

Syria Situation Report: November 19 - December 2, 2016

1 November 27 - 28: Israel's Target Islamic State-Linked Group in Southern Syria: The Israeli Defense Forces conducted an airstrike that killed at least four fighters from the IS-affiliated Jaysh Khalid ibn al-Walid in Western Daraa Province after the fighters attempted to ambush a military patrol in the Golan Heights. Israel later conducted airstrikes targeting several nearby villages and compounds used as bases of operations by Jaysh Khalid ibn al-Walid.

2 November 28 - December 2: Opposition Forces Evacuate Towns in Western Ghouta: Pro-regime forces assumed full control of the towns of Khan a-Shih and Zakiyah in the Western Ghouta Suburbs of Damascus as part of an evacuation deal reached with opposition forces on November 28. Activists reported that roughly 2,000 opposition fighters and 1,000 civilians departed the towns for Idlib Province in Northern Syria. The deal marks the fourth surrender of opposition-held towns outside Damascus since August 2016.

3 November 20: Opposition Groups Reach Deconfliction Deal in Eastern Ghouta: Prominent Salafi-Jihadist group Jaysh al-Islam and Islamist group Faylaq a-Rahman reached a deal to end a long-running series of clashes between the two groups that began in the Eastern Ghouta Suburbs of Damascus in April 2016. The deal stipulates the two groups must reinforce frontlines with pro-regime forces and disassemble checkpoints blocking the ground lines of communication between opposition-held parts of Eastern Ghouta. The deal comes amidst mounting gains by pro-regime forces in Eastern Ghouta.

4 November 22: Russian Delegation Visits Damascus: Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin met Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, Syrian Prime Minister Imad Khamis, and Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallem in Damascus as part of a high-level delegation to discuss the Syrian Civil War. Muallem asked that Russia provide further economic assistance to the regime in the form of wheat and fuel in exchange for priority access to reconstruction contracts after the conflict. Khamis noted that the regime intends to further expand its political ties with Russia in the future.

5 November 27: Iranian Official Highlights Potential Naval Base in Syria: Iranian Armed Forces General Staff (AFGS) Chief IRGC Maj. Gen. Mohammad Bagheri stated that Iran could "one day" establish naval bases in foreign countries including Yemen and Syria, stressing that the establishment of "distant bases" could be more valuable for deterring attacks against Iran than nuclear technology. The statement occurred during a speech marking National Navy Day in Iran.

6 November 29: Ahrar a-Sham Elects New Leader: Salafi-Jihadist group Ahrar a-Sham elected Abu Ammar al-Omar to serve as the new General Commander of Ahrar a-Sham during its annual Shura Council meeting. Omar - who previously served as the Deputy General Commander - later released a statement calling for the prioritization of efforts to unify opposition groups. The election comes after eight members of the Shura Council - including former General Commander Abu Jaber al-Sheikh - announced the "suspension" of their participation in the council due to disagreements on the election.

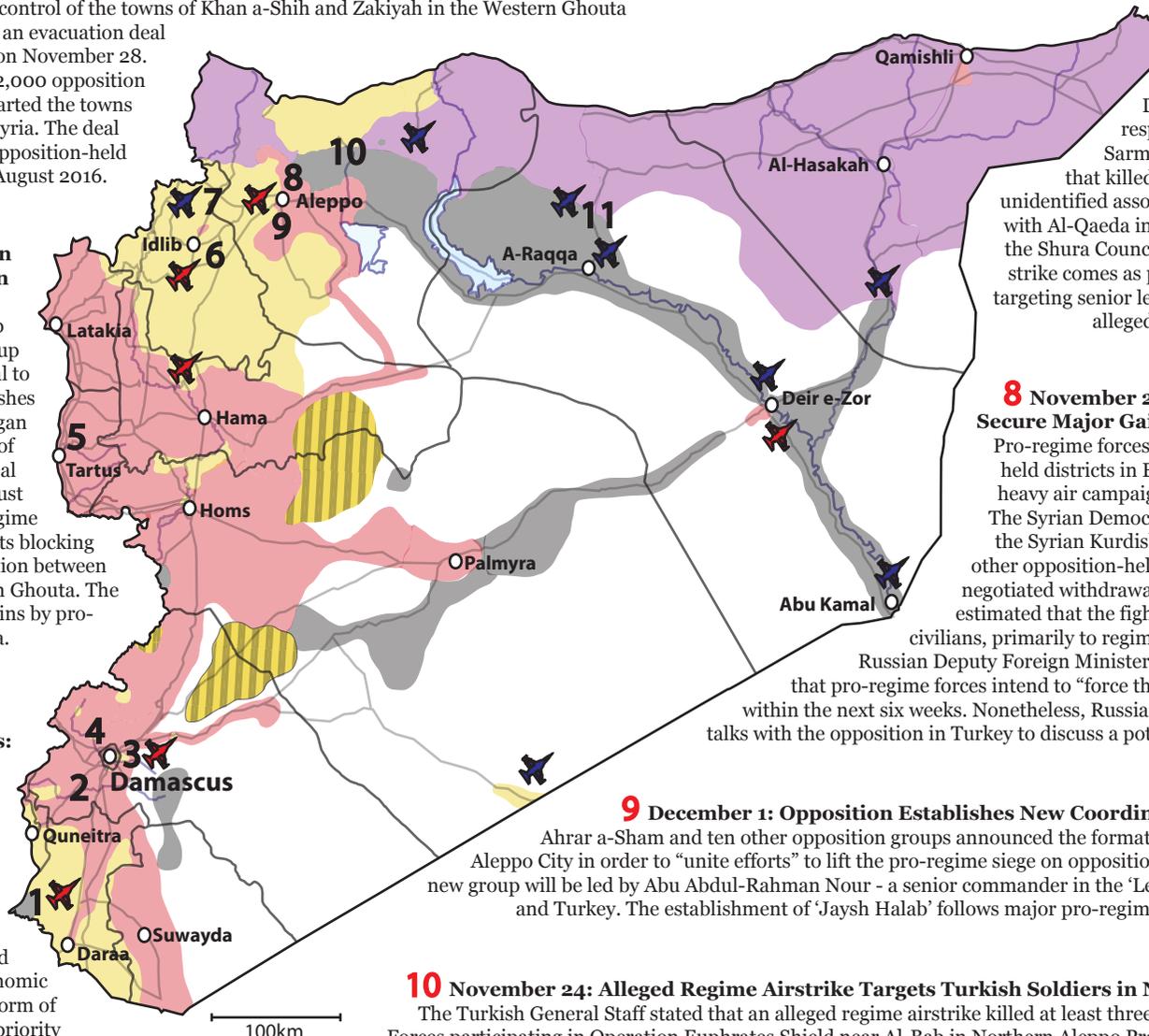
7 November 18: U.S. Targets Jabhat Fatah a-Sham Official: The U.S. Department of Defense claimed responsibility for an airstrike near Sarmada in Northern Idlib Province that killed Abu Ayyoub al-Masri and two unidentified associates. Masri reportedly fought with Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan before serving on the Shura Council of Jabhat Fatah a-Sham. The strike comes as part of an intensified campaign targeting senior leaders of Jabhat Fatah al-Sham allegedly authorized in October 2016.

8 November 26 - 30: Pro-Regime Forces Secure Major Gains in Eastern Aleppo City: Pro-regime forces seized at least five opposition-held districts in Eastern Aleppo City following a heavy air campaign that began on November 15. The Syrian Democratic Forces - a coalition led by the Syrian Kurdish YPG - also seized at least five other opposition-held districts following an alleged negotiated withdrawal by opposition forces. The UN estimated that the fighting displaced roughly 30,000 civilians, primarily to regime-held districts of Aleppo City. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov later stated that pro-regime forces intend to "force the terrorists out" of Aleppo City within the next six weeks. Nonetheless, Russia also reportedly participated in talks with the opposition in Turkey to discuss a potential ceasefire in Aleppo City.

9 December 1: Opposition Establishes New Coordinating Body in Aleppo City: Ahrar a-Sham and ten other opposition groups announced the formation of 'Jaysh Halab' in Eastern Aleppo City in order to "unite efforts" to lift the pro-regime siege on opposition-held districts of the city. The new group will be led by Abu Abdul-Rahman Nour - a senior commander in the 'Levant Front' backed by the U.S. and Turkey. The establishment of 'Jaysh Halab' follows major pro-regime gains in Eastern Aleppo City.

10 November 24: Alleged Regime Airstrike Targets Turkish Soldiers in Northern Aleppo Province: The Turkish General Staff stated that an alleged regime airstrike killed at least three soldiers of the Turkish Armed Forces participating in Operation Euphrates Shield near Al-Bab in Northern Aleppo Province. Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim stated that Turkey will "respond in kind" to the attack, while the Turkish Armed Forces allegedly sent short-range air defense systems to Northern Aleppo Province. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov denied the involvement of any pro-regime aircraft in the incident. Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad blamed the tensions on the aggressive policies of Turkey in Syria. Turkish President Recep Erdogan claimed that Turkey launched Operation Euphrates Shield in order to "end the rule" of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad on November 29, although he later softened this statement following outcry from Russia. The incident occurred on the one-year anniversary of the downing of a Russian fighter jet by Turkish warplanes in Northern Latakia Province in November 2015.

11 November 19 - 25: Syrian Democratic Forces Continue Advance Towards A-Raqqa City: The U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) seized the village of Tal Samaan approximately thirty kilometers north of A-Raqqa City as part of Operation Euphrates Wrath. The advance follows clashes with IS that included at least three SVBIED detonations. Meanwhile, the U.S. Department of Defense stated that a U.S. soldier died from wounds inflicted by an IED near Ayn Issa in Northern A-Raqqa Province, marking the first U.S. serviceman to be killed in action in Northern Syria.



Areas of Control*

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

Airstrikes

- ✈ Pro-Regime
- ✈ U.S. / Coalition

*Control of Terrain Accurate as of 20 NOV 2016



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