle Euphrates River Valley with logistically advanced vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED). ISIS attacked a General Security Service (GSS) police station with a VBIED in al Mayadin, Deir ez Zor Province, on May 18. The attack severely damaged the police station. The production of a VBIED powerful enough to crater concrete and damage nearby cement buildings requires significant logistical capabilities, including the ability to procure and modify vehicles, manufacture explosives, and develop a detonation system that is either remote or vehicle-operated. This attack indicates that ISIS has established a relatively sophisticated logistics network near al Mayadin to produce VBIEDs and is emblematic of ISIS's continued presence in eastern Syria.
- **Syrian Security Forces Raids Against ISIS:** Syrian security forces raided ISIS cells in Aleppo City on May 17. The GSS killed two ISIS members and arrested four others during raids in al Jazmati and al Haydariyah, Aleppo City. A separate ISIS member detonated a suicide vest during one of the raids. ISIS fighters killed two GSS members in small arms clashes during the raids.
- **Integration of Armed Factions into the Syrian Defense Ministry:** The Syrian transitional government's nominal integration of some armed groups into the Ministry of Defense (MoD) in order to rapidly assert state control over Syrian factions risks diminishing the government's command and control over these groups. Syrian Defense Minister Marhaf Abu Qasra announced on May 17 that armed groups that have not yet integrated into state security services must do so within 10 days or face unspecified penalties. The Syrian MoD has effectively re-flagged several factions as divisions or brigades within the new army without requiring commanders to reform or restructure their forces. Syrian media reported on May 18 that the Syrian government re-flagged the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP) as the new 84th Division in the Syrian army.
- **Integration of Armed Factions into the Syrian Defense Ministry:** Re-flagged Syrian National Army (SNA) factions are far less likely to adhere to the formal chain of command than

groups that have subordinated themselves to HTS. These less responsive groups risk alienating minority groups, such as the Kurds, by conducting unsanctioned operations or attacks against these groups. Both anti-Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and pro-Kurdish media reported that the SDF and SNA factions advanced toward each other west of Tishreen Dam in the Manbij countryside on May 18 and briefly exchanged fire in the area on May 19. It is unclear if Damascus sanctioned the SNA's recent activity near Tishreen Dam. The existence of SNA-dominated army units that do not answer to Damascus risks discouraging Kurdish militants from integrating into the state due to the SNA's historic abuses against the Kurdish population.

Iranian Decision-Making, Internal Dynamics, and Foreign Policy

Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei highlighted Iran's continued pursuit of its main strategic objectives in a speech to Iranian educators on May 17.^[56] Khamenei reiterated Iran's goal to expel the United States from the Middle East and destroy the state of Israel. Khamenei emphasized the importance of indoctrination and instilling Islamic principles in Iranian youth.

Jaish al Adl claimed on May 17 that it detonated an improvised explosive device (IED) targeting an Iranian Law Enforcement Command (LEC) vehicle in Saravan City, Sistan and Baluchistan Province.^[57] Jaish al Adl is a Baloch Salafi-jihadi militant group that regularly attacks Iranian security forces in southeastern Iran.^[58] Jaish al Adl threatened to conduct further attacks on May 18.^[59]

Jaish al Adl fighters have separately set fire to at least 29 Iranian construction vehicles in two separate incidents in Sistan and Baluchistan Province in recent weeks.^[60] Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC)-affiliated media reported on May 18 that unspecified "terrorist forces" set fire to road construction machinery in Bampur City and in Iranshahr City.^[61] IRGC-affiliated media reported that the group seeks to disrupt development in southeastern Iran.^[62] Jaish al Adl seeks to disrupt the development of the Makran coast, which is a coastal strip that extends between southeastern Iran and southwestern Pakistan.^[63]

The Iranian rial appreciated from 829,000 rials to one US dollar on May 16 to 820,000 rials to one US dollar on May 19.^[64]

Syria

Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al Shaibani attended the Arab Summit in Baghdad on May 17.^[65] Shaibani stated in his speech at the conference that the Syrian government will soon appoint "a national parliament representing the entire Syrian spectrum" and draft "a permanent constitution that enshrines rights, safeguards sovereignty, and establishes a state of law."^[66] Shaibani's statements come after the Syrian government unveiled a draft constitution on March 13 that initiated a five-year transition period.^[67] The Constitutional Declaration stipulates that Shara will appoint a third of the Syrian parliament, called the People's Assembly, and select the committee that will appoint the other two-thirds of the legislature. These provisions will enable Shara to consolidate his power over the Syrian state.^[68] The People's Assembly is a transitional legislative body that will propose, adopt, and amend Syrian laws, according to the Syrian Constitutional Declaration.^[69] Syrian Constitutional Committee member Ahmed al Qabri previously told Qatari media on April 18 that the Syrian government had begun "consultations" to select the committee that will select two-thirds of the People's Assembly.^[70]

Shaibani separately claimed during his speech that the Syrian government has conducted inclusive national dialogue and succeeded in forming an inclusive government.[71] Various Syrian minority groups and Syrian political and civil society factions have criticized the Syrian government's transitional Constitutional Declaration and National Dialogue Conference for centralizing power under Shara and failing to include Syria's diverse minority communities.[72]

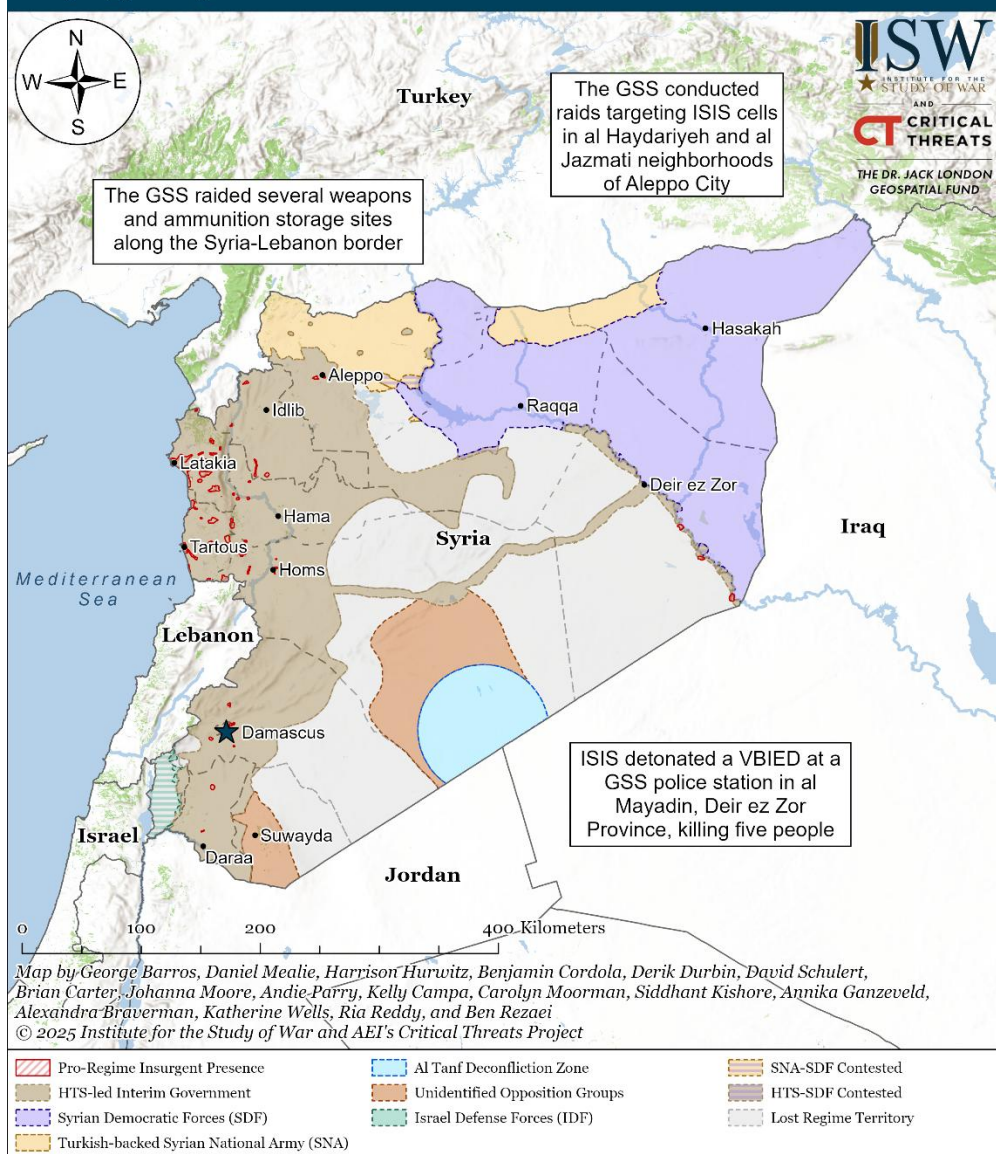
Syrian President Ahmed al Shara formed the National Transitional Justice Commission on May 17.[73] The commission is responsible for investigating crimes committed by the former regime, holding individuals who committed crimes accountable for their actions, compensating victims, and establishing principles of national reconciliation.[74] Shara stated that the commission has legal, financial, and administrative independence, and will operate throughout Syria.[75] Shara appointed Abdul Basit Latif as the commission chairman.[76] Latif previously served as the political bureau head of the Free Syrian Army (FSA)-affiliated Jaysh Usud al Sharqiya and as an administrator in the FSA's 20th Division.[77] Shara's announcement comes as various groups have conducted extrajudicial killings targeting alleged former Assad regime members.[78] These killings reflect that some Syrians believe that there has been no justice for the atrocities that the Assad regime committed. The National Transitional Justice Commission could alleviate some of these grievances, but the transitional government must also charge, prosecute, and sentence former Assad regime members to demonstrate its commitment to transitional justice and build trust among targeted communities.

Shara also formed the National Commission for Missing Persons to create a database of missing individuals, search for missing persons, and document cases.[79] Shara appointed Muhammad Radhi Jalkhi as the commission chairman.[80] Jalkhi is a Syrian lawyer and academic from Idlib Province who was previously a member of the committee that drafted the Constitutional Declaration.[81]

GSS forces raided several weapons and ammunition storage sites along the Syria-Lebanon border on May 16 and 18.[82] GSS forces seized small arms, grenades, rocket-propelled grenades, launchers, and other weapons near Mount Hermon, Rif Dimashq Province, on May 16.[83] Syrian media reported that the seized weapons were likely intended to be smuggled.[84] Mount Hermon is located south of several Hezbollah smuggling routes between Syria and Lebanon.[85] The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) have maintained a position on the Syrian side of Mount Hermon since December 2024.[86] GSS forces separately discovered ammunition in an underground cache near Jandar, east of Qusayr, on May 18.[87] GSS forces have recently interdicted several weapons shipments likely bound for Hezbollah near Qusayr, Homs Province.[88] Qusayr previously served as a strategic logistical corridor for Hezbollah.[89]

Assessed Control of Terrain in Syria

May 19, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



Syrian media reported that the Interior Ministry will soon adopt several reforms. These reforms are likely meant to centralize state control over Syria and improve government responses to internal threats and crises.^[90] An unspecified Interior Ministry source told Syrian media on May 16 that the ministry will assign officials to oversee each of the five main geographic sectors in Syria.^[91] These officials will report directly to Interior Minister Anas Khattab.^[92] The source said that the new division of power and resources will not impact Damascus' centralization of power but will better facilitate security operations across Syria.^[93] The Interior Ministry source also said that the ministry will create two new departments: the Department for the Pursuit of Outlaws and the Rapid Intervention Forces.^[94] The source suggested that the former department will pursue former Assad regime members and other "undisciplined" groups.^[95] The Interior Ministry currently oversees both the GSS and the police command.^[96] The reliability of the GSS as a security organization

has been mixed and has often depended on the composition and behavior of individual units.[97] New departments could, in theory, relieve the GSS of some of its responsibilities and thereby enable the GSS to prioritize professionalizing its forces. It is unclear if the two new departments will pull resources and personnel from the GSS or police or will recruit new personnel, however.

Iraq

Iraqi media published new details on May 19 about which Sunni political alliances and parties will compete in Ninewa Province in the upcoming November 2025 Iraqi parliamentary elections.[98] Iraqi media reported that former Ninewa Governor Atheel al Nujaifi will lead the National Path Party list and former Salah al Din Governor Ahmed al Jubouri will lead the Civilians Party list. Ahmed al Jubouri is part of the United Sunni Leadership Coalition, which is a political coalition that five prominent Iraqi Sunni politicians formed in January 2025.[99] Iraqi media also reported that the National Decision Party list, which is led by Defense Minister Thabet al Abbasi, and the Ninewa for its People Party, which is led by former Ninewa Governor Najm al Jubouri, will jointly compete in the upcoming elections.[100] Najm al Jubouri was disqualified from competing in the December 2023 Ninewa Provincial Council elections, during which Shia parties won the majority of seats in the Ninewa Provincial Council.[101] Sunni, Shia, and Kurdish groups have long vied for control in Ninewa Province, and many Sunni and Kurdish residents resent Shia groups' presence and influence in areas of the province.[102] Sunni political parties recently tried to remove the Ninewa Provincial Council chairman, who is a member of Popular Mobilization Committee Chairman Faleh al Fayyadh's National Contract Bloc.[103] Atheel al Nujaifi accused Fayyadh of making last-minute attempts to win votes in Ninewa Province on May 19 after Fayyadh stated that only four percent of the population of Ninewa Province "has been proven to be affiliated with ISIS." [104] Nujaifi argued that Fayyadh should have made this statement when Ninewa residents were previously persecuted "based on suspicion of belonging to ISIS" rather than in the lead-up to the parliamentary elections.

Iraqi Foreign Affairs Minister Fuad Hussein discussed the US-Iran nuclear negotiations with Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi on the sidelines of the Tehran Dialogue Forum on May 19.[105] Araghchi emphasized Iran's readiness to resume nuclear negotiations with the United States and thanked the Iraqi federal government for "creating the appropriate conditions for diplomacy" between Iran and the United States. This meeting comes after Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Quds Force Commander Brigadier General Esmail Ghaani traveled to Baghdad on May 14, reportedly to encourage Iraq and other Arab countries to convince the United States to end its maximum pressure campaign on Iran and conclude a new nuclear deal.[106]

Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government Prime Minister Masrour Barzani attended a conference focused on Kurdish energy development in Washington, DC.[107] Barzani oversaw the signing of two agreements that give US-based energy companies rights to develop petroleum resources in Iraqi Kurdistan.[108] Barzani is scheduled to meet with several senior US officials during his visit.[109]

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 launched two ballistic missiles and a drone targeting Ben Gurion Airport in central Israel on May 17.^[110] The IDF intercepted both ballistic missiles.^[111] The Houthis launched a total of six ballistic missiles targeting Ben Gurion Airport between May 12 and May 18.^[112] The IDF responded to these attacks with airstrikes targeting Hudaydah and Salif ports on May 16.^[113]

The USS *Harry S. Truman* aircraft carrier left the Red Sea through the Suez Canal on May 17, according to an open-source analyst.^[114] NATO Allied Joint Force Command Naples stated on May 19 that the USS *Harry S. Truman* will participate in an upcoming NATO naval exercise in the Mediterranean Sea.^[115]

The Palestinian Territories and Lebanon

Arab media reported that an IDF airstrike on May 13 killed Hamas leader in the Gaza Strip Mohammad Sinwar.^[116] Various Israeli and Arab media outlets reported on May 18 that unspecified individuals located Sinwar's body in a tunnel in Khan Younis.^[117] The IDF struck an underground command-and-control complex in Khan Younis on May 13 where it believed Sinwar was hiding. The IDF has not yet confirmed his death, however.^[118] Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz told the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee on May 18 that "according to all the indications Mohammad Sinwar was eliminated."^[119]

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.



[1] https://www.ukmto.org/-/media/ukmto/products/20250520_ukmto_advisory_incident-020-25.pdf?rev=9fboce7704fa410c922d519d1992fa3e

[2] https://www.ukmto.org/-/media/ukmto/products/20250520_ukmto_advisory_incident-020-25.pdf?rev=9fboce7704fa410c922d519d1992fa3e

[3] <https://www.noaa.gov/jurisdiction-over-vessels#:~:text=Thus%20a%20State%20has%20jurisdiction,nationality%20or%20the%20vessel's%20flag>.

[4] <https://www.businessinsider.com/iran-is-jamming-ship-gps-navigation-systems-to-seize-them-2019-8>

[5] <https://defapress dot ir/fa/news/745973/>

<https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1404/02/23/3311610>

[6] <https://defapress dot ir/fa/news/745973/> ;

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[7] <https://defapress dot ir/fa/news/746650/>

[8] https://www.ukmto.org/-/media/ukmto/products/20250511_ukmto_advisory_incident-016-25-1.pdf?rev=7415aac6479848b68a34f2907a287cf1

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[10] <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/vessels-experiencing-gps-interference-port-sudan-suez-co-ltd--gcy7f> ; <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/756ca769315d4b879ca7fdd6bd4a82be>

[11] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/the-growing-iranian-threat-around-the-strait-of-hormuz> ;

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