



Syria Conflict Update

October 30, 2015

October 30th marks a full month of Russia's direct military intervention on behalf of the Syrian government. Over the past month, Russian warplanes dropped hundreds of bombs in advance of and in coordination with a ground offensive conducted by government and pro-government forces. Throughout the course of this offensive, Russia has continuously claimed to be targeting positions held by Islamic State (or ISIS) forces, "terrorists," or some combination of these terms. Despite these claims however, approximately 85% of these strikes have targeted non-ISIS opposition forces.

Despite the attention garnered by the government ground offensives, they have had little success to date. The few territorial gains made by the government have come at great cost to the military (in terms of armor being destroyed) and have led to increased opposition coordination and popular support. These territorial gains (which amount to approximately 50 square kilometers) have resulted in the displacement of more than 100,000 people in October alone.

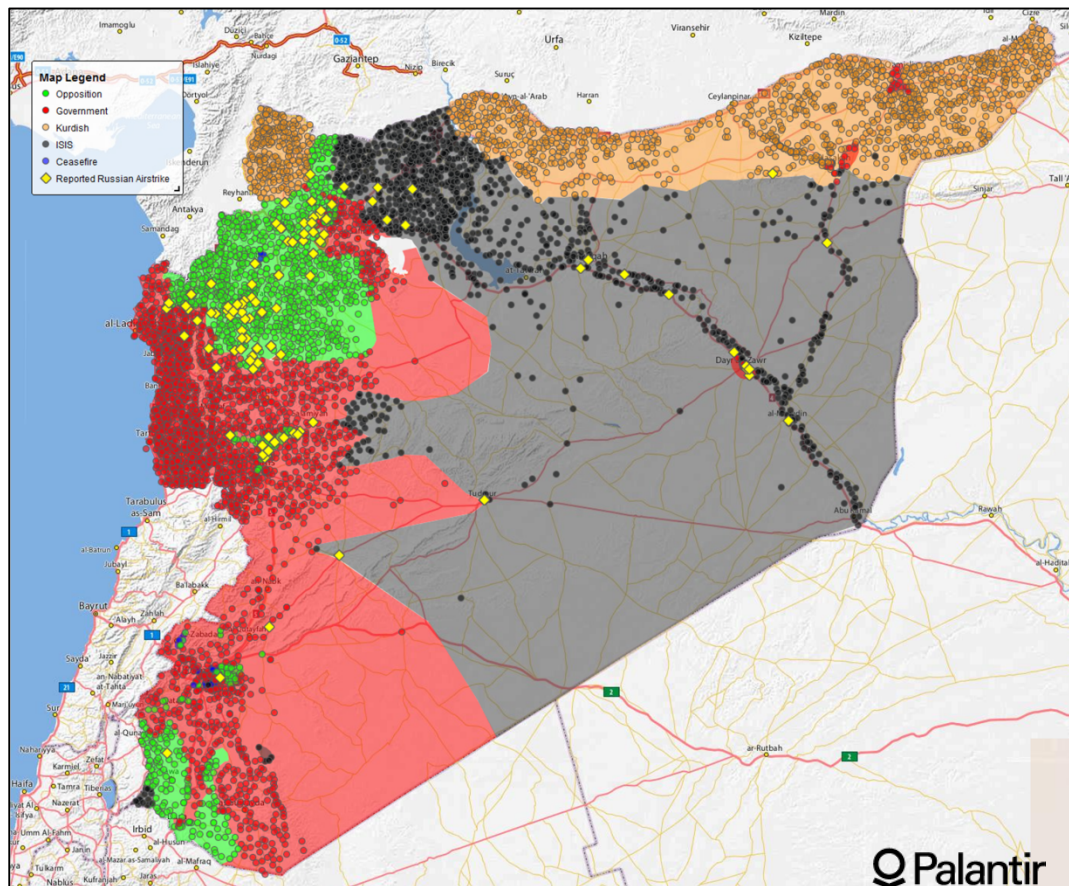


Figure 1: Areas of control as of October 30, 2015. Each dot represents a city or town.

Homs Governorate

Homs governorate is home to a smaller, but by no means insubstantial, pocket of opposition control north of the city. Beginning in early October, government forces advanced towards the city of Talbiseh from two sides. Consistent fighting has persisted throughout, but front lines have remained largely unchanged. Government offensives in this area resulted in the formation of a joint command structure between three of the largest groups present in the area – Jabhat al-Nusra, Ahrar al-Sham, and the Homs Legion.

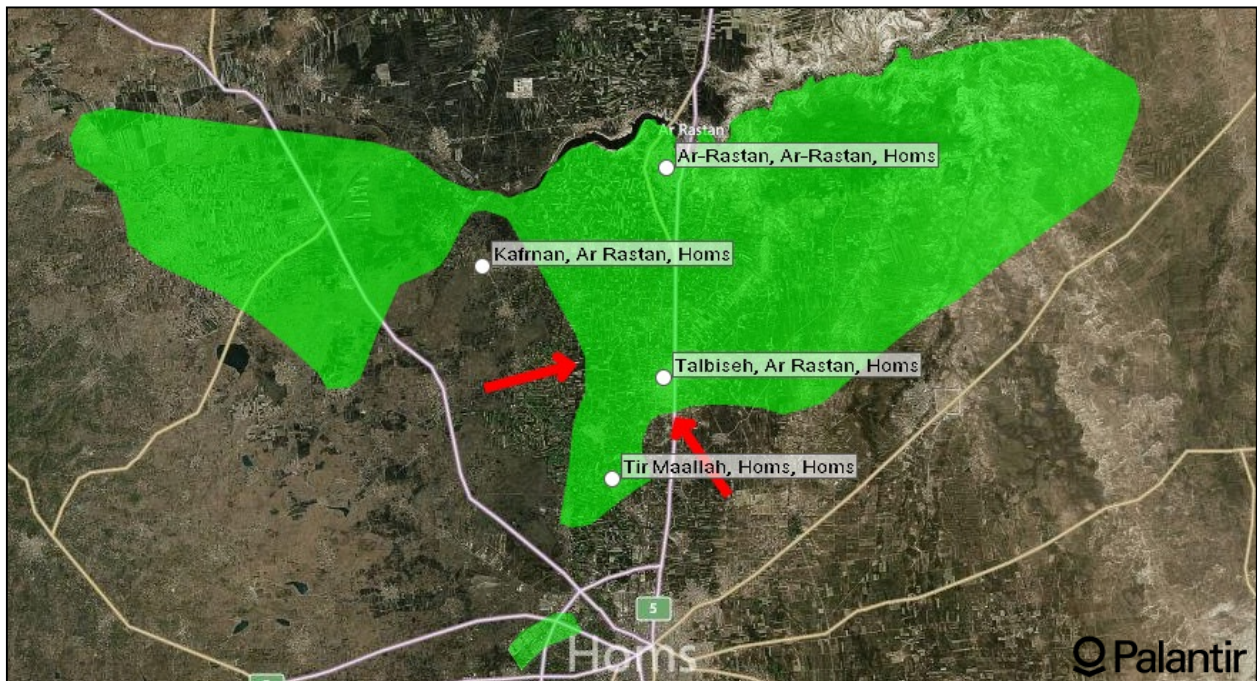


Figure 2: Location of government ground offensives in Homs governorate during October, 2015.

Hama, Idlib, and Lattakia Governorates

The most intense fighting has taken place along the main government-opposition front lines in northern Hama, Idlib, and Lattakia (see map below). This area was also the focus of approximately 90% of Russia's initial aerial bombardments, dropping to 50% by the end of the month.

Initial ground offensives in this area were swiftly repelled and nearly decimated by internationally supported armed opposition groups using TOW anti-tank guided missiles. The Carter Center has observed a twofold increase in sightings of these weapons in the area, with stocks being almost immediately replenished by weapon transfers from Saudi Arabia and other pro-opposition countries. The weapons have effectively neutralized government armor in the area, repelling most ground attacks and even (on at least one occasion) downing a helicopter.

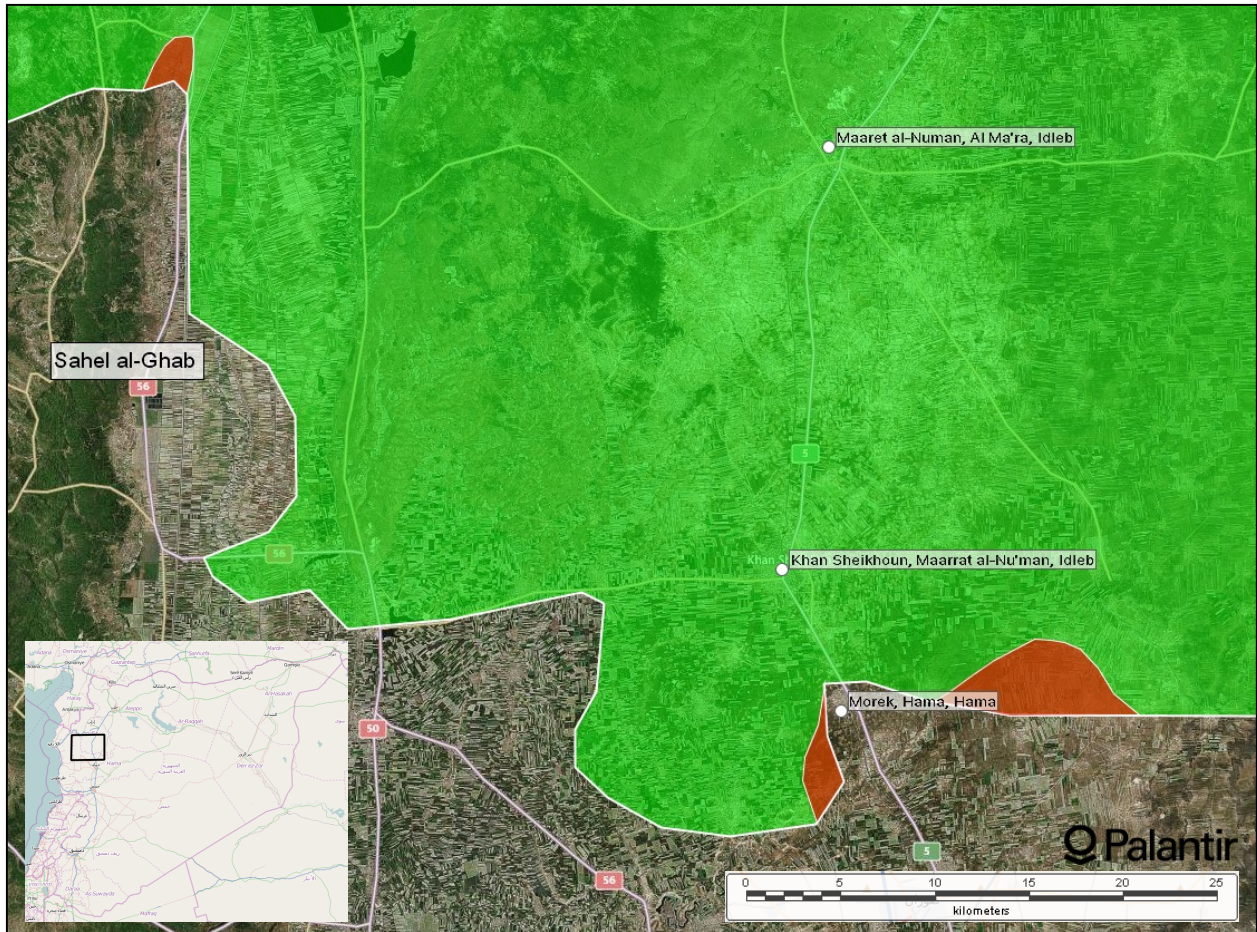


Figure 3: Government advances along Hama, Idlib, and Lattakia front lines during the month of October, 2015.

Aleppo Governorate

The most substantial government advance during the month of October took place in southern Aleppo governorate. This advance resulted in the displacement of approximately 100,000 people, many of whom had only recently been displaced by aerial bombardments in Idlib governorate. Prior to October, this area had seen relatively little fighting, and was considered somewhat of a “safe haven” for IDPs. The offensive to the east of Aleppo city is part of an ongoing attempt to reach the besieged Kweiris military airbase. Progress towards the airbase has been slow, but steady for the past month and a half, and an eventual breaking of the siege appears to be inevitable.

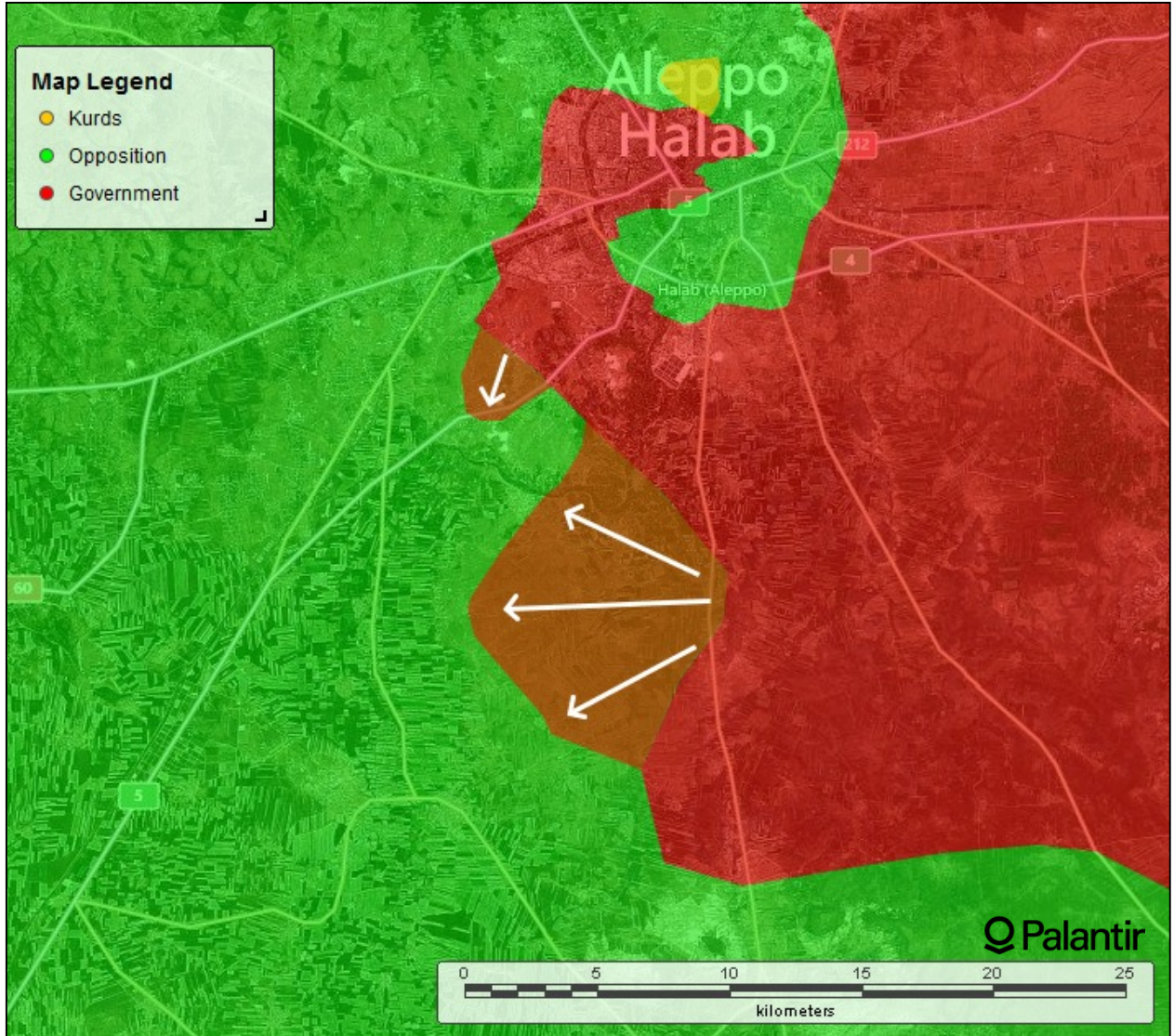


Figure 4: Government advances south of Aleppo city during October, 2015.