

Syria Situation Report: May 14-20, 2015

1 May 19-20: ISIS seized the regime stronghold of Palmyra in eastern Homs Province after a complete withdrawal of pro-regime forces. Prior to the renewed ISIS assault, local reports indicated that the regime began to evacuate prisoners from the Palmyra Prison. Regime forces reportedly also withdrew from the Palmyra military airbase, ceding control of the base to ISIS. The seizure of Palmyra followed a multi-pronged ISIS offensive through which ISIS seized the town of al-Sukhna, east of Palmyra, on May 14 and isolated Palmyra city from surrounding regime fortifications.

2 May 19 - 20: The JN-led Jaysh al-Fatah Operations Room advanced south of Idlib City to isolate the remaining regime stronghold of Ariha. The joint anti-Assad forces seized the town of Musaybin northeast of Ariha on May 12 and then advanced to seize the Mastouma camp and the town of Nahliya north of Ariha on May 19. Clashes are ongoing near the town of Kafri Najed, north of Ariha.

3 May 17 - 18: ISIS advanced towards the regime-held Sheikh Najjar Industrial District northeast of Aleppo city, seizing two villages on the district's northeastern outskirts. In response, regime forces deployed additional Iranian-backed Afghan militias from Bashkwi to the area.

4 May 14: The Aleppo Conquest Operations Room extended its membership to include a total of 31 rebel brigades, adding a number of factions based in Idlib and Hama Provinces.

5 May 15: The FSA-affiliated Southern Front announced the formation of a Southern Front Joint Command, comprised of seven commanders from prominent Southern Front factions and led by First Army commander Major Hassan Ibrahim Abu Osama Joulani.

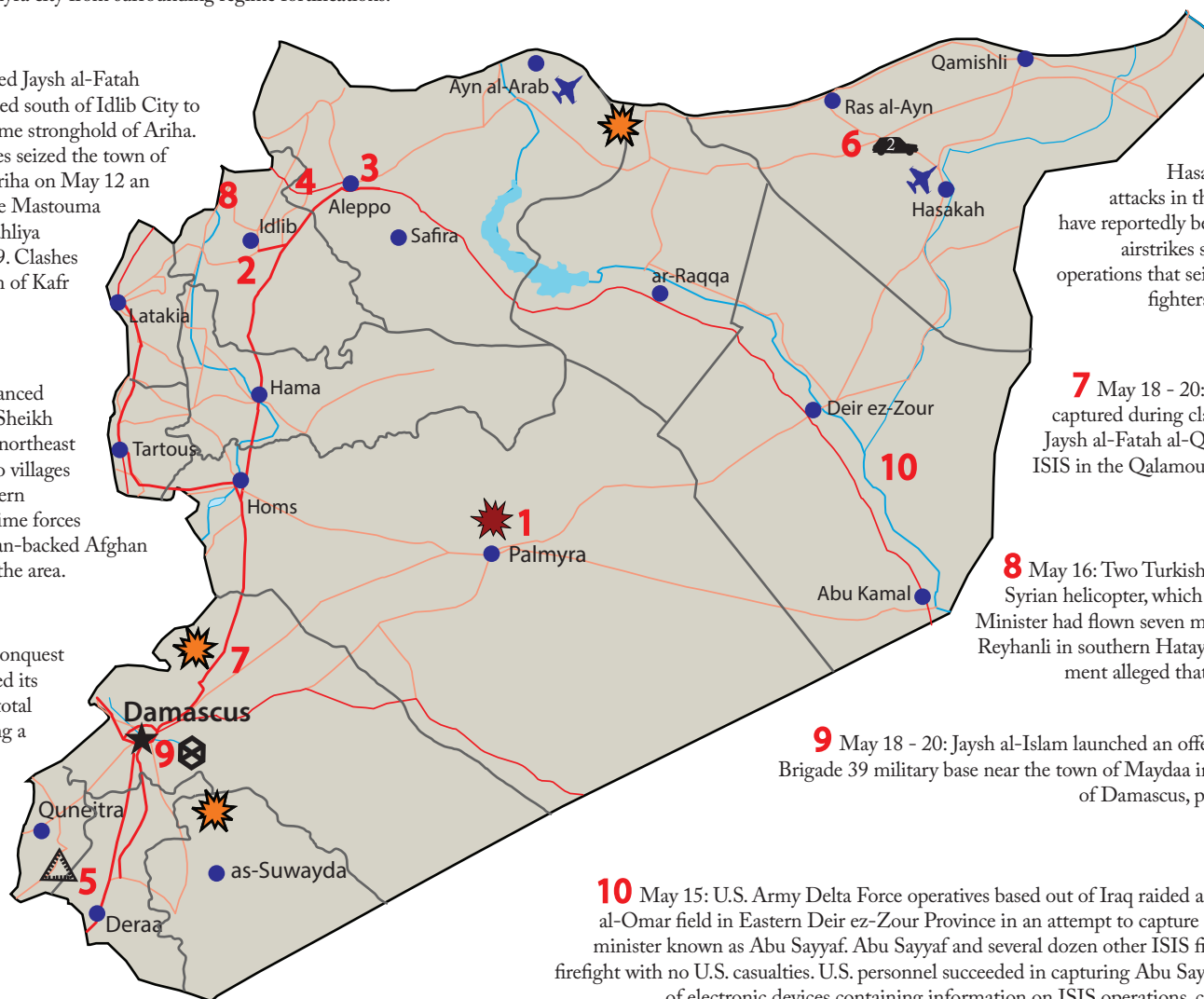
6 May 18 - 20: YPG forces, supported by U.S.-led coalition airstrikes, took control of Abd al-Aziz Mountain in the northwestern countryside of Hasaka despite two ISIS SVBIED attacks in the area. Over 170 ISIS fighters have reportedly been killed by U.S.-led coalition airstrikes since May 18, facilitating YPG operations that seized over 20 villages from ISIS fighters throughout Hasaka province.

7 May 18 - 20: JN released 27 ISIS detainees captured during clashes between members of the Jaysh al-Fatah al-Qalamoun operations room and ISIS in the Qalamoun region, following a ruling by the local Sharia Court.

8 May 16: Two Turkish F-16 fighter jets shot down a Syrian helicopter, which according to Turkish Defense Minister had flown seven miles into Turkish airspace near Reyhanli in southern Hatay Province. The Syrian government alleged that the target was a Syrian UAV.

9 May 18 - 20: Jaysh al-Islam launched an offensive against the regime-held Brigade 39 military base near the town of Maydaa in the Eastern Ghouta suburbs of Damascus, penetrating the base's outskirts.

10 May 15: U.S. Army Delta Force operatives based out of Iraq raided an ISIS-held building near the al-Omar field in Eastern Deir ez-Zour Province in an attempt to capture a Tunisian ISIS leader and oil minister known as Abu Sayyaf. Abu Sayyaf and several dozen other ISIS fighters were killed following a firefight with no U.S. casualties. U.S. personnel succeeded in capturing Abu Sayyaf's wife as well as a number of electronic devices containing information on ISIS operations, communications, and finances.



- Turkey
- United States
- YPG
- Opposition Forces
- Pro-Regime Forces
- ISIS
- Jabhat al-Nusra (JN)

- New Operations Room
- Declared Offensive
- SVBIED
- Major Clash

Background Kinetic Activity

- Anti-ISIS Coalition Airstrikes
- Other clashes



by Jennifer Cafarella

100km

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The ISIS seizure of Palmyra city is a major defeat for the Assad regime that is likely to jeopardize the regime's ability to maintain a foothold in Deir ez-Zour. It is the second major ISIS victory across Iraq and Syria since May 17, when ISIS seized the Iraqi provincial capital of Ramadi in Anbar Province. These gains provide considerable momentum to the ISIS narrative of victory and offset the success of the U.S. raid into Deir ez-Zour Province that killed an ISIS leader and oil minister on May 15. If ISIS is able to eliminate remaining, and now isolated, regime positions in the western outskirts of Deir ez-Zour City ISIS will be able to consolidate a direct line of control that stretches from outer Anbar Province, Iraq through to the Homs Desert. ISIS forces in central Syria are now well-positioned to challenge regime-held terrain in the Syrian Central Corridor, which may cause major shifts in the Syrian war that other anti-Assad forces can exploit. It will be critical to watch whether the Assad regime redeploys elite units such as the Republican Guard or additional Iranian-backed paramilitary forces to reclaim territory in the Homs Desert. Many of these elite pro-regime units are engaged in Idlib Province and it is likely that their deployment to northern Syria prevented an adequate reinforcement of Palmyra. Meanwhile, the string of JN and rebel gains south of Idlib City have set the conditions for an upcoming JN-led assault on the town of Ariha, the final regime stronghold in Idlib Province. If successful in seizing Ariha, the combined anti-Assad forces will likely exploit this victory to seize remaining regime-held towns on the road connecting Jisr al-Shughour with Ariha, effectively "liberating" the entire Syrian Province. There are two additional regime enclaves in the province, which anti-Assad forces could maintain under siege as they turn to another front: a pocket northeast of Idlib City consisting of the towns of Kafarya and Fu'ah, and the besieged Abu ad-Duhor military base in the eastern countryside of the province. The expansion of the Aleppo Conquest Operations Room to include rebel brigades based in Idlib and Hama Provinces indicates that anti-Assad forces in northern Syria may be mobilizing for a major upcoming operation against the regime in Aleppo Province, possibly as soon as JN and the Jaysh al-Fatah Operations Room seize Ariha.