

Syria Situation Report: September 27 - October 10, 2017

1 October 2: IS Conducts Spectacular Attack in Damascus Amidst IS Counter-Offensive in Eastern Homs Province: IS conducted a spectacular attack targeting a regime police station in the Midan District of Central Damascus, killing at least fifteen individuals and wounding twenty others. IS detonated two SVESTs inside the station as well as either an SVEST or VBIED outside the station targeting security forces responding to the blasts. IS-affiliated Amaq News Agency claimed the attack.

2 October 4 - 6: Pro-Regime Forces Claim to Clear IS Pocket in Eastern Hama Province: Pro-regime forces claimed to end clearing operations against the pocket of terrain held by IS near Salamiyah in Eastern Hama Province. IS allegedly withdrew from Hama Province to rural areas in Eastern Homs Province. Activists noted that thousands of civilians and fighters remain in Wadi Atheeb in Eastern Hama Province amidst efforts to broker safe passage to areas held by Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham (HTS) - the successor of Syrian Al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat Fatah a-Sham - in Idlib Province.

3 October 7: AQ Seizes Key Regime-Held Smuggling Hub in Northern Hama Province: Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham (HTS) seized the smuggling hub of Abu Dali in Northern Hama Province following clashes that included at least one VBIED. Abu Dali served as a key commercial node for opposition-held Idlib Province. The town was defended by pro-regime tribal fighters supported by Syrian Parliamentarian Ahmed al-Darwish.

4 October 9: IS Seizes Terrain in HTS-Held Greater Idlib Province: IS seized at least sixteen villages and towns after launching an offensive against terrain held by HTS in Eastern Hama and Southern Idlib Provinces. HTS later recaptured at least six towns in a counterattack. HTS released a statement accusing pro-regime forces of facilitating the offensive by granting safe passage for IS to cross the Salamiyah-Ithriya Highway from Eastern Hama Province into Southern Idlib Province. Activists stated that the attack originated from local sleeper cells as well as fighters that evacuated the former pocket held by IS in Eastern Hama Province.

5 October 1 - 3: AQ Publicly Assumes Control of HTS: The HTS Shura Council appointed former Jabhat a-Nusra (JN) Emir Abu Mohammad al-Joulani as HTS General Emir on October 1. Joulani leads the wider network of Al-Qaeda in Syria. The Russian Defense Ministry later claimed to target and critically wound Joulani in a set of airstrikes in Idlib Province on October 3. HTS denied the strike. The leadership reshuffle comes amidst intensifying signs of internal discord over the past month within HTS, including a number of assassinations and defections.

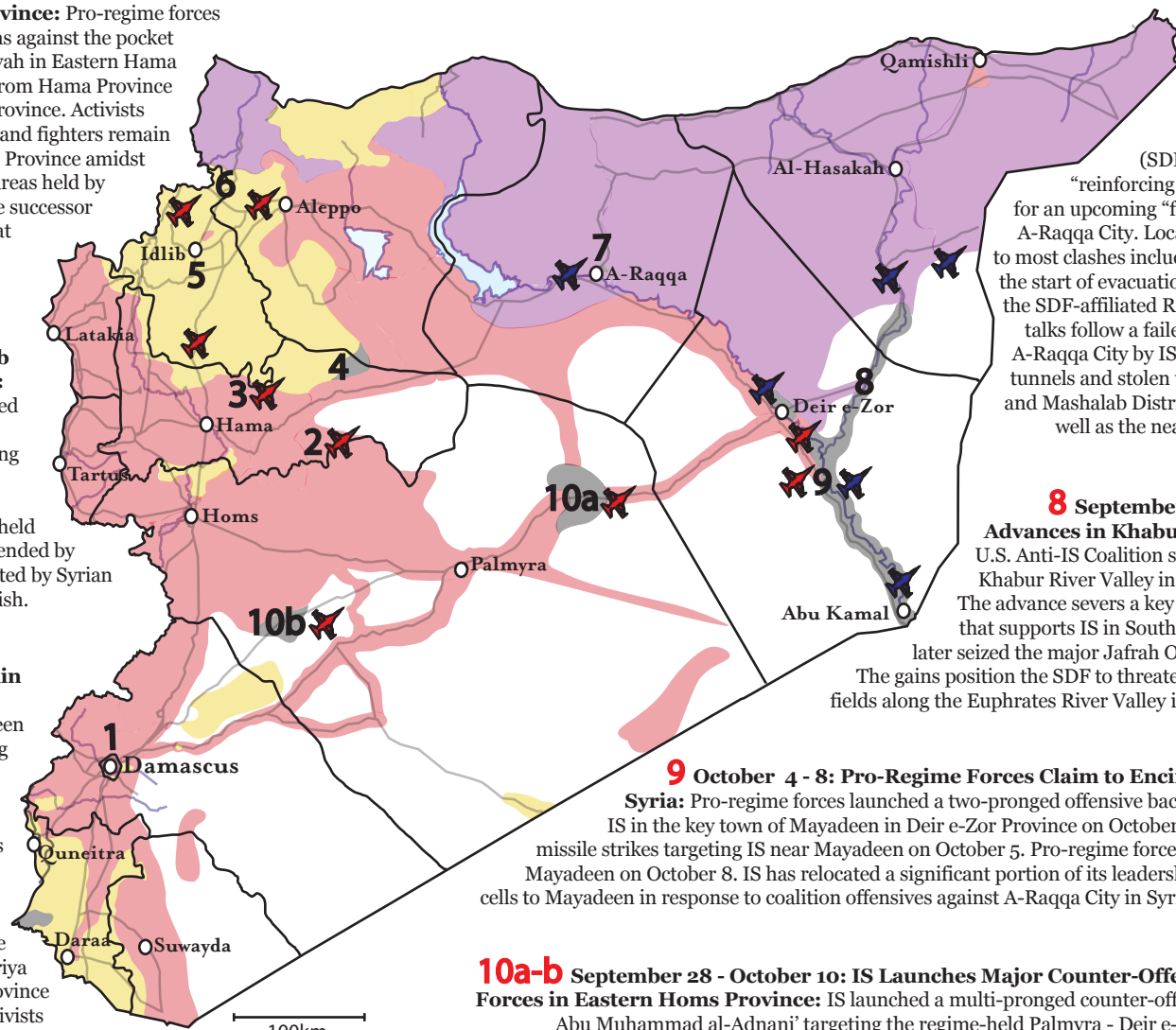
6 October 7 - 8: Turkey Stages for Intervention into Idlib Province: Turkish President Recep Erdogan announced the start of cross-border operations by opposition groups backed by the Turkish Armed Forces in Idlib Province on October 7. Erdogan described the intervention as a step towards a formal 'de-escalation zone' in Idlib Province brokered by Russia, Turkey, and Iran at the Astana Talks on September 15. Turkey later sent a military delegation to hold negotiations with HTS in Western Aleppo Province. Activists alleged that Turkey aims to deploy its forces to occupy opposition frontlines with the majority-Kurdish Afrin Canton as well as select towns along the Syrian-Turkish Border.

7 October 8 - 10: SDF Prepares for Final Effort to Clear IS from A-Raqqa: The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) stated that its fighters began "reinforcing their positions" in preparation for an upcoming "final offensive" to expel IS from A-Raqqa City. Local activists later reported a halt to most clashes including coalition airstrikes amidst the start of evacuation negotiations between IS and the SDF-affiliated Raqqa Civil Council. The alleged talks follow a failed attempt to break the siege of A-Raqqa City by IS on September 26 - 29. IS used tunnels and stolen uniforms to infiltrate the Sinaa and Mashalab Districts of Eastern A-Raqqa City as well as the nearby suburb of Raqqa a-Samra.

8 September 28 - 30: Anti-IS Coalition Advances in Khabur River Valley: The SDF and U.S. Anti-IS Coalition seized the town of Suwar on the Khabur River Valley in Northern Deir e-Zor Province. The advance severs a key ground line of communication that supports IS in Southern Hasaka Province. The SDF later seized the major Jafrah Oil Field in Deir e-Zor Province. The gains position the SDF to threaten other key oil and natural gas fields along the Euphrates River Valley in Eastern Deir e-Zor Province.

9 October 4 - 8: Pro-Regime Forces Claim to Encircle Key IS Hub in Eastern Syria: Pro-regime forces launched a two-pronged offensive backed by heavy airstrikes against IS in the key town of Mayadeen in Deir e-Zor Province on October 4. Russia also launched cruise missile strikes targeting IS near Mayadeen on October 5. Pro-regime forces later claimed to encircle IS in Mayadeen on October 8. IS has relocated a significant portion of its leadership, media, and external attack cells to Mayadeen in response to coalition offensives against A-Raqqa City in Syria and Mosul in Northern Iraq.

10a-b September 28 - October 10: IS Launches Major Counter-Offensive Against Pro-Regime Forces in Eastern Homs Province: IS launched a multi-pronged counter-offensive entitled the 'Invasion of Abu Muhammad al-Adnani' targeting the regime-held Palmyra - Deir e-Zor Highway in Eastern Homs Province. IS temporarily seized stretches of the Palmyra - Deir e-Zor Highway on September 28 - 29. IS later publicized its capture of at least two military contractors from Russia. IS also partially encircled the town of Sukhna in Eastern Homs Province on September 29 - 30. IS later seized the town of Qaryatayn in the Eastern Qalamoun Mountains on October 1. Heavy clashes remain ongoing on the outskirts of both Sukhna and Qaryatayn. Pro-regime forces reestablished a ground line of communication to Deir e-Zor City on September 5.



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

