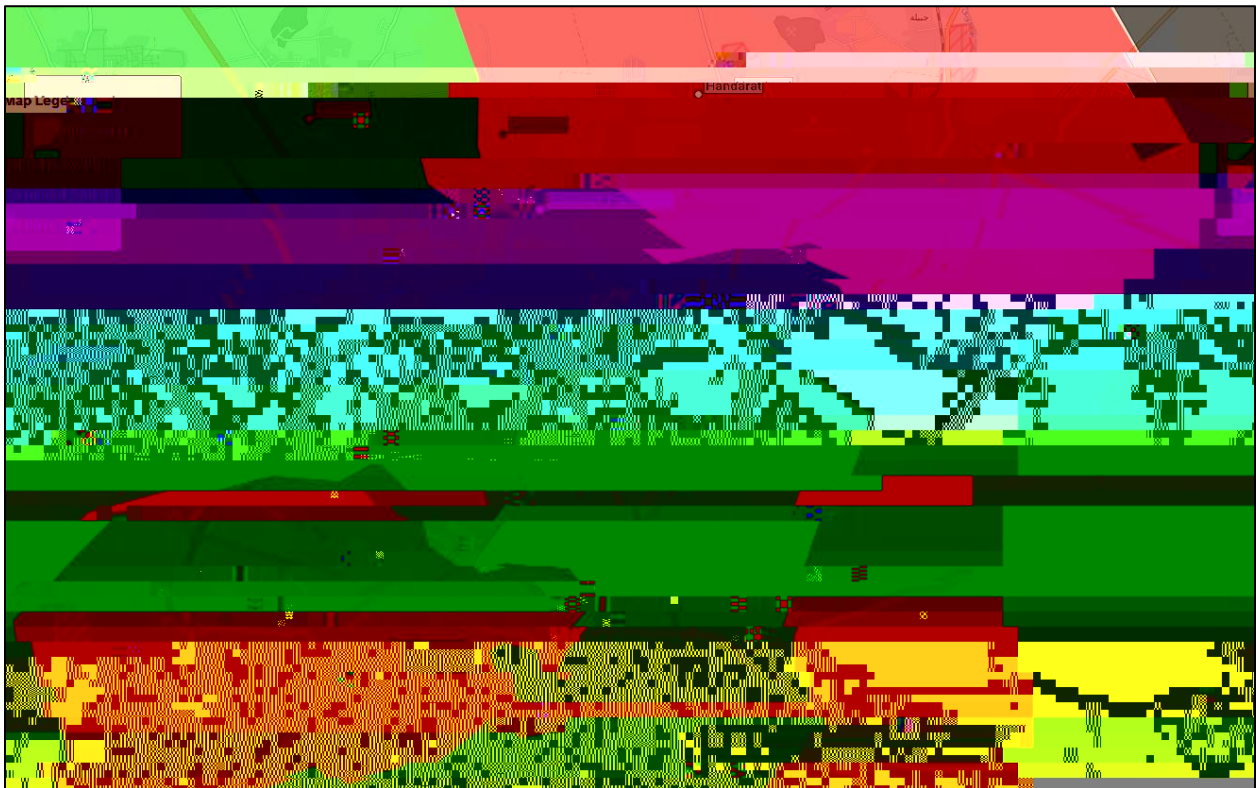




Weekly Conflict Summary June 23-29, 2016

Conflict events from June 23-29, 2016 were once again focused primarily in the governorate of Aleppo, mainly occurring in Aleppo city and its near countryside. Other areas of active fighting throughout the week included offensives against ISIS in northern and eastern Syria.

The majority of clashes occurred in Aleppo city and Rural Damascus. Aleppo has seen a steady increase in government aerial bombardment over the past four weeks, culminating this week with an increase in artillery shelling quickly followed by a ground offensive. Government forces targeted opposition-held Bani Zeid, located alongside the strategic Castillo Road (Aleppo's northern bypass, and the last opposition-held highway leading to eastern Aleppo city). Additionally, reports and videos of incendiary and cluster munitions on villages just north of Aleppo city continued throughout the week. The heaviest level of aerial bombardment struck Hureitan, to the northwest of Aleppo city. Clashes around al-Mallah and the surrounding al-Mallah farmlands led to back-and-forth shifts in front lines in the area. Reports surfacing as of the writing of this report suggest pro-government forces are now in control of the al-Mallah area and are only a short distance from the Castillo road to the south.



The continued offensive by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the International Coalition against ISIS positions in Menbij saw significant gains this week despite several ISIS suicide/IED attacks. The SDF, with International Coalition air support, advanced significantly along the western highway into

Menbij, capturing the al-Ketab and Sharia Roundabouts along the way. The offensive on this front has seen little opposition from ISIS.

The SDF also made significant gains in the south of the city. After several days of heavy aerial bombardment centered on the silos at the southern end of Menbij, the SDF was able to advance until they eventually captured Matahin Roundabout, a crucial roundabout for control of the southside of the city. Since taking this roundabout, the SDF has advanced further into the city to clash with ISIS forces in Hezwania neighborhood.

ISIS, however, has had some success pushing back on SDF gains in the east of the city and has been able to strike at the recently SDF-controlled village of al-Khataf with at least one car bomb since losing the village early in the week.

Conflict in Deir Ez-Zor governorate has increased this week as the International Coalition provided air support for offensives against ISIS held areas. While some strikes assisted advances on the oil fields near Mayadin, majority of airstrikes supported the New Syrian Army (NSyA) against ISIS forces near the border town of Abu Kamal. Though NSyA forces took the Hamdan Military Airport near Abu Kamal, the forces quickly lost it in their retreat, along with a good deal of equipment.

Abu Kamal is a crucial point connecting ISIS territory in Iraq and Syria. With ISIS having lost territory to advancing Kurdish and SDF forces to the north, a successful offensive in Abu Kamal could eventually result in a division of ISIS territory in two, which is likely the goal of the NSyA offensive. ISIS, however,

In Rural Damascus, government forces continued to bombard the besieged town of Darayya, with multiple reports of barrel bombs each day. Additionally, fighting continues in the opposition-held Eastern Ghouta area.

Conclusion

Overall levels of violence, particularly in Aleppo, have continued to rise steadily over the course of the past four weeks. The potential besiegement of eastern Aleppo, and the increasing reports of cluster and incendiary munitions raise serious concerns for the wellbeing of civilians in the area. Parties to the conflict should work towards reinstating a ceasefire in Aleppo and redirect their attention to a weakened ISIS in northern Aleppo.