



## Weekly Conflict Summary

September 1-7, 2016

The week of September 1-7, 2016 again saw high levels of conflict along several frontlines, including the northern countryside of Hama, southwest of Aleppo city, and the Turkish border between A'zaz and Jarablus.

In Hama, ongoing clashes as part of the Marwan Hadid offensive led to further gains by opposition forces, including control of the villages of Weibdeh and Nasiriyah south of Halfaya, bringing them within 10 km of the Hama airport. Opposition forces took at least 14 villages in the span of four days within the province, and warplanes struck areas taken by anti-government forces. An estimated 100,000 people were reported displaced in Hama between Aug. 28 and Sept. 5.

In Aleppo city, pro-government forces regained critical territory in the southwest of the city, retaking Ramousa Artillery School. This new gain has effectively put opposition-held East Aleppo under siege once more, just six weeks after the government initially besieged East Aleppo and three weeks after the original siege was broken.



Figure 1: Frontlines in northern Syria as of September 7, 2016. Map made with software from Palantir Technologies.

Along the Syria-Turkey border, Turkish-backed opposition forces have continued taking ISIS territory as part of Operation Euphrates Shield (OES). By September 4, the twelfth day of declared operations, OES secured the Turkish border from ISIS. To do this, they cut across 90km of territory to link A'zaz and Jarablus. Tensions between Arab opposition and Kurdish forces in the north continue to escalate as Turkey this week again explicitly acknowledged that their operations in the area are against both ISIS and

Kurdish forces. As a result of these new tensions, on September 2, Liwa-al-Tahrir defected from the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to join OES following tensions with the SDF. Immediately following the defection, they clashed with YPG forces.

Turkish artillery units, tanks, and armored personnel carriers were deployed to the Turkish town of Islahiye, near Kurdish-controlled Afrin in northwestern Aleppo countryside. Turkish artillery began a new round of shelling against YPG positions in Afrin. Afrin has until now served as a safe haven for many IDPs from other areas in Aleppo, and any escalation could lead to another round of large-scale displacement.

In central Syria, ISIS attacked pro-government forces near the village of Huwaysis, and captured territory between Huwaysis and the Al-Sha'er gas fields. Pro-government forces then restored control over many points near Huwaysis.

On September 2, Russian jets dropped incendiary and cluster munitions in western Aleppo and rural Idleb, hitting Masrit, Saraqab, Binesh, Bseida, Khan Sobol, Maarat al-Nu'man, Ma'arat Masrin, Tamana'a, and Ram Hamdan. On September 6, more cluster bombs were dropped on Khan Sheikhoun. On September 6, yet another instance of chlorine gas use by the government was reported in Aleppo.

Warplanes (allegedly from the Syrian air force) struck Ma'er Debsie, killing 8 people. They also struck a sheep market in Sheikh Mustafa, killing a child. The only remaining hospital in Khan Sheikhoun was also struck by aerial bombardment, putting it out of service. Over 150 shells struck areas in the only two government-held towns in Idleb province, Kefraya and al-Fo'ah, hitting the only water tanks of the towns.

Between 1,200 and 1,400 families have fled the city of Abtaa in Daraa as a result of a new government offensive against the town. The majority fled to Da'el, Sheikh Saed, Nawa, Tassil and Sahm El Golan.

Suicide attacks on Arzouna Bridge south of Tartous are reported to have killed 30 and wounded 45. The new attacks are not the first bombings on areas of pro-government Tartous, but are significant given the amount of civilians impacted by the attacks.

Conflict between two diverging opposition groups, Liwa Jund al-Aqsa and Ahrar al-Sham, reached a breaking point this week as fighters clashed in Idleb city. Al-Aqsa agents allegedly attempted to assassinate an Ahrar al-Sham commander in Idleb.

#### Conclusions:

Northern Hama countryside, southern Aleppo city, and Syria's northern border with Turkey all experienced another week of significant conflict. As conflict spreads to parts of Syria that were previously considered safe havens for civilians, every effort must be made to reduce the impact upon civilians and to address the needs of recently displaced persons.

As with last week and the weeks prior, use of incendiary and cluster munition remains a major concern. Allegations of continued use of chlorine gas in Aleppo city should be urgently investigated and addressed.