

THE CARTER CENTER



Weekly Conflict Summary October 20-26, 2016

The partial ceasefire over East Aleppo continued into the start of this week, as the Russian military extended their cessation of air strikes for another 24 hours. The goal of the ceasefire was to allow the civilian population to evacuate East Aleppo before continuing the offensive into besieged opposition-held territory. However, due to sniper fire from pro-government forces and anti-government shelling on the evacuation routes, evacuation was impossible. Protests broke out in East Aleppo during the ceasefire.

After the ceasefire broke down, pro-government forces advanced in the northern neighborhood of al-Owaija, and made limited gains in the southern neighborhood of Sheikh Sa'id. Conflict on the western and southern front lines of East Aleppo remained high this week.

An opposition offensive to break the siege, dubbed “the Mother of All Battles” began at the end of the week.

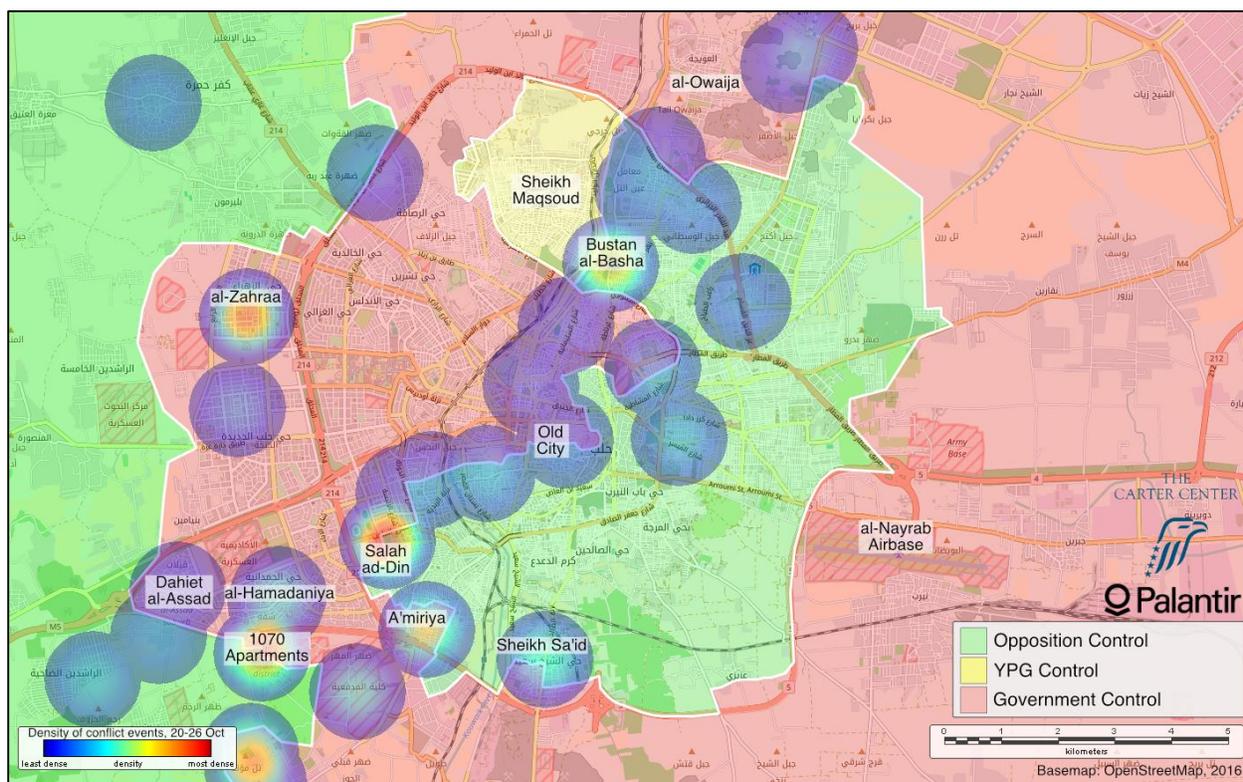


Figure 1 - Map of conflict events in Aleppo, 20-26 October, 2016

The Turkey-backed Operation Euphrates Shield (OES) offensive slowed in its advance, primarily due to the fact that tensions and sporadic shelling against the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) escalated into direct clashes. Turkish planes hit SDF-held areas early morning on October 20, reportedly killing between 100-200 people. On October 21, the OES attack on SDF territory began on the axis between Tall Refa'at and Um Hosh, supported by a high level of artillery fire.

The OES strikes on Kurdish territory prompted the Syrian Defense Ministry to threaten Turkey for any future incursions into Syrian territory, declaring that they would down any Turkish warplanes flying in Syrian airspace.

Turkish forces briefly entered areas near the border between Idleb and Aleppo provinces, and several areas of western Afrin district were struck by Turkish artillery. Escalation along these fronts are of great humanitarian concern. Civilians in the Afrin and A'zaz districts are concerned that escalating clashes between the SDF and OES forces could lead to another wave of displacement in the northwestern Aleppo countryside. This area has hosted a large number of internally displaced people who are just now finding stability.

In Idleb, warplanes hit a complex of three schools in al-Hass on October 26. 34 were reported killed in the strike, including 14 schoolchildren. Due to the high incidence of strikes on schools in the area, schools in Hazano, Kelly, Kafr Nubol, and Kafr Takhrim were closed this week out of fear they, too, would be hit.

In Ma'arrat an Nu'man, it was announced that school will be closed on Thursday and Friday in response to the reported bombings of schools in the villages of Hazano and Kelly in northern Idleb. Kafr Nabl has also closed schools for fear of aerial bombardment. Schools in Kafr Takharim were also closed due to the intense bombing and the reported targeting of schools in other areas in the province.

The opposition offensive in Hama did not succeed in any further advances in the past week. Due to continued major disagreements and tensions among opposition units on the front lines, it appears unlikely that opposition forces will be able to advance on this front.

In Rural Damascus, Jaish al-Islam and Faylaq al-Rahman have declared an end to competition between the groups. Jaish al-Islam has indicated they are ready to form a shared operation room to coordinate their efforts against pro-government forces in the Eastern Ghouta. This cooperation comes after repeated advances by pro-government forces in the Eastern Ghouta region over the past several months.

Conclusions:

The status of civilians in East Aleppo remains the most pressing issue at the present time. The inability of many to evacuate means that many will remain at serious risk as the pro-government ground offensive into opposition-held territory continues.