

Syria Situation Report: August 15 - 23, 2017

1 August 19 - 20: Opposition Group Launches Counterattack Along Syrian-Jordanian Border: Free Syrian Army (FSA)-affiliated Jaysh Ahrar al-Asha'ir - an opposition group backed by the U.S. and Jordan - launched a counterattack entitled Operation 'Rad al-Karama' against pro-regime forces along the Syrian-Jordanian Border in Eastern Suwayda Province on August 19. FSA Chief of Staff Albey Ahmed Berri and twenty-five armed opposition groups later released a statement pledging "political, military, media, and moral support" to opposition groups fighting against both pro-regime forces in Eastern Suwayda Province and IS in Deir e-Zor Province.

2 August 17: Alleged U.S. Airstrikes Target IS Affiliate in Southern Syria: The U.S. Anti-IS Coalition allegedly conducted airstrikes targeting a courthouse operated by IS affiliate Jaysh Khalid ibn al-Walid in Shajara in Western Deraa Province, according to local sources. The strikes killed Jaysh Khalid ibn al-Walid General Commander Wael Faour al-Eid as well as thirty other individuals. The U.S. Department of Defense has not confirmed the strike. Israel has also previously conducted airstrikes targeting Jaysh Khalid ibn al-Walid in Southern Syria.

3 August 18 - 21: Russia Brokers Ceasefire with Islamist Group in Eastern Ghouta: Islamist group Faylaq a-Rahman signed a ceasefire deal with Russia in the Eastern Ghouta Suburbs of Damascus that began on August 18. The deal includes a halt to ongoing pro-regime operations in the Ayn Tarma and Jobar Districts of Eastern Ghouta as well as the delivery of humanitarian aid. Faylaq a-Rahman previously refused to abide by a 'de-escalation zone' brokered by Russia and Egypt in Eastern Ghouta on July 22. Pro-regime forces nonetheless fired shells containing "toxic materials" into Jobar District on August 19.

4 August 17 - 20: Damascus Hosts First International Fair Since 2011: Syria opened the 59th Damascus International Trade Fair on August 17, marking the first reopening of the trade show since the start of the Syrian Civil War. The ten-day fair reportedly involves hundreds of delegations and private companies from at least forty-three states including Russia, Iran, China, and Egypt. Syrian Prime Minister Imad Khamis stated that the fair highlighted the "failure" of "all attempts to isolate" Syria despite a "terrorist war and economic blockade". Unidentified militants later fired a mortar shell at the entrance to the fairground on August 20, killing at least six civilians.

5 August 18 - 23: Lebanese Army and Hezbollah Launch Simultaneous Offensives Against IS on Syrian-Lebanese Border: The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) began Operation 'Fajr al-Jaroud' to clear IS from the Syrian-Lebanese Border near Ras Baalbek and Al-Qaa in Northern Lebanon on August 18. The LAF claimed to clear at least 80% of the terrain held by IS in Lebanon by August 23. Lebanese Hezbollah and the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) also announced operations to clear IS from the Syrian-Lebanese Border in the Western Qalamoun Mountains of Syria on August 18. The LAF denied any coordination with Hezbollah or the SAA.

6 August 16 - 19: Pro-Regime Forces Isolate IS in Eastern Hama Province: Pro-regime forces backed by Russia and Iran successfully isolated a large pocket of terrain held by IS near the village of Uqayribat in Eastern Hama Province on August 18 following a two-pronged operation that began from the key crossroads town of Ithriya in Eastern Hama Province and the Sha'er Gas Field in Homs Province. The Uqayribat Local Council later called for aid organizations to establish a humanitarian corridor for civilians to evacuate Eastern Hama Province amidst an intensified air campaign by Russia.

7 August 15: Opposition Fighters Defect to New AQ-Linked Group in Northern Hama Province: Six component brigades of Salafi-Jihadi groups Ahrar a-Sham, Jund a-Sham, and Ajnad a-Sham allegedly defected to form a new group called Jaysh Hama in Northern Hama Province. Jaysh Hama later pledged its allegiance to Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham - the successor of Syrian Al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat Fatah a-Sham. Local activists and opposition sources claimed that the new group consists of less than two hundred fighters.

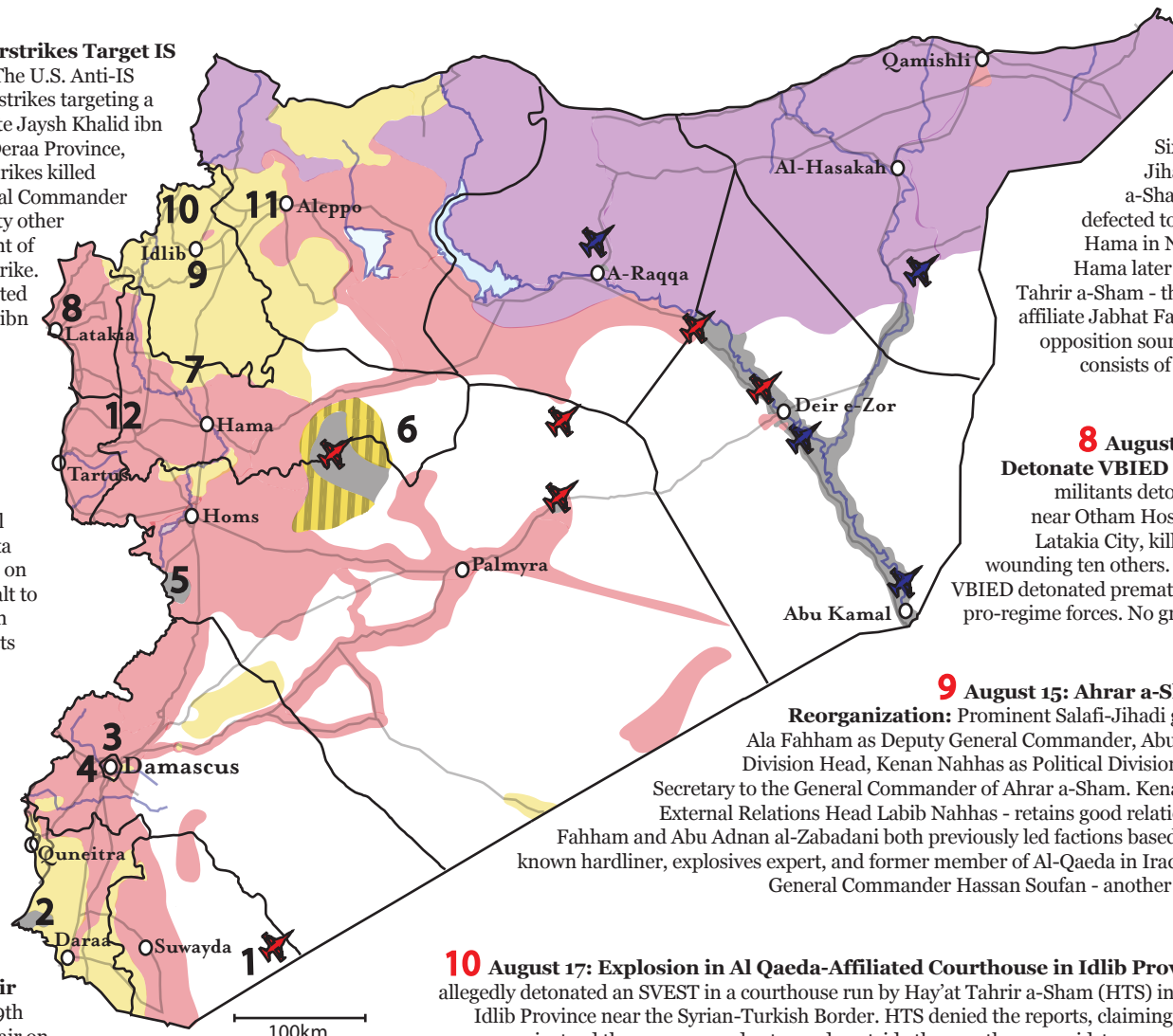
8 August 19: Unidentified Militants Detonate VBIED in Latakia City: Unidentified militants detonated a VBIED at a checkpoint near Otham Hospital in the Tishreen District of Latakia City, killing at least two individuals and wounding ten others. Regime media claimed that the VBIED detonated prematurely after being intercepted by pro-regime forces. No group has yet to claim the attack.

9 August 15: Ahrar a-Sham Continues Leadership Reorganization: Prominent Salafi-Jihadi group Ahrar al Sham appointed Ala Fahham as Deputy General Commander, Abu Adnan al-Zabadani as Military Division Head, Kenan Nahhas as Political Division Head, and Abu Ali al-Sahel as Secretary to the General Commander of Ahrar a-Sham. Kenan Nahhas - a relative of former External Relations Head Labib Nahhas - retains good relations with actors in the West. Ala Fahham and Abu Adnan al-Zabadani both previously led factions based in Damascus. Al-Zabadani is a known hardliner, explosives expert, and former member of Al-Qaeda in Iraq. Ahrar a-Sham appointed new General Commander Hassan Soufan - another known hardliner - on August 1.

10 August 17: Explosion in Al Qaeda-Affiliated Courthouse in Idlib Province: An unidentified militant allegedly detonated an SVEST in a courthouse run by Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham (HTS) in the town of Salqin in Northern Idlib Province near the Syrian-Turkish Border. HTS denied the reports, claiming that unidentified militants had instead thrown a grenade at guards outside the courthouse amidst an unsuccessful prison break attempt.

11 August 19: Opposition Group Detonates IED Targeting Regime Ammunitions Depot in Aleppo City: The 'Special Forces Company' of the Abu Amara Brigades - an opposition group affiliated with Ahrar a-Sham and Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham (HTS) - detonated an IED targeting an ammunition depot for the pro-regime Palestinian militia Liwa al-Quds in the Nayrab Refugee Camp in Aleppo City, killing a number of regime fighters. The bombing marks the seventh blast claimed by group in Aleppo City since February 2017.

12 August 15: Israeli Media Publishes Images of Syrian-Iranian Missile Facility: Iran is allegedly constructing a facility to manufacture long-range missiles near Baniyas in Tartus Province, according to satellite images circulated by media in Israel. Local activists previously disclosed the existence of the facility after a visit by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in June 2017. The sources claimed that the facility will operate under the sanctioned Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Center (SSRC) after its completion in December 2017.



Areas of Control*

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

Airstrikes

- ✈ Pro-Regime
- ✈ U.S. / Coalition



*THIS MAP DOES NOT DEPICT AL QAEDA CONTROL IN WESTERN SYRIA. ISW IS DEVELOPING A NEW CONTROL OF TERRAIN MAP THAT WILL ASSESS THE FULL EXTENT OF AL QAEDA PRESENCE IN SYRIA.

*Control of Terrain Accurate as of 08 AUG 2017

Text Credit: Sana Sekkarie

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