

Syria Situation Report: February 03-10, 2015

1 February 7: YPG forces operating within the Euphrates Volcano Operations room alongside three Syrian rebel brigades seized the Qara Qawzaq bridge from ISIS. They appear to be mobilizing for an attack against the ISIS-held towns of Serrin, proximate to the bridge, and Manbij, southwest across the Euphrates river.



2 February 3: A VBIED detonated in the town of Mzeirab in the southwestern countryside of Dera'a city, killing two civilians. This follows a similar VBIED attack in Mzeirab on January 28 that killed 10 civilians. According to the confession of an Iranian prisoner held by a rebel group affiliated with the Southern Front, the VBIED attacks were allegedly conducted by IRGC and Hezbollah sleeper cells.



3 February 3 – 9: Regime forces continued to heavily bombard the rebel-held town of Duma and surrounding areas in the Eastern Ghouta suburbs of Damascus. In response, Jaysh al-Islam declared the entire capital a "military zone" and began a retaliatory bombardment of the old city of Damascus and increased shelling in Latakia, offering to halt the bombardment in return for a cessation of the regime's air campaign in Eastern Ghouta. Significant clashes have occurred southeast and northeast of Duma, but regime forces have been unable to advance.



4 February 3-6: Damascus-based Islamist group Ajnad al-Sham accused JN of assassinating the commander of one of its component brigades in Irbeen. JN demanded evidence for the accusation and committed to holding any individual responsible if found guilty. On February 6, Ajnad al-Sham accused JN of assassinating a second commander in Irbeen.



5 February 5: Hezbollah began massing forces in the town of Kafr Yabous, north-west of Damascus on the Lebanese Border, amongst ongoing clashes with rebel forces in the area. Hezbollah displaced the IDP population residing in the town amid continuing regime bombardment of nearby rebel positions.



6 February 5-6: JN fighters stormed a Harakat Hazm headquarters near the village of Sheikh Ali in the western countryside of Aleppo, arresting 2 Hazm fighters. Clashes ended when Jaysh al-Mujahideen fighters acted as a "rapid intervention force" to de-escalate the situation.



7 February 5: The YPG and Aleppo-based Jabhat Shamiya coalition formed an alliance in northern Syria, agreeing to unify their judicial systems with rule by Shari'a law and to coordinate security in rebel and YPG-controlled areas.



8 February 6: Jabhat Shamiya announced a "Free Aleppo Operations Room" to defend Aleppo city against regime forces, stating that all members will participate "without exception" and encouraging other factions to join.

9 February 9: Pro-regime forces launched a major operation in northwestern Dera'a province to seize rebel positions near the towns of Deir al-Adas and Kafr Shams. IRGC commanders appear to be leading the operation, which reportedly has heavy participation from Hezbollah and the Iranian-backed Shi'a militia umbrella group Liwa Abu Fadl al-Abas (LAFA). In response, the Southern Front's First Army announced a new operation titled "Break the Claws" targeting regime positions near Sanamayn and Kafr Shams.

10 February 8: Jaysh al-Islam and Ahrar al-Sham (HASI) announced the beginning of the "Battle to Free Fu'ah," targeting the Shi'a-majority town of Fu'ah north of Idlib city. HASI reportedly seized high ground proximate to the town after detonating a tunnel bomb under a regime stronghold in the area. This follows an attack by regime forces on the town of al-Kfir, southwest of Idlib city, in an attempt to disrupt rebel supply lines running southeast through the Ghab plain to Hama.



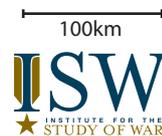
11 February 6-9: "ISIS sources" reportedly confirmed that the organization plans to withdraw from areas under its control in the countryside of Aleppo, including the cities of al-Bab, Manbij, Jarablus, and Akhtarin in order to redeploy to Raqqa, Deir ez-Zour, and Hasaka. ISIS reportedly already transferred family members, weapons, and equipment from the area. In addition, ISIS forces have reportedly withdrawn from several positions east of the Deir ez-Zour Military Airbase and from bases in the border town of Abu Kamal.



- Opposition Forces
- Pro-Regime Forces
- ISIS
- YPG
- Jabhat al-Nusra (JN)
- New Operations Room
- Declared Offensive
- VBIED

Background Kinetic Activity

- Anti-ISIS Coalition Airstrikes
- Major Regime Airstrikes
- Major Barrel Bomb Attack



Content: Jennifer Cafarella
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ISIS Continues to Lose Ground in Northeastern Aleppo: ISIS appears to be contracting in response to continued gains by the YPG and allied rebel forces. This may indicate ISIS intent to accept recent losses to the YPG and shift resources to other fronts such as Hasaka or eastern Homs. ISIS is unlikely, however, to fully retreat or to reallocate resources without consolidating a new defensive line. As ISIS reassesses its key terrain and shifts to accommodate the changes in its northern battlespace, ISIS mobilization in Deir ez-Zour may indicate a wider recalculation of the ISIS war effort in its Syrian theatre.

Rebel – YPG Relations Deepen in Aleppo: The decision by the Islamic Front-led Jabhat Shamiya coalition to unite governance and security functions with the YPG in Aleppo indicates deepening YPG-rebel relations in northern Syria that complement joint YPG and rebel military action against ISIS in the Ayn al-Arab/Kobani countryside. This may bolster anti-ISIS ranks in northern Syria and contribute to continued success in the fight against ISIS in that area. Nonetheless, hardline jihadist elements such as JN and the Jabhat Ansar al-Din coalition likely view this unification as problematic, and may emerge in defiance of this accord. JN has historically fought against the YPG, condemning it for failing to join the armed Syrian revolution against the Assad regime. However, the establishment of a new joint operations room in Aleppo city serves to preserve the influence of both JN and Jabhat Ansar al-Din, and may constitute an attempt by Aleppo rebels to preserve their beneficial relationship with JN and ensure its continued support in the defense of Aleppo city.

Iranian Proxies Mobilize in Southern Syria: The operation launched by pro-regime forces in northwestern Dera'a province marks the first significant regime offensive in southern Syria since a regime counter-offensive against the town of Nawa in May 2014. Reports of Iranian command of the operation follow recent indicators of increasing IRGC and Hezbollah activity in the area, including reports of IRGC-linked sleeper cells and a January 18 Israeli airstrike that killed a top IRGC commander along with a prominent Hezbollah member, Jihad Mughniyah. Increasing Iranian involvement may provide a desperately needed reinvigoration of the regime's southern campaign in addition to potentially serving larger Iranian strategic objectives by positioning Iranian forces in closer proximity to the disputed Israeli-controlled Golan Heights.