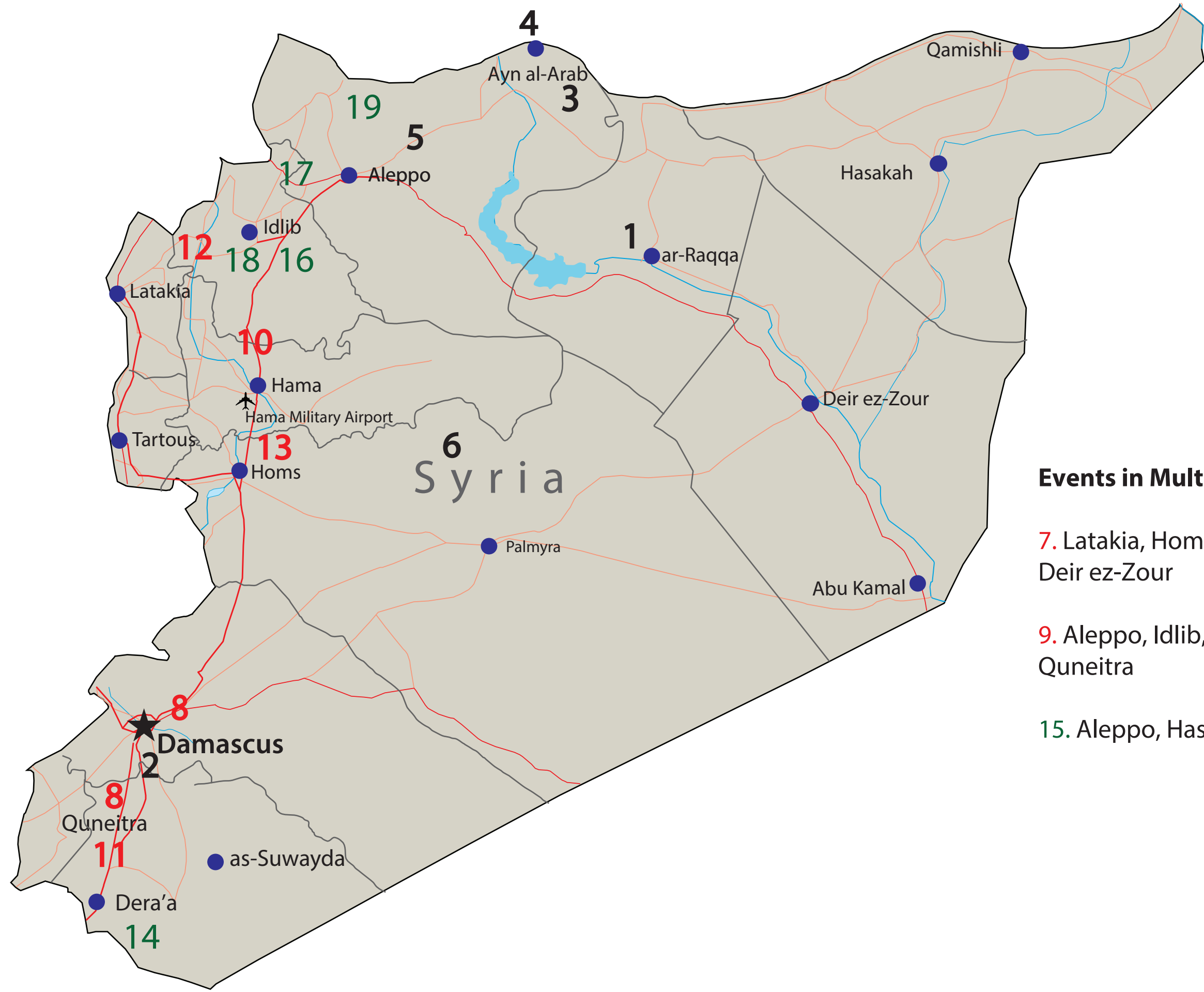


# Syria Update: October 17 - October 29, 2014



## Events in Multiple Provinces

- 7. Latakia, Homs, Hama, Raqqa, Deir ez-Zour
- 9. Aleppo, Idlib, Tartous, Latakia, Quneitra
- 15. Aleppo, Hasaka



by Theodore Bell and Jennifer Cafarella

## ISIS

- October 17: The former commander of Jaysh al-Sham, Rashid Taku, reportedly defected to ISIS, traveling to ar-Raqqa from Idlib with a small group of fighters. (Black, Blue)
- October 17-19: Two assassination attempts targeted rebel commanders in Damascus. An unsuccessful attempt on October 17 targeted a Jaysh al-Ababil commander using either a car bomb or a SVBIED in al-Yarmouk Camp in southern Damascus. A second SVBIED or a SVBIED targeted the commander of Jaysh al-Umma (JU), Abu Subhi Taha, on the outskirts of Douma, northeast of Damascus, killing his son and one of his companions. (Green)
- October 17-29: The YPG and ISIS continue to clash in Ayn al-Arab (Kobane) amid ongoing U.S. CENTCOM airstrikes against ISIS with coordination with the YPG. ISIS is increasingly deploying VBIEDs to maintain its momentum and is reportedly sending younger, less experienced fighters from Aleppo and ar-Raqqa, indicating military setbacks. On October 27 ISIS released a video featuring hostage John Cantlie, supposedly shot inside Ayn al-Arab, in which Cantlie reads from a prepared script claiming the YPG's imminent defeat and an ISIS victory in Ayn al-Arab. (Black, Yellow, Blue)
- October 20: Turkey announced that it would permit an unconfirmed number of Iraqi Peshmerga forces to transit Turkey to support the YPG in Ayn al-Arab. On October 29, the first 80 of the initial detachment of 150 Peshmerga soldiers entered Ayn al-Arab from Turkey. Peshmerga soldiers arrived in Turkey from Erbil by plane while a convoy carried heavy weapons overland. (Yellow, Black)
- October 21: Forty JN fighters, including a commander, reportedly defected to ISIS and moved to al-Bab city in northeastern Aleppo province. This follows rumors of the defection of a JN-allied Salafist brigade, Katiba Khadra, to ISIS on October 20. While Katiba Khadra denied the defection, the commander in question announced that he traveled to ar-Raqqa and pledged allegiance to ISIS along with a number of other Katiba Khadra members following his release from Syrian Revolutionaries Front detention on accusations of being an ISIS member. (Purple, Black, Green)
- October 28: ISIS reportedly captured three gas fields in the Sha'er area of eastern Homs Province after clashes with regime forces near Mount Sha'er. (Black, Red)

## Syrian regime

- October 17-29: The regime continued conscription and reservist mobilization of men born 1973-1991 in the regime stronghold of Latakia as well among the wider population in Homs, Hama, ar-Raqqa, and Deir ez-Zour, indicating severe regime manpower shortages. The regime has also reportedly issued a travel ban on military-age males. (Red)
- October 20-28: The regime reportedly launched two chlorine gas attacks. On October 20 the regime targeted the northeastern Damascus suburb of Harasta, allegedly killing two and injuring at least 12. The chlorine gas attack on October 28 targeted rebels in Deir al-Adas in northern Dera'a province, the site of a previous regime chlorine gas attack. (Red, Green)
- October 22: Syrian President Bashar al-Assad issued a decree replacing the governors of Aleppo, Idlib, Tartous, Latakia, and Quneitra provinces, but refrained from replacing the Homs governor, despite calls from pro-regime protesters for the governor's resignation following the October 1 twin car bomb attack in Homs that killed over 50 children. (Red)
- October 23: The regime seized complete control of the city of Morek, located north of Hama city along the M5 highway, after a heavy three-day aerial bombardment and clashes with JN, the Islamic Front, and other rebel groups. FSA-affiliated groups and groups that appear to have received arms from international backers have reportedly sent reinforcements to the outskirts of Morek and continue to contest the city, calling for a wider rebel mobilization. (Red, Green, Purple)
- October 23-24: Syrian President Bashar al-Assad reportedly ordered the execution of military officers responsible for the loss of Tel al-Hara, located in northern Dera'a province, which was captured by JN and rebel forces on October 5, and allegedly sent Syrian Defense Minister Fahd Jassem Freij to personally oversee the recapture of Tel al-Hara. On October 24 Brigadier General Mahmoud Abu Arraj, commander of the 121st Brigade, 7th Division, defected to Jordan following fears of execution over the loss of Tel al-Hara. The regime has also reportedly executed the commanders of the 90th Brigade, 7th Division in Quneitra and the 7th Division in Damascus on charges of cooperating with the FSA. (Red)
- October 24: Pro-regime sources reported that a regime ambush in northern Latakia Province near the Turkish border killed 31 JN fighters. Pro-regime National Defense Forces also clashed with a JN unit in ad-Durra, northern Latakia Province, reportedly killing 20 JN fighters and six NDF members amidst increased JN activity in the area. (Red, Purple)
- October 27: An IED reportedly unsuccessfully targeted the regime's top military commander in Hama, Suhail Hassan, near Hama Military Airport. In response, the regime detained the chief of Hama Military Intelligence and accused him of planning the assassination. (Red, Green)

## Rebels and Jabhat al-Nusra

- October 20-27: The FSA-affiliated Southern Front captured three regime checkpoints near the Nasib border crossing on the Damascus-Amman M5 highway as part of its October 17-announced Ahl al-Azm offensive in Dera'a, and announced its intention to capture the Nasib customs station on the Syria-Jordan border. (Red, Green)
- October 22: Syrian Kurdish political parties agreed to form a 30-member power-sharing council to govern the majority-Kurdish areas in Aleppo and Hasaka provinces. The body will reportedly manage local elections and form a joint military force, with the YPG at its core. (Yellow)
- October 23: An Islamic body including representatives from JN, the Sham Legion, Ahrar al-Sham, and other rebel groups issued new regulations for media activities in rebel-held areas of Idlib, banning the filming of accurate regime airstrikes out of fear of aiding regime targeting. (Green, Purple)
- October 26-29: JN clashed with Syrian Revolutionaries Front forces in Idlib province. According to an SRF statement, clashes broke out after the SRF, acting on a warrant from a Shari'a court, attempted to detain JN fighters accused of looting and attacking civilians. On October 27 JN reportedly forced the SRF out of several villages in the Jabal al-Zawiya area of southern Idlib, in addition to large portions of Ma'arat al-Nu'man city. U.S.-backed Harakat Hazm stated that it established checkpoints in Idlib province, western Aleppo province in an attempt to separate JN and SRF forces but JN and Harakat Hazm forces have clashed at Harakat Hazm checkpoints as a result. In Aleppo city, JN and Harakat Hazm, together with the Islamic Front, Jaysh al-Mujahedin, Jabhat Ansar al-Din, Harakat Nour al-Din al-Zenki, and the Aleppo Military Council signed a local truce to focus their efforts on fighting the regime. (Green, Purple)
- October 27: JN launched four suicide operations against regime checkpoints in Idlib city, seizing the al-Mastuma hill south of the city as well as a number of buildings and regime positions inside the city itself. The Hamza Division and Suqour al-Ghab, two groups that appear to have received TOW missiles from the U.S., participated in the offensive in addition to Jund al-Aqsa, an Islamist brigade that operates closely with JN. JN and rebel forces reportedly advanced due to cooperation from some members of the regime police force, and executed 70 regime soldiers captured during the attack. However, rebel forces were forced to withdraw after the regime deployed reinforcements to the city and began a heavy bombardment of the area. (Red, Green, Purple)
- October 28: The Islamic Front (IF) executed a couple accused of planting the VBIED that detonated near the Bab al-Salam border crossing with Turkey on September 16. The couple had reportedly confessed to setting the VBIED in coordination with the "Palestine Branch" of regime military intelligence. (Green)

## Key Takeaway:

The regime's seizure of Morek is a significant setback for rebel forces seeking to maintain the disruption of the regime's preferred supply line to Aleppo north from Hama along the M5 highway. The JN-led assault against Idlib city was likely targeted to force the regime to divert attention away from this critical corridor to allow rebels to bolster their defense of Khan Shaykhoun, located north of Morek, which has come under increased regime bombardment as regime forces consolidate. Meanwhile, the ongoing JN and SRF clashes in Idlib province create a vulnerability for rebel forces in defending the M5 highway from a reinvigorated regime offensive. However, the uptick in regime conscription, detention, and reservist mobilization campaigns by the regime across Syria is in turn a critical indicator of regime manpower shortages and the regime may not possess the necessary forces to project further north. As such, ongoing rebel successes against the regime in southern Syria may force the regime to abandon this front if it encounters stiffer resistance as it pushes into rebel-held areas of the M5 highway.