

Syria Situation Report: April 9-15, 2016

1 April 10: Syrian premier announces upcoming operation to seize Aleppo city. Syrian Prime Minister Wael al-Halqi announced Russia and Syria are preparing a joint operation to seize Aleppo city and “blockade all illegal armed groups” that have violated the ongoing ‘cessation of hostilities’. The Russian General Staff denied plans for any operation to “storm” Aleppo but noted that both countries aim to “disrupt the plans of Jabhat a-Nusra” in Syria. Pro-regime forces launched several attacks against the opposition-held Handarat District amidst reports that thousands of pro-regime fighters have begun to mass near the city.

2 April 9-15: Islamic State mounts counter-attack along Syrian-Turkish border. IS recaptured the key border town of a-Rai and at least ten additional villages after launching a major counter-offensive against Turkish-backed opposition groups in northern Aleppo province. The advance reverses several weeks of gains for opposition forces that seized a-Rai on April 7. IS also launched multiple rocket salvos into the town of Kilis in Southern Turkey, wounding at least 20 civilians and prompting Turkey to retaliate with cross-border artillery fire.

3 April 9: Violence in southern Aleppo province threatens to shatter ‘cessation of hostilities’. Jabhat a-Nusra and other opposition groups mounted a failed offensive against pro-regime forces in southern Aleppo province on April 9, seizing four villages for a short period of time before being forced to retreat due to heavy Russian and Syrian airstrikes. Pro-regime forces later attempted to seize the opposition-held town of al-Eis on April 12 but withdrew with heavy casualties in the face of stiff opposition.

4 April 8-9: Islamic State expands control over Yarmouk Camp in south Damascus. IS seized several positions in Yarmouk Camp from Jabhat a-Nusra after clashes ignited in the 15th Street Neighborhood. IS and Jabhat a-Nusra have maintained joint control over large parts of Yarmouk Camp since seizing the district in April 2015. The clashes represent a further attempt by IS to consolidate its military power on the periphery of the capital.

9 April 13: Medical workers in 10 hospitals go on strike in opposition-held Aleppo city. Employees at ten hospitals suspended all work with the exception of emergencies on April 13 after a local opposition faction allegedly killed a medical worker. Demonstrators accuse the rebel faction Jabhat a-Turkman of subjecting the worker to torture including electrical shocks, severe beatings, and hanging. The Aleppo Sharia Court announced it would “carry out the appropriate punishment for those whose involvement in the crime is proven.” Jabhat a-Turkman is a 50-member battalion that left from the Free Syrian Army (FSA)-affiliated Sultan Murad Division two months ago.

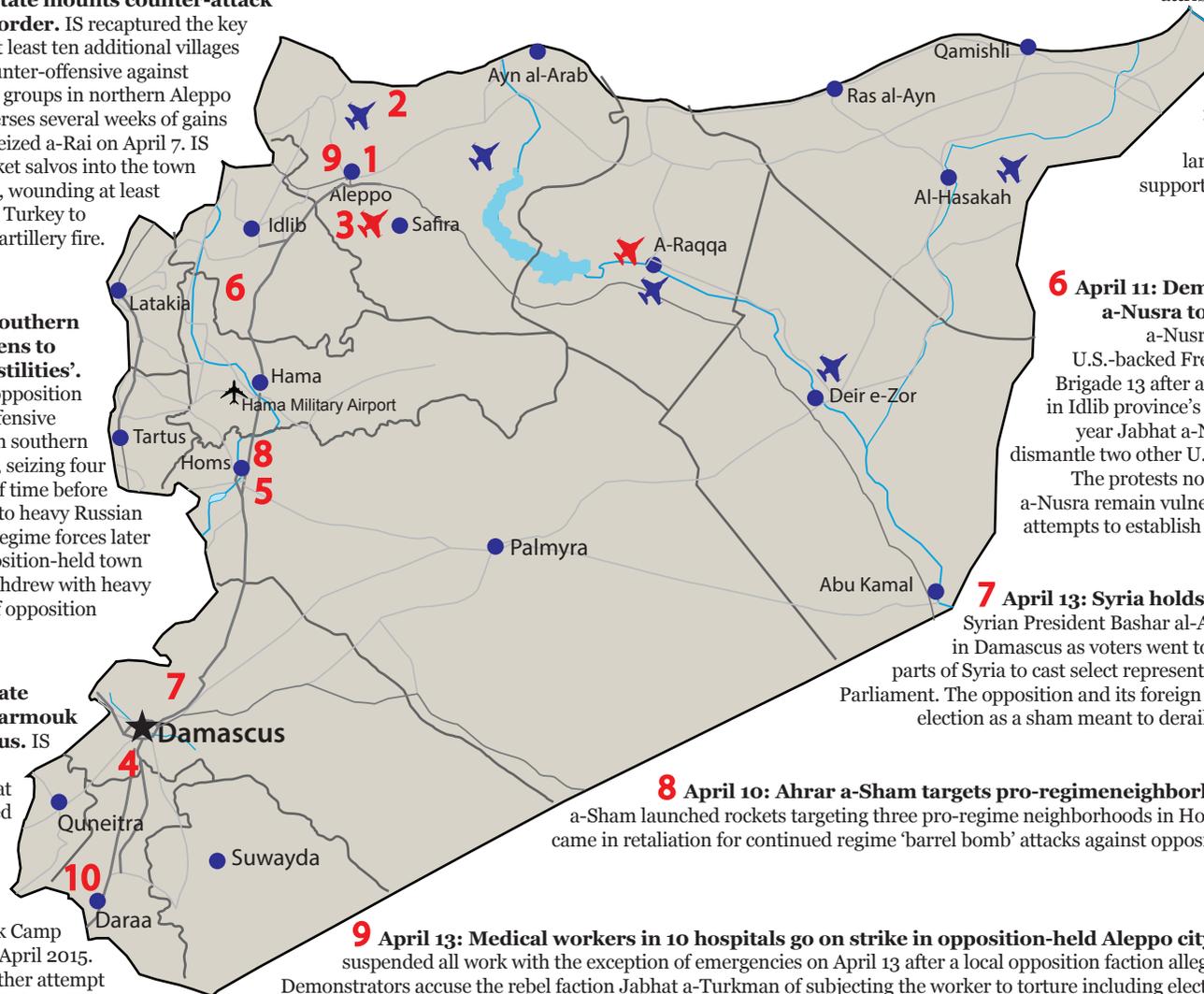
10 April 9-15: Clashes continue against alleged Islamic State affiliates in southern Syria. Jabhat a-Nusra, Ahrar a-Sham, and the Free Syrian Army (FSA)-affiliated Southern Front clashed with alleged IS affiliates Liwa Shuhada al-Yarmouk and Harakat al-Muthanna in western Dera'a province. The violence has displaced an estimated 2,000 families towards the Jordanian border since it began on March 21. An unverified statement circulated on Twitter claimed that Harakat al-Muthanna conducted a full merger with Liwa Shuhada al-Yarmouk on April 12, although local activists later disputed this account.

5 April 12: Russian attack helicopter crashes near Homs city. A Russian Mi-28N ‘Havoc’ helicopter gunship crashed near Homs city, killing both pilots. The Russian Ministry of Defense attributed the crash to a “technical issue” while anonymous sources claimed that the low-flying aircraft had collided with an obstacle at night. The incident highlights Russia’s recent shift from large-scale airstrikes to close air support of the Syrian Arab Army and its allies.

6 April 11: Demonstrations force Jabhat a-Nusra to release prisoners. Jabhat a-Nusra released detainees from the U.S.-backed Free Syrian Army (FSA) affiliate Brigade 13 after a month of protests by citizens in Idlib province’s Maarat a-Numan. In the past year Jabhat a-Nusra used similar pretexts to dismantle two other U.S.-backed opposition groups. The protests nonetheless suggest that Jabhat a-Nusra remain vulnerable to local resistance in its attempts to establish an emirate in northern Syria.

7 April 13: Syria holds parliamentary elections. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and his wife cast ballots in Damascus as voters went to the polls across regime-held parts of Syria to cast select representatives for the 250-seat Syrian Parliament. The opposition and its foreign backers have condemned the election as a sham meant to derail ongoing UN-led peace talks.

8 April 10: Ahrar a-Sham targets pro-regime neighborhoods in Homs city. Ahrar a-Sham launched rockets targeting three pro-regime neighborhoods in Homs city. The attacks allegedly came in retaliation for continued regime ‘barrel bomb’ attacks against opposition-held terrain in northern Homs province.



● Pro-Regime Forces

● Jabhat a-Nusra

✖ Pro-Regime Airstrike

● The Islamic State

● Opposition Forces

✖ Anti-IS Coalition

