

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

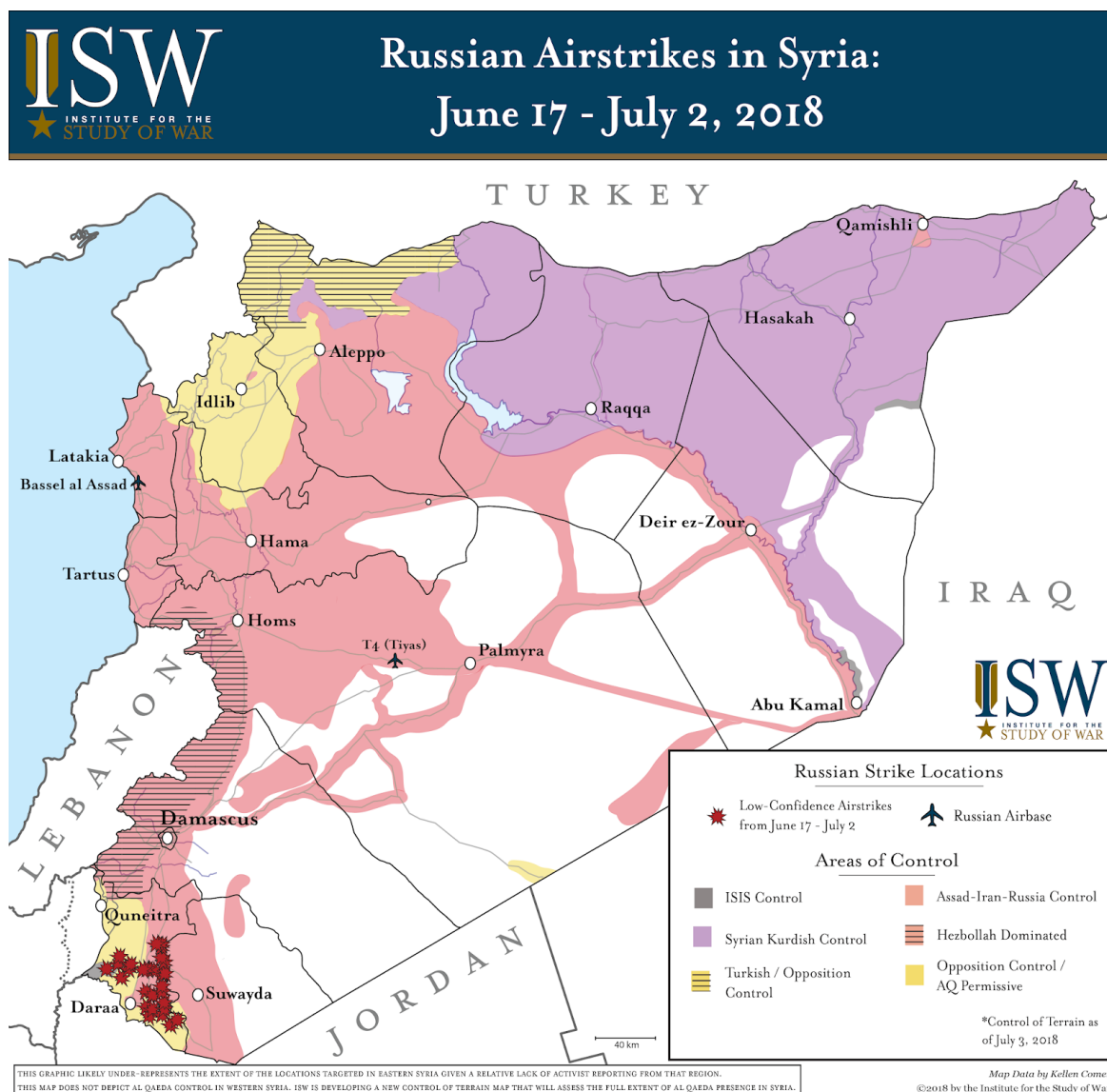
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Russia Abandons Southwest Syria Deal in Support of Assad & Iran

By Matti Suomenaro and Kellen Comer

Russia is directly supporting an offensive by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in violation of the de-escalation zone in Southern Syria. Pro-Assad regime forces backed by Russia and Iran launched a major offensive against opposition-held terrain in Southern Syria on June 19. The offensive involves elite pro-regime units such as the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) Fourth Armored Division, Republican Guard, and Tiger Forces^[1] as well as alleged participation by the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)^[2] and Iraqi Shia militias. Pro-regime forces seized - or forced the surrender of - most of opposition-held Eastern Dera'a Province by July 2. Russia supported these advances with a campaign of intense airstrikes targeting both military and civilian infrastructure across Eastern Dera'a Province starting on June 24. The Russian Foreign Ministry nonetheless claimed that Russia remains committed to the de-escalation zone in Southern Syria brokered by the U.S., Russia, and Jordan in July 2017. Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova stressed that the pro-regime offensive aims to fulfill the alleged obligation of the deal to "eradicate terrorists"^[3] in Southern Syria. Zakharova noted that the Russian Armed Forces are present on the ground to facilitate negotiations between the regime and armed opposition groups in Southern Syria.



Russia is facilitating a humanitarian catastrophe in order to force the surrender of opposition-held towns and villages in Southern Syria. Russia's air campaign has reportedly destroyed at least **seven hospitals and displaced more than two hundred thousand civilians** in Eastern Dera'a Province since June 24. Russia has also advised the UN to halt cross-border deliveries of humanitarian aid from Jordan into Southern Syria. Russia is purposefully creating a wave of displacement and violence in order to coerce armed opposition groups and civilians into accepting localized reconciliation deals across Southern Syria. Russian Military Police have successfully **brokered the reconciliation** of more than eight towns and villages in Eastern Dera'a Province since June 29. The terms for these reconciliations often amount to unconditional submission, including the surrender of all heavy and medium weapons as well as the return of regime security and intelligence services. Russia used **similar military and political pressure** to coerce the surrender of opposition-held communities during the pro-regime offensive against the Eastern Ghouta Suburbs of Damascus in February 2018. Russia has demonstrated a consistent willingness to disregard international law and its own diplomatic commitments in order to facilitate the full reconquest of opposition-held Syria by Assad.

[1] "Tiger Forces Commander Enters Deraa with Russian ground, Air Escort." *Al Masdar*, June 19, 2018. Available: [https://www.almasdarnews\(.\)com/article/tiger-forces-commander-enters-daraa-with-russian-ground-air-escort/](https://www.almasdarnews(.)com/article/tiger-forces-commander-enters-daraa-with-russian-ground-air-escort/)

[2] *[Liwa Imam al Baqir] Facebook*, June 21, 2018. Available: [https://www.facebook\(.\)com/hendawi.98/posts/1009482709201809](https://www.facebook(.)com/hendawi.98/posts/1009482709201809)

[3] "Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova, Moscow, June 28, 2018." *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, June 28, 2018. Available: [http://www.mid\(.\)ru/en/press_service/spokesman/briefings/-/asset_publisher/D2wHaWMCU6Od/content/id/3280395#3](http://www.mid(.)ru/en/press_service/spokesman/briefings/-/asset_publisher/D2wHaWMCU6Od/content/id/3280395#3)

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