

THE
CARTER CENTER



Weekly Conflict Summary
November 9-15, 2017

Government troops and allies continued to advance against ISIS in Syria's east, advancing from Mayadin towards the border town of Abu Kamal. In the opposition-held Idleb pocket, clashes continued to escalate between Hai'yat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS, formerly Al-Qaeda-linked Jabhat al-Nusra) and Nour al-Din al-Zenki (NDZ) west of Aleppo city. Pro-government forces have also begun a campaign to advance in the northern countryside of Hama, experiencing some success during the reporting week.

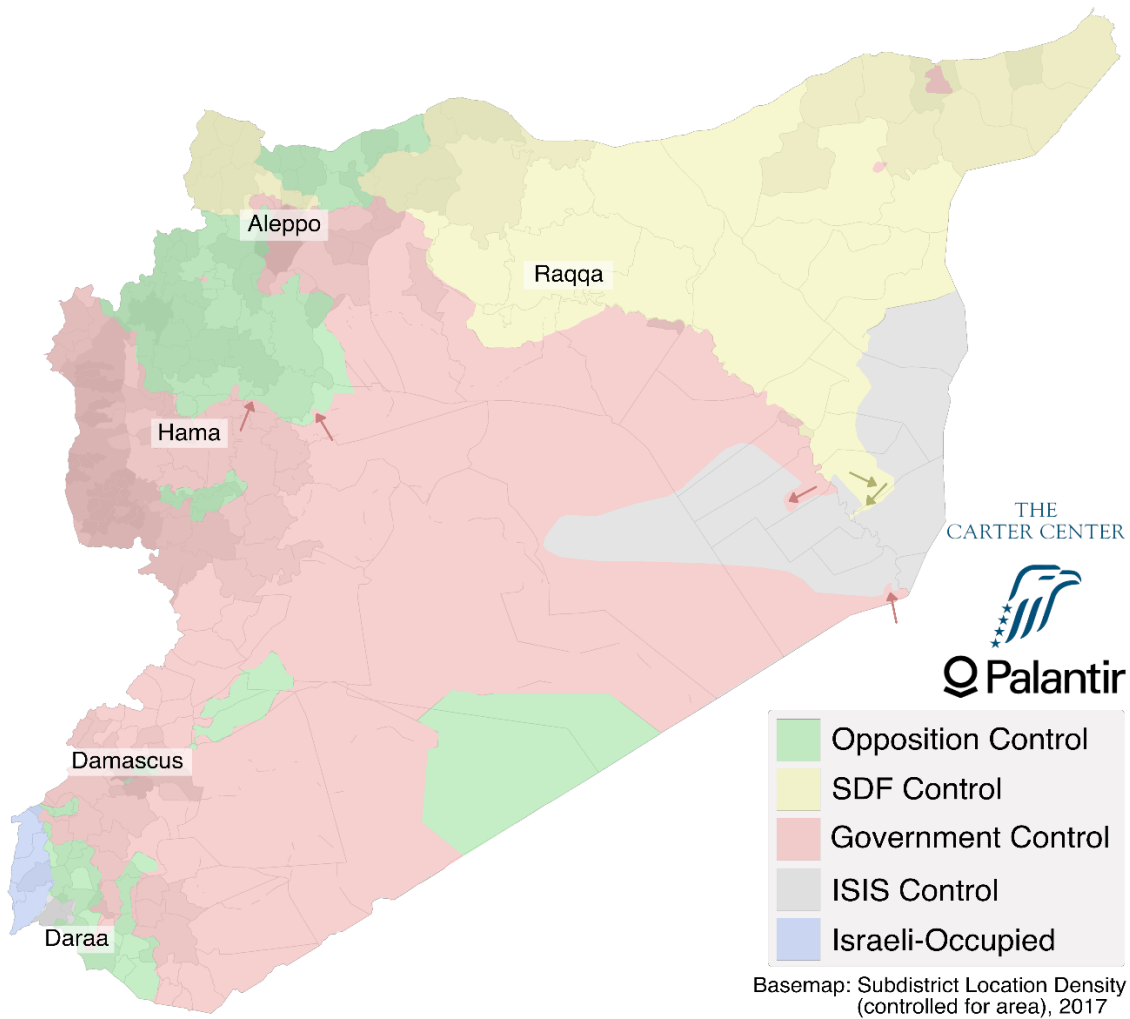


Figure 1 - Areas of control by November 15. Arrows indicate advances made during the reporting period.

Pro-government forces fight ISIS in Deir Ezzor

Government forces and Iranian-supported militias (including Hezbollah, Iraqi Hezbollah al-Nujaba, and Afghani Fatemiyoun Battalions) continue in their attempts to take the border city of Abu Kamal from ISIS. As of writing this report, this combined force is holding frontlines to the south, west, and northwest of the city. More allied fighters have arrived over the past seven days, and are expected to take the town in the next week.

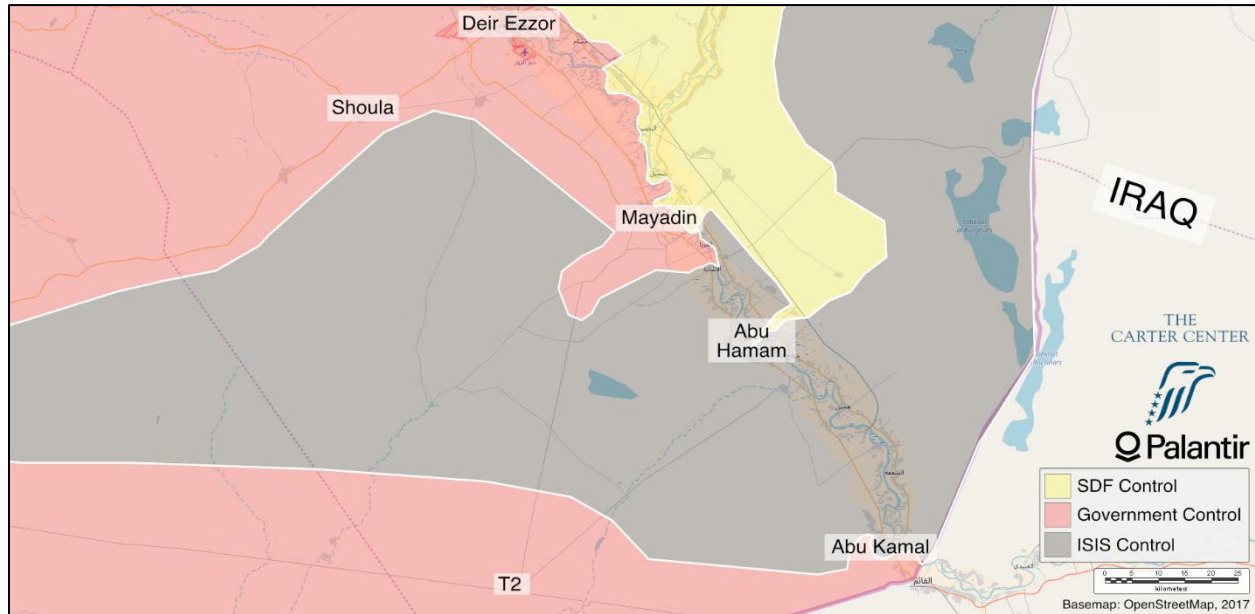


Figure 2 - Situation south of Deir Ezzor in Syria's far east by November 15

In addition to advancing on Abu Kamal, pro-government forces, including the Tiger Forces advanced 18km southwest of Mayadin towards the T2 pumping station, and up to 14km south of Mayadin towards the Iraqi border. Though pro-government forces have advanced rapidly in the past several weeks, ISIS has shown itself capable of conducting counter-offensives, and will likely push back hard as remaining forces are compressed into an increasingly small geographic area. In addition to large-scale counter-offensives, ISIS has increasingly used insurgency tactics to infiltrate government territory and conduct suicide attacks against key military targets.

Opposition developments

Clashes in opposition-held territory between HTS and NDZ intensified during this assessment period with reported use of heavy arms and civilian casualties. Clashes took place along HTS-NDZ front lines throughout much of the western Aleppo countryside,¹ and resulted in HTS capturing the towns of Abazmo and Saadiyah.

Two separate ceasefires were attempted by local communities and external mediators. The second, established on the evening of November 15th is holding, but unlikely to result in a permanent solution as both parties appear to be intent on dominating the western Aleppo countryside. While agreeing to the ceasefire, NDZ demanded that HTS withdraw from all positions it has captured from either NDZ or allied

¹ Clashes have been reported in Taqad, Al-Ibizmu, Khan al Asal, Urum al Kubrah, Kafr Naha, Uwayjil, Al Sahara, Tadil, Sadiyah, the “Electricity Association” (a suburb of Aleppo) and the 111th Regiment military base.

Ahrar al-Sham in the preceding two weeks. Given the recent history of HTS relations with rivals, it is unlikely to heed this demand.

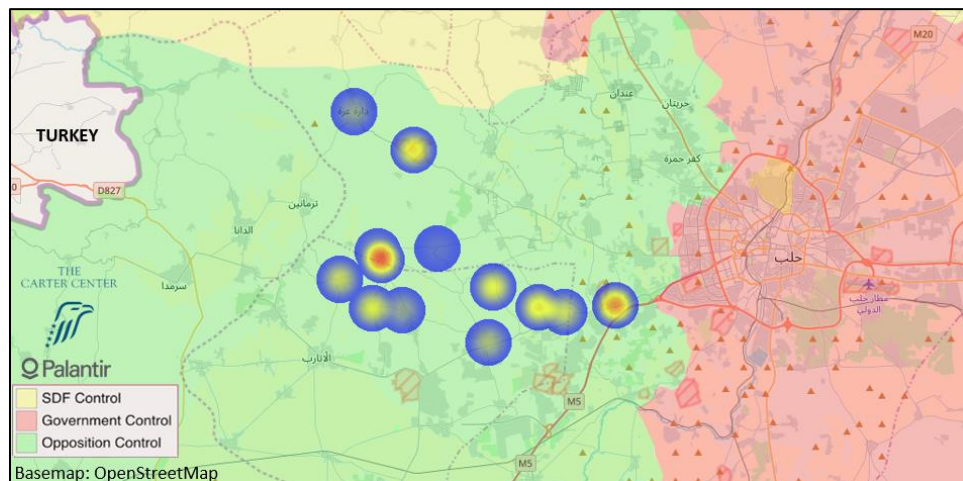


Figure 3: Heatmap of fighting between NDZ and HTS from November 9-15.

In response to the recent fighting, on Nov 10, Ahrar al-Sham and Jaish al-Ahrar (a former ally of HTS) announced a defense pact with NDZ and indicated their readiness to enter the conflict against HTS. The new alignment received vocal support from a handful of other armed groups, who claimed to have broken with HTS due to its aggression against NDZ. Though still militarily powerful, this growing condemnation of HTS marks a new low point for the group.

Northern Hama frontlines

Clashes have continued between pro-government forces and opposition fighters along the frontlines to the east of Morek and north of Sa'an in northern Hama (see map below). Back-and-forth advances have been made by both forces, resulting in the displacement of an estimated 40,000 civilians since the end of October.

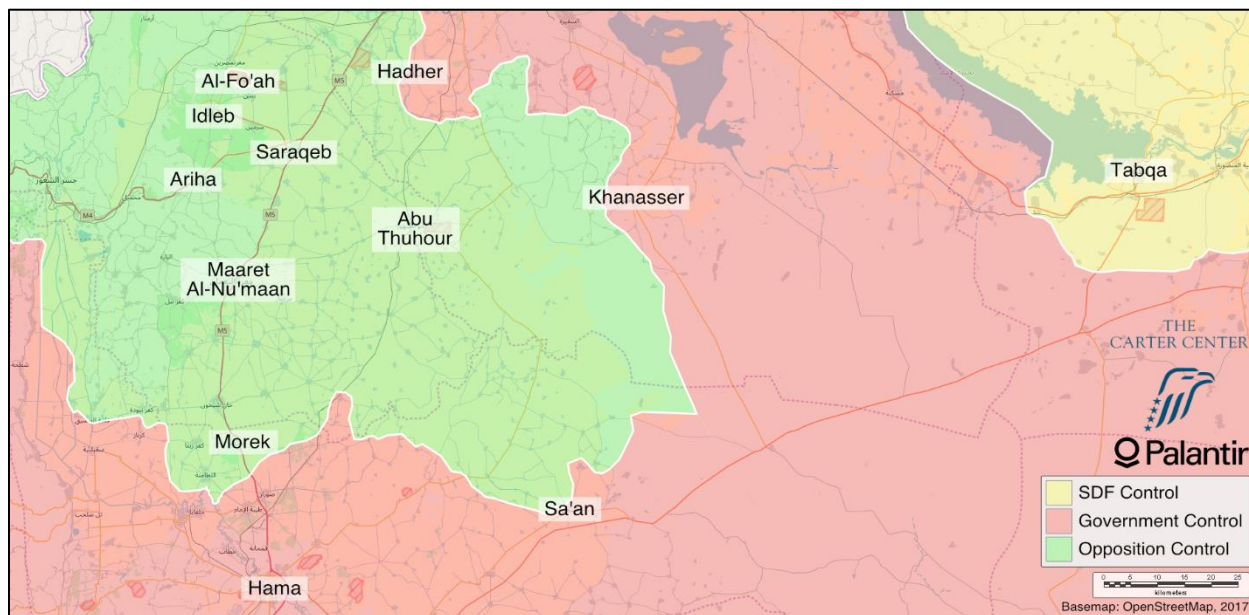


Figure 4 - Situation in southeast of opposition-controlled Idleb pocket by November 15

During the reporting week, at least three airstrikes hit the market in Atareb in the western Aleppo countryside, resulting in 67 deaths. These deaths included six women, five children, and three police officers. Atareb remains outside of government control and the town population has grown due to the settlement of IDPs fleeing fighting in other areas in the north. It is unclear which air force perpetrated the attack, but the opposition has accused Russia. This attack was the latest violation of the “de-escalation” agreement that seeks to protect civilians.

Updates in the South

The International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations were successful in delivering 24 trucks of humanitarian relief to the Damascus suburb of Douma. This is the first successful delivery since August. Deliveries included medicine, food parcels, and nutrition items for 21,500 people (the area has an estimated population of 400,000). The situation there is considered critical, with the UN World Health Organization pushing for the evacuation of around 400 civilians in critical condition.

Eastern Ghouta has experienced near continuous violence during November, with ongoing clashes along the outskirts of Damascus city, and widespread airstrikes on opposition-held towns.

On November 12, government forces closed the Babila checkpoint leading into the opposition-held towns of Babila and Yalda in southern Damascus. The closure came after opposition forces refused a demand to close the Aroubeh checkpoint leading into ISIS-held territory in the Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp (see map below). This closure effectively besieges all opposition and ISIS-held territory in southern Damascus city, including a large portion of the Palestinian refugee camp.

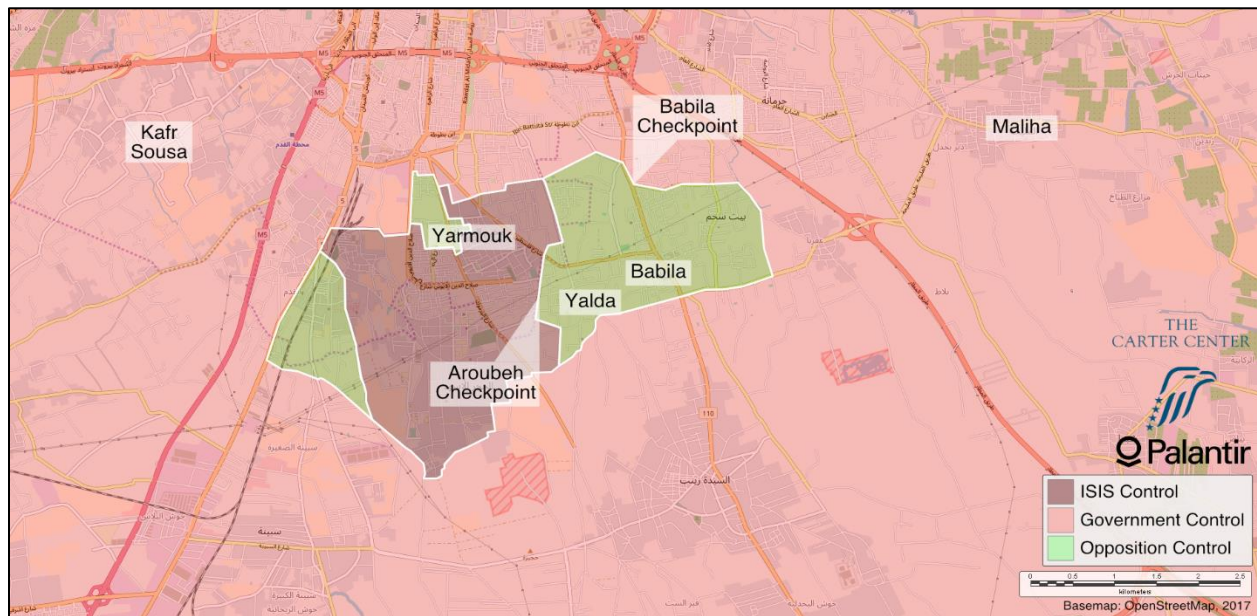


Figure 5 - Situation around Yarmouk Camp by November 15