



Armed Conflict

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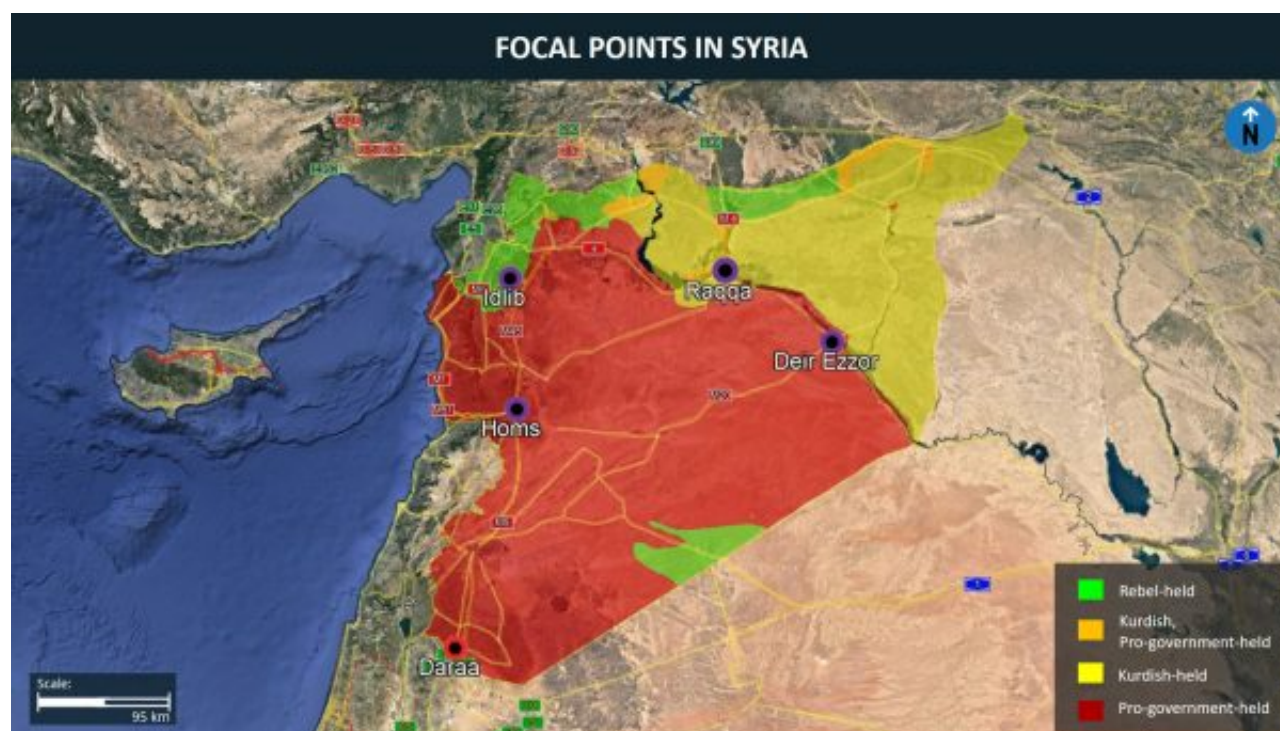
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Syria SITUATION UPDATE: UNSC on July 9 votes to extend delivery of humanitarian aid through Idlib's Bab al-Hawa Border Crossing; to prevent extensive deterioration of socioeconomic conditions in rebel-held areas

Executive Summary:

- On July 9, the UN Security Council (UNSC) voted to extend the use of Idlib's Bab al-Hawa Border Crossing for the delivery of humanitarian aid for at least an additional six months. The development will help to prevent further deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Idlib's rebel, and jihadist-controlled territories.
- On July 10-11, a mortar attack targeted Deir Ezzor's Koniko Gas Field, and on July 11-13, two rocket attacks reportedly targeted US forces near al-Omar Oil Field. The incidents likely constitute retaliation by Iran-backed Shiite militias for a July 27 US airstrikes targeting their positions along the Syria-Iraq border area. Amid tensions, further attacks may recur in the area in the coming days.
- On July 11, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) announced the arrest of ten Islamic State (IS) militants in Idlib's Kafr Tekharim and Foua. The presence of IS cells in Idlib, despite HTS's operations, points to the region's significance for IS's logistical operations. It also highlights the risk that is posed to civilians and foreign nationals operating in the area, by the jihadists.
- Exchanges of shelling between rebel and jihadist groups, on the one side, and pro-government forces, on the other, in and around Idlib will persist over the coming days. This is despite the extension of the humanitarian program to Idlib constituting a form of consent by Russia, the Syrian government's main backer, towards international stakeholders.

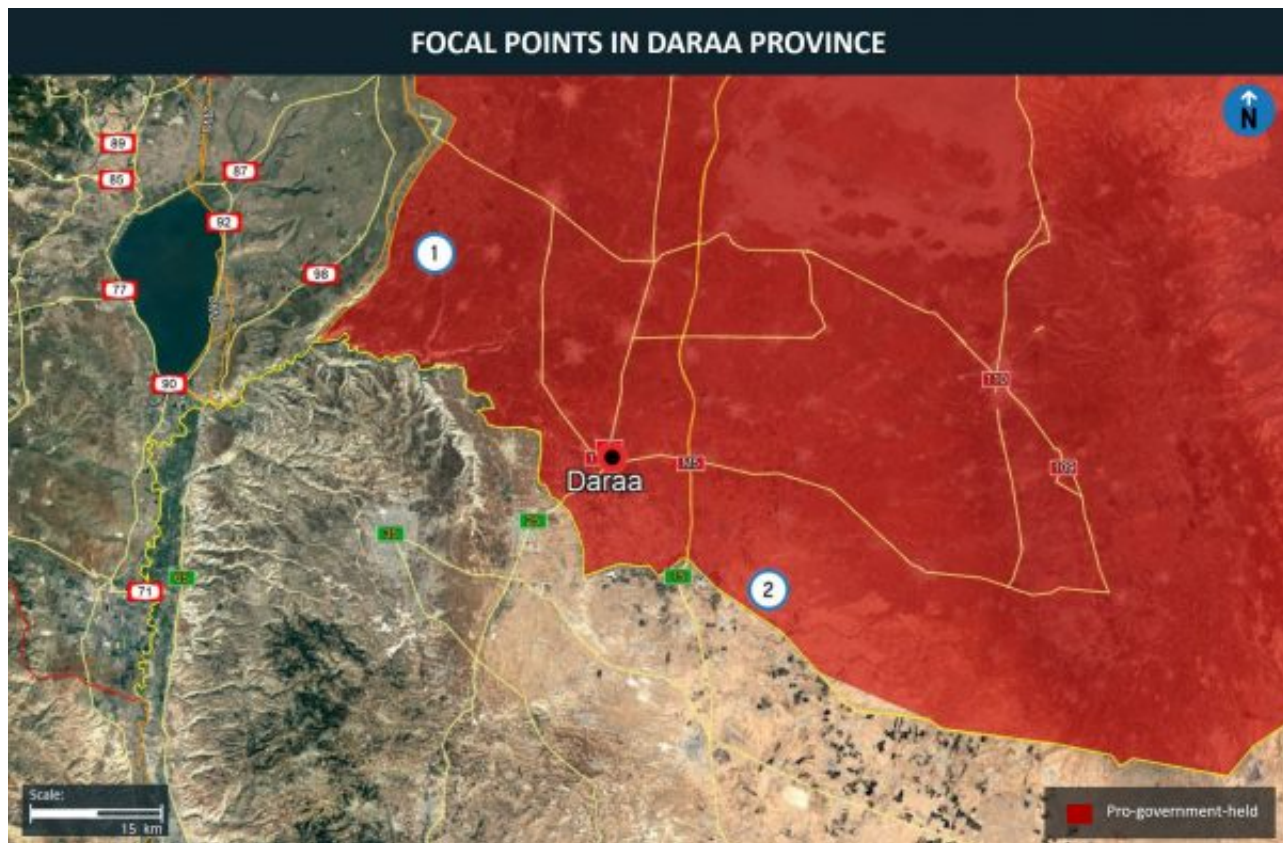


Please be advised:

Across the country, the following incidents have been reported:

Daraa Province

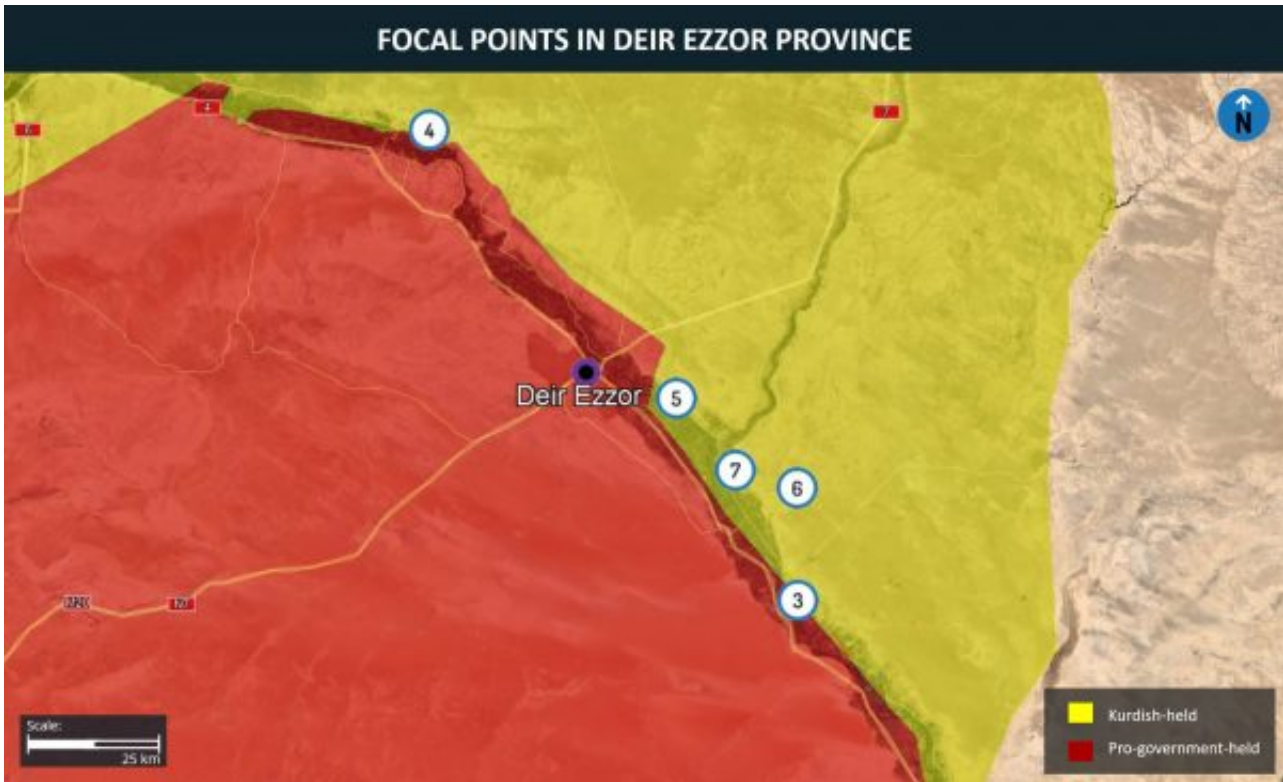
Map #	Date	District/City	Brief Description
1	July 7	Road between the villages of Nafa'ah and Ain Thakar	Reports indicate that an IED attack targeting a pro-government forces vehicle resulted in the death of an officer and an unspecified number of additional casualties.
2	July 7	Mataaiyah	Two members of the pro-government forces "Eighth Brigade" were reportedly killed and an additional two were wounded following clashes with local villagers.



Deir Ezzor Province

Map #	Date	District/City	Brief Description
3	July 9	Karama	IS claimed the kidnapping and killing of a SDF "spy."
4	July 10	Jezrah	IS claimed the killing of a member of the SDF as a result of a shooting attack.
5	July 10-11	Koniko Gas Field	According to the SDF, a mortar shell fell on the outskirts of the field and did not result in casualties. Prior unconfirmed reports indicated that a rocket attack had targeted US personnel stationed at the field. Additional reports indicated that another rocket or mortar attack targeted the site during the overnight hours of July 10-11.
6	July 11	al-Omar Oil Field	A semi-official Iranian news agency, citing sources linked to Iran-backed Shiite militias in

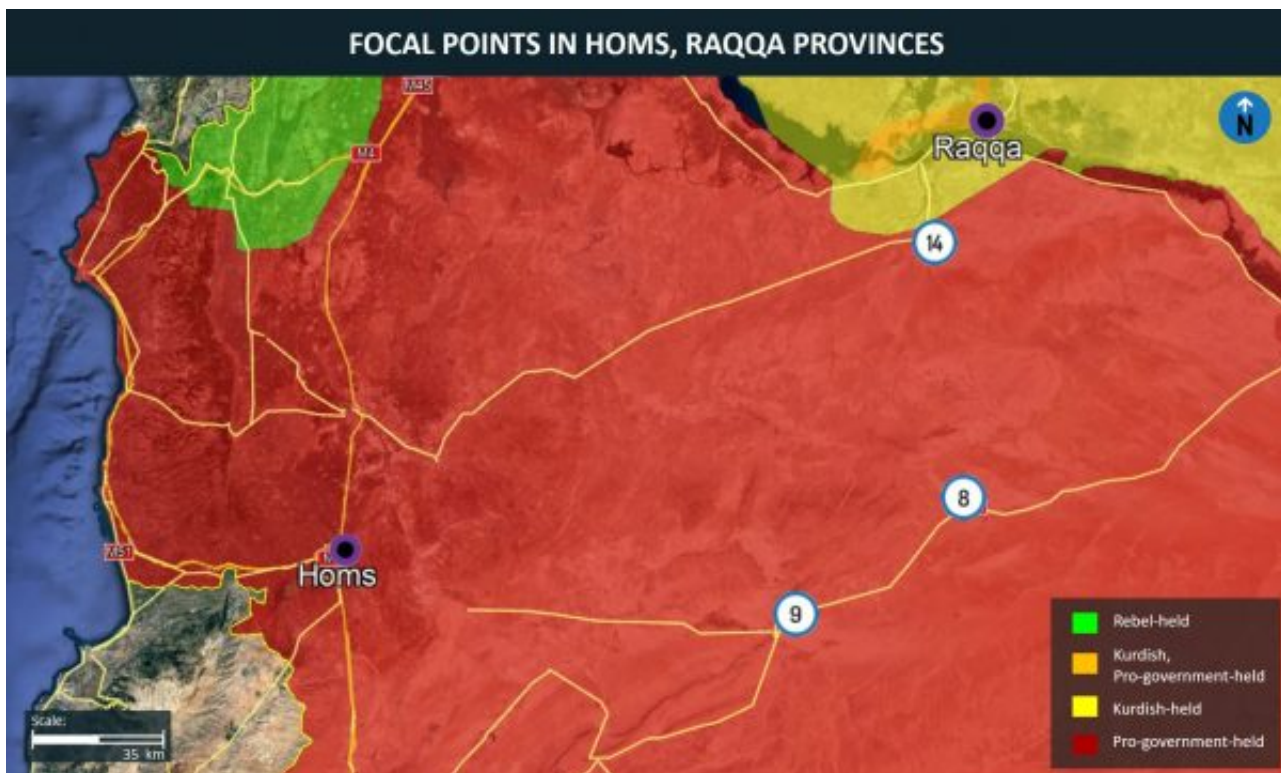
6	July 13	al-Omar Oil Field	<p>Iraq, reported that four rockets targeted a US base at the al-Omar Oil Field. There is no indication of casualties resulting from the attack.</p> <p>Syria's official news agency reported that two rockets were fired towards the US base near the al-Omar Oil Field and "plumes of smoke" rose from the area after the attack. No US casualties were reported.</p>
7	July 14	Shuhayl	<p>According to reports, an unspecified number of SDF personnel were wounded as a result of an armed attack targeting an SDF checkpoint in the town. The attack was attributed to IS.</p>



Homs Province

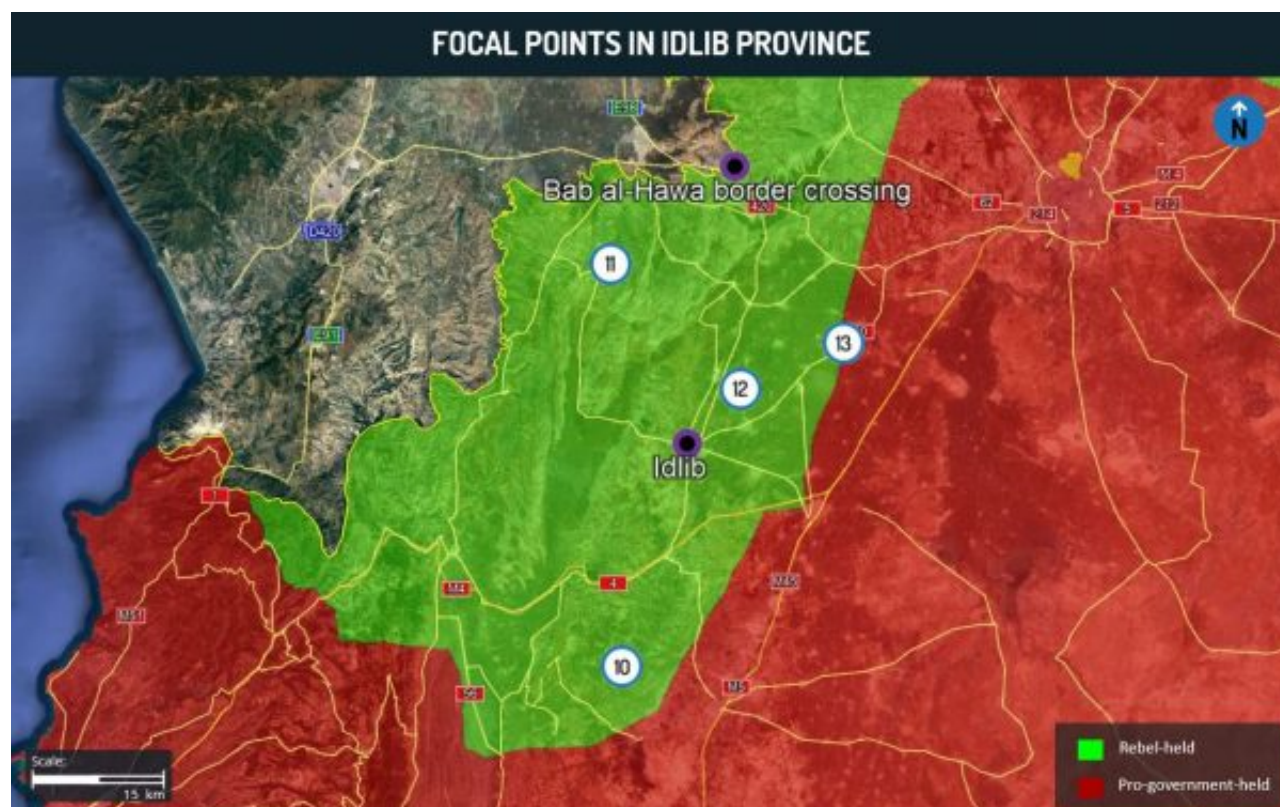
Map #	Date	District/City	Brief Description
8	July 6	Sukhna	An IS-affiliated news

	July 11	Unspecified	agency claimed the militant group successfully ambushed a Syrian Arab Army (SAA) vehicle in the area. Ten SAA personnel are alleged to have been killed and wounded during the attack. An SAA officer was also allegedly captured. IS claimed to have wounded an unspecified number of SAA personnel following the latter's entry into a booby-trapped house.
8	July 12	Sukhna	IS claimed an IED attack targeting an SAA military vehicle. The attack resulted in the destruction of the vehicle as well as the death of SAA personnel onboard.
9	July 12	Palmyra environs	An IS-perpetrated IED attack kills three members of the pro-government al-Quds Brigade.



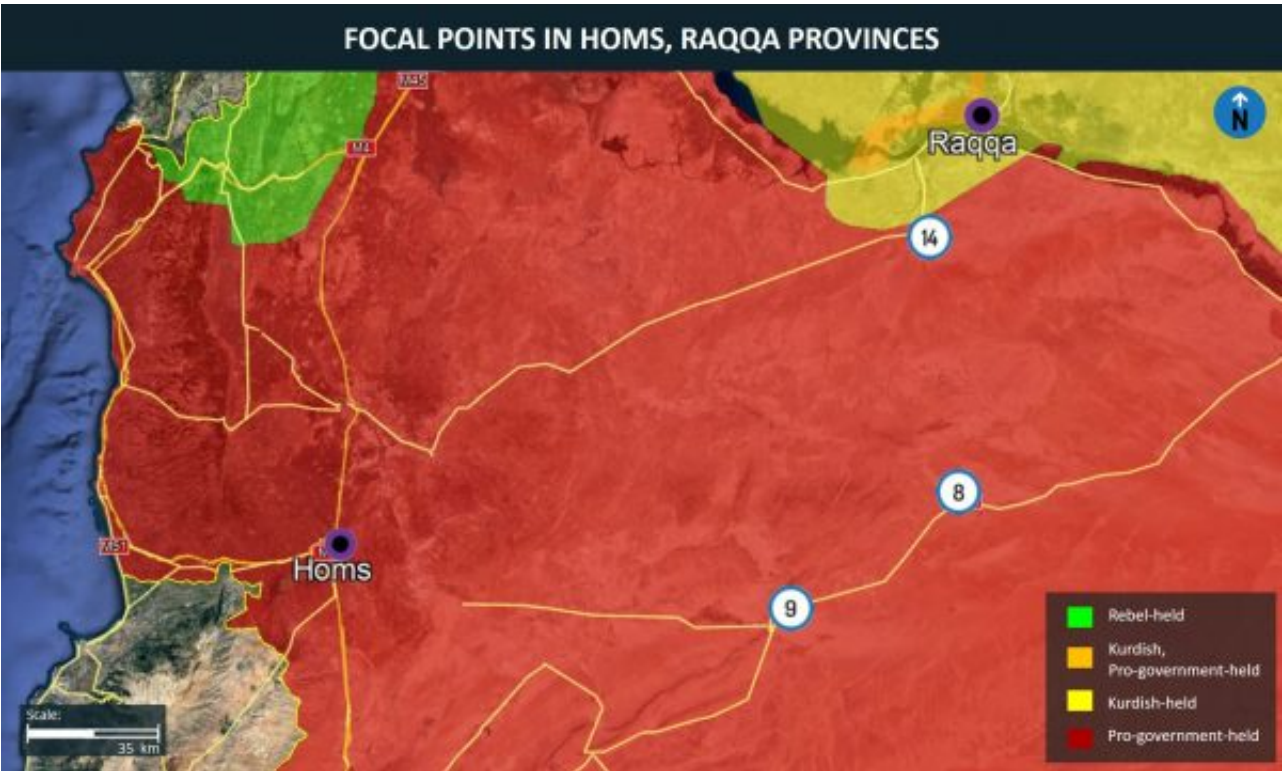
Idlib Province

Map #	Date	District/City	Brief Description
10	July 11	Bara	According to reports, one civilian was killed and an unspecified number were wounded as a result of pro-government shelling in the area.
11, 12	July 11	Kafr Tekharim, Foua	HTS's General Security Service (GSS) announced the arrest of ten IS militants in counter-militancy raids. several IEDs and firearms were seized. The arrestees, described as members of Islamic State (IS) cells, are suspected of involvement in "criminal acts".
13	July 12	Maaret Elnaasan	Two fighters from the Syrian National Army (SNA)-affiliated "Jaysh al-Ahrar" were reportedly killed as a result of shelling by pro-government forces.



Raqqa Province

Map #	Date	District/City	Brief Description
14	July 12-13	Rusafa	Reports indicate that three pro-government forces were killed and five others were wounded during clashes with IS militants after the latter launched an attack at a pro-government position in the area.



Political Development

Map #	Date	District/City	Brief Description
	July 7-8		The 16th meeting of the Astana Peace Process was held in Kazakhstan to discuss the situation in Syria. The meeting concluded with the three guarantor states, Turkey, Iran, and Russia reaffirming their commitment to cooperate in Syria to decisively defeat IS and other militants. Moreover, the three guarantor states

July 8		condemned Israeli airstrikes in Syria calling it a “violation of international law, international humanitarian law, the sovereignty of Syria, and neighboring countries”. The Sultan Murad Division of the Turkish-backed SNA issued a statement regarding the information contained in the US State Department report entitled “Human Trafficking in 2021” that accused Turkey of child labor and trafficking. The Sultan Murad Division denied the US’s accusation of Turkey and its linked militias systematically recruiting children for fighting in their ranks. The Sultan Murad Division also stated that it complied with various international laws governing armed conflict and other administrative matters.
July 9	Bab al-Hawa border crossing	The UN Security Council (UNSC) extended the use of the border crossing for the delivery of humanitarian aid for six months, with a renewal option for another six months period.
July 10		The Syrian government increased the price of a liter of diesel to 500 Syrian Pounds (SYP). The price of a bundle of bread was also increased to 200 SYP. The new prices came into effect on July 11.

Assessments & Forecast:

1. The **attacks against US forces in Deir Ezzor Province** come amid currently heightened tensions between the US and Iran-backed factions in both Iraq and Syria. These attacks in Syria

started after Washington carried out airstrikes on [July 27](#) against positions of Iran-backed factions along the Syrian-Iraqi border, which were meant to reinstate US deterrence. Thus, the latest attacks reflect Iran-backed factions' continued willingness to target American forces in SDF-controlled areas along the Euphrates. As these attacks were yet to have triggered a wide US response, it is currently likely that Washington seeks to deescalate the situation rather than to hold the militias accountable. **FORECAST:** However, additional attacks may still draw retaliatory action by the US, particularly if future attacks would lead to casualties among US personnel.

2. The **UNSC resolution on the continuation of humanitarian aid through the Bab al-Hawa Border Crossing** with Turkey constitutes an important achievement for the UN-led humanitarian program and for the communities that are based in Idlib. This is because the measure will secure the only channel for the delivery of aid that goes straight from the international donors to the rebel-held areas. This program was set up in 2014 through several border crossings to prevent the Bashar al-Assad-led government from manipulating humanitarian aid delivery in favor of pro-government elements and as a coercion measure against rebels. Since then, Russia, the primary backer of the Syrian government which has a veto power within the UNSC, has used its veto power to terminate operations through several other routes, leaving the Bab al-Hawa the only functioning route for the UN-sponsored program. For this reason, the Bab al-Hawa border crossing is essential for the Rebel and Jihadist-held Idlib. Russia has threatened to revoke its support for the extension of the program, for which international stakeholders were concerned up until now. Thus, it is likely that major concessions were given to Russia by international stakeholders to secure the renewal of the mandate. Given that the humanitarian situation has also been deteriorating in government-held areas of Syria, with the local currency significantly devaluating and prices of goods, such as bread and fuel rising, it is possible that such concessions were in the form of extended humanitarian aid or other forms of assistance to government-held areas. **FORECAST:** The development will help to mitigate further deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Syria, particularly in rebel and jihadist-held areas of Idlib over the coming months.
3. The **detention of ten IS operatives in Idlib's Kafr Tekharim and Foua** is part of a continued clampdown on IS by HTS. Idlib constitutes a strategic location for IS due to the fact that it contains the Bab al-Hawa Border Crossing, the only functioning route for the movement of humanitarian aid as well as refugees between Syria and Turkey. For this reason, IS is likely attempting to capitalize on the region for its logistical operations, which likely partially include movement in and out of Turkey. The pressure that the HTS is placing on IS thus likely has a significant adverse impact on IS in Syria as a whole, particularly since the jihadist militant group has lost all of its territorial control in both Syria and Iraq over the past two years. Regardless, the presence of IS operatives in several villages and in possession of arms points towards the remaining risk that IS operative cells pose throughout Idlib. This risk extends to civilians and western nationals operating in the region.

ARMS CAUGHT IN IS OPERATIVES' POSSESSION IN IDLIB



Recommendations:

1. Avoid nonessential travel to Damascus at this time while maintaining heightened vigilance and adhering to standard security precautions regarding the threat of militant attacks and potential airstrikes. In addition, it is advised to avoid all travel to the vicinity of military installations due to the potential for Israeli Air Force (IAF) airstrikes.
2. Avoid all travel to outlying areas and cities including Homs, Hama, and Idlib due to persistent fighting and heightened risk of kidnapping targeting foreigners, particularly in combat zones and rebel-held areas.
3. Avoid all travel to the border area with Israel given the persistent risk of Israeli Air Force (IAF) and Israel Defense Forces (IDF) strikes targeting positions in the region.
4. Avoid all travel to the Kurdish-controlled areas in northern and eastern Syria, including Deir Ezzor and Raqqa, in light of the persistence of near-daily acts of militancy by jihadist militant operatives in these regions.
5. Those seeking to enter Syria are advised to confirm the status of their crossing points and final destinations, remaining aware of recent kidnapping incidents and the nature of military forces deployed in those areas.
6. Those remaining in Aleppo should minimize movement within the city and avoid all travel to the cities western and northwestern districts given the persistence of indiscriminate mutual artillery shelling between militant groups and government forces. An escalation of armed conflict remains possible.
7. Those continuing to operate in Damascus and Aleppo should ensure that contingency and emergency evacuation plans are updated due to the remaining potential for a deterioration of the security situation.
8. Avoid non-essential travel to government-controlled areas, including Latakia and Tartus, given the prevalence of significant anti-western sentiments, as well as a latent threat of militant attacks.
9. In case overland travel between Damascus and Latakia cannot be avoided, we currently recommend crossing out of Syria via the Damascus-Beirut Highway and crossing back via the Coastal Road.
10. In the event that a security checkpoint is encountered, act respectfully and patiently, while

cooperating fully with security personnel. Refrain from photographing security personnel or documenting events.

11. As a general rule, nationals from North America and Europe are advised to maintain a low profile throughout Syria given increased negative sentiment against various foreign governments among broad segments of the populace. In government-controlled areas, strictly refrain from discussing politically sensitive topics or making comments critical of government and political institutions, as this may lead to prosecution or arrest.