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WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 9 - 15 MARCH 2020

WHOLE OF SYRIA SUMMARY

- **NORTHWEST** | Conflict levels in the northwest remained low the week following a Russian/Turkish ceasefire agreement on 5 March. Protesters blocked a joint Russian/Turkish patrol on the M4 Highway. In Operation Euphrates Shield areas, attacks increased against Turkish-backed opposition armed groups. In the southeast corner of Aleppo Governorate, four alleged ISIS attacks occurred, the first in the area in over 2 years.
- **SOUTH & CENTRAL** | Following Government of Syria (GoS) re-enforcements arriving to southern Syria, attacks against GoS personnel in Daraa Governorate decreased. For the second time in the month, an explosive device detonated in Damascus. In Homs Northern Countryside, gunmen opened fire against a GoS military officer.
- **NORTHEAST** | In addition to shelling exchanges between SDF forces and Turkish-backed opposition groups around Operation Peace Spring area, ACLED reported increases in explosive attacks and looting activity. Attacks against Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) personnel and oil infrastructure along the Euphrates River Valley included a suicide attack, only the third in the preceding 12 months. Israeli airstrikes targeted the Abu Kamal area.

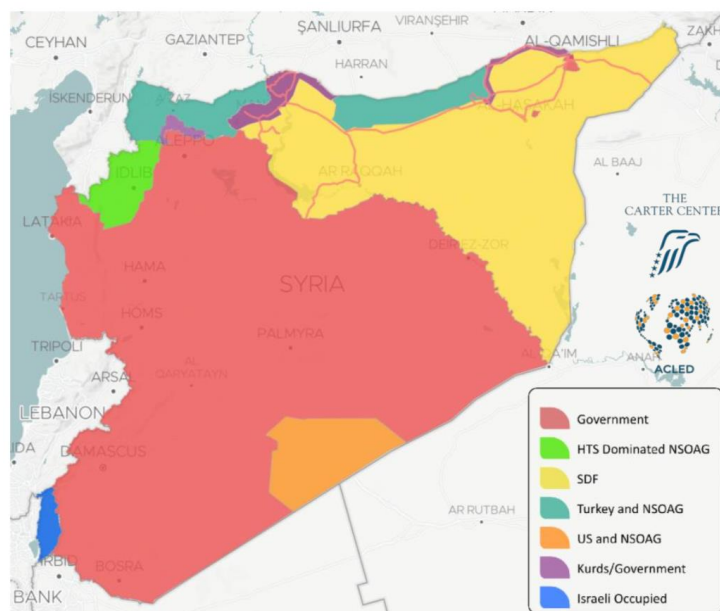


Figure 1: Dominant actors' area of control and influence in Syria as of 15 March 2020. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. Also, please see the footnote on page 2.

NORTHWEST SYRIA

Conflict levels in northwest Syria decreased in the week following the implementation of a Turkish/Russian ceasefire agreement reached on 5 March. ACLED data recorded no GoS/Russian airstrikes in the northwest this week, and just 13 GoS shelling bombardments on eight locations.² Hayyat Tahrir al Sham (HTS)-dominated opposition shelled two GoS locations; Qardaha town in Latakia Governorate and the Russian operated Hmeimim Airbase. This brings the total number of shelling events in the northwest to 24 since 5 March.³

Despite the decrease in conflict levels, GoS forces captured Maraath Mukhus and Al Burayj villages during the week. ACLED data indicates that opposition armed groups did not resist the move. Pro-government media [reported](#) that these areas had been abandoned by the opposition (Figure 2).

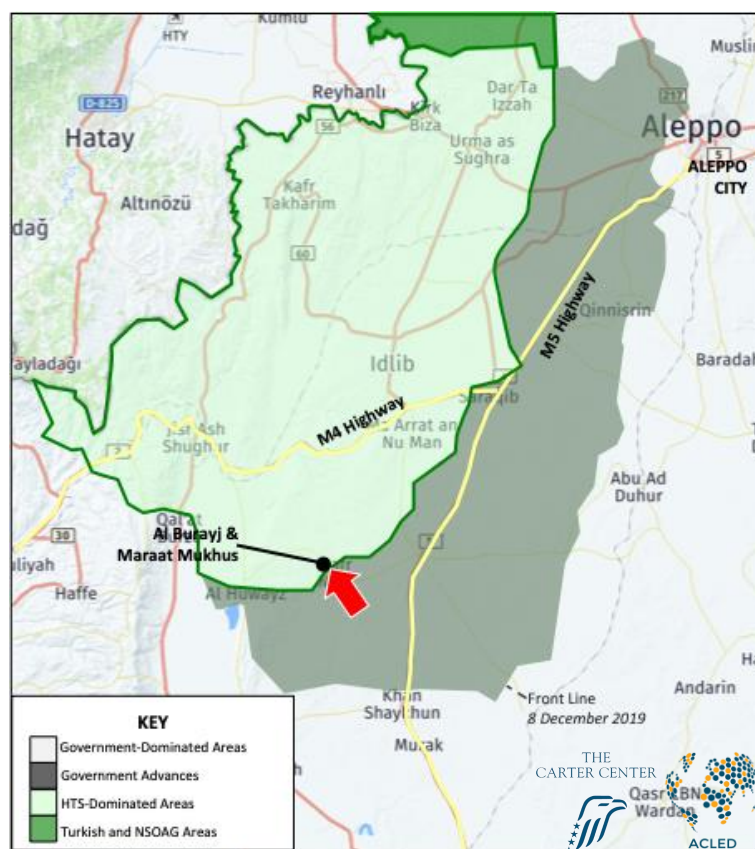


Figure 2: GoS / HTS & Opposition Frontlines in Northwest Syria in 2020. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

¹ Figure 1 denotes dominant actors' control and influence. Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah maintain a presence in Syrian government-controlled territory. Non-state organized armed groups (NSOAG), including the Kurdish dominated SDF and a variety of other groups operate in areas not under Syrian control. The US continues to have a presence in the SDF-controlled east of the country. The area along the borders junction with Iraq and Jordan is a 55km de-confliction zone, established by the US-led coalition that also includes a number of aligned local armed groups. Data collected is by the publicly available project ACLED.

² Kafr Amma, Kafr Taal, Al Sirmaniyah (x4), Saraqab, Deir al Kabira, on Idlib city, Jisr-Ash-Shugur countryside, and Kabani (x3).

³ By contrast, in the 10 days prior to the 5 March, ACLED recorded 183 shelling exchanges between the two sides and 128 airstrikes.

Turkish military re-enforcements continued to arrive in the northwest throughout the week. Four convoys of military vehicles, made up of approximately 250 vehicles according to ACLED data, crossed into Syria at the Kafr Lusin border. This is in addition to the 150 vehicles that crossed the previous week.

On 13 and 14 March, civilians gathered on the M4 Highway near Jisr Ariha in Idleb Governorate and established an encampment, burning tires and digging large trenches across the road in an attempt to block a planned Russian/Turkish military patrol along the highway scheduled for the following day. The patrol was carried out, but ended just before Jisr Ariha due to the protest camp.

In the Turkish-backed Euphrates Shield areas of northern Aleppo Governorate, there was an increase in attacks against Turkish-backed local opposition armed groups. Improvised explosive devices (IEDs) detonated against groups in al-Ra'ee, on the Raju Road near Afrin, in Dabiq, in Al Bab, and in Azaz. In Azaz, an armed group also opened fire against a Northern Storm Brigade convoy.

On 10 March, an alleged ISIS-affiliated armed group raided Abu Mayal and Mikhliif villages in the southwest corner of Aleppo Governorate. The group shot dead civilians in the village and abducted others. GoS forces later clashed with a suspected ISIS-affiliated armed group in Hazm al Sar and Al Ja'ar villages. It is unclear if it was the same or a different group. If it is confirmed that ISIS were involved in the attacks, this would be the first record of the group operating in this area of Aleppo Governorate since December 2017.

SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

Attacks against GoS-aligned personnel decreased in southern Syria this week, following increases in the previous two weeks. ACLED recorded three incidents targeting alleged 4th Division and Air force Intelligence collaborators in Nasib and individuals in Um Elmayatheen and al Thaala towns.

GoS re-enforcements arrived to Daraa Governorate throughout the week in areas between Tafas and Mzeireb and Jasim and Izra. GoS also established a new security position in a residential block in Tafas town on 11 March. These re-enforcements follow the arrival of re-enforcements the previous week after unrest in As Sanamayn town. Long-term trends show that violence in southern Syria is not affected by such activity (Figure 3).

In Eastern Ghouta, GoS conducted multiple arrest operations against civilians living in the former opposition enclave. Tens of people were arrested in Duma, Ein Terma, Zamalka, Jisreen, Hezzeh, and Arbin towns, including 9 former health workers who had worked when Eastern Ghouta was controlled by Jaish al Islam and Faylaq al Rahman. This area regularly experiences GoS arrest operations as previously reported [here](#).

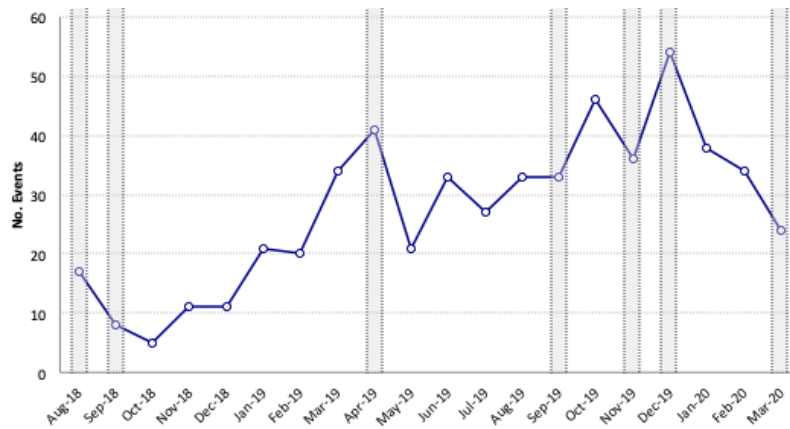


Figure 3: Conflict levels in southern Syria (As-Sweida, Daraa & Quneitra Governorates) with months that saw GoS Re-enforcement arrivals (Grey) Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

For the second time this month, a roadside improvised explosive device (IED) detonated in Damascus City. On 13 March, a device detonated in the al Dahalil area of the capital against a GoS military officer. This brings the total number of explosions in the capital in 2020 to seven, six of which have occurred in the previous month.

In Homs Governorate, an armed group opened fire on a GoS military official driving between Kafr Laha and Maryamin on 12 March. The area was under opposition group control until 2018. In the previous six weeks, there have been a growing number of attacks against GoS aligned personnel in Homs Northern Countryside.⁴

NORTHEAST SYRIA

Shelling exchanges between Turkish-backed opposition groups and the predominantly Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)/GoS continued around Turkish occupied Operation Peace Spring areas. Activity was focused in Dibis (x2 events) and Tal Abiad (x2), but also impacted seven other areas.⁵

Inside the Operation Peace Spring area, attacks against Turkish-backed opposition groups also continued. Explosive devices detonated against groups in the vicinity of Ras al Ein town in Al Nasriyah, Dwerah, and Tal Halaf villages. Since the Turkish Operation Peace Spring began in October 2019, explosive activity against Turkish and aligned opposition forces has focused on Ras al Ein and its environs, Tal Abiad, Suluk, and Hammam al Turkman (Figure 4).

Turkish backed opposition groups inside Operation Peace Spring areas also continued their looting activity. In al Bab al Kheir and Jan Tamr, unidentified group looted commercial and residential properties and stole agricultural and water equipment. Such activity is regularly reported from within the Turkish occupied enclave.

⁴ ACLED recorded three attacks since 8 February, compared to the same number in the previous three months (all occurring in early or mid November 2019).

⁵ Um al Khair, Tawileh, Um al Kayf, Abdi Koy, Kobarlik, Qazali, and Al Hurriyeh.

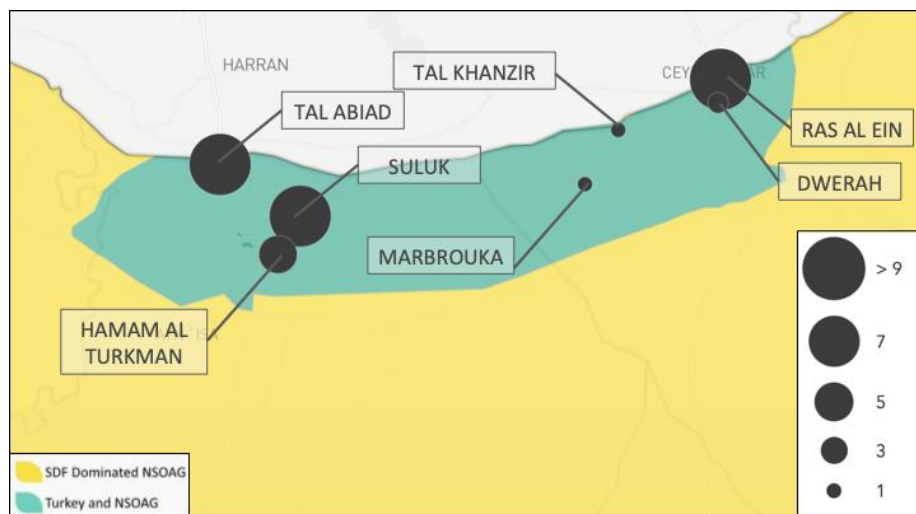


Figure 4: Explosive attacks in Turkish occupied Operation Peace Spring Areas since October 2019. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

SDF militias along the Euphrates River Valley continued to be targeted by small arms fire and IED attacks. ACLED recorded attacks in Darnaj (x2), Takihi, and in Al Shafa, where a suicide bomber detonated his device against a SDF convoy. It is only the third ISIS suicide attack in Deir Ez Zor Governorate since SDF forces captured the group's last pocket in March 2019.⁶

Attacks also continued against oil infrastructure in the northeast this week. Gunmen opened fire on an oil station in al Suwaydiyah in the countryside of al Malikeyyah, and an IED detonated against a Qatirji Oil Company truck on the Minkhar road near Karama.

On 12 and 13 March, suspected Israeli airstrikes impacted the Abu Kamal area. Strikes impacted Iranian locations near Al Mayadin, Al Hassian, and the Imam Ali Airbase. The attacks came a day after unidentified aircraft conducted 10 airstrikes in the vicinity of Abu Kamal. Since December 2019 airstrikes targeting Iranian sites in Deir Ez Zor Governorate have increased (Figure 5).

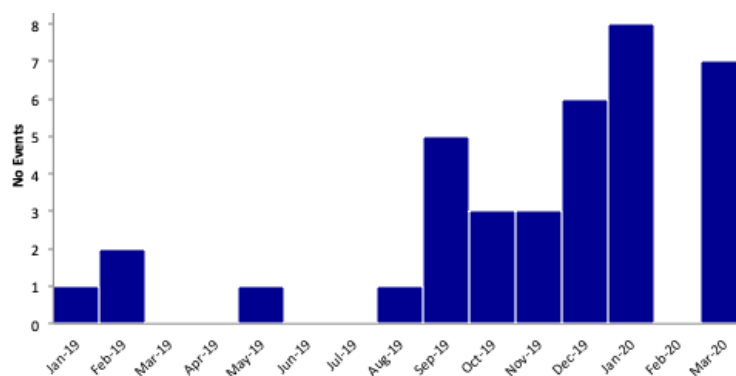


Figure 4: Suspected Israeli airstrikes in Deir Ez Zor Governorate since Jan 2019. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

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⁶ After attacks in Hawayij on 14 October 2019 and in Tayyana on 12 July 2019.