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CARTER CENTER



**Weekly Conflict Summary**  
April 13-19, 2017

During this reporting period, negotiations surrounding the ongoing “Four Towns Agreement” continued despite the appalling attack on civilians being evacuated from the pro-government enclave of al-Fo’ah and Kafraya. Pro-government forces succeeded in their attempts to reverse the overwhelming majority of the opposition’s previous advances in northern Hama countryside, though fighting remains fierce. ISIS forces briefly retaliated after months of significant territorial loss, but continue to lose territory on several fronts. Opposition forces advanced against government forces in Daraa city and forced a minor withdrawal of pro-government forces to the east of Damascus.

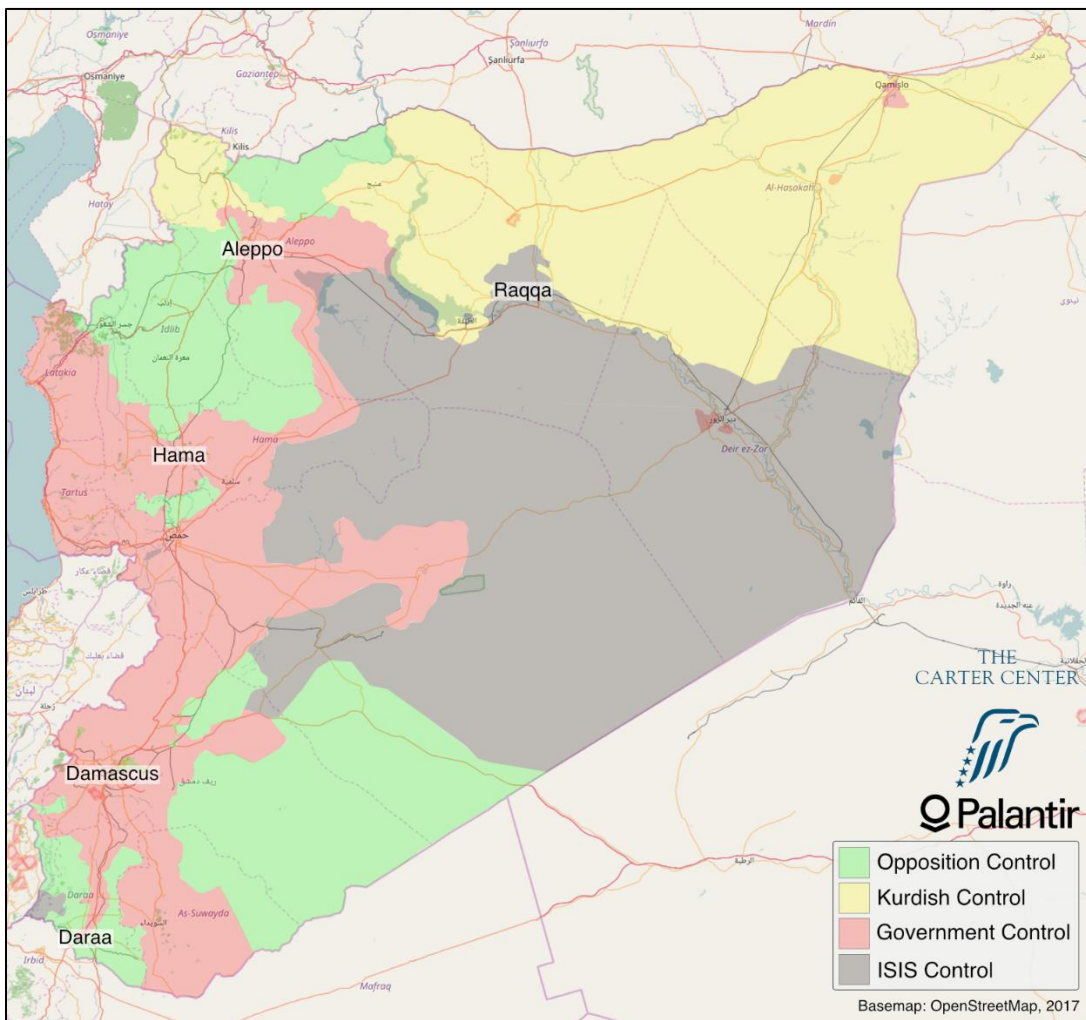


Figure 1 - Areas of control in Syria as of April 19

### **“Four Towns Agreement” developments**

As part of the “Four Towns Agreement,” evacuations from the pro-government towns of Kefraya and al-Fo’ah began on April 15. However, as evacuations began, a suicide car bomber struck the convoy of evacuee-filled buses while they were waiting at a checkpoint in Al-Rashidein, west of Aleppo. The attack killed 126 people and injured more than another 50. The blast also killed aid workers and many Ahrar al-Sham and Hai’yat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) fighters escorting the convoy. The same al-Fo’ah/Kefraya convoy was reported to have reached the Jibreen center for IDPs in Aleppo later that night. Another convoy, carrying evacuees from besieged pro-opposition towns of Zabadani and Madaya, was also reported to have reached opposition territory in Idleb without incident.

Ahrar al-Sham was in part responsible for the security of the convoy from Kefraya and al-Fo’ah, and has launched an investigation into the bombing. Opposition fighters and the White Helmets rushed to help in the wake of the attack. The attack prompted swift UN condemnation.

The remainder of evacuations continued in stages, despite the attack on the convoy, and without further incident. By April 19, convoys carrying fighters from the Zabadani area and 150 persons from Wadi Barada (an opposition-held besieged area recently included in the agreement) departed for opposition-held territory. The Zabadani plain, including the towns of Zabadani, Madaya, Baqin, Sargaya, and Bloudan, is now completely under the control of Hezbollah and Syrian government forces.

HTS in Yarmouk Camp reached a similar evacuation agreement with the Syrian government, whereby they will leave for Idleb in two months. The agreement also includes a ceasefire in exchange for allowing entrance of food and supplies to HTS and civilians. HTS clashed with ISIS in the Yarmouk area over the reporting week.

### **Conflict in Northern Hama and Western Aleppo**

Less than a month after the opposition offensive in northern Hama began, pro-government forces have recaptured nearly all the territory lost to the March opposition offensive, and have even advanced past previous frontlines to occupy points in Tibat el-Imam by April 19. The government’s Tiger Forces and Hezbollah participated heavily in this recapture. Russian soldiers have also been seen in the northern Hama countryside, alongside the newly established, Russian-equipped 5<sup>th</sup> Corps of the Syrian government. Additionally, it is reported that fighters from IRGC-backed militias have been killed in fighting in the northern Hama countryside in the last four weeks.

Opposition forces used an anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) to successfully target two Russian military advisors on the Hama front over this reporting period. The Central Division, an FSA affiliate, used a US-supplied TOW anti-tank missile to hit a gathering of troops in Rahabet Khattab in northern Hama on April 18.

Incendiary munitions used by Russian warplanes were documented multiple times in Idleb province over this reporting period. Al-Lataminah in Hama was hit by such weapons at least three times, including in daylight on April 15.

Fighting continues between opposition and pro-government forces supported by allies (including the Palestinian Liwa' al-Quds) near al-Rashidein in the western countryside of Aleppo. In a surprising new development, pro-government forces advanced south from YPG-controlled territory west of Aleppo in an attempt to capture the mountain of Sheikh Aqil, located just north of the opposition-controlled community of Qabtan al-Jabal. If pro-government forces succeed in capturing this area, it would further isolate the

opposition bastions of Kafr Hamra, Andan and Haritan, located immediately to the northwest of Aleppo city.

### Continuing conflict against ISIS

Pro-government forces continued to make gains against ISIS both north and south of the T4 Airbase in eastern Homs. No additional advances were made by pro-government forces in northeastern Aleppo near the Euphrates River.

To the east, the predominantly Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) advanced significantly against ISIS forces in Tabqa city. SDF fighters secured the western and eastern neighborhoods of Tabqa and advanced as far north as the Tabqa Hospital, which is about 3.5km west of the damaged Tabqa Dam control room. Risk to the dam remains high as fighting continues.

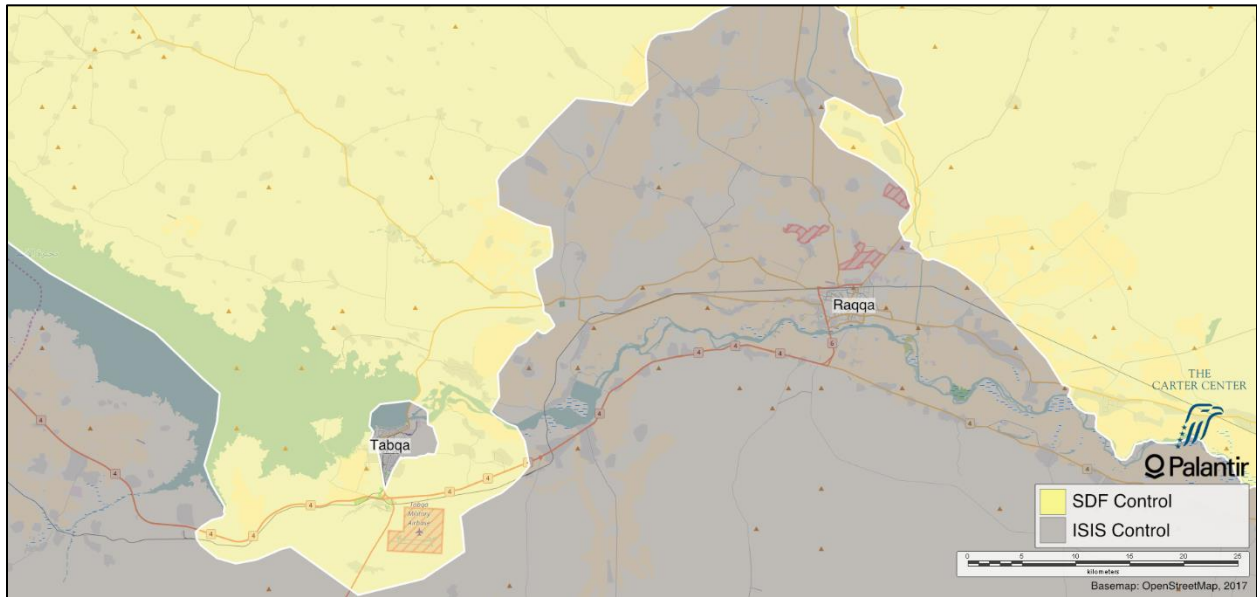


Figure 2 - Map of areas of control around Tabqa and Raqqa

SDF forces north of Raqqa city also advanced, capturing villages through the center of what remains of ISIS-held northern Raqqa countryside, reportedly isolating a pocket to the north and forcing an ISIS withdrawal. News of a more solidified Raqqa Civilian Council broke this period, three weeks after the organization's initial announcement. The council is an SDF/PYD-supported civilian council to govern the territory around Raqqa in advance of its capture from ISIS.

After increased ISIS activity near the Syrian-Iraqi border town of Albukamal, Coalition planes struck locations in Deir Ezzor province on April 17. The warplanes struck a residential compound in the Albukamal, killing around 15 civilians and injuring dozens more.

## Daraa and Eastern Qalamoun

The opposition offensive for Daraa city, al-Bunyan al-Marsous, gained more ground within the city over this period. Opposition forces advanced in al-Manshiyeh neighborhood and have begun to advance against pro-government forces in Sajneh neighborhood to the north as well. The opposition's Ahrar Nawa also targeted ISIS forces on the outskirts of Adwan in western Daraa.

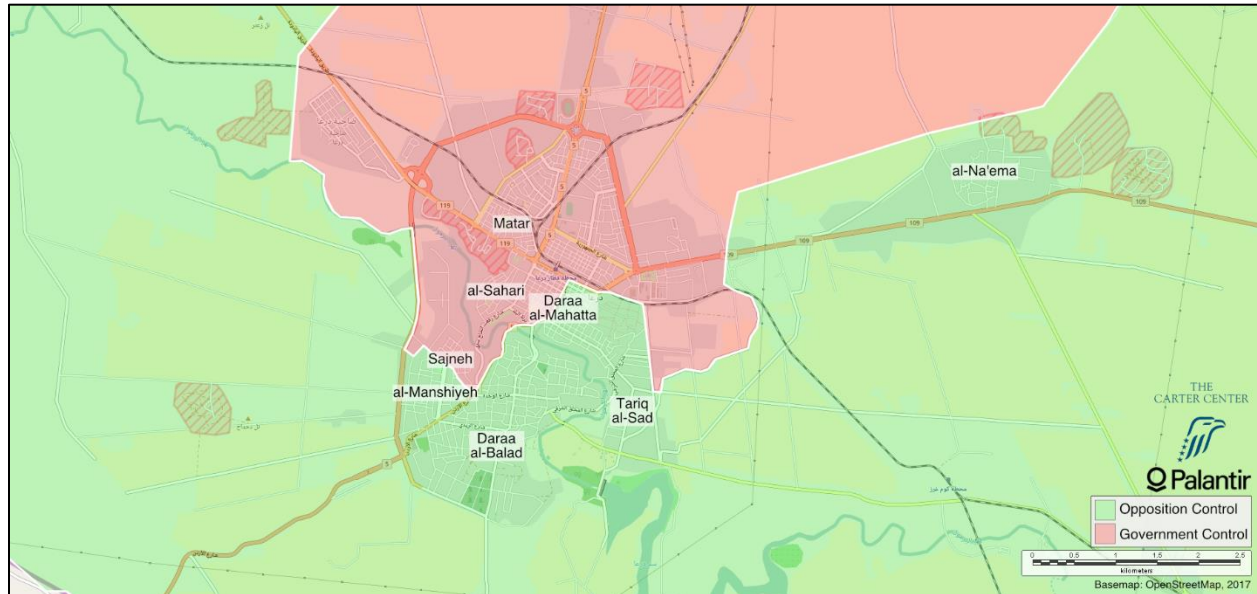


Figure 3 - Map of areas of control in Daraa city

Opposition forces in Eastern Qalamoun (the mountain range to the east of Damascus city) are not solely targeting ISIS in their offensives. The opposition's Martyr Ahmed Abdo Forces have established a foothold on the mountains surrounding the Dumayr Military Airport (one of the largest of Syria's airbases), leading to a partial withdrawal of government forces from the airbase. Aircraft were also evacuated from the nearby al-Seen airbase, relocated under the cover of darkness.

The opposition's Jaysh Usood al-Sharqia have continued to advance against ISIS in Eastern Qalamoun, but are facing higher levels of government aerial bombardment targeting their newly-captured areas. These airstrikes are likely a result of concern caused by the pace of opposition advances in the area, including near Dumayr. Additionally, if opposition forces continue the northward trajectory of their advance, they will run into government forces advancing southward from Palmyra.

### Conclusions:

This reporting period saw a continuation of trends witnessed over the past several weeks – continued pro-government advances in northern Hama, continued shrinking of ISIS territorial control, and consistently high conflict in Daraa and Eastern Qalamoun. The attacks on the Kefraya and al-Fo'ah convoy of buses are war crimes that aimed to derail negotiations between anti-government and pro-government forces across much of Syria. It is encouraging that evacuations continued despite this act, though civilian deaths throughout Syria remain a major concern.