

Syria Situation Report: February 21 - March 6, 2018

1 February 25 - March 6: Pro-Regime Forces Tighten Siege of Opposition-Held Eastern Ghouta: Pro-regime forces reportedly seized one quarter to one third of the besieged opposition-held Eastern Ghouta Suburbs of Damascus as of March 6. Pro-regime forces breached heavily-fortified defensive lines in Eastern Ghouta on March 2 after launching a major multi-axis ground offensive there on February 25. The pro-regime offensive came one day after the UN Security Council voted unanimously to order a thirty-day ceasefire covering the entirety of Syria.

2 February 27 - March 6: Russian 'Humanitarian Pauses' Fails to Halt Violence in Eastern Ghouta: Russia implemented a daily five-hour-long "humanitarian pause" and "humanitarian corridor" to evacuate civilians from the besieged Eastern Ghouta Suburbs of Damascus starting on February 27. Pro-regime forces nonetheless sustained airstrikes, artillery shelling and ground attacks targeting Eastern Ghouta. Activists reported that only four civilians used the passage to exit Eastern Ghouta as of March 6. Activists also reported the death of over 900 civilians in Eastern Ghouta in February 2018.

3 March 5: Assad Regime Blocks Completion of Eastern Ghouta Aid Delivery: The UN and Red Cross dispatched a humanitarian aid convoy that briefly entered the town of Douma in the Eastern Ghouta Suburbs of Damascus. The convoy later withdrew before unloading all of its contents due to continued pro-regime airstrikes and shelling in the area. Pro-regime forces forced the convoy to remove nearly seventy-percent of its medical supplies for civilians in an obligatory inspection, according to the World Health Organization.

4 February 28: North Korea Reportedly Supported Syrian Chemical Weapons Program: According to a confidential report to the UN Security Council, North Korea delivered chemical weapons components to Syria as part of at least 40 shipments between 2012 and 2017. Supplies included "acid resistant tiles, valves, and thermometers" that could be used to build a large-scale chemical weapons facility. North Korea reportedly maintains technicians at chemical weapons and ballistic missile facilities based outside of Damascus and Hama City.

5 March 6: Russian An-26 Military Transport Aircraft Crashes at Russian Airbase on Syrian Coast: A Russian An-26 'Curl' transport aircraft crashed while landing at the Bassel al-Assad International Airport, killing at least thirty-nine servicemembers of the Russian Armed Forces. The fatalities included Russian Maj. Gen. Vladimir Yeremeyev. The Russian Military of Defense stated that the aircraft "did not come under fire" but rather crashed due to an unspecified "technical error".

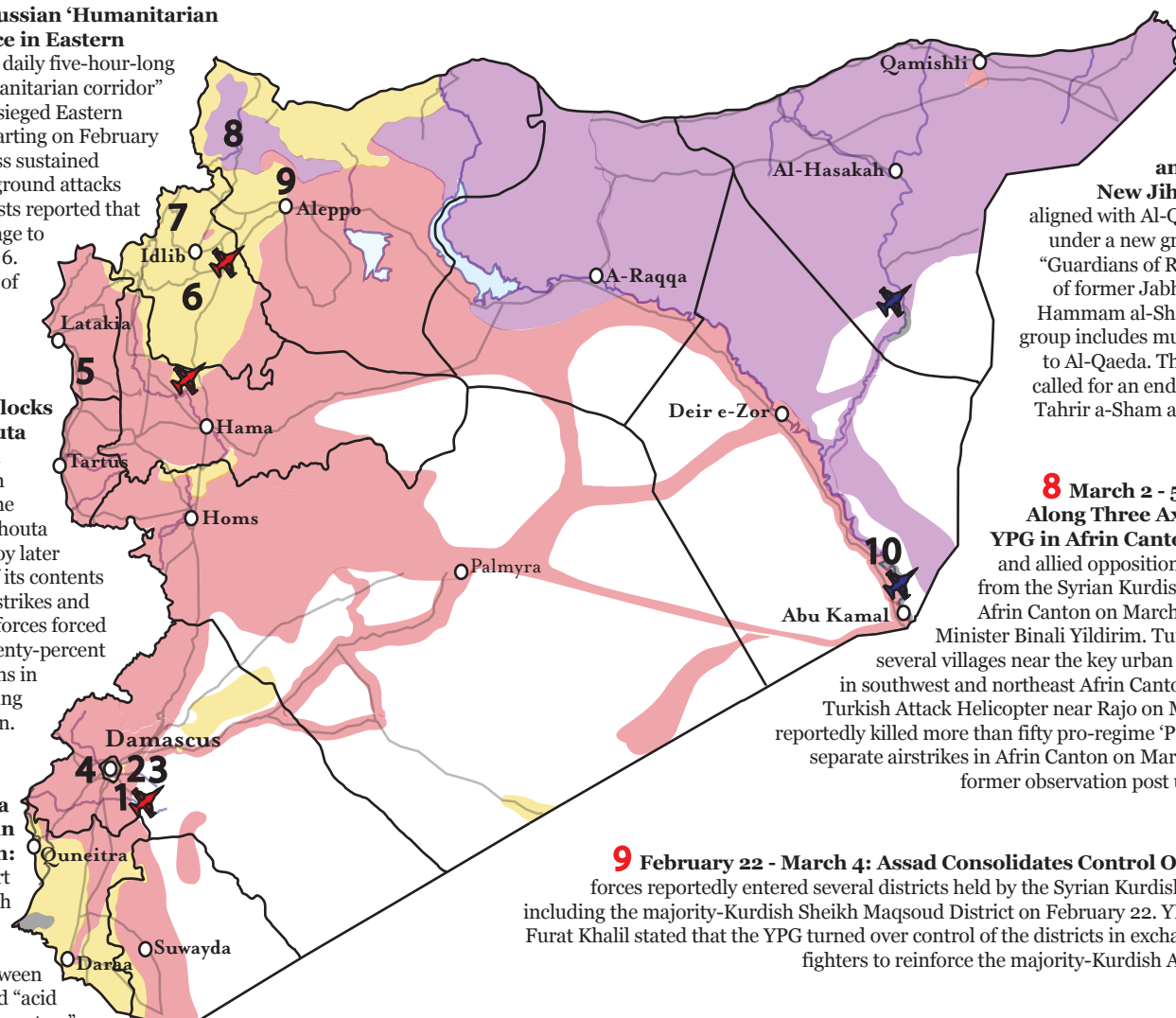
6 February 21 - March 6: Hay'at Tahrir al Sham and Syrian Liberation Front Clash in Greater Idlib Province: Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham (HTS) engaged in heavy clashes with the Syrian Liberation Front (SLF) - the recently-formed merger of Salafi-Jihadist group Ahrar a-Sham and Islamist group Harakat Nour a-Din a-Zenki - across Idlib and Aleppo Provinces. HTS and the allied Turkestan Islamic Party (TIP) consolidated control over strongholds near Idlib City and the Syrian-Turkish Border. The SLF seized large parts of Western Aleppo and Southern Idlib Provinces. The SLF and HTS also reached several neutrality deals and military withdrawals to turn over key towns to local councils or other opposition groups in Northern Hama Province.

7 February 28 - March 1: Major Al-Qaeda Military and Religious Leaders Form New Jihadist Group: Seven groups aligned with Al-Qaeda in Idlib Province merged under a new group called Hiras a-Din - or the "Guardians of Religion" - under the leadership of former Jabhat a-Nusra Military Emir Abu Hammam al-Shami. The leadership of the new group includes multiple prominent clerics linked to Al-Qaeda. The group's formation statement called for an end to the fighting between Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham and the Syrian Liberation Front

8 March 2 - 5: Turkish Forces Progress Along Three Axes against Syrian Kurdish YPG in Afrin Canton: The Turkish Armed Forces and allied opposition forces seized the town of Rajo from the Syrian Kurdish YPG in the majority-Kurdish Afrin Canton on March 3, according to Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim. Turkish-backed forces also seized several villages near the key urban centers of Shiran and Jinderes in southwest and northeast Afrin Canton. The YPG claimed to down a Turkish Attack Helicopter near Rajo on March 2. The Turkish Air Force reportedly killed more than fifty pro-regime 'Popular Forces' fighters in three separate airstrikes in Afrin Canton on March 2 - 4, including a strike on a former observation post used by Russia in Kafr Jannah.

9 February 22 - March 4: Assad Consolidates Control Over Aleppo City: Pro-regime forces reportedly entered several districts held by the Syrian Kurdish YPG in Northern Aleppo City including the majority-Kurdish Sheikh Maqsood District on February 22. YPG Commander in Aleppo City Furat Khalil stated that the YPG turned over control of the districts in exchange for a facilitated transfer of fighters to reinforce the majority-Kurdish Afrin Canton in Northern Syria.

10 March 5: US Coalition Confirms 'Operational Pause' in Campaign against Islamic State in Eastern Syria: Pentagon Spokesperson Col. Rob Manning stated that the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and U.S. Anti-ISIS Coalition have implemented an "operational pause" in the ground campaign against the Islamic State (IS) in the Euphrates River Valley of Eastern Syria. Manning attributed the "temporary" pause to Turkey's intervention into the majority-Kurdish Afrin Canton in Northern Syria. Anonymous officials reported that the SDF has redeployed "hundreds" of fighters from Eastern Syria to counter Turkey in Afrin Canton and Manbij in Northern Aleppo Province. Pentagon Spokesperson Maj. Adrian Rankine-Galloway stressed that the pause has not resulted in any territorial gains by IS in Syria.



Areas of Control*

- Pro-Regime Forces
- Opposition Forces
- The Islamic State
- Kurdish Forces
- Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham
*Formerly Jabhat a-Nusra
- Mixed Control

Airstrikes

- Pro-Regime
- U.S. / Coalition



*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.

*Control of Terrain Accurate as of 08 MAR 2018