

Syria Situation Report: November 11 - December 1, 2020

1 Nov. 11 - 12: Russian-backed 5th Corps Prevents Iranian-backed Security Operation in Southern Syria. The Iranian-backed Syrian Arab Army's (SAA) 4th Division and Syrian Air Force Intelligence (SAFI) attempted to storm the town of al-Karak, Dera'a Province on November 11. Units from the Russian-backed SAA's 5th Corps 8th Brigade prevented an offensive by positioning forces inside of al-Karak. This intervention indicates Russia's continued commitment to preserving reconciliation agreements through de-escalation between residents and regime and Iranian-backed units.

2 Nov. 12 - 15: ISIS is Expanding its Attack Capabilities in Central Syria. ISIS militants killed 21 pro-regime soldiers in an attack on an outpost near Abu Fayyad Dam, Hama Province on November 12. ISIS fighters captured and killed an unspecified number of regime-backing Qaterji militiamen near the Tuweinan Oil Fields, Homs Province on November 15.

3 Nov. 12 - 27: Israel Continues to Target Iranian Positions and Personnel with Airstrikes in Syria. Israeli airstrikes killed seven members of the Fatemiyoun Brigade and two members of Lebanese Hezbollah near Abu Kamal, Deir ez-Zour Province, and targeted two Hezbollah positions near the Raqqa and Deir ez-Zour provinces border on November 12. Israeli airstrikes targeted Iranian militia positions, killing three, near al-Rahba, Deir ez-Zour Province on November 19 and Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC)-affiliated Meizila and Thulathat training camps, killing seven, in Deir ez-Zour Province on November 27. Israel also launched airstrikes against the Iranian-backed SAA 90th Brigade's checkpoint near Rwhinah, Quneitra Province and a Hezbollah warehouse in al-Kiswah, Damascus Province on November 24.

4 Nov. 13 - 22: Recent SDF Releases Could Fuel an ISIS Insurgency. The SDF released former ISIS leader and Emir of Public Relations Abd al-Hamid al-Dairi from prison in Deir ez-Zour Province on November 13. The SDF released 515 ISIS family members without tribal guarantees to prevent them from rejoining ISIS from al-Hawl, Hasakah Province on November 16 and 23 former ISIS fighters under tribal guarantees from a prison in Shaddadi, Hasakah Province on November 22.

5 Nov. 15: Members of the Tayy Tribe May Seek Greater Support from the Regime to Undermine Turkey, the SDF, and U.S. Forces in Northeast Syria. Sheikhs and notables of the Tayy tribe held a national forum meeting to discuss expelling forces from the region in Jormuz, Hasakah Province. The participants announced support for the SAA, President Bashar al-Assad, and Russia and a desire to expel U.S. and Turkish forces from the region. National Defense Forces Commander and Tayy notable Hassan al-Saloumi called for Arab tribes to fight against U.S. and Turkish forces.

6 Nov. 22 - 30: Turkey is Likely Deterring a Pro-Regime Offensive by Repositioning Forces in Greater Idlib Province. The Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) established new military positions in al-Ruwayha, Idlib Province on November 22 and Tal Badran, Idlib Province on November 30. The TSK withdrew forces from an observation post in Rashideen, Aleppo Province on November 24 and a military position in Kafr Amim, Idlib Province on November 26. The units were redeployed to recently established military positions in southern Idlib Province, the likely site of any forthcoming pro-regime offensive.

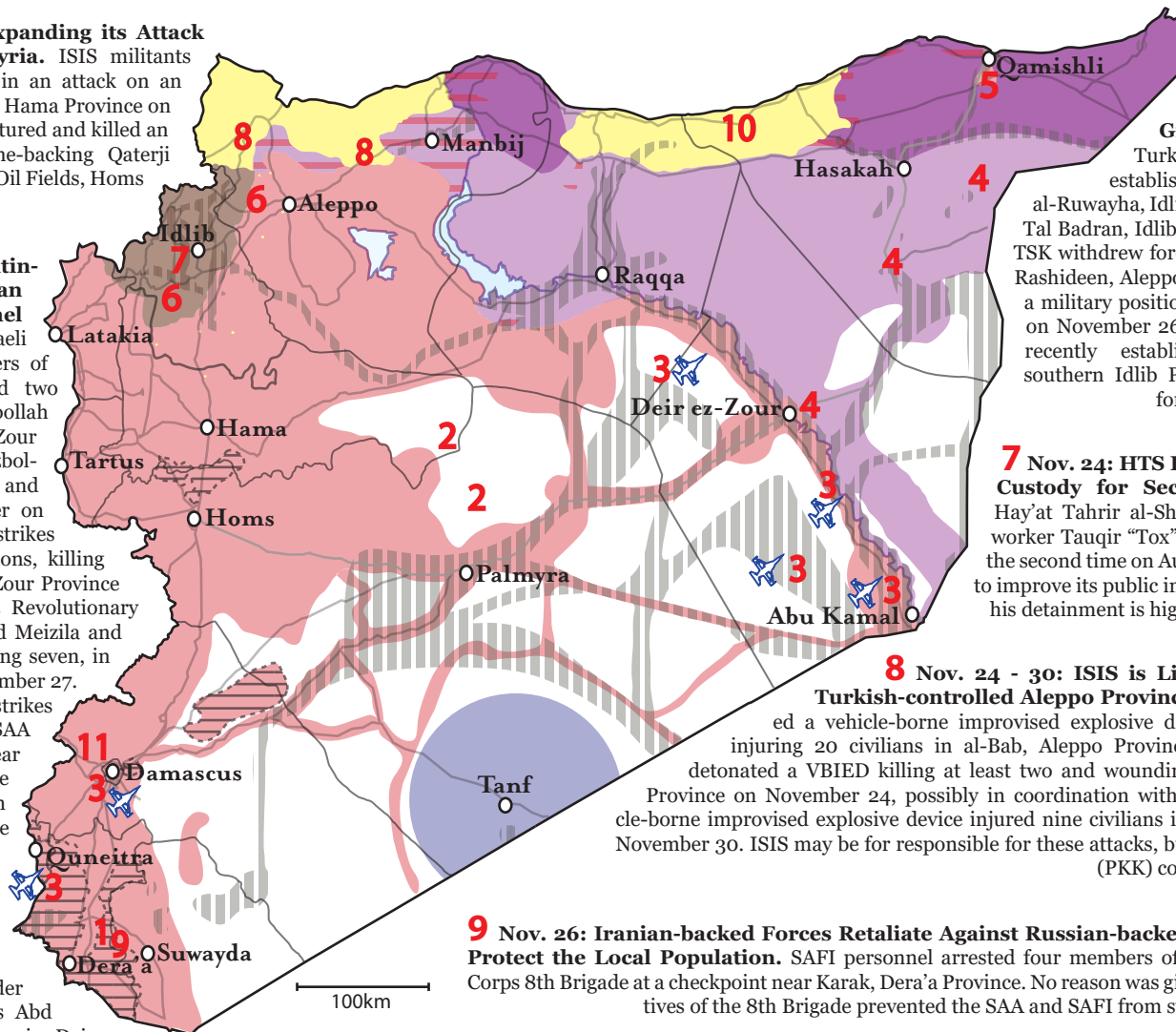
7 Nov. 24: HTS Releases Tauqir Sharif from Custody for Second Time. Al Qaeda-linked Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) released British aid worker Tauqir "Tox" Sharif for the second time on August 11. HTS may be attempting to improve its public image by releasing Sharif because his detainment is highly unpopular in Idlib Province.

8 Nov. 24 - 30: ISIS is Likely Increasing Activity in Turkish-controlled Aleppo Province. Unknown militants detonated a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) killing five and injuring 20 civilians in al-Bab, Aleppo Province on November 24. Militants detonated a VBIED killing at least two and wounding 19 civilians in Afrin, Aleppo Province on November 24, possibly in coordination with the al-Bab attack. A motorcycle-borne improvised explosive device injured nine civilians in Jarablus, Aleppo Province on November 30. ISIS may be responsible for these attacks, but the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) could alternatively be responsible.

9 Nov. 26: Iranian-backed Forces Retaliate Against Russian-backed Forces for Intervening to Protect the Local Population. SAFI personnel arrested four members of the Russian-backed SAA's 5th Corps 8th Brigade at a checkpoint near Karak, Dera'a Province. No reason was given for their arrest. Representatives of the 8th Brigade prevented the SAA and SAFI from storming Karak on November 12.

10 Nov. 27: ISIS or the PKK Likely Targeted Turkish-backed Forces in Northern Syria. Likely ISIS or PKK militants detonated VBIED at a checkpoint controlled by the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army in Mabrouka, Hasakah Province. The attack killed three and injured four fighters.

11 Dec. 01: Russia Positions its Companies to Secure Lucrative Resource Development Contracts. The regime's Ministry of Economy and Foreign Trade granted Russian oil companies Mercury and Villada certificates to open branches in Damascus City. Russian oil companies will likely seek to leverage their presence into contracts to extract oil in Syria. Such contracts would benefit both Russia and the Assad regime.



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

*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 December 1, 2020

Key Takeaway: ISIS is reconstituting and expanding attack zones in northern and central Syria. ISIS militants may have carried out three explosive attacks in Turkish-controlled Aleppo Province and separately attacked a pro-regime outpost and oil facility in central Syria. The increasing severity and geographic area of ISIS attacks likely indicates the organization is successfully expanding its freedom of action in Syria. Continued releases of ISIS militants and family members by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) will likely provide ISIS with veteran fighters and enable it to further expand its operations.

