

THE
CARTER CENTER



Weekly Conflict Summary

January 11-17, 2018

The ISIS-held pocket in northern Hama governorate continues to grow, as both ISIS and pro-government forces advanced further into opposition-held territories at the southeastern frontiers of the Idleb pocket. Turkish officials voiced their disdain at US support for the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF, a Kurdish-led organization in Syria's north) and threatened offensive action (specifically in the northwestern district of Afrin) over the reporting period.

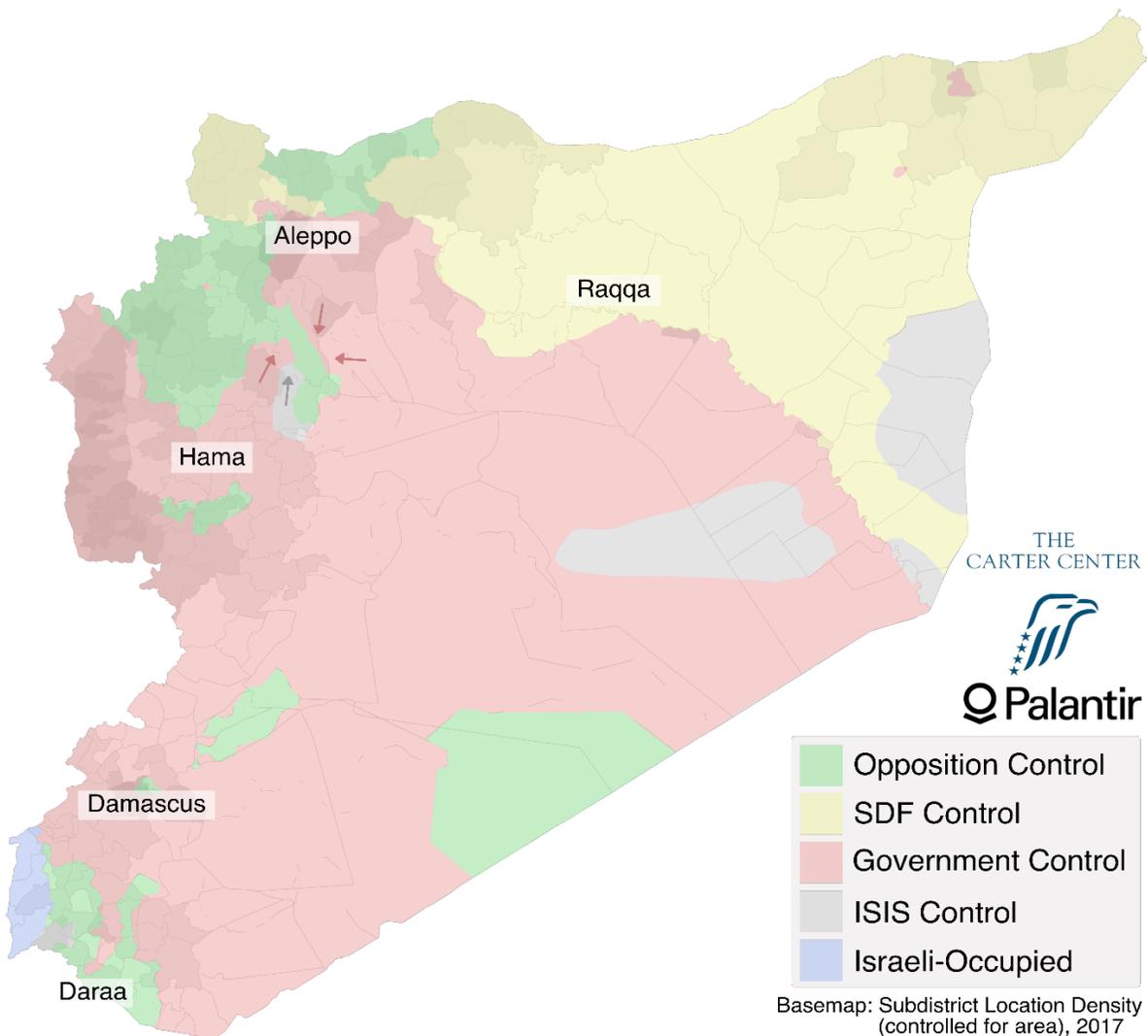


Figure 1 - Areas of control as of January 17. Arrows indicate advances made during the reporting period.

Idleb Offensive Updates

On January 16, another major advance was made by pro-government forces, taking territory west of Khanassr as well as more territory north and northeast of Abu al-Thuhour. This comes days after further pro-government advance south and southeast of the airbase at Abu al-Thuhour. Much of the al-Hess Plateau is now under pro-government control as HTS units have continued to pull back from frontlines.

ISIS advanced northwards against opposition frontlines, on a front that was previously defended by HTS. No offensive has been attempted against new ISIS gains.

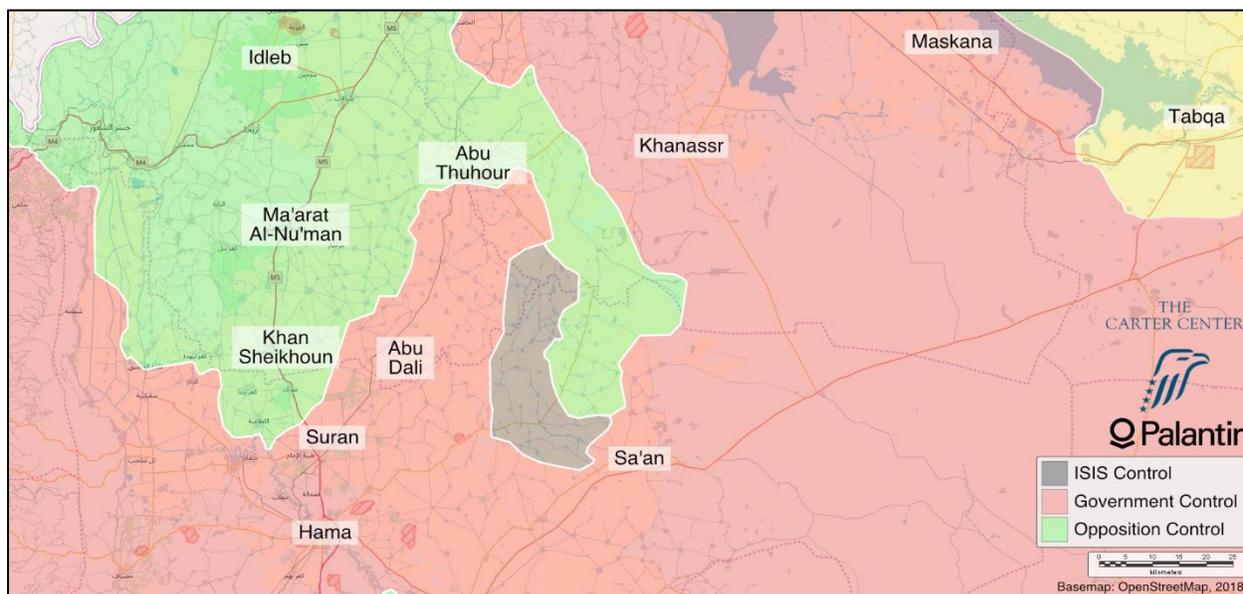


Figure 2 - Areas of control around the opposition-held Idlib pocket by January 17

Over the course of the pro-government and ISIS offensives into opposition-held Idlib, over 200,000 people have been expelled from their homes.¹ This is due not only to territorial changes and advancing forces, but also due to an acute spike in aerial bombardment on targets deep within opposition-held territory.

During the reporting week, Turkey once again increased artillery shelling of the SDF-held Afrin pocket. There are no US soldiers in the Afrin pocket, though Turkey-supported Syrian opposition units in the Operation Euphrates Shield (OES) pocket have exchanged fire with SDF units near Menbij, where US soldiers conduct patrols. The Syrian government responded to Turkish calls for an offensive by stating that they would shoot down any Turkish jets that crossed into Syrian airspace and Russian forces moved within Afrin to show Turkey their presence. Russian flags were sighted along the Turkish border as a warning sign. Shelling has continued, including from Turkish-supported Syrian units.

¹ "Turkey | Syria: Recent Developments in North-Western Syria (as of 16 Jan 2018). HumanitarianResponse. January 16, 2018. Accessed January 16, 2018. <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/stima/document/turkey-syria-recent-developments-north-western-syria-16-jan-2018>.



Figure 3 - Areas of control at Syria's northwestern border with Turkey by January 17. Opposition areas should be seen as mixed Turkish-opposition control.

Southern Syria

Fighting continues on the outskirts of Damascus city, with opposition forces maintaining their near siege of the military vehicle management center between the districts of Harasta and Arbin. Mortar and artillery fire has been regular along these frontlines, with no reported changes in front lines. Civilians living in East Ghouta are still reporting siege conditions.

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