

Iran Update



Ben Schmida, Ben Rezaei, Avery Borens, Andie Parry, and Brian Carter

Information Cutoff: 2:00 PM ET

The Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute and the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) publish the Iran Update, which provides insights into Iranian and Iranian-sponsored activities that undermine regional stability and threaten US forces and interests. CTP-ISW publishes the Iran Update daily.

The Iranian regime is pursuing a relatively unchanged nuclear negotiating position even as hardliners continue to advocate preconditions that would amount to a rejection of renewed negotiations with the United States. The Iranian Supreme Leader's International Affairs Adviser, Ali Akbar Velayati, stated on July 14 that Iran does not oppose negotiations without "preconditions" if the United States respects Iranian red lines, which include an assurance that Iran can retain its right to enrich uranium.[1] Velayati, as the supreme leader's adviser, is presumably stating the position of the supreme leader. This policy is the policy that Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi advocated for and are attempting to execute.[2] The current negotiation policy is relatively unchanged from before the Israeli strikes, when the regime insisted that it must be allowed to enrich uranium. This is consistent with the July 13 Washington Post report that noted the "consensus" among Iran's political class that Iran needs to resume nuclear negotiations with the United States. US President Donald Trump stated on July 4 that the negotiations would not be successful unless Iran agrees to inspections and zero enrichment.[3]

Hardliners have continued to advocate for much more stringent preconditions that would amount to a rejection of renewed negotiations, but the supreme leader does not appear to be heeding their advice. Iranian Armed Forces General Staff-affiliated media and a current parliamentarian and former Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) member have supported very stringent preconditions for talks since July 10, including recognition of "Israeli aggression," investigation of US involvement, payment of war reparations, and binding security guarantees to prevent future attacks.[4] An Iranian expert close to the regime reinforced the hardliner position and told the *Washington Post* on July 13 that there is "basically no chance" that Iran will negotiate under threat of US or Israeli attack and that Iran requires guarantees against future Israeli attacks.[5] These preconditions would be non-starters and amount to a rejection of negotiations. The hardliner's preconditions are not supported by the supreme leader and therefore do not reflect official Iranian policy.

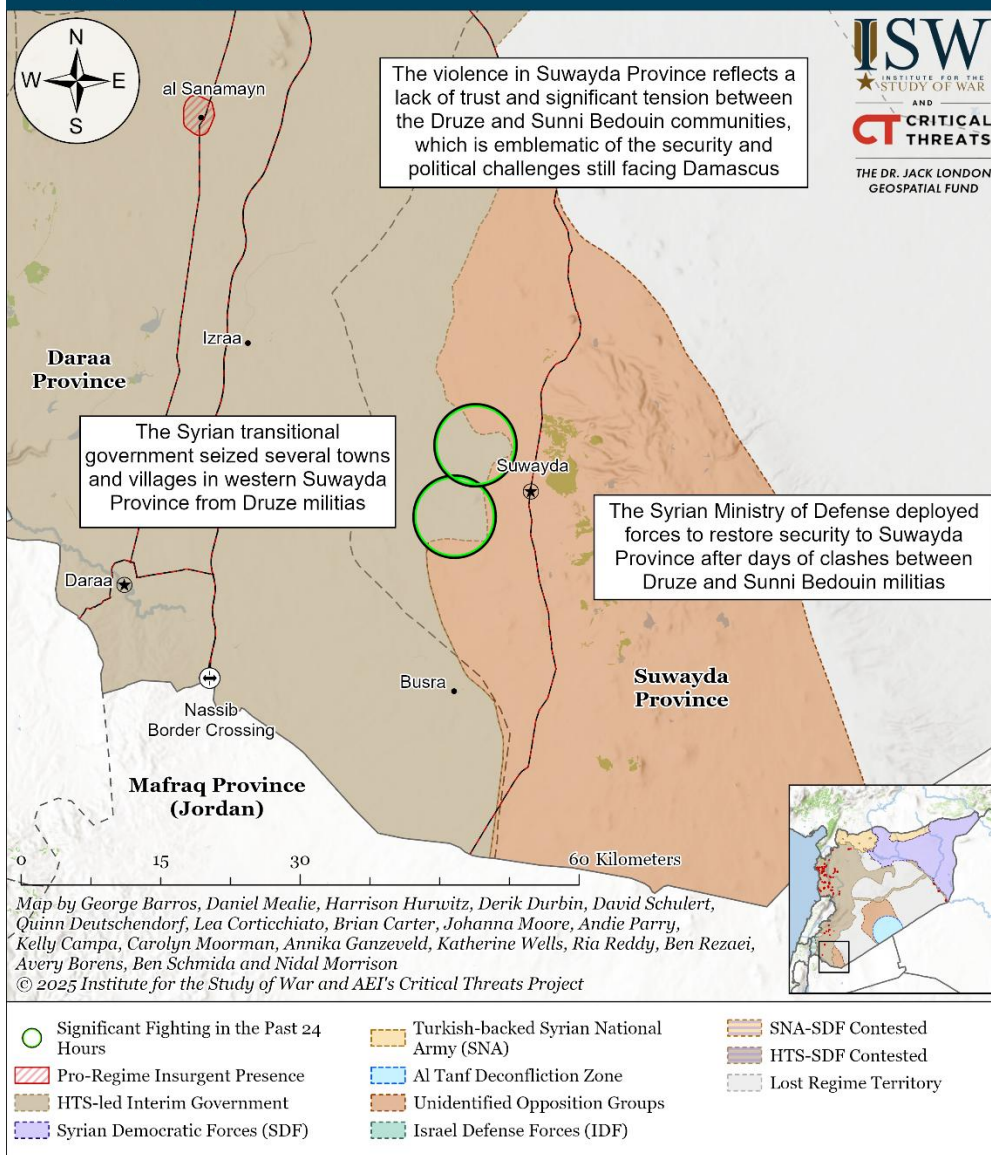
The recent fighting between Druze and Sunni Bedouin militias in Suwayda Province, Syria, is emblematic of the lack of trust and tension between different Syrian communities. The government's present makeup and the history of its key members will contribute

to the distrust and make it more difficult for the government to maintain security and stability along certain demographic fault lines in Syria. The fighting in Suwayda reportedly began after Bedouin militias beat and robbed a Suwaydawi Druze man in Masmiyah, Daraa Province, on July 11.[6] The initial engagements began near al Tirah village, Suwayda Province, and al Maqous neighborhood, Suwayda City, on July 13.[7] Both sides kidnapped dozens of civilians as hostages in these early engagements.[8] The fighting rapidly expanded on July 13 and spread throughout Suwayda Province.[9] Thirty people died and 80 more were injured during the fighting on July 13.[10] The Syrian Defense Ministry (MoD) deployed forces to Suwayda on July 14.[11] These forces have cleared Druze militia positions west of Suwayda City and are now on the city outskirts, where MoD forces have paused as the Syrian transitional government begins negotiations to stop the violence.[12]

This most recent outbreak of violence will deepen the mistrust and poor intercommunal relations that characterize the relationship between the Druze community, Sunni Bedouins, and the government. The Druze previously signed an agreement with the government on May 1 that would allow for joint Druze-government deployments across Suwayda Province to improve trust without requiring Druze militias to disarm.[13] The Druze likely sought to retain their weapons because they are skeptical of the government's motives.[14] The Druze are skeptical because President Ahmed al Shara's Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS) persecuted the Druze in northwestern Syria. The current violence will not decrease this Druze perception. Both Druze factions and MoD forces have engaged in serious abuses since the fighting began. Druze forces have beaten MoD captives, and MoD forces have looted Druze villages and forcibly shaved Druze fighters' moustaches, which have religious significance for the Druze.[15] The MoD has also reportedly coordinated with Sunni Bedouin militias.[16] The MoD has since ordered MoD personnel to cease "pillaging and violations," but this is highly unlikely to assuage Druze concerns.[17] The Druze behavior towards the MoD will also cause the MoD to increasingly view the Druze as enemies to be defeated. The lack of trust will make it very difficult for the Syrian government to create lasting stability in Suwayda under the current conditions.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Southwestern Syria

July 14, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST

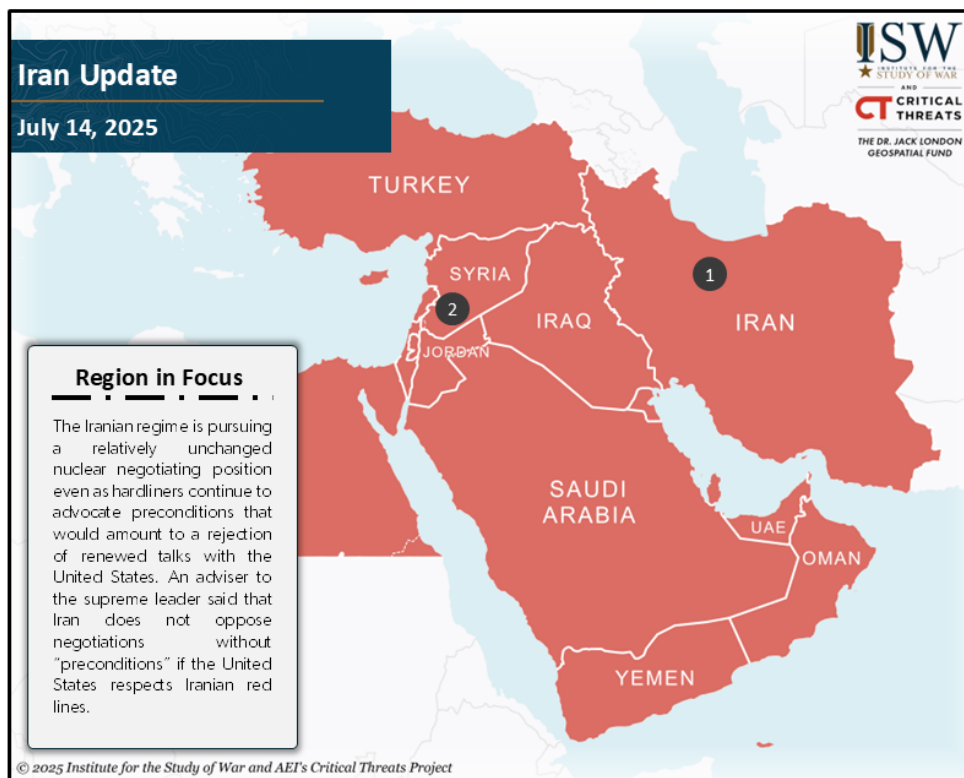


The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) conducted multiple airstrikes on Syrian MoD forces in Suwayda Province after Druze spiritual leader Hikmat al Hijri called for “international protection” for the Druze community on July 14.[18] The IDF Air Force repeatedly flew shows of force over Syrian MoD forces amassed in Daraa Province on July 14.[19] The IDF Air Force also conducted a demonstration in which it dropped unknown ordnance on a MoD tank in the village of Sami on the outskirts of Suwayda City on July 14.[20] The demonstration reportedly caused no casualties and such limited damage that the tank was repaired in under an hour and redeployed.[21] The IDF then conducted multiple airstrikes in the town of Mazraa on the outskirts of Suwayda City after MoD forces advanced to the town on July 14.[22] The IDF conducted several more airstrikes targeting unspecified sites on the outskirts of Suwayda City.[23] IDF airstrikes killed one MoD member in western Suwayda Province on July 14.[24] The IDF said that it conducted the airstrikes to prevent the

buildup of armed forces in southern Syria but did not reiterate its previous pledge to protect the Druze community.[25]

Key Takeaways:

- The Iranian regime is pursuing a relatively unchanged nuclear negotiating position even as hardliners continue to advocate preconditions that would amount to a rejection of renewed negotiations with the United States. An adviser to the supreme leader said that Iran does not oppose negotiations without “preconditions” if the United States respects Iranian red lines, which include an assurance that Iran can retain its right to enrich uranium.
- The recent fighting between Druze and Sunni Bedouin militias in Suwayda Province, Syria, is emblematic of the lack of trust and tension between different Syrian communities. The government’s present makeup and the history of its key members will contribute to the distrust and make it more difficult for the government to maintain security and stability along certain demographic fault lines in Syria.



- 1 **TEHRAN, IRAN.** The Iranian regime is pursuing a relatively unchanged nuclear negotiating position even as hardliners continue to advocate preconditions that would amount to a rejection of renewed negotiations with the United States. An adviser to the supreme leader said that Iran does not oppose negotiations without "preconditions" if the United States respects Iranian red lines, which include an assurance that Iran can retain its right to enrich uranium.
- 2 **SUWAYDA, SYRIA.** The recent fighting between Druze and Sunni Bedouin militias in Suwayda Province, Syria, is emblematic of the lack of trust and tension between different Syrian communities. The government's present makeup and the history of its key members will contribute to the distrust and make it more difficult for the government to maintain security and stability along certain demographic fault lines in Syria.

Iran

An unspecified French diplomatic source cited by Reuters on July 14 said that the European parties to the JCPOA would need to reimpose snapback sanctions on Iran without a nuclear deal that guarantees European security interests.[26] British Foreign Secretary David Lammy previously warned on July 8 that the E3 (the United Kingdom, France, and Germany) could trigger the snapback mechanism if Iran does not cooperate on its nuclear program.[27] The E3 repeatedly threatened to trigger snapback sanctions if the United States and Iran do not reach a "substantial deal" by August 2025.[28] The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (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.”[29]

China’s imports of Iranian crude oil surged in June to the highest level since March, as sellers expedited loadings to preempt potential disruptions from the Israel-Iran conflict, according to energy market intelligence firm Vortexa Ltd.[30] Bloomberg reported on July 14, citing Vortexa that crude oil imports averaged over 1.7 million barrels per day in June—up from 1.1 million in May—with a peak of 2.5 million barrels per day in the first 12 days of June before Israeli strikes.[31] A Vortexa analyst noted the surge reflected a faster, more flexible export strategy to mitigate perceived supply threats.[32] The analyst added that ongoing US tanker sanctions have not stopped Iranian flows but warned that the trend may not continue into July as Chinese independent refiners face weaker margins and reduced crude-processing rates.[33] Ample stockpiles of Iranian crude also likely give these Chinese refiners leverage to demand deeper discounts.[34] Current offers for Iranian crude are about four dollars below Brent futures, compared to about two dollars below Brent futures in May. Neither Israel nor the United States targeted Iran’s oil export infrastructure during recent strikes. China remains the largest importer of Iranian oil, helping Iran circumvent US sanctions.[35]

Syria

The Syrian General Intelligence Service arrested a Hezbollah-linked individual and seized several explosively formed penetrators (EFPs) in Homs Province on July 13.[36]

The Hezbollah-linked individual received the EFPs through illegal border crossings into Syria and reportedly intended to carry out “terrorist operations” in the region with the weapons.[37] This is the first recorded seizure of an EFP in Syria since the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024. EFPs are lethal improvised explosive devices designed to penetrate armored vehicles. EFPs require specially manufactured concave copper disks, indicating that Hezbollah affiliates smuggled the disks into Syria. Hezbollah’s Media Relations Department claimed that the individual had no affiliation with Hezbollah and said that Hezbollah has “no presence or activity in Syria.”[38] The Syrian transitional government’s frequent interdictions of weapons shipments heading to Lebanon from Syria indicate that Hezbollah has maintained some of its well-established smuggling corridors in Syria, however. Hezbollah has historically used land corridors in Syria to procure weapons from Iran into Lebanon.[39] The Syrian government has continued to dismantle smuggling networks between Syria and Iraq that previously served as a key node in the ground line of communication between Iran and Hezbollah during the Assad regime.[40]

Iraq

Likely Iranian-backed Iraqi militants launched a one-way attack drone that may have targeted the Erbil International Airport, Iraqi Kurdistan, on July 14.[41]

The Kurdistan Regional Government’s Counter-Terrorism Group reported that the drone was intercepted near Erbil International Airport on July 14.[42] Erbil International Airport hosts US forces that are part of the US-led anti-ISIS coalition.[43] The drone did not cause any casualties or damage.[44] No group has claimed or commented on the attack at the time of this writing. Likely Iranian-backed Iraqi militias have conducted multiple one-way drone attacks targeting US positions across Iraq between June 12 and 24.[45] Iranian-backed Iraqi militias have not claimed any attacks during this period.

-
- [1] <https://www.mehrnews dot com/news/6529656>
- [2] <http://defapress dot ir/fa/news/762179> ;
<https://www.ettelaat dot com/news/102266/>
- [3] <https://x.com/JasonMBrodsky/status/1941430780518924595>
- [4] <https://defapress dot ir/fa/news/761391/>
- [5] <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2025/07/13/iran-nuclear-negotiations-pezeschkian-araghchi/>
- [6] <https://x.com/QalaatAlMudiq/status/1944325890327945337> ; <https://apnews.com/article/syria-druze-clashes-explainer-sweida-bedouin-b591788d6573d48cc6aebc2edef4d649> ;
<https://x.com/suwayda24/status/1944395956616610172> ;
<https://x.com/CdricLabrousse/status/1944441843539661032>
- [7] https://x.com/Charles_Lister/status/1944411814982222172 ;
<https://x.com/QalaatAlMudiq/status/1944325890327945337> ;
<https://x.com/QalaatAlMudiq/status/1944448649309683741> ;
<https://x.com/QalaatAlMudiq/status/1944437767024328912>
- [8] https://x.com/Charles_Lister/status/1944411814982222172 ;
<https://x.com/QalaatAlMudiq/status/1944325890327945337> ;
<https://x.com/QalaatAlMudiq/status/1944448649309683741> ;
<https://x.com/QalaatAlMudiq/status/1944437767024328912>
- [9] <https://x.com/QalaatAlMudiq/status/1944649349062877557> ; <https://t.me/syrianmoi/25030> ;
<https://x.com/QalaatAlMudiq/status/1944840176527610001>
- [10] <https://x.com/QalaatAlMudiq/status/1944649349062877557> ; <https://t.me/syrianmoi/25030> ;
<https://x.com/QalaatAlMudiq/status/1944840176527610001>
- [11] <https://x.com/QalaatAlMudiq/status/1944710037772910613> ;
<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/14/world/middleeast/syria-clashes-deaths-bedouin-druze.html>
- [12] https://x.com/omar_alharir/status/1944695044302049317 ;
<https://x.com/QalaatAlMudiq/status/1944766002031395105> ;
<https://x.com/QalaatAlMudiq/status/1944840176527610001> ;
<https://x.com/QalaatAlMudiq/status/1944840176527610001> ;
- [13] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-may-2-2025>
- [14] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-may-2-2025>

- [15] <https://x.com/anasanas84/status/1944646035722108984> ;
<https://x.com/anasanas84/status/1944713983585399218> ;
<https://x.com/CdricLabrousse/status/1944793541936386263> ;
<https://x.com/CdricLabrousse/status/1944797492497010899>
- [16] <https://x.com/QalaatAlMudiq/status/1944733663649833290> ;
<https://x.com/QalaatAlMudiq/status/1944840176527610001>
- [17] <https://x.com/CdricLabrousse/status/1944799014244790482> ;
https://x.com/Murhaf_abuqasra/status/1944794884679860409
- [18] <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1CxZty4dwF/> ;
<https://x.com/manniefabian/status/1944775218687266845> ;
<https://x.com/QalaatAlMudiq/status/1944786281256362102>
- [19] <https://x.com/QalaatAlMudiq/status/1944681924150362528>
- [20] <https://x.com/QalaatAlMudiq/status/1944776028204806585> ;
https://x.com/Charles_Lister/status/1944778954788815264 ;
<https://x.com/manniefabian/status/1944775218687266845>
- [21] <https://x.com/QalaatAlMudiq/status/1944776028204806585> ;
https://x.com/Charles_Lister/status/1944778954788815264
- [22] <https://x.com/QalaatAlMudiq/status/1944786281256362102> ;
<https://x.com/QalaatAlMudiq/status/1944754627456413978>
- [23] <https://x.com/QalaatAlMudiq/status/1944797919523078421>
- [24] <https://x.com/QalaatAlMudiq/status/1944832919618392216>
- [25] <https://x.com/idfonline/status/1944775315651236179> ;
<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/14/world/middleeast/syria-clashes-deaths-bedouin-druse.html> ;
<https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-may-2-2025>
- [26] <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iran-says-it-will-respond-reimposition-un-sanctions-2025-07-14/>
- [27] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jul/08/uk-threatens-sanctions-on-iran-if-it-doesnt-end-uncertainty-on-nuclear-plan>
- [28] <https://www.reuters.com/world/iran-europeans-hold-nuclear-talks-friday-diplomatic-sources-say-2025-05-13/>
- [29] https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2016-03/UNSC-Res-2231_o.pdf
- [30] <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2025-07-14/china-s-imports-of-iran-crude-at-three-month-high-vortexa-says>
- [31] <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2025-07-14/china-s-imports-of-iran-crude-at-three-month-high-vortexa-says>

- [32] <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2025-07-14/china-s-imports-of-iran-crude-at-three-month-high-vortexa-says>
- [33] <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2025-07-14/china-s-imports-of-iran-crude-at-three-month-high-vortexa-says>
- [34] <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2025-07-14/china-s-imports-of-iran-crude-at-three-month-high-vortexa-says>
- [35] <https://www.unitedagainstnucleariran.com/blog/april-2025-iran-tanker-tracker>
- [36] <https://t.me/syrianmoi/25026>
- [37] <https://t.me/syrianmoi/25026>
- [38] <https://mediarelations-lb dot org/post.php?id=19342>
- [39] <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/dont-assume-irans-supply-lines-hezbollah-are-cut>
- [40] <https://www.understandingwar.org/background/iran-update-may-25-2023> ;
<https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2020/03/the-transformation-of-the-iraqi-syrian-border-from-a-national-to-a-regional-frontier?lang=en¢er=middle-east>
; <https://newlinesmag.com/spotlight/life-returns-to-al-bukamal-after-iranian-militias-flee/>
- [41] <https://shafaq dot com/ar/کورستانیات/بیان رسمی-سقاط طاره-مسی ره-قرب مطار-ریل دون-ضرار>
- [42] <https://shafaq dot com/ar/کورستانیات/بیان رسمی-سقاط طاره-مسی ره-قرب مطار-ریل دون-ضرار>
- [43] <https://www.newarab.com/news/drone-shot-down-near-iraqi-airport-hosting-us-troops>
- [44] <https://shafaq dot com/ar/کورستانیات/بیان رسمی-سقاط طاره-مسی ره-قرب مطار-ریل دون-ضرار>
- [45] https://www.wsj.com/livecoverage/iran-israel-us-latest-news/card/u-s-forces-in-iraq-intercept-five-attack-drones-I8AYjH2Iv96HcWMrf7MP?gaa_at=eafs&gaa_n=ASWzDAjfsJajjj4ypcg5EnS3xaVQghNyt2MgpYDQpbld5DaQKeqKaul-pqZl&gaa_ts=6862dbd7&gaa_sig=UJpIvanqU32UYy65_iBP7QLBpwLtAk_GNImW6DEoBdttqpfwWeJHcQ44hoAXBocWLmuRHb4RIAKWadFGd6Cu5A%3D%3D ;
https://www.wsj.com/livecoverage/iran-israel-us-latest-news/card/u-s-forces-in-iraq-intercept-five-attack-drones-I8AYjH2Iv96HcWMrf7MP?gaa_at=eafs&gaa_n=ASWzDAjfsJajjj4ypcg5EnS3xaVQghNyt2MgpYDQpbld5DaQKeqKaul-pqZl&gaa_ts=6862dbd7&gaa_sig=UJpIvanqU32UYy65_iBP7QLBpwLtAk_GNImW6DEoBdttqpfwWeJHcQ44hoAXBocWLmuRHb4RIAKWadFGd6Cu5A%3D%3D