



## Weekly Conflict Summary

June 30 - July 6, 2016

The conflict events in Syria between 30 June - 6 July again focused primarily on the governorate of Aleppo, where about half of recorded instances of conflict occurred. Most conflict in the governorate happened in the cities of Menbij and Aleppo.

On 6 July, the Syrian government announced a nationwide 72-hour ceasefire for Eid al-Fitr. Just hours after the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) declared a ceasefire for Eid al-Fitr, barrel bombs fell on Hureitan, north of Aleppo and pro-government forces have reportedly nearly captured the besieged town of Madaya in Rural Damascus.

Government forces also continued their offensive to take control of Castillo Road and surround the city of Aleppo, succeeding (as of July 7<sup>th</sup>) in closing the road and effectively besieging the opposition-controlled portion of Aleppo city. Pro-government forces are not, however, in full control of the area and heavy fighting continues with opposition reinforcements trying to push back recent gains.

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) offensive for Menbij continues, with a few setbacks. ISIS has launched multiple attempts to break the siege, deploying suicide bombers to the northeast and west of the city to paralyze SDF frontlines. ISIS claims to have recaptured a handful of villages to the north and east of the city, reoccupying villages and hills in the surrounding area. SDF reports that about 600 ISIS fighters remain in Menbij, though this estimate has not been independently verified.

On July 2, Jabhat al-Nusra fighters captured the leader of Jaysh al-Tahrir and about 40 of his fighters in Kafr Nobol in Idleb governorate.<sup>1</sup> Jaysh al-Tahrir is backed by Western governments and thus joins a long list of similar groups that have been targeted by Jabhat al-Nusra.

An offensive launched by Jaysh al-Fatah in Latakia last week was successful in retaking Kansaba from pro-government forces. The city is a strategic point in Jabal al-Akrad as it overlooks the opposition supply line along the Aleppo-Latakia highway. This location capture will make it increasingly difficult for pro-government forces in their attempts to recapture the mountain ranges near the port of Latakia. Heavy aerial bombardment continued in Jabal al-Turkman and Jabal al-Akrad throughout the week.

A previous advance by the US-backed New Syrian Army (NSyA) along the Iraqi border has been effectively reversed as ISIS fighters forced NSyA combatants to withdraw to al-Tanif crossing on the border with Jordan (Figure 1).

---

<sup>1</sup> Al-Khalidi, Suleiman, 3 July 2016. Nusra captures leader, fighters of Western-backed rebels in northern Syria. *Reuters*. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-nusra-idUSKCN0ZJ0F3>

Elsewhere in eastern Syria, a suicide attack on a bakery in a Kurdish market in Hasakah killed 16 on July 5. The attack targeted civilians buying food in preparation for Eid and has not yet been claimed.

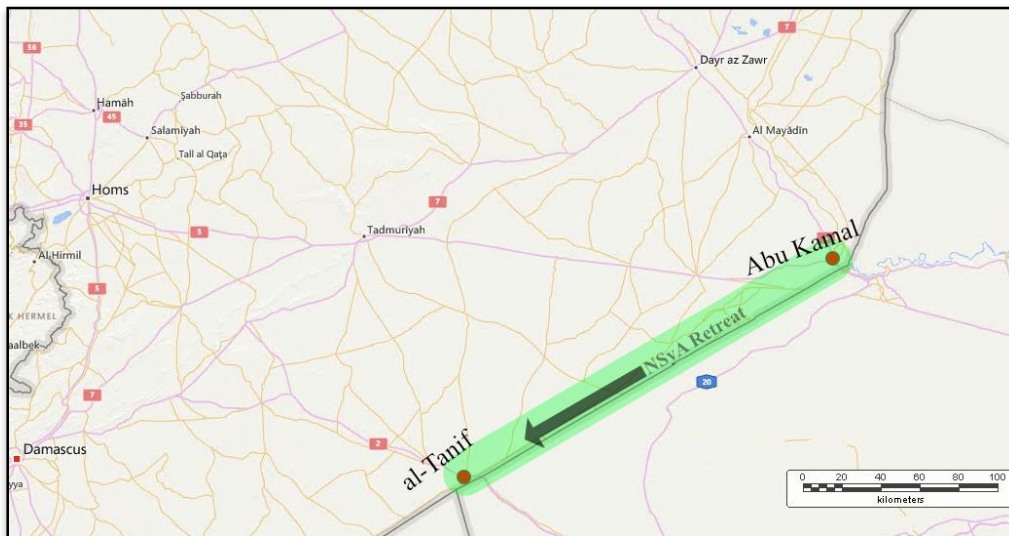


Figure 1: Map of NSyA retreat from Abu Kamal to al-Tanfif since last week

Over the past week, several government planes and helicopters were shot down, primarily in areas controlled by Jaysh al-Islam in Damascus and its countryside. A Syrian Air Force pilot was executed by Jabhat al-Nusra after ejecting from his warplane on 2 July near Jayrud, 60km northeast of Damascus. The day after the killing, Syrian government airstrikes hit Jayrud, ending a two-year local truce. The truce had been agreed upon by local leaders and Syrian government forces.

### Conclusion

The effective besiegement of opposition-controlled eastern Aleppo is the culmination of a prolonged offensive in the area. Since reaching the besieged towns of Zahraa and Nubul earlier in 2016, pro-government forces have slowly worked their way south, pressuring a narrowing line of opposition access into Aleppo city. The past few weeks have seen a heavy increase in aerial bombardment, which culminated in the ongoing ground offensive. Given the long history of besiegement as a preferred tactic over the course of this conflict, the status of civilians in eastern Aleppo should be of paramount concern for all actors involved.

The fact that this final ground offensive took place during a government-announced ceasefire for Eid is more worrying still, as it has dramatically eroded what little trust remained between parties. Furthermore, the inability - or unwillingness - of international actors to compel adherence to the ceasefire and prevent the besiegement of eastern Aleppo suggests that the political progress that was made with the cessation of hostilities and the resumption of talks earlier in 2016 has been wholly reversed, and that there is still no end in sight for the Syrian conflict.