

Syria: ISIS defeated in last major stronghold



Artillery are seen lined up in the village of Suway'iah, near the Syrian border town of Albu Kamal, on November 10, 2017.

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BEIRUT – Pro-government forces defeated the Islamic State group in its last major stronghold in Syria, state media and a monitoring group reported on Sunday, leaving the militants to defend just strips of desert territory in the country and a besieged pocket outside the capital, Damascus.

The battle for Boukamal, on the border with Iraq, featured its share of feints and ruses, with the militants pulling out of the town ten days ago only to attack it again and threaten to trap pro-government forces inside.

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But they could not hold it against a coalition of Syrian, Lebanese, Iraqi, and Iranian forces, organized under Tehran's leadership to fight the war in Syria.

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Holding Boukamal will be an important strategic objective for the government and its sponsor Iran, which is shifting militias under its authority across both sides of the border.

Pro-government forces were combing the town for booby traps, Syria's SANA news agency reported.

Units from Lebanon's militant group Hezbollah, Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces militias, Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards, and the Syrian Army all fought in the battle for Boukamal, according to various statements and interviews with

the groups and the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group, which also reported the militants' defeat at Boukamal.

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Iranian Brig. Gen. Khayrallah Samadi was killed by a mortar shell, Iran's semi-official Fars News Agency reported Saturday. The Revolutionary Guards' Gen. Qasem Soleimani was also present at the battle, according to the Observatory.

IS has suffered consecutive defeats at the hands of separate but simultaneous offensives in Iraq and Syria by the Russian-backed Syrian forces and allied militias as well as U.S.-backed Iraqi and Syrian fighters.

Despite its recent defeats, the extremist group's media apparatus has remained active and its fighters are likely to keep up their insurgency from desert areas.

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