

Syria Situation Report: July 27 - August 9, 2017

1 July 28 - August 5: Opposition Reorganizes in Southern Syria: Approximately twenty-five additional groups linked to the Free Syrian Army (FSA)-affiliated Southern Front joined the 'National Front to Liberate Syria' (NFLS) in Southern Syria. The organization - originally formed on July 22 - allegedly intends to hedge against the recent halt of covert military aid to vetted opposition groups by the U.S. in Syria. Opposition factions also announced the formation of a new 'Free Police Force' in Daraa Province on July 31. The force will operate under the Dar al-Adel Courthouse. Unidentified militants detonated an IED targeting Dar al-Adal President Ismat al-Absi in Eastern Daraa Province on August 5.

2 August 1 - 9: De-Escalation Zone Strains Opposition Ties in Eastern Ghouta: Prominent Salafi-Jihadist group Jaysh al-Islam expelled Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham (HTS) - the successor of Syrian Al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat Fatah a-Sham - from the Ashari District of the Eastern Ghouta Suburbs of Damascus on August 7. HTS faced local protests demanding its withdrawal or dissolution in Eastern Ghouta following an ultimatum from Russia on July 26. Rival Islamist group Faylaq a-Rahman later accused Jaysh al-Islam of "fighting the revolution" by participating in the 'de-escalation zone' in Eastern Ghouta brokered by Russia and Egypt on July 22. Pro-regime forces intensified an offensive against positions held by Faylaq a-Rahman in the Jobar and Ayn Tarma Districts of Eastern Ghouta on August 7 - 9.

3 July 26 - August 3: HTS Evacuates Arsal on Syrian-Lebanese Border: Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham (HTS) evacuated Arsal in Eastern Lebanon to Idlib Province in Northern Syria under a deal with Lebanese Hezbollah on August 2. The evacuation reportedly involved up to 1,000 HTS fighters including HTS in Lebanon Commander Abu Malik al-Talli as well as more than 6,000 Syrians from Arsal. The evacuation followed a prisoner swap between Hezbollah, HTS, and the Lebanese Armed Forces on August 1. Hezbollah and the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) launched clearing operations against HTS in Arsal on July 21.

4 July 30: Russia Conducts Naval Parade in Syria: Russia conducted a naval parade to celebrate Russian Naval Day in Tartus on the Syrian Coast. The parade included a submarine and six surface warships led by the Russian Frigate Admiral Essen as well as multiple warplanes based at the Bassel al-Assad International Airport in Latakia Province. The parade marks the first such display held outside Russia for Russian Naval Day.

5 August 3 - 4: Russia Announces Ceasefire Deal in Northern Homs Province: The Russian Ministry of Defense announced the start of a ceasefire between pro-regime and opposition forces in Northern Homs and Southern Hama Provinces brokered by Russia and Egypt on August 3. Russian Military Police later deployed to several checkpoints in Northern Homs Province on August 4. Russia noted that opposition groups agreed to remove factions affiliated with ISIS and Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham (HTS) from Northern Homs Province. Several opposition groups later released a statement demanding a guarantor role for Turkey.

6 August 2: Regime Reportedly Disbands Pro-Regime Militia: Syrian President Bashar al-Assad reportedly disbanded Liwa Suqour a-Sahra - a prominent pro-regime militia based in Latakia Province. Liwa Suqour a-Sahra Commander Col. Mohammed Jaber - a wealthy businessman - will reportedly return home to Russia. Fighters from the group will integrate into other pro-regime militias including the Fifth Storming Corps and the Syrian Marines backed by Russia.

7 July 30: SVEST Targets HTS Meeting in Aleppo Province: An unidentified militant detonated an SVEST at the entrance to a headquarters of Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham (HTS) in the town of Najjar in Southern Aleppo Province, killing four HTS members. The assailant reportedly attempted to target a meeting between HTS, Salafi-Jihadist group Ahrar a-Sham, and local tribal elders. HTS blamed the attack on ISIS in Idlib Province.

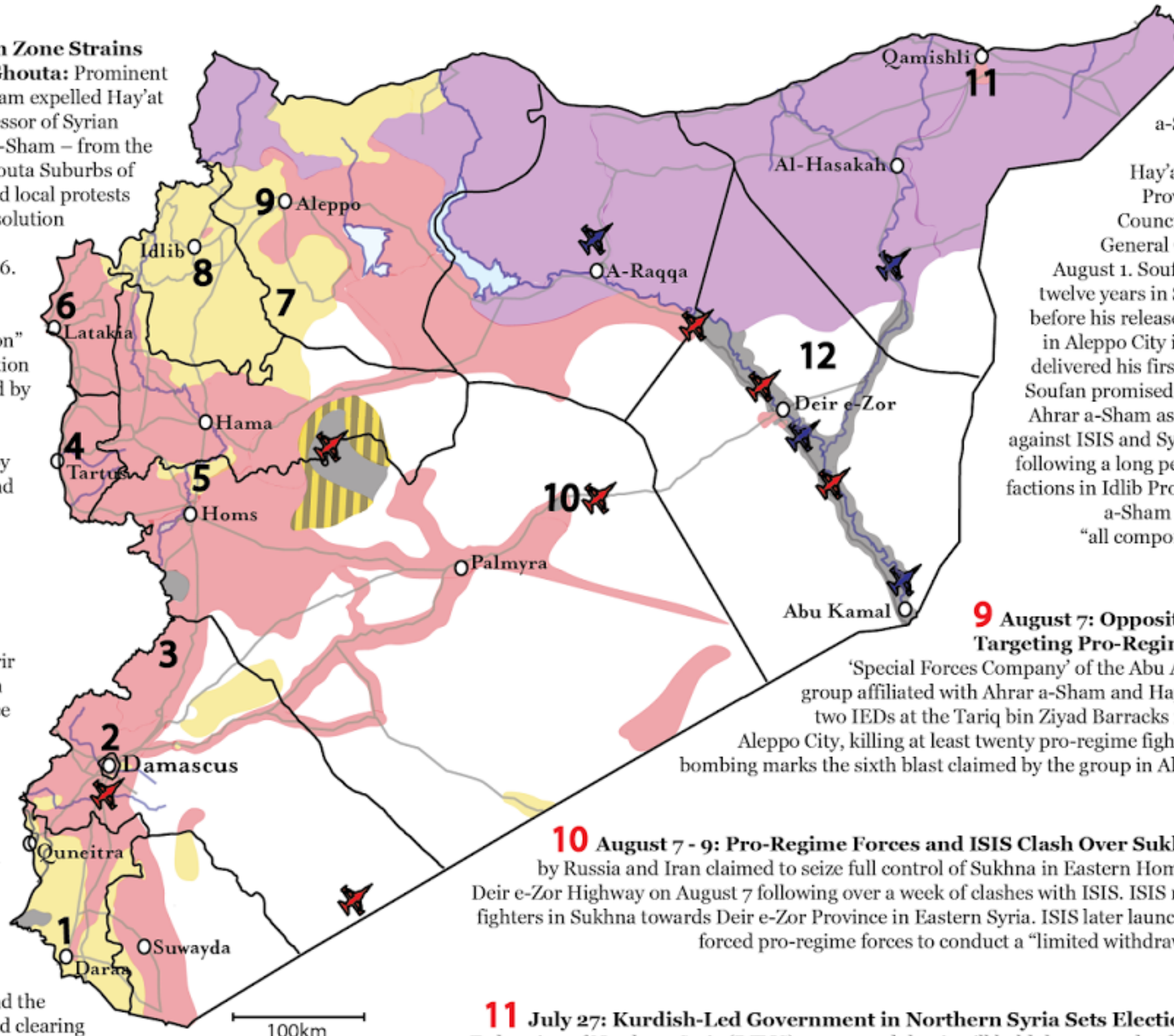
8 August 1 - 7: Ahrar a-Sham Appoints New Leader After Clashes With HTS: Prominent Salafi-Jihadist group Ahrar a-Sham reportedly began a major restructuring after its defeat by Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham (HTS) in Idlib Province. The Ahrar a-Sham Shura Council appointed new Ahrar a-Sham General Commander Hassan Soufan on August 1. Soufan - a known hardliner - spent twelve years in Sednaya Prison near Damascus before his release as part of a prisoner exchange in Aleppo City in December 2016. Soufan later delivered his first public statement on August 7. Soufan promised comprehensive reforms within Ahrar a-Sham as well as a refocus on operations against ISIS and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad following a long period of infighting against other factions in Idlib Province. Soufan noted that Ahrar a-Sham remains prepared to work with "all components" of the Syrian Revolution.

9 August 7: Opposition Group Detonates IEDs Targeting Pro-Regime Base 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 - detonated two IEDs at the Tariq bin Ziyad Barracks in the Sabil District of Western Aleppo City, killing at least twenty pro-regime fighters and other individuals. The bombing marks the sixth blast claimed by the group in Aleppo City since February 2017.

10 August 7 - 9: Pro-Regime Forces and ISIS Clash Over Sukhna: Pro-regime forces backed by Russia and Iran claimed to seize full control of Sukhna in Eastern Homs Province along the Palmyra - Deir e-Zor Highway on August 7 following over a week of clashes with ISIS. ISIS reportedly withdrew most of its fighters in Sukhna towards Deir e-Zor Province in Eastern Syria. ISIS later launched a major counterattack that forced pro-regime forces to conduct a "limited withdrawal" from Sukhna on August 9.

11 July 27: Kurdish-Led Government in Northern Syria Sets Election Schedule: The Democratic Federation of Northern Syria (DFNS) announced that it will hold three rounds of elections in areas controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Northern Syria. The DFNS will hold local, regional, and national elections respectively on September 22, November 3, and January 19. The elections will exclude Manbij and A-Raqqa City as well as thousands of Sunni Arabs resettled into Hasaka Province. The Kurdish National Council - a rival political organization backed by Turkey - denounced the "illegitimate" elections as a means to protect the dominance of the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD). Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister also condemned the elections as a "joke" that promotes separatism in Syria.

12 August 4 - 8: Opposition Groups Plan Anti-ISIS Operations in Eastern Syria: Mughawir a-Thawra, Ahrar a-Sharqiyah, and Jaysh Usud a-Sharqiyah formed an 'interim committee' to coordinate a future offensive against ISIS in Deir e-Zor Province. The three groups all maintain past or current support from the U.S. and Turkey. Meanwhile, the Al-Qaqa Group claimed to burn four vehicles at a checkpoint run by ISIS in Abu Kamal in Deir e-Zor Province on the Syrian-Iraqi Border. The Al-Qaqa Group released a statement demanding that ISIS to cease forced recruitment in Deir e-Zor Province. The Al-Qaqa Group is likely linked to a former opposition group affiliated with Al-Qaeda in Eastern Syria in 2014.



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		

*Formerly Jabhat a-Nusra
*Control of Terrain Accurate as of 08 AUG 2017



Graphic Credit: Matti Suomenaro
Text Credit: Sana Sekkarie

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*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.