



Weekly Conflict Summary
July 7-13, 2016

On July 6, the Syrian government announced a 72-hour ceasefire for Eid al-Fitr, which was followed by two 72-hour extensions. Despite the government's announcement and subsequent acceptance of the ceasefire by opposition forces, both parties violated the agreement within 24 hours – government and allied forces with a series of airstrikes on al-Mallah and Kastillo Road in Aleppo, and opposition forces by bombarding government-held civilian areas of Aleppo city. By Friday, July 8, pro-government forces had advanced to and effectively blocked Kastillo Road, the final supply route into opposition-held areas of Aleppo city.

Increased shelling by opposition forces of government-controlled neighborhoods such as al-Khaldiya and al-Hamdaniyeh has led some civilians to leave their homes in the city and move to opposition-controlled areas of the western Aleppo countryside.

Despite an attempt by opposition forces to retake lost ground on Kastillo Road on July 10, pro-government forces maintained and have consolidated control of much of their recently gained ground. The roughly 200,000-300,000 inhabitants of east Aleppo have already begun to feel the strain of severed supply routes, resulting in reports of a five-fold increase in prices for some food items, empty vegetable markets and long bread lines. The UN estimates that the affected areas have enough food for a month.

On July 11, the opposition Local Council for Aleppo City described the closure of the Kastillo Road as “a form of collective punishment”, and called for international organizations and governments to intervene to lift the siege and prevent a humanitarian catastrophe among the civilian population.

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) continue their offensive on Menbij in northeastern Aleppo. SDF forces now control most of Hazawni neighborhood and have nearly surrounded the Menbij National Hospital in the west of central Menbij. The SDF has once again divided ISIS areas of control by surrounding remaining ISIS forces in Bustan al-Hadad neighborhood. Advances in al-Sarb, Hawarima, and Jelawi neighborhoods have put major pressure on ISIS forces in the north of the city. International Coalition airstrikes continue to play a major role in the SDF advance on Menbij, but snipers have been called into the city as the conflict shifts from major offensives to street-by-street fighting.

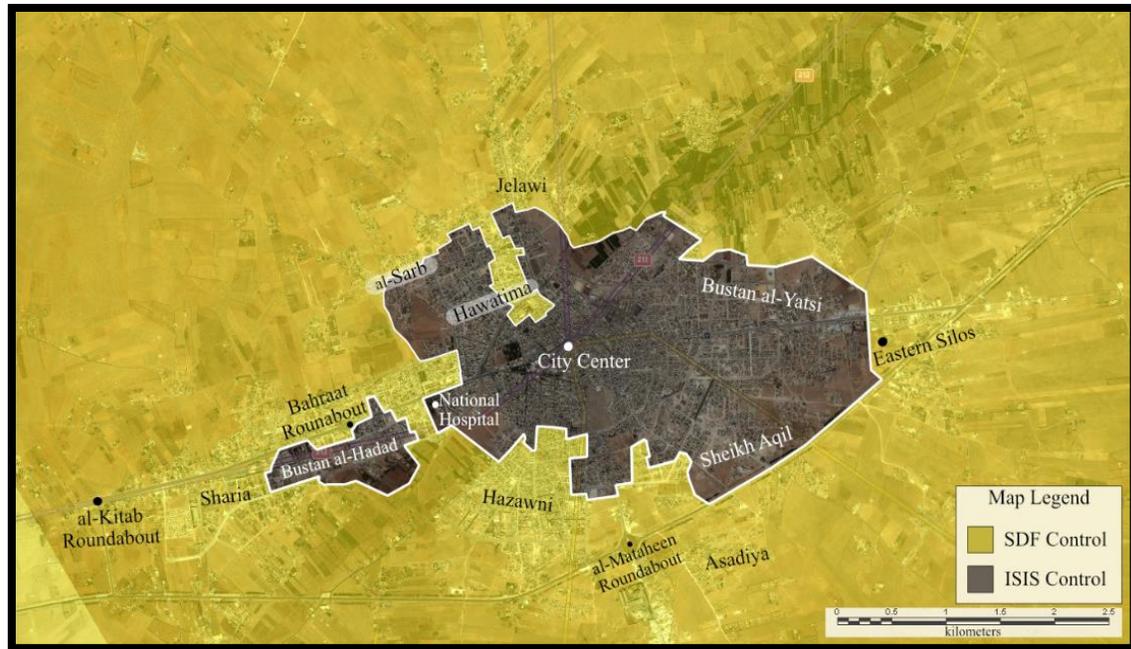


Figure 1: Menbij city in northeastern Aleppo governorate.

Reports suggest that an estimated 13,000 people have left the city of Menbij since the SDF campaign began on May 31. In the village of Hajj Abdeen, 5 km to the southeast of Menbij city center, the SDF claim to have provided safe passage for approximately 1,300 internally displaced persons (IDPs) leaving the city. Others from the city have sought shelter in the communities of Karsana, Qabr Imu, Abu Qalqal, and even Kobani (Ain al-Arab).

IDPs fleeing the conflict continue to arrive in areas across the northern Aleppo countryside, western Aleppo countryside, and even as far as the northern countryside of Idleb governorate near Sarmada and the Bab al-Hawa border crossing. The Kurdish-controlled area of Afrin in northwest Aleppo governorate has reportedly received some 1,000 IDPs between July 10-12 alone.

Strikes in Idleb and Hama have continued throughout this week, including an airstrike on a public market in Ariha, Idleb. Warplanes struck a Syrian IDP camp on the Jordanian border on July 12, only a couple of weeks after a devastating suicide attack on another border camp. The Jordanian border has been sealed off as a closed military zone since the prior suicide bombing.

In the rest of Eastern Syria, few significant incidences of conflict occurred between ISIS and Kurdish forces. On July 8, ISIS shot down a Russian helicopter east of Palmyra, apparently with a wire-guided missile.

In Latakia, government forces continued to make small gains as they pushed towards the Turkish border, capturing Shilif Castle near the town of Kensaba. An Ahrar al-Sham commander, Abdel Hamid Aboud, was killed during clashes in the mountainous region.

Clashes between pro-government forces and opposition fighters continued in the Eastern Ghouta this week. Government forces fighting for control of Darayya to the west of the capital have gained ground, controlling nearly half of the city as of the writing of this report. Opposition forces are reportedly low on equipment and have suffered significant casualties.

Conclusion

The continued escalation of violence in Aleppo and Darayya imperils hundreds of thousands of civilians trapped in both cities. Given the ongoing offensives and all parties' continued disregard for ceasefire agreements and the indiscriminate targeting of civilians, parties to the conflict should work to secure safe passage for civilians seeking to depart active conflict zones.