

The second batch of fighters from the Islamic State jihadist group left their final Damascus stronghold overnight, a monitor said Monday, bringing the Syrian regime closer to a major milestone.

The government has so far not confirmed any deal with IS, but a military source quoted by state media said civilians had been evacuated on Sunday night during a brief ceasefire.



SANA/AFP/File / Handout. The Syrian government and allied forces started an operation last month to flush out jihadists and other groups from a cluster of neighborhoods in southern Damascus.

“The second batch of elements from the Islamic State organization left after midnight,” the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

“They are heading to a pocket in the desert still under the control of the extremist organization,” the Britain-based monitoring group said.

The first group of IS fighters was transferred by bus out of southern Damascus on Sunday, the monitor said.

Government and allied forces started an operation last month to flush out jihadists and other groups from a cluster of neighborhoods in southern Damascus.

They include Yarmuk, which was the largest Palestinian refugee camp in Syria and has been a besieged IS stronghold since 2015, as well as the adjacent neighborhoods of Tadamun and Hajar al-Aswad.

The evacuation of those areas would bring the entire capital and its surroundings under regime control for the first time since 2012.

State media has thus far fiercely denied reaching a deal with IS, but state news agency SANA reported for the first time Monday that some evacuations had taken place.

Citing a military source, it said women and children had been bussed out during a ceasefire

that would remain in place until noon (0900 GMT) on Monday, but that the government would subsequently resume operations.

President Bashar al-Assad has used a combination of military pressure and evacuation deals in recent months to recapture territory around the capital from his armed opponents.

The assault against the jihadist force in southern Damascus has left more than 250 pro-regime forces, 233 jihadists and more than 60 civilians dead, according to the Britain-based Observatory.

The monitor's head Rami Abdel Rahman said the evacuation operation took place "at night and in secret".

"The Syrian government does not admit to negotiating with IS and wants to make sure the convoy is not targeted by the coalition led by Washington," he added.

Last year, IS fighters and relatives were evacuated from an area on the Lebanese-Syrian border under a deal between IS on one side and the regime and the powerful Lebanese Shiite movement Hezbollah on the other.

The US-led coalition bombing IS in Syria since 2014 sent planes to monitor the convoy, picking off dozens of jihadists along the way.

AFP

Irfan Ansari

The Kootneeti Team - Middle East Monitor



**CERTIFICATE COURSE IN  
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

SIX-WEEK ONLINE COURSE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS  
BY THE KOOTNEETI

**JOIN TODAY!**

team@thekootneeti.com  
courses.thekootneeti.in  
(+91) 120 4565994

*The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Kootneeti Team*

Facebook Comments