

Syria: Aleppo and Beyond

30 November 2016

Summary

The Syrian government's attempt to take East Aleppo continues, with areas of control changing by the hour. This brief tries to review the longer-term trends beyond the battle for Aleppo. Beginning with a brief examination of major trends and the state of the conflict on major fronts, this paper concludes with an analysis of the most likely trajectory of the Syrian conflict and an assessment of the opportunities and threats to achieving a political settlement to the conflict in the near-to-medium term future.

Battle for Aleppo

The current siege of East Aleppo has continued unbroken for three months. Despite successive opposition offensives aimed at breaking the siege, pro-government forces have managed to tighten their grip on the eastern half of the city, closing in from central and northern Aleppo. Opposition counter-offensives have been plagued by infighting, further weakening their efforts to break the siege.

The siege, combined with a prolonged joint Russian-Syrian air campaign, has made life in East Aleppo nearly unlivable. When the siege appeared imminent, humanitarian aid agencies warned that existing supplies could only sustain the population for a month's time. Human casualties aside, UN Special Envoy Staffan De Mistura has warned that, should the intensity of aerial bombardment continue at its current level, East Aleppo will be little more than rubble before the end of the year.

The strategy employed in East Aleppo is the same that pro-government forces used in the first major battle of the conflict in the Baba Amro district of Homs in February 2012 and most recently in the western Damascus suburbs of Darayya and Moadamiyat ash-Sham in August 2016, as well as at least a dozen other places in between. Though some besieged communities have withstood for a very long time,

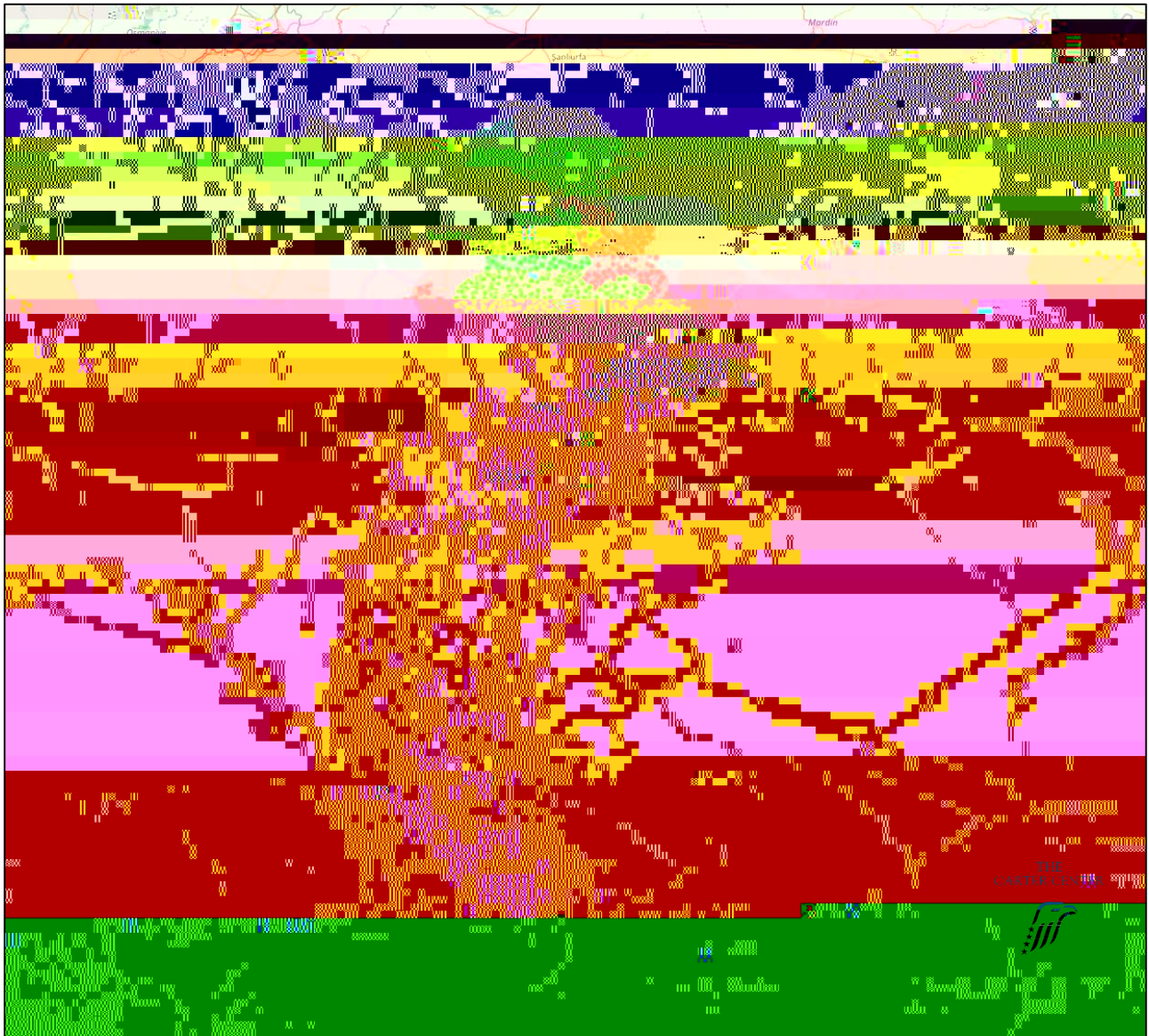


Figure 1: Areas of control throughout Syria as of November 22, 2016. Each point on the map represents a city, town, or district of major population centers. Map made using Palantir Technologies.

Syria: Aleppo and Beyon

Southern Syria (Figure 5)

Southern Syria, encompassing the Damascus and Rural Damascus governorates as well as Quneitra, Duma, and Suweida, has seen substantial activity in recent months. While Daraa, Quneitra, and Suweida remain relatively quiet when compared to other regions of Syria, pro-government forces have made substantial progress in Rural Damascus in the Eastern and Western Ghouta regions surrounding the capital.

In late August of this year, one of the longest sieges of the war came to a close with the conditional surrender of the western Damascus suburb of Darayya. Shortly after, fighters in nearby Moadamiyat ash

Eastern Syria (Figure 6)

Territorial control over Eastern Syria has remained relatively stagnant for the past several months. The Kurdish-led ad[)JTJnF1 0 1JETnF1 0q0.0000092 0 612 9 reW*nBT/F1 11.04 Tf1 0 0 1 1234 67.7 Tm0 6o-4(ov)2/Ev6s/E

must now offer