

THE
CARTER CENTER



Weekly Conflict Summary
November 2-8, 2017

Syrian government forces and allies fully captured the eastern city of Deir Ezzor from ISIS on November 3, ending three years of ISIS occupation. Pro-government forces also advanced further east along the Euphrates river, ultimately capturing the border crossing at Abu Kamal in a coordinated assault with Iraqi Popular Mobilization Units (PMUs). This victory led the Syrian government to claim victory over ISIS. ISIS still holds territory along the eastern Euphrates, in Eastern Hama, in the Yarmouk Camp district of Damascus city, and along the border with the Golan Heights.

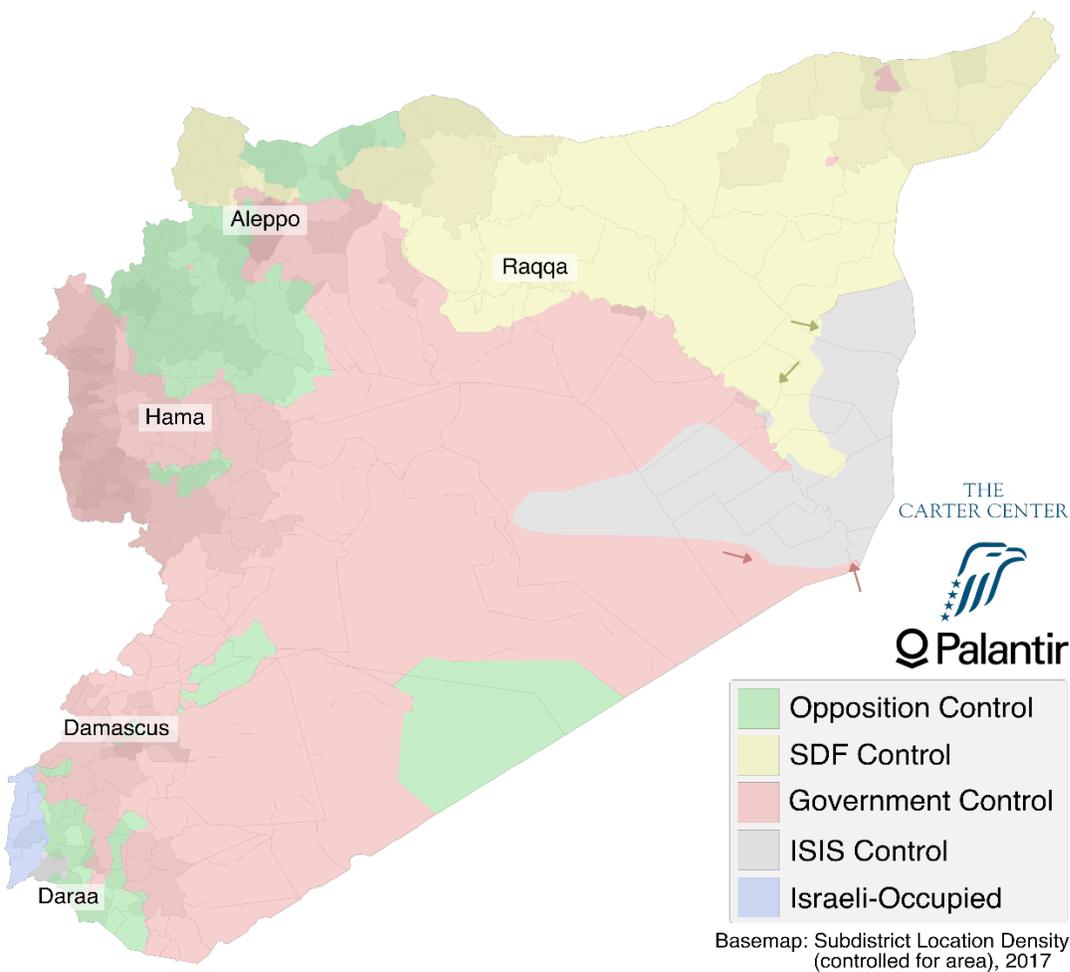


Figure 1: Areas of control as of November 8, 2017. Arrows indicate advances made during the reporting period.

Fight against ISIS

In addition to pro-government advances (involving the Syrian army, Afghani Fatemiyoun, Hezbollah, and the Iraqi Hezbollah al-Nujaba), the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) made significant advances against ISIS positions along the Khabur River, clearing an ISIS-held pocket north of the city of Deir Ezzor. The SDF is currently poised to take the remaining oil-rich territory held by ISIS on the north bank of the Euphrates in eastern Syria, and will be helped in this ongoing offensive by a new shipment of supplies from the US-led International Coalition.

The small ISIS enclave in eastern Hama was halved following an offensive by Hai'yat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS, formerly al-Qaeda affiliated Jabhat al-Nusra). ISIS fighters in the area are now restricted to three small towns north of the Homs-Raqqa highway.

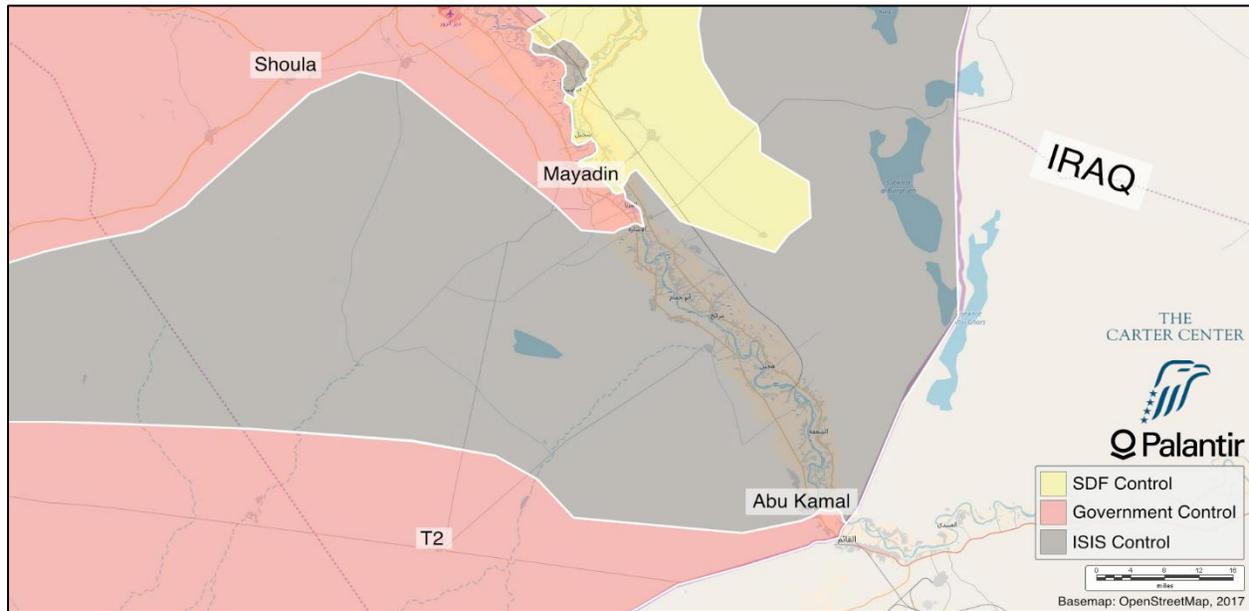


Figure 2: Areas of control in Eastern Syria as of November 8.

Opposition Infighting in northern Idlib

On November 7 and November 8, clashes broke out between HTS and Nour al-Din al-Zinki (NDZ) forces in multiple locations throughout western Aleppo and northern Idlib. Clashes were reported in at least 12 different towns and military establishments, spanning the length of the border between the two rival groups.¹ The clashes resulted in some territory being taken by both factions, but primarily resulted in a consolidation of control and hardening of frontlines between the rivals.²

This infighting is significant as it takes place in locations surrounding the recent deployment of Turkish observers. These observers secured agreements with both HTS and NDZ while deploying to the area

¹ Clashes were reported in or near Hayan, Andan, Khan al Asl, Taqad, Bsartun, Yashqatin, Oweijel, Kafr Naha, Dana, and Atma and military bases of the 46th and 111th Regiments.

² For additional details on relations between HTS and NDZ, please refer to the following special report: https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict_resolution/syria-conflict/2017.11.03-hts-ndz-report.pdf

despite (ostensibly) being in the area in part to counter HTS. So far, the Turkish observers have remained on the sideline, but may be forced to intervene should their interests be threatened by increased infighting.

Southern Idleb and Northern Hama

Syrian Government and allied forces continue to target opposition-held areas in northern Hama and southern Idleb. These ongoing attacks, combined with new reports of troop movement in the area suggest that the Syrian government is preparing to move on Idleb, even as fighting against ISIS continues in the east. The areas currently targeted suggest that this offensive may aim to take the Abu Thuhour military airbase in eastern Idleb as a first objective. The airbase is situated in the more sparsely populated east of Idleb governorate, and could serve as a valuable foothold for future operations in Idleb, should the government succeed in capturing it.

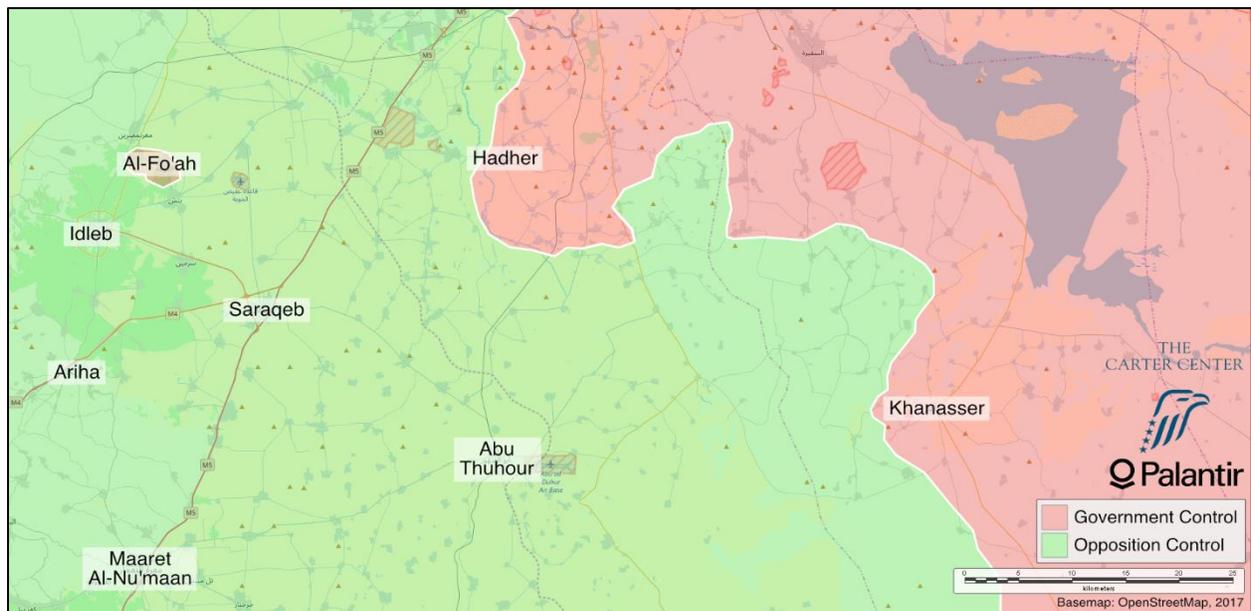


Figure 3: Areas of control in eastern Idleb / Western Aleppo as of November 8, 2017.

In northern Hama, clashes continue between government and opposition forces (HTS, along with Free Syrian Army affiliates Jaish al-Nasr, Jaish al-Izza, and the Central Division). The coordinated efforts of these opposition factions succeeded in capturing some territory from government forces, though most of the conflict activity remains restricted to artillery fire and aerial bombardment.

“Salvation Government” announced in opposition territory

A parallel governance structure to the opposition’s Syrian Interim Government has been announced in HTS-held territory in northern Syria. Referred to as the “Salvation Government,” its formation was supported by HTS which controls or has a significant presence in much of Idleb, northern Hama, and western Aleppo. The “Salvation Government” has since assumed formal control of the HTS-affiliated Civil Service Administration, an ostensibly independent administrative body which provides public services and maintains infrastructure in HTS-controlled opposition territory.

Clashes in Rural Damascus and Quneitra

Fighting remains intense along front lines in Quneitra governorate and in the suburbs of Damascus city. Some back-and-forth territorial changes have taken place in northern Quneitra, but frontlines remain fixed in the suburbs of Damascus. Syrian government aircraft intensified their bombardment of opposition positions throughout Eastern Ghouta during this reporting period. In apparent retaliation, unspecified opposition groups launched a series of artillery attacks on areas in Damascus city, including the Old City.

Court Closures in Daraa

The opposition-run courts in Daraa have been closed beginning we week of November 6 following a jailbreak and a series of attacks against court personnel. One branch of the opposition-run court system experienced both an IED attack on October 25th and a jailbreak on October 29th in which 20 prisoners escaped due to a lack of adequate prison resources. The court system has suffered from a decrease in funding as opposition groups' resources are stretched thin. Furthermore, court buildings and officials are frequently targeted by IED attacks throughout Daraa.

Opposition groups in southern Syria have been severely strained following the cessation of financial support from international backers. Incidents such as the ongoing crisis in the courts are likely to increase as resources dwindle.

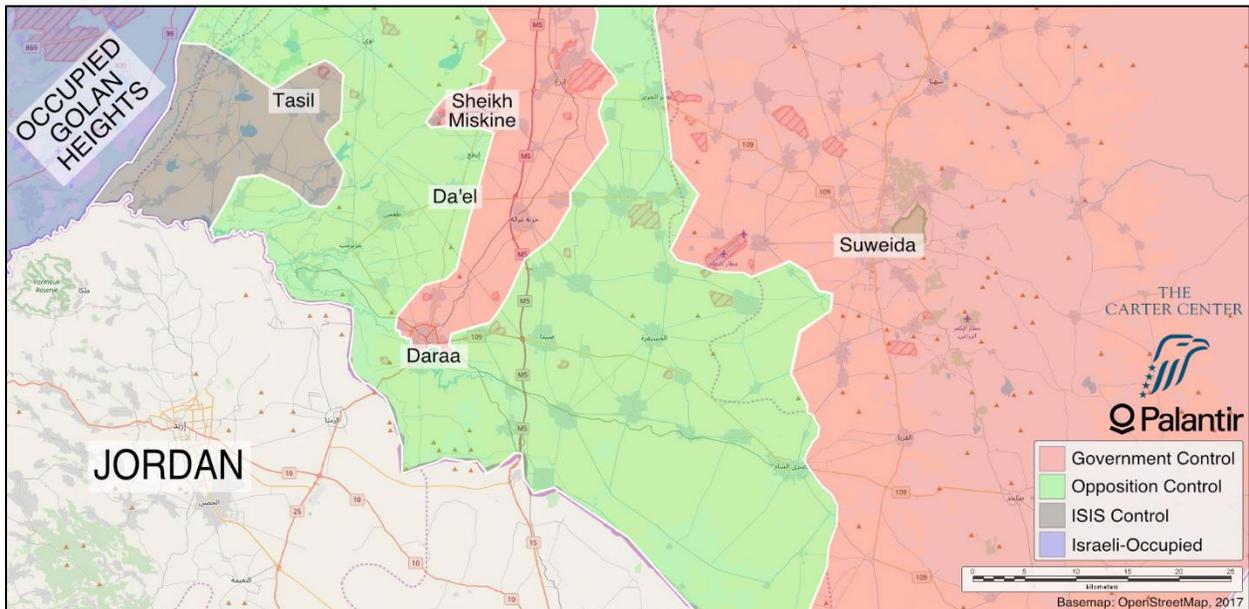


Figure 4: Areas of control in southern Syria as of November 8, 2017.