

# Coalition general: Syrian government unable to hold their ground in Deir ar-Zour

by Wladimir van Wilgenburg - 06/10/2017 13:44



KOBANI - Joint Staff Director Lieutenant General Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr told reporters on Thursday that the Syrian government forces have difficulties holding territory in areas captured from ISIS in Deir ez-Zour.

“As Syrian state forces supported by Russia have moved to the West, they have found it increasingly difficult to actually to provide a hold force.” he said. McKenzie questioned whether or not the lack of “relative affection” that the people of the region have towards the Regime might be a factor in the difficulties of the Syrian Arab Army.

It is a problem that US-backed forces such as the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) aren't coming across. Complaints of the Syrian Army's advances not being effective are also coming from political analysts.

Hassan Hassan, a senior fellow at the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy in an opinion-piece for [the National](#), argued that [a counter-offensive by ISIS](#) also showed

that the regime is unable to hold its ground.

“ISIL recaptured several enemy outposts and the pro-government force’s defences began to crumble in some areas. The counterattacks significantly disrupted the flow of the Russian and Iranian plan for Deir Ezzor, and demonstrated that the gains made in that region were fragile and largely inflated,” he wrote.

How precisely does the SDF avoid falling into some of these same pitfalls? According to Nicholas A Heras, a Middle East Fellow at the Center for a New American Security, “The SDF has a model for establishing rapport with the local population in areas it conquers from ISIS, which are local councils that are representative of the population in the area.”

This grassroots approach separates it from the Syrian Regimes efforts to win the support of the population.

“ This model is superior to the "reconciliation" model of the Assad government and its allies, which is essentially placing siege on a local community, and then allowing it a short-term autonomy until Assad aligned forces move into it,” he told the Region.

The next question that confronts the SDF is whether this model will be successful as they move forward in Deir-Ezzor.

“While the SDF model has been successful in places with complex communal dynamics such as Manbij, it will still be challenged in eastern Syria, particularly Deir Azzour. In Deir Azzour, complex tribal politics and the presence of a network of ISIS sleeper cells waiting to be activated all await the SDF. That is why the SDF must bring into Deir Azzour a unified Deir Azzour Military Council made up of the different tribes, all organized with a coherent structure that is ready to support the local councils model that the SDF builds in the wake of ISIS,” Heras told the Region.

“If the Deir Azzour Military Council is not stable from the first days the SDF is in Deir Azzour, and is riven with tribal in-fighting, disaster would be stalking the SDF efforts to hold eastern Syria,” he added.

Many civilians from Deir Ar-Zour interviewed by the Region in a camp for displaced people in Ain al Issa, expressed their hopes that the SDF will control their areas.

“We’ll go back if its controlled by SDF,” Ali (24) a civilian from the countryside of Deir ar-Zour said. “But the regime is like ISIS.”

Especially many young men say they will not go back fearing the military service of

the Assad Government.

Hassan (35) from the town of Maadan not very far from Deir ar-Zour said he will not go back to Maadan after its controlled by the Assad Government.

“Maybe now Daash is better than the regime. Their fighters are not Syrian, but Iraqi, Iranian, Afghani,” he added.

He said that while ISIS also kills people, the regime also kills civilians and steal their belongings.

The SDF forces on 9 September launched the Jazeera Storm to liberate the Deir ez-Zor, which led to tensions between the Russian-backed regime forces and the US-backed SDF over who controls the oil-rich region.

On 25 September, the SDF accused the Russian government of bombing SDF positions which killed one of it's fighters and injured two.

Previously during the Raqqa operation, a regime jet that attacked SDF forces was [shot down](#) by the US-led coalition on 18 June.