

Syria Situation Report: December 8 - 15, 2016

1 December 11: IS Recaptures Palmyra: IS seized Palmyra in Eastern Homs Province following clashes with pro-regime forces despite heavy air support provided by Russia. Local activists reported that Russia and Iran withdrew their garrisons from Palmyra several days earlier, leaving the city under the control of only several hundred National Defense Forces militiamen. IS launched a multi-axis offensive in the outskirts of Palmyra beginning on December 8, seizing several nearby regime-held oil and natural gas fields as well as critical positions in the mountains overlooking the city.

2 December 11 - 15: IS Attempts to Besiege Regime Airbase in Eastern Homs Province:

IS seized several pro-regime positions, villages, and crossroads on the outskirts of the T4 (Tiyas) Airbase in Eastern Homs Province, isolating the base from three directions. Pro-regime forces including Russian Spetsnaz also reportedly deployed reinforcements to the airbase amidst the fighting. The attempted encirclement comes after IS seized the nearby city of Palmyra on December 11.

3 December 8: Coalition Airstrike Destroys 168 Tanker Trucks Near Palmyra:

Operation Inherent Resolve Spokesperson Col. John Dorrian stated that coalition warplanes destroyed at least 168 oil tanker trucks operated by IS near Palmyra. The incident marks the largest such airstrike to date under Operation Tidal Wave II targeting the oil infrastructure of IS in Eastern Syria.

4 December 12: Pro-Regime Aircraft Allegedly Use Chemical Weapons Against IS:

Activists reported that pro-regime aircraft targeted at least five villages held by IS in Eastern Hama Province with chemical weapons, killing at least fifty civilians and injuring at least two hundred others. IS claimed that the attack involved sarin gas deployed by Russia. The attack comes after IS recaptured Palmyra on December 11.

5 December 10: Hardline Members of Ahrar a-Sham Form New Subgroup:

Sixteen local factions announced their merger to form Jaysh a-Ahrar as a component group of Salafi-Jihadist group Ahrar a-Sham. Jaysh a-Ahrar will be led by former Ahrar a-Sham General Emir Hashim al-Sheikh. The new formation comes amidst reports of internal tension within the Shura Council of Ahrar a-Sham between factions close to Turkey or Jabhat Fatah a-Sham - the successor of Syrian Al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat a-Nusra. Twelve major scholars later released a fatwa outlawing Jaysh a-Ahrar for "bypassing the emir and laws" of Ahrar a-Sham on December 12.

6 December 13 - 15: Opposition Groups Surrender in Eastern Aleppo City:

Opposition forces agreed to a ceasefire in order to evacuate their remaining positions in Eastern Aleppo City following bilateral negotiations between Russia and Turkey. The deal calls for all opposition fighters and civilians who wish to depart from Eastern Aleppo City to be evacuated to Western Aleppo Province via Ramouseh District. Turkey will be able to transfer displaced civilians and fighters to Northern Aleppo Province through its own territory. The initial wave of evacuations scheduled to begin on December 14 broke down after Iran inserted new last-minute conditions that called for simultaneous evacuations from the besieged Shi'a-majority towns of Fu'ah and Kefraya in Idlib Province. The deal resumed on December 15 with medical evacuations from Fu'ah and Kefraya as well as Aleppo City.

7 December 9: Operation Euphrates Shield Announces Start of Battle for Al-Bab:

Opposition groups backed by the Turkish Armed Forces in Operation Euphrates Shield announced the start of operations to seize the town of Al-Bab in Northern Aleppo Province from IS. The statement followed the deployment of three hundred additional Turkish Special Forces to reinforce Operation Euphrates Shield on December 8. Opposition forces later claimed to enter the outskirts of Al-Bab, although security officials noted that momentum had slowed due to 'thousands' of ditches and improvised explosive devices planted by IS in Al-Bab.

8 December 14: U.S. and Turkish Delegation Reportedly Visited Manbij:

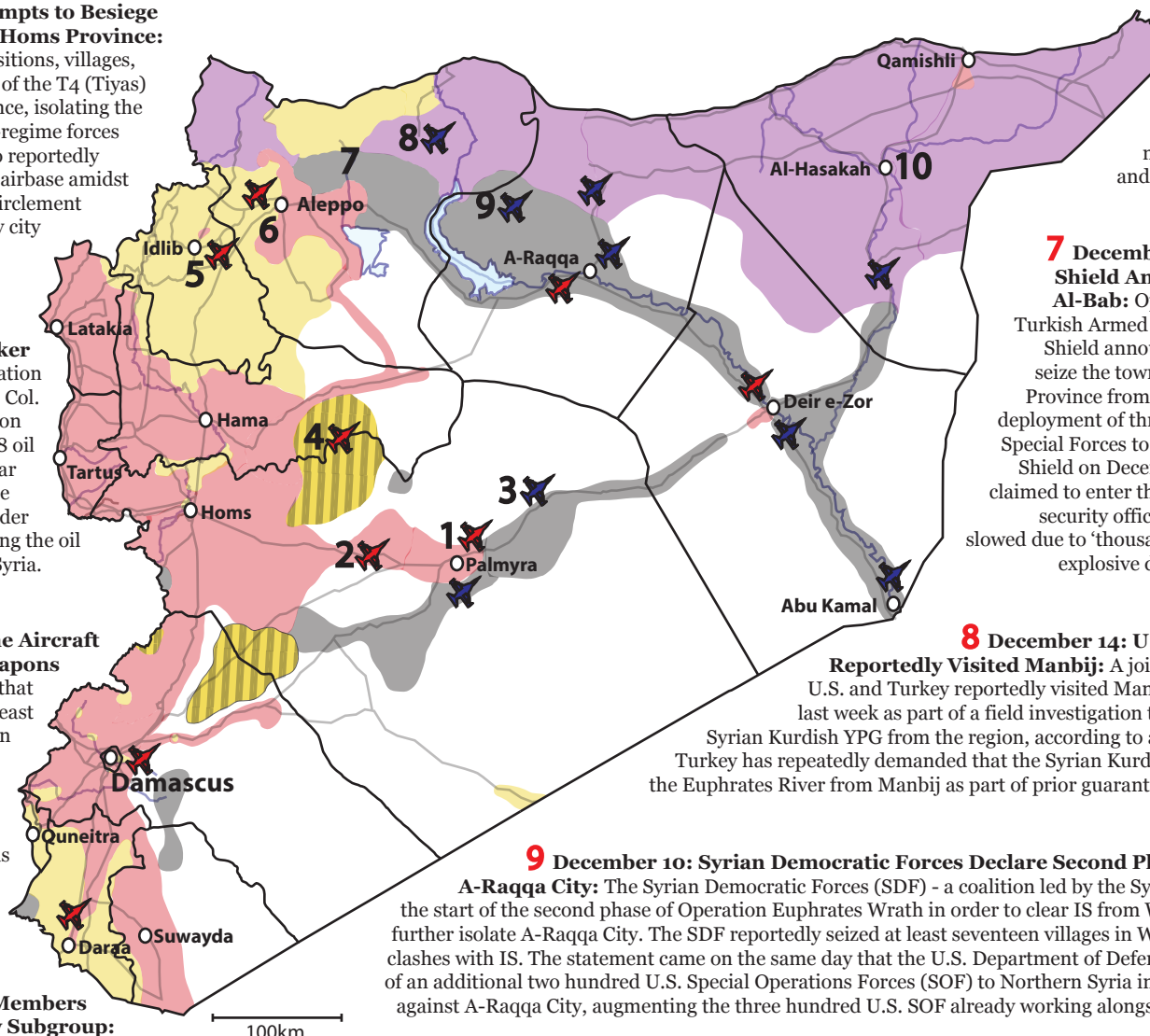
A joint military delegation from the U.S. and Turkey reportedly visited Manbij in Eastern Aleppo Province last week as part of a field investigation to ensure the withdrawal of the Syrian Kurdish YPG from the region, according to an anonymous Turkish official. Turkey has repeatedly demanded that the Syrian Kurdish YPG must withdraw east of the Euphrates River from Manbij as part of prior guarantees given by the U.S. Coalition.

9 December 10: Syrian Democratic Forces Declare Second Phase of Offensive to Isolate A-Raqqa City:

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) - a coalition led by the Syrian Kurdish YPG - announced the start of the second phase of Operation Euphrates Wrath in order to clear IS from Western A-Raqqa Province and further isolate A-Raqqa City. The SDF reportedly seized at least seventeen villages in Western A-Raqqa Province after clashes with IS. The statement came on the same day that the U.S. Department of Defense announced the deployment of an additional two hundred U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) to Northern Syria in order to accelerate operations against A-Raqqa City, augmenting the three hundred U.S. SOF already working alongside the SDF in Northern Syria.

10 December 8: Syrian Democratic Forces Holds Major Meeting of Component Factions:

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) held a major meeting with delegations from its affiliated components in Hasaka City to discuss ongoing military operations in Northern Syria. The delegates rejected the participation of any foreign ground forces in any future offensives to seize and isolate A-Raqqa City. The delegates also agreed to establish a local military council to govern A-Raqqa City similar to other councils formed for Manbij, Al-Bab, and Jarabulus in Northern Aleppo Province.



Areas of Control*

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

Airstrikes

- Pro-Regime
- U.S. / Coalition

*Control of Terrain Accurate as of 06 DEC 2016

