

The last weeks were characterized by threatening gestures between Iran and Israel. In April numerous Israeli airstrikes targeted military bases in Syria causing the death of Iranian military personnel. On May, 10 an Iranian retaliatory strike (from the perspective of Israel) targeted the Golan heights. Iran denied firing rockets on Israeli positions. Israel has reacted with the heaviest airstrikes on pro-Iranian targets since the beginning of the conflict.

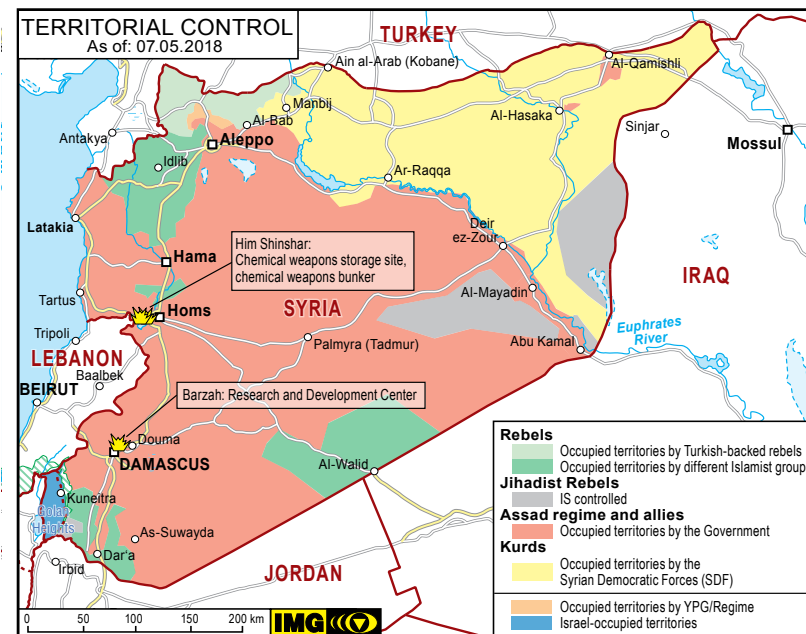
The coordinated joint operation by the US, France and Britain on April, 14 was limited to the destruction of chemical weapons producing and storing facilities of the regime and did not provoke the feared confrontation with Russia. The purpose of the pro-

portional military strike was to dissuade the Assad regime from using chemical weapons.

Numerous evacuation agreements, predominantly brokered by Russia, resulted in the capture of long-standing rebel-controlled territories around Damascus, thus, further consolidated the regime's leadership.

The US-State Department and the Pentagon remain deeply split over their future Syria strategy.

Defense Secretary James Mattis told reporters that the US are unlikely to pull out troops from Syria until diplomats have achieved peace. His remarks came after President Trump announced to pull US soldiers out of the war-torn country in the near future.



## MAP ANALYSIS

On April, 14 the US, France and Britain launched a total of 105 missiles on 3 targets in Syria: A scientific center in Damascus allegedly manufacturing biological and chemical weapons (76 missiles), the Him Shinsar chemical weapons storage facility in the west of Homs, allegedly containing Sarin (22 missiles) and the Him Shinsar chemical weapons storage facility (7 missiles).

Fighting continues between pro-regime forces and ISIS in the Palestinian refugee camp Yarmouk, in the province of Deir ez-Zour between ISIS and the regime and in the Syrian-Iraqi border region between ISIS and SDF/US.

## FORECAST

In April the Syrian Army announced that it was planning a large-scale offensive in the province of Daraa. The participation of pro-Iranian forces at the operation would most probably provoke Israel, which wants to prevent a military presence of pro-Iranian militias close to its borders by all means. In spite of current mutual threats pronounced by Iran and Israel to use force, both countries are not interested in a full confrontation risking a regional war. However, measured and targeted strikes, such as the one of May, 10 could still occur.

The Israeli Defense Minister Lieberman said that the recent escalation was limited to a conflict between Israel and the Iranian Quds Force in Syria. A confrontation with Israel would further endanger Iranian assets in Syria, especially in the present critical juncture, following the American decision to withdraw from the nuclear accord and the worsening of the economic crisis in Iran.

The US intention to withdraw its troops from Syria would weaken the control area of the SDF forces and as a result strengthen ISIS in the lower Euphrates valley. Additionally, the US would completely lose its influence to Russia, Iran and Turkey in Syria and in the region as a whole. In view of these serious consequences, a US troop withdrawal in the near future remains unlikely.

*The periodically published Fact Sheet compiles and analyzes significant developments pertaining to the Syrian conflict while providing maps and an outlook of possible future events.*

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## INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT

29.03.: The announcement by president Trump to pull out US troops from Syria very soon caused much puzzlement. Meanwhile, internal discussions to replace the US troops by an Arab coalition represented by Egypt, Jordan, Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to stabilize Syria are ongoing.

03.04.: The US forces established a new military base near the Kurdish held town Manbij, presumably to prevent a Turkish takeover. Meanwhile bilateral talks between US and Turkish officials to determine the future of Manbij have resumed, after the new Secretary of State Mike Pompeo took office. Turkey has warned that it would drive the YPG militia away from the border region if it does not reach an agreement with the US.

03.04.: At the Ankara summit, Russia, Iran and Turkey underlined their joint commitment to stabilize Syria, days after President Trump raised the possibility of withdrawing US troops. The Troika could not agree on the future of Afrin.

07.04., 09.05.: Under the deescalation agreement Turkey established its 9th and 10th observation post in Idlib out of a total of 12 and thus formed a kind of protective belt along the eastern and southern provincial borders against possible regime offensives.

07.04.: A chemical weapons attack with at least 70 fatalities in the rebel held town of Douma was documented by the Syrian Civil Defense rescue workers. Arab and Western media report a death toll of 150-200. The Assad regime said the attack was staged by the rebel group Jaysh al-Islam.

10.04.: US and Russia blocked competing UN resolutions, thus preventing a probe to the suspected chemical attack in Douma before the multinational response.

14.04.: The US, France and Britain launched 105 missiles and destroyed large parts of the chemical weapons producing and storing facilities. The purpose of the proportional military strike was to dissuade the Assad regime from using chemical weapons.

14.04.: Russia strongly condemned the attacks, calling them a violation of international law. Russia declared that it would reconsider its decision not to deliver the S-300 air defense system to Syria. Israel threatened to destroy the system if used against IAF jets.

09.04.: Israeli missile attacks allegedly targeted the T4 Regime air base west of Homs, killing 14 people, including 7 Iranian soldiers. The top adviser to Iran's Supreme Leader Khomeini promised a retaliatory strike. Additionally, 26 pro-Regime militias, mostly Iranians, were killed on April, 29 when missiles hit army positions in Hama and Aleppo.

19.04., 23.04., 06.05.: The Iraqi Air Force killed dozens of ISIS operatives in an airstrike on Syrian soil. The Iraqi Prime Minister previously declared that the Iraqi security forces would also operate in Syria to hunt down ISIS.

25.04.: At a joint EU/UN Syria conference in Brussels, donors raised USD 4,4 billion from the needed USD 9 billion. The shortfall prompts UN agencies to cut many programmes. Furthermore, Western powers seek to reclaim the lead role in the peace process, which has been overshadowed by the regional talks in Astana.

04.05.: The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) concluded its mission in Douma following the alleged chemical weapons attack. Since the beginning of the mission on April, 14 they faced numerous delays. The results of the collected samples will be published in 4 weeks.

10.05.: According to Israel, units close to the Iranian Quds Brigades fired about 20 missiles at Israeli positions on the Golan Heights. Israel responded by firing about 60 missiles at dozens of pro-Iranian bases in southern and central Syria, according to Russian reports. 23 people, including 8 Iranians, have been killed.

## DOMESTIC POLITICS

08.04.: The largest rebel group in Eastern Ghouta, Jaysh al-Islam accepted an evacuation agreement, one day after the alleged chemical weapons attack in Douma. 8,000 Jaysh al-Islam operatives and 40,000 civilians left for Idlib. In return 52 pro-regime detainees were released. In total 68,000 fighters along with their families were evacuated from Eastern Ghouta, including the rebel groups Faylaq al-Rahman and Ahrar al-Sham.

09.04.: A new legislation (law number 10) calls on Syrians to prove ownership of their private properties within 30 days, otherwise they are forced to relinquish their properties to the regime. The law would affect the 13 million externally and internally displaced Syrians.

20.04.: The evacuation operation in Qalamoun, northeast of Damascus took just one day. 4,000 Jaysh al-Islam operatives withdrew without any resistance to Idlib and Jarablus and handed over a large arms depot, tanks and armored vehicles to the Syrian Army.

29.04.: A new rebel alliance under the name "Alliance of Supporting Islam", previously part of the Al-Qaida linked Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) regards itself as loyal to Al-Qaida. The rebel alliance accused HTS chief Joulani of conducting his own Syria policy.

03.05.: Rebel groups accepted a Russian-brokered deal to leave the enclave between the cities of Hama and Homs, including the strategically important section of the M5 highway and to hand over their weapons to the Syrian regime.

## MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

20.03., Afrin: After the takeover of Afrin, the YPG declared to switch to guerilla warfare against Turkey and pro-turkish forces. Numerous attacks followed in the last weeks.

24.03., Deir ez-Zour: 26 pro-government fighters were killed in a surprise attack by ISIS in the Mayadeen desert. 9 ISIS operatives were also killed.

12.04., Deir ez-Zour: The Russian military constructed a new bridge connecting the eastern bank of the Euphrates with regime held territories in the west. Clashes with ISIS took place in the cities of Mayadeen, Hajin and the village Al-Shafah, north of Abu Kamal.

17.04., Aleppo: HTS captured Khan Sheikhoun and surrounding villages in the southern part of Idlib from their rival Jabhat Tahrir Suriya (JTS), who is supported by Turkey. Fighting continued in Western Aleppo.

19.04., Southern Damascus: After heavy airstrikes, the Syrian army launched a campaign to take over the Palestinian refugee camp Yarmouk in Southern Damascus. Several rebel groups accepted an evacuation deal, heavy clashes with ISIS are ongoing. On May, 5 the Syrian Army controlled about 65% of the camp.

29.04., Deir ez-Zour: Regime forces seized four villages east of the Euphrates River from the US-backed SDF. The SDF reportedly reconquered those villages shortly thereafter.

01.05., Deir ez-Zour: The SDF, operating with US support, launched a new operation "Island Storm" in order to remove ISIS's presence from the border region. The operation was coordinated with units of the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces.

Idlib: The regime regularly conducts airstrikes in Idlib and Northern Hama. UN officials expressed concerns that a regime offensive in Idlib would have devastating humanitarian consequences for the 2 million civilians, mostly IDPs.



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