

Syria Situation Report: December 15 - 22, 2016

1 December 19: Regime Holds Talks on Opposition Evacuation from Mount Hermon: Activists claimed that a regime delegation held two meetings with opposition representatives over the past week to discuss the evacuation of nearly 2,000 opposition fighters and their families from Mount Hermon in Southern Syria. Evacuees would reportedly be allowed to depart for Idlib Province.

2 December 16: Child Suicide Bomber Targets Police Station in Damascus: A young girl detonated an SVBIED in a police station in the Midan District of Damascus, killing at least three individuals and wounding at least seven others. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack.

3 December 15 - 16: Islamic State Attacks Homs City and Its Environs: Unidentified militants detonated an IED in a hospital in the majority-Alawite Zahraa District of Homs City, killing at least two pro-regime fighters. Local activists blamed the attack on IS. Meanwhile, IS claimed to detonate at least one SVBIED at a regime checkpoint between the towns of Furqlus and Qaryatayn east of Homs City. The attacks come amidst continued operations by the group to encircle and seize the T4 (Tiyas) Airbase in Eastern Homs Province.

4 December 19: Evacuations Begin in Besieged Pro-Regime Towns in Idlib Province: Buses began conducting medical evacuations in the besieged pro-regime towns of Fu'ah and Kefraya in Idlib Province following several days of negotiations between Iran, Russia, and Turkey. The final deal reportedly calls for the evacuation of 4,000 individuals from the two towns in exchange for the complete evacuation of Eastern Aleppo City as well as the evacuation of 1,500 individuals from the besieged opposition-held towns of Zabadani and Madaya near Damascus. Unidentified fighters set fire to at least seven buses near Fu'ah and Kefraya on December 18 in an attempt to obstruct the deal. A little-known group called 'Saraya al-Tawhid' released a statement claiming the attack.

5 December 17: Local Opposition Affiliates Announce Unification in Idlib Province Amidst Rumors of Ongoing 'Grand Merger' Negotiations: Local affiliates of Jabhat Fatah a-Sham, Ahrar a-Sham, Faylaq a-Sham, and Thuwar a-Sham in Turmanin in Idlib Province announced their merger under a unified military body. The announcement comes amidst rumors of renewed negotiations for a 'grand merger' of Jabhat Fatah a-Sham, Ahrar a-Sham, and other factions in Northern Syria under the name of the Syrian Islamic Commission.

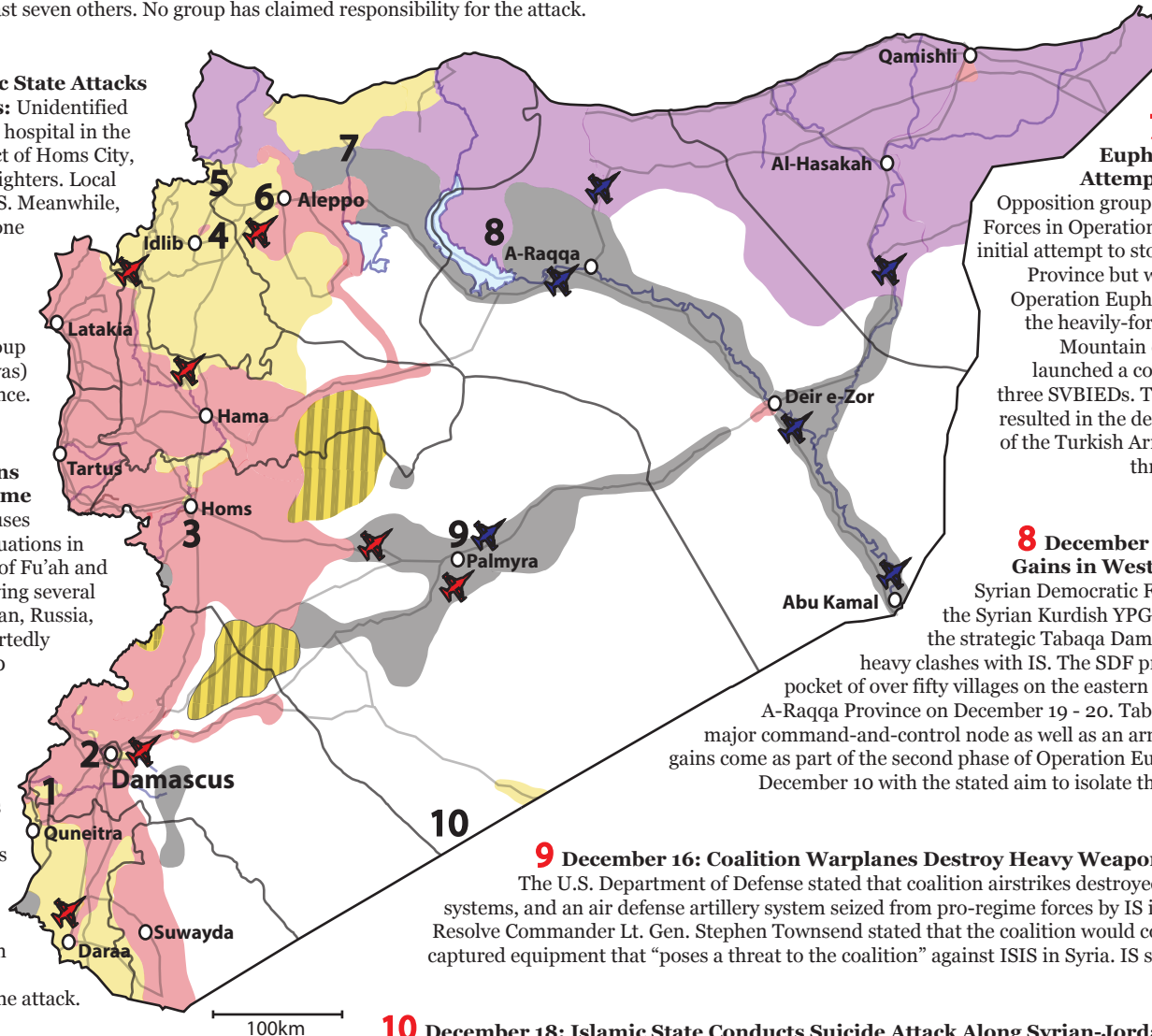
6 December 15 - 22: Opposition Evacuates Eastern Aleppo City: The Syrian Arab Army announced its full control over Aleppo City on December 22 following the end of evacuations from the remaining opposition-held districts of Eastern Aleppo City. Opposition forces initially surrendered on December 13 following negotiations between Turkey and Russia. The evacuations faced repeated delays due to poor weather conditions as well as last-minute demands by Iran for parallel evacuations from the besieged pro-regime towns of Fu'ah and Kefraya in Idlib Province. The ICRC and UN estimate that at least 37,000 individuals including 4,000 opposition fighters departed the city for Western Aleppo Province over the past week of evacuations.

7 December 21: Operation Euphrates Shield Fails in Initial Attempt to Storm IS-Held Al-Bab: Opposition groups backed by the Turkish Armed Forces in Operation Euphrates Shield mounted an initial attempt to storm Al-Bab in Northern Aleppo Province but withdrew after heavy casualties. Operation Euphrates Shield reportedly entered the heavily-fortified Al-Bab Hospital and Aqil Mountain overlooking Al-Bab before ISIS launched a counterattack that involved up to three SVBIEDs. Turkey reported that the clashes resulted in the death of at least sixteen members of the Turkish Armed Forces with at least thirty-three others reportedly wounded.

8 December 19 - 21: SDF Secures Major Gains in Western A-Raqqa Province: The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) - a coalition led by the Syrian Kurdish YPG - advanced within five miles of the strategic Tabaqa Dam west of a-Raqqa City following heavy clashes with IS. The SDF previously isolated and cleared a pocket of over fifty villages on the eastern bank of Lake Assad in Western A-Raqqa Province on December 19 - 20. Tabaqa Dam reportedly serves as a major command-and-control node as well as an arms depot and prison for IS. The gains come as part of the second phase of Operation Euphrates Wrath which began on December 10 with the stated aim to isolate the western axis of a-Raqqa City.

9 December 16: Coalition Warplanes Destroy Heavy Weapons Seized by IS in Palmyra: The U.S. Department of Defense stated that coalition airstrikes destroyed fourteen tanks, three artillery systems, and an air defense artillery system seized from pro-regime forces by IS in Palmyra. Operation Inherent Resolve Commander Lt. Gen. Stephen Townsend stated that the coalition would conduct strikes to neutralize any captured equipment that "poses a threat to the coalition" against ISIS in Syria. IS seized Palmyra on December 11.

10 December 18: Islamic State Conducts Suicide Attack Along Syrian-Jordanian Border: IS detonated a motorcycle-borne improvised explosive device targeting opposition forces near the Rukban IDP Camp in Eastern Homs Province along the Syrian-Jordanian Border, killing at least two fighters with Jaysh Ahrar al-Asha'ir. IS previously conducted an SVBIED attack at a border post near Rukban IDP Camp in June 2016 that killed at least seven soldiers.



Areas of Control*

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

Airstrikes

- Pro-Regime
- U.S. / Coalition

