

# Syria Situation Report: January 20-26, 2015

**1** January 21-23: ISIS forces in ar-Raqqa city and its countryside reportedly entered a state of high alert, erecting checkpoints to inspect identity documents, imposing a curfew in several areas, and instituting a ban on its members from traveling without official permission. In addition, ISIS executed a number of ISIS members in the southern outskirts of ar-Raqqa city on charges of attempting to return home.

**2** January 20-23: The YPG rejected a 72-hour deadline to withdraw from captured positions north of Hasaka city. Kurdish residents of the city were reportedly evacuated to villages in the northern countryside as YPG reinforcements arrived to the city. On January 23, the Kurdish National Council (KNC) formed a committee to negotiate a truce agreement between the YPG and regime forces after tensions escalated further following a spate of YPG arrests of pro-regime elements in Ras al-Ayn northwest of Hasaka City.

**3** January 21: A VBIED detonated in the majority-Alawite neighborhood of Akrema in Homs city, killing seven civilians and wounding thirty others.

**4** January 24 – 26: YPG forces reportedly took complete control of Ayn al-Arab/Kobane after expelling ISIS from its remaining positions in the eastern neighborhoods of the town, although ISIS may still hold parts of the southeastern Maqtalah neighborhood. YPG forces also seized two villages south of the town, marking the first Kurdish urban gains outside of Ayn al-Arab.

**5** January 22: The Mujahideen Shura Council of Southern Damascus threatened to cancel ceasefire agreements in the southern Damascus neighborhoods of Yalda, Babbila, and Beit Sahem unless the regime reopened a major crossing to food aid. The crossing has been closed for 39 days.

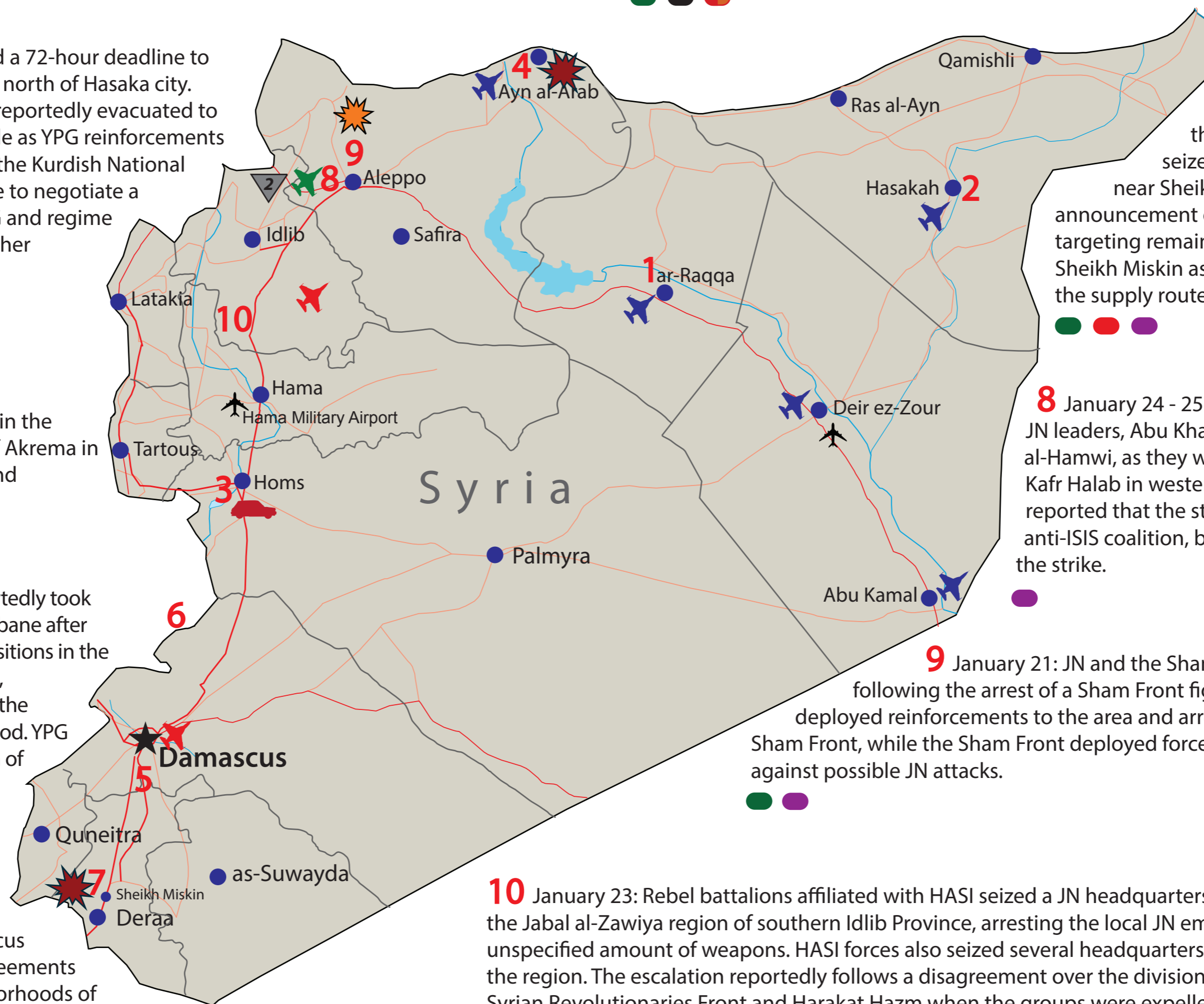
**6** January 22 – 23: On January 22, the Lebanese Army dismantled a VBIED parked at a military checkpoint near Arsal and later ambushed a group of militants attempting to infiltrate another nearby checkpoint, killing four unidentified fighters. On January 23, alleged ISIS militants overran a Lebanese position outside Ras Baalbek, near Arsal. Lebanese Army forces later recaptured the area with helicopter and artillery support.

**7** January 24: Jabhat al-Nusra (JN), Ahrar al-Sham (HASI), and the FSA-affiliated Southern Front seized the regime Brigade 82 base near Sheikh Miskin following the rebel announcement of three new named operations targeting remaining regime positions within Sheikh Miskin as well as regime positions along the supply route leading north out of the town.

**8** January 24 - 25: An airstrike killed two prominent JN leaders, Abu Khadija Joulani and Abu Omar al-Hamwi, as they were traveling near the town of Kafr Halab in western Aleppo Province. Activists reported that the strike was conducted by the anti-ISIS coalition, but CENTCOM has not confirmed the strike.

**9** January 21: JN and the Sham Front clashed in Aleppo city following the arrest of a Sham Front fighter at a JN checkpoint. JN deployed reinforcements to the area and arrested several members of the Sham Front, while the Sham Front deployed forces to guard its headquarters against possible JN attacks.

**10** January 23: Rebel battalions affiliated with HASI seized a JN headquarters in the town of Shinan, located in the Jabal al-Zawiya region of southern Idlib Province, arresting the local JN emir and confiscating an unspecified amount of weapons. HASI forces also seized several headquarters belonging to Kata'ib al-Farouq in the region. The escalation reportedly follows a disagreement over the division of spoils captured from the Syrian Revolutionaries Front and Harakat Hazm when the groups were expelled from Idlib Province in November 2014.



- Lebanese Armed Forces
- Opposition Forces
- Pro-Regime Forces
- ISIS
- YPG
- U.S.-Led Coalition
- Jabhat al-Nusra (JN)

- 🚗 VBIED
- ★ Major Clash

## Background Kinetic Activity

- ✈️ Unknown Airstrike
- ✈️ Anti-ISIS Coalition Airstrikes
- ✈️ Major Regime Airstrikes
- ★ Low-level clashes
- ▾ Car Bomb

\*January 20: A car bomb unsuccessfully targeted the commander of Chechen Salafist-jihadist group Jaysh al-Muhajireen wa al-Ansar in Huraytan, West of Aleppo city. A second car bomb targeted an unknown rebel commander in Mare'a, North of Aleppo city.



Content: Jennifer Cafarella  
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**ISIS Forces Defeated in Ayn al-Arab/Kobane:** YPG advances in Ayn al-Arab appear to have defeated ISIS forces in the town. While ISIS likely maintains positions in the surrounding countryside, the YPG advance into villages south of the town signifies that the YPG is likely to be successful in extending its line of control and penetrating deeper into ISIS terrain. The growing instability in ISIS's control in Raqqa may indicate that the loss of Ayn al-Arab will have asymmetric effects on the ISIS war effort in Syria.

**Rebel – JN Tensions Flare in Northern Syria:** Escalating tensions between JN and rebel forces in both Aleppo and southern Idlib Provinces may indicate growing discontent with increasingly aggressive JN action in northern Syria. JN has historically been successful in mitigating intra-rebel tensions through local Shari'a court mediation, and is likely to continue to pursue this strategy for preserving its gains in northern Syria. However, if no Shari'a mediation emerges, it is possible that JN's control will fragment as it begins to lose key local allies.

**Regime Loses Key Military Base in Dera'a:** After contesting the base for months, JN and rebel forces seized control of the Brigade 82 military base near Sheikh Miskin in southern Dera'a Province. This further defeat of regime forces in Sheikh Miskin is a critical setback for the regime's ability to reestablish a crucial supply line to Dera'a City from Damascus.