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Iran

Digest

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Iranian border guards and Taliban clash amid water dispute

On 27 May, a skirmish broke out at the border between Iran's south-eastern province of Sistan and Balouchestan and the Nimruz province of Afghanistan. After Taliban forces shot at Iran's [Sasouli Police station](#), which operates as part of the Zabol border regiment, Iranian forces retaliated with light weapons, crew-served weapons and artillery, but denied use of missiles. Two Iranian border guards and one Taliban guard were killed. Iranian [Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi](#) noted on 29 May that the conflict was resolved after negotiations were held with the Taliban side, and the border point, which was briefly closed, is open for traffic. These border clashes came at a time when the protracted dispute over sharing waters of the transboundary Helmand River has become a key issue in Iran-Taliban relations. On 19 May, President [Ebrahim Raisi visited](#) the drought-stricken province of Sistan-Baluchistan, where he used forceful language calling on Taliban to honour the obligations arising from the Helmand Treaty of 1973. "I want to tell the rulers of Afghanistan not to consider my words as normal, but to take them very seriously; I warn the officials and rulers of Afghanistan to give the rights of the people and the region of Sistan and Baluchistan immediately," warned Raisi. Referring to Taliban's claims that the dams built on Helmand do not have sufficient water, Raisi argued that a joint team of experts should be allowed to visit the route and upstream of Helmand. According to [Hassan Kazemi Qomi](#), the acting Iranian ambassador to Kabul, Iran barely received 4% of its allotted water during the Iranian year, which concluded on March 20.

President Ebrahim Raisi visits Syria

On 3 May, Iran's President Raisi arrived in Damascus for a two-day official visit. It was the first visit by an Iranian president to Syria in over 13 years. Raisi and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad signed a [comprehensive agreement](#) on long-term and strategic

cooperation between the two countries. They signed fourteen other agreements on cooperation in various fields, including free trade zones, oil and energy, technical and engineering sectors, infrastructure including housing, railroad and air transportation, telecommunication, earthquake safety and rescue operation, and facilitation of pilgrimage. Raisi met with Syrian businesspeople to promote trade between Syria and Iran. In an interview with the official Syrian SANA news agency, Raisi stressed that the solution to the concerns of Syria's neighboring countries is the return of all Syrian lands to the [sovereignty of the state](#), stressing that there should be no Turkish forces on any part of the Syrian territory. The [joint statement](#) released after Raisi's visit condemned US and European Union sanctions on their countries, calling the measures "coercive, unilateral and illegitimate actions." It welcomed "positive political developments in the region" including Syria's improving relations with the Arab world and the Saudi-Iran deal mediated by China. It also condemned Israeli air strikes on Syria, and "emphasised the legitimate right of Syria to respond to these aggressions in an appropriate way". In Damascus, Raisi also met with leaders of the Palestinian armed groups [Hamas and Islamic Jihad](#), who briefed him on the situation in the West Bank, Jerusalem and Gaza Strip.

President Ebrahim Raisi visits Indonesia

At the invitation of the President of Indonesia Joko Widodo, President Raisi paid a two-day official visit to Indonesia from 23 May. Before leaving for Jakarta, Raisi spoke of his government's plan of "comprehensive communication with [all Asian countries](#)", and the need to "define broader relations with Indonesia as a very important country with a privileged position in Southeast Asia". Their [joint press statement](#) noted that the countries had signed a Preferential Trade Agreement, discussed

B2B agreement, investment in the development of Nusantara Capital, and investments in oil and gas sector. They also discussed matters related to technology transfer co-production with Indonesian state-owned enterprises and biotechnological and nanotechnological cooperation in health, energy, agriculture and environmental sectors. On bilateral cooperation in health sector, the statement referred to ongoing pilot project for telerobotic surgery and telemedicine. Given Indonesia is currently the chair of ASEAN, Raisi also met with [Secretary General of ASEAN](#), Kao Kim Hourn, where they discussed regional issues, and exchanged views on their ongoing efforts to advance ASEAN-Iran relations. Notably, in 2018 Iran had acceded to Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia.

Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tarik visits Iran

On 28 May, Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tarik arrived in Tehran for a two-day visit. The visit followed Oman's successful mediation of a prisoner exchange agreement under which Belgium released an Iranian diplomat [Assadollah Assadi](#), who was sentenced for 20-years in 2021 over a 2018 foiled bomb plot targeting an exiled Iranian opposition group, Muhakeddin-e-Khalq Organisation rally in Paris. Iran has freed Belgian aid worker Olivier Vandecasteele, who had been sentenced by Iranian court to 40- years in prison on the charges of espionage and money laundering. Notably, in March 2023, a plea by MKO for the revocation of a treaty with Iran that permits the exchange of prisoners between Iran and Belgium was rejected by the Constitutional Court of Belgium. President Raisi, in his meeting with Sultan Haitham noted that "Tehran and Muscat have [common views on regional cooperation](#), strengthening and stabilising the security, peace and prosperity of the nations of the region". The two sides also signed [MoUs to promote investments](#) and boosting development in economic

zones and free zones of the two countries. Sultan Haitham met with [Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei](#), who noted that enhancing Iran-Oman cooperation remains important as the "two countries share the very important Strait of Hormuz waterway." Khamenei welcomed Sultan Haitham's message of Egypt's willingness to resume relations with Iran. He also "urged all regional countries to take into account the policy pursued by the Zionist regime and its supporters to sow discord and erode peace in the region." The last time Omani Sultan visited Iran was in 2013.

Former IRGC Navy Commander Ali Akbar Ahmadian appointed as the Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council

[Ali Akbar Ahmadian](#), a veteran Islamic Revolution Guards Corps commander was appointed by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei as the chairman, and also as the leader's representative to the Supreme National Security Council. Ahmadian replaced Rear Admiral Ali Shamkhani, who served in the position for 10 years and played a prominent role in resuming Iran's relations with Saudi Arabia. Rumours about Shamkhani's imminent departure came to surface in January when one of his close associates was executed over espionage for the British intelligence agency. Shamkhani's meeting with reformist leaders during the recent protests also made him [target of attacks](#) from the powerful conservative Paydari faction. Ahmadian started his career in the IRGC navy and during the eight-year war with Iraq, he played a role in retaliatory maritime operations, an experience that he later used to theorise "reciprocal operations" in the IRGC navy and the [asymmetric warfare doctrine](#). Last year, Ahmadian was appointed by Khamenei as a member of the Expediency Discernment Council, an influential legal body responsible for resolving differences between the parliament and the Guardian Council and advising the Supreme Leader.