

# ASOR Cultural Heritage Initiatives (CHI): Planning for Safeguarding Heritage Sites in Syria and Iraq<sup>1</sup>

NEA-PSHSS-14-001

Weekly Report 63–64 —October 14–27, 2015

Michael D. Danti, Allison Cuneo, Marina Gabriel, Susan Penacho,  
Kyra Kaercher, LeeAnn Barnes Gordon, Emily Ham, and John O’Neill

## Executive Summary

During the reporting period, the Islamist extremist group Daesh (ISIS, ISIL, IS) committed another horrific atrocity at the archaeological site of Palmyra (modern Tadmor), executing three unidentified individuals by binding them to three of the stone columns of the site’s Colonnaded Street and detonating attached explosives. Daesh previously used Palmyra’s Roman Theater as the location for a filmed mass execution of prisoners and has carried out numerous performative deliberate destructions of standing remains at the site. Daesh apparently seeks to increase its international media exposure and social media footprint through the combination of atrocities involving human victims and the inclusion, or deliberate destruction of, cultural heritage. In part, Daesh seemingly commits atrocities and terrorist acts — and times the release of related media — to divert attention away from major setbacks, as the organization continues to suffer casualties among its high level leadership, to lose territory, and fails to provide basic services to those trapped within its territories.

The Syrian Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums released new reports of archaeological looting and other heritage incidents in Quneitra Governorate. Previously little has been known of heritage incidents in the Quneitra area, and this region has seemingly suffered relatively little conflict-related damage relative to other parts of the country. The DGAM also released new information on heritage incidents in Hama Governorate, and newly released DigitalGlobe satellite imagery provided details on conditions in the vicinity of modern Raqqa.

## Key Points

- The DGAM reports illicit excavation at multiple sites in southern Quneitra Governorate of Syria ([ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0139](#)).
- DigitalGlobe satellite imagery shows new constructions built near the site of Heraqla in Syria ([ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0140](#)).
- The DGAM reports looting and damage at multiple sites in Hama Governorate of Syria ([ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0141](#)).
- ISIL executes three captives tied to the Colonnaded Street in ancient Palmyra, Syria ([ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0142](#)).

---

<sup>1</sup> This report is based on research conducted by the “Cultural Preservation Initiative: Planning for Safeguarding Heritage Sites in Syria and Iraq.” Weekly reports reflect reporting from a variety of sources and may contain unverified material. As such, they should be treated as preliminary and subject to change.

## Heritage Timeline

October 27, 2015

The **DGAM** published an article entitled “**Exploding 3 persons ties to Palmyra columns by ISIS.**” The DGAM reports that local sources confirmed the killing of three persons tied to three different columns in the ancient city of Palmyra by ISIL militants on October 26, 2015. <http://dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1846>

- **More Palmyra Coverage:**

<http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/10/27/ISIS-blows-up-ancient-columns-in-Syria-s-Palmyra-monitor.html>

<http://ara.tv/2es3k>

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34647186>

<http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2015/10/isis-combines-murder-with-artifact-destruction.html>

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Oct-27/320403-isis-blows-up-palmyra-columns-to-kill-three.ashx>

<http://www.syriahr.com/en/2015/10/for-the-first-time-execution-by-tying-to-ancient-pillar-and-detonating-it-by-the-islamic-state/>

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/isis-kills-three-captives-in-palmyra-1445940753>

- *Hurriyet Daily News* published an article entitled “**Gilded Bible seized in Tokat.**” A police operation in the Turkish northern province of Tokat seized a 10-page gilded bible, written in Syriac and dated back 1,000 years. The volume was handed over to a museum. Four operations were carried out in Tokat, recovering 294 historical artifacts.

<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/gilded--bible-seized-in-tokat.aspx?pageID=238&nID=90425&NewsCatID=375>

- *The Art Newspaper* published an article titled “**Bible museum founders may have illicit antiquities from Iraq**” (by Julia Halperin). The Green Family, owners of the craft store chain Hobby Lobby and founders of the Museum of the Bible in Washington, DC are under federal investigation for artifacts they may have imported from Iraq. The Daily Beast reported that in 2011, US Customs seized between 200 and 300 cuneiform tablets coming from Israel to Oklahoma City, where the Greens are located.

<http://theartnewspaper.com/news/museums/160473/>

- The Guardian* published an article titled “**British Museum to train Iraqi curators in heritage protection**” (by Maev Kennedy). The British Museum will issue a three million euro government grant to equip future trainees in conservation and restoration of heritage sites destroyed by ISIL in Syria and Iraq. This effort is not aimed to prevent the destruction of cultural sites, but rather improve the ability to preserve them.  
<http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2015/oct/28/british-museum-to-train-iraqi-curators-in-heritage-protection>
- October 26, 2015

*Daily Sabah* published an article titled “**ISIS ties three people to historic columns before blowing them up in Palmyra.**” **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0142.**  
<http://www.dailysabah.com/mideast/2015/10/26/isis-ties-three-people-to-historic-columns-before-blowing-them-up-in-palmyra>
- The Daily Beast* published an article entitled “**Exclusive: Feds Investigate Hobby Lobby Boss for Illicit Artifacts.**” The Hobby Lobby Corporation is under investigation for buying ancient bibles from the Middle East. The suspicion is that these bibles might be connected to illegal antiquity trafficking.  
<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/10/26/exclusive-feds-investigate-hobby-lobby-boss-for-illicit-artifacts.html>
- Foreign Policy* published an article entitled “**The War to Save Syria’s History**” (by Thanassis Cambanis). Syrian antiquities chief Maamoun Abdulkarim speaks on the inadequate amount of attention being given to the antiquities crisis in Palmyra.  
<http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/10/26/the-war-to-save-syrias-history-assad-palmyra/>
- The United States House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs** published an article entitled “**Royce, Engel To Speak On Antiquities Looting to Finance Terrorism.**” Multiple organizations will sponsor a press conference focusing on the looting and destruction of antiquities in Syria and Iraq by ISIL militants. This press conference will be on October 28, 2015  
<https://democrats-foreignaffairs.house.gov/news/press-releases/royce-engel-speak-antiquities-looting-finance-terrorism>
- ICCROM** published an article titled “**An urgent and firm response to the destruction of heritage in Syria and Iraq.**” The Italian association *Incontro di Civiltà* drafted an appeal to counter the cultural heritage crisis in Syria and Iraq and to promote preservation and restoration efforts.  
<http://www.iccrom.org/an-urgent-and-firm-response-to-the-destruction-of-heritage-in-syria-and-iraq/>

- **The United States Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs** published an article titled “**Conflict Antiquities.**” The article details the U.S. Department of States and The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s event titled “Conflict Antiquities: Forging a Public/Private Response to Save the Endangered Patrimony of Iraq and Syria.”  
<http://eca.state.gov/cultural-heritage-center/conflict-antiquities>
- October 25, 2015 The **DGAM** published an article titled “**Latest news from sites in Southern Quneitra.**” The article discusses ongoing looting and illegal excavation activity occurring at several sites in southern Quneitra including: Tal al-Ahmar Sharqi, Tal al-Ahmar Gharbi, Al-Koum, Akasha, Abou Koubeiss, as well as several historical buildings and ancient churches in the village of Koudneh. **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0139.**  
<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1836>
- October 24, 2015 *CNN Money* published an article entitled “**The man trying to save ancient sites from ISIS**” (by Heather Kelly). This is a biographical article on Ben Kacyra, the leader of a nonprofit organization CyArk that is working to digitally preserve and document heritage sites using 3D-scanning technology.  
<http://money.cnn.com/2015/10/24/technology/digital-preservation-cyark/>

**The U.S. Committee of the Blue Shield** extended an invitation to attend an event entitled “**Death of History: Witnessing Heritage Destruction in Syria and Iraq.**” The event will include a briefing on at-risk sites and artifacts in Iraq and Syria, followed by a discussion of upcoming legislation and ongoing efforts to protect cultural heritage against ISIL’s ideological campaign to destroy it.  
<http://uscbs.org/news/uscbs-to-co-sponsor-event-about-the-heritage-destruction-in-syria-and-iraq/>
- October 22, 2015 *Weekly Post* published an article entitled “**Danish archaeologists playing pivotal role in restoration of Syrian cultural heritage**” (by Lucie Rychla). Danish archaeologists are helping to reconstruct the ancient city of Palmyra, parts of which were destroyed by ISIL in August. <http://cphpost.dk/news/danish-archaeologists-playing-pivotal-role-in-restoration-of-syrian-culture-heritage.html>

The **DGAM** published an article entitled “**Latest News from Sites in Hama: Apamea, Ibn Wardan, al-Kastal, al-Andarin.**” This article details looting and damage occurring in parts of Hama Governorate. The sites that are mentioned are Apamea: Apamea - Theater, Apamea - Museum; Palace of Ibn Wardan; Church of Northern Al-Kastal; Al-Andarin. **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0141.**  
<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1834>

- October 21, 2015 **DGAM** published an article entitled “**Restoration Works by DGAM 2015,**” which announced that they have continued with restoration projects at some Syrian heritage sites. Preservation efforts that have taken place, are ongoing, or are planned include: 1) Homs Governorate: Crac des Chevaliers, the Palace of Zahrawi, the mosque of Khalid Ibn al-Walid, the Mosque of al-Awza’i, The National Museum of Homs; 2) Damascus Governorate: Citadel of Damascus; 3) Lattakia Governorate: the Citadel of al-Mahalbeh; 4) Hasakah Governorate: Tell Mozan; 5) Daraa Governorate: Al-Omari Mosque in Bosra; 6) Tartous Governorate; Citadel of al-Khawabi. **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0139.**  
<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1832>
- *The Washington Post* published an article entitled, “**The Islamic State isn’t the only group looting Syrian archaeological sites,**” (by Adam Taylor). This article details the remote sensing research conducted by ASOR CHI Co-Investigator Jesse Casana to document illegal excavations, which shows that, along with ISIL, looting has been performed by the YPG, opposition forces, and the Syrian regime.  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/10/21/the-islamic-state-isnt-the-only-group-looting-syrian-archaeological-sites/>
  - *Wired* published an article entitled, “**A Jailed Activist’s 3-D Models Could Save Syria’s History From ISIS**” (by Andy Greenberg).  
<http://www.wired.com/2015/10/jailed-activist-bassel-khartabil-3d-models-could-save-syrian-history-from-isis>
- October 20, 2015 *Wall Street Journal* published an article entitled “**How to Save Art From the Islamic State**” (by Maxwell Anderson). This article emphasized the protocols by AAMD, which involves a database of items that are stored until the depositor allows for exhibition or return to the depositor. So far there are over 900 items stored by the AAMD.  
<http://www.wsj.com/articles/how-to-save-art-from-islamic-state-1445376423>
- October 18, 2015 **DGAM** published an article entitled “**Safeguarding of casually uncovered mosaics in Afrin.**” Staff members from the DGAM in conjunction with a local network in Afrin are working to safeguard and preserve floor mosaic panels dating back to the Byzantine period.  
<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1826>
- October 17, 2015 *Russia Today* published an article entitled “**UN peacekeepers to protect world heritage sites from ISIS attacks.**” UNESCO and Italy agreed to send a UN ground presence to protect heritage sites from various attacks and destruction by militants throughout the Middle East, primarily focusing on risks linked to ISIL.  
<https://www.rt.com/news/318965-un-protect-heritage-sites/>

- *The Guardian* published an article titled “**UN to deploy peacekeepers to protect world heritage sites**” (by Staff and agencies). The United Nations will move to protect world heritage sites from attacks by ISIL, according to UNESCO.  
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/17/un-peacekeepers-protect-world-heritage-sites-isis>
- October 16, 2015
- Repubblica* published an article titled “**Maamoun Abdulkarim: "Noi siriani rischiamo la vita per salvare la nostra Storia"**” (by Francesca Caferri). The article presents an interview with Maamoun Abdulkarim, Director General of Antiquities and Museums in Syria.  
[http://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2015/10/16/news/maamoun\\_abdulkarim\\_noi\\_siriani\\_rischiamo\\_la\\_vita\\_per\\_salvare\\_la\\_nostra\\_storia\\_-\\_125192249/](http://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2015/10/16/news/maamoun_abdulkarim_noi_siriani_rischiamo_la_vita_per_salvare_la_nostra_storia_-_125192249/)
- October 14, 2015
- The Oxford Culture Review* published an article titled “**The Long View: Endangered Archaeology in the Middle East and North Africa**” (by Emma Cunliffe). The article provides an overview of the University of Oxford project EAMANA to document at-risk heritage in the Middle East and North Africa.  
<http://theoxfordculturereview.com/2015/10/14/the-long-view-endangered-archaeology-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa/>
- *Granta* published an article entitled “**Saving Mesopotamia**” (by Alexandra Lucas Coelho), which discusses the ongoing archaeological investigations taking place near the front line of ISIL.  
<http://granta.com/saving-mesopotamia/>

## Military and Political Context

The most significant political and military events during the reporting period in Syria were:

1. Aleppo Governorate:
  - During the reporting period, US-led coalition forces conducted ongoing strikes against ISIL targets near the areas of Washiyah, Membij, Tal Jibbin, Mar’a, and Aleppo.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/623173/us-coalition-airstrikes-hit-isil-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/624651/coalition-airstrikes-hit-isil-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/624658/anti-isil-airstrikes-continue-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/624695/military-airstrikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/624912/military-strikes-hit-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/624539/military-airstrikes-target-isil-terrorists-revenue-sources> ; <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/10/18/us-mideast-crisis-syria-strike-idUSKCN0SC00520151018> ; [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/pentagon-says-leader-of-al-qaeda-offshoot-in-syria-was-killed-in-airstrike/2015/10/18/4102845a-75a9-11e5-b9c1-f03c48c96ac2\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/pentagon-says-leader-of-al-qaeda-offshoot-in-syria-was-killed-in-airstrike/2015/10/18/4102845a-75a9-11e5-b9c1-f03c48c96ac2_story.html) ; <http://www.thenational.ae/world/middle-east/khorasan-group-leader-killed-in-syria-air-strike-says-pentagon> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/624657/coalition-airstrike-kills-khorasan-group-leader> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/624657/coalition-airstrike-kills-khorasan-group-leader> ;

- During the reporting period, the Syrian military was able to expand their ground offensive in Aleppo with the backing of Russian airstrikes and Iranian fighters, allowing them to retake at least seven villages south of the city of Aleppo.<sup>3</sup>
- During the reporting period, ISIL militants were able to gain some territory in the northern and southeastern areas of Aleppo, including a critical section of road between the towns of Khanaser and Ithriya, as well as the town of Safira.<sup>4</sup>
- On October 25, the Turkish military used machine guns to shoot at YPG forces in the town of Tal Abyad. No casualties or injuries were reported.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. Latakia:

- On October 14, the head of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards' Quds Force, Qassem Soleimani, was in Latakia speaking with Iranian officers and Hezbollah fighters. Photographs also circulated of Soleimani speaking with Syrian and Hezbollah forces in the Syrian area of the Golan Heights.<sup>6</sup>
- On October 15, activists and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that "groups" of Iranian troops had been arriving at Bassel al-Assad International Airport near the district of Jableh. The airport is currently being used as an airbase by both Russia and Iran.<sup>7</sup>
- On October 19, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that 45 people had been killed, and dozens injured, in Russian airstrikes on the rebel-held area of Jabal al-Akrad. Among the casualties were the commander of the Western-backed Free Syrian Army brigade and rebel family members. Another statement from the opposition group, the Local Coordination Committee, reported that 57 people were killed in Latakia Governorate, mainly in Russian airstrikes.<sup>8</sup>
- On October 20, a senior pro-government military official stated that three Russians were killed "when a shell hit their position" as they were fighting alongside Syrian

---

[View/Article/625024/airstrikes-continue-against-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq](#) ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/625218/strikes-hit-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/626040/airstrikes-continue-against-isil-terrorists-in-iraq-syria>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.rferl.org/content/syrian-government-forces-gain-ground/27312376.html> ; <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Oct-16/319138-as-many-as-2000-iran-backed-forces-near-aleppo-us-official.ashx> ; <http://www.wsj.com/articles/syrian-regime-backed-by-russia-iran-and-hezbollah-expands-ground-offensive-to-aleppo-1445206886> ; [http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2015/10/russian-airstrikes-in-syria-september\\_23.html](http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2015/10/russian-airstrikes-in-syria-september_23.html) ; [http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/E/EU\\_SYRIA\\_RUSSIA](http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/E/EU_SYRIA_RUSSIA)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Oct-14/318871-syrian-air-raids-pound-rebel-areas-around-damascus.ashx> ; <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/10/23/us-mideast-crisis-syria-idUSKCN0SH2D520151023> ; <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Oct-28/320533-isis-advances-on-regime-town-in-north-syria.ashx> ; <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Oct-28/320533-isis-advances-on-regime-town-in-north-syria.ashx>

<sup>5</sup> [http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/E/EU\\_TURKEY\\_SYRIA](http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/E/EU_TURKEY_SYRIA)

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/hundreds-of-iranian-troops-mass-near-aleppo-us-defense-official-and-activists-say/2015/10/14/0f63227e-7298-11e5-ba14-318f8e87a2fc\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/hundreds-of-iranian-troops-mass-near-aleppo-us-defense-official-and-activists-say/2015/10/14/0f63227e-7298-11e5-ba14-318f8e87a2fc_story.html) ;

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/irans-soleimani-visits-syrian-golan-as-tehran-bolsters-war-effort/>  
<sup>7</sup> <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/10/iran-deploys-troops-syrian-army-offensive-aleppo-homs-151015053316090.html>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34580188>

government forces in the Nabi Younis area. Several more Russians were reportedly wounded. According to Rami Abdulrahman, the director of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, these Russians were “volunteers” not official Russian soldiers.<sup>9</sup>

- On October 21, it was reported that more than 100 cargo ships had arrived in Syria’s port in Latakia since mid-September, reportedly carrying a variety of military and food items to maintain the Russian offensive.<sup>10</sup>

### 3. Raqqa:

- During the reporting period, US-led coalition forces conducted ongoing strikes against ISIL targets near the area of Raqqa.<sup>11</sup>
- On October 21, the town of Tel Abyad, captured by Kurdish forces from ISIL in June, joined the “Kurdish-led political order in northern Syria.” The town of Tel Abyad is located directly on the border between Syria and Turkey, and this political move is likely to increase Turkish concerns of Kurdish territorial gains.<sup>12</sup>
- On October 22, Syrian activists reported that 11 ISIL militants and at least seven civilians were killed in overnight airstrikes, believed to be carried out by Russian forces in Raqqa. Russian airstrikes also reportedly struck a hospital in the city of Raqqa. Local sources released images of the damage. Russia has not yet confirmed or denied the strike.<sup>13</sup>

### 4. Homs:

- On October 15, a new offensive by Syrian forces and Russian airstrikes focused on “rebel-controlled towns between Homs and Hama.” According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, the airstrikes struck targets in the “town of Talbiseh, Rastan and the villages of Teir Malla, Dar Kabira and Khalidiya”. Residents of the targeted areas reported heavy bombardments as well as warnings being issued from mosques for civilians to take cover. Activists reported dozens of casualties in the attacks. In the town of Talbiseh an airstrike hit Al-Ali Bakery, killing at least 13 civilians and a local Free Syrian Army commander. In the village of Ghantou, a house was struck killing 46 family members of a local commander of the Free Syrian Army. Reports also surfaced of Lebanese Hezbollah fighters being involved in the offensive.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/10/20/us-mideast-crisis-syria-russia-idUSKCN0SE1YO20151020>

<sup>10</sup> <http://news.yahoo.com/exclusive-shipping-traffic-syria-surges-russia-steps-offensive-185707545.html>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/624539/military-airstrikes-target-isil-terrorists-revenue-sources> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/623173/us-coalition-airstrikes-hit-isil-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/624651/coalition-airstrikes-hit-isil-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/624658/anti-isil-airstrikes-continue-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/624912/military-strikes-hit-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/625218/strikes-hit-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/10/21/us-mideast-crisis-syria-kurds-idUSKCN0SF1BD20151021>

<sup>13</sup> [http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/E/EU\\_SYRIA\\_RUSSIA](http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/E/EU_SYRIA_RUSSIA) ; [http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2015/10/russian-airstrikes-in-syria-september\\_23.html](http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2015/10/russian-airstrikes-in-syria-september_23.html)

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/16/world/middleeast/syrian-forces-and-russian-jets-attack-rebel>



- On October 22, activists said Syrian regime airstrikes killed at least 14 civilians in the town of Talbiseh.<sup>15</sup>
5. Damascus:
- On October 14, Syrian regime warplanes conducted bombing raids in rebel-held areas in Damascus. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported eight air raids on Jobar, in eastern Damascus, as well as the presence of pro-regime forces, including troops from Hezbollah, fighting against members of al-Nusra Front. Syrian state media also reported that the Syrian army had launched new attacks on the rebel-held area of Harasta.<sup>16</sup>
  - On October 15, Iran's head of national security and foreign policy, Alaeiddin Boroujerdi, was in Damascus discussing with the Syrian media Iran's support for the Syrian government. Boroujerdi did not discuss the presence of Iranian troops in Syria, but did state that troops would be sent if requested by the Syrian government.<sup>17</sup>
  - On October 26, Omani Foreign Minister Yusuf bin Alawi met with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus to discuss possible solutions to the Syrian conflict.<sup>18</sup>
6. Deir ez-Zor:
- During the reporting period, US-led coalition forces conducted ongoing strikes against ISIL targets near the areas of Abu Kamal and Deir ez-Zor.<sup>19</sup>
  - On October 21-22, the Russian Ministry of Defense reported two strikes against ISIL targets in Deir ez-Zor; however, only one strike was verified by local reports.<sup>20</sup>
7. Hama:
- Between October 17-18, unidentified warplanes struck a 16-vehicle motorcade, killing ISIL militants.<sup>21</sup>
  - Between October 19-20, Russian airstrikes supported Syrian regime forces in rebel-held areas of northern Hama governorate.<sup>22</sup>

---

[held-towns.html](#) ; <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/10/iran-deploys-troops-syrian-army-offensive-aleppo-homs-151015053316090.html> ; <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/10/25/russia/syria-possibly-unlawful-russian-air-strikes>

<sup>15</sup> [http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/E/EU\\_SYRIA\\_RUSSIA](http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/E/EU_SYRIA_RUSSIA)

<sup>16</sup> <http://news.yahoo.com/syrian-air-raids-pound-rebel-neighbourhoods-around-damascus-091811741.html> ; <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/10/14/us-mideast-crisis-syria-idUSKCN0S81A320151014> ; <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Oct-14/318871-syrian-air-raids-pound-rebel-areas-around-damascus.ashx>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/16/world/middleeast/syrian-forces-and-russian-jets-attack-rebel-held-towns.html> ; <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Oct-14/318871-syrian-air-raids-pound-rebel-areas-around-damascus.ashx> ; <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/10/14/us-mideast-crisis-syria-idUSKCN0S81A320151014>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Oct-26/320307-omani-foreign-minister-meets-syrias-assad-state-tv.ashx>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/624658/anti-isil-airstrikes-continue-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/625218/strikes-hit-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq>

<sup>20</sup> [http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2015/10/russian-airstrikes-in-syria-september\\_23.html](http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2015/10/russian-airstrikes-in-syria-september_23.html)

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/192295-air-strikes-on-is-convoy-in-syria-kill-40>

<sup>22</sup> [http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2015/10/russian-airstrikes-in-syria-september\\_23.html](http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2015/10/russian-airstrikes-in-syria-september_23.html)

8. Hasakah:

- During the reporting period, US-led coalition forces conducted ongoing strikes against ISIL targets near the area of Al-Hawl.<sup>23</sup>
- On October 15, the U.S. Defense Department Spokesman Peter Cook said he was unsure if any of the weapons or ammunition delivered in Hasakah Governorate had been recovered by Kurdish forces, despite Kurdish claims that they had received “new defense articles” from the U.S.<sup>24</sup>

9. Idlib:

- On October 20, a Russian airstrike reportedly struck a field hospital in the town of Sarmin, killing at least 13 people including two medical staff members.<sup>25</sup>
- On October 21, “Explosive laden unmanned aerial vehicles,” thought to have originated in Iran, targeted the Islamist rebel group Ahrar al-Sham in the town of Ma’ar Shimmareen, reportedly killing one civilian.<sup>26</sup>

Key Points:

- On October 14, U.S. and Russian military officials held a second videoconference to discuss methods of deconflicting air operations in Syria. The first videoconference was held on October 10; that video was later released by the Russians via YouTube.<sup>27</sup>
- On October 16, Russia announced that it had carried out 33 sorties in the last 24 hours against targets in rebel-held areas between Homs and Hama. The Russian Defense Ministry website claimed it had struck ISIL infrastructure in the governorates of Idlib, Hama, Damascus, Aleppo, and Deir ez-Zor.<sup>28</sup>
- On October 16, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights announced that it had documented the deaths of 250,124 people, including at least 74,426 civilians over the past four years. The number of casualties includes pro-government and anti-government forces, as well as civilians and others who could not be identified. The Observatory did not include around 30,000 Syrians who remain missing in their total. In addition, the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces reported that Russian-Iranian “aggression” in Syria had killed 878 civilians since September 30.<sup>29</sup>
- On October 16, Russian President Vladimir Putin, addressing a group of ex-Soviet nation leaders in Kazakhstan, announced that Russia’s efforts in Syria had destroyed “dozens of

---

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/624539/military-airstrikes-target-isil-terrorists-revenue-sources> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/623173/us-coalition-airstrikes-hit-isil-in-syria-iraq>

<sup>24</sup> <http://rudaw.net/english/middleeast/syria/16102015> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News/News-Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/624501/department-of-defense-press-briefing-by-secretary-carter-and-press-secretary-co>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.rferl.org/content/russian-air-strike-hits-syrian-hospital-killing-at-least-12/27319783.html>

<sup>26</sup> <https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/NewsReports/566091-iran-attacking-syria-rebels-with-explosive-drones>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-military-activity-october-8-14-2015>

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/16/world/middleeast/syrian-forces-and-russian-jets-attack-rebel-held-towns.html> ; [http://eng.mil.ru/en/news\\_page/country/more.htm](http://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm)

<sup>29</sup> <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/10/16/More-than-250-000-people-killed-in-Syria-war-.html> ; <http://en.etilaf.org/all-news/local-news/878-civilians-killed-in-the-russian-iranian-aggression-on-syria.html>

control facilities and ammunition depots, hundreds of terrorists, and a large number of weapons.”<sup>30</sup>

- On October 18, the leader of the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah announced that the “group’s presence in Syria is larger than ever before” on the borders of Hama, Idlib, Latakia, and Aleppo.<sup>31</sup>
- On October 19, the Russian Ministry of Defense announced that in the past 24 hours it had carried out 39 airstrikes, striking 51 targets in the governorates of Hama, Latakia, Damascus, and Aleppo.<sup>32</sup>
- On October 20, it was announced that the U.S. and Russia had signed a memorandum of understanding to minimize the “risk of inflight incidents” between coalition and Russian aircrafts over Syria. A working group will be formed between Russia and the U.S to discuss “any implementation issues” that could follow the agreement. However, both sides will not be sharing any intelligence concerning targets. In the past week, Russian and U.S. jets came within miles of each other.<sup>33</sup>
- On October 20, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad made a “surprise” visit to Moscow, where he met with Russian President Vladimir Putin. This was the first time the Syrian president has left Syria since the start of the civil war.<sup>34</sup>
- On October 21, the Russian Defense Ministry announced that its planes had flown 46 sorties in Syria in the past 24 hours, striking “83 militant targets” in Aleppo, Idlib, Damascus, Hama, and Deir ez-Zor. Simultaneously, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu announced Russia’s plan to continue military support to Syria.<sup>35</sup>
- On October 23, talks were held in Vienna between Russia, the U.S., Saudi Arabia, and Turkey regarding ongoing military activity in Syria. Simultaneously, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that Russia and Jordan agreed to “coordinate their military actions in Syria by setting up a ‘special working mechanism’” in Amman. Lavrov also called for Iran and Egypt to be included in the ongoing diplomatic talks.<sup>36</sup>
- On October 23, an “anonymous Russian defense official” confirmed that Russia had “deployed a small group of Special Forces from eastern Ukraine” in its intervention in Syria.

---

<sup>30</sup> <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/putin-warns-incursion-afghanistan-central-asia-34513878>

<sup>31</sup> <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/10/18/Hezbollah-Syria-presence-greater-than-ever-before-.html>

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.wsj.com/articles/syrian-regime-backed-by-russia-iran-and-hezbollah-expands-ground-offensive-to-aleppo-1445206886>

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/624964/us-russia-sign-memorandum-on-air-safety-in-syria> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News/News-Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/624976/departments-of-defense-press-briefing-by-pentagon-press-secretary-peter-cook-in> ; <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34588286>

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34590561>

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/10/21/us-mideast-crisis-syria-russia-strikes-idUSKCN0SF1IV20151021> ; <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/10/21/mideast-crisis-syria-shoigu-idUSR4N12F00Y20151021>

<sup>36</sup> [http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/E/EU\\_SYRIA\\_RUSSIA](http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/E/EU_SYRIA_RUSSIA) ; <http://www.understandingwar.org/background-under/russian-military-activity-october-21-27-2015> ; <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/10/23/us-mideast-crisis-syria-russia-jordan-idUSKCN0SH1ER20151023>

According to a Russian soldier, generals from Russia's 58th Army were "involved in military operations in Syria."<sup>37</sup>

- On October 23, Iranian media reported the deaths of "two members of a unit of Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards Corps" in Syria.<sup>38</sup>
- On October 24, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shukri agreed to "continue cooperation" in finding a political solution to the conflict in Syria as well as counter terrorism in the Middle East. Lavrov reportedly assured Shukri that Egypt would be at the "forefront of international meetings over the Syrian crisis."<sup>39</sup>
- On October 24, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov expressed Russia's desire for Syria to have both parliamentary and presidential elections. In addition, Lavrov announced that Russia's air force would be willing to help "Western-backed Free Syrian Army rebels" if they knew their locations. FSA-affiliated members expressed their disinterest in cooperating with Russia in Syria.<sup>40</sup>
- On October 26, the Russian Ministry of Defense resumed its reporting of airstrikes in Syria. Between October 23-25, the Russian MOD did not release information on its airstrikes amid reports of high civilian casualties, but did state that between October 24-26 Russia carried out "59 sorties" in the governorates of Idlib, Latakia, Homs, Damascus, Deir ez-Zor, and Aleppo. From October 25-26, Russia focused its airstrikes on rebels near al-Ghab Plain in Hama Governorate and south of the city of Aleppo.<sup>41</sup>
- On October 26, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov stated that Moscow had contacts within the Western-backed rebels in Syria, and that representatives of the Free Syrian Army had visited Moscow the previous week. The Free Syrian Army did not confirm any visit to Moscow.<sup>42</sup>
- On October 26, an "unnamed source" from the Russian military's general staff reported that "soldiers from the elite 7th Guards Airborne Assault Division" are involved in "Russia's military contingent in Syria".<sup>43</sup>
- On October 27, the Russian Ministry of Defense announced its first military fatality, claiming that a Russian soldier had committed suicide. The soldier's family disputed these claims to Reuters.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-military-activity-october-21-27-2015> ;

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/10/27/us-mideast-crisis-syria-russia-idUSKCN0SL11720151027>

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/10/23/us-mideast-crisis-iran-syria-idUSKCN0SH1D420151023>

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/10/24/us-mideast-crisis-syria-russia-egypt-idUSKCN0SI0AM20151024> ; <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/161733/Egypt/Politics-/Egypt-will-be-in-the-forefront-of-international-me.aspx>

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/10/25/us-mideast-crisis-syria-russia-idUSKCN0SI08820151025>

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-airstrikes-syria-september-30-2015-october-26-2015>

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.rferl.org/content/syria-russia-rebels-skeptical-offer/27327918.html>

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-military-activity-october-21-27-2015> ;

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/10/27/us-mideast-crisis-syria-russia-idUSKCN0SL11720151027>

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-military-activity-october-21-27-2015> ;

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/10/27/us-mideast-crisis-syria-russia-idUSKCN0SL11720151027>

**The most significant political and military events during the reporting period in Iraq were:**

1. Salah ad Din Governorate:
  - During the reporting period, US-led coalition forces conducted ongoing strikes against ISIL targets near the areas of Beiji and Samarra.<sup>45</sup>
  - During the reporting period, Iraqi security forces, with support from Shi'ite militias, recaptured Beiji oil refinery from ISIL militants, in an operation known as "Operation Inherent Resolve". Iraqi security forces then moved north, reaching the town of Zawiyah, about 78 miles south of Mosul.<sup>46</sup>
2. Al Anbar Governorate:
  - During the reporting period, US-led coalition forces conducted ongoing strikes against ISIL targets near the areas of Baghdadi, Ramadi, Fallujah, Hit, Habbaniyah, Waleed, Albu Hayat, Qaim, and Rutbah.<sup>47</sup>
3. Ninewa Governorate:
  - During the reporting period, US-led coalition forces conducted ongoing strikes against ISIL targets near the areas of Sinjar, Tal Afar, Kisik, Mosul, Qayyarah, Sultan Abdallah, and Makhmur.<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/622993/coalition-airstrikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-iraq-syria> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/623173/us-coalition-airstrikes-hit-isil-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/624539/military-airstrikes-target-isil-terrorists-revenue-sources> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/624651/coalition-airstrikes-hit-isil-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/624658/anti-isil-airstrikes-continue-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/624695/military-airstrikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/625830/military-airstrikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/625870/airstrikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-iraq-destroy-isil-prison>

<sup>46</sup> <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2015/10/iraq-situation-report-october-6-15-2015.html> ; <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/10/15/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-beiji-idUSKCN0S91GS20151015> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/624983/battle-of-beiji-instills-confidence-in-iraqi-forces> ; <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/17/world/middleeast/iraqi-forces-and-shiite-militias-retake-oil-refinery-from-isis.html> ; <http://news.yahoo.com/iraq-forces-push-north-bid-reshape-battlefield-151011048.html>

<sup>47</sup> <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/622993/coalition-airstrikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-iraq-syria> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/623173/us-coalition-airstrikes-hit-isil-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/624539/military-airstrikes-target-isil-terrorists-revenue-sources> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/624651/coalition-airstrikes-hit-isil-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/624658/anti-isil-airstrikes-continue-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/624695/military-airstrikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/624912/military-strikes-hit-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/625024/airstrikes-continue-against-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/625218/strikes-hit-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/625827/airstrikes-hit-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/625830/military-airstrikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/626040/airstrikes-continue-against-isil-terrorists-in-iraq-syria>

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/622993/coalition-airstrikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-iraq-syria> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/623173/us-coalition-airstrikes-hit-isil-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/624539/military-airstrikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/624539/military-airstrikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq>

#### 4. Kirkuk:

- During the reporting period, US-led coalition forces conducted ongoing strikes against ISIL targets near the areas of Hawijah and Kirkuk.<sup>49</sup>
- On October 22, a U.S. Special Operations team rescued 70 Kurdish hostages, including 20 members of the Iraqi security forces, who had been kidnapped by ISIL militants in the district of Hawijah. According to Pentagon Press Secretary Peter Cook, the hostages were in immediate danger of being executed. One American soldier was reported to have been killed in the operation and four Peshmerga soldiers were wounded. Five ISIL militants were arrested and an unknown number were killed. Accounts vary as to the level of participation by Peshmerga and Iraqi security forces in the operation.<sup>50</sup>
- On October 26, the US Department of Defense confirmed that the prison that had previously been raided, freeing 70 Kurdish hostages in Hawijah, was targeted by two US-led coalition airstrikes and destroyed.<sup>51</sup>

#### 5. Erbil:

- On October 20, U.S. Marine Corp. General Joseph F. Dunford Jr. held a meeting with Kurdish President Massoud Barzani to discuss ongoing coalition training efforts for Kurdish Peshmerga fighters.<sup>52</sup>

#### 6. Baghdad:

- On October 18, the Iraqi judiciary issued an arrest warrant against Iraqi Trade Minister Malas Abdulkarim al-Kasnazani and his brother on charges of corruption.<sup>53</sup>
- On October 20, U.S. Marine General Joseph Dunford announced that he had received assurances from Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi and Iraqi Defense Minister

---

[terrorists-revenue-sources](http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/624651/coalition-airstrikes-hit-isil-in-syria-iraq) ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/624651/coalition-airstrikes-hit-isil-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/624658/anti-isil-airstrikes-continue-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/624695/military-airstrikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/624912/military-strikes-hit-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/625024/airstrikes-continue-against-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/625218/strikes-hit-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/625827/airstrikes-hit-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/625830/military-airstrikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/626040/airstrikes-continue-against-isil-terrorists-in-iraq-syria> ; <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2015/11/iraq-situation-report-october-27.html>

<sup>49</sup> <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/623173/us-coalition-airstrikes-hit-isil-in-syria-iraq> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/624539/military-airstrikes-target-isil-terrorists-revenue-sources> ; <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/625218/strikes-hit-isil-terrorists-in-syria-iraq>

<sup>50</sup> <http://www.cnn.com/2015/10/22/middleeast/us-iraq-hostage-rescue-attempt/index.html> ; <http://www.ibtimes.com/islamic-state-iraq-update-us-soldier-killed-70-kurdish-hostages-rescued-hawija-2152238>

<sup>51</sup> <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/625830/military-airstrikes-target-isil-terrorists-in-iraq>

<sup>52</sup> <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/624865/coalition-trains-kurdish-troops-for-anti-isil-fight>

<sup>53</sup> <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/arrest-warrant-issued-iraqi-trade-minister-over-corruption-829577955>

Khaled al-Obeidi that they would not be seeking Russian assistance in combating ISIL in Iraq.<sup>54</sup>

**The most significant political and military events during the reporting period in Turkey were:**

- On October 14, Turkey summoned the U.S. ambassador about concerns over arming Syrian Kurdish forces. Turkey argues that such weapons could “fall into the hands of” the PKK, and then be used against Turkey. The same concern was reiterated to the Russian ambassador.<sup>55</sup>
- On October 16, Turkey announced that its warplanes had shot down an “unidentified aircraft” that had entered its airspace near the border with Syria. Turkish media and one Turkish official reported that the aircraft was a drone, however little detail was released. Russia announced all its drones and aircraft remained accounted for.<sup>56</sup>
- On October 19, Turkish police in Ankara arrested around 50 people on suspicion of having ties to ISIL.<sup>57</sup>
- On October 21, the co-chair of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) Aysa Abdullah and the head of the administration in the town of Kobane Anwar Muslim held talks with Russia’s Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov in Moscow.<sup>58</sup>
- On October 21, it was reported that U.S. A-10 Thunderbolt aircrafts were arriving at Incirlik Air Base in Turkey to be used in the fight against ISIL.<sup>59</sup>
- On October 22, the Turkish National Security Council (MGK) called for the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) in Syria to be classified as a terrorist organization.<sup>60</sup>
- On October 27, two Turkish policemen in the southeastern city of Diyarbakir were killed by a suicide bomber during a raid against an ISIL cell.<sup>61</sup>
- On October 28, Turkish police detained 30 suspected ISIL members in the cities of Konya and Cumra, in central Turkey. 21 more suspects were detained in Istanbul and another 17 ISIL militants were arrested in the border governorate of Kilis according to the Turkish military.<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/10/21/us-mideast-crisis-usa-iraq-idUSKCN0SE0QX20151021>

<sup>55</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/turkey-slams-us-over-reported-weapons-supply-to-syria-kurds/2015/10/14/a8083292-7259-11e5-ba14-318f8e87a2fc\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/turkey-slams-us-over-reported-weapons-supply-to-syria-kurds/2015/10/14/a8083292-7259-11e5-ba14-318f8e87a2fc_story.html)

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/10/16/us-mideast-crisis-turkey-warplane-idUSKCN0SA15K20151016> ; <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34551155>

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Oct-19/319341-turkey-detains-some-50-syria-and-iraq-bound-isis-suspects.ashx>

<sup>58</sup> <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/192552-syrian-kurdish-leaders-hold-moscow-talks>

<sup>59</sup> <http://www.ibtimes.com/amid-islamic-state-syria-10-thunderbolt-jet-target-isis-us-air-force-employs-aging-2150610>

<sup>60</sup> <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkeys-top-security-body-calls-for-designation-of-pyd-as-terrorist.aspx>

<sup>61</sup> [http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/E/EU\\_TURKEY\\_ISLAMIC\\_STATE](http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/E/EU_TURKEY_ISLAMIC_STATE)

<sup>62</sup> [http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/E/EU\\_TURKEY\\_ISLAMIC\\_STATE](http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/E/EU_TURKEY_ISLAMIC_STATE)

### **Other significant political and military events during the reporting period:**

- On October 20, unidentified “warplanes” conducted airstrikes against ISIL targets in Sirte, Libya. Casualties and damage from the strikes remain unknown.<sup>63</sup>
- On October 21, the new prime minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau announced his plans to pull Canadian fighter jets out of the US-led coalition airstrikes in Syria and Iraq. Trudeau reiterated Canada’s military role should be “restricted to training missions only.”<sup>64</sup>
- On October 26, ISIL claimed responsibility for a suicide attack at a Shia mosque in the southern city of Najran in Saudi Arabia that killed one person and wounded dozens more.<sup>65</sup>
- On October 27, United States Defense Secretary Ashton Carter announced that the U.S. would begin “direct action on the ground” against ISIL in Syria and Iraq.<sup>66</sup>

### **Satellite Imagery and Geospatial Analysis**

Analysis during this reporting period was based on three newly released DigitalGlobe images, which included 54 different sites within Syria. There were no new changes to the known built heritage or archaeological sites that fell within these images. Only the archaeological site of Heraqla showed some clear changes. Since 2013 temporary encampments have been visible on the site. The encampments belong to non-combatants and include fenced areas for the pasturing of animals. These encampments continue to encroach on the site, and are situated within the circular enclosure walls on the image from October 14, 2015.

---

<sup>63</sup> <http://af.reuters.com/article/libyaNews/idAFL8N12K1ND20151020>

<sup>64</sup> [http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/C/CN\\_CANADA\\_ELECTION](http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/C/CN_CANADA_ELECTION)

<sup>65</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34640313>

<sup>66</sup> <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/sec-carter-direct-u-s-action-ground-iraq-syria-n452131>



## Incident Reports: Syria

SHI 15-0139

**Report Date:** October 25, 2015

**Site Name:** Al-Ahmar Sharqi (Tal al-Ahmar Sharqi); Al-Ahmar Gharbi (Tal al-Ahmar Gharbi); Al-Koum (Al-Kawm); Akasha (Ukkashah); Abou Koubeiss; Koudneh (Kudnah/Kwdana)

**Date of Incident:** Ongoing

**Location:** southern Quneitra Governorate, Syria

**Site Description:** Based on information posted online by the Syrian Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums:

- Al-Ahmar Sharqi is a small hill located across the road from Al-Ahmar Gharbi.
- Al-Ahmar Gharbi is a small hill with an elevation of 951 meters above sea level.
- Al-Koum has ruins named Rasm Abu Zaqhra, Rusum Ayn al Basha and Rasm Ash Sharkas around the town.
- Akasha is located in the UNDOF area between Syria and Israel. It is a mountain with a small summit area, steep slopes, and 300m in elevation.
- Abou Koubeiss is unknown
- Koudneh has ruins named Rasm al Aqra and Rasm ash Shamali near the modern town. It is located near Tal Al-Ahmar Sharqi and Gharbi.

**Site Date:** All site dates are unconfirmed

**Incident Summary:** The DGAM reports that ongoing looting and illegal excavations are taking place at numerous sites in southern Quneitra Governorate.

**Incident Source and Description:** On October 24, 2015 the DGAM reported that several sites in southern Quneitra Governorate, including tells of al-Ahmar Sharqi, al-Ahmar Gharbi, al-Koum, Akasha, Abou Koubeiss, and ancient churches within the village of Koudneh, showed signs of ongoing illegal excavations. The DGAM reports the use of heavy machinery, which is causing “massive destruction in some of those sites.”<sup>67</sup> Previously acquired DigitalGlobe satellite imagery shows building activity and earthworks around these sites dating back to as early as 2010. In particular, imagery dating to May 1, 2010 shows large earthworks around Tell al-Ahmar Sharqi and possible terracing on the site of Tell al-Ahmar Gharbi.

**Pattern:** Illegal excavation, theft, vandalism.

---

<sup>67</sup> <http://dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1836>

**Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures:** ASOR CHI will attempt to gather further information on these reports via in country sources as well as DigitalGlobe satellite imagery as it becomes available, and is continuing to monitor the condition of these sites. Photographs and video of the sites' conditions have not been posted at the time of publication, but ASOR CHI will search for additional evidence that corroborates these reports.

**Sources:**

Online Reporting:

DGAM (October 25, 2015) <http://dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1836>

**SHI 15-0140**

**Report Date:** October 25, 2015

**Site Name:** Heraqla

**Date of Incident:** Ongoing

**Location:** Heraqla, Harqalah, Ar-Raqqa Governorate, Syria

**Site Description:** This site was a fort constructed in the 9th century to commemorate the campaign of Harun al-Rashid against Heraclea in southwestern Anatolia. The nearly square and compact construction measures 100 by 106 meters in area and reaches 3m in height. On all four corners there are 3.5m tall towers. The walls were made of evenly-hewn stone blocks from locally available pale yellow gypsum. The building is at the center of a circular outer wall ring made of gypsum stone blocks of 500 meters in diameter, 2.5m thick. The wall was buttressed every 20 meters, and had four gates in the cardinal directions.<sup>68</sup>

**Site Date:** 9th Century CE

**Incident Summary:** Increased encampment of people within the site has resulted in damage to the site's enclosure wall, particularly to the western side.

**Incident Source and Description:** DigitalGlobe satellite imagery dating to October 14, 2015, shows damage to the enclosure wall around the site due to increased encampment on site since the beginning of 2015. These relatively new, temporary constructions have been built significantly closer to the main architecture of the site, compared to previous years when people camped outside the enclosure walls. According to ASOR CHI geospatial analysts, these newer encampments include various temporary buildings closer to the largest building of the site, as well as the building of fences for animals.

**Pattern:** Refugee camp/encampment; Agricultural threats (grazing).

**Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures:** ASOR CHI will attempt to gather further information on these reports via in country sources and is continuing to monitor the condition of Heraqla.

**Sources:**

Scholarly:

Toueir, Kassem. 1983. "Heraqlah: A Unic Victory Monument of Harun ar-Rashid". *World Archaeology*. 14(3): 296-304.

---

<sup>68</sup> Toueir 1983, "Heraqlah: A Unic Victory Monument of Harun ar-Rashid" *World Archaeology*



Heraqla, new constructions to the north and west of the extant architecture (DigitalGlobe; October 14, 2015)

**SHI 15-0141**

**Report Date:** October 27, 2015

**Site Name:** Apamea: Apamea - Theater, Apamea - Museum; Palace of Ibn Wardan; Church of Northern Al-Kastal; Al-Andarin

**Date of Incident:** Ongoing

**Location:** Hama Governorate, Syria

**Site Description:** Apamea according to Ross Burns,

“The mound of Qalaat Mudiq (‘fortress of the defile’) lies west of the classical walled city and is still occupied by some of the town’s inhabitants. The mound, an artificial accumulation on a natural rocky outcrop, has indications of settlement going back at least to the Bronze Age. The site was chosen as the location for one of the four cities founded by Seleucus I Nicator at the end of the fourth century BC. Originally named Pharnake, the name was changed to Apameia to honour Seleucus’ Persian wife, Apama [...] In 64 BC, Apamea was taken by the Romans under Pompey and its citadel was razed. Under Roman rule, it was again favoured as a military base. The theatre, baths, temples, and villas, constructed during the town’s peak period of prosperity, the boom years of the second century AD, were perhaps initiated when Trajan ordered the rebuilding of the city after a severe earthquake in 115. The colonnaded main street was completed in its present form under Marcus Aurelius (161–80) and served both as an axis and a market, lined with stalls and shaded arcades.

The old citadel was probably incorporated when the new city’s enclosure walls were extended to the west. It became one of the main centres of Seleucid Syria and a forward military base. Its rich pastures made it a natural breeding centre for the horses of the Seleucid cavalry and it lay astride the kingdom’s main north-south communications, slightly to the rear of the buffer zone with the Ptolemaic lands to the south. By the second century BC, however, it well behind Antioch in economic and political importance. In 64 BC, Apamea was taken by the Romans under Pompey and its citadel was razed. Under Roman rule, it was again favoured as a military base. The theatre, baths, temples and villas, constructed during the town’s period of peak prosperity and boom years of the second century AD, were perhaps initiated when Trajan ordered the rebuilding of the city after a severe earthquake in 115 AD. The colonnaded main street was completed in its present form under Marcus Aurelius (161-80) and served both as an axis and a market, lined with stalls and shaded arcades. In the third century, the city was made the winter base for the elite II Parthica legion.

Apamea remained a centre of considerable importance into the Byzantine period. It was made the capital of Syria Secunda province in the early 5th century and was the seat of a bishop. The Persians sacked and burnt the city in 573 during a troubled century which also saw a succession of major earthquakes. The Persians again held it from 612 to 628 and the Byzantine ‘liberation’ came only a decade before it fell to the Arabs, changing hands without resistance.

The town came under Crusader control (attached to the Principality of Antioch) in 1106 when it was taken by Tancred. In July 1149 it fell to Nur al-Din. In 1157, an earthquake caused major damage. The castle was refortified by the Ayyubids and some remains of this phase are found on the citadel mound. The 16th century mosque and caravanserai indicate

the role of the town later played as a staging post on the pilgrimage route from Istanbul to Mecca.”<sup>69</sup>

The Palace of Ibn Wardan is a 6th century CE site located in the Syrian Desert. The architectural complex consists of a palace, church, and barracks and was erected in the mid-6th century CE by the Byzantine Emperor Justinian I. The site formed part of a defensive line against the Sasanian Empire that included Resafa and Halabiye. Its unique style is imported from Constantinople and is not found anywhere else in Syria. Basalt was brought from areas to the north or south, and marble columns and capitals are thought to have been brought from Apamea.<sup>70</sup>

The Church of Northern Al-Kastal is located in the al-Salamiyah region of Hama Governorate.

Al-Andarin is a Byzantine city surrounded by circuit basaltic walls, including a *kastron*, a public bathhouse, and several residential structures. The town’s ancient residents depended mainly on irrigated agriculture.<sup>71</sup>

**Site Date:** Apamea — Hellenistic, Roman, Islamic  
Palace of Ibn Wardan — Seleucid-Byzantine  
Church of Northern Al-Kastal — Unknown  
Al-Andarin — Byzantine

**Incident Summary:** Illegal excavations, theft, and heavy damage to multiple sites in Hama reported by the DGAM.

**Incident Source and Description:** The DGAM reported that several sites in Hama Governorate have experienced random illegal excavations, which are leading to heavy destruction within the sites. At Apamea the excavations have reached the Roman Theatre facing the Citadel, and military clashes have caused damage to the museum and its open court. The DGAM states that Apamea has formed a buffer zone between the Syrian Armed Forces and Opposition Forces for over two years.<sup>72</sup> For ASOR CHI’s analysis of the looting at Apamea see **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0130**.

Illegal excavations are taking place at the Byzantine Eastern Gate of the Palace of Ibn Wardan, and some architectural elements have been broken and stolen from the site. The northwestern part of the palace has suffered combat damage.<sup>73</sup> The most recent DigitalGlobe satellite imagery available dates to November 23, 2011.

According to the DGAM, the Church of Northern al-Kastal has been excavated by archaeological “amateurs” supported by non-local experts, causing much damage to the site.<sup>74</sup> The most recent DigitalGlobe satellite imagery available dates to December 2, 2014.

Some columns and roof stones at Al-Andarin have been stolen, and illegal excavations have been conducted in order to find valuable stones for new construction.<sup>75</sup> The available DigitalGlobe satellite imagery is obscured by cloud cover and is unsuitable for analysis.

---

<sup>69</sup> Burns, Ross. 2010. *The Monuments of Syria. A Guide*. (I.B. Tauris), p. 60-61

<sup>70</sup> Burns, Ross. 2010. *The Monuments of Syria. A Guide*. (I.B. Tauris)

<sup>71</sup> DGAM Interactive Map

<sup>72</sup> <http://dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1834>

<sup>73</sup> <http://dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1834>

<sup>74</sup> <http://dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1834>

**Pattern:** Illegal excavation; Theft; Vandalism.

**Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures:** ASOR CHI will attempt to gather further information on these reports via in country sources as well as DigitalGlobe satellite imagery as it becomes available, and is continuing to monitor the condition of these sites. Photographs and video of site conditions have not been posted at the time of publication. CHI will search for evidence that corroborates the alleged damage to these sites. Should the reports be proven true, we will attempt to determine the extent of the damage with recent photographs and satellite imagery of the site.

**Sources:**

Online Reporting:

DGAM (October 25, 2015): <http://dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1834>

Scholarly:

Burns, Ross (2010). *The Monuments of Syria. A Guide*. I.B. Tauris. London.



Apamea, Colonnaded Street (DGAM; October 22, 2015)

---

<sup>75</sup> <http://dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1834>



Apamea, Colonnaded Street (DGAM; October 22, 2015)

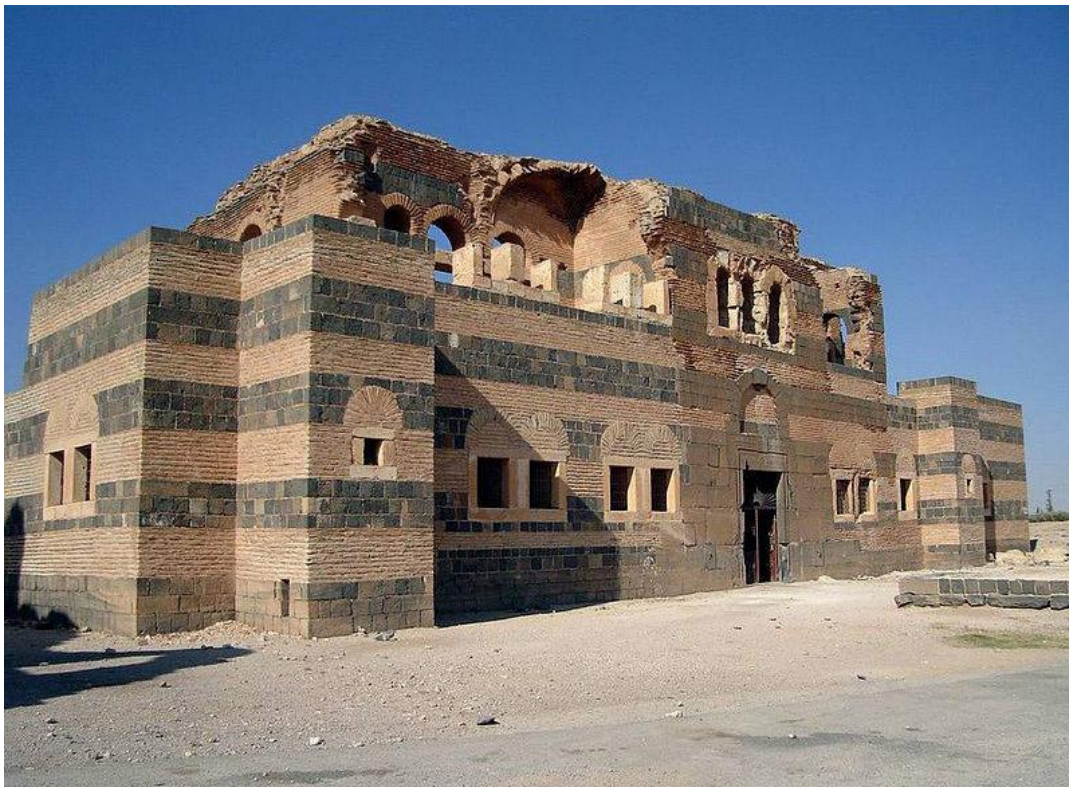


The Palace of Ibn Wardan (DGAM; October 22, 2015)





The Palace of Ibn Wardan (DGAM; October 22, 2015)



The Palace of Ibn Wardan (DGAM; October 22, 2015)

**SHI 15-0142**

**Report Date:** October 27, 2015

**Site Name:** Colonnaded Street, UNESCO World Heritage Site of Palmyra

**Date of Incident:** October 26, 2015

**Location:** UNESCO World Heritage Site of Palmyra, Homs Governorate, Syria

**Site Description:** The colonnaded street at Palmyra was the main colonnaded avenue in the ancient city of Palmyra. The colonnade was built in several stages during the second and third centuries CE and stretched for more than one kilometer. It linked the Temple of Bel, in the southeastern end of the city, to the West Gate and the Funerary Temple in the northwestern part. The western stretch of the colonnade is the oldest, and started at the West Gate near the Funerary Temple. Based on inscriptions on the columns, the work was started before 158 CE, and its terminus, the Western Gate was built in the late second century CE. The eastern section was built later, and stretched from the Monumental Arch in the center of the town to the entrance of the Temple of Bel. This work started in 175 CE and continued through the beginning of the third century CE. The middle section was built last to connect the two separate colonnades. It met the western stretch at the Great Tetrastyle, and the eastern stretch at the Monumental Arch. It was started in the early third century CE and was finished during the late third century CE.<sup>76</sup> See **ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0096** for additional details for all of ancient Palmyra.

**Site Date:** The Colonnaded Street was constructed during the second and third centuries CE.

**Incident Summary:** Individuals strapped to three different ancient columns in the Colonnaded Street were executed when the columns were destroyed with explosives.

**Incident Source and Description:** On October 26, 2015 social media outlets reported that local sources reported that ISIL militants executed three captives in Palmyra.<sup>77</sup> October 27, 2015 the DGAM confirmed these reports.<sup>78</sup> The execution was carried out by binding the three individuals to three different ancient Roman-era columns, which were covered with explosives. The explosives were then detonated, destroying the columns and killing the three victims. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which relies on a network of informants on the ground, stated that the identities of those killed remain unknown.

**Pattern:** Military activity: explosives, occupation/militarization; Reuse of ancient/historic structure for public execution site; Intentional performative destruction.

**Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures:** ASOR CHI is directing critical attention to the condition of all periods of cultural heritage at Palmyra, given the high visibility and ongoing significance of the city and UNESCO World Heritage Site. The use of a cultural heritage site as a

---

<sup>76</sup> Butcher 2003

<sup>77</sup> <http://www.dailysabah.com/mideast/2015/10/26/isis-ties-three-people-to-historic-columns-before-blowing-them-up-in-palmyra>

<sup>78</sup> <http://dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1846>

stage for the execution of people is both an affront to human decency and a violation of numerous international humanitarian laws and the laws of war.

**Sources:**

Online Reporting:

Al Arabiya:

<http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/10/27/ISIS-blows-up-ancient-columns-in-Syria-s-Palmyra-monitor.html>

Al Arabiya (Arabic): <http://ara.tv/2es3k>

Associated Press:

[http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/M/ML\\_ISLAMIC\\_STATE?SITE=AP&SECTION=HOME&TEMP\\_LATE=DEFAULT](http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/M/ML_ISLAMIC_STATE?SITE=AP&SECTION=HOME&TEMP_LATE=DEFAULT)

DGAM: <http://dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1846>

BBC: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34647186>

CBS: <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/isis-blows-up-hostages-with-ancient-roman-columns-in-palmyra/>

CNN: <http://www.cnn.com/2015/10/26/middleeast/isis-pillar-executions-palmyra-syria/>

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights:

<http://www.syriahr.com/en/2015/10/for-the-first-time-execution-by-tying-to-ancient-pillar-and-detonating-it-by-the-islamic-state/>

The Wall Street Journal: <http://www.wsj.com/articles/isis-kills-three-captives-in-palmyra-1445940753>

Washington Times:

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/oct/27/islamic-state-straps-prisoners-to-ancient-palmyra-/>

Scholarly:

Baranski, Marek (1995). "The Great Colonnade of Palmyra Reconsidered." *ARAM Periodical* (ARAM Society for Syro-Mesopotamian Studies) 7(1): 37-46.

Butcher, Kevin (2003). *Roman Syria: And the Near East*. Getty Publications.