



Grad Missile Sightings

September 21-28, 2016

In the final week of September, an observable increase in Grad shelling videos appeared on Syrian opposition media, including several videos or photosets that included brand new missiles. These images featured both portable single and double tube Grad launchers as well as larger missile trucks like the BM-21.

Grad missiles were filmed on frontlines in both Aleppo and Hama governorates, with the majority appearing among groups operating in the latter. Across the videos dated from September 21 until September 28, about 67 grad missiles were launched from missile racks and portable launchers alike.

The overwhelming majority of these weapons were claimed to have been deployed against pro-government forces as part of the Marwan Hadid offensive in Hama or the ongoing counteroffensive in Aleppo. There is only one exception to this, a few missile strikes from a Grad-P system conducted by Liwa al-Sultan Murad on ISIS in the countryside of Aleppo.



Figure 1: Three armed opposition groups and their corresponding shelling events

Ahrar al-Sham was responsible for the bulk of the recorded strikes, and used to great effect several Grad missiles in two different instances in the northern countryside of Hama. These strikes were almost immediately followed by reports that Ahrar al-Sham and other allied factions advanced further south towards the Hama airport. Kataib al-Safwa al-Islamia, another group operating along the same frontline, also recorded the launch of several Grad missiles from another multiple rocket platform.

In the ongoing Hama offensive, known as the Marwan Hadid mission, the location captures that were reported following the strikes include Jabal Zein al-Abidin, as-Suqaylabiyah, al-Jneineh, al-Tulaysiyah, and Qahera. It is difficult to determine whether or not these advances were directly the result of the use of these recently acquired weapon systems, as the offensive has been steadily tracking south and east for weeks. In Aleppo, front line changes were reported in association with the missile strikes. In fact,

opposition forces at Handarat Camp retreated within a week of receiving Grad missile support on their frontlines with the government.

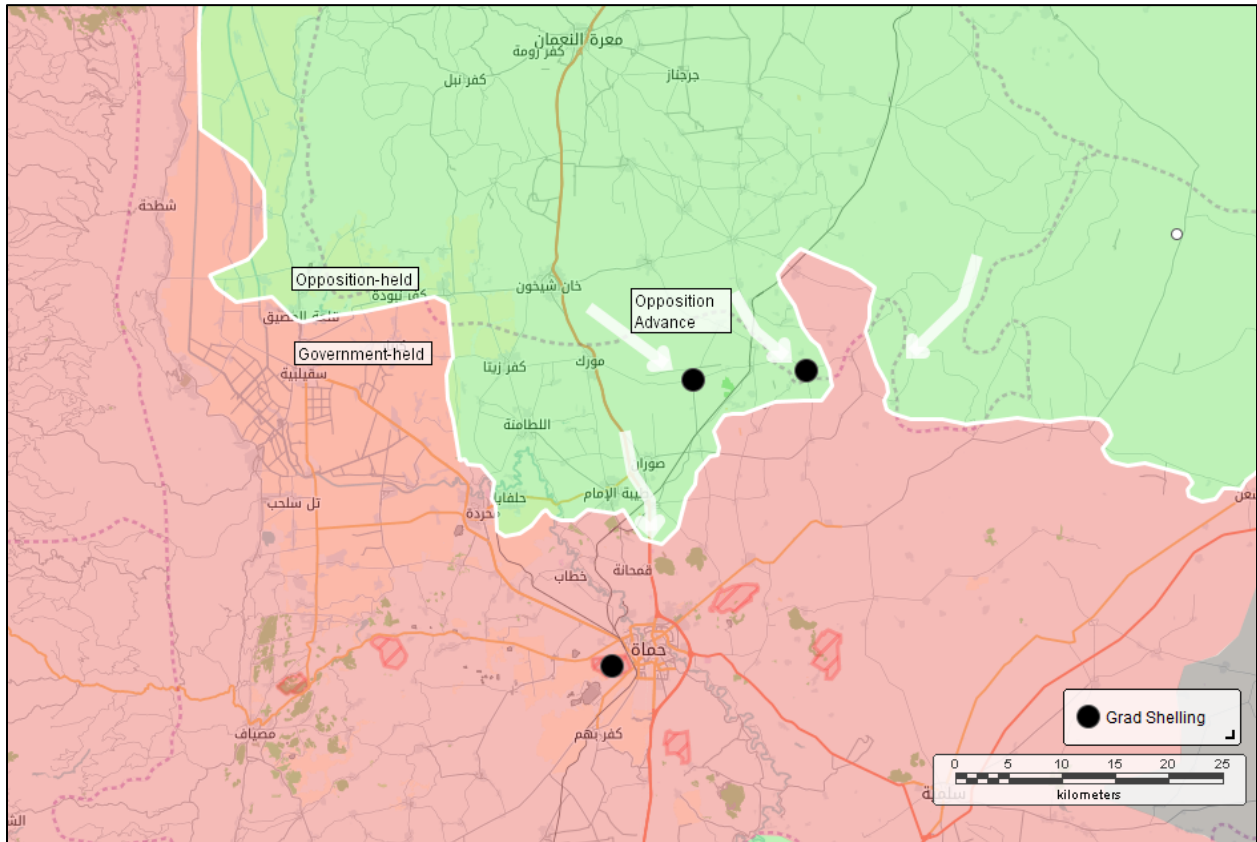


Figure 2 - Opposition advance and location of Grad missile attacks in northern Hama.

An opposition commander speaking to the press stated that this uptick in Grad missile deployment is related to new relationships to foreign donors.¹ The move to supply opposition groups with heavier weapons is yet another example of the continuous cycle of escalation currently underway in Syria. With steadily intensifying battles on most of the major frontlines throughout the country, and opposition forces under extreme pressure in eastern Aleppo, it is likely that more supporting countries will seek to support their favored side, with Syrian civilians ultimately paying the price.

¹ Landay, Jonathan, and Arshad Mohammed. "Gulf May Arm Rebels Now Syria Truce Is Dead: U.S. Officials." Reuters. 2016. Accessed September 30, 2016. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-usa-idUSKCN11W2NN>.