



The Islamic State in Southern Syria

May 15, 2015

This report was compiled from open source information and information reported to The Carter Center. The brief is not meant to be comprehensive but rather to serve as a reference guide and summary of what information is available at present time.

Overview

The southern governorates of Daraa and Quneitra have recently witnessed a spate of local armed groups aligning themselves with the Islamic State (IS). While this pattern of IS expansion is not unique to southern Syria, recent fighting indicates southern

Brigade, Harakat al-Muthana al-Islamiyah, and Jaysh al-Jihad, are not openly affiliated with the IS, but have refused to denounce the organization and have recently undertaken coordinated military action against rival opposition groups in the area. Local opposition members have accused all three groups of IS affiliation, citing extremist views and statements, symbolism, and widespread allegations of financial support from the IS.

In late 2014, the Shuhada al-Yarmouk Brigade became the first group accused of affiliation with the IS. Following a series of low intensity clashes between the Shuhada al-Yarmouk Brigade and JAN, in December JAN launched offensive operations against the brigade. Southern Front member groups intervened, separated the two forces, and sequestered the Shuhada al-Yarmouk Brigade to its base in the towns of Jumlah and al-Shajarah, near Sham al-Jolan in southwest Daraa. This intervention was accompanied by the signing of a - by several key members of the Southern Front. While the pact was meant to protect against all threats, it was understood by many as a pact to protect against IS incursions in southern Syria.

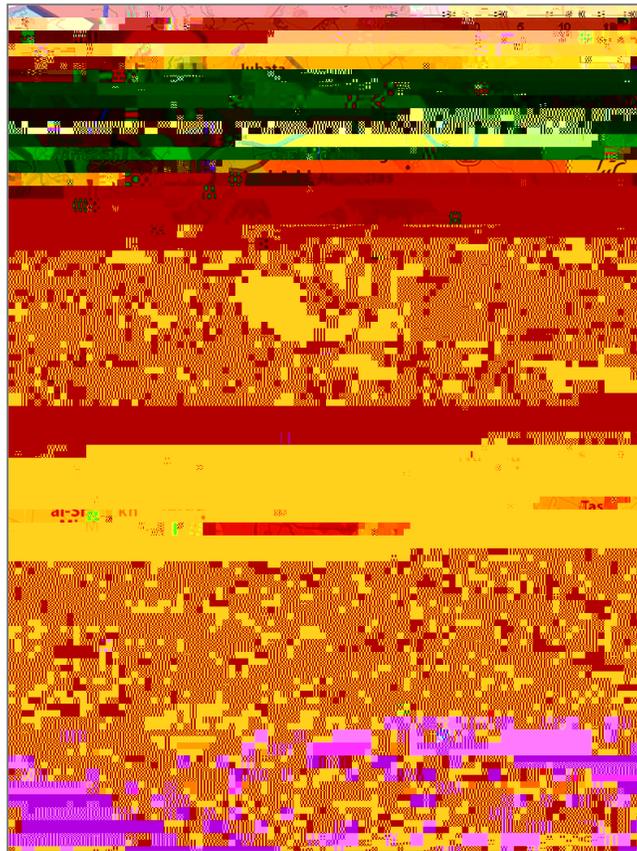


Figure 1: Areas of control and recent opposition and JAN clashes with Suspected IS affiliates in southern Syria

In February, the longtime JAN affiliate Harakat al-Muthana al-Islamiyah announced that it was not opposed to the IS. Given the wording and timing of the unexpected statement, many groups saw the pronouncement as tantamount to Harakat al-Muthana pledging allegiance to the IS. A month later, following the seizure of Busra al-Sham by Southern Front member groups, JAN, and Harakat al-Muthana, the latter sought to establish a headquarters in the town. Given Harakat al-Muthana

carve out territory on behalf of the IS, and given Busra al- long the Daraa-
Suweida border, the Shabab al-Sunnah Division (a member of the Southern Front),

Southern Front. The brigade has suffered poor relations with Jordanian authorities since it kidnapped 22 UN peacekeepers in early 2013, but has been able to offset the lack of international support with sources of local income and access to private Jihadist funding networks. Prior to falling out with JAN, the two organizations cooperated closely.

Following accusations of IS affiliation and the December 2014 clashes, a video was released online

Figure 1: Organizational structure of Jaysh al-Jihad as of April 30, 2015.

While these three groups are the only ones actively involved in fighting at the present time, other units, such as Jund al-Malahim, have defected or distanced themselves from JAN