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<https://www.middleeastobserver.org/2016/11/29/analysis-what-is-next-for-syria-after-aleppo-battle/>

What is next for Syria after Aleppo battle?

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Assad regime forces' fierce offensive cost the Syrian rebels all of the northern neighborhoods of their stronghold in east Aleppo on Monday, as the threat has been larger than ever of losing the battle and eventually the revolution forever.

The Assad regime forces, backed by Russian air power, Iranian ground forces and Shi'ite militia fighters from Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon, has been tightening its grip on rebel-held districts of Aleppo this year.

They have gradually closed in on eastern Aleppo this year, first cutting the most direct lifeline to Turkey before fully encircling the east, and launching a major assault in September.

Assad regime forces started a major offensive to push opposition fighters out of the besieged eastern half of the city on 15 September.

Helicopters continue extensively dropping barrel bombs in conjunction with airstrikes by warplanes on areas in the eastern neighborhoods of the city, accompanied by artillery shelling by the regime forces in the same places.

in the first week of offensive, Assad regime forces retrieved all the areas that the rebels gained in their last attempts.

Assad regime forces retook almost a third of the Masaken Hanano district, which has been held by the rebels for the past 4 years, on 22 November according to the observatory.

Masaken Hanano was the first Aleppo district to fall to rebels in 2012, and it is strategically vital.

On Saturday 26 November, Assad regime forces said in a statement they had, alongside their allies, taken full control over the Hanano housing district.

On Sunday, the 13th day of the operation, they also took control of the adjacent neighborhoods of Jabal Badra and Baadeen and captured three others, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

On Monday 28 November, government forces seized the Sakhur, Haydariya and Sheikh Khodr districts, and Kurdish fighters took the Sheikh Fares neighborhood from rebels, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitor said.

Rebels have lost most of the northern neighborhoods in besieged east Aleppo, it added, as the army pushed an offensive to retake the whole of Syria's second city.

"The rebels have lost control of all the neighborhoods in the north of east Aleppo, and this is their worst defeat since they seized half the city in 2012," said Observatory director Rami Abdel Rahman.

What is next for Syria after Aleppo?

The holdout by the rebels in eastern Aleppo has served as a rallying cry for other rebel groups that have looked at their resistance as a sign that the Assad regime was vulnerable on the battlefield, and Aleppo became a new symbol for the Syrian revolution as the biggest rebel stronghold in Syria.

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Rebels tried to break the siege two times, one in July and one in November but their attempts failed and the regime's fierce offensive has cost them more than anyone has expected.

When the latest offensive started analysts feared that Assad regime might split rebel-held Aleppo in two, but today one-half of this region was lost.

Syria's Al-Watan daily, which is close to the government, said the army was advancing quickly.

It said the next stage of the operation would be "to divide the remaining area into security districts that will be easily controlled and to capture them successively".

The advance would then "push the gunmen to turn themselves [in] ... or accept national reconciliation under the terms of the Syrian state".

Capturing eastern Aleppo would be the biggest victory for Assad regime since the start of the revolution against him in 2011, restoring his control over the whole city apart from a Kurdish-held area that has not fought against him.

It would also be seen as a victory for his allies, Russia and Iran, which have outmaneuvered the West and Assad's regional enemies through direct military intervention.

For Assad regime, taking back Aleppo would make its forces focus on ending the remaining rebels-held areas. These areas include the rebels' stronghold in Idlib in addition to isolated areas in rural Damascus, Homs and Hama.

These areas have been under daily bombardment and crippling siege for years. The Old city in Homs and parts of rural Damascus has already been lost to Assad regime, and the remaining areas are expected to follow.

As a conclusion, defeating the rebels and retrieving Aleppo means destroying the last major resistance stronghold of the Syrian rebels and will lead eventually to the victory of Assad regime and ending the Syrian revolution.