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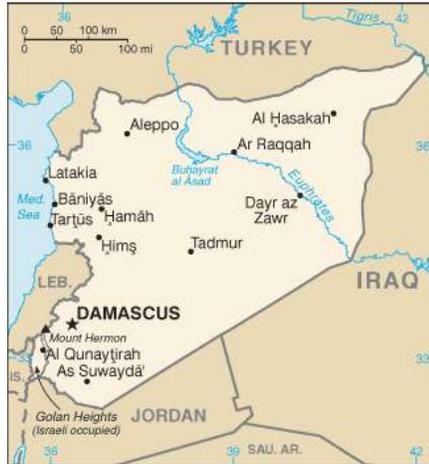
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Syria Poised for Aleppo Victory as Rebels Talk Surrender

By Jason Ditz
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After two weekends of major gains in the northern city of Aleppo, Syrian forces are increasingly near to an outright victory in the former industrial and financial capital of the country, with

several more districts seized and reports of the first troops making their way into the Old City, one of the last rebel strongholds.

Rebels have long downplayed the significance of these losses, insisting they will fight to the last man to defend the city, though reports today suggest the rebel leadership is in talks with the US on some sort of negotiated withdrawal from what little remains of their portion of the city.

Russia's Defense Ministry reported that five new districts were taken today alone, while the Syrian Army says that in this most recent offensive over the past couple of weeks they've taken 35 districts from the rebels, well over half of the rebel territory in the city's east. Russia has warned the rebels who refuse to leave the city face outright elimination.

Aleppo originally became contested early in the Syrian Civil War in 2012, with the factions involved then each predicting a quick military victory, and one which would be decisive to the overall civil war. Since then, several factions have come and gone from the city, and no faction has been close to fully reuniting it.

During the February ceasefire, al-Qaeda's Nusra Front was excluded from the truce, and used it as a chance to expand into Aleppo Province, eventually getting territory inside the city itself. By summer the city was split in half, with the Nusra-dominated rebels in the east, and the military in the west. Both sides have launched offensives and counteroffensives since.

While it now seems that the military may ultimately "win" the battle over the city, it isn't clear how much of an impact it will have on the overall civil war, with the city having been heavily damaged over the last several years, and amounting to a bunch of badly damaged residential districts separated by barriers.