

Syria Situation Report: April 20 - May 1, 2017

1 April 24: U.S. Sanctions Employees of Syrian Chemical Weapons Research Center: The U.S. Treasury Department announced sanctions targeting nearly three hundred employees of the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Center (SSRC) in response to the chemical weapons attack in Northern Hama Province on April 4. The targeted employees hold expertise in chemistry and related fields or a background working in support of the regime's chemical weapons program over the past five years. The measure more than doubles the number of entities sanctioned by the U.S. in Syria.

2 April 27: Israel Allegedly Targets Hezbollah Weapons Shipment Near Damascus: Israel reportedly conducted airstrikes inside the Damascus International Airport targeting a shipment of "advanced weapons" meant for Lebanese Hezbollah. Israel later downed an unidentified drone that entered its airspace over the Golan Heights. Israel previously conducted airstrikes targeting a pro-regime encampment at the former UN Camp Fawwar in Quneitra Province on April 23 after mortar fire struck the Golan Heights.

3 April 28 - May 1: Jaysh al-Islam Clashes with Rival Groups in Eastern Ghouta: Salafi-Jihadist group Jaysh al-Islam engaged in clashes against Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham (HTS) and rival Islamist group Faylaq a-Rahman in the Eastern Ghouta Suburbs of Damascus. The clashes began after Jaysh al-Islam accused HTS of detaining one of its convoys near frontlines in Qaboun District. Salafi-Jihadist group Ahrar a-Sham also blamed Jaysh al-Islam for attacks against its fighters and called for all sides to agree to mediation by sharia court. Pro-regime forces achieved significant advances amidst a similar round of infighting in Eastern Ghouta in April 2016.

4 April 21: Evacuations End in Besieged Towns in Idlib and Damascus: The first phase of a wider deal brokered by Iran and Qatar ended after the evacuation of more than 8,000 individuals from the besieged pro-regime towns of Fu'ah and Kefraya in Idlib Province as well as more than 3,000 individuals from the besieged opposition-held towns of Zabadani and Madaya near Damascus. The regime later claimed to reassert full control over Zabadani and Madaya. The deal also included the immediate release of 500 detainees held by the regime as well as several members of the Qatari Royal Family kidnapped by Iraqi Shi'a Militia Kata'ib Hezbollah in 2015. The deal calls for additional evacuations from opposition-held districts of Southern Damascus as well as Fu'ah and Kefraya over the next sixty days.

5 April 20 - 25: Pro-Regime Forces Seize Two Key Towns in Northern Hama Province: Pro-regime forces backed by Iraqi and Afghan Shi'a Militias as well as Russia seized the key towns of Tayibat al-Imam and Halfaya in Northern Hama Province following heavy clashes with opposition forces including Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham (HTS). The gains mark the furthest such advances by pro-regime forces in Northern Hama Province since August 2016. Salafi-Jihadist group Ahrar a-Sham later called for a "unified military body" on "all fronts" amidst reports of ongoing talks to form a joint operations room between HTS and Ahrar a-Sham.

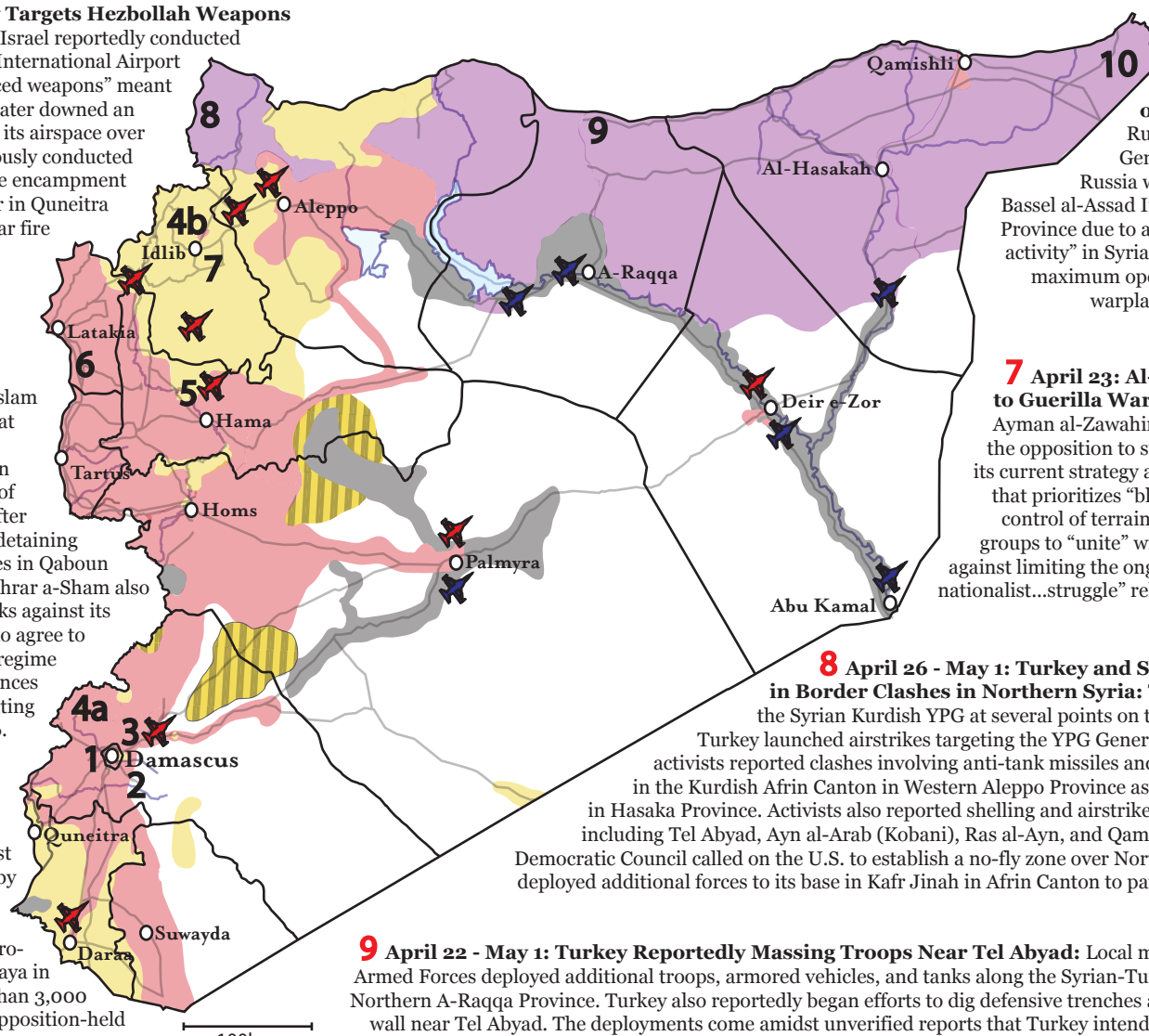
6 April 26: Russia Claims to Withdraw Half of Air Deployment to Syria: Russian General Staff Operations Gen. Sergey Rudskoy claimed that Russia withdrew half of its air group at Bassel al-Assad International Airport in Latakia Province due to an alleged decrease in "terrorist activity" in Syria. Rudskoy stated that Russia at maximum operated no more than thirty-five warplanes and eighty drones in Syria.

7 April 23: Al-Qaeda Emir Calls for Shift to Guerilla Warfare in Syria: Al-Qaeda Emir Ayman al-Zawahiri issued a statement calling for the opposition to start a "critical reassessment" of its current strategy and shift towards "guerilla war" that prioritizes "bleeding" pro-regime forces over control of terrain. Zawahiri called on opposition groups to "unite" with the global jihad and warned against limiting the ongoing conflict to an "exclusively nationalist...struggle" reliant upon international actors.

8 April 26 - May 1: Turkey and Syrian Kurdish YPG Engage in Border Clashes in Northern Syria: Turkey engaged in clashes with the Syrian Kurdish YPG at several points on the Syrian-Turkish Border after Turkey launched airstrikes targeting the YPG General Command on April 25. Local activists reported clashes involving anti-tank missiles and cross-border artillery shelling in the Kurdish Afrin Canton in Western Aleppo Province as well as the town of Darbasiyah in Hasaka Province. Activists also reported shelling and airstrikes in several other border towns including Tel Abyad, Ayn al-Arab (Kobani), Ras al-Ayn, and Qamishli. The YPG-affiliated Syrian Democratic Council called on the U.S. to establish a no-fly zone over Northern Syria. Meanwhile, Russia deployed additional forces to its base in Kafr Jinah in Afrin Canton to patrol the Syrian-Turkish Border.

9 April 22 - May 1: Turkey Reportedly Massing Troops Near Tel Abyad: Local media reported that the Turkish Armed Forces deployed additional troops, armored vehicles, and tanks along the Syrian-Turkish Border near Tel Abyad in Northern A-Raqqa Province. Turkey also reportedly began efforts to dig defensive trenches and remove parts of the border wall near Tel Abyad. The deployments come amidst unverified reports that Turkey intends to launch major cross-border operations against the Syrian Kurdish YPG in Tel Abyad. Turkish-backed opposition groups formed the Eastern Shield Army with the stated goal of expelling ISIS and the YPG from A-Raqqa, Deir e-Zor, and Hasaka Provinces on April 22.

10 April 25: Turkey Conducts Airstrikes Targeting YPG General Command: Turkey conducted several airstrikes targeting the Syrian Kurdish YPG General Command Headquarters on Mount Karachok in Hasaka Province, killing at least twenty YPG fighters. Turkey also conducted simultaneous airstrikes targeting positions held by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and YPG in Sinjar in Northern Iraq. The Turkish Armed Forces stated that the strikes targeted two key "terror hubs" in order to prevent the flow of fighters, weapons, and explosives to the PKK in Southern Turkey. The U.S. expressed "deep concern" regarding the strikes and later began new military patrols along the Syrian-Turkish Border in Hasaka Province.



Areas of Control*

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

Airstrikes

- ✈ Pro-Regime
- ✈ U.S. / Coalition

*Control of Terrain Accurate as of 03 APR 2017

