

# Syria Situation Report: July 7 - 21, 2020

**1 July 9: Iran Seeks to Deploy New Air Defense Systems to Syria following Meetings with Assad Regime.** Chief of the Iranian General Staff Major General Mohammad Bagheri met with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus. The two expressed satisfaction with the bilateral ties between the two countries as well as with the recent signing of a military cooperation agreement. Syrian Defense Minister Ali Abdullah Ayoub signed a military cooperation agreement with Bagheri, which included a provision to deploy Iranian air defense systems to Syria, on July 8.

**2 July 10: Deir e-Zor Tribes Announce Formation of Political Body to Rival US Local Partner's Administration.** An unspecified group of tribal elders met to form the "Political Authority of Deir e-Zor Province" in Kashkiya, Deir e-Zor Province. The group is reportedly not affiliated with the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which controls this area of Deir e-Zor. The group of elders issued a 15-point statement that included a rejection of the return of Syrian Regime control to the province, a rejection of terrorism, a call for a grassroots approach to governing, and a call for elected locals to manage the province.

**3 July 10: Druze Militias in Suwayda Continue to Pressure Syrian Regime following Negotiated Prisoner Release.** Pro-regime security forces released eight protesters to a Druze militia, the Men of Dignity, near Suwayda City. Pro-regime forces detained the protesters during anti-regime protests in Suwayda City in June. The Men of Dignity issued a statement following the release emphasizing the group's commitment to protecting the protest's legitimacy and standing against the Syrian government's unjust response.

**4 July 12: Prominent Daraa Central Committee Member Assassinated Days after Formation of Unified National Committee.** Unknown gunmen assassinated a member of the Daraa Central Committee and former leader of the Free Syrian Army, Abu Bakr al-Hassan, in Jasim, Daraa Province. Members of the Central Committee reportedly met and agreed to unify local committees in Daraa into a single committee to negotiate with the regime on July 9. Though the perpetrators remain unknown, the assassination of al-Hassan is likely intended to weaken the Central Committee as it consolidates its power through the formation of the Unified National Committee.

**5 July 14: ISIS Demonstrates Explosive Capabilities with New Attacks in SDF-held Raqqa City.** Likely ISIS militants detonated three improvised explosive devices (IEDs) near the al-Tub al-Hadith Hospital and one IED in the Jazrah neighborhood in SDF-controlled Raqqa City. The attack demonstrates ISIS remains capable of conducting simultaneous and coordinated explosive attacks inside Raqqa City despite pressure from SDF security forces.

**6 July 14: SVBIED Targets Joint Russian-Turkish Patrol on M4.** A suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (SVBIED) struck a joint Russian-Turkish patrol of the M4 Highway near Ariha, Idlib Province. The al Qaeda-aligned Khattab al-Shishani Brigades claimed responsibility for the attack. The exact origins of the group are unclear. Three Russian soldiers were injured in the attack and were transported to Hmeimim Airbase, Latakia Province. An unknown number of Turkish soldiers were injured.

**7 July 15: Likely Russian Aircraft Conduct Airstrikes in Turkish-controlled Aleppo Province in Retaliation for SVBIED Attack on M4 Patrol.** An unknown aircraft conducted at least two airstrikes killing at least one civilian and wounding multiple others, including children, in a residential section of al-Bab, Aleppo Province. The Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) mobilized around al-Bab following the strikes. Russia likely launched the strike in retaliation for the July 14 SVBIED attack on a Russian-Turkish patrol, which Russia blamed Turkey for failing to prevent.

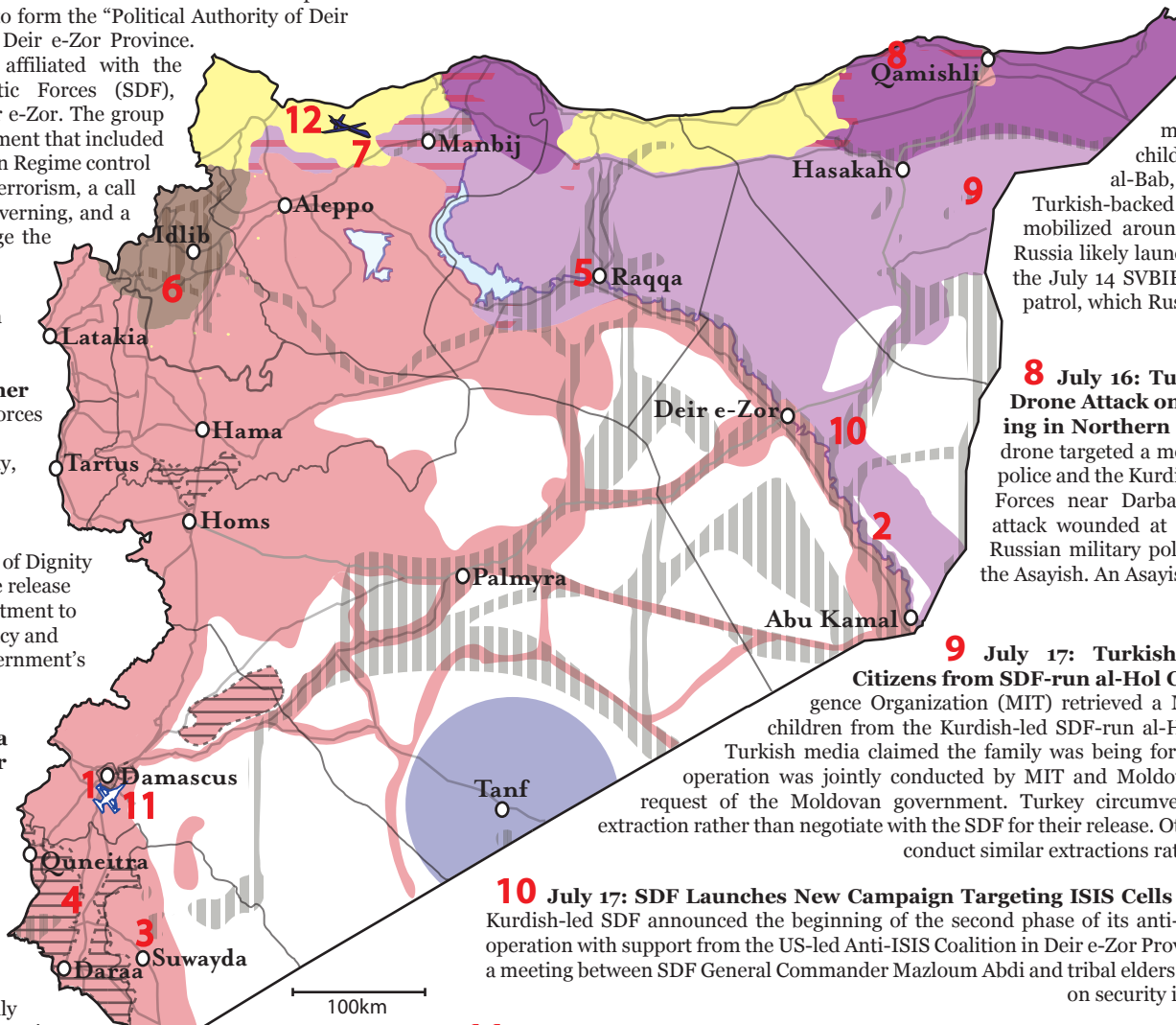
**8 July 16: Turkey Likely Behind Suicide Drone Attack on Russian and Asayish Meeting in Northern Hasakah Province.** A suicide drone targeted a meeting between Russian military police and the Kurdish-led Asayish Internal Security Forces near Darbasiyah, Hasakah Province. The attack wounded at least six people, including two Russian military police (MPs) and two members of the Asayish. An Asayish official blamed Turkey for the drone attack.

**9 July 17: Turkish MIT Extracts Moldovan Citizens from SDF-run al-Hol Camp.** Turkey's National Intelligence Organization (MIT) retrieved a Moldovan woman and her four children from the Kurdish-led SDF-run al-Hol Camp in Hasakah Province. Turkish media claimed the family was being forcibly held in the camp and the operation was jointly conducted by MIT and Moldovan intelligence services at the request of the Moldovan government. Turkey circumvented the SDF to conduct the extraction rather than negotiate with the SDF for their release. Other countries may ask Turkey to conduct similar extractions rather than work through the SDF.

**10 July 17: SDF Launches New Campaign Targeting ISIS Cells in Deir e-Zor Province.** The Kurdish-led SDF announced the beginning of the second phase of its anti-ISIS "Deterrence of Terrorism" operation with support from the US-led Anti-ISIS Coalition in Deir e-Zor Province. The new campaign follows a meeting between SDF General Commander Mazloum Abdi and tribal elders from Deir e-Zor in Hasakah City on security issues in the province on July 15.

**11 July 20: Israeli Airstrikes Target Weapons Warehouses and Meetings between IRGC and Hezbollah Officers.** Likely Israeli aircraft conducted a series of airstrikes resulting in at least six large explosions in Reef Dimashq Province, specifically near Damascus International Airport (DIAP), al-Kiswa, and Sahnaya. The strikes targeted weapons warehouses and military locations where Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Lebanese Hezbollah officers reportedly met. Lebanese Hezbollah confirmed the strikes killed at least one of their members.

**12 July 20: Possible US Drone Targets ISIS Members in Turkish and Opposition-controlled Northern Aleppo Province.** An unidentified, possibly US, drone struck a vehicle traveling near Ihtaimlat, Aleppo Province. The strike destroyed the vehicle and killed a reported ISIS member and his two companions.



- Pro-Regime
- Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)
- Core SDF-Held Kurdish Terrain
- U.S. and Partner Forces
- ISIS Support Zones
- SDF-Dominated, Regime Presence
- Former Opposition Terrain (Reconciled)
- Al Qaeda-Dominated\*
- Turkey-Opposition
- U.S. Drone Strike
- Israeli Airstrikes

\*AL QAEDA-LINKED GROUPS CONTROL NEARLY ALL GOVERNANCE AND MILITARY STRUCTURES IN GREATER IDLIB PROVINCE. VARIOUS LOCAL ACTORS ASSERT LIMITED CONTROL OVER ISOLATED AREAS OF GREATER IDLIB.

Control of Terrain Accurate as of July 21, 2020

**Key Takeaway:** Russia and Turkey briefly escalated against one another following an attack on a Russo-Turkish joint patrol in Idlib. A suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (SVBIED) struck a Russo-Turkish joint patrol along the M4 Highway, causing several injuries on July 14. Russia appears to have held Turkey accountable for failing to prevent the attack and conducted airstrikes targeting the Turkish and opposition-controlled city of al-Bab in northern Aleppo on July 15. Turkey was likely responsible for a suicide drone attack that struck Kurdish-led Asayish Internal Security Forces and Russian Military Police (MPs) in northern Hasakah Province the following day. Russia and Turkey did not kinetically escalate further, but future attacks on joint patrols may prompt a larger Russian escalation against Turkish forces and allies.



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