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Syria Situation Report: August 6 – 16, 2018

1 Aug 8: Jordanian Trade Minister Meets with Syrian Counterpart to Discuss Trade via Naseeb Border Crossing: Jordanian Ministry of Transport Secretary-General Annemar al-Khasawneh met with Syrian Industry and Trade Minister Mohammed Mazen Ali Yousef in Damascus on August 8 to discuss reopening the Naseeb Border Crossing on the Syrian-Jordanian Border. Al-Khasawneh stressed that the security of the route is a priority for the Government of Jordan once trade resumes between Jordan and Syria.

2 Aug 7: Emirati Business Delegation Travels to Damascus to Discuss Development Investment: An Emirati business delegation visited Damascus to discuss investment in a government-backed development project known as Marota City, southwest of Damascus. The delegation was led by Afaq Islamic Finance Council Vice Chairman and Emirates Development & Investment Company Chair Abdul Jalil Al-Baluki. The delegation met representatives of the Damascus Sham Holding Company as well as Damascus Province Governor Bishr al Sabban.

3 Aug 14: Turkish-Backed Opposition Group Targets Base in Hama Province: The National Liberation Front (NLF) attacked a base of the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) Tiger Forces in Western Hama Province with Grad Rockets. The Tiger Forces use the base to store helicopters. Opposition media sources claimed that the shelling damaged a government plane, two helicopters and one tank. Activists previously reported that government-affiliated "military helicopters" were transferred to the base from an unspecified location in Southern Syria on August 9.

4 Aug 14: Russian Forces Reportedly Attempt to Limit Pro-Government Escalation in Southern Idlib Province: Russian Military Police based in Northern Hama Province reportedly attempted to expel pro-government militias from positions near observation posts held by Turkey in Southern Idlib Province. The Syrian Arab Air Force dropped barrel bombs on Umm al-Khalakhil in Southern Idlib Province near front lines separating government forces from territory held by Syrian Al-Qaeda affiliate Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham (HTS). Civilians reportedly fled the area towards the Syrian-Turkish Border.

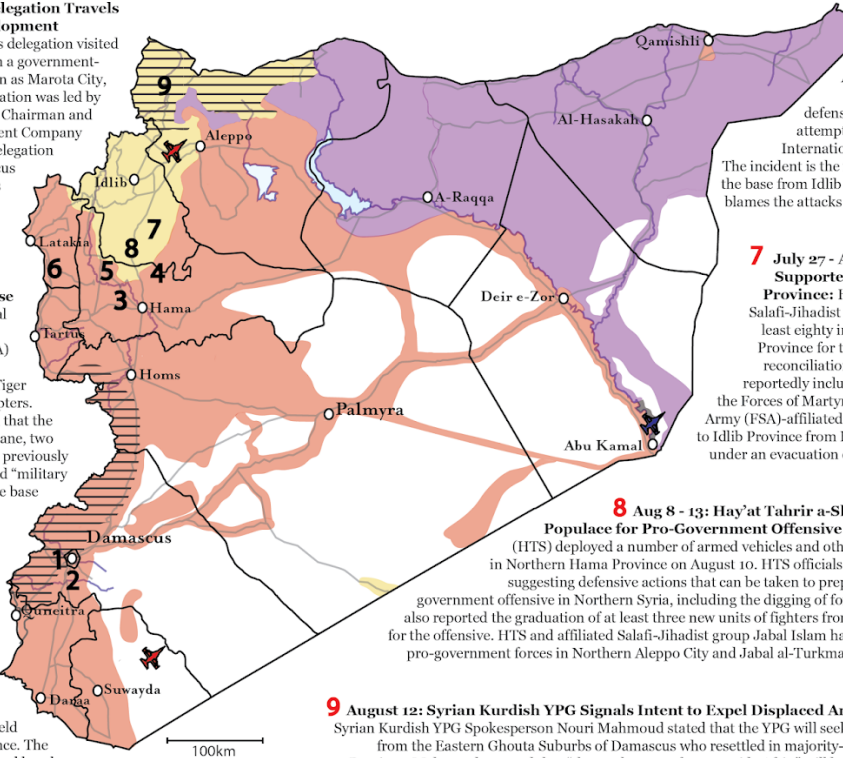
5 Aug 13 - 16: Pro-Government Forces Close Crossings into Idlib Province Amid Military Buildup: The Syrian Arab Army (SAA) closed frontline crossings at Qalaat al-Madiq and Morek in Northern Hama Province as a unspecified "preventative measure" on August 13. Pro-government forces later temporarily reopened crossings at Morek and Abu a-Duhur in Southern Idlib Province on August 16 in an attempt to persuade civilians to leave opposition-held areas of Idlib Province. The SAA warned that all of Idlib Province should be considered a "military zone" under the occupation of Syrian Al-Qaeda affiliate Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham (HTS).

6 August 13: Unknown Militants Escalate Frequency of Drone Attacks on Russian Military Base: Russia stated that its air defenses destroyed at least five drones attempting to reach the Bassel al-Assad International Airport on the Syrian Coast. The incident is the fifth such drone attack targeting the base from Idlib Province since August 8. Russia blames the attacks on Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham (HTS).

7 July 27 - Aug 6: HTS Cracks Down on Supporters of Reconciliation in Idlib Province: Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham (HTS) and Salafi-Jihadist group Ahrar a-Sham arrested at least eighty individuals across Southern Idlib Province for their alleged support for political reconciliation with Damascus. The detainees reportedly included at least seventy members of the Forces of Martyr Ahmed al-Abdu - a Free Syrian Army (FSA)-affiliated opposition group that relocated to Idlib Province from Eastern Qalamoun in April 2018 under an evacuation deal with Damascus and Russia.

8 Aug 8 - 13: Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham Prepares Forces, Local Populace for Pro-Government Offensive in Idlib: Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham (HTS) deployed a number of armed vehicles and other equipment toward front lines in Northern Hama Province on August 10. HTS officials have put out several statements suggesting defensive actions that can be taken to prepare opposition-held towns for a government offensive in Northern Syria, including the digging of fortified trenches. Pro-HTS media also reported the graduation of at least three new units of fighters from training camps in preparation for the offensive. HTS and affiliated Salafi-Jihadist group Jabal Islam have conducted limited attacks on pro-government forces in Northern Aleppo City and Jabal al-Turkman in Northern Latakia Province.

9 August 12: Syrian Kurdish YPG Signals Intent to Expel Displaced Arabs Living in Afrin Canton: Syrian Kurdish YPG Spokesperson Nouri Mahmoud stated that the YPG will seek to expel displaced Sunni Arabs from the Eastern Ghouta Suburbs of Damascus who resettled in majority-Kurdish Afrin Canton in Aleppo Province. Mahmoud stressed that "those who came from outside Afrin" will be a legitimate "target" in order to return Kurds to their homes in Afrin Canton. Local sources reported Turkey and affiliated opposition groups facilitated the movement of IDPs to Afrin Canton following their evacuation from Eastern Ghouta in April 2018.



Areas of Control*

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

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. ^{Formerly Jabhat al-Nusra}

*Control of Terrain Accurate as of 30 AUG 2018



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Syria Situation Report: August 16 – 28, 2018

1 Aug 21: Unknown Militants Target Syrian Government Official in Southern Syria:

Unidentified militants opened fire on a government convoy carrying Syrian Minister of Defense Gen. Ali Abdullah Ayyoub in Tarba in majority-Druze Suwayda Province. Local villagers reportedly shouted insults as the convoy retreated. Ayyoub had been conducting a tour of pro-government forces fighting against the Islamic State (IS) in Eastern Suwayda Province.

2 Aug 18: Abu Amara Special Tasks Battalion Conducts Second Assassination in Hama Province in Two Weeks:

The Abu Amara Special Tasks Battalion - an opposition group affiliated with Syrian Al-Qaeda affiliate Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham (HTS) and Salafi-Jihadist group Ahrar a-Sham - claimed to assassinate a member of the Palestine Branch of the Syrian Military Intelligence Directorate near Masyaf in Western Hama Province.

3 Aug 17: Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham Dissolves Shura Councils in Northern Hama Province:

Syrian Al-Qaeda affiliate Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham (HTS) dissolved its governing shura councils in opposition-held Northern Hama Province. HTS turned over governance to a set of local councils affiliated with the Syrian Interim Government. HTS-affiliated media confirmed the "reorganization" of dozens of local councils as part of a plan to provide administrative jobs for local residents. The plan will reportedly be overseen by an HTS official identified as Abu Radwan al-Khattabi.

4 Aug 7 - 27: Syrian Forces and Iranian Proxies Deploy to Borders of Idlib Province in Preparation for Offensive:

Pro-government forces deployed from Southern Syria to Northern Hama and Latakia Provinces between August 21 - 27. Liwa al-Quds, Liwa Imam Hussein, and other proxy forces backed by Iran also deployed to areas near Idlib Province from Damascus.

5 Aug 21: Al-Qaeda Leader Visits Front in Northern Latakia Province:

Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham (HTS) Emir Abu Muhammad al-Jolani visited positions held by HTS in Northern Latakia Province. HTS-affiliated media published photos of Jolani accompanied by a small group of unidentified officials at frontline positions in Kabani approximately eight miles southwest of Jisr a-Shughour in Western Idlib Province.

6 Aug 18: Unknown Militants Target Turkish-Backed Opposition Headquarters in Idlib Province:

Unknown militants detonated an explosive device targeting the headquarters of the National Liberation Front (NLF) - a coalition of opposition groups backed by Turkey including Salafi-Jihadist group Ahrar a-Sham - in Jabal Arbain near Ariha in Idlib Province. Some activists described the blast as a VBIED. The attack killed at least two people and injured several others.

7 Aug 19 - 20: Turkish-Backed Opposition Groups Join Arrest Campaign in Idlib Province:

Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham (HTS) and the National Liberation Front (NLF) backed by Turkey detained roughly thirty-five individuals across Idlib Province on charges of their support for reconciliation with Damascus. The arrests were concentrated in Maarat Misrin north of Idlib City.

8 Aug 19: Residents Continue to Protest Abuses by Syrian Democratic Forces in A-Raqqa City:

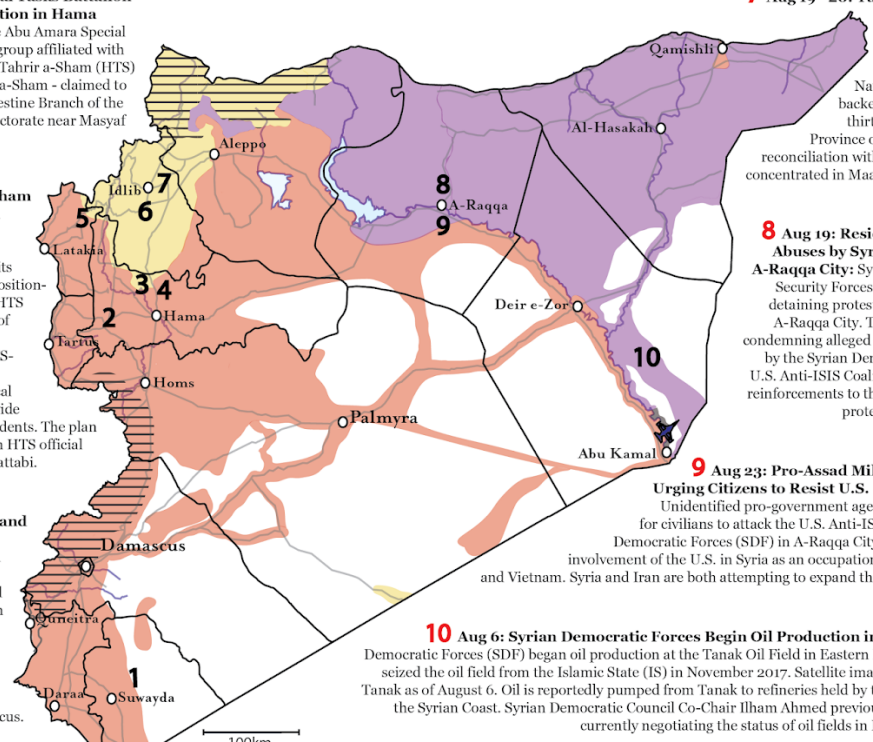
Syrian Kurdish Asayish Internal Security Forces opened fire on civilians while detaining protesters in the Mashlab District of A-Raqqa City. The protesters were reportedly condemning alleged abuses against local residents by the Syrian Democratic Forces backed by the U.S. Anti-ISIS Coalition. The SDF later deployed reinforcements to the district in order to quell the protests and arrest demonstrators.

9 Aug 23: Pro-Assad Militants Distribute Leaflets Urging Citizens to Resist U.S. and SDF in A-Raqqa City:

Unidentified pro-government agents distributed leaflets calling for civilians to attack the U.S. Anti-ISIS Coalition and allied Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in A-Raqqa City. The leaflets condemned the involvement of the U.S. in Syria as an occupation similar to Iraq, Afghanistan, and Vietnam. Syria and Iran are both attempting to expand their networks in Eastern Syria.

10 Aug 6: Syrian Democratic Forces Begin Oil Production in Eastern Syria:

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) began oil production at the Tanak Oil Field in Eastern Deir e-Zor Province. The SDF seized the oil field from the Islamic State (IS) in November 2017. Satellite images show active production at Tanak as of August 6. Oil is reportedly pumped from Tanak to refineries held by the government in Baniyas on the Syrian Coast. Syrian Democratic Council Co-Chair Ilham Ahmed previously stated that the SDF is not currently negotiating the status of oil fields in Eastern Syria with Damascus.



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