

Syria Situation Report: April 20-28, 2015

1 April 24 – 26: ISIS raided three villages in the Shuyukh Plain region southwest of Ayn al-Arab after crossing the Euphrates River with boats, allegedly capturing a number of civilians. YPG forces supported by U.S.-led coalition airstrikes clashed with ISIS militants to repel the assault.

2 April 22 – 26: JN and other rebel factions participating in the 'Jaysh al-Fatah' Operations Room announced the 'Battle to Liberate Qarmeed Camp' on April 22 targeting a regime military base southeast of Idlib city, sparking heavy clashes which included a VBIED detonation. JN and rebel forces seized total control over Qarmeed Camp on April 26 following an assault which began with two BMP-delivered SVBIED attacks. Regime forces subsequently targeted the camp with barrel bombs and artillery.

3 April 22 – 25: Ahrar al-Sham and a number of local Islamist and FSA-affiliated rebel factions announced the 'Battle to Free Sahel al-Ghab' in northern Hama Province on April 22 targeting regime supply lines connecting Hama Province and Jisr al-Shughour. Rebel forces participating in the offensive seized five villages and a number of checkpoints in the northern al-Ghab Plain south of Jisr al-Shughour on April 25. The regime responded to the opposition advances with heavy aerial bombardment.

4 April 26 – 27: ISIS militants seized several regime positions southwest of Hasaka city after launching an attack which included at least two SVBIEDs. Regime forces subsequently deployed over 800 SAA and NDF fighters from Qamishli to reinforce the area.

5 April 20: Regime forces supported by Hezbollah and Iranian-backed Afghan Shia volunteers launched an unsuccessful attempt to seize the town of Busra al-Harir in eastern Dera'a Province. Pro-regime forces made initial gains before the arrival of large numbers of reinforcements from JN, the FSA-affiliated Southern Front, and other rebel factions forced the regime to retreat. Opposition forces reportedly killed an IRGC general and captured a number of Afghan Shia fighters during the attack.

6 April 22 – 26: ISIS seized the Jabal al-Muhassa region of the Eastern Qalamoun on April 22 following heavy clashes with JN, Jaysh al-Islam, and other rebel forces, cutting a strategic rebel supply route in the Damascus countryside. The ISIS advance was allegedly facilitated by assistance from local rebel brigade Jaysh Tahrir al-Sham. Jaysh al-Islam and other rebel forces continue to clash with ISIS in an attempt to retake Jabal al-Muhassa.

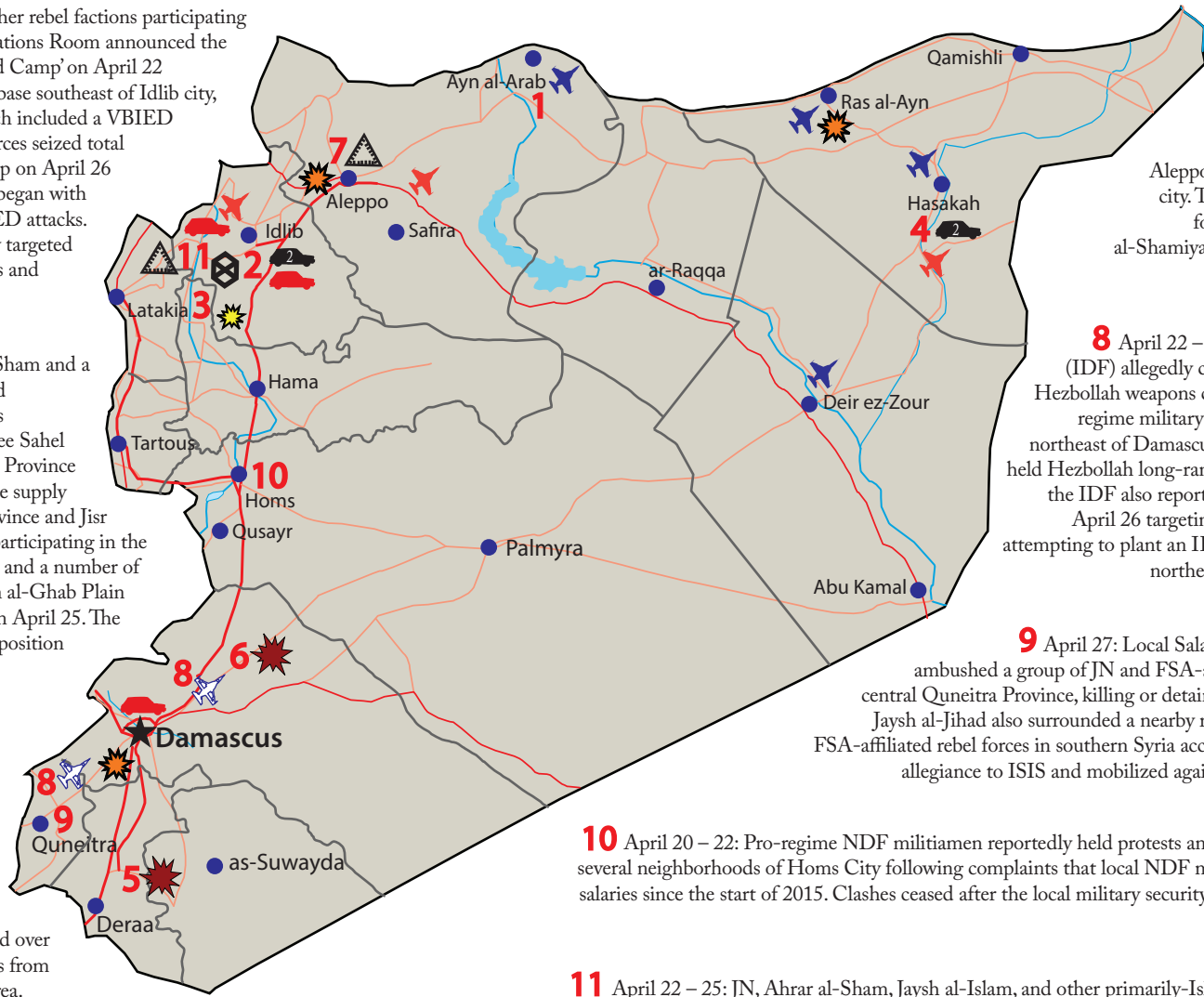
7 April 26: Ahrar al-Sham, Jaysh al-Islam, and five other Aleppo-based rebel groups announced the formation of the 'Conquest of Aleppo' Operations Room in Aleppo city. This announcement follows the formal dissolution of the Jabhat al-Shamiyah rebel coalition in Aleppo on 14 APR.

8 April 22 – 26: The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) allegedly conducted airstrikes targeting a Hezbollah weapons convoy on April 22 and several regime military bases in the Qalamoun region northeast of Damascus on April 25, which allegedly held Hezbollah long-range missile depots. Meanwhile, the IDF also reportedly conducted an airstrike on April 26 targeting a group of "armed terrorists" attempting to plant an IED along a border fence in the northern Golan Heights, killing four.

9 April 27: Local Salafi-jihadist group Jaysh al-Jihad ambushed a group of JN and FSA-affiliated First Army fighters in central Quneitra Province, killing or detaining a number of rebel fighters. Jaysh al-Jihad also surrounded a nearby rebel field hospital. Islamist and FSA-affiliated rebel forces in southern Syria accused Jaysh al-Jihad of pledging allegiance to ISIS and mobilized against the group, sparking clashes.

10 April 20 – 22: Pro-regime NDF militiamen reportedly held protests and clashed with regime forces in several neighborhoods of Homs City following complaints that local NDF members have not received their salaries since the start of 2015. Clashes ceased after the local military security commander promised to solve the issue.

11 April 22 – 25: JN, Ahrar al-Sham, Jaysh al-Islam, and other primarily-Islamist rebel factions announced the formation of the 'Battle of Victory' Operations Room targeting the regime-held city of Jisr al-Shughour on April 22. JN and rebel forces reportedly entered the northwestern sector of the city by April 23 following an intense shelling campaign and clashes on the city outskirts, including a JN VBIED attack. Meanwhile, Jaysh al-Islam seized several checkpoints east of Jisr al-Shughour in an attempt to sever the regime line of communication to its positions south of Idlib city. JN and other factions in the 'Battle of Victory' Operations Room seized full control over Jisr al-Shughour and several neighboring villages on April 25 following heavy clashes which forced regime units to withdraw. The regime responded with heavy aerial bombardment targeting the city as well as other towns throughout Idlib Province.



- IDF
- YPG
- Opposition Forces
- Pro-Regime Forces
- ISIS
- Jabhat al-Nusra (JN)
- Israeli Defense Forces Airstrike
- Declared Offensive
- New Operations Room
- SVBIED
- Major Clash

Background Kinetic Activity

- Anti-ISIS Coalition Airstrikes
- Major Regime Airstrikes
- Alleged CW Attack
- Low-level clashes
- VBIED

April 23: A local Damascus rebel group detonated a car bomb targeting a regime Military Intelligence officer near the Presidential Palace.

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Prominent Anti-Assad Forces Expand Territorial Control in Idlib: The seizure of two major regime strongholds in Idlib Province by JN and rebel forces constitutes a second major victory against the Syrian regime following the "liberation" of the provincial capital of Idlib City on March 28, 2015. The rapid fall of Jisr al-Shughour and the Qarmeed Camp serves as a key indicator of the regime's inability to defend its remaining terrain in northern Syria without the heavy involvement of Iranian proxy forces such as Hezbollah. The JN and rebel advances also indicate an increasing level of coordination within anti-Assad ranks. In addition to securing key terrain, the operation to seize the Qarmeed camp and the ongoing Sahel al-Ghab operation in northwestern Hama prevented regime forces from reinforcing across fronts to defend Jisr al-Shughour. In total, these advances could enable anti-Assad forces to conduct future operations to penetrate key regime terrain in Latakia or Hama Provinces. The effective coordination of the assault on Jisr al-Shughour represents the second major victory for JN's model for coordinating joint operations after the seizure of Idlib city on March 28. These successes cement JN's value as a military ally and incentivize further rebel buy-in, strengthening JN's overall position in northern Syria. The formation of the 'Conquest of Aleppo' Operations Room on April 26 may be an early attempt to set the conditions to export this concept of operations to other battlefronts. The successes in Idlib and Hama also create a narrative of victory that is likely to further decrease both the prospects for negotiations with Assad and the attractiveness of the limited U.S.-led train and assist program.

String of Regime Defeats Continues Prior to Geneva III: Assad has been placed on the defensive by a series of defeats prior to the announced start of the Geneva III talks on May 4. Major regime losses at Idlib city on March 28 and Jisr al-Shughour on April 25 illustrated the risk incurred by the regime's deployment of overextended military assets to vulnerable forward positions throughout northern Syria. Meanwhile, rebels have also enjoyed a series of victories in southern Syria beginning in late 2014 despite expanded Iranian involvement in Dera'a and Quneitra Provinces. However, this apparent shift in battlefield momentum against the Assad regime will likely still prove insufficient to generate fruitful negotiations. These rebel victories have occurred on fronts which the regime consistently deprioritized throughout 2014 and the Syrian opposition remains unlikely to decisively defeat the regime throughout the country. As a result, neither Assad nor rebels perceive the need to make meaningful concessions. Thus, the separate talks which UN Special Envoy to Syria Staffan de Mistura will hold with all "stakeholders" during Geneva III will likely fail to produce meaningful results without further pressure on the regime and its backers.