

# Syria Situation Report: February 24 - March 2, 2017

**1 February 25: IS Affiliate Continues Expansion in Southern Syria:** Islamic State affiliate Jaysh Khalid ibn al-Walid seized the opposition-held towns of Jaleen and Mazirah in the Yarmouk Basin in Western Daraa Province. The group also detonated an SVEST in the nearby opposition-held town of Sheikh Saad. Opposition groups including Salafi-Jihadist groups Ahrar a-Sham and Jaysh al-Islam as well as the Free Syrian Army (FSA)-affiliated Southern Front later launched an unsuccessful attempt to recapture the towns. Jaysh Khalid ibn al-Walid began its offensive in Daraa Province on February 20.

**2 March 2: Pro-Regime Forces Claim to Regain Palmyra from IS:** The Syrian Arab Army stated that pro-regime forces backed by Russia, Iran, and Lebanese Hezbollah recaptured the city of Palmyra in Eastern Homs Province following heavy clashes. IS reportedly withdrew east after rigging the city with improvised explosive devices. IS regained Palmyra for the second time in December 2016 during a major offensive by pro-regime forces to seize the remaining opposition-held districts of Aleppo City.

**3 February 25: Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham Conducts Complex Attack in Homs City:** Five fighters from Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham (HTS) - the successor of Syrian Al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat Fatah a-Sham - conducted simultaneous attacks targeting the State Security and Military Intelligence Offices in Homs City with gunfire, IEDs, and SVESTs, killing at least forty pro-regime officers including Military Intelligence Branch Chief Brig. Gen. Hassan Dabul. HTS Military Emir Abu Mohammad al-Joulani stated that the attacks aimed to undermine the ongoing Geneva Talks on the Syrian Civil War and demonstrate the fragility of the regime. Pro-regime forces later intensified airstrikes and artillery shelling on the besieged Wa'er District of Homs City.

**4 February 26: Alleged U.S. Airstrike Kills Deputy Emir of Al-Qaeda in Idlib Province:** An alleged U.S. drone strike killed Al-Qaeda Deputy Emir Abu al-Khayr al-Masri near Mastouma south of Idlib City. The strike also killed an unidentified member of Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham. An anonymous U.S. intelligence official confirmed the strike. Masri served on the Al-Qaeda Shura Council, held close ties to Osama bin Laden, and reportedly helped to plan to 1998 U.S. Embassy Bombings in Kenya and Tanzania.

**5 February 24: IS Detonates SVBIED Targeting Civilians Returning to Al-Bab:** IS detonated an SVBIED at an opposition checkpoint in Susiyan north of Al-Bab in Northern Aleppo Province, killing at least sixty individuals including dozens of civilians. The civilians had reportedly been waiting to return to Al-Bab after its seizure by opposition groups backed by Turkey in Operation Euphrates Shield on February 23.

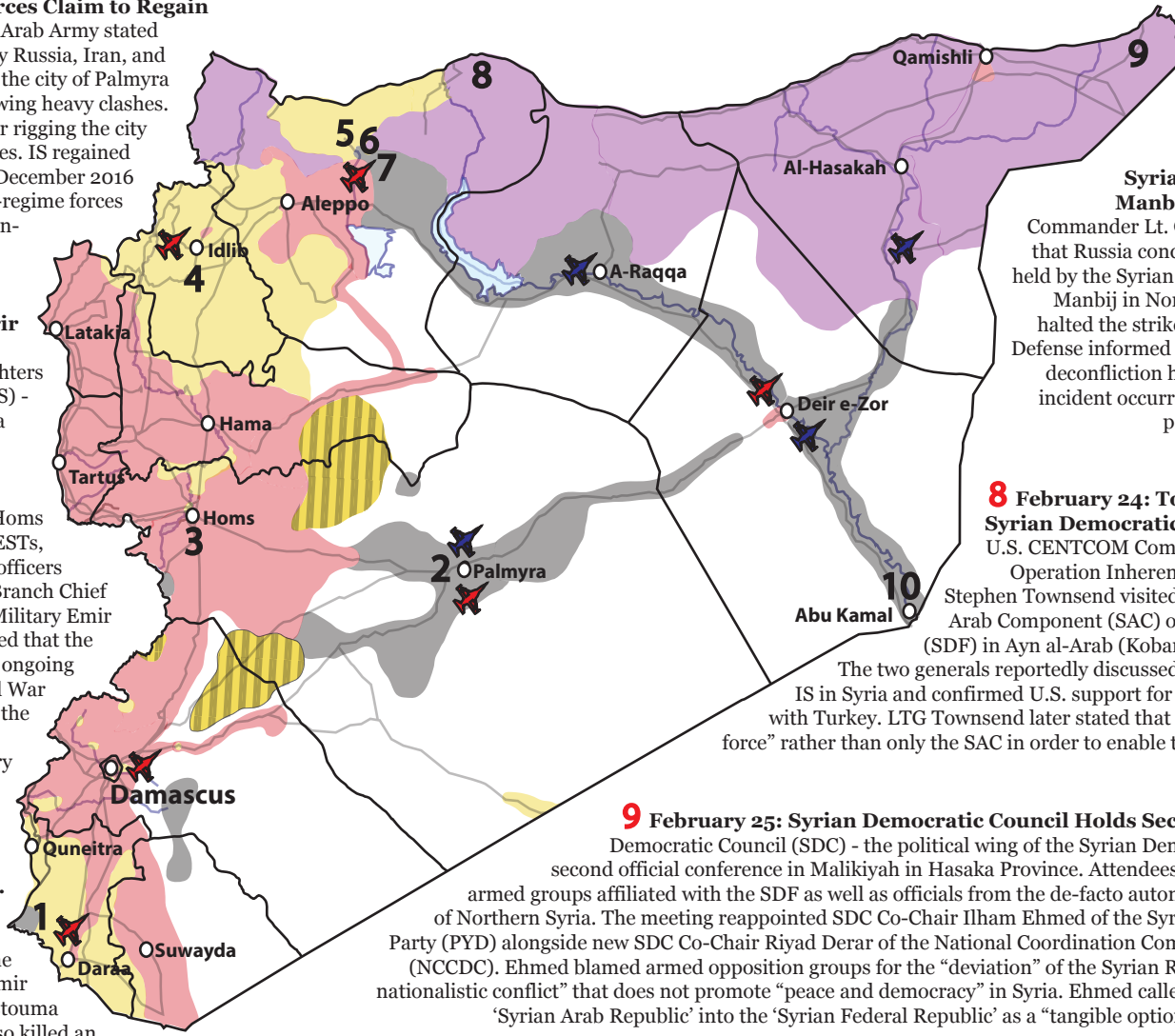
**6 February 28 - March 2: Turkish-Backed Opposition Groups Attack Syrian Democratic Forces Near Manbij:** Opposition groups backed by Turkey in Operation Euphrates Shield seized two villages from the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) near Manbij on March 1. The advance comes after Turkish President Recep Erdogan reiterated on February 28 that Operation Euphrates Shield would seize Manbij following its capture of Al-Bab on February 23. The SDF-affiliated Manbij Military Council later claimed on March 2 that its fighters will turn over a number of frontline villages outside of Manbij to pro-regime 'border guards' as part of a deal brokered by Russia to prevent further expansion by Turkey in Northern Syria.

**7 February 28: Russian Aircraft Reportedly Strike Syrian Democratic Forces Near Manbij:** Operation Inherent Resolve Commander Lt. Gen. Stephen Townsend stated that Russia conducted airstrikes targeting sites held by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) near Manbij in Northern Aleppo Province. Russia halted the strikes after the U.S. Department of Defense informed its counterparts via an existing deconfliction hotline. Russia claimed that the incident occurred after the SDF advanced into positions recently vacated by IS.

**8 February 24: Top U.S. Generals Meet with Syrian Democratic Forces in Northern Syria:** U.S. CENTCOM Commander Gen. Joseph Votel and Operation Inherent Resolve Commander Lt. Gen. Stephen Townsend visited a training camp for the Syrian Arab Component (SAC) of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Ayn al-Arab (Kobani) in Eastern Aleppo Province. The two generals reportedly discussed the ongoing campaign against IS in Syria and confirmed U.S. support for the SDF amidst rising tensions with Turkey. LTG Townsend later stated that the U.S. must equip the "entire force" rather than only the SAC in order to enable the SDF to seize Ar-Raqqa City.

**9 February 25: Syrian Democratic Council Holds Second Conference:** The Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) - the political wing of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) - held its second official conference in Malikiyah in Hasaka Province. Attendees included representatives from armed groups affiliated with the SDF as well as officials from the de-facto autonomous Democratic Federation of Northern Syria. The meeting reappointed SDC Co-Chair Ilham Ehmed of the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) alongside new SDC Co-Chair Riyad Derar of the National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change (NCCDC). Ehmed blamed armed opposition groups for the "deviation" of the Syrian Revolution into a "doctrinal and nationalistic conflict" that does not promote "peace and democracy" in Syria. Ehmed called for the transformation of the 'Syrian Arab Republic' into the 'Syrian Federal Republic' as a "tangible option" to end the ongoing civil war.

**10 February 24: Iraq Conducts Airstrikes Against ISIS in Eastern Syria:** Iraq conducted cross-border airstrikes targeting positions held by ISIS in Abu Kamal in Deir ez-Zour Province on the Syrian-Iraqi Border. Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi stated that the airstrikes targeted a cell responsible for a series of recent bombings by ISIS in Baghdad. Iraqi Joint Operations Command (JOC) confirmed that the strikes by F-16s had been coordinated with the Syria through a joint intelligence-sharing cell in Baghdad that includes Iraq, Syria, Russia, and Iran. Pentagon Spokesperson Capt. Jeff Davis stated that the U.S. provided intelligence in support of the strikes. The incident marks the first publicly-acknowledged cross-border air operation by Iraq in Syria.



## 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