

Inter-opposition clashes

Following clashes between Hai'yat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS, formerly al-Qaeda-affiliated Jabhat al-Nusra) and Faylak al-Sham a week earlier, on June 8 HTS launched a new assault on Faylak al Sham and the Free Idleb Army's Division 13, a Free Syrian Army (FSA) affiliate, in Maarat al-Numan, Idleb. Clashes continued until the next day and resulted in a victory for HTS, which took control of Free Idleb Army and Faylak al-Sham positions and executed members of Division 13. Among those executed was Colonel Taysir Al Samahi, a Free Idleb Army commander and head of the Free Police in Maarat al-Numan. Clashes halted after an agreement between HTS and the Free Idleb Army was reached, pledging to form a committee to arbitrate the dispute between the two groups. Additionally, the agreement called for Free Idleb Army to surrender members being sought by HTS for prosecution, and for Division 13 to be completely dissolved into the Free Idleb Army.

Residents closed roads to protest the outbreak of clashes and demonstrated against HTS following the attack on the FSA forces in Maarat al-Numan in the days following. HTS fighters fired shots to disperse the crowds during demonstrations on June 9. On June 12, HTS withdrew its forces from Maarat al-Numan.

On June 11, heavy clashes began between opposition groups in Al-Bab and in the northern Aleppo countryside, causing casualties among armed groups and civilians alike. The clashes initially broke out between the Fifth Division (a major force within the Al Bab military council) on one side and al-Fawj al-Awal (an Ahrar al-Sham ally) on the other. The fighting quickly escalated as Ahrar al-Sham was attacked by the Fifth Division and the Sultan Murad Brigades in Al-Bab and in the nearby cities of Olan, Abla and Qabbasin, after Ahrar al-Sham attempted to intervene between the two groups fighting in Al-Bab. Clashes were limited and the dispute between the armed groups is currently being mediated by local political forces and Turkish actors.

Ahrar al-Sham has previously clashed with Sultan Murad Brigades and other armed groups in the areas captured during Operation Euphrates Shield (OES) and issued a statement in late May promising a strong response to opposition groups that it claims are plotting against it in the area.

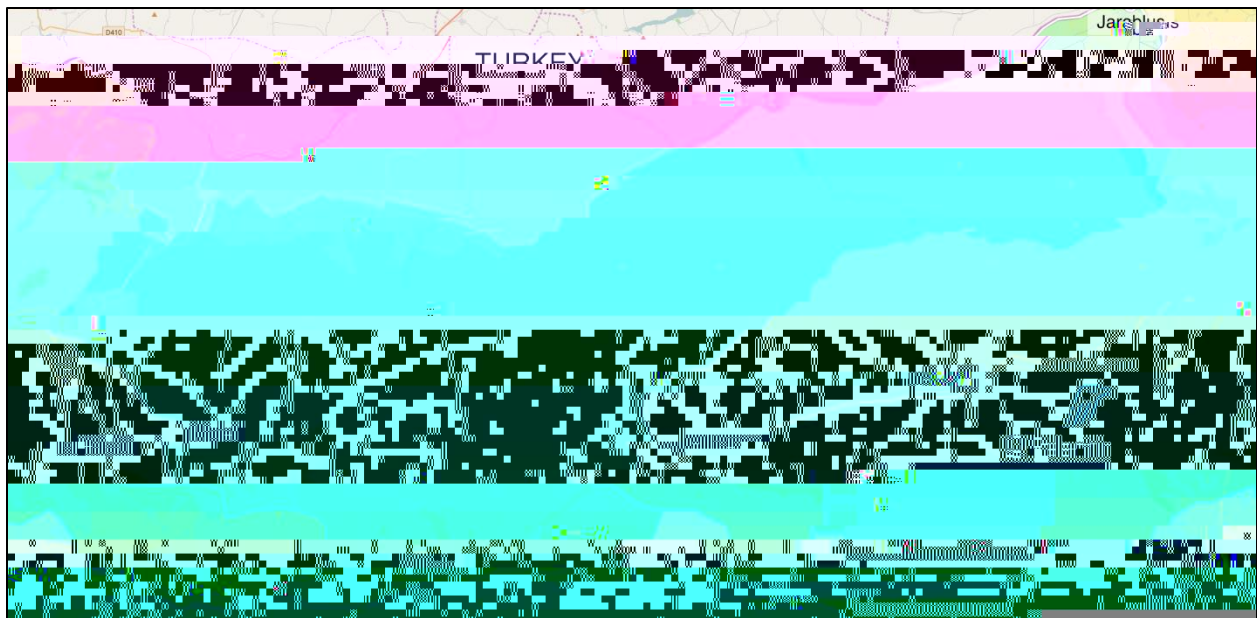


Figure 2 - Areas around the OES-held northern Aleppo pocket by June 14

SDF attempt to advance on Daret Azza area in western Aleppo

On June 12, the SDF in Afrin attempted to advance toward the opposition-held town of Daret Azza to the west of Aleppo. Ahrar al-Sham, HTS, and Faylak al-Sham defended against the attack. No advances were made but casualties among both sides were significant. At the same time as the attacks on Daret Azza, the SDF attempted to advance eastward from Afrin towards Mare' and A'zaz.

Fight against ISIS

The SDF, with the support of the US and Arab allies, have begun a push into Raqqa city. As the offensive enters the city, the humanitarian situation in Raqqa has continued to rapidly deteriorate. Around 160,000 civilians have been displaced since the SDF-led “Euphrates Wrath” campaign began in May. Combat has shifted from the countryside of Raqqa to the streets of the city, where civilian deaths have begun to escalate. Among US strikes leading to



Figure 4 - Frontlines in the eastern Aleppo/western Raqqa countryside by June 14

Pro-government forces have also continued to make gains in the Tadmor countryside to the south. By June 13, pro-government forces captured Arak town and Arak gas field east of Tadmor. By June 14, pro-government forces fully captured the T-3 pumping station and surrounding area southeast of Tadmor.

Situation around al-Tanf

After more than a month of skirmishes and airstrikes along the Damascus-Baghdad highway near the al-Tanf border crossing, pro-government forces, composed primarily of Iranian-backed Shi'a militias, bypassed the US-led International Coalition's unilaterally designated "deconfliction zone," traversing more than 100km of open desert to reach the Syrian border with Iraq 60km northeast of al-Tanf. The pro-government forces skirted the edge of the "deconfliction zone," but are not believed to have entered it during their advance. At the border, the pro-government forces met with Iraqi Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) arriving from the other side of the border, who have also pledged to open the border between the two countries.

US-backed opposition forces in al-Tanf and the Syrian desert, including the FSA Jaysh Usoud al-Sharqiya, are now surrounded by government-controlled territory. Thus, the opposition's advances against ISIS near Deir Ezzor now has an uncertain future.

Earlier in the week, FSA groups shelled pro-government militias at Zaza checkpoint along the Damascus-Baghdad highway. FSA groups also repelled pro-government attempts to advance and launched a successful offensive to capture a checkpoint on June 8. The same day, the US struck two vehicles approaching al-Tanf, and downed a weaponized drone.

Additional reinforcements from Iranian-backed Shi'a militias such as Liwa Imam al-Baqir are still arriving on the border. In addition to securing their positions against both ISIS and US-backed opposition groups, the stated objective of these forces is to progress up along the border towards the Euphrates River and the border city of Al-Bukamal, in parallel with their Iraqi PMU counterparts on the Iraqi side who will move along the border towards the Iraqi border town of al-Qa'im. On June 13, Russian forces, which have abstained from fighting in the area thus far, were also reported to be moving towards the border.

