

Al Qaeda Strikes Back: Aleppo Remains the Focal Point Of The War On Syria

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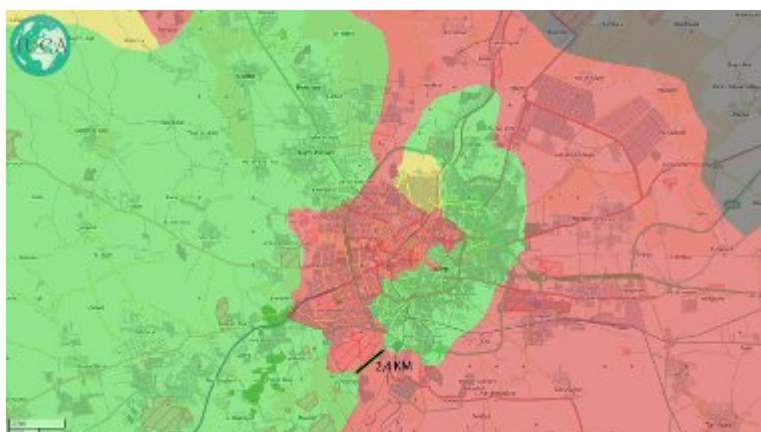
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On Thursday I [judged](#) that the U.S. supported al-Qaeda attack in southwest Aleppo was failing. *"Despite the failure of their main thrust, al-Qaeda and its allies launched a third phase attack towards Ramouseh district a few hundred meters further north. A tactical mistake as the attackers failed to build a decisive Schwerpunkt. ... Local fighting still continues on the front lines but the government positions seem secured and the attacking force is slowly getting ground down."*

That judgement was premature.



The Jihadis retreated after their first three attacks but renewed their efforts with fresh troops on the next day. This time they concentrated on one focal point. Another frontal assault throughout Friday failed, but a fifth major strike followed in the darkness of Friday night.

A total of five vehicle borne suicide bombs broke the defense line of the Syrian government forces and Jihadi forces stormed into the wide area of the Artillery Academy. The compound is a hard to observe mixture of small open fields, garages, office and quarter buildings.

The sparsely manned defense lines were overwhelmed or circumvented. By Saturday night most of the academy was in the hand of the Jihadis. A small corridor to the Jihadi held east-Aleppo was opened but is not secured.



The Syrian government forces are bringing up reserves and additional forces. A counterattack is likely to follow soon. The battle for Aleppo is now the strategic Schwerpunkt, the focal point of the fight for north-Syria if not of the whole war.

According to earlier reports by the Guardian journalist [Chulov](#), [Vice News](#) and Dutch TV, east-Aleppo is essentially empty. The population has long fled to government held areas. “[Spookstad](#)”, ghost-town, is the title of the Dutch TV documentary from there. “Western” media now laud the Islamists for lifting the siege the Syrian government held over the area. But the new Jihad corridor in south-west Aleppo is cutting off 1.5 million people in government held west-Aleppo. Now these are under siege with the besieging forces having promised to slaughter many of them. This is somewhat recurrence of the situation in 2013 when west-Aleppo, to little attention of the media, was also cut off from all resupplies by “moderate rebel” forces.

The “western” think-tank and media fanboys of al-Qaeda are celebrating the breaking the siege of east-Aleppo while a much bigger siege is created against a much larger population. Their cheer-leading for al-Qaeda is [literarily indistinguishable](#) from al-Qaeda’s own propaganda.

The Russian air force was heavily engaged, but not very visible in the defense of the Artillery Academy. Its main focus are the supply lines of the Jihadists. But efforts in the logistic depth of the theater always take some time to show significant effects on the front lines. What was regrettably missing was direct helicopter support for the defenders. Russia has a number of excellent front line helicopters in Syria. But there was arguably reason not to use them. Last Monday a Russian helicopter was shot down some 40 kilometers south of Aleppo and all crew and passengers were killed. The Russians believe that the helicopter was taken down by a man portable air defense missile (MANPAD) delivered to Jihadis either by or with the knowledge of the U.S. They fear that the attackers of Aleppo have a significant number of these weapons.

The breaking of a corridor towards east-Aleppo was announced as only the first part of a plan to conquer and occupy all of Aleppo. More than 5,000 attackers took part in the first phase. There are rumors – unconfirmed – that an additional 10,000 attackers have been activated and are on the march towards the city.

The whole attack on Aleppo [was planned since at least April](#). U.S. Secretary of State Kerry prevented Russian reactions against the preparations and build up by holding out a possible cessation of hostilities and a political solution of the conflict. At the same time the U.S. and its allies delivered new weapons and equipment to al-Qaeda in Syria and its aligned forces. Videos from the Jihadi front lines show every fighter in well kept uniforms and armored vests

with plenty of weapons and ammunition available.

The current attack on Aleppo is only one part of a larger U.S. plan to bring Syria (as well as Russia and Iran) to its knees. We do not yet know all the plan's phases, parameters and aims. We also do not know the responses the other side has prepared to counter them. All observers (including me) should keep that in mind when judging the day-to-day changes of the situation.

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