

Syria Situation Report: January 27 - February 02, 2015

1 January 27 – February 2: ISIS-affiliated news sources acknowledged the ISIS withdrawal from Ayn al-Arab/Kobane, stating that it had been prompted by high casualties and constant coalition airstrikes. Meanwhile, YPG forces continued advancing west, south, and east out of Ayn al-Arab, seizing at least thirty villages from ISIS amidst continuing coalition airstrikes.

2 January 28 – 29: The Hezbollah Quneitra Martyrs Brigade targeted an Israeli convoy in the disputed Sheba'a Farms area of the Golan Heights with an anti-tank missile, killing two Israeli soldiers and prompting mutual shelling across the Lebanese-Israeli border killing a Spanish UN peacekeeper. On January 29 Israel received a message via UNIFIL indicating that Hezbollah was not interested in further escalation.

3 January 31: Seven Islamist groups in Quneitra and Dera'a Provinces formed Jaysh al-Jihad, stating that their relations with other rebel factions will be based on "Islamic law" and indicating their intent to establish a Shari'a court.

4 January 29 – 31: Western-backed rebel group Harakat Hazm formally joined the Islamist-led Sham Front coalition following several days of clashes between JN and Harakat Hazm in western Aleppo Province JN seized several Harakat Hazm positions, including the Sheikh Suleiman military base, during the clashes. Meanwhile, JN and the Sham Front reportedly established the "Military Operations Room of the Southern Aleppo Countryside" on the same day.

5 January 30: YPG and regime forces in Hasaka city reached a ceasefire agreement following the intervention of a senior security delegation from Damascus. The agreement included a prisoner exchange, the formation of a "National Peace Council," and the arrest of the local regime NDF commander.

6 January 27 – 28: JN in the Eastern Qalamoun reportedly declared its withdrawal from all Shari'a bodies and agreements made with other rebel factions, although it stated that it will continue to coordinate against the regime and ISIS. Meanwhile, JN and ISIS militants reportedly clashed in the Qalamoun region along the Lebanese border after JN fighters stationed at a checkpoint opened fire on a vehicle carrying the local ISIS emir.

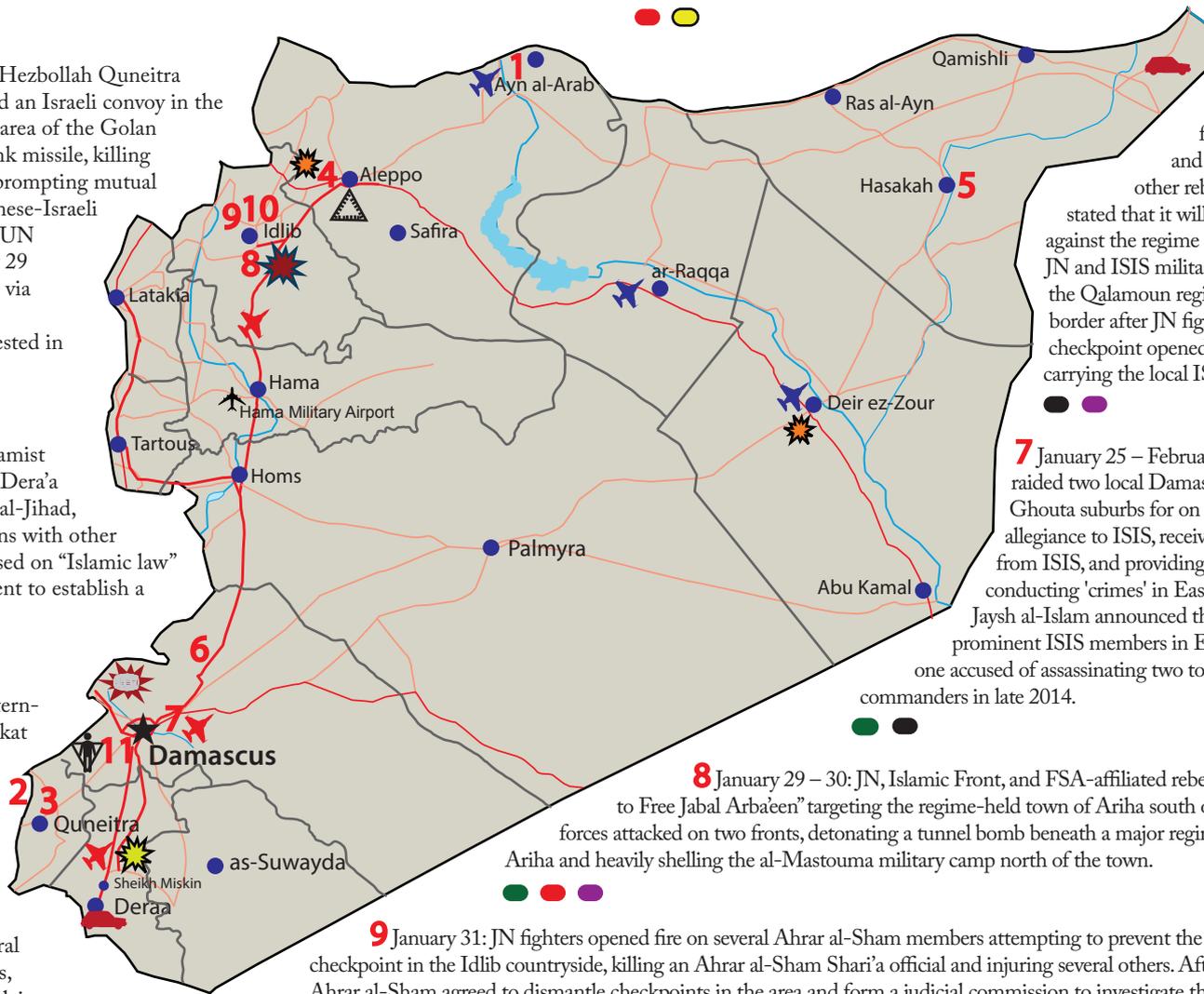
7 January 25 – February 2: Faylaq al-Rahman raided two local Damascus groups in the Eastern Ghouta suburbs for on charges of pledging allegiance to ISIS, receiving financial support from ISIS, and providing assistance to ISIS cells conducting 'crimes' in Eastern Ghouta. Meanwhile, Jaysh al-Islam announced the killing of two prominent ISIS members in Eastern Ghouta, including one accused of assassinating two top Jaysh al-Islam commanders in late 2014.

8 January 29 – 30: JN, Islamic Front, and FSA-affiliated rebels launched "The Battle to Free Jabal Arba'een" targeting the regime-held town of Ariha south of Idlib city. JN and rebel forces attacked on two fronts, detonating a tunnel bomb beneath a major regime position southeast of Ariha and heavily shelling the al-Mastouma military camp north of the town.

9 January 31: JN fighters opened fire on several Ahrar al-Sham members attempting to prevent the erection of a JN checkpoint in the Idlib countryside, killing an Ahrar al-Sham Shari'a official and injuring several others. After negotiations, JN and Ahrar al-Sham agreed to dismantle checkpoints in the area and form a judicial commission to investigate the incident.

10 February 2: Local rebel factions in the town of Ma'arat Misrim issued a statement demanding that JN turn over fighters suspected of involvement in the death of a local resident. The factions also stated that they do not recognize the local JN-affiliated "Dar al-Qadaa" courthouse and intend to close it down.

11 February 1: JN claimed an SVEST attack targeting a bus of Lebanese Shi'a pilgrims in the Old City of Damascus, killing at least nine and wounding nearly twenty.



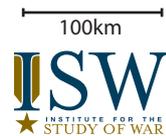
- IDF
- Opposition Forces
- Pro-Regime Forces
- ISIS
- YPG
- U.S.-Led Coalition
- Jabhat al-Nusra (JN)
- ▲ SVEST
- ★ Major Clash
- ▲ New Operations Room

Background Kinetic Activity

- ✈ Anti-ISIS Coalition Airstrikes
- ✈ Major Regime Airstrikes
- ★ Major Barrel Bomb Attack
- ★ Alleged CW Attack
- ★ Low-level clashes
- 🚗 VBIED

28 JAN: A VBIED detonated in the town of Mzeirab west of Dera'a city, killing at least ten civilians.

01 FEB: YPG forces foiled a VBIED attack in the town of al-Maadabah in northeastern Hasaka Province amid clashes with ISIS fighters in the area.



Content: Christopher Kosak and Jennifer Cafarella
Graphics: John Sauerhoff

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ISIS-Affiliated Rebels Raided in Damascus: The raids conducted by Faylaq al-Rahman and Jaysh al-Islam against rebel brigades alleged to have pledged allegiance to ISIS in Eastern Ghouta confirms continued ISIS effort to widen its influence in the capital despite continuous attacks from other rebel factions. As the YPG counter-offensive continues to roll back ISIS from Ayn al-Arab/Kobane, ISIS may seek to invigorate its footholds in Damascus and other parts of western Syria to offset losses in northwestern Syria.

JN Clashes with Rebels in Aleppo Province: The incorporation of Harakat Hazm into the Islamist-led Sham Front indicates growing integration of moderate elements into Islamist-dominated structures in northern Syria as international assistance to the moderate opposition fails to manifest. It also represents a successful maneuver to counter JN influence, effectively neutralizing ongoing Harakat Hazm-JN clashes by enveloping Harakat Hazm under the protection of the Sham Front. This move by the Sham Front is therefore an important indicator of the group's ability to withstand JN pressure. Nonetheless, the establishment of a joint southern Aleppo operations room between the Sham Front and JN likely constitutes a concession to JN that solidifies the cessation of hostilities in Aleppo in a way that preserves JN influence.

Regime Continues to Pursue a "Unified Syria": The Assad regime's war effort continues to pursue a "unified Syria." The regime's intervention to negotiate a resolution of the escalating conflict between the YPG and local NDF forces indicates regime commitment to maintaining its isolated outposts in Eastern Syria. Preservation of these outposts is utilized by the Assad regime to lay credence to the claim that the Syrian government can and will regain control of the entirety of the country. This position was echoed in the January 26-29 Moscow Talks between the regime and the regime-tolerated opposition, during which regime representatives called for the maintenance of Syrian "unity and sovereignty" in the face of "foreign interference" and "terrorism."