

**Status Report on Yarmouk Camp
November 14, 2017**

Executive Summary

neighborhoods. Pro-government Palestinian forces occupied around 10% of the northernmost area of Yarmouk Camp.

The de-escalation zones negotiated by Russia, Iran, and Turkey in Astana do not include Yarmouk Camp. Ceasefires in the area have emerged separately. The “Four Towns Agreement” negotiated between the government, Ahrar al-Sham, and HTS in Idleb provided the framework for a nine-month ceasefire in Yarmouk camp, beginning March 28, 2017. The agreement sought to exchange the evacuation of two opposition-besieged Shia-majority towns in Idleb with evacuations of civilians and fighters from

Status Report on Yarmouk Camp – November 14, 2017

HTS and its iterations:

HTS, formerly Jabhat al-Nusra, controls between 30-40% of Yarmouk Camp and shares frontlines with the PFLP-GC and Fatah al Intifada in the north and northeast and ISIS to the east and south. HTS forces were estimated at 200 fighters in Spring 2017. Despite only few evacuations taking place, the deal reached under the Four Towns Agreement has heightened tensions with ISIS. Under the agreement, HTS would cede territory to the Palestinian groups which would greatly expand ISIS' frontlines with government forces in Yarmouk Camp.

ISIS

ISIS currently controls 40-50% of Yarmouk Camp in addition to the adjacent neighborhoods of Hajar al-Aswad, al-Asali to the southwest, and Taqadom to the east. Estimates of ISIS fighters reach up to 2000 but ambiguity surrounds the question of whether that number applies to Yarmouk camp alone or if it describes all of ISIS territory in southern Damascus. Of all the groups in the area, ISIS has the most active frontlines. Clashes and artillery exchanges with HTS happen with relative frequency. To the east, infrequent fighting between Jaish al-Islam and ISIS still occurs. Additionally, pro-government and government forces target ISIS with artillery strikes on occasion.

ISIS fears pro-government expansion into HTS zones of control as agreed to in April 2017. Despite reaching its own evacuation deal with the government in May, reports detail ISIS fortification efforts along HTS frontlines. On August 2, it declared a new "military zone" along its border with HTS, forcing the evacuation of dozens of families as it converts homes into military positions.

FSA

FSA groups control the areas of Yalda, Babila, and Beit Sahem to the east of Yarmouk Camp. Jaish al-Islam maintains the active frontlines with ISIS, but other groups include Sham al-Rasoul Brigades, Jaish al-Ababil, Martyrs of Islam Brigades, and the Ajnad al-Sham Islamic Union. Indicative of Jaish al-Islam's influence in the area, representatives of the group reached an agreement in June 2017 with the Russian and Syrian governments to establish a de-escalation zone for the communities of Yalda, Beit Sahem, and Babila.

Evacuations Stalled

Yarmouk Camp has been the site of multiple offensives and counter-offensives since December 2012 when FSA and Jabhat al-Nusra forces seized the area. Pro-government Palestinian groups have maintained a strict siege since July 2013. While the siege has successfully contained opposition and ISIS forces, evacuation and reconciliation negotiations have repeatedly failed.

Both the agreements to evacuate HTS and ISIS from Yarmouk Camp have stalled. Only a small number of wounded HTS fighters and family members have evacuated under the agreement to date. An article published on July 6 by the "Palestinian Refugees Portal" cites a source in Yarmouk Camp claiming that the evacuation of HTS to Idleb stalled because Ahrar al-Sham demanded inclusion in the negotiations. Tensions and infighting between HTS and Ahrar al-Sham throughout Idleb and northern Hama during the month of July likely contributed to

