

Weekly Conflict Summary
January 26-February 1, 2017

Over the course of the week in review, developments in the relationship between Jabhat Fatah al-Sham (JFS) and Ahrar al-Sham in opposition-held Idleb have further solidified the opposition into two distinct camps. On the one hand, JFS announced a new merger under the name Ha'iyat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), including

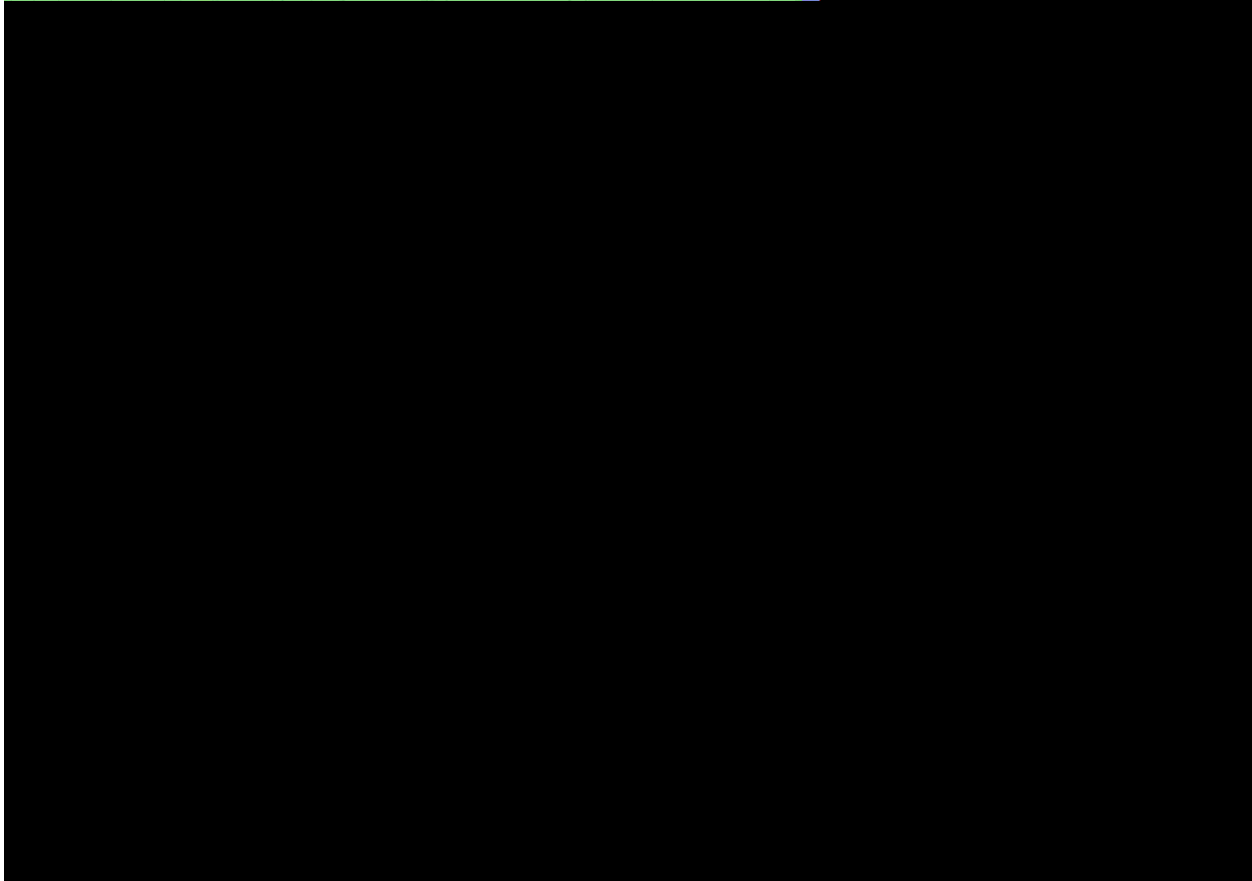


Figure 1 - Advances around Al-Bab during January 2017

On the al-Bab frontline, Operation Euphrates Shield (OES) forces have advanced slightly to the east of the town. Pro-government forces have advanced steadily northwards against ISIS fighters as they continue to make their way to al-Bab as well. The OES front to the west of al-Bab includes a heavy contingent of Turkish forces while the pro-government advance northwards has been carried out primarily by the Syrian army's Tiger Forces.

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) offensive for Raqqa, launched in November 2016, has been a difficult fight for SDF forces though they appear to be advancing overall. This has been an extremely volatile frontline in part due to the difficulty of defending the sparsely populated areas in contest. A final shipment of military hardware from the Obama administration arrived for SDF forces in the last week of January, in the form of armored SUVs. The continuation of shipments to SDF forces under the new administration in Washington remains unclear.

Conclusions:

Shifts in alliances and mergers between major opposition forces has created significant uncertainty in opposition-held Idlib. Meanwhile, the advance of pro-government and opposition forces towards the ISIS-held town of al-Bab raises questions on who will control the town should ISIS be defeated.