



Weekly Conflict Summary

July 14-20, 2016

Opposition-controlled areas in eastern Aleppo city have been effectively under government siege for two weeks, and pro-government forces have now strengthened their positions on a critical route into and out of the city. On the morning of July 17, pro-government forces were able to advance and capture areas on Kastillo road itself, putting a stop to any remaining movement of families and goods into or out of opposition-controlled neighborhoods of east Aleppo.

Pro-government forces failed in an attempt to take Handarat village northeast of Aleppo, while a few anti-government offensives for Mallah farms and Kastillo Road have also been unsuccessful.

In eastern Aleppo governorate the governorate the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have continued to make steady process into Menbij city, capturing more territory in the west and southwest of the city over the period of July 14 - 20, including the Menbij National Hospital west of the city center. This building had previously been used as an ISIS HQ.

Coalition airstrikes led to the death of dozens of civilians in Tukhar, north of Menbij. The strike hit a school housing internally displaced persons (IDPs) in an ISIS-controlled area. The attack appears to have incurred the highest level of civilian casualties at the hands of international coalition warplanes and prompted part of the Syrian opposition to ask the anti-ISIS coalition to halt strikes. Reported death tolls varying from 56 to 160 people killed. Demonstrators in A'zaz condemned the coalition airstrikes and called for a humanitarian corridor for IDPs fleeing the conflict around Menbij.

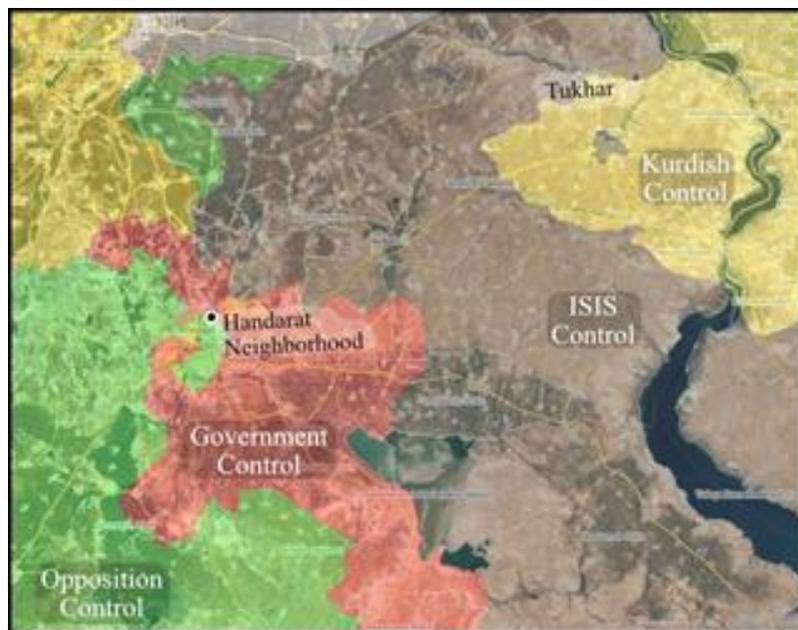


Figure 1: Areas of control in Northern Aleppo governorate.

Large numbers of IDPs continue to arrive in Afrin in northwestern Aleppo governorate. According to estimates from local sources, more than 8,000 IDPs from Aleppo and Raqqa governorates have arrived since July 12 alone.¹

In Rural Damascus pro-government tanks progressed farther into Darayya, the farthest they have been since beginning the siege of the city. This is likely due to the weakened opposition frontlines as a result of months of consistent shelling, bombing, and barrel bombing.

Fighting in the mountains of Latakia continues as pro-government forces and anti-government forces battle for key strategic locations around Jabal al-Akrad. On July 19, pro-government forces were able to retake Kensaba, though Jabhat al-Nusra and groups and affiliates returned in an attempt to retake lost ground soon after.

Video of Harakat Nour al-Din al-Zinki fighters beheading a child emerged on July 19 from the Handarat front of Aleppo. The child was allegedly involved with the pro-government Liwa al-Quds brigade when captured by Nour al-Din al-Zinki fighters. The group's leadership released a statement following circulation of the video of the beheading saying they would provide justice for the execution. Nour al-Din al-Zinki has been a primary recipient of U.S. support, adding to the controversy surrounding the incident.

Following the failed coup attempt in Turkey on July 15-16, the Turkish government briefly closed all border crossings with Syria – including for humanitarian traffic. Bab al-Hawa border crossing to Idleb and western Aleppo countryside was closed beginning July 16, but re-opened to commercial and humanitarian convoys on July 18, and to medical cases registered with the crossing's medical office on July 19. At the time of writing, the crossing remained closed to general traffic, stranding thousands of Syrian refugees who are attempting to return to Turkey after spending Eid al Fitr in their home country.

The Bab al-Salamah border crossing to the northern Aleppo countryside was also closed following the coup, causing the prices of bread and other goods in opposition-controlled Azaz to spike sharply until July 19, when humanitarian aid and goods were again allowed to cross into Syria.

The Tal Shihab border crossing on Syria's southern border with Jordan remains closed to all Syrians following the 21 June attack at an army post near the Ruqban Camp. It previously served as a humanitarian crossing for severely injured persons seeking medical treatment in Jordan.

Conclusion:

The continued besiegement of eastern Aleppo city, coupled with a new round of strict border closings, has placed excessive pressure on civilians throughout Syria. Neighboring countries and all parties involved should work to ensure basic goods and medical supplies can reach civilians in need.

¹ This information was reported to The Carter Center by Humanitarian Research Services, Inc.