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WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 23 - 29 MARCH 2020

SYRIA SUMMARY

- **NORTHWEST** | Conflict activity increased between the Government of Syria and the Hayyat Tahrir al Sham (HTS) dominated opposition in the northwest this week. Turkish military re-enforcements arrived in Idleb, conducting additional patrols along the M4 highway. Inside Turkish backed Operation Euphrates Shield areas, clashes between opposition armed groups increased.
- **SOUTH & CENTRAL** | Attacks against Government of Syria (GoS)-aligned personnel continued in Daraa Governorate, also spreading to Rural Damascus Governorate. Clashes between armed groups in As-Sweida resulted in a high number of casualties.
- **NORTHEAST** | Shelling exchanges around Turkish-backed Operation Peace Spring areas continued, with opposition armed groups fighting each other. Also, attacks against Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) personnel in northeast Syria continued, affecting civilians. SDF implemented a curfew in northeast Syria in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

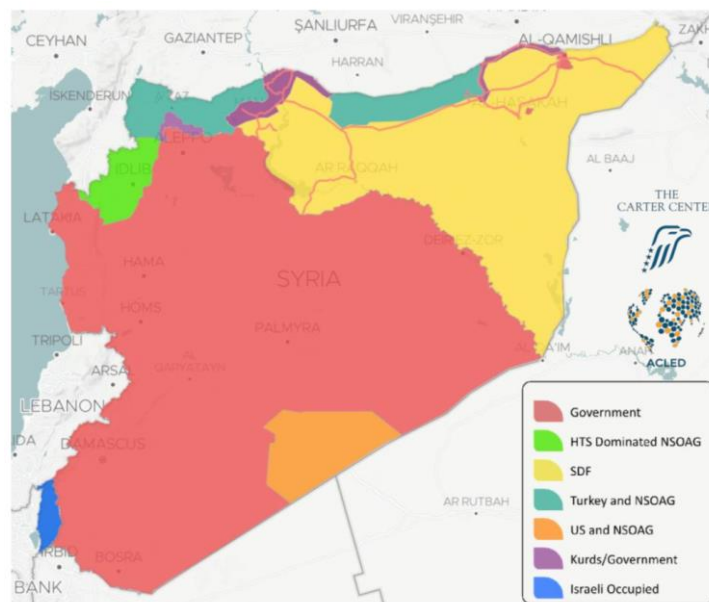


Figure 1: Dominant actors' area of control and influence in Syria as of 29 March 2020. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. Also, please see the footnote on page 2.

NORTHWEST SYRIA

Conflict activity increased this week after two weeks of reduced fighting since the implementation of 5 March Turkish/Russian ceasefire. The Government of Syria (GoS) shelled 21 locations 33 times² during the week according to ACLED. This included one event where a Turkish observation post in Najiyyeh village came under shelling. Opposition groups shelled GoS held Saraqeb and Kafr Nobel three times this week. There were only nine shelling exchanges between the sides during the previous reporting week.

Turkey sent re-enforcements into northwest Syria this week. A total of 340 vehicles entered Syria at the Kafr Lussin border in convoys on 23, 26, and 27 March. These re-enforcements are in addition to 310 vehicles that arrived during the previous reporting week. Turkey also established additional observation posts in Kafir, Ghassaniyeh, Zeiniyeh, Badma, and Najiyyeh throughout the week. Since the 5 March ceasefire, Turkey has established 11 new military observation posts in northwest Syria.

Turkey also conducted further military patrols along the M4 highway in the countryside of Ariha. On 24, 25, 27, and 28 March, Turkish military convoys travelled between Saraqeb and Mseibin. Turkey and Russia also conducted their second joint patrol on the highway between Saraqeb and Turnabah on 23 March, but could not continue further due to ongoing civilian protests on the highway.

In the Turkish-backed Euphrates Shield areas of Northern Aleppo, there was an increase of violence among opposition armed groups. In Afrin, the Levant Front and the 51st Brigade (both Turkish-backed armed opposition groups) clashed in the town. In al Bab, Ahrar al Sharqiya and the opposition's National Police forces fought after the latter attempted to close shops in the town in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Ahrar al Sharqiya also detained National Police officers at a checkpoint near Ghandorah. A vehicle-bound IED detonated outside the opposition's Jaish al Thani command center in Jandaris. The number of clashes between opposition armed groups in Turkish-backed areas of Aleppo Governorate in March has been the highest monthly total since November 2019 (Figure 2).

In the Tal Refaat area, there was a decrease in shelling exchanges between the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) and Turkish armed forces, as well as Turkish-backed opposition armed groups, this week. ACLED recorded just seven events,³ a decrease compared to the previous reporting week's 21 shelling

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 Syria's border 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 GoS Shelled Afes, Balyun, Banin, Bara (x3), Deir Sunbul, Ehsem, Ftireh, Jebal al Zawiyah (x2), Kafr Amma (x3), Kafr Battikh, Kafr Oweid (x3), Kafr Taal, Kansafra (x4), Najiyyeh, Saraqeb, Sirmaniyah, Sfuhen (x4), Tuffahiyeh, Zayzun and Ziyara

³ In Irshadiyah, Shawarighat al Arz, Tal Rifaat, Afrin, Menagh, Maraanaz, al Malikeyyyeh.

exchanges.

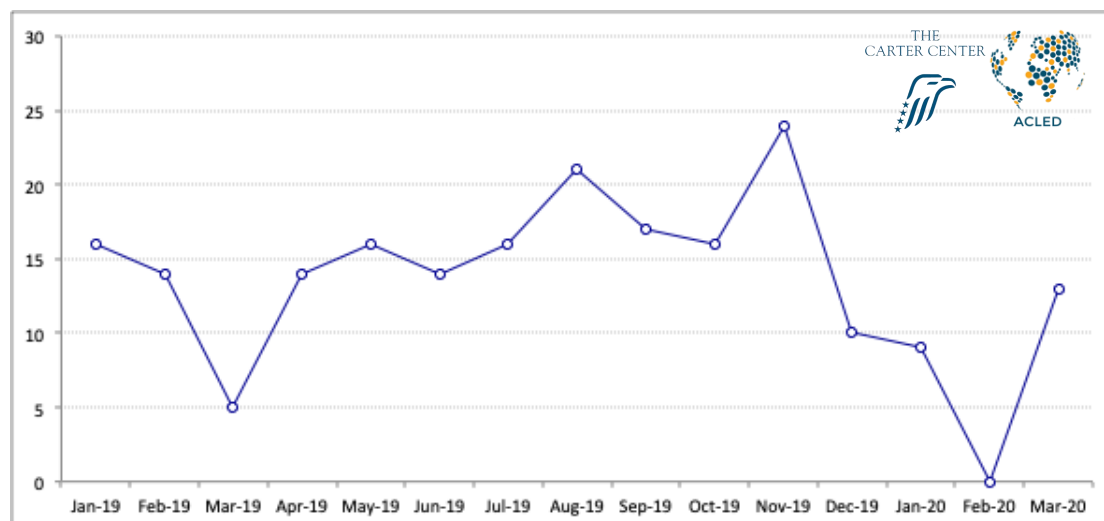


Figure 2 – Clashes or IED attacks in Turkish backed Operation Euphrates Shield and Olive Branch Areas 2019 – 2020. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

In As Sweida Governorate, clashes between pro-government militias erupted near Qarayya town on 26 and 27 March. The events began when an armed group kidnapped two men from the pro-government Bosra al-Sham's communal militia. The next day, as the Bosra al-Sham communal militia were attempting to kidnap individuals from Qarayaa in response, armed clashes erupted between the Bosra al-Sham communal militia, people from Qarayya, and two local pro-government militias.⁴ According to ACLED data, 15 people were killed. On March 28, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) mediated between the sides for the exchange of remains. Community clashes are common in the governorate, with 46 incidents recorded by ACLED in the previous 12 months (Figure 3). However, the high number of casualties and the involvement of SARC make this event notable.

In Rural Damascus Governorate, unidentified armed groups conducted attacks on GoS personnel and positions. On March 25, gunmen attacked a checkpoint manned by the Republican Guard near Zamalka. A day later, an IED detonated against a GoS National Defense Forces commander in Wadi Barida. In Zakiyeh, unidentified individuals injured a GoS soldier in a grenade attack. In 2020, ACLED has recorded 19 attacks against GoS personnel in Rural Damascus.

Attacks against GoS-aligned personnel continued in Daraa Governorate. An assassination attempt was made against the Mayor of Ankhel, a former opposition leader was killed between Daraa and Nasib, and a GoS member was killed in Daraa al Balad.

⁴ As-Sweida Communal Militia and the Jabal Al Arab Clan militia, two pro-government groups based around As-Swedida City.

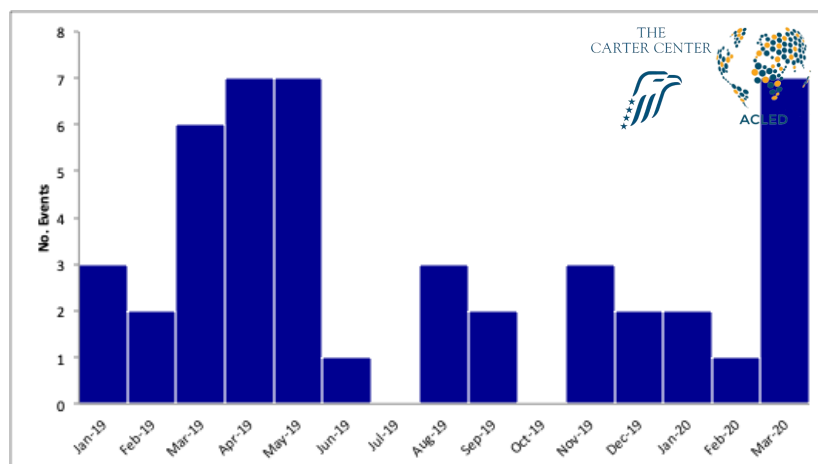


Figure 3: Inter-communal violence in As Sweida Governorate 2019 – 2020. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

NORTHEAST SYRIA

The number levels of shelling exchanges between Turkish-backed groups, the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), and GoS armed forces around the Turkish-backed Operation Peace Spring area remained steady this week, with 13 exchanges in nine areas⁵ compared to 16 exchanges during the previous reporting week.

Inside the Operation Peace Spring enclave, there were two cases of internal armed clashes between Turkish-backed opposition groups. In Hammam al Turkmen, Ahrar al Sharqiah and another unidentified armed group clashed in the town after a personal dispute escalated. In Sukaryu, armed gunmen opened fire on the Turkish-backed group Faylaq al Majd as they began looting the town. Both cases come a week after Turkish-backed opposition groups protested in Ras al Ain and Tal Abiad over the lack of stipend payment by Turkey.

In addition to continued attacks against SDF personnel in the Euphrates and Khabour River Valleys,⁶ conflict also targeted civilians in the northeast. In Shieheil, Kishkiyah, Sweidan Jazira, and Hassakeh city, gunmen opened fire on civilians this week.

Russian military convoy movements also continued this week. On 23 and 26 March, Russian and Turkish military personnel conducted joint patrols in the eastern countryside of Ain al Arab and on the Hassakah–Darbasiyah highway respectively. The Russian military also conducted a patrol in Qamishli city.

On 23 March, authorities in SDF-dominated areas of northeast Syria implemented a 2-week curfew in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Shops and restaurants were closed in Darbasiyah, Malimiyyeh, Hassakeh, Qamishli, and Manbej.

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⁵ ACLED data recorded exchanges in; Um al Kayf (x2), Arashet Ras al Ein, Aniq al Hawa, Debs, Saida (x2), Qazali (x2), Ein Issa Countryside (x2), Kor Hassan and Hoshan.

⁶ ACLED data recorded attacks in Shadadah, Harir, Sarjiya and Dhiban.