

# Syria Update: December 3 - 9, 2014

**1** December 2 - 9: ISIS launched an offensive against the Deir ez-Zour Military Airport, seizing control over several villages and checkpoints on the eastern outskirts of the base after clashes involving two SVBIED attacks. On December 6 and 7, ISIS militants launched two separate assaults spearheaded by two additional SVBIEDs against the airport itself but were forced to withdraw following heavy shelling and an alleged regime deployment of chlorine gas. ISIS forces also engaged in heavy clashes with the regime in the southeastern neighborhoods of Deir ez-Zour city which involved a tank-borne SVBIED.

**2** December 3: JN detonated a car bomb in the northern Masakin Barzeh neighborhood of Damascus city, killing four regime soldiers.

**3** December 2 - 9: YPG forces advanced in southern Ayn al-Arab/Kobane amidst ongoing clashes with ISIS which included the detonation of two SVBIEDs in the eastern districts of the town. On December 3, a relief force of 150 Iraqi Peshmerga arrived in the town to replace the Peshmerga fighters operating in the city.

**4** December 2 - 8: JN, Ansar al-Din, and other rebel forces reportedly advanced against the regime in several areas northeast of Aleppo city near Handarat and the Aleppo Central Prison. Meanwhile, a tunnel bomb near the Aleppo Citadel destroyed a historic mosque, sparking conflicting accusations of responsibility between rebels and the regime.

**5** December 7: JN and FSA-affiliated rebel groups reportedly seized the eastern district of Sheikh Miskin, north of Dera'a city, following a JN assault which included a dual SVBIED-VBIED attack against regime positions. One of the vehicles used in the attack was a UN peacekeeping vehicle ostensibly captured along the Golan Heights.

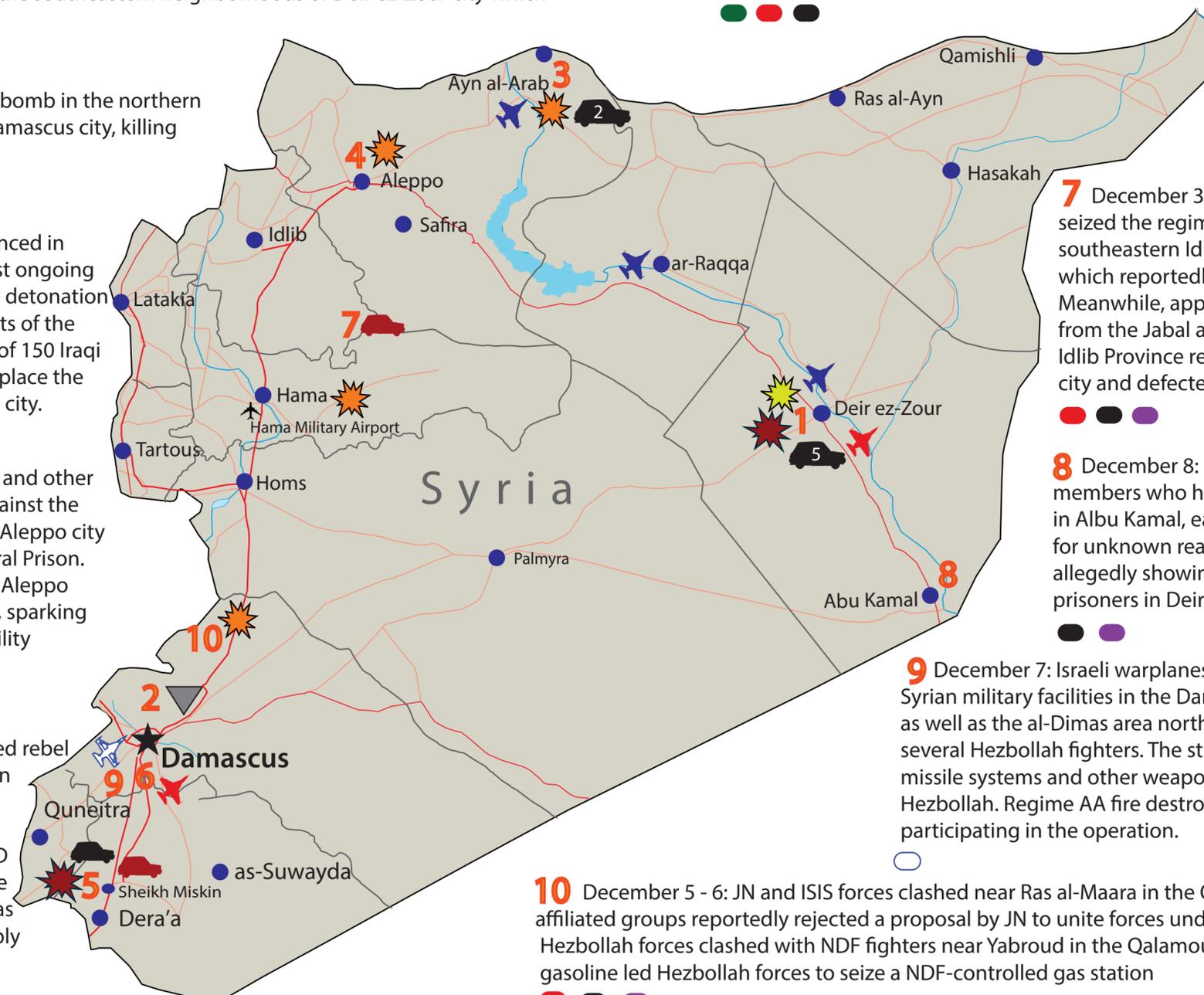
**6** December 3 - 9: ISIS militants clashed with regime and Hezbollah forces in the Hajar al-Aswad neighborhood of southern Damascus city and published a photo set claiming to show a large number of local residents pledging allegiance to ISIS. Meanwhile, Jaysh al-Islam reported clashes with ISIS amidst over fifty regime airstrikes in the Bir al-Qaseb region southeast of Damascus. ISIS later released images of a small reinforcement convoy deployed to the area.

**7** December 3 - 5: JN and other rebel forces seized the regime-held village of Abu Dali in southeastern Idlib Province following clashes which reportedly involved a JN VBIED attack. Meanwhile, approximately sixty JN members from the Jabal al-Zawiya region of southern Idlib Province reportedly traveled to ar-Raqqa city and defected to ISIS.

**8** December 8: ISIS arrested sixty former JN members who had pledged allegiance to ISIS in Abu Kamal, eastern Deir ez-Zour Province, for unknown reasons. Footage later emerged allegedly showing ISIS militants abusing JN prisoners in Deir ez-Zour.

**9** December 7: Israeli warplanes launched airstrikes against Syrian military facilities in the Damascus International Airport as well as the al-Dimas area northwest of Damascus, killing several Hezbollah fighters. The strikes allegedly targeted missile systems and other weapons meant for delivery to Hezbollah. Regime AA fire destroyed an Israeli drone participating in the operation.

**10** December 5 - 6: JN and ISIS forces clashed near Ras al-Maara in the Qalamoun region after ISIS-affiliated groups reportedly rejected a proposal by JN to unite forces under a single umbrella. Meanwhile, Hezbollah forces clashed with NDF fighters near Yabroud in the Qalamoun region, after a dispute over gasoline led Hezbollah forces to seize a NDF-controlled gas station



- Major Clash
- Opposition Forces
- Pro-Regime Forces
- ISIS
- YPG
- Jabhat al-Nusra (JN)
- U.S.-Led Coalition
- IDF
- SVBIED
- Car Bomb
- VBIED
- Alleged Chlorine Gas Attack

**Background Kinetic Activity**

- Israeli Defense Force Airstrikes
- Anti-ISIS Coalition Airstrikes
- Major Regime Airstrikes
- Low-level clashes



by Jennifer Cafarella and Christopher Kozak

**ISIS Launches Offensive against Deir ez-Zour Airport:** The ISIS offensive against the Deir ez-Zour Military Airport has now achieved gains similar to its failed attempt to seize the base in early September 2014. However, ISIS's final approach on the airport will likely prove difficult due to the presence of well-equipped Republican Guard units on the front, the availability of Syrian Air Force support, and the airport's position at the end of a relatively secure line of communication (as opposed to regime facilities previously overrun by ISIS, such as Tabqa Airbase in ar-Raqqa Province). Notably, there have been no indications of a major drawdown of ISIS forces in Ayn al-Arab to support the operation in Deir ez-Zour, suggesting that ISIS possesses sufficient manpower in Eastern Syria to conduct two simultaneous offensives.

**Ahrar al-Sham Reconstitutes After Leadership Decapitation:** Two Islamic Front member groups announced their merger with Ahrar al-Sham (HASI) on December 8, reconstituting HASI as a meaningful fighting force after it lost most of its senior leadership in an explosion on September 9, 2014. This merger follows a trend of consolidation within the Islamic Front and indicates the continued growth of Syria's Islamist opposition despite setbacks. A signatory to the Revolutionary Command Council, HASI remains an important rebel group with a geographical footprint across much of western Syria.

**Regime Targeted by Israeli Strikes:** The IDF airstrikes conducted around Damascus are in line with previous IDF strikes in Syria targeting weapons shipments and missile components allegedly meant for delivery to Lebanese Hezbollah and it is likely that the Syrian regime will not respond in order to avoid further escalation. However, the Israeli Air Force's ability to conduct airstrikes unopposed in key locations around the regime's capitol may indicate weaknesses in the Syrian air defense network which would be relevant to the discussion of the Turkish proposal to impose a no-fly zone over parts of northern Syria.