



Weekly Conflict Summary

July 21-27, 2016

Government forces, working from both eastern Aleppo and the northern countryside, have consolidated their control over Castello Road, fully besieging opposition areas in eastern Aleppo. While Kurdish forces in the Sheikh Maqsood district of Aleppo also advanced outwards, taking advantage of beleaguered opposition forces by siezing control of the Youth Housing complex near Castello Road.

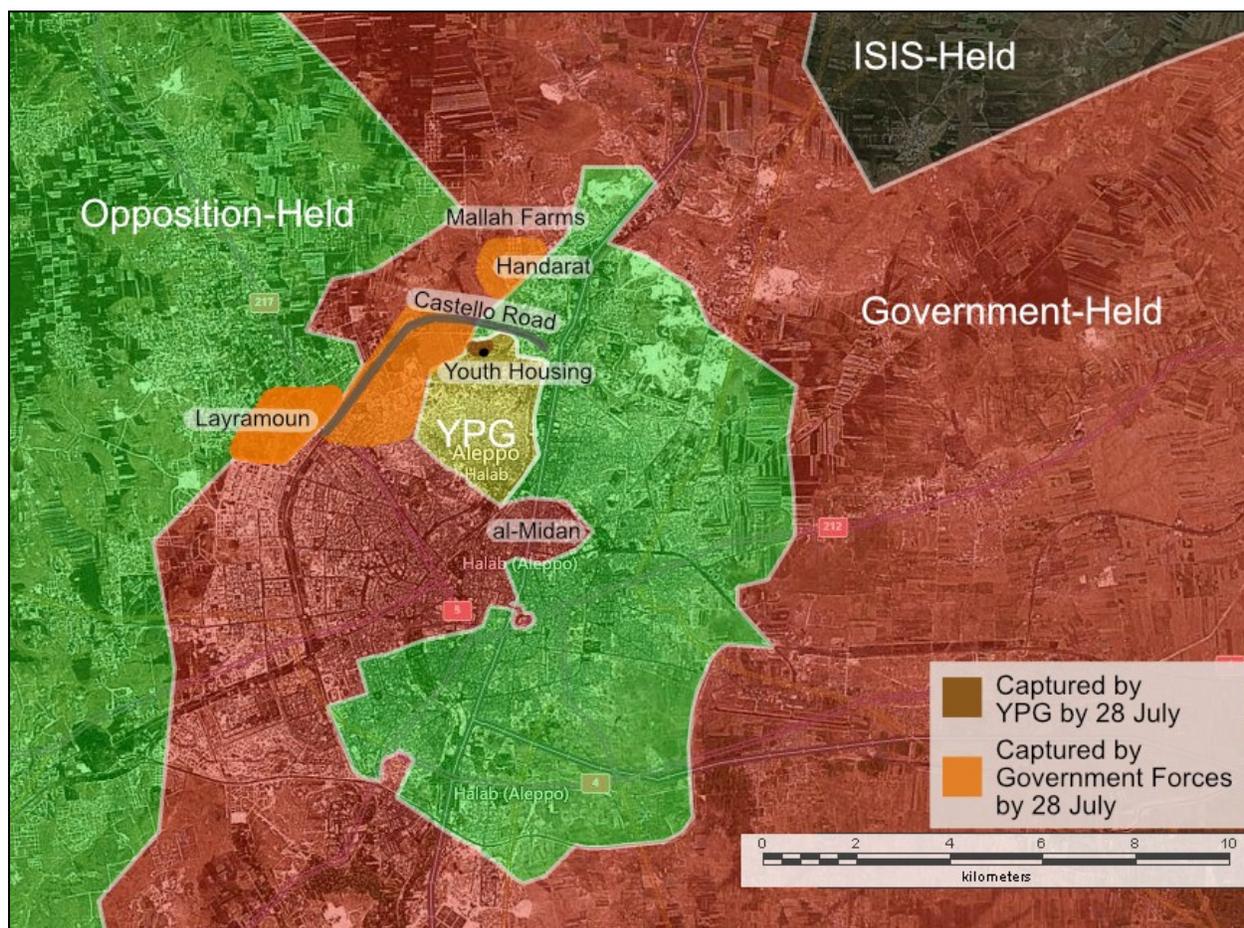


Figure 1: Areas of control in Aleppo city, with recent government advances highlighted in orange.

Due to ongoing airstrikes on opposition-controlled neighborhoods in Aleppo city, five of eight hospitals in these areas are now only able to offer basic medical services, and a blood bank was damaged. The Syrian government has offered civilians safe passage from opposition-held areas of Aleppo, promising temporary housing for IDPs in government-controlled areas. The UN and other actors continue to press for a ceasefire amid expectations that besieged opposition-controlled neighborhoods in Aleppo will run out of food in mid-to-late August.

Elsewhere in Aleppo governorate, local sources reported that Atareb was subjected to a campaign of airstrikes, which were particularly intense between 20-25 July. In addition to killing at least 18 civilians and injuring 35 others, airstrikes on 25 July damaged the Atareb hospital, resulting in the closure of the city's only operating room.

In eastern Aleppo governorate, Kurdish news sources reported that the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) issued an ultimatum to ISIS militants in Menbij city on July 21, demanding that they evacuate the city within 48 hours in order to protect civilian lives. ISIS forces have remained, and clashes and airstrikes continue.

A local source has described ongoing scarcity of both bread and fuel in the SDF-controlled areas of Menbij countryside. As of 21 July there were only three bakeries providing bread for the entire SDF-controlled area west of the Euphrates river. As of 25 July, only one fuel station was operating in all of SDF-controlled Menbij countryside, serving the needs of approximately 200 villages. Civilians wait for hours to purchase a limited supply of fuel that has been heavily subsidized by the Menbij Civil Council.

An ISIS suicide bombing killed 50 and injured dozens more in the city of Quamishli in Hasakah province. Amer Ghaffal al-Saleh, the ISIS commander of Deir Ezzor, was killed in clashes with pro-government forces near the Deir Ezzor military airport. The Emir for Deir Ezzor province, Abu Azzam, was also killed in a separate attack by pro-government forces in al-Tharda.

Conflict remains high around Damascus – particularly in the western suburb of Darayya, where government and opposition forces remain locked in a conflict for control of the city. In central Damascus, a car bomb struck the neighborhood of Kafr Sousa, killing and injuring several people. Attacks of this sort are rare in the center of the city due to heavy policing and distance from frontlines.

In a highly-anticipated move, Jabhat al-Nusra has formally announced its split from Al-Qaeda, establishing a new movement called Jabhat Fateh al-Sham. Despite the name change, however, the group remains largely the same, and the U.S. State Department has stated that they are still considered a legitimate target for airstrikes. Mergers between Nusra and likeminded groups have been considered in the past, but were never actualized due to concerns surrounding Nusra's close relationship with Al-Qaeda. It remains to be seen how groups in Syria will react to the name change.

Concerned about the possibility of infiltration and attack by members of ISIS along the Jordanian-Syrian border, the government of Jordan continues to prevent humanitarian access to thousands of displaced Syrians stranded in Hadalat and Rukban refugee camps in the remote desert east of Daraa Governorate. Electricity availability throughout Daraa Governorate continues to be limited to 1-2 hours per day. Water access is similarly limited due to the electricity shortage. Most communities now rely on water purchased from water tankers. Most cited needs are flour and infant formula, with a local source estimating the need for infant formula at 95,000 units per month.¹

¹ Information on humanitarian status of civilians comes from Humanitarian Research Services, Inc.

Conclusion

The situation in Syria looks particularly bleak this week. As supplies run short in Aleppo, the fate of civilians remains uncertain. Also, the SDF advance on ISIS-held Menbij has slowed to a near-stalemate as SDF try to negotiate a takeover of the city. Several ISIS attacks far outside of ISIS territory have rocked civilian populations across Syria even as ISIS struggles to maintain material authority over what territory they still claim.