THE THREAT OF ISIS PRISON BREAKS
An Analysis of Camp-Adjacent Violence Before and After the October 2019 Turkish Invasion

Introduction

With the Syrian conflict soon poised to enter its ninth year, the war has proven to be the greatest humanitarian and international security crisis in a generation. However, in the last year—at least in north-east of the country—there had been relative peace. The Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), along with American support, had consolidated its control of the region and all but rooted out the last remnants of ISIS. As of this fall, U.S. and SDF forces were engaged in counter-terrorism raids, ensuring that the now-stateless Islamic State remained suppressed. Moreover, American support, which the SDF considers to be directly tied to the PKK, a terrorist organization that has been in conflict with the Turkish state for decades, helped consolidate its control of the region and all but rooted out the last remnants of ISIS. On the other side of the Syrian border sits Turkey, which considers the SDF to be directly tied to the PKK, a terrorist organization that has been in conflict with the Turkish state for decades.

One of the biggest concerns (in addition to widespread reports of atrocities) regarding this Turkish invasion has been the implications for the fight against ISIS. SDF territory held numerous ISIS detention camps and IDP camps (which housed ISIS-affiliated family members). Since the invasion, there have been numerous reports of ISIS prison breaks and escapes. Given the now chaotic situation in NE Syria, these breakout threaten to aid in a potential re-emergence of ISIS. Current news reporting on details of this breakout remains spotty and inconsistent. This project seeks to answer to following questions:

1) Where were the biggest increases in violence following the Turkish invasion of NE Syria?
2) Which ISIS detention and IDP camps (that house ISIS family members) witnessed the biggest increase in violence in their surrounding area?
3) Which camps changed faction hands?

The answers to these questions will serve as an approximate estimation of which camps likely had the most security resources diverted from them during invasion and were thus most vulnerable to ISIS escapes and breakout attempts.

Methodology

Using The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) data, the kernel density tool was applied at a 15,000 km2 radius. This tool was applied for the time periods before and after the Turkish invasion (September 2-October 8; October 9-November 16, 2019). The difference between these two densities was then calculated. A buffer of five km was then applied around each camp (to account for errors in the georeferencing of camp locations). This tool was applied for the time periods before and after the Turkish invasion (September 2-October 8; October 9-November 16, 2019). The difference between these two densities was then calculated. This tool was applied for the time periods before and after the Turkish invasion (September 2-October 8; October 9-November 16, 2019). The difference between these two densities was then calculated. This tool was applied for the time periods before and after the Turkish invasion (September 2-October 8; October 9-November 16, 2019). The difference between these two densities was then calculated.

In order to compute the conflict densities, this analysis utilized all reported conflict events. As such, it does not differentiate between event magnitude or type. Such an analysis, which ideally would incorporate number of units involved, number of casualties, etc., would serve as a better approximation of which camps’ security was most at threat. However, in the absence of this far more intricate analysis, this project serves as a general estimate of which camps witnessed the greatest amount of violence, and thus the greatest likelihood of prisoner escape.

Results

Although nearly all camps witnessed a large increase in violence following the invasion, regions surrounding the Ayn Issa ISIS camp, Ayn Issa IDP camp, and Malikiya ISIS camp saw a four digit percent increase in conflict. In the absence of complete, accurate reporting on prison escapes, authorities would be wise to pay special consideration to these camps (and their imate records) while investigating potential escapes. Although over half of the total camps changed faction hands during the invasion, none ended up in Turkish control. Instead, those that changed hands now (as of November 16, 2019) lay in joint SDF-Syrian Regime control, as the two formerly antagonistic factions allied themselves following the Turkish invasion. We would thus not suspect this change to increase likelihood of escape.

Limitations

One of the biggest concerns (in addition to widespread reports of atrocities) regarding this Turkish invasion has been the implications for the fight against ISIS. SDF territory held numerous ISIS detention camps and IDP camps (which housed ISIS-affiliated family members). Since the invasion, there have been numerous reports of ISIS prison breaks and escapes. Given the now chaotic situation in NE Syria, these breakout threaten to aid in a potential re-emergence of ISIS. Current news reporting on details of this breakout remains spotty and inconsistent. This project seeks to answer to following questions:

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Table: Name of Camp, Population, % Change in Violence Near Camp, Pre-Invasion Faction Control, Post-Invasion Faction Control

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Camp</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>% Change in Violence Near Camp</th>
<th>Pre-Invasion Faction Control</th>
<th>Post-Invasion Faction Control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Al-Hawi IDP Camp</td>
<td>68,600</td>
<td>-50</td>
<td>SDF</td>
<td>SDF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayn Isa IDP Camp</td>
<td>12,901</td>
<td>4,501</td>
<td>SDF</td>
<td>SDF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roj IDP Camp</td>
<td>1,700</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>SDF</td>
<td>SDF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kobane ISIS Camp</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>SDF</td>
<td>SDF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayn Isa ISIS Camp</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>3,902</td>
<td>SDF</td>
<td>SDF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dashisha ISIS Camp</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>SDF</td>
<td>SDF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hasaka City ISIS Camp</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>SDF</td>
<td>SDF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camp</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>SDF</td>
<td>SDF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qamishli ISIS Camp</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1,305</td>
<td>SDF</td>
<td>SDF</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Change in Conflict Density over Both Time Periods

Pre-Invasion Conflict Density: SDF, Post-Invasion Conflict Density: SDF-Regime

Cartographer: Evan Corcoran
Date: December 15, 2019
MAP Data Sources: OSCHA ROSC, ACLED, Natural Earth, Institute for the Study of War (ISW), Syria.liveumpa
Projection: WGS 1984 UTM Zone 37N
Course: DHP P207 GIS for International Applications
Photos: Scott Bob, Voice of America News; Sahem Rababah, UN Photo