

Syria war: Raqqa deal agreed to evacuate civilians



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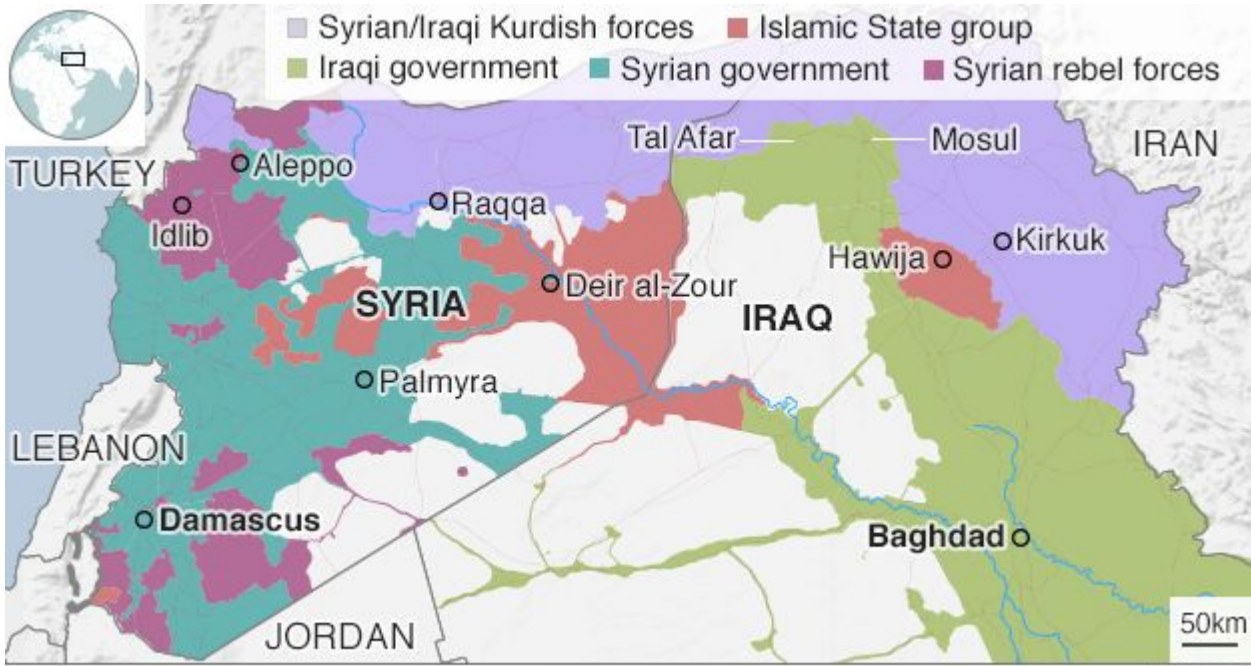
Image captionKurdish and Arab fighters have been pushing back IS since June. A deal has been struck to evacuate civilians by bus from the Syrian city of Raqqa, where so-called Islamic State (IS) is surrounded by a US-led coalition of Kurdish and Arab fighters.

Under the agreement arranged by local officials, a convoy is due to leave on Saturday, a coalition spokesman said.

But foreign members of the IS jihadist group are apparently excluded.

Fighting is expected to continue for days before the former IS stronghold is fully liberated, the coalition added.

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have been besieging the city for nearly four months. They say about 100 IS fighters have surrendered in recent days.



The coalition was not involved in the evacuation deal but the SDF reserve the right to search people leaving the city, a statement said.

“The arrangement is designed to minimise civilian casualties and purportedly excludes foreign Daesh [IS] terrorists,” it noted.

The coalition said IS had been “hiding behind women and children for three years” and it was against any arrangement that allowed them to continue to do so

Raqqa Is Being Slaughtered Silently, an activist group that reports on the city, said on its Facebook page that dozens of buses had arrived there overnight, after travelling from further north.

Civilians have been making dangerous journeys of their own to leave the embattled city.

Raqqa became the de facto capital of the IS “caliphate” whose creation was proclaimed by IS three years ago, attracting thousands of jihadists from around the world.

Enforcing an extreme interpretation of Islamic law, the group used beheadings, crucifixions and torture to terrorise residents who opposed its rule.

- The desperate fight for IS ‘capital’ Raqqa
- Inside ‘Islamic State’: A Raqqa diary
- IS wives: Why I joined the ‘caliphate’ in Raqqa

Nouri Mahmoud, a spokesman for the Kurdish YPG militia which is part of the SDF, told Reuters news agency: "The battles are continuing in Raqqa city.

"Daesh is on the verge of being finished. Today or tomorrow the city may be liberated."

Source: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-41620009>

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