

THE
CARTER CENTER



Weekly Conflict Summary
December 14-20, 2017

The ISIS-held pocket in northern Hama governorate continues to grow, with both ISIS and government forces advancing northward into the Idleb pocket. Though political conflict continues between the opposition's alternate civilian structures – the Salvation Government and the Syrian Interim Government (SIG), armed opposition groups in the Idleb pocket have begun to implement elements of a reconciliation agreement. In southern Syria, fighting has erupted throughout much of Daraa and Quneitra governorates, with government forces advancing in the Beit Jinn pocket near the Golan Heights. In response to mounting violence, opposition armed groups in the south have formed a new joint operations room.

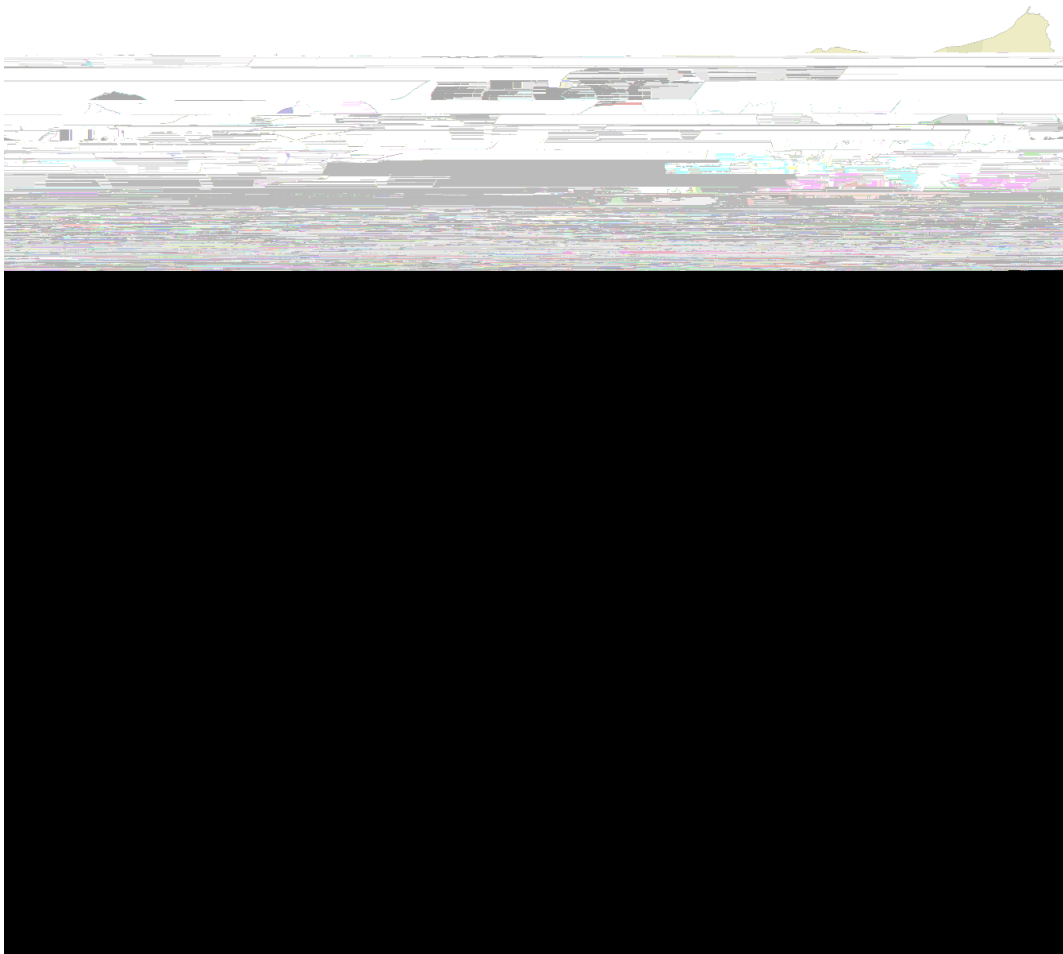


Figure 1 - Areas of control as of December 20, 2017. Arrows indicate advances made during the reporting period. Shaded areas represent areas with higher population density.

Southern Syria updates

Despite an agreed-upon ceasefire, pro-government forces shelled Daraa al-Balad and other opposition-controlled areas in Daraa throughout the week. The opposition's Al-Bunyan al-Marsous operations room reported on December 11 that pro-regime militias targeted several neighborhoods in Daraa al-Balad for the first time since the most recent ceasefire was put into effect. The operations room warned that it would respond to the shelling. In the following days, artillery shelling and clashes spread to frontlines throughout southern Syria and opposition-held areas of Daraa city.

As a reaction to the increased violence, four opposition armed factions formed a new coalition on December 19, "The Coalition of Revolutionaries of Jaydur", comprised of forces from the Jaydur Houran Brigades, the Houran Mujahideen Brigades, the First Special Missions Brigade, and the Osama Bin Zaid Brigade. The new coalition will operate in northwestern Daraa near the border with Rural Damascus governorate.

Shelling has continued throughout Eastern Ghouta for the past week, particularly the districts of Ain Terma, Harasta, and Douma. The latest round of shelling led to a social media campaign #SolidarityWithKarim in which social media users posted a photo of themselves covering one eye, referring to an infant who lost his mother, lost his eye, and had his skull fractured from shelling this week in Eastern Ghouta.

Also from the Eastern Ghouta, Hai'yat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS, formerly Jabhat al-Nusra) released photos of a small group of fighters' bodies, claiming that they were executed in Jaysh al-Islam prisons. Jaysh al-Islam later released a statement claiming that the fighters were killed in combat, and that HTS was spreading lies in an attempt to divide the opposition.

In Southern Damascus, ISIS launched a surprise attack, briefly taking control of parts of Tadamon neighborhood. Within a few hours, they were expelled by the pro-government National Defense Forces and Palestinian militias.

Though fighting and shelling persisted throughout much of southern Syria, the only significant changes in territorial control were reported in the opposition-held Beit Jinn pocket, near the Golan Heights. Following their successful push to capture Tal Bardiya last week, pro-government forces launched an offensive on the surrounding area of Maghar Elmir where clashes were ongoing at the time of writing, though pro-government forces have nearly cut the small pocket of opposition control in half (see map below).

Figure 3 -