

# The Islamic State (ISIS) Counteroffensive and the Battle for East Aleppo

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*The battle for east Aleppo has recently intensified between the pro-government forces and ISIS, as both forces have exchanged large-scale offensives in this tug-of-war fight for control of the areas in Syria's northern countryside.*

On Thursday, the Syrian Arab Army (SAA), the National Defense Forces (NDF) and Kataebat Al-Ba'ath advanced on the terrorists' positions at the mounds of Sheikh Ahmad. According to reports, the Syrian forces were able to advance inside the southern neighborhoods of Sheikh Ahmad. Nonetheless, they still have a long way to go before being able to impose full control over this town near the Kuweries Military Airport.

Pro-Syrian sources argue that the next 48 hours in this sector will be critical for both the Syrian Armed Forces and ISIS, as the former attempts to lift the two year long siege on the Kuweries Military Airport. In turn, we expect a continuation of the heavy fighting in the settlements' building blocks. It will be likely resulted in impossibility of the both sides to gain a momentum to get a significant success at the frontline in a short time.

The SAA's 66th Brigade of the 11th Tank Division has been taking part in fierce clashes against the ISIS militants for control of the Khanasser-Ithriya Highway. It leads to the Syrian Government controlled areas of the Aleppo province. On account of this battle, the pro-government forces have been forced to abandon their southern Aleppo offensive in order to reopen this strategic supply route. On Thursday, the Syrian Arab Army's 66th Brigade received a much needed boost when a contingent from Hezbollah arrived from the town of Khanasser to purge militants from this area.

Hezbollah fighters took control of the integral hilltop at Tal Ithriya after a series of intense firefights. This has allowed the SAA to concentrate some of their units to the Sheikh Hilal front, where they confronted another ISIS assault on this town located along the Raqqa-Salamiyah highway. In turn, ISIS terrorists pushed north towards the town of Sheikh Hilal. ISIS attacks were fixed near the town of Al-Sa'an. Northeast of al Safira, ISIS attempted to infiltrate into the town of Al-Aziziyah for the second time in 72 hours. The SAA servicemen repelled this attack in a fierce firefight.

Despite the pro-government forces' efforts, the Khanasser-Ithriyah highway is still closed due to the ISIS presence. If it still remains closed, the Syrian Government will have to rely on airdrops in order to resupply their forces in Aleppo.

According to Oil Ministry spokesman Assem Jihad, the Iraqi authorities have liberated almost all oilfields captured by ISIS in the country.

The army and security forces managed to drive ISIS out of the Saladin province. Thus, terrorist groups are controlling only a small amount of developed oilfields in the Nineveh province. He added ISIS was unable to develop oilfields in the Nineveh province as it required technical experience. ISIS has been reliant on funds raised from selling crude originating in Iraq and Syria. Last year, they captured the country's largest oil refinery in Baiji. The Iraqi military reportedly retook the facility earlier in October.

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