

Russian Airstrikes in Syria

(September 30, 2015 – September 19, 2016)

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Russia Airstrikes in Syria Assessment Methodology

ISW changed its assessment methodology regarding low- and high-confidence strikes on May 28, 2016. Both the Russian Ministry of Defense and Western officials had altered their patterns of reporting on Russian air operations within recent weeks. ISW therefore amended the criteria for determining high-confidence reporting to rely more heavily on key indicators of Russian airstrikes, rather than statements from Russian and Western officials. Key indicators of strikes include precision, flight patterns, and time of strikes as well as an examination of picture intelligence.

May 28, 2016- Present

These graphics depicts ISW's assessment of Russian airstrike locations based on reports from local Syrian activist networks, statements by Russian and Western officials, and documentation of Russian airstrikes through social media. This map represents locations targeted by Russia's air campaign, rather than the number of individual strikes or sorties.

High-Confidence reporting. ISW places high confidence in reports corroborated by documentation from opposition factions and activist networks on the ground in Syria deemed to be credible that demonstrate a number of key indicators of Russian airstrikes.

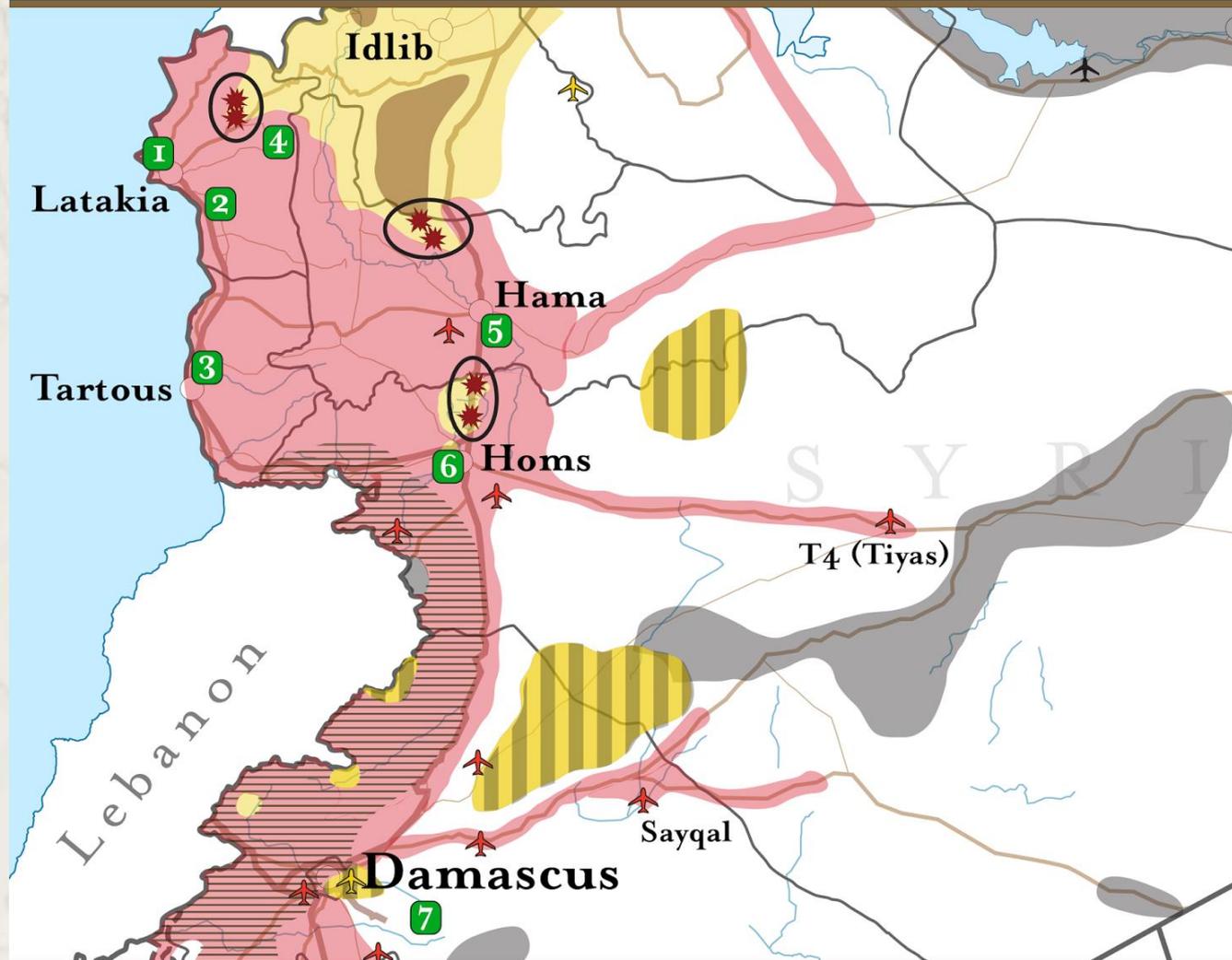
Low-Confidence reporting. ISW places low confidence in reports corroborated only by multiple secondary sources, including from local Syrian activist networks deemed credible or Syrian state-run media.

September 30, 2015- May 28, 2016

These graphics depicts ISW's assessment of Russian airstrike locations based on reports from local Syrian activist networks, Syrian state-run media, and statements by Russian and Western officials. This map represents locations targeted by Russia's air campaign, rather than the number of individual strikes or sorties.

High-Confidence reporting. ISW places high confidence in reports corroborated both by official government statements reported through credible channels and documentation from rebel factions or activist networks on the ground in Syria deemed to be credible.

Low-Confidence reporting. ISW places low confidence in secondary sources that have not been confirmed or sources deemed likely to contain disinformation.



Key

- Regime Control
- Hezbollah Presence
- Jabhat al-Nusra Control
- Rebel Control
- ISIS Control
- ISIS, JN, Rebel Control

1 2 Russian Positions

- 1-Port of Latakia
- 2-Bassel al-Assad Airport
- 3-Tartous Naval Facility
- 4-Slinfah
- 5-Hama Equestrian Club
- 6-Homs City
- 7-Damascus International Airport

✈ Airbase

★ Airstrike

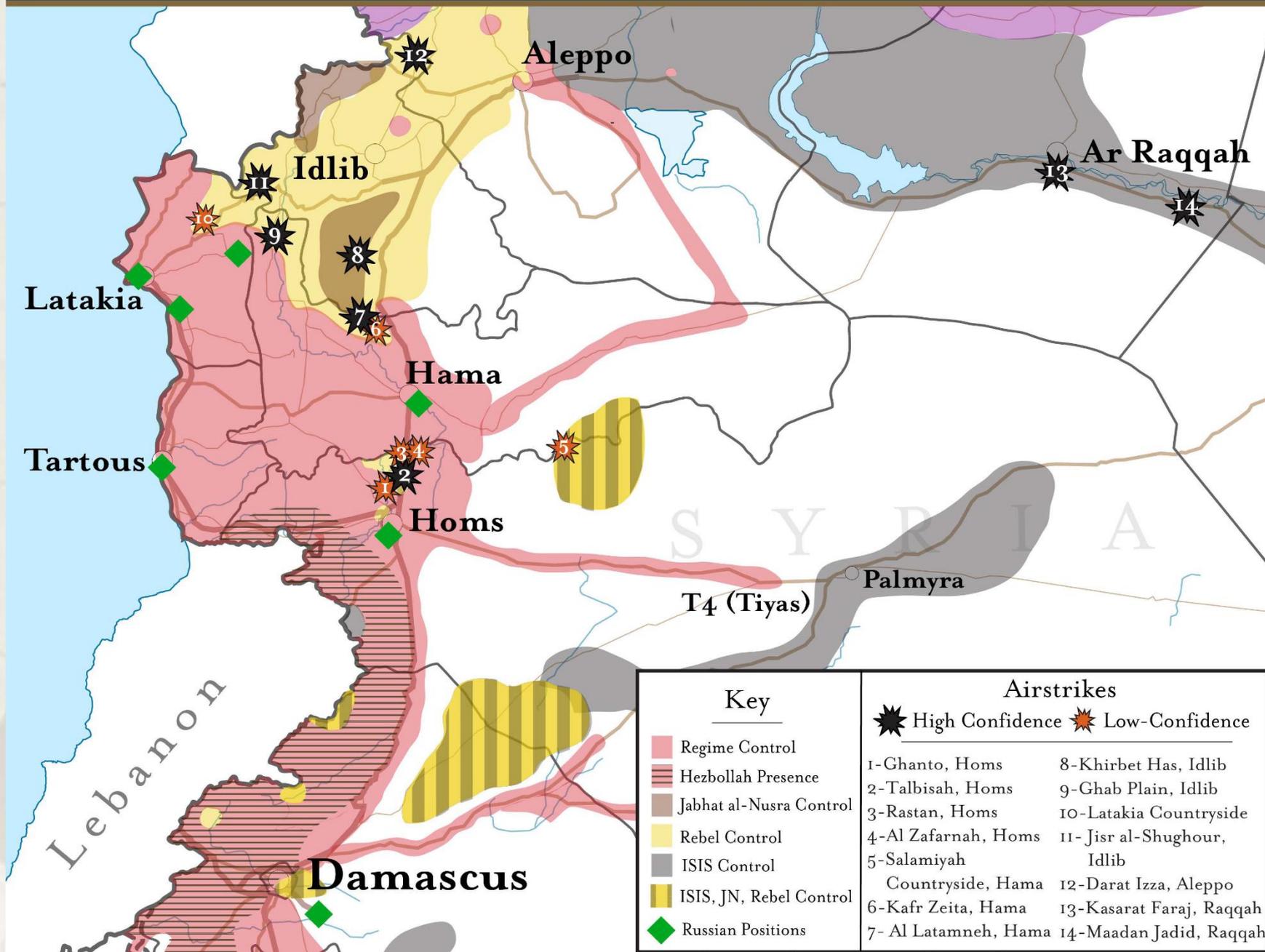
September 30, 2015

Key Takeaway:

First Russian strikes in Syria: Russian warplanes conducted 20 airstrikes on the rebel-held towns of Rastan and Talbisah north of Homs City, as well as on the towns of Al Latamneh and Kafr Zeita in Hama Province. In addition, Russia “aided” regime airstrikes in the northwestern countryside of Latakia Province, according to an anonymous regime security source. The Russian Defense Ministry claimed that the airstrikes targeted eight Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) positions in total. The Syrian regime also released statements confirming Russian airstrikes in Homs and Hama, claiming that the airstrikes targeted both ISIS and al-Qaeda affiliated militants, likely referring to Syrian al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra. However, local Syrian sources claim the airstrikes exclusively targeted rebel positions, including the headquarters of Free Syrian Army-affiliated, Western-backed TOW anti-tank missile recipient al-Izza Gathering in the town of Al Latamneh, rather than ISIS-held positions. Syrian Civil Defense Forces, a volunteer emergency responder organization, reported 36 civilian casualties from the Russian airstrike in Talbisah in northern Homs, in addition to several civilian casualties in Hama. Although there are small ISIS “sympathetic” cells in the rebel-held pockets of northern Homs, the Russian decision to target terrain that is held by the Syrian opposition and not ISIS signals Russia’s intent to assist the Assad regime’s war effort at large, beyond anti-ISIS operations.

Official Syrian regime request: Damascus confirmed that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad requested military assistance from Russia in a letter to President Vladimir Putin prior to the launch of Russian airstrikes in Syria. The Kremlin’s chief of staff Serge Ivanov confirmed Assad “appealed to the leadership of [Russia] with a request for military aid.”

Russian effort to edge out U.S.-led coalition: U.S. State Department spokesman John Kirby stated that a Russian official informed the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad about the airstrikes and requested that American military aircraft avoid Syrian airspace during Russian operations. An anonymous U.S. official reported that the U.S.-led coalition warplanes continued to conduct airstrikes against ISIS militants in Syria. Senior Israeli officials also announced that Russia informed Israel about an hour before it conducted airstrikes in Syria. Russian government officials made contact with Israeli National Security Adviser, Yossi Cohen, as well as other senior officials in the Israeli defense establishment. The notice was designed to avoid any confrontation between Israeli and Russian planes.



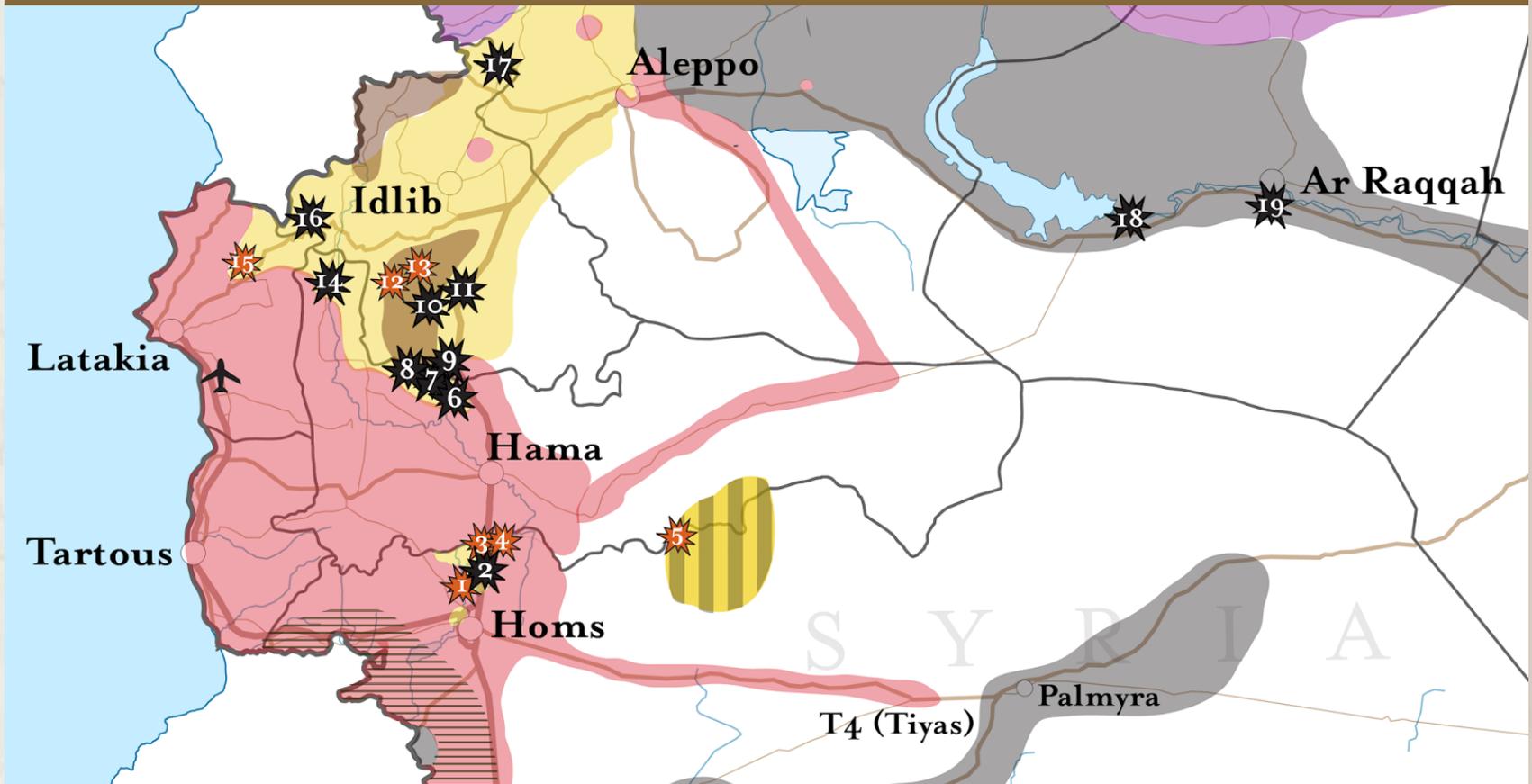
| Key | | Airstrikes | |
|-----|-------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | Regime Control | | High Confidence |
| | Hezbollah Presence | | Low-Confidence |
| | Jabhat al-Nusra Control | | |
| | Rebel Control | | |
| | ISIS Control | | |
| | ISIS, JN, Rebel Control | | |
| | Russian Positions | | |
| | | 1- Ghanto, Homs | 8- Khirbet Has, Idlib |
| | | 2- Talbisah, Homs | 9- Ghab Plain, Idlib |
| | | 3- Rastan, Homs | 10- Latakia Countryside |
| | | 4- Al Zafarnah, Homs | 11- Jisr al-Shughour, Idlib |
| | | 5- Salamiyah Countryside, Hama | 12- Darat Izza, Aleppo |
| | | 6- Kafr Zeita, Hama | 13- Kasarat Faraj, Raqqa |
| | | 7- Al Latamneh, Hama | 14- Maadan Jadid, Raqqa |

September 30- October 1, 2015

Key Takeaway:

Russia conducted a second round of airstrikes in Syria on October 1, targeting rebel-held positions in the provinces of Homs, Idlib, and Aleppo. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) has repeatedly claimed that the airstrikes are targeting ISIS positions in these rebel-held areas. However, Russian targets included the training camp of an FSA-affiliated, Western-backed TOW anti-tank missile recipient Liwa Suqour al-Jebel near the town of Maaret al-Nouman in Idlib Province, in addition to other rebel-held targets. The Russian MoD also claimed two airstrikes in Raqqah Province, targeting an ISIS-held training camp and “command post”. These airstrikes are the first Russian strikes confirmed by the Russian MoD that have targeted positions in ISIS-held terrain.





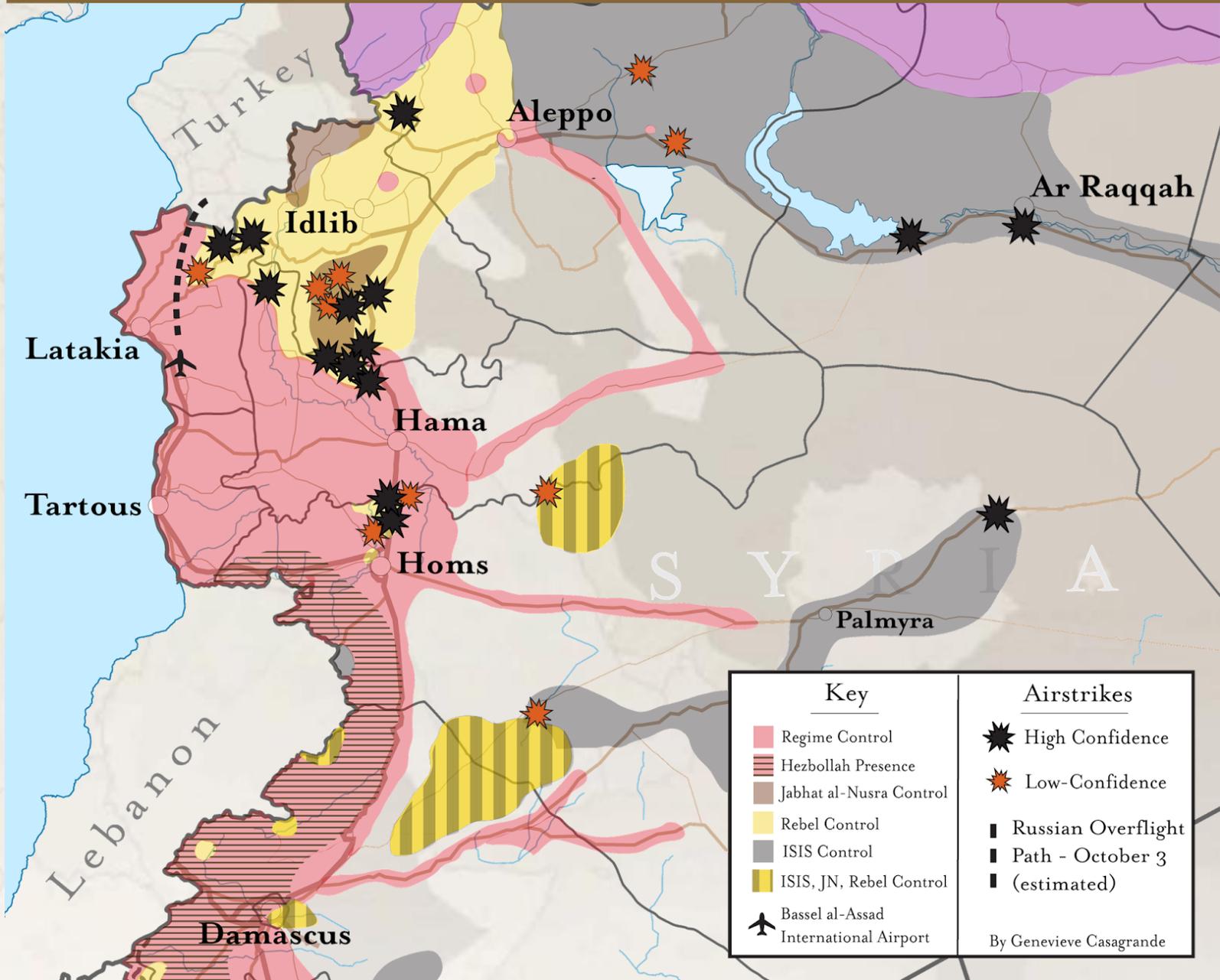
| Key | | Airstrikes | | | |
|-----|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------|--|----------------|
| | Regime Control | | High Confidence | | Low-Confidence |
| | Hezbollah Presence | 1- Ghanto, Homs | | | |
| | Jabhat al-Nusra Control | 2- Talbisah, Homs | | | |
| | Rebel Control | 3- Rastan, Homs | | | |
| | ISIS Control | 4- Al Zafarnah, Homs | | | |
| | ISIS, JN, Rebel Control | 5- Salamiyah | | | |
| | Bassel al-Assad International Airport | 6- Al Latamneh, Hama | | | |
| | | 7- Kafr Zeita, Hama | | | |
| | | 8- Al Habayt, Idlib | | | |
| | | 9- Khan Sheikhoun, Idlib | | | |
| | | 10- Khirbet Has, Idlib | | | |
| | | 11- Ma'aret al-Nouman, Idlib | | | |
| | | 12- Baylon, Idlib | | | |
| | | 13- Ihsem, Idlib | | | |
| | | 14- Ghab Plain, Idlib | | | |
| | | 15- Latakia Countryside | | | |
| | | 16- Jisr al-Shughour | | | |
| | | 17- Darat Izza, Aleppo | | | |
| | | 18- Maadan Jadid, Raqqa | | | |
| | | 19- Kasarat Faraj, Raqqa | | | |

September 30- October 3, 2015

Key Takeaway:

Russian airstrikes continue to primarily target Syrian opposition groups in areas far from ISIS's core terrain. These strikes are concentrated in northwestern Syria, particularly in rebel-held areas of Idlib Province and the northern countryside of Hama Province. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed only three airstrikes targeting positions in known ISIS-held terrain between October 1 and October 3. However, local reporting only confirmed two of these strikes. The Russian air campaign in Syria appears to be largely focused on supporting the Syrian regime and its fight against the Syrian opposition, rather than combatting ISIS.





| Key | Airstrikes |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Regime Control | High Confidence |
| Hezbollah Presence | Low-Confidence |
| Jabhat al-Nusra Control | Russian Overflight |
| Rebel Control | Path - October 3 (estimated) |
| ISIS Control | |
| ISIS, JN, Rebel Control | |
| Bassel al-Assad International Airport | |

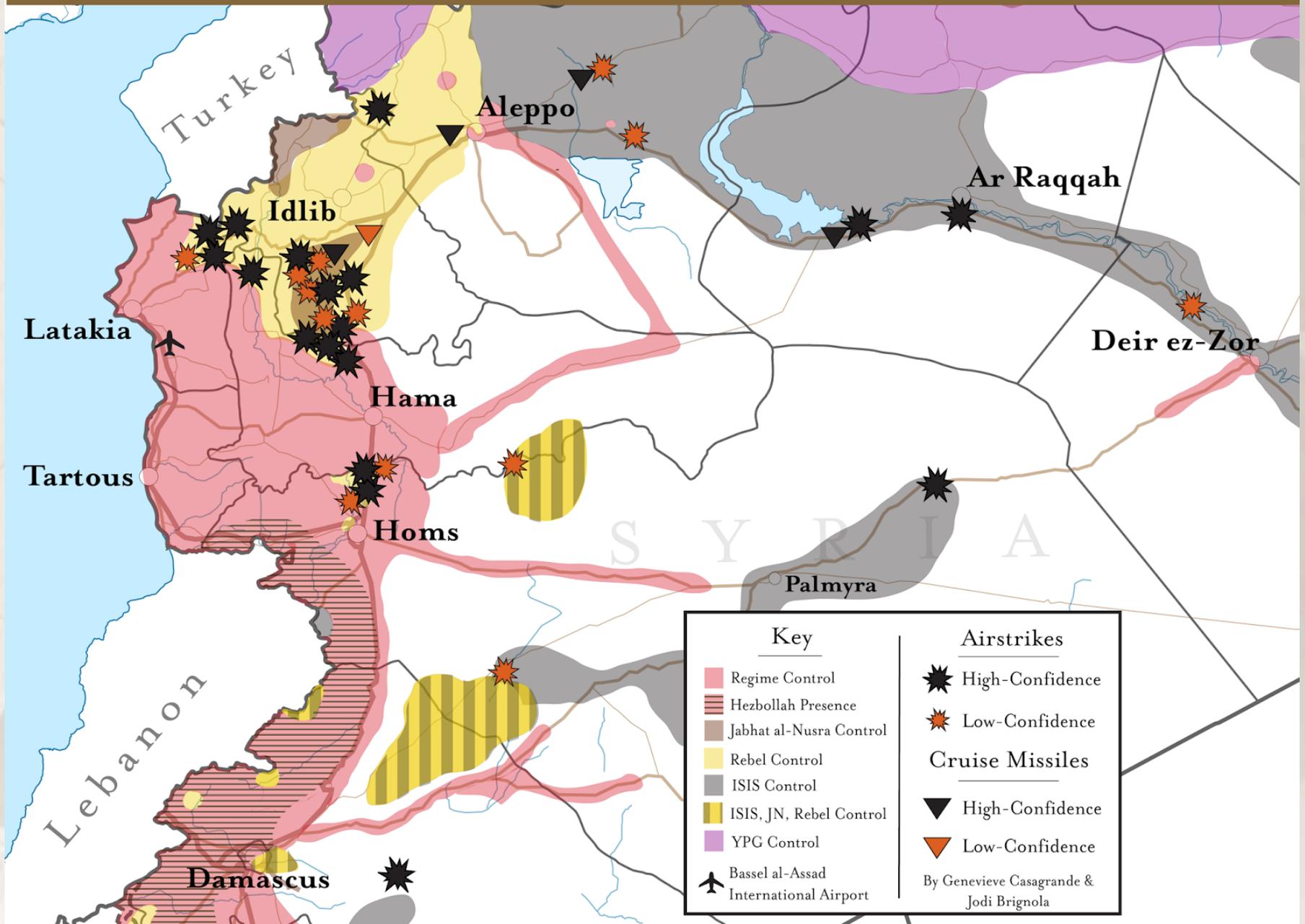
By Genevieve Casagrande

September 30- October 5, 2016

Key Takeaway:

Russian airstrikes continue to primarily target Syrian opposition groups throughout northwestern Syria, including areas along the Turkish border in northern Latakia Province. Russian warplanes violated Turkish airspace and harassed Turkish F-16s in at least two separate incidents over Hatay Province of southern Turkey on October 3 and 4, prompting an emergency NATO meeting on October 5. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) also claimed airstrikes targeting ISIS-held positions northeast of Palmyra. The Russian MoD later clarified that the airstrikes did not hit positions within the city of Palmyra itself following contrary reports in Syrian state media. In addition, the Russian MoD claimed its first airstrikes in Damascus Province on October 5. However, local reporting has not yet substantiated these claims and, thus, ISW does not assess them at even a level of Low Confidence at this time.

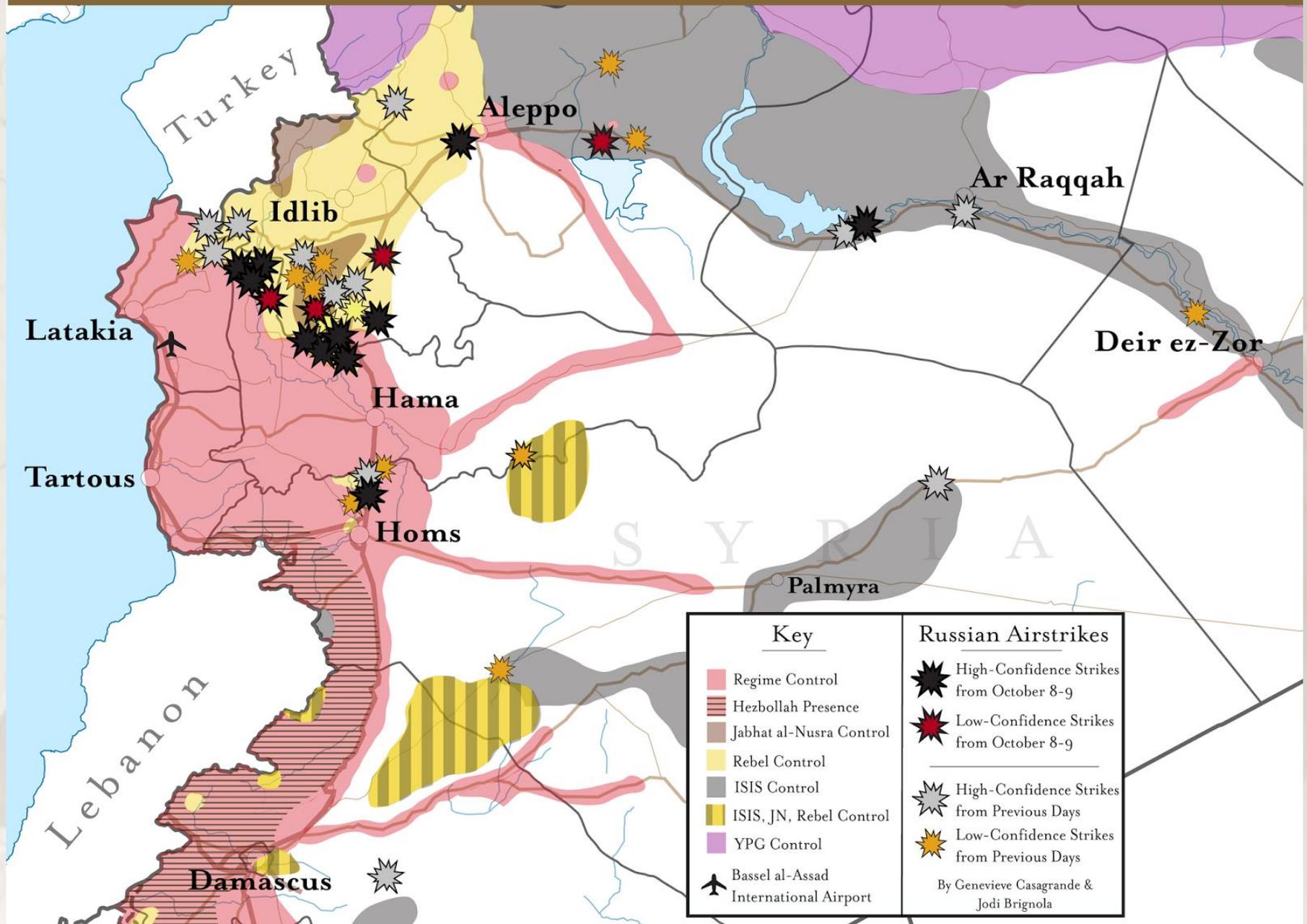
Russian Air and Missile Strikes in Syria: September 30 - October 7, 2015



September 30- October 7, 2016

Key Takeaway:

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that four Russian warships in the Caspian Sea fired twenty-six Kalibr-NK cruise missiles against alleged ISIS-held positions in Aleppo, Idlib, and ar-Raqqa Provinces on October 7. The Russian MoD released a video depicting the cruise missiles traveling over the airspace of Iraq and Iran in order to primarily strike targets in rebel-held areas of northwestern Syria. U.S. officials later reported that at least four of the cruise missiles had crash-landed in northwestern Iran, although both the Russian and Iranian Ministries of Defense denied these reports as “psychological warfare” by the West. The use of cruise missiles despite the presence of a functional Russian airbase in Latakia Province likely represents an overt show of force intended to project Russian military strength to both the Syrian opposition and members of the U.S.-led anti-ISIS coalition.



| Key | Russian Airstrikes |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Regime Control | High-Confidence Strikes from October 8-9 |
| Hezbollah Presence | Low-Confidence Strikes from October 8-9 |
| Jabhat al-Nusra Control | High-Confidence Strikes from Previous Days |
| Rebel Control | Low-Confidence Strikes from Previous Days |
| ISIS Control | |
| ISIS, JN, Rebel Control | |
| YPG Control | |
| Bassel al-Assad International Airport | |

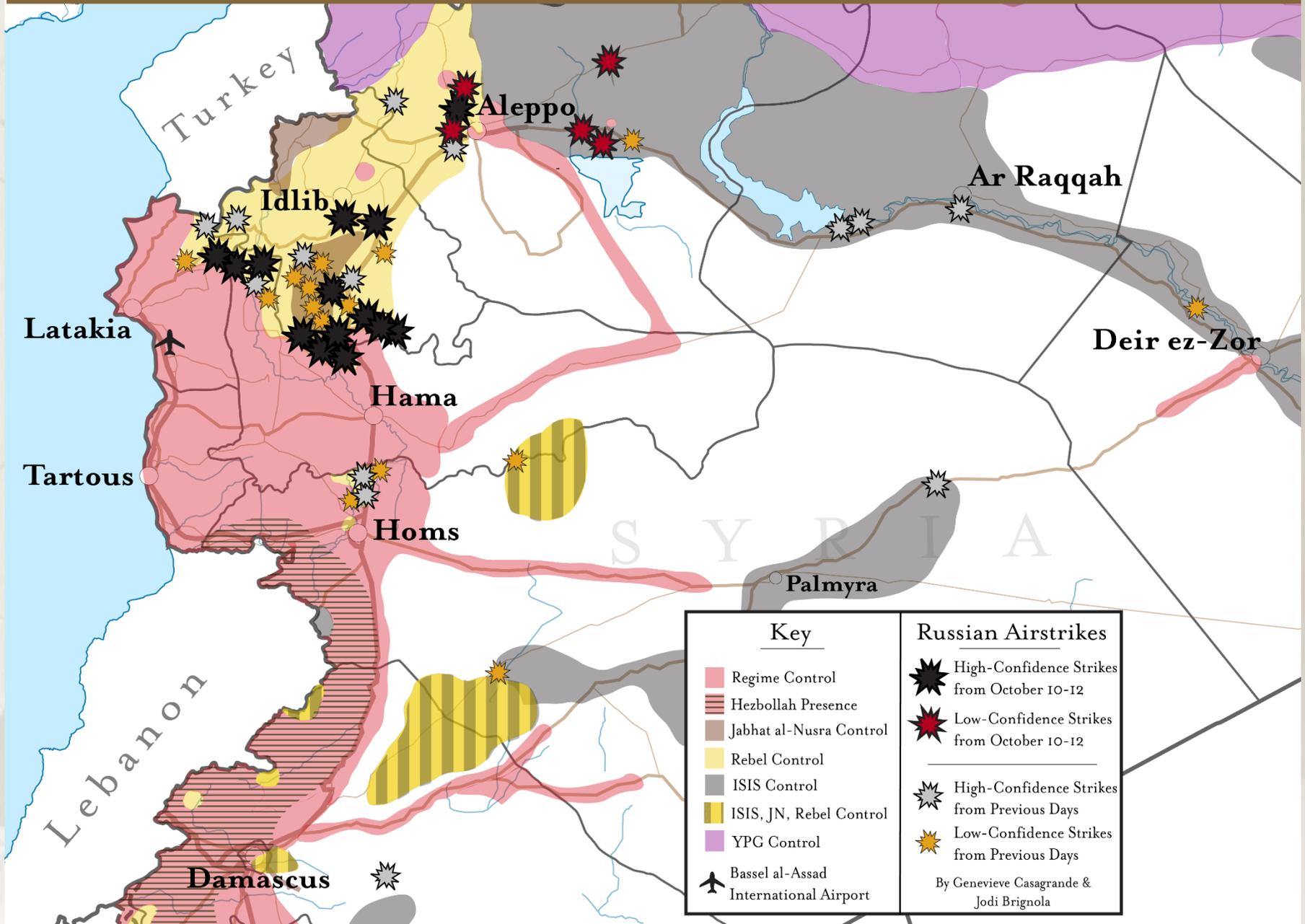
By Genevieve Casagrande & Jodi Brignola

September 30- October 9, 2015

Key Takeaway:

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that Russian warplanes conducted 67 “combat missions” throughout Syria on October 9, marking the largest number of Russian airstrikes in Syria on a single day since September 30. Russian airstrikes continued to largely concentrate in rebel-held areas of northwestern Syria from October 8-9. In particular, Russian warplanes continued to conduct airstrikes in support of a large-scale regime offensive against rebel positions in the northern Hama countryside.





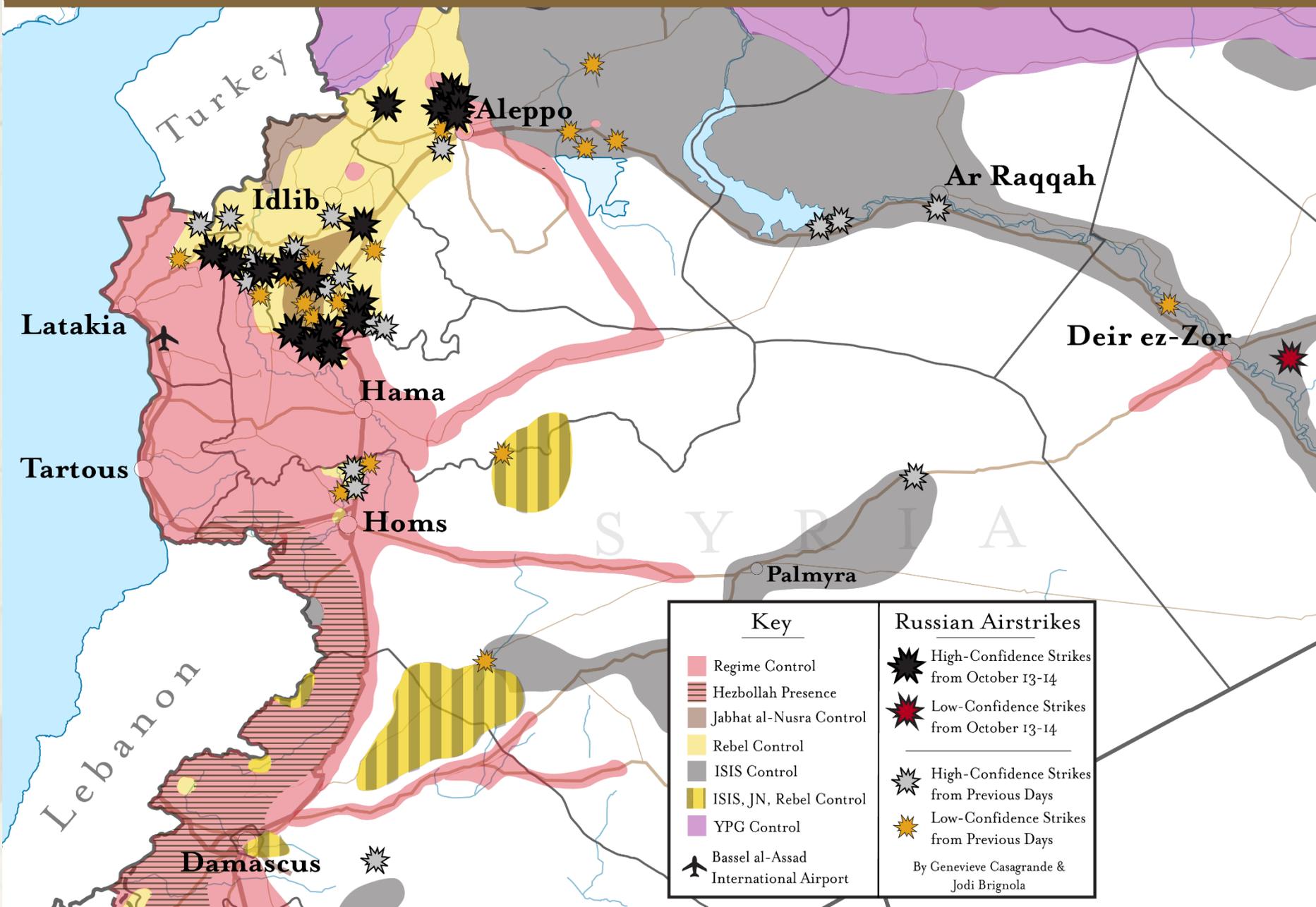
| Key | | Russian Airstrikes | |
|-----|---------------------------------------|--------------------|--|
| | Regime Control | | High-Confidence Strikes from October 10-12 |
| | Hezbollah Presence | | Low-Confidence Strikes from October 10-12 |
| | Jabhat al-Nusra Control | | High-Confidence Strikes from Previous Days |
| | Rebel Control | | Low-Confidence Strikes from Previous Days |
| | ISIS Control | | |
| | ISIS, JN, Rebel Control | | |
| | YPG Control | | |
| | Bassel al-Assad International Airport | | |

By Genevieve Casagrande & Jodi Brignola

September 30- October 12, 2015

Key Takeaway:

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) continued to ramp up its aerial campaign in Syria, claiming to conduct 250 “combat sorties” from October 9-12. This spike in Russian military activity is a notable escalation compared to the 20 “combat sorties” flown on October 8. Most Russian airstrikes continued to concentrate in northwestern Hama province in support of a large-scale regime offensive in the area. In addition, Russian warplanes conducted numerous airstrikes in the western countryside of Aleppo against rebel and Jabhat al-Nusra positions. These airstrikes coincided with ISIS’s largest advance against rebels in northern Aleppo since August 2015, indicating that Russian airstrikes are not deterring ISIS from launching new offensives. Instead, rebels in Aleppo province are currently facing escalated threats from pro-regime airstrikes and ISIS simultaneously. The Russian MoD also claimed airstrikes in the vicinity of Kuweires Airbase east of Aleppo City, likely targeting ISIS, alongside Syrian regime operations near the airbase that led to the death of IRGC Brigadier General Hossein Hamedani on October 8. Kuweiris has been under siege by ISIS, such that providing relief to pro-regime ground forces there requires engaging ISIS directly. The Russian MoD also claimed airstrikes in ar-Raqqah, Homs, and Damascus, which would suggest additional strikes targeted a combination of ISIS and rebel positions; however, credible local reporting did not validate these claims.



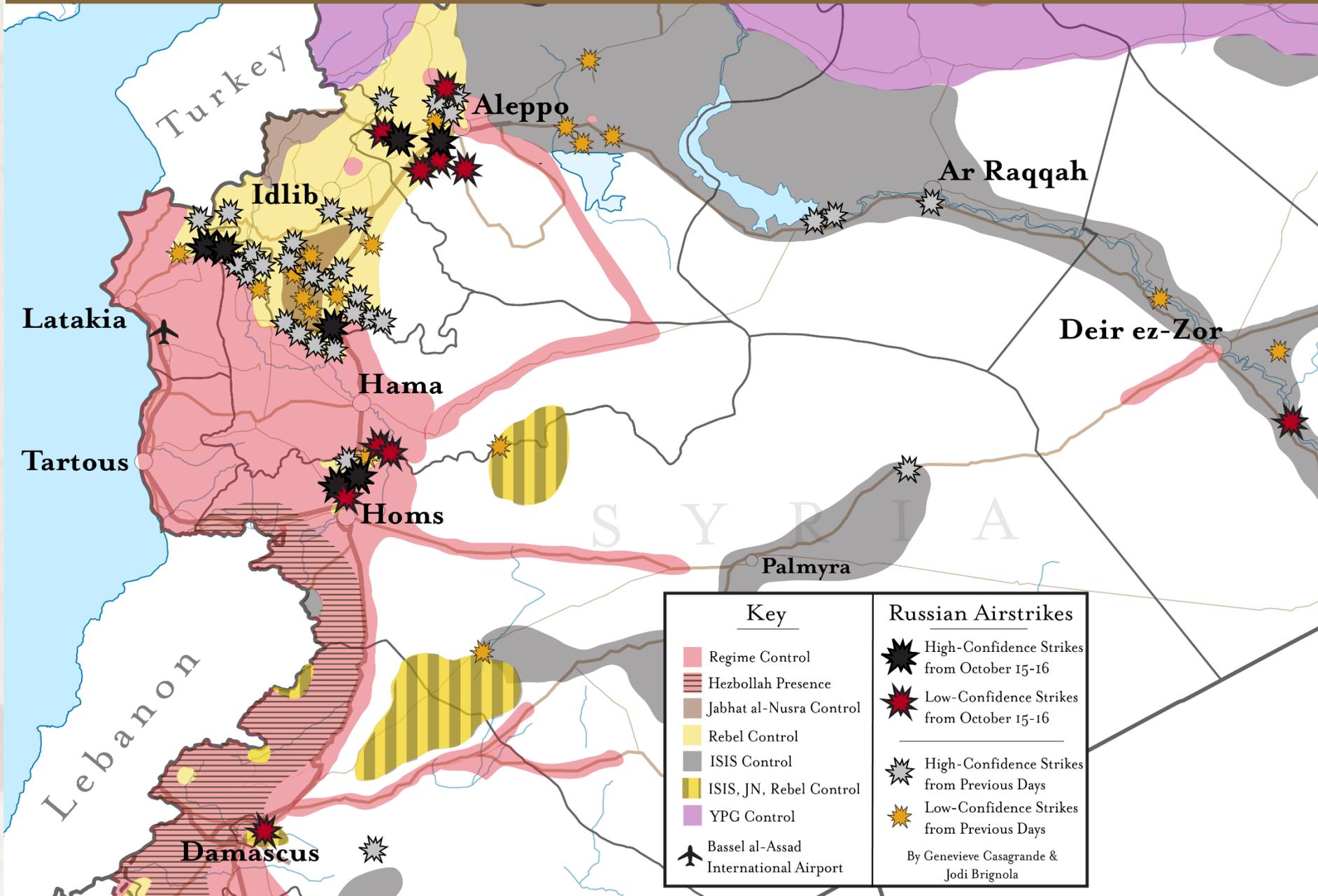
| Key | | Russian Airstrikes | |
|-----|---------------------------------------|--------------------|--|
| | Regime Control | | High-Confidence Strikes from October 13-14 |
| | Hezbollah Presence | | Low-Confidence Strikes from October 13-14 |
| | Jabhat al-Nusra Control | | High-Confidence Strikes from Previous Days |
| | Rebel Control | | Low-Confidence Strikes from Previous Days |
| | ISIS Control | | |
| | ISIS, JN, Rebel Control | | |
| | YPG Control | | |
| | Bassel al-Assad International Airport | | |

By Genevieve Casagrande & Jodi Brignola

September 30- October 14, 2015

Key Takeaway:

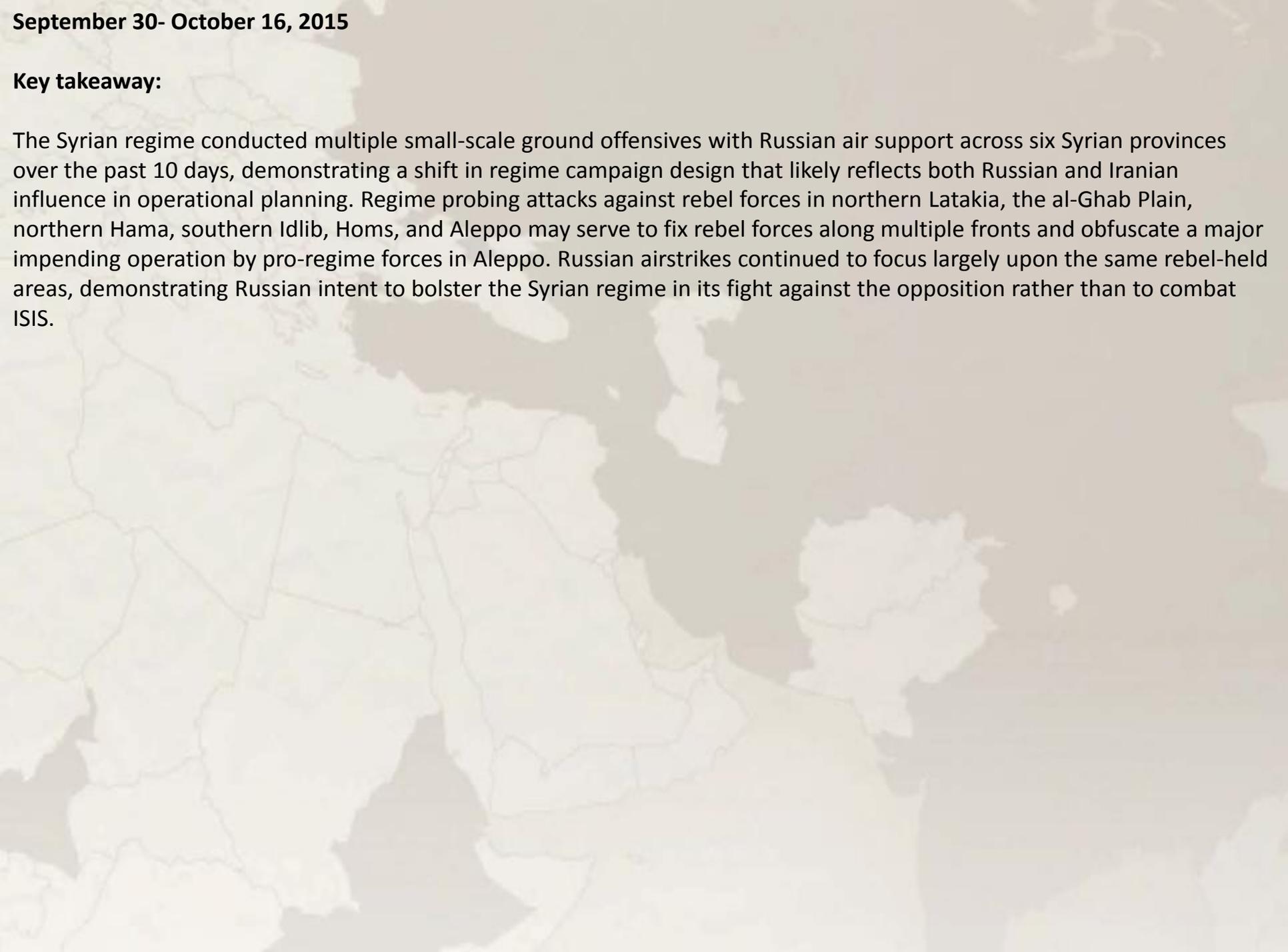
Russia's involvement in Syria is facilitating ISIS's territorial gains, while also strengthening Assad. Russia is supporting the Syrian regime's offensives in Latakia, the al-Ghab Plain, and northern Hama. Russia also intensified strikes on rebel-held northwestern Aleppo, likely to set conditions for an imminent Russian-Iranian-Syrian regime offensive in the area. U.S. defense officials and local Syrian activists reported the arrival of hundreds of Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)-Quds Force fighters and other Iranian proxy forces in Aleppo over the past few days. Russian strikes largely concentrated along the rebel-held supply route leading to the besieged regime enclaves of Nubl and Zahraa northwest of Aleppo City. If the regime can link with these enclaves, they will successfully sever the rebel-held supply route from Aleppo City to the Turkish border. Simultaneous regime offensives in both Hama and Aleppo Provinces will likely fix rebel forces along multiple fronts and prevent them from reinforcing their positions across northwestern Syria, resulting in a loss of terrain for the Syrian opposition.

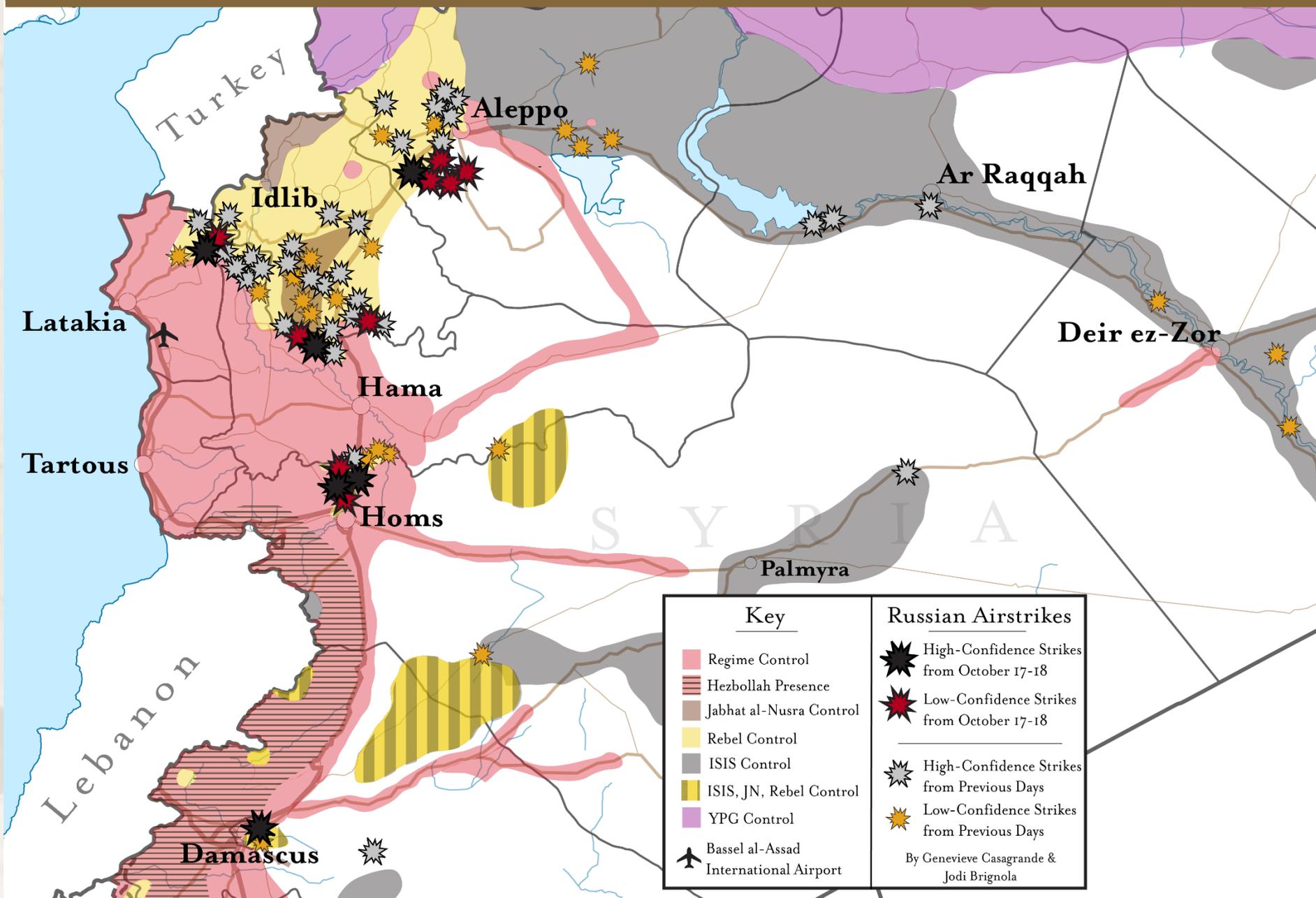


September 30- October 16, 2015

Key takeaway:

The Syrian regime conducted multiple small-scale ground offensives with Russian air support across six Syrian provinces over the past 10 days, demonstrating a shift in regime campaign design that likely reflects both Russian and Iranian influence in operational planning. Regime probing attacks against rebel forces in northern Latakia, the al-Ghab Plain, northern Hama, southern Idlib, Homs, and Aleppo may serve to fix rebel forces along multiple fronts and obfuscate a major impending operation by pro-regime forces in Aleppo. Russian airstrikes continued to focus largely upon the same rebel-held areas, demonstrating Russian intent to bolster the Syrian regime in its fight against the opposition rather than to combat ISIS.





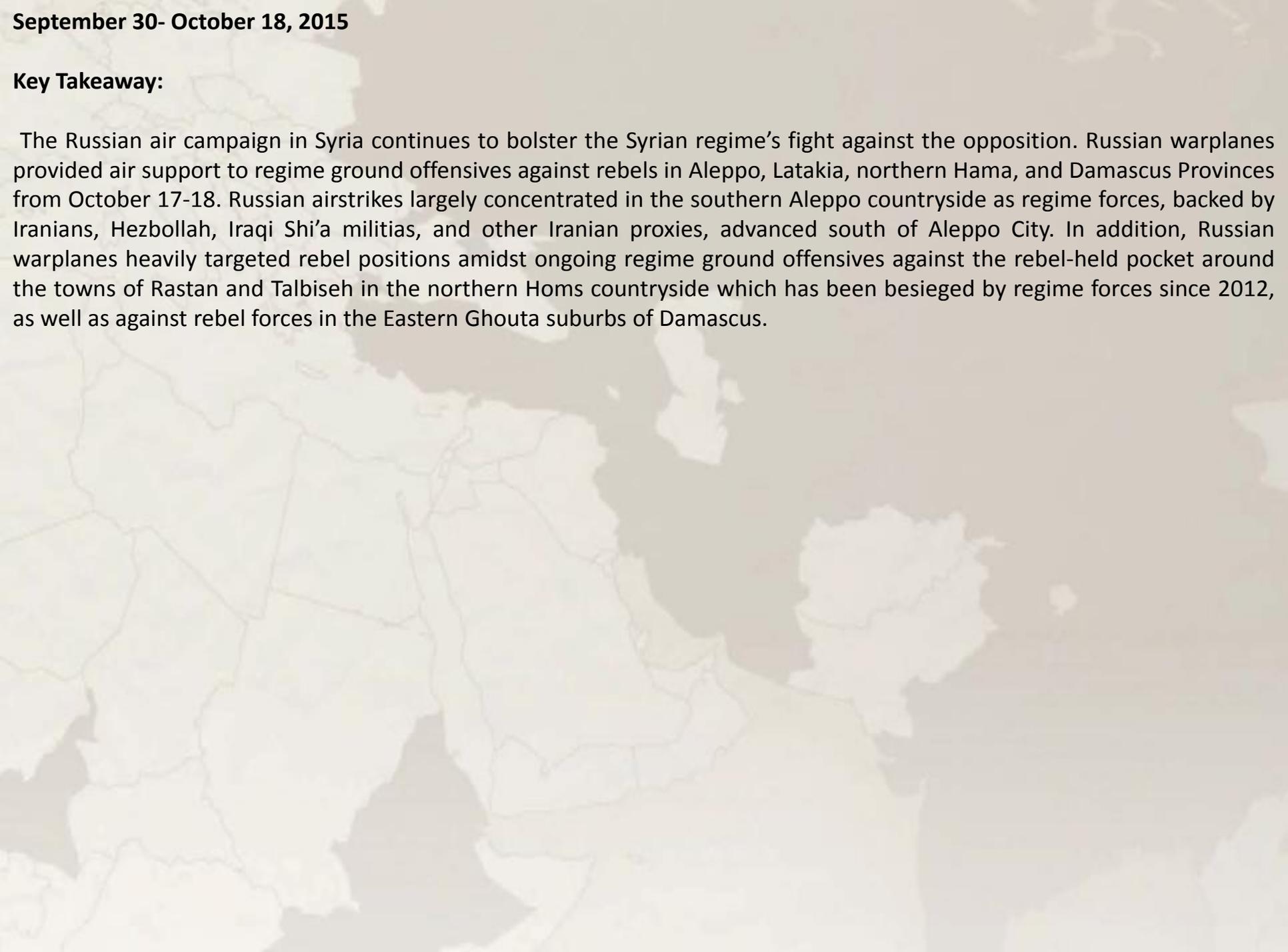
| Key | | Russian Airstrikes | |
|-----|---------------------------------------|--------------------|--|
| | Regime Control | | High-Confidence Strikes from October 17-18 |
| | Hezbollah Presence | | Low-Confidence Strikes from October 17-18 |
| | Jabhat al-Nusra Control | | High-Confidence Strikes from Previous Days |
| | Rebel Control | | Low-Confidence Strikes from Previous Days |
| | ISIS Control | | |
| | ISIS, JN, Rebel Control | | |
| | YPG Control | | |
| | Bassel al-Assad International Airport | | |

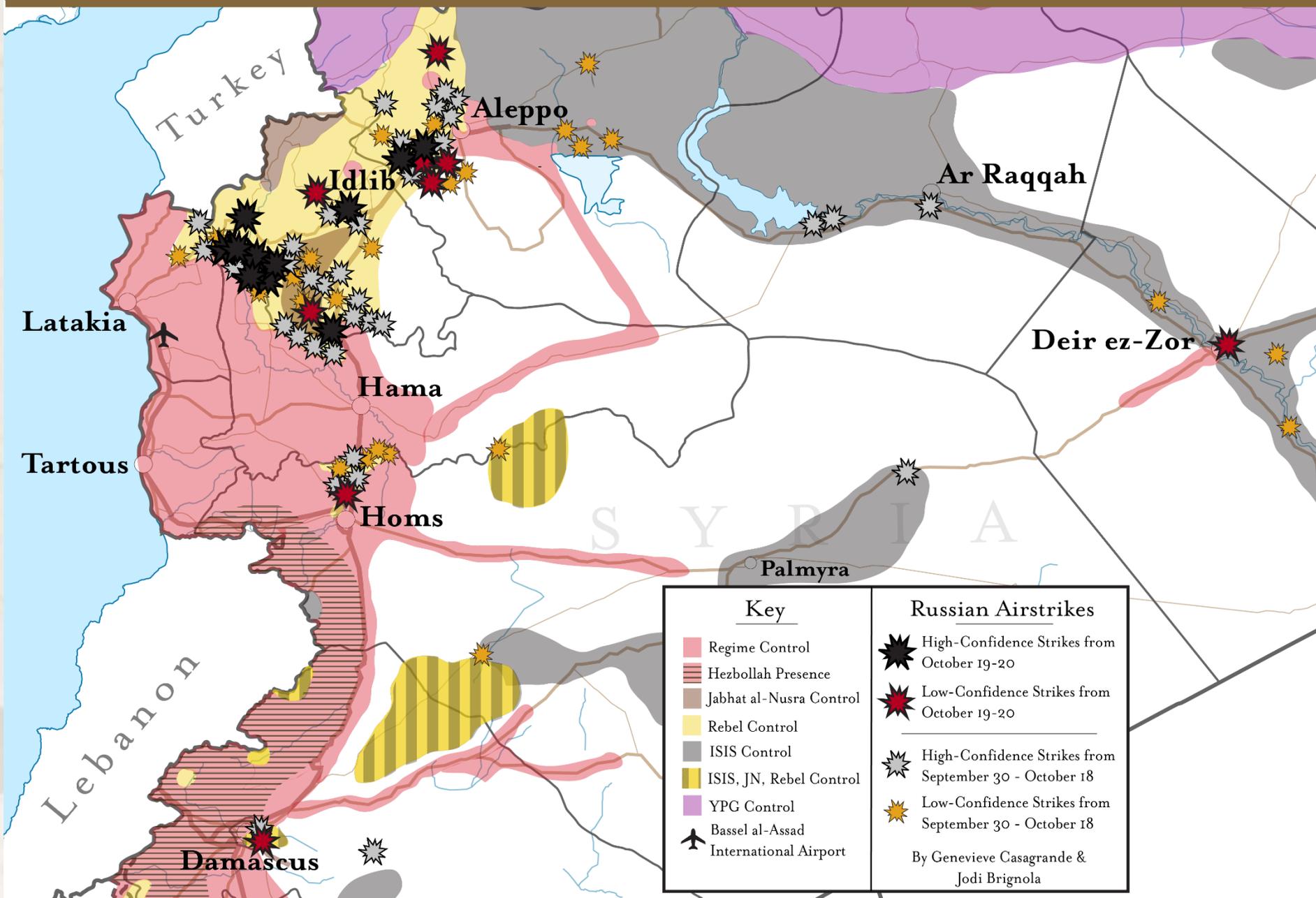
By Genevieve Casagrande & Jodi Brignola

September 30- October 18, 2015

Key Takeaway:

The Russian air campaign in Syria continues to bolster the Syrian regime's fight against the opposition. Russian warplanes provided air support to regime ground offensives against rebels in Aleppo, Latakia, northern Hama, and Damascus Provinces from October 17-18. Russian airstrikes largely concentrated in the southern Aleppo countryside as regime forces, backed by Iranians, Hezbollah, Iraqi Shi'a militias, and other Iranian proxies, advanced south of Aleppo City. In addition, Russian warplanes heavily targeted rebel positions amidst ongoing regime ground offensives against the rebel-held pocket around the towns of Rastan and Talbiseh in the northern Homs countryside which has been besieged by regime forces since 2012, as well as against rebel forces in the Eastern Ghouta suburbs of Damascus.





| Key | | Russian Airstrikes | |
|-----|---------------------------------------|--------------------|--|
| | Regime Control | | High-Confidence Strikes from October 19-20 |
| | Hezbollah Presence | | Low-Confidence Strikes from October 19-20 |
| | Jabhat al-Nusra Control | | High-Confidence Strikes from September 30 - October 18 |
| | Rebel Control | | Low-Confidence Strikes from September 30 - October 18 |
| | ISIS Control | | |
| | ISIS, JN, Rebel Control | | |
| | YPG Control | | |
| | Bassel al-Assad International Airport | | |

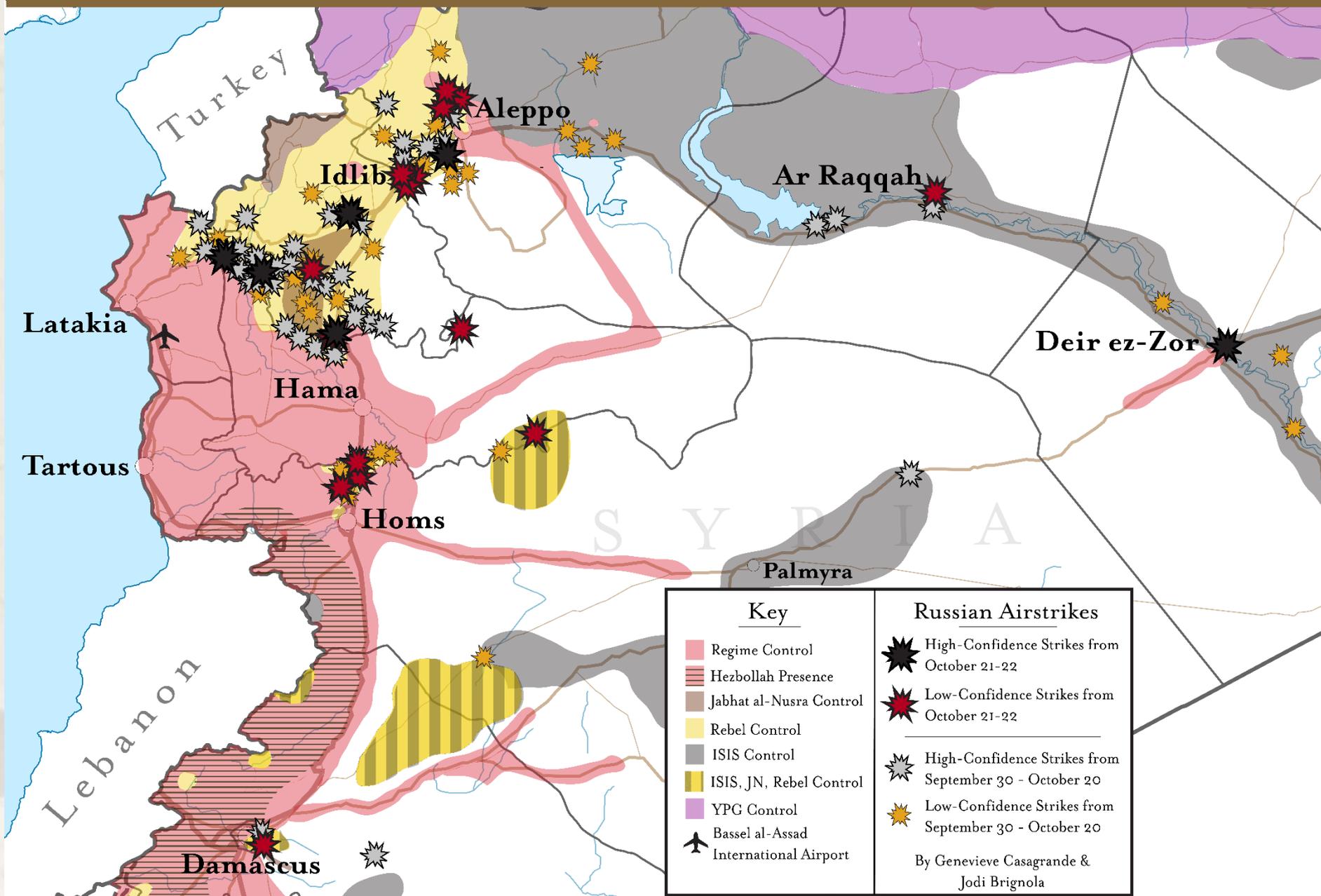
By Genevieve Casagrande & Jodi Brignola

September 30- October 20, 2015

Key Takeaway:

Russian airstrikes continue to bolster the Assad regime's efforts to defeat the Syrian opposition. Russian airstrikes from October 19-20 primarily supported ongoing regime ground offensives in rebel-held areas in the southern countryside of Aleppo, the al-Ghab plain of northwestern Hama Province, and the Jebel al-Akrad mountain range in northeastern Latakia Province. The regime is launching probing attacks in Jebel al-Akrad and the al-Ghab plain, likely in order to fix rebel forces in Hama and Latakia Provinces. This effort will prevent rebel forces from reinforcing positions in Aleppo Province, where the regime and its allies have launched their main effort.

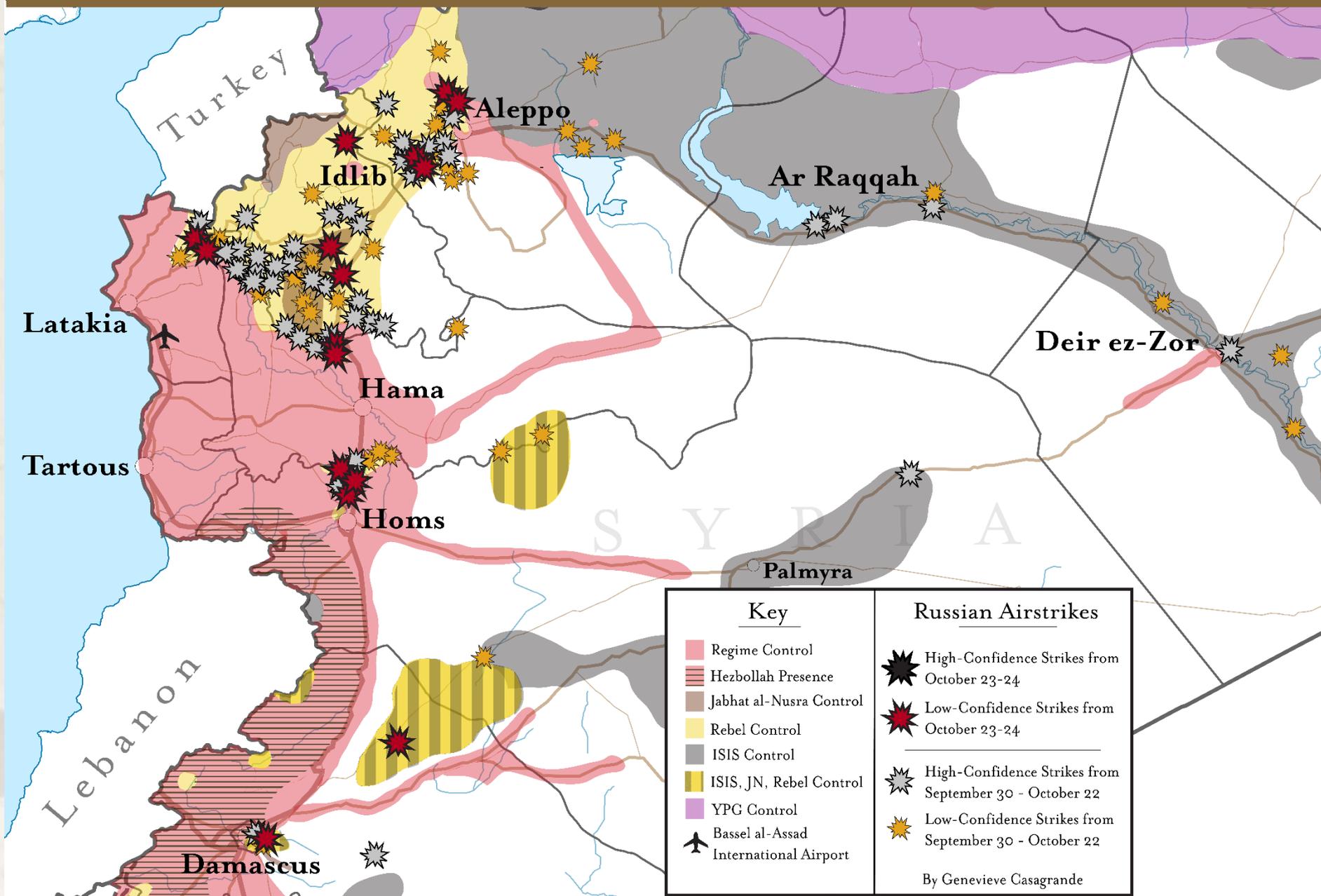




September 30- October 22, 2015

Key Takeaway:

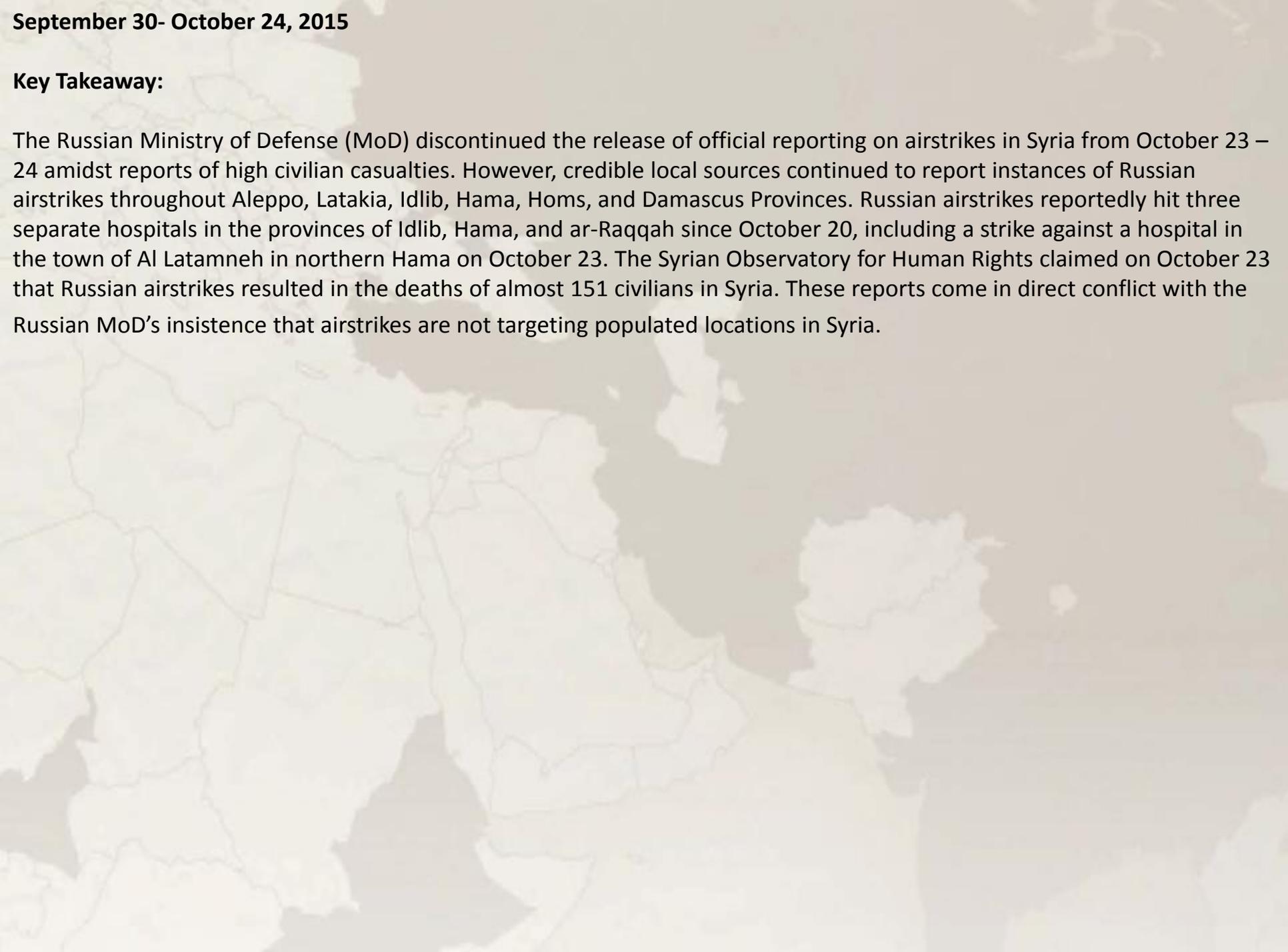
Russian airstrikes continue primarily to target rebel-held terrain in support of Syrian regime ground offensives in northwestern Syria. Russian airstrikes from October 19-20 largely supported regime ground offensives in rebel-held areas of the southern countryside of Aleppo and northern Hama Province far from core ISIS-held terrain. However, Russia continues to sustain its counter-ISIS narrative by claiming sporadic strikes against ISIS in Deir Ez-Zour and Raqqa Provinces. Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) reported two strikes against ISIS in Deir ez-Zour Province from October 21-22. However, only one strike was verified through local reporting on October 21. Russian airstrikes reportedly hit a hospital in ar-Raqqah City on October 22. Local sources released pictures of damages to the hospital and surrounding buildings. However, the Russian MoD has not yet confirmed the strike, or any strikes from 1:00PM EST on October 22 and 3:30PM EST on October 23, claiming a technical problem with its website.

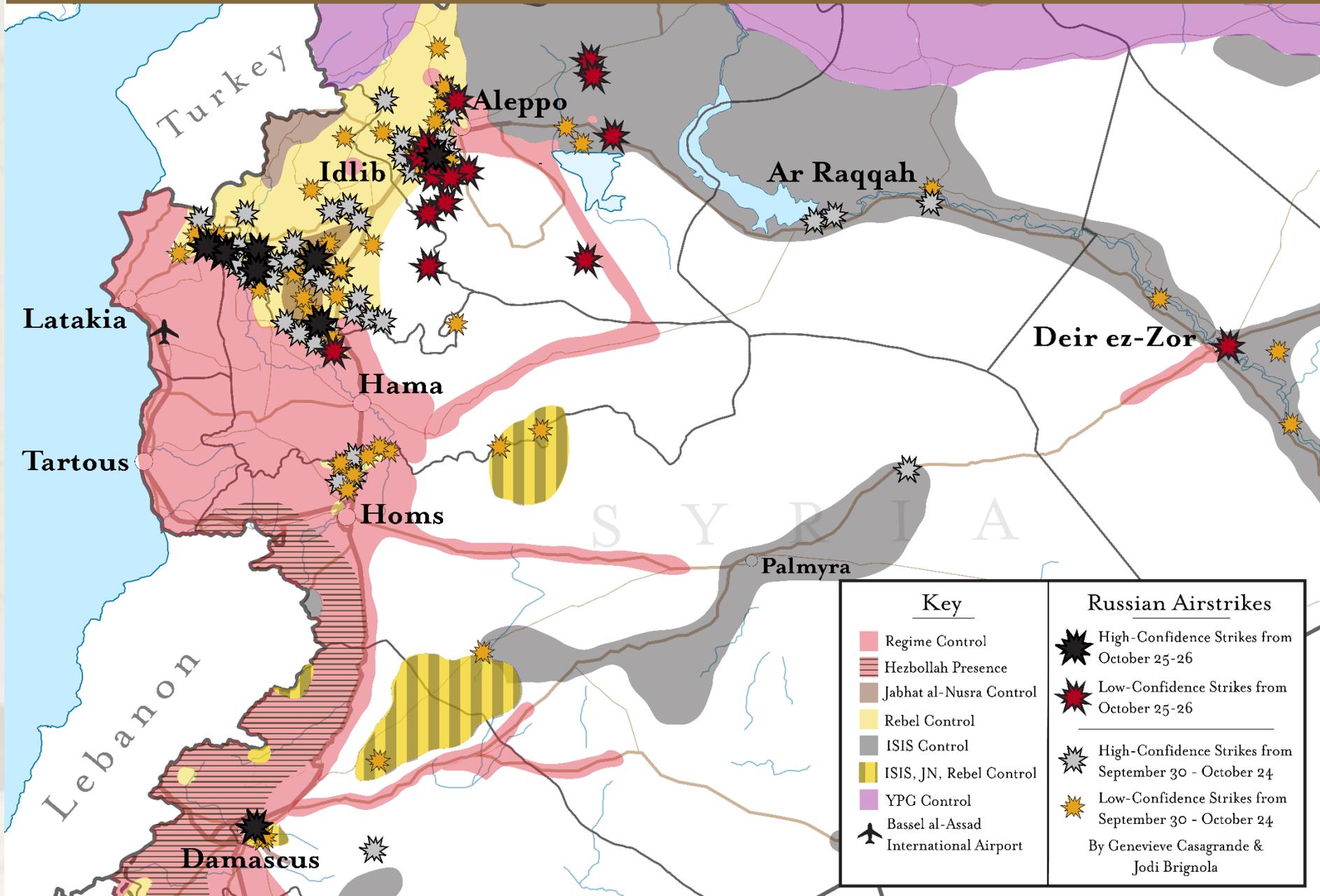


September 30- October 24, 2015

Key Takeaway:

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) discontinued the release of official reporting on airstrikes in Syria from October 23 – 24 amidst reports of high civilian casualties. However, credible local sources continued to report instances of Russian airstrikes throughout Aleppo, Latakia, Idlib, Hama, Homs, and Damascus Provinces. Russian airstrikes reportedly hit three separate hospitals in the provinces of Idlib, Hama, and ar-Raqqah since October 20, including a strike against a hospital in the town of Al Latamneh in northern Hama on October 23. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights claimed on October 23 that Russian airstrikes resulted in the deaths of almost 151 civilians in Syria. These reports come in direct conflict with the Russian MoD's insistence that airstrikes are not targeting populated locations in Syria.





Key

- Regime Control
- Hezbollah Presence
- Jabhat al-Nusra Control
- Rebel Control
- ISIS Control
- ISIS, JN, Rebel Control
- YPG Control
- Bassel al-Assad International Airport

Russian Airstrikes

- High-Confidence Strikes from October 25-26
- Low-Confidence Strikes from October 25-26
- High-Confidence Strikes from September 30 - October 24
- Low-Confidence Strikes from September 30 - October 24

By Genevieve Casagrande & Jodi Brignola

September 30- October 26, 2015

Key Takeaway:

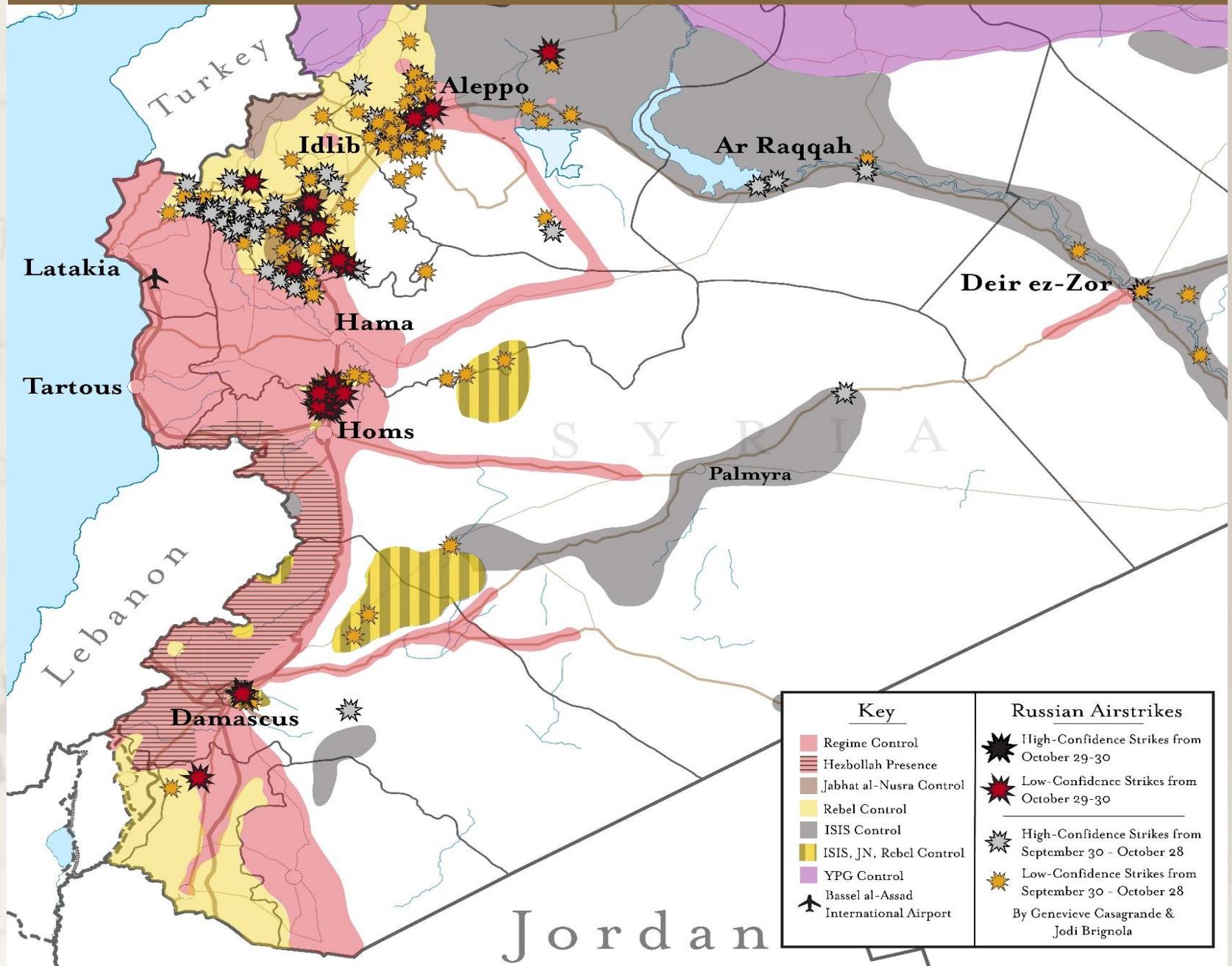
The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) resumed reporting of airstrikes in Syria on October 26, following a hiatus of reports about airstrikes from October 23-25. The Russian MoD claimed to carry out “59 sorties” from October 24-26 in the Syrian provinces of Idlib, Latakia, Homs, Damascus, Aleppo, and Deir ez-Zour. Russian airstrikes from October 25-26 largely supported regime ground offensives against Syrian rebels near the al-Ghab Plain in northwestern Hama Province and south of Aleppo City. Meanwhile, ISIS captured sections of the road between Khanasser and Ithriya in southeastern Aleppo Province from October 22-26 and claimed to sever the regime supply route to Aleppo City amidst ongoing regime advances near the besieged Kuweires Airbase east of Aleppo. The Russian MoD claimed airstrikes near the city of Palmyra in central Syria; however, local reporting has not yet substantiated these claims. ISW therefore does not consider the Russian MoD reports concerning Palmyra to be credible at this time. No high-confidence Russian airstrikes occurred against ISIS’s positions during the reporting period. Meanwhile, the U.S. Coalition did not report airstrikes in Syria from October 24-26, an unusual break in the pattern of reported airstrikes following the U.S.-Russian MOU concerning air safety protocols over Syria.

September 30- October 28, 2015

Key Takeaway:

Russian airstrikes near Aleppo targeted rebels from October 27-28 as the Syrian regime's ground offensives suffered setbacks. Syrian regime ground offensives against rebels in the southern countryside of Aleppo and against ISIS near the besieged Kuweires Airbase east of Aleppo City largely stalled following ISIS's offensive against the regime-held town of Safira in the southeastern Aleppo countryside on October 26. Russian airstrikes, however, largely concentrated in rebel-held areas south of Aleppo City and within the city center according to local activist reporting. Rebel forces have historically leveraged ISIS's offensives against the regime in Aleppo in order to advance against both the regime and ISIS elsewhere in the province. The intensity of Russian airstrikes in Aleppo may limit the Syrian opposition's ability to capitalize on the regime's stalled offensive.

Iranian state news claimed that Russian warplanes targeted ISIS and Syrian al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra near the Syrian Golan Heights on October 28. Local reporting in Syria has not yet substantiated these claims. ISW therefore does not assess these strikes with even low-confidence at this time. If confirmed, Russian airstrikes in southern Syria could be a sign of Russian cooperation with Israel and Jordan after both countries established independent coordination "mechanisms" with Russia on September 21 and October 23, respectively. The strikes could alternatively represent an escalation against Syria's southern neighbors if not coordinated with Amman and Tel Aviv.



| Key | |
|-----|---------------------------------------|
| | Regime Control |
| | Hezbollah Presence |
| | Jabhat al-Nusra Control |
| | Rebel Control |
| | ISIS Control |
| | ISIS, JN, Rebel Control |
| | YPG Control |
| | Bassel al-Assad International Airport |

| Russian Airstrikes | |
|--------------------|--|
| | High-Confidence Strikes from October 29-30 |
| | Low-Confidence Strikes from October 29-30 |
| | High-Confidence Strikes from September 30 - October 28 |
| | Low-Confidence Strikes from September 30 - October 28 |

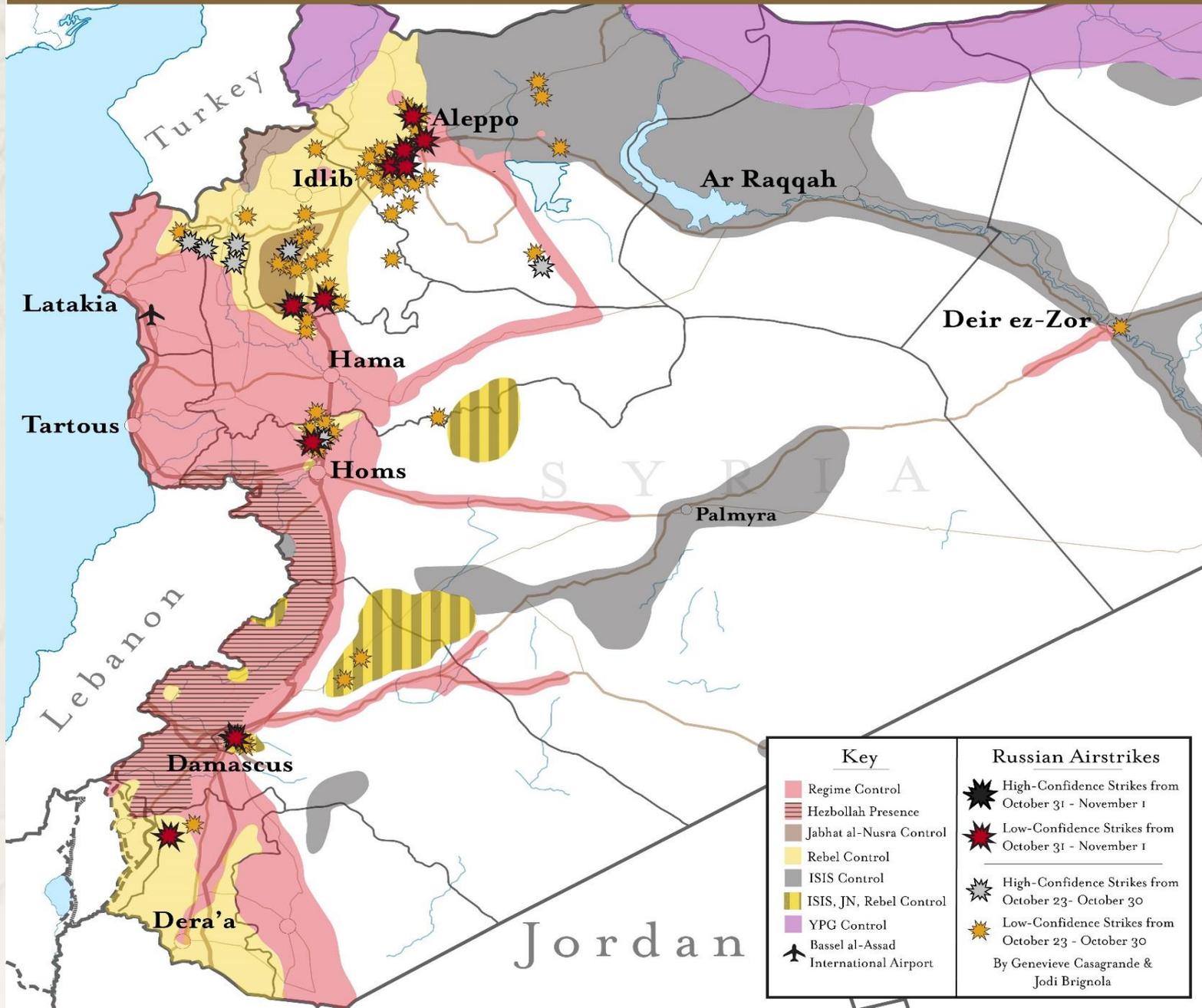
By Genevieve Casagrande & Jodi Brignola

September 30- October 30, 2015

Key Takeaway:

The Russian air campaign in Syria reportedly expanded into the southern province of Dera'a one month after Russian airstrikes in Syria commenced. Credible local sources reported that Russian warplanes conducted overnight strikes near Tel al-Harra and other nearby villages east of the Golan Heights in Dera'a Province on October 28. Tel al-Harra is the location of a Russian signals intelligence facility, which was seized by rebels in October 2014. These airstrikes follow reports that the Syrian regime and Hezbollah reinforcements arrived in northwestern Dera'a Province on October 27. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) did not release official airstrike reports for October 29-30. However, credible local activist sources continued to report instances of Russian airstrikes throughout Dera'a, Damascus, Homs, Idlib, and Aleppo. Russian airstrikes largely concentrated around rebel-held areas in the northern Homs countryside and within Aleppo City.





| Key | | Russian Airstrikes | |
|-----|---------------------------------------|--------------------|--|
| | Regime Control | | High-Confidence Strikes from October 31 - November 1 |
| | Hezbollah Presence | | Low-Confidence Strikes from October 31 - November 1 |
| | Jabhat al-Nusra Control | | High-Confidence Strikes from October 23 - October 30 |
| | Rebel Control | | Low-Confidence Strikes from October 23 - October 30 |
| | ISIS Control | | |
| | ISIS, JN, Rebel Control | | |
| | YPG Control | | |
| | Bassel al-Assad International Airport | | |

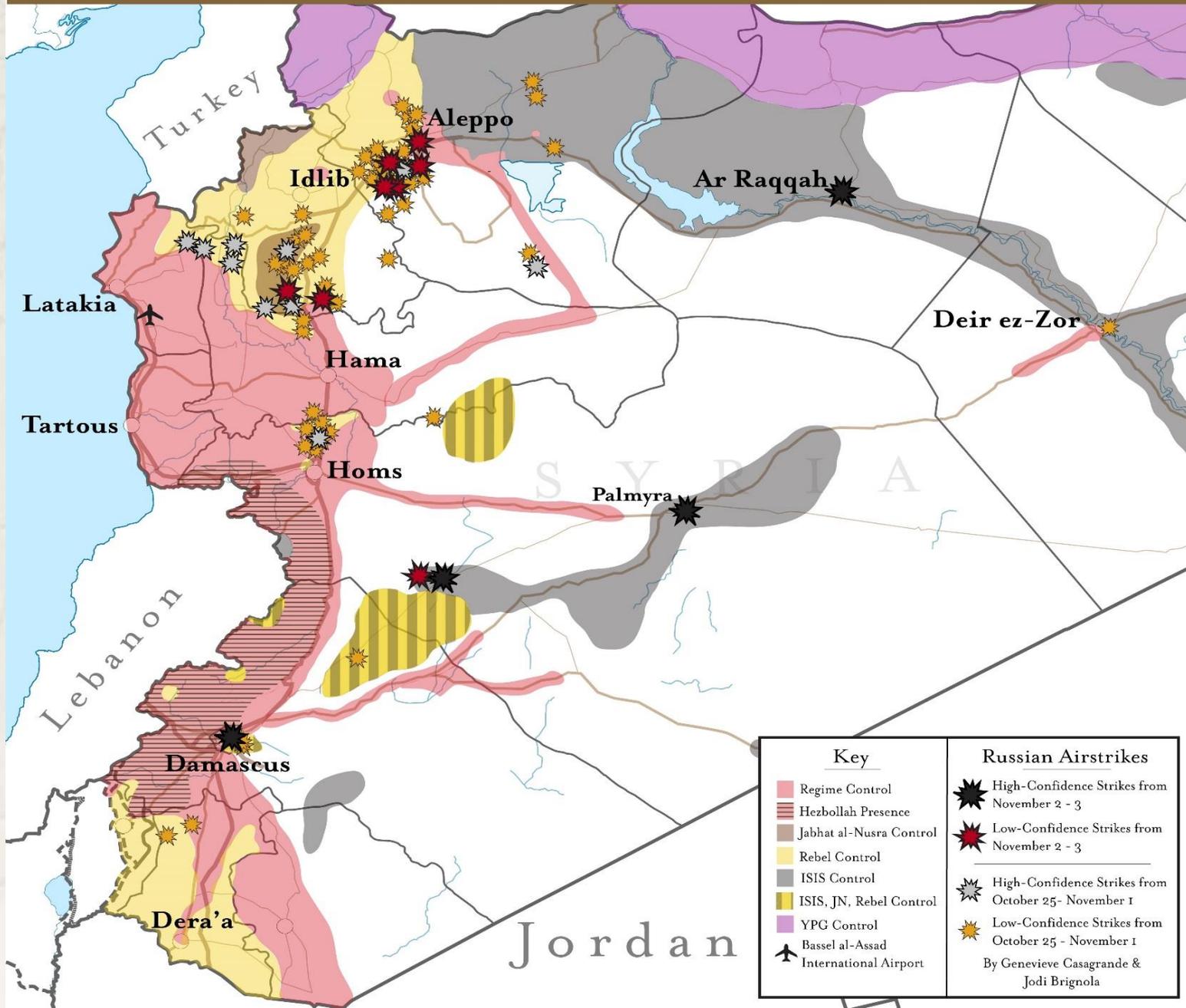
By Genevieve Casagrande & Jodi Brignola

October 23- November 1, 2015

Key Takeaway:

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) discontinued the release of daily airstrike reports from October 28 – November 1 amidst multilateral talks on the Syrian Civil War held in Vienna on October 30 and continued reports of civilian casualties. Nevertheless, credible local sources continued to report airstrikes in Dera'a, Damascus, Homs, Hama, Idlib, and Aleppo from October 31 – November 1. Russian airstrikes predominantly targeted rebel-held areas in Aleppo Province in conjunction with regime ground offensives against ISIS in the southeastern countryside of Aleppo and rebel forces southwest of Aleppo City. Local activist reporting claimed that Russian airstrikes and regime forces killed 64, including 28 children in Aleppo on October 31 alone.

ISIS maintains its ability to threaten both regime and rebel-held terrain, largely undeterred by Russian airstrikes. ISIS continues to contest the regime-held town of Safira in the southeastern countryside of Aleppo, threatening the regime's primary ground line of communication to Aleppo City. Additionally, ISIS reportedly seized the town of Maheen in the southern countryside of Homs Province. This expansion threatens regime control of the strategic M5 Highway connecting Damascus to Homs City. Regime forces subsequently launched an intense shelling campaign on Maheen in response. ISIS's seizure of the town may spark a response from Russian warplanes in the coming days.



| Key | | Russian Airstrikes | |
|-----|---------------------------------------|--------------------|--|
| | Regime Control | | High-Confidence Strikes from November 2 - 3 |
| | Hezbollah Presence | | Low-Confidence Strikes from November 2 - 3 |
| | Jabhat al-Nusra Control | | High-Confidence Strikes from October 25 - November 1 |
| | Rebel Control | | Low-Confidence Strikes from October 25 - November 1 |
| | ISIS Control | | |
| | ISIS, JN, Rebel Control | | |
| | YPG Control | | |
| | Bassel al-Assad International Airport | | |

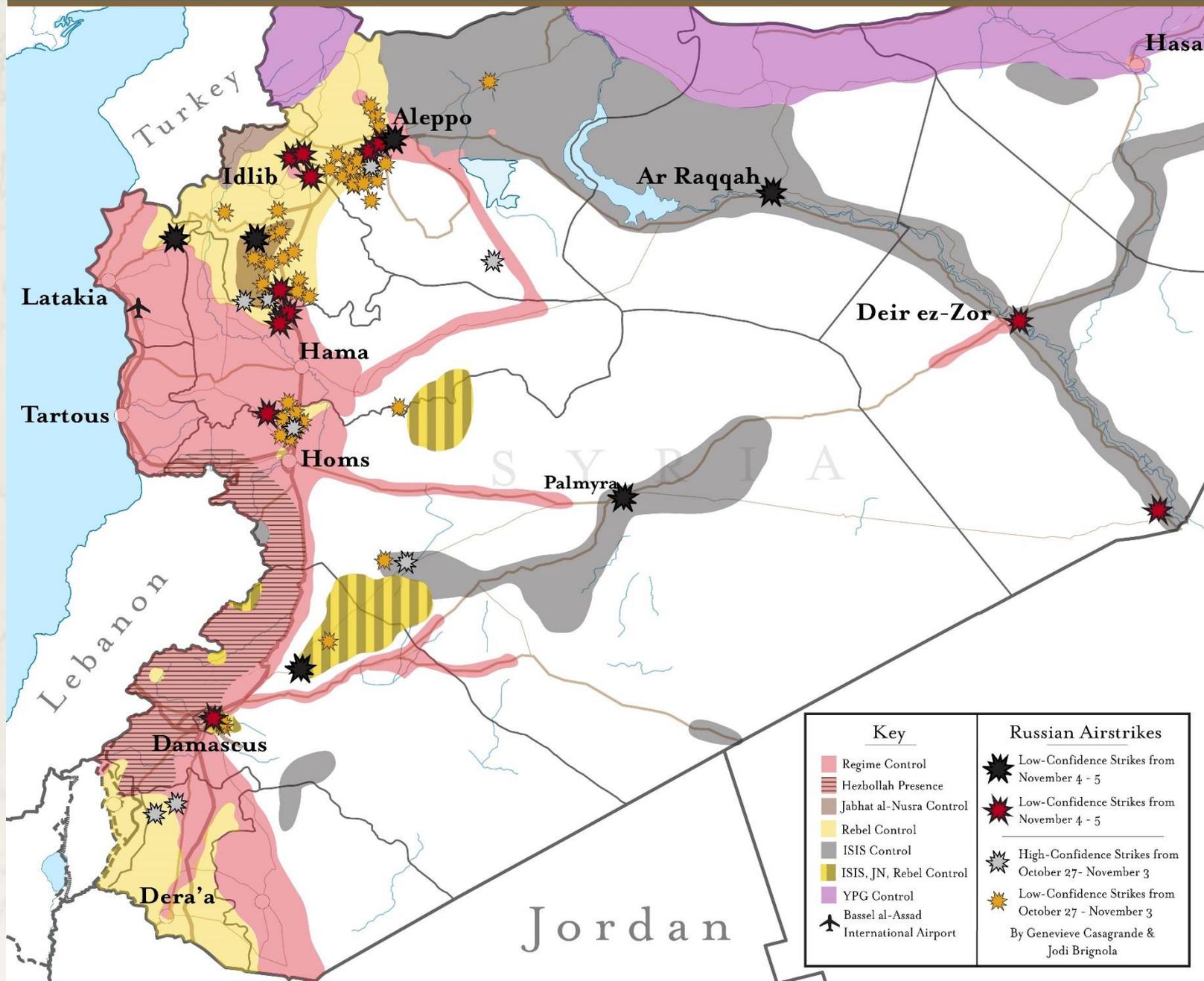
By Genevieve Casagrande & Jodi Brignola

October 25- November 3, 2015

Key Takeaway:

Russian airstrikes largely shifted to target ISIS following new advances by the group in southern Homs Province. Russian warplanes targeted ISIS's positions near Qaraytan and Palmyra in the eastern countryside of Homs as well as in ar-Raqqah City from November 2 - 3 approximately 24 hours after ISIS seized Maheen southeast of Homs City. Russia is therefore able to alter its Air Tasking Order (ATO) to designate new theater targets within 24 hours in Syria. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed to conduct airstrikes using precision weapons near Palmyra, southeastern Aleppo Province, and Deir ez-Zour in direct coordination with the Syrian opposition. These claims support Russia's disingenuous attempt to pressure the U.S. to work together to protect moderate rebels. Russia reportedly deployed five attack helicopters to the T4 (Tiyas) Airbase in eastern Homs Province along the highway between Homs City and Palmyra, according to an anonymous U.S. military official on November 3. The unnamed official also stated that Russia deployed aircraft to the Shayrat Military Airbase less than 30 kilometers northwest of Maheen. Syrian activists previously reported on October 31 that the Syrian regime redeployed all of its aircraft from Shayrat Military Airbase to the T4 and Hama Military Airbases. Russian military presence in eastern Homs could provide aerial reconnaissance for Russian strikes in the area as an alternative or augmentation to Syrian rebel intelligence to guide Russian airstrikes.

ISIS maintains the ability to pressure regime-held terrain despite the shift in Russian airstrikes. ISIS continued to clash with regime forces in the town of Sadad northwest of Maheen on November 3. ISIS's expansion threatens regime control of the strategic M5 Highway connecting Damascus to Homs City. Credible local sources also reported that Russian airstrikes continued to target rebel-held areas in the southern countryside of Aleppo, southern Idlib Province, and the Eastern Ghouta suburbs of Damascus from November 2 – 3 simultaneously.



| Key | |
|-----|---------------------------------------|
| | Regime Control |
| | Hezbollah Presence |
| | Jabhat al-Nusra Control |
| | Rebel Control |
| | ISIS Control |
| | ISIS, JN, Rebel Control |
| | YPG Control |
| | Bassel al-Assad International Airport |

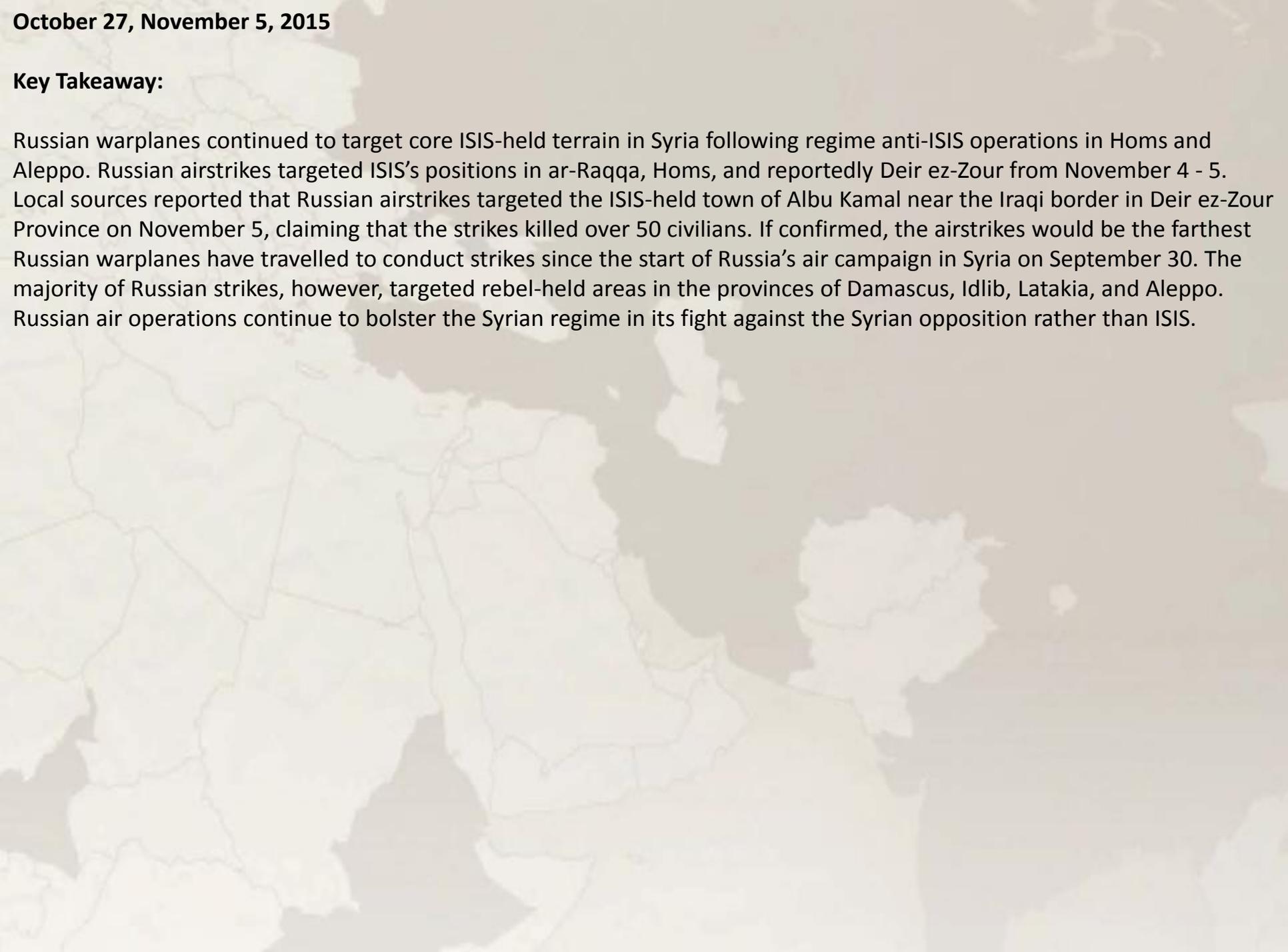
| Russian Airstrikes | |
|--------------------|---|
| | Low-Confidence Strikes from November 4 - 5 |
| | Low-Confidence Strikes from November 4 - 5 |
| | High-Confidence Strikes from October 27- November 3 |
| | Low-Confidence Strikes from October 27 - November 3 |

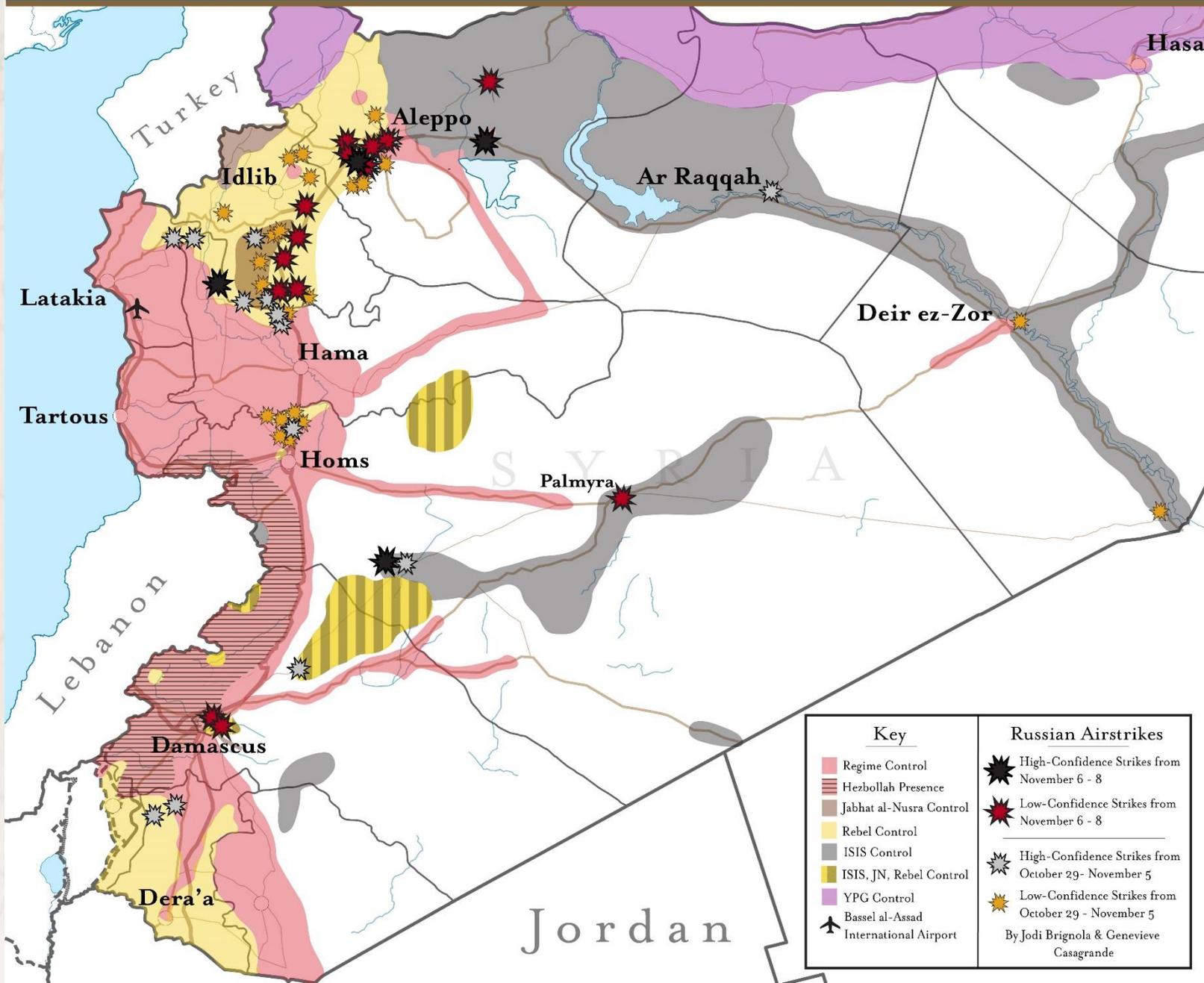
By Genevieve Casagrande & Jodi Brignola

October 27, November 5, 2015

Key Takeaway:

Russian warplanes continued to target core ISIS-held terrain in Syria following regime anti-ISIS operations in Homs and Aleppo. Russian airstrikes targeted ISIS's positions in ar-Raqqa, Homs, and reportedly Deir ez-Zour from November 4 - 5. Local sources reported that Russian airstrikes targeted the ISIS-held town of Albu Kamal near the Iraqi border in Deir ez-Zour Province on November 5, claiming that the strikes killed over 50 civilians. If confirmed, the airstrikes would be the farthest Russian warplanes have travelled to conduct strikes since the start of Russia's air campaign in Syria on September 30. The majority of Russian strikes, however, targeted rebel-held areas in the provinces of Damascus, Idlib, Latakia, and Aleppo. Russian air operations continue to bolster the Syrian regime in its fight against the Syrian opposition rather than ISIS.





| Key | |
|-----|---------------------------------------|
| | Regime Control |
| | Hezbollah Presence |
| | Jabhat al-Nusra Control |
| | Rebel Control |
| | ISIS Control |
| | ISIS, JN, Rebel Control |
| | YPG Control |
| | Bassel al-Assad International Airport |

| Russian Airstrikes | |
|--------------------|---|
| | High-Confidence Strikes from November 6 - 8 |
| | Low-Confidence Strikes from November 6 - 8 |
| | High-Confidence Strikes from October 29- November 5 |
| | Low-Confidence Strikes from October 29 - November 5 |

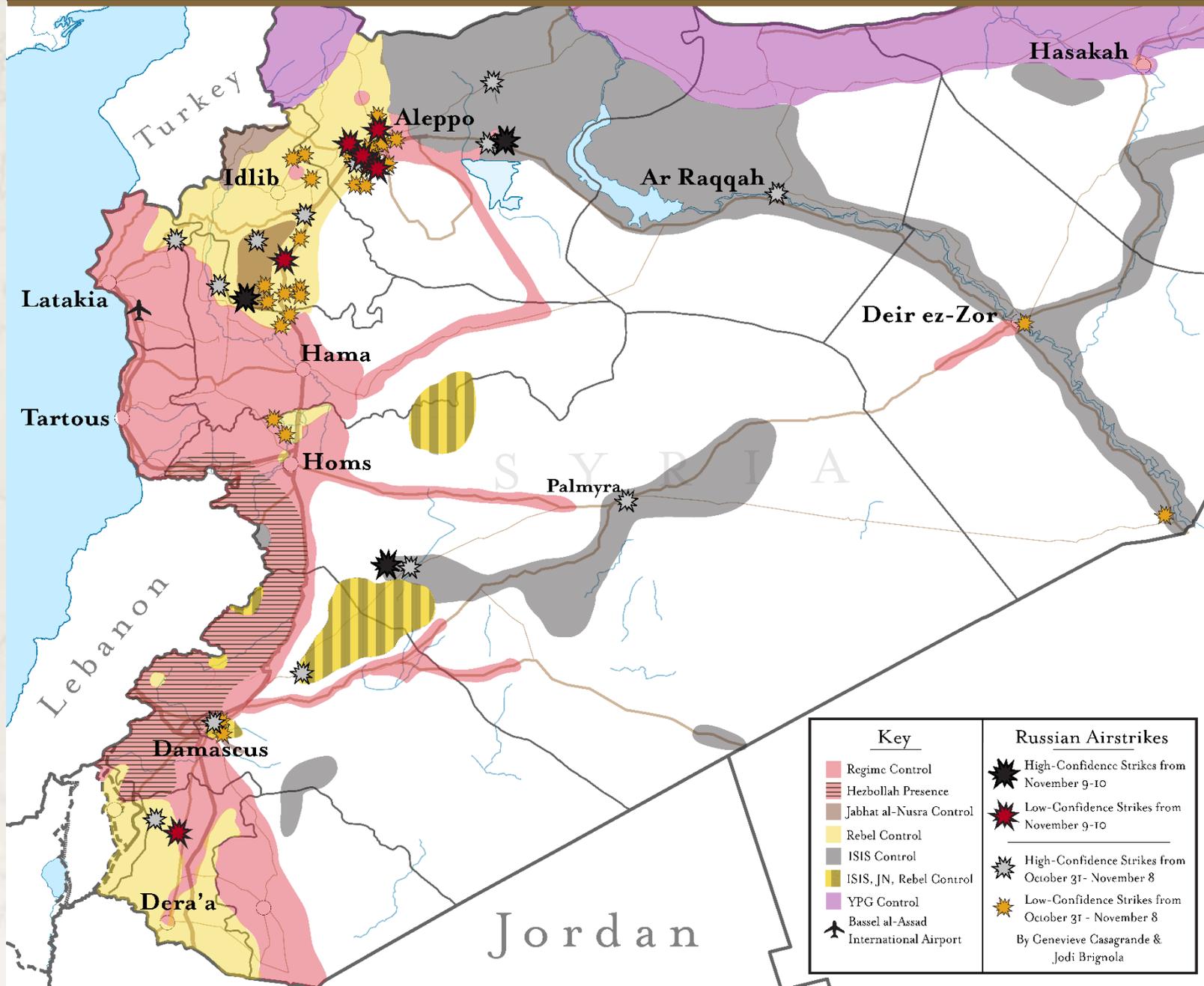
By Jodi Brignola & Genevieve Casagrande

October 29- November 8, 2015

Key Takeaway:

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed airstrikes in Aleppo, Damascus, Idlib, Lattakia, Homs, Hama, and Raqqa from November 6 – November 8. Credible local sources substantiated strike claims in Aleppo, Damascus, Idlib, Homs, and Hama during this time period, but failed to verify reports of Russian airstrikes in Raqqa province. Russian airstrikes continued to support regime ground operations with limited effect. Russian warplanes targeted rebel-held territory in Aleppo city and in the southwestern Aleppo countryside amidst ongoing clashes between pro-regime and rebel forces in the area. Pro-regime forces have failed numerous attempts to advance on the ground. Russian airstrikes also targeted rebel-held territory in Idlib and Hama countrysides, likely in response to continued rebel advances in Northern Hama. Jabhat al-Nusra (JN) and rebel forces seized the strategic town of Morek, north of Hama City on November 4 and continued to make tactical gains in the surrounding villages including Ashtan and Um Hartayn on November 6. Rebel advances in Hama indicate that the Russian air campaign is insufficient to prevent rebel gains in the area amidst increased shipments of U.S. TOW anti-tank missiles to moderate rebels. It is possible that rebel forces are taking advantage of a decrease in Russian rotary wing air support following the deployment of Russian helicopters to the T4 (Tiyas) and Sharyat airbases in Homs on November 4.

Russian airstrikes also targeted ISIS-held territory in Aleppo and Homs Provinces from November 6 to November 8. Russian warplanes targeted ISIS-held towns of al-Bab in Northeastern Aleppo and Palmyra and Maheen in Eastern Homs. Russian strikes near the Kuweires airbase east of Aleppo city, besieged by ISIS set conditions for a renewed regime advance toward the base after regime forces regained control of the Khanaser-Ithraya highway from ISIS on November 4. Re-establishing control of the highway allowed the regime to reinforce Kuweires and seize the village of Sheikh Ahmad, three kilometers south of the airbase on November 9. Coalition warplanes also targeted ISIS-held territory from November 6 to November 8, conducting strikes in Hasakah, Deir ez-Zour, and northern Aleppo. Both Russian and coalition airstrikes are therefore occurring in northern Aleppo and possibly Deir ez Zour and Raqqa against ISIS, exercising de-confliction and raising questions of varying effects upon ground conditions. Coalition airstrikes are precise, whereas Russian airstrikes continued to target civilian populations despite Russian claims to the contrary. Russian strikes on Douma in the Eastern Ghouta suburb of Damascus killed at least 23 civilians, including women and children on November 7. The strike follows recent regime aerial attacks in Douma, the stronghold of prominent Islamist group Jaysh al-Islam. The regime and Russia likely seek to disrupt an ongoing offensive by Jaysh al-Islam against pro-regime forces south of Douma near regime-held neighborhoods in Damascus.



| Key | Russian Airstrikes |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Regime Control | High-Confidence Strikes from November 9-10 |
| Hezbollah Presence | Low-Confidence Strikes from November 9-10 |
| Jabhat al-Nusra Control | High-Confidence Strikes from October 31- November 8 |
| Rebel Control | Low-Confidence Strikes from October 31 - November 8 |
| ISIS Control | By Genevieve Casagrande & Jodi Brignola |
| ISIS, JN, Rebel Control | |
| YPG Control | |
| Bassel al-Assad International Airport | |

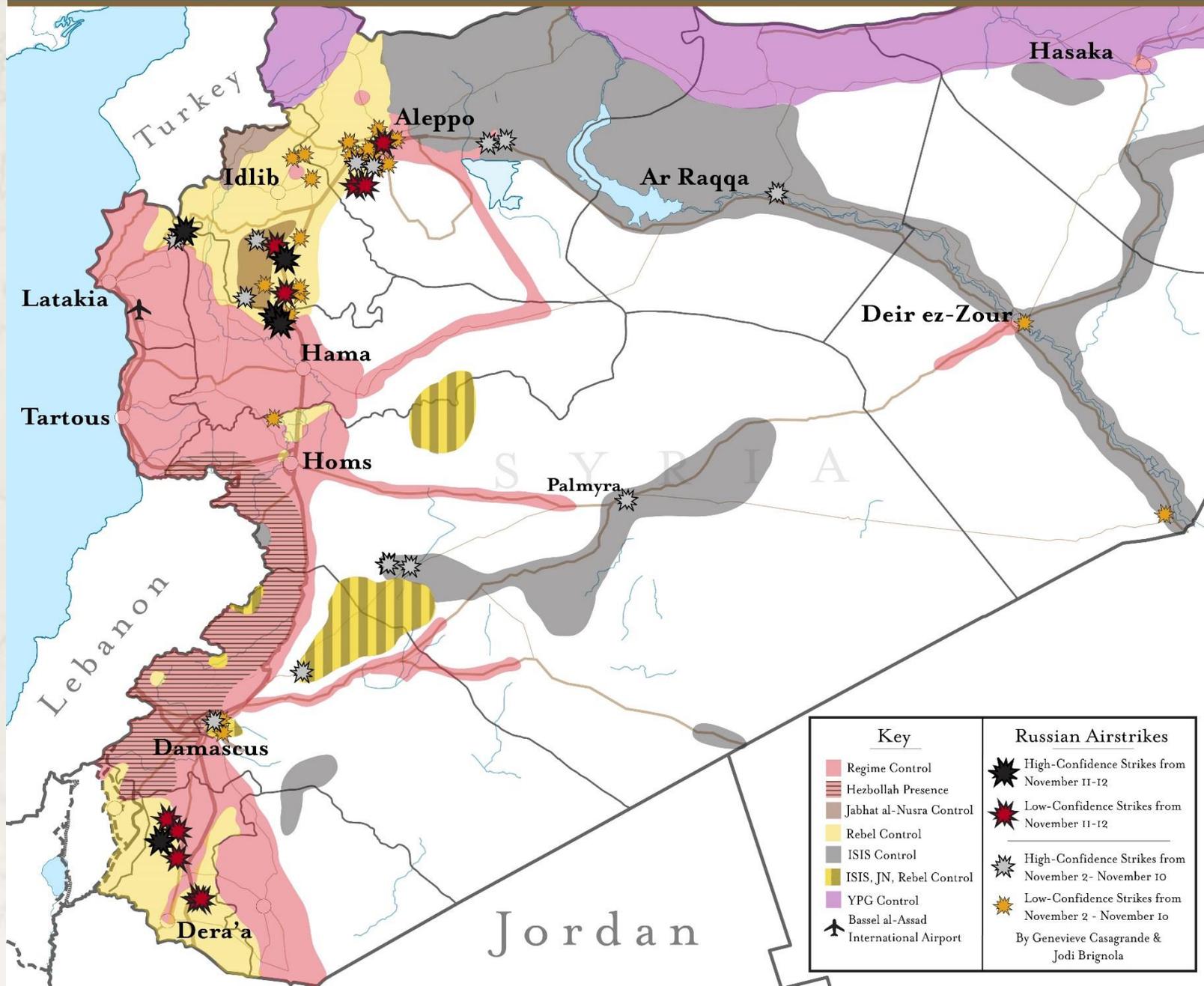
October 31- November 10, 2015

Key Takeaway:

Russian airstrikes continued to support regime ground operations in Aleppo, Hama, Homs, Idlib, and Dera'a from November 9 - 10. Pro-regime forces relieved several hundred regime soldiers besieged by ISIS in the Kuweires Airbase east of Aleppo City on November 10 with air support provided by Russian warplanes. Russian airstrikes began to target ISIS's positions surrounding Kuweires Airbase on October 12, preceding the start of the regime's ground campaign against Kuweires on October 15. The regime largely relied upon Russian air power as well as reinforcement from hundreds of Iranian-backed proxy forces. The breaking of the siege represents a significant psychological victory for the regime and its allies. Russia will likely use this victory to validate its intervention in Syria and portray itself and the regime as decisive forces against ISIS in Syria. Russian airstrikes also continued to target rebel-held terrain south of Aleppo City as pro-regime forces continue to push southwest towards the town of Hader.

Russian airstrikes targeted Syrian opposition forces in Hama and Idlib Provinces from November 9 - 10 as rebels continued to make gains against regime forces following rebels' seizure of the town of Morek in northern Hama Province on November 4. Regime forces have in fact lost terrain in Hama Province since the start of Russian airstrikes in Syria on September 30. U.S. support to Syrian rebels has also largely assisted rebel advances in Hama Province. The U.S. provided increased shipments of TOW anti-tank missiles to "moderate" Syrian opposition groups following Russia's intervention. U.S.-backed rebels launched a total of 115 TOW missiles in the month of October alone.

Russian warplanes allegedly targeted the city of Inkhel 50 km north of Dera'a city amidst reports of a buildup of regime military forces in northwestern Dera'a Province. Pro-regime military buildup in southern Syria may indicate the regime's intent to launch a future offensive to retake the town of Tel Harra in northwest Dera'a, which housed a joint Syrian-Russian signals intelligence (SIGINT) base before rebels seized Tel Harra in October 2014. These reports raise the question of future Russian support towards an Iranian backed regime offensive near the Golan Heights in Southern Syria, particularly in light of recent Russian agreements with Syria's southern neighbors Israel and Jordan.



| Key | |
|-----|---------------------------------------|
| | Regime Control |
| | Hezbollah Presence |
| | Jabhat al-Nusra Control |
| | Rebel Control |
| | ISIS Control |
| | ISIS, JN, Rebel Control |
| | YPG Control |
| | Bassel al-Assad International Airport |

| Russian Airstrikes | |
|--------------------|---|
| | High-Confidence Strikes from November 11-12 |
| | Low-Confidence Strikes from November 11-12 |
| | High-Confidence Strikes from November 2-10 |
| | Low-Confidence Strikes from November 2-10 |

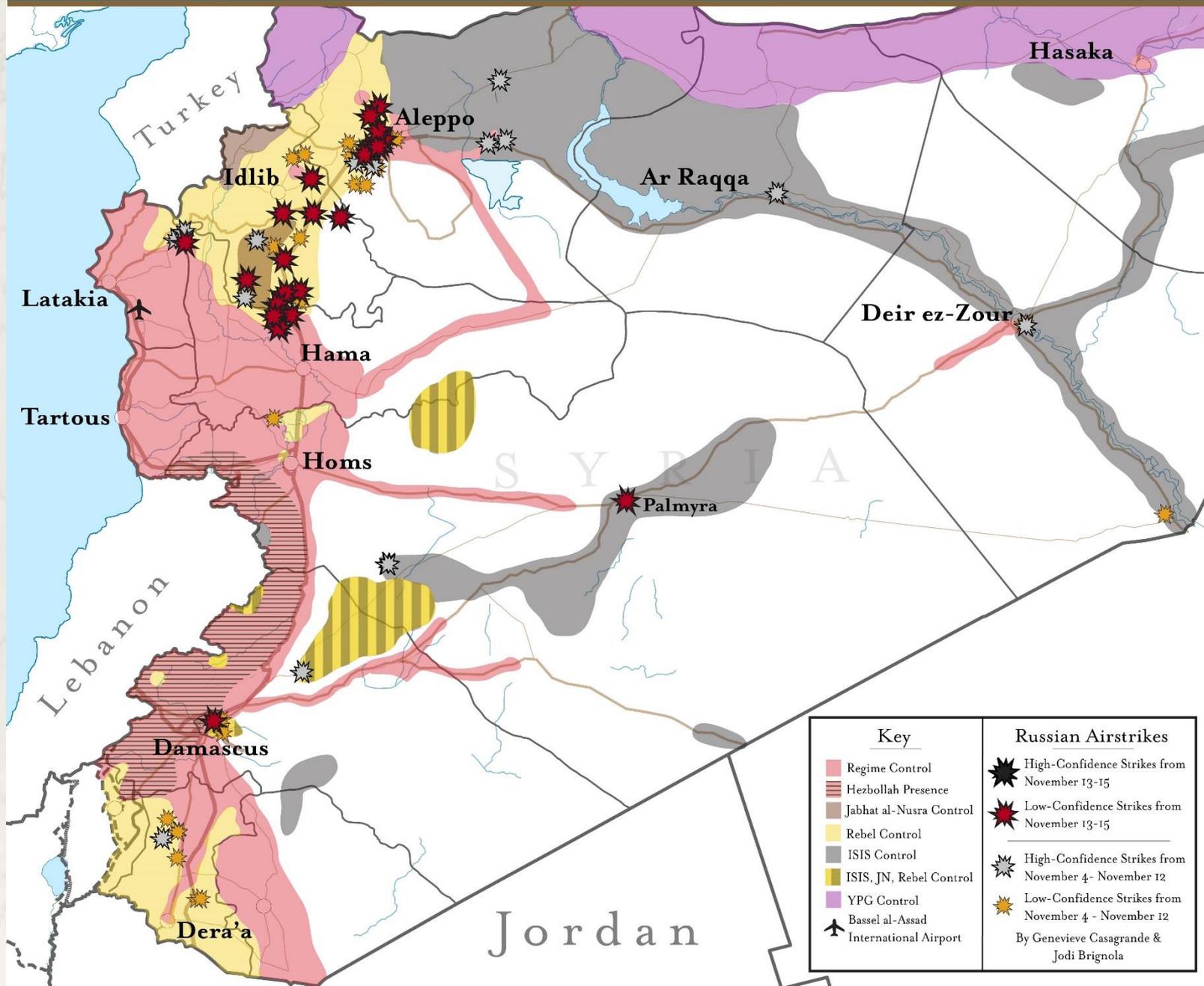
By Genevieve Casagrande & Jodi Brignola

November 2- 12, 2015

Key Takeaway:

The Russian air campaign continued to support regime ground operations against the Syrian opposition in Aleppo, Latakia, Idlib, Hama, and Dera'a Provinces from November 11 - 12. Russian warplanes targeted rebel-held terrain in the southern Aleppo countryside, enabling pro-regime forces to seize the towns of al-Hader and al-Eis located southwest of Aleppo City on November 12. Russian warplanes began to bombard both of these towns on October 15 in conjunction with the start of the regime's ground offensive against rebels in the area. These advances have brought the regime and its allies within sixteen miles of the two besieged Shi'a-majority towns of Fua'h and Kafraya in northeastern Idlib Province. Iraqi Shi'a militia Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba claimed that the group is preparing for operations to break the rebel siege on these two towns. Russian warplanes began targeting rebel-held towns surrounding Fu'ah and Kafraya on November 4. These reported airstrikes violate terms of a UN-implemented ceasefire established on September 24. Local sources also reported the use of white phosphorus during Russian airstrikes near the Jebel Zawiya mountain range in southern Idlib Province on November 12.

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) announced the expansion of its air campaign into Dera'a Province. ISW assessed Russian airstrikes against one location in Dera'a Province with high-confidence and five others with low-confidence from November 11 – 12, the largest concentration of reported Russian strikes in Dera'a since the start of Russian airstrikes on September 30. Local sources began reporting instances of Russian airstrikes in Dera'a Province as early as October 28. The influx in reported strikes follows reports of regime mobilization for an upcoming offensive near the Golan Heights. Israeli warplanes later conducted at least one airstrike near the Damascus International Airport on November 11 targeting an alleged weapon shipment intended for Lebanese Hezbollah. Continued Israeli targeting of Iranian proxy forces in Syria could exert additional pressure on Russia's relations with Iran and the Syrian regime, particularly if Russia received advance warning of the strike through the Russian-Israeli air coordination mechanism established on September 21.



| Key | |
|-----|---------------------------------------|
| | Regime Control |
| | Hezbollah Presence |
| | Jabhat al-Nusra Control |
| | Rebel Control |
| | ISIS Control |
| | ISIS, JN, Rebel Control |
| | YPG Control |
| | Bassel al-Assad International Airport |

| Russian Airstrikes | |
|--------------------|---|
| | High-Confidence Strikes from November 13-15 |
| | Low-Confidence Strikes from November 13-15 |
| | High-Confidence Strikes from November 4-12 |
| | Low-Confidence Strikes from November 4-12 |

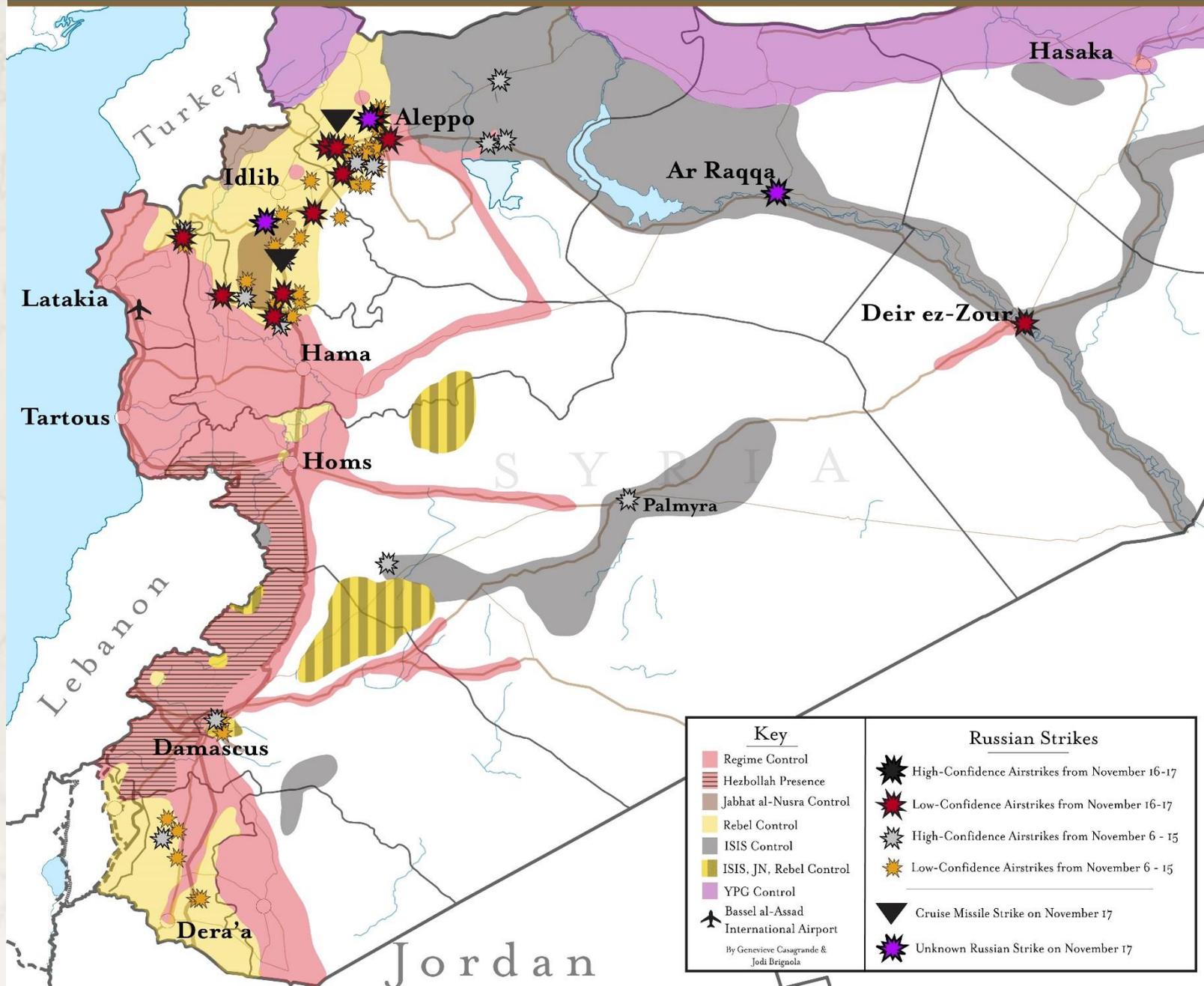
By Genevieve Casagrande & Jodi Brignola

November 4- 15, 2015

Key Takeaway:

Russia continues to prioritize the preservation of the Assad regime rather than the defeat of ISIS through its air campaign in Syria. Russian airstrikes primarily supported regime ground operations against the Syrian armed opposition from November 13 – 15, concentrating in the southern countryside of Aleppo and the northern countryside of while pro-regime ground forces attempted to advance. ISW assessed Russian airstrikes against only one ISIS-held location with low-confidence during the reporting period. Meanwhile, the French Ministry of Defense announced French aircraft dropped 20 bombs against ISIS in ar Raqqa on November 15 in retaliation for the violent string of terrorist attacks carried out by ISIS in Paris on November 13. Russia will likely leverage the Paris attacks to drive its efforts to form a new counterterrorism coalition in the Middle East. Russia will continue to present itself as a decisive partner against ISIS in Syria to the international community, despite the relatively low number of Russian airstrikes targeting core ISIS terrain.

The Russian air campaign in Syria is accelerating the radicalization of the Syrian armed opposition. The brutality of the Assad regime against civilian populations throughout four years of armed conflict has driven rebels into partnerships with Syrian al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra, a powerful anti-Assad ground force. Russia's air campaign uses similarly indiscriminate tactics against civilians. U.S. officials have confirmed the Russian use of cluster munitions against populated locations in Hama and Idlib Provinces. Open source reporting indicates the use of cluster munitions in Aleppo Province as well. Russian airstrikes have reportedly killed over 254 civilians from September 30 – October 26 alone, according to the Syrian Network for Human Rights. Russian airstrikes reportedly targeted at least 12 medical facilities throughout Syria, according to statements from Doctors Without Borders on October 29. Local sources also reported the use of white phosphorus during Russian airstrikes in Idlib Province on November 12. Russia's violent intervention is already driving the unification of rebels under powerful jihadist and hardline elements of the armed opposition. Three rebel groups made up of foreign fighters pledged allegiance to Jabhat al-Nusra from September 23 to October 3, and three groups merged under hardline Islamist Ahrar al-Sham beginning in early September 2015 following reports of increased Russian presence in Syria.



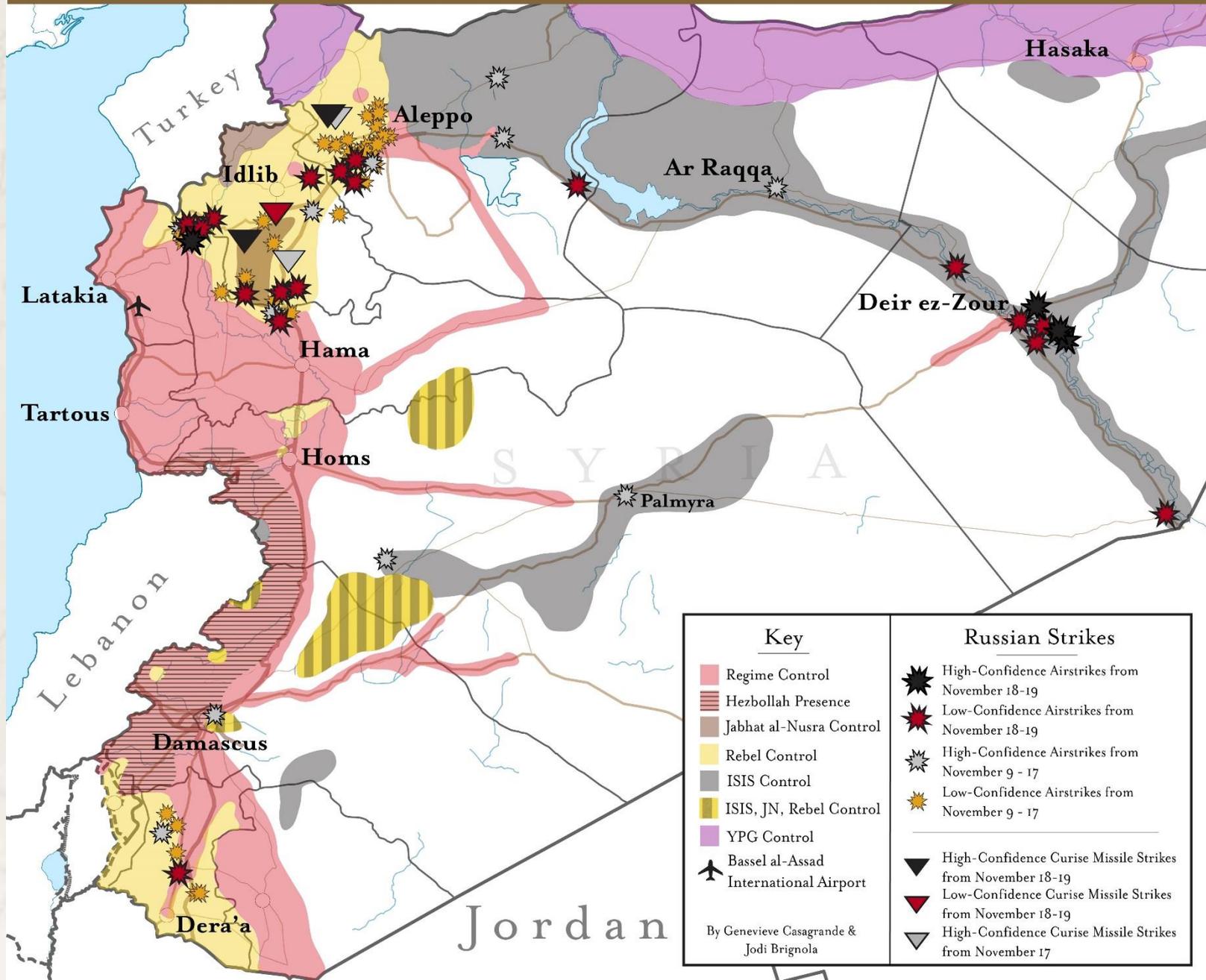
November 6-17, 2015

Key Takeaway:

Russia announced a new phase of its air campaign in Syria on November 17 following a new directive from Russian President Vladimir Putin. This new directive comes as FSB Director Alexander Bortnikov confirmed the downing of Metrojet Flight 9268 to be “a terrorist act.” President Putin vowed to “punish” those responsible and stated that the Russian air campaign in Syria “must be intensified in such a way that the criminals understand that retribution is inevitable.” The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) announced that the new air operations plan will double the size of Russia’s strike force able to target positions inside of Syria to include 25 long-range strategic bombers, 8 SU-34s, and 4 SU-27s. These new warplanes will be based from the Mozdok airbase in Northern Ossetia along Russia’s southern border with Georgia and flown over Iranian and Iraqi airspace to launch operations inside Syria. The new phase will also include an increased number of combat sorties from the Bassel al-Assad International Airport in Latakia Province.

Russian Minister of Defense Sergey Shoygu reported during a briefing with President Putin that 12 long-range Tu-95 bombers carried out airstrikes against ISIS' positions in ar Raqqa and Deir ez-Zour on November 17. One Tu-160 and one Tu-95 fired 34 Kalibr cruise missiles at targets in Aleppo and Idlib Provinces on November 17. The U.S. was alerted of Russia’s intention to use sea-based cruise missiles in addition to long-range aircraft prior to these strikes according to an anonymous U.S. defense official. Multiple sources including the Russian MoD and the French MoD stated that Russia used cruise missiles to strike ISIS positions in Raqqa. French newspaper Le Monde reported that Russia launched cruise missiles from the Mediterranean, citing anonymous sources. The Kremlin did not confirm cruise missiles targeting ISIS in ar Raqqa. Local ground reporting only confirmed cruise missile strikes against rebel positions in Idlib and Aleppo Provinces with some local Syrian sources reporting that the missiles were fired from the direction of the Mediterranean. Notably, the majority of Russian airstrikes from November 16-17 targeted rebel positions, not ISIS.

Russia’s intensified air campaign may open the opportunity for Russia to continue its efforts to draw Western countries into a new counterterrorism coalition in the Middle East. French Defense Minister Jean Yves Le Drian stated that the cruise missile strikes near ar Raqqa may indicate “this grand coalition with Russia is possible.” Increased airstrikes by both France and Russia prelude further cooperation between the two countries. Russia will continue to present itself as an effective anti-ISIS actor in Syria to the international community, despite the continuous low number of Russian airstrikes targeting core ISIS terrain.



| Key | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| | Regime Control |
| | Hezbollah Presence |
| | Jabhat al-Nusra Control |
| | Rebel Control |
| | ISIS Control |
| | ISIS, JN, Rebel Control |
| | YPG Control |
| | Bassel al-Assad International Airport |
| By Genevieve Casagrande & Jodi Brignola | |

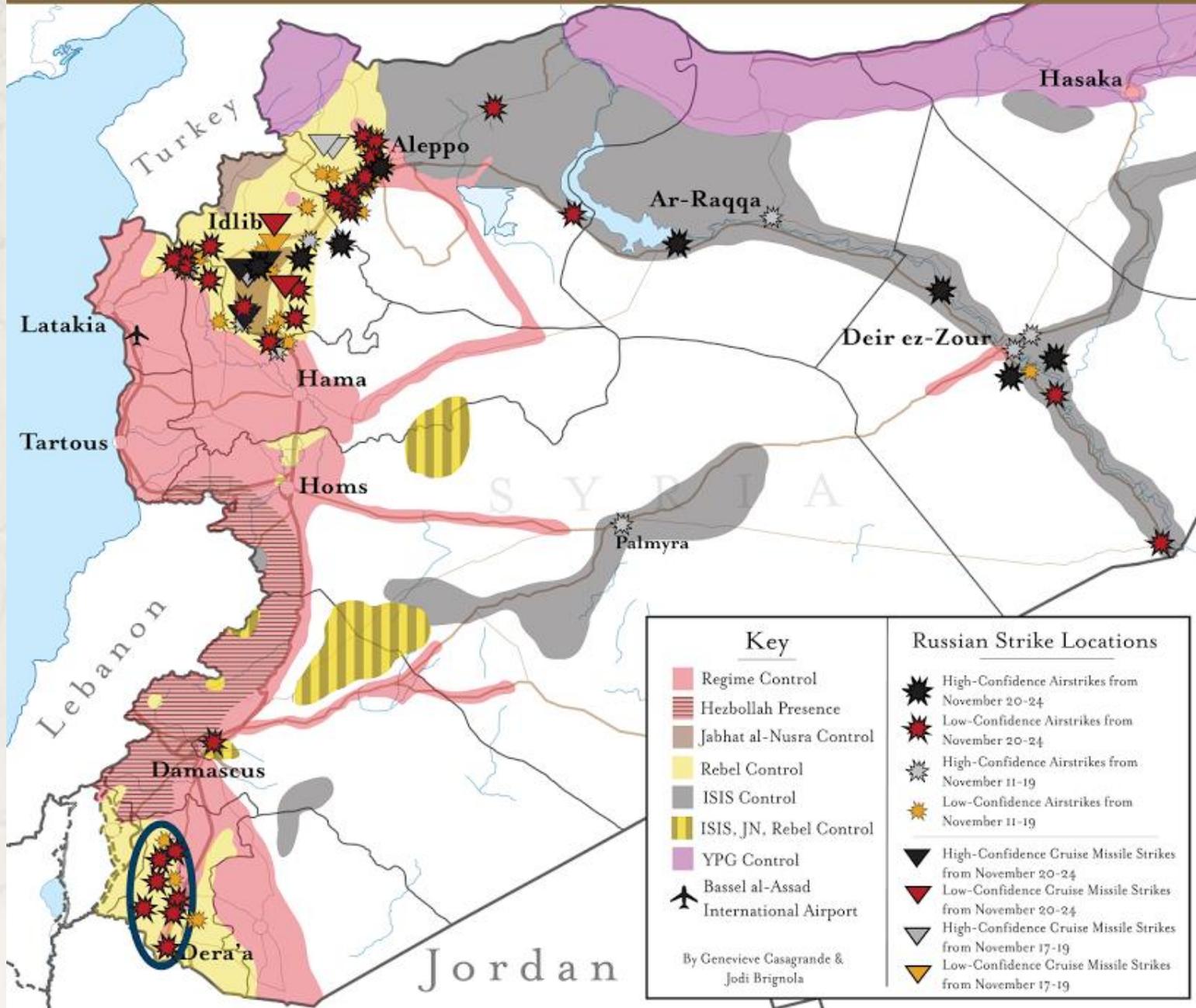
| Russian Strikes | |
|-----------------|--|
| | High-Confidence Airstrikes from November 18-19 |
| | Low-Confidence Airstrikes from November 18-19 |
| | High-Confidence Airstrikes from November 9-17 |
| | Low-Confidence Airstrikes from November 9-17 |
| <hr/> | |
| | High-Confidence Curise Missile Strikes from November 18-19 |
| | Low-Confidence Curise Missile Strikes from November 18-19 |
| | High-Confidence Curise Missile Strikes from November 17 |

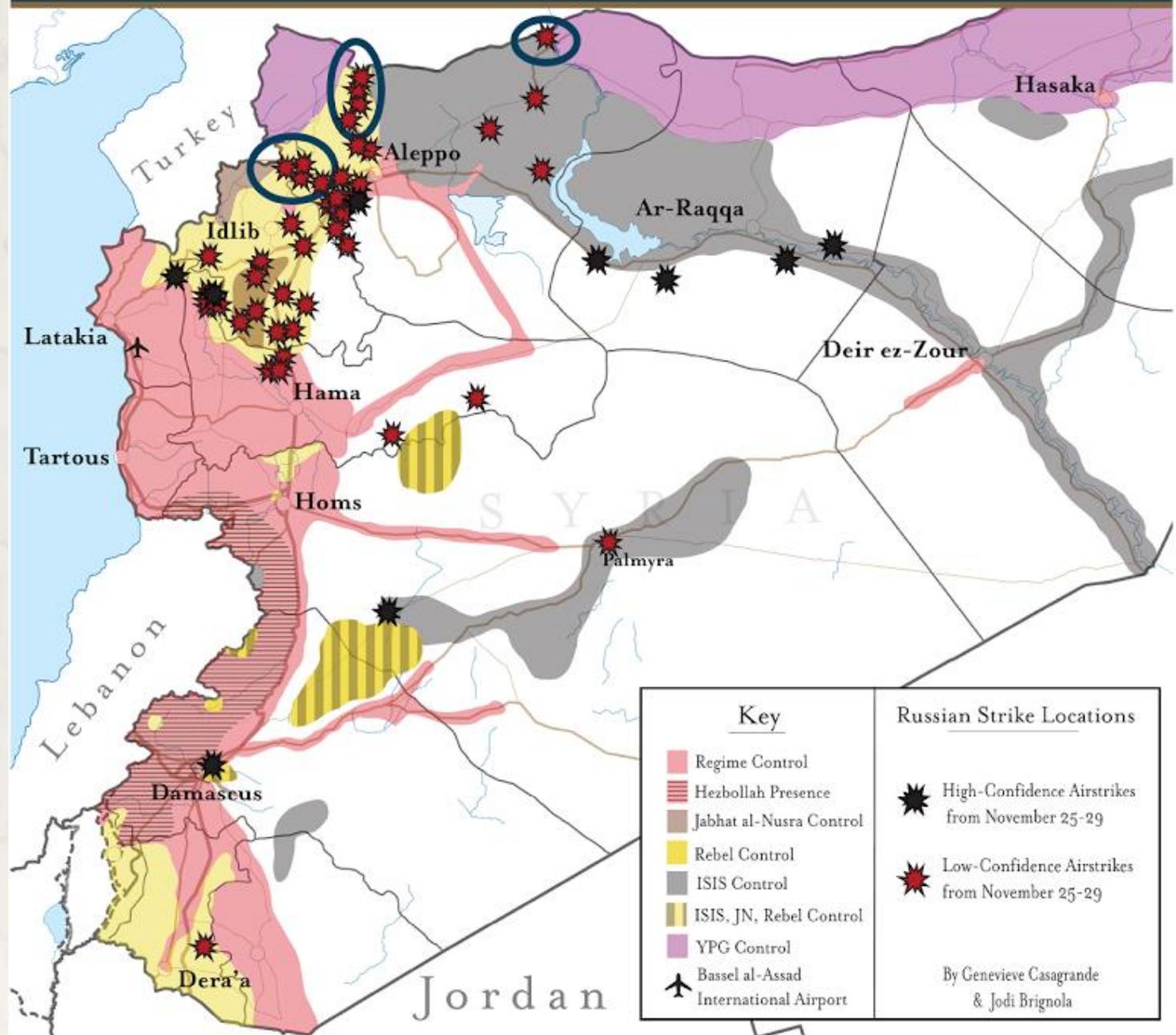
November 9- 19, 2015

Key Takeaway:

Russia shifted its air campaign in an effort to mimic the U.S.-led anti-ISIS coalition's recent offensive to target ISIS-run oil and natural gas infrastructure from November 18-19. Russian military chief of staff Col. Gen. Andrey Kartapolov announced on November 18 "Russian warplanes are now flying on a free hunt" against ISIS-operated oil tanker trucks traveling back and forth from Syria and Iraq, claiming that Russian strikes had destroyed over 500 ISIS-operated oil trucks in the past "several days." This claim follows a November 16 U.S.-led coalition strike near Deir ez-Zour, which destroyed at least 116 ISIS-operated oil tanker trucks. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that its long-range warplanes based in southern Russia conducted strikes against ISIS in both Deir ez-Zour and ar Raqqa Provinces. There was a notable influx of Russian strikes in the countryside of Deir ez-Zour, an area crucial to ISIS's oil revenue. Local reporting has not yet substantiated claims of Russian airstrikes in ar Raqqa. French warplanes, however, continued to heavily bombard ISIS's position in ar Raqqa from November 18-19. The targeting of ISIS-held oil infrastructure will allow Russia to present its interests as aligned with Western countries such as France despite Russia's continued targeting of Syrian armed opposition groups in support of the Syrian regime's ground campaign. Russia's recent escalation against ISIS in Deir ez-Zour may also be intended to demonstrate the irrelevance of the U.S.'s newest initiative inside Syria.

Russia continues to use its intensified air campaign in Syria to position itself as an effective anti-ISIS actor amongst the international community. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed to carry out 253 sorties from the Bassel al-Assad International Airport in Latakia as well as its base located along Russia's southern border with Georgia, doubling the average number of sorties flown each day. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that long-range warplanes fired 50 cruise missiles against ISIS in Aleppo, Idlib, and Deir ez-Zour Provinces. However, cruise missile strikes have thus far only been documented against rebel-held terrain in northern Idlib and western Aleppo Provinces. Russian warplanes continued to carry out airstrikes against rebel positions in Latakia, Hama, Idlib, and Dera'a Provinces in support of regime ground operations. Russia continues to indiscriminately target civilians and continues to provide air support to pro-regime forces, including Iranian-backed proxy groups. The Russian air campaign in Syria primarily supports the Assad regime's efforts against the armed opposition despite Russia's recent increase in strikes against ISIS targets.





| Key | | Russian Strike Locations | |
|-----|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| | Regime Control | | High-Confidence Airstrikes from November 25-29 |
| | Hezbollah Presence | | Low-Confidence Airstrikes from November 25-29 |
| | Jabhat al-Nusra Control | | |
| | Rebel Control | | |
| | ISIS Control | | |
| | ISIS, JN, Rebel Control | | |
| | YPG Control | | |
| | Bassel al-Assad International Airport | | |
| | | By Genevieve Casagrande & Jodi Brignola | |

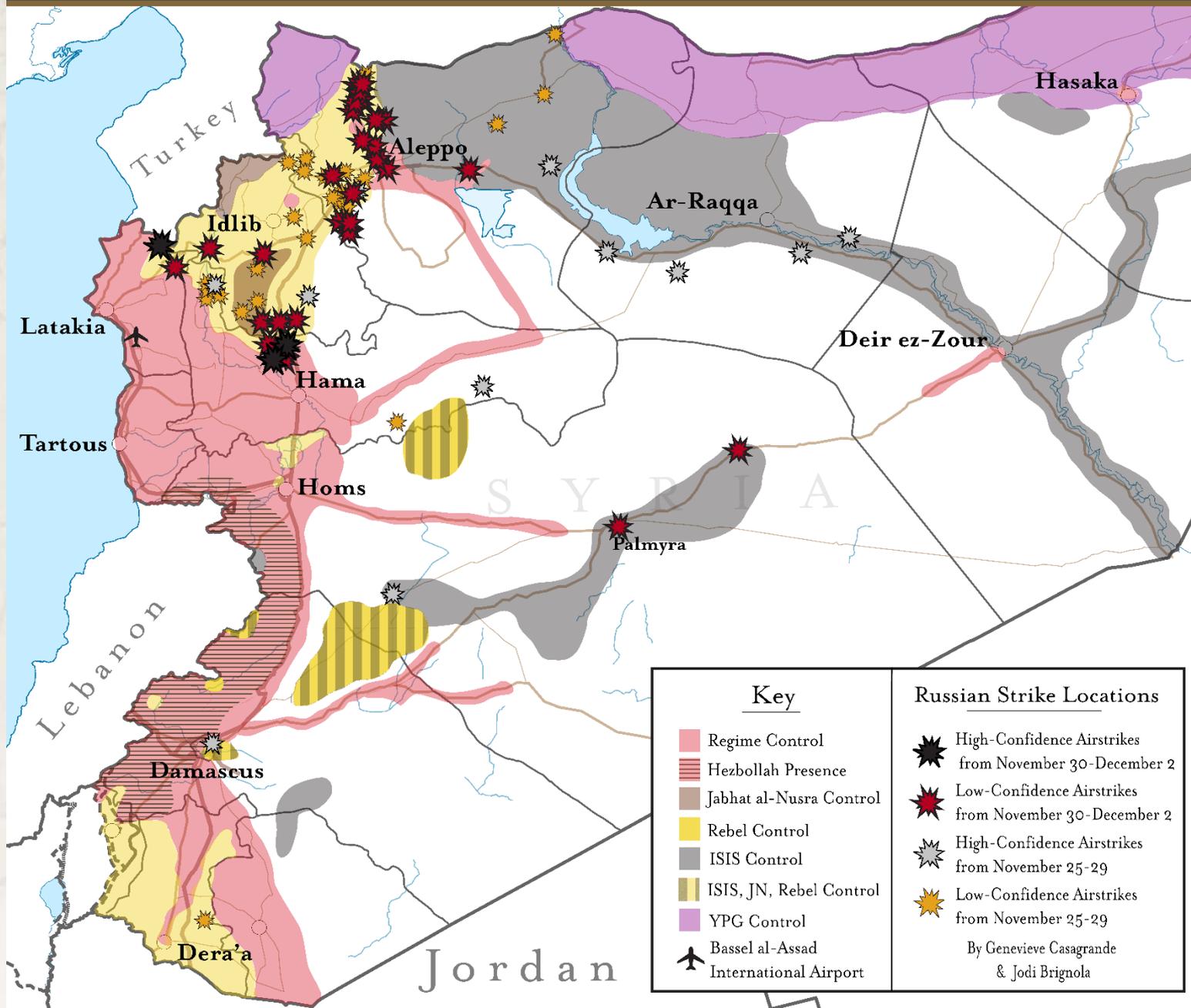
November 11-29, 2015

Key Takeaway:

Russia shifted its airstrikes in Syria to concentrate along the Turkish border following the downing of a Russian jet by Turkish warplanes on November 24 in an effort to reassert its freedom of action inside Syria. Russian airstrikes focused on the rebel-held Bab al-Hawa and Bab al-Salam border crossings as well as the ISIS-held Jarablus border crossing from November 25 - 29. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) announced the arrival of its advanced S-400 long-range surface-to-air missile (SAM) system at the Bassel al-Assad International Airport in Latakia on November 26 in an effort to deter Turkey from conducting future attacks on Russian warplanes. Additionally, the Russian MoD announced that Russian Su-34 bombers are newly equipped with air-to-air missiles “for providing security of the aircraft of the Russian Aerospace Forces.” Russo-Turkish relations have deteriorated considerably since the incident as Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev approved an official list of economic sanctions against Turkey on December 1. Turkish officials maintain that Turkey will not offer an apology, asserting that the Turkish Armed Forces took “defensive action” and responded appropriately to the unwarranted Russian airspace violations. Both Russian and Syrian presidents have openly accused Turkey of supporting terrorism in Syria in the wake of the incident. Russian President Vladimir Putin went as far as accusing Turkey of downing the Russian warplane in order to “defend its supplies” of oil from ISIS-held territory in Syria.

The Russian air campaign in Syria otherwise continues to prioritize the preservation of the Assad regime. Russian strikes engaged several civilian targets from November 25 to November 29, emulating the regime’s use of its air power to punish civilian populations. Russia’s strikes along the Turkish border notably struck civilian targets, accomplishing multiple Russian objectives. Russian warplanes conducted at least six rounds of airstrikes targeting convoys of humanitarian aid trucks entering Syria from Turkey in the border town of Azaz in northern Aleppo Province on November 25 and another convoy in the vicinity of the Bab al-Hawa border crossing in northern Idlib on November 28. Local sources claimed that Russian airstrikes also targeted a bakery in Idlib province on November 29, which was reportedly responsible for the distribution of bread to over 45,000 IDPs.

Russia continues to present itself as a decisive actor against ISIS to the international community despite the relative low number of Russian airstrikes targeting ISIS in Syria. Russian airstrikes targeted ISIS-held oil infrastructure in Raqqa and Deir ez-Zour in addition to targeting core ISIS terrain in the northern Aleppo countryside and eastern Homs. Putin asserted that Russia remains “ready to cooperate” with the U.S.-led anti-ISIS coalition on intelligence-sharing measures and other battlefield cooperation in Syria. Putin stated that France and Russia agreed upon bilateral measures to coordinate battlefield activities and share intelligence regarding legitimate targets for airstrikes in Syria following a meeting with French President Francois Hollande on November 26. Putin reportedly requested a map of “forces that are not terrorists and fighting ISIS” during the meeting and pledged to avoid targeting these groups. Such a map would enable Russia to better target the Syrian opposition to the ultimate benefit of the Assad regime.



| Key | Russian Strike Locations |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Regime Control | High-Confidence Airstrikes from November 30-December 2 |
| Hezbollah Presence | Low-Confidence Airstrikes from November 30-December 2 |
| Jabhat al-Nusra Control | High-Confidence Airstrikes from November 25-29 |
| Rebel Control | Low-Confidence Airstrikes from November 25-29 |
| ISIS Control | |
| ISIS, JN, Rebel Control | |
| YPG Control | |
| Bassel al-Assad International Airport | |

By Genevieve Casagrande & Jodi Brignola

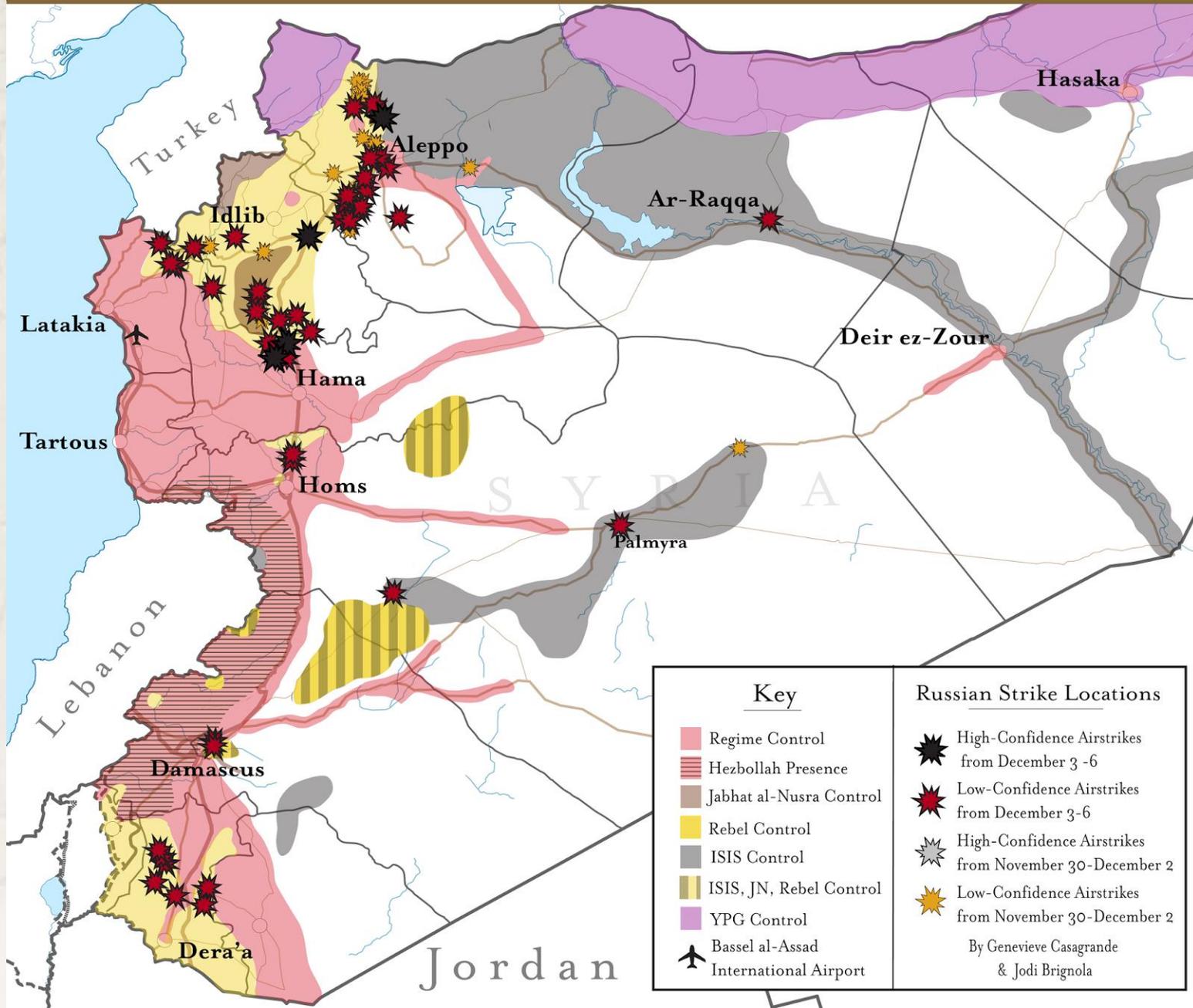
November 25- December 2, 2015

Key Takeaway:

Russian air operations in Syria continue to pursue the preservation of the Assad regime. Spokesman for Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve Colonel Steve Warren commented on Russia's most recent statements regarding its operations in Syria, stating that "Everything they are doing is to support Assad, to keep Assad in power... Every time the Russians conduct an operation that extends or helps extend Assad's hold on power is yet another day that Syrian civilians will suffer under the boot of Bashar al-Assad."

Russian airstrikes largely targeted rebel-held terrain in Aleppo, Idlib, and Hama Provinces from November 30 to December 2. Russian warplanes concentrated in the northern Aleppo countryside, primarily striking targets along a key rebel-held ground line of communication (GLOC) necessary for the delivery of Turkish support into Aleppo City. This rebel supply line remains highly vulnerable as ISIS continues to advance in the area, capitalizing on the intensity of the Russian strikes. ISIS seized at least four villages east of the strategic border town of Azaz on December 2, bringing ISIS within six miles of the supply route. Meanwhile, regime forces supported by Iranian-backed proxy forces and Russian airstrikes continue to fix Syrian opposition fighters south of Aleppo City, likely hindering large-scale reinforcements from bolstering the northern rebel frontline against ISIS. The Syrian regime and ISIS have historically leveraged each other's offensives in order to advance against rebel forces in the north of Aleppo City. Russian airstrikes, regime ground operations, and the most recent ISIS offensive threaten to incur major losses for rebel forces in Aleppo.

Russian airstrikes continue to punish local Syrian populations through the targeting of key civilian infrastructure in rebel-held territory. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) released a video claiming to strike an "oil storage" facility on December 2. However, analysis by investigative journalists confirmed that the strike had in fact hit a water treatment facility located in eastern Aleppo. The strike reportedly produced significant damage to the facility and more than 1.4 million people in rural Aleppo suffered interruptions in their water supply as a result. Further analysis of Russian MoD strike footage as well as local activists reporting revealed that Russian airstrikes also targeted grain silos in the countryside of Idlib and Aleppo.



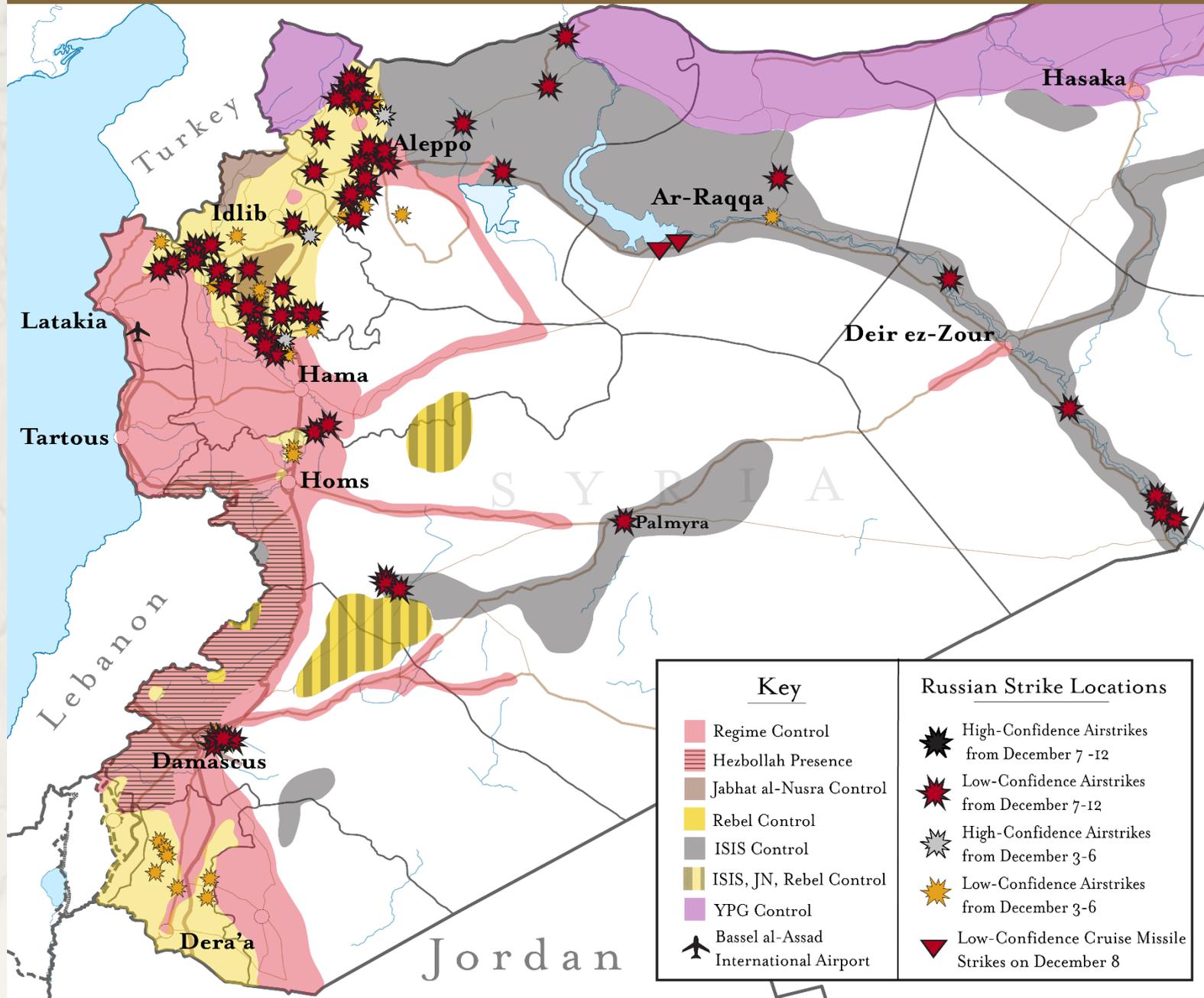
| Key | | Russian Strike Locations | |
|---|---------------------------------------|---|--|
|  | Regime Control |  | High-Confidence Airstrikes from December 3-6 |
|  | Hezbollah Presence |  | Low-Confidence Airstrikes from December 3-6 |
|  | Jabhat al-Nusra Control |  | High-Confidence Airstrikes from November 30-December 2 |
|  | Rebel Control |  | Low-Confidence Airstrikes from November 30-December 2 |
|  | ISIS Control | | |
|  | ISIS, JN, Rebel Control | | |
|  | YPG Control | | |
|  | Bassel al-Assad International Airport | | |
| | | By Genevieve Casagrande & Jodi Brignola | |

November 30- December 6, 2015

Key Takeaway:

Russia resumed its air campaign in Southern Syria in support of regime ground operations against the FSA-affiliated Southern Front from December 3-6. Russia's renewed effort follows a December 3 declaration by FSA-affiliated Southern Front factions, including tribal fighters who claim to receive funding from Jordan, of a new offensive to seize the regime-held Judayyah artillery battalion in the northwestern countryside of Dera'a province. Russian airstrikes targeted areas along the nearby frontline surrounding the battalion, an area primarily held by Southern Front-affiliated factions. The shift comes just two weeks after Russian President Vladimir Putin vowed to avoid hitting "healthy," non-terrorist rebel groups in Syria and to focus air operations against ISIS. While talks between members of the Syrian opposition and the Syrian regime are tentatively scheduled for January 1, 2016, Russia's continued aggression makes the prospects of a mutually agreeable political transition unlikely.

The Syrian Foreign Ministry accused the U.S.-led coalition of conducting an airstrike against a regime military position in the town of Ayyash in Deir ez-Zour province on December 6 killing four Syrian Arab Army (SAA) soldiers and wounding thirteen others. The ministry sent a letter to the U.N. Security Council in protest of "flagrant aggression by the U.S.-led coalition forces." Operation Inherent Resolve Spokesman Colonel Steve Warren denied that the Coalition carried out the attack, stressing that the nearest coalition strikes targeted an ISIS-held oil field 35 miles away from the incident. Anonymous Pentagon officials stated that radar data indicated that the bombing had been a 'friendly fire' incident committed by a Russian bomber. Local sources have previously reported on alleged Russian strikes against regime positions along frontlines in both Homs and Latakia Provinces.



| Key | Russian Strike Locations |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Regime Control | High-Confidence Airstrikes from December 7 -12 |
| Hezbollah Presence | Low-Confidence Airstrikes from December 7-12 |
| Jabhat al-Nusra Control | High-Confidence Airstrikes from December 3-6 |
| Rebel Control | Low-Confidence Airstrikes from December 3-6 |
| ISIS Control | Low-Confidence Cruise Missile Strikes on December 8 |
| ISIS, JN, Rebel Control | |
| YPG Control | |
| Bassel al-Assad International Airport | |

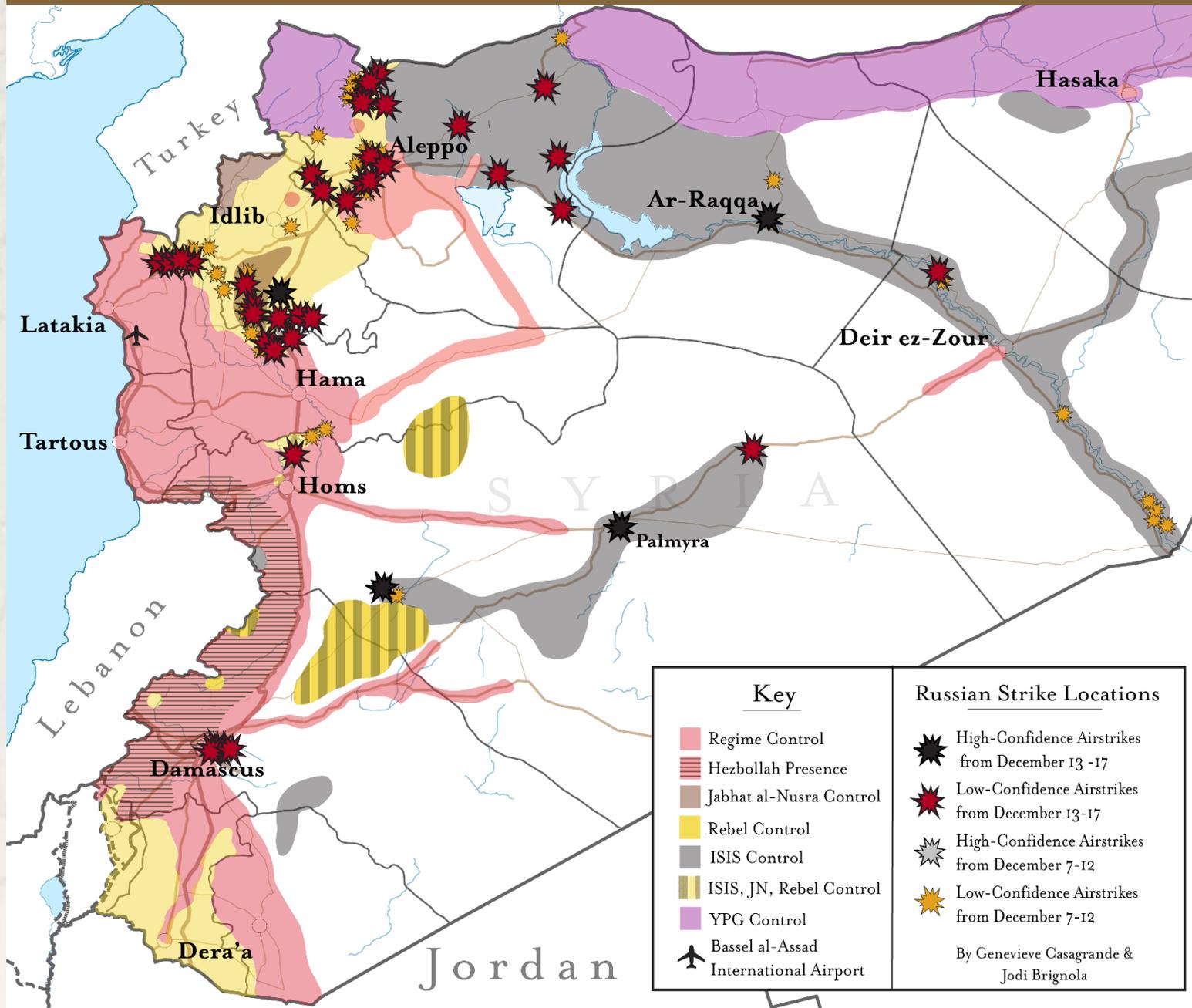
December 3- 12, 2015

Key Takeaway:

Russia and the Syrian regime faced significant setbacks in Syria this week as ISIS recaptured the towns of Maheen and Hawareen in the southeastern countryside of Homs on December 9. ISIS successfully repelled attempts by regime forces to recapture these towns on December 10, despite a large concentration of Russian airstrikes in the area. The regime previously seized Maheen and Hawareen on November 23 as components of a larger offensive to retake Palmyra further east in Homs Province. The seizure of Palmyra would represent a significant victory for both Syrian President Basar al-Assad and Russia as Russia continues to present itself and the Assad regime as effective anti-ISIS actors in Syria. Following these setbacks, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu claimed ISIS's influence in Syria is increasing and that the militant group controls around 70% of Syria.

Russian airstrikes in Syria, however, continue to be concentrated in rebel-held terrain in Aleppo, Idlib, and Hama Provinces, targeting positions across rebel front lines with the regime, ISIS, and Kurdish YPG forces. Russian airstrikes continued to target locations along the key rebel ground line of communication (GLOC) from northern Aleppo City to the Turkish border, coinciding with a recent ISIS offensive to sever the GLOC. Rebel forces, however, successfully slowed ISIS's advance and recaptured the town of al-Hamzat in northern Aleppo from ISIS on December 11, despite the concentration of Russian strikes in the area. Russian airstrikes also targeted rebel front lines near the Kurdish Afrin canton in northwestern Aleppo, a site of recent clashes between rebel and Kurdish YPG forces.

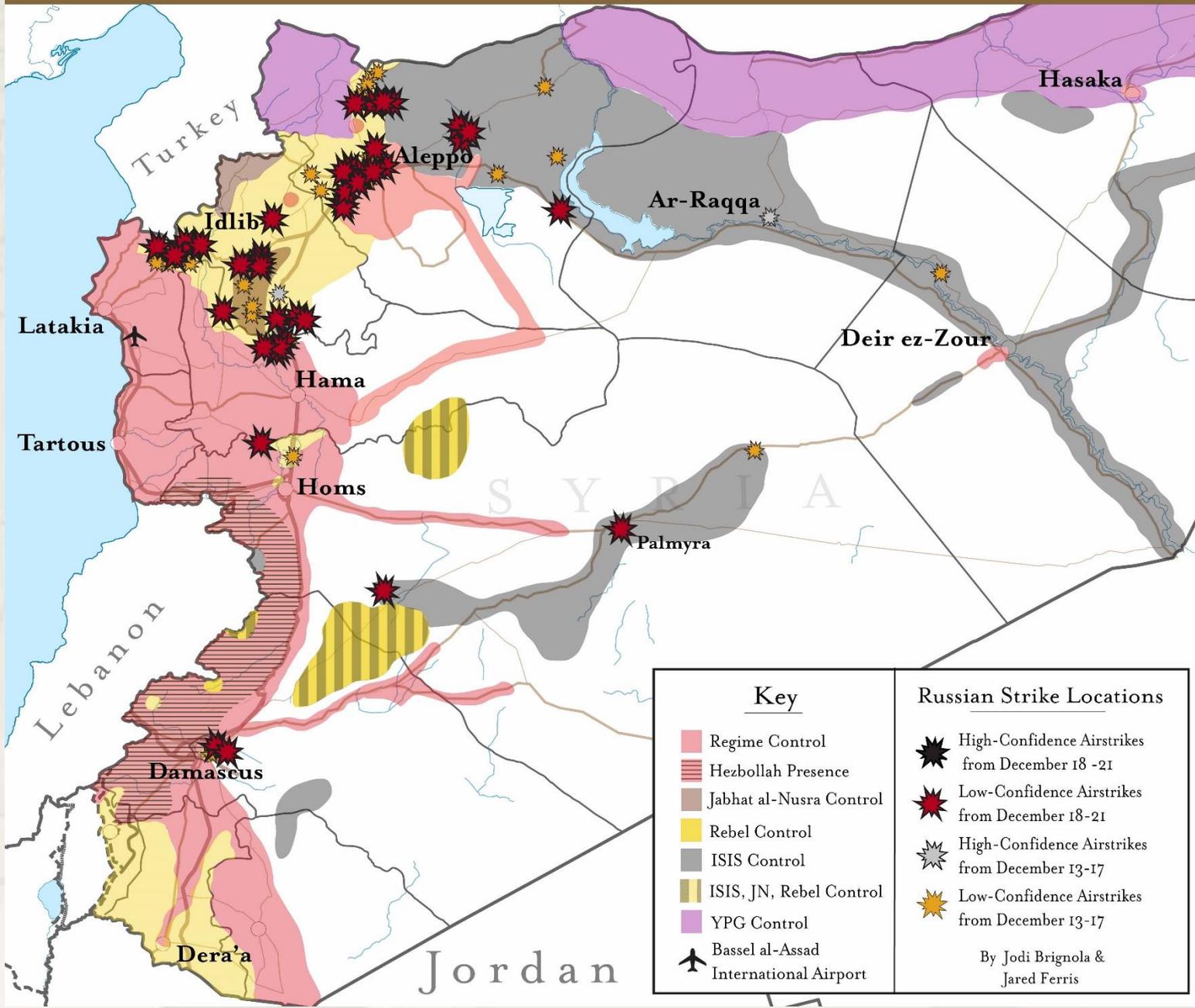
The Russian air campaign continues to provide the regime with asymmetric capabilities against the armed Syrian opposition. A report published by the Syrian Network for Human Rights on December 8 illustrated that Russia's concentrated air campaign in northern Syria has enabled the regime to direct the majority of its barrel bomb operations towards rebel-held Damascus suburbs and other areas of southern Syria. The use of barrels bombs by the regime and Russia's continued punishment of local Syrian populations in rebel-held territory, such as the targeting of hospitals, bakeries, and markets, will only further exacerbate the humanitarian situation in Syria and increase refugees flows into Turkey and Europe.



December 7-17, 2015

Key Takeaway:

Russia continues to use disinformation to present its air campaign as a constructive force in Syria ahead of the next wave of talks on the Syrian conflict. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed to provide air support to elements of the Free Syrian Army in an effort to “unite” the various efforts of regime and “other groups” in Syria on December 15. Alleged recipients of Russian air support include the “Desert Lions” and “the Democratic Forces,” likely a reference to the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) currently operating in Aleppo and Hasaka Provinces. The Russian MoD claimed its first airstrikes in Hasaka Province on December 16. However, local reporting has not yet substantiated these claims and, thus, ISW does not assess them at even a level of Low Confidence at this time. Russian warplanes meanwhile continued to indiscriminately target rebel-held areas in northwestern Syria, which are home to both hardline and “moderate” FSA-affiliated rebel factions from December 13-17. The Russian air campaign continued its efforts to weaken the Syrian opposition as airstrikes concentrated along rebel front lines with the regime, ISIS, and Kurdish YPG forces in Damascus, Hama, Latakia, and Aleppo Provinces. Russian warplanes also continued to conduct a limited number of strikes against ISIS targets west of the Euphrates as regime forces continued to clear ISIS-held terrain near the Kuweires Airbase east of Aleppo City.

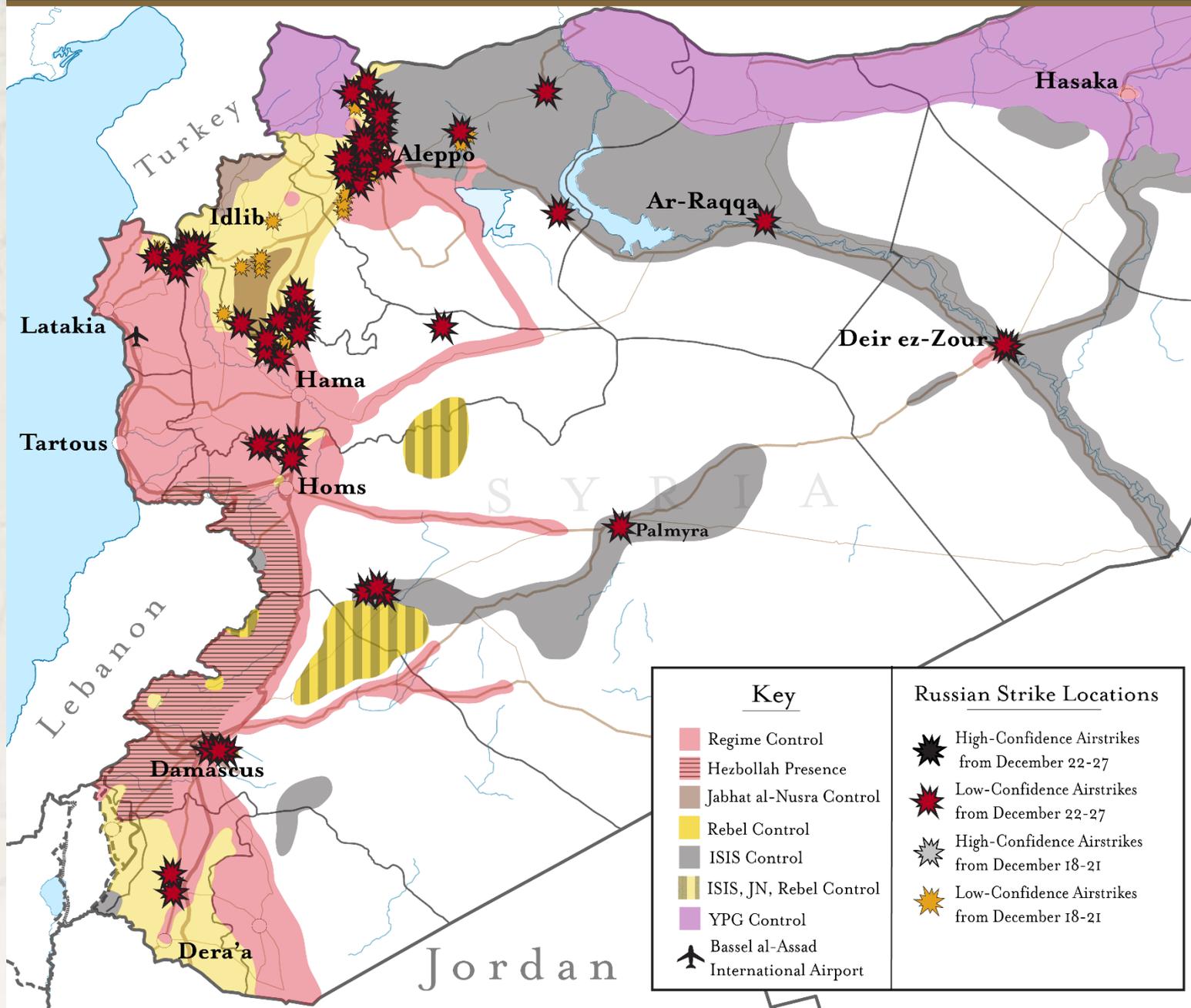


December 13- 21, 2015

Key Takeaway:

Russia continues to use its air campaign in Syria to bolster the position of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad despite an ongoing political process to end the Syrian Civil War. Russian warplanes concentrated airstrikes against rebel positions southwest of Aleppo City from December 18 to December 21, enabling pro-regime forces to seize the key town of Khan Touman and several nearby villages on December 20. Russian airstrikes later shifted to target rebel forces along the strategic M5 Highway to Aleppo City in likely preparation for future offensive operations. Russia also continued to indiscriminately target rebel-held terrain throughout Northwestern Syria and Damascus in an effort to bolster ongoing regime offensives and weaken the resolve of the opposition. Russia conducted only a limited number of airstrikes against ISIS targets in Aleppo and Homs Provinces over the reporting period.

Russia remains willing to conduct its air campaign in Syria without regard to civilian casualties or international law. Russian warplanes targeted residential neighborhoods in rebel-held Idlib City on December 20, killing or wounding over two hundred civilians. The heavy bombardment sparked renewed clashes near the besieged pro-regime enclaves of Fu'ah and Kefraya northeast of Idlib City, threatening to overturn a UN-sponsored local ceasefire that also includes the besieged rebel-held town of Zabadani near Damascus. Russia also targeted a relief organization and food distribution center in the besieged Eastern Ghouta suburbs of Damascus on December 20, demonstrating calculated intent to target critical civilian infrastructure as a tactic of war. Meanwhile, Russia reportedly began dropping PFM-1 'Green Parrot' cluster mines in Syria in a new demonstration of disregard for international norms. 'Green Parrot' mines generated high levels of child casualties during the Soviet War in Afghanistan due to their bright colors and harmless 'toy-like' appearance. Nonetheless, Russian President Vladimir Putin insisted that Russia could use even more of its military capabilities if necessary in order to achieve its goals in Syria.

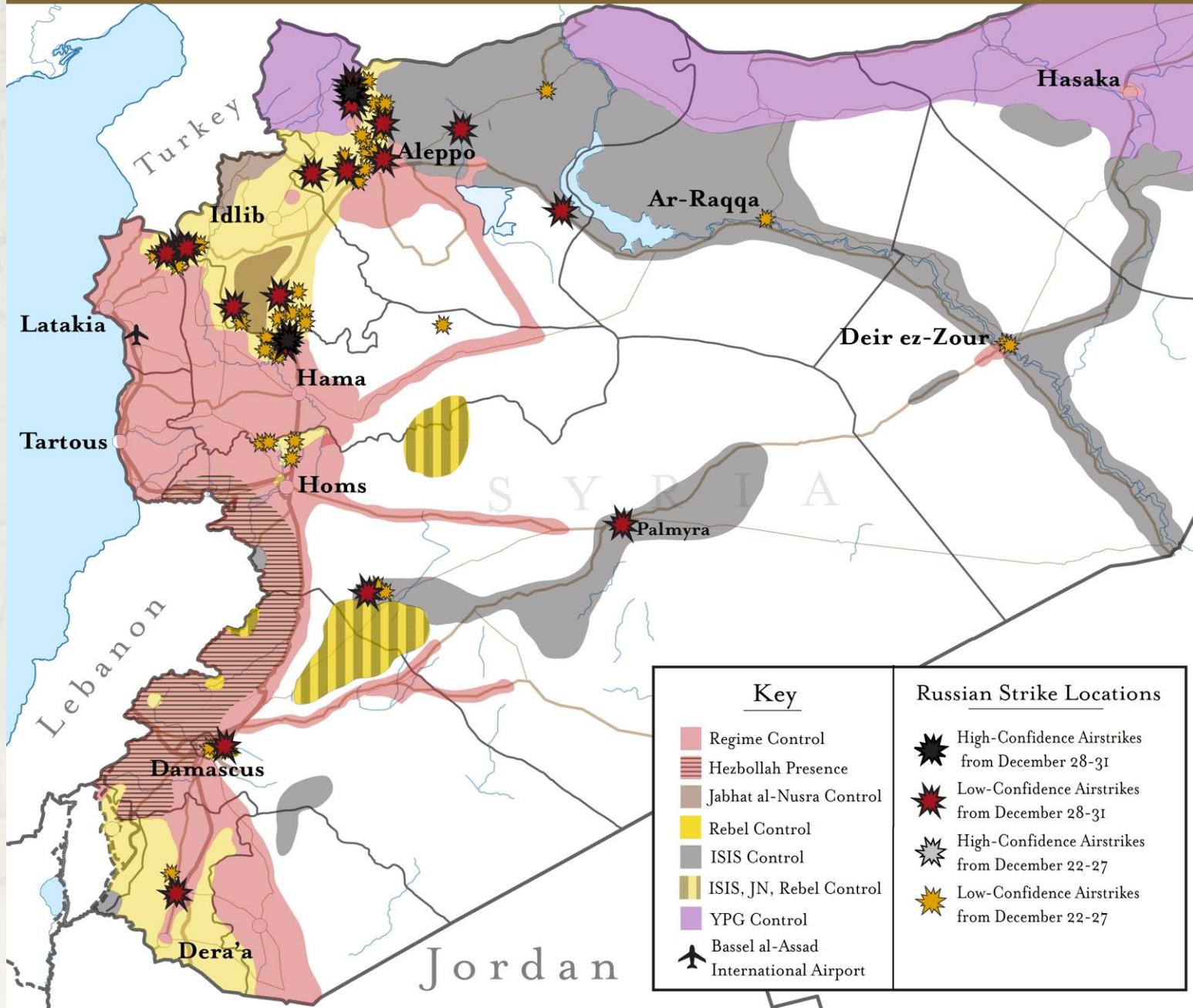


December 18- 27, 2015

Key Takeaway:

Russian airstrikes continue to weaken the position of the Syrian armed opposition ahead of negotiations between pro- and anti-regime forces scheduled for January 25. An alleged Russian airstrike in Eastern Ghouta on December 25 killed leading Salafist rebel commander Zahran Alloush, the commander of prominent Damascus-based group Jaysh al-Islam. Alloush's death could result in further instability inside rebel-held areas of the capital, threatening the success of a local U.N.-brokered evacuation deal between rebels and the Syrian regime in Southern Damascus as well as the upcoming January 25 negotiations. Jaysh al-Islam was the largest armed opposition group to sign the Riyadh opposition conference outcome document on December 10 and it remains unclear if Jaysh al-Islam will retain its support of the document following Alloush's death. Russian airstrikes also concentrated across rebel frontlines with ISIS in Northern Aleppo Province, compounding pressure on Aleppo-based rebel factions. The majority of strikes targeted rebel positions from December 22 - 27, although Russian warplanes conducted a limited number of airstrikes in support the regime's anti-ISIS operations in Homs, Aleppo, and Deir ez-Zour Provinces.

The Russian air campaign continues to target local populations within rebel-held terrain in order to weaken the resolve of the Syrian opposition amidst renewed efforts to bring about a negotiated settlement to the Syrian Civil War. Amnesty International accused Russia of deliberately targeting civilian infrastructure and killing over 200 civilians since the start of its air campaign, asserting that these incidents constitute "violations of international humanitarian law." The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) subsequently denied the allegations. Local activist sources continued to report Russia's targeting of civilian infrastructure in rebel-held terrain, accusing Russian warplanes of killing as many as 14 in strikes against hospitals in Azaz in the northern countryside of Aleppo on December 25.



| Key | | Russian Strike Locations | |
|-----|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| | Regime Control | | High-Confidence Airstrikes from December 28-31 |
| | Hezbollah Presence | | Low-Confidence Airstrikes from December 28-31 |
| | Jabhat al-Nusra Control | | High-Confidence Airstrikes from December 22-27 |
| | Rebel Control | | Low-Confidence Airstrikes from December 22-27 |
| | ISIS Control | | |
| | ISIS, JN, Rebel Control | | |
| | YPG Control | | |
| | Bassel al-Assad International Airport | | |

December 22- 31, 2015

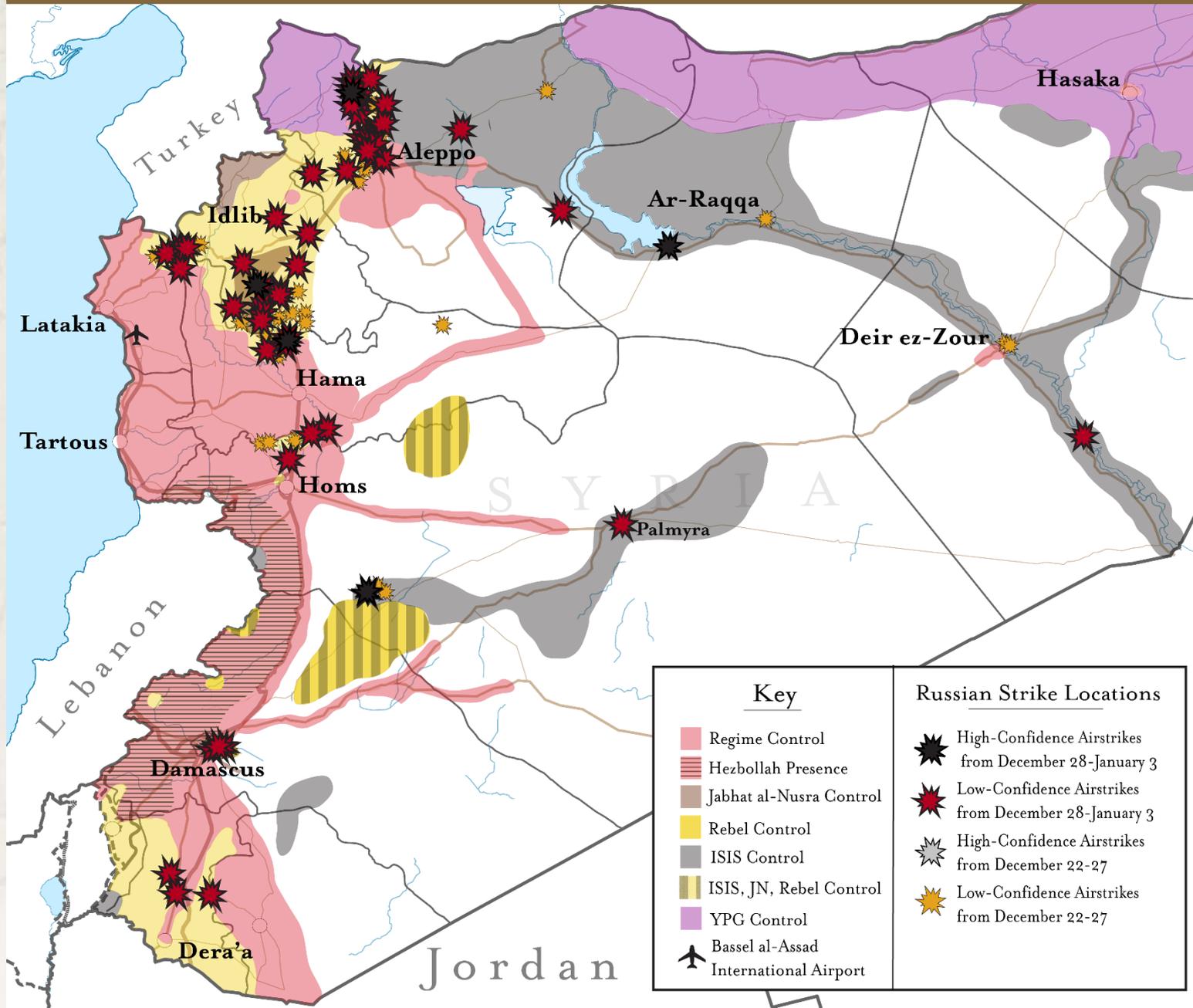
Key Takeaway:

The Russian air campaign in Syria continues to bolster the position of the Assad regime ahead of negotiations between pro- and anti-regime representatives scheduled for January 25. The overwhelming majority of Russian airstrikes continue to support ongoing regime operations, targeting rebel positions in Aleppo, Idlib, Hama, Homs, Damascus, and Dera'a Provinces from December 28, 2015 to January 3, 2016. Russia targeted ISIS-held terrain with only a limited number of strikes in Aleppo, Raqqa, and Deir ez-Zour Provinces. Russian warplanes carried out a concentration of strikes in central Dera'a Province in support of an ongoing regime offensive against the rebel-held town of Sheikh Meskin and the nearby Brigade 82 base, which are situated along a key ground line of communication (GLOC) connecting Dera'a City to Damascus. Local sources reported as many as 200 Russian strikes targeting rebel positions near Sheikh Meskin from December 28 to January 3, enabling pro-regime forces to seize Brigade 82 as well as the northern neighborhoods of Sheikh Meskin on December 29. The seizure of Brigade 82 and the inability of rebel forces to retake it will erode both the will and capability of the armed opposition to continue to fight the Syrian regime in Southern Syria ahead of negotiations.

Russian warplanes also supported Kurdish ground operations against the Syrian opposition in Aleppo Province from December 28 to January 3. Russian airstrikes along the rebel frontline with Kurdish forces in northwestern Aleppo enabled U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) – an alliance of Kurdish YPG and moderate armed opposition groups -- to seize at least three villages near the rebel-held border town of Azaz. Russian support for Kurdish operations against Arab-majority areas will likely further destabilize Aleppo province and escalate ongoing tensions between Aleppo's armed opposition and Kurdish forces.

ISW Russian Airstrikes in Syria: December 22, 2015- January 3, 2016

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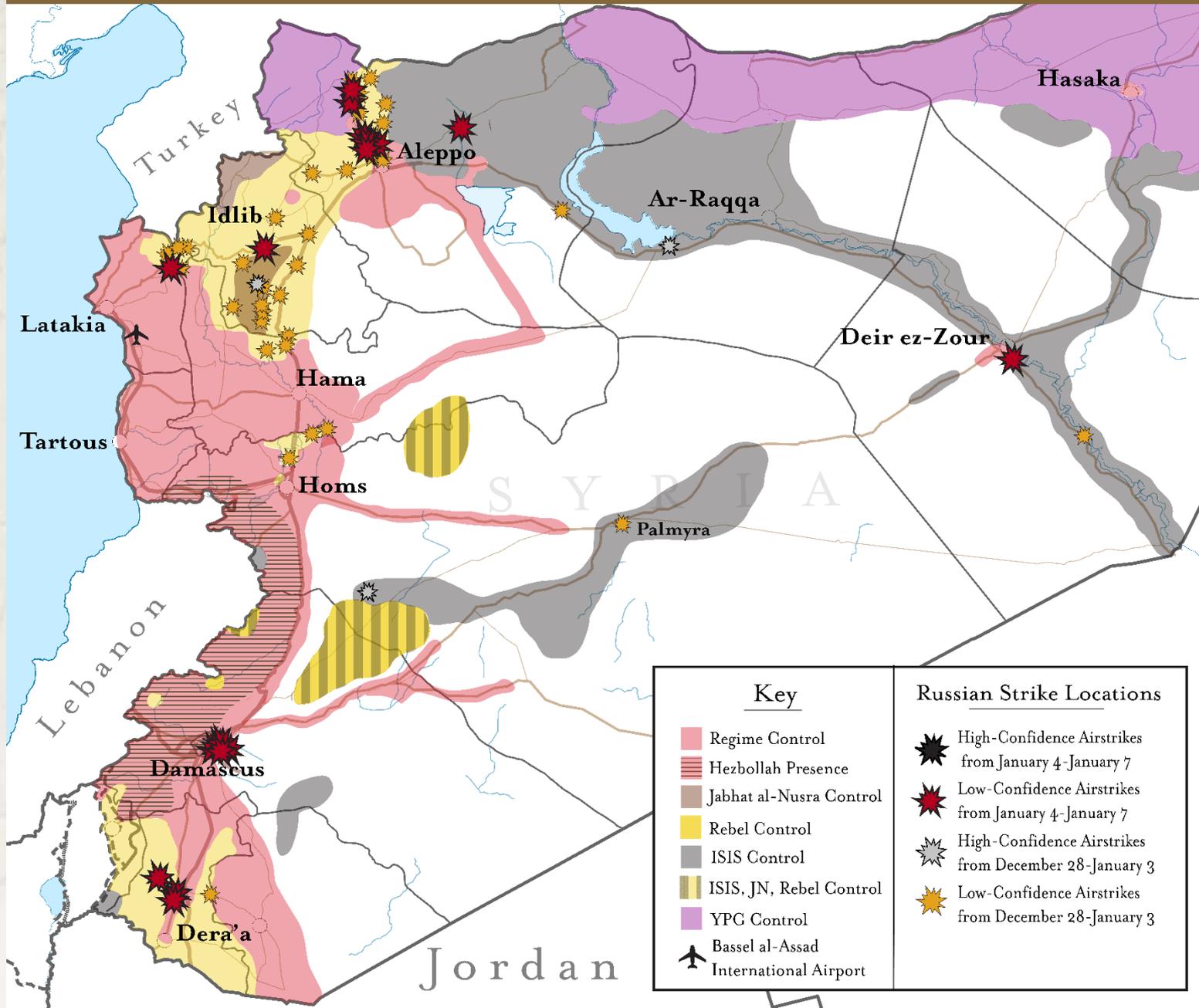


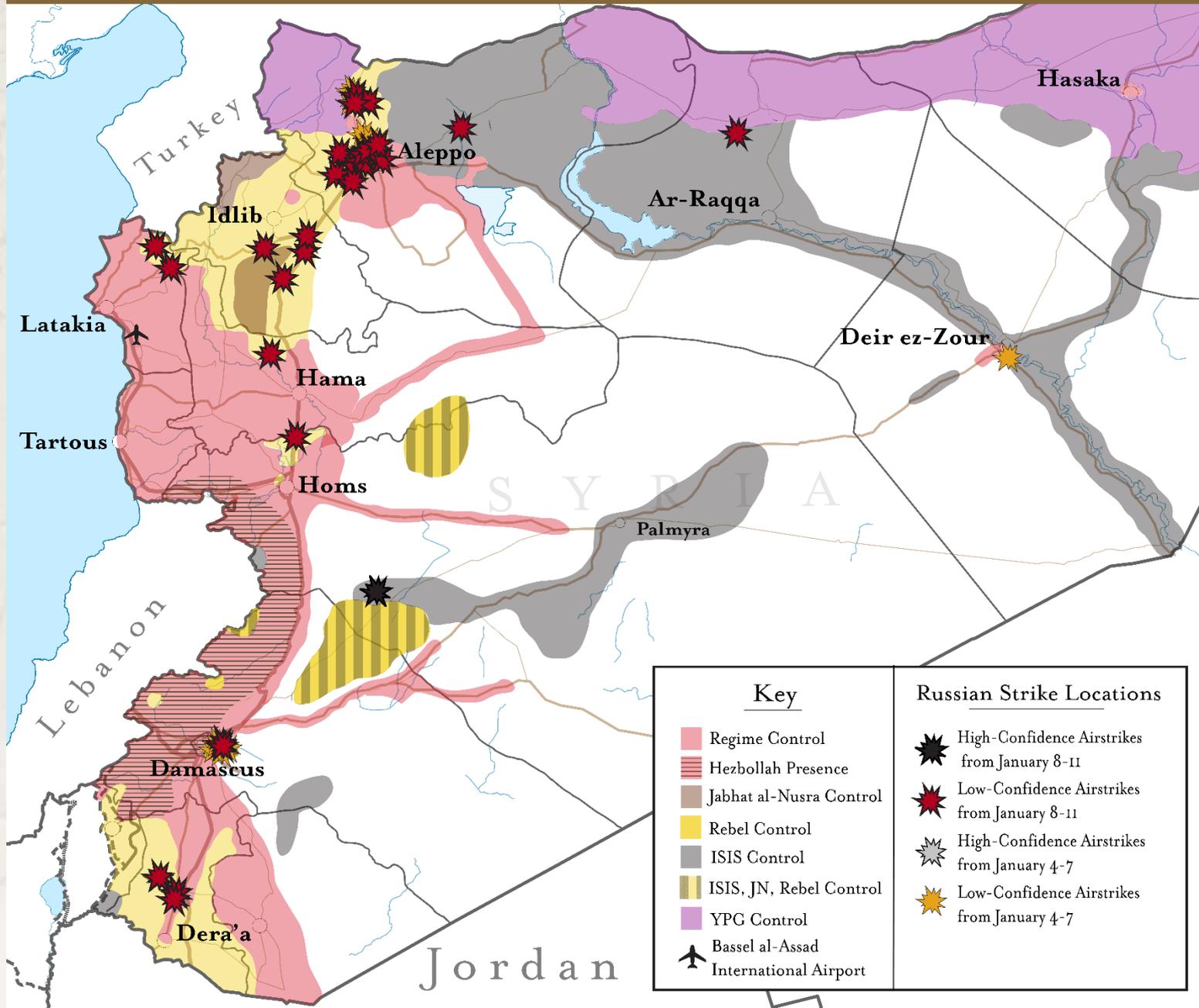
December 22, 2015- January 3, 2016

Key Takeaway:

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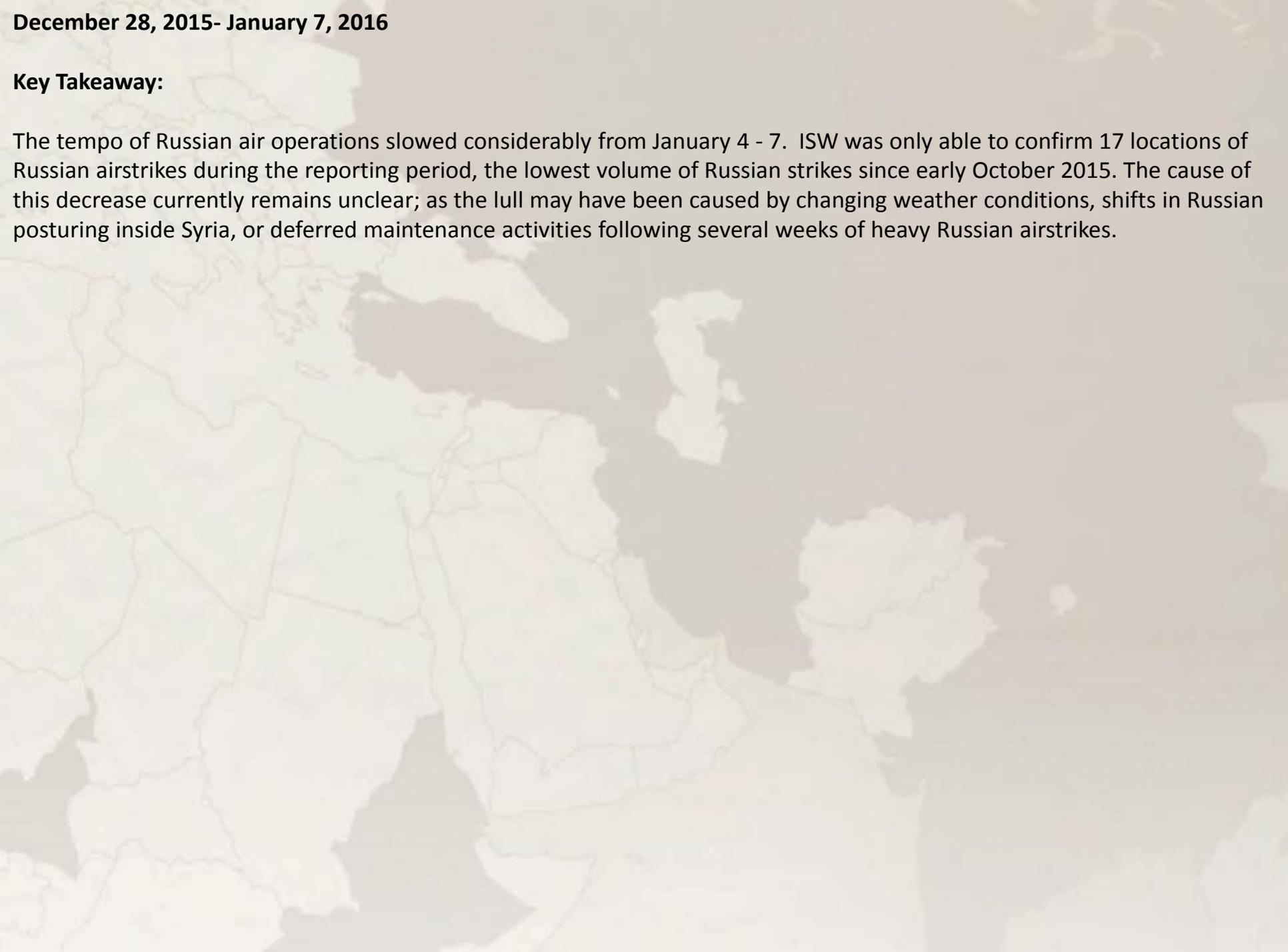


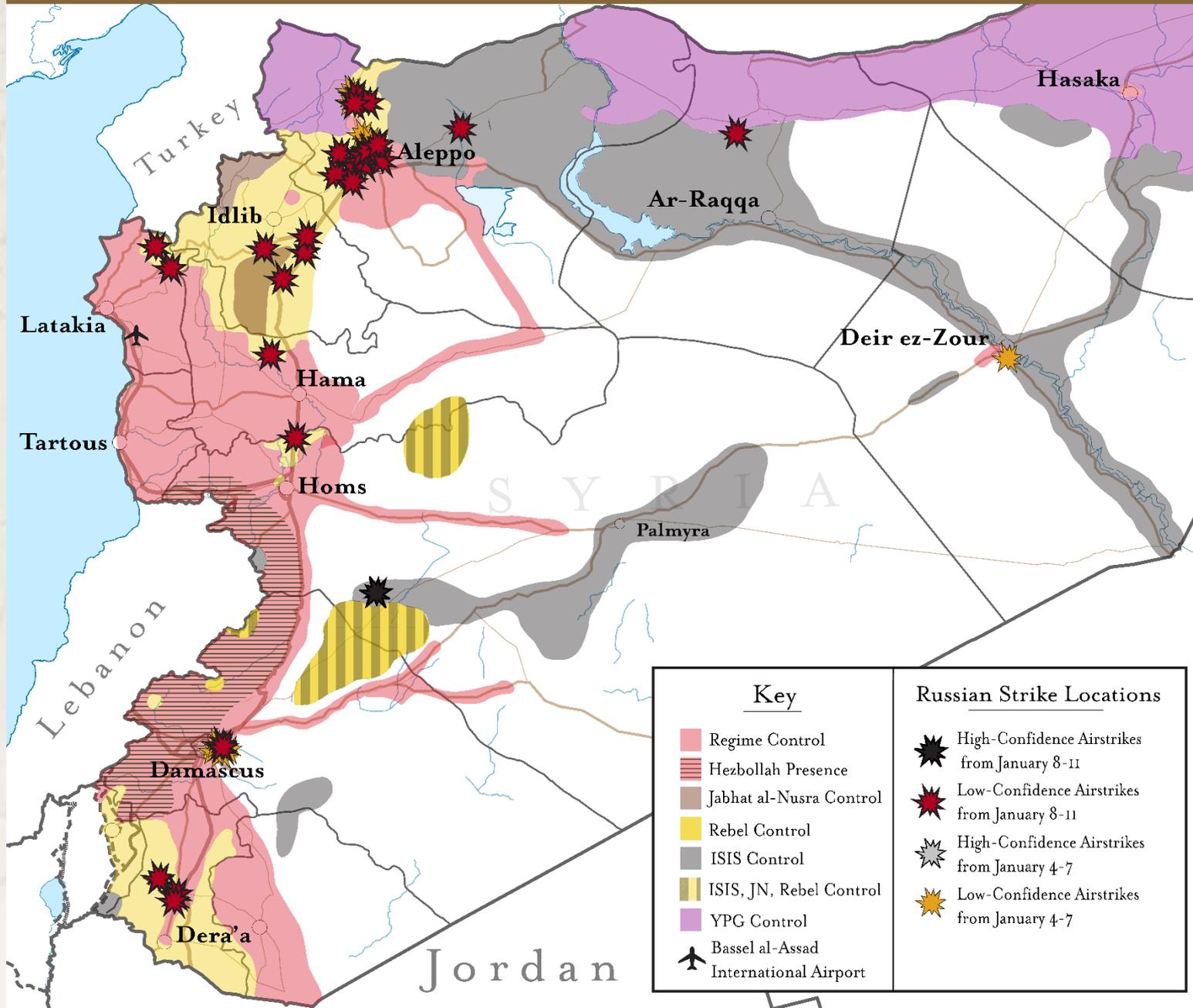


December 28, 2015- January 7, 2016

Key Takeaway:

The tempo of Russian air operations slowed considerably from January 4 - 7. ISW was only able to confirm 17 locations of Russian airstrikes during the reporting period, the lowest volume of Russian strikes since early October 2015. The cause of this decrease currently remains unclear; as the lull may have been caused by changing weather conditions, shifts in Russian posturing inside Syria, or deferred maintenance activities following several weeks of heavy Russian airstrikes.

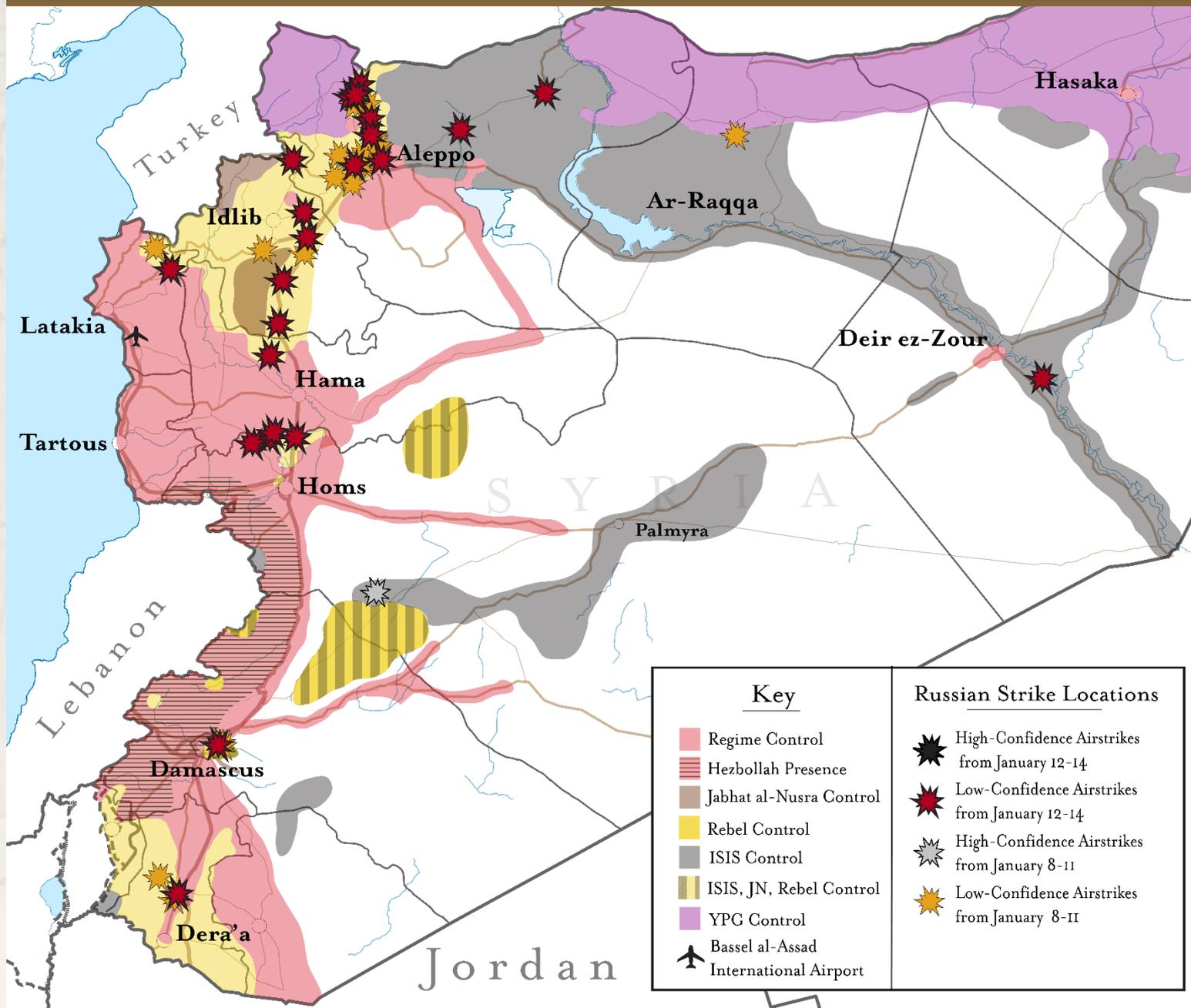




January 4- 11, 2016

Key Takeaway:

Russia expanded efforts to portray itself as a neutral actor in Syria ahead of the next round of negotiations by claiming to support tailored elements of the Syrian armed opposition. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) reiterated during a press briefing on January 11 that “only joint efforts” by the Syrian regime and select Syrian opposition groups will “achieve victory over terrorism” in Syria, despite Russia’s continued targeting of armed opposition factions. The Russian MoD claimed that Russian warplanes are currently conducting strikes supporting ground operations of 11 opposition factions, which the Russian MoD described as “Syrian patriotic forces.” Alleged recipients of Russian air support primarily consist of groups supported by the U.S. such as TOW anti-tank missile recipient Jaysh Asoud al-Sharqiya, an anti-Assad opposition faction that has previously accused Russia of targeting their headquarters in the Damascus countryside. Russia claimed to conduct strikes “in the interest of” Jordanian-backed opposition group Jaysh Ahrar al-Asha’er in the villages of al-Taf and Khosh Hammad in Dera’a Province, areas where the group is currently clashing with ISIS. Local reporting, however, did not verify Russian strikes in the area. The Russian MoD also reported strikes supporting U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces’ anti-ISIS ground operations near Ayn Issa north of ar-Raqqa City. Local reporting indicated a limited number of Russian airstrikes occurred in the area, although it remains unclear if the Syrian Democratic Forces benefitted from these strikes. Russia is overstating and, in some cases, fabricating its efforts to support armed opposition groups in Syria. Russia aims to use this disinformation to obfuscate its position as the regime’s guarantor against the armed opposition and present itself as a legitimate mediating actor ahead of negotiations. Russia also seeks to demonstrate that it does discriminate between opposition groups in order to position itself as an authority in determining which parties are able to participate in negotiations. In tandem with airstrikes against other armed opposition groups, these efforts also ultimately aim to disrupt the U.S.’s partnerships inside Syria. Russia continues to target critical infrastructure and inflict heavy civilian casualties in Syria. French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius demanded the cessation of Russian and Syrian airstrikes on civilian locations on January 11, calling any such strike “inadmissible.” Russian strikes in Idlib Province resulted in 81 casualties, at least 22 of which were civilians, in a January 9 attack against a Jabhat al-Nusra prison in the town of Ma’aret al-Nouman. Local sources also reported that Russian strikes targeting three schools in the town of Anjara in Western Aleppo on January 11 killed as many as 35 civilians, including 17 children. Russian warplanes reportedly also targeted both a hospital and a relief warehouse in the Jebel Turkman Mountains of Northwestern Syria. The Syrian opposition demanded further confidence building measures from the regime ahead of negotiations to include the cessation of Russian airstrikes in Syria, stating that talks are not feasible while “there are foreign forces bombing the Syrian people.” The regime, however, remains unlikely to grant any such concession as Russian air operations have ensured the preservation of the regime and its superior position on the battlefield.

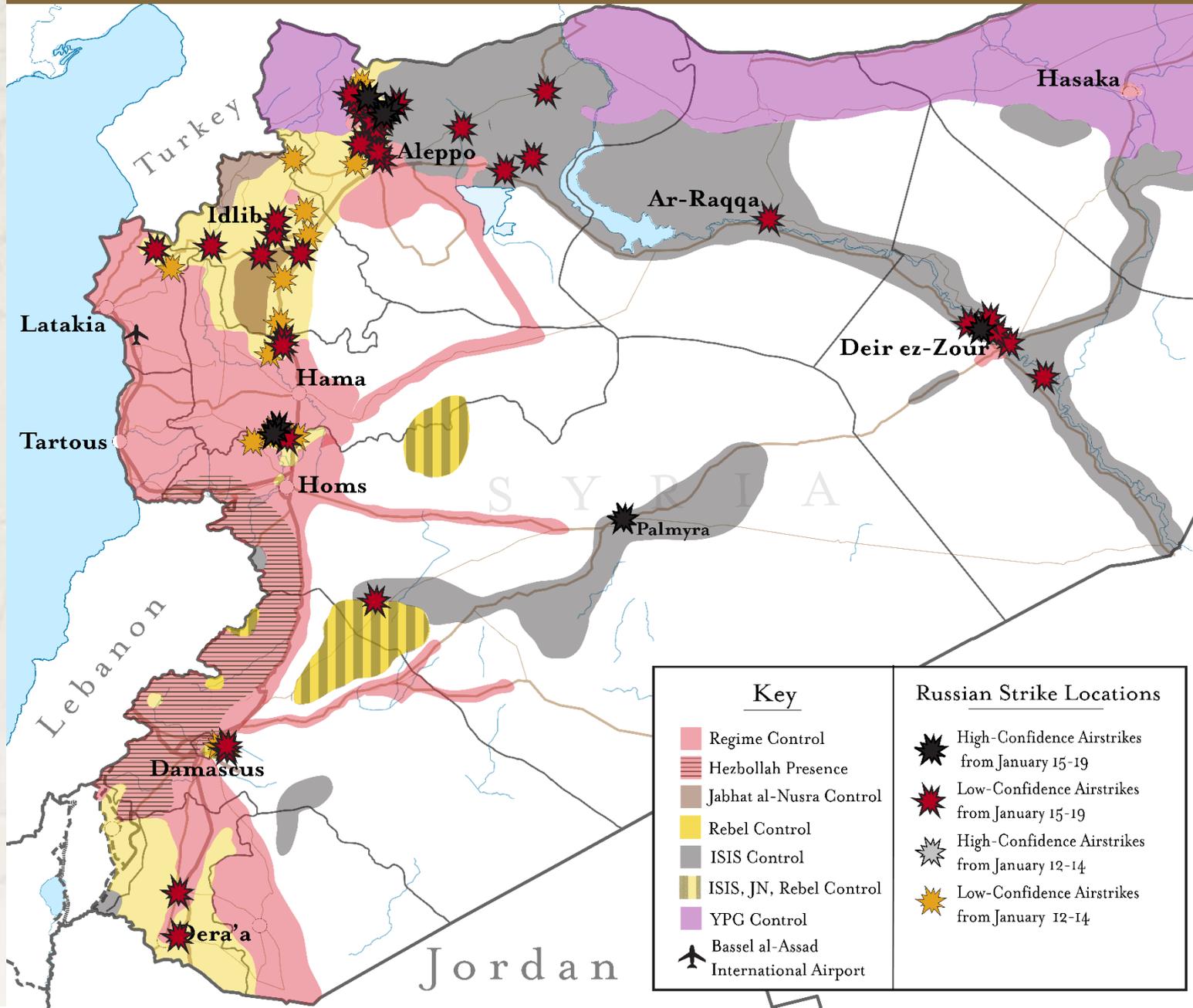


January 8-14, 2016

Key Takeaway:

The Russian air campaign enabled additional battlefield gains by the Syrian regime from January 8 to January 14, providing increased leverage to the regime ahead of negotiations between pro- and anti-Assad elements on January 25. Pro-regime forces seized the town of Salma in Northeastern Latakia Province with the support of as many as 200 Russian airstrikes on January 12. Salma has been consistently targeted by Russian airstrikes over the past three months, which began hitting the town as early as October 6. The seizure of Salma will enable further clearing operations against the armed opposition in Northeastern Latakia as pro-regime forces continue efforts to buffer the regime's coastal stronghold. Pro-regime forces will likely take additional measures to degrade the capability of the armed opposition ahead of negotiations by intensifying advances on core opposition-held terrain in Idlib, Northern Homs, and Damascus, in addition to expanding and securing regime strongholds. The regime tightened its siege on the opposition-held pocket in Northern Homs Province on January 12, seizing the village of Jarjisah northwest of Rastan amidst heavy Russian airstrikes on opposition positions in the area. The seizure of Jarjisah reportedly severed the last opposition supply route into the area, completing the besiegement of roughly 250,000 civilians that currently reside there.

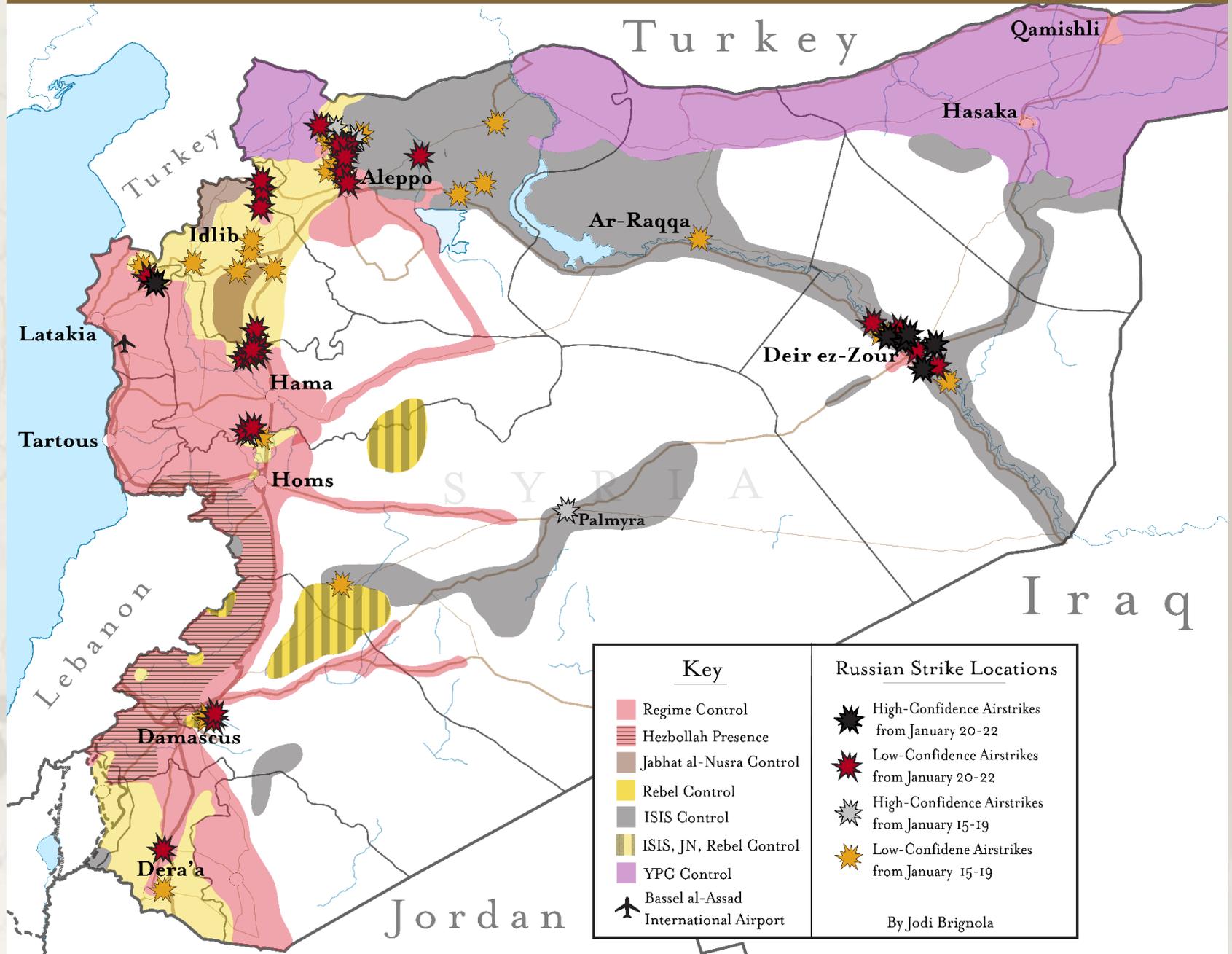
Russia released the text of the August 26 agreement between Russian and Syrian officials that transferred control of the Bassel al-Assad airbase to Russia. The released text indicates that the agreement transferred control of Bassel al-Assad airport indefinitely and can only be officially terminated one year after a written request is submitted by either party. Russia's publication of the text of this agreement clearly signals its intent to maintain military presence in Syria over the medium term regardless of the outcome of the January 25 negotiations. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) also published footage of Russian and Syrian warplanes carrying out their first joint mission over Syria on January 14, a clear show of force for the Syrian opposition. The joint mission also demonstrates growing coordinative capabilities between the Syrian and Russian air forces, likely signaling deepened cooperation to come.



January 12- 19, 2016

Key Takeaway:

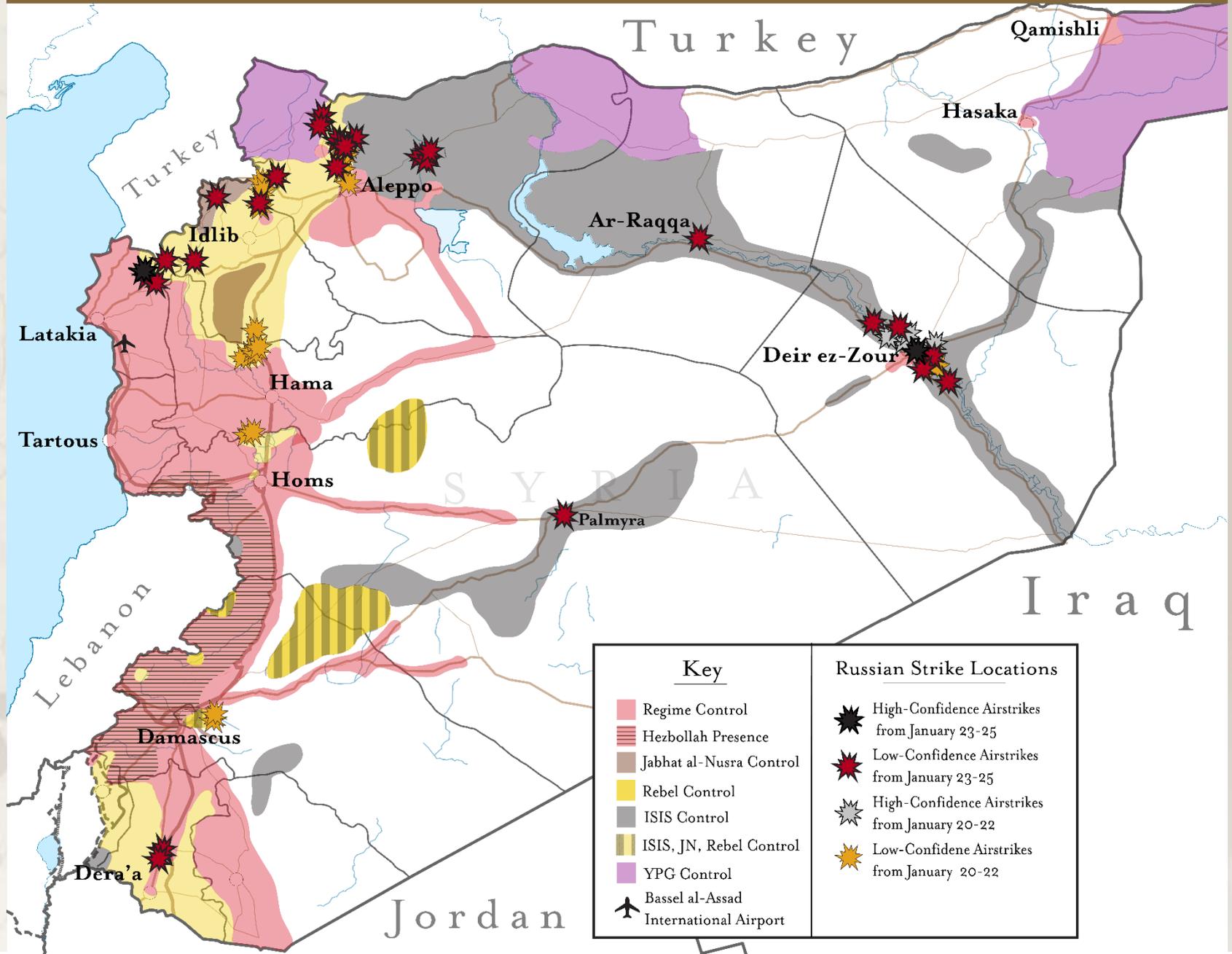
Russian air operations shifted eastward on January 18-19, targeting ISIS-held terrain in Homs, ar-Raqqa and Deir ez-Zour Provinces following a major attack on Deir ez-Zour City by ISIS. ISIS launched an offensive against regime positions on the northwestern outskirts of Deir ez-Zour on January 17, seizing two villages and several military installations under the cover of a major sandstorm that reportedly grounded both regime and Russian aircraft. Russian warplanes subsequently shifted operations away from opposition-held terrain in Aleppo, Idlib, Hama, Homs, Damascus, and Dera'a Provinces in order to target ISIS-held positions along the Euphrates River north and south of Deir ez-Zour City on January 18. The shift in Russian air operations serves to forestall the immediate defeat of regime forces in Deir ez-Zour City, one of the last remaining regime outposts in Eastern Syria. Russia previously carried out its first humanitarian aid drop in Syria on January 15, claiming to deliver over 22 tons of humanitarian aid to besieged regime positions in Deir ez-Zour City. The aid operation comes amidst renewed diplomatic pressure by the international community to lift sieges on civilian populations in Syria. Local sources could not confirm whether the aid was humanitarian or military supplies.



January 15-22, 2016

Key Takeaway:

The Russian air campaign continued to concentrate in Deir ez-Zour Province on January 20 - 22 in response to recent ISIS advances against regime forces in the northwestern outskirts of Deir ez-Zour City. Russia's increase in strikes in Eastern Syria coincides with reports of the deployment of approximately one hundred Russian soldiers and engineers to the Qamishli International Airport in Northeastern Syria. Turkish intelligence and other local Syrian sources claimed that the Russian military personnel arrived at the facility in order to expand the airfield to enable the operation of Russian fighter jets and cargo planes. The use of Qamishli would provide Russia with closer access to Deir ez-Zour Province, where the regime is coming under increasing threat by ISIS. Russia continues to primarily use its air operations to ensure the preservation of the Assad regime, bolstering the regime's battlefield position against the Syrian opposition and ISIS. Russian airstrikes have previously targeted both opposition forces and ISIS along Syrian Kurdish YPG frontlines in Aleppo and ar-Raqqa Provinces, facilitating Kurdish advances. Russia may intend to expand this relationship as indicated by reports that Russian personnel met with representatives from the YPG, a key U.S. ground partner, in order to discuss further deployments in Northeastern Syria. Russia could use coordination with the YPG to both undermine U.S. ground partnerships in Syria and threaten Turkey along its southern border. Russian personnel were similarly reported to have deployed to the Kuweires Airbase east of Aleppo City on January 22 in order to inspect the airfield. Use of the Kuweires Airbase would allow Russian to position itself to take advantage of U.S. efforts to sever ISIS's access to the Turkish border in Northern Aleppo. Russia likely intends to compete with U.S. anti-ISIS operations in both Eastern Syria and Aleppo as it seeks to assert itself as a leading power in the fight against ISIS.

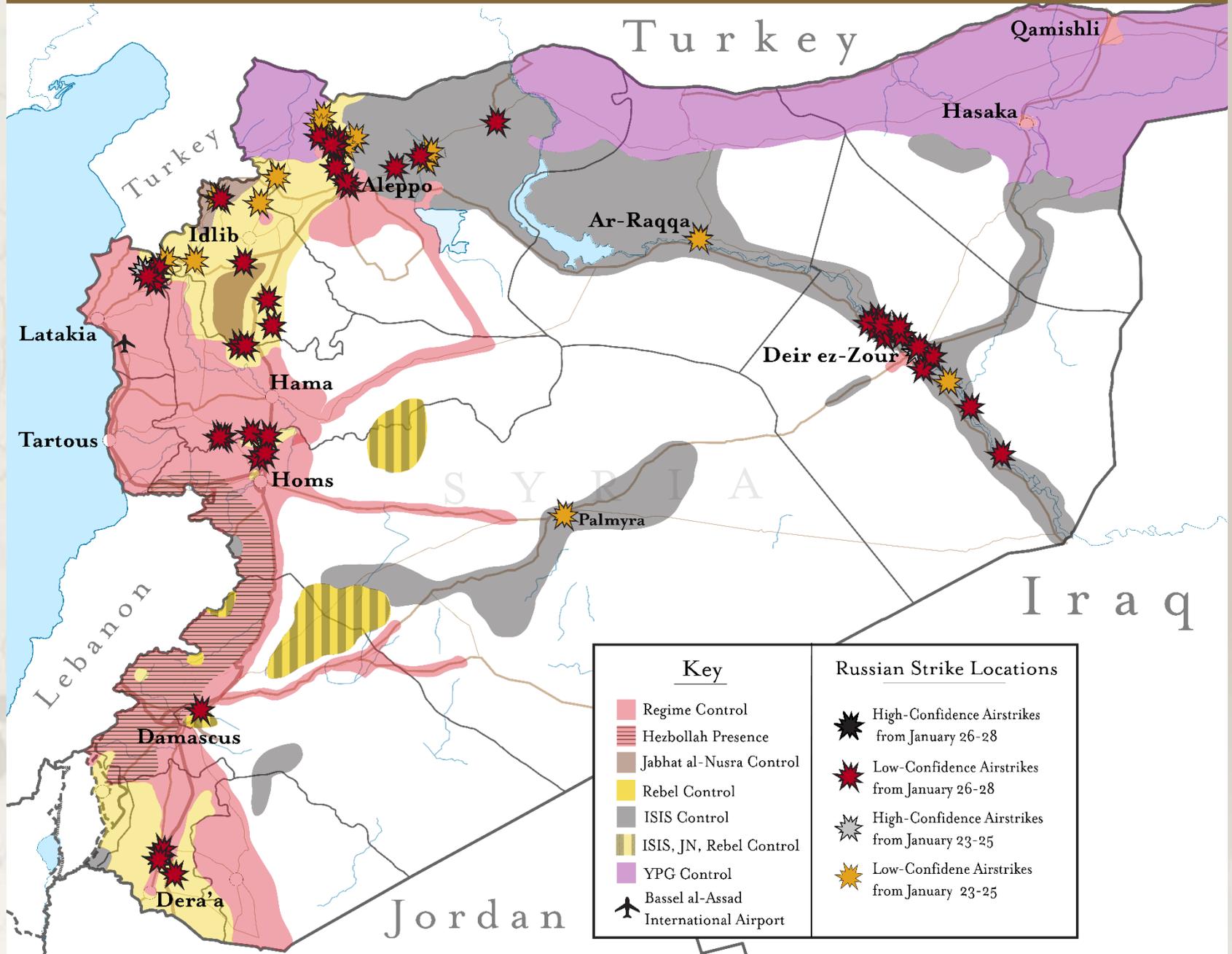


January 20- 25, 2016

Key Takeaway:

The Russian air campaign in Syria enabled strategic gains in the regime's longstanding effort to buffer its coastal heartland in Latakia from January 23 - 25. Russian strikes targeted opposition-held positions along the frontline in both Jebel al-Akrad and Jebel Turkmen mountain ranges in Northern Latakia, facilitating the regime's seizure of the town of Rabi'ah, the last major opposition-held town in the province on January 24. The regime's clearing operations in northern Latakia were enabled by Russian air support and were also reportedly guided by Russian advisers on the ground who likely contributed to the operation's success. The regime's consolidation of territory in northeastern Latakia comes after the seizure of Salma by pro-regime forces on January 12, which penetrated the opposition's defensive line and left opposition forces vulnerable to further regime gains. The Russian air campaign has prioritized the preservation of regime-held territory, especially on the coast and in the central corridor, since its inception. Russia began its military intervention shortly after opposition forces began advancing in northeastern Latakia, and the threat to the regime's heartland likely precipitated Russia's military effort in Syria. Regime advances in Latakia also apply increasing pressure on opposition forces in neighboring Idlib province, an opposition stronghold. Russian airstrikes also allowed pro-regime forces to fully recapture the town of Sheikh Meskin in Dera'a province on 25 January following several weeks of clashes with opposition forces.

Russian forces also sought alternate ways to support regime ground operations as the air campaign continues to be forced to sustain multiple fronts. The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed to conduct strikes using Tu-22M3 long-range bombers against targets in Deir ez-Zour province from January 22 - 24. Russia has not claimed the use of Tu-22s since December 8, when Russia similarly targeted opposition- and ISIS-held terrain simultaneously. The deployment of long-range bombers may indicate that the existing fleet operating out of Bassel al-Assad Airport is not sufficient to sustain the current rate and distribution of strikes against both opposition- and ISIS-held territory. Russian warplanes have demonstrated a concerted effort against ISIS since the group's advance on regime-held parts of Deir ez-Zour City on September 17; however, Russian indiscriminate targeting continues to incur high numbers of civilian casualties, and Russian operations aimed at degrading the armed opposition have continued unscathed. Russian warplanes targeted opposition-held territory in Aleppo, Idlib, and Dera'a from January 23 - 25. Russia provided military aid to Kurdish forces via helicopter in northwestern Aleppo on January 25. Russia's shipment of weapons to Kurdish forces northwest of Aleppo City marks a new stage in Russia's effort to strengthen ties with Kurdish elements, and will increase pressure on opposition groups operating in the area. Increasing Russo-Kurdish cooperation can disrupt US partnerships with Kurdish forces in other parts of Syria, introduce the potential for Turkish military reaction, and exacerbate Kurdish-Arab tensions in Aleppo province as Kurdish forces attempt to advance on Arab-dominant terrain. Although Russia attempts to present itself as a constructive actor in Syria, it continues to prioritize the preservation of the Assad regime without concern for civilian lives, ethnic tensions, or regional stability.

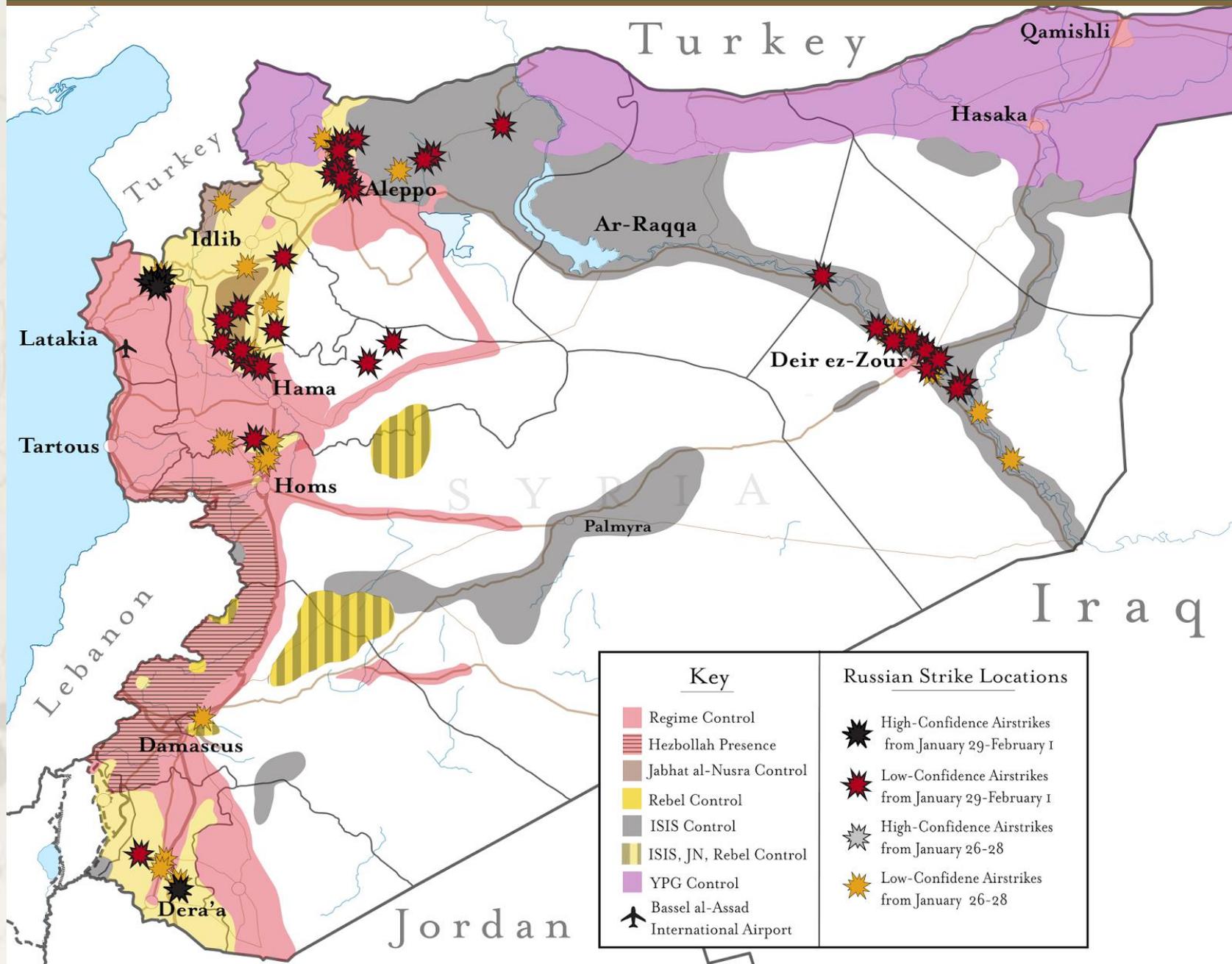


| Key | | Russian Strike Locations | |
|---|---------------------------------------|---|---|
|  | Regime Control |  | High-Confidence Airstrikes from January 26-28 |
|  | Hezbollah Presence |  | Low-Confidence Airstrikes from January 26-28 |
|  | Jabhat al-Nusra Control |  | High-Confidence Airstrikes from January 23-25 |
|  | Rebel Control |  | Low-Confidence Airstrikes from January 23-25 |
|  | ISIS Control | | |
|  | ISIS, JN, Rebel Control | | |
|  | YPG Control | | |
|  | Bassel al-Assad International Airport | | |

January 25- 28, 2016

Key Takeaway:

The Russian air campaign continued to target opposition-held terrain in an effort to solidify regime gains and increase negotiating leverage in the days immediately prior to the Geneva talks on January 29. Russian warplanes targeted over 40 separate locations in Aleppo, Idlib, Latakia, Hama, Homs, Damascus and Deir ez-Zour Provinces from January 26 – 28. Russia’s intervention has significantly changed the situation on the ground, enabling significant regime victories in Aleppo, Latakia, and Dera’a and placing the regime in a superior negotiating position after suffering a number of meaningful losses to both the armed opposition in Idlib and ISIS in Eastern Homs in early- and mid-2015. Russian warplanes continued to support the regime’s clearing operations in Northeastern Latakia and target locations in Western Idlib, likely to set conditions to seize the strategic town of Jisr al-Shughour and secure regime control over the high ground in the Jebel al-Akrad and Jebel Turkmen mountain ranges. The Russian air campaign also continued to target opposition-held positions in Northwestern Aleppo and supported regime efforts to tighten the siege on the opposition-held pocket in Northern Homs. In the south, regime forces continued their offensive in Dera’a with the support of Russian air power after fully capturing opposition-held Sheikh Meskin on January 25. UK Envoy for Syria Gareth Bayley stated that Russian assistance in the Sheikh Meskin operation “reveals the hypocrisy of Russian targeting in Syria,” and that “this blatant targeting of opposition groups is deeply concerning, particularly as it comes just days before UN-led negotiations for a political settlement leading to transition in Syria.” The UK envoy also criticized Russia for the way Russian warplanes targeted the town, which has essentially left the city leveled. Russian warplanes continue to indiscriminately target civilian-populated areas, incurring high numbers of civilian casualties. The Russian air campaign targets ISIS-controlled territory in Northeastern Aleppo, ar-Raqqa, and Deir ez-Zour at the expense of civilian casualties. The activist organization Raqqa Slaughtered Silently reported that the majority of Russian strikes that target ISIS-held Raqqa City hit civilian-populated residential neighborhoods, while no more than 15 percent actually target ISIS’s strongholds in the city.



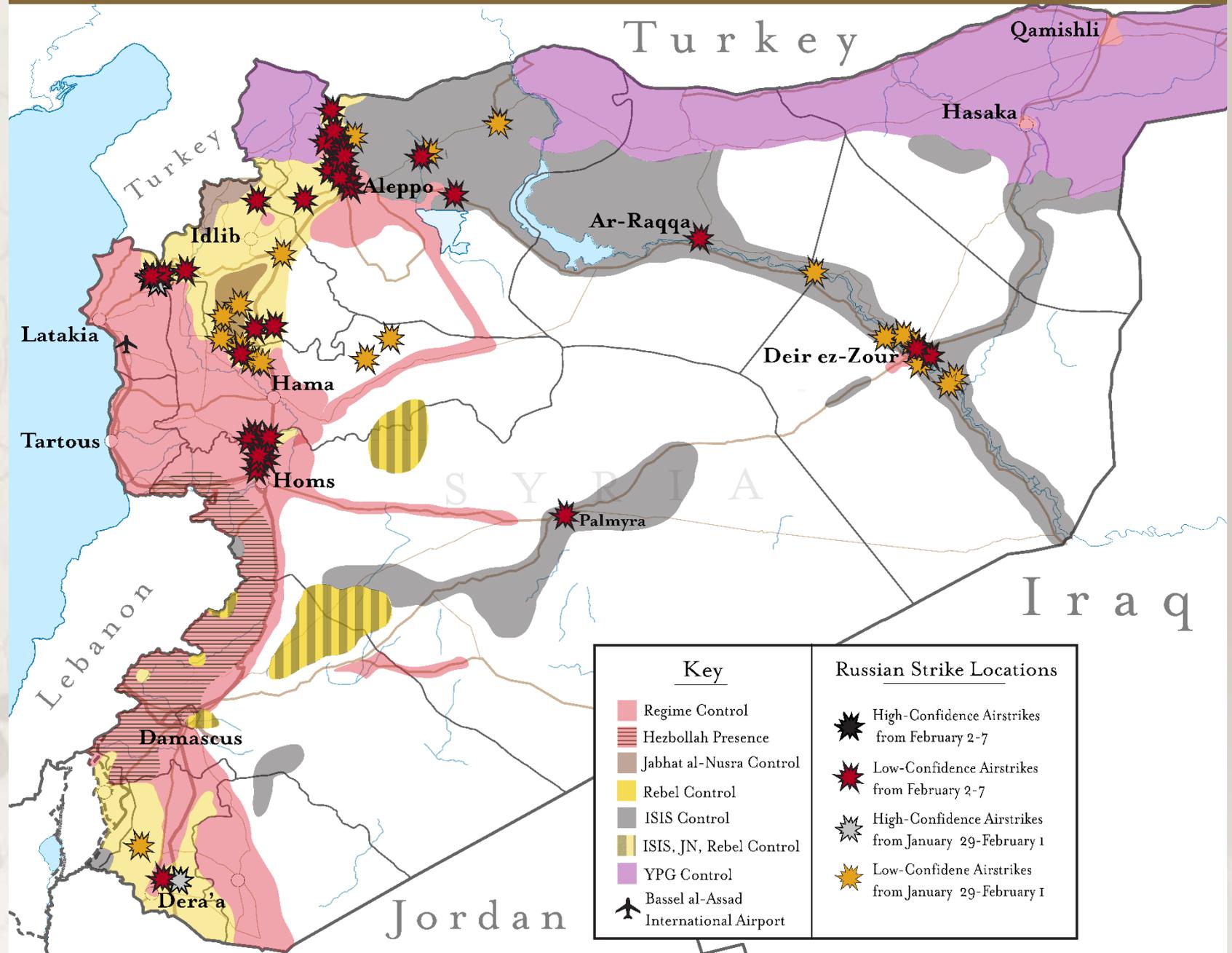
| Key | | Russian Strike Locations | |
|---|---------------------------------------|---|---|
|  | Regime Control |  | High-Confidence Airstrikes from January 29-February 1 |
|  | Hezbollah Presence |  | Low-Confidence Airstrikes from January 29-February 1 |
|  | Jabhat al-Nusra Control |  | High-Confidence Airstrikes from January 26-28 |
|  | Rebel Control |  | Low-Confidence Airstrikes from January 26-28 |
|  | ISIS Control | | |
|  | ISIS, JN, Rebel Control | | |
|  | YPG Control | | |
|  | Bassel al-Assad International Airport | | |

January 26- February 1, 2016

Key Takeaway:

Russian warplanes concentrated their airstrikes in opposition-held territory in northwestern Aleppo Province in support of an ongoing regime offensive to sever the primary opposition ground line of communication (GLOC) from Aleppo City to the Syrian-Turkish border. Pro-regime forces seized three villages in the northern countryside of Aleppo City on February 1 - 2, bringing the regime within five miles of linking with besieged regime forces in the towns of Nubol and Zahraa. The offensive marks the culmination of a series of Russian-backed shaping operations in Aleppo Province that began in October 2015. Anonymous U.S. defense officials confirmed that Russian Spetsnaz special operations forces have also been working to enable the ongoing campaign in Aleppo Province. The isolation of Aleppo City would provide Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and his foreign backers with valuable leverage against their opponents amidst ongoing UN-sponsored Geneva Talks to end the Syrian Civil War. The opposition High Negotiations Committee (HNC) condemned the advances north of Aleppo City on February 2 and reaffirmed that the opposition will not participate in the negotiations until the regime and its allies implement confidence-building measures detailed in previous UN Security Council resolutions, including an end to aerial bombardment on civilian targets. Russia nonetheless attempted to portray itself as a constructive actor in the political process. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov announced that Russia has agreed to include representatives from prominent Salafi-jihadist groups Jaysh al-Islam and Ahrar al-Sham in negotiations on an individual basis despite previously condemning the groups as terrorist organizations.

Meanwhile, a Russian Su-34 bomber violated Turkish airspace on January 29 in the first reported airspace incursion since Turkey downed a Russian fighter jet in November 2015. The Russian Ministry of Defense denied responsibility for the violation, terming the report “unsubstantiated propaganda” despite NATO confirmation. Russia later claimed to deploy advanced Su-35S air superiority fighters to its airbase at the Bassel al-Assad International Airport in Latakia Province. The deployment of Russia’s most advanced fighter jets to Syria provides a new boost to its ability to provoke Turkey and assert its freedom of action along the southern flank of NATO.

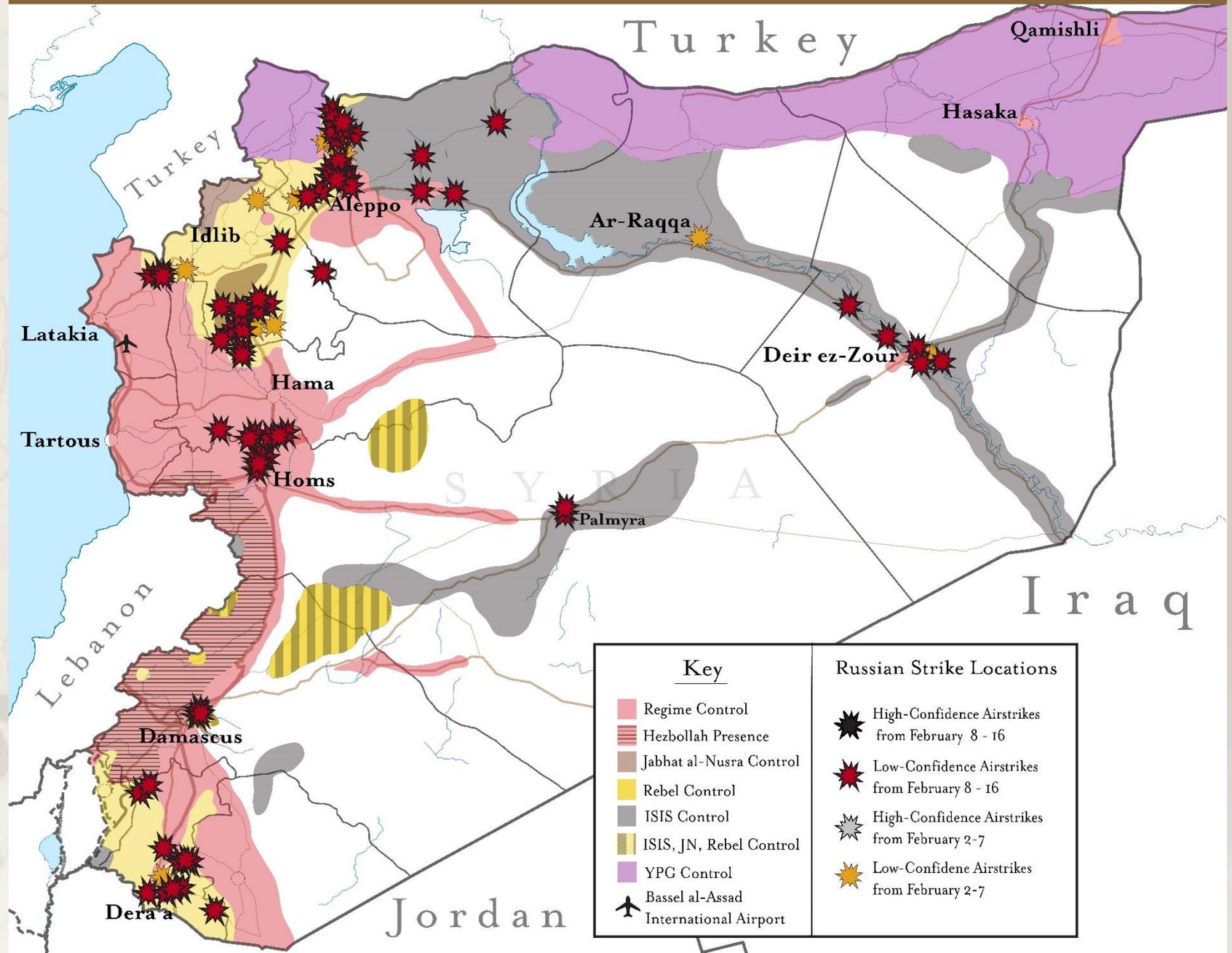


| Key | | Russian Strike Locations | |
|-----|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| | Regime Control | | High-Confidence Airstrikes from February 2-7 |
| | Hezbollah Presence | | Low-Confidence Airstrikes from February 2-7 |
| | Jabhat al-Nusra Control | | High-Confidence Airstrikes from January 29-February 1 |
| | Rebel Control | | Low-Confidence Airstrikes from January 29-February 1 |
| | ISIS Control | | |
| | ISIS, JN, Rebel Control | | |
| | YPG Control | | |
| | Bassel al-Assad International Airport | | |

January 29- February 7, 2016

Key Takeaway:

Russia's four month long air campaign has set conditions for the encirclement of Aleppo. Pro-regime forces backed by heavy Russian airstrikes severed one of two opposition supply lines into Aleppo City from the Turkish border on February 3 when they pushed northwest of the city to reestablish a regime supply line to the besieged regime towns of Nubl and Zahra'a. Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps fighters and Iranian-backed Shi'a militia forces played a prominent role in the offensive, demonstrating the lethality of combined Russian air and Iranian ground operations against the opposition in Syria. Reports of Russian Spetnaz activity at unspecified locations in Aleppo Province likely indicate the involvement of these forces in the operation. The gains position pro-regime forces to encircle opposition-held portions of Aleppo City by severing the last remaining opposition supply line that runs east from the Turkish border into the city. The regime can sever this final supply line at two locations: an outer location northwest of Aleppo City on the road to the Turkish border that passes through the towns of Huraytan and Kafr Hamra, or an inner location in the city's eastern sector controlled by the armed opposition, such as the Hanano District. Russia's air campaign has consistently targeted the outer location for the past three months, indicating that this is where pro-regime forces intend to complete the encirclement. This section of the supply line runs through rural terrain that Russian airpower can easily target and Iranian-backed ground forces can ultimately seize, whereas the inner location is more difficult as the terrain includes both topographic and urban barriers to rapid ground offensives. Pro-regime forces are meanwhile taking steps to buffer their forward line of troops (FLOT) to the north of Aleppo to make it possible to sustain the encirclement. Pro-regime forces will likely complete the encirclement of Aleppo in coming weeks and besiege the opposition inside the city in order to force Turkey and Saudi Arabia to concede to a negotiated settlement or ceasefire.

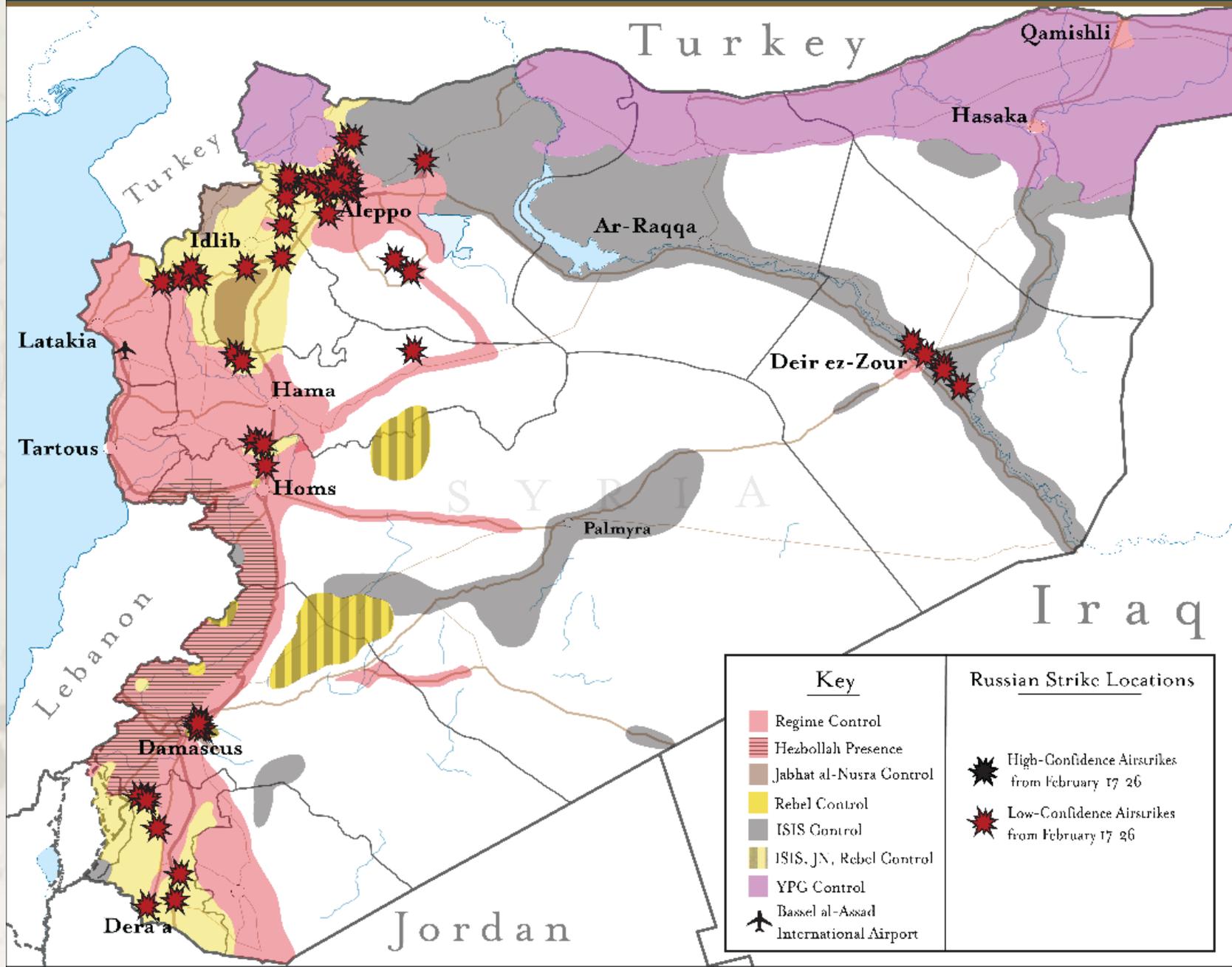


February 2- 16, 2016

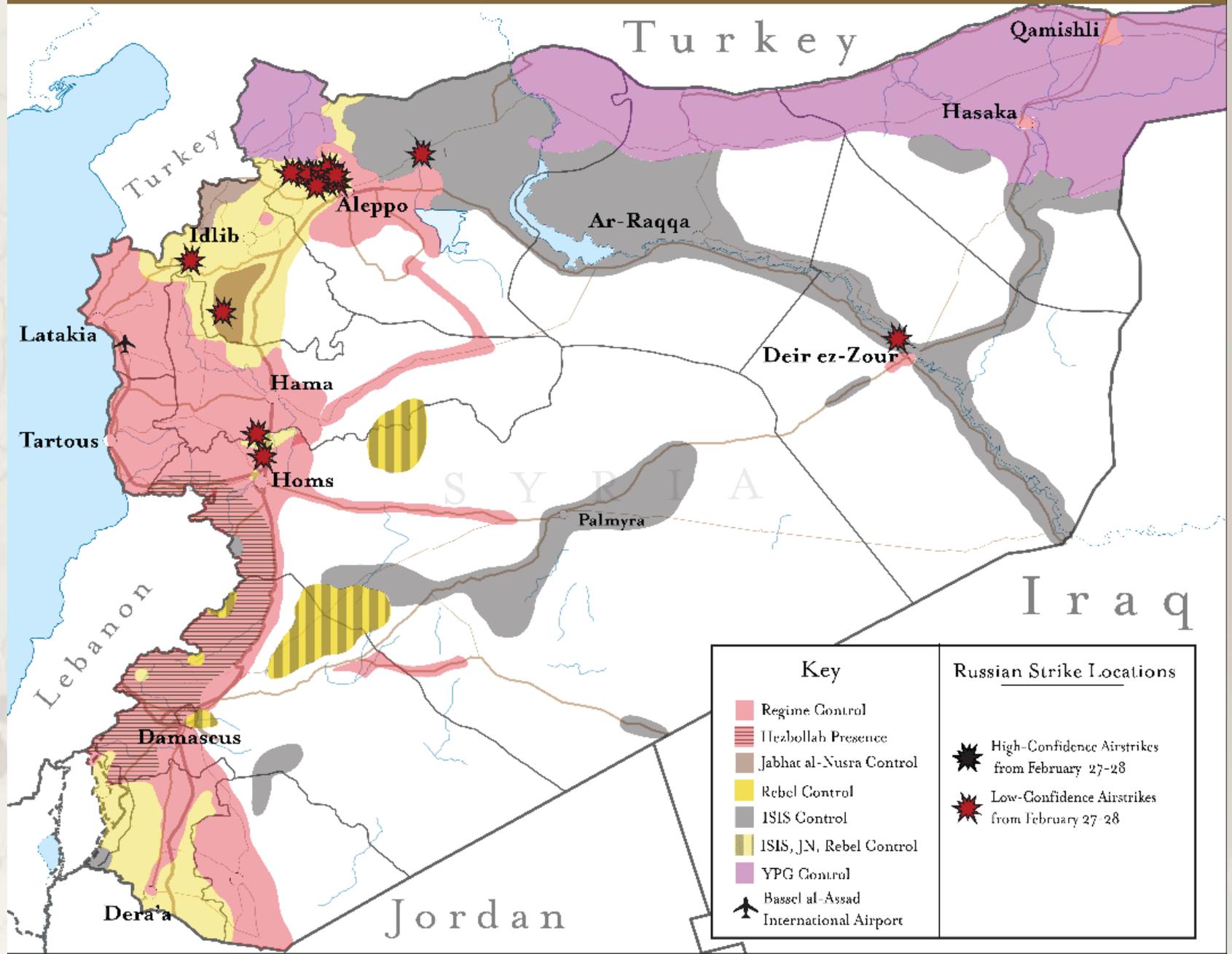
Key Takeaway:

Russia continues to target opposition forces and civilian infrastructure after brokering a “cessation of hostilities” agreement through the International Syrian Support Group (ISSG) on February 11. Russian air operations against the armed opposition have continued unhindered since the announcement of the agreement. Russian officials have reiterated that they have no plans to halt their air campaign against “terrorists,” which they have broadly defined to include all opposition groups threatening the Assad regime, including some receiving U.S. support. The “cessation of hostilities” agreement will ultimately leave Russian and other pro-regime forces free to continue anti-opposition operations throughout Syria. Meanwhile, aid organizations accused Russian warplanes of targeting four hospitals and one school in Aleppo and Idlib Provinces on February 15 alone. The reported attacks are a continuation of Russian targeting of vital civilian infrastructure, likely in an effort to soften the resolve of the Syrian armed opposition. Russia also has ratcheted up its military power in Syria since the agreement, with the deployment of the advanced Tu-214R intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) aircraft to the Bassel al-Assad International Airport on February 15. The Tu-214R will likely work in coordination with the new Russian Su-35S warplanes to conduct quick and accurate precision strikes. Its deployment is another indication that Russia and the regime continue to pursue a military solution to the conflict in Syria.

Russian-enabled Kurdish advances have applied additional pressure against opposition forces already strained by recent regime advances northwest of Aleppo City. Kurdish forces cleared over 10 kilometers of opposition-held terrain north of the city, seizing the town of Tel Rifaat, the Menagh Airbase, and at least five other villages from the armed opposition from February 6 - 16 with the assistance of Russian airstrikes. Given recent gains, Kurdish forces are positioned to seize the opposition stronghold of Mare’a located along the frontline with ISIS. Kurdish forces are also positioned to seize the town of Azaz located 10 kilometers south of Turkish border. Russian air support for Kurdish forces further escalates tensions with Turkey, which has responded to recent Kurdish gains by shelling recently seized villages adjacent to Azaz . Turkish officials called for the formation of a “secure strip” along Syria’s northern border with Turkey to protect the area from additional Kurdish advances on February 16, and have increasingly pressured the U.S. to cease support for Kurdish forces in the conflict.



| Key | | Russian Strike Locations | |
|-----|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| | Regime Control | | High-Confidence Airstrikes from February 17-26 |
| | Hezbollah Presence | | Low-Confidence Airstrikes from February 17-26 |
| | Jabhat al-Nusra Control | | |
| | Rebel Control | | |
| | ISIS Control | | |
| | ISIS, JN, Rebel Control | | |
| | YPG Control | | |
| | Bassel al-Assad International Airport | | |

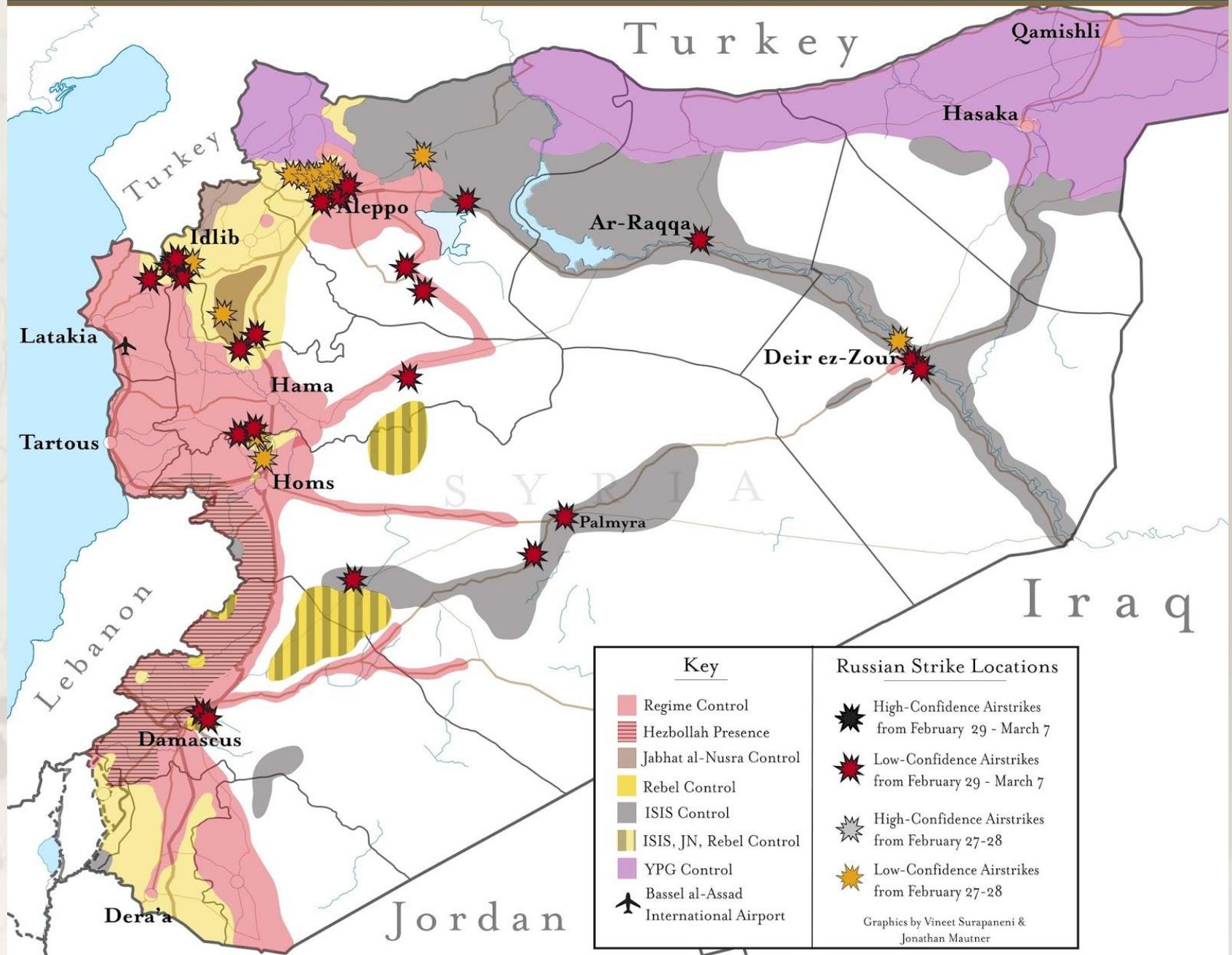


| Key | | Russian Strike Locations | |
|---|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| ■ | Regime Control |  | High-Confidence Airstrikes from February 27-28 |
| | Hezbollah Presence |  | Low-Confidence Airstrikes from February 27-28 |
| ■ | Jabhat al-Nusra Control | | |
| ■ | Rebel Control | | |
| ■ | ISIS Control | | |
| | ISIS, JN, Rebel Control | | |
| ■ | YPG Control | | |
|  | Bassel al-Assad International Airport | | |

February 17-28, 2016

Key Takeaway:

Russia has continued its air campaign in support of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, despite the ongoing cessation of hostilities agreement that began on February 27. Russian airstrikes concentrated in opposition-held areas of northwestern Syria on February 28, following a lull in Russian airstrikes on February 27. The ceasefire, however, is largely holding, despite accusations from both pro- and anti-regime elements of violations of the agreement. The Russian MoD reported nine violations of the ceasefire by “terrorist” groups, “moderate” opposition factions, and Turkey. Head of the opposition High Negotiations Committee (HNC) Riad Hijab accused Russian warplanes of conducting 26 airstrikes on February 28 targeting opposition factions that have announced their commitment to the truce. Hijab stressed that “negotiations will be unfeasible” amidst continued Russian use of cluster munitions and persistent violations of the ceasefire by the Syrian regime and its allies resulting in civilian casualties. Russian airstrikes have reportedly targeted the headquarters of U.S.-backed TOW anti-tank missile recipient Firqat al-Wasta in northern Hama Province on February 29. The likely continuation of Russian and regime air operations against mainstream elements of the opposition throughout western Syria under the guise of fighting terrorism will ultimately threaten the stability of any sustainable ceasefire agreement.

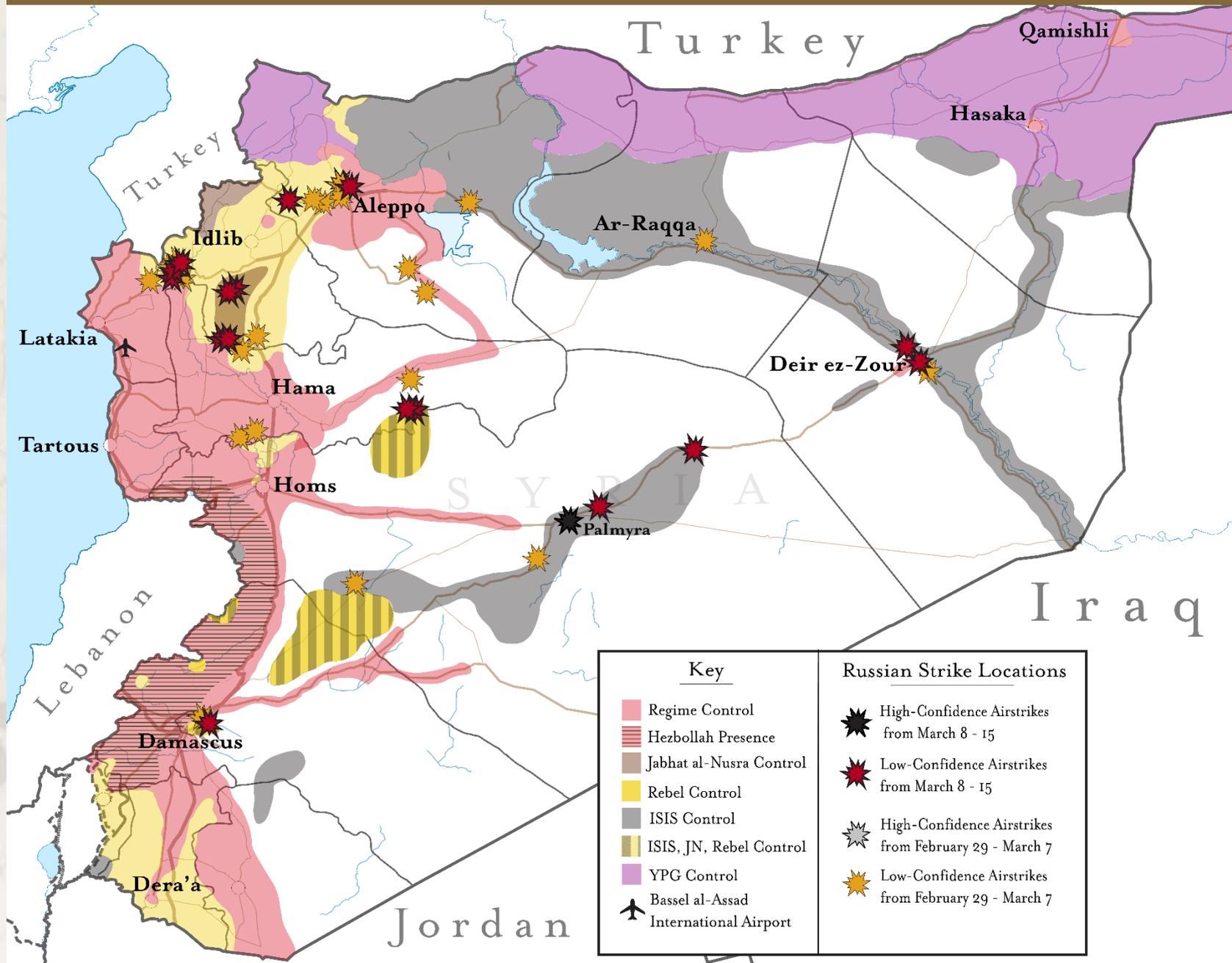


February 27- March 7, 2016

Key Takeaway:

Russian airstrikes continue to target mainstream elements of the Syrian armed opposition, despite the ongoing cessation of hostilities agreement. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that the level of violence in the country has decreased by ninety percent since the onset of the agreement on February 27. Pro-regime forces supported by Russian airstrikes nevertheless continued operations to clear opposition-held terrain in Latakia Province in an effort to buffer the regime's coastal stronghold. Jaysh al-Nasr, a coalition of FSA-affiliated opposition factions that includes prominent U.S.-backed TOW anti-tank missile recipients, reported Russian airstrikes near the opposition's frontlines with the regime in the al-Ghab Plain, which lies on Latakia's eastern border. Russian warplanes also conducted limited strikes against the armed opposition in other areas of western Syria from February 29 - March 7, including the first reported Russian airstrikes in Damascus Province since the cessation of hostilities agreement began. The likely continuation of limited Russian airstrikes against mainstream elements of the opposition ultimately threatens the sustainability of any ceasefire agreement and the outcome of upcoming negotiations between the regime and the opposition in Geneva, currently scheduled to resume on March 14. The opposition High Negotiations Committee (HNC) continues to report Russian and regime violations of the cessation of hostilities agreement, which included a total of 90 airstrikes carried out by Russian and regime warplanes as of March 4. The HNC has yet to make a decision regarding its attendance of the talks. Prominent HNC member Riad Nassan Agha stated on March 8 that their "inclination is to go," but remains dependent upon the degree to which the regime and its allies maintain the cessation of hostilities.

Russia's decrease in airstrikes against the armed opposition in western Syria has likely allowed Russian air operations to increase support to the regime's limited operations against ISIS. Russian air operations have notably decreased in areas such as Aleppo, where heavy strikes have been maintained for the first five months of Russia's air campaign. Russian airstrikes concentrated against ISIS's positions in and around Palmyra in central Homs Province amidst a concerted regime effort to breach the town on March 7. Regime ground operations in Palmyra were ultimately unsuccessful, highlighting the regime's continued limitations in combating ISIS as the regime and its allies remain preoccupied with the defeat of the Syrian armed opposition.



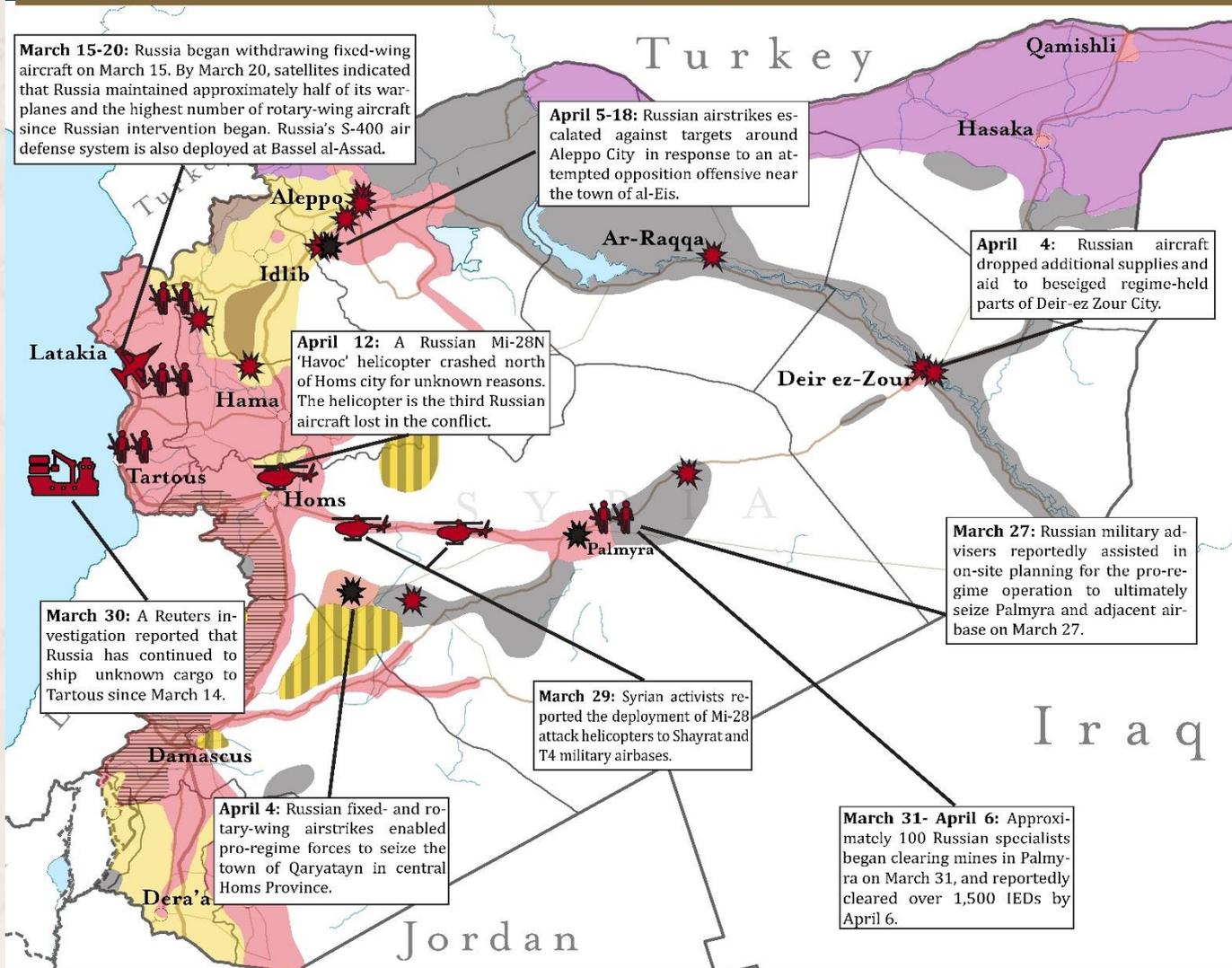
| Key | | Russian Strike Locations | |
|-----|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| | Regime Control | | High-Confidence Airstrikes from March 8 - 15 |
| | Hezbollah Presence | | Low-Confidence Airstrikes from March 8 - 15 |
| | Jabhat al-Nusra Control | | High-Confidence Airstrikes from February 29 - March 7 |
| | Rebel Control | | Low-Confidence Airstrikes from February 29 - March 7 |
| | ISIS Control | | |
| | ISIS, JN, Rebel Control | | |
| | YPG Control | | |
| | Bassel al-Assad International Airport | | |

February 29- March 15, 2016

Key Takeaway:

Russia reportedly withdrew approximately fifteen of its airframes from the Bassel al Assad International Airport in Latakia Province from March 15 - 16, following Russian President Vladimir Putin's announcement of a drawdown on March 14. Five Russian Su-34 bombers, four Su-25s, five Su-24s, and at least one Su-30 had left the airbase to return to Russia as of March 16, according to a Reuters investigation of Russian state media. Russian officials asserted that Russia would nonetheless continue its counterterrorism efforts, a term Russia has previously used to obfuscate its air campaign in support of President Bashar al Assad against mainstream elements of the Syrian opposition. Russia has yet to withdraw many of its other aircraft from the base, including numerous short- and medium-range bombers. Putin has messaged his determination to defend both the airfield at Bassel al Assad and Russia's naval basing in Tartous as well as his intent to retain the S-400 air defense system in Latakia. Russia has therefore gained significant capabilities along the Eastern Mediterranean that it intends to secure. Russia will therefore continue to be able to rapidly deploy long- and medium-range air assets into the theater through its airbase in Latakia. As Russia's air campaign had operated at decreased levels since the cessation of hostilities agreement on February 27 and had lowered its rate of airstrikes even further from March 14 – 15, Russia may be removing excess airframes from the base.

Russian airstrikes in Syria have notably decreased since Putin's announcement and partial drawdown. ISW was only able to confirm strikes in the vicinity of the ISIS-held town of Palmyra in central Homs Province with both high and low confidence from March 14 - 15. Pro-regime forces launched a renewed campaign to seize Palmyra in early March, backed heavily by Russian and regime fixed and rotary wing strikes. Russia will likely continue its air operations in support of the regime ground offensive against Palmyra, despite the drawdown. The combination of Russian airpower and likely Iranian reinforcement has brought Assad's forces within four kilometers of Palmyra as of March 16. The current "cessation of hostilities," which does not apply to ISIS targets and which has reduced overall levels of violence has likely allowed the regime to refocus efforts on clearing ISIS's presence in central Homs. Russia will also use its air operations against ISIS as a means to further project itself as a provider of international security and to legitimize its continued presence inside Syria. Russia's airstrikes against ISIS, however, come at a cost. Alleged videos and photos from Palmyra show the damage caused by the intensity of Russia's air campaign in the area, while local sources continue to report civilian casualties, highlighting the continued indiscriminate nature of Russian airstrikes. The Russian air campaign and recovery of Palmyra may on the surface seem to support U.S. objectives against ISIS, but over the long term may exacerbate grievances and insurgency.



| Areas of Control | | Russian Military Assets | | Russian Strike Locations |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| Regime Control | ISIS Control | Arrival of Russian cargo vessel | Military personnel sighting | High-Confidence Airstrikes from March 16 - April 18 |
| Hezbollah Presence | ISIS, JN, Rebel Control | Rotary wing deployment | Fixed wing deployment | Low-Confidence Airstrikes from March 16 - April 18 |
| Jabhat al-Nusra Control | YPG Control | | | |
| Opposition Control | | | | |

Russian Military Activity March 15- April 18, 2016

Key Takeaway:

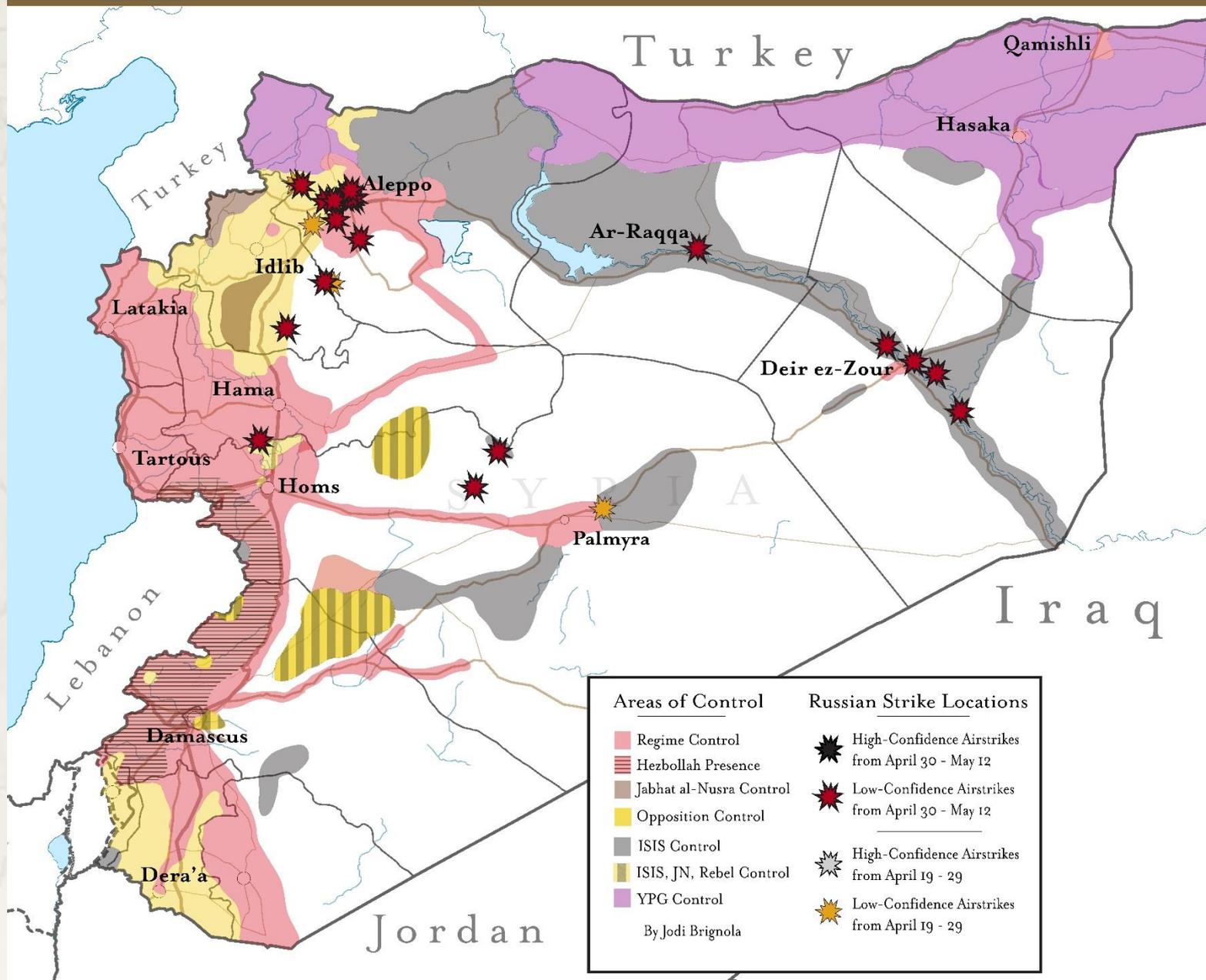
Russia remains a decisive actor in Syria despite announcing its limited drawdown on March 14. It has since reshaped the nature of its deployment and military operations in ways that continue to bolster the Assad regime's position on the ground as well as at the negotiating table, while allowing Russia to maintain its strategic military foothold along the Eastern Mediterranean. Russian military contributions continue to shape the battlefield momentum of pro-regime operations through the deployment of alternative assets to theater such as advanced rotary wing attack aircraft. Russia retains the capacity to escalate its fixed-wing strikes to support pro-regime operations, as shown in operations against ISIS in Palmyra in late March and more recently against armed opposition forces in Aleppo.

Russian air operations pivoted once again to Aleppo as of April 6, following weeks of strikes primarily carried out in support of pro-regime ground operations against ISIS in central Homs Province. Pro-regime forces supported by Russian and regime airstrikes have resumed operations to encircle and besiege armed opposition forces in Aleppo City. Russian air operations have regularly targeted opposition-held terrain in Aleppo province throughout its air campaign in Syria, beginning condition-setting efforts for pro-regime operations to encircle and besiege Aleppo City as early as October 2015. Russian air support has been a pivotal component of pro-regime operations to encircle Aleppo City, bringing regime forces within five kilometers of besieging opposition forces inside the city as of February 2016.

Russian airstrikes have both repelled opposition efforts to reverse gains made by regime forces south of the city and propelled regime advances in the city's northern industrial outskirts. Russia resumed regular strikes in the vicinity of Aleppo City on April 6 in response to an opposition offensive. This new wave of strikes in Aleppo, although not yet at the levels seen in the first five months of the Russian air campaign, ultimately places the already tenuous "cessation of hostilities" agreement at risk of collapse. The escalation of both Russian airstrikes and pro-regime operations appears to be driving additional upticks of violence elsewhere in northwestern Syria, particularly on key regime frontlines in northeastern Latakia and northwestern Hama Provinces on April 18. Renewed opposition operations in this area apply additional pressure to the regime's heartland on the Syrian coast.

Russia has changed the shape of its deployment to meet the needs of the Syrian regime rather than scaling back its operations in theater. Russia has deployed additional installments of advanced attack helicopters in the past month, allowing Russia to carry out dynamic strikes and provide close air support in accordance with ongoing pro-regime ground operations. Activist sources reported that Russia has deployed additional rotary-wing attack aircraft to Bassel al-Assad International Airport in Latakia as well as the Shayrat, and T4 Airbases in central Homs, including installments of advanced Mi-28N 'Havoc' Helicopters. Advanced helicopters like the Mi-28N, which the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) confirmed on April 4 was in use in Syria, would be especially useful in clearing operations against the remaining ISIS-held areas of eastern Homs. Russia prioritized the regime's front with ISIS in central Homs in March 2016, as demonstrated by the presence of Russian military advisers on the ground and the eventual deployment of de-mining personnel to clear Palmyra. While the operation achieved pro-regime objectives in securing terrain lost to ISIS in May 2015, it also allowed Russia to forward the narrative that it acts as a constructive international arbiter to the Syrian conflict and is an effective partner in the fight against terrorism while it continues to target moderate elements of the opposition on other fronts.

Russian Airstrikes in Syria: April 19 - May 12, 2016



April 19- May 12, 2016

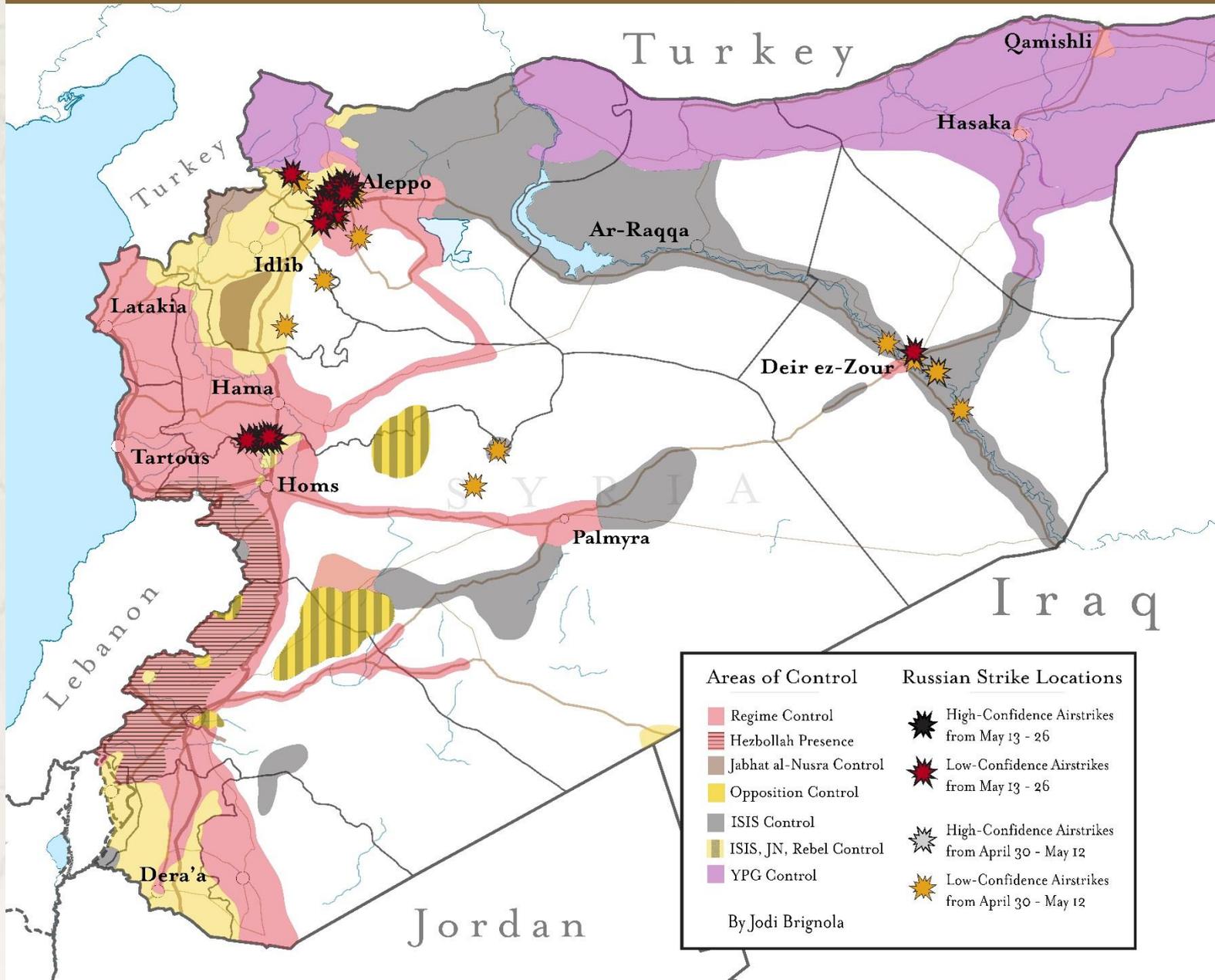
Key Takeaway:

Pro-regime forces supported by Russian airpower are continuing operations to encircle and besiege the Syrian opposition in Aleppo City following the expiration of a series of temporary ceasefires on May 12. Russian air operations in Aleppo from April 19 – May 12 demonstrate Russia's continued prioritization of support to its client regime in Damascus. Russia has nonetheless continued to present itself as a constructive international arbiter to the Syrian conflict through a series of Russian- and U.S.-brokered partial ceasefire deals from May 4 – 11. Russia maintains a robust military presence in Syria and has continued its military campaign, following Russian President Vladimir Putin's announcement of a partial withdrawal on March 14 and subsequent reports of continued Russian drawdown. Russia has rather begun to reshape its military deployment in Syria, withdrawing certain airframes from the Bassel al Assad airbase while deploying additional rotary wing aircraft, developing new basing near Palmyra, and maintaining "several thousand" Russian ground forces in the country. "Dozens" of Russia's fixed wing aircraft reportedly remain at its airbase in Latakia and continue air operations against both the armed opposition and ISIS across Syria.

Russian air operations seek to preserve strategic regime-held terrain and Russia's military basing in Syria. Russian airstrikes escalated against ISIS's positions throughout Syria to include areas in Homs, Deir ez-Zour, and Raqqa, following ISIS's resumption of large-scale operations against pro-regime forces in central Homs on May 3. These operations have been primarily focused on seizing strategic gas fields that serve as the regime's primary source of natural gas for areas in western Syria. ISIS seized the Sha'er Gas Field from pro-regime forces on May 5 and subsequently severed the primary regime ground line of communication (GLOC) between Homs City and Palmyra on May 10, inhibiting the ability of pro-regime forces to redeploy to critical frontlines with ISIS in the area. Russian airstrikes responded to this threat, targeting ISIS's positions in the Sha'er Gas Field and the nearby Mahr Gas Field. ISIS's operations also pose a threat to Russian's own military contingent in central Homs, which includes its newest military base near Palmyra as well as its reported rotary wing deployment in the regime's T4 and Shayrat airbases. Western journalists brought to Palmyra by Russia as well as local activists reported that Russia established a new military base in Palmyra, following the regime's recapture of the ancient city on March 27. The base reportedly facilitates Russian demining operations and is guarded by air defense systems and armored vehicles. Russian advisors are likely deployed near active frontlines, as indicated by the death of a Russian soldier in Homs Province on May 11 in addition to ISIS's claims to kill at least five Russian Spetnaz personnel during regime operations to seize Palmyra in late March.

Russia is using the series of strained and intermittent ceasefires in Aleppo to reset its operations against opposition forces in the area. Russian air operations have continued in Aleppo, which was once the primary focus of Russia's air campaign, albeit at decreased and sporadic rates. The Syrian regime has in turn barraged Aleppo with intense airstrikes beginning on April 22, making Russian airstrikes in the area difficult to discern. Regime and Russian strikes in Aleppo from April 22 – 30 killed and injured over 145, including a strike on a Doctors Without Borders hospital that killed over 60. ISW was not able to assess any Russian strikes with low confidence in Aleppo from April 30 – May 4, but airstrikes resumed targeting the Syrian opposition in the city on May 5. Russia has also reportedly begun to deploy additional assets to Aleppo, including ground forces to the Efrin Canton in northwestern Aleppo to support the Syrian Kurdish YPG and artillery units north of Aleppo City. The opposition meanwhile launched major operations against regime forces south of Aleppo City, securing the town of Al Eis on April 1 as well as Khan Touman on May 5 - 6. Delayed and limited Russian airpower was unable to reverse gains made during the opposition's offensive against the town of Khan Touman south of Aleppo led by al-Qaeda's Syrian affiliate Jabhat al Nusra and Salafi-Jihadist group Ahrar al Sham. The offensive was timed alongside a Russian-organized concert in the ancient ruins of Palmyra, which required a significant number of Russian attack helicopters and armored vehicles to secure the guests in attendance. Iranian forces, without the support of major Russian airstrikes, suffered heavy losses in the Khan Touman offensive. Pro-regime forces, however, resumed operations to encircle opposition forces in Aleppo City through its northern industrial outskirts on May 12 as the as the temporary 48-hour ceasefire expired. Opposition forces reportedly prevented pro-regime advances in the area despite Russian airstrikes.

Russian Airstrikes in Syria: April 30 - May 26, 2016



April 30- May 26, 2016

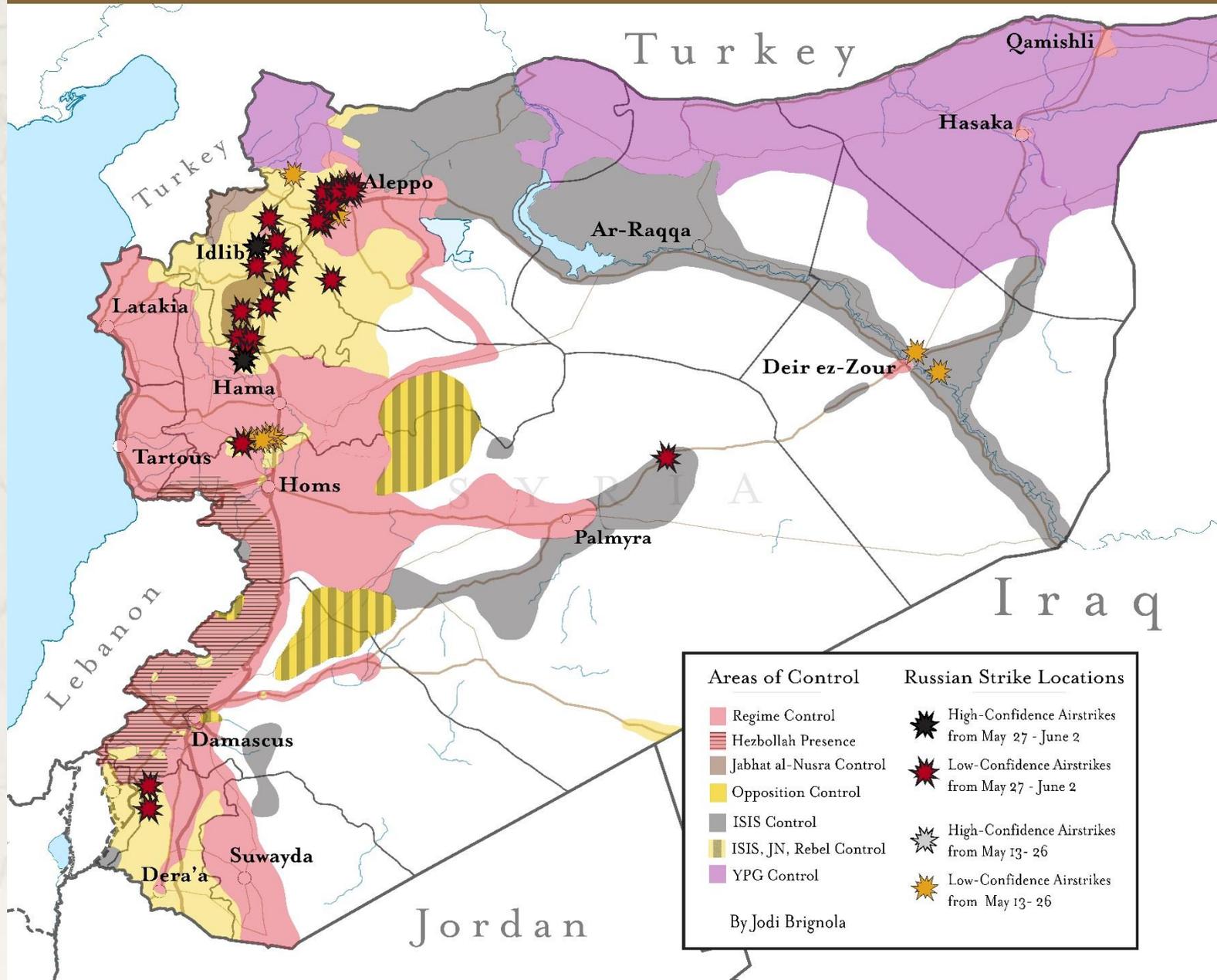
Key Takeaway:

Russia has continued its air campaign against the Syrian opposition, despite its claims to temporarily suspend airstrikes against Syrian al Qaeda-affiliate Jabhat al Nusra and the opposition. The Russian Ministry of Defense announced a temporary pause in its air campaign against Jabhat al Nusra in order to give opposition groups time to distance themselves from the jihadist group on May 25 and again on May 27. The withdrawal of opposition forces from key frontlines jointly held with Jabhat al Nusra – particularly in Aleppo – would likely render core opposition-held terrain vulnerable to advances by pro-regime forces. Russia is conducting a concerted effort against opposition forces in Aleppo, following opposition gains against pro-regime forces in southern Aleppo throughout April and May 2016. Russian air operations have largely concentrated against positions along the opposition's last remaining supply route into Aleppo City from May 13 - 26, including against towns northwest of the city and areas in Aleppo's northern industrial outskirts. Pro-regime forces remain positioned to encircle and besiege opposition forces in Aleppo City by severing this supply route. Pro-regime forces continued low-level ground operations supported by Russian airstrikes from May 12 -17 to complete the encirclement through the city's northern industrial districts, although these efforts were unsuccessful.

Russia remains a decisive military force in the Syrian conflict, despite its alleged drawdown. Operation Inherent Resolve Spokesperson Col. Steve Warren stated that Russian currently retains "almost identical" military capabilities following Russian President Vladimir Putin's announcement of a partial withdrawal on March 14. The distribution of Russian air operations in northwestern Syria demonstrates Russia's continued prioritization of support to the Assad regime. The military assets that Russia maintains in theater allow it to respond within 24 hours to threats to regime terrain. Russian airstrikes escalated against opposition forces in northern Homs Province and southern Hama Province from May 12 – 16 and again from May 19 – 22 in response to renewed opposition operations against regime forces in the area. This concentration of strikes in defense of pro-regime terrain, however, was largely unable to reverse opposition gains.

Russia has meanwhile continued to present itself as an effective partner in the fight against terrorism, while continuing to function as a destabilizing force in the Syrian conflict. Russian Minister of Defense Sergei Shoigu announced on May 20 that Russia had presented a plan to the U.S.-led anti-ISIS coalition to begin joint airstrikes against "international terrorist and illegal armed groups" that violate the cessation of hostilities agreement. U.S. officials subsequently denied the existence of any such agreement. Russia caveated its proposal for joint strikes, stating that Russia would not accept any arrangement that prevented it from conducting unilateral airstrikes in Syria. Russia is unlikely to halt military action against mainstream elements of the Syrian opposition, which remain the Assad regime's largest adversaries. Russia has continued to indiscriminately target both Jabhat al Nusra and mainstream opposition factions in northwestern Syria despite the International Syria Support Group's agreement to new measures to reinforce a nationwide cessation of hostilities on May 17. Russian airstrikes continued to primarily target opposition forces in northwestern Syria from May 13 - 26, rather than terrorist organizations such as ISIS. ISW was only able to assess one Russian airstrike against ISIS for the two-week period from May 13 – 26 with low confidence, despite continued ISIS operations throughout Syria.

Russian Airstrikes in Syria: May 13 - June 2, 2016



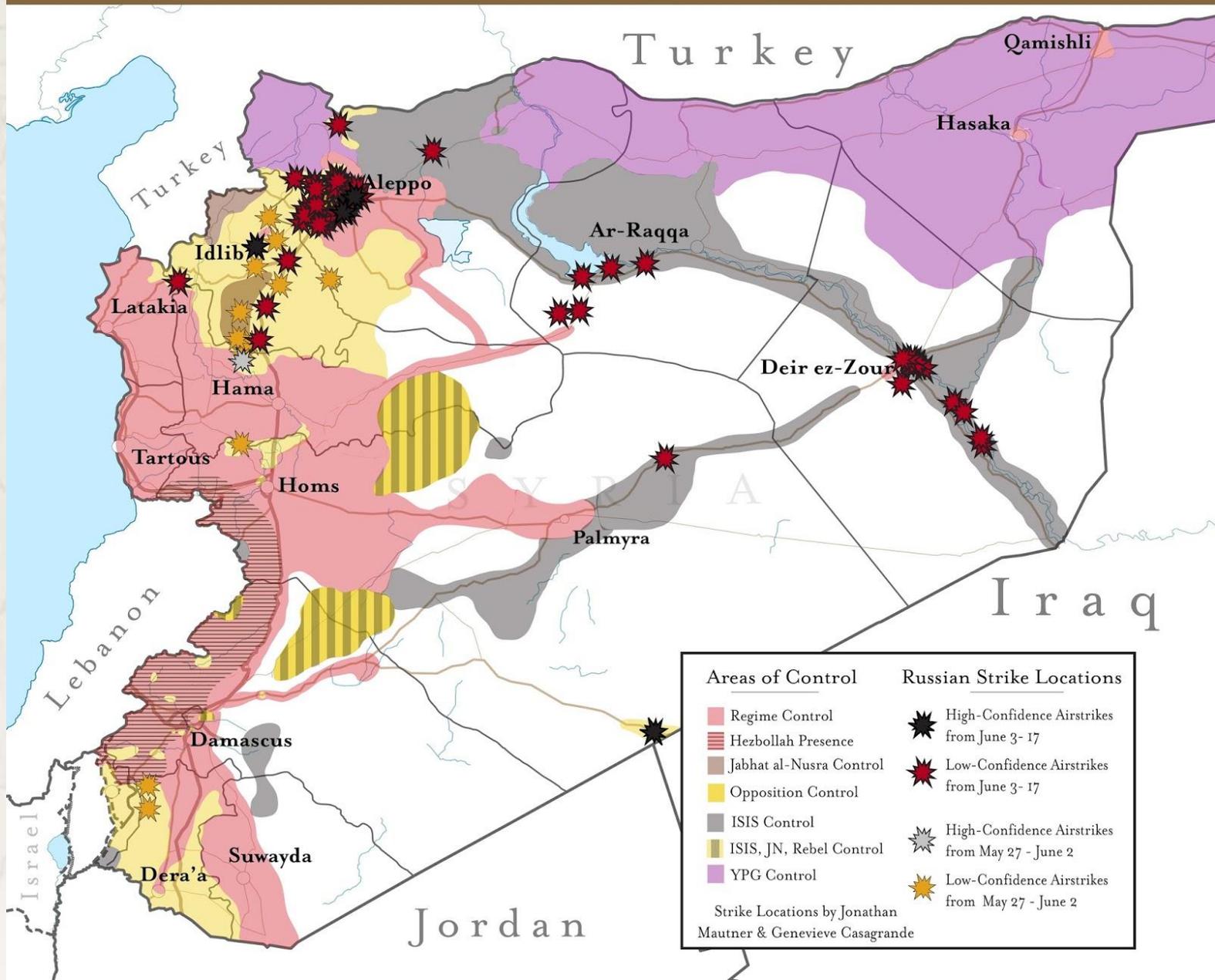
May 13- June 2, 2016

Key Takeaway:

The tempo of Russian air operations has dramatically escalated in Syria. The rate and breadth of Russian airstrikes nearly tripled from May 29 – June 2 in comparison to the previous five day period. ISW was able to assess a total of 29 Russian airstrikes with low and high confidence beginning on May 29 and only 10 locations from May 24 -28. This escalation marks a dangerous shift in the Russian airstrike pattern to levels only seen prior to the brokering of the Cessation of Hostilities agreement in late February 2016. This expansion of the Russian air campaign coincides with the further breakdown of Geneva negotiations, including the resignation of Chief Opposition Negotiator Mohammad Alloush on May 30 due to a reported lack of political progress and continued bombardment of civilians in opposition-held terrain.

Russia is clearly demonstrating its freedom of action in Syria. It has pivoted its air operations towards mainstream elements of the armed opposition across Western Syria. An anonymous U.S. intelligence official confirmed on June 3 that “Russia and [Syrian President Bashar al-] Assad have “primarily targeted the moderate opposition,” despite their claims to the contrary. Russian air operations against the Syrian opposition expanded beyond the targeting of critical frontlines in Aleppo and once again began to target deep within opposition-held terrain in Idlib Province from May 30 – June 2. ISW was also able to assess two Russian airstrikes with low confidence in Dera’a Province on May 31, marking the first assessed Russian strikes in the province since February 25. The strikes targeted terrain largely held by factions within the U.S.-backed Southern Front coalition. Russia also continued its intense bombardment against the opposition in Aleppo in a likely condition setting effort for the pro-regime encirclement of Aleppo City, targeting key locations along the opposition’s last remaining supply route into the city.

Russian Airstrikes in Syria: May 27 - June 17, 2016



May 27- June 17, 2016

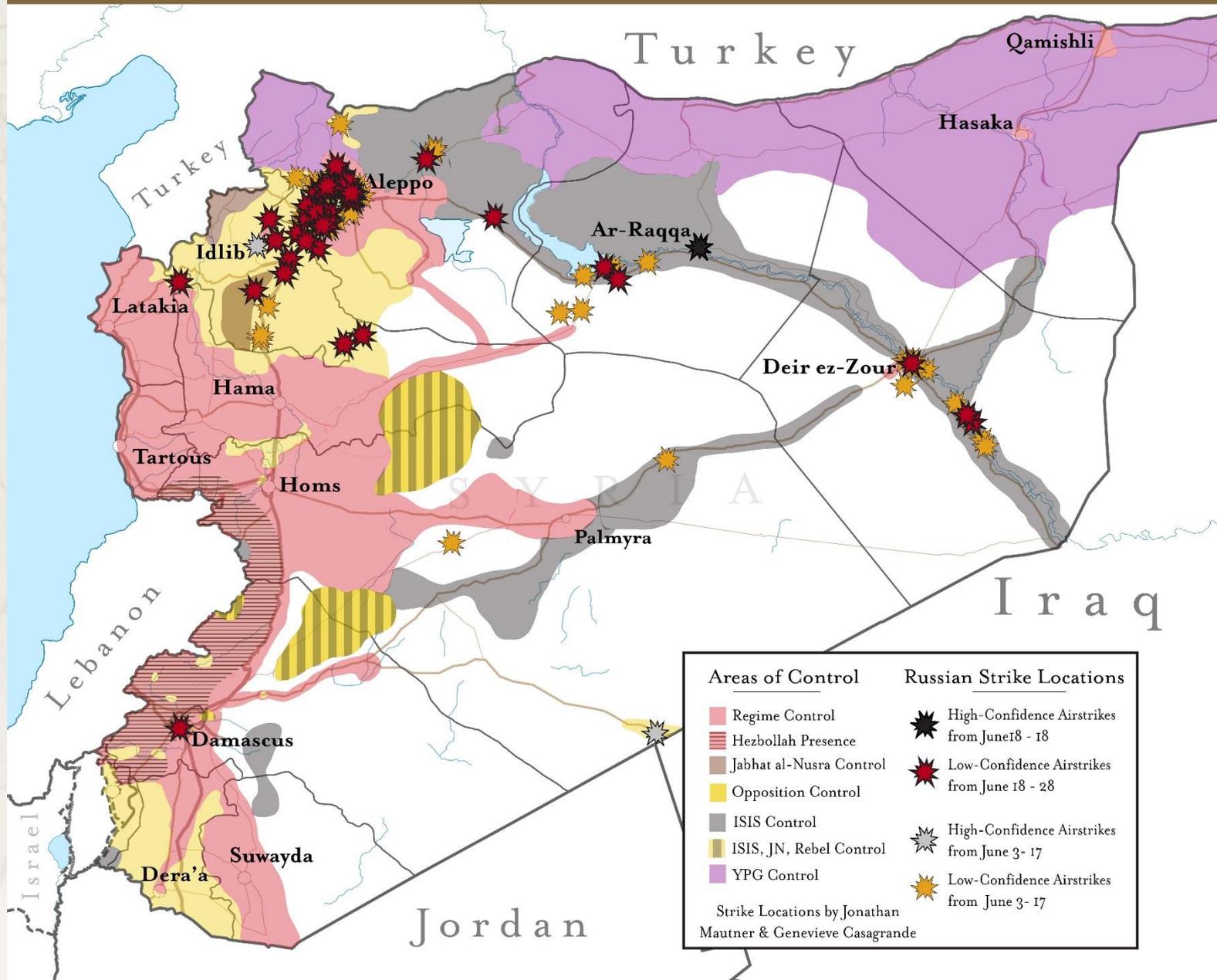
Key Takeaway:

Russia has escalated its air campaign in Syria in an effort to deter and undermine Western military action. ISW assesses with high confidence that Russian airstrikes targeted areas held by the U.S.-backed New Syrian Army near the Syrian al Tanaf border crossing with Iraq on June 16. The U.S. trained and equipped the New Syrian Army to fight ISIS in southeastern Syria. The U.S. sent jets to intercept and prevent additional attacks, but Russian warplanes returned to conduct a second strike against New Syrian Army positions while the American jets refueled, according to anonymous U.S. Defense Officials. Russia and the U.S. held a teleconference on June 18 to discuss the incident, during which Russia requested that the U.S. “share coordinates” of U.S.-backed opposition groups in Syria. The Russian Ministry of Defense announced that the two sides agreed to “[aim] to improve the coordination on fighting the terrorist organization in Syria,” but did not specify any new measures to prevent the targeting of U.S.-backed groups. The strikes are a clear demonstration of Russia’s willingness to escalate with the U.S. and likely belief that the U.S. will be unwilling to sufficiently counter the provocation.

The attack against the New Syrian Army follows an increased American military response to Russian activity in Syria over recent weeks. The U.S. deployed the USS Harry S. Truman Carrier Strike Group on June 3 to the Mediterranean Sea in order to conduct strikes against ISIS in Iraq and Syria and offset increased Russian naval capabilities in the Mediterranean. Russia subsequently deployed long-range naval reconnaissance and anti-submarine warfare aircraft to theater, which local Syrian activists documented in Aleppo Province on June 5. Russia also began to project force into Eastern Syria from June 5 - 17, intensifying its own aerial bombardment of ISIS-held terrain in ar-Raqqa and Deir ez-Zour Provinces. The U.S. has nonetheless continued to conduct strikes against ISIS from the Mediterranean. The U.S. also deployed the Dwight D. Eisenhower Carrier Strike Group to the Mediterranean on June 13, which will reportedly remain in the Mediterranean after the Truman returns to the U.S. in late June. The deployments of U.S. strike carrier groups are likely an effort to deter a continued Russian buildup of air and naval anti-access/area denial (A2AD) capabilities in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Russia’s attacks against American-backed groups in Syria and the expansion of its air campaign into ISIS-held terrain demonstrate that Russia will continue to change conditions on the ground in Syria in order to undermine American interests. Russian airstrikes during the first two weeks of June increased to rates that “exceeded the pre-cessation of hostilities totals” in Aleppo Province, according to Director of the CIA John Brennan. In response, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry stated on June 15 that the U.S. is not “going to sit there while Assad continues to offensively assault Aleppo and while Russia continues to support in that effort.” Russia nonetheless continued to bombard opposition-held areas in Aleppo Province amidst a temporary ceasefire agreement in Aleppo City from June 16 - 17. ISW assessed a total of 14 Russian strike locations in the Aleppo area with low and high confidence during that time period. Russia’s claim to adhere to a ceasefire despite continuing its air campaign obfuscates its role in exacerbating the Syrian conflict. Russia’s violation of the ceasefire agreement demonstrates that it remains undeterred from continuing its campaign against the Syrian opposition despite American rhetoric threatening greater U.S. response.

Russian Airstrikes in Syria: June 3 - 28, 2016



June 3- 28, 2016

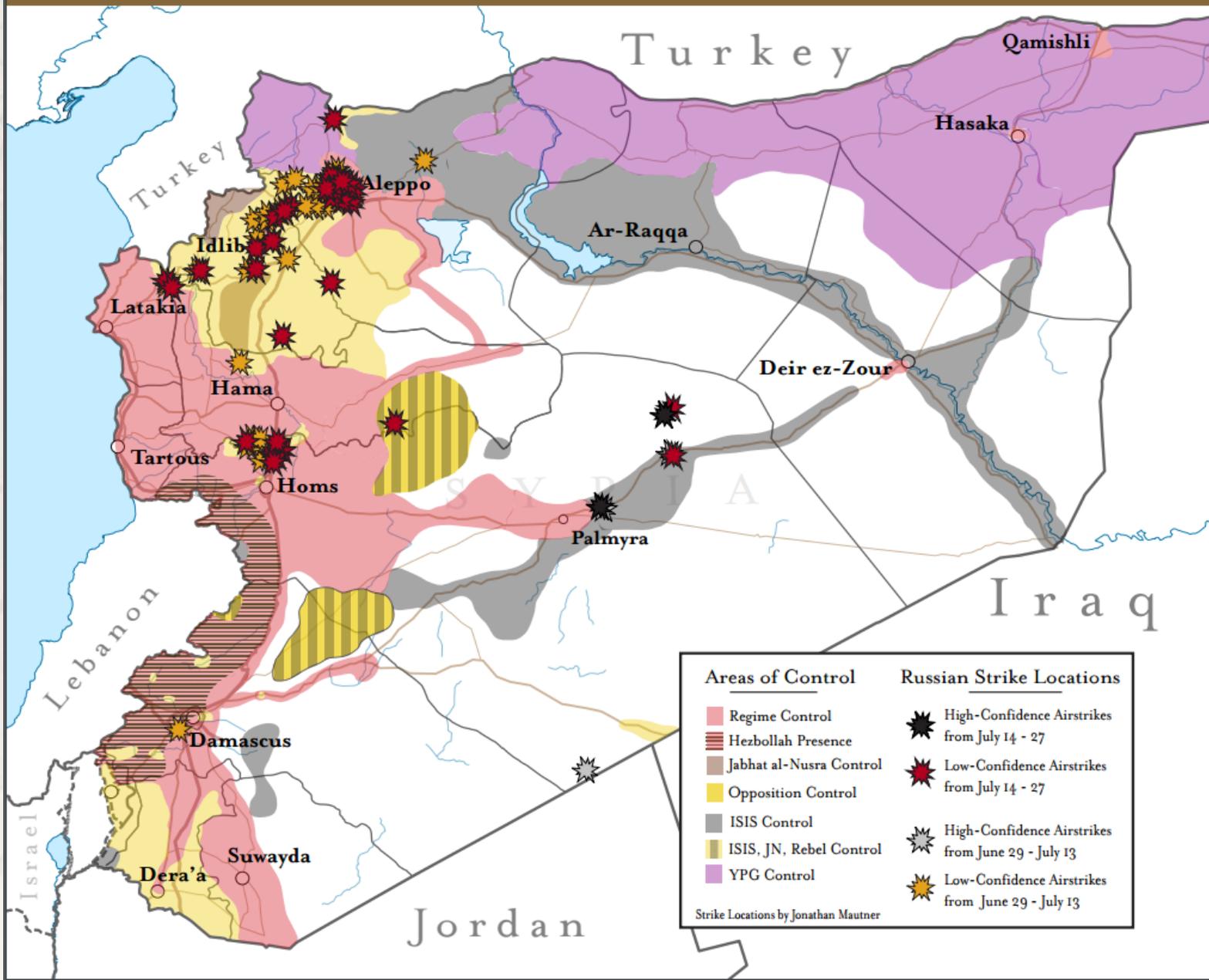
Key Takeaway:

Russia continues to pressure the U.S. and regional actors into closer cooperation through its military intervention in Syria. Russia ultimately seeks to supplant the U.S. as a security guarantor in the Middle East and has used its air campaign in Syria to galvanize its demands for greater coordination in the theater. Unidentified U.S. administration officials claimed that the White House issued a proposal for military partnership with Russia in Syria after several weeks of negotiations between the two countries. The deal reportedly calls for the U.S. to conduct a coordinated air campaign against ISIS and al Qaeda's Syrian affiliate Jabhat al Nusra. In exchange, Russia has reportedly agreed to push the regime to stop striking specific geographic zones held by opposition groups deemed acceptable by the U.S. The provision of geographic delineations of armed groups has been a longstanding demand of Russia. This type of delineation remains infeasible in opposition-held Syria as Jabhat al Nusra and other jihadist groups do not unilaterally control terrain, and any withdrawal of opposition forces from key frontlines jointly held with jihadist groups would likely render core opposition-held areas vulnerable to advances by pro-regime forces.

Russia nonetheless continued its air campaign against the Syrian opposition in support of the Assad regime across Western Syria. Russia prioritized its air campaign in Aleppo Province from June 18 – 28 and allegedly employed incendiary munitions against opposition-held areas of the province. Russian airstrikes and pro-regime ground operations largely concentrated against key towns along the opposition's last remaining ground line of communication (GLOC) into Aleppo City. Pro-regime forces remain positioned to sever this GLOC and complete the encirclement of opposition-held areas of the city, but have thus far been unsuccessful. The Russian air campaign in Aleppo, however, appears to have significantly decreased beginning on June 29 after a week of Russian-Turkish rapprochement. Turkish President Recep Erdogan sent a letter to Russian President Vladimir Putin on June 27 that allegedly apologized for the Turkish downing of a Russian fighter jet on November 24. Erdogan and Putin later agreed to normalize relations between Ankara and Moscow during a phone call on June 29. The two leaders also reportedly agreed to work together in the fight against "terrorism" in a sign that the de-escalation between Turkey and Russia in Syria will likely continue over the coming weeks.

Russia however will continue to use limited air operations against ISIS to bolster its narrative that Moscow remains the ideal partner in the fight against terrorism in Syria. Russian warplanes conducted limited strikes against ISIS-held terrain in ar Raqqah and Deir ez Zour Provinces from June 18 - 28, including an alleged strike against the town of al Quriyah in Eastern Deir ez Zour Province that killed at least 47 on June 25. Russia began to escalate its air campaign against ISIS-held areas of Deir ez Zour on June 5, conducting intermittent strikes against targets in the province in the weeks following the deployment of a U.S. carrier strike group to the Mediterranean on June 3. Russia will likely continue to both use limited air operations throughout Eastern Syria to assert itself as a decisive anti-ISIS actor and call for deeper cooperation in the fight against terrorism.

Russian Airstrikes in Syria: June 29 - July 27, 2016



June 29- July 27 2016

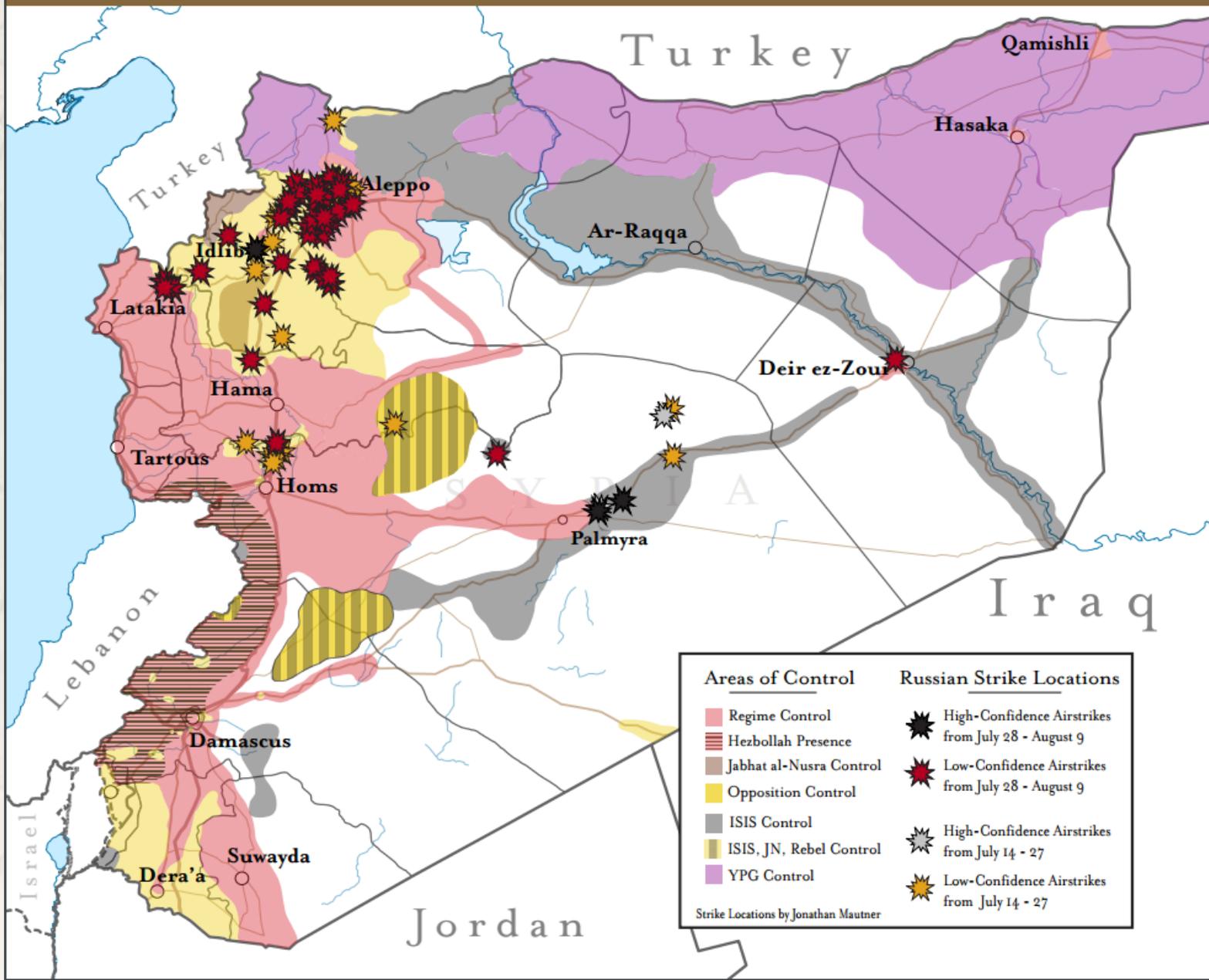
Key Takeaway:

Russia enabled pro-regime forces to complete the physical encirclement of Aleppo City on July 28, isolating the primary nexus of the non-jihadist opposition in Northern Syria. These gains threaten the long-term survival of mainstream opposition groups that could serve as potential partners against ISIS and Syrian Al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra. Russian warplanes continued to concentrate airstrikes against opposition targets on the northern and western outskirts of Aleppo City from July 14 - 27, allowing pro-regime forces to seize positions along the Castello Highway that serves as the only major ground line of communication (GLOC) into opposition-held districts in the eastern half of the city. Russian Minister of Defense Sergey Shoygu announced on July 28 that Russian President Vladimir Putin would authorize a “large-scale humanitarian operation” around Aleppo City in order to “help civilians...taken hostage by terrorists” while pro-regime forces opened a number of evacuation routes for the estimated 250,000 civilians that remain in Eastern Aleppo City. On the same day, Assad issued an offer of general amnesty for any opposition fighters that surrender to the regime within the next three months. The proposals regarding humanitarian support and national reconciliation, however, coincided with continued airstrikes against critical infrastructure and densely-populated urban terrain within Aleppo City, suggesting that Russia likely aims to depopulate Aleppo City in preparation for concerted pro-regime ground operations to force the surrender of opposition groups within the city.

Russia also intensified its air operations in Eastern Homs Province in a likely attempt to preserve its legitimacy as a viable international partner in the Syrian Civil War. Russia concentrated its strikes on the eastern outskirts of Palmyra – a key crossroads town that provides the regime with a launching point for future operations into Eastern Syria. Russia invested significant resources into the operation to seize Palmyra in March 2016 and spun the victory as a triumph against terrorism that justified its narrative for intervention into the Syrian Civil War. Recent advances by ISIS near Palmyra have threatened to undermine this narrative. The Russian Ministry of Defense announced that it sortied six long-range strategic bombers from Russia to strike alleged ISIS targets near Palmyra on July 21, marking the second such sortie in the past month. The regime later deployed over 1,000 Iranian-backed Iraqi and Afghan Shi’a militia fighters to Palmyra on July 25 in order to reinforce the defenses of the city. Russia will likely continue to prioritize its campaign against ISIS in Eastern Homs Province in order to preempt its potential resurgence in the region and protect its claims to be a credible partner against violent extremism.

Russia continues to wage its air campaign in a manner aimed at shaping the terms of a potential end-state to the Syrian Civil War in accordance with its strategic objectives. Putin has leveraged his role in the conflict in order to attract the U.S. into a one-sided partnership that will ultimately benefit Assad. On July 26, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry stated that talks regarding potential cooperation with Russia in Syria against ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra had been “making progress” and noted that final details could be announced as early as August 2016. The continued consideration of a bilateral deal despite the looming siege of Aleppo City will likely encourage Russia to continue its operations unchecked against large swaths of the mainstream opposition under the guise of counter-terrorism. Continued attacks against mainstream opposition groups will fuel further radicalization and consolidation under the leadership of jihadist groups. At the same time, Russia continued to promote itself as a constructive diplomatic actor by participating in a trilateral meeting with the U.S. and UN Special Envoy to Syria Staffan de Mistura on July 26 that urged a resumption of political negotiations. Russia will use its military influence to set conditions on the ground that force the U.S. into tacit acceptance of the long-term preservation of the regime.

Russian Airstrikes in Syria: July 14 - August 9, 2016



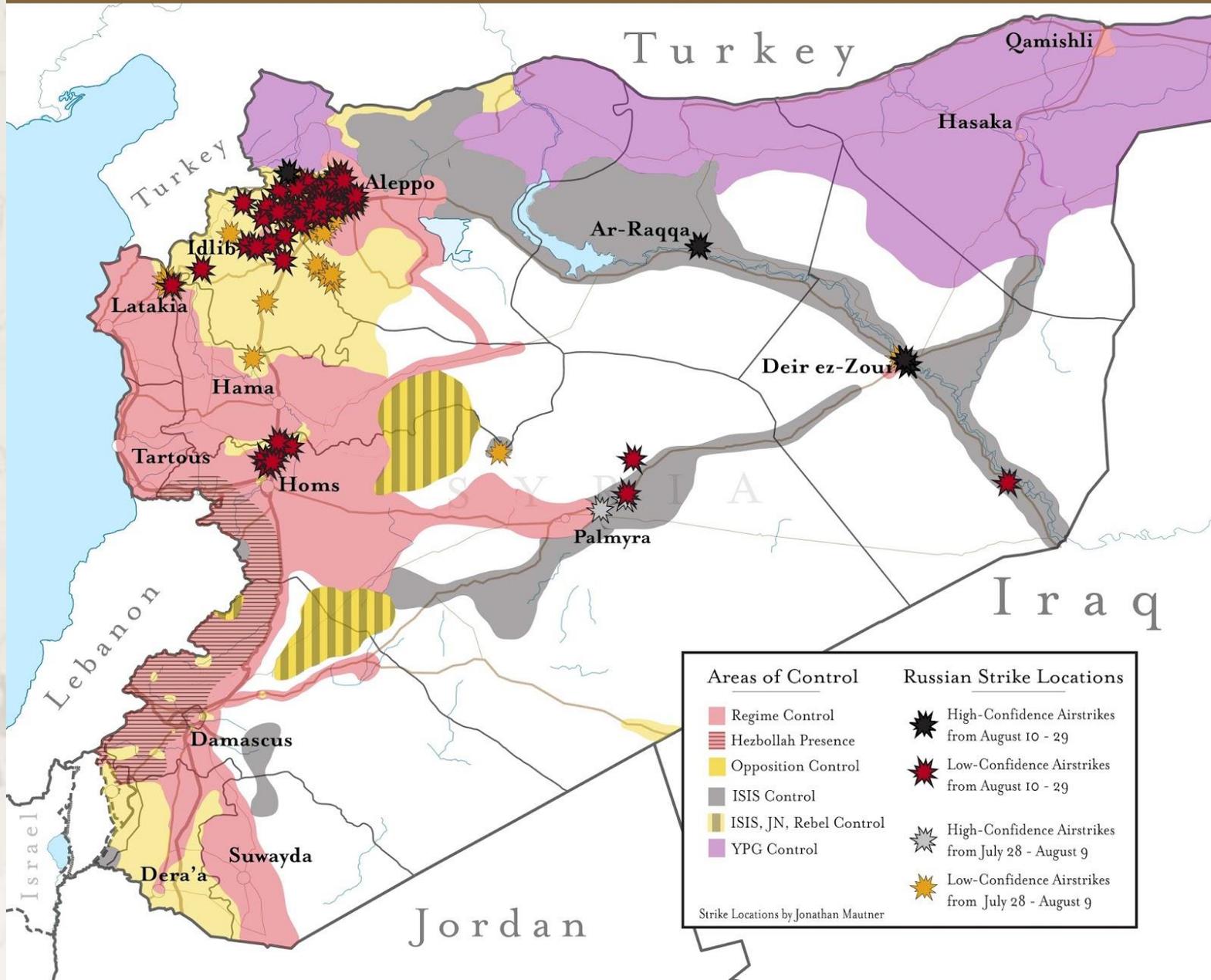
July 14- August 9, 2016

Key Takeaway:

Russia intensified its air operations in and around Aleppo City after Syrian opposition groups lifted the regime's blockade of the city's eastern districts on August 6, demonstrating its continued commitment to bolster the regime in the Syrian Civil War. Russia continued to conduct strikes in Aleppo from July 28 – August 9 in support of the regime campaign to besiege Aleppo City and force the surrender of the primary stronghold of opposition factions acceptable to the West in Northern Syria. The opposition reestablished its ground line of communication (GLOC) leading out of the city on August 6, dealing a significant setback to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in his attempt to capture Syria's largest urban and commercial center. Russian warplanes subsequently intensified their airstrikes against opposition targets in eastern Aleppo City and villages along the M5 Aleppo – Damascus Highway in the southern Aleppo countryside, preventing civilians and humanitarian organizations from using the newly-established GLOC into the city. The targeted strikes also constrained the movement of opposition forces as they attempted to further consolidate control in the southwestern districts of Aleppo City. Russia's continued use of air power against critical infrastructure and densely-populated terrain in Aleppo City follows U.S. President Barack Obama's statement on August 4 that Russia's "direct involvement" in support of regime operations to besiege the city has raised "very serious questions" about its commitment to a political resolution of the Syrian Civil War. Russia continues to prioritize the pursuit of pro-regime military objectives despite a recent proposal for partnership with the U.S. against ISIS and al-Qaeda in Syria. Russia is likely to continue to wage its air campaign in order to bolster pro-regime forces attempting to encircle the city, the surrender of which would pose an existential threat to the viability of the acceptable Syrian opposition in Northern Syria.

Russia also intensified its air operations against opposition targets in Idlib Province after an unidentified opposition group downed an Mi-8 Russian helicopter near the town of Saraqeb in northern Idlib on August 1, killing the five Russian military personnel on board. The downing of the helicopter marked the single deadliest event for Russia since its air campaign began in Syria on September 29, 2015. Russian warplanes conducted retaliatory airstrikes against several small opposition-held areas in the vicinity of Saraqeb from August 1 - 2 and targeted neighborhoods in Saraqeb from August 5 – 7. Local activist sources also reported that Russian jets dropped incendiary munitions while conducting airstrikes against Idlib City on August 7, suggesting that Russia intended to achieve punitive and deterrent effects against opposition forces in the province. Russia will likely continue to target core opposition-held terrain in Idlib Province in order to disrupt Idlib-based opposition forces massed in Aleppo. Russia also conducted airstrikes against ISIS-held terrain near the city of Palmyra in eastern Homs Province on August 7 following pro-regime deployments to Aleppo City from the Palmyra area. Russia likely aims to prevent ISIS advances against pro-regime forces in Palmyra as the regime is redeploying forces away from the area.

Russian Airstrikes in Syria: July 28 - August 29, 2016



July 28-August 29, 2016

Key Takeaway:

Russia continued to focus its air campaign against Aleppo City and its environs after opposition groups lifted the siege of the eastern districts of the city on August 6, setting conditions for a potential pro-regime counteroffensive to reestablish the encirclement. Russia conducted airstrikes in support of pro-regime forces in frontline districts on the southern outskirts of Aleppo City undertaking repeated efforts to roll back opposition gains. Meanwhile, Russia increasingly directed its air operations against a swathe of opposition-held terrain in the western and southwestern countryside of Aleppo Province in an attempt to block the opposition from dispatching reinforcements from Idlib Province towards Aleppo City. Russia also continued to conduct sorties targeting opposition-held suburbs northwest of Aleppo City in an effort to prevent the opposition from threatening the new regime ground line of communication (GLOC) to Western Aleppo City through the nearby Castello Highway. At the same time, Russia maintained its targeting of core opposition terrain in Idlib Province, including a wave of reported incendiary attacks on August 28 – 29 that came in likely response to the start of a new opposition offensive in Northern Hama Province. Russia will continue to use its air power in order to disrupt the movement of opposition forces in Northern Syria and thereby render the opposition increasingly vulnerable to a pro-regime counteroffensive in Aleppo City.

The Russian Ministry of Defense announced the start of air operations in Syria from the Shahid Nojeh Air Base in Hamedan Province in Western Iran on August 16 following the deployment of Tu-22M3 'Backfire' strategic bombers and Su-34 'Fullback' fighter-bombers to the airbase the preceding day. Russia claimed to use the base to conduct several airstrikes against ISIS and Syrian Al Qaeda successor Jabhat Fatah al-Sham in Aleppo, Ar-Raqqa, and Deir ez-Zour Provinces between August 16 and August 22. Russia previously used Shahid Nojeh Air Base as a transit point for its aircraft in November – December 2015. Russian MP Adm. Vladimir Komoyedov stressed that the "issue of costs for combat actions is paramount right now" amidst reports that basing the strategic bombers in Western Iran would allow Russia to reduce the flight time of its long-range bombers by roughly sixty percent when conducting strikes in Syria. Russia aims to minimize the financial and logistical costs of its intervention in the Syrian Civil War after almost one year of constant military operations. Russia also hopes to enhance its broader operational flexibility by securing the use of an additional base from which to conduct air operations in support of pro-regime forces in Syria. Russia promoted its use of the airbase in a likely attempt to underscore the participation of regional allies in its military intervention in the Syrian Civil War and highlight for the U.S. the strength and depth of the Russian-Iranian partnership. At the same time, the Russian Ministry of Defense announced that Russian warships launched cruise missiles from their positions in the Mediterranean Sea against alleged Al Qaeda targets in Western Aleppo Province on August 19. The public disclosure of Russia's use of the airbase nonetheless generated significant domestic pressure inside Iran. The Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated on August 22 that Russia had "finished for

July 28-August 29, 2016

Key Takeaway (cont'd):

now” its operations from the Shahid Nojeh Air Base, claiming that Russia had only sought “temporary” permission for use of the base. Meanwhile, Iranian Minister of Defense Hossein Dehghan condemned Russia for “grandstanding and incivility” in the announcement of its presence at the airbase, noting that there had been “operational coordination” between the two countries but “no written agreement” for use of the facility. The Russian Ministry of Defense confirmed the return of all its aircraft from Iran but added that further use of the base could occur “depending on the prevailing circumstances” in Syria. The abrupt end to the apparent basing deal highlights a degree of tension between Russia and Iran despite their mutual support for the regime of Syrian President Bashar Al Assad. This miscommunication may hamper coordination between Russia and Iran on the ground in Syria, but the potential for Russia to use the airbase in the future suggests that it is unlikely to alter Russia and Iran’s shared objective of bolstering the Syrian regime against its military and political adversaries.

The tempo of the air campaign declined significantly following the departure of Russian warplanes from the Shahid Nojeh Air Base on August 22. This decrease in activity also corresponds with the start of a cross-border intervention by Turkey into Northern Syria on August 24. Opposition groups supported by the Turkish Armed Forces and U.S.-led coalition airstrikes seized the ISIS-held town of Jarabulus as part of an offensive entitled ‘Operation Euphrates Shield.’ The operation began roughly two weeks after Turkish President Recep Erdogan met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in St. Petersburg in the culmination of an ongoing diplomatic rapprochement between Turkey and Russia. The relative lull in airstrikes from August 24 – 29 may be a tangible result of this thawing of relations. Turkey reportedly received assurances from Russia that its forces would not be targeted during the operation. Nonetheless, Turkey’s continued support for the opposition and insistence on regime change in Syria will likely preclude deeper coordination between Turkey and Russia in the Syrian Civil War. Alternatively, the de-escalation of the air campaign during this period could reflect continuing efforts by Russia to negotiate an agreement with the U.S. for joint military action in Syria. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov claimed on August 26 that the U.S. and Russia had moved “very close” to a new deal to reestablish a nationwide ‘cessation of hostilities’ in the Syrian Civil War following discussions between the two sides in Geneva. Kerry and Lavrov previously held talks in Moscow in July 2016 to discuss a proposal for bilateral military cooperation between the U.S. and Russia against ISIS and Al Qaeda in Syria in exchange for concrete progress towards a ceasefire and political transition. Russia also signaled on August 18 its support for a weekly forty-eight-hour ceasefire in Aleppo City as called for by UN Special Envoy to Syria Staffan de Mistura, albeit under terms and conditions favorable to the regime. The decline in strikes and support for ceasefires mark a continuation of Russia’s efforts to portray itself as a good-faith actor amidst the ongoing negotiations. The trajectory of the campaign on the ground, however, suggests that the recent decrease in the intensity of the air campaign will likely be temporary at best.

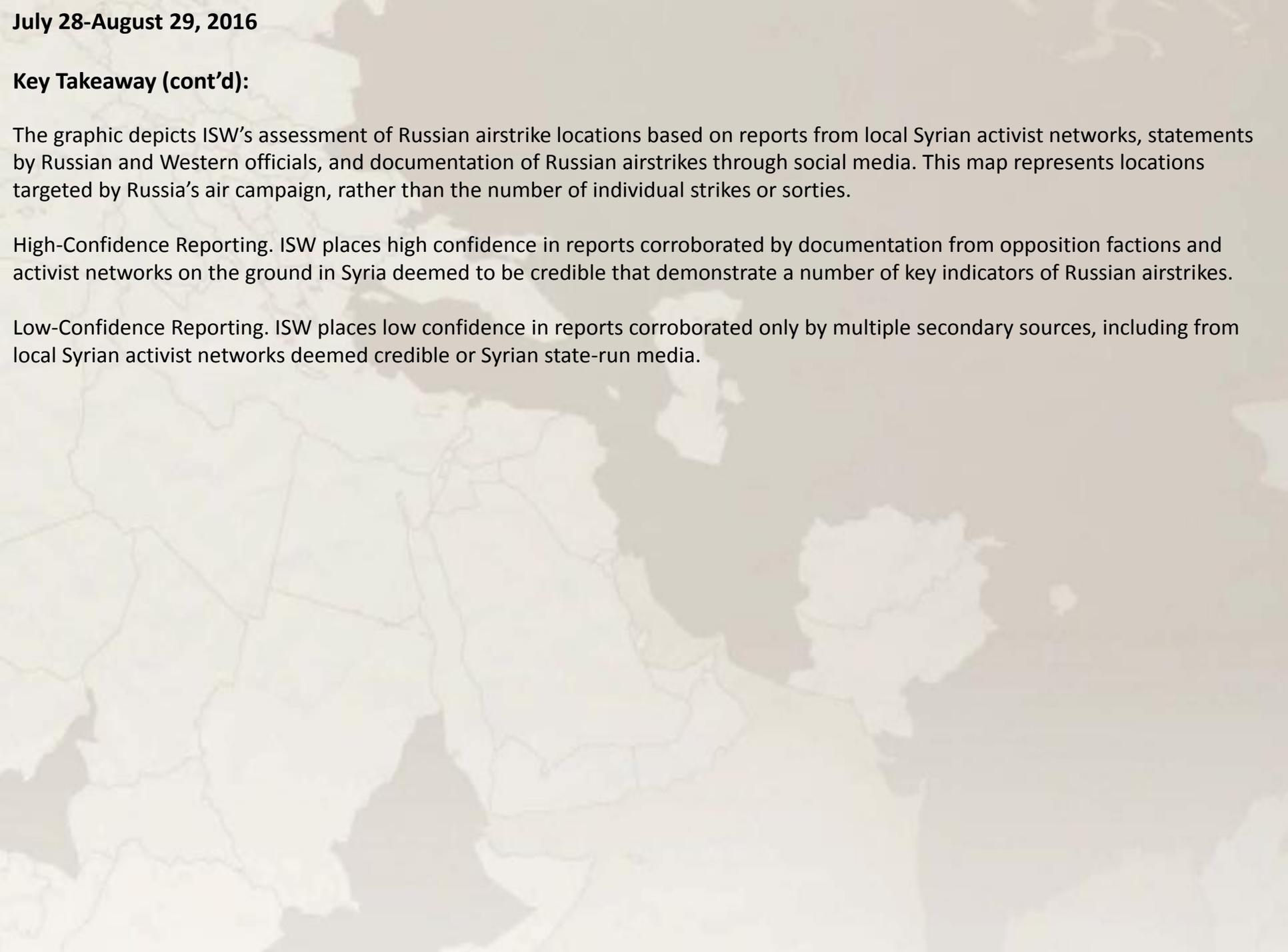
July 28-August 29, 2016

Key Takeaway (cont'd):

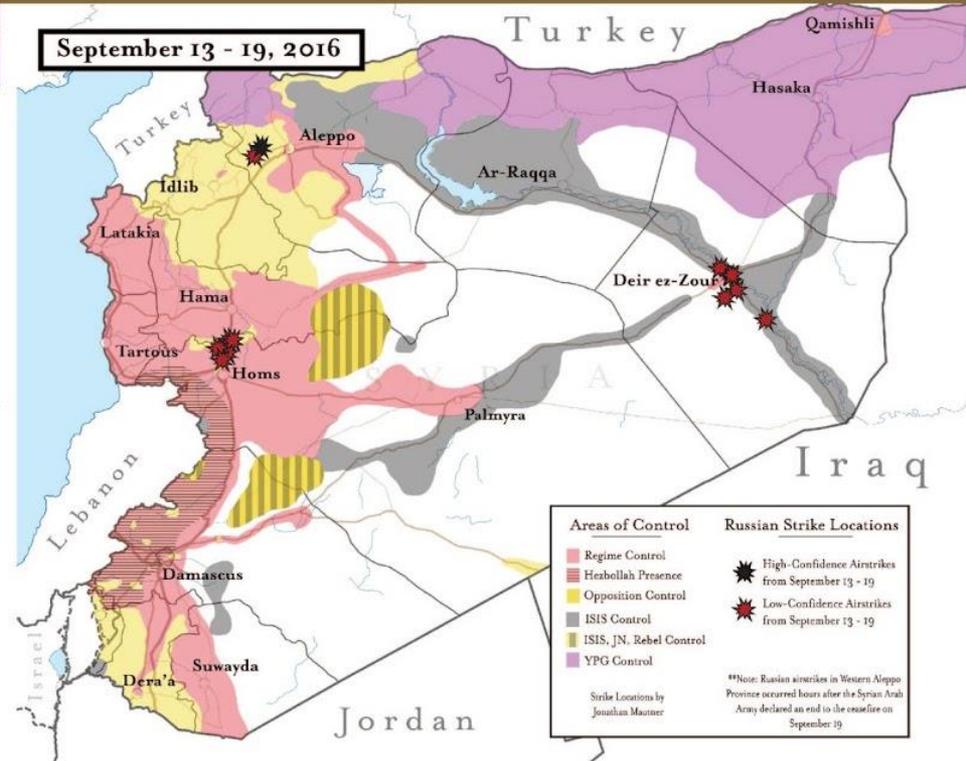
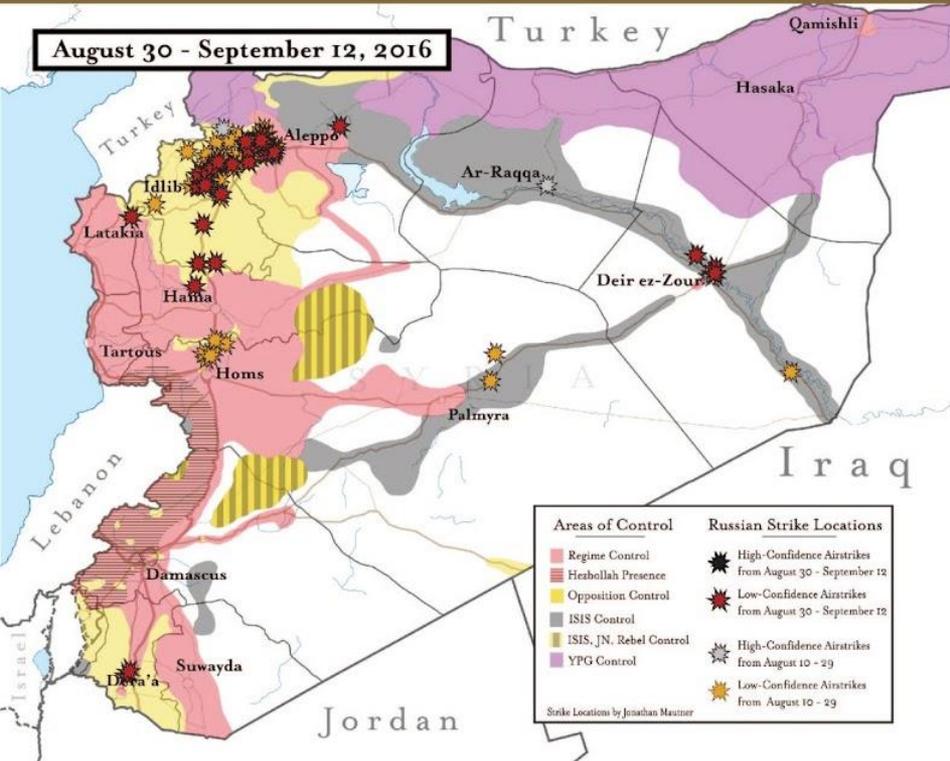
The graphic depicts ISW's assessment of Russian airstrike locations based on reports from local Syrian activist networks, statements by Russian and Western officials, and documentation of Russian airstrikes through social media. This map represents locations targeted by Russia's air campaign, rather than the number of individual strikes or sorties.

High-Confidence Reporting. ISW places high confidence in reports corroborated by documentation from opposition factions and activist networks on the ground in Syria deemed to be credible that demonstrate a number of key indicators of Russian airstrikes.

Low-Confidence Reporting. ISW places low confidence in reports corroborated only by multiple secondary sources, including from local Syrian activist networks deemed credible or Syrian state-run media.



Russian Airstrikes in Syria: Pre- and Post-Cessation of Hostilities



August 30-September 12, 2016 and September 13-19, 2016

Key Takeaway:

The cessation of hostilities agreement in Syria has collapsed and violence has once again ramped up across Syria. The nationwide ceasefire brokered by Russia and the U.S. on September 9 stipulated that after at least seven days of reduced violence and uninterrupted humanitarian access across Syria, the U.S. and Russia would establish a Joint Implementation Center (JIC) to coordinate strikes against ISIS and al Qaeda. The ceasefire, although short-lived, was ultimately a success for the Syrian regime and Russia. Both parties utilized the cessation in order to consolidate recent gains in Aleppo City and to redeploy military assets to other critical frontlines in likely preparation for upcoming offensives. Russian and regime airstrikes escalated against opposition forces in Aleppo and Idlib Provinces in the 48-hours prior to the cessation of hostilities going into effect on September 12. Russia subsequently pivoted its strikes towards ISIS-held terrain in Eastern Syria throughout the tenuous ceasefire with the opposition, but began to break the terms of the ceasefire and intensify strikes against opposition targets in Homs Province on September 16 – 17. Reported Russian airstrikes targeting a UN humanitarian aid convoy on September 19 marked a dangerous phase line in the willingness of Russia and the Syrian regime to violate international law and deny besieged opposition-held areas humanitarian aid. Hardline elements of the Syrian opposition meanwhile continued to use the failed ceasefire to increase their own influence among mainstream opposition factions, undermining efforts by the U.S. to compel independent opposition groups to distance themselves from al Qaeda and ISIS in Syria. Both Russia and the Syrian regime will continue to use subsequent ceasefires to solidify gains against the Syrian opposition in Aleppo City and to employ siege-and-starve tactics to force the defeat of the opposition in critical terrain. Russia will continue to exert pressure on the U.S. and the international community by escalating levels of violence in order to extract concessions in negotiations over the Syrian Civil War.

For a more detailed analysis of the pre- and post-cessation of hostilities go [here](#).

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