

THE
CARTER CENTER



Weekly Conflict Summary
February 2-8, 2017

The situation around Al-Bab continued to develop during the preceding week as pro-government forces took more territory from ISIS in their steady march to the city. Operation Euphrates Shield (OES) forces, a collection of opposition groups backed by Turkey and led by the Turkish military, penetrated the western defenses of the ISIS-held city overnight between February 7 and 8 and were able to control and hold some of the western areas of the city around Sheikh Aqil and the National Hospital. A few weeks earlier, OES forces had occupied these areas but retreated following an ISIS counterattack.

To the east, the Syrian Democratic Forces' (SDF) offensive for Raqqa continued to make progress. The SDF, comprised mainly of the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), advanced south from the northeastern countryside of Raqqa city, forming yet another front that has come within 25km of the ISIS capital. The frontline between ISIS and SDF around the town of Suweida Kabira, located just west of Raqqa, has remained stable. An FGM-148 Javelin anti-tank missile system, a highly sophisticated US-made weapon rarely seen in Syria, was spotted with Kurdish forces on this frontline during the reporting week.

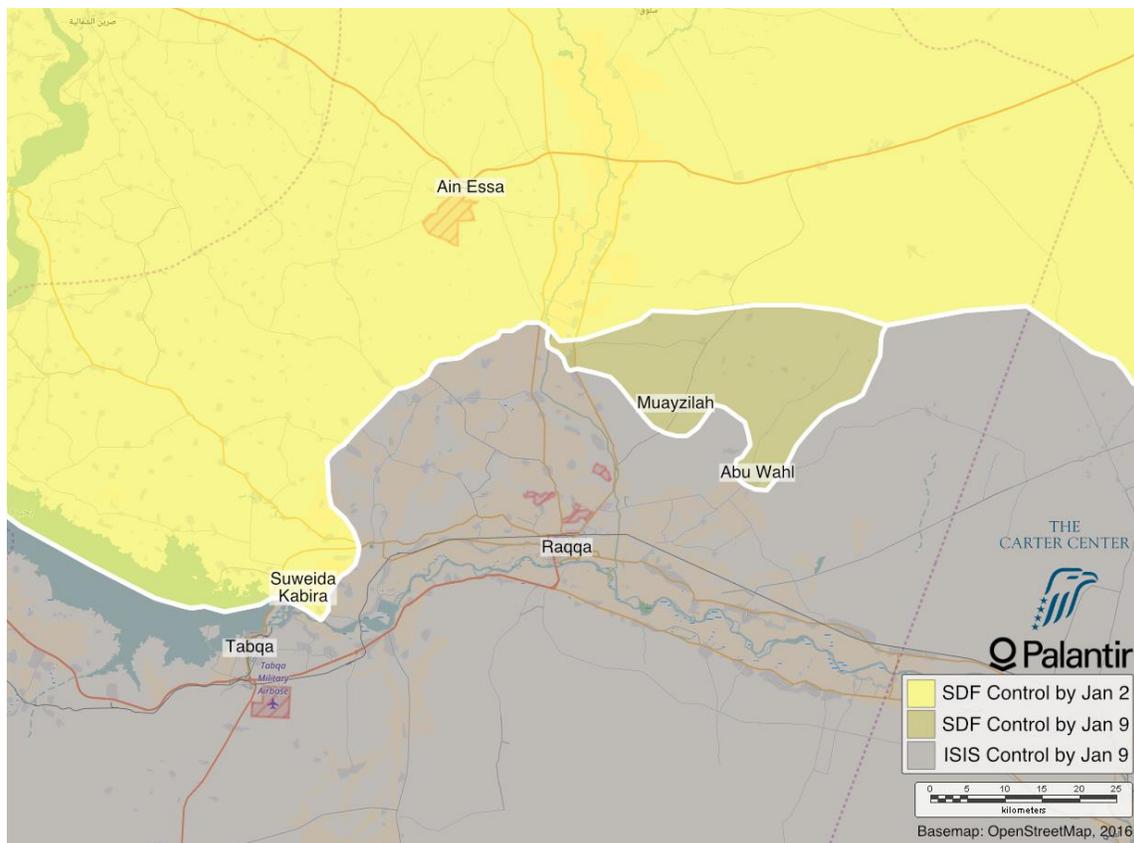


Figure 1 - SDF advance towards Raqqa in past week

Except for sporadic clashes, fighting around Aleppo city has been minimal since the last evacuation of opposition forces. West of Aleppo city, conflict between opposition and pro-government forces has reignited, especially around the neighborhood of al-Zahraa.

Intra-opposition conflict within the Idleb pocket continued to grow more complicated over the past seven days. Several defections from Ahrar al-Sham to the new Hai'yat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) have shifted the balance of power slightly. Within HTS, Jabhat Fatah al-Sham (JFS) is a primary force. A Jund al-Aqsa splinter called Liwa al-Aqsa, currently unaffiliated with either umbrella group, attacked Jaysh al-Nasr positions along the northern Hama frontline, where Jund al-Aqsa's previous war with Ahrar al-Sham began months ago. HTS, which has a substantial military presence in the area, has refused to aid Jaysh al-Nasr unless they pledged allegiance to HTS.

In the neighborhood al-Wa'er in Homs city, conflict has been intense this week. This has primarily been in the form of government airstrikes on the besieged neighborhood.

Fighting between ISIS and pro-government forces remains fierce around the government-held Taifour Airbase (T4) in Homs governorate, where ISIS fighters continue their attempts to take the military airport.

The battle for Deir Ezzor city raged on this week as well. Hezbollah, National Defense Forces (NDF), and government forces fought to regain territory lost to ISIS in the southern portion of the city. The Deir Ezzor Military Airport remains separated from pro-government control in the city.

Conclusions:

The situation in Idleb grows even more complicated for the opposition forces there, even as the two primary opposition forces in the pocket have solidified their positions as the largest anti-government ground forces. Northern Syria also grows more complex as several forces with different foreign backers all converge on Al-Bab.