

Syria Update: November 04 - 11, 2014

1 November 5: The regime reportedly plans to form a new "national security" militia unit in Deir ez-Zour city that will be used to retake areas of the western countryside of the city before moving to the eastern front lines.

2 November 6: Syrian state television claimed that regime force recaptured the Sha'er gas fields, near Palmyra in eastern Homs Province, from ISIS on November 6. The regime had reportedly deployed prominent regime commander Colonel Suhail Hassan to the area along with reinforcements on November 5, amidst an ISIS VBIED at a regime checkpoint at the northern entrance of Palmyra and an SVBIED at a regime checkpoint in as-Sukhna, northeast of Palmyra.

3 November 6: U.S. warplanes conducted five strikes against "Khorasan Group" targets near Sarmada in northwestern Idlib province, sparking civilian protests in Aleppo. Media reports indicated that JN and Ahrar al-Sham members were also targeted in the strikes, possibly indicating the colocation of these elements with the Khorasan targets. However, CENTCOM was careful to clarify that this did not represent an escalation against JN, denying that the strikes were in response to the JN expansion in Idlib. At least one of the strikes is alleged to have targeted a vehicle transporting French bomb-maker David Drugeon, however there has been no confirmation of the effectiveness of the strikes.

4 November 7: JN and Ahrar al-Sham conducted an operation against regime and Hezbollah forces near al-Zabadani in the Qalamoun mountains northwest of Damascus, killing over 100 regime soldiers and capturing several armored vehicles.

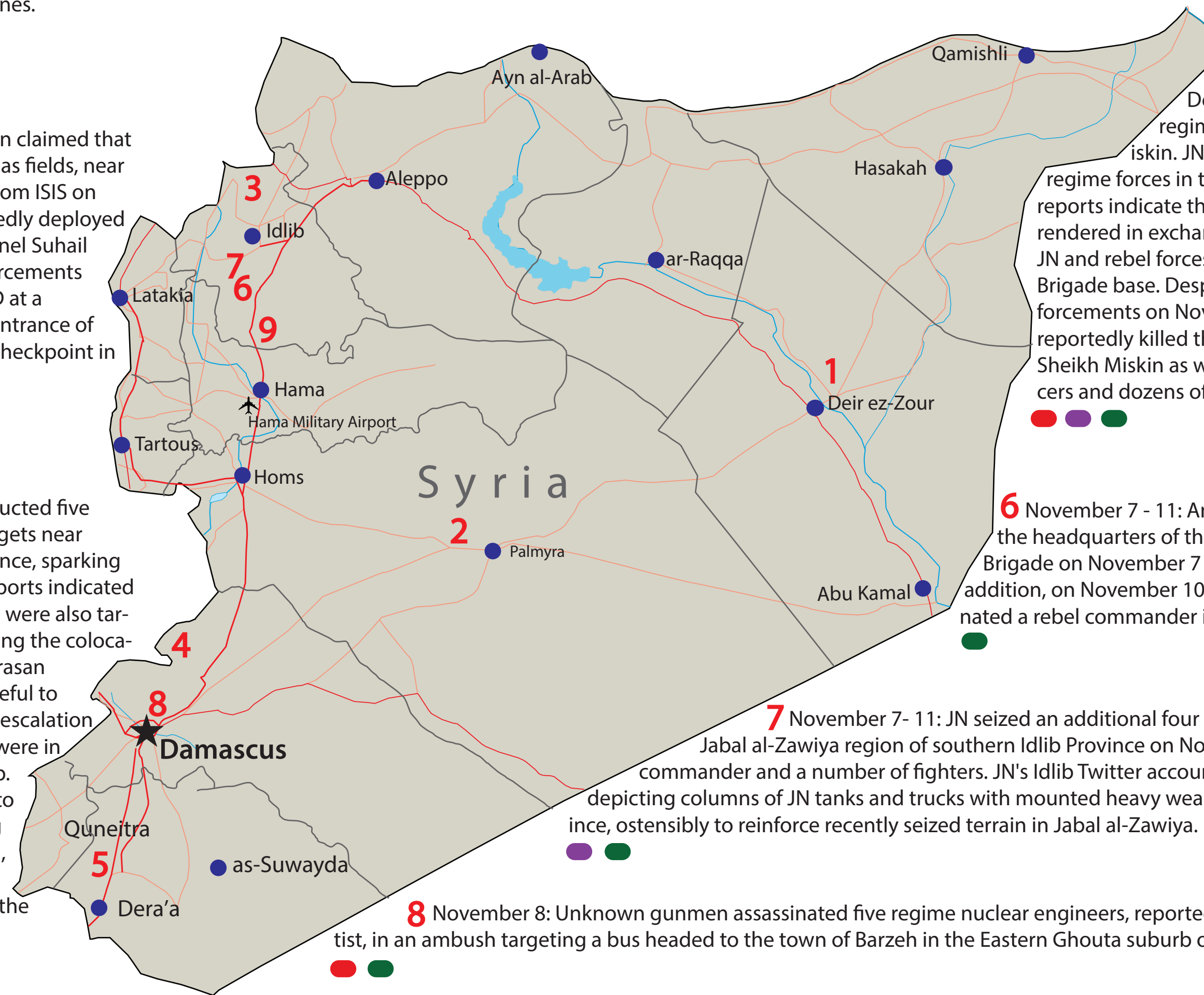
5 November 7 - 9: JN and rebel forces seized full control of the town of Nawa, north of Dera'a city, after severing the regime's supply line from Sheikh iskin. JN claimed the defection of regime forces in the area, however conflicting reports indicate that regime soldiers surrendered in exchange for safe passage, allowing JN and rebel forces to seize the regime's 112th Brigade base. Despite the arrival of regime reinforcements on November 5, rebel forces had reportedly killed the regime's commander in Sheikh Miskin as well as a number of other officers and dozens of soldiers during the advance.

6 November 7 - 11: An IED reportedly detonated in the headquarters of the U.S.-backed Fursan al-Haq Brigade on November 7 in Kafr Nabl, Idlib Province. In addition, on November 10, unknown gunmen assassinated a rebel commander in Idlib.

7 November 7- 11: JN seized an additional four villages near al-Bara in the Jabal al-Zawiya region of southern Idlib Province on November 7, arresting a rebel commander and a number of fighters. JN's Idlib Twitter account distributed photos depicting columns of JN tanks and trucks with mounted heavy weaponry arriving in Idlib province, ostensibly to reinforce recently seized terrain in Jabal al-Zawiya.

8 November 8: Unknown gunmen assassinated five regime nuclear engineers, reportedly including an Iranian scientist, in an ambush targeting a bus headed to the town of Barzeh in the Eastern Ghouta suburb of Damascus.

9 November 10: 12 rebel groups, including JN, Ahrar al-Sham, Faylaq al-Sham, and a number of FSA-affiliated brigades established a joint operations room to defend Khan Shaykoun and liberate Morek from regime forces in northern Hama Province.



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



by Jennifer Cafarella and Theodore Bell

The U.S. conducted a second round of strikes against "Khorasan Group" targets in Northwestern Idlib province, reportedly killing a number of JN and Ahrar al-Sham fighters that appeared to have been collocated with the "Khorasan" targets. However, CENTCOM's clarification that the strikes did not represent an escalation against JN indicates that the U.S. campaign in Syria remains focused on counter-terror operations in response to the growing al-Qaeda threat, in addition to the ongoing effort to disrupt ISIS in Syria as a supporting effort to ground operations in Iraq. Meanwhile, JN continues to expand and consolidate its control in Jabal al-Zawiya in southern Idlib Province alongside allied rebel forces following its ousting of the Syrian Revolutionaries Front and Harakat Hazm beginning on October 27. The deployment of armored vehicles and heavy weaponry to the area by JN indicates its intention to hold newly acquired ground rather than cede control to local forces. In addition, JN and the FSA-affiliated Southern Front have made significant gains in Dera'a Province, threatening to fully sever the regime's supply line to Dera'a City. The inability of regime forces to reverse rebel momentum in southern Syria despite the repeated deployment of reinforcements is a crucial indicator of JN and rebel strength in Dera'a, and highlights the regime's growing manpower and morale challenges.