March 28: The Ministry of the Iraqi Peshmerga announced that it will deploy a new installment of Peshmerga fighters to Ayn al-Abar in order to establish a Peshmerga military base in the city following an agreement between Turkey and the U.S. The military base will contribute to the training of Kurdish forces, as well as offer protection from further attacks on Ayn al-Abar.

March 24: JN, HASI, Harakat Muthanna al-Islamiyah, Jaysh al-Islam, and ESA affiliated rebel groups seized the town of Busra al-Sham in southeastern Dera’a Province as part of the rebel-declared battle of “Qadisiyya Busra al-Sham” following heavy clashes with regime forces supported by NDF, Hezbollah, and IRGC advisors. Regime forces reportedly withdrew eastward into the Druze-majority Suwayda Province.

March 25-29: The regime reportedly released up to 700 detainees from various security branches in Damascus Province. Meanwhile, the PYD Democratic Union Party, Arab Socialist Movement, Syrian Kurdish Democratic Party, and other Syrian opposition parties met in Damascus to discuss “current political developments including the framework for a transition to democracy and the importance of the upcoming talks in Moscow.”

March 28: JN, Ahrar al-Sham (HASI), Jund al-Aqsa, and other affiliated rebel groups seized the town of Jisr al-Shughour from the regime. The Jaysh al-Fatah Operations Room also stated its intent to continue its military operations against the regime.

March 27-30: Dozens of residents in Kafr Batna in the Eastern Ghouta suburbs of Damascus and in the southern Aleppo neighborhoods of al-Marjeh and Fardous held demonstrations carrying al-Qaeda style flags and calling for an Islamic revolution against “Assad and the secularists.”

March 29: After participating in the JN and rebel seizure of Idlib City, the leader of Druze in Idlib Province, Sheikh Saleh Hassan, declared his intent to fight the regime until the fall of Damascus, calling on the Druze population in Suwayda to also take up arms against the regime. Sheikh Hassan participated in the rebel seizure of Idlib City alongside a contingent of Druze fighters.

March 26: The First Army, First Corps and other Southern Front-affiliated rebel groups announced a new “battle to free Jadiya battalion” to retake positions from the regime in the northeastern Dera’a Province.

March 30: Jaysh al-Islam leader Zahran Alloush announced the formation of a new military council in Damascus consisting of defected regime soldiers that will fall under the Eastern Ghouta Unified Military Command. Alloush also called for the formation of a joint operations room similar to the Jaysh al-Fatah operations room. JN issued a statement indicating its willingness to participate in such an operations room. However, JN reiterated previous demands for changes in the existing Eastern Ghouta structures, including the subordination of the Eastern Ghouta Unified Command led by Zahran Alloush to the local Shari’a court.

March 28: JN, Ahrar al-Sham (HASI), Jund al-Aqsa, and other rebel forces participating in the Jaysh al-Fatah Operations Room seized complete control of Idlib City following a regime withdrawal. Activists accused the regime of responding with chlorine gas amidst heavy aerial bombardment of the city. HASI leader Hasim al-Sheikh issued a statement calling on residents to participate in the governance of the city and assuring residents that there will be no attempt to establish unilateral leadership or an Islamic “Emirate.” In addition, JN Shari’a chief Abu Abdullah al-Mohsini stated via Twitter that preparations began “some time ago” for the establishment of an Administrative Council in Idlib that would be neither a courthouse nor an “Islamic body.” The establishment of this council appears to be underway, notably with participation from the Syrian National Coalition.

March 30: Pro-regime forces seized terrain west of Zahabani in the Qamishlo region from unspecified rebel forces. In addition, U.S. forces are reportedly operating two unarmed reconnaissance drones in northeastern Lebanon to support the Lebanese Army offensive against militants in the Bekaa Valley.

March 30: JN reiterated previous demands for changes in the Eastern Ghouta structures, including the subordination of the Eastern Ghouta Unified Command led by Zahran Alloush to the local Shari’a court.

April 6: The meeting of a number of opposition parties in Damascus to discuss a framework for the negotiations indicates that the talks will move forward, likely with a focus on the humanitarian crisis inside the country. The only opposition party with meaningful influence on the ground that attended the meeting, however, is the PKK-linked PYD, which is the political wing associated with the Syrian Kurdish YPG militia. The PYD may pursue a renegotiation of the party’s relationship with the regime in northern Syria, where PYD-backed YPG fighters act in close proximity to pro-regime forces. The PYD could demand the regime recognize the de-facto autonomy of Syrian Kurdish areas in northern Syria in return for the continued detente between regime and YPG forces. However, due to the lack of participation from rebel power brokers in the Moscow negotiations, the outcome of the talks is unlikely to contribute to an eventual political solution to the war.

Regime Prepares for Moscow II Negotiations: The release of hundreds of prisoners by the Assad regime in Damascus appears to be a goodwill gesture prior to the start of the Moscow II negotiations on April 6. The meeting of a number of opposition parties in Damascus to discuss a framework for the negotiations indicates that the talks will move forward, likely with a focus on the humanitarian crisis inside the country. The only opposition party with meaningful influence on the ground that attended the meeting, however, is the PKK-linked PYD, which is the political wing associated with the Syrian Kurdish YPG militia. The PYD may pursue a renegotiation of the party’s relationship with the regime in northern Syria, where PYD-backed YPG fighters act in close proximity to pro-regime forces. The PYD could demand the regime recognize the de-facto autonomy of Syrian Kurdish areas in northern Syria in return for the continued detente between regime and YPG forces. However, due to the lack of participation from rebel power brokers in the Moscow negotiations, the outcome of the talks is unlikely to contribute to an eventual political solution to the war.

Background Kinetic Activity

- Major Regime Airstrikes
- Anti-ISIS Coalition Airstrikes
- Low-level clashes
- ISIS clashes

For more on ISIS activity in Syria from March 24 - 31, 2015 see ISW publication: ISIS in Syria Campaign Update: March 31, 2015

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