

Syria Situation Report: March 17 - 30, 2017

1 March 19: Alleged Israeli Drone Strike Kills Pro-Regime Militia Commander Near Golan Heights: Israel reportedly conducted a drone strike targeting a vehicle near Khan Arnabeh in Quneitra Province on the Golan Heights Border, killing a commander in the pro-regime 'Golan Brigade'. Syrian state media later accused Israel of conducting additional strikes near the Lebanese-Syrian Border. Israel confirmed the loss of a separate reconnaissance drone in Quneitra Province on March 20.

2 March 23 - 28: IS Contracts in Southern Syria Amidst Ongoing Opposition Offensives: IS reportedly withdrew from more than twenty villages, hills, and other positions in the triborder region of Daraa, Rif Dimashq, and Suwayda Provinces in Southern Syria towards its core terrain in Eastern Syria.

Pro-regime forces claimed to seize a number of villages in Northern Suwayda Province while opposition groups advanced in the Lajat Region of Northern Daraa Province as well as Eastern Rif Dimashq Province. Opposition groups including Ahrar a-Sham and Jaysh al-Islam also secured gains against IS in the Eastern Qalamoun Mountains near Damascus as part of an offensive that began on March 18.

3 March 19 - 24: Opposition Groups Launch Offensive in Damascus: Jaysh al-Islam, Ahrar a-Sham, and Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham (HTS) launched an offensive in the Jobar District of Damascus to lift the pro-regime siege on the Barzeh and Qaboun Districts that serve as a key smuggling route to the Eastern Ghouta Suburbs of Damascus. The offensive included at least three SVBIEDs. Opposition groups secured tactical gains and temporarily lifted the siege on March 22 before regime forces reversed the advances.

4 March 17: Regime Fires Surface-to-Air Missiles at Israeli Warplanes: Israel conducted airstrikes involving at least four fighter jets against pro-regime forces near Palmyra in Eastern Homs Province. Pro-regime forces fired surface-to-air missiles at the aircraft over Southern Syria with one missile intercepted by an Israeli 'Arrow' anti-ballistic missile system over Northern Israel. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated that the airstrikes targeted a convoy of "advanced weapons" transferred to Lebanese Hezbollah. The Russian Foreign Ministry later summoned Israeli Ambassador to Moscow Gary Konen to "express concern" over the incident.

5 March 18 - 27: Opposition Begins Evacuation from Besieged Wa'er District of Homs City: Pro-regime forces evacuated at least three thousand civilians including six hundred opposition fighters from the besieged Wa'er District of Homs City as part of a reconciliation deal brokered by Russia on March 13. The two initial waves of evacuations occurred on March 18 and March 27. The evacuation plan calls for the intermittent transfer of local residents to Jarabulus in Northern Aleppo Province as well as Idlib Province and Northern Homs Province over the next "two to three months".

6 March 21 - 30: Al-Qaeda Launches Major Offensive in Northern Hama Province: Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham and Ahrar a-Sham launched a major offensive against pro-regime forces in Northern Hama Province on March 21 alongside several Free Syrian Army (FSA)-affiliated groups, seizing at least seventeen villages in heavy clashes that included at least four SVBIEDs. The gains bring opposition groups within four kilometers of Hama City. Pro-regime forces including Iran, Hezbollah, and the elite 'Tiger Forces' later repelled several attacks against the majority-Shi'a town of Qomhana north of Hama City from March 24 - 27. Clashes remain ongoing.

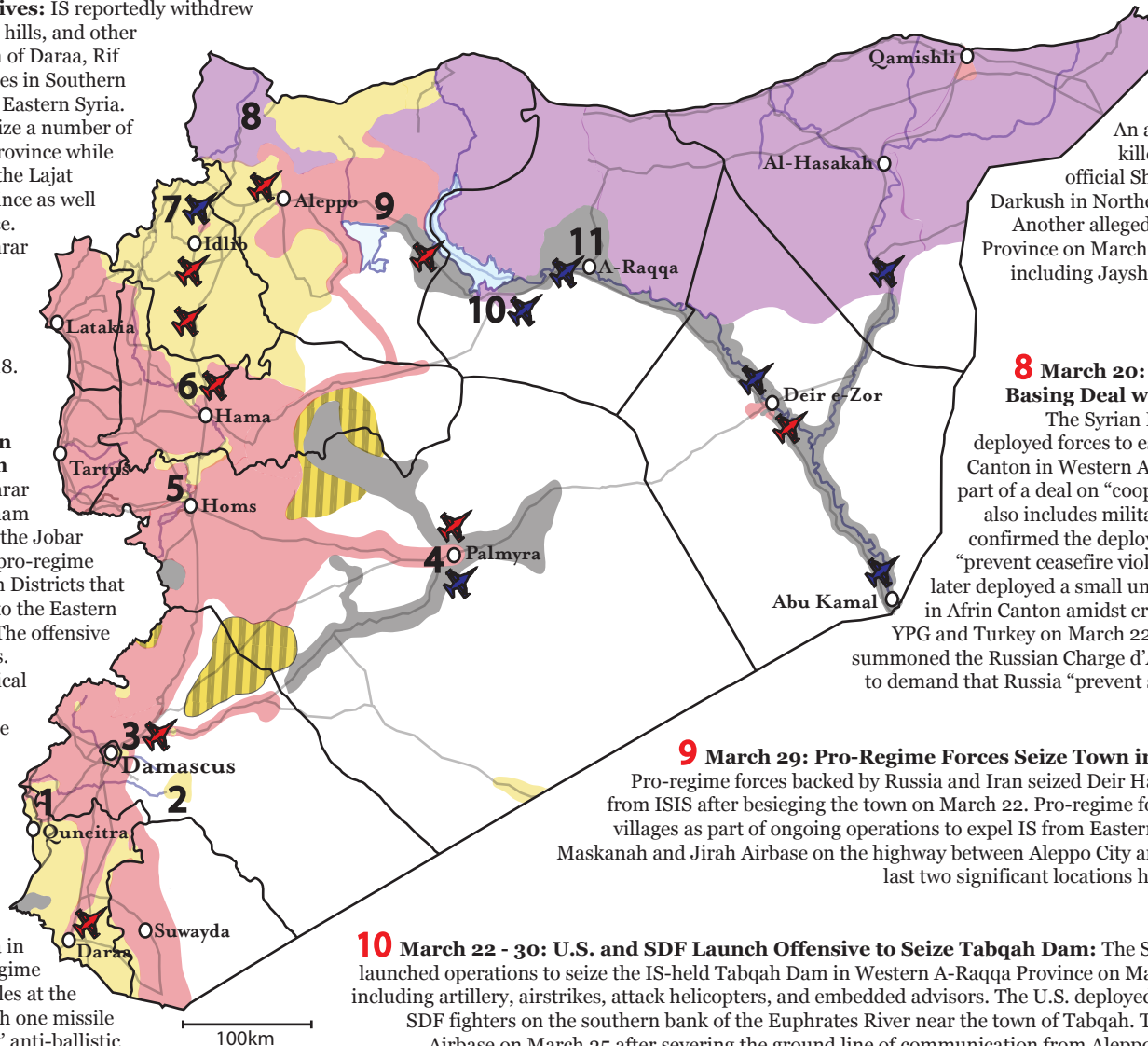
7 March 21 - 27: Alleged U.S. Airstrikes Target AQ Officials in Idlib Province: An alleged U.S. airstrike reportedly killed Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham (HTS) official Sheikh Abu al-Abbas al-Suri near Darkush in Northern Idlib Province on March 21. Another alleged U.S. strike in Sarmada in Idlib Province on March 27 killed four members of HTS including Jaysh al-Fatah Courthouse President Abu Jaber al-Shawi.

8 March 20: Syrian Kurdish YPG Claim Basing Deal with Russia in Afrin Canton: The Syrian Kurdish YPG stated that Russia deployed forces to establish a military base in Afrin Canton in Western Aleppo Province on March 20 as part of a deal on "cooperation against terrorism" that also includes military training for the YPG. Russia confirmed the deployment of a small detachment to "prevent ceasefire violations" in Afrin Canton. Russia later deployed a small unit to the Syrian-Turkish Border in Afrin Canton amidst cross-border clashes between the YPG and Turkey on March 22. The Turkish Foreign Ministry summoned the Russian Charge d'Affaires in Ankara on March 23 to demand that Russia "prevent similar incidents" in the future.

9 March 29: Pro-Regime Forces Seize Town in Eastern Aleppo Province: Pro-regime forces backed by Russia and Iran seized Deir Hafir in Eastern Aleppo Province from ISIS after besieging the town on March 22. Pro-regime forces also seized several nearby villages as part of ongoing operations to expel IS from Eastern Aleppo Province. The town of Maskanah and Jirah Airbase on the highway between Aleppo City and Ar-Raqqa City represent the last two significant locations held by ISIS in Aleppo Province.

10 March 22 - 30: U.S. and SDF Launch Offensive to Seize Tabqah Dam: The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) launched operations to seize the IS-held Tabqah Dam in Western A-Raqqa Province on March 22 with heavy U.S. support including artillery, airstrikes, attack helicopters, and embedded advisors. The U.S. deployed helicopters to insert up to 500 SDF fighters on the southern bank of the Euphrates River near the town of Tabqah. The SDF later seized the Tabqah Airbase on March 25 after severing the ground line of communication from Aleppo City to A-Raqqa City. The SDF temporarily paused its operations near the Tabqah Dam on March 26 to allow access to engineers after both IS and Russia accused the U.S. of targeting the facility. The U.S. denied inflicting any "structural damage" to Tabqah Dam.

11 March 25 - 27: Syrian Kurds Prepare to Administer Ar-Raqqa City After IS: The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) turned over the administration of areas seized from IS in Eastern A-Raqqa Province to the affiliated A-Raqqa Civil Council on March 27. Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) Co-Chair Salih Muslim stated that A-Raqqa City will likely join the "democratic federal" system run by the PYD in Northern Syria. Muslim stressed that the city must remain in "friendly hands" lest it pose a "danger to all of Syria". Kurdish officials also stated that the U.S. and SDF trained hundreds of civilian police officers in Ain Issa in Northern A-Raqqa Province to provide "internal security" in A-Raqqa City.



Areas of Control*		Airstrikes	
■ Pro-Regime Forces	■ Opposition Forces	✈ Pro-Regime	✈ U.S. / Coalition
■ The Islamic State	■ Mixed Control		
■ Kurdish Forces	■ Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham <small>*Formerly Jabhat al-Nusra</small>		

*Control of Terrain Accurate as of 30 MAR 2017

