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Subject: Fwd: Weekly Update: Fight Against ISIS Ramps Up, U.S. Rules for Syrians Change
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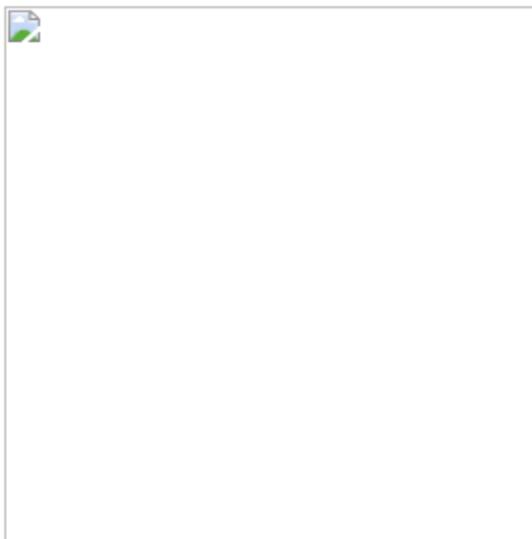
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WEEKLY UPDATE

February 3, 2017



Dear Readers,

Welcome to the weekly Syria Deeply newsletter. We've rounded up the most important stories and developments about Syria and the Syrians in order to bring you valuable news and analysis. But first, here is a brief overview of what happened this week:

The Syrian army, Turkey and the United States-led coalition continued their separate offensives against the so-called Islamic State (ISIS) group in northern Syria. The Syrian army plans to move on militants in the northern Aleppo countryside. In recent weeks, they advanced to within 4 miles (6km) of the ISIS-controlled city of al-Bab, where Turkish military and Ankara-backed Syrian rebels are also fighting militants.

The Syrian Defence Forces (SDF), a U.S.-backed alliance of Kurdish and Arab forces, are advancing on ISIS's de facto capital, Raqqa. As they get closer to encircling the city, the SDF is also planning the next phase of the operation in other ISIS-controlled areas such as neighboring Deir Ezzor province to the south. The U.S. is assisting the operation with airstrikes, which reportedly destroyed a pipeline near

Raqqa, cutting off the water supply to the militant stronghold, and by providing supplies. An SDF spokesman said on Tuesday that the coalition provided them with armored vehicles for the first time.

In Idlib, infighting between rebel groups reached a tipping point over the weekend, when several Syrian Islamist armed groups announced a merger with the former al-Qaida affiliate in Syria, Jabhat Fatah al-Sham (JFS). The new alliance, named the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (Liberation of the Levant Committee), is now fighting against Ahrar al-Sham, a powerful rebel group on the ground.

As fighting continues on the ground in Syria, the United States dealt a devastating blow this week to those trying to escape the conflict. Syrian nationals are now banned from entering the United States, after U.S. president Donald Trump signed an executive order barring the entry of nationals from seven countries in the region for 90 days. The order also suspends the entry of all refugees for 120 days, but Syrian refugees are banned indefinitely.

We will be keeping a close eye on diplomatic developments next week as Iran, Russia and Turkey are set to meet for the second round of peace talks in the Kazakh capital of Astana on Tuesday. They will discuss how the cease-fire in Syria is being implemented, Kazakhstan's foreign ministry said in a statement. The talks will be followed by the next round of ■■■-sponsored Syria peace talks in Geneva, which has been scheduled for February 20, after being briefly postponed last week.

After Trump Order, Syrian Family Endures Anguish of Changing Rules

Following Trump's executive order barring Syrians indefinitely from the U.S., Tania Karas reports on how its chaotic implementation hit one Syrian family who were already in transit as the order was inked.



Hanan, 8, and Lian, 5, were meant to be reunited with their father, Fadi Kassar, last Saturday, after years of a meticulous procedure that legally qualified them for family reunification. But Trump's ban barred them and their mother, Razan, from entering the U.S. Family Photo

Afrin: Kurdish Town Isolated by Siege, Geography

The predominantly Kurdish district of Afrin in northwestern Syria has been under near-continuous siege for four years but remained relatively calm, attracting hundreds of thousands of displaced people. Now, it is under threat from Turkish military operations in Syria.



Rebel fighters of the Syrian Kurdish Popular Protection Units (YPG) pay their respects during a funeral ceremony in the village of Afrin, August, 2013. AFP/STR

Trump Order on Refugees Is ‘Amateur Hour’: Konyndyk

The whirlwind of executive orders from the new administration risks alienating the bureaucrats needed to implement them. Former USAID senior official Jeremy Konyndyk says U.S. government bureaucracy is now entering uncharted territory.



Jeremy Konyndyk

Additional Reading:

- [Analysis: Russia Plans Syria Name Change in Draft Constitution](#)

Top image: Protesters take part in a rally to oppose President Donald Trump's executive orders. AP/Elaine Thompson

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