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WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 11 May - 17 May 2020

SYRIA SUMMARY

- **NORTHWEST** | Conflict between Hurras al Din and Government of Syria (GoS) armed forces and militias continued. Turkish-backed opposition militias clashed with GoS, the Kurdish dominated Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), and the Afrin Liberation Forces. Again this week, rioters confronted the joint patrols by Russian and Turkish forces. The Israeli air force attacked pro-Iranian militia positions in central Aleppo Governorate.
- **SOUTH & CENTRAL** | GoS armed forces continued their military buildup following last week's attack in Mzeireb, Dara'a Governorate. Attacks against GoS personnel and positions continued across Dara'a Governorate. ISIS attacks in Dara'a and Homs Governorate killed GoS soldiers and civilians. GoS armed forces demolished houses in Rural Damascus Governorate.
- **NORTHEAST** | The Israeli air force targeted pro-Iranian militias in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. Infighting between Turkish-backed armed opposition groups took place in Al-Hassakah Governorate. GoS armed forces, SDF, and the US-led Global Coalition Against Daesh clashed with ISIS fighters in the region. A US patrol faced protests in Al-Hassakah Governorate. The Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration announced the first patient to recover from COVID-19 in their region.

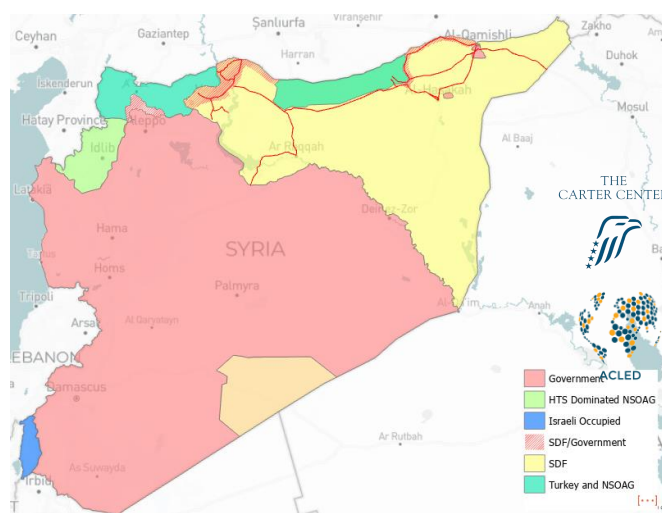


Figure 1: Dominant actors' area of control and influence in Syria as of 17 May 2020. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. Also, please see the footnote on page 2.

NORTHWEST SYRIA¹

Conflict between Hurras al Din and GoS armed forces and militias continued this week. Following the temporary takeover of Tanjarah in Hama Governorate by Hurras al Din on 10 May, GoS armed forces regained full control of the town on 11 May. GoS armed forces and militias then shelled opposition-held areas near Tanjarah² on 11 and 12 May.³

This week, Turkish-backed armed opposition groups clashed with GoS and Kurdish forces throughout the Idlib and Aleppo Governorates. On 13 May, armed opposition forces clashed with the predominantly Kurdish Afrin Liberation Forces,⁴ on the frontline areas of Tweis and Tal Madeeq in northern Aleppo Governorate. On 13 May in Idlib Governorate, the Al Shams Corps⁵ headquarters in Al-Sawghiyyah was attacked by unidentified gunmen with RPGs. On 15 May, Turkish-backed opposition armed groups clashed with the SDF in Hazwan in Aleppo Governorate. On 16 May, armed opposition groups targeted a pro-Iranian militia weapons depot in Kafr Dael in Aleppo Governorate.

On 12 and 14 May, rioters confronted again the Russian-Turkish joint patrols along the M4 highway between Turnabah and Ariha in Idlib Governorate. On 12 May, an unclaimed explosion occurred along their path.⁶ On both dates, rioters pelted the joint patrol military vehicles with eggs and stones near Masibin.⁷ Since the 5 March ceasefire agreement, the joint patrols have faced protests and riots.

Turkish-backed armed opposition groups arrested opponents and seized property in Aleppo and Idlib Governorates during the reporting period. On 11 May, Hamza Division members arrested 4 individuals in Ma'btali in Aleppo Governorate over charges of having worked with the Kurdish-run Autonomous Administration. On 12 May in Foah city in Idlib Governorate, Ahrar al Sham (AAS) fighters evicted a family from their home to turn it into a headquarters for the group.⁸ The eviction caused protests, which AAS fighters dispersed.

On 16 May, the Israeli air force target locations occupied by pro-Iranian militias in Ramousa in central Aleppo Governorate. On the same day, another airstrike targeted Deir-ez-Zor Governorate (see northeast Syria). In 2020, Israel has

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 The areas of Ankawi and Al-Qahera in Hama Governorate.

³ <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/syrian-army-unleashes-relentless-attack-on-jihadist-forces-in-al-ghaab/>

⁴ <http://anfenglishmobile.com/rojava-syrian/afrin-liberation-forces-kills-6-mercenaries-wounds-3-43697>

⁵ Also known as Faylaq al Sham and a key member of the opposition's National Liberation Front, which is supported by Turkey.

⁶ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/383827>

⁷ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/384495>

⁸ <https://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=164268>

conducted only 2 airstrikes in northwest Syria, and 11 total airstrikes in the region since 1 January 2018 (see figure 2).

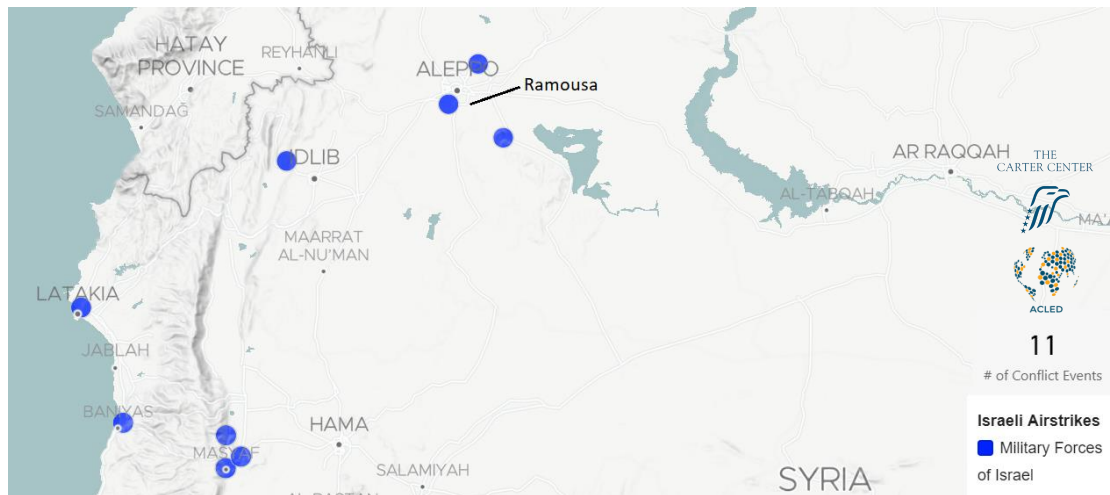


Figure 2: Israeli airstrikes between 1 January 2018 to 16 May 2020. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

Following a deadly police station attack in Mzeireb during the preceding week, GoS continued its military buildup in Dara'a Governorate. Between 10-13 May, GoS armed forces and pro-Iranian militias reinforced their positions within Dara'a Governorate⁹ in anticipation for a military offensive targeting Tafas city, to capture the individuals who carried out the attack in Mzeireb. This military build up is part of a larger campaign to rid the southern region of anti-government "sleeper cells"¹⁰ (see figure 3 depicting locations of attacks against GoS forces since January 2020 and locations of the military reinforcements). Widespread protests against the planned offensive took place on 13 May in Tafas city.¹¹ Additional protests took place on 14-15 May in Tafas city, Sahm El Golan, and Dara'a city. The protests were against the military buildup and demanded that pro-Iranian militias withdraw from the governorate.

Attacks against pro-GoS personnel and former opposition fighters continued across Dara'a Governorate. On 11 May, a former opposition fighter was killed in Dara'a city by unidentified gunmen. GoS armed forces clashed with unidentified gunmen in Hrak on 12 May, resulting in the arrest of gunmen. On 13 May in Um Walad, unidentified gunmen opened fire on a former opposition commander and a GoS security personnel. Additional GoS armed forces and former opposition militia personnel were shot on 14 and 15 May in Um Elmayathen and Al-Sad respectively.

⁹ Tal Al Khudor, Sheikh Saed, Yadudeh, Tafas, Al-Sourah, Atman, Sheikh Miskine, as well as its 38 Brigade and 52nd Armored Brigade.

¹⁰ <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/syrian-army-reinforcements-roll-into-daraa-with-heavy-weapons-for-new-operation/>

¹¹ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/384376>

Attacks by ISIS-affiliated individuals continued this week. On 14 May, an alleged ISIS gunman killed two GoS soldiers in Mseifra in Dara'a Governorate.¹² On 17 May in Al-Sukhnah, Homs Governorate, ISIS executed four people on allegations that they were GoS spies reporting on ISIS positions in the Al-Sukhnah desert. ISIS had kidnapped these four people two months earlier.¹³

GoS armed forces (4th Division) demolished 50 houses in Harasta city in Rural Damascus Governorate, continuing a pattern since it retook the area in May 2017. GoS checkpoints prevented civilians from entering the area.¹⁴

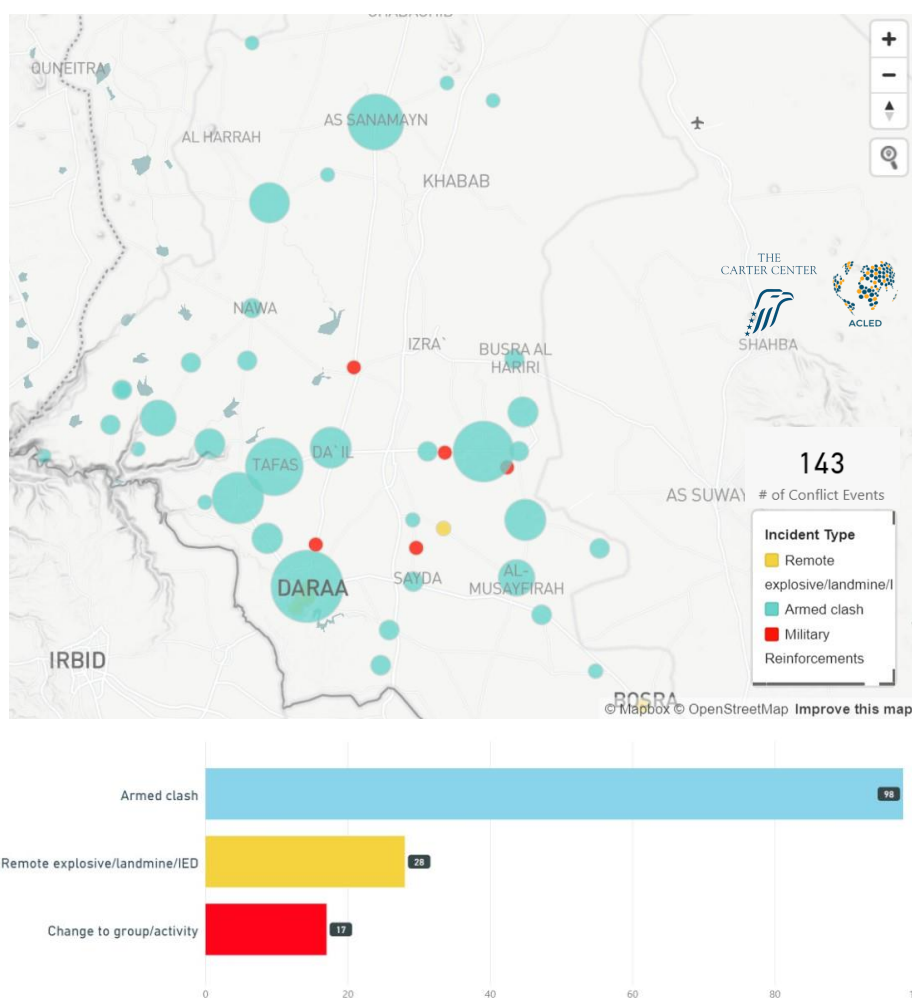


Figure 3: Incidents in Dara'a Governorate involving GoS forces between 1 January-16 May 2020 as well as locations of the military reinforcements (red). Largest bubble is equal to 20 incidents, smallest bubble is 1. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

NORTHEAST SYRIA

On 17 May, a suspected Israeli airstrike hit pro-Iranian militias in Al-Bukamal city on the Iraqi border, Deir-ez-Zor Governorate.¹⁵ Prior to the strike, reports were

¹² <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/384722>

¹³ <https://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=165197>

¹⁴ <https://damascusv.com/archives/23897?fbclid=IwAR100bBsE9tnhcQPqSNHuizRq0kmpd6m1sa0kb2JOnUImbNOQn7Dh80oEQY>

¹⁵ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/385302>

circulating that additional pro-Iranian militias were coming into the area.¹⁶ Israel has increased its airstrikes in Syria as global attention has focused on COVID-19.¹⁷

This week, the SDF engaged in several raids and clashes in Al-Hassakah Governorate. On 12 May, Turkish forces and SDF clashed after the latter entered Turkish-held Operation Peace Spring (OPS) areas, resulting in the deaths of three SDF fighters. On 13 May, SDF fighters arrested two alleged Turkish intelligence agents in the town of Al-Malikeyyeh.

Infighting between Turkish-backed armed opposition groups in Turkish-held OPS areas continued this week. On 14 May, a dispute over loot sharing erupted into clashes between Al Rahman Corps, Sultan Murad Division, and Al Mu'tasim Brigade in the villages of Al-Ahras, Leylan, and Tal Tamer in Al-Hassakah Governorate. Infighting among Turkish-backed opposition factions have been a regular occurrence in Turkish-held areas in northeast and northwest Syria.

Clashes between ISIS, GoS armed forces and militias, SDF, and the US-led Global Coalition against Daesh increased this week. On 11 May, ISIS clashed with GoS' National Defense Forces (NDF) and the pro-GoS Quds Brigade in the Bishri mountains in northwest Deir-ez-Zor Governorate, with additional clashes taking place in Ash Shula and Kaba Jeb. Additional clashes in the Bishri mountains between ISIS fighters and pro-GoS forces took place on 12 May. The same day, suspected ISIS fighters attacked a SDF checkpoint near the village of Elhisan in the western countryside of Deir-ez-Zor city. On 12 May in Al Mayadin, an ISIS landmine killed a NDF fighter. On 13 May, the SDF thwarted an escape attempt by ISIS family detainees in Al-Hol Camp in Al-Hassakah Governorate. The SDF arrested three ISIS prisoners of Turkish citizenship who participated in the escape attempt. Due to the uptick of ISIS attacks in northeast Syria, US-led Global Coalition forces conducted a raid on the Jurneyyeh village in Ar-Raqqah Governorate on 14 May. An ISIS fighter was arrested during this raid. ISIS has carried out more attacks in recent weeks taking advantage of the space provided by the focus on COVID-19.¹⁸ Since 1 January 2020, there have been 23 raids and clashes against ISIS across northeast Syria (see figure 4), 8 of these events are in May.

On 12 May, a US-led Global Coalition patrol in Tal Tamer, Al-Hassakah Governorate was blocked by NDF militias and protesters. Following this disruption, the US-led Global Coalition patrol returned to their base. The next day, the SDF arrested 20 young men who participated in the protests against the American patrol. US-led Global Coalition patrols have regularly faced protests and disruptions by protesters and pro-GoS forces in Al-Hassakah Governorate, with protests occasionally escalating into violence.

The Kurdish-run Autonomous Administration announced that one COVID-19 patient has recovered, the first recovery case recorded by the Autonomous

¹⁶ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/reported-airstrike-in-east-syria-kills-seven-iran-backed-fighters/>

¹⁷ <https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/reports-of-airstrike-targeting-aleppo-denied-by-syrian-state-media-628283>

¹⁸ <https://syrianobserver.com/EN/news/57819/isis-takes-advantage-of-coronavirus-pandemic-to-launch-new-attack-in-eastern-syria.html>

Administration¹⁹. According to the Autonomous Administration, there is only one other recorded case of COVID-19 in the area under their administration.

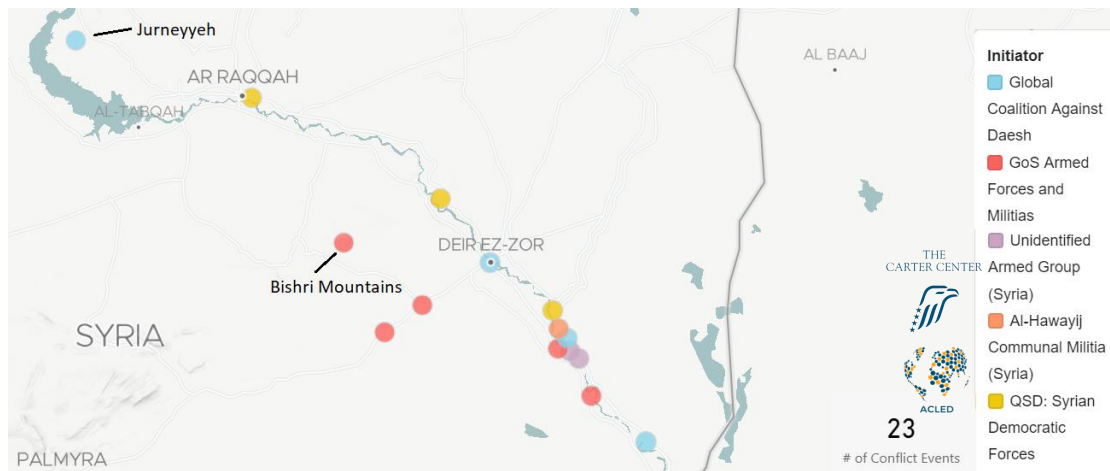


Figure 4: Anti-ISIS raids and clashes in northeast Syria between 1 January to 16 May 2020. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

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¹⁹ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/383877>