

Syria Situation Report: April 29 - May 12, 2020

1 Apr 30-May 1: HTS Conducts Violent Crackdown against Protesters in Town with Turkish Presence, Threatening Turkish Intervention against HTS: Al Qaeda-affiliated Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) shot at and ran over civilians protesting the opening of a commercial crossing with regime-held areas in the town of Ma'arat al Na'san, northeast of Idlib City. Turkey also opposed the opening of the crossing and Turkish forces blocked freight vehicles from crossing on April 29. Demonstrators gathered in Idlib and western Aleppo Province on May 1 to criticize HTS leader Mohammad al-Joulani for HTS's use of force after the group killed a civilian during previous protests.

2a-b May 1: Israel Increases Airstrikes, Attempting to Push Iranian Proxy Forces out of Syria: Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) helicopters targeted Iranian proxy forces and regime positions in Tal Ahmar al-Gharbi in Quneitra Province and Ma'ariya in western Daraa Province. Syrian Air Defenses responded to the attacks, and pro-regime sources claimed defenses were able to destroy "most" of the missiles before reaching their target. The attacks caused unknown damages; no casualties have been reported. The IDF also reportedly launched missiles at a Hezbollah munition warehouse in Homs City, Homs Province, triggering a secondary explosion as munitions inside the warehouse exploded on May 1. Pro-regime media denied that the explosion was the result of an Israeli strike and instead blamed "human error." Regime sources claimed the explosion caused material and human loss.

3a-d May 4-8: ISIS Conducts Four Rounds of Attacks along the Border between Homs and Deir e-Zor: ISIS fighters conducted a series of attacks on the National Defense Forces (NDF) and Syrian Arab Army (SAA) positions in the Syrian Desert along the Homs-Deir e-Zor provincial border. ISIS first stormed NDF positions in the al-Asharah area in Deir e-Zor Province on May 4; the NDF repelled the attack with the SAA's support. Simultaneously, ISIS attacked SAA positions in al-Suknah eastern Homs Province, and targeted the SAA in the desert region west of Mayadin, 14 km from al-Asharah, Deir e-Zor Province. ISIS assailants conducted a second attack on May 7, ambushing the SAA and its allied militias along the Deir e-Zor-Homs border. ISIS conducted a third ambush attack on May 8 against SAA positions in al-Suknah, Homs Province. ISIS reportedly attempted to seize a village in the al-Bishri Mountain region, Deir e-Zor Province, on May 11. The NDF retook the village on May 12. ISIS fighters also attacked SAA and NDF positions in al-Suknah, Homs Province on May 11, with both sides incurring casualties.

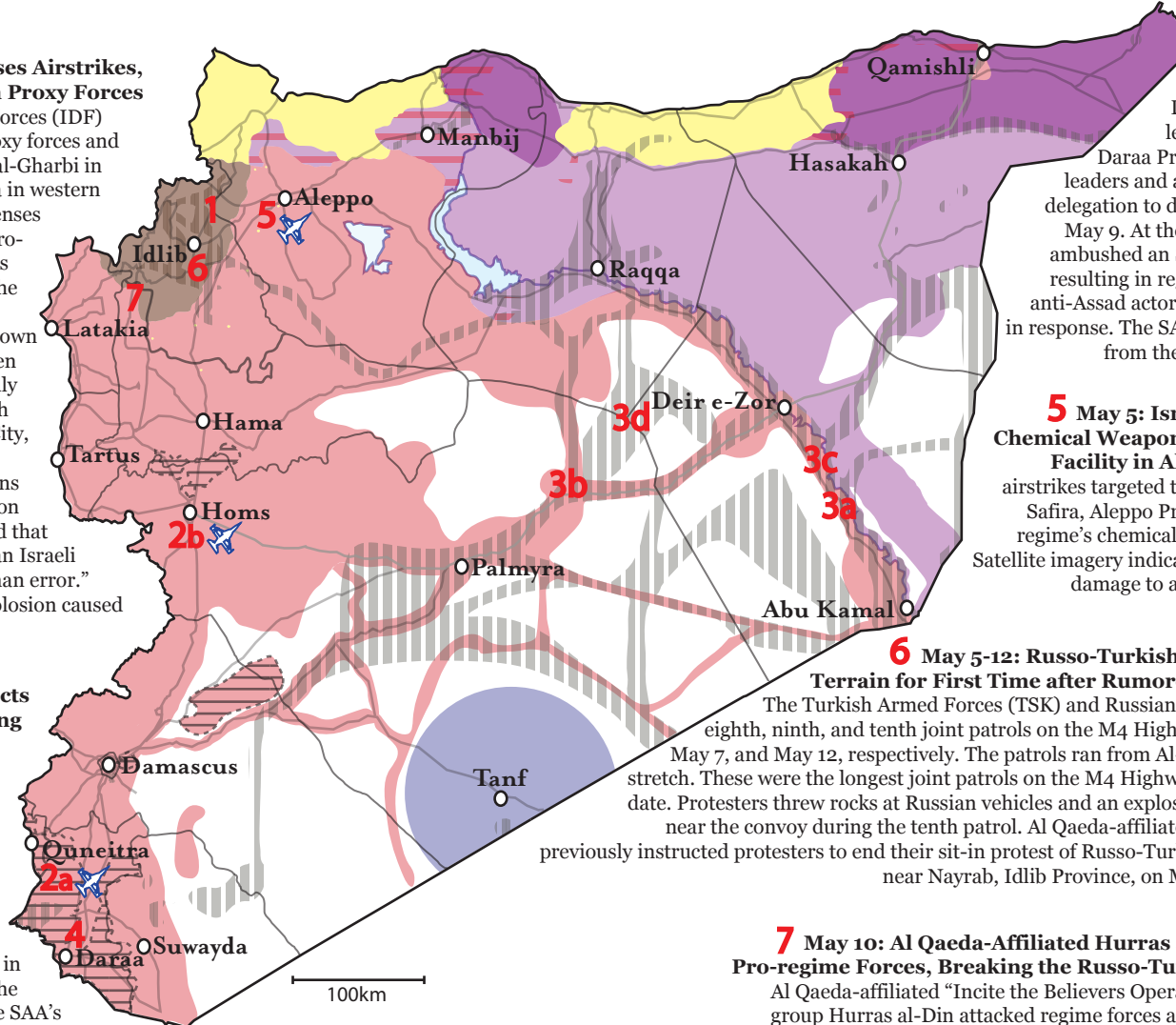
4 May 4-10: Southern Syria Further Destabilizes as Regime Forces Prepare for Security Operation against Anti-Assad Actors: Fifty-to-sixty unknown gunmen armed with light weapons reportedly raided a government building, abducting and killing nine Syrian internal security officers in Muzayrib, western Daraa Province, on May 4. The Syrian Arab Army (SAA) and Lebanese Hezbollah deployed to several locations in Daraa Province between May 5 and May 6 in response to the attack. The Russian-backed SAA 5th Corps and the 15th Special Forces Division reportedly stormed the town of Muzayrib on May 8. SAA forces reportedly arrested an unspecified number of individuals linked to the May 4

killings. A group of militants and the accused organizer of the May 4 killing reportedly fled from Muzayrib to Tafas, Daraa Province, on May 9. Local leaders and representatives from Daraa Province met with regime security leaders and a Russian Reconciliation Center delegation to discuss his surrender in Tafas on May 9. At the same time, unknown militants ambushed an SAA position in Tafas on May 9, resulting in regime casualties. The SAA struck anti-Assad actors with heavy artillery near Tafas in response. The SAA reportedly partially withdrew from their positions in Tafas on May 10.

5 May 5: Israel Conducts Strike against Chemical Weapons and Missile Development Facility in Aleppo Province: Likely Israeli airstrikes targeted the Scientific Research Center in Safira, Aleppo Province, which housed the Assad regime's chemical weapon development program. Satellite imagery indicates the strike caused significant damage to a workshop facility at the center.

6 May 5-12: Russo-Turkish Patrol Reaches Rebel-held Terrain for First Time after Rumored HTS-Turkey Agreement: The Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) and Russian Military Police conducted their eighth, ninth, and tenth joint patrols on the M4 Highway in Idlib Province on May 5, May 7, and May 12, respectively. The patrols ran from Al-Tarnaba to Musaybin, an 11 km stretch. These were the longest joint patrols on the M4 Highway in southern Idlib Province to date. Protesters threw rocks at Russian vehicles and an explosion of unknown cause occurred near the convoy during the tenth patrol. Al Qaeda-affiliated Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (HTS) previously instructed protesters to end their sit-in protest of Russo-Turkish patrols on the M4 Highway near Nayrab, Idlib Province, on May 5 to allow for longer patrols.

7 May 10: Al Qaeda-Affiliated Hurras al-Din Conducts Attacks on Pro-regime Forces, Breaking the Russo-Turkish Ceasefire Agreement: Al Qaeda-affiliated "Incite the Believers Operations Room" and lead member group Hurras al-Din attacked regime forces and took control of Tanjarah and other nearby villages in Sahel al-Ghab, northern Hama Province. The attacks killed at least 20 regime soldiers. Pro-regime forces regained control of the villages after intensely shelling rebel positions, forcing them to retreat. The attacks were the first major escalation against regime forces since the March 5 ceasefire agreement between Russia and Turkey.



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

*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 May 14, 2020



SYRIA
direct

Key Takeaway: The situation in southern Syria will continue to destabilize as insurgent activity increases and the Assad regime remains unwilling to commit the resources necessary to avert growing unrest. Security in southern Syria's strategic and restive Daraa Province collapsed rapidly as pro-regime forces deployed to the south to conduct a security operation against anti-Assad actors targeting pro-regime positions. However, a Russian delegation intervened to negotiate with local Daraa leaders, thus circumventing the pro-regime operation. The outcome of the negotiations is unclear, but civilians will likely continue protesting against increased regime presence in the area.