



FACT SHEET SYRIA

01. February 2018 – 19. March 2018 Nr. 67

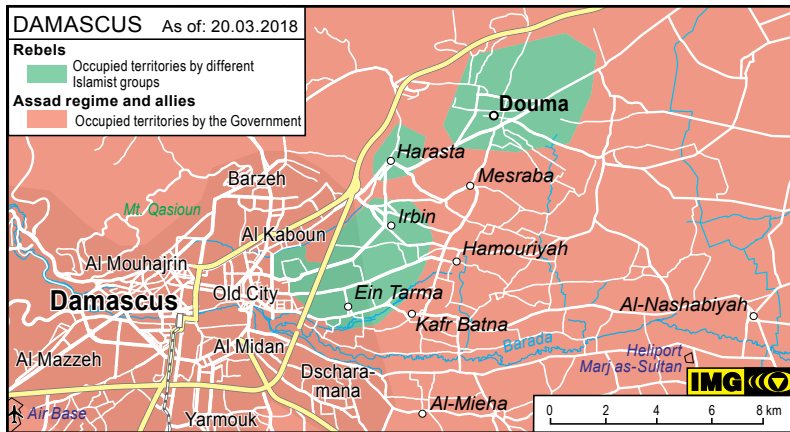


The regime and its allies shifted their attention to rebel-controlled areas in Idlib, Ghouta and in Syria's south-west, all of which are considered de-escalation zones. Weeks of Russian and Syrian airstrikes on the last rebel-held enclave in eastern Ghouta, near Damascus, resulted in the collapse of civilian infrastructure and in 1,400 deaths. UN Security Resolution 2401, calling for a 30-day ceasefire in Eastern Ghouta was not implemented. The mass exodus of civilians, isolated evacuation agreements with rebel groups and ongoing ground offensives carried out by regime forces will shape the immediate future in Eastern Ghouta.

Turkish soldiers and Syrian combatants, fighting under the banner of the FSA, seized the center of Afrin, a Kurdish enclave, from YPG forces and would, according to Erdogan, advance to further Kurdish territories such as

Kobane, Qamishli and Manbij. Turkish military presence in the city of Manbisich could lead to possible clashes with the USA, whose soldiers are stationed in the area.

Since early February, four states involved in the Syrian conflict entered into a direct conflict with each other; A US airstrike took place in response to the convergence of pro-regime forces and numerous Russian mercenaries to an American base in Deir ez-Zour; One of the most serious confrontations between Israel and Iran since the onset of the Syrian war occurred when the Syrian missile defense shot down an Israeli jet. The jet was part of an Israeli airstrike in Syria, in response to an entry of an Iranian drone into Israeli airspace. The 9th round of the Astana peace talks took place alongside military offensives in which Russia, Iran and Turkey- the three negotiating states, are deeply entangled.



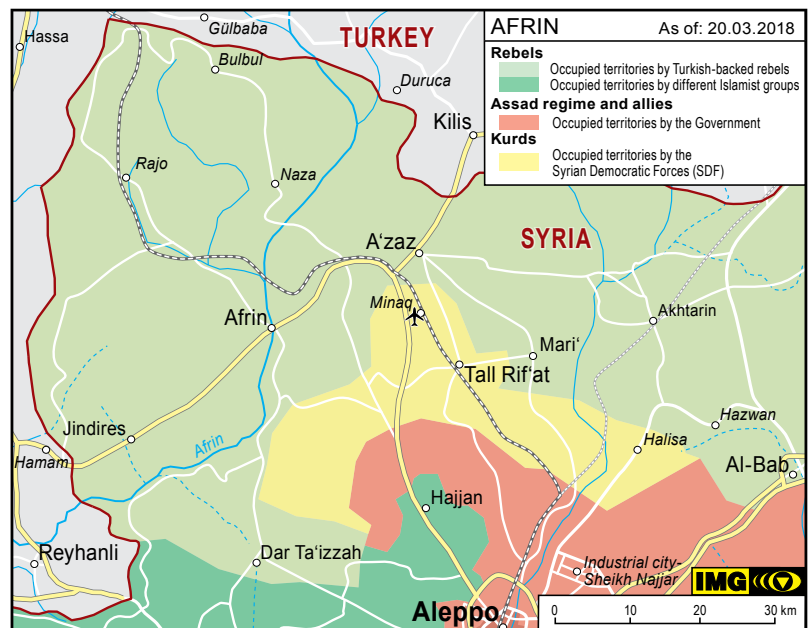
MAP ANALYSIS

The Syrian Army and related militias split the last opposition-held area near Damascus into three parts, which have a combined size of 30km², yet they are densely populated. Each part, is dominated by different opposition factions; In the southern pocket, around Ein Tarma, the major part of the offensive is currently taking place. In Harasta and Duma, no significant shifts in territorial control took place.

MAP ANALYSIS

Following the retreat of the Kurdish YPG militia from the city of Afrin and the surrounding villages in northern Syria, the Turkish army took control of these areas with little to no resistance. The offensive is now being pushed southwards, where the YPG would potentially lose further territory.

Due to several military bases of Regime forces, situated between Aleppo and Afrin and the newly established Turkish observation post near Hajjan, northwest of Aleppo, it is likely that the fighting will cease for the time being.



The periodically published Fact Sheet compiles and analyzes significant developments pertaining to the Syrian conflict while providing maps and an outlook of possible future events.

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SOURCES: MEDIA ANALYSIS; LAYOUT: REF III/Medien, IMG



INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT

10.02.: The US targeted a pro-regime battle tank, which previously crossed the Euphrates River and attacked positions of the Kurdish SDF and US Special Forces, near the provincial capital- Deir ez-Zour. The strike reportedly claimed the lives of several hundred regime-loyal combatants, including Russian mercenaries and Iranian proxies.

10.02.: The Syrian missile defence shot down an Israeli jet, formerly involved in airstrikes against the regimes' air base in eastern Homs. The jet was part of an Israeli airstrike in Syria launched in response to an Iranian drone entering Israel's airspace. The drone was immediately shot down by Israel.

15.02.: In consultation with Russia, Turkey set up three new observation posts in eastern Idlib and in southern Aleppo, aimed at monitoring the Idlib de-escalation zone and repealing a possible offensive by the regime. Pro-Iranian forces fired at a Turkish convoy, Russia responded by deploying military police to form a buffer between the forces.

26.02.: Opposition forces reported poisoning gas attacks by the regime in East Ghouta. Russia and the regime accused rebel groups of staging the attacks to provoke an international response.

01.03.: Unconfirmed reports suggest that the US had deployed 600 additional Special Forces personnel and armoured vehicles to its base in al-Tanf, near the Jordan-Iraq border.

05.03.: Due to the Turkish operation in Afrin, hundreds of Kurdish SDF fighters withdrew from battling IS in eastern Syria and joined local forces in Afrin and Manbij. Accordingly, the Pentagon's spokesman announced a temporary halt in the anti-IS operation.

11.03.: US Secretary of Defense threatened the Assad regime with retaliatory measures in case chemical weapon will be used in East Ghouta. Russia responded that it will not stand by in the face of US airstrikes.

16.03.: The foreign ministers of Iran, Russia and Turkey took part in the 9th round of the Astana peace talks, while all three countries are deeply involved in military offensives in Syria (Afrin, Ghouta).

19.03.: Whereas Kalin, the Presidential spokesman, announced the establishment of a Turkish-American security zone around Manbij, the announcement was denied by the American State department.

HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

04.02.: The UN is investigating the alleged use of chlorine gas against civilians in Idlib and Eastern Ghouta. The Syrian regime denied using chemical weapons. An alleged Turkish army use of chlorine gas against civilians in al-Mazynah village is also under investigation.

20.02.: A 48 hours attack by the regime's air force of a rebel-held area in northwest Idlib resulted in the death of 250 civilians, including 50 children, 1,200 were injured. The UN expressed grave concern for the safety of two million people living in the city of Idlib, one million of which have already been displaced.

20.02.: Weeks-long Russian and Syrian airstrikes, targeting Eastern Ghouta, and involving attacks on medical facilities and vital infrastructure, resulted in more than 1400 victims (status: 19.03) and a deteriorating humanitarian situation.

27.02.: Following mounting condemnations of the continued violence in besieged Ghouta despite the UN SC resolution, Russian president Putin ordered a daily five-hour "humanitarian pause".

16.03.: A mass exodus from eastern Ghouta took place, as thousands of Syrian civilians fled the area, crossing by foot to regime positions.

18.03.: A two-months Turkish attack on the Kurdish controlled area of Afrin was terminated with a Turkish victory. Various casualty estimates were made during the operation. The monitoring group SOHR documented that 1,500 SDF and 437 Turkish-backed fighters were killed, as well as the death of 91 pro-regime militia-men, 78 Turkish soldiers and 289 civilians. Up to 150,000 residents have fled the city.

DOMESTIC POLITICS

01.02.: The opposition alliance HNC reiterated its call for the establishment of a transitional governing body with executive power. They affirmed their readiness to discuss all issues on the basis of UN resolution 2254 in Geneva, which they consider the main platform for negotiation.

02.02.: Residents of the town of Binnish (Idlib) protested against the rule of the HTS-backed local government. HTS' response included numerous arrests, resulting in the death of at least one civilian.

06.02.: Thousands of Afrin's citizens took to the streets denouncing the Turkish assault on Afrin.

25.02.: The Syrian Cabinet set a cohesive plan for restoring main services to liberated villages in Idlib's countryside in order to allow for civilians' return.

26.02.: The Syrian-Russian Businessmen Forum was launched in Moscow in order to increase investments from Russian private companies for Syria's reconstruction.

04.03.: The Cabinet reviewed touristic investment projects for the Syrian coastal area and decided to allocate funds necessary to

MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

03.02., Idlib: Eleven turkish-supported militant groups, including Ahrar al-Sham, Nur ad-Din and al-Zinki announced their merger into the "Syrian Liberation Front" (SLF). In the following weeks, heavy clashes broke out between SLF and HTS, resulting in territorial losses for the latter.

03.02., Idlib: A Russian Jet was shot down by militants in the province of Idlib, the pilot was killed on the ground. HTS and Jaysh al-Nasr claimed responsibility. Russia reacted with fierce bombardments of the area.

13.02., Idlib: The regime offensive, accompanied by heavy russian airstrikes, ended with closing the IS-pocket north of Hama. Since then, the frontlines are frozen along the recently established observation posts of the Turkish army in Idlib.

20.02., Afrin: The Kurds have struck a deal with the Syrian regime forces to help repel attacks in Afrin as the death toll among Kurdish fighters and civilians increased. Turkish bombardment prevented pro-regime forces from entering Afrin.

22.02., Aleppo: The YPG confirmed it had handed over the control of the kurdish districts in Aleppo to the regime in exchange for a number of fighters joining the defense of Afrin.

25.02., Ghouta: Regime forces commenced a ground operation in Eastern Ghouta. The rebel held area was split into 3 parts and 70% of the territory- the less densely populated parts- was seized by 19.03.

07.03., Deir ez-Zor: An increasing number of SDF fighters have been reportedly redeployed from fighting IS in Deir ez-Zor to Afrin. IS was nevertheless prevented from gaining ground due to US airstrikes.

12.03., Deraa: Regime forces bombed towns in Deraa province for several days in a row, which suggests a ground offensive in the near future.

18.03., Afrin: After the withdrawal of the YPG from large parts of Afrin, Turkish-backed forces took control of the city. The YPG announced its intention to resort to guerilla tactics in order to counter the Turkish occupation. In Southern Afrin, fighting is still ongoing.



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