

# Syria Update: January 6-12, 2015

**1** January 10: A double suicide vest (SVESV) attack occurred at the Omran cafe in the Alawite-majority Jabal Mohsen neighborhood of Tripoli, killing 9 and wounding 30. JN claimed credit for the attack, and stated that it targeted the National Democratic Party, an Alawite political movement with ties to the Syrian regime. In the aftermath of the attack, the Lebanese internal security forces conducted a raid into the notorious "B Block" of Rumieh prison after reportedly gathering intelligence that a number of prisoners were connected to the attack. Commenting on the Rumieh raid, Lebanon's Interior minister Nohad al-Mashnouq implicated ISIS rather than JN in the attack.

**2** January 6: The JN-affiliated 'Dar al-Qadaa' courthouse in Aleppo Province disbanded police stations in the towns of Huraytan, Anadan, and Kafr Hamra, accusing the stations of "receiving support from foreign bodies."

**3** January 6: ISIS released a video titled "A Message from the Muslims to the Family of the Pilot" containing interviews with residents of ISIS-controlled areas in Syria calling for the execution of captured Jordanian fighter pilot Muath al-Kasaesbeh.

**4** January 8: A group of young Druze men attacked the local regime recruitment division in the town of Salkhad in Suwayda Province in order to free a young man who had been detained for compulsory military service.

**5** January 7: An IED destroyed the historical tomb of Imam al-Nawawi in the town of Nawa, west of Sheikh Miskin in Dera'a Province. The regime and local activists both accused JN of conducting the bombing; JN denied involvement and claimed the attack was conducted in an attempt to create a rift between JN and local residents.

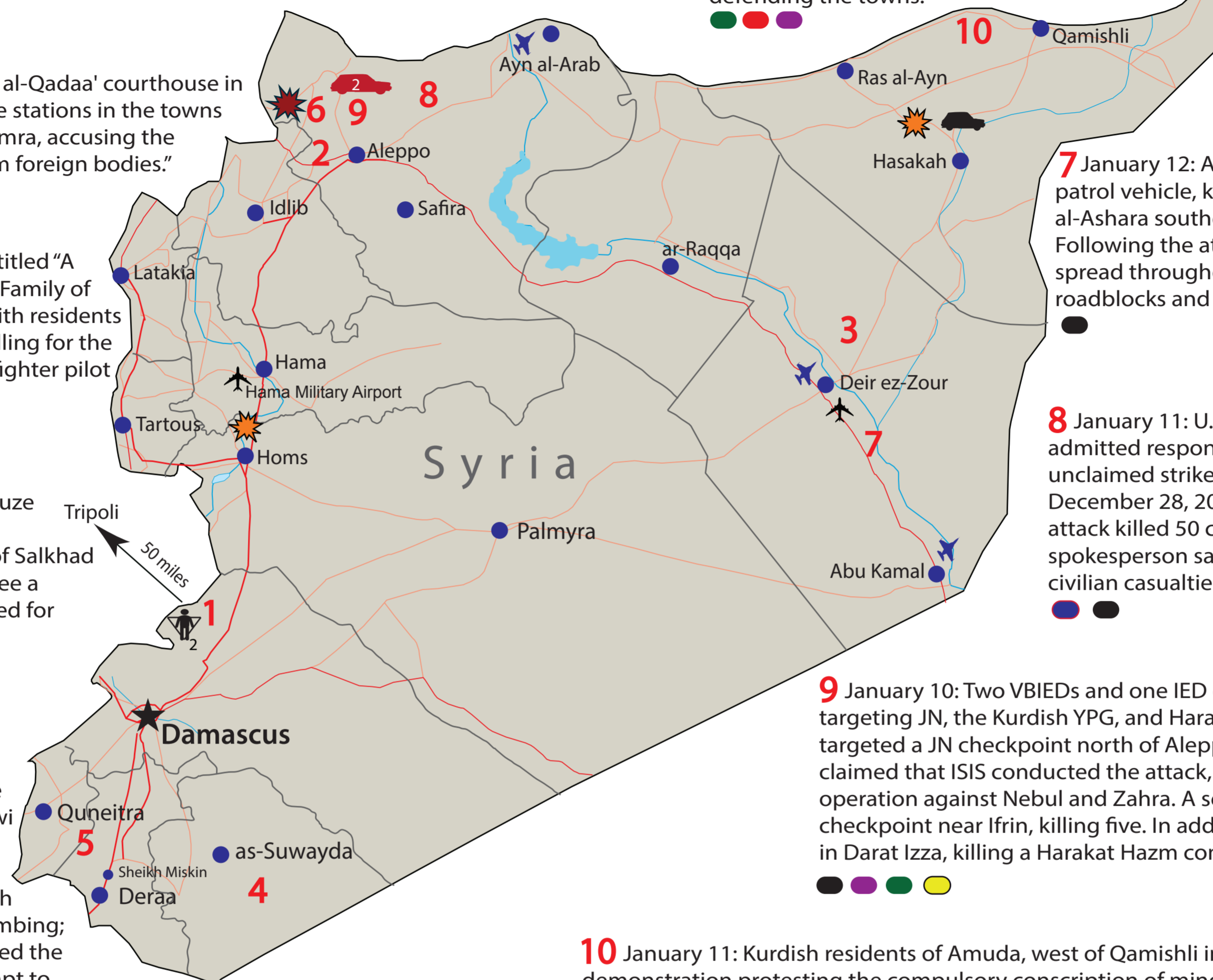
**6** January 8-9: JN launched a renewed offensive against the isolated regime enclave of Nebul and Zahra north of Aleppo City, claiming to shell the towns with over 500 mortars amidst heavy clashes with regime forces. Salafi-Jihadist group Jabhat Ansar al-Din and other unidentified rebel groups participated in the attack, temporarily advancing into the outskirts of the towns before being forced to withdraw. The attack took advantage of a severe snowstorm to attack the enclave while the regime was unable to deploy air assets in support of regime forces defending the towns.

**7** January 12: An IED targeted an ISIS Hisba patrol vehicle, killing five, in the town of al-Ashara southeast of Deir ez-Zour city. Following the attack, armed ISIS elements spread throughout the city, setting up roadblocks and searching cars.

**8** January 11: U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) admitted responsibility for a previously unclaimed strike on an ISIS building in al-Bab on December 28, 2014. Local activists claim the attack killed 50 civilians, however a CENTCOM spokesperson said that the U.S. was unaware of civilian casualties incurred in the strike.

**9** January 10: Two VBIEDs and one IED detonated in Aleppo province, targeting JN, the Kurdish YPG, and Harakat Hazm. One of the VBIEDs targeted a JN checkpoint north of Aleppo city, killing thirteen. JN claimed that ISIS conducted the attack, taking advantage of JN's operation against Nebul and Zahra. A second VBIED detonated at a YPG checkpoint near Ifrin, killing five. In addition, an IED detonated in a car in Darat Izza, killing a Harakat Hazm commander.

**10** January 11: Kurdish residents of Amuda, west of Qamishli in Hasaka Province, held a demonstration protesting the compulsory conscription of minors for service in YPG forces following the conscription of a 16-year-old schoolgirl in the town.



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

**Background Kinetic Activity**

- Anti-ISIS Coalition Airstrikes
- SVBIED
- Low-level clashes

January 11: ISIS militants detonated a SVBIED near a YPG post near Safiya, north of Hasaka city



Content: Jennifer Cafarella  
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**VBIED Attacks in Aleppo May Signify Increased ISIS Aggression:** The three attacks targeting JN, the YPG, and Harakat Hazm in Aleppo Province on January 10 may indicate an attempt by ISIS to disrupt rebel systems in Aleppo Province. ISIS may undertake such attacks as a conditions-setting operation for a renewed offensive against the JN and rebel-held town of Marea north of Aleppo city. Alternatively, the attack that killed a Harakat Hazm commander could have been conducted by JN, which has increased its direct aggression toward moderate rebel forces since ousting the Syrian Revolutionaries Front (SRF) from the Jabal al-Zawiya area of Idlib Province. Continued attacks against JN and rebel forces in Aleppo may threaten the ability of anti-regime forces to maintain their resistance to the regime's attempted encirclement of Aleppo City.

**JN Conducts a Double Suicide Attack in Tripoli:** JN appears to be increasing its pressure on supporters of the Assad regime in Lebanon. The double suicide vest (SVESV) attack in Lebanon's northern city of Tripoli marks the first serious breach of a security plan implemented by the Lebanese Armed Forces in June of 2014 following tension between Alawite and Sunni communities connected to opposing sides of the war in Syria. The attack follows a warning issued by JN leader Abu Mohammad al-Joulani in November 2014 that "the true battle in Lebanon has not actually begun, and what is coming, Allah willing, is worse and more bitter for Hezbollah." While the attack did not target Hezbollah forces or supporters, it targeted the National Democratic Party, an Alawite political organization with ties to the Assad regime. The statement by the Lebanese Interior Minister may indicate cooperation between ISIS and JN in conducting the attack, however ISIS has issued no formal claim of participation.

**The Regime Continues to Foment Unrest through Conscription:** Unrest continues to build in the Druze area of Suwayda Province as the regime continues to conscript young men for military service despite statements of protest by Druze leaders. If this trend continues, the regime may risk losing critical elements of support from within the Druze community, which may provide an increasing advantage to rebel forces combating the regime in southern Dera'a Province. Regime forces remain unsuccessful in changing the momentum in southern Syria, where rebel forces with the participation of JN continue to make gains against regime strongholds.