



Weekly Conflict Summary
October 13-19, 2016

Syria witnessed yet another week of high levels of conflict. As usual, the majority of recorded conflict events occurred in Aleppo city and the northern countryside, though Hama was also intense, particularly around the city of Suran. Clashes between Kurdish YPG forces and Turkey-backed opposition forces erupted yet again in northern Aleppo, further raising tensions between the two forces as both advance against ISIS.

Though some ongoing offensives have slowed, others continue to make progress. Foremost among these is Operation Euphrates Shield (OES), which continued its steady advance against ISIS. On October 16, ISIS forces fled the town of Dabiq, which OES fighters easily occupied. The town is critical to ISIS ideology and marks a major spiritual loss for the group. As OES forces expanded southward, Kurdish YPG units pressed eastward from the Afrin canton, causing the two to collide and clash near the cities of Mare' and Om al-Hosh.

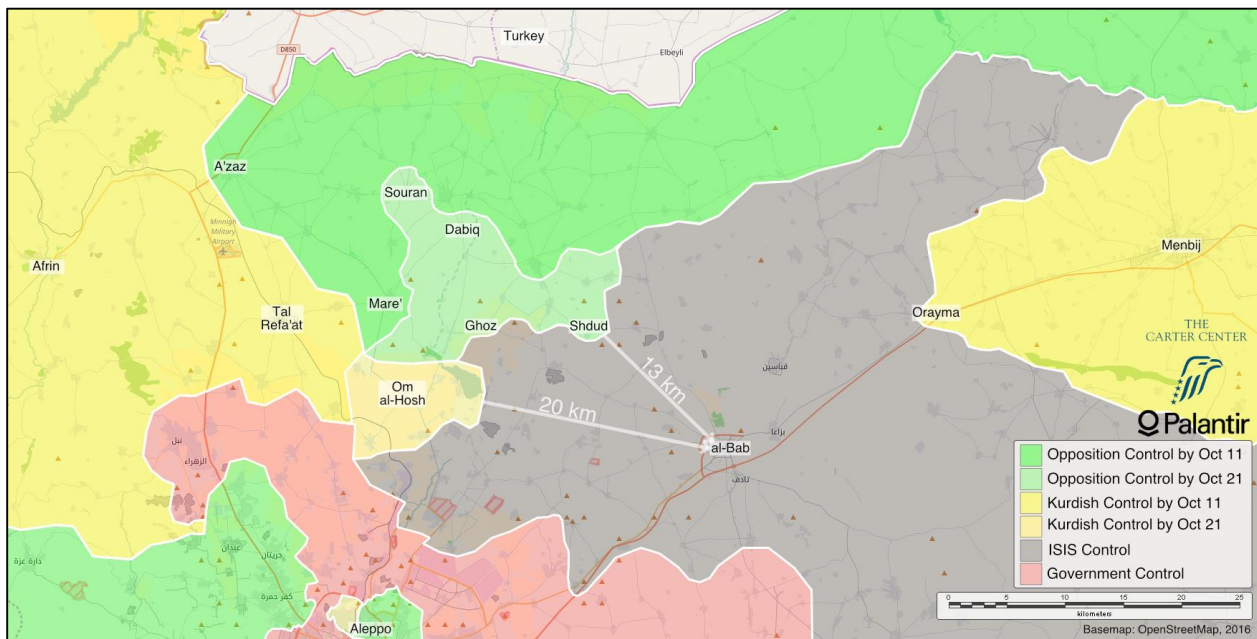


Figure 1: Areas of control in northern Aleppo as of October 21, showing areas of OES and YPG expansion.

This move by the YPG blocked OES forces from advancing close to government front lines and narrowed the gap between Kurdish front lines to just under 40km. The YPG's advance also complicates any Turkish attempts at containing expansionist Kurdish forces in the Afrin canton. Turkish forces have responded by conducting artillery and air strikes on YPG positions near Tel Refa'at. These recent advances bring all sides closer to the ISIS stronghold of al-Bab, but raise serious concerns about what will happen when all sides eventually collide in the coming weeks or months.

In Aleppo, the government offensive on opposition-held East Aleppo continues, and even appears to have intensified over the past week, despite the Russian-announced 8-hour unilateral ceasefire for humanitarian aid delivery. This ceasefire was ultimately extended to 11 hours during which they encouraged civilians to evacuate. The opposition has continued to shell government-held areas of west Aleppo, often targeting civilian areas.

Front lines in Hama were relatively quiet this week as many opposition forces are only now returning to front lines after weeks of infighting. Government forces conducted multiple airstrikes on opposition positions near front lines throughout the week.

Pro-government forces enjoyed continued success in Damascus and its countryside as more opposition-held towns surrendered this week. On October 13, fighters and their families were evacuated from al-Hama and Qudsiya to the north of the city. On October 19, some 3,000 people were evacuated from M'adamiyet al-Sham. Buses from all three cities headed to Idleb, after the surrender and transfer of arms.

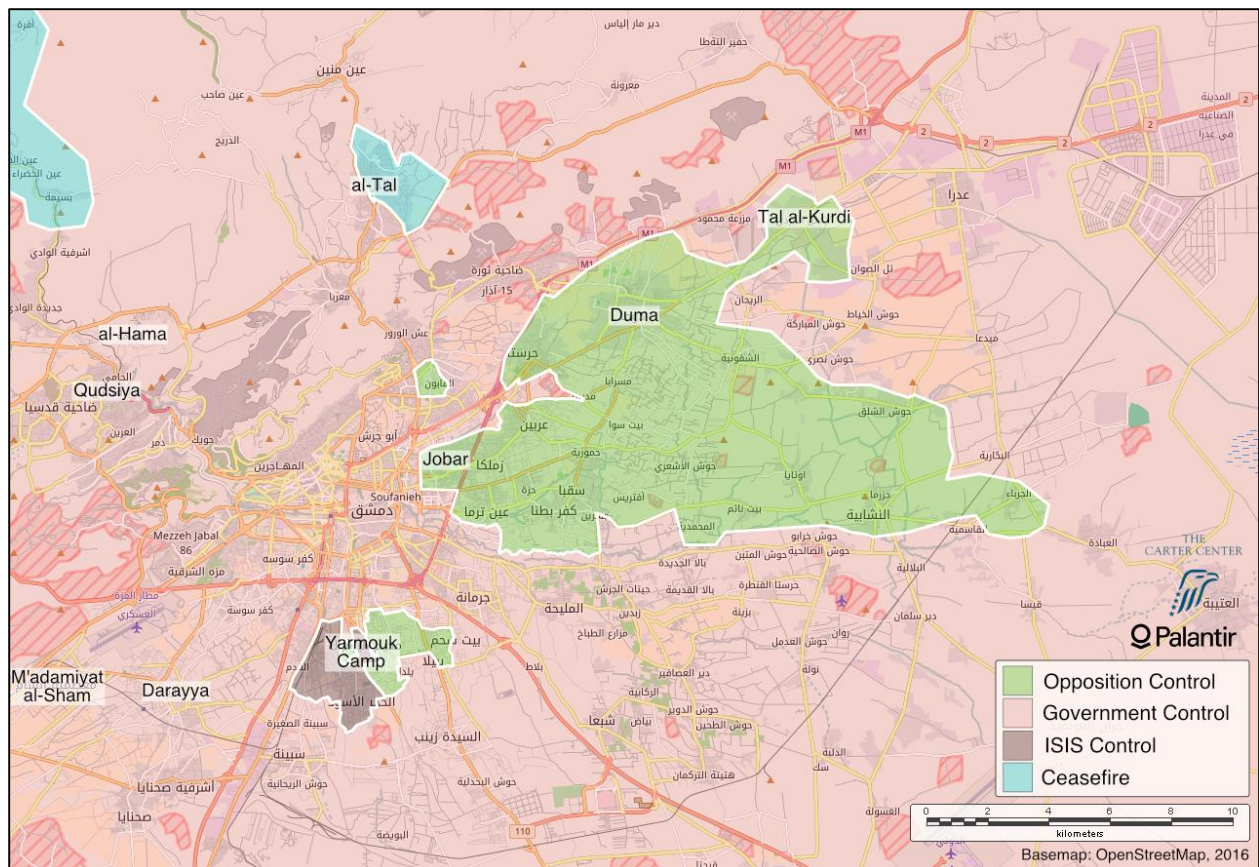


Figure 2 - Map of the current situation in Damascus and its countryside by 19 October, 2016

Last week's opposition offensive in Lattakia has been halted, though retaliatory air strikes continued through this week. On October 18, warplanes and helicopters bombed areas of Kabani in Jabal al-Akrad, reportedly employing barrel bombs in some of the attacks.

In eastern Homs governorate, pro-government forces mounted an offensive against ISIS, pushing back front lines nearly every day for the past week.

Conclusions:

Though the brief pauses in bombing in eastern Aleppo city are a positive development, the situation of civilians remains extremely concerning. Additionally, intensifying conflict between YPG and OES forces north of Aleppo distracts from the progress being made against ISIS, and risks a major escalation of the conflict.