

Syria Situation Report: March 18 - 31, 2020

1 Mar 18: Russian Military May be Preparing to Use Qamishli Airport as Fixed Wing Attack Aircraft Base: The Russian military reportedly began building out their fixed wing aircraft capabilities at the Qamishli Airport in Hasakah Province. Russian Su-25 aircraft have already landed at the Qamishli Airport, according to a Russian media report. A Russian Air Force officer previously told Russian reporters that Russia deployed rotary wing aircraft and Pantsir Air Defense System from Hmeimim Airbase to Qamishli Airport on November 14.

2 Mar 19: Likely al Qaeda-Affiliated Militants Target Turkish Forces with IEDs to Disrupt Implementation of Ceasefire Agreement: Unidentified actors targeted a Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) convoy with two improvised explosive devices (IEDs), killing at least one Turkish soldier and injuring several others in Mahambal, one kilometer south of the M4 Highway in southern Idlib Province. Local reports claim headline al Qaeda-affiliated group Hurras al-Din conducted the attack, although these reports have not been confirmed.

3 Mar 23: Russia May Send New Specialists to Damascus to Increase Control over Regime's Economy: Syrian President Bashar al-Assad met with Russian Minister of Defense Sergey Shoigu and a Russian delegation in Damascus. Syrian Defense Minister Ali Ayoub and Syrian Vice President for Security Affairs Ali Mamlouk also attended the meeting. They discussed the implementation of the March 5 Russo-Turkish ceasefire agreement in Greater Idlib Province, the situation in eastern Syria, and bilateral cooperation between the Syrian and Russian Ministries of Defense and militaries. They also discussed Russian humanitarian assistance and restoring the Syrian economy with the help of "Russian specialists."

4 Mar 22-24: Russian Navy Sends Reinforcements to Syria, Possibly Anticipating Escalation in Greater Idlib: A Russian Navy Black Sea Fleet 197th Assault Ship transited the Bosphorus Strait en route to the Port of Tartous on March 22. The ship reportedly transported unspecified weapons and military equipment to reinforce Syrian regime forces. Separately, a Russian Dvinitsa-50 ship, part of Russia's auxiliary fleet crossed the Bosphorus Strait en route to the Port of Tartous on March 24. The ship carried "at least three military ambulances" and a shipping container, according to a Reuters report.

5 Mar 23: Turkey and Russia Fail to Conduct Joint Patrol on the M4 Highway in Idlib for Second Time: Turkish and Russian forces attempted to conduct a joint patrol for the second time on the M4 Highway in Idlib Province on March 23, in accordance with the March 5 Russo-Turkish ceasefire agreement. The patrol began in Tarnaba in eastern Idlib Province and intended to reach Ayn al-Hawr, Latakia Province, but stopped after just a few kilometers in the town of Narab due to "security concerns," according to the Russian Ministry of Defense. Unidentified militants used explosives to destroy a bridge along the planned patrol route on March 25.

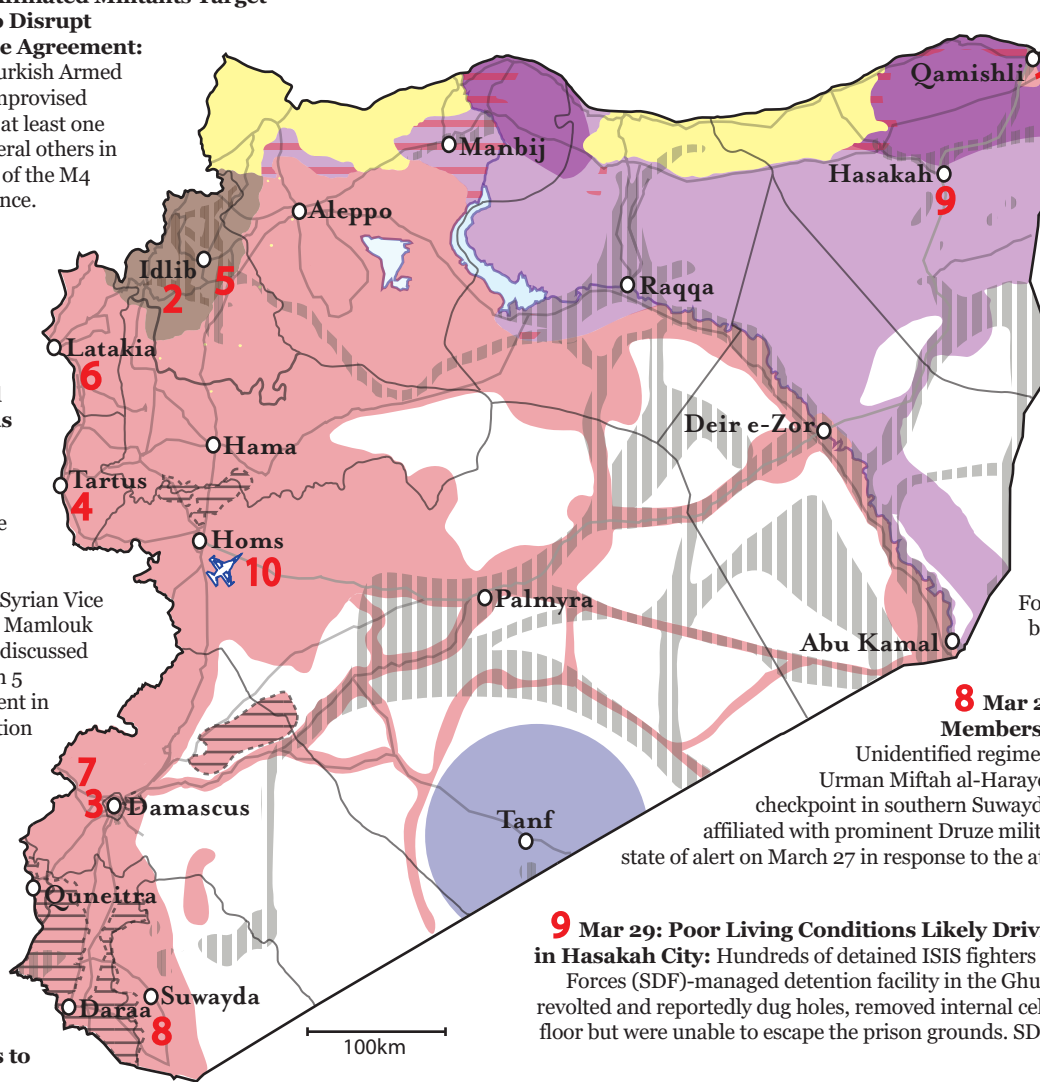
6 Mar 23: Continued Armed Drone Attacks on Russian Air Base May Exacerbate Already Tense Russo-Turkish Relations in Greater Idlib: Unidentified militants fired a weaponized drone at the Russian-operated Hmeimim Airbase on the coast of Latakia Province, but air defenses reportedly intercepted the drone over the city of Jableh. This is the first such drone attack since Russia and Turkey reached a ceasefire agreement for Greater Idlib Province on March 5. There were no reports of damage or injuries.

7 Mar 26: Anti-Assad Insurgents Target Prominent NDF Commander in the Damascus Region with Car Bomb: Unidentified anti-Assad insurgents targeted a Syrian regime forces commander with a car bomb in the village of al-Tekiyah in the western Damascus Countryside. Conflicting reports indicate the commander was affiliated with either the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) 4th Division or the National Defense Forces (NDF). The commander suffered serious injuries but survived. The commander reportedly led a military unit composed of mostly reconciled former rebels.

8 Mar 26-27: Regime Targeting of Local Druze Militia Members May Lead to Escalation in Suwayda Province: Unidentified regime forces reportedly shot members of local Druze militia Urman Miftah al-Harayeb, killing four and wounding three at the al-Ayn Dam checkpoint in southern Suwayda Province on March 26. Urman Miftah al-Harayeb is affiliated with prominent Druze militia Sheikhs of Dignity. Sheikhs of Dignity announced a state of alert on March 27 in response to the attack on its affiliate. Local reports claimed that regime forces manning the checkpoint instigated the attack.

9 Mar 29: Poor Living Conditions Likely Driving Escape Attempts at SDF Detention Facility in Hasakah City: Hundreds of detained ISIS fighters attempted to escape a Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)-managed detention facility in the Ghuwayran neighborhood of Hasakah City. The detainees revolted and reportedly dug holes, removed internal cell doors, and temporarily gained control of the ground floor but were unable to escape the prison grounds. SDF Anti-Terror Units quelled the uprising with support from the U.S.-led anti-ISIS coalition forces.

10 Mar 31: Israeli Air Force Targets Possible Iranian Weapons Shipment at Airbase Southeast of Homs City: Likely Israeli Air Force warplanes launched at least eight missiles from Lebanese airspace at unidentified Iranian or Iranian-backed targets at Shayrat Airbase, southeast of Homs City. Regime media claimed anti-aircraft defense systems shot down the missiles before they reached their targets. Previous regime claims of air defenses downing Israeli strikes have been demonstrably false, although it is unclear what, if any, damage or casualties the March 31 strikes caused. Unconfirmed reports from Lebanese media indicated the strike may have targeted a meeting between Iranian and Syrian military officials.



- Pro-Regime
- Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)
- Turkish-Dominated
- U.S. and Partner Forces
- ISIS Support Zones
- Joint SDF-Regime Control
- Core SDF-Held Kurdish Terrain
- Former Opposition Terrain (Reconciled)
- Al Qaeda-Dominated*
- Israeli Airstrikes

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*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 Apr 2, 2020