

Syria Situation Report: April 16 - 22, 2016

1 April 16 - 22: IS presses counter-offensive along Syrian-Turkish border. ISIS reversed several weeks of opposition gains and temporarily encircled opposition fighters along the Turkish border in northern Aleppo Province. IS mounted a major attack using at least three SVBIEDS against the opposition stronghold of Mare'a on April 20, displacing tens of thousands of civilians along the border. The recent setbacks also stand to fuel further disagreement between the U.S. and Turkey over the potential involvement of Syrian Kurds in operations to clear IS.

2 April 20: Russia reportedly deploying artillery near Aleppo City. Russia has reportedly raised concerns after redeploying artillery units and personnel to the vicinity of Aleppo City, according to senior U.S. officials. The artillery units had previously been deployed in support of regime operations to seize the IS-held city of Palmyra in Homs Province. The return of these units to Aleppo Province suggests that the regime and its allies may soon intend to encircle or seize Aleppo City.

3a-b April 21: Five-hundred wounded civilians evacuated from besieged towns across Syria. The Syrian Red Crescent and United Nations carried out "the largest evacuation ever" from besieged regions of Syria. 250 wounded civilians were evacuated from the opposition-held towns of Madaya and Zabadani near Damascus in exchange for the evacuation of 250 civilians from the pro-regime towns of Fuaa and Kefraya in Idlib Province. Meanwhile, the Syrian Red Crescent and UN also delivered 65 trucks full of humanitarian aid to roughly 120,000 civilians in the opposition-held town of Rastan in northern Homs Province.

4 April 18 - 19: Opposition mounts new offensive against regime heartland.

Ten opposition factions ranging from hardline Islamist groups Ahrar a-Sham and Jaish al-Islam to Free Syrian Army (FSA)-affiliated factions announced the formation of the 'Rad al-Mazalem' Operations Room targeting regime positions in the Jabal al-Akrad region of northern Latakia Province. The statement noted that the move comes in response to continued ceasefire violations by pro-regime forces. Meanwhile, Salafi-Jihadist groups Jund al-Aqsa and the Turkistan Islamic Movement seized the village of Khirbet a-Naqous in the Sahl al-Ghab plains of northwestern Hama Province following clashes that included at least two SVBIED detonations.

5 April 20 - 21: Kurds clash with pro-regime forces in northeastern Syria. The Syrian Kurdish YPG and its affiliated Asayish internal security forces engaged in heavy clashes with pro-regime forces in Qamishli in Hasaka Province, seizing the city prison and a number of other key points. The fighting began on April 20 following an altercation between a Kurdish Asayish patrol and a pro-regime National Defense Forces (NDF) checkpoint. The Kurdish Self-Administration controls most of Qamishli, while the Syrian Arab Army and allied militias control a number of neighborhoods as well as the Qamishli International Airport.

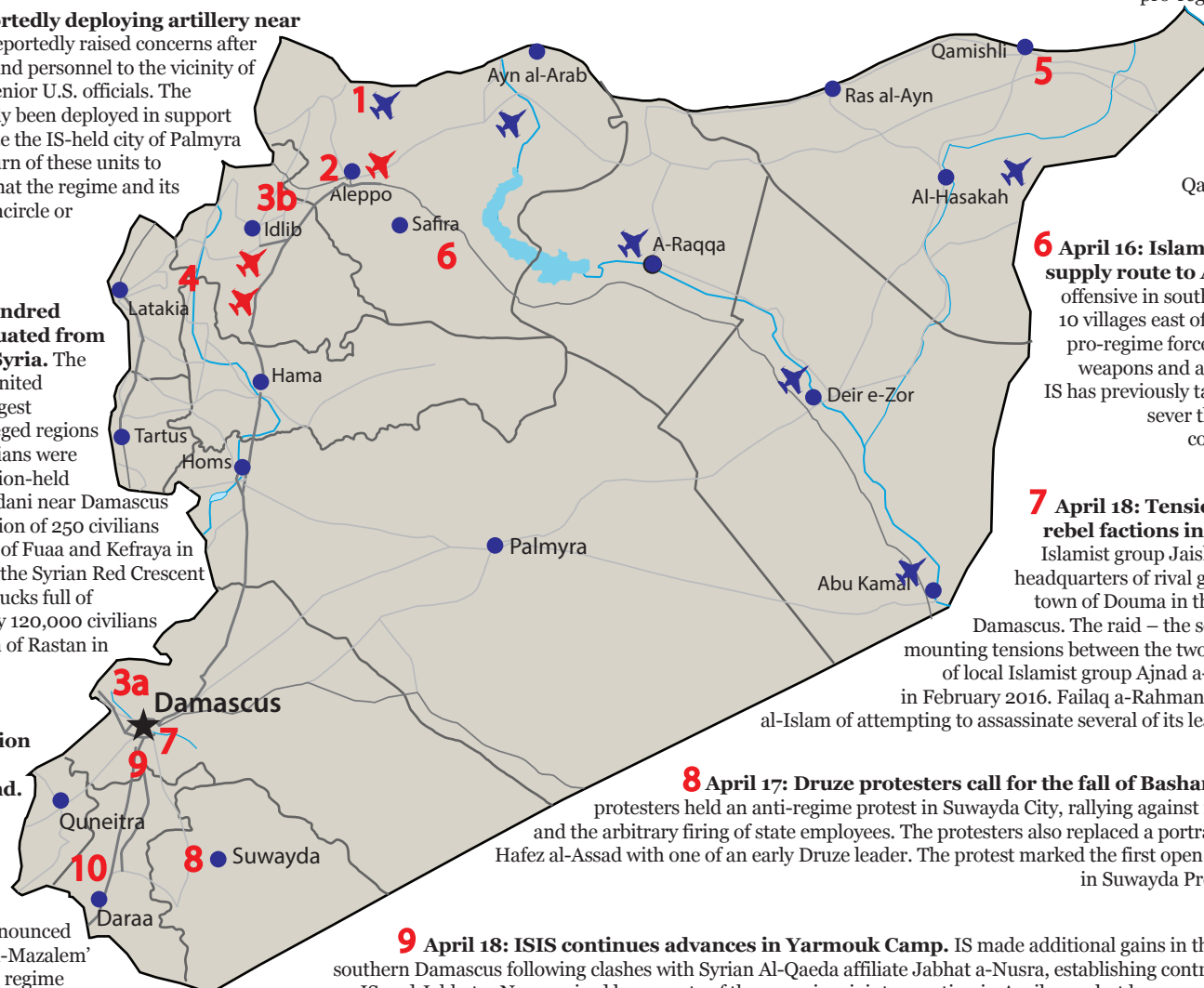
6 April 16: Islamic State threatens regime supply route to Aleppo City. IS launched an offensive in southern Aleppo Province, seizing 10 villages east of Khanasser after clashes with pro-regime forces. IS also captured a cache of weapons and ammunition provided by Iran. IS has previously targeted Khanasser in order to sever the only regime ground line of communication to Aleppo City.

7 April 18: Tensions rise between Islamist rebel factions in Eastern Ghouta. Hardline Islamist group Jaish al-Islam raided the military headquarters of rival group Failaq a-Rahman in the town of Douma in the Eastern Ghouta suburbs of Damascus. The raid – the second of the month – reflects mounting tensions between the two groups following the merger of local Islamist group Ajnad a-Sham with Failaq a-Rahman in February 2016. Failaq a-Rahman has previously accused Jaish al-Islam of attempting to assassinate several of its leaders, adding to the tensions.

8 April 17: Druze protesters call for the fall of Bashar al-Assad. Up to 200 Druze protesters held an anti-regime protest in Suwayda City, rallying against regime conscription practices and the arbitrary firing of state employees. The protesters also replaced a portrait of former Syrian President Hafez al-Assad with one of an early Druze leader. The protest marked the first open calls for the fall of the regime in Suwayda Province since September 2015.

9 April 18: ISIS continues advances in Yarmouk Camp. IS made additional gains in the Yarmouk Refugee Camp in southern Damascus following clashes with Syrian Al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat a-Nusra, establishing control over more than 70% of the camp. IS and Jabhat a-Nusra seized large parts of the camp in a joint operation in April 2015 but have engaged in repeated clashes over the past several weeks.

10 April 19: Free Syrian Army conducts new mergers in southern Syria. Three Free Syrian Army (FSA)-affiliated factions announced their merger to form the Division of Decisiveness in Daraa Province. The merger follows the formation of two other groups – the Gathering of Righteousness and the 46th Division – last week. Anonymous sources claimed that the U.S.-backed Military Operations Center (MOC) based in Jordan has pushed for further consolidation within the FSA-affiliated Southern Front.



● Pro-Regime Forces
● The Islamic State
● Kurdish Forces

● Jabhat a-Nusra
● Opposition Forces

✈ Pro-Regime Airstrike
✈ Anti-IS Coalition

