

## **Saving Syria's Ghouta**

### **What is the issue?**

\n\n

\n

- An agreement was reached between armed groups in Eastern Ghouta and a UN delegation to evacuate some militants from the besieged enclaves.

\n

- This is the first major deal reached since the attack on the city began, and more such deals are to be clinched to reduce casualties and bring peace.

\n

\n\n

### **How did the situation evolve?**

\n\n

\n

- Ghouta is a suburb which lies close to the Syrian capital Damascus, which came under rebel control since early in the civil war (that began in 2011).

\n

- The territory recently came under attack by government forces to flush out the multiple rebel groups that have their presence.

\n

- As Ghouta is one of the last rebel strongholds and houses close to 4 lakh civilians, the battle is proving to be brutal and catastrophic.

\n

- Recently, the city came under virtual siege and essential supplies were cut, and reports of rebels deploying people as human shields also emerged.

\n

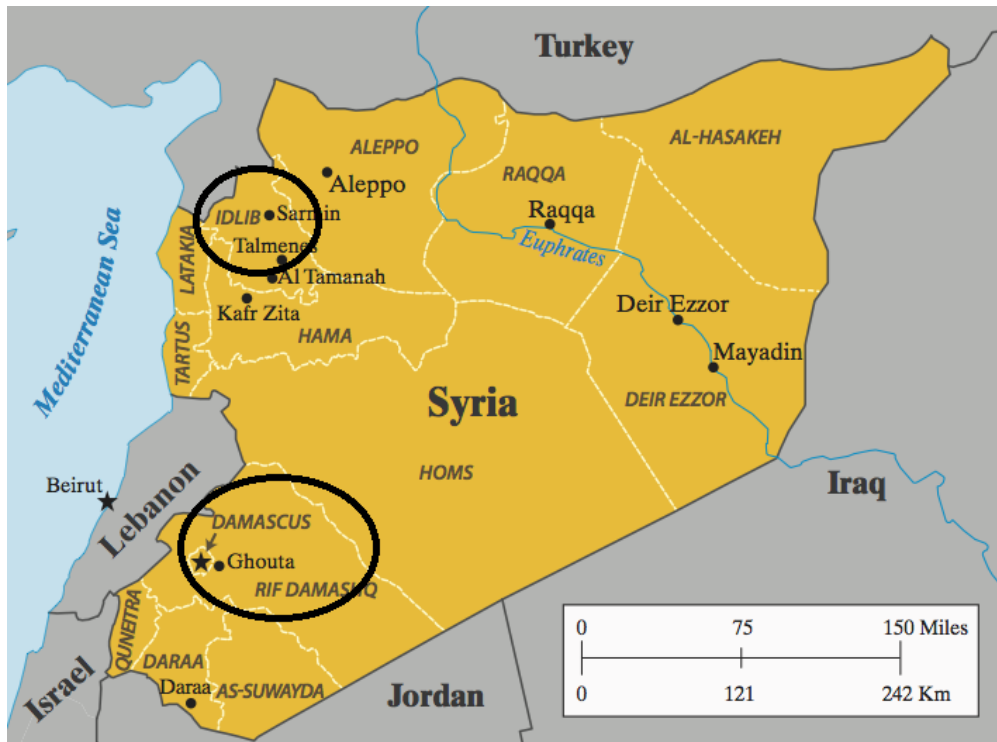
- More than 1000 people were estimated to be killed in the past week alone but Syrian Government and its Russian backers seem unrelenting in vigour.

\n

- UN Security Council unanimously called for a cease fire, which helped in reducing the intensity and helped start a dialogue with the rebels.

\n

\n\n



\n\n

### What has come out of the negotiations?

\n\n

\n

- UN peace makers have struck a deal with the main rebel group 'Jaish al-Islam', to facilitate the evacuation of militants belonging to "HTS" from Ghouta.

\n

- 'Hayat Tahrir al-Sham' (HTS) was formerly an Al-Qaeda front and is an internationally designated terrorist group.

\n

- Notably, despite endorsing ceasefire in the UN Security Council, Russia has been justifying its assaults on Ghouta by sighting the presence of HTS.

\n

- HTS evacuees are expected to proceed to Idlib, which is another rebel held town in north-western Syria (see map).

\n

- The deal has come after more than a month of protracted negotiations even as the rebels stayed stubborn in the face of intense government bombardment.

\n

\n\n

### How does the future look?

\n\n

\n

- The evacuation of HTS militants removes a hurdle for Syrian regime and Russia to cease hostilities and engage the other armed groups diplomatically.

\n

- Notably, besides Jaish al-Islam - “Faylaq al-Rahman”, an affiliate of the Free Syrian Army is also a major player in Ghouta.

\n

- The rebels in Ghouta currently do not have any meaningful support coming from outside that could allow them to resist regime forces.

\n

- The sooner the government forces and the armed gangs reach an agreement to end hostilities, the better it is for all sides.

\n

\n\n

\n\n

**Source: The Hindu**

\n

