

Syria Situation Report: July 22 - August 4, 2020

1 July 21 - 22: ISIS Claims SMBIED Attack in Daraa Province as it Exploits Worsening Security Conditions. ISIS Wilayat al Sham-Horan Division claimed responsibility for a suicide motorcycle-borne improvised explosive device (SMBIED) attack on July 21 as part of its "Battle of Attrition" campaign. The attack targeted a Syrian Military Intelligence (SMI) gathering, killing one and injuring six in the city of Daraa in Daraa province.

2 July 22: Increased Security Measures Ensure First Successful Russian-Turkish Joint Patrol of Entire M4 Highway. Russian-Turkish forces conducted their first complete patrol of the M4 highway, covering 70 km from Tarnaba, Idlib Province, to Ain Hour, Latakia Province. This is the longest joint patrol to date. The Turkish military deployed additional troops to the M4 patrol route starting July 21 to secure the route for the joint patrol. The Russian portion of the joint patrol continued into regime-held Ain Ghazal in Latakia Province.

3 July 23: US Aircraft Temporarily Intercepts Iranian Plane Flying Over US Base in Southeastern Syria. A US F-15 temporarily intercepted an Iranian Mahan Air passenger aircraft flying over the US base at Tanf on the Syrian-Jordanian-Iraqi border. The Iranian plane continued to Beirut, Lebanon. Iran protested the incident to UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres.

4 July 24: Israel Strikes Syrian Regime Positions in Southern Syria in Response to Pro-regime Munitions Fired into Israel. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) announced it conducted a series of helicopter airstrikes in southern Syria in response to unknown pro-regime actors firing unspecified munitions from Syria toward Israel. The strikes occurred near Hader, Quneitra province.

5 July 26: Russia Leverages Hagia Sophia Conversion to Strengthen Ties with Pro-Regime Christian Communities. Captain of the National Defense Forces (NDF) in al-Suqaylabiyah City Nabeul Abdullah met with Russian military officials in al-Suqaylabiyah, Hama Province. Russia provides support to the NDF unit in Suqaylabiyah, though other NDF units elsewhere in Syria remain unaffiliated with Russia. Abdullah stated that Russia seeks to build a small version of the Hagia Sophia church with the support of the Russian Duma in the city. Suqaylabiyah is traditionally Christian area

6 July 28: Russian-backed 8th Brigade of the SAA 5th Corps Openly Protests against Assad Regime in Southern Syria. Protesters demanded the fall of the Assad regime, the expulsion of Iranian militias from Syria, and the release of detainees. The protest occurred following a graduation ceremony for 1,000 new members of the Russian-backed 8th Brigade of the SAA 5th corps in Busra al-Sham, Daraa Province. Members of the 8th Brigade took part in the protests by chanting anti-Assad and anti-Iran slogans.

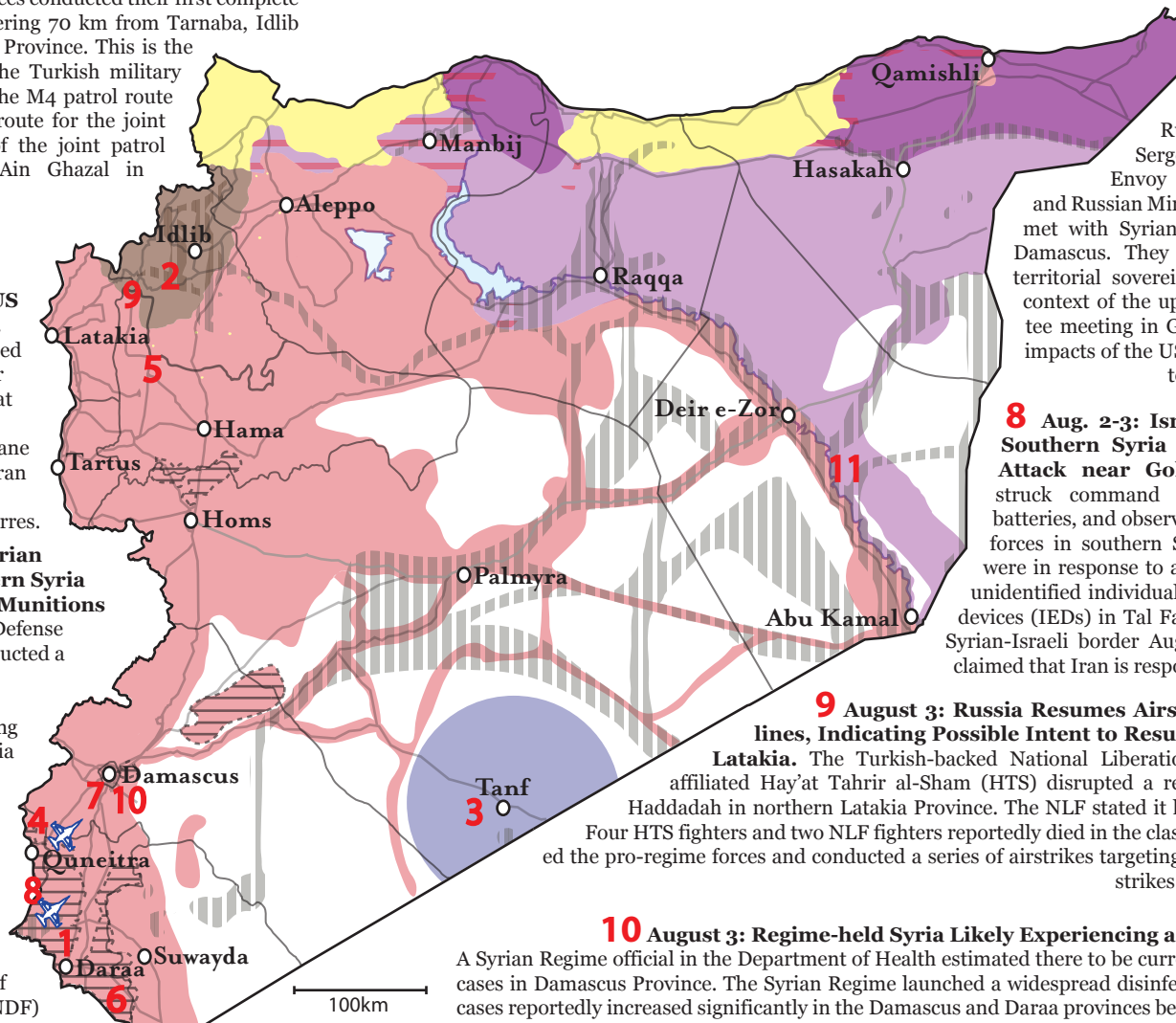
7 July 29: Russian Deputy Foreign Minister and Military Delegation Meet with Bashar Al-Assad, Augmenting Public Military Ties. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Vershinin, Russian Special Envoy to Syria Alexander Lavrentiev, and Russian Ministry of Defense representatives met with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus. They discussed maintaining Syria's territorial sovereignty and independence in the context of the upcoming constitutional committee meeting in Geneva. They also discussed the impacts of the US Caesar sanctions and the need to improve Syrian infrastructure.

8 Aug. 2-3: Israel Conducts Airstrikes in Southern Syria in Response to Disrupted Attack near Golan Heights. Israeli aircraft struck command centers, anti-aircraft artillery batteries, and observation posts belonging to regime forces in southern Syria on August 3. The strikes were in response to an unsuccessful attempt by four unidentified individuals to plant improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in Tal Fares in the UNDOF zone on the Syrian-Israeli border August 2. Israeli defense officials claimed that Iran is responsible for the attempted attack.

9 August 3: Russia Resumes Airstrikes along Latakia Frontlines, Indicating Possible Intent to Resume Offensive Operations in Latakia. The Turkish-backed National Liberation Front (NLF) and al-Qaeda affiliated Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) disrupted a regime infiltration attempt near Haddadah in northern Latakia Province. The NLF stated it killed 15 Syrian regime soldiers. Four HTS fighters and two NLF fighters reportedly died in the clashes. Russian airstrikes supported the pro-regime forces and conducted a series of airstrikes targeting Binnish, east of Idlib City. The strikes killed three civilians in Binnish.

10 August 3: Regime-held Syria Likely Experiencing a Major COVID-19 Outbreak. A Syrian Regime official in the Department of Health estimated there to be currently around 112,500 COVID-19 cases in Damascus Province. The Syrian Regime launched a widespread disinfection campaign after COVID-19 cases reportedly increased significantly in the Damascus and Daraa provinces between July 31 and August 3. The Syrian Ministry of Health estimated that 57 percent of all known cases in the country are in Damascus.

11 August 4: SDF Violence against Protesters Increases Regional Tensions and Impacts SDF Local Legitimacy. The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) clashed with protesters demonstrating against the recent assassination of al-Aqidat tribal leaders and general lawlessness in Deir e-Zor Province. The SDF reportedly shot at protesters, injuring seven. The Aqidat tribe issued a "one month deadline" to SDF and US-led Anti-ISIS Coalition forces to hand over the suspects in the assassination cases on August 4. Unknown militants previously assassinated an Aqidat sheikh near al-Hawajj, Deir e-Zor, on August 2. No group claimed responsibility for the assassination. ISIS previously claimed responsibility for assassinating the tribal spokesperson of the Aqidat Tribe, Sulaiman al-Kassar, on July 30 in Busayrah, Deir e-Zor.



- Pro-Regime
- Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)
- Core SDF-Held Kurdish Terrain
- ISIS Support Zones
- SDF-Dominated, Regime Presence
- U.S. and Partner Forces
- Former Opposition Terrain (Reconciled)
- Al Qaeda-Dominated*
- Turkey-Opposition
- ★ Israeli Airstrikes

*AL QAEDA-LINKED GROUPS CONTROL NEARLY ALL GOVERNANCE AND MILITARY STRUCTURES IN GREATER IDLIB PROVINCE. VARIOUS LOCAL ACTORS ASSERT LIMITED CONTROL OVER ISOLATED AREAS OF GREATER IDLIB.

Control of Terrain Accurate as of August 4, 2020



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Key Takeaway: The COVID-19 outbreak in regime-held Syria is likely spreading at a significant rate and increasing internal economic and social pressures on the Assad regime. A regime official estimated there are over 112,000 cases in Greater Damascus alone. The regime is likely incapable of preventing the spread. The outbreaks in regime areas will likely spread to anti-Assad controlled areas in the northwest and Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)-held areas in the northeast, further threatening stability in those regions.