

Iran Update



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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.

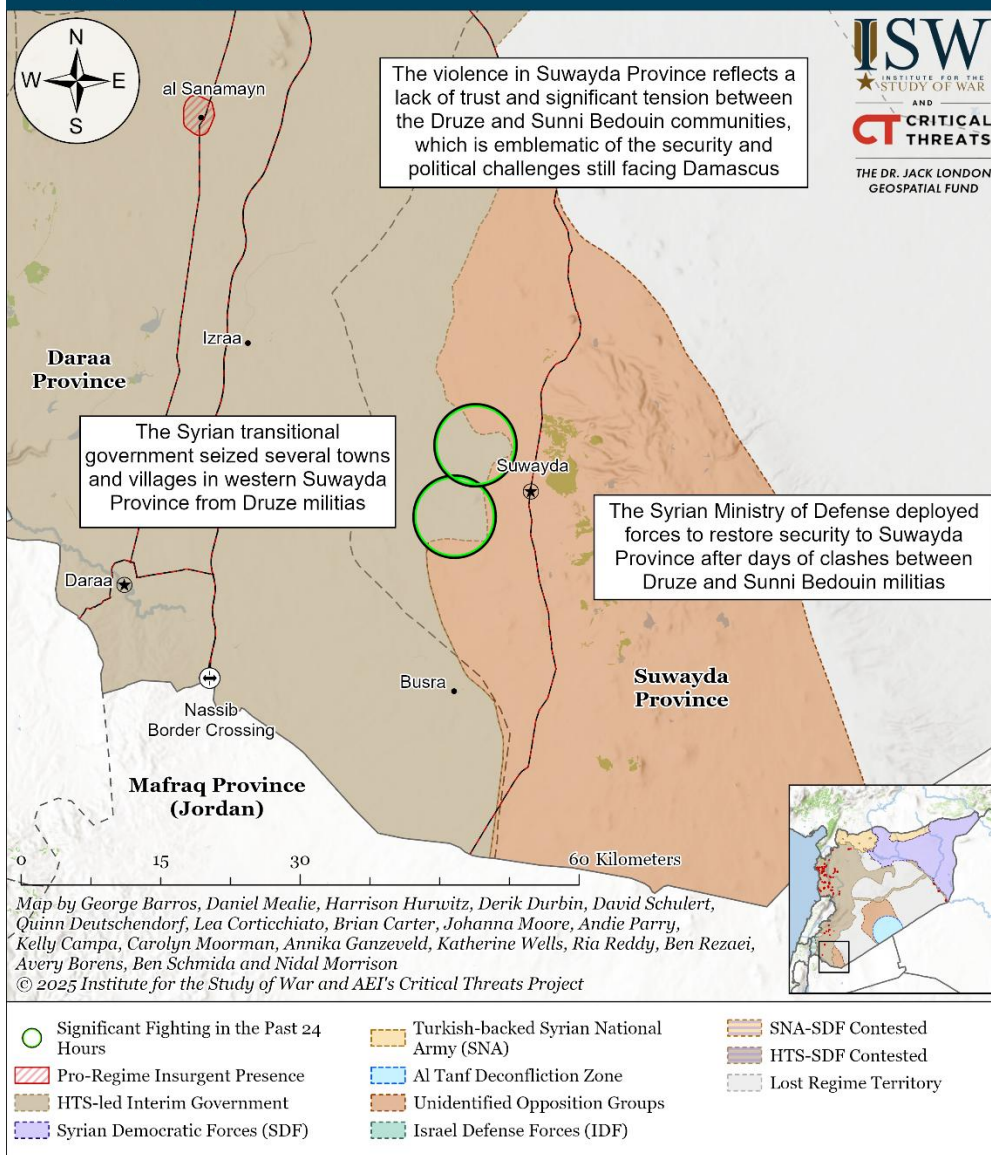
The recent fighting between Druze and Sunni Bedouin militias in Suwayda Province, Syria, is emblematic of the lack of trust and tension between different Syrian communities. The government’s present makeup and the history of its key members will contribute

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

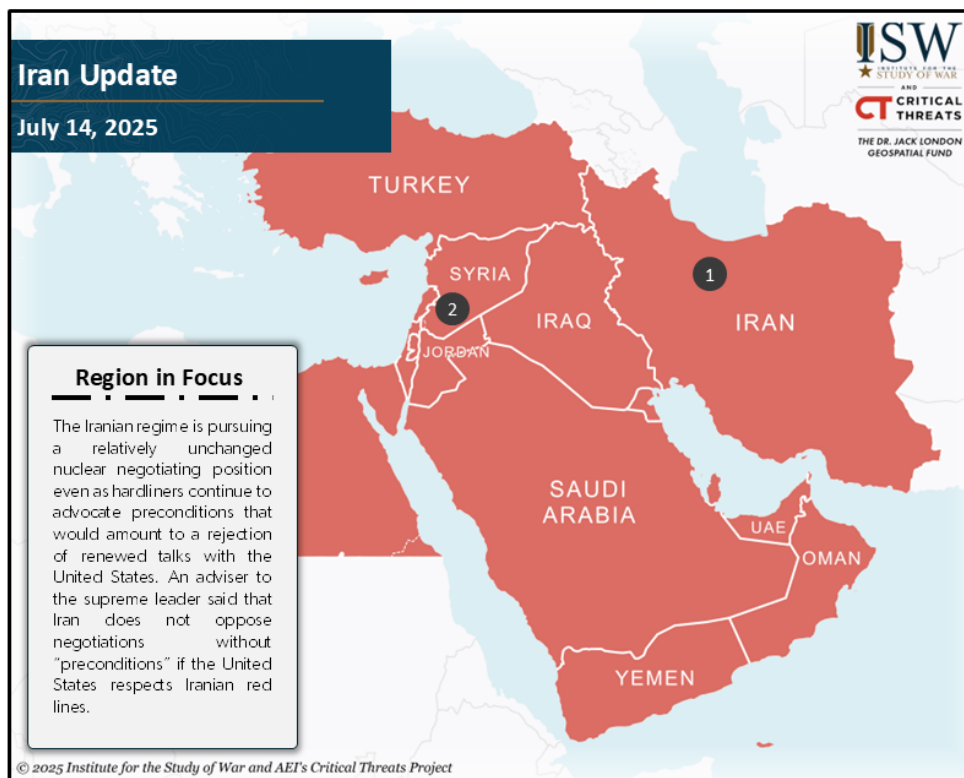


The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) conducted multiple airstrikes on Syrian MoD forces in Suwayda Province after Druze spiritual leader Hikmat al Hijri called for “international protection” for the Druze community on July 14.[18] The IDF Air Force repeatedly flew shows of force over Syrian MoD forces amassed 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.

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Iran Update



Iran Update, July 15, 2025

**Ria Reddy, Ben Rezaei, Ben Schmida, Carolyn Moorman, Nidal Morrison,
Avery Borens, Johanna Moore, and Annika Ganzeveld**

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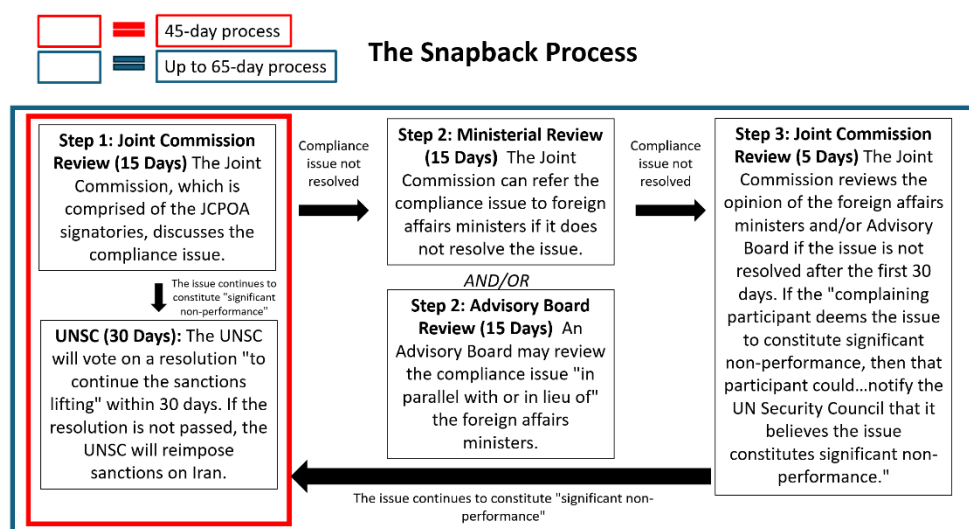
Iran may be prioritizing deeper strategic ties with China over its current partnership with Russia, though the extent of China's willingness to support Iran remains unclear. Iranian hardline outlet Farhikhtegan reported on July 15 that Iran is frustrated over Russia's "cautious stance" during the 12-Day War.[1] The outlet stated that Iranian officials believe that Russia misinterpreted the war as a localized conflict between Iran and Israel rather than a "broader NATO confrontation." [2] Farhikhtegan reported that Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi's visit to Moscow on June 23 pushed Russia to more strongly condemn Israeli strikes, including at UN Security Council meetings.[3] Iranian experts told Farhikhtegan that Iran will likely maintain ties with Russia but must "rethink parts of the relationship and expand cooperation with other partners," especially in "sensitive military and strategic areas." [4] Reuters previously reported on June 23 that Iran was unsatisfied with Russia's support for Iran during the Israel-Iran War, citing unspecified Iranian sources.[5]

Iran appears to be trying to strengthen military and defense cooperation with China following the Israel-Iran War.[6] Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General Aziz Nasir Zadeh met with his Chinese counterpart on June 26 during a Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit in Beijing, reportedly to discuss potential military purchases, including J-10 fighter jets and advanced AWACS systems.[7] Arab media claimed on July 9 that China sent surface-to-air missile systems to Iran in late June to replenish its degraded air defenses after Israeli strikes, although Chinese and Iranian officials denied the report.[8] These developments reflect Iran's efforts to diversify its defense partnerships after dissatisfaction with Russia's limited wartime support and delays in delivering S-400 systems and Su-35 aircraft.[9]

Araghchi held a meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping on July 15 on the sidelines of an SCO ministerial meeting in Beijing.[10] Xi also met with Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Sergei Lavrov on the sidelines of the SCO meeting.[11] Araghchi delivered a speech at the summit and proposed initiatives to strengthen regional cooperation, including the creation of a permanent security mechanism, a center to counter sanctions, and a regional security forum to address shared threats.[12] The permanent security mechanism proposal likely reflects Iran's dissatisfaction with Russia's support during the war. The Russo-Iranian strategic cooperation agreement lacks a mutual defense guarantee, unlike the cooperation agreement between Russia and North Korea.[13]

Iran has lastly signaled that China could play a more significant role in future nuclear negotiations. Farhikhtegan reported on July 14 that Iran would consider Norway or China as mediators to replace Oman in future nuclear talks with the United States.[14] Iranian Foreign Affairs Ministry Spokesperson Esmail Baghaei separately highlighted China's potential "significant and constructive" role in nuclear diplomacy and in rebuilding Iran's economy under the 25-year partnership agreement, which Iran and China signed in 2020.[15]

Iran is threatening to expand its nuclear program, likely in an attempt to deter snapback sanctions. 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." [16] Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps-affiliated media published an article on July 15 outlining potential Iranian responses to snapback sanctions.[17] The responses included increasing uranium enrichment levels from 60 percent to 90 percent weapons-grade uranium, deploying more advanced centrifuges, expanding nuclear research and development, and developing uranium metal production chains. These threats come after E3 (the United Kingdom, France, and Germany) officials have resurfaced threats to trigger the snapback mechanism if Iran fails to make verifiable commitments related to its nuclear program.[18] French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot told reporters on July 15 that the E3 will trigger the snapback mechanism "by the end of August at the latest" if Iran fails to make a "firm, tangible, and verifiable commitment." [19] The snapback mechanism under the JCPOA expires on October 18, 2025. The process to impose snapback sanctions takes between 45 and 65 days from when the initial non-compliance complaint is issued, which means that the E3 would have to initiate the process no later than September 3.[20] The graphic below outlines the processes by which the E3 could impose snapback sanctions on Iran. The quickest process would take a minimum of 45 days, while the longest process would take 65 days.



Each step in the snapback process provides Iran with an opportunity to comply with its JCPOA commitments. The process for imposing snapback sanctions continues so long as Iran continues to fail to comply with its commitments.

US and Israeli airstrikes have likely hindered Iran's ability to carry out these threats to expand its nuclear program, at least in the short term. The Institute for Science and Security assessed that US and Israeli airstrikes on Iran have “effectively destroyed” Iran’s enrichment program and that it will take a “long time” for Iran to restore its enrichment capabilities to pre-strike levels.[21] The strikes targeted centrifuge production facilities and active centrifuges, damaging and destroying thousands of centrifuges.[22] Israeli airstrikes also destroyed some of Iran's uranium metal production facilities, which Iran could have used to transform uranium gas into dense metal in a process called metallization.[23] This process is one of the last steps required to form the explosive core of an atomic bomb. Israeli airstrikes also targeted Iranian nuclear scientists, which will likely temporarily disrupt Iran's ability to conduct nuclear research.[24] Iran will likely try to take some of the steps outlined in IRGC-affiliated media, regardless of whether the E3 triggers the snapback mechanism, as part of its effort to rebuild its nuclear program following the Israel-Iran War.

The Institute for Science and International Security (the Institute) assessed that Israel's decapitation campaign targeting Iranian nuclear scientists “weakened Iran’s base for building nuclear weapons.”[25] The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) killed at least 14 nuclear scientists during the Israel-Iran War.[26] The Institute reported on July 15 that it “may be far more difficult and take far longer” for Iran to recover from the loss of these scientists, given the scope of the decapitation campaign compared to previous Israeli killings of Iranian nuclear scientists.[27] The Institute stated that 11 of the scientists were affiliated with or senior managers at the Iranian Organization of Defensive Innovation and Research (SPND), which played a leading role in the Iranian nuclear weapons research program before 2003.[28] The Institute reported that among the 11 scientists, six had expertise in explosives, at least three were nuclear coding and simulation experts, four were experts in nuclear weapons testing, two were linked to foreign procurement networks for Iran's nuclear weapons program, three had experience in ballistic missiles, two worked on nuclear propulsion for submarines, and two conducted theoretical work on gas centrifuges.[29] Axios reported in June 2024 that Iran had begun running computer simulations that could support the research and development of a nuclear weapon, citing US and Israeli intelligence agencies.[30] The loss of these nuclear scientists may temporarily hinder Iran’s ability to conduct nuclear research and develop its nuclear program.

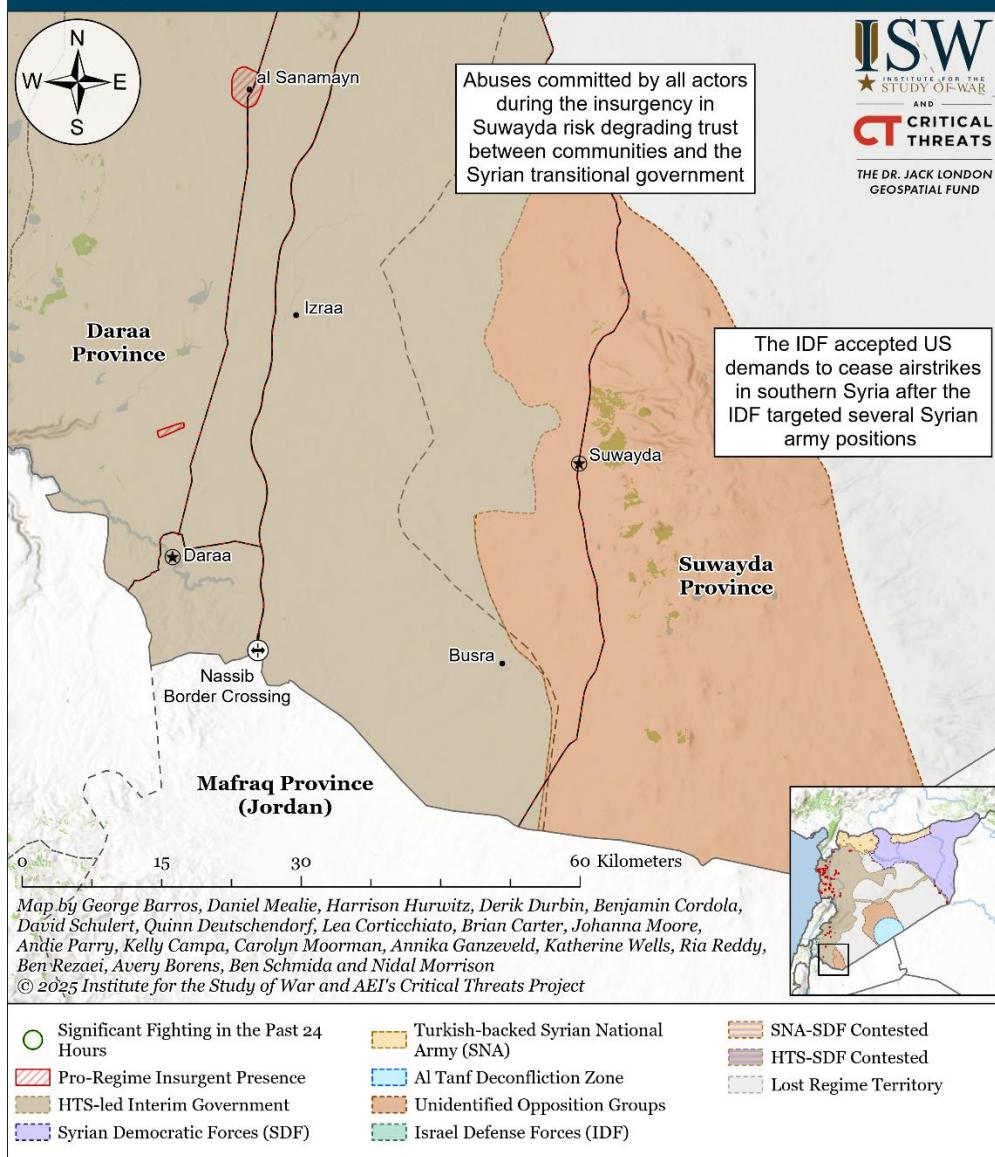
Abuses committed by all actors during the ongoing insurgency in Suwayda Province will likely degrade trust between communities and the Syrian transitional government, which risks undermining the transitional government's ability to establish long-term stability in Syria. These abuses, while not all inherently sectarian, will be perceived as such by Syrian minority groups and will have protracted impacts on Syria’s stability and security. Syrian Defense Minister Marhaf Abu Qasra announced a ceasefire between the Syrian transitional government and local Suwadawi leadership on July 15 and instructed Ministry of Defense (MoD) units that had entered Suwayda City to only fire when fired upon, pursue outlaw groups, protect the local population, respect property, and maintain peace.[31] Security forces deployed to Suwayda City on July 15 and established checkpoints to monitor activity.[32] Security forces engaged in numerous abuses, however, including the summary executions of civilians and Druze militiamen, arson attacks on shops, acts of pillage, and the forcible shaving of Druze men's moustaches, which have religious significance for the Druze.[33] Druze militia members have also engaged in abuses during the insurgency, such as the summary execution of security forces on July 14. These abuses further complicate the security situation and increase tensions between the MoD and Druze militias.[34]

The Syrian transitional government's ability and willingness to hold security forces members accountable for crimes committed against civilians will be one factor that influences its ability to establish security and stability in southern Syria. Defense Minister Qasra announced on July 14 and 15 that the government will hold troops who commit abuses in Suwayda responsible for their actions.[35] These abuses violate the MoD's code of conduct, which applies to all military personnel.[36] The Syrian transitional government has not publicly held Syrian soldiers accountable for the massacres of Alawites on the Syrian coast in March, despite investigative reports from humanitarian groups documenting and identifying perpetrators.[37] This inaction has fueled distrust of the transitional government among the Alawite community.[38] Failing to hold security forces accountable for crimes committed in Suwayda would similarly likely increase distrust between the Druze community and the Syrian transitional government.

Some Druze factions that oppose the Syrian transitional government rejected the ceasefire between the government and Suwaydawi leadership. Suwaydawi religious and civil leaders announced a ceasefire agreement on July 15 that allowed MoD forces to enter Suwayda City.[39] Faction leaders, such as the leader of the Men of Dignity's Sheikh al Karama militia, Layth al Balous, coordinated with the MoD during the recent insurgency and supported the previous security agreement in May.[40] The Suwayda Military Council (SMC), which retains ties to Assad-era generals and is loyal to prominent Druze Sheikh Hikmat al Hijri, rejected the ceasefire and attacked MoD units entering the city.[41] Hijri initially accepted the ceasefire agreement in two published statements, but then released a third statement on July 15 in which he claimed that his earlier statements were made under duress.[42] Hijri added that the Druze face a "war of extermination" and that they must confront the "barbaric campaign with all available means." [43] Ahmed al Shara's government could build relationships with militias that agreed to the ceasefire and oppose Hijri, such as Liwa al Jibal, the Men of Dignity, and Sheikh al Karama, to isolate and ultimately defeat Hijri and the SMC.[44] Shara has employed similar tactics previously, such as when he successfully disbanded and integrated the Eighth Brigade into the Syrian government in April.[45] Druze factions have divergent political views and are not a monolith, but most have rejected the imposition of security forces from outside the province.[46] This is due to legitimate concerns about the Syrian transitional government's treatment of minorities, amplified by the massacres of Alawites on the Syrian coast in March and previous mistreatment of Druze in Rif Dimashq Province in May.[47]

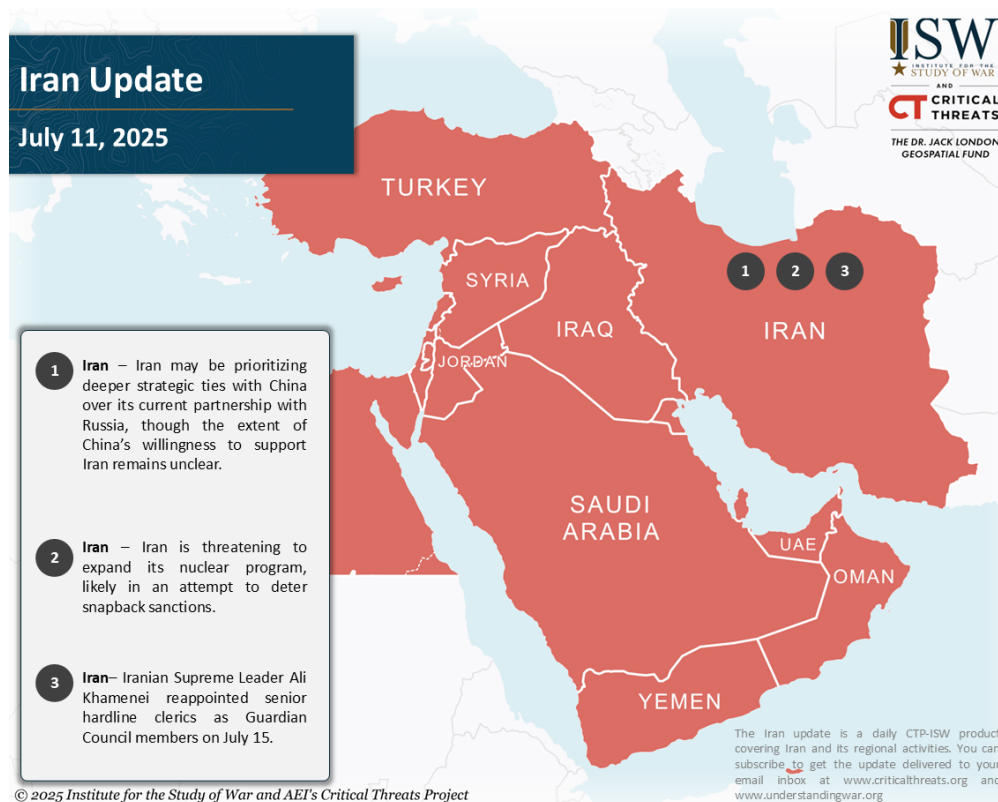
Assessed Control of Terrain in Southwestern Syria

July 15, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) accepted a US demand to cease all airstrikes in southern Syria on July 15 following a series of airstrikes on Syrian transitional government military targets in southwestern Syria.[48] The IDF conducted several airstrikes in Suwayda Province on July 15 that targeted the Syrian MoD and General Security Service (GSS).[49] Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Israel Katz released a statement on July 15 that Israel conducted the strikes to protect the Druze minority in Syria.[50] The IDF struck MoD vehicles, tanks, and the police station in Suwayda City before and after the ceasefire between Druze notables and the Syrian transitional government was announced.[51] The Syrian Foreign Affairs Ministry condemned the strikes, calling them a blatant violation of Syria's sovereignty and a breach of international law and the UN Charter.[52] The ministry called on the UN Security Council to condemn the strikes.[53]

Saraya Ansar al Sunnah, which is a Salafi-jihadi group ideologically aligned with ISIS, threatened on July 15 to expand its sectarian attacks to include the Druze community in Suwayda.[54] The group has threatened the Druze and killed Druze civilians since it was established in December 2024.[55] Saraya Ansar al Sunnah has not claimed any attacks in Suwayda since its establishment. The group's threat may be intended to instill fear and distrust within the Druze community of transitional government forces.[56] Saraya Ansar al Sunnah's stated objective is to establish an Islamic State in Syria that excludes Alawites, Druze, Christians, and Shia.[57]



Key Takeaways:

- Iran may be prioritizing deeper strategic ties with China over its current partnership with Russia, though the extent of China's willingness to support Iran remains unclear. Iranian hardline outlet Farhikhtegan reported on July 15 that Iran is frustrated over Russia's "cautious stance" during the 12-Day War.
- Iran is threatening to expand its nuclear program, likely in an attempt to deter snapback sanctions. US and Israeli airstrikes have likely hindered Iran's ability to carry out these threats to expand its nuclear program, at least in the short term.
- Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei reappointed senior clerics Ahmad Khatami, Alireza Araf, and Ahmad Hosseini Khorasani as Guardian Council members on July 15. All three clerics are Assembly of Experts members and belong to the hardline Society of Seminary Teachers of Qom. The Guardian Council plays a key role in Iranian elections and vets candidates and legislation, which gives these clerics significant influence over Iran's political landscape until at least 2031.

Iran

Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei reappointed senior clerics Ahmad Khatami, Alireza Araf, and Ahmad Hosseini Khorasani as Guardian Council members on July 15.[58] All three clerics are Assembly of Experts members and belong to the hardline Society of Seminary Teachers of Qom.[59] Khatami is also the interim Tehran Friday prayer leader and has repeatedly called for the execution of US President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.[60] Khatami, Araf, and Hosseini Khorasani were among over 400 Qom clerics who signed a statement on July 13 in support of a recent fatwa that declared threats against Khamenei as acts of “mohareb” (enemies of God).[61] The fatwa also called for jihad and global Muslim mobilization against the United States and Israel.[62] The term of six Guardian Council members, including three jurists and three clerics, ended on July 9.[63] Iran’s constitution grants the Supreme Leader authority to appoint six clerics to the Guardian Council, while the Judiciary Chief nominates six legal experts.[64] The three clerics will each serve another six-year term. The Guardian Council plays a key role in Iranian elections and vets candidates and legislation, which gives these clerics significant influence over Iran’s political landscape until at least 2031.[65]

Iraq

The United States reportedly threatened in July 2025 to sanction the Iraqi state-run State Organization for Marketing of Oil (SOMO) and block \$350 million of Iraqi oil revenue if the Iraqi federal government failed to prevent Iranian crude oil smuggling.[66] Iran oversees an oil smuggling network in Iraq that generates around a billion dollars annually for Iran and its Axis of Resistance.[67] The United States announced on July 3 that it sanctioned six entities and four vessels involved in smuggling Iranian oil, which included a network of companies run by an Iraqi businessman.[68] Oil accounted for around 91 percent of Iraqi federal revenue in 2025.[69]

Likely Iranian-backed Iraqi militants conducted at least two one-way drone attacks targeting two oil fields in Iraqi Kurdistan on July 14 and 15. Unidentified actors launched two one-way attack drones targeting the Kurdish-owned Khurmala oil field in Erbil Province on July 14.[70] Unidentified actors launched a one-way attack drone targeting the US-operated Sarsang oil field in Dohuk Province on July 15.[71] Reuters reported that the drone attack on the Sarsang oil field caused an explosion, which paused production.[72] The attack came hours before the oil field’s operator, US-based private company HKN Energy Limited, and the Iraqi government signed a preliminary agreement for HKN Energy Limited to invest in another oil field. Likely Iranian-backed Iraqi militias have conducted several attacks targeting US positions in Iraq in recent weeks. Iranian-backed Iraqi militias have not claimed any of these attacks.

The suspected Iranian-backed Iraqi militia attacks have coincided with key political and diplomatic developments within the Iraqi federal government. The loosely aligned pro-Iran Shia Coordination Framework has been exploiting various legal and illegal means to sideline Iraqi political opponents in the lead up to the November 2025 elections to secure a parliamentary majority. Iranian-backed Iraqi militias previously conducted rocket attacks on Kurdish oil and gas fields between March and June 2022 to pressure Kurdish parties to withdraw their support for Iraqi Shia nationalist cleric Moqtada al Sadr. This strategy sought to deprive Sadr of allies to secure a majority in parliament.[73] Kurdish parties, including the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), aligned with the

Shia Coordination Framework following Sadr’s failure to form a majority coalition and subsequent withdrawal from parliament.

Sadr disavowed 31 members of his Shia Nationalist Movement (formerly the Sadrist Movement) on July 13 due to their participation in the upcoming elections.^[74] Sadr announced in March 2025 that his political party would not participate in the upcoming November 2025 parliamentary elections, although there has been speculation among Iraqi politicians that Sadr could sway voters through policy or candidate endorsement.^[75] A close associate of Sadr reported on July 13 that Sadr asked about candidates and blocs running in the upcoming elections on agendas like Sadr’s, such as promoting Iraqi independence, dismantling the Iranian-backed Popular Mobilization Forces, and cracking down on corruption.^[76]

Syria

See topline section.

Arabian Peninsula

The Israeli Air Force intercepted a Houthi drone before it crossed into Israeli territory on July 15.^[77] The Houthis have not claimed the attack at the time of this writing. 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.^[78]

The Palestinian Territories and Lebanon

The IDF struck Hezbollah Radwan Force training camps and weapons depots in the Wadi Fara area of Lebanon’s Bekaa Valley on July 15.^[79] The strikes reportedly killed 12 individuals, making these strikes the deadliest IDF airstrikes in Lebanon since the Israel-Hezbollah ceasefire went into effect in November 2024.^[80] The Radwan Force is Hezbollah’s special operations forces unit that is designed to conduct offensive ground operations into Israel.^[81] Hezbollah reportedly used the Radwan camps to train fighters to plan and execute “terror operations” against the IDF and Israel.^[82] Israeli ground operations in southern Lebanon between October and November 2024 destroyed key Hezbollah assets in southern Lebanon, such as tunnels that could support ground attacks into northern Israel.^[83] The IDF has continued to conduct airstrikes on the Radwan Force since November 2024.^[84] The IDF said that Hezbollah Radwan units have been working to restore their capabilities since September 2024.^[85] Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz said that the strikes were a “clear message” to Hezbollah against rebuilding the Radwan Force.^[86] Hezbollah condemned the strikes, describing them as a “major escalation.”^[87] Hezbollah said that the strikes will make Lebanese civilians more committed to “resistance” as a “necessary option.”^[88]

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Iran Update



Ben Schmida, Ben Rezaei, Katherine Wells, Ria Reddy, Carolyn Moorman, Avery Borens, Nidal Morrison, Kelly Campa, and Annika Ganzeveld

Information Cutoff: July 16, 2025, 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.

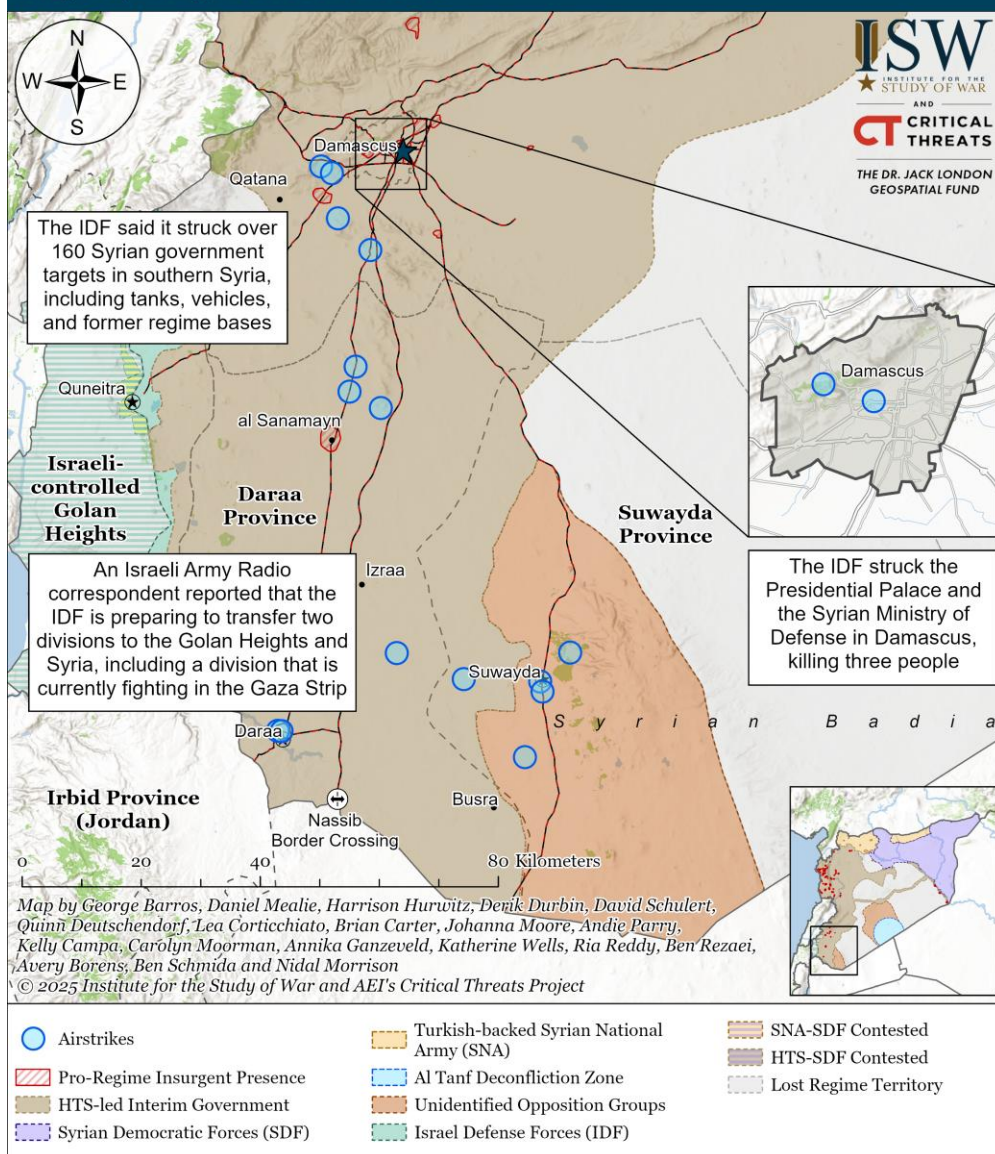
Israeli airstrikes in Syria are unlikely to achieve Israel’s stated aim of protecting the Druze in Syria because the strikes do not address the root cause of attacks committed by some members of the Syrian Ministry of Defense (MoD) against the Druze. These attacks largely stem from a lack of control over undisciplined MoD units.[1] Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on July 16 that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) is working to “save” the Druze and “eliminate” the “regime’s gangs,” referring to Syrian government forces that have conducted attacks against Druze.[2] The IDF has conducted over 160 airstrikes across southern Syria since July 15, including a strike on the Syrian Presidential Palace and multiple strikes on the MoD headquarters in Damascus.[3] The IDF also struck MoD personnel, tanks, vehicles, and military bases in Rif Dimashq, Daraa, and Suwayda provinces.[4] Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz said on July 16 that the IDF will continue to “impose the demilitarization policy” until Syrian MoD units withdraw from Suwayda Province.[5]

It is highly unlikely that Syrian President Ahmed al Shara ordered or encouraged the abuses that some MoD forces have committed in Suwayda. The abuses likely stem from a lack of control over undisciplined units. The transitional government has repeatedly called on MoD members to cease violations and has implemented some measures, such as the deployment of military police, to arrest perpetrators. MoD forces’ violations disrupt Damascus’s ability to secure Druze support for a settlement to the crisis.[6]

Israel conducted these strikes after the United States demanded that Israel cease all airstrikes in southern Syria on July 15. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on July 16 that the United States is very concerned about Israeli strikes and “want[s] the fighting to stop.”[7] An Israeli Army Radio correspondent reported that the IDF is preparing to transfer two divisions to the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights and Syrian border area, including the 98th Reserve Paratrooper Division and another unspecified reserve division.[8] The 98th Division is currently deployed in the Gaza Strip, where it has operated since May 2025.[9] The IDF also diverted additional aircraft to Syria.[10]

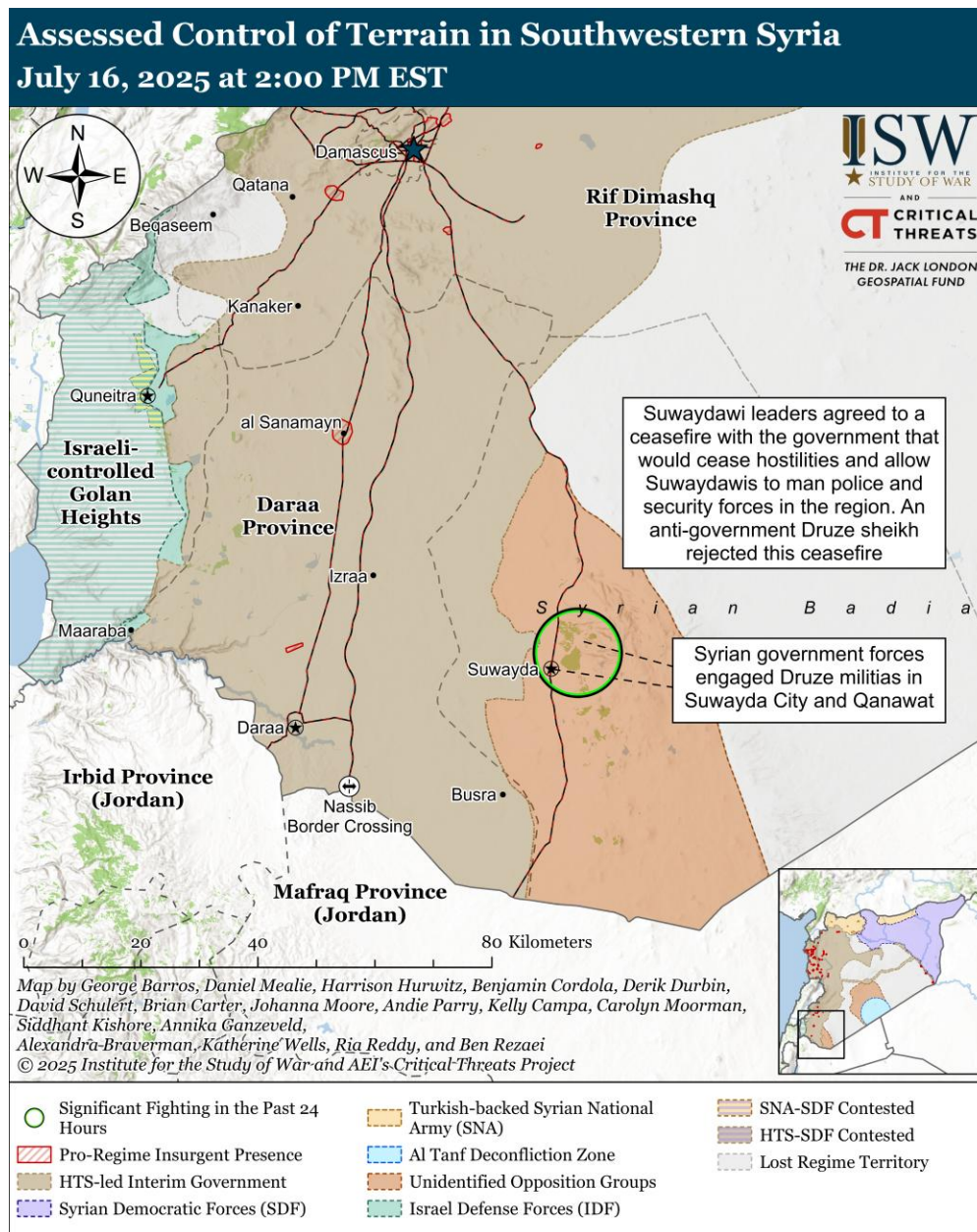
Israel Airstrikes in Southern Syria

July 16, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



A lone Druze faction is undermining the Syrian transitional government's diplomatic efforts with pro-government Suwaydawi leaders. Prominent Druze Sheikh Hikmat al Hijri publicly rejected a ceasefire agreed upon by the transitional government and pro-government Druze leaders on July 16. This marks the third time that Hijri has rejected a government-Suwaydawi ceasefire since the fighting began on July 13.[11] Druze militias loyal to Hijri resumed attacks on government forces after the ceasefire was announced on July 16.[12] These militias include the Suwayda Military Council, which retains ties to Assad-era generals.[13] Hijri only represents a fraction of the Syrian Druze community, however. Several prominent Druze leaders, such as Sheikh Yousef Jarbou, have committed to working with the Shara government and continue to do so even after government forces entered Suwayda and committed abuses against residents.[14] Pro-government Druze leaders like Jarbou and Hamoud al Hanawi have a fractious history of political rivalry with Hijri, and Hijri was

often at odds with Men of Dignity founder and father of Laith al Balous, Wahid al Balous.[15] Balous and other leaders have rejected Hijri's call for international intervention to protect the Druze in Suwayda Province.[16] Hijri called for the "unconditional liberation" of Suwayda Province from government forces, which suggests that he is unwilling to negotiate with the transitional government without a complete withdrawal of government forces from Suwayda.[17] The ceasefire agreement that Hijri broke on July 16 was nearly identical to a May 2025 agreement between Suwaydawi leaders, the transitional government, and Hijri himself.[18] Both the broken ceasefire agreement and the May 2025 agreement appear designed to minimize abuses against civilians by allowing Suwaydawis to man local police and General Security Service (GSS) forces. The agreement also created a fact-finding commission to investigate abuses committed during the recent conflict.



The Syrian government remains responsible for holding the perpetrators of abuses against Druze accountable, even if the government does not order or support these abuses. Suwayda-based media reported on July 16 that MoD forces have executed Druze men in their homes and in city streets.[19] The outlet, citing unspecified local sources, also accused military forces of raiding homes, looting, and threatening residents at gunpoint.[20] The pro-government Men of Dignity condemned government forces' "excessive use of violence" against civilians and criticized government forces' lack of discipline and violation of agreements.[21] Shara issued a statement that "strongly" condemned attacks against Suwaydawi residents and promised that the attacks will not go "unpunished." [22] The Syrian government must hold undisciplined units, individuals, and commanders responsible for their crimes. Not all MoD units that have deployed to Suwayda in recent days are responsive to the chain of command, as evidenced by these violations. The Syrian transitional government's ability and willingness to hold security forces accountable for crimes committed against civilians will be one factor that influences its ability to establish security and stability in southern Syria. A complete breakdown of trust between the government and the Druze community would make it very difficult for the government to build lasting stability in southern Syria. These attacks also risk significantly eroding other Syrian minority communities' trust of the Syrian government and its motives, regardless of whether or how the government holds perpetrators accountable. Other minority communities that fear that the government will not protect them, such as the Kurds, may view these attacks as confirmation of their fears.

The United States and the E3 (the United Kingdom, Germany, and France) have reportedly set an end-of-August deadline for Iran to agree to a nuclear deal before the E3 triggers the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) snapback mechanism.[23] Axios reported on July 16 that US Secretary of State Marco Rubio spoke with the E3 foreign ministers on July 14 and set this deadline, citing three sources familiar with the call.[24] 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." [25] The snapback mechanism under the JCPOA expires on October 18, 2025. The process to impose snapback sanctions takes between 45 and 65 days from when the initial non-compliance complaint is issued, which means that the E3 would have to initiate the process no later than September 3.[26] The E3 reportedly seeks to engage Iran and push for verifiable commitments, such as renewed cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency and the removal of Iran's 60 percent enriched uranium stockpile, ahead of the deadline to avoid triggering the snapback mechanism.[27]

Iran has maintained its position on its right to enrich uranium in Iran, which makes it very unlikely that Iran would accept a nuclear agreement by the end of August that required Iran to halt domestic uranium enrichment. Iranian Parliamentary National Security and Foreign Policy Committee member Alaeddin Boroujerdi reiterated the Iranian regime's official position on July 16 that Iran will never accept zero enrichment.[28] The Iranian Parliament separately rejected renewed talks with the United States on July 16 unless certain preconditions are met.[29] Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf stated that the preconditions include guarantees against future US or Israeli strikes and compensation for recent damage.[30] Ghalibaf's statement does not reflect the regime's official position and aligns with the position of an anti-negotiation camp within Iran, which is largely comprised of hardliners. This camp has continued to advocate for stringent preconditions that effectively amount to rejecting renewed

negotiations.[31] CTP-ISW previously assessed that these preconditions are likely non-starters for the United States and Israel.[32]

Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei underscored the need for national unity to stabilize the regime amid fissures between regime factions on July 16.[33] Khamenei praised the Iranian people's response to the recent war during a meeting with senior judiciary officials and emphasized that "it is everyone's duty to preserve this national unity." [34] Khamenei emphasized that individuals with different religious beliefs and opposing political views must unite to "defend Iran and the regime." [35] Khamenei cautioned Iranian officials against raising "unnecessary criticisms" and disputing minor issues, noting that such behavior undermines state unity.[36] Khamenei's remarks come as moderate elements in the regime appear to be trying to use the Israel-Iran War and its aftermath to increase their political influence in the regime. Former reformist President Hassan Rouhani reportedly lobbied senior clerics in Qom to encourage Khamenei to accept a ceasefire during the war and has issued public statements urging de-escalation and renewed engagement with the United States.[37] Former Iranian Prime Minister and 2009 Green Movement leader Mir Hossein Mousavi separately called on July 11 for a referendum to establish a constitutional assembly. Mousavi warned that public solidarity during the Israel-Iran War should not be mistaken for "approval of the government" and that the war was "the bitter result of a series of grave errors." [38]

Khamenei's remarks also come amid divisions within the region over how Iran should engage the United States following the Israel-Iran War. Khamenei asserted that individuals who oppose Iranian officials on "diplomatic or military issues" must express their opposition in line with regime policy.[39] Khamenei may have been referring to efforts by the anti-negotiation camp in the regime to resist efforts to resume nuclear talks with the United States.[40] This camp has presented preconditions for negotiations that effectively amount to rejecting renewed negotiations, as noted above. Supreme Leader International Affairs Adviser Ali Akbar Velayati stated on July 14 that Iran would accept negotiations without "preconditions" if the United States respects Iranian red lines, which include the right to enrich uranium on Iranian soil.[41] Velayati may have been referring to the preconditions that have been presented by the anti-negotiation camp. The *Washington Post* reported on July 13 that there is a "consensus" among Iran's political class to resume nuclear negotiations with the United States.[42]

Iran is likely concerned that Syrian cooperation with Azerbaijan could increase Turkish influence in the South Caucasus. Syrian President Ahmed al Shara visited Baku, Azerbaijan, on July 12.[43] Shara signed a memorandum of understanding with Azerbaijan's state oil company to export Azerbaijani gas to Syria via Turkey during his visit to Baku.[44] Iranian state media criticized Shara's visit to Baku and claimed that his trip was part of an effort to diminish Iranian influence in the South Caucasus.[45] A Syrian source close to Shara told Israeli media that Shara met with Israeli officials in Baku on July 12.[46] Iran opposes Azerbaijan's ties with Israel and has historically accused Israel of using Azerbaijani territory to conduct operations in Iran, including during the Israel-Iran War.[47]

Iranian media separately described the Zangezur Corridor as a Turkish attempt to extend Turkish influence into Eurasia.[48] The Zangezur Corridor is a Turkish-Azerbaijani proposed transportation route that would connect Azerbaijan proper to the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. The Zangezur

Corridor would sever Iranian land access to Russia and Europe via Armenia.[49] Iranian media stated on July 16 that the Zangezur Corridor would also prevent Iran from being able to militarily support Armenia against Azerbaijan.[50] Iran has become increasingly concerned about the growth of Turkey's influence in the South Caucasus in recent years, particularly since the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Iran is concerned that Russia's focus on the war in Ukraine has left a power vacuum for other regional actors, such as Turkey and Israel, to exploit.

Iran continues to send advanced weapons to the Houthis, including cruise and anti-ship missiles, which the Houthis regularly use to attack Israel and international shipping in the Red Sea.[51] The Yemeni National Resistance Front (NRF) announced on July 16 that the NRF coast guard intercepted over 750 tons of munitions and hardware with instruction manuals written in Farsi from an unnamed US-sanctioned company affiliated with the Iranian Defense and Armed Forces Logistics Ministry.[52] The NRF is an anti-Houthi paramilitary group led by former Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh's nephew, Brigadier General Tariq Saleh.[53] The shipment included hundreds of advanced cruise missiles, anti-ship and anti-aircraft missiles, warheads, and other missile components, as well as hundreds of drone engines, air defense equipment, radar systems, and communications equipment. The NRF's interdiction of the Iranian weapons shipment comes amid continued Houthi missile and drone attacks targeting Israel and renewed Houthi attacks on international shipping. The Houthis recently attacked and sank two commercial bulk carriers off the coast of Hudaydah, western Yemen, on July 6 and 7.[54]

Some Iraqi parliamentarians, including Shia Coordination Framework-aligned Deputy Parliament Speaker Mohsen al Mandalawi, may have threatened to remove Parliament Speaker Mahmoud al Mashhadani to pressure Mashhadani to place the Popular Mobilization Authority Law on the parliamentary agenda. The Shia Coordination Framework is a loose coalition of Shia political parties, some of which Iran backs. The Parliament Speaker and their two deputies are responsible for "jointly" determining the agenda.[55] The Popular Mobilization Authority Law would integrate Iranian-backed Iraqi militias that operate outside of the Iranian-backed Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) into the PMF before the PMF integrates into the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF).[56] A parliamentarian with an unknown affiliation told Iraqi media on July 14 that 80 parliamentarians signed a petition to remove Mashhadani due to Mashhadani's "monopoly" on decision-making that "reflects a new sectarian trend." [57] The parliamentarian may have been accusing Mashhadani of helping pass the General Amnesty Law in January 2025 while not helping pass the Popular Mobilization Authority Law.[58] The General Amnesty Law is largely supported by Sunni parties. Iraqi media separately reported that a "verbal altercation" between Mashhadani and several Shia Coordination Framework parliamentarians, including Mandalawi, during a parliament session on July 14 led to the session's postponement.[59] A parliamentary source told Iraqi media on July 15 that Mashhadani and Mandalawi reconciled and agreed to resume the parliamentary session.[60]

The Popular Mobilization Authority Law was raised during the July 16 parliament session even though it was not formally placed on the July 16 parliamentary agenda.[61] It is notable that the law was raised in parliament after Mashhadani and Mandalawi reconciled. Iraqi media reported that Kurdish and Sunni parliamentarians left the July 16 session in protest to the reading of the law because the law was raised without prior "political consensus" or discussion in relevant committees.[62] Mandalawi reportedly chaired the parliament session on July 14 and directed the Parliamentary Security and

Defense Committee to complete all suggested amendments to the Popular Mobilization Authority Law and submit the final version of the law to Mashhadani for a vote.[63]

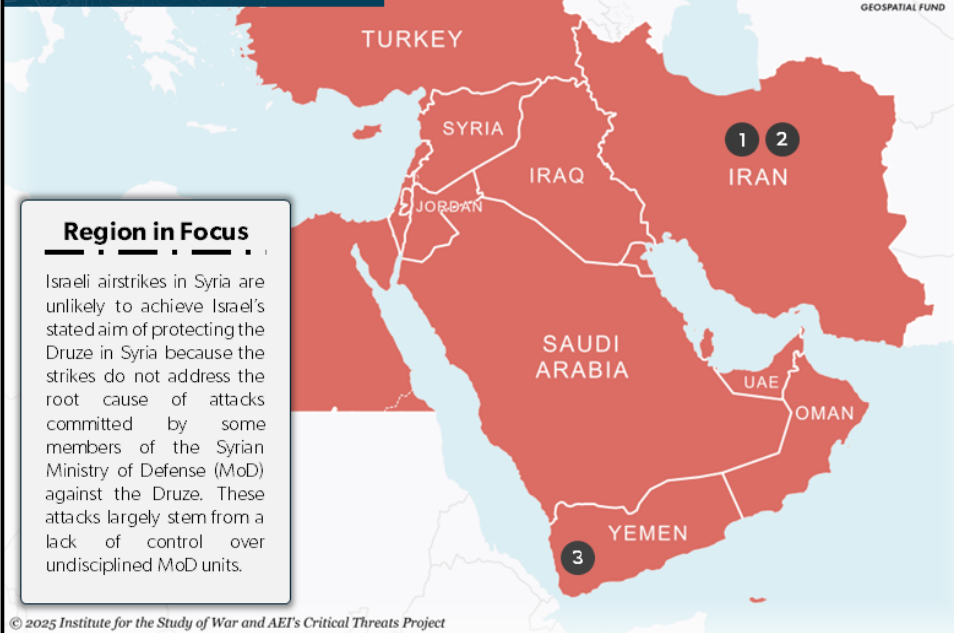
The Popular Mobilization Authority Law includes provisions that require PMF brigades to only carry out orders from the prime minister, as already required under Iraqi law, and refrain from attacking US forces, interests, and other unspecified targets outside of Iraq.[64] The United States has pressured the Iraqi federal government to dissolve and disarm the PMF and has reportedly threatened to sanction PMF leaders in recent months.[65] CTP-ISW previously assessed that the integration of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias into the Iraqi armed forces must be predicated on a commitment by the militias to stop abiding by Iranian orders and a commitment by the Iraqi federal government to respond to any militia attack on US or partner interests in the Middle East.[66] The integration of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias into the armed forces in a way that does not meet these criteria would harm US interests in the region.

Key Takeaways:

- **Southern Syria:** Israeli airstrikes in Syria are unlikely to achieve Israel's stated aim of protecting the Druze in Syria because the strikes do not address the root cause of attacks committed by some members of the Syrian Ministry of Defense (MoD) against the Druze. These attacks largely stem from a lack of control over undisciplined MoD units.
- **Iran Nuclear Talks:** The United States and the E3 have reportedly set an end-of-August deadline for Iran to agree to a nuclear deal before the E3 triggers the JCPOA snapback mechanism. Iran has maintained its position on its right to enrich uranium in Iran, which makes it very unlikely that Iran would accept a nuclear agreement by the end of August that required Iran to halt domestic uranium enrichment.
- **Iran After the War:** Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei underscored the need for national unity to stabilize the regime amid fissures between regime factions. Khamenei's remarks come as moderate elements in the regime appear to be trying to use the Israel-Iran War and its aftermath to increase their political influence in the regime.
- **Iran-Houthi Coordination:** Iran continues to send advanced weapons to the Houthis, including cruise and anti-ship missiles, which the Houthis regularly use to attack Israel and international shipping in the Red Sea.

Iran Update

July 16, 2025



- 1 **TEHRAN, IRAN.** The United States and the E3 have reportedly set an end-of-August deadline for Iran to agree to a nuclear deal before the E3 triggers the JCPOA snapback mechanism. Iran has maintained its position on its right to enrich uranium in Iran, which makes it very unlikely that Iran would accept a nuclear agreement by the end of August that required Iran to halt domestic uranium enrichment.
- 2 **TEHRAN, IRAN.** Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei underscored the need for national unity to stabilize the regime amid fissures between regime factions. Khamenei's remarks come as moderate elements in the regime appear to be trying to use the Israel-Iran War and its aftermath to increase their political influence in the regime.
- 3 **RED SEA.** Iran continues to send advanced weapons to the Houthis, including cruise and anti-ship missiles, which the Houthis regularly use to attack Israel and international shipping in the Red Sea.

Iran

The Iranian Parliament approved three Iranian politicians as legal experts for the Guardian Council on July 16.[67] The Guardian Council is comprised of 12 members, including six clerics and six legal experts.[68] The Guardian Council plays a key role in Iranian elections and vets candidates and legislation.[69] Parliament approved Hadi Tahan Nazif and Gholam Reza Mola Beygi, who are both retaining their seats for another six-year term.[70] Parliament also approved Behzad Pour Seyyed, who has served as deputy for parliamentary laws in the Iranian Parliament, deputy head of the Judiciary's Research Institute, and deputy legal affairs chief of Iran's Judiciary.[71] Pour Seyyed replaced Mohammad Hassan Sadeghi Moghadam, whose term expired on July 9.[72] Sadeghi

Moghadam previously served as deputy head of Iran's General Inspection Organization under former President Ebrahim Raisi.[73] The US Treasury Department sanctioned Sadeghi Moghadam in 2020 for obstructing free elections.[74] Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei reappointed senior clerics Ahmad Khatami, Alireza Araf, and Ahmad Hosseini Khorasani as Guardian Council clerical members on July 15.[75]

Iraq

Likely Iranian-backed Iraqi militants conducted at least six one-way drone attacks targeting four oil fields in Iraqi Kurdistan and Kirkuk Province on July 16.[76] Unidentified actors launched three attack drones targeting the Norwegian-operated Peshkabour and Tawke oil fields in Duhok Province.[77] The Iraqi Kurdistan Region's Counter-Terrorism Service reported that the attacks caused material damage that suspended production at both oil fields.[78] Unidentified militants conducted at least two drone attacks targeting the US-operated Ain Sifni oil field in Duhok Province.[79] An unspecified security source told Iraqi media that a drone landed near the Iraqi state-owned Bai Hassan oil field in Kirkuk Province.[80] Likely Iranian-backed Iraqi militias previously conducted at least two drone attacks targeting two oil fields in Iraqi Kurdistan on July 14 and 15.[81] These attacks come as Iranian-backed Iraqi politicians have used a variety of legal and illegal means to sideline political opponents and try to retain their majority in parliament in the November 2025 elections.[82] Iranian-backed Iraqi militias previously conducted rocket attacks on Kurdish oil and gas fields between March and June 2022 to pressure Kurdish parties to withdraw their support for Iraqi Shia nationalist cleric Moqtada al Sadr. This strategy sought to deprive Sadr of allies to secure a majority in parliament.[83] Kurdish parties, including the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), aligned with the Shia Coordination Framework following Sadr's failure to form a majority coalition and subsequent withdrawal from parliament.

Iranian-backed Iraqi actors denied on July 15 that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias were responsible for the recent drone attacks targeting oil facilities. Iraqi media reported on July 15 that the Shia Coordination Framework (SCF) "absolved" the militias of blame for the recent attacks on oil facilities.[84] The Shia Coordination Framework is a loose coalition of Shia political parties, some of which have armed wings. SCF member and parliamentarian Amer al Fayezi said that militia leaders denied any connection to the drone attacks.[85] The militias may suffer from a lack of discipline among lower-ranking fighters who attempt to independently launch drones at oil fields in Iraq. Militia leadership may also allow fighters to conduct attacks without publicly sanctioning them.

Reported One-Way Drone Attacks on Oil Fields in Iraqi Kurdistan July 14 to July 16, 2025



Syria

See topline section.

Arabian Peninsula

The Houthis launched two drones targeting an unspecified “sensitive” site in the Negev Desert and one drone targeting Eilat Port in southern Israel on July 15.[86] The Israeli Air Force intercepted a Houthi drone before it crossed into Israeli territory on July 15.[87] 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.[88]

The Palestinian Territories and Lebanon

Lebanon’s central bank banned all licensed Lebanese banking institutions from working directly or indirectly with Hezbollah’s primary financial institution, al Qard al Hassan, on July 15.[89] The Lebanese Central Bank announced that it would prosecute and penalize financial institutions that interact with al Qard al Hassan. The Central Bank added that it could suspend institutions’ licenses and freeze institutions’ assets.[90] Al Qard al Hassan is one of Hezbollah’s main banking and financial arms and Hezbollah uses it to transfer, manage, and receive funds.[91] The United States sanctioned al Qard al Hassan in 2007 for enabling Hezbollah to conduct “financial activities and gain access to the international financial system.”[92] Al Qard al Hassan employees often create bank accounts at local Lebanese banks that enable al Qard al Hassan to conduct transactions on behalf of Hezbollah and gives Hezbollah access to the international financial system.[93] An unspecified Lebanese official told Reuters on July 15 that the Central Bank’s decision reflected US

pressure on Lebanon to take action against Hezbollah's financial wing.[94] US Special Envoy Thomas Barrack described the bank's decision as a "step in the right direction." [95]

The Central Bank's crackdown on al Qard al Hassan will likely complicate Hezbollah's ability to compensate its fighters and provide services to Lebanese civilians, which could reduce Hezbollah's domestic support. Hezbollah has struggled to maintain its financial commitments to fighters following the Israel-Lebanon conflict in late 2024. Hezbollah indefinitely suspended compensation payments to its fighters on June 25, which are distributed by al Qard al Hassan.[96] Al Qard al Hassan also previously froze compensation payments in February 2025.[97] Hezbollah has historically used financial benefits, including pensions and payments for the families of deceased fighters, to retain its support base among Lebanese Shia.[98] Disruptions to Hezbollah's ability to provide its support base with promised benefits could reduce support among this base for Hezbollah.

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Iran Update, July 16, 2025

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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.

Click [here](#) to see CTP and ISW's interactive map of assessed control of terrain in Syria, and [here](#) to see CTP and ISW's interactive map of Israeli ground operations. The Syria map is updated daily alongside the static Syria maps in this report. CTP-ISW ended daily maps of Israeli ground operations in February 2025.

Click [here](#) to see ISW-CTP's interactive map showing the total strikes in Iran since June 12, as well as an interactive timelapse showing the strikes day-by-day.

[one-pager template]

Israeli airstrikes in Syria are unlikely to achieve Israel's stated aim of protecting the Druze in Syria because the strikes do not address the root cause of attacks committed by some members of the Syrian Ministry of Defense (MoD) against the Druze. These attacks

largely stem from a lack of control over undisciplined MoD units.[1] Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on July 16 that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) is working to “save” the Druze and “eliminate” the “regime’s gangs,” referring to Syrian government forces that have conducted attacks against Druze.[2] The IDF has conducted over 160 airstrikes across southern Syria since July 15, including a strike on the Syrian Presidential Palace and multiple strikes on the MoD headquarters in Damascus.[3] The IDF also struck MoD personnel, tanks, vehicles, and military bases in Rif Dimashq, Daraa, and Suwayda provinces.[4] Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz said on July 16 that the IDF will continue to “impose the demilitarization policy” until Syrian MoD units withdraw from Suwayda Province.[5]

It is highly unlikely that Syrian President Ahmed al Shara ordered or encouraged the abuses that some MoD forces have committed in Suwayda. The abuses likely stem from a lack of control over undisciplined units. The transitional government has repeatedly called on MoD members to cease violations and has implemented some measures, such as the deployment of military police, to arrest perpetrators. MoD forces’ violations disrupt Damascus’s ability to secure Druze support for a settlement to the crisis.[6]

Israel conducted these strikes after the United States demanded that Israel cease all airstrikes in southern Syria on July 15. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on July 16 that the United States is very concerned about Israeli strikes and “want[s] the fighting to stop.”[7] An Israeli Army Radio correspondent reported that the IDF is preparing to transfer two divisions to the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights and Syrian border area, including the 98th Reserve Paratrooper Division and another unspecified reserve division.[8] The 98th Division is currently deployed in the Gaza Strip, where it has operated since May 2025.[9] The IDF also diverted additional aircraft to Syria.[10]

Israeli strike map

A lone Druze faction is undermining the Syrian transitional government’s diplomatic efforts with pro-government Suwaydawi leaders. Prominent Druze Sheikh Hikmat al Hijri publicly rejected a ceasefire agreed upon by the transitional government and pro-government Druze leaders on July 16. This marks the third time that Hijri has rejected a government-Suwaydawi ceasefire since the fighting began on July 13.[11] Druze militias loyal to Hijri resumed attacks on government forces after the ceasefire was announced on July 16.[12] These militias include the Suwayda Military Council, which retains ties to Assad-era generals.[13] Hijri only represents a fraction of the Syrian Druze community, however. Several prominent Druze leaders, such as Sheikh Yusef Jarbou, have committed to working with the Shara government and continue to do so even after government forces entered Suwayda and committed abuses against residents.[14] Pro-government Druze leaders like Jarbou and Hamoud al Hanawi have a fractious history of political rivalry with Hijri, and Hijri was often at odds with Men of Dignity founder and father of Laith al Balous, Wahid al Balous.[15] Balous and other leaders have rejected Hijri’s call for international intervention to protect the Druze in Suwayda Province.[16] Hijri called for the “unconditional liberation” of Suwayda Province from government forces, which suggests that he is unwilling to negotiate with the transitional government without a complete withdrawal of government forces from Suwayda.[17] The ceasefire agreement that Hijri broke on July 16 was nearly identical to a May 2025 agreement between Suwaydawi leaders, the transitional government, and Hijri himself.[18] Both the broken ceasefire agreement and the May 2025

agreement appear designed to minimize abuses against civilians by allowing Suwaydawis to man local police and General Security Service (GSS) forces. The agreement also created a fact-finding commission to investigate abuses committed during the recent conflict.

SY map

The Syrian government remains responsible for holding the perpetrators of abuses against Druze accountable, even if the government does not order or support these abuses. Suwayda-based media reported on July 16 that MoD forces have executed Druze men in their homes and in city streets.[19] The outlet, citing unspecified local sources, also accused military forces of raiding homes, looting, and threatening residents at gunpoint.[20] The pro-government Men of Dignity condemned government forces' "excessive use of violence" against civilians and criticized government forces' lack of discipline and violation of agreements.[21] Shara issued a statement that "strongly" condemned attacks against Suwaydawi residents and promised that the attacks will not go "unpunished." [22] The Syrian government must hold undisciplined units, individuals, and commanders responsible for their crimes. Not all MoD units that have deployed to Suwayda in recent days are responsive to the chain of command, as evidenced by these violations. The Syrian transitional government's ability and willingness to hold security forces accountable for crimes committed against civilians will be one factor that influences its ability to establish security and stability in southern Syria. A complete breakdown of trust between the government and the Druze community would make it very difficult for the government to build lasting stability in southern Syria. These attacks also risk significantly eroding other Syrian minority communities' trust of the Syrian government and its motives, regardless of whether or how the government holds perpetrators accountable. Other minority communities that fear that the government will not protect them, such as the Kurds, may view these attacks as confirmation of their fears.

The United States and the E3 (the United Kingdom, Germany, and France) have reportedly set an end-of-August deadline for Iran to agree to a nuclear deal before the E3 triggers the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) snapback mechanism. [23] Axios reported on July 16 that US Secretary of State Marco Rubio spoke with the E3 foreign ministers on July 14 and set this deadline, citing three sources familiar with the call.[24] 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." [25] The snapback mechanism under the JCPOA expires on October 18, 2025. The process to impose snapback sanctions takes between 45 and 65 days from when the initial non-compliance complaint is issued, which means that the E3 would have to initiate the process no later than September 3.[26] The E3 reportedly seeks to engage Iran and push for verifiable commitments, such as renewed cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency and the removal of Iran's 60 percent enriched uranium stockpile, ahead of the deadline to avoid triggering the snapback mechanism.[27]

Iran has maintained its position on its right to enrich uranium in Iran, which makes it very unlikely that Iran would accept a nuclear agreement by the end of August that required Iran to halt domestic uranium enrichment. Iranian Parliamentary National Security and Foreign Policy Committee member Alaeddin Boroujerdi reiterated the Iranian regime's official position on July 16 that Iran will never accept zero enrichment.[28] The Iranian Parliament separately

rejected renewed talks with the United States on July 16 unless certain preconditions are met.[29] Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf stated that the preconditions include guarantees against future US or Israeli strikes and compensation for recent damage.[30] Ghalibaf's statement does not reflect the regime's official position and aligns with the position of an anti-negotiation camp within Iran, which is largely comprised of hardliners. This camp has continued to advocate for stringent preconditions that effectively amount to rejecting renewed negotiations.[31] CTP-ISW previously assessed that these preconditions are likely non-starters for the United States and Israel.[32]

Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei underscored the need for national unity to stabilize the regime amid fissures between regime factions on July 16.[33] Khamenei praised the Iranian people's response to the recent war during a meeting with senior judiciary officials and emphasized that "it is everyone's duty to preserve this national unity." [34] Khamenei emphasized that individuals with different religious beliefs and opposing political views must unite to "defend Iran and the regime." [35] Khamenei cautioned Iranian officials against raising "unnecessary criticisms" and disputing minor issues, noting that such behavior undermines state unity.[36] Khamenei's remarks come as moderate elements in the regime appear to be trying to use the Israel-Iran War and its aftermath to increase their political influence in the regime. Former reformist President Hassan Rouhani reportedly lobbied senior clerics in Qom to encourage Khamenei to accept a ceasefire during the war and has issued public statements urging de-escalation and renewed engagement with the United States.[37] Former Iranian Prime Minister and 2009 Green Movement leader Mir Hossein Mousavi separately called on July 11 for a referendum to establish a constitutional assembly. Mousavi warned that public solidarity during the Israel-Iran War should not be mistaken for "approval of the government" and that the war was "the bitter result of a series of grave errors." [38]

Khamenei's remarks also come amid divisions within the region over how Iran should engage the United States following the Israel-Iran War. Khamenei asserted that individuals who oppose Iranian officials on "diplomatic or military issues" must express their opposition in line with regime policy.[39] Khamenei may have been referring to efforts by the anti-negotiation camp in the regime to resist efforts to resume nuclear talks with the United States.[40] This camp has presented preconditions for negotiations that effectively amount to rejecting renewed negotiations, as noted above. Supreme Leader International Affairs Adviser Ali Akbar Velayati stated on July 14 that Iran would accept negotiations without "preconditions" if the United States respects Iranian red lines, which include the right to enrich uranium on Iranian soil.[41] Velayati may have been referring to the preconditions that have been presented by the anti-negotiation camp. The *Washington Post* reported on July 13 that there is a "consensus" among Iran's political class to resume nuclear negotiations with the United States.[42]

Iran is likely concerned that Syrian cooperation with Azerbaijan could increase Turkish influence in the South Caucasus. Syrian President Ahmed al Shara visited Baku, Azerbaijan, on July 12.[43] Shara signed a memorandum of understanding with Azerbaijan's state oil company to export Azerbaijani gas to Syria via Turkey during his visit to Baku.[44] Iranian state media criticized Shara's visit to Baku and claimed that his trip was part of an effort to diminish Iranian influence in the South Caucasus.[45] A Syrian source close to Shara told Israeli media that Shara met with Israeli officials in Baku on July 12.[46] Iran opposes Azerbaijan's ties with Israel and has historically accused

Israel of using Azerbaijani territory to conduct operations in Iran, including during the Israel-Iran War.[47]

Iranian media separately described the Zangezur Corridor as a Turkish attempt to extend Turkish influence into Eurasia.[48] The Zangezur Corridor is a Turkish-Azerbaijani proposed transportation route that would connect Azerbaijan proper to the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. The Zangezur Corridor would sever Iranian land access to Russia and Europe via Armenia.[49] Iranian media stated on July 16 that the Zangezur Corridor would also prevent Iran from being able to militarily support Armenia against Azerbaijan.[50] Iran has become increasingly concerned about the growth of Turkey's influence in the South Caucasus in recent years, particularly since the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Iran is concerned that Russia's focus on the war in Ukraine has left a power vacuum for other regional actors, such as Turkey and Israel, to exploit.

Iran continues to send advanced weapons to the Houthis, including cruise and anti-ship missiles, which the Houthis regularly use to attack Israel and international shipping in the Red Sea.[51] The Yemeni National Resistance Front (NRF) announced on July 16 that the NRF coast guard intercepted over 750 tons of munitions and hardware with instruction manuals written in Farsi from an unnamed US-sanctioned company affiliated with the Iranian Defense and Armed Forces Logistics Ministry.[52] The NRF is an anti-Houthi paramilitary group led by former Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh's nephew, Brigadier General Tariq Saleh.[53] The shipment included hundreds of advanced cruise missiles, anti-ship and anti-aircraft missiles, warheads, and other missile components, as well as hundreds of drone engines, air defense equipment, radar systems, and communications equipment. The NRF's interdiction of the Iranian weapons shipment comes amid continued Houthi missile and drone attacks targeting Israel and renewed Houthi attacks on international shipping. The Houthis recently attacked and sank two commercial bulk carriers off the coast of Hudaydah, western Yemen, on July 6 and 7.[54]

Some Iraqi parliamentarians, including Shia Coordination Framework-aligned Deputy Parliament Speaker Mohsen al Mandalawi, may have threatened to remove Parliament Speaker Mahmoud al Mashhadani to pressure Mashhadani to place the Popular Mobilization Authority Law on the parliamentary agenda. The Shia Coordination Framework is a loose coalition of Shia political parties, some of which Iran backs. The Parliament Speaker and their two deputies are responsible for "jointly" determining the agenda.[55] The Popular Mobilization Authority Law would integrate Iranian-backed Iraqi militias that operate outside of the Iranian-backed Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) into the PMF before the PMF integrates into the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF).[56] A parliamentarian with an unknown affiliation told Iraqi media on July 14 that 80 parliamentarians signed a petition to remove Mashhadani due to Mashhadani's "monopoly" on decision-making that "reflects a new sectarian trend." [57] The parliamentarian may have been accusing Mashhadani of helping pass the General Amnesty Law in January 2025 while not helping pass the Popular Mobilization Authority Law.[58] The General Amnesty Law is largely supported by Sunni parties. Iraqi media separately reported that a "verbal altercation" between Mashhadani and several Shia Coordination Framework parliamentarians, including Mandalawi, during a parliament session on July 14 led to the session's postponement.[59] A parliamentary source told Iraqi media on July 15 that Mashhadani and Mandalawi reconciled and agreed to resume the parliamentary session.[60]

The Popular Mobilization Authority Law was raised during the July 16 parliament session even though it was not formally placed on the July 16 parliamentary agenda.[61] It is notable that the law was raised in parliament after Mashhadani and Mandalawi reconciled. Iraqi media reported that Kurdish and Sunni parliamentarians left the July 16 session in protest to the reading of the law because the law was raised without prior “political consensus” or discussion in relevant committees.[62] Mandalawi reportedly chaired the parliament session on July 14 and directed the Parliamentary Security and Defense Committee to complete all suggested amendments to the Popular Mobilization Authority Law and submit the final version of the law to Mashhadani for a vote.[63]

The Popular Mobilization Authority Law includes provisions that require PMF brigades to only carry out orders from the prime minister, as already required under Iraqi law, and refrain from attacking US forces, interests, and other unspecified targets outside of Iraq.[64] The United States has pressured the Iraqi federal government to dissolve and disarm the PMF and has reportedly threatened to sanction PMF leaders in recent months.[65] CTP-ISW previously assessed that the integration of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias into the Iraqi armed forces must be predicated on a commitment by the militias to stop abiding by Iranian orders and a commitment by the Iraqi federal government to respond to any militia attack on US or partner interests in the Middle East.[66] The integration of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias into the armed forces in a way that does not meet these criteria would harm US interests in the region.

Key Takeaways:

- **Southern Syria:** Israeli airstrikes in Syria are unlikely to achieve Israel’s stated aim of protecting the Druze in Syria because the strikes do not address the root cause of attacks committed by some members of the Syrian Ministry of Defense (MoD) against the Druze. These attacks largely stem from a lack of control over undisciplined MoD units.
- **Iran Nuclear Talks:** The United States and the E3 have reportedly set an end-of-August deadline for Iran to agree to a nuclear deal before the E3 triggers the JCPOA snapback mechanism. Iran has maintained its position on its right to enrich uranium in Iran, which makes it very unlikely that Iran would accept a nuclear agreement by the end of August that required Iran to halt domestic uranium enrichment.
- **Iran After the War:** Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei underscored the need for national unity to stabilize the regime amid fissures between regime factions. Khamenei’s remarks come as moderate elements in the regime appear to be trying to use the Israel-Iran War and its aftermath to increase their political influence in the regime.
- **Iran-Houthi Coordination:** Iran continues to send advanced weapons to the Houthis, including cruise and anti-ship missiles, which the Houthis regularly use to attack Israel and international shipping in the Red Sea.

Iran

The Iranian Parliament approved three Iranian politicians as legal experts for the Guardian Council on July 16.[67] The Guardian Council is comprised of 12 members, including six clerics and six legal experts.[68] The Guardian Council plays a key role in Iranian elections and vets

candidates and legislation.[69] Parliament approved Hadi Tahan Nazif and Gholam Reza Mola Beygi, who are both retaining their seats for another six-year term.[70] Parliament also approved Behzad Pour Seyyed, who has served as deputy for parliamentary laws in the Iranian Parliament, deputy head of the Judiciary's Research Institute, and deputy legal affairs chief of Iran's Judiciary.[71] Pour Seyyed replaced Mohammad Hassan Sadeghi Moghadam, whose term expired on July 9.[72] Sadeghi Moghadam previously served as deputy head of Iran's General Inspection Organization under former President Ebrahim Raisi.[73] The US Treasury Department sanctioned Sadeghi Moghadam in 2020 for obstructing free elections.[74] Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei reappointed senior clerics Ahmad Khatami, Alireza Araf, and Ahmad Hosseini Khorasani as Guardian Council clerical members on July 15.[75]

Iraq

Likely Iranian-backed Iraqi militants conducted at least six one-way drone attacks targeting four oil fields in Iraqi Kurdistan and Kirkuk Province on July 16.[76] Unidentified actors launched three attack drones targeting the Norwegian-operated Peshkabout and Tawke oil fields in Duhok Province.[77] The Iraqi Kurdistan Region's Counter-Terrorism Service reported that the attacks caused material damage that suspended production at both oil fields.[78] Unidentified militants conducted at least two drone attacks targeting the US-operated Ain Sifni oil field in Duhok Province.[79] An unspecified security source told Iraqi media that a drone landed near the Iraqi state-owned Bai Hassan oil field in Kirkuk Province.[80] Likely Iranian-backed Iraqi militias previously conducted at least two drone attacks targeting two oil fields in Iraqi Kurdistan on July 14 and 15.[81] These attacks come as Iranian-backed Iraqi politicians have used a variety of legal and illegal means to sideline political opponents and try to retain their majority in parliament in the November 2025 elections.[82] Iranian-backed Iraqi militias previously conducted rocket attacks on Kurdish oil and gas fields between March and June 2022 to pressure Kurdish parties to withdraw their support for Iraqi Shia nationalist cleric Moqtada al Sadr. This strategy sought to deprive Sadr of allies to secure a majority in parliament.[83] Kurdish parties, including the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), aligned with the Shia Coordination Framework following Sadr's failure to form a majority coalition and subsequent withdrawal from parliament.

Iranian-backed Iraqi actors denied on July 15 that Iranian-backed Iraqi militias were responsible for the recent drone attacks targeting oil facilities. Iraqi media reported on July 15 that the Shia Coordination Framework (SCF) "absolved" the militias of blame for the recent attacks on oil facilities.[84] The Shia Coordination Framework is a loose coalition of Shia political parties, some of which have armed wings. SCF member and parliamentarian Amer al Fayezi said that militia leaders denied any connection to the drone attacks.[85] The militias may suffer from a lack of discipline among lower-ranking fighters who attempt to independently launch drones at oil fields in Iraq. Militia leadership may also allow fighters to conduct attacks without publicly sanctioning them.

Iraq map

Syria

See topline section.

Arabian Peninsula

The Houthis launched two drones targeting an unspecified “sensitive” site in the Negev Desert and one drone targeting Eilat Port in southern Israel on July 15.[86] The Israeli Air Force intercepted a Houthi drone before it crossed into Israeli territory on July 15.[87] 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.[88]

The Palestinian Territories and Lebanon

Lebanon’s central bank banned all licensed Lebanese banking institutions from working directly or indirectly with Hezbollah’s primary financial institution, al Qard al Hassan, on July 15.[89] The Lebanese Central Bank announced that it would prosecute and penalize financial institutions that interact with al Qard al Hassan. The Central Bank added that it could suspend institutions’ licenses and freeze institutions’ assets.[90] Al Qard al Hassan is one of Hezbollah’s main banking and financial arms and Hezbollah uses it to transfer, manage, and receive funds.[91] The United States sanctioned al Qard al Hassan in 2007 for enabling Hezbollah to conduct “financial activities and gain access to the international financial system.”[92] Al Qard al Hassan employees often create bank accounts at local Lebanese banks that enable al Qard al Hassan to conduct transactions on behalf of Hezbollah and gives Hezbollah access to the international financial system.[93] An unspecified Lebanese official told Reuters on July 15 that the Central Bank’s decision reflected US pressure on Lebanon to take action against Hezbollah’s financial wing.[94] US Special Envoy Thomas Barrack described the bank’s decision as a “step in the right direction.”[95]

The Central Bank’s crackdown on al Qard al Hassan will likely complicate Hezbollah’s ability to compensate its fighters and provide services to Lebanese civilians, which could reduce Hezbollah’s domestic support. Hezbollah has struggled to maintain its financial commitments to fighters following the Israel-Lebanon conflict in late 2024. Hezbollah indefinitely suspended compensation payments to its fighters on June 25, which are distributed by al Qard al Hassan.[96] Al Qard al Hassan also previously froze compensation payments in February 2025.[97] Hezbollah has historically used financial benefits, including pensions and payments for the families of deceased fighters, to retain its support base among Lebanese Shia.[98] Disruptions to Hezbollah’s ability to provide its support base with promised benefits could reduce support among this base for Hezbollah.

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- 30

Iran Update



Andie Parry, Ria Reddy, Carolyn Moorman, Katherine Wells, Nidal Morrison, Ben Rezaei, and Annika Ganzeveld

Information Cutoff: July 17, 2025, 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.

Click [here](#) to see CTP and ISW's interactive map of assessed control of terrain in Syria, and [here](#) to see CTP and ISW's interactive map of Israeli ground operations. The Syria map is updated daily alongside the static Syria maps in this report. CTP-ISW ended daily maps of Israeli ground operations in February 2025.

Click [here](#) to see ISW-CTP's interactive map showing the total strikes in Iran since June 12, as well as an interactive timelapse showing the strikes day-by-day.

A US media outlet reported on July 17 that US strikes in Iran on June 21 caused significant damage to only one of the three Iranian nuclear facilities that the United States struck.[1] CTP-ISW has previously assessed that the strikes caused significant damage to all three facilities and will likely set back Iran's nuclear program.[2] US airstrikes targeted the Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant, Natanz Enrichment Complex, and Esfahan Nuclear Technology Center (ENTC).[3] NBC News reported on July 17 that the US strikes set back uranium enrichment at Fordow by up to two years but stated that "nuclear enrichment [at Natanz and the ENTC] could resume in the next several months," citing former and current US officials familiar with a recent US damage assessment.[4] A US weapons expert stated on July 17 that Iran does not conduct uranium enrichment at the ENTC.[5]

The strikes destroyed key infrastructure at all three facilities. US strikes destroyed the Uranium Metal Conversion Plant at the ENTC, which Iran could have used to transform uranium gas into dense metal in a process called metallization.[6] This process is one of the last steps required to form the explosive core of an atomic bomb. CIA Director John Ratcliffe reportedly said in a closed-door briefing that it would take "years to rebuild" this facility, according to a US official authorized to discuss the briefing.[7] The strikes also struck and sealed tunnel entrances to an underground complex at the ENTC that stores part of Iran's enriched uranium stockpile.[8] Ratcliffe said that the strikes buried the "vast majority" of enriched uranium at the ENTC and Fordow and that it would be "extremely difficult" for Iran to extract the material.[9] CTP-ISW previously reported that Iranian personnel have not made any visible attempts to access the ENTC or Natanz.[10] Senior Israeli officials have repeatedly warned that Israel would "almost certainly" detect any Iranian attempts to recover the material and conduct

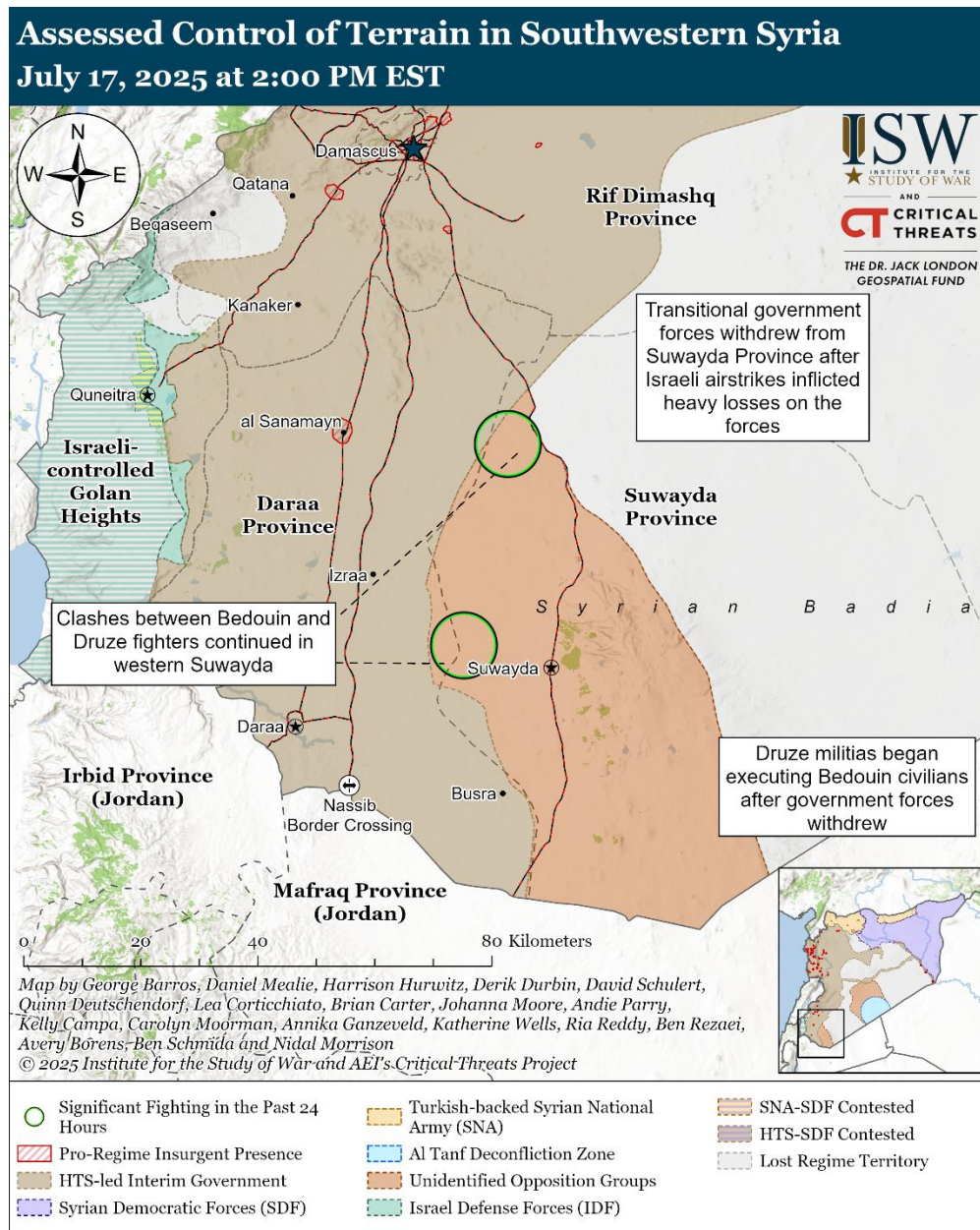
renewed strikes to prevent Iran from accessing the material.[11] The IAEA previously reported that US and Israeli strikes also rendered most, if not all, of the centrifuges at Natanz and Fordow inoperable.[12] Three sources told NBC News that US officials knew that some facilities at Natanz were “beyond the reach” of GBU-57 bunker buster bombs.[13] The destruction of centrifuges and facilities does not necessarily require bombs to “reach” all infrastructure, however. Grossi previously stated that centrifuges are “delicate” and that even small vibrations can destroy them.[14] The United States used two massive ordnance penetrator (MOP) bunker-buster bombs on Natanz, which would have generated a blast wave far more significant than small vibrations.[15]

Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani reportedly withdrew the Popular Mobilization Authority Law from Parliament on July 17 following US concern over the legislation.[16] The Popular Mobilization Authority Law would integrate Iranian-backed Iraqi militias that operate outside of the Iranian-backed Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) into the PMF before the PMF integrates into the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF).[17] Parliament Speaker Mahmoud al Mashhadani implied that the United States had contacted several unidentified Iraqi leaders about the Popular Mobilization Authority Law in an interview with Iraqi media on July 14.[18] Shia Coordination Framework-aligned Deputy Parliament Speaker Mohsen al Mandalawi directed the Parliamentary Security and Defense Committee to complete all amendments to the law and submit the final version of the law to Mashhadani for a vote during the July 16 parliament session.[19] The Shia Coordination Framework is a loose coalition of Shia political parties, some of which Iran backs. Kurdish and Sunni parliamentarians left the parliament session on July 16 in protest because they claimed that the reading of the law occurred without prior “political consensus” or discussion in relevant committees.[20]

The head of Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Asaib Ahl al Haq’s Sadiqoun political bloc implied to Asaib Ahl al Haq-controlled media on July 17 that US and Israeli pressure caused Sudani to withdraw the legislation.[21] The United States has pressured the Iraqi federal government to dissolve and disarm the PMF and has reportedly threatened to sanction PMF leaders in recent months.[22] Sudani withdrew the law after its first reading in Parliament in March 2025, likely to prevent political deadlock and the removal of Popular Mobilization Committee Chairman Faleh al Fayyadh.[23] A previous version of the law would have required around 3,500 PMF leaders, including Fayyadh, to retire. The amended version of the law allows PMF leaders who entered their posts before the law’s passage to maintain their positions.[24]

The Popular Mobilization Authority Law includes several provisions that would likely further Iranian influence in the Iraqi security and political apparatus. The law stipulates that Fayyadh would receive a ministerial rank.[25] The United States sanctioned Fayyadh in 2021 for suppressing protests in Iraq in late 2019 with the support of the IRGC Quds Force.[26] The law would require PMF brigades to only carry out orders from the Iraqi prime minister, as already required under Iraqi law, and refrain from attacking US forces and interests and other unspecified targets outside of Iraq.[27] It remains unclear if PMF units that would merge into the ISF would be reflagged or distributed among existing ISF units. Reflagging units would enable them to largely retain their current command and control structures. The integration of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias into the Iraqi armed forces must be predicated on a commitment by the militias to stop abiding by Iranian orders and a commitment by the Iraqi federal government to respond to any militia attack on US or partner interests

in the Middle East.[28] The integration of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias into the armed forces in a way that does not meet these criteria would harm US interests in the region.



Syrian transitional government forces withdrew from Suwayda Province on July 16 after Israeli airstrikes conducted in support of the Druze inflicted heavy losses on transitional government forces.[29] The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) ceased conducting airstrikes targeting Syrian Ministry of Defense (MoD) members after MoD forces withdrew from Suwayda Province. The IDF conducted over 160 airstrikes across southern Syria between July 15 and 16, including a strike on the Syrian Presidential Palace and multiple strikes on the MoD headquarters in Damascus.[30] Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on July 17 that Israel would continue to enforce its demand for a demilitarized Syria south of Damascus. Netanyahu first articulated this demand in February 2025.[31] Israel has enforced this demand inconsistently, such as by permitting MoD and General

Security Service (GSS) forces to deploy in Daraa Province in southern Syria on multiple occasions since February 2025.[32]

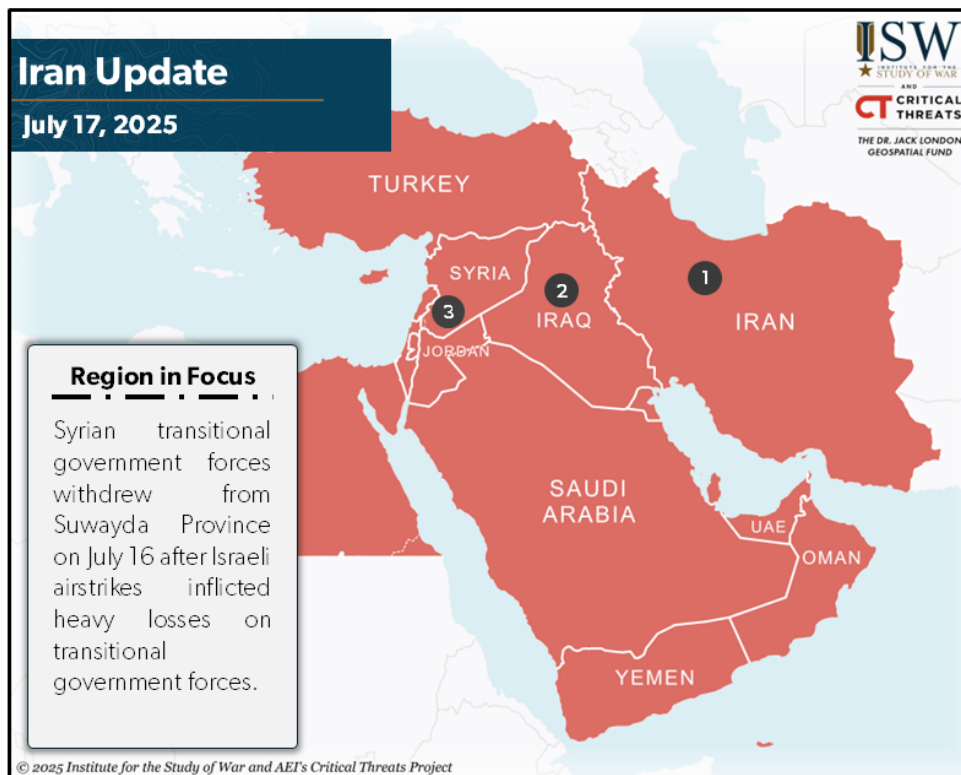
The withdrawal of government forces has not brought peace to Suwayda Province and has contributed to a security vacuum that risks generating further violence. Government forces initially deployed to Suwayda to quell intercommunal violence between Druze and Bedouin communities that included targeted killings and kidnappings of civilians.[33] The recent outbreak of violence has deepened the mistrust and poor intercommunal relations that characterize the relationship between the Druze community, the Sunni Bedouins, and the government. Likely anti-Damascus Druze factions began to torture and execute Bedouin civilians in several areas of Suwayda on July 17 after government forces withdrew.[34] Hundreds of Bedouins have fled Suwayda to neighboring Daraa Province.[35]

Bedouin clans across Syria, including in Deir ez Zor, Idlib, and Daraa provinces, began mobilizing to deploy to Suwayda to fight Druze militias that are conducting retaliatory killings against Bedouins after the transitional government withdrew from the province.[36] It is unclear at the time of writing how many groups, if any, have successfully deployed to Suwayda. The arrival of Bedouin clans from across Syria would likely increase intercommunal violence in Suwayda, given the absence of a neutral force to prevent intercommunal violence. Attacks targeting the Druze between July 14 and 16 largely stemmed from a lack of control over undisciplined MoD units and not official orders from the transitional government.[37] While these official units have now withdrawn due to Israeli airstrikes, informal and even less disciplined fighters have threatened to mobilize to protect Bedouin communities.

Bedouin fighters from Daraa and Suwayda provinces have continued to fight in western Suwayda Province amid the reprisal killings.[38] Bedouin fighters seized several towns in Suwayda Province near the Suwayda-Daraa border from Druze militias on July 17.[39] Prominent Druze Sheikh Hikmat al Hijri, who has led much of the fighting against the transitional government, called on Druze fighters to avoid harming “the peaceful Bedouin tribes” and to treat prisoners well.[40] A Bedouin military commander told Reuters on July 17 that the withdrawal and truce only apply to government forces and that his fighters seek to free Bedouins detained by Druze armed groups.[41] Sunni residents of Sasa in Rif Dimashq Province targeted Druze in a neighboring town in response to Druze militia attacks on Bedouins in Suwayda, demonstrating that intercommunal violence has the potential of expanding geographically.[42]

Syrian President Ahmed al Shara portrayed his government’s failed campaign to impose control over Suwayda Province as the result of Israeli attempts to fracture Syria and to start a war in a July 17 speech.[43] Shara claimed that his “efforts to restore stability and expel outlawed factions succeeded, despite Israeli interventions.”[44] Violence has continued in Suwayda, however. Shara accused Israel of seeking to “dismantle” Syrian unity and to weaken Syrian reconstruction and advancement by drawing Syria into another war.[45] He said that Syria can overcome all Israeli attempts to tear Syria apart.[46] Shara said that “building a new Syria requires” all Syrians to “place the nation's interests above all individual or limited interests.” Shara attempted to reassure the Druze community that the transitional government would prioritize Druze rights and freedoms and announced that he assigned “some local factions and religious elders the responsibility of maintaining security in Suwayda” upon the government’s withdrawal. [47] The local factions that

Shara assigned to maintain security in Suwayda have not established control over the province, however.[48] Anti-Damascus Druze militias have returned to positions in Suwayda and have taken advantage of the security vacuum to settle scores with pro-Damascus Druze factions by desecrating gravesites of former pro-Damascus Druze faction leaders and looting the factions' weapons stockpiles.[49] Violence will likely continue absent a strong security guarantor. The Druze factions that Shara put in charge of security in Suwayda have not demonstrated that they are capable of establishing security thus far.



- 1 **Iran.** A US media outlet reported on July 17 that US strikes in Iran on June 21 caused significant damage to only one of the three Iranian nuclear facilities that the United States struck. CTP-ISW has previously assessed that the strikes caused significant damage to all three facilities and will likely set back Iran's nuclear program.
- 2 **Iraq.** Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani reportedly withdrew the Popular Mobilization Authority Law from Parliament on July 17 following US concern over the legislation. The Popular Mobilization Authority Law includes several provisions that would likely further Iranian influence in the Iraqi security and political apparatus.
- 3 **Syria.** Syrian President Ahmed al Shara portrayed his government's failed campaign to impose control over Suwayda Province as the result of Israeli attempts to fracture Syria and to start a war in a July 17 speech.

Key Takeaways:

- **US Strike Damage:** A US media outlet reported on July 17 that US strikes in Iran on June 21 caused significant damage to only one of the three Iranian nuclear facilities that the United States struck. CTP-ISW has previously assessed that the strikes caused significant damage to all three facilities and will likely set back Iran's nuclear program.
- **Iraqi PMF Legislation:** Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani reportedly withdrew the Popular Mobilization Authority Law from Parliament on July 17 following US concern over the legislation. The Popular Mobilization Authority Law includes several provisions that would likely further Iranian influence in the Iraqi security and political apparatus.
- **Southern Syria:** Syrian transitional government forces withdrew from Suwayda Province on July 16 after Israeli airstrikes conducted in support of the Druze factions inflicted heavy losses on transitional government forces. The withdrawal of government forces has not brought peace to Suwayda Province and has contributed to a security vacuum that risks generating further violence.

Iran

Iran is increasing securitization measures in response to concerns about infiltration. Judiciary Chief Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejei called on July 17 for accelerating the resolution of cases against individuals accused of having ties to Israel, calling any delays “unacceptable.”[50] Ejei’s directive follows Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei’s July 16 call for the judiciary to pursue “recent crimes” with precision and vigilance.[51] Intelligence Minister Esmail Khatib separately stated on July 16 that the judiciary is processing espionage cases and that “some [accused individuals] have already been executed, and the rest will also receive their punishment.”[52] Khatib briefed Iranian lawmakers on counterintelligence operations against “spies” and anti-regime groups both during and before the recent war during a closed parliament session on July 15.[53] The Judiciary spokesperson separately stated on July 12 that the judiciary has filed 50 cases in Tehran Province against individuals accused of collaborating with Israel.[54] Parliament previously introduced a nine-article law on June 29 that labels any intelligence, espionage, or cooperation with Israel, the United States, or other “hostile” actors as “corruption on earth,” which is a crime punishable by death.[55]

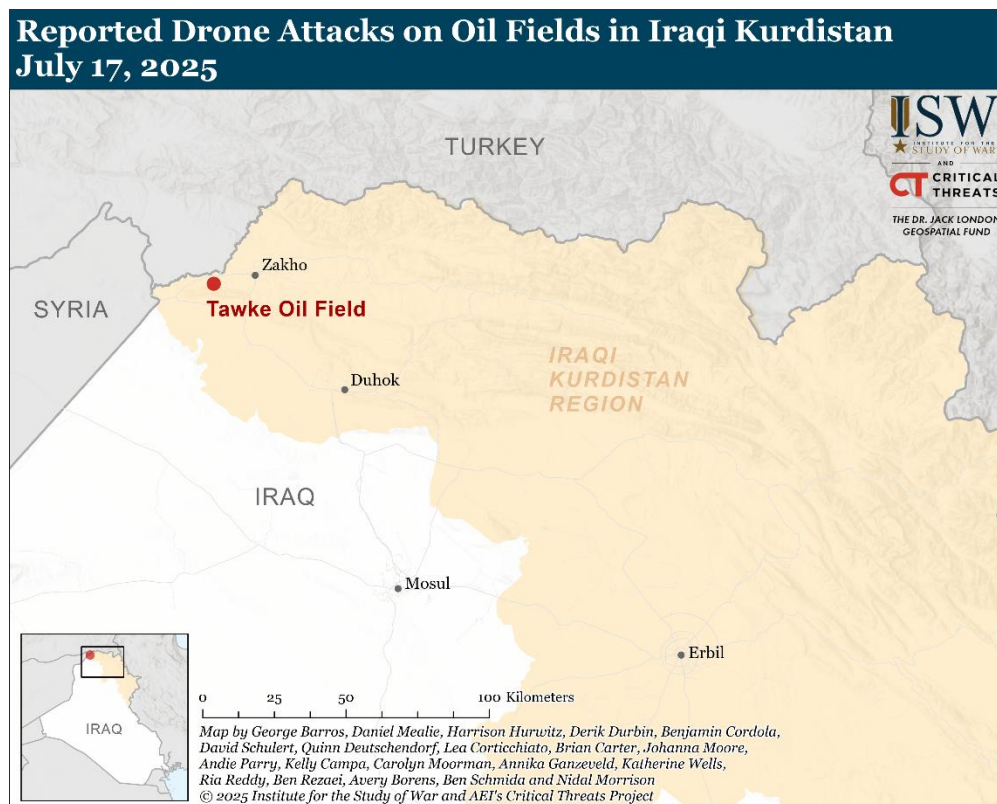
Senior Iranian commanders are likely establishing relationships across military branches following the introduction of a new generation of military leadership during the Israel-Iran War. Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Commander Major General Mohammad Pak Pour met with Artesh Commander Major General Amir Hatami on July 17, marking the first public meeting between Iran’s new IRGC and Artesh commanders since the war.[56] Pak Pour praised the IRGC’s “high morale” and Iran’s unity during the war.[57] Pak Pour replaced Major General Hossein Salami, while Hatami replaced Major General Abdol Rahim Mousavi.[58] Pak Pour and Hatami’s meeting followed a July 14 meeting between Armed Forces General Staff Chief Major General Abdol Rahim Mousavi and IRGC Aerospace Force Commander Brigadier General Hossein Mousavi.[59] Abdol Rahim Mousavi replaced Major General Mohammad Bagheri, and Hossein Mousavi replaced Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajji Zadeh.[60] These engagements likely reflect efforts

to build relationships between top Iranian military commanders after Israeli strikes eliminated key Iranian military leaders.[61]

Assembly of Experts member Mohsen Araki warned on July 17 that any attack on Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei would trigger a full-scale war.[62] Araki declared that the United States and its allies, including the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, would face attacks on their “military bases, economic assets, political forces, and affiliated companies.”[63] Senior Iranian clerics issued a fatwa on June 30 that described US President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as “mohareb” (enemies of God) and called for their assassination.[64] Araki was among 400 Qom clerics who signed a statement on July 13 in support of the fatwa.[65]

Iraq

Likely Iranian-backed Iraqi militias conducted a one-way drone attack targeting the Norwegian-operated Tawke oil field in Duhok Province on July 17.[66] Unidentified militants previously conducted at least six one-way drone attacks targeting four oil fields, including the Tawke oil field, in Iraqi Kurdistan and Kirkuk Province on July 16.[67] No group has claimed responsibility for the attacks at the time of this writing.



Several oil firms that operate in Iraqi Kurdistan, including some that haven’t been targeted, suspended oil production due to the attacks.[68] The Association of the Petroleum Industry of Kurdistan (APIKUR) announced on July 16 that most of its eight member companies suspended oil production.[69] British oil company and APIKUR member Gulf Keystone Petroleum said on July 16 that it temporarily suspended production at its Shaikan oil field in Erbil Province as a precaution due

to the recent attacks targeting other oil fields in Iraqi Kurdistan.[70] Two unspecified officials told Reuters on July 17 that the attacks have decreased the Iraqi Kurdistan region's oil output by half.[71]

The attacks on oil fields coincide with Iraqi federal government-Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) negotiations regarding oil exports. The Iraqi federal government announced on July 17 that the KRG will resume exporting oil to Turkey through the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline.[72] The KRG halted oil exports through the pipeline in March 2023 after the International Chamber of Commerce ruled that the Iraqi federal government had the right to control loading at Turkey's Ceyhan Port. [73] The Iraqi federal government and the KRG have conducted negotiations since February 2025 to reach an oil export agreement, despite Iraqi Oil Minister Hayan Abdel Ghani's announcement in mid-February 2025 that oil exports would resume by the end of February.[74] Unspecified sources told Reuters in late February 2025 that the United States threatened to sanction the Iraqi federal government if it prevented the KRG from resuming oil exports.[75] A Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) member accused Iranian-backed Iraqi militias on July 16 of conducting the recent attacks targeting oil fields in Iraqi Kurdistan.[76] The KDP member implied that the resumption of gas and oil exports from Iraqi Kurdistan would threaten Iranian economic interests. KRG oil exports through the Ceyhan Pipeline would likely curb crude oil smuggling from Iraqi Kurdistan to Iran.[77]

Syria

See topline section.

Arabian Peninsula

The Houthis launched one ballistic missile and one drone at Ben Gurion Airport, two drones targeting an unspecified "sensitive" site in the Negev Desert, and one drone targeting Eilat Port in southern Israel on July 16.[78] The Israeli Air Force intercepted a Houthi missile before it crossed into Israeli territory on July 16.[79] 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.[80]

A Yemeni journalist assessed on July 16 that a recently seized Iranian weapons shipment to the Houthis included equipment that the Houthis can use to strengthen their air defense capabilities.[81] **The equipment includes systems that the Houthis can use to shoot down US MQ-9 Reaper drones and other slow-moving drones.** The National Resistance Front (NRF) seized a weapons shipment on July 16 that included Iranian-made Ghaem-118 surface-to-air missiles and a 358 loitering surface-to-air missile.[82] A Yemen analyst published a photo in January 2024 of Houthi President Mahdi al Mashat inspecting a Saqr 1 Eagle missile, which is the Houthi name for the Iranian 358 missile.[83] The 358 missile has a range of 650 to 1,050 kilometers per hour, a payload of 10 kilograms, and a flight ceiling of 8,500 meters. The 358 missile is equipped with an optoelectronic guidance system, which allows the operator of the missile to modify the missile's trajectory in flight to improve the accuracy of the missile's targeting system.[84] The Yemen analyst assessed that the Houthis likely used Saqr 1 Eagle missiles to shoot down US MQ-9 Reaper drones, which US Central Command used for reconnaissance over Houthi-controlled territory in Yemen before the May 2025 US-Houthi ceasefire.[85] A US official stated in late April 2025 that the

Houthis had shot down at least six US MQ-9 Reaper drones since the start of the US airstrike campaign against the Houthis on March 15.[86]

The Houthis' attacks on the *Magic Seas* and *Eternity C* commercial vessels in the Red Sea on July 6 and 7 significantly increased regional shipping insurance prices. Sources familiar with shipping insurance costs told Reuters on July 10 that war risk premiums rose from around 0.3 percent of the value of a vessel before the attacks to around 0.7 percent of the value of a vessel after the attacks.[87] Some insurance companies have reportedly stopped covering some voyages that pass through the Red Sea.[88] Some insurance companies reportedly set rates on July 7 up to one percent of the value of a vessel, which match the rates set by insurance companies when the Houthis were conducting almost daily attacks on commercial vessels transiting the Red Sea in 2024.[89] Reuters reported that these insurance rates add hundreds of thousands of dollars in additional costs to every shipment.[90] The head of insurance company Marsh and McLennan's marine and cargo department told the *Financial Times* on July 8 that insurance costs for a \$100 million-valued vessel increased by approximately 230 percent after the most recent Houthi attacks.[91] Houthi Supreme Leader Abdulmalik al Houthi stated on July 17 that the attacks on the *Magic Seas* and *Eternity C* sent a "strong message to all companies" that transit through Israeli ports.[92] Houthi military spokesperson Yahya Sarea stated on July 16 that the Houthis will continue to target commercial vessels that transit through Israeli ports as part of the Houthis' economic blockade against Israel.[93]

The Palestinian Territories and Lebanon

Nothing significant to report.

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Iran Update



**Avery Borens, Ben Rezaei, Johanna Moore, Carolyn Moorman,
Ria Reddy, and Brian Carter**

Information Cutoff: July 18, 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.

Click [here](#) to see CTP and ISW's interactive map of assessed control of terrain in Syria, and [here](#) to see CTP and ISW's interactive map of Israeli ground operations. The Syria map is updated daily alongside the static Syria maps in this report. CTP-ISW ended daily maps of Israeli ground operations in February 2025.

Click [here](#) to see ISW-CTP's interactive map showing the total strikes in Iran since June 12, as well as an interactive timelapse showing the strikes day-by-day.

Israel reversed its previous demand that Syrian transitional government forces refrain from intervening in Suwayda Province, southern Syria. An unspecified Israeli official reported on July 18 that Israel will “allow” a limited number of Syrian transitional government forces to enter Suwayda for the next 48 hours to restore stability.[1] Syrian transitional government forces withdrew from Suwayda Province on July 17 after Israeli airstrikes conducted “to protect” the Druze inflicted heavy losses on transitional government forces.[2] Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on July 16 that Israel would continue to enforce its demand for a demilitarized Syria south of Damascus.[3] Bedouin clans across Syria exploited the security vacuum created in the withdrawal of government forces and deployed to Suwayda to fight Druze militias that are conducting retaliatory killings against Bedouins.[4] These killings by Druze militias are retaliation for the atrocities committed against the Druze in Suwayda by predominantly Sunni militias over the last week. Fighting between factions and attacks on civilians has intensified across Suwayda Province since the government forces withdrew on July 17.

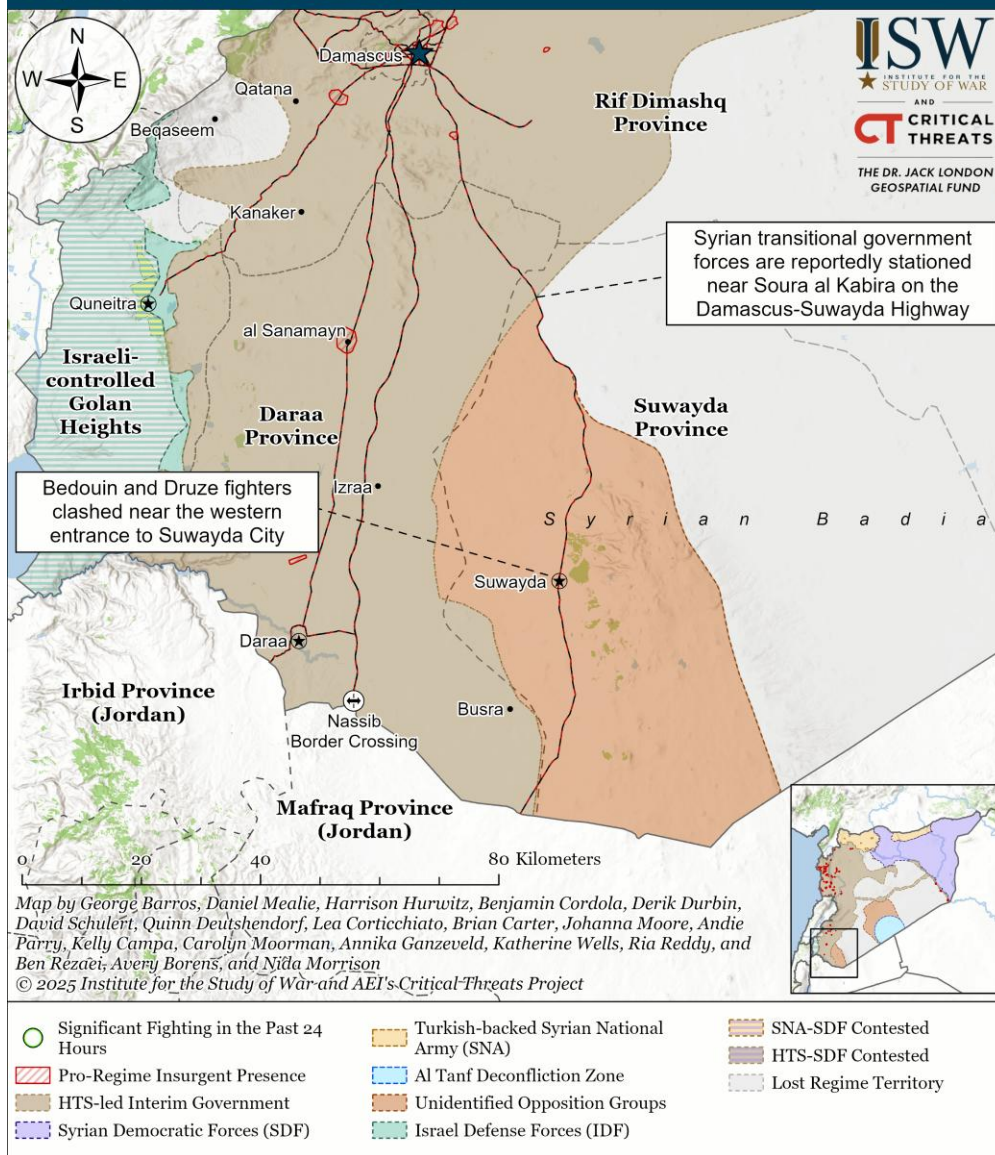
Syrian transitional government forces are reportedly stationed on the outskirts of Suwayda Province.[5] It is unclear if Syrian government forces have entered Suwayda at this time. Syrian media reported on July 17 that Syrian government forces are present near Soura al Kabira on the Damascus-Suwayda Highway and have reportedly allowed non-government fighters to pass through government checkpoints to enter Suwayda.[6] Syrian media reported on July 18 that Syrian General Security Service (GSS) convoys reached the northern countryside of Suwayda but have not advanced beyond the city of Liwa, northeast of Suwayda Province.[7] An unspecified security source

told Reuters on July 18 that Syrian government forces “were awaiting a final green light to enter Suwayda.”[8] Suwaydawi media reported on July 18 that some Syrian Ministry of Defense (MoD) and Ministry of Interior (MoI) fighters have removed their uniforms and begun supporting Bedouin fighters.[9] CTP-ISW is unable to verify these claims. The existence of these claims in the information space, combined with atrocities committed by government forces against the Druze over the last week, will have extremely deleterious effects on the government’s ability to present itself as a neutral security guarantor and restore order in Suwayda Province.

It is very unlikely that the Syrian transitional government will be able to re-secure and establish lasting stability in Suwayda Province within the Israeli-dictated 48-hour window. Government forces initially deployed to Suwayda on June 14 to quell intercommunal violence between Druze and Bedouin communities.[10] Unsanctioned violence and abuses committed by government forces between June 14 and June 16 deepened existing distrust between the government and the Druze.[11] Violence in Suwayda Province has intensified as Sunni Bedouin fighters have flooded Suwayda in the wake of the government forces’ withdrawal. These tribal fighters have seized large swaths of Suwayda’s territory. Government forces returning to Suwayda to quell the violence will need to successfully position themselves so that they can adequately protect both Druze and Sunni Bedouin populations in Suwayda before setting up lasting security mechanisms to suppress violence over the long term. This would likely require a ceasefire among the many armed groups involved in the violence, along with a well-disciplined stay-behind force that could protect both the Druze and Sunni Bedouins equally without resorting to the abuses that government forces have been involved in over the last week. A plan that relies on undisciplined government forces or local, communal-based militias is likely to drive additional violence because these forces would continue to conduct retaliatory killings, contribute to a cycle of violence, and fail to protect the local populations.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Southwestern Syria

July 18, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



The E3 (the United Kingdom, Germany, and France) urged Iran to deliver “concrete results” or the E3 would trigger the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) snapback mechanism, but more time is unlikely to result in changes to Iranian policy.[12] The E3 foreign ministers held a teleconference with Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi on July 17 to urge Iran to resume nuclear negotiations and cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to avoid snapback sanctions.[13] An unspecified French diplomatic source stated the E3 seeks a “verifiable and lasting” deal and reiterated their readiness to reimpose UN sanctions if Iran fails to produce results by the end of August.[14] The E3 would have to initiate the process to impose snapback sanctions by September 3 to complete the 45–65-day process before the measure expires in October 2025.[15] A *Wall Street Journal* reporter noted that the E3 foreign ministers and European Union Foreign Policy Chief Kaja Kallas also suggested extending the snapback

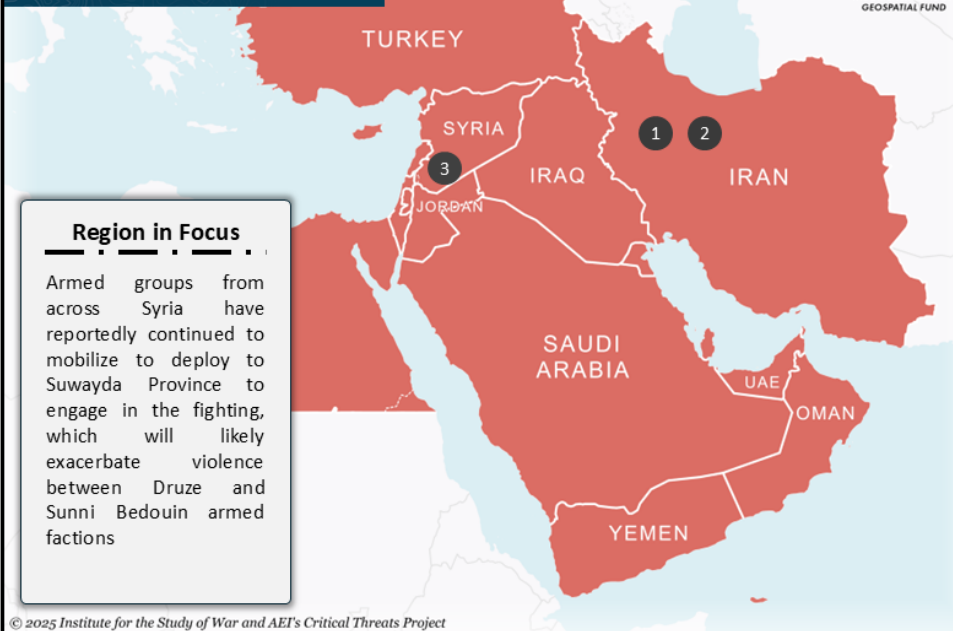
deadline during the call.[16] He added that such an extension would reportedly require agreement from Iran and its UN Security Council allies, Russia and China, to amend the timeline.[17] There is no provision in the JCPOA to extend the snapback clause, however.[18] It is unclear how the UN Security Council could amend the snapback timeline, given that the JCPOA is a political agreement among its participants and not a legally binding UN treaty.[19]

Iran has set a de facto precondition to negotiations that would require the United States to guarantee Iran's right to enrich before the resumption of any negotiations. Iran has repeatedly reiterated its unwillingness to concede on its right to enrich, though there is an ongoing debate in Iran over resuming negotiations, and this policy could change. Iranian officials have maintained their position on retaining uranium enrichment capabilities despite pressure from the United States and European countries. The delay of snapback sanctions is unlikely to change Iran's position on nuclear enrichment because a delay does not incentivize Iran to change its position. The Iranian Supreme Leader's International Affairs Adviser, Ali Akbar Velayati, stated on July 14 that Iran would not oppose negotiations without "preconditions" if the United States guarantees Iran's right to enrichment.[20] The recognition of this right is itself a precondition, however. US officials repeatedly rejected the demand and insisted on "zero enrichment." [21] Senior Supreme Leader adviser Ali Larijani separately stated on July 17 that "no talks are underway" and argued that Iran should not rush into negotiations, leaving it to Khamenei to decide when to proceed.[22]

Senior Iranian commanders are discussing air defense modernization as they assess force readiness after the Israel-Iran War. Armed Forces General Staff Chief Major General Abdol Rahim Mousavi inspected Iran's air defense headquarters on July 18 to assess postwar readiness.[23] Mousavi highlighted the need for updated air defense systems, creative tactics, and operational agility to counter "future threats." [24] Khatam ol Anbia Air Defense Headquarters Commander Brigadier General Alireza Sabahi Fard also presented a report during Mousavi's visit on recent efforts to strengthen Iran's air defense capabilities.[25] The emphasis on modernization follows Iran's ineffective defense against Israeli strikes between June 12 and June 24, using domestically produced systems.[26] Iranian officials may seek to acquire advanced systems from partners like China after domestically produced systems failed.[27]

Iran Update

July 11, 2025



Region in Focus

Armed groups from across Syria have reportedly continued to mobilize to deploy to Suwayda Province to engage in the fighting, which will likely exacerbate violence between Druze and Sunni Bedouin armed factions

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- 1 **NUCLEAR NEGOTIATIONS.** The E3 urged Iran to deliver “concrete results” or the E3 would trigger the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) snapback mechanism, but more time is unlikely to result in changes to Iranian policy. Iran has set a de-facto precondition to negotiations that would require the United States to guarantee Iran’s right to enrich prior to the resumption of any negotiations.
- 2 **IRAN.** Senior Iranian commanders are discussing air defense modernization as they assess force readiness after the Israel-Iran War. The emphasis on modernization follows Iran’s ineffective defense against Israeli strikes between June 12 and June 24 using domestically produced systems.
- 3 **SUWAYDA.** Israel reversed its previous demand that Syrian transitional government forces refrain from intervening in Suwayda Province, southern Syria. Syrian transitional government forces are reportedly stationed on the outskirts of Suwayda Province. It is very unlikely that the Syrian transitional government will be able to re-secure and establish lasting stability in Suwayda Province within the Israeli-dictated 48-hour window.

Key Takeaways:

- The E3 urged Iran to deliver “concrete results” or the E3 would trigger the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) snapback mechanism, but more time is unlikely to result in changes to Iranian policy. Iran has set a de facto precondition to negotiations that would require the United States to guarantee Iran’s right to enrich before the resumption of any negotiations.
- Senior Iranian commanders are discussing air defense modernization as they assess force readiness after the Israel-Iran War. The emphasis on modernization follows Iran’s ineffective defense against Israeli strikes between June 12 and June 24, using a domestically produced system.

- Israel reversed its previous demand that Syrian transitional government forces refrain from intervening in Suwayda Province, southern Syria. Syrian transitional government forces are reportedly stationed on the outskirts of Suwayda Province. It is very unlikely that the Syrian transitional government will be able to re-secure and establish lasting stability in Suwayda Province within the Israeli-dictated 48-hour window.

Iran

See topline section.

Iraq

The spokesperson for Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani’s Reconstruction and Development parliament bloc confirmed on July 18 that Parliament will “proceed” with the Popular Mobilization Authority Law despite objections from unspecified political blocs.[28] The Popular Mobilization Authority Law would integrate Iranian-backed Iraqi militias that operate outside of the Iranian-backed Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) into the PMF before the PMF integrates into the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF).[29] Sudani withdrew a previous version of the law from the parliament agenda in March 2025 to prevent political deadlock and to prevent the removal of Popular Mobilization Committee Chairman Faleh al Fayyadh.[30] A previous version of the law would have required around 3,500 PMF leaders, including Fayyadh, to retire. Shia Coordination Framework-aligned Deputy Parliament Speaker Mohsen al Mandalawi directed the Parliamentary Security and Defense Committee to complete all amendments to the law and submit the final version of the law to Parliament Speaker Mahmoud al Mashhadani for a vote during a parliament session on July 16.[31] The Shia Coordination Framework is a loose coalition of Shia political parties, some of which Iran backs. The amended version of the law allows PMF leaders who entered their posts before the law’s passage to maintain their positions.[32] Sudani reportedly withdrew the amended law from the parliamentary agenda on July 17 following US concerns over the legislation.[33]

Syria

Bedouin and Druze fighters have continued to fight across Suwayda Province.[34] Bedouin fighters have reportedly advanced into several towns in western Suwayda Province on July 17 and 18, according to Syrian media.[35] There were also engagements between Bedouin and Druze fighters near the western entrance to Suwayda City.[36] The Suwayda Military Council (SMC), a Druze force opposed to the Syrian transitional government, claimed on July 18 that its forces control most of Suwayda Province.[37] The SMC is affiliated with the prominent Druze Sheikh Hikmat al Hijri, who has led much of the fighting against the transitional government.[38] The SMC announced that it is conducting operations to clear “extremist terrorist elements” that came to Suwayda from other Syrian provinces.[39] The SMC said that its forces will not “accept any form of surrender” or any concession of Druze rights.[40] The SMC blamed the killings in Suwayda on “extremist terrorist groups” that have entered Suwayda in support of the Syrian transitional government.[41] Footage and images circulated by Syrian media accounts reportedly showed Druze militias affiliated with Hijri also publicly displaying the dead bodies of Bedouin tribesmen throughout Suwayda Province on July 18, which will deepen the animosity between Bedouin and Druze groups and make long-term security in the area more

difficult.[42] Neither the Bedouin nor the Druze organizations can be relied upon to properly or adequately provide security in Suwayda because both groups are contributing to continued cycles of violence. Both Bedouin clans and Druze fighters have committed abuses during the ongoing insurgency in Suwayda Province.[43]

Armed groups from across Syria have reportedly continued to mobilize to deploy to Suwayda Province to engage in the fighting, which will likely exacerbate violence between Druze and Sunni Bedouin armed factions.[44] Syrian media reported on July 18 that at least 30 Bedouin fighters in Deir ez Zor Province began mobilizing to deploy to Suwayda Province.[45] Syrian media also reported on July 18 that unspecified armed convoys from the Syrian desert began deploying to Barek, northeast of Suwayda Province.[46] Bedouin clans across Syria have mobilized and deployed to Suwayda since July 17 to fight Druze militias that are conducting retaliatory killings against Bedouins after the transitional government withdrew from the province.[47] It is unclear at the time of writing how many groups, if any, have successfully deployed to Suwayda. The arrival of armed groups will likely increase intercommunal violence in Suwayda if there continues to be no neutral forces to prevent intercommunal violence.

The Islamic Resistance Front in Syria – the First of the Brave said on July 17 that it will confront sectarian strife with “weapons and reason.”[48] The group is opposed to Israel and uses iconography widely associated with and inspired by the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). It is relatively weak and limited to no military capability to seriously threaten IDF formations.[49] The Islamic Resistance Front of Syria – the First of the Brave previously claimed responsibility for a small-scale rocket attack from southwestern Syria into the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights on June 3.[50] The Islamic Resistance Front in Syria – the First of the Brave declared a general mobilization of all free fighters to move towards sites in which Israeli forces are present.[51] Israeli forces have been positioned in several Syrian towns in Daraa and Quneitra provinces since December 2024.[52]

Arabian Peninsula

Nothing significant to report.

The Palestinian Territories and Lebanon

Nothing significant to report.



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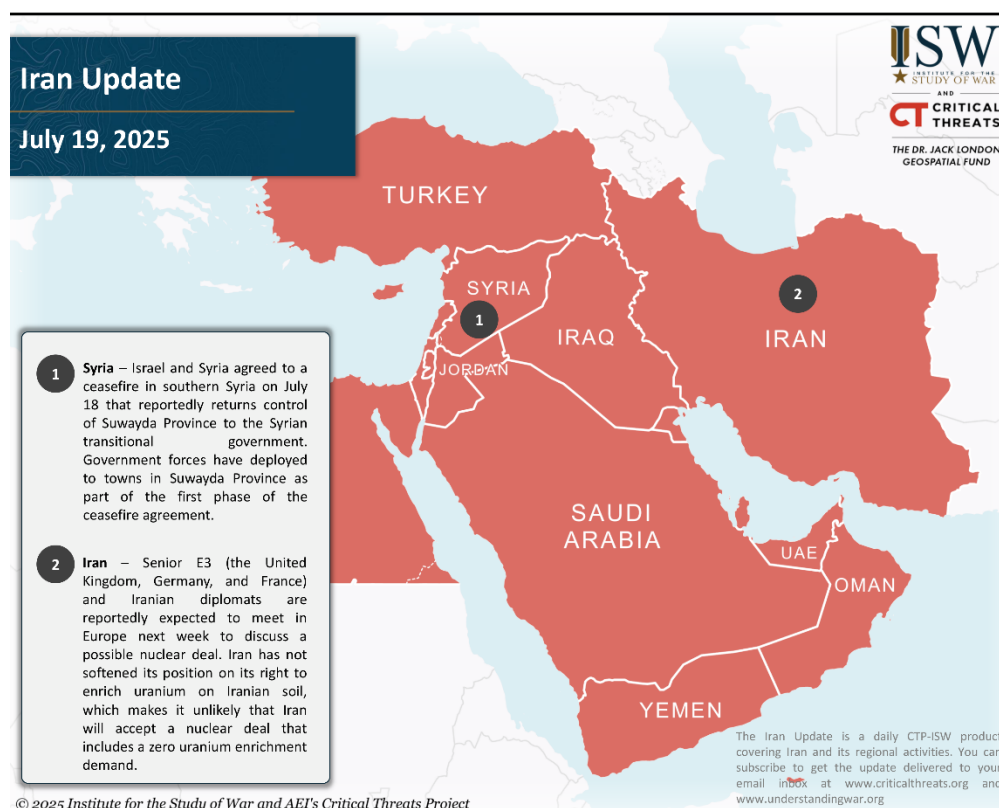
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Iran Update

Johanna Moore, Avery Borens, Ben Rezaei,
Carolyn Moorman, Ria Reddy, and Annika Ganzeveld

July 19, 2025, Information Cutoff: 2:00 PM ET

CTP-ISW will publish an abbreviated Iran Update on July 19 and 20 and will resume full coverage on July 21.



Key Takeaways:

- **Israel-Syria ceasefire:** Israel and Syria agreed to a ceasefire in southern Syria on July 18 that reportedly returns control of Suwayda Province to the Syrian transitional government. Government forces have deployed to towns in Suwayda Province as part of the first phase of the ceasefire agreement.
- **Iranian nuclear negotiations:** Senior E3 (the United Kingdom, Germany, and France) and Iranian diplomats are reportedly expected to meet in Europe next week to discuss a possible

nuclear deal. Iran has not softened its position on its right to enrich uranium on Iranian soil, which makes it unlikely that Iran will accept a nuclear deal that includes a zero uranium enrichment demand.

Israel and Syria agreed to a ceasefire in southern Syria on July 18 that reportedly returns control of Suwayda Province to the Syrian transitional government.[1] An unidentified Interior Ministry official reported that the ceasefire will be implemented in three phases.[2] Transitional government forces will deploy to Suwayda in the first phase to oversee disengagement between Druze and Bedouin fighters.[3] The official stated that an emergency committee comprised of Syrian transitional government officials will simultaneously oversee the delivery of humanitarian aid and provision of basic services to civilians in Suwayda Province as well as monitor the repair of infrastructure as part of the second phase.[4] The Interior Ministry official stated that the third phase will begin after “calm” is restored in Suwayda Province.[5] The third phase will activate state-run institutions, gradually redeploy government forces to Suwayda Province, and integrate Suwaydawi institutions into the Syrian state. These provisions are similar to the ones that were included in the July 16 ceasefire agreement, which was rejected by prominent Druze Sheikh Hikmat al Hijri.[6]

Syrian President Ahmed al Shara sought to secure the support of the Druze and Sunni Bedouin for the ceasefire during a speech on July 19 by making references to these communities’ history and identity.[7] Shara criticized Hijri’s movement for having “separatist ambitions,” seeking support from abroad, and acting counter to Syrian values and interests. Shara called on Syrians not to judge all Druze based on the actions of a few. He lauded the “noble values” of Bedouin tribes and their history of standing by the Syrian state. Shara stated that the motives for these tribes to take unilateral action to defend themselves are understandable, but cautioned that these actions cannot be an alternative to state intervention to restore security. Shara reiterated the transitional government’s stated commitment to protecting minorities and holding any and all perpetrators of violence accountable.

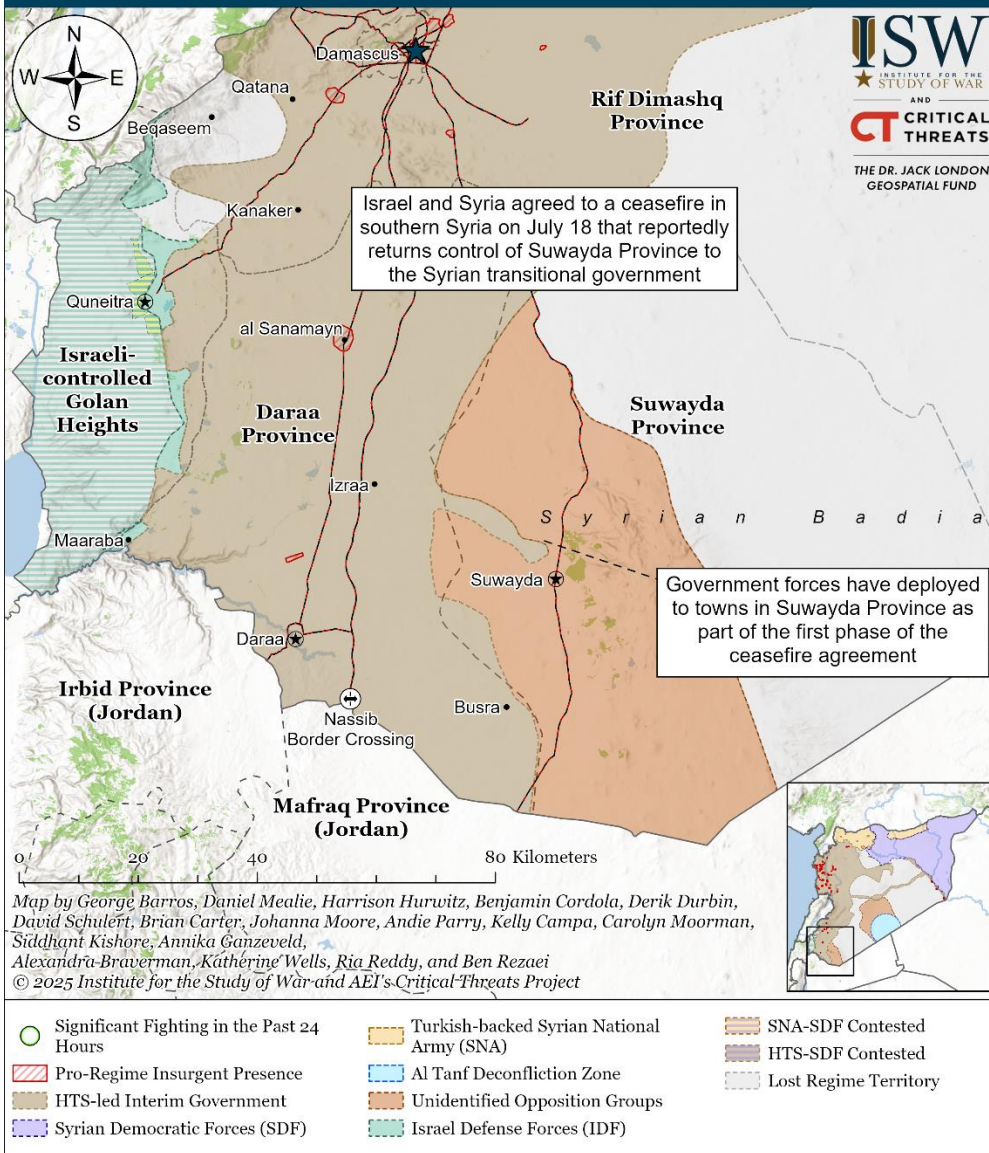
Hijri, other Druze factions, and Sunni Bedouin tribes have agreed to the Israel-Syria ceasefire in southern Syria. Hijri, who has rejected three ceasefire agreements in the past week, called for his supporters to adhere to the ceasefire agreement.[8] Hijri stated that Syrian government forces would deploy to Suwayda Province’s borders to establish checkpoints.[9] The checkpoints are meant to prevent any parties from entering border villages for 48 hours to allow security forces to deploy to the province and allow Bedouin tribesmen who had traveled to Suwayda to leave the province safely.[10] Under the ceasefire agreement, Busra al Sham and Busra al Harir are designated as safe crossings.[11] Hijri asserted that any party that violates the agreement bears full responsibility for its collapse.[12] It is unclear at this time whether Hijri or his forces will adhere to the ceasefire.

Several Druze and Bedouin groups have welcomed the ceasefire agreement. An unspecified spokesperson for Syrian Bedouin tribes told Syrian media on July 19 that the Bedouin tribes support the Syrian government and have stopped sending tribal fighters to Suwayda.[13] The Southern Tribes Gathering also expressed its commitment to the ceasefire agreement.[14] Prominent Druze Sheikh Hikmat al Hijri, who has led much of the fighting against the transitional government, called for an end to the clashes and fighting on July 18.[15]

Government forces have deployed to towns in Suwayda Province as part of the first phase of the ceasefire agreement. Forces deployed to al Mazraa, Walgha, and the outskirts of Suwayda City on July 19.[16] Syrian media reported that fighting continued in Suwayda on July 19 as internal security forces deployed to the province.[17] Geolocated footage posted on July 19 reportedly shows clashes between unspecified armed factions along the Suwayda-Walgha highway in northwestern Suwayda City.[18] Southern Syria-based media posted footage of clashes between Sunni Bedouin fighters and Druze fighters in an unspecified area of Suwayda City.[19] A Turkish analyst posted footage reportedly showing fighting between Sunni Bedouin fighters and Druze fighters loyal to Druze leader Hikmat al Hijri at the al Omran junction in Suwayda City.[20] Sunni Bedouin and Druze fighters continue to contest control of neighborhoods in northern and western Suwayda City at the time of this writing.[21]

CTP-ISW will provide further analysis about the ceasefire in Syria in its updates in the coming days.

Assessed Control of Terrain in Southwestern Syria July 19, 2025 at 2:00 PM EST



Axios reported on July 19 that senior E3 (the United Kingdom, Germany, and France) and Iranian diplomats are expected to meet in Europe next week to discuss a possible nuclear deal, citing unspecified sources.[22] Iran has not softened its position on its right to enrich uranium on Iranian soil, which makes it unlikely that Iran will accept a nuclear deal that includes a zero uranium enrichment demand. Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Abbas Araghchi told Chinese media on July 19 that Iran is “not convinced yet” to resume nuclear negotiations.[23] Araghchi added that the United States must show a “real intention” to achieve a “win-win solution.”[24] Iranian officials, including a senior adviser to the Supreme Leader, have similarly signaled caution about talks and reiterated that Iran will not accept a zero uranium enrichment demand.[25] The E3 has warned that it may trigger the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) snapback mechanism to reimpose UN Security Council sanctions on Iran if Iran does not

deliver unspecified “concrete results” by the end of August.[26] The E3 would have to initiate the process to impose snapback sanctions by September 3 to complete the process before the mechanism expires in October 2025.[27]

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BABEL STREET

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