

Syria Situation Report: January 26 - February 2, 2017

1 January 26: Pro-Regime Forces Seize Town in Eastern Ghouta: Pro-regime forces seized the town of Qasimiyah in the Eastern Ghouta suburbs of Damascus following clashes with opposition groups including Salafi-Jihadist group Jaysh al-Islam. The advance marks the third town seized by pro-regime forces in Eastern Ghouta since December 29.

2 January 28 - 30: Opposition Forces Evacuate Besieged Wadi Barada Valley: Opposition fighters evacuated the besieged Wadi Barada Valley north of Damascus as part of a reconciliation deal reached with pro-regime forces following an uptick in violence that began in late December 2016. The Syrian Arab Army stated that more than 1,100 opposition fighters and 750 civilians had been evacuated to Idlib Province on January 29 - 30. Pro-regime forces also began repairing the Ayn al-Fijeh Pumping Station that provides the majority of the water supply to Damascus. Meanwhile, pro-regime forces also claimed a reconciliation deal with opposition fighters in the besieged town of Ghabaghib in Northern Daraa Province on January 31.

3 January 28 - February 2: IS Clashes with Pro-Regime Forces in Eastern Qalamoun: IS launched an offensive against pro-regime forces near the Sayqal (Al-Seen Airbase) in the Eastern Qalamoun Mountains northeast of Damascus, seizing several positions outside the airfield. Pro-regime forces deployed reinforcements to the region in order to counter the offensive. IS previously attacked the Sayqal Airbase in May 2016.

4 January 28: FSA-Affiliated Opposition Group Withdraws from Nationwide Ceasefire: The Free Syrian Army (FSA) affiliated Jaysh al-Izza stated that its fighters will no longer adhere to a nationwide truce brokered by Turkey and Russia in December 2016, citing the continued offensive by pro-regime forces against the Wadi Barada Valley in Damascus. Jaysh al-Izza later stated that Russia targeted its headquarters with airstrikes in Northern Hama Province on January 29.

5 January 28: Syrian Al-Qaeda Affiliate Merges with Four Other Groups: Jabhat Fatah a-Sham (JFS) announced its merger with former U.S.-backed Harakat Nour a-Din a-Zenki, Free Syrian Army (FSA) affiliate Jaysh a-Sunna, and Salafi-Jihadist groups Liwa al-Haqq and Ansar a-Din in order to form a new group called Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham (HTS) led by former Ahrar a-Sham Emir Hashem a-Sheikh on January 28. The new group later incorporated a number of independent sharia officials as well as dozens of local opposition groups. Current Ahrar a-Sham Emir Ali al-Omar Ammar released a statement on January 29 calling upon Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham to agree to mediation via

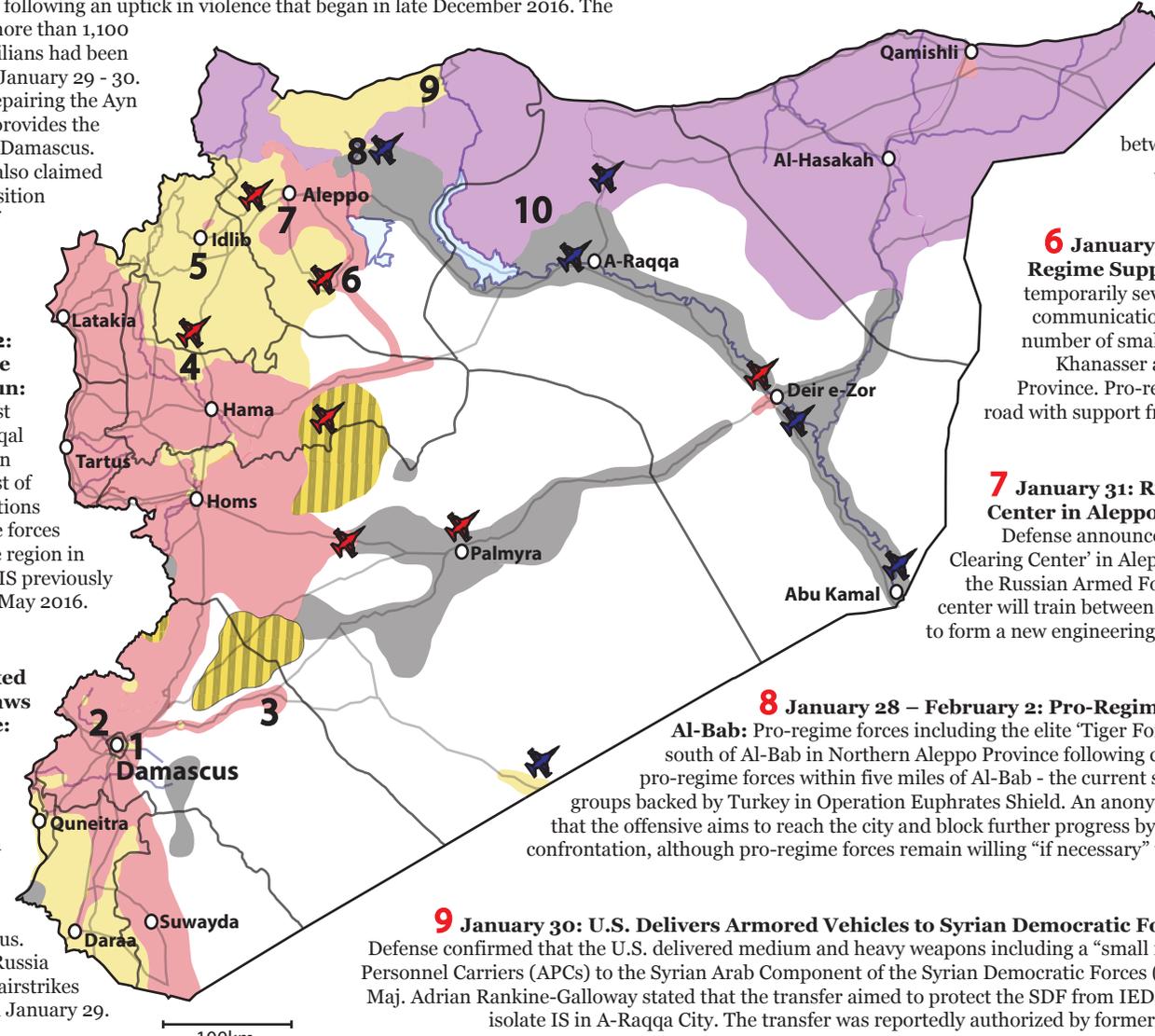
an independent sharia court in order to end a wave of opposition infighting in Idlib and Western Aleppo Provinces that erupted on January 29. Low-level clashes between Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham and Ahrar a-Sham remain ongoing.

6 January 26: IS Temporarily Severs Regime Supply Route to Aleppo City: IS temporarily severed the regime ground line of communication to Aleppo City after seizing a number of small villages between the towns of Khanasser and Ithriya in Southern Aleppo Province. Pro-regime forces later reopened the road with support from heavy airstrikes by Russia.

7 January 31: Russia Opens Mine Clearing Center in Aleppo City: The Russian Ministry of Defense announced the establishment of a 'Mine Clearing Center' in Aleppo City staffed by experts from the Russian Armed Forces. An official stated that the center will train between fifty to seventy regime soldiers to form a new engineering force of the Syrian Arab Army.

8 January 28 - February 2: Pro-Regime Forces Advance South of Al-Bab: Pro-regime forces including the elite 'Tiger Forces' seized at least five villages south of Al-Bab in Northern Aleppo Province following clashes with IS. The gains bring pro-regime forces within five miles of Al-Bab - the current site of operations by opposition groups backed by Turkey in Operation Euphrates Shield. An anonymous pro-regime source stated that the offensive aims to reach the city and block further progress by Turkey while avoiding a major confrontation, although pro-regime forces remain willing "if necessary" to clash with opposition forces.

9 January 30: U.S. Delivers Armored Vehicles to Syrian Democratic Forces: The U.S. Department of Defense confirmed that the U.S. delivered medium and heavy weapons including a "small number" of Guardian Armored Personnel Carriers (APCs) to the Syrian Arab Component of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Pentagon Spokesperson Maj. Adrian Rankine-Galloway stated that the transfer aimed to protect the SDF amidst ongoing operations to isolate IS in A-Raqqa City. The transfer was reportedly authorized by former U.S. President Barack Obama.



Areas of Control*		Airstrikes	
Pro-Regime Forces	Opposition Forces	Pro-Regime	U.S. / Coalition
The Islamic State	Mixed Control		
Kurdish Forces	Jabhat Fatah a-Sham <small>*Formerly Jabhat a-Nusra</small>		

*Control of Terrain Accurate as of 26 JAN 2017

