



Weekly Conflict Summary June 2-8, 2016

Aleppo governorate saw a significant increase in conflict during the past week, resulting from the continued Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) offensive to capture Manbij city, an opposition counter-offensive against ISIS in northern Aleppo, and continued clashes between Jaysh al-Fateh coalition and pro-government forces south of Aleppo city. Additionally, nearly 100 aerial raids have been reported in and around Aleppo city, targeting areas under opposition control.

Rapid SDF advances against ISIS positions surrounding Manbij led ISIS to reallocate forces and thus facilitated the advance by opposition forces. These opposition advances bring front lines within 5km to the symbolically important town of Dabiq, which will likely become a flashpoint in the near future if opposition advances continue.

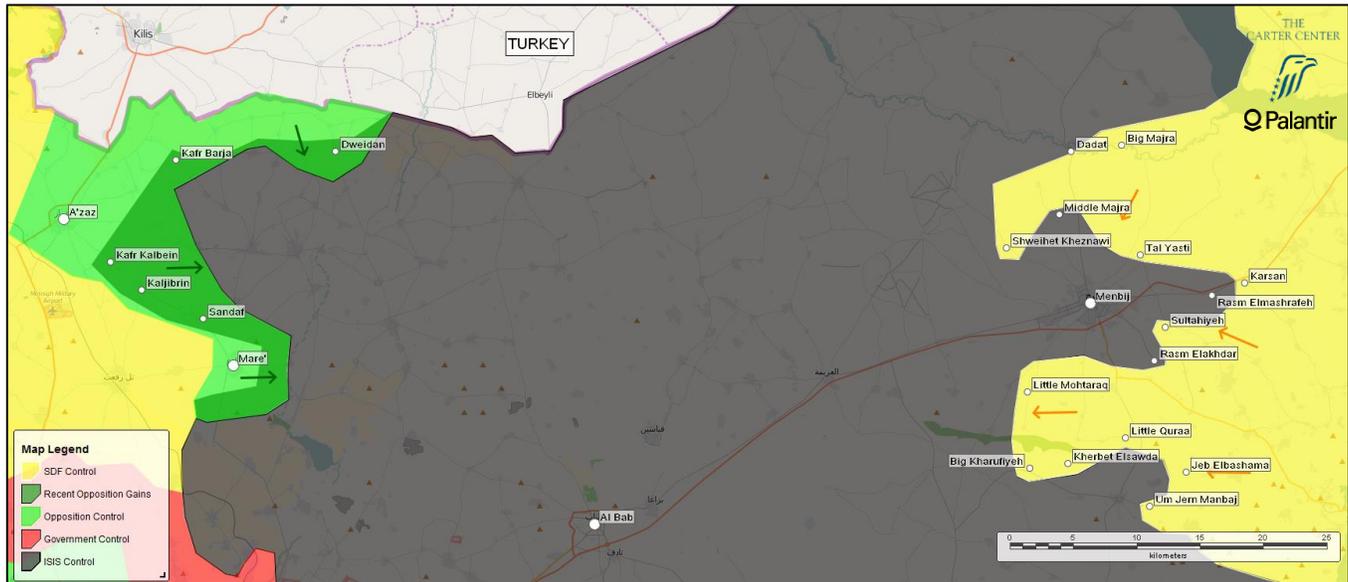


Figure 1: Areas of control in Aleppo as of June 8, 2016. Note: On June 9th, opposition forces advanced further against ISIS positions in Western Aleppo, and SDF forces succeeded in surrounding Manbij city, with fighting reported on the outskirts of the city itself.

In southern Aleppo, pro-government forces have made modest advances eastwards from Ithriya towards Tabqa city, which was captured by ISIS in August of 2014. As of June 8, pro-government forces remained approximately 30km from the city and the nearby Tabqa Military Airbase. Despite a steady advance so far, pro-government forces will likely face heavy resistance as they approach Tabqa, because taking the city would effectively isolate ISIS positions in northern Aleppo.

In Idlib governorate, airstrikes have increased in frequency and scope, targeting most major population centers under opposition control, with particular emphasis on Maarat an-Numan. Though verifiable information on the party responsible is scarce, most parties agree that Syrian government planes are responsible for the attacks.

In southern Syria, clashes continued in the western Damascus suburbs of Darayya and Deir Khabiya, accompanied by airstrikes and artillery attacks. Fighting in Deir Khabiya, southwest of Darayya, has been particularly intense over the past week, with clashes reported nearly every day. In Eastern Ghouta, fighting has calmed somewhat following the pro-government advance in mid-May, though periodic mortar and artillery attacks have targeted frontline positions surrounding the opposition enclave.

Further south near the Golan Heights, Jabhat al-Nusra and opposition forces continued to clash with ISIS-affiliated Shuhada al-Yarmouk around Sham al-Golan.

In eastern Syria, no territorial changes have been reported, though fighting continues on a daily basis surrounding the Deir Ez-Zor military airport and along front lines in Deir Ez-Zor city.

Conclusion

Parties in Syria now show blatant disregard for the cessation of hostilities (CoH). The frequency and scope of fighting have steadily risen, as have attacks on civilian areas throughout the country. The recent focus on anti-ISIS offensives, however, may bring with it a slowdown in fighting between CoH participants as all parties seek to take advantage of a weakened ISIS in northern Aleppo. International parties should work quickly to re-assert the CoH while this opportunity exists. Should pro-government, opposition, and SDF forces succeed in displacing ISIS from the Manbij pocket, all three parties will eventually collide in northern Aleppo, risking a return to full-scale conflict.