

THE
CARTER CENTER



Weekly Conflict Summary
October 19-25, 2017

Pro-government forces and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF, a Kurdish-led coalition) continued to advance through ISIS territory. While pro-government forces advanced in Deir Ezzor and around Mayadin, SDF advanced further east to capture oil fields and territory around a tributary to the Euphrates. Turkish operations in the north of the opposition-held Idleb pocket continued this week as the first three battalions of a unified opposition army were established. Conflict around Daraa heated up this week and pro-government forces tightened a siege on opposition-held Eastern Ghouta.

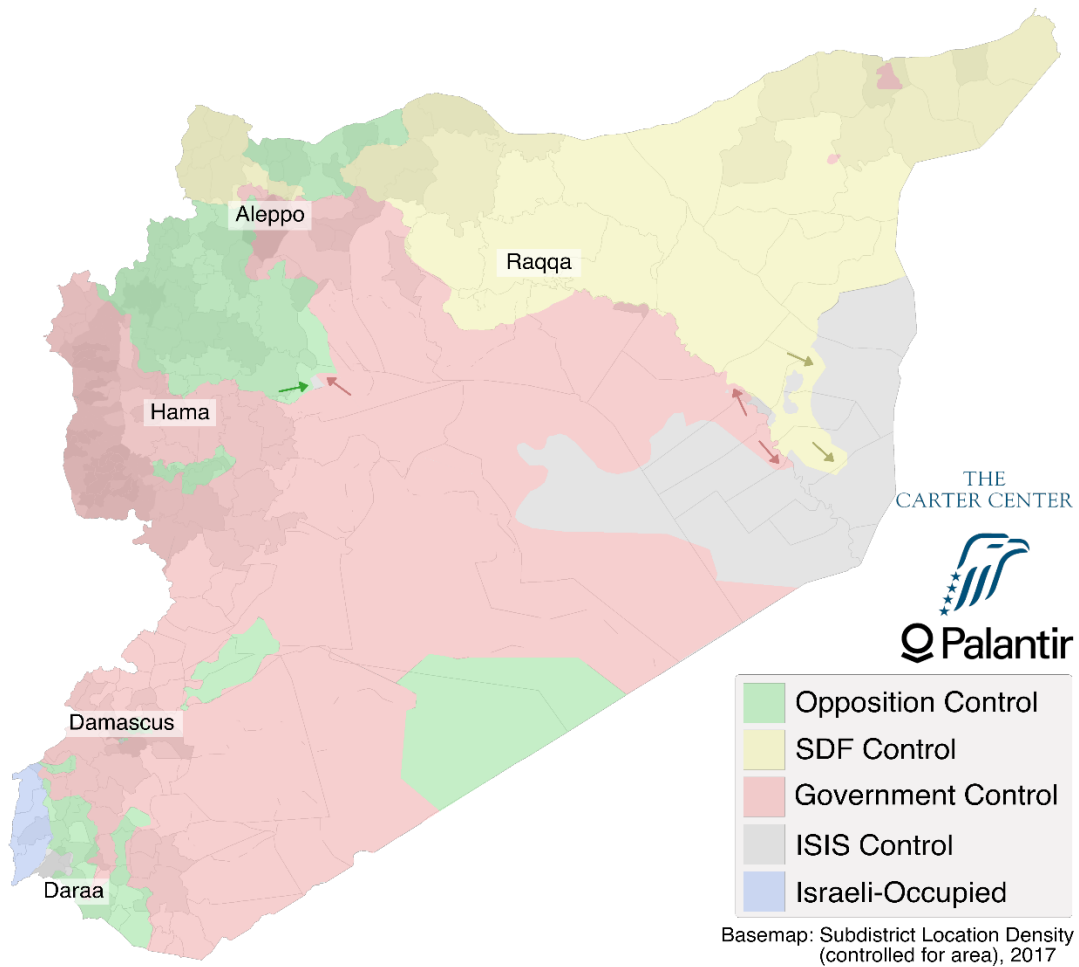


Figure 1 - Areas of control in Syria by October 25, with arrows indicating advances since the start of the reporting period

Fight against ISIS

Demining and security operations continue in the city of Raqqa following its capture by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). YPG forces have been photographed painting Raqqa in Kurdish colors amid their controversial dedication of the victory in Raqqa to Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The SDF continued efforts towards ensuring that Raqqa will be controlled by the Raqqa Civilian Council with a local police force providing security. The police force will be set up with help from the US-led Coalition.

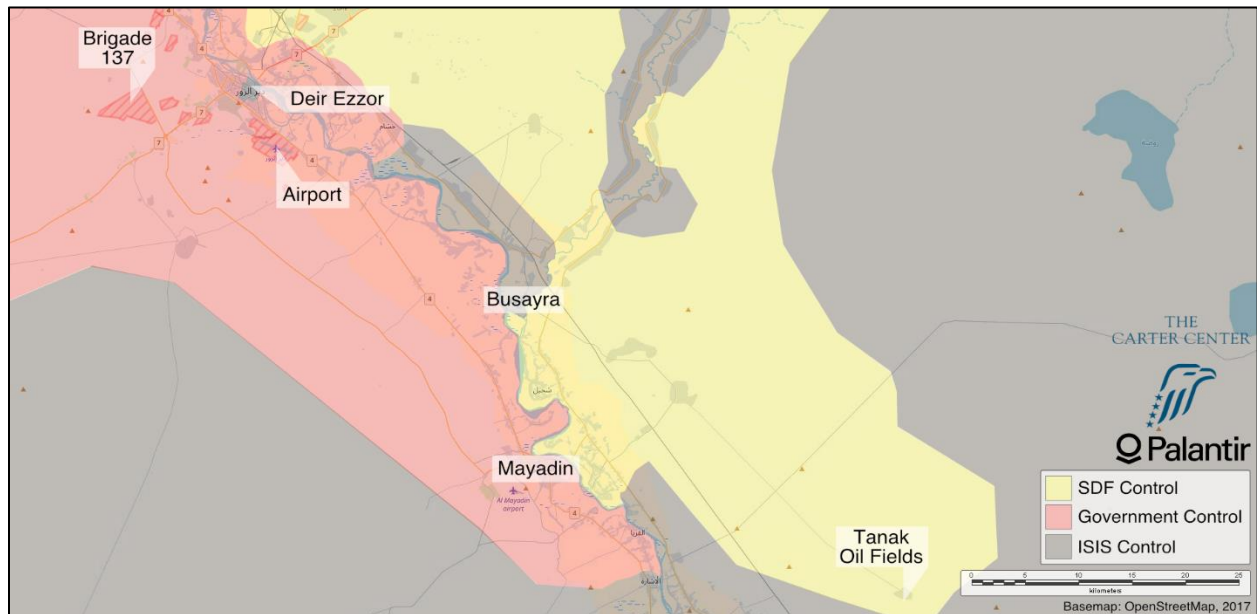


Figure 2 - Areas of control in Syria's east by October 25

Further to the east, the SDF and pro-government forces continued to advance on their separate fronts east of Deir Ezzor. SDF fighters took much of the area around the Khabour River and pro-government forces took the areas around Mayadin. On October 25, the SDF expanded their control east of the Euphrates substantially, capturing several oil fields, including the Tanak fields in the southeast.

Both the SDF and pro-government forces have shelled ISIS-held portions of Deir Ezzor city during this reporting period. Russian and American military in the area have been in contact to keep pro-government forces and the SDF from fighting one another. Within the city, pro-government forces have advanced in the eastern neighborhoods of Deir Ezzor, capturing the al-Sina'a area in the east of the city on October 25. On the eastern bank of the Euphrates River, pro-government forces also advanced south from Khasham and captured the town of Tabiyet Jazira.

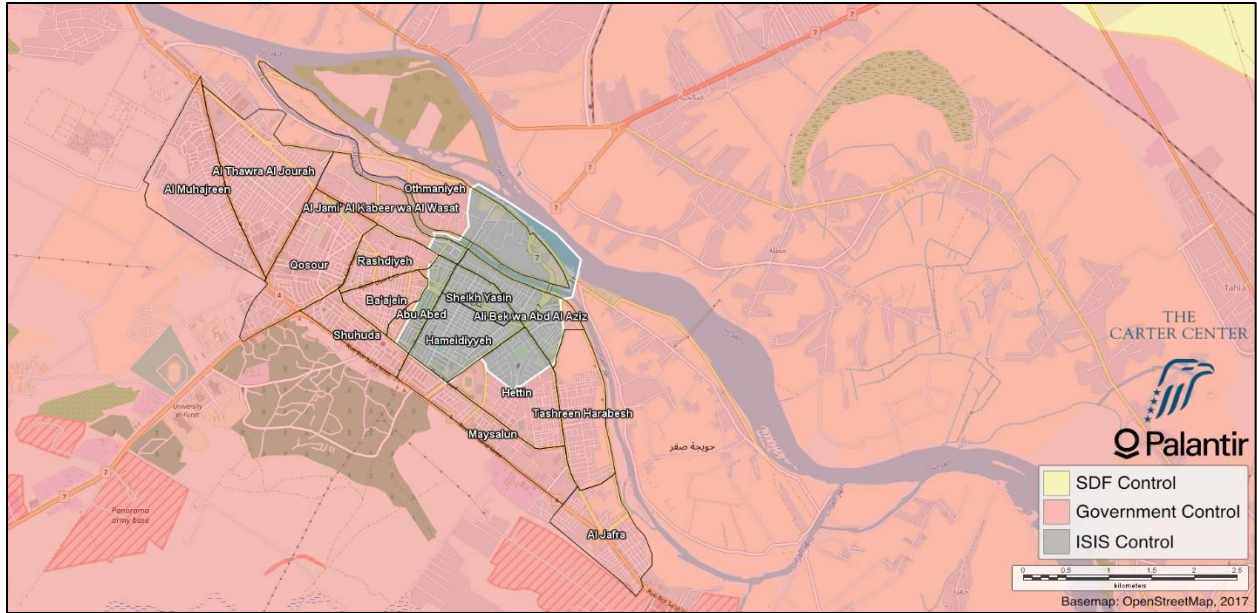


Figure 3 - Frontlines in Deir Ezzor City by October 25

Qaryatein, a city in Rural Homs captured and held by ISIS for three weeks, was returned to government control by pro-government forces during this reporting period. However, ISIS fighters in the area killed over 120 people before October 21. The bulk of these deaths fell in the final 48 hours of ISIS control in the area, wherein executions of individuals accused of collaborating with the government occurred.

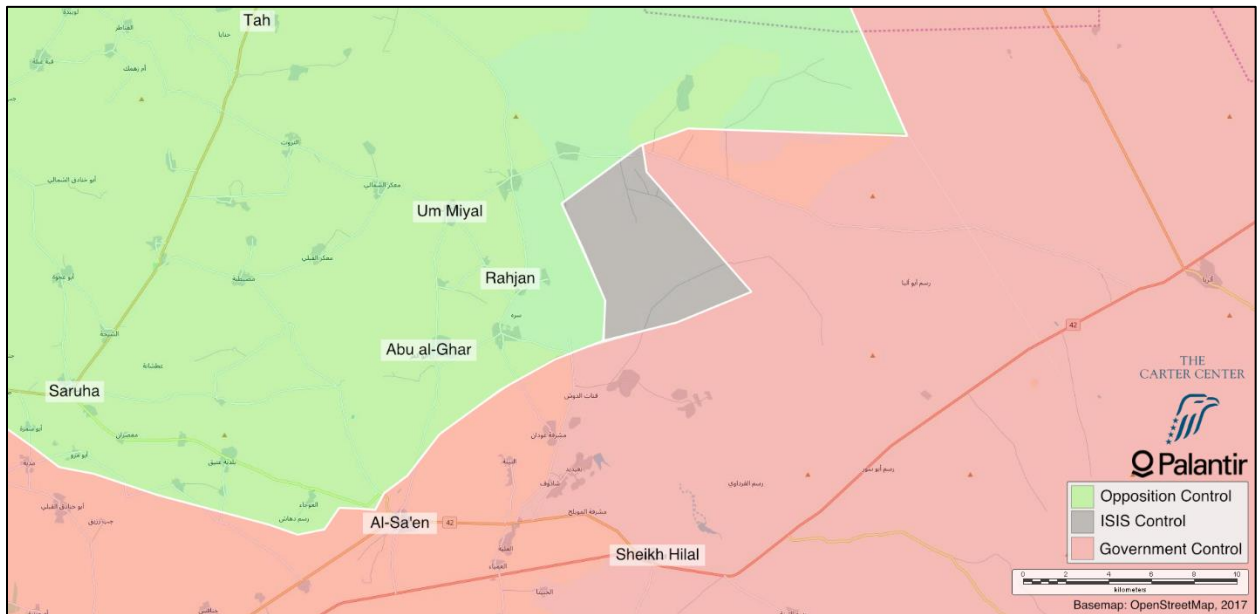


Figure 4: Frontlines in NE Hama and SE Idleb governorates by October 25.

The territory taken by an ISIS incursion into Idleb two weeks prior to the reporting period has been almost fully retaken by HTS. Russian aircraft struck HTS positions in eastern Hama, near the clash areas with ISIS, preceding and supporting a surprise pro-government offensive on October 24 on territory recently

recaptured by HTS. Pro-government forces were able to capture the town of Jeb Abiyad and advanced to the outskirts of Um Miyal before being pushed back by an HTS counter-offensive on the same front.

Pro-government forces have been sighted moving in eastern Hama following the surprise offensive on Jeb Abiyad. Many of these movements have been towards Abu Thohur military airport, for which an offensive could possibly include additional forces from southern Aleppo.

Opposition developments

On Oct. 24, leaders of FSA factions in the Euphrates Shield area signed an agreement with the opposition’s Syrian Interim Government in the presence of Turkish stakeholders to begin the process of “ending the factionalism” of groups in northern Aleppo. This involves the reorganization of the first three corps of the Syrian National Army over a series of stages. The agreement additionally stipulated that all border crossings would be transferred to the control of the Syrian Interim Government, which would oversee distribution of all proceeds from the crossings to the Syrian Interim Government, local armed groups, and local councils.

The Turkish military has expanded into opposition-held territory on the northern frontiers of the so-called Idleb pocket. In doing so, Turkish forces have set up observation posts in Salwa and Jebel Samaan, north of Daret Azza. Turkish forces, escorted by Nur al-Din al-Zenki fighters, surveyed additional locations in the area from Sheikh Aqil to Andan. Four convoys, consisting of Turkish special forces, APCs, anti-aircraft weapons, and tanks, entered from the Atma and Kafr Lusin border crossings for deployment along the northern Idleb/western Aleppo strip of territory. HTS is still present in the areas west of Nur al-Din al-Zenki-controlled Sheikh Aqil mountain and has not ceded control of the border crossings, territory, or population centers in northern Idleb.

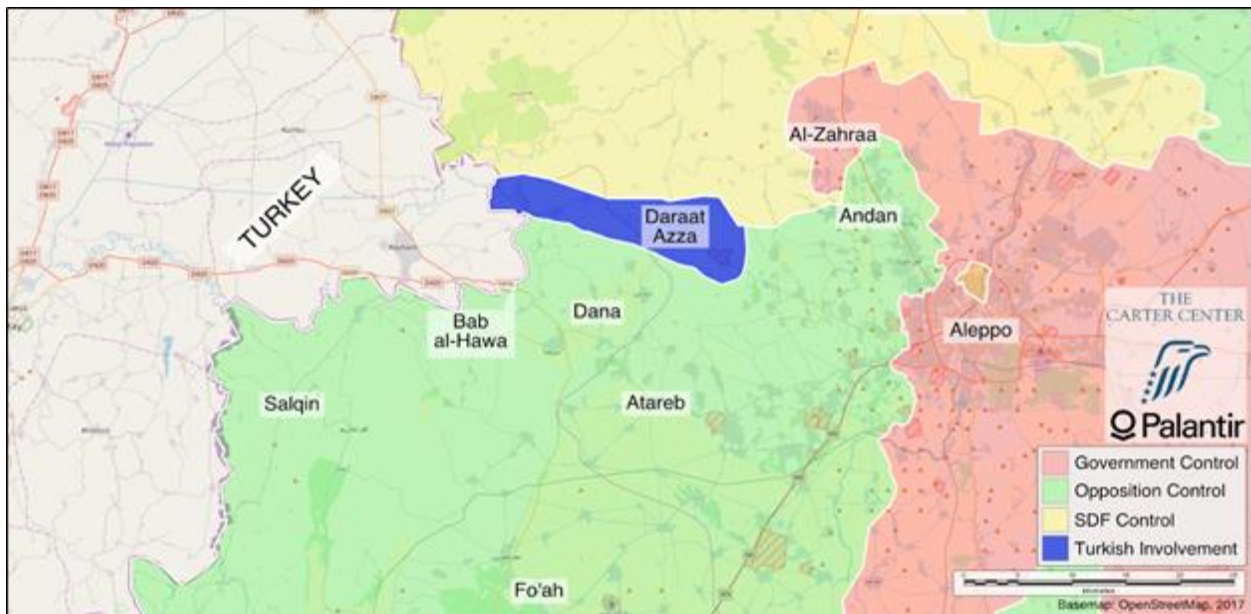


Figure 5 - Situation east of Aleppo by October 25

As part of the agreement with HTS allowing for Turkish entry into Idleb and Aleppo, Euphrates Shield forces currently in Reyhanli, Turkey, across the border, will not enter Idleb as part of the Turkish “de-escalation” mission and will possibly be re-deployed to northern Aleppo.

Developments in the South

Clashes and artillery shelling are taking place in Daraa and other areas under the southern ceasefire at a higher rate than previously reported. On October 18, Jaysh al-Thawra released a statement saying that it did not consider pro-government militias to be included in the southern ceasefire, and that as such it had launched an attack on pro-government militias in Beit Jin, near the northern border of the Golan Heights. This development could signal a resurgence of violence in Syria's south, which has experienced a period of calm since the implementation of the ceasefire in July 2017.

In Damascus, clashes have continued between Faylaq al-Rahman and the 4th Division at the Ain Terma front in Eastern Ghouta. The siege of Eastern Ghouta has tightened during this reporting week, especially on areas held by Faylaq al-Rahman. Aid convoys carrying food and medicine have not been allowed into these territories. On October 23, a new media campaign was launched, calling for assistance for the populations of Eastern Ghouta.

By October 18th, over 500 individuals displaced from Deir Ezzor had settled in the Rukban Camp. This number has almost certainly risen since, as estimates suggest that IDPs have arrived in the camp at a rate of 250 people per day as fighting continues in and around Deir Ezzor. On October 20th, the opposition's Jaysh Ahrar al-Asha'ir shared a video of a food distribution that it organized, most likely in the Rukban Camp, as it often provides essential goods and services there.