

Syria Situation Report: January 21 - February 4, 2020

1 Jan 21: Religious Authority in Suwayda Voices Support for Protests and Places Responsibility on Regime to Improve Conditions: The head of the Presidency of the Religious Community of Suwayda, Sheikh Hekmat al-Hijri, issued a statement supporting the protest movement in Suwayda Province. Hijri called on the Assad regime to produce an economic rescue plan and address the poor living conditions and security situation in Suwayda

2 Jan 21: Daraa Tribal Meeting Reaffirms Support for Protests in Daraa City following Tensions with Regime Forces: Tribal leaders met with the local Negotiations Committee to discuss the regime's security actions in Daraa city. Tribal officials reportedly stated that the regime is trying to harm clans in Daraa by carrying out kidnappings and killings. The tribes reportedly stressed the unity of the population in Daraa against the regime's security policy in southern Syria. A demonstration against the regime took place in the Daraa al Balad neighborhood following the meeting.

3 Feb 4: Apparent VBIED Attack in Damascus Countryside Demonstrates Continued Escalation of Southern Syria Insurgent Campaign: An explosion shook the city of Khan Al-Sheeh near a checkpoint of the Syrian regime's 68th Tank Brigade, 15 miles southwest of central Damascus on the Damascus-Quneitra Highway. The explosion killed and wounded pro-regime elements in the area. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack.

4 Jan 27-29: Assad Meets with Russian Officials Ahead of UN Envoy's Visit to Damascus: Syrian President Bashar al-Assad met with Russian Envoy to Syria Alexander Lavrentiev and Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Vershinin in Damascus on January 27. They discussed the implementation of the Syrian Constitutional Committee, terrorism, humanitarian aid, and the return of refugees to Syria. Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moallem subsequently met with UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen in Damascus to discuss the Constitutional Committee on January 29.

5 Feb 4: Anti-Assad Groups in Greater Idlib May Have Developed Long-range Drone Capability to Target Regime's Rear Infrastructure: Unknown militants conducted multiple drone strikes on four gas and oil refineries in and east of Homs city. Syrian Minister of Oil and Mineral Resources Ali Ghanem said Syrian firefighters contained the resulting fires and that engineering teams started repairs. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack.

6 Jan 27: Regime Claims Unidentified Actor Attacked Oil Refinery along Syrian Coast: The Syrian Ministry of Oil is examining the damage caused to an underwater pipeline leading to Baniyas Oil Refinery in Tartus Province after an unidentified actor detonated an explosive device. It is unclear if the damage will disrupt the regime's ability to produce oil at the Baniyas Refinery.

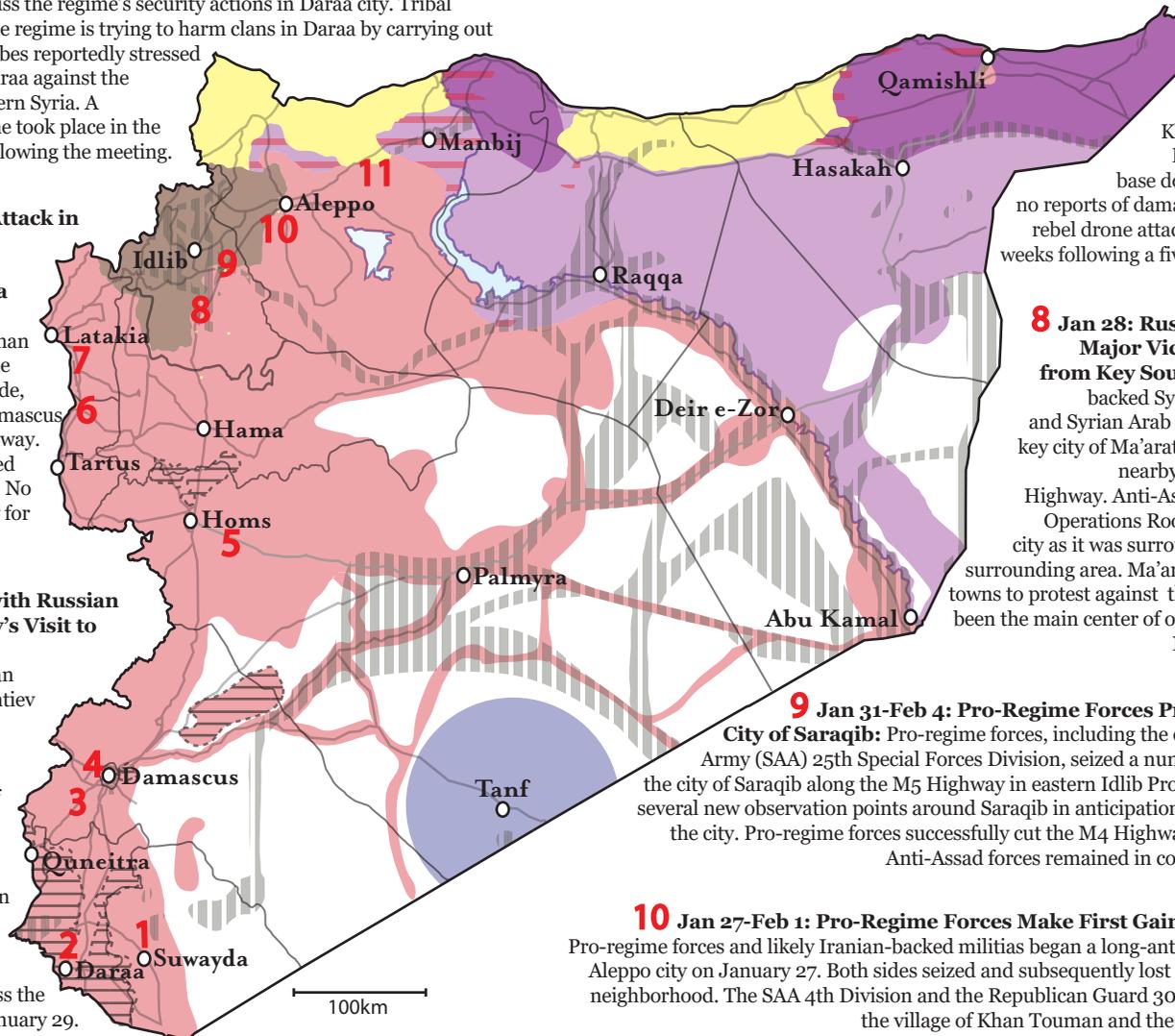
7 Feb 1: Likely Al-Qaeda-affiliated Militants Conduct Second Drone Attack on Russian Base in Two Weeks: Militants from rebel-held territory in Idlib Province reportedly fired weaponized drones at Russian-operated Khmeimim Airbase on the coast of Latakia Province. Air defenses on base downed the drones and there were no reports of damage. This is the second confirmed rebel drone attack on Khmeimim in less than two weeks following a five-month pause in the campaign.

8 Jan 28: Russian-Backed Forces Achieve Major Victory with Rebel Withdrawal from Key Southern Idlib City: The Russian-backed Syrian 25th Special Forces Division and Syrian Arab Army (SAA) 5th Corps seized the key city of Ma'arat al-Nu'man, as well as numerous nearby towns and villages along the M5 Highway. Anti-Assad forces in the Fatah al-Mubin Operations Room reportedly withdrew from the city as it was surrounded but remained active in the surrounding area. Ma'arat al-Nu'man was one of the first towns to protest against the Assad regime in 2011, and has been the main center of operations for the Turkish-backed National Liberation Front (NLF).

9 Jan 31-Feb 4: Pro-Regime Forces Prepare to Seize Eastern Idlib City of Saraqib: Pro-regime forces, including the elite Russian-backed Syrian Arab Army (SAA) 25th Special Forces Division, seized a number of villages south and west of the city of Saraqib along the M5 Highway in eastern Idlib Province. Turkish forces established several new observation points around Saraqib in anticipation of a pro-regime attempt to seize the city. Pro-regime forces successfully cut the M4 Highway west of Saraqib on February 2. Anti-Assad forces remained in control of Saraqib as of February 5.

10 Jan 27-Feb 1: Pro-Regime Forces Make First Gains on Western Aleppo Front: Pro-regime forces and likely Iranian-backed militias began a long-anticipated ground offensive west of Aleppo city on January 27. Both sides seized and subsequently lost control of terrain in the Rashidin neighborhood. The SAA 4th Division and the Republican Guard 30th Division successfully captured the village of Khan Touman and the surrounding area on January 31.

11 Feb 1-2: Turkish-backed SNA Temporarily Opens Eastern Aleppo Front to Relieve Pressure on Western Aleppo: Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) temporarily seized two joint Russian and Syrian checkpoints near Tadeef, Northern Aleppo Province. SNA forces withdrew shortly after. The SNA likely intended the operation to relieve pro-regime pressure on anti-Assad forces in Western Aleppo Province. A pro-regime aircraft struck the city of al-Bab in Turkish-dominated Northern Aleppo Province on February 2.



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

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STUDY OF WAR

*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 06 FEB 2020