

Weekly Conflict Summary

March 22-28, 2018

Pro-government and opposition forces followed through with evacuation deals for much of what remained of opposition-held Eastern Ghouta. Despite the deals and evacuations, fighting continues in Duma. Operation Olive Branch, the Turkish-

Eastern Ghouta

Evacuations of hundreds of opposition fighters and their families started this week from Harasta. In the first day of evacuations, six buses took the evacuees to the opposition-controlled Idleb pocket. The evacuation is part of a deal brokered by Russia between the opposition fighters and the government and is being facilitated by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and a UN delegation. Local sources reported that some fighters remained in these areas to reconcile with the Syrian government. Russian observers have supervised initial meetings with those intending to reconcile

Figure 2 - Situation in Eastern Ghouta by March 28

At least 37 people were killed in a March 22 bombing of an underground shelter in Arbin, a town in the southern pocket of opposition-controlled Eastern Ghouta. The pocket is controlled by Faylaq al-Rahman, which announced on March 23 that it would agree to a ceasefire and negotiate with Russia to stop fighting.

Hundreds more fighters and civilians were bussed out of the southern Jobar pocket of Eastern Ghouta on March 25. Evacuations of both the Harasta and Jobar pockets were completed during the reporting week, leaving Duma as the only remaining pocket of opposition forces in Eastern Ghouta.

Discussions between Russian negotiators and Jaysh al-Islam (the prominent opposition unit in Duma) are ongoing. Negotiations in Duma are complicated by the fact that Jaysh al-Islam does not have good relations with armed groups in the Idleb pocket – which has been the destination of nearly all prior evacuations. This fact, and the fact that Jaysh al-Islam has been in Duma for years, has greatly complicated negotiations and pro

Afrin

Operation Olive Branch units continued to gain territory southeast of Afrin city this week, moving to threaten both Tel Refaat and the Menagh Airbase to its north. Turkish President Erdogan stated that Operation Olive Branch would conclude with the capture of Tel Refaat..

Figure 3 - Situation in northwestern Syria by March 28

In the wake of the previous week's reports of looting in Afrin city, the Turkey's foreign minister indicated that Turkish forces were investigating the crimes to punish those responsible. The FSA leadership also made a similar claim.

Turkish officials have indicated once more that they wish the complete withdrawal of the SDF from territories around Menbij and those holdings west of the Euphrates River. Implementation of this withdrawal has been discussed by American and Turkish officials at length.