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THE
CARTER CENTER



WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 15 - 21 APRIL 2019

WHOLE OF SYRIA SUMMARY

- **NORTHWEST** | Elevated level of conflict involving the Hayyat Tahrir ash Sham (HTS)-dominated Idleb enclave this week, while Turkish military patrols continued. In Tal Rifaat, conflict activity increased after Russian troops ceased joint patrols.
- **SOUTH & CENTRAL** | Attacks against individuals associated with the government in southern Syria continued. Further north, more signs of ISIS continuing presence in central Syria were recorded with four ambushes against government convoys in the Sokhneh desert. There were also two explosive device attacks in Damascus this week.
- **NORTHEAST** | Shootings and explosive attacks against Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) continued this week. Coalition forces continue to conduct airstrikes against residual ISIS elements almost a month after their last pocket fell in Baghuz.

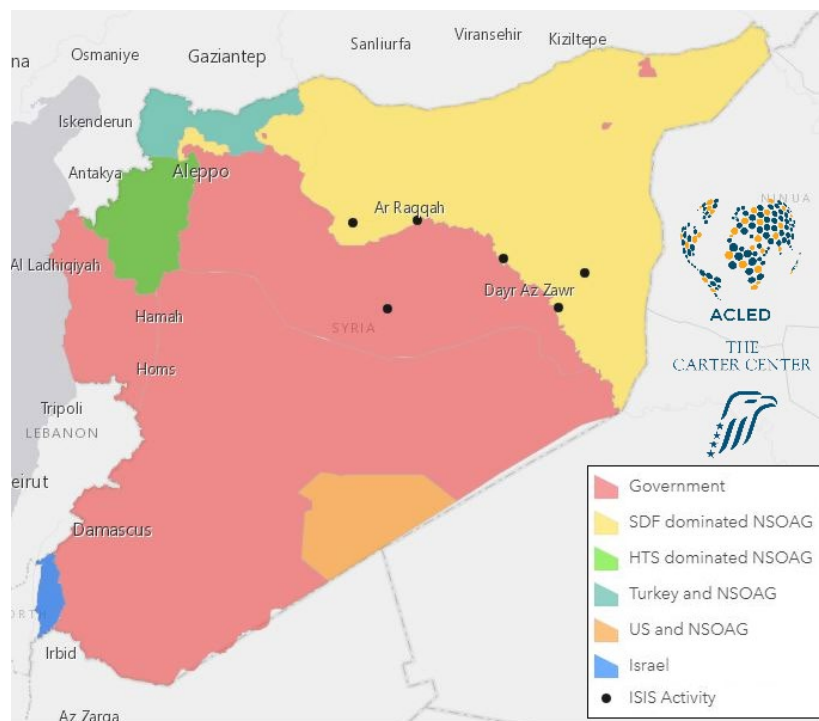


Figure 1: Dominant Actors' Area of Control and Influence in Syria as of 24 February 2019. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. For more explanation on our mapping, please see the footnote on page 2.

NORTHWEST SYRIA

Elevated levels of conflict in the Hayyat Tahrir Ash Sham (HTS)-dominated Idleb pocket continued this week despite four Turkish patrols in the enclave on 15, 18, 19 and 20 April.² There were 170 shellings and airstrikes recorded between HTS and the government. The weekly average of recorded incidents of shelling has been 178 since February 2019.

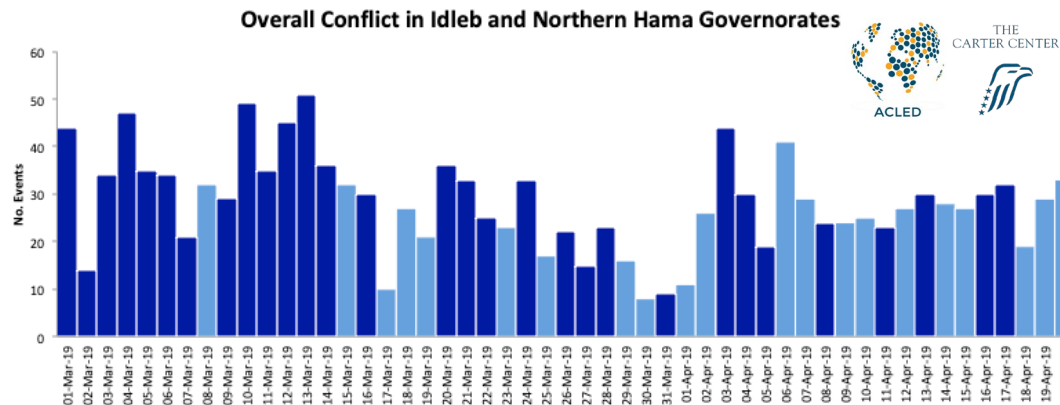


Figure 2: Conflict Levels on the Hayyat Tahrir ash Sham (HTS)-dominated Idleb Pocket with days of recorded Turkish Patrols highlighted in light blue.

Several infiltration attacks were recorded on the Western Aleppo frontlines this week. HTS assaults were seen against the fortified government positions of Al Warida, Rashideen 4, Tishreen, and Aqrab areas to the west of Aleppo City. The first attack resulting in at least 12 Syrian soldiers being killed according to pro-government [sources](#).

HTS rocket bombardments [also](#) impacted government-held Al Khalidiyah, Hamadaniye and Jumeliyah areas in the north west of Aleppo City. In recent weeks, HTS infiltration attacks and rocket bombardments had largely concentrated on western frontlines with Latakia or northern Hama governorates rather than the east.³ A contingent of government military re-enforcements was [recorded](#) arriving in Aleppo this week.

Further north, There were five explosive device attacks in the Turkish backed Euphrates Shield and Olive Branch areas. Also, there has been a spike in conflict

¹ Figure 1 denotes dominant actors' control and influence. Russia, Iran, Hezbollah and Iraqi militias maintain a presence in Syrian government areas. Non-state organized armed groups (NSOAG), including the Kurdish-dominated SDF and a variety of other groups operate in areas not under the Syrian government control. The NSOAG labeled area along the border intersection 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.

² Bringing the total number of Turkish patrols since they began on 8 March to 21.

³ And as previously reported on [here](#) and [here](#).

activity recorded in the Tal Rifaat enclave north east of Aleppo City.⁴

Seven incidents of Turkish bombardments were recorded in the vicinity of Tal Rifaat, Menagh Airbase, Maraanaz, Mreimin, Mare' and Kafr Kalbin areas. In addition to ground clashes between the Kurdish dominated Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)/ People's Protection Units (YPG) and Operation Euphrates Shield / Olive Branch aligned groups in the Maraanaz and Mare' frontlines. YPG forces also destroyed a Turkish armored vehicle using an anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) north of Menagh Airbase on 19 April (Figure 3).

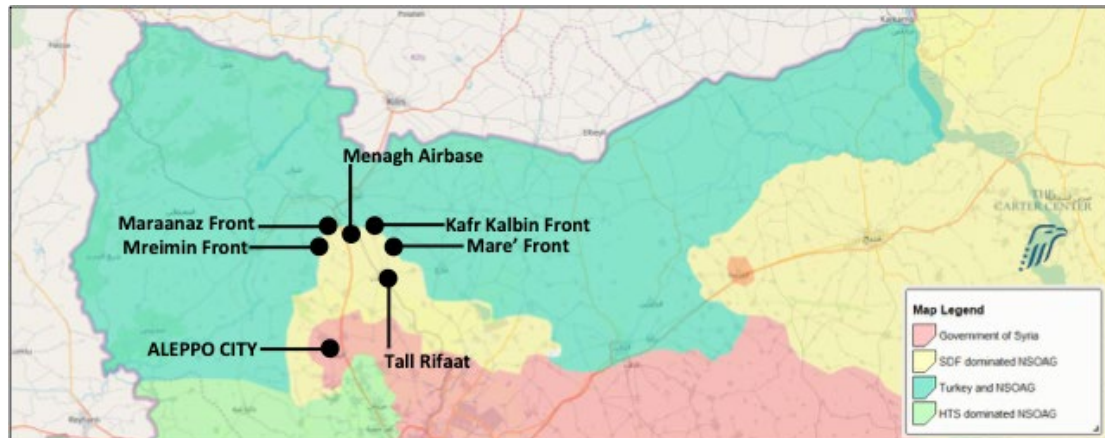


Figure 3: Locations of conflict activity in Tal Rifaat enclave 15 – 21 April 2019.

In the past 12 months, conflict activity in these locations have been low compared to other parts of Syria, with 102 incidents of shelling, ground clashes, or airstrikes recorded in the area since January 2018.

SOUTH AND CENTRAL SYRIA

Attacks involving explosives and shooting against government aligned personnel continued in southern Syria this week, with three attacks recorded in Yadudeh, Sanamayn and close to Daraa city. The Popular Resistance [claimed](#) the attack in Daraa city, where an explosive detonated against a moving SUV. As stated in [previous](#) reporting, explosive attacks remain uncommon in southern Syria, making up just 8 percent of the total number of attacks recorded since August 2018 (79).

It was also [reported](#) that the government's 4th Division transferred as many as 1,200 troops to Daraa governorate, and established a new checkpoints in Kharab Shaham town and Yadudeh towns by the start of this week.

Further east, in As Sweida, unidentified actors killed a Military Intelligence Officer in Salkhad on 15 April, the first recorded event of its kind in the town in 12 months.

For the second consecutive week, evidence of the ISIS presence in the deserts of

⁴ The Tal Rifaat area is under joint control of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and government aligned forces since late 2016. Russian forces had also been conducting joint patrols with Turkish troops in the area since 14 February 2019, and with SDF forces since 26 March 2019.

Homs Governorate was reported. On 17 April, ISIS ambushed a government military convoy in the Kowm village area, north of Sokhneh town. Pro government media [reported](#) that at least 15 soldiers were killed, [including](#) one Hezbollah member, and that ISIS were able to temporarily [take](#) control of the village.

On 20 April, clashes between ISIS and a government patrol occurred in the same area, while to the east of Tadmor city, on the road to Sokhneh town, a government patrol came under ISIS small arms fire attack in a separate event. ISIS elements also clashed with government forces in the Quriyeh area to the south of Deir Ez Zor city.

This brings the number of major ambushes against government forces in the deserts of Homs / Deir ez Zor governorates to six since early February 2019, when government forces carried out an anti-ISIS operation in the deserts of Homs governorate. Five of these attacks have occurred in the past two weeks.

In addition, a previously unknown group, Katiba Thawr Mohassin (Mohassin Revolutionary Brigades), released an [online](#) statement claiming an IED attack against government forces in Kabajib town between Sokhneh and Deir Ez Zor on 15 April. This is the first record of the group acting in Syria. Their affiliation is not clear. (Figure 5).

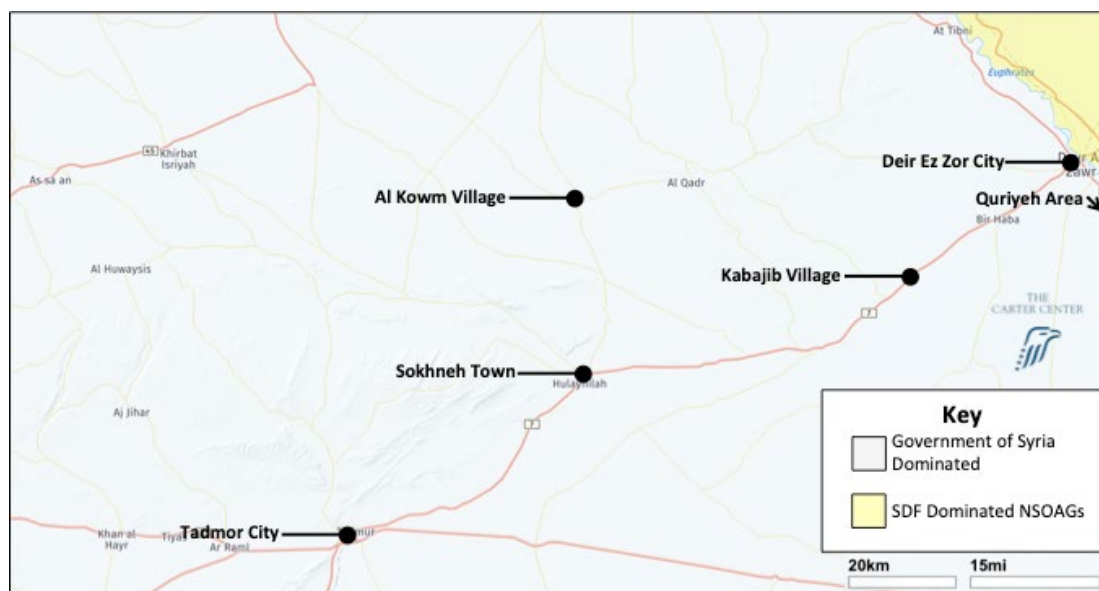


Figure 5: Locations of ISIS and Katiba Thawr Mohassin attacks in desert areas between Tadmor and Deir Ez Zor City 15 – 21 April 2019.

Finally, in Damascus, two explosive attacks were recorded this week. The first occurred on 15 April against a checkpoint in the Jdaydet Artooz suburb to the southwest of Damascus city. The second attack, on 16 April, saw an explosive detonate in the Qudsaya neighbourhood in the north of the capital. The attacks are only the second and third explosive incidents to affect the capital in 2019.

The Popular Resistance [claimed](#) the first attack, while a group called Saraya

Qasiuoun (the Qasioun Companies)⁵ claimed the second attack and said that it had targeted a military intelligence officer. Other sources [linked](#) the attack to Liwa Al Muhim Al Siraya (Special Task Companies). Both groups also stated that they would continue to target the capital in the future.

While these are the first time the two groups have claimed activity in the capital, it is important to note that Liwa al Muhim al Siraya has a record of making unreliable claims. On 2 April, the group [claimed](#) it had ambushed a military convoy in Barza, when the event had actually been a local dispute between Airforce Intelligence and local National Defense Force (NDF) personnel in the neighboring Ish al Warwar district of the capital.

NORTHEAST SYRIA

Attacks against forces within the SDF-dominated northeast of Syria continued this week with seven shooting and explosive attacks recorded against SDF and aligned forces in Kasra, Shiheil, the Abu Nittel and Namliyah road and Al Sabkhah in Deir Ez Zor governorate, the Kharafi road in Shadadah town in Hassakeh governorate and in Maadan, and Tabqa in Raqqa governorate.

Despite the fall of ISIS' last remaining enclave in Baghuz Fawqani nearly a month ago, coalition air activity continued against ISIS targets in the northeast. This week saw at least one raid on 15 April on the town of Shafa, while the latest Operation Inherent Resolve official figures [state](#) that at least 29 airstrikes were conducted in Syria between 23 March and 6 April 2019.

⁵ Apparently with reference to Qasioun Mountain, that overlooks Damascus from the northwest.