

Syria Situation Report: April 28-May 5, 2015

1 April 30: According to activists, a U.S.-led coalition airstrike targeting the ISIS-held town of Beir Mehli in eastern Aleppo Province allegedly killed over fifty people, a majority of which were civilians. U.S. CENTCOM spokesman Major Curt Kellogg stated that U.S.-led coalition airstrikes targeted and killed over 50 ISIS militants in Beir Mahli, and stressed that there is “no indication that any civilians were killed” in the strikes.

2 May 1-5: JN and Qalamoun-based rebel groups formed the “Jaysh Fatah al-Qalamoun” to coordinate their military activity against pro-regime forces in the border region. According to a local rebel commander, participants include JN, Ahrar al-Sham (HASI), the local “Hold Fast to the Rope of Allah Gathering,” and the FSA-affiliated Jaysh al-Qalamoun. Members of the Jaysh al-Fatah al-Qalamoun operations room launched an attack on the town of al-Jouba in eastern Qalamoun, seizing three positions from regime and Hezbollah forces. The attack follows a surprise attack by JN and rebel forces targeting Hezbollah and regime positions near Asal al-Ward along the Lebanese border.

3 May 04: JN reportedly detonated an explosives-laden motorcycle and an SVEST targeting regime Major General Mohammed Eid in the Rukn al-Din district in central Damascus city, wounding him. According to a JN statement, three JN fighters entered the district on a motorbike and stormed the regime’s military supply and logistics building, after which one detonated his SVEST inside the building and the two others died clashing with regime fighters, after which the motorcycle detonated. Regime sources subsequently denied any reports that Eid was wounded, stressing that regime forces had thwarted the “terrorist group” attack.

4 May 3: Regime forces attacked the town of Maydaa, southeast of Adra in the Eastern Ghouta suburbs of Damascus. According to prominent Damascus-based commander Zahran Alloush from Jaysh al-Islam, “if the army succeeds in taking Maydaa they could use it as a launchpad to storm Eastern Ghouta.”

5 May 1: JN detonated an SVBIED targeting besieged regime forces in the National Hospital south of Jisr al-Shughour, killing an unknown number of pro-regime fighters. Clashes are ongoing with involvement from Jaysh al-Fatah rebels.

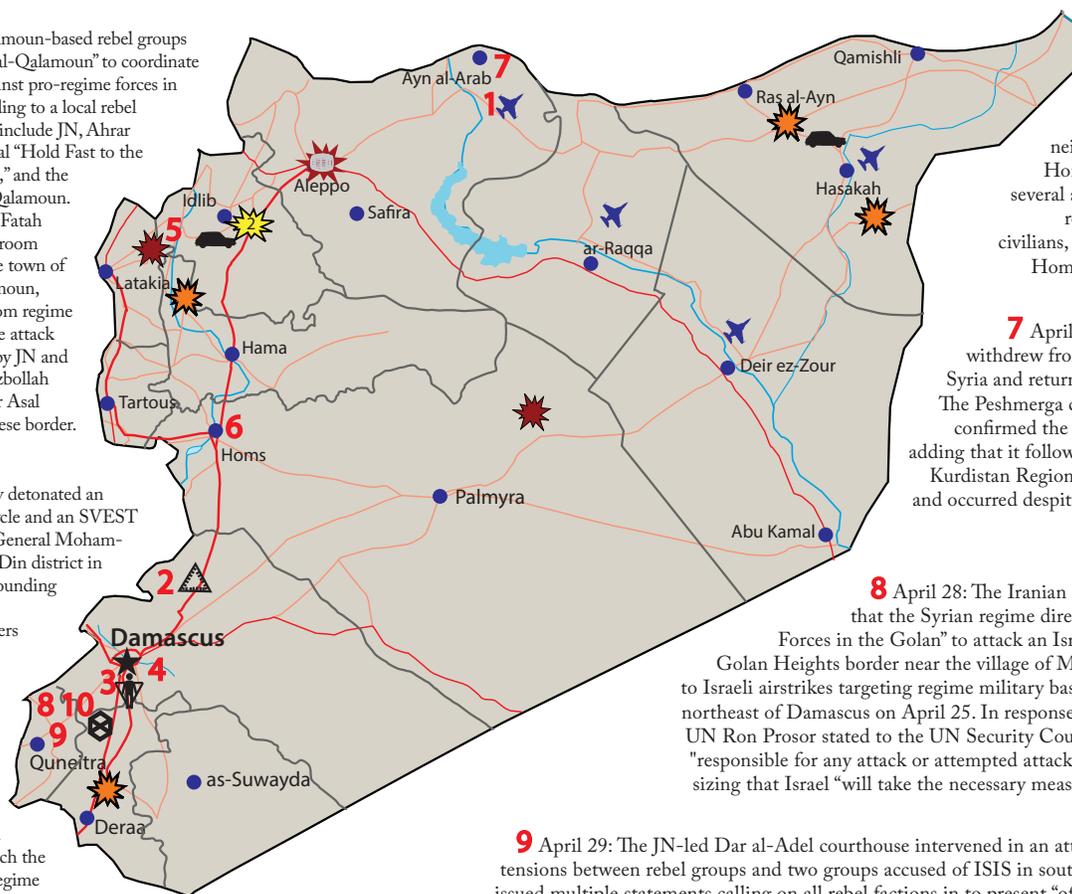
6 April 29 - 30: Regime forces clashed with National Defense Force (NDF) fighters in the Alawite-majority neighborhood of al-Zahraa in Homs city, killing and injuring several and accusing the fighters of robbing, kidnapping of local civilians, and planning to assassinate Homs Governor Talal al-Barazi.

7 April 29: Iraqi Peshmerga forces withdrew from Ayn al-Arab in northern Syria and returned to Irbil, Iraq via Turkey. The Peshmerga commander in Ayn al-Arab confirmed the withdrawal in an interview, adding that it followed discussions between the Kurdistan Regional Government and Turkey and occurred despite YPG interest in a continued Peshmerga presence.

8 April 28: The Iranian Fars News Agency claimed that the Syrian regime directed the “Syrian Resistance Forces in the Golan” to attack an Israeli military post along the Golan Heights border near the village of Majdal al-Shams in response to Israeli airstrikes targeting regime military bases in the Qalamoun region northeast of Damascus on April 25. In response, Israeli Ambassador to the UN Ron Prosor stated to the UN Security Council that the Syrian regime “responsible for any attack or attempted attack from its territory,” emphasizing that Israel “will take the necessary measures to protect its citizens.”

9 April 29: The JN-led Dar al-Adel courthouse intervened in an attempt to contain escalating tensions between rebel groups and two groups accused of ISIS in southern Syria. The courthouse issued multiple statements calling on all rebel factions in to present “offenders” to the courthouse.

10 April 28: Prominent FSA-affiliated groups claimed to have discussed the provision of “Arab air cover” or anti-aircraft missiles by regional actors for upcoming military operations in southern Syria. Meanwhile, the FSA-affiliated First Army announced the start of the Battle of “Break the Joints” targeting regime forces in the towns of Sa’sa’ and Maqrusah southwest of Damascus with the intention of cutting the regime supply line along the Damascus - Quneitra highway. The First Army and other rebel factions also launched an operation targeting the Regiment 137 base on the outskirts of the rebel-held town of Khan al-Shih southwest of Damascus, sparking heavy clashes.



- Iraqi Peshmerga
- United States
- YPG
- Opposition Forces
- Pro-Regime Forces
- ISIS
- Jabhat al-Nusra (JN)
- ☀ Alleged CW Attack
- ⊠ Declared Offensive
- ☘ SVBIED
- ☘ Major Clash
- ▲ New Operations Room
- ⚡ SVEST

Background Kinetic Activity

- ✈ Anti-ISIS Coalition Airstrikes
- ☀ Other clashes
- ☘ Major Barrel Bomb Attack



©2015 by the Institute for the Study of War

Violence Escalates in Syrian – Lebanese Border Region: It is unclear how pro-regime forces will respond as JN and rebel forces launch their campaign to widen zones of jihadist and rebel control in the border region. Despite early reports that Hezbollah has undertaken preparations for a wide-scale offensive in Qalamoun, a security source reported to the Lebanese news outlet The Daily Star that Hezbollah ultimately decided against a large offensive and will pursue more tactical objectives to contain jihadist actors in the border region. This could indicate that Hezbollah will submit to internal pressure to avoid an escalation in the border region that could encourage jihadist actors to execute attacks inside Lebanon. Hezbollah’s calculus may have also been influenced by video released by JN on May 5 in which one of the Lebanese Army hostages kidnapped by JN and ISIS in August 2014 calls on the Lebanese Shiite community to “stand up” to Hezbollah and stop the upcoming Hezbollah offensive in Qalamoun. In the video, the hostages stated that if Hezbollah proceeds with the operation “we will pay the price.” The video also confirms that a reported deal to release the hostages fell through in recent weeks. Nonetheless, Hezbollah Deputy Chief Sheikh Naim Qassem declared “the Qalamoun battle is coming.” Major offensive operations in the border region therefore remain possible. JN leader Abu Mohammed al-Joulani reiterated his desire to punish Hezbollah for its involvement in Syria in a statement in November 2014. JN is therefore likely to seek opportunities to escalate in Lebanon regardless of Hezbollah’s actions in the Qalamoun region.

Regional Actors Increase Support to Syrian Rebel Groups: The claim by moderate rebel groups in southern Syria that regional actors are considering providing some form of anti-aircraft capabilities in support of anti-Assad operations follows recent reports of increased weapons and aid provided to northern Syrian rebel groups by Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar. According to unidentified regional officials, these deliveries enabled recent victories by anti-Assad forces in Idlib Province. A series of meetings that occurred in Turkey beginning in late April between major rebel factions may support the possibility of regional intent to intervene directly as a component this increasing support. The leaders of prominent hardline Islamist groups Jaysh al-Islam and Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiya (HASI) were photographed together in a meeting in Turkey on May 3, in which they reportedly discussed a deepening cooperation in Syria. These two groups are powerful anti-Assad actors, and a deepened relationship between them could create a powerful military ally for regional actors that is capable of acting across multiple fronts. The hardline nature of these groups, however, makes them unlikely to support the emergence of a fully democratic and inclusive post-Assad Syrian state.