



The Status of Forces in Aleppo City

November 7, 2014

Areas of Control:

Syrian government and pro-government forces have been conducting a campaign to re-capture and secure the eastern suburbs of Aleppo city since March 2014. This campaign has seen incremental advances through town-to-town fighting at a rate of approximately 2km per month. Since October 2, fighting has been concentrated in the towns of Handarat and Handarat Camp, with government forces gaining a large degree of control in the area. This recent advance has put government forces within firing range of most opposition supply routes into the city, complicating re-supply efforts for fighters and civilians alike. Given the time this advance has taken, complete government encirclement of opposition positions in Aleppo city is unlikely in the near future. Continuing at the current rate of advance, such an initiative would take several more months and be increasingly costly as more opposition groups respond to the call for assistance. Furthermore, with government forces having already achieved a significant disruption of opposition supply lines, they may choose to consolidate gains in existing areas of control rather than spreading themselves thin and risking an opposition counter-attack or an advance by Islamic State (IS) forces from the east.

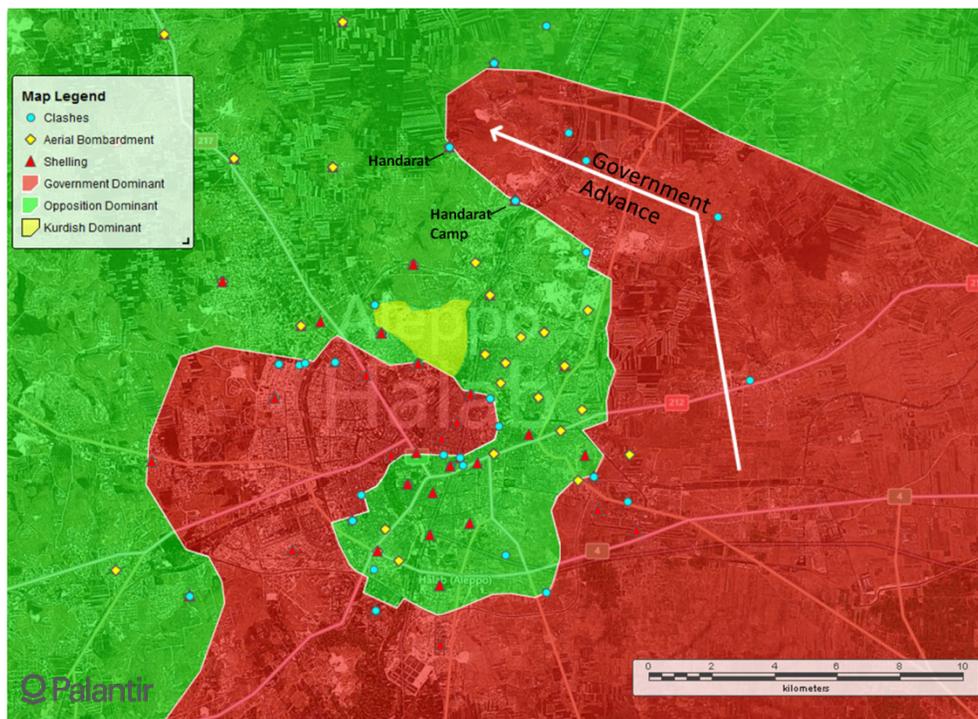


Figure 1: Areas of control as of November 7, 2014, overlaid with conflict events from October 1 - November 7, 2014.

Overview of Opposition Forces:

Opposition forces in Aleppo city have been present since the beginning of the conflict. The city ranks second only to greater Damascus with respect to the number of armed groups that have formed locally. These armed groups overwhelmingly formed in the eastern and southern districts of the city, and have maintained control of the areas throughout. The relatively large area of control of opposition groups in the city, the support they receive from the local population, and the entrenched nature of largely stagnant front lines makes government recapture of eastern and southern Aleppo city highly unlikely.

While clashes persist along the front lines within the city, Syrian government forces have largely resorted to siege tactics and heavy aerial bombardment, hitting opposition controlled neighborhoods with an increasingly devastating barrage of barrel bombs.

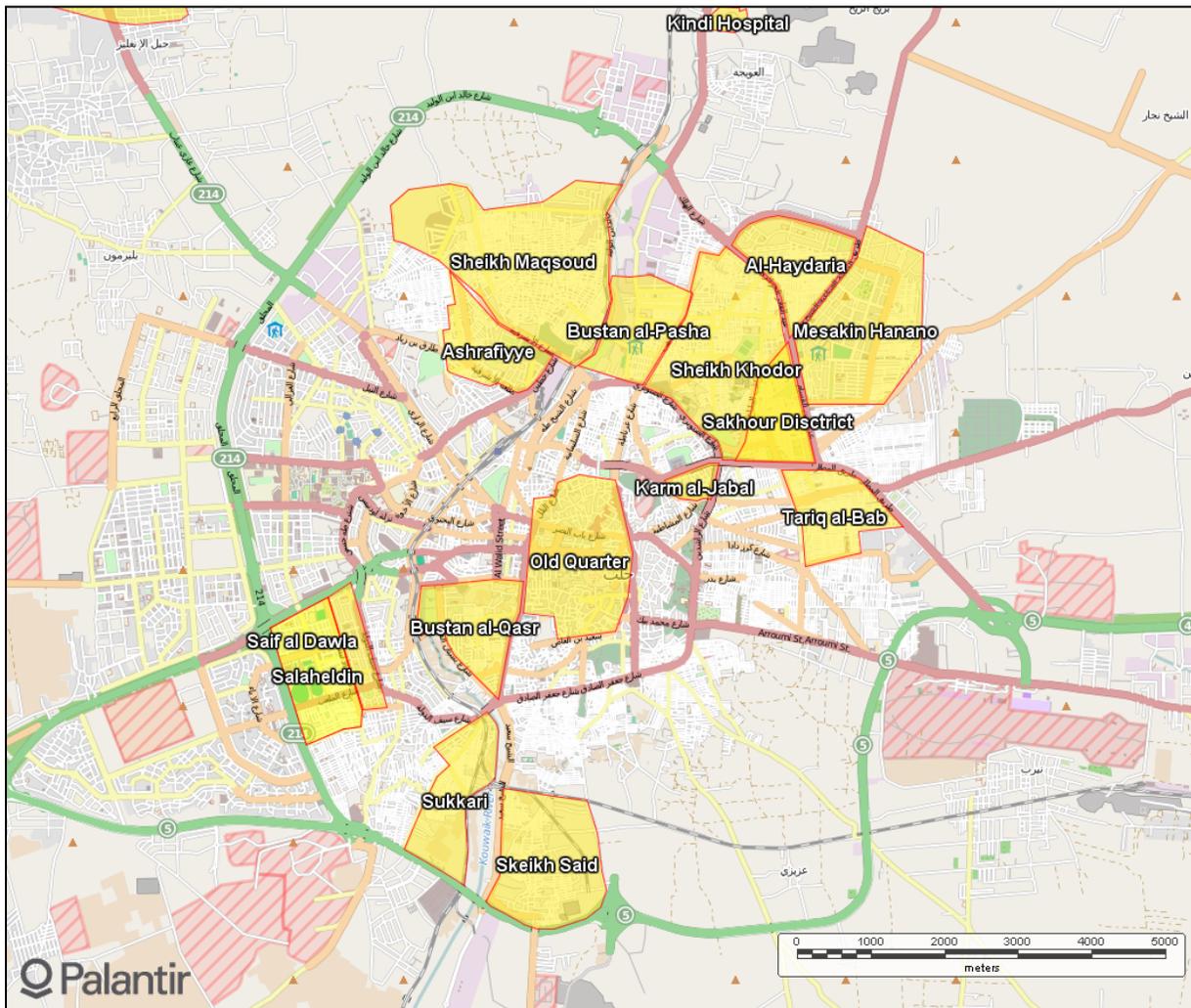


Figure 2: Areas of Aleppo city that have seen armed group formations over the course of the conflict.

There is a large and diverse group of armed opposition forces operating in and around Aleppo city. These include groups affiliated with the Aleppo Revolutionary Military Council, the Islamic Front, Jabhat al-Nusra, and several additional independent organizations. Despite the diverse nature of these groups, nearly all organizations operating in the area cooperate closely with one another to oppose the Syrian government advance from the south and preventing further advance by the IS to the north and east.

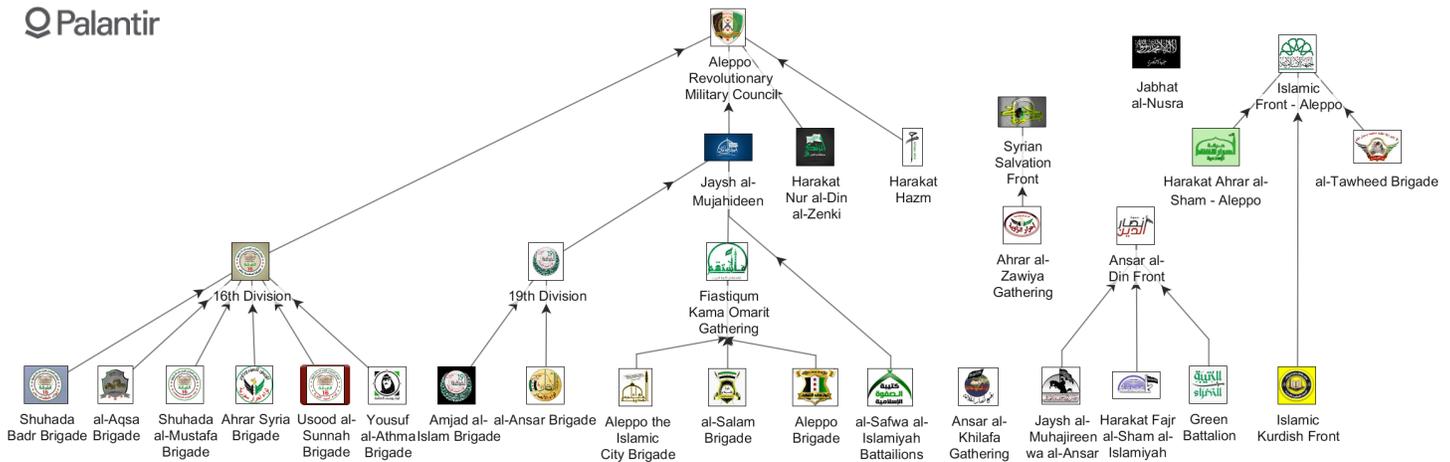


Figure 3: Primary armed opposition groups operating in Aleppo city. Vertical positioning can be seen as a rough estimate of each group’s importance or strength in the area (higher placement representing stronger position with respect to other group).

Government forces in Aleppo city, while apparently under a unified command, are also comprised of a variety of groups. In addition to regular Syrian army troops, fighters from the officially sanctioned National Defense Forces have played a heavy role in fighting, as have troops from Hezbollah, the Palestinian al-Quds Brigade, and the Ba’ath Forces. There have also been reports of fighters from Iran and Afghanistan fighting alongside government forces.

The Islamic State:

The fight for control of the eastern outskirts of Aleppo took place during one of the most violent and dramatic expansions of Islamic State areas of control. While opposition and government forces were myopically occupied with control over a 40 square kilometer strip of land, Islamic State fighters expanded hundreds of kilometers through both opposition and government controlled territory, killing hundreds of opposition and government forces alike.

A slightly wider view of areas of control in the area reveals the serious threat that the IS poses to both opposition and government positions in the area. While the organization’s attention is, at the moment, focused on Kurdish and opposition forces along the Turkish border in Kobane and Ras al-Ain, a shift in attention towards Aleppo city could have disastrous effects on both opposition and government forces that have largely turned their attention toward each other.

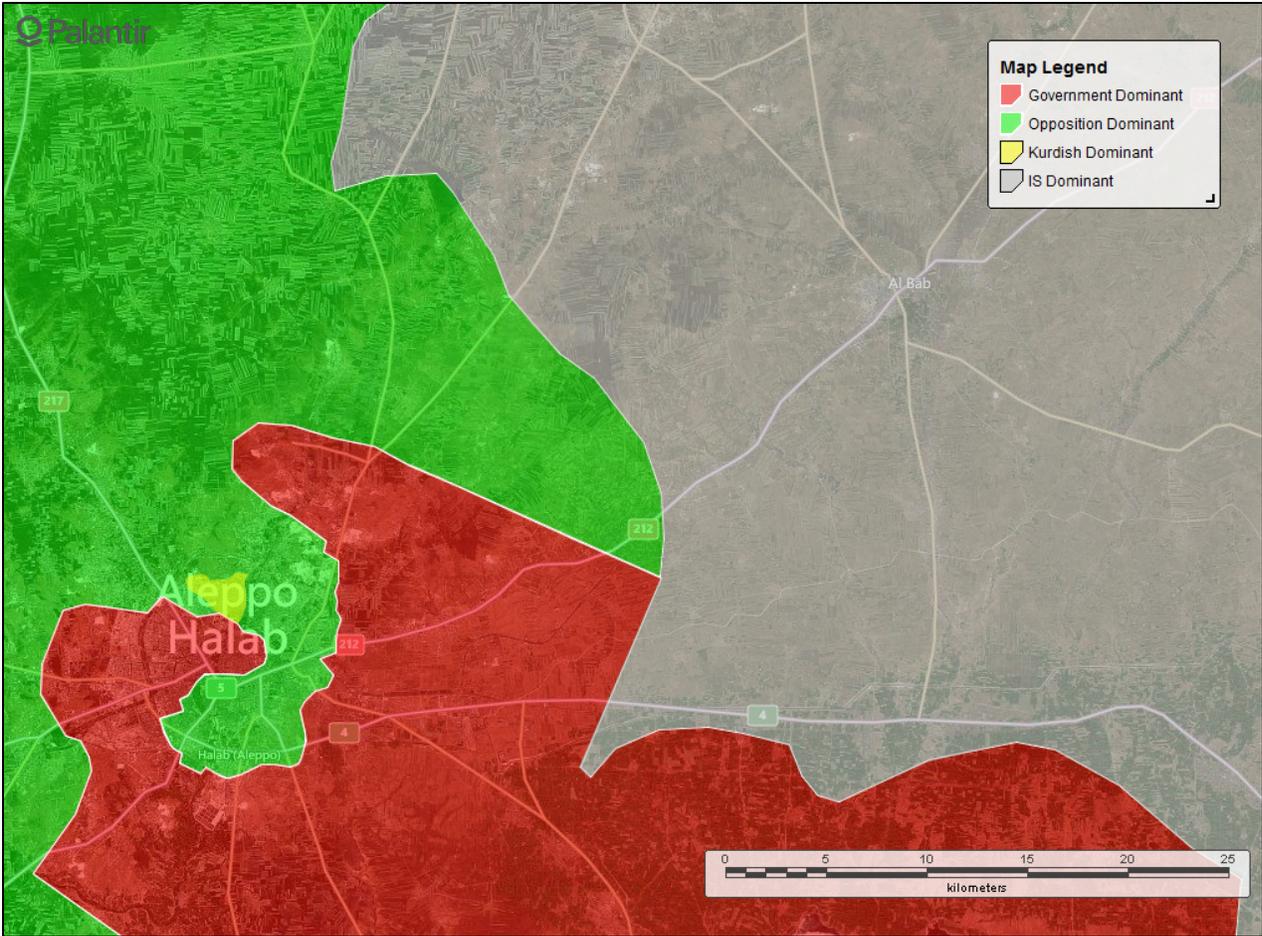


Figure 4: Areas of control surrounding Aleppo city as of November 7, 2014.