



Weekly Conflict Summary

June 9-15, 2016

The past week's conflict events have once again been focused primarily in the northern governorate of Aleppo (over 50% of all recorded incidents took place in Aleppo).

Between June 9 and June 15, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) managed to encircle the ISIS-held city of Manbij. Despite some lingering back-and-forth fighting, as of June 9th the city was effectively besieged, with fighting taking place on the outskirts of the city.

To the south of Manbij, fighting between pro-government forces and ISIS continues along the road to Tabqa city. Despite ongoing fighting, no significant advances have been made since last week, and government forces remain approximately 30km from Tabqa city. Government forces also dropped leaflets on Raqqa city (another 40km to the northeast of Tabqa) warning of an impending attack. Forces with the SDF continue to clash with ISIS in the countryside north of Raqqa city. Pro-government forces have also made a push eastwards towards besieged government troops in Deir Ez-Zor, but have made little progress so far amid reports of high casualties.

To the south of Aleppo city, intense fighting has continued between opposition and pro-government forces in the towns of Zaytan and Khalasah. The two towns have been subject to violent back-and-forth offensives involving opposition fighters largely from Jaysh al-Fateh and the Syrian Army, supported by Hezbollah and pro-government Syrian and foreign militias. In Mare' area north of Aleppo city, much of the territory lost to ISIS in May has been reclaimed over the past week after breaking the ISIS-led siege on Mare' on June 9th.

In Aleppo city itself, both opposition and pro-government forces have engaged in shelling of each other's territory, with nearly every district of the city being affected. Airstrikes by government and Russian warplanes have heavily targeted the al-Castillo road, which is the only major entryway to opposition-held portions of the city (see heat map below). Airstrikes have also targeted opposition-held suburbs to the north of Aleppo city, particularly Anadan and Haritan.

On June 15, Russia announced the start of a 48 hour ceasefire in Aleppo, with the stated goal of "lowering the level of armed violence and stabilizing the situation." As of the publishing of this report, multiple airstrikes have already been reported, including some barrel bombs.

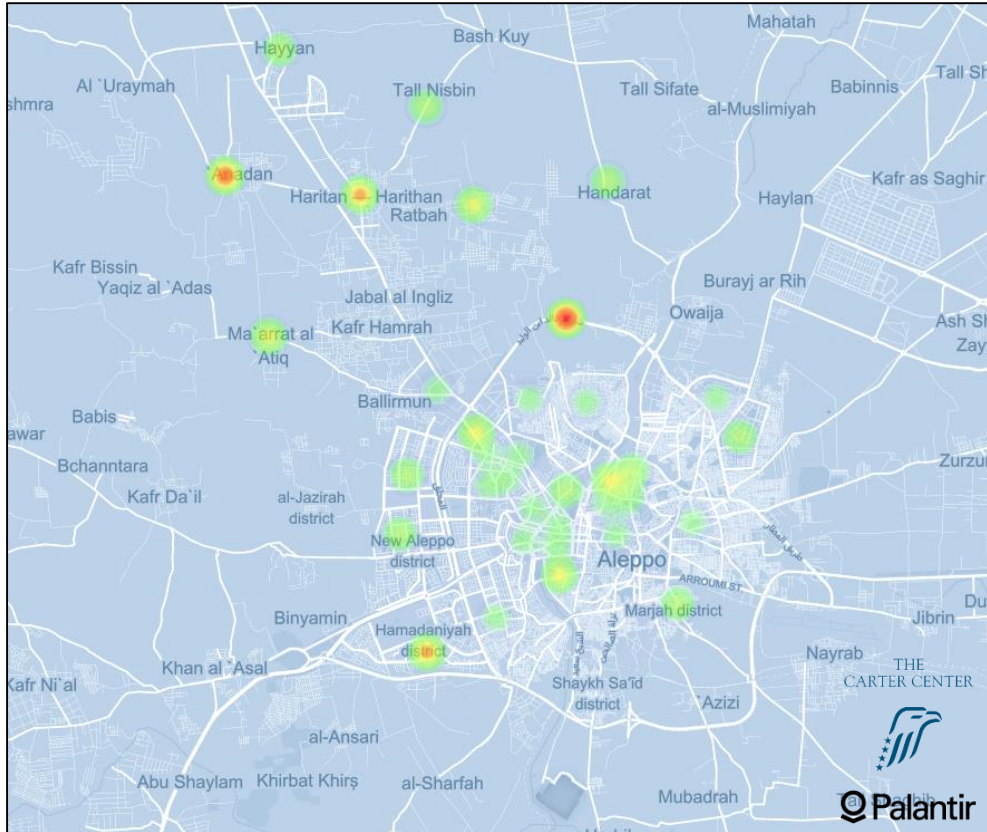


Figure 1: Heat map showing frequency of conflict events per area from June 8-15, 2016.

Intensive fighting and aerial bombardment continued this past week around the town of Kabani and the Jabal al-Akrad area in Lattakia governorate near the Turkish border. At the time of this report's publishing, the Syrian Arab Army and National Defense Forces (NDF) took control of large swaths of area in eastern Lattakia, resulting in nearly complete control of the governorate by Syrian government forces.

In southern Syria, fighting has continued between opposition forces and the ISIS-affiliated Liwa Shuhada al-Yarmouk near the Jordanian border, though no major territorial changes have occurred. Outside of Damascus, regular airstrikes have continued on the suburbs of Daraya and in Khan al-Shih. Additionally relatively small-scale clashes have occurred along much of the front lines in Eastern Ghouta.

Conclusion:

The continued rise in violence in and around Aleppo is worrying. While the unilateral announcement of a ceasefire is a positive sign, multiple violations have already been reported and opposition figures expressed skepticism even before the ceasefire began. The gains that have been made against ISIS by all parties in recent weeks are a positive development, but cannot be sustained if full-scale fighting returns in Aleppo. Every effort should be made to ensure the success of the ceasefire to stem the rise of violence in northern Syria.