

# Syria Update: January 13-19, 2015

**1** January 16 – 19: On January 16, ISIS militants launched an attack initiated by an SVEST detonation against YPG positions in southern and central Ayn al-Arab/Kobane but were repelled by YPG fighters. On January 19, YPG forces seized the Mashta Nour hill south of Ayn al-Arab city.

**2** January 13 – 19: JN seized the village of Tel Salmu from regime forces, a few hundred meters south of the regime-held Abu al-Duhor Military Airbase. On January 18, JN claimed to shoot down a regime transport aircraft near the town of Majas, north of the base. The crash killed over thirty regime and Hezbollah fighters, with unconfirmed reports of IRGC members among the dead as well.

**3** January 14: A ten-day ceasefire was announced between regime and rebel forces in the besieged al-Wa'er neighborhood of Homs city. Dozens of UN vehicles carrying food and medical supplies immediately entered al-Wa'er. However, SOHR reported shelling of the area by pro-regime elements despite the agreement.

**4** January 18: Israeli Defense Forces launched an airstrike against a house and several vehicles in the al-Amal Farms area, near the Golan Heights border in northern Quneitra Province. The attack killed IRGC general Mohammed Ali Allahdadi in addition to Hezbollah commanders Abu Ali Tabatabai and Mohammad Issa, and four Hezbollah fighters including Jihad Mughniyeh. The UN increased patrols along the Israeli-Lebanon border in response.

**5** January 13 – 15: JN fighters reportedly withdrew from the Beit Sahem neighborhood of southern Damascus following two weeks of anti-JN demonstrations by local residents. Days later, regime forces allowed an aid convoy to enter the neighborhood as well as the adjacent Babbila neighborhood.

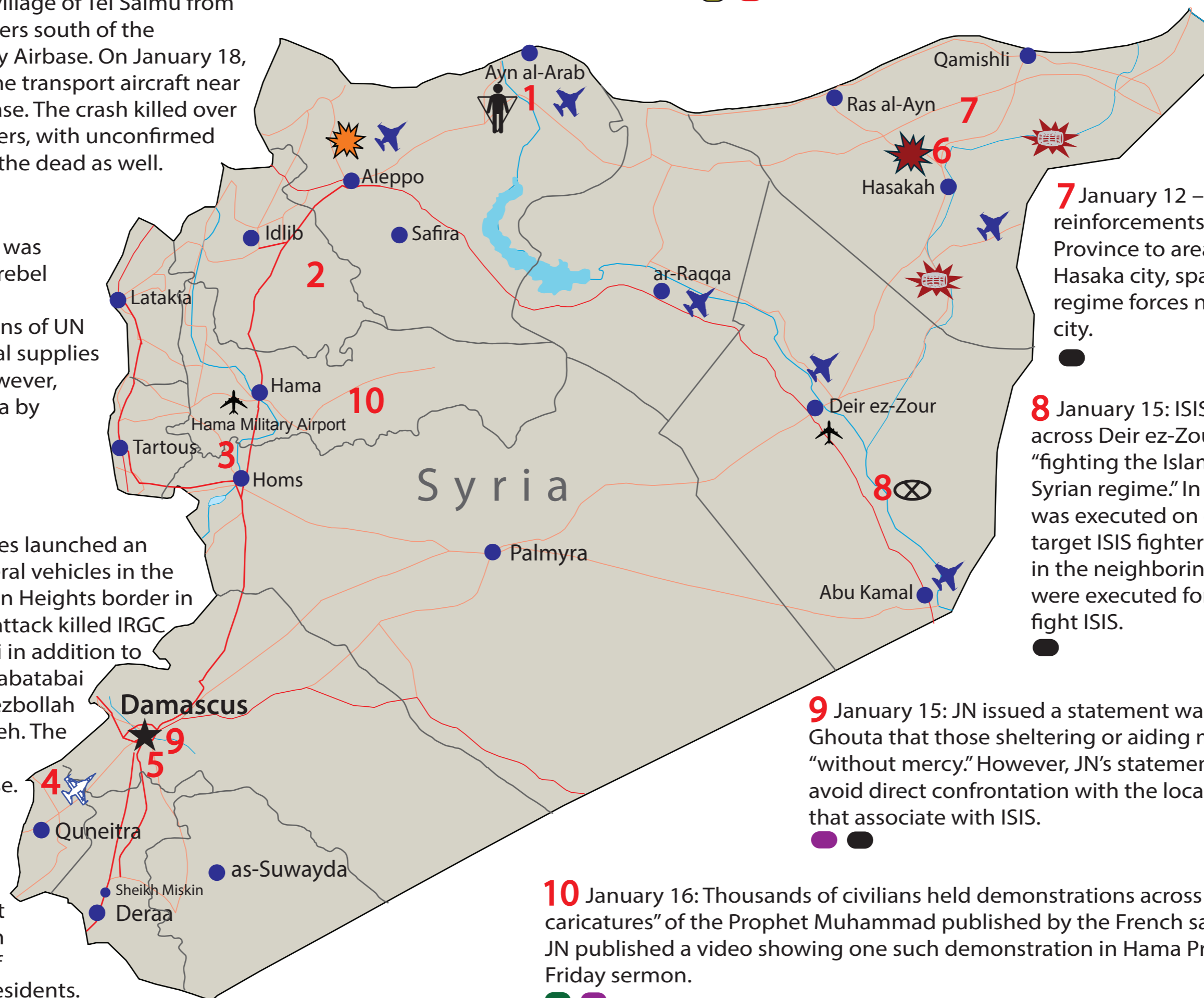
**6** January 17 – 19: YPG fighters seized several regime positions in northern Hasaka city following clashes with regime soldiers and national defense force (NDF) militiamen. Fighting reportedly began after regime units attempted to occupy a building in an area disputed between the two parties. Regime forces shelled YPG-held neighborhoods of the city, with the YPG alleging that regime forces also utilized cluster munitions.

**7** January 12 – 14: ISIS reportedly deployed reinforcements from southeastern Hasaka Province to areas in the northern countryside of Hasaka city, sparking increased clashes with regime forces northwest and northeast of the city.

**8** January 15: ISIS executed at least fifteen men across Deir ez-Zour Province, mainly on charges of "fighting the Islamic State" or "dealing with the Syrian regime." In the city of al-Mayadin, one man was executed on charges of establishing a cell to target ISIS fighters with IEDs and car bombs, while in the neighboring town of al-Shuhayl two men were executed for establishing a "battalion" to fight ISIS.

**9** January 15: JN issued a statement warning residents of Eastern Ghouta that those sheltering or aiding members of ISIS will be punished "without mercy." However, JN's statement said that it will make efforts to avoid direct confrontation with the local population and militant groups that associate with ISIS.

**10** January 16: Thousands of civilians held demonstrations across Syria protesting "offensive caricatures" of the Prophet Muhammad published by the French satire magazine Charlie Hebdo. JN published a video showing one such demonstration in Hama Province following a JN-led Friday sermon.



- Opposition Forces
- Pro-Regime Forces
- ISIS
- YPG
- IDF
- Jabhat al-Nusra (JN)
- Israeli Defense Force Airstrikes
- Major Clash
- SVEST
- Execution

- Background Kinetic Activity**
- Major Barrel Bomb Attack
  - Anti-ISIS Coalition Airstrikes
  - Low-Level Clashes



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**ISIS Utilizes Hasaka as a Safe Haven and Staging Area for the Fight in Ninewa, Iraq:** The report of an ISIS deployment of reinforcements to northern Hasaka province follows recent reports of ISIS fighters withdrawing into the area following a Peshmerga and Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) operation to clear the adjacent Sinjar district in Ninewa Province, Iraq. If it continues, the recent increase in tensions between the Syrian regime and YPG forces in Hasaka City is likely to indicate an increasingly permissive environment for ISIS forces in the Hasaka countryside. As ISIS forces continue to come under pressure in western Ninewa Province, they are likely to utilize terrain in Hasaka province as a relative safe haven and staging ground for future attacks in the Sinjar area.

**JN Pressures Last Regime Military Base in the Rebel-Held Countryside of Idlib:** JN's seizure of the town of Tel Salmu, south of the Abu al-Duhor military base, likely indicates JN intent to launch an offensive against the base itself after JN and rebel forces captured the nearby Wadi al-Deif and Hamadiya military bases on December 15, 2014. The Abu al-Duhor base is the last remaining regime-held base in eastern Idlib Province. While not historically a primary regime stronghold in the area, it is likely that regime forces reallocated resources to the base after the fall of Wadi al-Deif and Hamadiya to JN and rebel forces. An attack against the base would therefore cement a considerable blow to the regime in Idlib Province and garner further credibility for JN as an effective actor against Assad.

**Israeli Airstrike Sheds Light on Hezbollah Disposition in Syria:** The Israeli airstrike that killed IRGC General Mohammed Ali Allahdadi and several Hezbollah commanders is likely a short-term setback to IRGC and Hezbollah support to the Syrian regime's war effort. The strike likely did not target the IRGC element of the force, although Jihad Mughniyeh, son of late Hezbollah commander Imad Mughniyeh, may have been the intended target. The presence of Hezbollah and IRGC members in Quneitra, ostensibly in order to conduct a reconnaissance mission in the area, may indicate an increased level of involvement in the Syrian regime's military campaign in southern Syria. As the regime continues to suffer severe manpower shortages, it may require deepening Hezbollah involvement in southern Syria in order to halt the momentum of JN and rebel forces in Dera'a and Quneitra provinces. Israeli strikes have generally targeted the movement of weapons near its borders rather than specific individuals, however an increased level of Hezbollah activity in the Quneitra region may be perceived as sufficiently threatening to provoke an expansion of Israeli strikes.