

# ASOR Cultural Heritage Initiatives (CHI): Planning for Safeguarding Heritage Sites in Syria and Iraq<sup>1</sup>

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Weekly Report 49—July 14, 2015

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## Executive Summary

During the reporting period, in Syria unknown combatants detonated a tunnel bomb beneath the northeastern span of the fortification wall of the Aleppo Citadel. The medieval–early modern/Ottoman citadel lies at the center of the UNESCO World Heritage Site Ancient City of Aleppo and sits atop an archaeological mound of great age — archaeological excavations reached levels of the Early Iron Age (ca. 1000 BC) although much earlier levels lay below. For years, the citadel has been the focal point of fighting between SARG and Opposition forces and has suffered numerous damage incidents.

## Key Points

- The Aleppo Citadel sustained severe damage after a tunnel bomb was detonated beneath the northeastern fortification wall ([ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0110](#)).

## Heritage Timeline

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|---------------|---|
| July 14, 2015 | The <b>DGAM</b> published photographs of the current state of the ancient city of Bosra taken by local community members.<br><a href="http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&amp;id=1741">http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&amp;id=1741</a>  |
| July 13, 2015 | <i>Reuters</i> published an article titled “ <b>Smugglers dodge Turkish army on border with Islamic State-held Syria</b> ” (by Humeyra Pamuk).<br><a href="http://uk.reuters.com/article/2015/07/13/uk-mideast-crisis-turkey-border-idUKKCN0PN12M20150713">http://uk.reuters.com/article/2015/07/13/uk-mideast-crisis-turkey-border-idUKKCN0PN12M20150713</a> |

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<sup>1</sup> This report is based on research conducted by the “Syria Preservation Initiative: Planning for Safeguarding Heritage Sites in Syria.” Weekly reports reflect reporting from a variety of sources and may contain unverified material. As such, they should be treated as preliminary and subject to change.

- *The New Yorker* published an article online titled “**Homage to Zenobia**” (by Lawrence Wright). This article discussed Palmyra under the rule of Zenobia, correlating ISIL’s control of the region with the construction of a large empire.  
<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/07/20/homage-to-zenobia>
- July 12, 2015
- The **DGAM** published an article titled “**Ancient city of Aleppo: Damages at the citadel defensive wall**” (by DGAM).  
<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1739>  
<http://dgam.gov.sy/?d=239&id=1738>
- **APSA** posted pictures, and a short description titled “**Aleppo citadel 11.07.2015.**”  
<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.1420898448017262.1073741907.324869057620212&type=3>
  - *Alwasat* published an article titled “**Blast in Aleppo does major damage to citadel wall**” (by Reuters).  
<http://en.alwasat.ly/en/news/world/411/Blast-in-Aleppo-does-major-damage-to-citadel-wall.htm>
  - *BBC* published an article titled “**Syria civil war: Bomb damages Aleppo's ancient citadel.**”  
<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-33499609>
  - *ABC News* published an article titled “**Tunnel Explosion Lightly Damages Syria's Citadel in Aleppo.**”  
<http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/tunnel-explosion-lightly-damages-syrias-citadel-aleppo-32393114>
  - *Al Jazeera* published an article titled “**Collapse of wall caused by the bombing of the Citadel of Aleppo** (انهيار بسور قلعة حلب ج.ا.ء. تفجير).” <http://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2015/7/12/انهيار-بسور-قلعة-حلب-ج-ا-ء-تفجير>
  - *SANA* published an article titled “**Terrorists’ targeting of Aleppo Citadel a new crime against Syria’s heritage, chief of Syrian World Heritage sites says.**”  
<http://sana.sy/en/?p=48157>
- July 11, 2015
- Albawba* published an article titled “**Ongoing attacks on Sufi shrines threaten Syria’s cultural heritage.**”  
<http://www.albawaba.com/editorchoice/ongoing-attacks-sufi-shrines-threaten-syria-s-cultural-heritage-717994>

- *Syrian TV & Radio* published an article titled “**65,000 archeological artifacts stolen by terrorists recovered so far.**”  
<http://www.syriaonline.sy/?f=Details&catid=22&pageid=17344&g=1>
- July 10, 2015 *National Geographic* published an article titled “**Syrians Race to Save Ancient City's Treasures from ISIS**” (by Tim McGirk).  
<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/2015/07/150710-palmyra-syria-isis-looting-museum-archaeology/#>
- **Molad (מולד): The Center for the Renewal of Israeli Democracy** published an opinion piece titled “**The ‘Global Legacy’ of the Islamic State (ה"מורשת העולמית של המדינה האסלאמית)**” (by Dotan Levi [דותן הלוי]).  
<http://canthink.molad.org/articles/המורשת-העולמית-של-המדינה-האסלאמית>
- July 9, 2015 The **DGAM** released photographs of damage to the ancient city of **Bosra**, taken on June 7, 2015.  
<http://www.dgam.gov.sy/?d=314&id=1737>
- *Huffington Post* published an article titled “**Senate Targets ISIS Profits From Ancient Syrian Artifacts**” (by Jessica Schulberg).  
[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/07/09/isis-syrian-antiquities\\_n\\_7762136.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/07/09/isis-syrian-antiquities_n_7762136.html)
- *Channel News Asia* published an article titled “**Iraq celebrates return of antiquities, appeals for world help.**”  
<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/world/iraq-celebrates-return-of/1970610.html>
- **The Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University** held a seminar titled “**History under the Sword: Tracking Cultural Heritage Destruction, Human Migration, and the Dynamic Nature of Conflict in Iraq**” between July 9-10, 2015.  
[http://projects.iq.harvard.edu/history\\_under\\_the\\_sword](http://projects.iq.harvard.edu/history_under_the_sword)
- July 8, 2015 *The Washington Post* published an article titled “**UNESCO names 27 new World Heritage Sites; other sites threatened by Islamic State**” (by Nick Kirkpatrick).  
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/07/08/unesco-names-27-new-world-heritage-sites-other-sites-threatened-by-islamic-state/>

- *NBC News* published an article titled “**UNESCO's Irina Bokova Laments ISIS' 'Cultural Cleansing' of Antiquities**” (by Michele Neubert and Alexander Smith). Brief description.  
<http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-terror/unesco-boss-irina-bokova-laments-isis-cultural-cleansing-antiquities-n386291>
- *TeleSUR Videos, From the South* released a video segment titled “**Syria Restores Artifacts to Preserve Cultural Heritage**,” which features footage of heritage across the country including the Damascus National Museum and the newly installed Virgin Mary statue at Maalula.  
<http://multimedia.telesurtv.net/web/telesur/#!en/video/syria-restores-artifacts-to-preserve-cultural-heritage>
- *Worldcrunch* published an article titled “**People of Palmyra, Where ISIS Puts Syrian History at Risk**” (by Omar Abudllah).  
<http://www.worldcrunch.com/syria-crisis/people-of-palmyra-where-isis-puts-syrian-history-at-risk/palmyra-isis-syria-bashar-assad-muslim-brotherhood/c13s19242/#.VaD4TuvR-6L>

## Military and Political Context

The main theaters of military operations during the reporting period in Syria were:

1. Aleppo Governorate
  - On Wednesday, July 8, the Syrian regime dropped a barrel bomb in the Karm al-Beik neighborhood, killing a number of civilians according to UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.<sup>2</sup>
  - On Saturday, July 11, the Syrian regime dropped container bombs, which are three times more powerful than barrel bombs, on the Al-Bab neighborhood, killing a number of civilians, according to UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.<sup>3</sup>

Other key points:

- During the reporting period, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan intensified his support for the creation of buffer zone between Turkey and Syria. This discussion is likely in response to the capture of Tel Abyad by Syrian Kurdish YPG and rebel groups last month, a move that concerned Erdoğan and others in Turkey who interpret an independent Kurdish state as a threat to Turkish sovereignty.<sup>4</sup> The proposed buffer zone is approximately 100

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.reuters.com/video/2015/07/10/airstrikes-hit-embattled-city-of-aleppo?videoId=364899528> ; <http://www.syriahr.com/en/2015/07/the-regime-air-force-carry-out-more-strikes-on-the-city-of-aleppo-and-the-clashes-renew-in-its-countryside/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/07/11/-Huge-regime-bombs-kill-28-in-ISIS-held-Syria-town-Monitor.html> ; AFP, <http://news.yahoo.com/huge-regime-bombs-kill-28-held-syria-town-100423274.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/07/turkish-military-wary-erdogan-buffer-zone-syria-no-fly.html#>

kilometers (62 miles) long and 10 to 15 kilometers (6 to 9 miles) wide located along the southern Turkish border. Erdogan contends that it would "meet Turkey's security requirements" and create a "safe haven for Syrian refugees," while his supporters add that it would provide an advantage in Turkey's fight against ISIL. The Turkish military, however, does not support Erdogan's plan, concerned that creation of a buffer zone would eventually lead to an undesirable military intervention in Syria. The formation of a new coalition government, one with more Kurdish representation and a poor result for Erdoğan's own Justice and Development Party (AKP), could impede the President's plans.<sup>5</sup>

- Jordan seeks to establish buffer zones across the provinces of Deraa and Suwayda in southern Syria in reaction to the capture of Tadmor, 240 kilometers from the Jordanian border, by ISIL militants last May.
- Both the Turkey and Jordan plans, however, are weakened by the lack of a UN-sanctioned no-fly zone, which would require American support that the United States is not ready to lend.<sup>6</sup> U.S. Defense Secretary Ashton Carter stated that the creation and enforcement of a no-fly zone or any other military enforced zone presents significant challenges.<sup>7</sup> Erdoğan has denied access to Incirlik air base for American airstrikes against ISIL militants until the United States agrees to a no-fly zone.<sup>8</sup>
- On Friday, July 10, the U.S. military stated that it launched airstrikes against ISIL positions near Hasakah, Aleppo, Raqqa, Ayn Isa, Kobani, and Tel Abyad.<sup>9</sup>

#### **The main theaters of military operations during the reporting period in Iraq were:**

1. Al Anbar Governorate
  - During the reporting period, Iraqi security forces prepared a counteroffensive to reclaim Ramadi from the Islamic State, which ISIL seized in May. President Obama reiterated American support for the Iraqi military to move into Ramadi on the ground with air support from the U.S.-led coalition. The plan is expected to take around 6,000 troops and require training by American advisers at Al Taqqadum, an Iraqi base east of Ramadi. Sunni fighters will primarily lead the attack to avoid sectarian conflict in the predominantly Sunni region. Iraq's Shi'ite militia, the Popular Mobilization Force, will focus on setting blocking positions south and west of the city to prevent ISIL fighters from escaping. The Iraqi government and American government are both intent on regaining Ramadi before ISIL militants

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/07/turkish-military-wary-erdogan-buffer-zone-syria-no-fly.html#>

<sup>6</sup> "Drawing in the neighbours" *The Economist* July 4 2015.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/07/turkish-military-wary-erdogan-buffer-zone-syria-no-fly.html#>

<sup>8</sup> "Drawing in the neighbours" *The Economist* July 4 2015.

<sup>9</sup> <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/07/11/U-S-led-warplanes-strike-ISIS-targets-in-Syria-Iraq.html> ; Reuters, <http://news.yahoo.com/u-allies-conduct-air-strikes-syria-iraq-against-223455766.html> ; <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=129259>

consolidate control of the area, which sits strategically near the borders of Saudi Arabia and Jordan.<sup>10</sup>

- During the reporting period, the Iraqi army and Shi'ite Hashid Shaabi militia fighters launched an attack in Fallujah to commence the counteroffensive in Al Anbar governorate. Although the Iraqi government originally declared the counteroffensive to be on Ramadi, the fight for Fallujah proves its significance as well in the fight against ISIL. Also, while Sunni fighters and Iraq's Shi'ite militia were initially reported to be in charge of the counteroffensive, the Shi'ite Hashid Shaabi fighters have emerged as key players due to their experience fighting in Syria and their support from Iran.<sup>11</sup>
- On Friday, July 10, ISIL militants attacked Iraqi security forces near Khaldiya, a town next to a military base between Ramadi and Falluja, both of which are held by ISIL. The attacks wounded many Shi'ite Hashid Shaabi fighters.<sup>12</sup>

Other key points:

- On Friday, July 10, the U.S. military stated that it launched airstrikes against ISIS positions near Baiji, Fallujah, Habbaniyah, Haditha, Makhmur, Mosul, Sinjar, and Tal Afar.<sup>13</sup>

## Key Heritage Recommendations and Actions

- New satellite imagery of the Old City of Aleppo is needed to update damage assessments. The most recent DigitalGlobe imagery dates to December 15, 2014.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/07/world/middleeast/iraqi-forces-plan-offensive-to-retake-ramadi-from-isis.html>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/07/10/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-insight-idUSKCN0PK1GL20150710>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/07/10/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-fighting-idUSKCN0PK1UP20150710>

<sup>13</sup> <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/07/11/U-S-led-warplanes-strike-ISIS-targets-in-Syria-Iraq.html> ; Reuters, <http://news.yahoo.com/u-allies-conduct-air-strikes-syria-iraq-against-223455766.html> ; <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=129259>

## Incident Reports: Syria

SHI 15-0110

**Report Date:** July 12, 2015

**Site Name:** Aleppo Citadel

**Date of Incident:** July 11, 2015

**Location:** UNESCO World Heritage Site Ancient City of Aleppo, Aleppo Governorate, Syria

**Site Description:** From UNESCO:

The monumental Citadel of Aleppo, rising above the suqs, mosques and madrasas of the old walled city, is testament to Arab military might from the 12th to the 14th centuries. With evidence of past occupation by civilizations dating back to the 10th century B.C., the citadel contains the remains of mosques, a palace and bath buildings. The walled city that grew up around the citadel bears evidence of the early Graeco-Roman street layout and contains remnants of 6th century Christian buildings, medieval walls and gates, mosques and madrasas relating to the Ayyubid and Mameluke development of the city, and later mosques and palaces of the Ottoman period.

A ring of crenellated walls and towers rises 50m above the city from a steep glacis, encircling a mass of ruins of every period. The nail-heads on the doors themselves are beautifully worked, the lintels have comic or enigmatic carvings on them, and there are fine Kufic inscriptions calling upon the power and the mercy of Allah. The interior of the citadel shows all too clearly how it has been ravaged by its enemies.

**Site Date:** Hittite through Ottoman eras

**Source of Destruction:** On July 11, 2015, in the early morning, a tunnel bomb was detonated under the citadel of Aleppo, causing a portion of the citadel wall to collapse. Aleppo-based activist Nazeer al-Katib (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights) said about 2 meters of the wall collapsed.<sup>14</sup>

Lina Quteifan, head of the World Heritage List Syrian Archaeological Sites Department, reported that part of the wall between two towers on the northeastern side of the citadel were destroyed.<sup>15</sup> The Aleppo Citadel is one of several sites on UNESCO's world heritage list. She stated that the main iron gate of the citadel, its main entrance, and its northern tower have also sustained damage during the conflict. Quteifan went on to say that the damage could not be assessed by DGAM because of the fighting occurring in Aleppo.<sup>16</sup>

**Pattern:** Syrian Arab Republic Government (SARG) forces have been using the citadel as a military position, but at the time of publication it was unclear who detonated the bomb. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights states that SARG detonated the bomb, and opposition news sources are reporting that SARG was trying to destroy tunnels in the old city that they suspected the

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<sup>14</sup> <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/tunnel-explosion-lightly-damages-syrias-citadel-aleppo-32393114>

<sup>15</sup> <http://sana.sy/en/?p=48157>

<sup>16</sup> <http://sana.sy/en/?p=48157>

opposition was using.<sup>17</sup> The Syrian Arab News Network (SANA) states that opposition fighters detonated the bombs.<sup>18</sup> The blast was followed by clashes between rebels and government forces in the western portion of Aleppo.

For further information on incidents leading up to the bombing, see:

ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0035 [Weekly Report 7](#)

ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0076 [Weekly Report 14](#)

ASOR CHI Incident Report SHI 15-0087 [Weekly Report 41](#)

**Monitoring Recommendations and Mitigation Measures:** ASOR CHI will attempt to confirm reports via in-country sources and is continuing to monitor the condition of the Aleppo Citadel and cultural heritage in Syria and Iraq.

### **Sources:**

#### Online Reporting:

Reuters:

<http://en.alwasat.ly/en/news/world/411/Blast-in-Aleppo-does-major-damage-to-citadel-wall.htm>

DGAM: <http://www.dgam.gov.sy/index.php?d=314&id=1739>

BBC: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-33499609>

APSA:

<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.1420898448017262.1073741907.324869057620212&type=3>

ABC News:

<http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/tunnel-explosion-lightly-damages-syrias-citadel-aleppo-32393114>

SANA: <http://sana.sy/en/?p=48157>

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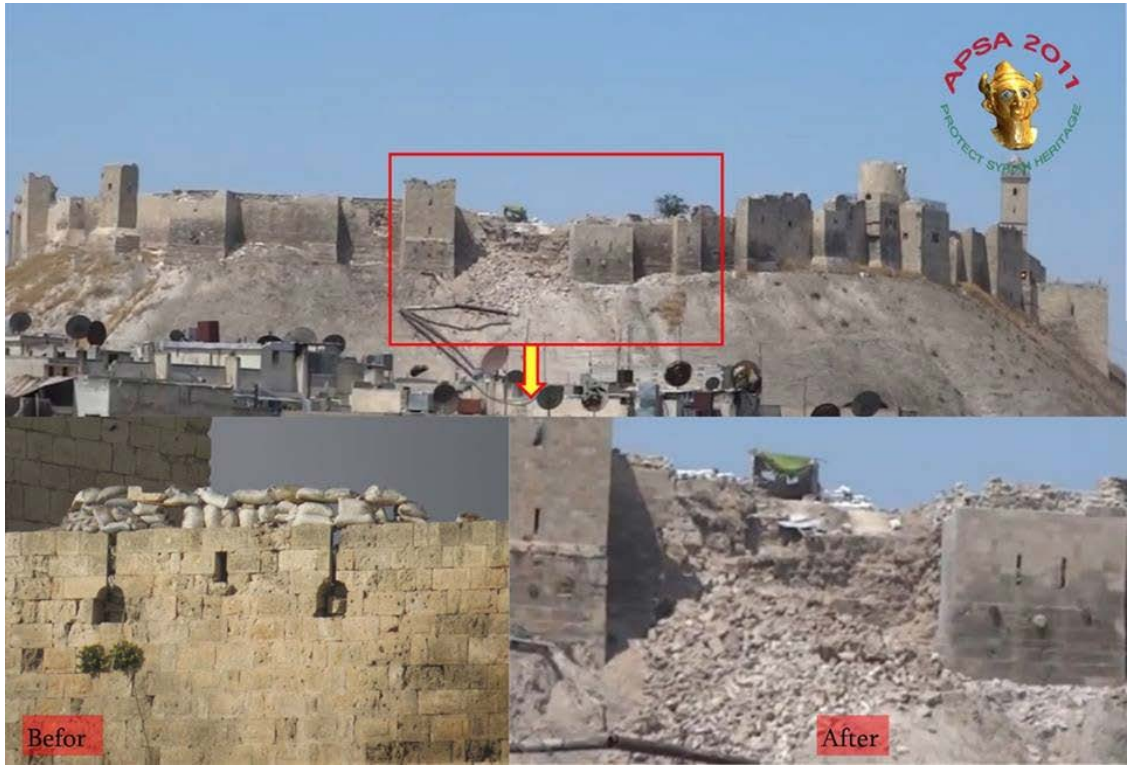
<sup>17</sup> <http://en.alwasat.ly/en/news/world/411/Blast-in-Aleppo-does-major-damage-to-citadel-wall.htm>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-33499609>





Aleppo Citadel (APSA; July 12, 2015)



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