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WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 13 - 19 JANUARY 2020

WHOLE OF SYRIA SUMMARY

- **NORTHWEST** | Government of Syria (GoS) shelling in northwest Syria continued despite a ceasefire on 12 January. HTS and other opposition groups captured two locations in southwest Idleb from GoS forces. In the Turkish-occupied areas of northern Aleppo Governorate, opposition armed groups continued looting and extortion.
- **SOUTH & CENTRAL** | Attacks against GoS-aligned personnel in Daraa Governorate continued. Kidnapping activity targeted civilians west of Daraa City. Widespread civilian demonstrations returned to southern Syria, including As Sweida City. ISIS attacks against GoS forces continued in central Syria. Suspected Israeli airstrikes targeted the T4 Airbase and locations near Albu Kamal.
- **NORTHEAST** | Conflict between Turkish-backed opposition armed groups and the US-supported Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) continued around Operation Peace Spring areas. In the Euphrates and Khabour River Valley, attacks against SDF personnel continued. The US and Russian militaries conducted patrols and re-enforced several locations in the northeast.

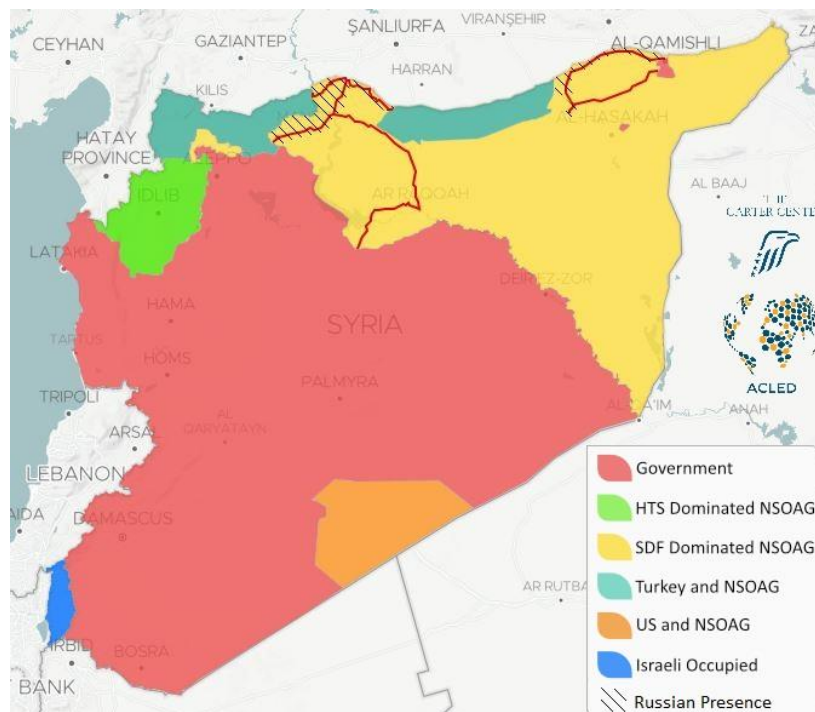


Figure 1: Dominant actors' area of control and influence in Syria as of 19 January 2020. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. Also, please see the footnote on page 2.

NORTHWEST SYRIA

Despite a ceasefire in the northwest brokered by Russia and Turkey on 12 January, Government of Syria (GoS)/Russian aerial and ground bombardments continued (Figure 2). According to data from ACLED, 15 January was the second highest daily level of GoS airstrikes since 27 July 2019.

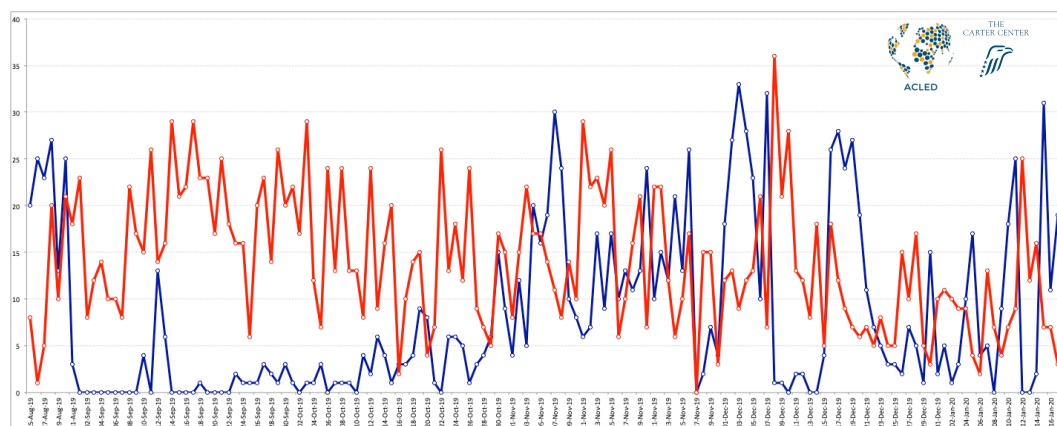


Figure 2: GoS Aerial (blue) and ground (red) bombardments in the northwest since August 2019. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

GoS aerial bombardment and shelling continued to affect southern areas of Idleb and Aleppo Governorates. However, 38% (48) of GoS conflict activity focused on areas west of Aleppo City this week.² This activity displaced tens of thousands of civilians from the Zarbah, Atereb, Kafr Dael, and Mansoura areas.

GoS and Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS)/opposition groups also exchanged territory during the week. On 15 January, GoS forces captured Tall Khatra and Abu Jurayf from various opposition groups. The two locations were recaptured in a joint HTS/Ansar al Tawhid operation by 17 January. HTS also attempted to recapture Tall Mustayfi from GoS forces on the same day. The Russian Center for Reconciliation of Conflicting Sides [reported](#) that 47 GoS soldiers had been killed and more than 77 others injured in northwest Syria since 16 January. HTS/opposition shelling on GoS-dominated areas also continued after the beginning of the ceasefire (Figure 3).

In the Turkish-backed areas of northern Aleppo Governorate,³ there were further incidents of armed group looting and extortion targeting civilians. In Kakhrah village, the Turkish-backed Sultan Suleiman Shah Brigade kidnapped five civilians and contacted the families for ransom. In Kurke, the Turkish-backed opposition's

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 government control. The US continues to have a presence in the SDF-controlled east of country, despite growing Russian presence indicated by the hatched region of the map. Russian military patrol routes are also indicated by the red lines. 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.

² According to ACLED data.

³ Operation Euphrates Shield and Operation Olive Branch.

Sultan Mohammad al Fatih kidnapped 10 civilians, and in Jabal Qashr and Turandah, Levant Front members looted farms. Unidentified Turkish-backed groups also kidnapped a child in Afrin City, a civilian in Jandairis, a woman in Ma'arkasa, and a local police officer in Jazer, who was later found dead.

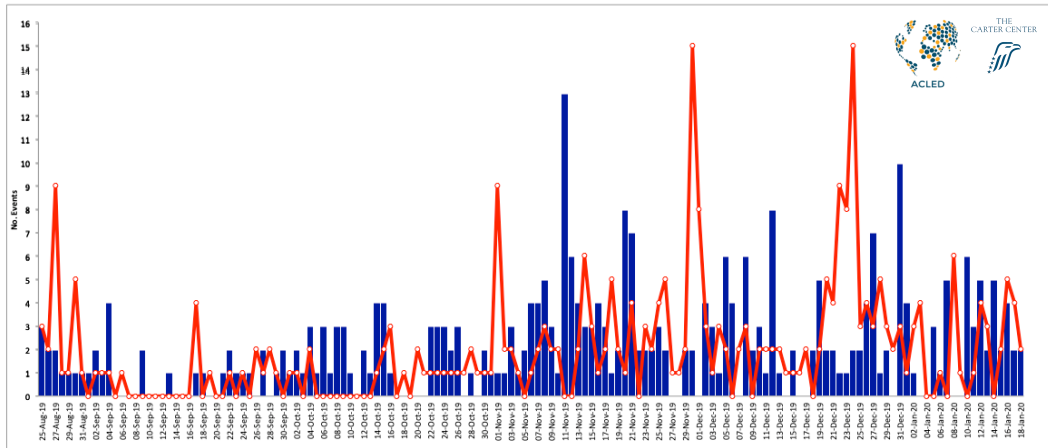


Figure 3: HTS and other opposition group shelling (blue) and ground clashes (red) in the northwest since August 2019. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

Attacks against GoS-aligned personnel continued in southern Syria. Unidentified gunmen shot dead GoS-affiliated individuals in Jassim, Eastern Ghariyah, and Um Mayatheen, and clashed at GoS locations in Sanamayn. An attack in Tassil also targeted an alleged Hezbollah associate. Since August 2019, 11 attacks targeting individuals affiliated with Hezbollah have been recorded by ACLED in southern Syria (Figure 4).

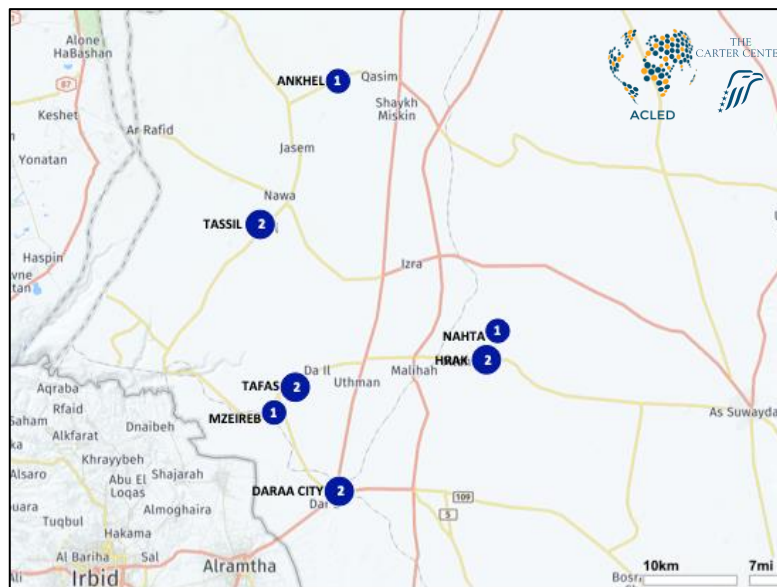


Figure 4: Attacks targeting Hezbollah-affiliated individuals in southern Syria since August 2019. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

Civilians in southern Syria were also the targets of kidnapping activity this week. In Daraa al Balad, a former opposition member kidnapped two civilians, and in the

Arbaine area of Daraa City and Um Mayatheen–Daraa City Highway, two civilians, who had previously been kidnapped, were found dead. Kidnappings are not uncommon in southern Syria and have been previously [reported](#) on by the Carter Center.

Widespread civilian demonstrations returned to southern Syria this week. In the Daraa City and Karak town, protestors denounced GoS's arrest policies and called for the release of political prisoners. In As Sweida City and Shahba town, civilians gathered to protest poor living conditions and rising food prices.⁴

In central Syria, ISIS activity continued against GoS personnel travelling or stationed in the area. In Qetet Elbuleil village and the Rasafah desert, ISIS clashed with GoS forces patrolling the areas. In the Jurdi al Gharbi desert, ISIS shot dead a GoS soldier, and in the Mayadin Desert, ISIS fired an anti-tank missile at a Syrian Republican Guard bus, killing 14 soldiers. Pro-government media also reported that ISIS attacked GoS positions in the [Sokhneh](#) desert and north of the US-enforced [Tanf Zone](#) in southeast Rural Damascus. ISIS activity has remained at a similar level over the course of 2019 despite multiple GoS anti-ISIS operations (Figure 5).

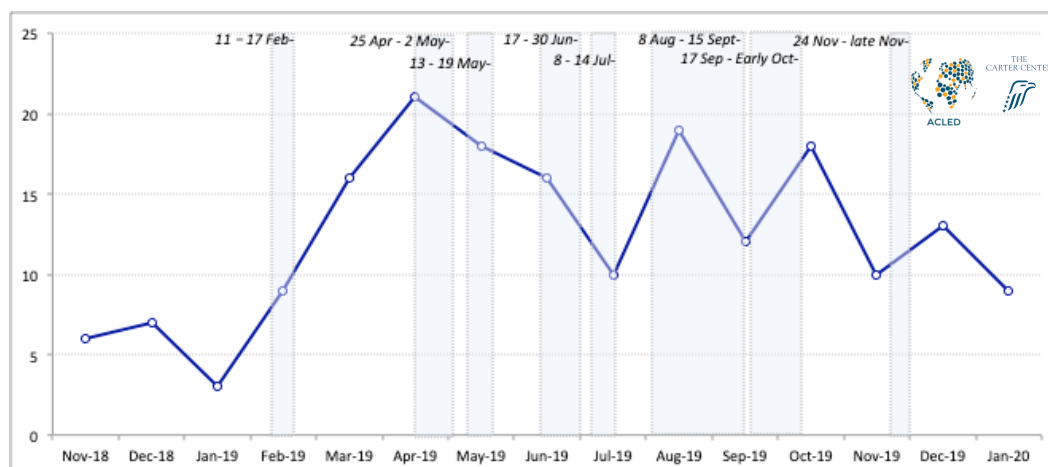


Figure 5: ISIS Activity (Blue line) and GoS Anti ISIS Security Operations in Central Syria since November 2018. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

On 14 January, suspected Israeli airstrikes also targeted military positions between Tabni and Midan al Atiq villages in Deir Ez Zor Governorate, as well as the T4 Airbase in Homs Governorate. Both locations are associated with the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and other Iranian backed groups.

NORTHEAST SYRIA

Turkish-backed groups within the Turkish Operation Peace Spring area and the US-supported Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) engaged in shelling activity throughout the week focused on Tal Tamr (x 5 events) and Tal Abiad countryside

⁴ Coinciding with a drop in the value of the Syrian pound this month. Current exchanges are around 1000 SYP to 1 US dollar. In February 2019 1 USD was between 540 – 560 SYP.

(x1 event).

For a second consecutive week, car bombs struck Turkish-backed opposition groups within Operation Peace Spring areas. In Hwiesh al Nassr in the Ras al Ain countryside, a device exploded with no clear target. In Suluk, a car bomb detonated outside an Ahrar al Sharqiyah headquarters in the town resulting in several casualties, including Turkish soldiers.

Attacks against US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces continued in the Euphrates and Khabour River valleys. Unidentified armed groups and suspected ISIS members ambushed or opened fire on SDF patrols in Shadadah, Markada, Hawayij, Hassakeh City, Habb al Shawk, and Shiheil. Three improvised explosive devices (IEDs) also detonated against SDF vehicles in Abu Hardoub, Taqba, and Borjab. This activity has continued despite SDF security operations in the previous year (Figure 6). This week, SDF forces carried out six arrest operations for suspected ISIS members in Shadadah, Karama, Al Hole Camp (x2),⁵ Basira, and Hajin, as well as the diffusing of a car bomb in Abu Hamam.

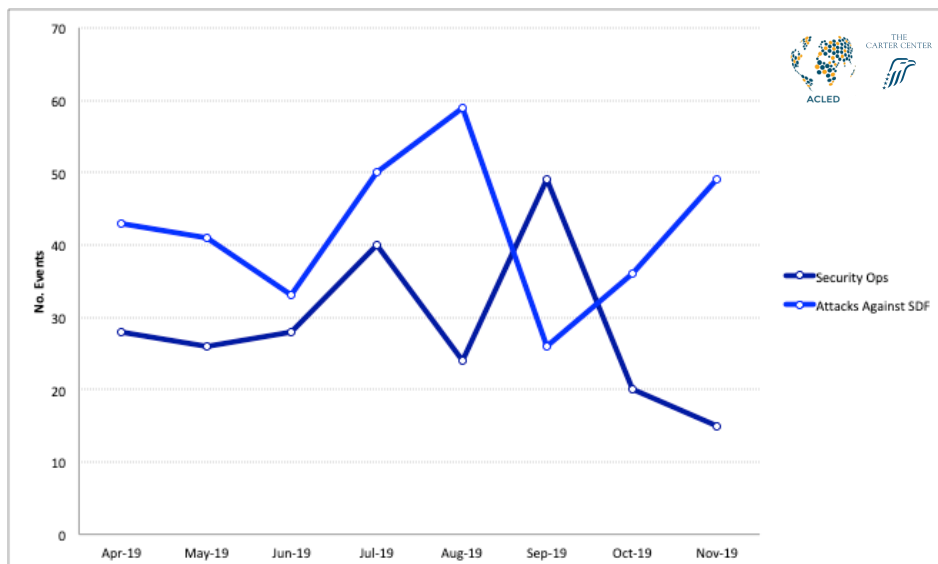


Figure 5: Attacks against SDF personnel and sites (Light blue) and SDF security operations against ISIS or suspected ISIS members (Dark blue) in northeast Syria since April 2019. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

There were several US and Russian troop movements in the northeast this week. In Tal Tamr and various oil fields in Deir Ez Zor and Hassakeh Governorates, the US military conducted patrols. A US contingent arrived in the Shadadah area. Russian Military forces also arrived in the Tal Tamr and Qamishli areas, and conducted the 21st joint patrol with the Turkish military in the Darbasiyah area of the Syrian/Turkish border. Russia also established a military observation post in the Abu Rasin area, just east of the Operation Peace Spring zone.

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⁵ After SDF found the body of a female camp resident on 15 January.