

Syria Situation Report: February 2 - 16, 2017

1 February 12 - 16: Opposition Groups Launch Offensive in Daraa City: Opposition groups in the Banyan al-Marsous Operations Room including Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham - the successor of Syrian Al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat Fatah a-Sham - as well as several members of the Free Syrian Army (FSA)-affiliated Southern Front launched an offensive against pro-regime forces in the Manshiyah District of Daraa City. The offensive marks the first major disruption of a local ceasefire that has largely held since February 2016. The attack follows the merger of eight Southern Front factions on February 9.

2 February 6 - 11: Hezbollah Allegedly Negotiating Withdrawal from Parts of Qalamoun Region:

Activists reported that Lebanese Hezbollah began negotiations to withdraw from at least ten towns in the Western Qalamoun Mountains in order to allow for the return of refugees currently living near Arsal in Eastern Lebanon. The alleged deal would grant amnesty to local opposition fighters and normalize their status under a local opposition force called 'Saraya Ahl a-Sham'. The deal would allow Hezbollah to retain a presence in key areas including the towns of Qastal, Nabek, Deir Attiyah, and Qarah on the Damascus - Homs Highway.

3 February 14: Pro-Regime Force Advances Towards Palmyra:

Pro-regime fighters in the 'Fifth Storming Corps' backed by Russian airstrikes seized the Hayyan Gas Field and Western Bayarat Region after clashes with IS in Eastern Homs Province. The advances bring pro-regime forces within twenty miles of the city of Palmyra.

4 February 8: Russia Sends Fifty Short-Range Ballistic Missiles to Syria:

Russia sent a shipment of fifty SS-21 'Scarab' short-range ballistic missiles to the Port of Tartus in Syria, according to anonymous officials. The officials noted that Russia also fired at least two SS-21 'Scarab' and four SS-26 'Iskander' ballistic missiles against opposition-held terrain in Idlib Province over the prior two days.

5 February 7 - 16: Alleged Pro-IS Group Clashes with Opposition in Northern Hama Province:

Liwa al-Aqsa - an alleged pro-IS offshoot of Salafi-Jihadist group Jund al-Aqsa - launched attacks against other opposition groups based in Northern Hama and Southern Idlib Provinces including two U.S.-backed TOW missile recipients as well as Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham (HTS). The offensive included a dual SVEST attack against an HTS headquarters as well as the alleged execution of more than 150 fighters in Khan Sheikhoun in Southern Idlib Province. HTS released a statement on February 13 calling upon Liwa al-Aqsa to submit to sharia mediation and accusing the group of "coordination and links" with IS.

6 February 3 - 4: U.S. Airstrikes Target Al-Qaeda in Idlib Province: U.S. warplanes conducted an airstrike against a headquarters of Salafi-Jihadist group Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham in Sarmin in Idlib Province on February 3, killing at least ten fighters. U.S. warplanes later conducted a second strike targeting a car near Batbu in Northern Idlib Province, killing Abu Hani al-Masri of Ahrar a-Sham. Masri reportedly served as an overseer for a number of training camps for Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan in the 1980s and 1990s as well as a founder of Egyptian Islamic Jihad.

7 February 4 - 16: Pro-Regime Forces Complete Encirclement of Al-Bab:

Pro-regime forces supported by Russia and Lebanese Hezbollah effectively completed the siege of IS in Al-Bab in Northern Aleppo Province on February 4 after seizing several villages south of the city. Meanwhile, opposition forces backed by Turkey in Operation Euphrates Shield later launched an offensive into Al-Bab on February 8. Heavy clashes remain ongoing.

8 February 9: Russian Airstrikes Kill Three Turkish Soldiers Near Al-Bab:

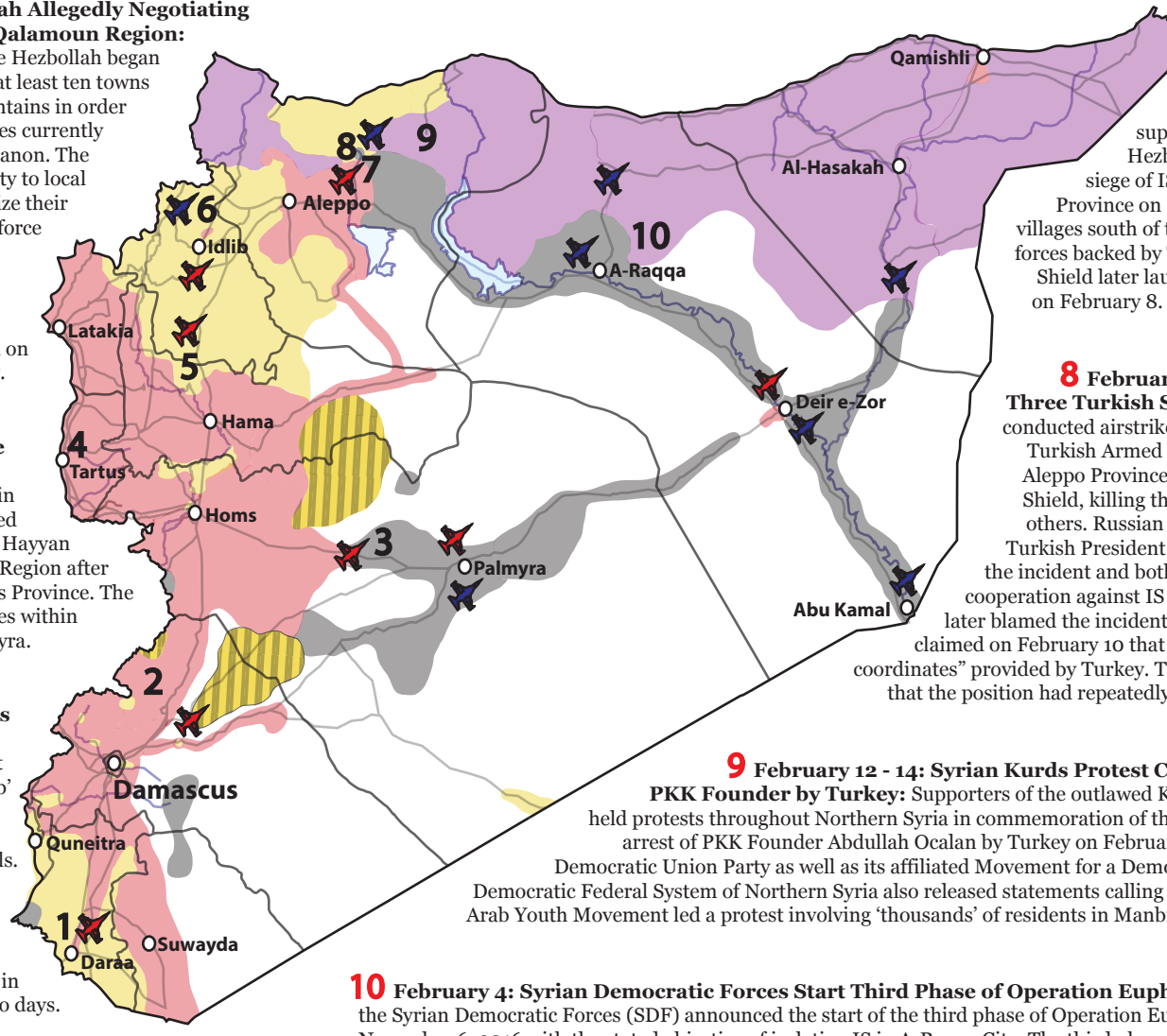
Russia conducted airstrikes against a position held by the Turkish Armed Forces near Al-Bab in Northern Aleppo Province as part of Operation Euphrates Shield, killing three soldiers and injuring eleven others. Russian President Vladimir Putin called Turkish President Recep Erdogan to apologize for the incident and both leaders agreed to deepen their cooperation against IS in Northern Syria. The Kremlin later blamed the incident on a "lack of coordination" and claimed on February 10 that the strikes had been "guided by coordinates" provided by Turkey. The Turkish Armed Forces noted that the position had repeatedly been communicated to Russia.

9 February 12 - 14: Syrian Kurds Protest Continued Imprisonment of PKK Founder by Turkey:

Supporters of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) held protests throughout Northern Syria in commemoration of the eighteenth anniversary of the arrest of PKK Founder Abdullah Ocalan by Turkey on February 15, 1999. The Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party as well as its affiliated Movement for a Democratic Society (TEV-DEM) and Democratic Federal System of Northern Syria also released statements calling for his release. The Democratic Arab Youth Movement led a protest involving 'thousands' of residents in Manbij in Northern Aleppo Province.

10 February 4: Syrian Democratic Forces Start Third Phase of Operation Euphrates Wrath:

On February 4, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) announced the start of the third phase of Operation Euphrates Wrath which began on November 6, 2016 with the stated objective of isolating IS in A-Raqqa City. The third phase aims to isolate the eastern axis of A-Raqqa City by severing the ground line of communication between A-Raqqa City and Deir e-Zour City. Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) Commander Lt. Gen. Stephen Townsend stated on February 8 that operations to seize A-Raqqa City from IS in Syria will conclude within the "next six months" without further details.



Areas of Control*

- Pro-Regime Forces
- Opposition Forces
- The Islamic State
- Kurdish Forces
- Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham
*Formerly Jabhat a-Nusra
- Mixed Control

Airstrikes

- ✈ Pro-Regime
- ✈ U.S. / Coalition

*Control of Terrain Accurate as of 16 FEB 2017

