

# Syria Situation Report: October 14 - 27, 2020

**1 Oct. 14 - 21: Russian Forces Attempt to Create New Military Positions following SNA-SDF Clashes in Northern Syria.** The Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) and Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) clashed near Ayn Issa and Tal Abyad, Raqqa Province, on October 14. Following the clashes, a leaked report indicated Russia intended to establish new military positions in the area. Russian forces proposed that the SDF reduce its military presence in the area in exchange for an increase in pro-regime forces following SDF-SNA clashes near Ayn Issa on October 21.

**2 Oct. 14 - 23: Assassination of Former Opposition Leader by SMI Operatives Triggers Unrest in Daraa Province.** Suspected Syrian Military Intelligence (SMI) gunmen assassinated former Free Syrian Army commander Adham al-Akrad and four other reconciled opposition members near Sanamayn, Daraa Province, on October 14. Nearly 3,000 demonstrators protested the Assad regime following Adham al-Akrad's funeral in Daraa city on October 15. The opposition-aligned Syrian National Coalition held the Assad regime, Iran, and Russia responsible for the assassination while calling for local youth to reconsider reconciliation. Hundreds of protesters in Daraa City, Tafas, Al-Hirak, and Maaraba called for the overthrow of the Assad regime, release of detainees, and expulsion of Iranian militias on October 23.

**3 Oct. 15 - 19: TSK Repositions Forces, Likely Due to Mounting Regime and Russian Pressure in Greater Idlib Province.** The Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) established a new military position near Qafin, southern Idlib Province, on October 15. The TSK deconstructed defenses and withdrew forces, with a Russian military police escort, from its observation post in regime-held Morek, Hama Province on October 19. Unnamed Turkish officials cited Russian harassment of resupply convoys and Assad regime-led protests outside the posts as the reason for the withdrawal. Turkey reportedly plans to withdraw from additional observation posts and military points in regime-held territory. The TSK has not provided a timeline for withdrawals, but they will likely occur in the coming weeks.

**4 Oct. 15 - 22: US-led Coalition Continues to Degrade al-Qaeda-linked Groups in Idlib Province.** A Coalition unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) killed former Hurras al-Din (HaD) leaders Abu Dharr al-Masri and Abu Yusuf al-Maghribi with a missile in Arab Saeed, Idlib Province, on October 15. A drone strike killed 14 people including al-Fateh Brigade founders Hammoud Sahara and Abu Talha al-Hadidi, at least 11 Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)-linked leaders, and al-Akidat Tribe leaders in Jakara, Idlib Province on October 22.

**5 Oct. 17: Two ISIS Attacks Threaten US Military in Northeastern Syria.** Likely ISIS militants killed two SDF members in a motorcycle-borne improvised explosive device attack in Himo, Hasakah Province, next to a US military base. Possible ISIS militants conducted an improvised explosive device attack targeting a US convoy in al Sabhah, Deir e-Zor Province. No casualties were reported.

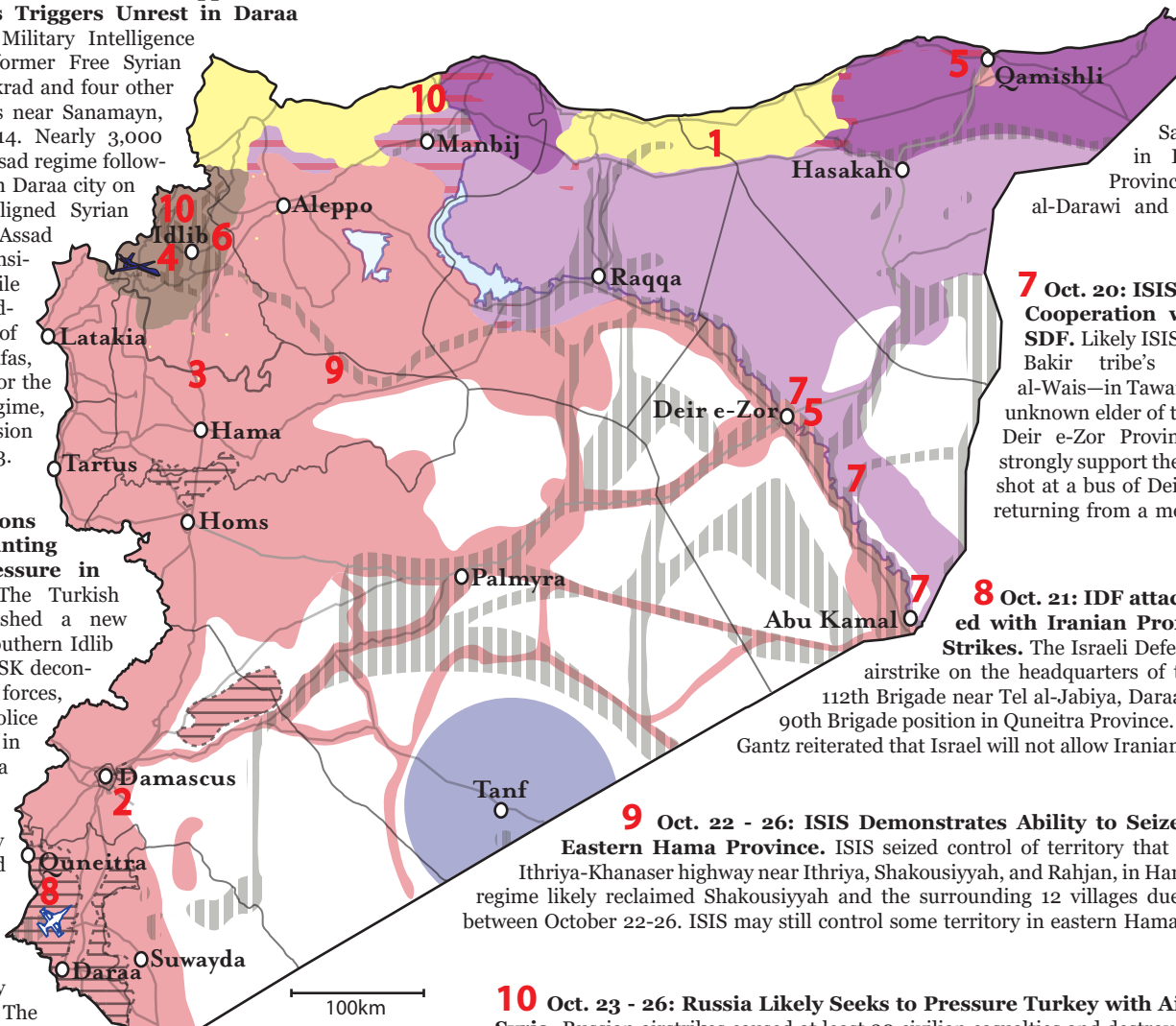
**6 Oct. 19: HTS Continues Crackdown on Rivals in Idlib Province.** HTS arrested 25 members of the rival Salafi-jihadist organization HaD in Idlib city and Fu'ah, Idlib Province. HaD leaders Abu Abd al-Darawi and Abu Ahmad al-Darawi were among the arrested.

**7 Oct. 20: ISIS Aims to Discourage Tribal Cooperation with US Officials and the SDF.** Likely ISIS militants killed a sheikh of the Bakir tribe's Rakywat clan—Ali Wahab al-Wais—in Tawamiya and seriously wounded an unknown elder of the Mashadeh tribe in al Sabha, Deir e-Zor Province. Members of both tribes strongly support the SDF. Likely ISIS militants also shot at a bus of Deir e-Zor Civil Council members returning from a meeting with US officials near al Jiya'ah.

**8 Oct. 21: IDF attacks SAA Positions Associated with Iranian Proxies and Warns of Future Strikes.** The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) conducted an airstrike on the headquarters of the Syrian Arab Army's (SAA) 112th Brigade near Tel al-Jabiya, Daraa Province, and shelled an SAA 90th Brigade position in Quneitra Province. Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz reiterated that Israel will not allow Iranian-backed groups near the Golan Heights.

**9 Oct. 22 - 26: ISIS Demonstrates Ability to Seize and Control Territory in Eastern Hama Province.** ISIS seized control of territory that included 12 villages along the Ithriya-Khanaser highway near Ithriya, Shakousiyah, and Rahjan, in Hama Province on October 22. The regime likely reclaimed Shakousiyah and the surrounding 12 villages due to significant reinforcements between October 22-26. ISIS may still control some territory in eastern Hama and is likely waging a counter attack.

**10 Oct. 23 - 26: Russia Likely Seeks to Pressure Turkey with Airstrikes in TSK-controlled Syria.** Russian airstrikes caused at least 20 civilian casualties and destroyed a fuel market near Jarablus, Aleppo Province, on October 23. The TSK reportedly uses the site to fuel their vehicles. Russian airstrikes killed roughly 100 fighters from the Turkish proxy Faylaq al-Sham near Kafr Takharim, Idlib Province, on October 26. The attack marks one of the largest airstrikes Russia has conducted in Syria and significantly it targeted a Turkish proxy rather than Salafi-jihadist opposition groups, the focus of Russian airstrikes since March. Russia is likely seeking to degrade the TSK's and its proxies' capabilities in Syria to force Turkey to accept a negotiated deal allowing for a regime offensive in southern Idlib Province.

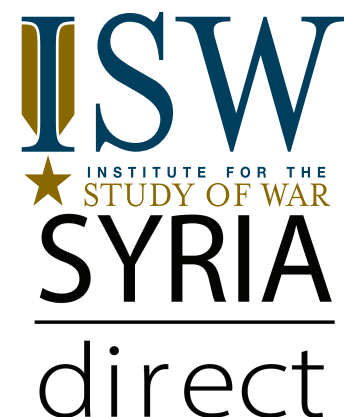


- Pro-Regime
- Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)
- Core SDF-Held Kurdish Terrain
- ISIS Support Zones
- SDF-Dominated, Regime Presence
- US and Partner Forces
- Former Opposition Terrain (Reconciled)
- Al Qaeda-Dominated\*
- Turkey-Opposition
- ✈ US Drone Strike
- ✈ Israeli Airstrikes

\*AL QAEDA-LINKED GROUPS CONTROL NEARLY ALL GOVERNANCE AND MILITARY STRUCTURES IN GREATER IDLIB PROVINCE. VARIOUS LOCAL ACTORS ASSERT LIMITED CONTROL OVER ISOLATED AREAS OF GREATER IDLIB.

Control of Terrain Accurate as of October 27, 2020

**Key Takeaway:** Russia is militarily pressuring Turkey across northern Syria likely to force a favorable negotiated settlement. Russian forces are likely setting conditions for negotiations by seeking to establish new positions along the Turkish border in Raqqa Province, forcing Turkey to withdraw from observation posts in regime-held territory, and conducting airstrikes against Turkish proxies and infrastructure in Aleppo Province. Turkey will likely respond to Russian pressure by escalating its involvement in Syria or another theater of conflict between the two countries, such as Nagorno Karabakh.



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