1 April 7: ISIS detonated two SVBIEDs against JN and rebel positions north of Aleppo City. The first consisted of Jabhat al-Nusra (JN) and Islamic Front (IF) headquarters in the town of Ibleen, killing 18 rebels including a rebel military commander and a JN Emir. The second targeted the headquarters of a Jabhat al-Shamiya affiliate in the town of Hawar Kilis north of Mare’a on the Syrian-Turkish border, killing over 40. Rebels reportedly instituted curfews between Man’a and the town of Mare’a in anticipation of a third VBIED that did not materialize.

2 April 2-4: The JN-led Jaysh al-Fatah Operations Room announced the start of the battle for al-Mastouma Camp located south of Idlib City. JN claimed to advance within the military camp on April 3, and JN and other Jaysh al-Fatah forces made gains in Masrouta village north of the camp. A supporting effort led by the rebel ‘Rad al-Abiar’ Operations Room in Hama targeted a regime checkpoint in northern Hama in order to prevent the regime from deploying reinforcements to the camp.

3 April 3: JN and the Abu Amara Brigades organized a demonstration throughout Aleppo City, providing a backdrop for demonstrations that called for the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate and the “toppling” of “secularism.” During the event, demonstration reportedly assauluted activists and burned Syrian independence flags, prompting Jabhat al-Shamiya to intervene. In a meeting between HASI and the Abu Amara Brigades, Abu Shamafi’s officers, activists, and civil administrators after the incident, all parties agreed that the Syrian independence flag is a symbol of “secularism” that should not be raised. HASI and the Abu Amara Brigades also agreed not to allow fighters to participate in or escort protests in the camp.

4 April 4: ISIS forces advanced northward into the Yarmouk Refugee Camp in southern Damascus from the Hajar al-Aswad neighborhood south of the camp, seizing control of a majority of the camp after clashes with Islamist rebels and the Palestinian group Aknaf Beit al-Maqdis. ISIS beheaded more than six Palestinians during the clashes. JN intervened to prevent Islamist rebel groups from sending fighters to the site. ISIS also aprovease the Yarmouk camp for the People of the Camp and engaged in a battle for al-Mastouma Camp located south of Idlib City.

5 April 4: Jaysh al-Islam, Ahrar al-Sham (HASI), and other local rebel groups launched the battle of “Fatah al-Mabeen” to fight ISIS in the eastern Qalamoun region of Damascus, ambushing ISIS forces in the village of Beir al-Mahrouna amidst ongoing clashes in the area.

6 April 4-6: Jaysh al-Islam announced the formation of “The Victory for the People of the Camp operations room” with a number of other Damascus-based groups to defend southern Damascus against further ISIS advances. Jaysh al-Islam and other Islamist rebel groups attacked ISIS positions in the Hajar al-Aswad neighborhood south of Yarmouk, but do not appear to have made advances.

7 April 6: JN, the First Army, and other Southern Front-affiliated rebels seized check-points on the southern and eastern outskirts of the town of Kafi Shams in northern Dara’a Province in a supporting effort for the ongoing rebel offensive on the regime-held Jadiya airbase, directly south of Kafi Shams. Clashes near the airbase and neighboring Jadraya Village are ongoing, with participation from the Revolutionary Command Council. Western-backing groups are also participating, with a western-backed Syrian National Army group’s using MANPADS and the western-backed First Army using TOW missiles to target regime positions during clashes in the area.

8 April 7: A Southern Front-affiliated Operations Room, HASI, and other rebel groups seized the Nasib border crossing in southern Dara’a province in the “Battle in Revenge of the Prisoners.” JN raised its flag on the border crossing and over a dozen truck drivers that appear to have been present at the crossing at the time of its seizure were taken into custody. An agreement was reached at JN’s Dar al-Aed courthouse to hand over thousand drivers captured at the Nasib border crossing over to the court and to subject the crossing to direct civil management with Southern Front policing. The crossing remains closed for the transport of goods.

9 April 6: The regime commissioned retired Brigadier General Nayef Sapiens to form a new JN group for mobilization and control in Sweida Province, with the aims of defending the borders of the province against “terrorist attacks.”

10 April 5: JN handed two of its members over to the Idlib Shabi’a court to be tried for their treatment of Christians in Idlib City.

Syrian Regime Continues Brutality despite Moscow Negotiations: Assad continues to capitalize on opportunities to utilize brutality to force the submission of rebels and rebel-supportive populations despite the ongoing Moscow II negotiations, which focuses on a humanitarian issues. The regime launched a considerable aerial bombardment against a large portion of the Yarmouk camp after the ISIS advance, including the use of indiscriminate barrel bombs against the civilian population. Assad has also launched heavy bombardments against Idlib City and the Nasib border crossing, resulting in dozens of civilian deaths. The regime furthermore continues to use hijauth terrorism in liberated areas to put forth the narrative that all armed opposition groups are actually radical Islamist terrorists and to justify the wholesale punishment of civilians in these areas. The Syrian Foreign Ministry also reiterates that the armed opposition groups are “all radical Islamist terrorists.” Syrian assassination attempts and bombings continues against the regime. JN and other rebel groups targeting the regime in the “liberated” provincial capital. JN leader Abu Mohammed al-Joulani highlighted JN’s commitment to continued partnership in Idlib in a speech on April 1 commenting on the regime’s cooperation in Idlib.

JN Tailors Behavior to Local Dynamics: The distinct behavior of JN’s behavior in Damascus and Idlib indicates JN’s ability to adapt to its local environment in order to tailor the pursuit of its interests to the realities of local dynamics. In Damascus, JN’s nuanced role navigating the ISIS advance into Yarmouk reflects careful JN calculation regarding its own positions within rebel ranks in the southern outskirts of the capital. Rather than joining a rebel counteroffensive against ISIS, JN leveraged its own position in Yarmouk to leverage the power of influence by a rebel group that has resisted JN presence in the area. This effectively allowed ISIS to seize the camp, yet provided JN leverage over Islamist rebels that may allow JN to acquire influence over rebel activities in southern Damascus. In Idlib city, JN’s decision to try JN members for the mistreatment of Christians indicates JN’s strict adherence to behavioral requirements established by rebel members of the Jaysh al-Fatah operations room, which proscribes the prosecution of civilians and minoriety groups in territory held by the JN. JN’s decision to provide a commitment to continued partnership in Idlib in a speech on April 1 commenting on the regime’s cooperation in Idlib.

ISIS Pushes to Reclaim Former Territory in Western Syria: The ISIS push into the Yarmouk refugee camp signifies ISIS intent to reclaim areas of southern Damascus with a key to providing a base from which to launch a future offensive on the regime. Unconfirmed reports that ISIS called for deserters to turn themselves into JN may indicate that ISIS seeks to coercively integrate JN into its own control. In its continued efforts to radicalize the population, the Islamic State has targeted a joint Jabhat al-Nusra (JN) and Islamic Front (IF) headquarters in the town of Ibleen, killing 18 rebels including a rebel military commander and a JN Emir. The second targeted the headquarters of a Jabhat al-Shamiya affiliate in the town of Hawar Kilis north of Mare’a on the Syrian-Turkish border, killing over 40. Rebels reportedly instituted curfews between Man’a and the town of Mare’a in anticipation of a third VBIED that did not materialize.

Background Kinetic Activity

Opposition Forces
Pro-Regime Forces
Jabhat al-Nusra (JN)
ISIS

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