

## Aleppo victory shifts civil war in Assad's favor

Still, Assad's forces are overextended, raising questions about how much territory it can hold at one time, as it relies on manpower from Hezbollah and Shi'ite militias.

By Ben Lynfield / 12.13.16

"Army units chasing down the fleeing terrorists" and "a big collapse of the terrorist morale" is how Syria's SANA news agency yesterday described the approaching end of the battle of Aleppo. Years from now, this juncture may be looked upon as the turning point towards victory for the Assad regime in the Syrian civil war.

[...]

"I don't know if this is the beginning of the end, but it's definitely a shift in the war," said **Benedetta Berti**, a Syria specialist at the **Institute for National Security Studies**.

"Whatever move the regime takes next it will do from a position of strength. The opposition isn't in a place to reverse the trend. It doesn't have the strength to regain what it has lost. That doesn't mean it will completely go away, and that Assad will be able to rule in a stable way the rest of Syria.

The victory comes ahead of schedule for the Syrian military, and for Russia, which had initially hoped the battle could be finished in time for Donald Trump's inauguration next month. In a larger sense, it puts Russia well on track to achieving its goal of Syrian regime control of what it terms "useful Syria," comprising the main urban centers of Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, and Hama, along with coastal areas inhabited by the Alawite minority.

A likely next move of the Syrian army and Russia is to try to retake Idlib province in the northwest, a remaining stronghold for rebels.

"If two years ago everyone was counting the days until the end of the Assad regime, now it's clear that while it's dependent more on foreign support, it's not going anywhere," **Berti** said.

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*For full report, see:*

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