

Syria Update: December 9 - 16, 2014

1 December 14-16: JN, HASI, and several other Islamic Front and FSA affiliated groups seized the Wadi al-Deif and al-Hamidiyah military bases as well as all remaining regime-held checkpoints in southern Idlib Province, forcing regime soldiers to retreat south into Hama Province. At least 80 rebel fighters and 100 regime soldiers died in the clashes, with approximately 200 regime soldiers reportedly captured. Meanwhile, JN released a video from the operation showing its fighters using a U.S. TOW missile system allegedly captured from the SRF.

2 December 9: Residents of the majority-Alawite town of Maysaf protested in the streets following rumors that ISIS had overrun the Deir ez-Zour Military Airport, forcing regime security forces to fire in the air to disperse the crowd.

3 December 9 - 15: Jaysh al-Islam seized the Bir al-Qasab area from ISIS militants after Islamist rebel group Jaysh al-Asud al-Sharqiyah deployed reinforcements from the Qalamoun region to assist in the fighting. Unconfirmed reports indicated that ISIS fighters in Bir al-Qasab are members of an FSA-aligned rebel brigade which recently pledged allegiance to ISIS.

4 December 11 - 16: ISIS militants continued to clash with regime forces on the outskirts of the Deir ez-Zour Military Airport as well as nearby Saker Island and the southern neighborhoods of Deir ez-Zour city. On December 12, ISIS detonated a tank-borne SVBIED against regime forces on the perimeter of the airbase.

5 December 10 - 12: On December 10, Jaysh al-Islam commander was assassinated by a car bomb in the village of al-Dhumayr, northeast of Damascus (A). On December 12, unidentified gunmen assassinated the commander of a rebel brigade associated with U.S. TOW recipient Suqour al-Ghab in Kafr Zeita, northern Hama Province (B), while a field commander for U.S. TOW recipient Harakat Hazm was seriously injured after an IED detonated inside his car in Aleppo city (C).

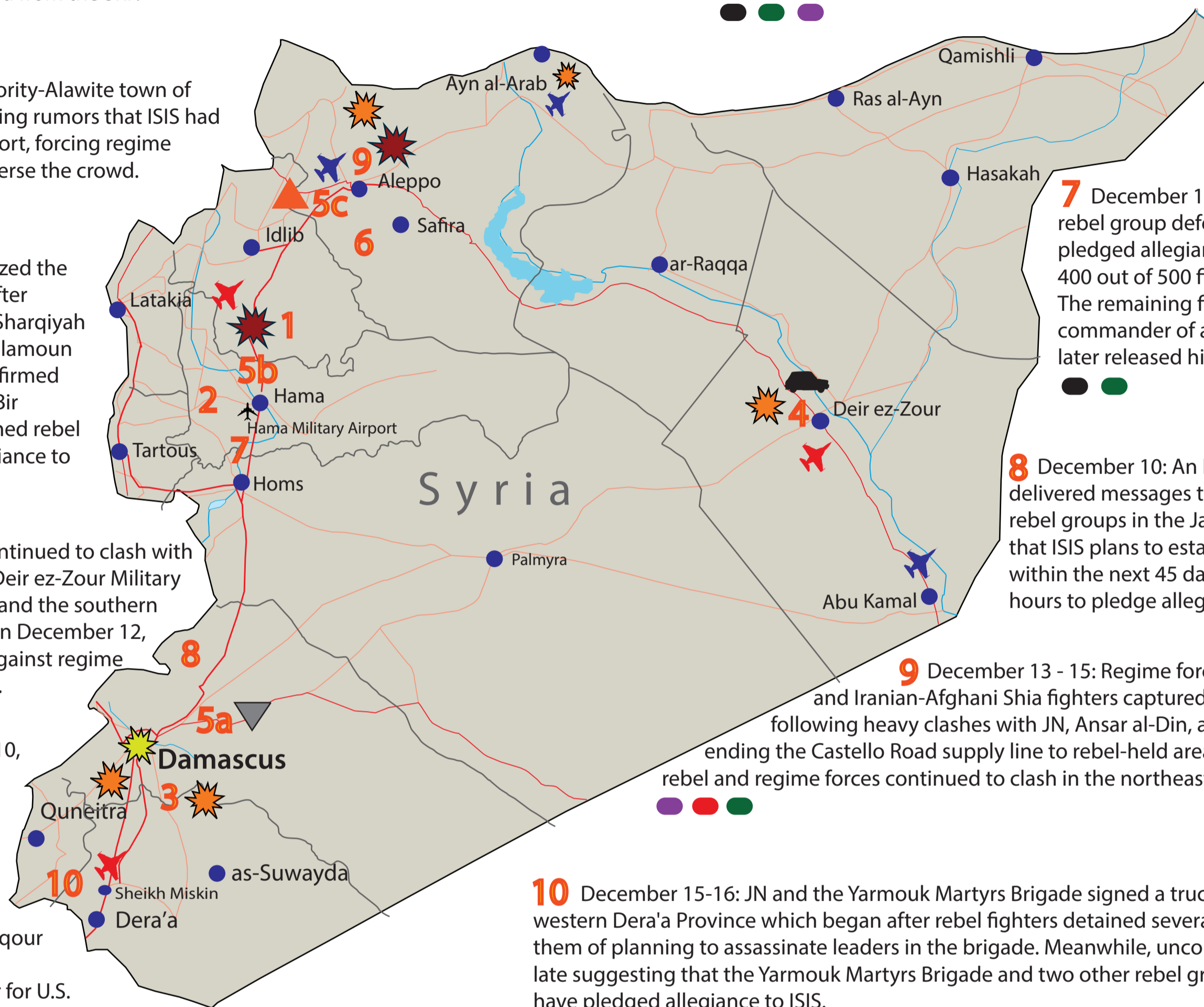
6 December 13: A local rebel group affiliated with ISIS reportedly attacked several Suqour al-Sham positions in southern Aleppo Province with the assistance of several JN units in the area, forcing Suqour al-Sham to withdraw its forces and call for Sharia arbitration. Suqour al-Sham blamed the attack on tribal disagreements, while other sources attributed the conflict to a JN operation targeting a rebel leader accused of corruption.

7 December 13: The commander of a local rebel group defected from Feilqa al-Sham and pledged allegiance to ISIS, prompting nearly 400 out of 500 fighters to leave the battalion. The remaining fighters kidnapped the commander of another local rebel group but later released him in exchange for weapons.

8 December 10: An ISIS Sharia judge reportedly delivered messages to the headquarters of several rebel groups in the Jaroud Qalamoun region stating that ISIS plans to establish an emirate in the area within the next 45 days and giving rebel forces 48 hours to pledge allegiance to al-Baghdadi.

9 December 13 - 15: Regime forces supported by Hezbollah and Iranian-Afghani Shia fighters captured the al-Mallah farmlands following heavy clashes with JN, Ansar al-Din, and other rebel groups, threatening the Castello Road supply line to rebel-held areas of Aleppo city. Meanwhile, rebel and regime forces continued to clash in the northeastern districts of Aleppo city.

10 December 15-16: JN and the Yarmouk Martyrs Brigade signed a truce following clashes in southwestern Dera'a Province which began after rebel fighters detained several JN members and accused them of planning to assassinate leaders in the brigade. Meanwhile, unconfirmed reports began to circulate suggesting that the Yarmouk Martyrs Brigade and two other rebel groups in Dera'a Province may have pledged allegiance to ISIS.



- Opposition Forces
- Pro-Regime Forces
- ISIS
- Jabhat al-Nusra (JN)
- Major Clash
- SVBIED
- Car Bomb
- IED

- Background Kinetic Activity**
- Alleged Chlorine Gas
 - Attack
 - Major Regime Airstrikes
 - Low-level clashes



by Christopher Kozak and Brian Fisher

ISIS Increases Presence in Western Syria: A string of recent defections and rumored defections to ISIS in rebel-held areas of western Syria – including outer Eastern Ghouta, southern Dera'a Province, and northern Homs Province – signals some level of discontent with the current status quo among the Syrian armed opposition. Although the recent defections consist of relatively small numbers of fighters and face a hostile reaction from local rebel forces, ISIS will likely use this method over the short-to-medium term to expand its presence into areas near the regime and rebel heartlands of western Syria.

JN and Ahrar al-Sham Seize Wadi al-Deif and al-Hamidiyah Army Posts: The rapid success of the assault on the Wadi al-Deif and al-Hamidiyah army bases delivers a clear message regarding the ascendant power and influence of JN and other Islamist groups in northern Syria following the expulsion of the Western-backed Syrian Revolutionaries Front (SRF) from the province last month. JN and Ahrar al-Sham leveraged their unique tactical assets and operational planning abilities to conduct simultaneous, coordinated offensives which achieved an objective unmet by a rebel siege lasting nearly two years. JN's use of at least one U.S.-provided TOW missile during the operation provides support to recent reports indicating that the United States ceased providing salaries and weapons to CIA-vetted rebel groups in Idlib and Hama Provinces due to recent JN seizures of TOW missiles from the SRF and Harakat Hazm.

Regime Forces Tighten Grip around Aleppo City The capture of the al-Mallah farmland area brings the regime one step closer to severing supply lines leading to rebel-held areas of Aleppo city and the successful encirclement of Syria's largest city, threatening the population with a siege-and-starve campaign similar to that experienced by rebels in the Old City of Homs from 2011 to 2014. However, it remains to be seen whether regime forces will be able to sustain their gains.