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WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 20 - 26 JANUARY 2020

WHOLE OF SYRIA SUMMARY

- **NORTHWEST** | Government of Syria (GoS) forces advanced in areas east of Maraat al Numaan, reaching a portion of the M5 highway. GoS aerial and ground bombardments continued at elevated levels. HTS and other armed opposition groups attacks on GoS controlled areas also increased this week, despite the 12 January ceasefire.
- **SOUTH & CENTRAL** | Attacks against GoS-aligned personnel and locations continued in Daraa Governorate. There were further civilian demonstrations against GoS detentions in southern Syria and the rising cost of living. ISIS harassment of GoS forces in central Syria continued.
- **NORTHEAST** | The U.S. and Russian militaries conducted patrols in the northeast, including one where a U.S. military vehicle blocked the path of a Russian patrol in Tal Tamr. Attacks against SDF and aligned personnel continued along the Euphrates and Khabour River Valleys. For the second time in January, an armed attack targeted individuals connected with the oil infrastructure of the northeast.

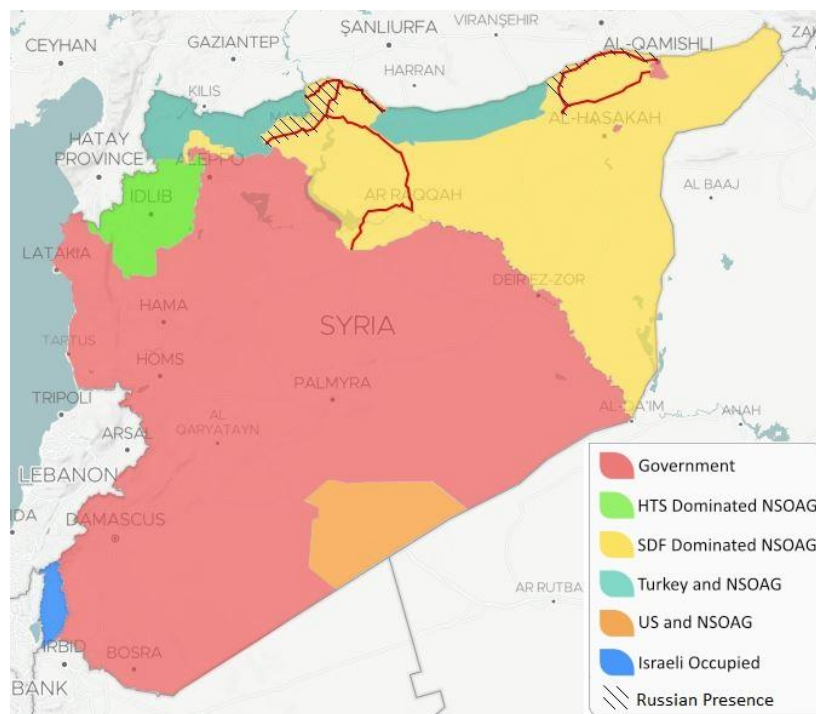


Figure 1: Dominant actors' area of control and influence in Syria as of 26 January 2020. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. Also, please see the footnote on page 2.

NORTHWEST SYRIA

GoS forces made further gains in HTS/opposition areas following the previous week's advances. By the end of the reporting period, GoS re-captured areas that HTS had captured the previous week, including Abu Jurayf, Tall Khatra, and Tall Mustayfi. GoS forces also captured HTS/opposition controlled areas east of Mara'at al Numaan town, including; Deir Gharbi, Deir Sharqi, Ma'aratah, Maar Shamarin, Maar Shamsheh, Maar Shorin, Tel Kersyan, and Telemnas.

The capture of these areas, especially Maar Shorin, has given GoS forces access to the M5 Highway north of Mara'at al Numaan, effectively isolating the town from the north (Figure 2). Pro-opposition media also [reported](#) the participation of Iranian-backed militias in the latest round of fighting in southern Idlib.

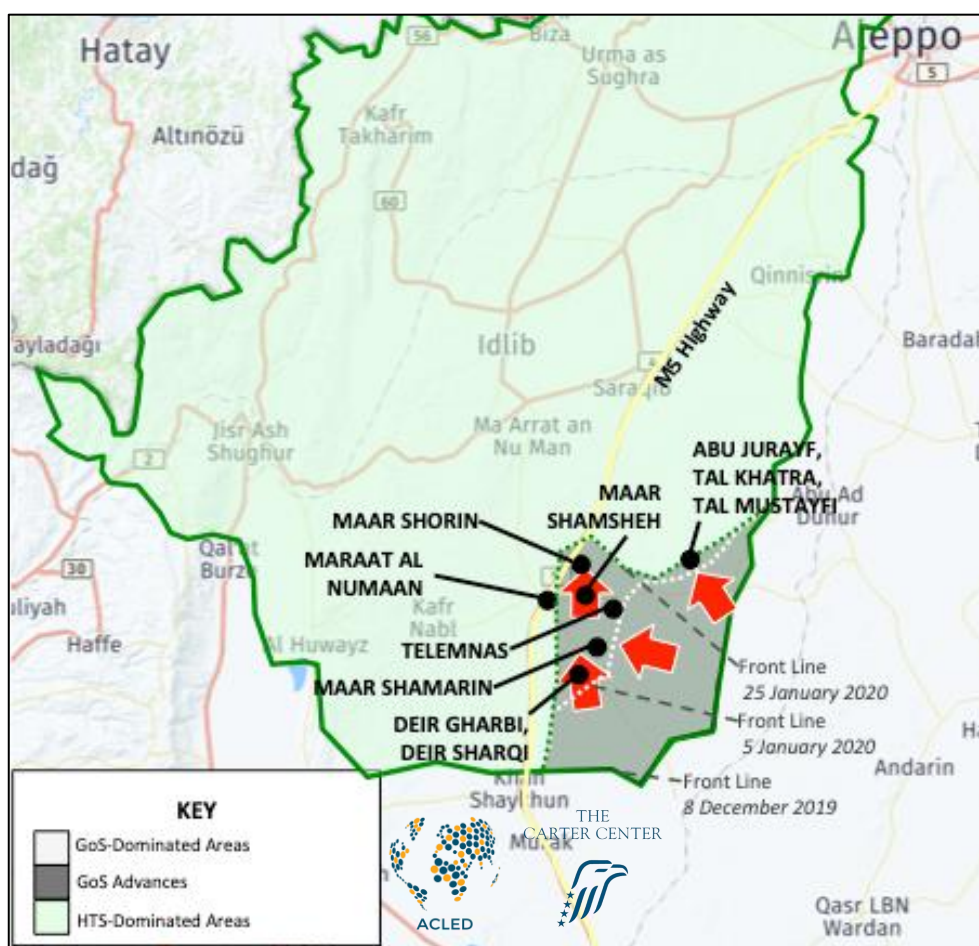


Figure 2: GoS Advances in Northwest Syria in 2020. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

Russia and GoS aerial and ground bombardments continued at elevated levels,

¹ Figure 1 denotes dominant actors' control and influence. Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah maintain 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 government control. The US continues to have a presence in the SDF-controlled east of country. The area along the 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.

with 174 GoS/Russian airstrikes recorded by ACLED the current week. This is the highest weekly count of airstrikes since the week of 21 - 27 July 2019 (Figure 3).

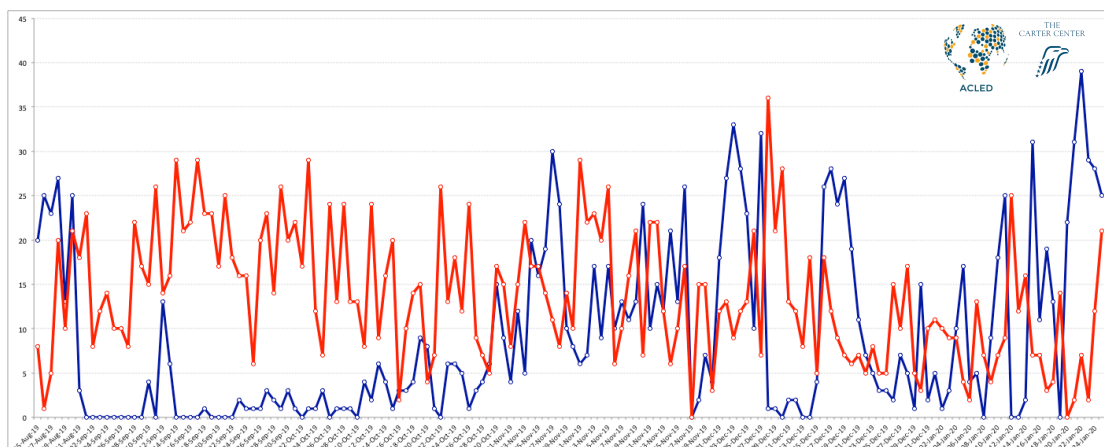


Figure 3: GoS Aerial (blue) and ground (red) bombardments in the northwest since August 2019. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

HTS and other opposition group attacks on GoS controlled areas also rose in conjunction with GoS advances. This week, ACLED data recorded more than 46 shelling and armed attacks, the highest number since the week of 22 – 28 December (Figure 4). Pro-opposition media also [reported](#) HTS *Inghimasis* (Special Forces) attacked behind GoS frontlines in the Barsah area of Idleb and [detonated](#) a suicide car bomb against a GoS position in the Zahraa area of western Aleppo City.

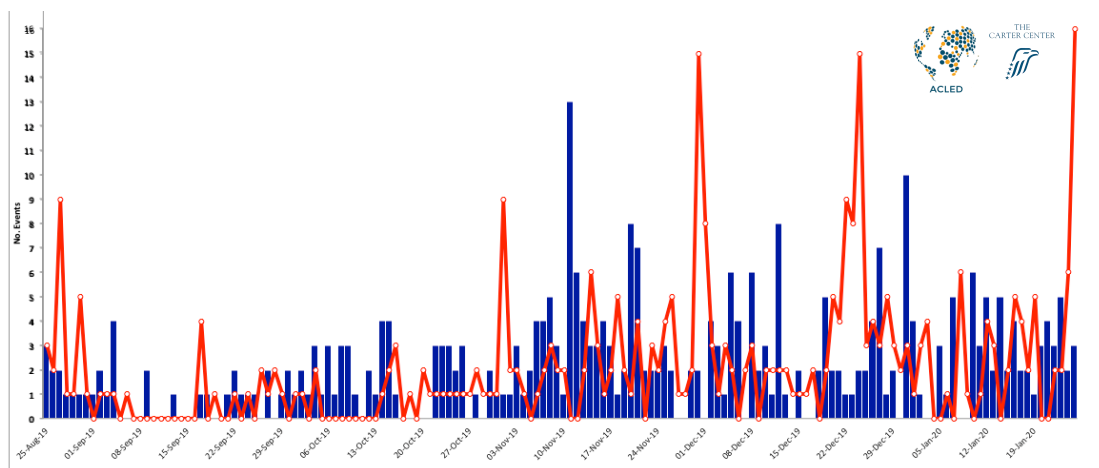


Figure 4: HTS and other opposition group shelling (blue) and ground clashes (red) in the northwest since August 2019. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

Attacks against GoS-aligned personnel continued in southern Syria. In Koya, unidentified gunmen opened fire at the entrance of the GoS's 112th Brigade base in the town. On the Tassil-Adwan road, gunmen attacked an Airforce Intelligence checkpoint. In As Sanamayn town, an armed group opened fire at a GoS checkpoint in the Al Souq area using heavy machine guns and RPGs. In Hrak, an unidentified group kidnapped two GoS soldiers. Attacks against GoS and aligned personnel

have increased since October 2018 (Figure 5).

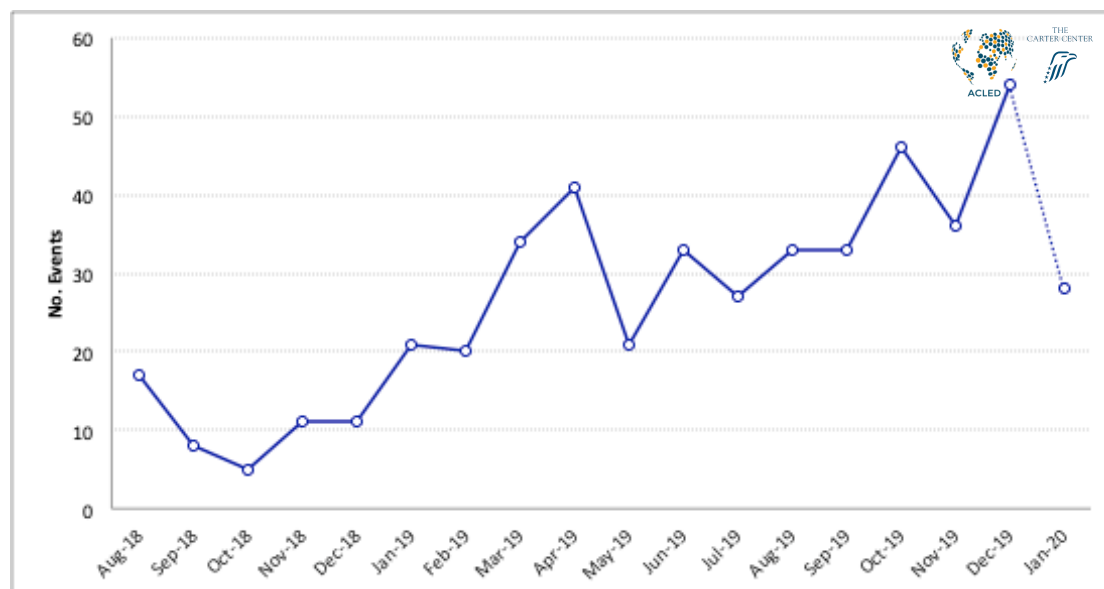


Figure 5: Conflict levels in southern Syria since August 2018. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

There were further civilian protests in southern Syria this week. In Hrak town, protestors gathered to call for the release of political prisoners and an end to GoS's arrest policy in Daraa Governorate. For a second consecutive week, demonstrators gathered in front of a number of GoS institutions in As Sweida City to protest poor living conditions and rising food prices.²

In central Syria, ISIS activity against GoS personnel also continued. In the Al Mayadeen desert, ISIS attacked a GoS position. The associated armed clashes lasted for several hours. Pro-government sources also [reported](#) sustained clashes against a number of GoS positions in the Sokhneh desert and al Shoula areas, which only subsided after GoS re-enforcements arrived.

NORTHEAST SYRIA

International forces in Northeast Syria were involved in several incidents during the week. US forces patrolling in Rmelan City in Hasakah Governorate and the M4 Highway from Hasakeh to Tal Tamr. US troops also [blocked](#) a Russian patrol from passing through Tal Tamr Town on 25 January for the second time this month.³

On 23 January, a joint Russia/Turkish military patrol near Ain Al Arab used tear gas to disperse demonstrators protesting the patrol's presence near Ain Al Arab. This is the sixth protest against joint Russian/Turkish military patrols, or that the patrols have used crowd dispersal measures since November. Four of the six

² Earlier in January, there was a significant drop in the value of the Syrian pound. Current exchanges are around 1000 SYP to 1 US dollar. In February 2019, 1 USD was between 540 – 560 SYP.

³ After US forces blocked a Russian patrol driving to the Semalka border crossing in Mustafa Derek Village in the Malikiyeh Sub District of Hassakeh Governorate on 19 January.

events occurred in Ain al Arab.⁴

Attacks against SDF and aligned personnel along the Euphrates and Khabour River Valleys also continued this week. In Markada, Thiban (x2), Abu Khashab, and Basira armed groups opened fire on SDF members. In Raqqa City and at Sosa Junction near Hassakeh City, improvised explosive devices detonated against SDF patrols. The SDF also intercepted a suicide car bomb near a funeral tent in Abu Hamam.

For the second time in a month, an attack targeted individuals connected with the oil infrastructure in the northeast. On 20 January, suspected ISIS gunmen opened fire on an oil truck of the al-Qaterji Oil Company in Karama, Raqqa Governorate. The attack comes a day after an explosive device detonated against a US patrol on a road near the Koniko gas field. As reported earlier this month, attacks against oil infrastructure, or individuals connected to it, have increased in the northeast since October (Figure 6).

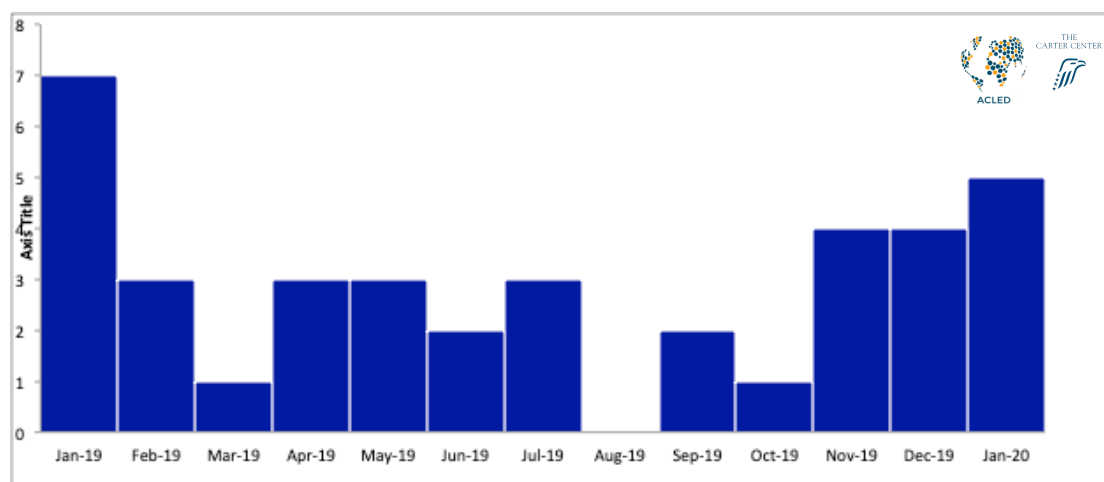


Figure 6: Attacks against oil infrastructure or individuals connected to the oil infrastructure in northeast Syria since January 2019. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

Around the Turkish Peace Spring Operation area, Turkish-backed groups continued to shell sporadically U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) positions in the week. Shelling activity concentrated on areas west of Tal Abiad (x3 events), Um Kayf (x2), and Kerbet Elroz (x2), but also impacted areas east of Ain Issa, Arida Abu Jarada village, Jurn village, Qazali village, and the Tal Tamr area.

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⁴ With previous events recorded on 18 November in Tiri Village when protestors gathered a civilian was struck by a Turkish military vehicle, on 13, 12 and 5 November in Ain al Arab when protestors threw rocks at joint Turkish / Russian patrols and on 11 November in Salam Alik when residents threw stones at the patrol.