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WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 27 July - 2 August 2020

SYRIA SUMMARY

- **NORTHWEST** | Turkish sources reported that Egyptian soldiers were deployed alongside Government of Syria (GoS) armed forces in the region. Hayyat Tahrir al-Sham consolidated control in Hama Governorate. GoS armed forces and the Kurdish People's Protection Units clashed with armed opposition groups. Turkish-backed armed opposition groups launched a security campaign in Al-Bab, Aleppo Governorate. GoS-backed militias clashed with ISIS in Hama Governorate.
- **SOUTH & CENTRAL** | The United States imposed new sanctions on individuals and institutions in Syria. GoS implemented new COVID-19 related measures. Attacks against GoS officials and former opposition fighters continued in Dara'a and As-Sweida Governorates. GoS armed forces and GoS-backed militias continued the military campaign against ISIS in Homs Governorate.
- **NORTHEAST** | The Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration (KAA) signed a deal with an American oil company. The KAA implemented new measures to stop the spread of COVID-19. GoS armed forces and ISIS clashed in the region. Unidentified gunmen attacked tribal officials in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. The SDF conscription campaign continued in Ar-Raqqa Governorate.

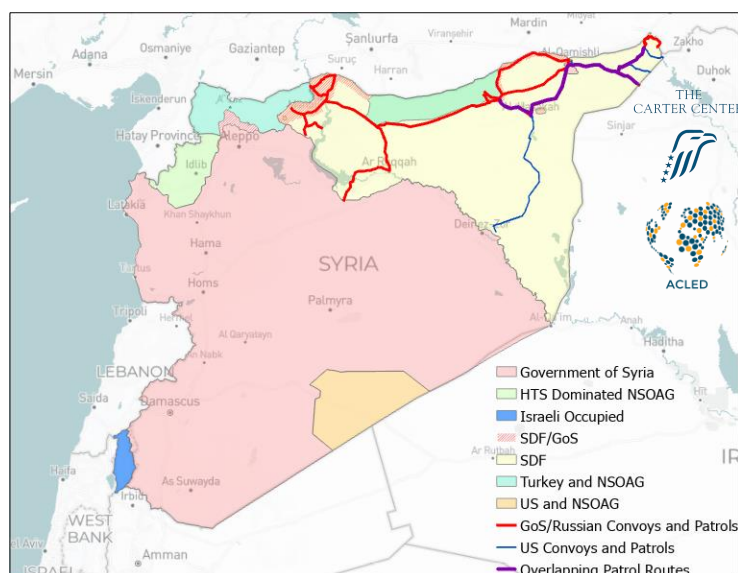


Figure 1: Dominant actors' area of control and influence in Syria as of 2 August 2020. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. Also, please see footnote 1 on page 2.

NORTHWEST SYRIA¹

On 30 July, Turkish sources reported that Egyptian soldiers were deployed alongside Government of Syria (GoS) armed forces in Aleppo and Idlib Governorates.² The report was contested by pro-GoS³ and some pro-opposition newspapers.⁴ The accusation comes as tensions between Turkey and Egypt continue to rise, with the Egyptian parliament approving military actions against Turkish-backed forces in Libya.⁵

Hayyat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) continued to consolidate its control in northwestern Syria. On 27 July, HTS took over Hurras al-Din (HD) and the coalition Fathbatou Operations Room's⁶ military positions along the Al-Ghab plain in Hama Governorate.⁷ Hurras al-Din (HD) and its allies often attacked GoS armed forces in the Al-Ghab plain, including a deadly attack on 10 May that killed 21 GoS soldiers. HTS has worked to weaken and marginalize Fathbatou Operations Room in the region to consolidate its own power, which has led to armed clashes in the past.

GoS armed forces and the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) continued to clash with armed opposition groups. On 27 July, the Turkish-backed opposition's Syrian National Army (SNA) clashed with the YPG on the Al-Yalni-Sheikh Naser frontline in northern Aleppo Governorate. The clashes were accompanied by a shelling exchange. On 28 July, Turkish-backed armed opposition groups clashed with the predominantly Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)-affiliated Al-Bab Military Council on the Daghelbash frontline in Aleppo Governorate. The same day, the YPG clashed with Turkish armed forces and Turkish-backed armed opposition groups near Tell Refaat in northern Aleppo Governorate. On 31 July, Turkish-backed armed opposition groups clashed and shelled Al-Bab Military Council in Hazwan, Aleppo Governorate. The same day, GoS armed forces clashed

¹ Figure 1, the Carter Center's areas of control map, depicts areas of the dominant actors' control and influence. While "control" is difficult to determine in a complex, dynamic conflict, territorial control is defined as an entity having power over use of force as well as civil/administrative functions in an area. Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah maintain a presence in Syrian government-controlled territory. Non-state organized armed groups (NSOAG), including the Kurdish-dominated SDF and Turkish-backed opposition groups operate in areas not under GoS control. 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. Patrols are also depicted in the map to show the presence of actors that may have influence in an area. This is particularly relevant as US and Russian forces regularly have patrolled towns and routes in the northeast. While they do not control local administration or local forces, there is an assumption of a high degree of coordination with local de facto authorities. Data collected is by the publicly available project [ACLEED](#).

² <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/egypt-sends-forces-to-syria-for-assad-regime/1927275>

³ <https://www.almazdarnews.com/article/no-truth-to-egyptian-military-deploying-to-syria-source/>

⁴ <https://anfenglishmobile.com/rojava-syria/sohr-refutes-turkish-media-report-45625>

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https://npasyria.com/en/blog.php?id_blog=3049&sub_blog=15&name_blog=War+in+Libya%3A+Egypt+denies+Turkish+accusations+of+Egyptian+soldiers+fighting+in+Syria#.XyXH4g36t9M.twitter

⁶ A coalition of armed opposition groups, including Hurras al Din, Ansar al Islam, Ansar al Din, Tansiqiyat al-Jihad, and Liwa al-Muqatileen al-Ansar.

⁷ <https://nedaa-sy.com/en/news/21540>

with HTS on the Jabal al-Zawiya frontlines in Idlib Governorate. 4 GoS soldiers were reportedly killed in the clashes. Since the start of the 5 March ceasefire, there have been 195 reported armed clashes in northwestern Syria (see figure 2).

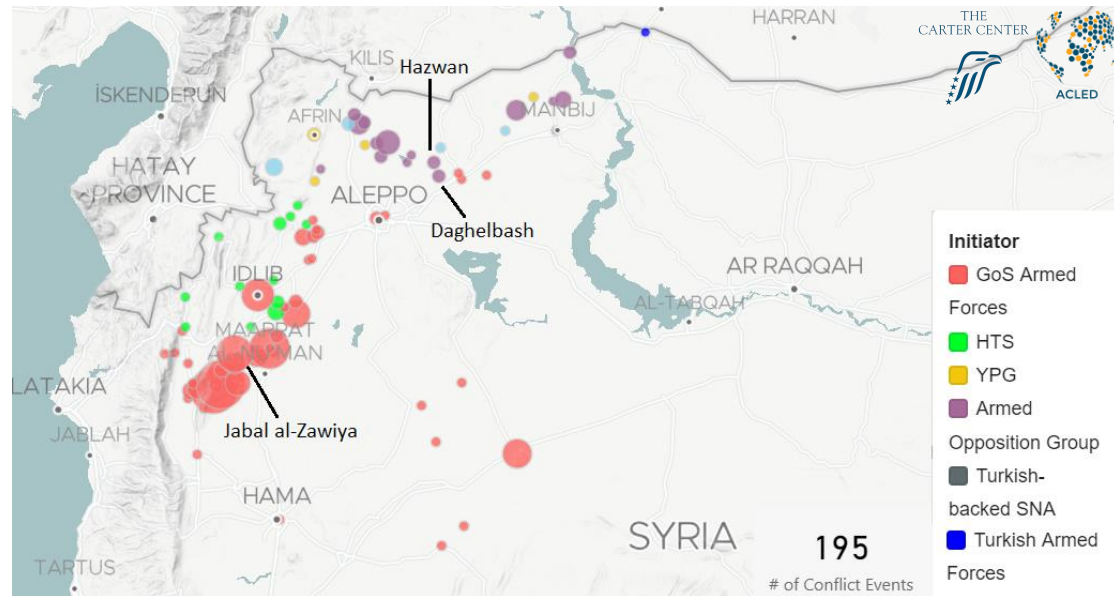


Figure 2: Armed clashes in northwest Syria since the 5 March ceasefire. Largest bubble is 12 conflict events. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

Clashes broke out in Turkish-held territory after Turkish-backed armed opposition groups launched a security campaign in Al-Bab, Aleppo Governorate. On 28 July, the Turkish-backed opposition National Police and SNA attempted to arrest fugitives in Al-Bab city. The alleged fugitives clashed with the opposition National Police and SNA, with some of the fugitives apprehended.⁸ Al-Bab has been an area of frequent conflict, with at least 120 reported events since 1 January 2020.

GoS-backed militias⁹ clashed with ISIS in Hama Governorate. On 28 July, ISIS attacked several GoS-backed militia checkpoints in Ithariyah, Hama Governorate. 5 GoS-backed militiamen were killed in the clashes. This attack coincided with ISIS attacks in central and northeastern Syria (see below). To date in 2020, there have been 17 ISIS related conflict events in Hama Governorate, with 8 in July alone.

SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

The US imposed new sanctions on individuals and entities in Syria. On 28 July, the US released the second wave of targeted sanctions under the Caesar Act. President Assad's son and GoS 1st Division officials were among the 14 individuals and entities sanctioned in the latest list.¹⁰ Since the passage of the Caesar Act, the sanctions have been controversial. Supporters argue that new sanctions reduce

⁸ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/404390>

⁹ Pro-GoS or GoS-backed militias refer to armed groups that are funded or in some way supported by GoS and coordinate with or fight alongside GoS armed forces, but are not part of the state-run military.

¹⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/29/us-imposes-sanctions-on-son-of-syrias-president-bashar-al-assad>

financing available for the GoS and could promote a political transition,¹¹ while critics have pointed out the negative impact on the population at large.¹² On 29 July, the US sanctioned two financial institutions in Syria and Turkey for alleged support to ISIS.¹³

The GoS Ministry of Endowments implemented new measures as COVID-19 cases continued to rise. On 31 July, major mosques were closed in Damascus and Rural Damascus Governorate as Eid prayers were held at home.¹⁴ On 2 August, Friday and other large gatherings for prayers were suspended for 15 days in Damascus and Rural Damascus Governorate.¹⁵ As of 2 August, there were 809 reported COVID-19 cases in GoS-controlled territory,¹⁶ but reports allege that the number of cases is higher than reported.¹⁷ Local hospitals have struggled to deal with the pandemic due to the impact of conflict, economic crisis, and the Caesar Act sanctions.¹⁸

Attacks against GoS officials and former opposition fighters continued in Dara'a and As-Sweida Governorates. On 27 July, three attacks were recorded in western Dara'a Governorate. In Dara'a city, unidentified gunmen killed a former opposition commander and a former opposition fighter.¹⁹ In Hrak, unidentified gunmen killed an alleged informant for GoS and Hezbollah. In Nawa city, an improvised explosive device (IED) planted by unidentified gunmen exploded near a vehicle carrying GoS 9th Armored Division soldiers, killing 3 GoS soldiers. On 28 July, unidentified fighters attacked GoS air force intelligence checkpoints, injuring several GoS air force soldiers in Nawa city, Dara'a Governorate. On 29 July, unidentified gunmen assassinated a GoS military security detachment commander and a GoS armed forces officer in Sahm El Golan in Dara'a Governorate.²⁰ The same day, an IED planted by an unidentified armed group exploded at a GoS air force intelligence post near Rakhim, Dara'a Governorate. On 28 July, local armed groups abducted a GoS armed forces officer and his driver in As-Sweida city due to a local dispute over kidnappings.²¹ The GoS official was later released as a goodwill gesture. On 1 August, unidentified gunmen killed a former opposition fighter in Dara'a city, Dara'a Governorate. Attacks against GoS officials and former opposition fighters have been frequent in the region, with most of the violence taking place in Dara'a Governorate.

¹¹ <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/congress-can-still-help-shape-the-endgame-in-syria>

¹² <https://warontherocks.com/2020/06/will-more-syria-sanctions-hurt-the-very-civilians-they-aim-to-protect/>

¹³ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/404562>

¹⁴ <https://sana.sy/en/?p=198713>

¹⁵ <https://sana.sy/en/?p=198934>

¹⁶ <https://sana.sy/en/?p=198940>

¹⁷ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/coronavirus-syria-cases-assad/2020/07/18/732573ec-c14a-11ea-8908-68a2b9eae9e0_story.html

¹⁸ <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/caesar-act-deals-another-blow-syrias-beleaguered-health-sector>

¹⁹ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/404349>

²⁰ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/404828>

²¹ <https://suwayda24.com/?p=14716>

GoS armed forces and GoS-backed militias continued to fight ISIS in the Badia desert region of Homs Governorate. On 28 July, ISIS attacked several GoS checkpoints near Al-Sokhneh, reportedly killing at least 13 GoS soldiers. This attack coincided with ISIS attacks in Hama and Ar-Raqqa Governorates. Since GoS consolidated control of Homs Governorate in 1 June 2019, there have been 41 conflict events involving ISIS, with most of the violence taking place around Al-Sokhneh (see figure 3).

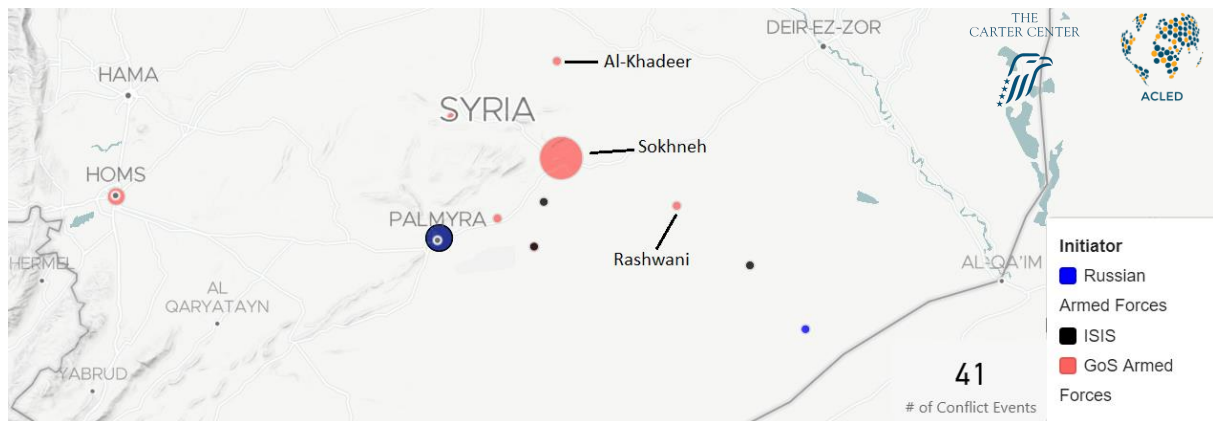


Figure 3: Conflict events involving ISIS in Homs Governorate since 1 June 2019. Largest bubble equals 24 conflict events. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

NORTHEAST SYRIA

On 30 July, the Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration (KAA) signed a deal with an American oil company to develop and modernize oil fields.²² On 2 August, GoS accused the US of stealing Syrian oil.²³ KAA officials defended the deal, saying it would generate investment for the Syrian people.²⁴ According to the KAA, it has received proposals from Russian and American companies to operate in SDF-controlled territory.²⁵

The KAA implemented new measures to stop the spread of COVID-19. On 27 July, the KAA allowed critical medical cases to travel abroad for care. The KAA had closed all border crossings on 24 July. On 29 July, the KAA announced a new curfew and restrictions that are to be in effect for at least 10 days.²⁶ On 1 August, the KAA closed Taqba in western Ar-Raqqa Governorate for 14 days after a rise in

²² <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/07/us-oil-company-deal-syria-kurds-kobani-turkey-russia-sdc-sdf.html>

²³ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-oil-usa/syria-says-us-oil-firm-signed-deal-with-kurdish-led-rebels-idUSKBN24Y0FD>

²⁴

https://npasyria.com/en/blog.php?id_blog=3053&sub_blog=11&name_blog=Russian,%20American%20companies%20request%20to%20sign%20deals%20with%20Kurdish-led%20administration%20in%20northeast%20Syria:%20Official

²⁵

https://npasyria.com/en/blog.php?id_blog=3053&sub_blog=11&name_blog=Russian,%20American%20companies%20request%20to%20sign%20deals%20with%20Kurdish-led%20administration%20in%20northeast%20Syria:%20Official

²⁶ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/404795>

COVID-19 cases in the town.²⁷ As of 31 July, there were 25 COVID-19 cases in northeast Syria.²⁸

On 27 July, ISIS attacked a GoS armed forces checkpoint near Al-Rasafah town, Ar-Raqqa Governorate. The attack killed 6 GoS soldiers. On 27 July, an ISIS planted IED killed a GoS border guard official near Ar-Raqqa city. The same day, ISIS gunmen killed a nurse near Shiheil, Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. On 28 July, ISIS attacked a GoS armed forces patrol near Al-Sabkhah, Ar-Raqqa Governorate, killing 3 GoS soldiers. On 1 August, ISIS attacked a GoS-backed National Defense Force (NDF) checkpoint near the al-Kharatah oil field in southern Deir-ez-Zor Governorate, killing 4 NDF fighters.

There was an increase of attacks against tribal members during the reporting period. On 30 July, unidentified gunmen killed an Al-Bakeer tribal militia fighter in Kassar, Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. On 31 July, unidentified gunmen assassinated the Muktar (mayor) of Dahleh village, Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. The Muktar was a dignitary with the Baggara tribal group. On 2 August, unidentified gunmen assassinated an elder of the Akkidat tribe in Al-Hawayij town, central Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. The tribe blamed the SDF for failing to secure their safety.²⁹ Some analysts have suggested that ISIS is behind the attacks due to cooperation between the Arab tribes and SDF.³⁰

The SDF conscripted people in Ar-Raqqa Governorate. On 27 July, SDF arrested and conscripted an unknown number of men in Mansura town, and at least 15 men in Hawara, Ar-Raqqa Governorate. The next day, the SDF continued to forcibly conscript men in Mansura and its surrounding villages. Since 1 January 2020, there have been at least 29 recorded incidents where the SDF forcibly conscripted people in northeast Syria (see figure 4).

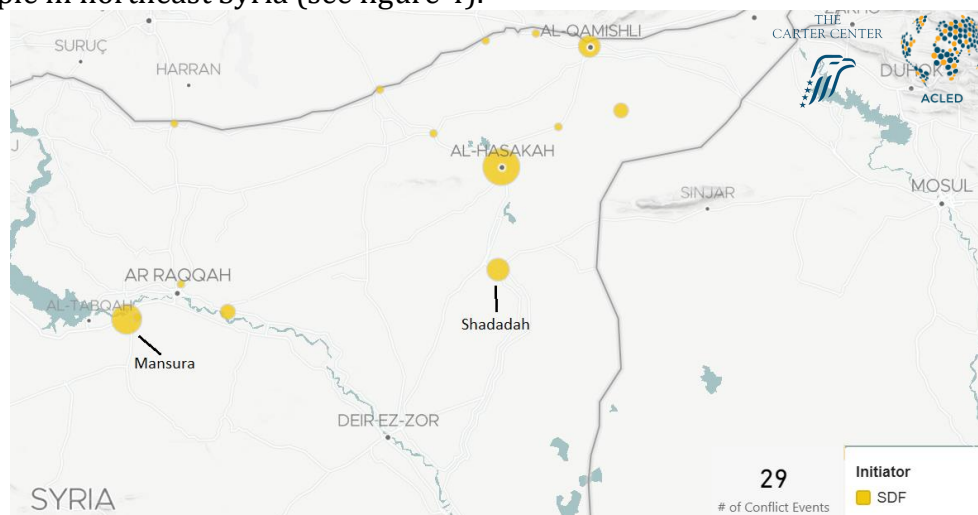


Figure 4: Incidents of forced conscription by SDF in northeast Syria since 1 January 2020. Largest bubble equals 7 conflict events. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

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²⁷ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/405289>

²⁸

https://npasyria.com/en/blog.php?id_blog=3044&sub_blog=12&name_blog=Coronavirus%20strongly%20outbreaks%20in%20northeast%20Syria,%20dozens%20infected

²⁹ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/405457>

³⁰ <https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/5f6a561a-1ab6-47fc-a350-a98b0e27e96a>