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WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 15 June - 21 June 2020

SYRIA SUMMARY

- **NORTHWEST** | There were increased attacks against Turkish-backed opposition groups in the region. Turkish and Russian armed forces continued to patrol the M4 highway in Idlib Governorate. Hayyat Tahrir al-Sham arrested a commander of a rival armed opposition group in Idlib Governorate. Civilians continued to face violence in the region.
- **SOUTH & CENTRAL** | Protests continued across southern Syria. An improvised explosive device (IED) killed Russian-backed 5th Corps fighters in Dara'a Governorate. Civilians continued to face targeted violence in Dara'a Governorate.
- **NORTHEAST** | ISIS attacks in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate continued. Clashes erupted between Iranian-backed groups and Government of Syria armed forces in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. Turkish-backed armed opposition groups continued to engage in property destruction and looting in Al-Hassakah Governorate. Artillery bombardments in the region increased from the previous week.

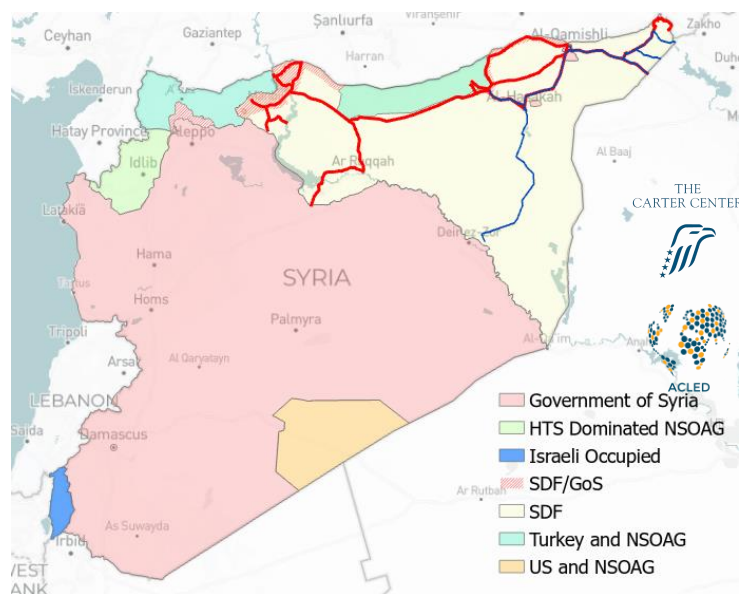


Figure 1: Dominant actors' area of control and influence in Syria as of 21 June 2020. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. Also, please see the footnote on page 2.

NORTHWEST SYRIA¹

There were increased attacks against Turkish-backed armed opposition groups in the region during the reporting period. On 15 June, unidentified gunmen assassinated the commander of the Turkish-backed Saqour al-Sham opposition group in Benin, Idlib Governorate.² The same day, Hayyat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) arrested a fighter of the Turkish-backed opposition's National Liberation Front (NLF) at a checkpoint in Salqin, Idlib Governorate. The reason for the arrest was not revealed. On 16 June, an IED placed by an unidentified group exploded near a bus carrying the Turkish-backed opposition National Police Forces near Shamarin in A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate. Kurdish armed groups conducted three attacks on Turkish-backed opposition groups. On 19 June, Afrin Liberation Front fighters³ killed 8 fighters from the Turkish-backed opposition Levant Front in Afrin city, Aleppo Governorate.⁴ Turkish armed forces blamed the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) for the attacks.⁵ On 20 June, the Kurdish Wrath of Olives Operations Room, an anti-Turkish armed group, claimed responsibility for killing 3 Sultan Murad fighters near Al-Bab city in eastern Aleppo Governorate.⁶ ISIS was initially suspected for carrying out the attack.⁷ The Afrin Liberation Front and Wrath of Olives claim to be independent Kurdish armed groups, though others allege that they are front groups for the YPG.⁸ On 20 June, an unidentified gunman killed a fighter with the Turkish-backed opposition Free Idlib Army in Idlib city.

On 18 June, HTS arrested one of the commanders of the Ansar al-Din armed opposition group, as well as two of the commander's associates. The commander was a former HTS leader who had defected to Ansar al-Din.⁹ HTS did not reveal where or why they had arrested the commander. The commander was from Kyrgyzstan and was wanted by Interpol. Ansar al-Din condemned the arrest.¹⁰ Following this, a group of foreign armed opposition fighters issued a statement in support of HTS and its rule over Idlib Governorate.¹¹ Tensions between HTS and rival armed opposition groups have increased, as the latter have criticized HTS's rule and formed a new opposition coalition in Idlib Governorate.

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 GoS control. The US continues to have a presence in the SDF-controlled east of the country. The area along the junction of the Syrian border 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 <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/393569>

³ <https://www.hawarnews.com/en/haber/hre-number-of-mercenaries-killed-in-afrin-countryside-h17284.html>

⁴ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/394572>

⁵ <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/8-sna-soldiers-martyred-in-ypg-pkk-attack-in-n-syria/1883184>

⁶ <https://nedaa-sy.com/news/20965>

⁷ <https://tinyurl.com/ybzq98ae>

⁸ <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/03/afrin-human-rights-turkey-fsa-war-crimes.html>

⁹ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/394308>

¹⁰ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/394445>

¹¹ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/394397>

Turkish and Russian armed forces continued to patrol the M4 highway in Idlib Governorate. On 16 June, an unknown group attacked the 17th Turkish-Russian joint patrol with an improvised explosive device (IED) in Idlib Governorate. The IED detonated near the outskirts of Jisr al-Shughour in eastern Idlib Governorate.¹² A Russian military vehicle sustained minor damage.¹³ On 18 June, Turkish armed forces conducted a patrol along the M4 highway, between Turnabah and Kafir to the southwest of Jisr al-Shughour in western Idlib Governorate.¹⁴ The Turkish-Russian joint patrols were mandated by the 5 March ceasefire agreement and are required to reach Ayn Al Hawr village in opposition-controlled territory (see figure 2).

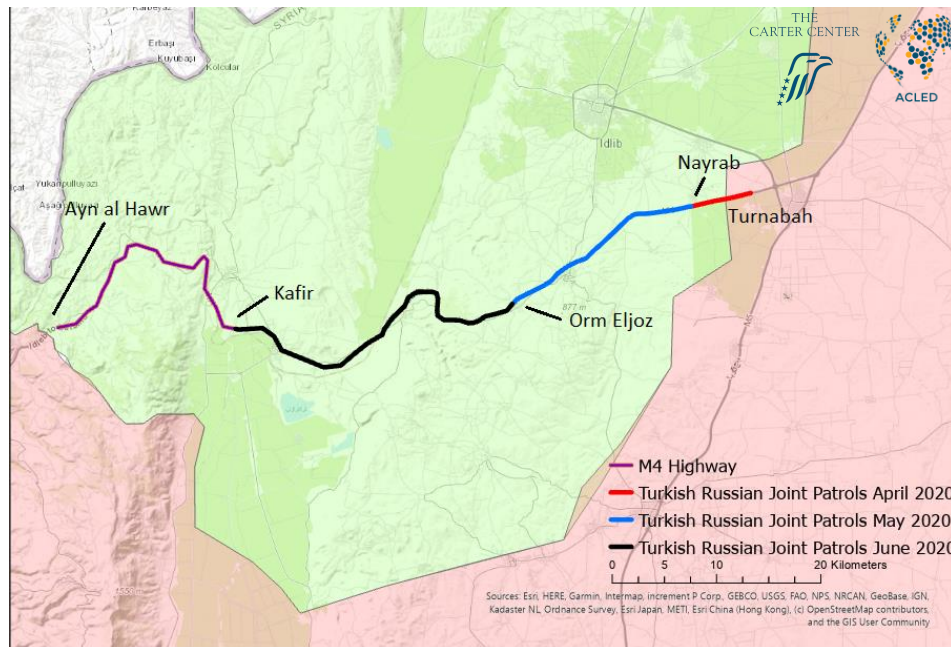


Figure 2: Turkish-Russian Joint Patrol on the M4 Highway in Idlib Governorate. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

Civilians continued to face violence in the region. On 15 June, an unidentified armed group's IED killed 1 civilian in Al-Bab city in northern Aleppo Governorate. Between 17 and 18 June, Government of Syria (GoS) armed forces snipers killed 3 civilians working on their agricultural fields near Maaret al Nasaan in eastern Idlib Governorate. On 17 June, Turkish Gendarmerie killed a child and injured another child and a woman as they attempted to cross into Turkey by the Bab al Hawa border crossing in Idlib Governorate. On 18 June, a landmine planted by an unidentified group exploded in Sabura village in Hama Governorate, severely injuring a civilian. On 20 June, a vehicle borne IED detonated in Afrin city, injuring six civilians, four of whom children.¹⁵

SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

¹² <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/russian-military-comes-under-attack-in-idlib/>

¹³ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/394187>

¹⁴ <https://nedaa-sy.com/news/20922>

¹⁵ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/394976>

Protests continued across southern Syria during the reporting period. On 15 June, two demonstrations were held in As-Sweida city, As-Sweida Governorate. Protests called for the overthrow of President Bashar Assad and the release of political prisoners. At the same time, Ba'ath party members held a demonstration in support of President Assad. Both demonstrations converged, leading to a clash between the two sides. On 16 and 17 June, protests against the deteriorating economic conditions were reported in Saqba and Hamouriyeh in Rural Damascus Governorate.¹⁶ The demonstrations were dispersed by the GoS Military Security Branch.¹⁷ On 17 June, protesters called for the overthrow of GoS in Tafas, Dara'a Governorate. Similar protests occurred the next day in Karak, Dara'a Governorate, with protesters also demanding the release of detainees and the withdrawal of Iranian-backed groups.¹⁸ On 19 June, protesters called for the toppling of GoS, the release of detainees, and the withdrawal of Iranian-backed groups and Lebanese Hezbollah in Dara'a city and Jizeh in Dara'a Governorate. On 20 June, civilians in Busra Esh-Sham in Dara'a Governorate demonstrated against GoS and the presence of Iranian-backed militias. On 20 June, reports emerged that community elders in As-Sweida city were negotiating with local Ba'ath party leaders regarding the release of detainees.¹⁹ Protests have been ongoing since 7 June 2020 when demonstrations erupted in As-Sweida Governorate due to deteriorating economic conditions, with calls for the overthrow of President Bashar Assad.

On 20 June, a bus carrying soldiers with the Russian-backed 5th Corps hit an IED near Kahil in eastern Dara'a Governorate. The explosion killed at least nine 5th Corps soldiers.²⁰ The perpetrators of the attack remain unknown. On 21 June, a funeral was held for the slain 5th Corps fighters in Busra Esh-Sham, Dara'a Governorate. The funeral transformed into an anti-GoS protest as participants called for the removal of Iranian-backed militias and the overthrow of GoS.²¹ This attack comes at a time when the 5th Corps has expanded its presence across southern Syria.²²

Civilians continued to face targeted violence across Dara'a Governorate. On 16 June, a landmine planted by an unidentified armed group exploded near a civilian vehicle in Western Ghariyeh town in the countryside of Dara'a Governorate, killing the driver. The next day, an unexploded cluster munition bomb exploded, seriously injuring a child in Maaraba in southwestern Dara'a Governorate. On 19 June, unidentified gunmen attempted to assassinate an anti-GoS activist in Um Walad, but failed and the activist escaped unharmed. The same day, unidentified gunmen killed three civilians after storming their home in Ankhel in northern Dara'a Governorate. On 19 June, an additional three civilians were wounded by gunfire in Tafas in western Dara'a Governorate. Violence against civilians in Dara'a Governorate has increased in 2020, with 266 incidents where civilians were

¹⁶ <https://nedaa-sy.com/news/20928>

¹⁷ <https://damascusv.com/archives/25695>

¹⁸ Pro-Iranian or Iranian-backed militias refers to armed groups that are supported by Iran, like Hezbollah, and include militias from Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan, or Pakistan.

¹⁹ <https://nedaa-sy.com/news/20946>

²⁰ <https://tinyurl.com/y9sm556l>

²¹ <https://www.aljarida.com/articles/1592755983368469400/>

²² <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/394923>

targeted or harmed (see figure 3). By comparison, only 145 such incidents were reported during the same time period between 1 January 2019 to 20 June 2019.

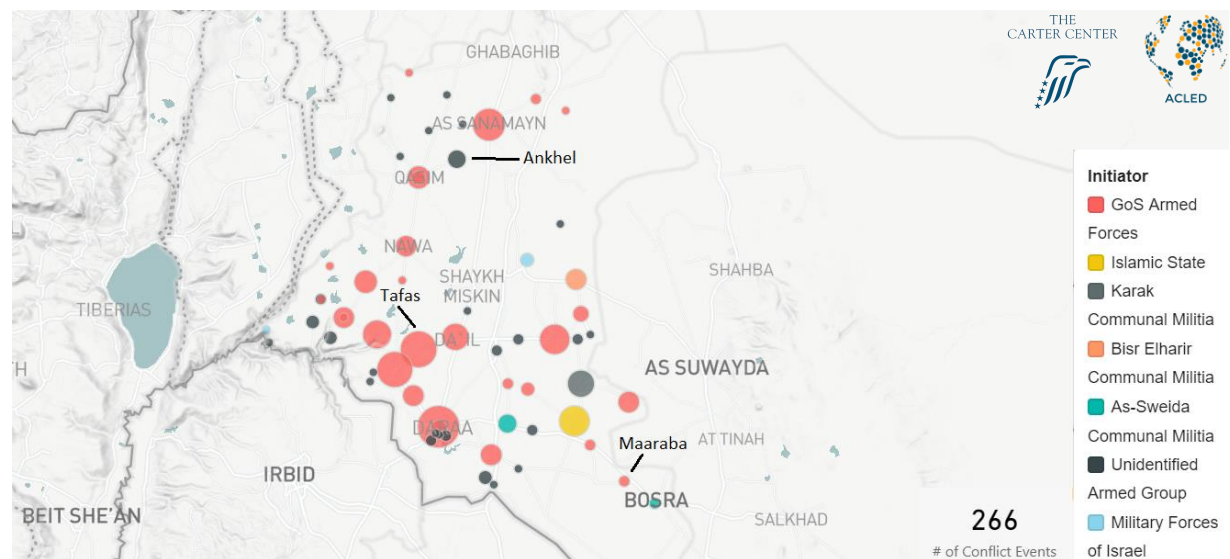


Figure 3: Violence against civilians in Dara'a Governorate between 1 January 2020 to 20 June 2020. Largest conflict bubble represents 35 conflict events. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

NORTHEAST SYRIA

ISIS attacks in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate continued during the reporting period. On 15 June, alleged ISIS fighters stormed a municipality building associated with the predominantly Kurdish-Autonomous Administration in Tayyana town in eastern Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. During the raid, the alleged ISIS fighters killed the town's mayor.²³ The same day, the SDF internal security forces, the Asayish, arrested 3 ISIS members near Ein Issa in Ar-Raqqa Governorate. The ISIS members reportedly tried to flee SDF-controlled territory. On 15 June, an ISIS landmine detonated, injuring 3 children in Sosa town, eastern Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. On 16 June, an ISIS gunman killed a SDF fighter in Al Jamah town in the countryside of Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. On 20 June, 2 suspected ISIS fighters killed a former SDF fighter in Al-Jurdi al-Gharbi, Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. On 21 June, ISIS attacked GoS armed forces near west Al-Mayadeen in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate,²⁴ killing 13 GoS soldiers.²⁵ ISIS activities have increased in recent months, concentrated near the Badia desert region in Homs, Ar-Raqqa, and Deir-ez-Zor Governorates.

On 19 June, tensions escalated into clashes as Iranian-backed militias fought with GoS armed forces in Al-Mayadeen and Al-Bukamal in eastern Deir-ez-Zor Governorate.²⁶ Tensions emerged after GoS armed forces arrested a medical doctor affiliated with the Iranian-backed militias and refused to release him.²⁷

²³ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/393524>

²⁴ <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/isis-launches-new-attack-against-syrian-army-in-deir-ezzor/>

²⁵ <https://tinyurl.com/ycot2u2t>

²⁶ <https://en.deirezzor24.net/a-dispute-between-the-iranian-proxy-militias-and-assads-forces-east-of-deir-ezzor-leads-to-a-state-of-alert-on-both-sides/>

²⁷ <https://tinyurl.com/ybce5p2r>

Turkish-backed armed opposition groups continued to engage in property destruction and looting within Turkish-held Operation Peace Spring (OPS) territory and near the frontlines of SDF and GoS controlled territory in Al-Hassakah Governorate (see figure 4). On 15 June, Turkish-backed opposition groups in Turkish-held OPS areas seized crops from farmers in rural Ras Al Ain who allegedly lacked official proof of ownership. The same day, Turkish-backed armed opposition groups burned crops, agricultural lands, and civilian property in the villages of Arshet Ras El Ein, Tawileh, Jahfa, Dardara, and Tall Tawil in the Ras al-Ain and Tal Tamer districts. On 15 June, residents of the Bab al-Khair, Jan Tamr, and Umm Ashba in Ras al-Ain district protested the looting and crop burning by Turkish-backed armed opposition groups. Turkish-backed opposition groups allegedly used live fire to disperse the protests. On 19 June, Turkish-backed armed opposition groups looted civilian houses and crops in Nadas and Atiya village in Ras al-Ain district in Al-Hassakah Governorate.

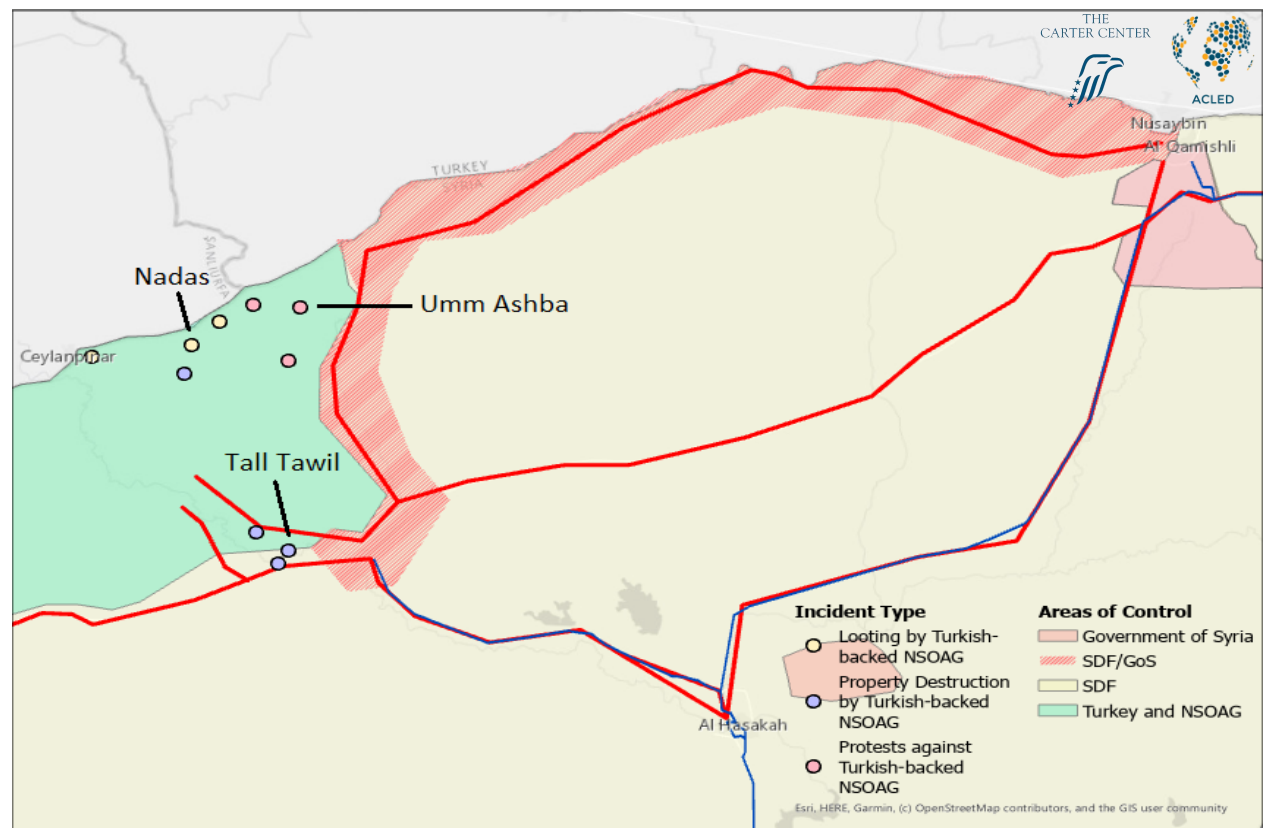


Figure 4: Property destruction, looting, and protests involving Turkish-backed armed opposition groups in Al-Hassakah Governorate between 15 June to 20 June 2020. The blue and red lines represent the path of American and Russian convoys respectively. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

Artillery bombardments increased from the previous week. On 16 June, Turkish armed forces and Turkish-backed armed opposition groups shelled Khirbat Al-Baqr and Arida Abu Jarada in Ar-Raqqa Governorate. The next day, the Turkish-backed opposition Syrian National Army shelled SDF positions in Kizali village in the countryside of Ar-Raqqa Governorate. On 19 June, Turkish armed forces and Turkish-backed armed opposition groups shelled SDF and GoS armed forces in Ein Issa, Al-Qarajna, and Abu Rasin in Ar-Raqqa and Al-Hassakah Governorates. On 20

June, GoS armed forces and Turkish-backed armed opposition groups shelled each other in Ras al-Ain in Al-Hassakah Governorate. The same day, the SDF and Turkish armed forces exchanged artillery bombardments in Ein Issa in Ar-Raqqa Governorate. This was the highest number of artillery bombardments in the region for June.

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