

Syria Update: November 25 - December 2, 2014

1 November 26-30: JN and allied groups seized at least 15 towns and villages from remaining FSA forces in the Jabal al-Zawiya region of Idlib Province. Some residents and local fighters initially resisted JN's imposition of control, however JN executions of FSA fighters appears to have succeeded in deterring further resistance.

2 November 28: A JN convoy entered the town of Rastan, north of Homs City to arrest the commander the FSA-affiliated Khaled ibn al-Waleed Brigades, which JN claimed was wanted by a local Sharia court. JN also claimed the participation of Ahrar al-Sham and the Homs Legion in the advance.

3 November 25: Rebel forces captured five checkpoints near Yabroud from Lebanese Hezbollah forces following an increase in tensions between Hezbollah and regime NDF militia forces in the area.

4 November 25: Regime and rebel forces enacted a truce in the town of Ayn al-Fijeh, northwest of Damascus City after rebels allegedly cut the water supply to parts of Damascus city following a failed regime attempt to capture the town on November 21.

5 November 27-30: Regime forces supported by Lebanese Hezbollah, Iraqi Shi'a militia Kata'ib Sayyid Shuhada, and IRGC forces seized the eastern district of Sheikh Miskin amidst heavy aerial bombardment.

6 November 29 – December 02: An ISIS attack against the Ayn al-Arab/Kobane border crossing using two SVBIEDs and two SVESTs amidst heavy shelling was repelled by YPG forces supported by Iraqi Peshmerga. The YPG alleged that ISIS mounted the attack from Turkish territory, although Turkey denied these claims. On December 2, Chechen ISIS fighters reportedly launched a renewed assault on the town's eastern neighborhoods, suffering high casualties including a Chechen commander.

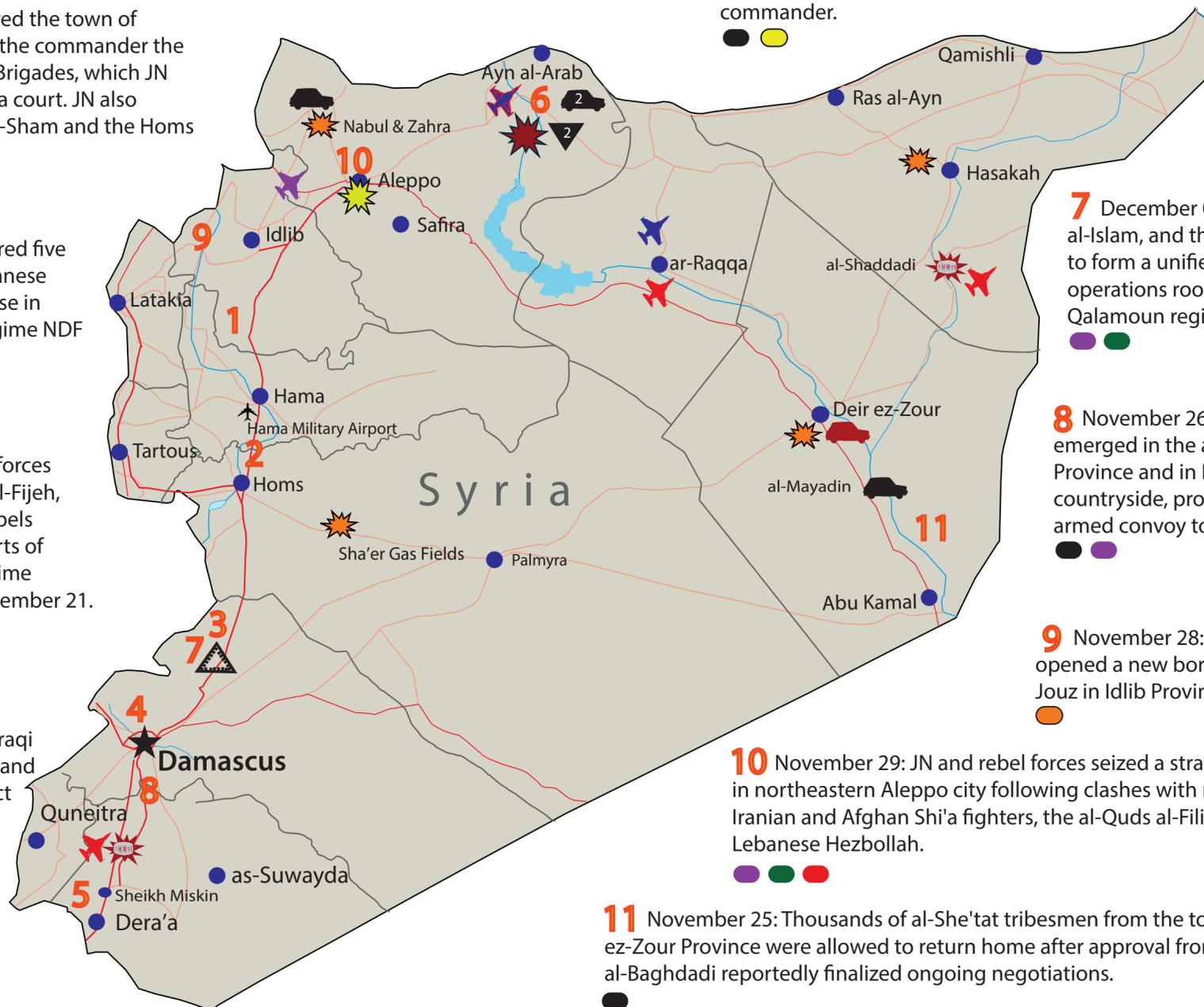
7 December 02: JN, Ahrar al-Sham, Jaysh al-Islam, and three other rebel groups agreed to form a unified leadership council, joint operations room, and Sharia court in the Qalamoun region.

8 November 26: ISIS sleeper cells reportedly emerged in the al-Lajat area in northern Dera'a Province and in Ber Qaseb in the Damascus countryside, prompting JN to deploy a heavily armed convoy to the area.

9 November 28: The Turkish Government opened a new border crossing at Khirbet Jouz in Idlib Province.

10 November 29: JN and rebel forces seized a strategic hill in the al-Brejji area in northeastern Aleppo city following clashes with regime forces supported by Iranian and Afghan Shi'a fighters, the al-Quds al-Filistini Brigade, and Lebanese Hezbollah.

11 November 25: Thousands of al-She'tat tribesmen from the town of Granij in eastern Deir ez-Zour Province were allowed to return home after approval from ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi reportedly finalized ongoing negotiations.



- Opposition Forces
- Pro-Regime Forces
- ISIS
- YPG
- Jabhat al-Nusra (JN)
- U.S.-Led Coalition
- Turkey
- ★ Major Clash
- ▼ SVEST
- 🚗 SVBIED
- △ New Operations Room

Background Kinetic Activity

- ✈ U.S. Airstrike on Khorasan Group
- ✈ Anti-ISIS Coalition Airstrikes
- ✈ Major Regime Airstrikes
- 🚗 VBIED
- ★ Low-level clashes
- ★ Alleged Chlorine Gas Attack
- ★ Major Barrel Bomb Attack

**ISIS detonated a VBIED against regime forces in the industrial area of Deir ez-Zour City amidst ongoing clashes*
**An SVBIED detonated in the town of al-Mayadin in Deir ez-Zour, with no group claiming responsibility*
**JN detonated an SVBIED against the town of Zahra north of Aleppo city amidst ongoing clashes with regime forces*



by Jennifer Cafarella and Christopher Kozak

Rebels Formalize New Command Structure: The formation of a new joint military command for the Syrian opposition has somewhat offset the setback suffered by moderate rebels due to JN's continued consolidation of direct control in northwestern Syria. 72 rebel groups including prominent members of the Islamic Front, the Free Syrian Army, and several groups believed to receive western backing in the form of U.S. TOW missiles formally established the Syrian Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) on November 29. The new body is independent from the defunct Free Syrian Army Supreme Military Command, and may prove effective in reconsolidating rebel forces, albeit with an increased role of Islamist groups such as Jaysh al-Islam that have a history of hardline positions. Statements by the council's founding leaders after the initiative was first declared in August indicated that the RCC did not constitute an attempt to sideline JN or counter its role within the opposition. It therefore remains unclear whether this rebel consolidation will impact JN's influence within the Syrian opposition.

ISIS Reinigorates Ayn al-Arab Offensive: ISIS launched two significant attacks against YPG forces in Ayn al-Arab/Kobani. Although neither attack made concrete gains, the deployment of valuable resources such as multiple SVBIEDs and Chechen fighters believed to comprise an elite ISIS unit indicates that ISIS may still view Ayn al-Arab as a primary line of effort despite recent tactical setbacks and the ongoing coalition air campaign.

Iranian Support Allows Regime to Advance in Dera'a: The visible role adopted by IRGC, Lebanese Hezbollah, and Iraqi Shi'a militia fighters in the regime's offensive against Sheikh Miskin in Dera'a province signals a deepening reliance by the regime on Iranian support to its military campaign. Reported tensions in Qalamoun between Hezbollah and regime NDF militias indicate that there may be a limit to Hezbollah's willingness to deepen its involvement in the regime's campaign, and it is possible that IRGC or Iranian-backed Iraqi Shi'a militias would be leveraged to fill manpower requirements Hezbollah is unable or unwilling to fill. A statement by a U.S. defense official on December 2 shed light on Iran's deepening regional involvement, confirming that Iran is conducting airstrikes against ISIS in Iraq within the same airspace used by the U.S.-led anti-ISIS coalition. It is possible this cooperation could extend to Syria, where coalition airstrikes against ISIS in Raqqa have occurred in close proximity to strikes ostensibly conducted by the regime on the same day on at least two occasions. Iranian support to the regime's air campaign would likely greatly assist in offsetting the regime's considerable manpower shortages, especially in eastern and southern Syria.