

Syria Situation Report: April 7-14, 2015

1 April 7-9: Islamist group Faylaq al-Sham announced the “battle of ‘The Believers are But Brothers’” in northwestern Hama Province in an attempt to reduce pressure on opposition fighters in Idlib Province. Rebel forces began a shelling campaign targeting regime positions throughout northern Hama Province, while Ahrar al-Sham (HASI) detonated a VBIED against a checkpoint along a regime supply route to Idlib

2 April 11-12: Unidentified rebel fighters shelled the regime-held Christian neighborhood of Suleimaniyeh in Aleppo city over the Orthodox Easter weekend, killing at least twenty-seven people and wounding ‘dozens’ of others. Opposition forces in Aleppo released a statement denying responsibility for the attack. In response, the regime carried out airstrikes against several civilian targets in rebel-held eastern Aleppo, including a market, an elementary school, and a warehouse for food aid.

3 April 12-13: JN and other rebel groups seized regime positions overlooking the town of Falita in the northern Qalamoun region following clashes with regime forces supported by NDF, Hezbollah, and Palestinian fighters. Meanwhile, Ahrar al-Sham and other rebels seized at least two regime checkpoints in the mountains near Zabadani in the southern Qalamoun region after clashes with Hezbollah and regime forces.

4 April 9: Ahrar al-Sham (HASI) and other rebel factions participating in the battle of ‘Fatah al-Mubeen’ seized the al-Ulayyaniyah area south of Palmyra following clashes which killed over 30 ISIS militants.

5 April 13-14: JN and other Islamist groups participating in the Jaysh al-Fatah Operations Room repelled at least two regime attempts to advance from the Brick Factory checkpoint and seize the village of Qamenas overlooking rebel positions surrounding the Mastoumah Camp south of Idlib city. In response, Jaysh al-Fatah forces launched an attack targeting the Brick Factory checkpoint.

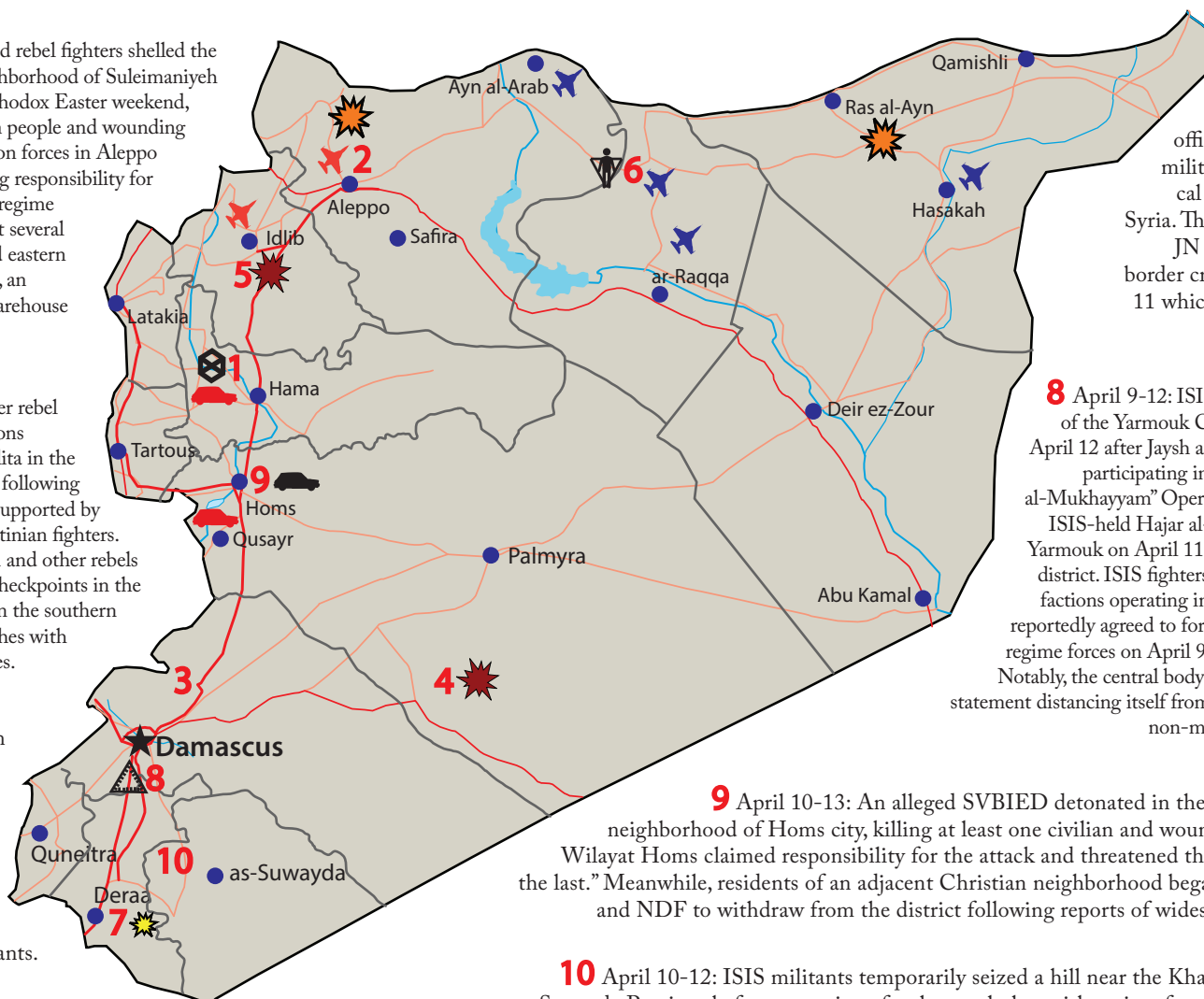
6 April 11-12: YPG forces supported by U.S.-led coalition airstrikes and rebel fighters in the Euphrates Volcano Operations Room seized the Lafarge cement plant and at least six nearby villages northwest of Ayn Issa in northern ar-Raqqa Province. ISIS militants launched an unsuccessful counter-attack involving two SVEST detonations in an attempt to recapture the area.

7 April 13: Six prominent rebel factions in the FSA-affiliated Southern Front issued official statements rejecting any military cooperation or ideological affinity with JN in southern Syria. These announcements follow a JN withdrawal from the Nassib border crossing with Jordan on April 11 which left the Southern Front in sole custody of the crossing.

8 April 9-12: ISIS withdrew from large portions of the Yarmouk Camp in southern Damascus on April 12 after Jaysh al-Islam and other rebel factions participating in the newly-formed “Nusra Ahl al-Mukhayyam” Operations Room advanced into the ISIS-held Hajar al-Aswad neighborhood south of Yarmouk on April 11 and seized most of the al-Zein district. ISIS fighters also lost ground to Palestinian factions operating in the Yarmouk Camp after they reportedly agreed to form a joint operations room with regime forces on April 9 to expel ISIS from the district. Notably, the central body of the PLO released an official statement distancing itself from this agreement and calling for non-military means to clear the camp.

9 April 10-13: An alleged SVBIED detonated in the majority-Alawite al-Zahraa neighborhood of Homs city, killing at least one civilian and wounding ‘dozens’ of others. ISIS Wilayat Homs claimed responsibility for the attack and threatened that “this operation will not be the last.” Meanwhile, residents of an adjacent Christian neighborhood began calling for regime soldiers and NDF to withdraw from the district following reports of widespread looting after the blast.

10 April 10-12: ISIS militants temporarily seized a hill near the Khalkhalah Airbase in northern Suwayda Province before retreating after heavy clashes with regime forces. Meanwhile, FSA-affiliated rebel forces recaptured another hill near the Tha’lah Airbase in western Suwayda Province following an initial regime advance. The increased military pressure on Suwayda comes amidst continued resistance by the local Druze population against expanded regime conscription efforts.



- YPG
- Opposition Forces
- Pro-Regime Forces
- ISIS
- Jabhat al-Nusra (JN)
- SVEST
- Declared Offensive
- New Operations Room
- SVBIED
- Major Clash

Background Kinetic Activity

- Anti-ISIS Coalition Airstrikes
- Major Regime Airstrikes
- Alleged CW Attack
- Low-level clashes
- VBIED

April 11: A VBIED detonated in the village of Hawik in southern Homs Province along the Syrian-Lebanese border, killing two Lebanese men and wounding several others. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack.



by Jennifer Cafarella, Christopher Kozak, and the ISW Syria Team

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ISIS Expansion into Southwestern Syria Threatens Previously-Stable Zones of Regime Control: ISIS’s claim of responsibility for an SVBIED that detonated in an Alawite-majority neighborhood in Homs City indicates ISIS ability to penetrate regime defenses and may signify the start of an ISIS campaign to disrupt security along the M5 highway in Syria’s central corridor. While this would constitute a major expansion in ISIS military operations, it is increasingly likely that continued YPG pressure on ISIS in northern Syria will prompt ISIS to launch a new major military campaign in the west to offset losses in the north. ISIS may also have been responsible for the VBIED that detonated on the Syrian-Lebanese border northwest of key regime terrain at al-Qusayr, south of Homs City. ISIS could seek to link future operations in the central corridor to efforts to disrupt a Lebanese Armed Forces crackdown in northeastern Lebanon, which has placed ISIS cells in the area under pressure. ISIS also continues to consolidate a staging area in the relatively unpopulated desert triangle stretching from southern Damascus to northern Suwayda to southeastern Homs which serves as a likely transit route from Deir ez-Zour to the Damascus countryside. Although Dera’a Province likely remains impermissible for ISIS in the near term as a result of JN and rebel measures to prevent ISIS incursion, ISIS appears to calculate that it is possible to create exploitable opportunities in southern Syria by disrupting the security of neighboring Suwayda Province. ISIS posturing in the vicinity of Damascus also dramatically asserts ISIS presence and operational capabilities to civilian populations and armed groups in the capital, as witnessed in Yarmouk and the surrounding area.

Prominent Southern Rebel Factions Claim Opposition to JN: The statements released by six Western-backed rebel groups from the FSA-affiliated Southern Front in Dera’a Province renouncing cooperation with JN are likely the result of pressure from Jordan and other members of the covert Military Operations Command (MOC) that funnels weapons and supplies to “moderate” rebel groups in southern Syria. The release of these statements follows the participation of some of these groups in the JN-led seizure of the Syrian-Jordanian border crossing at Nassib on April 1 despite reported Jordanian pressure on moderate rebels not to participate in the attack. The statements may therefore constitute a concession made by rebels to the MOC in order to maintain foreign support, and may not result in actual changes in JN-rebel interaction in Southern Syria. Furthermore, a number of moderate groups with suspected ties to the MOC did not release similar statements, likely indicating a decision to opt for closer coordination with JN over allegiance to the MOC. At least one such group - Shabab al-Sunna, the leader of a rebel operations room in the area - has demonstrated deepening its cooperation with JN and JN-allied brigades in recent weeks. This likely indicates that these groups are not receiving a level of support sufficient to disrupt the trend of deepening JN-rebel coordination in Southern Syria.