

Security Operations



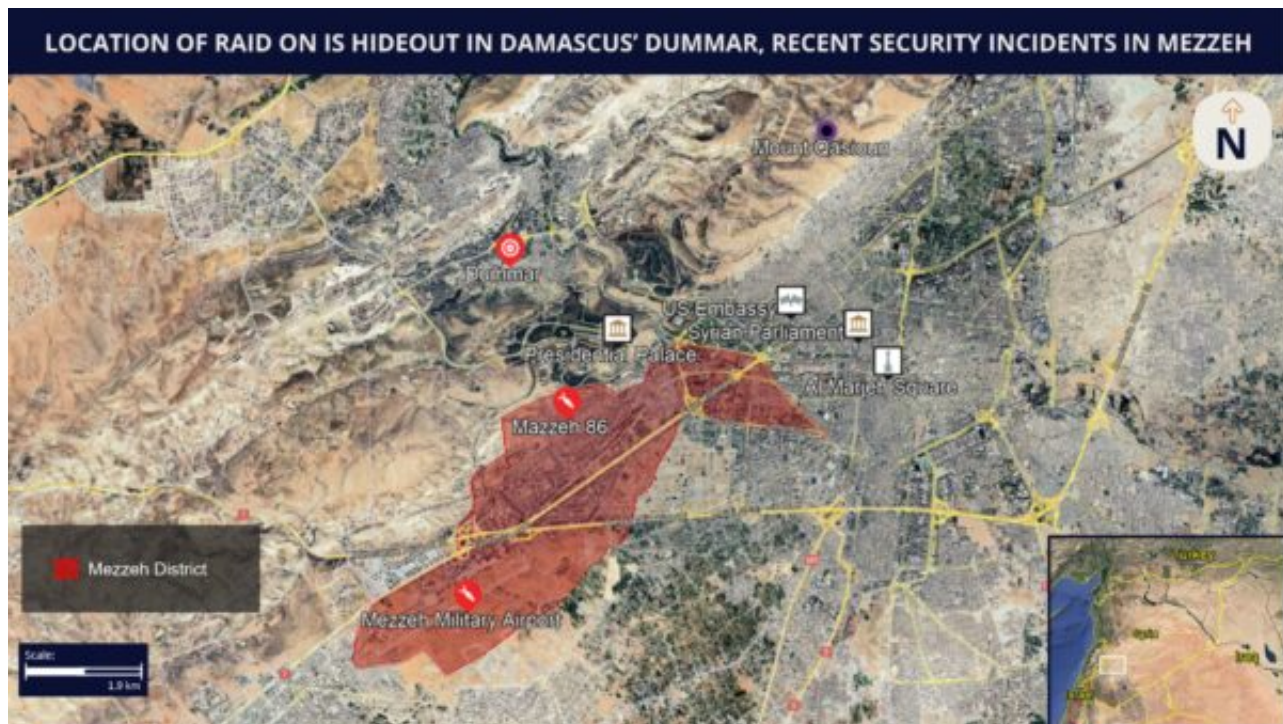
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Syria Alert: Authorities raid IS hideout, seize explosives, 'suicide drones' in Damascus' Dummar on December 17; notable due to location

Current Situation:

- On December 17, Syria's Ministry of Interior (MoI) announced that Internal Security Forces (ISF) and the General Intelligence Directorate conducted a joint operation targeting a hideout allegedly belonging to the Islamic State (IS) in the Dummar neighborhood of Damascus.
- Dummar is located northwest of central Damascus, located two km north of the Presidential Palace and Mezzeh district.
- The authorities announced that the ISF arrested one IS-linked suspect and seized ready-to-use explosive devices, multiple "suicide drones," explosive materials intended for drone attacks, communication devices, various weapons, and ammunition.
- Photos shared by the MoI depict commercial quadcopters seized at the scene.



Source: [Mol](#)

Assessment & Forecasts:

1. The latest development comes amid a general uptick in counter-militancy operations by the Syrian ISF across the country in recent months. Notable incidents have included operations around [Rif Dimashq province](#), [Aleppo](#), and simultaneous raids across several provinces in [recent weeks](#). These have occurred in light of repeated indications that IS is capitalizing upon security gaps following the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad to reconstitute itself, with the group claiming responsibility for multiple attacks in several areas of the country.
2. The [November 10](#) deal admitting Syria to the US-led International Coalition against IS has seemingly reinforced Damascus' counter-militancy campaign. This is underscored by the extensive joint operations conducted with [US Central Command \(CENTCOM\) on November 30](#) around Rif Dimashq province and in Palmyra on [December 13](#), during which an IS-linked individual opened fire and killed three US citizens participating in the raid. In this context, intelligence support from international coalition partners, particularly the US, is plausible in the latest incident. This is particularly in light of CENTCOM's affirmation on December 18 that there have been multiple instances of cooperation with Syrian forces in anti-IS operations, with Washington having conducted 80 raids overall since July.
3. Nevertheless, this raid in Dummar is particularly notable, as it appears to be among the first cases in which an IS hideout has been uncovered within Damascus city's boundaries. The location of the hideout is also noteworthy given its proximity to Mezzeh, where two security incidents involving projectile fire near government sites were recorded on [November 14-15](#) and [December 9](#). This potentially lends further credence to the involvement of IS affiliates in these incidents.
4. Regardless, the development underscores the persistent terror threat in the capital. It is plausible that this is a result of security gaps in outlying areas of Damascus, where IS cells could also be

exploiting nearby, unpopulated areas to advance their activities under relatively less scrutiny. For example, militant cells could be operating around Mount Qasioun, which runs north and west of Damascus, including through Dummar.

5. The equipment seized in the latest operation does not appear to be sophisticated military-grade gear, unlike the material recovered in previous raids. Instead, it consisted of improvised items, including commercial drones that operatives likely sought to load with explosives, and widely proliferated assault rifles, which could be combined to enable lethal attacks. This highlights the adaptability of local IS cells to create means with which to launch assaults in the absence of access to more sophisticated systems. This may also prove more challenging for authorities to detect.
6. **FORECAST:** Overall, the incident underscores the persistence of a fragmented but prevalent IS presence in Syria, with multiple cells retaining access to weapons. It is possible that the US may intensify its coordination with Syrian authorities to identify and dismantle such networks, particularly following the recent IS-linked attack near Palmyra. As a result, additional security operations are likely in the near term, including in and around northwestern Damascus, which is emerging as a flashpoint for security incidents.

Recommendations:

1. Avoid all travel to Syria at the current juncture due to the volatile security environment, including the elevated risks of militancy and armed conflict.
2. Travel to Damascus should be for essential purposes only, while adhering to all security precautions regarding the threat of militant attacks and potential for airstrikes.
3. Those conducting essential operations should seek security escorts and a local fixer to facilitate coordination with Syrian government authorities. Use only vetted and secure private transportation from a hotel, company, or organization.
4. Remain cognizant of the extreme risk posed by jihadist militant groups in the country, including IS.