

# Syria Situation Report: August 19 - September 1, 2020

**1 Aug. 18 - 19 ISIS Claims Two Assassinations in Daraa Province.** ISIS operatives assassinated a former journalist in Daraa City on August 19. ISIS claimed that the journalist was guilty of offending the prophet. ISIS operatives also killed a member of Lebanese Hezbollah and an additional person in Busra al-Harir, 30 km northeast of Daraa City on August 18.

**2 Aug. 20: Syrian Regime Hosts Tribal Conference to Call for Resistance to the US and SDF in Deir e-Zor.** Around 500 tribal sheikhs, including members of the Sharabeen and Aqidat tribes, attended a conference hosted by the Syrian regime to discuss issues relevant to Syrian tribal interests in regime-held Aleppo City. The attendees announced their public support for the Aqidat tribe in Deir e-Zor Province. The conference also called for national unity among the Syrian people and appealed to President Bashar al-Assad to form a tribal council that could be a counterpart of the Syrian army.

**3 Aug. 24: Likely ISIS Militants Conduct Major Attack on Syrian Regime Energy Infrastructure.** Unidentified militants attacked the Arab Gas Pipeline (AGP) between al-Dumayr and Adra, Reef Dimashq Province, Syria. The explosion caused a temporary electrical blackout in western and central Syria. US Special Envoy to Syria James Jeffrey claimed that the attack was likely carried out by ISIS militants.

**4 Aug. 25: Third Khattab al-Shishani Brigade Attack on Russo-Turkish Joint Patrols Threatens Ceasefire.** The Khattab al-Shishani Brigades attacked the 26th Russo-Turkish joint patrol of the M4 Highway, hitting a Russian personnel carrier with RPG fire in Urum al-Jawz, Idlib Province. Two Russian military police (MPs) were injured in the attack. The Khattab al-Shishani Brigades claimed responsibility for the attack and threatened future attacks. The Khattab al-Shishani Brigades, a small al-Qaeda-aligned group unknown before July, attacked joint patrols on July 14 and August 17.

**5 Aug. 25: Russian Vehicles Collide with US Patrol as Russia Seeks to Pressure US Ground Supply Routes in Northern Hasakah.** A Russian military police vehicle collided with a US military vehicle during a patrol near Malikiyah, northern Hasakah Province. The collision resulted in several US troops suffering from concussion symptoms, according to two unnamed US defense officials. Video from Russian social media accounts also showed a Russian helicopter flying over the US vehicles.

**6 Aug. 27: Iranian Delegation Meets with Syrian Prime Minister to Discuss Possible Iranian Role in New Reconstruction Projects.** Syrian Prime Minister Hussein Arnous met with Iranian Deputy Defense Minister Ebrahim Mahmoud Zadeh in Damascus City. They discussed improving cooperation between Syria and Iran, including in the infrastructure and housing sectors. They also discussed new cooperation in other sectors, such as water resources, electricity, and technical education.

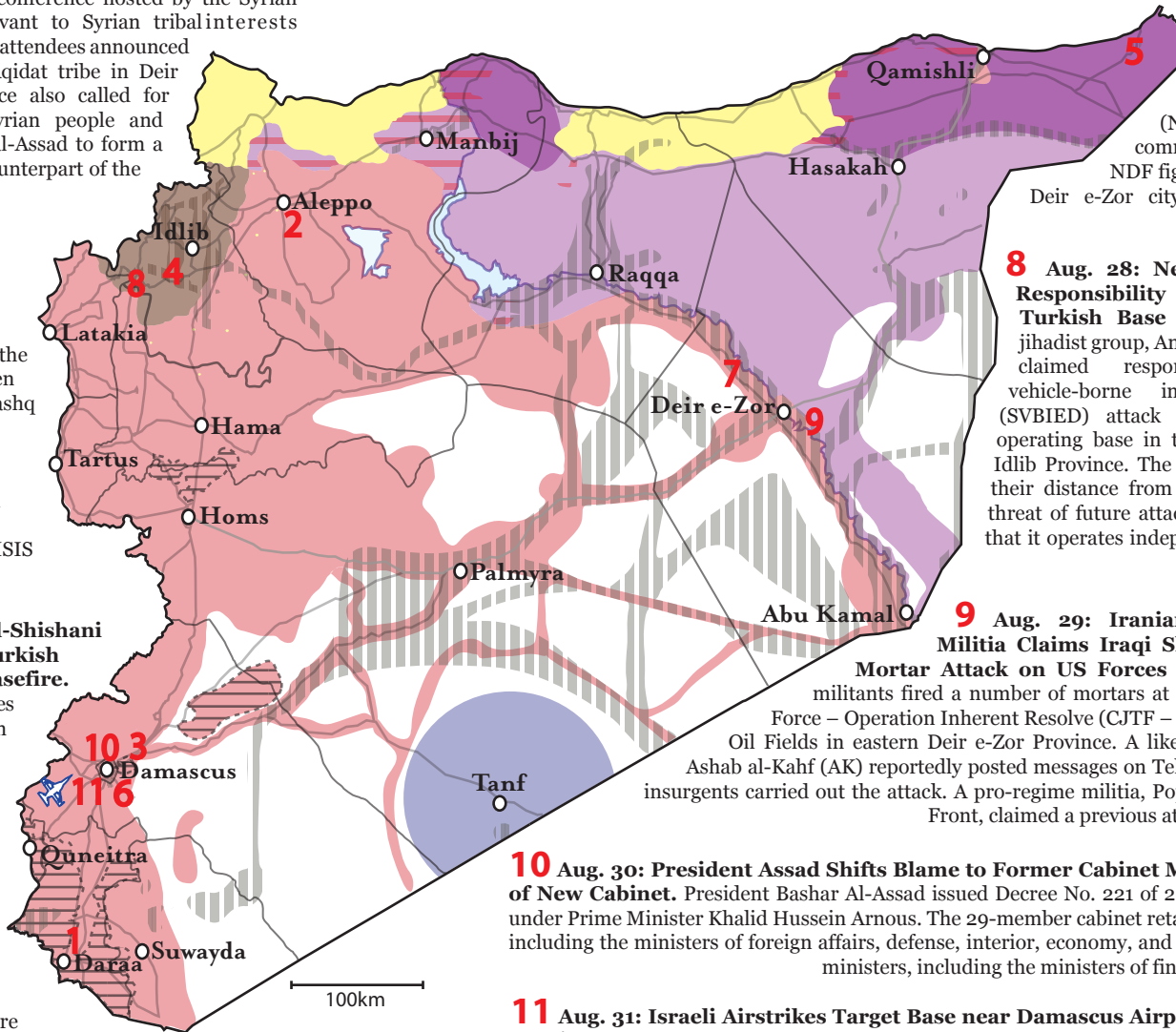
**7 Aug. 27: ISIS Conducts Large-scale Attack on National Democratic Forces (NDF) Northwest of Deir e-Zor City.** ISIS militants ambushed a Syrian National Defense Forces (NDF) unit and killed its commander and between 14 and 30 NDF fighters near al-Musarib, north of Deir e-Zor city. The NDF killed five ISIS militants in the attack.

**8 Aug. 28: New Jihadist Group Claims Responsibility for SVBIED Attack on a Turkish Base in Southern Idlib.** A new jihadist group, Ansar Abu Bakr al-Siddiq Brigade, claimed responsibility for a suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (SVBIED) attack targeting a Turkish forward operating base in the Jisr al-Shughour region of Idlib Province. The group called for civilians keep their distance from Turkish positions, an implied threat of future attacks. The new group also stated that it operates independently from any other group in Idlib or globally.

**9 Aug. 29: Iranian-backed "Iraqi Shadow" Militia Claims Iraqi Shi'a Insurgents Conducted Mortar Attack on US Forces in Eastern Syria.** Unknown militants fired a number of mortars at a US-led Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF – OIR) military base near Conoco Oil Fields in eastern Deir e-Zor Province. A likely Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Ashab al-Kahf (AK) reportedly posted messages on Telegram claiming that Iraqi Shi'a insurgents carried out the attack. A pro-regime militia, Popular Resistance of the Eastern Front, claimed a previous attack near Conoco on August 18.

**10 Aug. 30: President Assad Shifts Blame to Former Cabinet Members with Appointment of New Cabinet.** President Bashar Al-Assad issued Decree No. 221 of 2020 to form a new government under Prime Minister Khalid Hussein Arnous. The 29-member cabinet retained a majority of its members, including the ministers of foreign affairs, defense, interior, economy, and information, while replacing 12 ministers, including the ministers of finance, energy, and public health.

**11 Aug. 31: Israeli Airstrikes Target Base near Damascus Airport Area and Base in Daraa Province.** Several Israeli airstrikes targeted a pro-regime base near the Damascus International Airport in Damascus. The strikes killed two people and wounded several others, according to pro-regime media. Syrian air defense systems responded to the strikes, but it is unclear if disrupted any strikes. Israeli surface-to-surface rockets reportedly also targeted pro-regime barracks near Izra, Daraa Province.



- Pro-Regime
- Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)
- U.S. and Partner Forces
- ISIS Support Zones
- SDF-Dominated, Regime Presence
- Former Opposition Terrain (Reconciled)
- Turkey-Opposition
- Al Qaeda-Dominated\*
- ⚡ 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 September 1, 2020

**Key Takeaway:** The pro-regime coalition is increasing pressure on the US presence in northeast Syria through kinetic activity targeting US forces. A Russian military police (MP) vehicle collided with a US military vehicle in northern Hasakah Province on August 25. Russia seeks to disrupt the US ground supply lines in northern Hasakah that connect US forces in Iraq and Syria. Pro-regime militias conducted two rocket and mortar attacks near a US base in eastern Deir e-Zor on August 18 and 29. The pro-regime coalition seeks to exploit security tensions in Deir e-Zor to undermine the US and its local partner's presence along the Euphrates River.



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