

September 28 – October 4, 2017

A large-scale ISIS counterattack saw it gain territory against Syrian government forces on most fronts throughout the country, including well behind front lines in the town of Qariyatin in western Homs governorate. Despite this major counterattack, government forces succeeded in clearing ISIS from the western Hama countryside, and the Kurdish

During the past week, following three consecutive months of military success against ISIS on the road to Deir Ezzor, pro-government forces suffered a major setback on their eastern front. On the night of September 27, ISIS forces launched a string of attacks along almost the entire length of the pro-government frontline, hitting government positions at al-Shoula, Kobajep, Sokhneh, al-Heil Gas Field, and the T3 Pumping station. In these attacks, ISIS captured al-Shoula, Kobajep, areas north of Sokhneh and around the T3 station. In addition to the lost territory, pro-government forces also suffered extensive casualties. By October 2, nearly 200 pro-government fighters were killed during the previous five days of clashes against ISIS.



Since October 1, pro-government forces have made further progress eastward along Syria's southern border with Jordan, advancing approximately 40km, and seizing control of numerous border posts. As pro-government forces have advanced, the Jordanian government has begun maintenance work on the Jaber border crossing. On October 4, Jordan gave a 10-day warning to the opposition forces currently holding the Naseeb border, demanding that they hand over the crossing to the Syrian government, or Jordan would open the Jaber crossing instead.

Russian and Syrian forces launched 800-1,500 airstrikes, 1,200 missile strikes, and over 60 barrel bombs on towns and the countryside of Idleb, Hama, and Aleppo. As of October 3, 200 persons have been killed and over 700 injured, many of them civilians. Early strikes by Russian and GoS warplanes targeted crucial electrical and medical infrastructure, including six hospitals and five civil defense centers.

Physicians for Human Rights declared that three of Idleb's main hospitals in Khan Sheikhoun, Kafr Nabl, and Al Tah were severely damaged or destroyed over five airstrikes. The Rahma Hospital in Khan Sheikhoun and the Kafr Nabl Surgical Hospital, also known as Sham Hospital were targeted twice in one week, forcing both hospitals to close. The Sham Hospital, which served a population of 600,000 people with over 4,000 patients per month, suffered extreme damage forcing its closure indefinitely.

Local councils declared the opposition-held cities of Jisr al Shughur, Hibet, Latamna, and Morek as disaster areas because of damage to infrastructure from the extensive bombings. 70% of Jisr al Shughur in western Idleb is destroyed or damaged after the air campaign of the last two weeks. The intense aerial bombardment has displaced 16,000 of the city's 20,000 residents who report having no place to seek refuge. Northern Hama, in the areas of Morek and Latamna, has witnessed similar mass displacement with some reports claiming 200,000 IDPs have fled the airstrikes and shelling for relatively safer areas in the north.

During the previous week, pro-government forces redeployed to the northern Hama countryside. The arrival of this force, including the elite Tiger Forces, coincided with further escalation of airstrikes on opposition-held territory north of the northern Hama frontlines, the location of a recent opposition offensive against government frontlines in the Maan area northwest of Suran. This redeployment matches a buildup of Turkish military equipment along the northern border of Idleb as well, suggesting possible incursions into the opposition enclave from both north and south.

During the reporting week, Hai'yat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS, formerly al-Qaeda affiliated Jabhat al-Nusra) released a statement announcing the resignation of Abu Jaber al Sheikh as general leader of HTS and his subsequent demotion to leadership of the HTS Shura Council. The statement also announced that Golani would assume temporarily leadership of HTS until a new leader is appointed. Abu Jaber had been previously described in one of the leaked recordings by commanders loyal to Golani as not having real influence or control of HTS and that real control lay with Golani. On October 3, the Russian Ministry of Defense announced that HTS leader Golani was critically injured in a Russian airstrike. HTS officials initially refused to comment but have since denied the Russian claim.

Multiple defections from HTS, including Katibat al Siddiq (Idleb), Khalid ibn Walid Brigades (Hama),

