

Syria Update: December 16-23, 2014

1 December 22: A number of Iranian cargo planes landed at the Deir ez-Zour Military Airbase with military reinforcements amidst an ongoing ISIS offensive to penetrate the airbase. Clashes are ongoing, with reports that ISIS killed a regime Brigadier General during the fighting.

6 December 18: ISIS executed a local rebel commander in the Qalamoun region on the Lebanese Border after he refused to pledge allegiance to ISIS, prompting clashes with local rebel forces in multiple areas of Qalamoun.

2 December 11: The Syrian regime approved the delivery of medicine and surgical supplies by the World Health Organization to Aleppo (a) and the Damascus suburbs of Muadamiya and Eastern Ghouta (b).

3 December 19: JN publicly executed the commander of the FSA-affiliated Khalid ibn al-Waleed Brigade in the town of Rastan, north of Homs city, on charges of 'theft, rape, and murder' after arresting him on November 28.

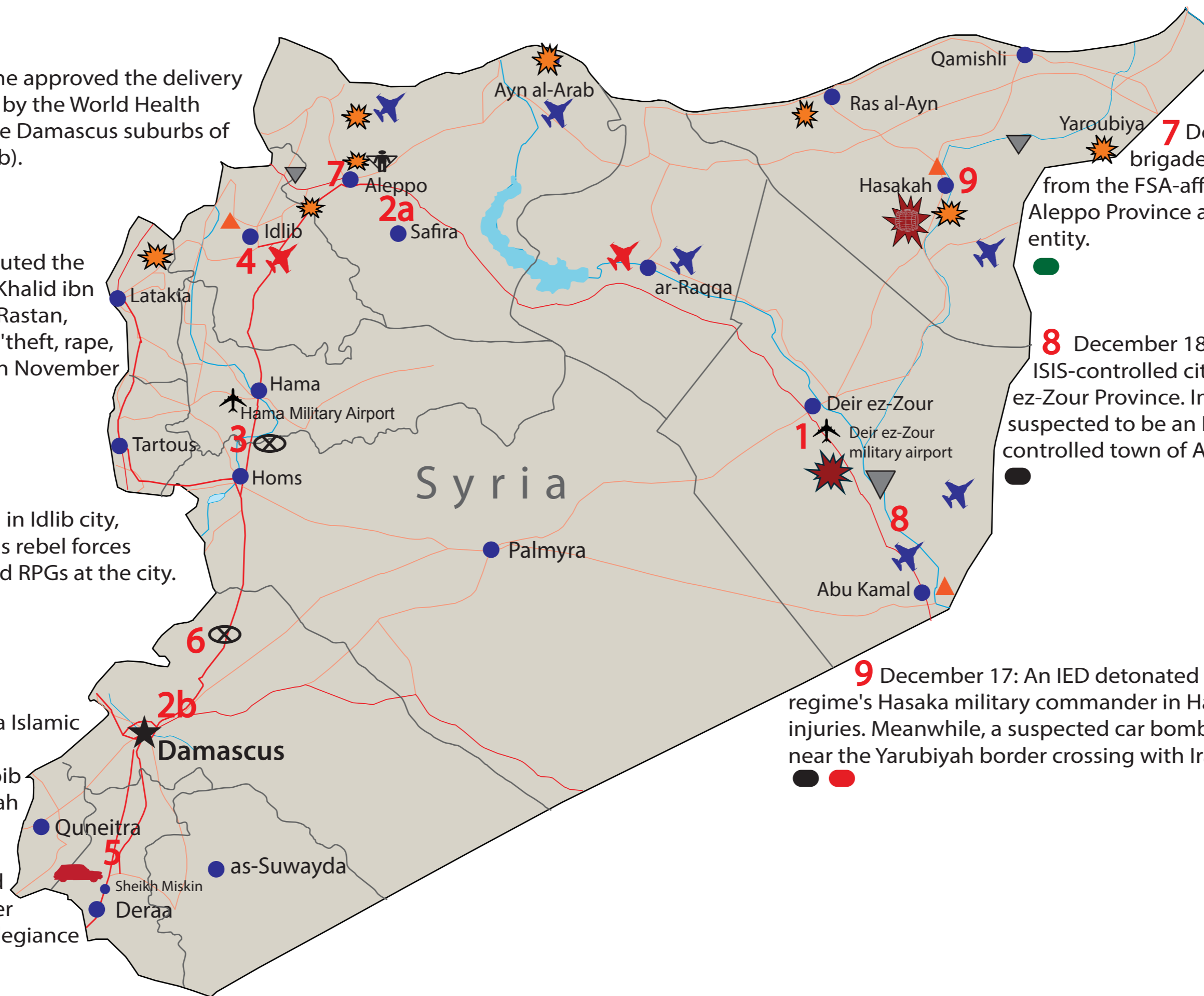
4 December 17: An IED exploded in Idlib city, wounding a number of civilians, as rebel forces launched a number of mortars and RPGs at the city.

5 December 21: The al-Muthanna Islamic Movement formed a joint Shari'a committee along with the al-Habib Muhammad Brigade and the Fatah al-Sham Operations Room in a renewed attempt to mediate the ongoing conflict between JN and the Yarmouk Martyrs Brigade after the brigade allegedly pledged allegiance to ISIS.

7 December 17: Three rebel brigades announced their withdrawal from the FSA-affiliated Jaysh al-Mujahideen in Aleppo Province and formed an independent entity.

8 December 18: A car bomb detonated in the ISIS-controlled city of al-Mayadin, eastern Deir ez-Zour Province. In addition, a large explosion suspected to be an IED occurred in the ISIS-controlled town of Abu Kamal near the Iraqi border.

9 December 17: An IED detonated inside the vehicle of the regime's Hasaka military commander in Hasaka city, causing several injuries. Meanwhile, a suspected car bomb detonated in the Jeza'a region near the Yarubiyah border crossing with Iraq.



- Opposition Forces
- Pro-Regime Forces
- ISIS
- Jabhat al-Nusra (JN)
- Execution
- IED
- Major Clash
- Car Bomb

Background Kinetic Activity

- Low-level clashes
- Anti-ISIS Coalition Airstrikes
- Major Regime Airstrikes
- SVEST
- Barrel Bombs
- VBIED

A VBIED detonated in Tariq al-Sad neighborhood of Sheikh Miskin, Dera'a
 A car bomb detonated in Darat al-Azzah, western Aleppo Province, causing material damage but no casualties.
 A local resident detonated an SVEST in the rebel-held al-Sha'ar neighborhood of eastern Aleppo city with no reports of casualties.



Content: Jennifer Cafarella
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ISIS Suffers Attacks in Deir ez-Zour Countryside: Local resistance to ISIS in Deir ez-Zour has occurred on a limited level since ISIS seized control of the province in July 2014. However, a recent increase in VBIEDs and IEDs targeting central ISIS-held towns in the province may indicate a growing resistance to ISIS. Alternatively, the attacks may be the work of irregular regime forces in an attempt to inflict damage deeper into the ISIS interior in order to relieve pressure on the Deir ez-Zour Military Airbase. In either case, the attacks signify that ISIS cannot fully police its internal terrain, and may threaten ISIS's legitimacy by challenging its ability to provide security to residents living under the terms of its caliphate.

JN and Rebel Forces Close Ranks in Dera'a in Concern over ISIS Expansion: JN's immediate escalation in response to reports that the Yarmouk Martyrs Brigade had defected to ISIS in Dera'a indicates JN's concern over an ISIS incursion into the province. An effective defection of local rebels to ISIS would likely threaten the integrity of rebel forces in the province and lead to further fractures within rebel ranks. JN's response to date indicates it is likely to continue to consolidate and deepen its own influence within rebel ranks in an attempt to offset continued ISIS expansion. The leading involvement of Harakat al-Muthanna al-Islamiyya in forming a Shari'a mediation committee to negotiate the conflict between JN and the Yarmouk Martyrs Brigade is an important example of the instrumental role JN's closest "tier 1" rebel allies can play in maintaining JN's wider network of relationships with rebel brigades amidst fears of ISIS expansion.

Iranian Support Allows the Regime to Hold onto the Deir ez-Zour Military Airbase: Iranian support to the regime's defense of the Deir ez-Zour Military Airbase indicates the strategic importance of the regime's foothold in the province and may signify widening direct Iranian involvement to support the regime's war effort. Furthermore, following the JN and rebel seizure of the Wadi al-Deif and Hamadiya military bases in Idlib Province on December 14-16, an additional loss of key military terrain by the regime in Deir ez-Zour could greatly exacerbate mounting frustration in the pro-regime camp. As the regime continues its effort to restructure its irregular forces and to replenish its ranks with conscripts and reservists, a heightened level of Iranian involvement may be required to protect critical regime terrain.