



Weekly Conflict Summary
August 11-17, 2016

Continuing a trend from previous weeks, reports of conflict in Syria from August 11-17 remained extremely high in Aleppo governorate. Throughout this period, the majority of conflict took place in the northern governorates, though several events of humanitarian concern continue outside of northern Syria as well.

After months of gains in the countryside and weeks of slow-but-steady advance in urban Menbij, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) took control of the city from ISIS. Over the weekend, SDF fighters began to de-mine the city and confirmed control of Menbij by August 17. After more than two months of conflict, the medical services of the city are badly damaged, severely lacking medical personnel, medicine, and necessary supplies. In some cases, nurses and medics have no capacity to respond to critical injuries from landmines in the city and nearby countryside.

During the week of August 15, a renewed pro-government counter-offensive in southwest Aleppo city afforded significant results. By August 17, much of the 1070 Apartments located in Ramousa neighborhood had been recaptured by pro-government forces. The apartments border the Ramousa highway, which the opposition was attempting to use as a resupply route into East Aleppo. Both opposition and government-controlled areas of Aleppo city are receiving only limited shipments of food, aid, and other goods as forces from both sides restrict badly damaged resupply routes. No roadblocks have yet been installed on either resupply line in the south of Aleppo.

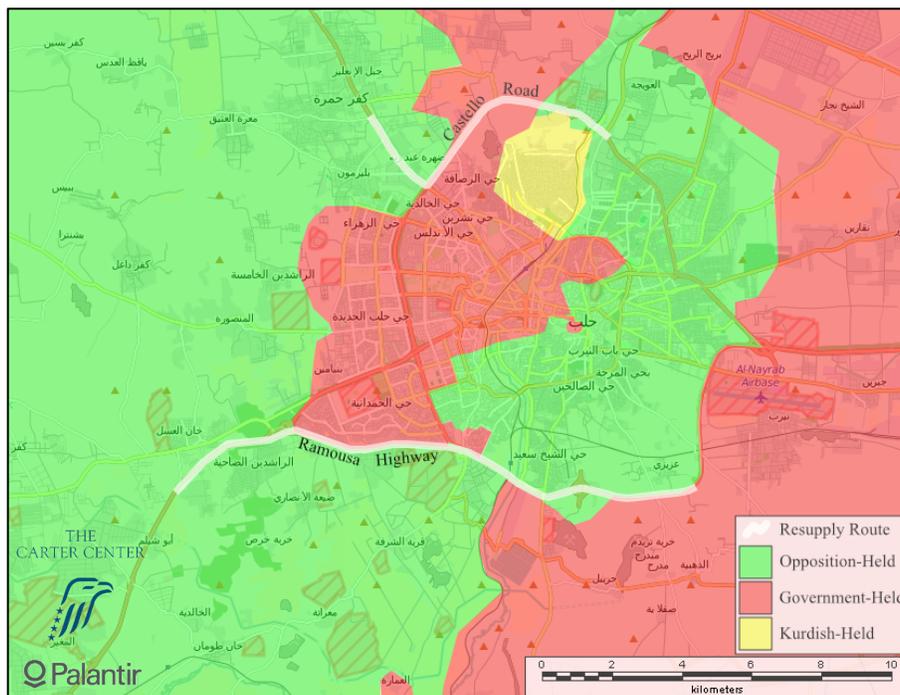


Figure 1 - Frontlines in Aleppo by August 17 and two resupply routes.

Russian officials this week recognized that three-hour ceasefires would not be long enough for aid organizations to provide properly for civilians in Aleppo. While no firm policy was proposed by Russia by August 17, diplomats and military leaders had not yet declined the UN's suggestion of 48-hour truces over weekends, keeping open the possibility of such an arrangement. Currently, internally displaced persons (IDPs) from the 1070 Apartments are seeking shelter in informal camps in Salah al-Din, al-Furqan, and the University area of Western Aleppo.

In northern Aleppo, opposition fighters advanced on ISIS-held al-Rai'i, led by Fastaqim Kama Umirt with air support from the US and shelling from Turkey. The opposition forces were unable to hold gains against strong counterattacks. Control of the town has changed several times, but ISIS was in control of the area as of August 17. In northern Aleppo countryside, tensions remained high between SDF and opposition forces following clashes near opposition-controlled A'zaz to the west.

ISIS renewed an offensive on the area surrounding Kwaire's Airbase, located east of Aleppo city. This resulted in high casualties for pro-government fighters due to a round of suicide attacks and the clashes that followed. Locals claim that ISIS launched a chemical attack on Mare' on August 16, almost exactly a year after a chemical attack by ISIS in August 2015.

Attacks against civilian areas and medical facilities by Syrian government or Russian airplanes continue this week. On August 12, a women and children's hospital in Kafr Hamra was destroyed by airstrikes. Other hospitals in Daret 'Azza and Big Orem were also struck. In Idleb a soccer field, the vegetable market, and a supermarket were targeted, culminating in a bombing in Idleb nearly every day between August 11th and 17th.

In northern Idleb governorate, planes also struck Sarmada and Dana. These and other areas along the Turkish border have traditionally housed large numbers of IDPs. Saraqab was hit every day this week, which many attribute to a third week of revenge for a downed Russian helicopter. About 30,000 residents have fled Saraqab towards the surrounding farmland or neighboring towns due to aerial bombardment.

On August 16, clashes broke out in Hasakah between the YPG and pro-government forces. This violence is another example of the ongoing tensions between Kurdish and pro-government forces throughout the Hassakah governorate.

In Rural Damascus, Darayya was reportedly hit by napalm shells, prompting the local coordination council to issue a statement against the use of these munitions. The siege of Madaya city, located just south of Zabadani, remains in place as civilians struggle to provide medical services to people injured in airstrikes, shelling, or sniper fire.

After weeks of refusing entry to the severely injured, Jordanian officials permitted a sick child from the Rukban refugee camp to enter Jordan for emergency medical treatment. This is in part due to pressure from humanitarian actors.

On August 16, Russian planes launched their first flights from an Iranian airbase. This is the first time that any foreign power has used an Iranian airbase for military purposes in over 30 years. The Russian MoD may utilize the base to hit ISIS targets, but the first flights flew past ISIS territory to instead strike opposition-held areas of Idleb and Aleppo.

Conclusion

Conflict remains high this week. The SDF finally succeeded in clearing Menbij of ISIS, but opposition groups failed to advance on al-Rai'i, despite extensive support from the US and Turkey. Several ongoing

sieges remain a concern for humanitarian organizations as they have significant direct impact through physical violence and indirect impact by further souring relations between sieging parties and the besieged. Parties should seek ceasefires and the end of sieges to help stymie the damage dealt on Syrian civilians.