

# Syria Situation Report: August 12 - August 18, 2016

**1 August 13: Iran reportedly appoints new National Defense Forces head in Suwayda Province.** Iranian Ambassador to Syria Mohammad Reza Shaybani reportedly appointed Saleh Jarbou as the new commander of the National Defense Forces in Suwayda Province following a meeting at the Iranian Embassy in Damascus. If confirmed, the appointment illustrates the growing degree of control held by Iran over the security apparatus of the regime, particularly its networks of pro-regime paramilitaries.

**2 August 16: Military Operation Center in Jordan allegedly orders Southern Front to refrain from anti-regime operations.**

The covert U.S.-backed Military Operations Center (MOC) based in Amman, Jordan allegedly demanded that the Free Syrian Army (FSA)-affiliated Southern Front refrain from launching an offensive against the regime-held town of Sheikh Miskeen in Dera'a Province, according to local activists. The MOC offered to provide monthly salaries to opposition fighters in return for the deal. Pro-regime forces supported by Russian airstrikes seized Sheikh Meskin from the opposition in January 2016.

**3 August 16: Senior Chinese official meets with Syrian Minister of Defense in Damascus.**

Director of the Office for International Military Cooperation of China's Central Military Commission Guan Youfei met Syrian Minister of Defense Fahd Jassim al-Frej and an unidentified Russian general in Damascus, according to Chinese state-run media. Guan stated that China is "willing to keep strengthening" bilateral military cooperation with Syria. An anonymous Chinese official stated that China agreed to provide humanitarian aid to Syria as well as consider the deployment of trainers to the Syrian Arab Army.

**4 August 14: Islamic State detonates SVEST at key opposition-held border crossing in Idlib Province.**

The Islamic State detonated an SVEST near a bus transporting opposition fighters near the Atmeh Border Crossing in Idlib Province, killing over thirty opposition fighters and wounding at least fifty others. Unconfirmed reports indicate that the attack also killed at least two soldiers in the Turkish Armed Forces.

**5 August 14: Pro-regime forces repel opposition offensive on Aleppo City.** Jabhat Fatah a-Sham - the successor of Syrian Al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat a-Nusra - and other members of the Jaysh al-Fatah Operations Room and Fatah Halab Operations Room launched a two-pronged offensive targeting the cement factory and other positions on the outskirts of Aleppo City. Opposition forces secured initial gains before being forced to retreat by heavy airstrikes.

**6 August 14-15: Opposition groups form Al-Bab Military Council.**

Seven local opposition groups announced the formation of the Al-Bab Military Council with the goal of seizing the ISIS-held town of Al-Bab in Aleppo Province. The Al-Bab Local Council later denounced the groups for their alleged links to the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) - a coalition with heavy participation of the Syrian Kurdish YPG.

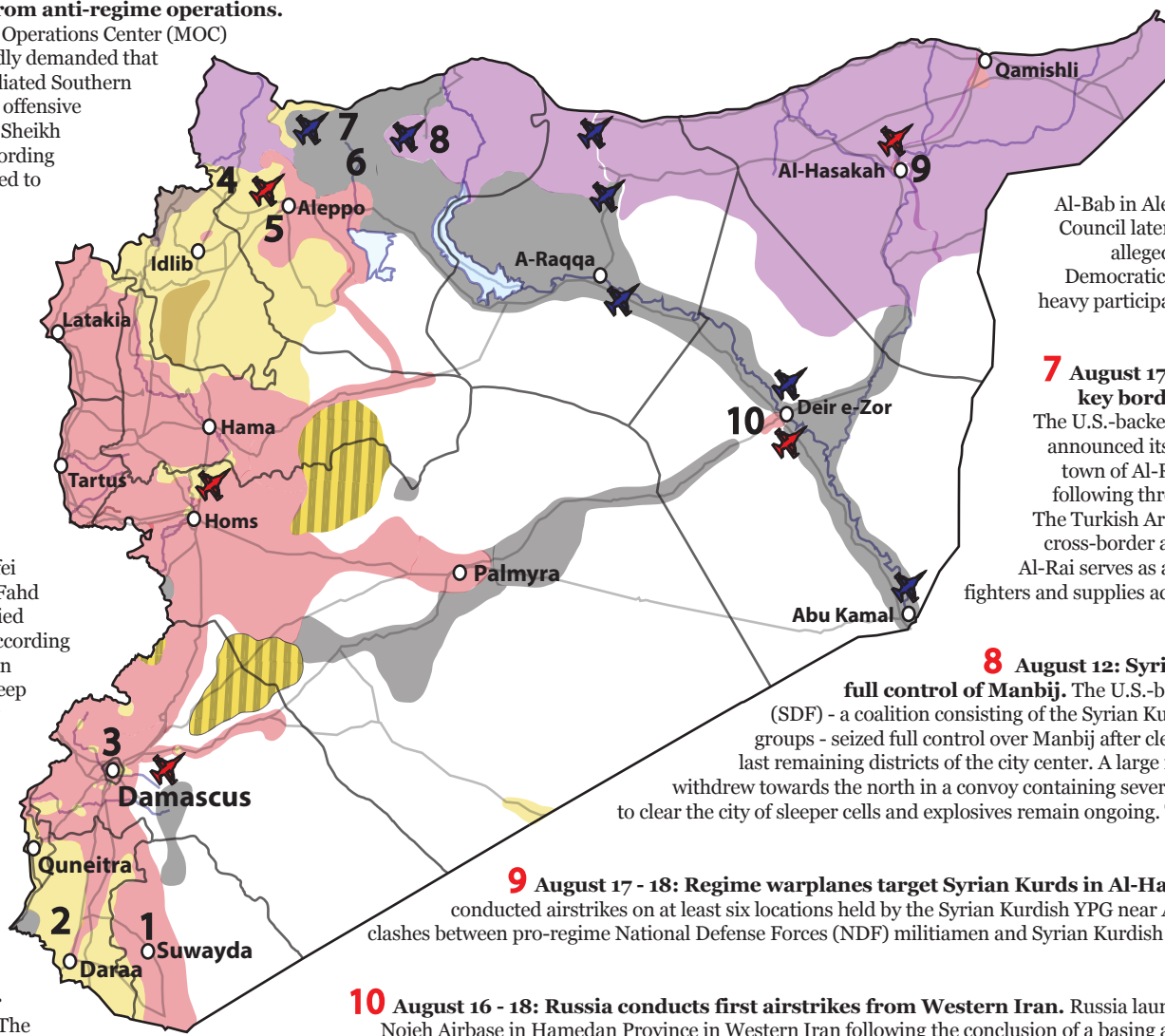
**7 August 17: Opposition claims to seize key border town from Islamic State.**

The U.S.-backed Hawar Kilis Operations Room announced its full control over the key border town of Al-Rai in Northern Aleppo Province following three days of heavy clashes with IS. The Turkish Armed Forces reportedly provided cross-border artillery support to the offensive. Al-Rai serves as a key transit route for smuggling fighters and supplies across the Syrian-Turkish Border.

**8 August 12: Syrian Democratic Forces seize full control of Manbij.** The U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) - a coalition consisting of the Syrian Kurdish YPG and allied opposition groups - seized full control over Manbij after clearing the Islamic State from the last remaining districts of the city center. A large number of remaining IS fighters withdrew towards the north in a convoy containing several hundred civilians. Operations to clear the city of sleeper cells and explosives remain ongoing. The campaign began on May 31.

**9 August 17 - 18: Regime warplanes target Syrian Kurds in Al-Hasakah City.** Regime warplanes conducted airstrikes on at least six locations held by the Syrian Kurdish YPG near Al-Hasakah City amidst ongoing clashes between pro-regime National Defense Forces (NDF) militiamen and Syrian Kurdish Asayish internal security forces.

**10 August 16 - 18: Russia conducts first airstrikes from Western Iran.** Russia launched airstrikes from the Shahid Nojeh Airbase in Hamedan Province in Western Iran following the conclusion of a basing agreement. Russia sortied Tu-22 M3 'Backfire' strategic bombers and Su-34 'Fullback' fighter-bombers from the base, claiming to conduct airstrikes against alleged Islamic State targets in Deir e-Zor Province as well as Jabhat Fateh a-Sham targets in Aleppo and Idlib Provinces.



## Areas of Control\*

- Pro-Regime Forces
- The Islamic State
- Kurdish Forces
- Jabhat Fatah a-Sham  
\*formerly Jabhat al-Nusra
- Opposition Forces
- Mixed Control

## Airstrikes

- Pro-Regime
- U.S. / Coalition

