

Syria Situation Report: March 9 - 17, 2017

1 March 9: Airstrikes Target Islamic State Affiliate in Southern Syria: Unidentified warplanes conducted airstrikes targeting the IS-affiliated Jaysh Khalid Ibn al-Walid in Western Daraa Province. Conflicting reports attributed the strikes to either Russia, Israel, Jordan, or the U.S.

2 March 11: Hayat Tahrir a-Sham Conducts Double Suicide Attack in Damascus: Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham (HTS) - the successor of Syrian Al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat Fatah a-Sham - detonated two SVESTs at a bus station near the Bab a-Saghir Cemetery outside the Old City of Damascus, killing at least 74 individuals and wounding at least 120 others. Local activists stated that the blasts primarily targeted Shi'a pilgrims from Iraq and Syria while HTS claimed that the attacks targeted foreign pro-regime militiamen. Iraq deployed medical teams to Syria in order to provide health care to the victims.

3 March 15: Unidentified Militants Detonate Two SVESTs in Central Damascus: An unidentified fighter detonated an SVEST at the entrance to the Palace of Justice near the Old City of Damascus, killing at least 30 individuals and wounding at least 45 others. A second militant detonated an SVEST in a restaurant in the Rabwah District of Damascus near the Presidential Palace after being confronted by regime security services. No group has yet claimed responsibility for the attacks. Both Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham (HTS) and Salafi-Jihadist group Ahrar a-Sham denied any involvement in the blasts.

4 March 13: Russia Brokers Alleged Reconciliation Deal in Wa'er District of Homs City: Russia brokered a reconciliation deal in the besieged opposition-held Wa'er District of Homs City. The deal reportedly calls for the evacuation of 10,000 to 15,000 civilians and opposition fighters from Wa'er District to Jarabulus in Northern Aleppo Province in weekly batches over the next two months. The deal also installs a local ceasefire and ends the pro-regime siege of the district. Unidentified militants later detonated an IED inside a bus in the Wadi al-Dhabab District of Homs City on March 14 in a likely response to the agreement.

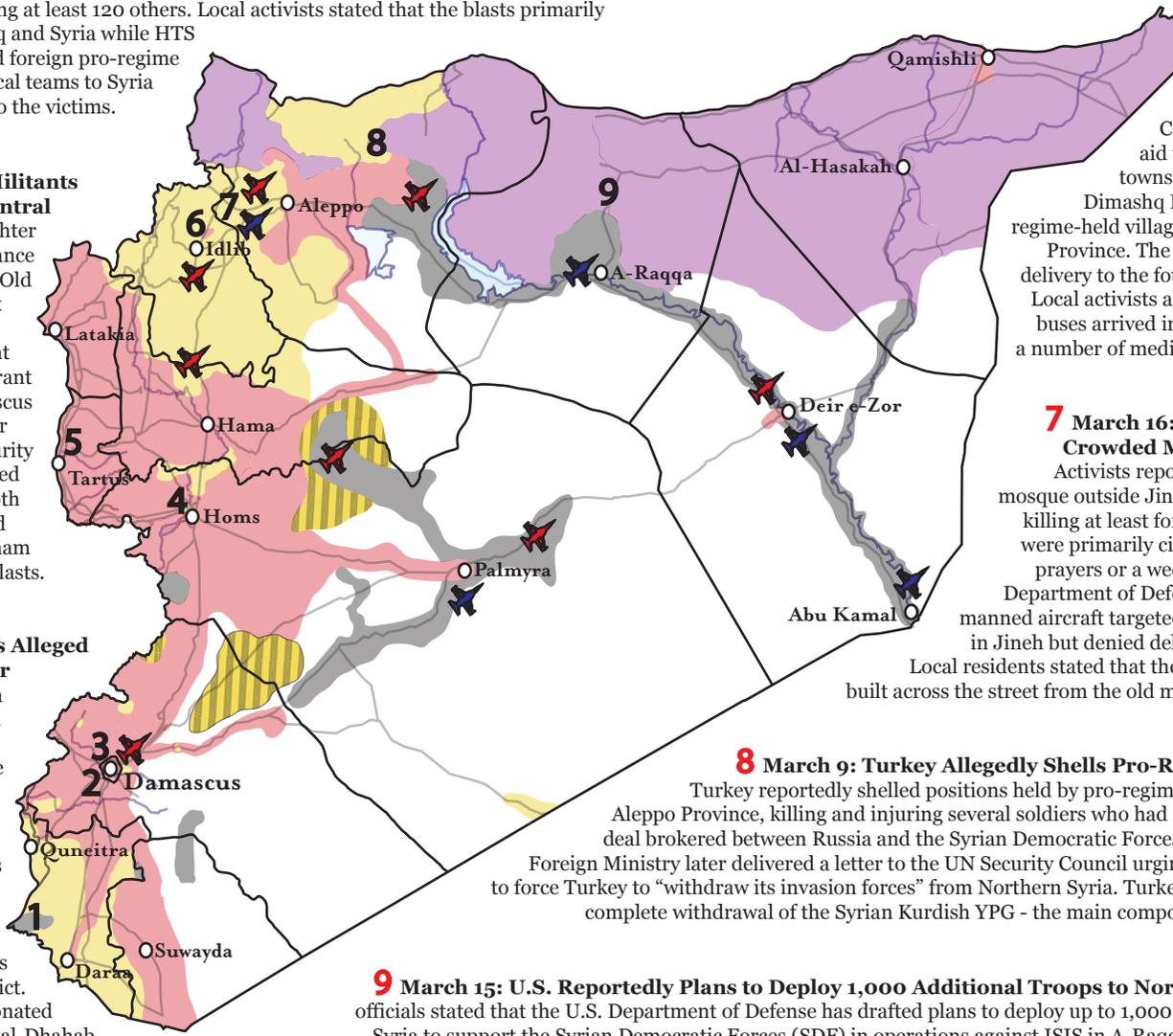
5 March 14: Russia Reportedly Begins Expansion of Tartus Naval Facility: Russian Federation Council Defense Committee Chairperson Viktor Ozerov stated that Russia started initial work to expand the Tartus Naval Facility on the Syrian Coast with major construction projects slated to begin by the end of the year. The modernization effort - which will convert the facility into a full-fledged naval base capable of hosting up to eleven warships - will reportedly take up to five years.

6 March 14: Aid Convoys Arrive in Four Besieged Towns: The UN, ICRC, and Syrian Arab Red Crescent delivered humanitarian aid to the besieged opposition-held towns of Madaya and Zabadani in Rif Dimashq Province as well as the besieged regime-held villages of Fu'ah and Kefraya in Idlib Province. The convoys mark the first such aid delivery to the four towns since November 2016. Local activists also claimed that more than fifty buses arrived in Fu'ah and Kefraya to evacuate a number of medical patients and other civilians.

7 March 16: Alleged U.S. Airstrike Hits Crowded Mosque in Aleppo Province: Activists reported that an airstrike targeted a mosque outside Jineh in Western Aleppo Province, killing at least forty-five individuals. The victims were primarily civilians attending either evening prayers or a weekly religious meeting. The U.S. Department of Defense confirmed that drones and manned aircraft targeted a senior "Al-Qaeda gathering" in Jineh but denied deliberately targeting the mosque. Local residents stated that the airstrike targeted a prayer hall built across the street from the old mosque at some point after 2011.

8 March 9: Turkey Allegedly Shells Pro-Regime Forces Near Manbij: Turkey reportedly shelled positions held by pro-regime forces near Manbij in Eastern Aleppo Province, killing and injuring several soldiers who had moved into the area as part of a deal brokered between Russia and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) on March 2. The Syrian Foreign Ministry later delivered a letter to the UN Security Council urging the international community to force Turkey to "withdraw its invasion forces" from Northern Syria. Turkey has repeatedly demanded the complete withdrawal of the Syrian Kurdish YPG - the main component of the SDF - from Manbij.

9 March 15: U.S. Reportedly Plans to Deploy 1,000 Additional Troops to Northern Syria: Anonymous U.S. officials stated that the U.S. Department of Defense has drafted plans to deploy up to 1,000 additional soldiers to Northern Syria to support the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in operations against ISIS in A-Raqqa City. The deployments would join the approximately 950 U.S. Marines, Army Rangers, and Special Operations Forces (SOF) already deployed to Syria. Other anonymous officials noted that the U.S. will likely delay a final decision on the operation against A-Raqqa City until after April 16 - the date of a major constitutional referendum to impose an executive presidential system in Turkey.



Areas of Control*

- Pro-Regime Forces
- Opposition Forces
- The Islamic State
- Kurdish Forces
- Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham
*Formerly Jabhat al-Nusra

Airstrikes

- ✈ Pro-Regime
- ✈ U.S. / Coalition

