

# Syria Update: December 30, 2014 - January 6, 2015

**1** January 3 - 4: Jaysh al-Islam seized dozens of Jaysh al-Umma positions in Eastern Ghouta and arrested several of the group's leaders in an alleged "anti-corruption" campaign, forcing several hundred Jaysh al-Umma fighters to surrender. Three other rebel groups in Eastern Ghouta - including Ahrar al-Sham - released a joint statement denying direct participation in the operation. Jaysh al-Islam's campaign follows the assassination of two Jaysh al-Umma commanders by unknown gunmen on January 3.

**6** December 31 - January 1: Syrian President Bashar al-Asad allegedly paid a New Year's Eve visit to SAA soldiers in the Jobar neighborhood of eastern Damascus amidst heavy ongoing clashes between regime and rebel forces in the area. Meanwhile, on January 1, the majority of rebel groups operating in Jobar reportedly unified into a single military body named 'Jund al-A'asima' (Soldiers of the Capital).

**2** December 29 - January 5: YPG forces advanced in central and southern Ayn al-Arab, seizing several ISIS positions including the government square area and killing senior ISIS spiritual leader Othman al-Nazih. SOHR reported that ISIS militants deployed two SVBIEDs and a unit of ten fighters wearing SVESTs during overnight clashes on December 29-30.

**3** January 2: Three FSA-affiliated rebel groups in Dera'a Province - the Syrian Revolutionaries Front (SRF), the Hamza Brigades, and the 1st Artillery Regiment - announced their union as the FSA 'First Army.'

**4** December 28: ISIS arrested the commander of the ISIS-allied rebel 'Allahu Akbar' Brigade in Abu Kamal after he refused to carry out orders to deploy fighters under his command to Iraq. Members of the brigade reportedly clashed with other ISIS militants on the outskirts of Abu Kamal after learning that their commander had been detained.

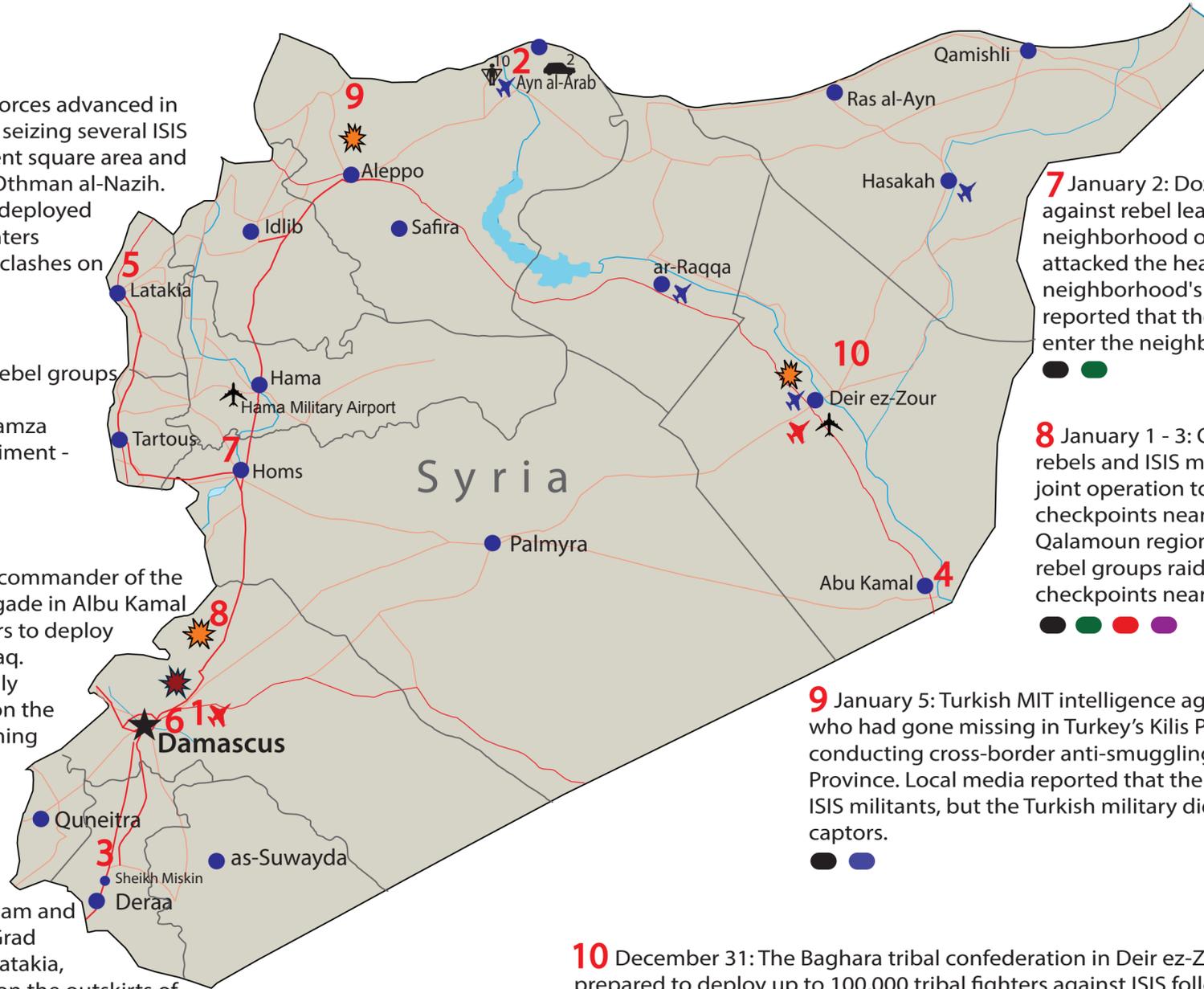
**5** December 30 - January 1: Islamic Front members Jaysh al-Islam and Ahrar al-Sham launched over 50 Grad rockets at regime positions near Latakia, striking several agricultural areas on the outskirts of the city. The rockets were allegedly captured from the Wadi al-Deif military base in southern Idlib Province.

**7** January 2: Dozens of local residents protested against rebel leaders in the besieged al-Wa'er neighborhood of Homs city and reportedly attacked the headquarters of the neighborhood's Shari'a authority. Some activists reported that the protesters called for ISIS to enter the neighborhood.

**8** January 1 - 3: On January 1, FSA-affiliated rebels and ISIS militants reportedly conducted a joint operation to raid five Hezbollah and NDF checkpoints near the village of Falita in the Qalamoun region. On January 3, JN and other rebel groups raided two additional regime checkpoints near Falita.

**9** January 5: Turkish MIT intelligence agents recovered a Turkish soldier who had gone missing in Turkey's Kilis Province on January while conducting cross-border anti-smuggling operations into Syria's Aleppo Province. Local media reported that the soldier had been kidnapped by ISIS militants, but the Turkish military did not confirm the identity of his captors.

**10** December 31: The Baghara tribal confederation in Deir ez-Zour Province claimed to be prepared to deploy up to 100,000 tribal fighters against ISIS following the abduction of three sons of Baghara head Sheikh Nawaf al-Bashir. Meanwhile, ISIS continued a campaign of arrests and property seizures targeting former opposition leaders in the province.



- Opposition Forces
- Pro-Regime Forces
- ISIS
- YPG
- Turkish Military
- Jabhat al-Nusra (JN)
- SVEST
- SVBIED
- Major Clash

**Background Kinetic Activity**

- Anti-ISIS Coalition Airstrikes
- Major Regime Airstrikes
- Low-level clashes



Content: Christopher Kozak  
Graphics: Brian Fisher

**Anti-ISIS Tensions Rise in Deir ez-Zour Province:** ISIS has relied on the submission and occasional participation of rebel groups and Sunni tribes to maintain its control over large swathes of Deir ez-Zour Province, but these negotiated agreements appear to be coming under strain as ISIS shifts its force posture in the province from a phase of consolidation to one of enforcement. In a parallel to ISIS' strategy regarding Sunni tribal leaders in Iraq, ISIS forces have enacted an arrest-and-intimidation campaign in Deir ez-Zour targeting influential figures representing potential sources of opposition to ISIS. Reports regarding the insubordination of the 'Allahu Akbar' Brigade, which nominally falls under ISIS command, as well as the apparent violation of ISIS' political truce with the al-Baghara tribal confederation suggest that this heavy-handed approach may exacerbate anti-ISIS sentiment in the province. However, it is unclear whether this will translate to heightened anti-ISIS activity in light of the display of heavy force brought by ISIS against active resistance during the She'tat tribal uprising in late summer 2014.

**Jaysh al-Islam Consolidates Power in Eastern Ghouta:** Jaysh al-Islam's seizure of Jaysh al-Umma positions and leadership effectively eliminates a competitor to Jaysh al-Islam in Eastern Ghouta and continues Jaysh al-Islam leader Zahran Alloush's consolidation of direct control in the Damascus area. The strike against Jaysh al-Umma was framed as an 'anti-corruption' operation, echoing language commonly used by JN in its campaigns against moderate rebel groups in northern Syria. This unilateral action by Jaysh al-Islam may threaten the stability of the Eastern Ghouta Unified Command, of which Jaysh al-Umma was also a member. However, prominent groups in the Unified Command released a joint statement reaffirming their commitment to the Command while simultaneously distancing themselves from the operation against Jaysh al-Umma.

**Regime Forces Under Pressure in the Qalamoun:** Successful rebel operations targeting pro-regime checkpoints near Falita suggests that JN, ISIS, and FSA-affiliated rebel groups operating in the Qalamoun may be intensifying their operations in the region. The continuation of this trend could directly threaten key Hezbollah and regime supply lines north of Damascus along the Lebanese border.