

Syria Situation Report: May 27 - June 9, 2020

1 May 27: Unknown Explosions Cause Turkish Military Casualties in Southern Idlib Province. An unknown explosion targeted a Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) convoy patrolling the M4 Highway in al-Ghassaniyah. The explosion killed one Turkish soldier and injured several others from the TSK and Turkish-backed National Liberation Front (NLF). A second explosion occurred at an al Qaeda-affiliated Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP) warehouse overlooking the M4 Highway in al-Ghassaniyah, 4 km west of Jisr al-Shughour in southern Idlib Province. The explosion, which had an unknown cause, coincided with Russian aircraft flying over western and southern Idlib Province. The explosion killed six TIP members and injured several others.

2 May 27: Likely ISIS Gunmen Kill Russian-supported Daraa Central Committee Leaders. Unknown gunmen ambushed a convoy carrying members of the Russian-supported Daraa Central Committee and Russian-backed Syrian Arab Army (SAA) 5th Corps' 8th Brigade in Muzayrib, western Daraa Province. The attack killed three members of the Daraa Central Committee and wounded four other individuals including two members of the SAA 8th Brigade. One of the men killed was Mahmoud Bardan, a former Free Syrian Army commander who was instrumental in negotiations during the regime takeover of southern Syria in 2018.

3 May 27 - June 4: Russia Likely Expanding Presence East of Qamishli to Increase Pressure on US Forces near Iraqi Border. Russian Military Police (MPs) began establishing a new base east of Qamishli near Malikiyah, Hasakah Province, along the Syria-Turkey border on May 27. Civilians protested the increased Russian patrols and presence in the area. US forces blocked a Russian patrol from entering Malikiyah on June 3. Russian forces withdrew from their new base to Qamishli Airport on June 4. It is unclear if the MPs intend to return to the facility.

4 June 1 - 4: Turkish Forces Deploy Anti-air Systems and Increase Presence in Southern Idlib Province Likely to Deter a Pro-Regime Offensive. The TSK established at least two new bases in southern Idlib Province and reinforced several other positions in the Jabal al-Zawiya region on June 4. Turkish forces established new bases in Maarata and Maaraya in southern Idlib Province, though the number and type of troops and equipment deployed are unknown. The TSK sent additional forces to Ariha, Idlib Province, and began patrolling the streets there on June 1. The TSK also deployed additional heavy artillery to Idlib Province and stationed an air defense system at Nabi Ayoub, a town that overlooks the M4 Highway in southern Idlib Province.

5 May 30: Russia Provides Regime with New Aircraft Likely for Use in Greater Idlib Province. Russia delivered an unspecified number of MiG-29 aircraft to the Syrian Air Force at Hmeimim Airbase in Latakia Province. A Syrian military source stated that the aircraft will be operational starting June 1. The source also said the Syrian Air Force will move the MiG-29 aircraft from Hmeimim to unspecified Syria Air Force bases.

6 June 1: Iranian-backed SAA Units Reach New Settlement Agreement in Western Daraa Province, Likely to Expand Footprint in Southern Syria. The Russian-supported Daraa Central Committee reportedly reached a settlement with unspecified Syrian regime representatives on June 1. As part of the agreement, defectors and individuals

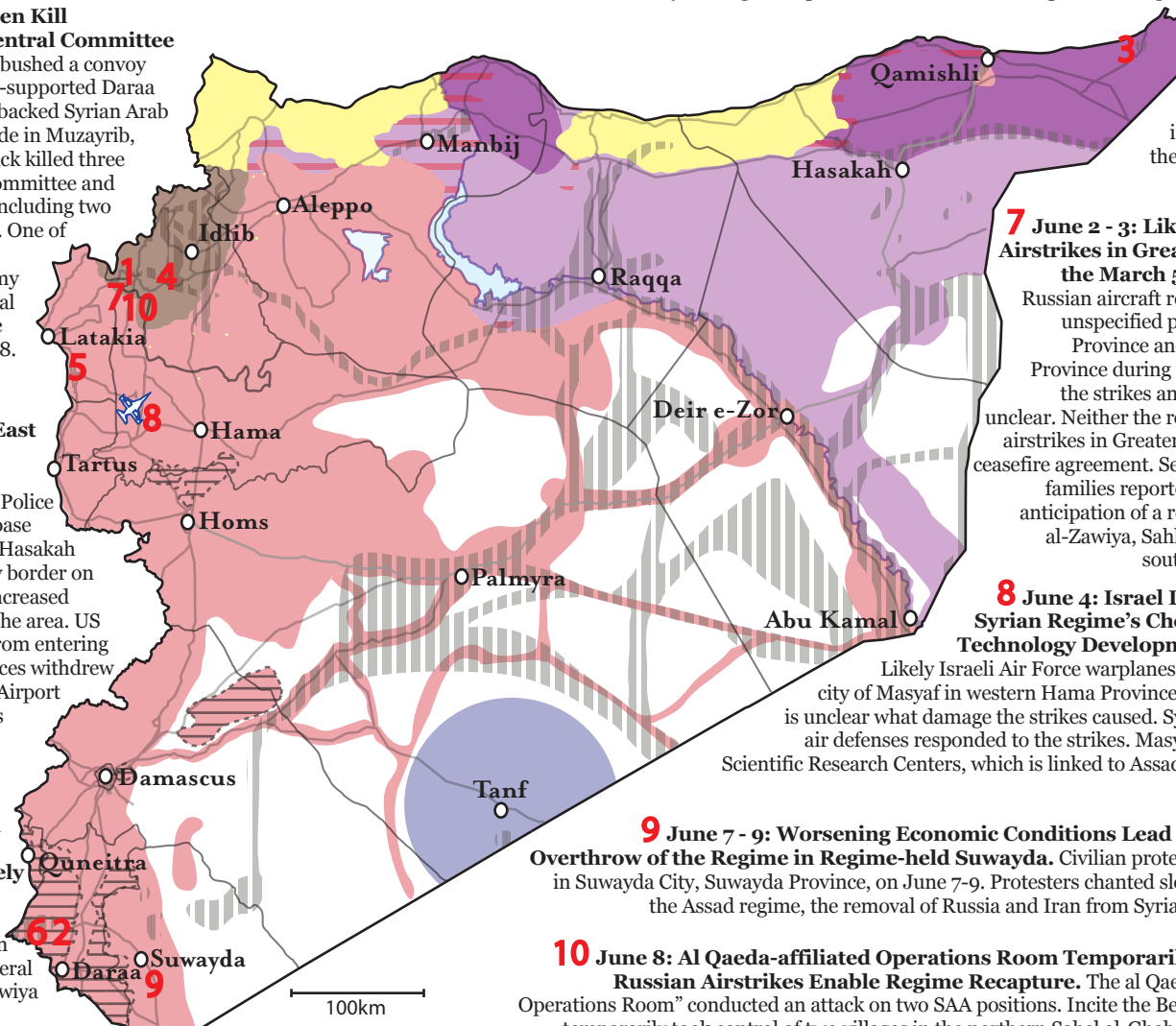
wanted for military service will be able to join the Iranian-backed Syrian Arab Army (SAA) 4th Division to avoid prosecution. These individuals will reportedly train at the Zayzoun Camp in western Daraa Province, 7 km west of Muzayrib.

7 June 2 - 3: Likely Russian Aircraft Resume Airstrikes in Greater Idlib Province, Breaking the March 5 Ceasefire Agreement. Likely Russian aircraft reportedly conducted airstrikes on unspecified positions near Kabanah in Latakia Province and Sahal al-Ghab in southern Idlib Province during the night on June 2. The target of the strikes and extent of their damage remains unclear. Neither the regime nor Russia have conducted airstrikes in Greater Idlib Province since the March 5 ceasefire agreement. Separately, an unknown number of families reportedly left their homes on June 3 in anticipation of a resumed regime offensive in Jabal al-Zawiya, Sahal al-Rouj, and Jisr al-Shughour in southern and western Idlib Province.

8 June 4: Israel Likely behind Strikes against Syrian Regime's Chemical Weapons and Missile Technology Development Labs in Western Hama. Likely Israeli Air Force warplanes struck unknown targets near the city of Masyaf in western Hama Province late in the evening of June 04. It is unclear what damage the strikes caused. Syrian state media claimed regime air defenses responded to the strikes. Masyaf is home to one of the regime's Scientific Research Centers, which is linked to Assad's chemical weapons and missile technology programs.

9 June 7 - 9: Worsening Economic Conditions Lead to Major Protests Calling for Overthrow of the Regime in Regime-held Suwayda. Civilian protesters protested the Syrian regime in Suwayda City, Suwayda Province, on June 7-9. Protesters chanted slogans calling for the overthrow of the Assad regime, the removal of Russia and Iran from Syria, and improved living conditions.

10 June 8: Al Qaeda-affiliated Operations Room Temporarily Seizes Two Villages before Russian Airstrikes Enable Regime Recapture. The al Qaeda-affiliated "Incite the Believers Operations Room" conducted an attack on two SAA positions. Incite the Believers Operations Room fighters temporarily took control of two villages in the northern Sahel al-Ghab area: al-Tanjara, northern Hama Province, and al-Fatratrah, southern Idlib Province. The SAA reportedly recaptured the villages after intense shelling on the anti-Assad-held positions. Russian aircraft also conducted several airstrikes in southern Idlib Province and northern Hama Province in response to the attacks.



- Pro-Regime
- Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)
- Core SDF-Held Kurdish Terrain
- U.S. and Partner Forces
- ISIS Support Zones
- SDF-Dominated, Regime Presence
- Former Opposition Terrain (Reconciled)
- Al Qaeda-Dominated*
- Turkey-Opposition
- Israeli Airstrikes

*AL QAEDA-LINKED GROUPS CONTROL NEARLY ALL GOVERNANCE AND MILITARY STRUCTURES IN GREATER IDLIB PROVINCE. VARIOUS LOCAL ACTORS ASSERT LIMITED CONTROL OVER ISOLATED AREAS OF GREATER IDLIB. Control of Terrain Accurate as of June 11, 2020



SYRIA

direct

Contributors: John Dunford and Will Christou
©2020 by the Institute for the Study of War

Key Takeaway: Pro-regime forces are preparing to restart their offensive in Greater Idlib Province. Russia resumed airstrikes in southern Idlib on June 2 for the first time since the March 5 ceasefire; the airstrikes are a key indicator that pro-regime forces are preparing to renew their offensive in Idlib. Turkey is responding to the recent pro-regime build-up in southern Idlib by expanding its own presence and increasing its air defense capabilities in southern Idlib in a likely attempt to deter the pro-regime campaign. Turkey previously deployed forces and air defense systems into Greater Idlib Province between February and March 2020.