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### Glossary

AOG	Armed Opposition Group
FSA	Free Syrian Army
GoT	Government of Turkey
GoS	Government of Syria
GoR	Government of Russia
INGO	International non-Government Agency
IS	Islamic State
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IRC	International Rescue Committee
KSA	Kurdish Self-Administration
PYD	Democratic Union Party (Political wing of YPG and leading political party in Hasaka's 'Self-Administration')
YPG	Peoples Protection Unit
SDF	Syrian Democratic Force (mostly made up of and led by YPG forces, approximately 10% are from Arab tribes)
SLF	Syria Liberation Front (Arabic - Jabhat Tahrir Suriya, is an alliance of 'moderate' AOGs, notably Ahrar Al-Sham and Nourredine Al-Zinki)
HTS	Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (alliance of 'extreme' AOGs, notably Jabhat al-Nusra)
THF	Turkey Humanitarian Fund
WHO	World Health Organisation

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Sources of information include Mercy Corp Humanitarian Access Team (MC HAT), INSO, and websites including, but not exclusive, Institute for the Study of War, Chatham House, Human Rights Watch, Al Jazeera, SouthFront, Rudaw, and Al-Monitor.

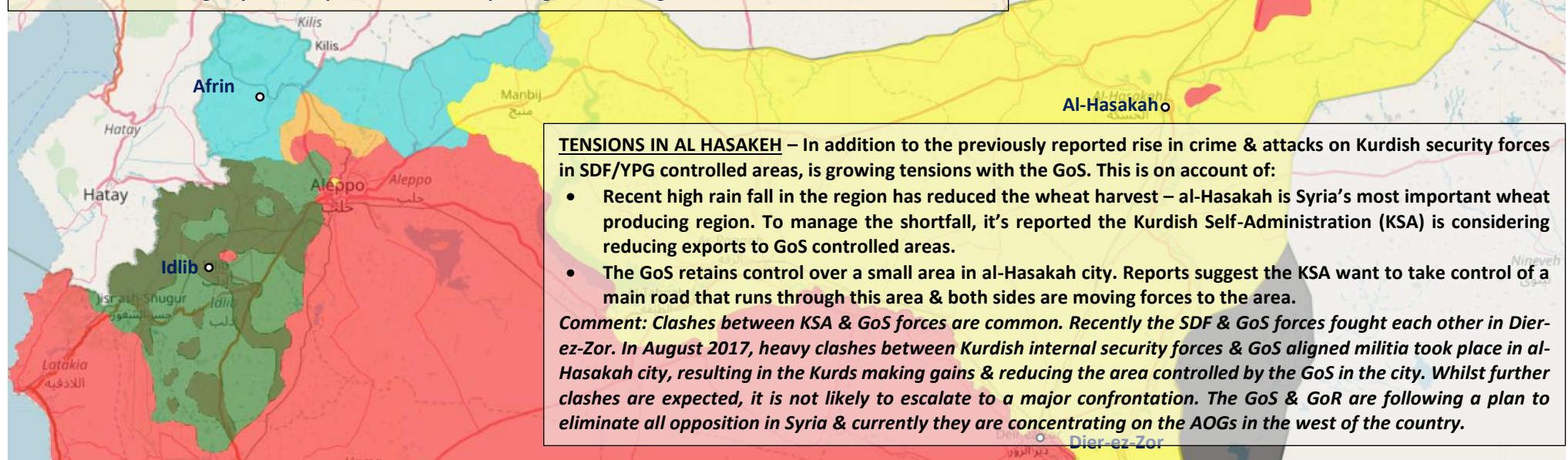
In the text when '*Comment: ...*' appears in *italic* and the subsequent text is also in *italic*, this information is not fact, but the opinion of the author.

**Disclaimer:** The aim of this document is to give information, make analytical comment and give advice. Japan Platform is not responsible for any actions taken by the reader.

## 1. Conflict and Security (Map as at 16<sup>th</sup> May 2018. Source <http://syriancivilwarmap.com>)

**INSTABILITY IN AFRIN & NORTH ALEPPO** – Reportedly in Basuta, 10km south of Afrin, a YPG sleeper cell claimed responsibility for the assassination of the Deputy Leader of the Free Police. The Free Police are a GoT sponsored & trained 620 strong Syrian force deployed to conduct policing duties in the Afrin region. Reportedly, a YPG targeted the Deputy Leader because he was responsible for the settlement of Eastern Ghouta evacuees in the Afrin region. In GoT controlled north Aleppo armed clashes took place between newly arrived AOG from the evacuated areas & GoT supported AOG that are part of the Euphrates Shield operation.

*Comment: The assassination not only indicates the targeting capabilities of YPG sleeper cells, but also how the relocation of civilians & AOG from Eastern Ghouta, south Damascus & rural Homs is causing tensions with local communities. The AOG in-fighting in north Aleppo creates an opportunity for YPG sleeper cells to cause further tension between the groups & disruption to GoT attempts to govern the region.*



**TENSIONS IN AL HASAKEH** – In addition to the previously reported rise in crime & attacks on Kurdish security forces in SDF/YPG controlled areas, is growing tensions with the GoS. This is on account of:

- Recent high rain fall in the region has reduced the wheat harvest – al-Hasakah is Syria's most important wheat producing region. To manage the shortfall, it's reported the Kurdish Self-Administration (KSA) is considering reducing exports to GoS controlled areas.
- The GoS retains control over a small area in al-Hasakah city. Reports suggest the KSA want to take control of a main road that runs through this area & both sides are moving forces to the area.

*Comment: Clashes between KSA & GoS forces are common. Recently the SDF & GoS forces fought each other in Dier-ez-Zor. In August 2017, heavy clashes between Kurdish internal security forces & GoS aligned militia took place in al-Hasakah city, resulting in the Kurds making gains & reducing the area controlled by the GoS in the city. Whilst further clashes are expected, it is not likely to escalate to a major confrontation. The GoS & GoR are following a plan to eliminate all opposition in Syria & currently they are concentrating on the AOGs in the west of the country.*

**IDLIB** – Between 26 & 10 May 2018, there were approximately 74 assassinations or assassination attempts of AOG personnel in Idlib Governorate. The majority have been shootings or targeted IED attacks, & most of the AOGs in the region, including HTS, were targeted. The majority of those targeted were not leading figures, but low-to-medium ranking personnel. In addition, Civil Defence workers, & civilians were also targeted. Of note on 3 May, a vehicle-borne IED detonated close to International Rescue Committee (IRC) building in Dana killing 3 including one IRC staff member. This is the first time an INGO has been targeted in this manner in Idlib governorate. On 12 May a vehicle borne IED in Idlib city targeted a tribunal run by HTS, 28 people were killed. *Comment: No single group has claimed responsibility for the assassinations, except one which was blatantly HTS. The level of assassinations suggests a coordinated plan to create tension & conflict between the AOGs, therefore probably the GoS. But it is also likely some of the attacks are due to inter-AOGs tensions & mistrust.*

**SDF OFFENSIVE ON IS** – The SDF continued its offensive against IS near Hajin town on the Euphrates river & in the northeast of Deir-ez-Zor governorate. Support was provided by coalition air-forces. No SDF advances were reported *Comment: The limited SDF success may be due to poor weather or SDFs limited military capacity.*

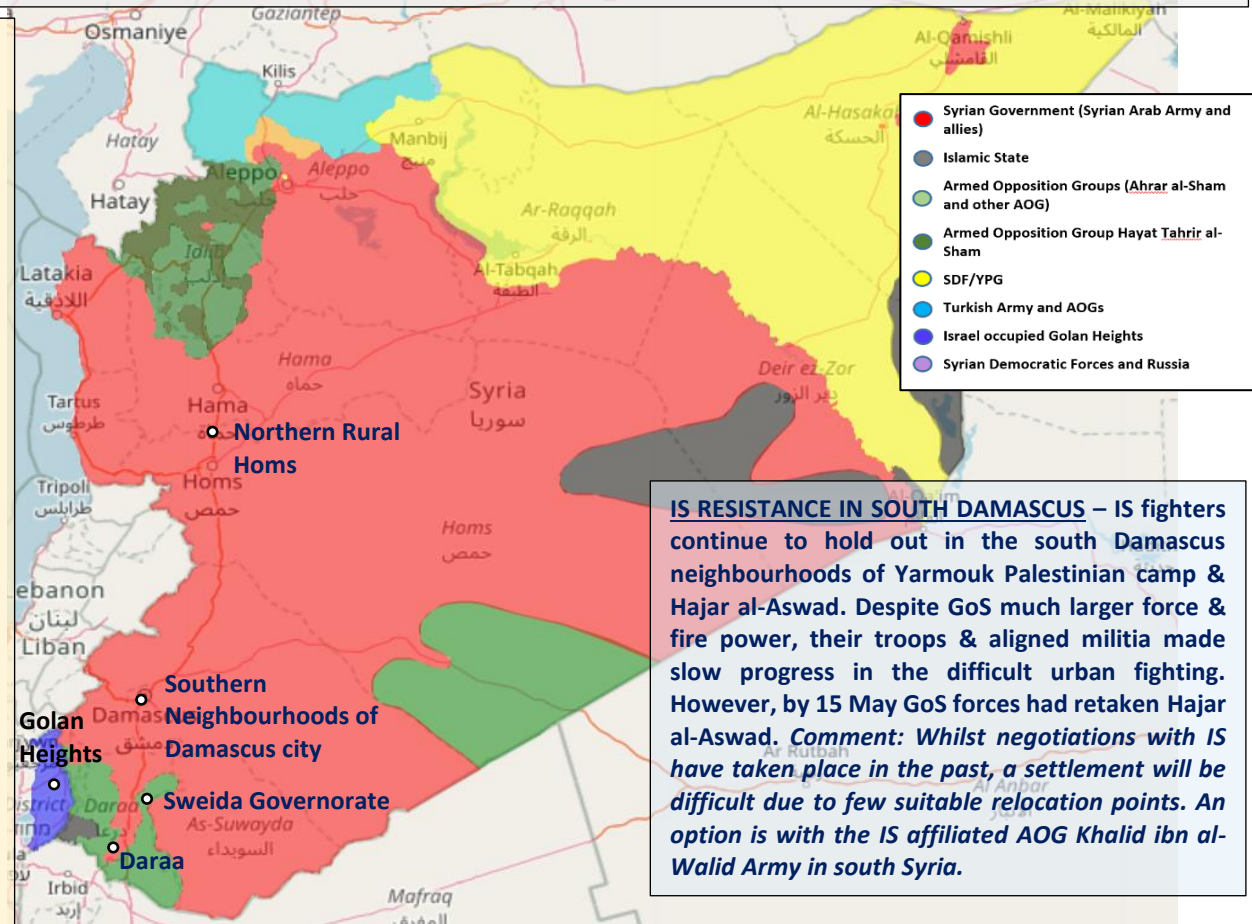
## 2. Activities elsewhere in Syria (Map as at 16<sup>th</sup> May 2018. Source <http://syriancivilwarmap.com>)

**NORTHERN RURAL HOMS RELOCATION/RECONCILIATION AGREEMENTS** – In the first week of May the GoS & GoR finalized a Relocation/Reconciliation Agreement with the AOG in Northern Rural Homs. This is the third agreement in as many weeks & means the GoS has regained control of central Syria. Those who relocated include not only AOG fighters, but also community/council leaders & NGO staff. Their destination was Idlib governorate & northern rural Aleppo, however, the GoT refused entry into north Aleppo & the evacuees were redirected to Idlib where the camps are reported to be full (see ‘Humanitarian Situation’ on page 4). GoR Military Police are facilitating the initial stages of the agreement by occupying the areas previously controlled by AOG, with GoS civilian police, & by escorting the relocation convoys. Not all AOG were relocated, some agreed to reconcile with the GoS. Currently it is unclear if these groups will be incorporated into GoS security forces, but the terms of the agreement allow men of military age to be conscripted into the GoS forces after 6 months. In Eastern Ghouta, it’s reported 4,000 former AOG fighters volunteered to join GoS forces. *Comment: NGOs previously operating in the Northern Rural Homs pocket will probably have to shut or reduce their programmes if staff decide to stay. Only NGOs registered with the GoS in Damascus are permitted to operate in areas under GoS control. The fall of the Homs pocket leaves only 2 AOG enclaves in west Syria – Southern Syria & Idlib Governorate (this includes areas of northern Hama & rural west Aleppo). The GoS & GoR’s next move is difficult. Moving against the AOGs in the south is sensitive due to Israel’s growing aggressiveness towards Iranian forces & Iranian backed militia. A move against AOGs in Idlib has the complication of GoT forces increasingly deploying across the governorate, they now have 11 ‘observation posts’ on the north & eastern borders of the governorate. However, there are several small areas in both enclaves that the GoS could retake without confronting Israel or Turkey; notably south Daraa & Sweida governorates.*

### IRAN – ISRAEL CLASH

- 8 May, prior to the rocket attack on the Golan Heights, media in Syria reported Israel conducted an airstrike on a suspected Iranian base south of Damascus, killing 9 pro-Iranian fighters.
- 9 May, Iranian backed forces, including the al-Quds force, launched 20 rockets into the Israel occupied Golan Heights. Several rockets were intercepted by Israel defensive systems & little damage was caused.
- 10 May Israel responded with its heaviest attack on Syria since the start of the conflict by hitting 35 targets across west Syria with air & land launched missiles. Targets were Iranian military & militia positions, including weapons storage facilities, logistics sites, & intelligence centres, & several Syrian anti-aircraft defence systems. Reportedly, at least 23 were killed, including five Syrian soldiers & 18 pro-government militia. On

*Comment: The sequence of events is a major escalation in tensions between Israel & Iran, & Iranian militia, notably Hezbollah. The Israel attack on 8 May was probably what started the sequence. The size, speed & accuracy of Israel’s attack on 10 May suggests they were well prepared for a counterattack. Israel no doubt felt sure it would receive US support following the US exit from the Iran Nuclear Deal on 8 May & the opening of the US Embassy in Jerusalem planned for 14 May. Whilst further similar actions by both sides is likely, an escalation to war is not. However, a concern is that Israel will increasingly target Iran’s proxy, Hezbollah, with the fear that Israel will conduct land incursions into Syria and, more worryingly, into south Lebanon.*



**IS RESISTANCE IN SOUTH DAMASCUS** – IS fighters continue to hold out in the south Damascus neighbourhoods of Yarmouk Palestinian camp & Hajar al-Aswad. Despite GoS much larger force & fire power, their troops & aligned militia made slow progress in the difficult urban fighting. However, by 15 May GoS forces had retaken Hajar al-Aswad. *Comment: Whilst negotiations with IS have taken place in the past, a settlement will be difficult due to few suitable relocation points. An option is with the IS affiliated AOG Khalid ibn al-Walid Army in south Syria.*

### 3. Other News

**ASTANA TALKS** – On 14 & 15 May representatives of Russia, Turkey & Iran met in Astana for the 9<sup>th</sup> round of talks to discuss progress in brokering a settlement in Syria. The UN envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, & a Syrian rebel delegation was present at some of the talks. At the end of the 2 days the 3 governments agreed to hold a Working Group meeting in Ankara in June 2018, a High-Level International Meeting in Sochi in July 2018, & reaffirmed their determination to continue joint efforts to advance the process of a political settlement. *Comment: It was unlikely anything positive would come from the talks when the war is going so well for the GoS & its Russian & Iranian allies. Delaying the next round of talks until July, allows the GoS to maintain its momentum of the last 3 months. However, until now the governments of Russia, Iran & Turkey have been able to coordinate & pursue their own interests in Syria, the time is coming when these interests might compete, notably with Turkey's presence in Idlib, Afrin & north Aleppo.*

**UN ENVOY WARNING** – The UN special envoy to Syria, Staffan de Mistura, following the Astana meeting, warned that a GoS assault on Idlib governorate would be "six times" more destructive than the battle to recapture Eastern Ghouta, affecting 2.3 million people.

### 4. Recent Displacement Numbers

In April & May the GoS and GoR negotiated Reconciliation Agreements with AOGs in Eastern Ghouta, Eastern Qalamoun, 3 neighbourhoods in south Damascus, and northern rural Homs. The agreement allowed for the relocation of those AOG fighters and civilians who did not wish to reconcile with the GoS, to either Idlib Governorate under the control of several AOGs, or northern rural Aleppo and Afrin, under the control the GoT and its aligned AOGs. The estimated number of people who relocated from each of the enclaves is:

- Eastern Ghouta: 66,365 individuals – 47,188 to Idlib governorate and 19,177 to northern rural Aleppo.
- Eastern Qalamoun: 6,235 individuals – 1,204 to Idlib and 5,031 to northern rural Aleppo.
- Yalda, Babella and Beit Sahm neighbourhoods in south Damascus: 9028 individuals – 1,612 to Idlib governorate, 4,348 to northern rural Aleppo, 618 to Afrin, the majority of whom are reportedly Palestinian refugees, and at least another 2,450 individuals also relocated, although it's unclear if they went to Idlib or northern rural Aleppo.
- Yarmouk camp in south Damascus: 141 individuals to Idlib governorate (these were fighters and their families from the HTS who controlled a small area in Yarmouk camp).
- Northern Rural Homs: 27,323 individuals to Idlib governorate.

The above estimates total 109,092 individuals who have relocated to northwest Syria. More than 77,468 relocated to Idlib governorate, 28,556 to northern rural Aleppo and 618 to Afrin.

On 10 May 2 IDP convoys from northern rural Homs to northern rural Aleppo were stopped and refused access by the GoT authority. This was reported to be due to the temporary IDP camps, set up to receive the evacuees from the south, not having the capacity to host the new IDPs from Homs. The convoys were subsequently redirected to Idlib. IDP camps in Idlib are also reported to be full to capacity struggling with the last batch of IDPs from the south.

Sources of information include: <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/turkey-syria-situation-north-western-syria-situation-report-no4-8-may>, <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/syrian-arab-republic-afrin-crisis-situation-report-no-4-8-may-2018>, MC HAT Weekly Report 05/10 - 05/16/18, INSO Update: 8 Report – Syria South – Homs 17 May 2018)

Adding to the above numbers are the IDPs following the GoT military operation in Afrin in early 2018. While an estimated 135,000 people remain inside Afrin district, the military conflict resulted in mass displacement to Tall Refaat and surrounding communities, as well as Nabul, Zahraa, and Fafin. Initial estimates are that 60,000 individuals are sheltering in the Tall Refaat area, mostly in empty houses and schools that have been converted to makeshift shelters, as well as in empty houses left vacant by previously displaced families.

The UN and humanitarian organizations have a funding requirement of an estimated \$100 million to provide life-saving assistance and services to people who have been displaced to northern Syria. This is in addition to the \$95 million required to assist those who were displaced to areas in rural Damascus and who remained in areas of Eastern Ghouta.

The Turkey Humanitarian Fund (THF), which has been an integral part of the humanitarian response over the past years, is almost depleted. Urgent funding is needed to ensure that the THF can support further humanitarian activities, when emergencies occur. To respond to the acute needs of these new arrivals to northwest Syria, the THF's second reserve allocation of \$4 million has been launched. The allocation is prioritizing Camp Coordination and Camp Management, Shelter and NFIs and Food Security and Livelihoods response.