

Syria Situation Report: April 14 - 20, 2017

1 April 19 - 20: Evacuations Resume from Besieged Towns in Damascus and Idlib: Buses evacuated more than 2,300 civilians and 700 pro-regime fighters from the besieged regime-held towns of Fu'ah and Kefraya in Idlib Province to Aleppo City. Meanwhile, pro-regime forces also evacuated at least 250 opposition fighters and civilians from the besieged opposition-held towns of Zabadani and Madaya near Damascus. The evacuations resumed after a temporary delay caused by an SVBIED that targeted an evacuation convoy on April 15. The regime also released 750 out of 1,500 detainees from prison as part of a larger deal brokered by Iran and Qatar that includes the release of a member of the Qatari Royal Family kidnapped by alleged Iraqi Shi'a Militias in Southern Iraq in 2015. The last phase of the population transfer agreement is expected to begin within the next sixty days.

2 April 17: Russia Allegedly Withdraws from Hama Military Airport: Russia reportedly withdrew its military forces and equipment from Hama Military Airport in Central Syria to Bassel Al-Assad International Airport on the Syrian Coast. Free Syrian Army (FSA)-affiliated Jaysh a-Nasr later targeted Hama Military Airport with more than forty rockets, temporarily putting the airfield out of service after destroying the control tower and several warplanes.

3 April 16: Pro-Regime Forces Regain Key Town in Northern Hama: Pro-regime forces including the IRGC, Lebanese Hezbollah, and Iraqi and Afghan Shi'a Militias seized the key town of Souran in Northern Hama Province following clashes with opposition forces. The advance marks the full reversal of all gains achieved by opposition forces including Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham (HTS) in an offensive against Hama City that began on March 21.

4 April 19: OPCW Confirms Use of Sarin Gas in Idlib Province: OPCW Director-General Ahmet Uzumcu stated that "incontrovertible" laboratory analysis confirms the use of "sarin or a sarin-like substance" in the town of Khan Sheikhoun in Northern Syria on April 4. The OPCW noted that it remains ready to deploy teams on the ground if granted appropriate security guarantees. Meanwhile, anonymous defense officials stated that Israel estimates that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad retains "one to three tons" of chemical weapons despite a deal brokered by the U.S. and Russia in 2013.

5 April 15: SVBIED Targets Convoy of Evacuees from Besieged Towns in Northern Syria: Unidentified militants detonated an SVBIED targeting a convoy of evacuees from the besieged regime-held towns of Fu'ah and Kefraya in Idlib Province as it idled in the opposition-held Rashadeen District of Aleppo City, killing at least one hundred individuals including over twenty fighters from Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham and Ahrar a-Sham. The convoy had been waiting for the arrival of evacuees from the besieged opposition-held towns of Zabadani and Madaya near Damascus as part of a wider population transfer deal brokered by Qatar and Iran.

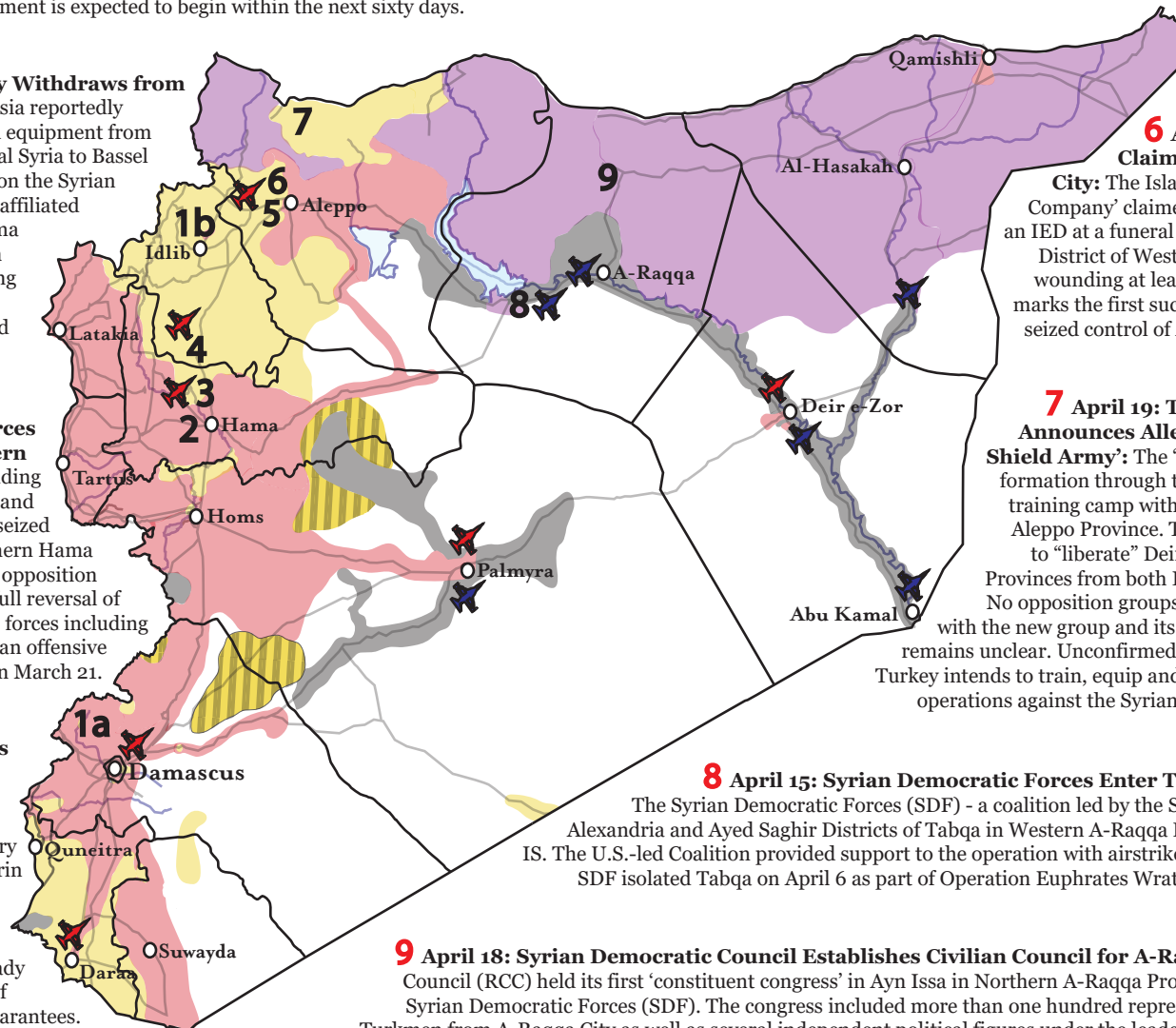
The bombing delayed further implementation of the deal until April 19.

6 April 19: Opposition Group Claims IED at Funeral in Aleppo City: The Islamist 'Abu Amara Special Tasks Company' claimed responsibility for detonating an IED at a funeral procession in the Salah ad-Din District of Western Aleppo City, killing six and wounding at least thirty-two others. The attack marks the first such blast since pro-regime forces seized control of Aleppo City in December 2016.

7 April 19: Turkish-Backed Opposition Announces Alleged Formation of 'Eastern Shield Army': The 'Eastern Shield Army' stated its formation through the release of a video showing a training camp with dozens of fighters in Northern Aleppo Province. The group highlighted its intent to "liberate" Deir e-Zor, Hasakah, and A-Raqqa Provinces from both IS and the Syrian Kurdish YPG. No opposition groups have yet claimed an affiliation with the new group and its actual influence on the ground remains unclear. Unconfirmed reports previously alleged that Turkey intends to train, equip and support opposition fighters in operations against the Syrian Kurdish YPG in Eastern Syria.

8 April 15: Syrian Democratic Forces Enter Tabqa in A-Raqqa Province: The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) - a coalition led by the Syrian Kurdish YPG - seized the Alexandria and Ayed Saghir Districts of Tabqa in Western A-Raqqa Province following clashes with IS. The U.S.-led Coalition provided support to the operation with airstrikes and embedded advisors. The SDF isolated Tabqa on April 6 as part of Operation Euphrates Wrath to isolate IS in A-Raqqa City.

9 April 18: Syrian Democratic Council Establishes Civilian Council for A-Raqqa City: The A-Raqqa Civil Council (RCC) held its first 'constituent congress' in Ayn Issa in Northern A-Raqqa Province under the auspices of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). The congress included more than one hundred representatives of Arabs, Kurds, and Turkmen from A-Raqqa City as well as several independent political figures under the leadership of RCC Co-Chairs Sheikh Mahmoud al-Barsan and Leila Mustafa. The congress released a statement calling for "coexistence" and the formation of a "democratic, pluralistic and decentralized system" as well as the return of all displaced residents of A-Raqqa Province.



Areas of Control*

- Pro-Regime Forces
- Opposition Forces
- The Islamic State
- Kurdish Forces
- Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham
*Formerly Jabhat a-Nusra
- Mixed Control

Airstrikes

- ✈ Pro-Regime
- ✈ U.S. / Coalition

