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WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 11 – 17 MARCH 2019

WHOLE OF SYRIA SUMMARY

- **NORTHWEST** | Despite further Turkish Military patrols in the Idlib pocket, a rise in airstrike activity was reported in areas dominated by the al Qaeda linked Hayyat Tahrir ash Sham (HTS). Ongoing bombardments in government-dominated areas were also recorded, including at least one-infiltration attempt by HTS.
- **SOUTH** | Further protests against the Syrian government's arrest policy in the south of Syria occurred in As Sanamayn and Karak towns following last week's demonstrations in southern Daraa City and Tafs town. Low-level conflict against individuals in southern Syria also continued this week, including two attacks claimed by the anti-government group Popular Resistance.
- **NORTHEAST** | The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) advanced on the last remaining ISIS encampment in Baghuz Village in the southeast Deir Ez Zor Governorate. However, legacy landmine and improvised explosive devices, large numbers of IDPs, and ISIS resistance involving suicide bombers has slowed progress.

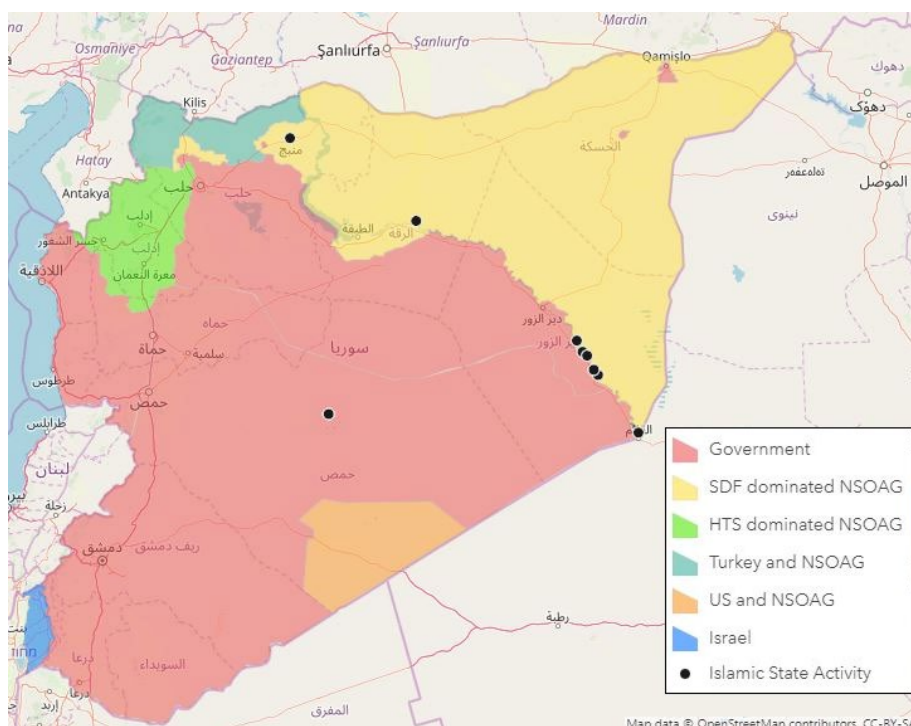


Figure 1: Dominant Actors' Area of Control and Influence in Syria as of 17 March 2019. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. For more explanation on our mapping, please see footnote 1 on page 2.

NORTHWEST SYRIA

The Turkish military conducted two patrols in the Idleb pocket this week. The first began in the Idleb countryside on 15 March but was not completed. The second patrol occurred on 17 March in the Ashtarab region of western Hama/Idleb governorates. The patrols did not reduce conflict events in the governorates for this reporting period. (Figure 2)

Conflict Event in Idleb and Northern Hama Governorates for 1-16 March

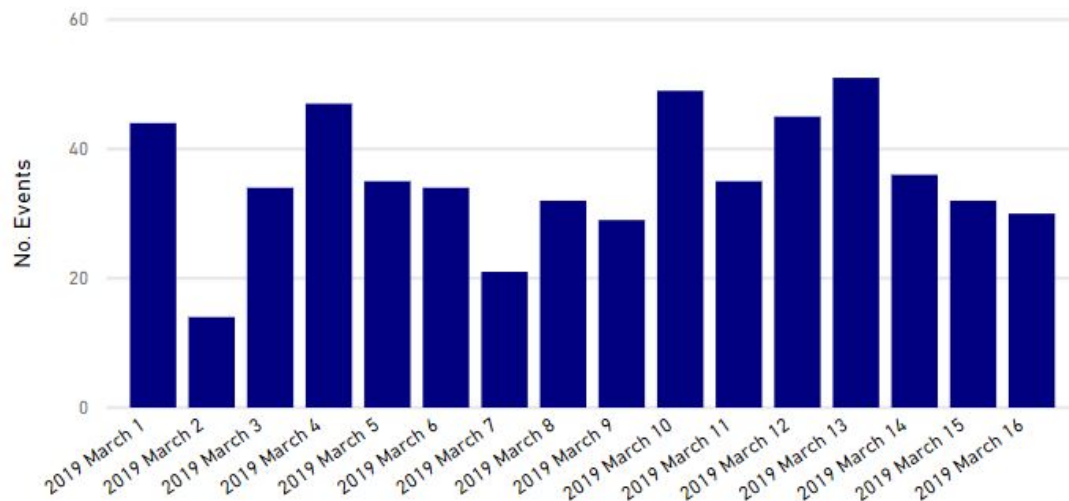


Figure 2: Timeline of Syrian military and NSOAG activity in Idleb and Northern Hama Governorates in March 2019, with the days of Turkish Military Patrols Highlighted in light blue.

Government initiated conflict activity in the HTS dominated enclave remained elevated this week, with 211 incidents of conflict reported. This is an increase from 182 incidents reported last week and brings March's total to 469 reported incidents (Figure 3).

¹ Figure 1 denotes dominant actors' control and influence. Syrian government-controlled areas include the presence of allied actors such as Russia, Iran, Hezbollah and Iraqi militias. Areas outside of Syrian government control include the SDF in the northeast, the Turkish military and aligned militias, such as the Free Syrian Army and the National Liberation Front, in the northwest, while HTS controls large portions of the de-escalation zone around Idleb. ISIS still controls a small strip of territory in Baghuz Faqwani town. Of note, the NSOAG labeled area along the border with Iraq and Jordan denotes the US led coalition's 55km de-confliction zone that contains several aligned local armed groups.

Government Initiated Conflict Events in Northwest Syria

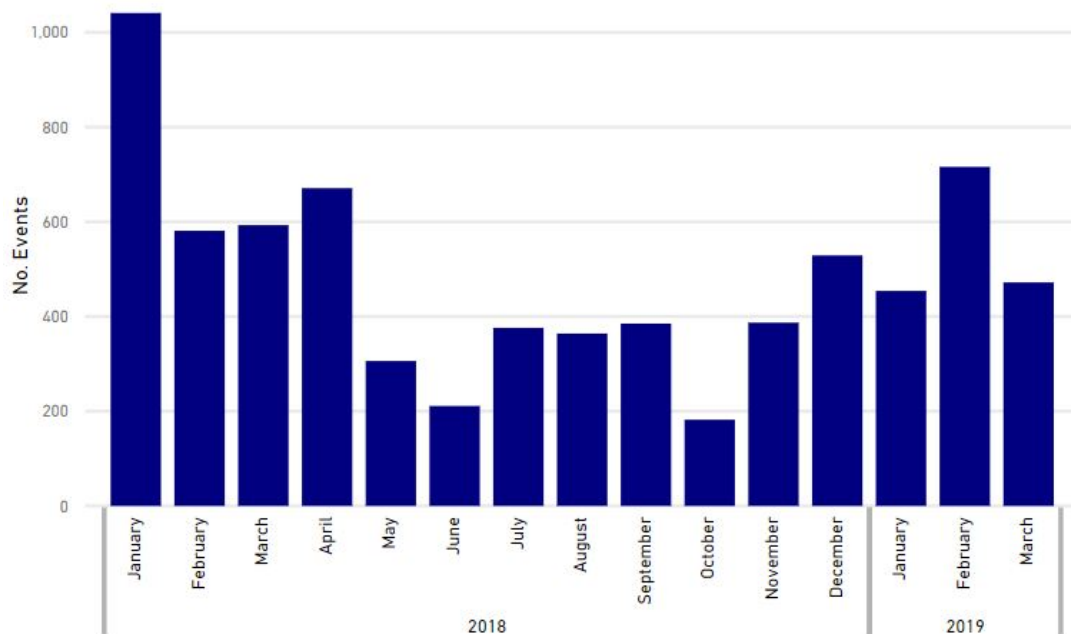


Figure 3. Timeline of conflict activity in Idleb and Northern Hama Governorates since January 2018.

An increase in the number of airstrikes was reported at the start of the reporting period, with 24 cases recorded in three days between 10 and 13 March. This was the same number of airstrike events that had been recorded in the two weeks prior, between 25 February and 9 March. The majority of airstrikes focused on urban areas inside the pocket, especially Saraqb (9), Idleb City (7), Maraat al Numan (4), Kafr Nabal (1) and Ariha (1). Two airstrike events were also recorded near frontlines in Jisr Shaghur to the west of the pocket.

As a result of the growing intensity of the conflict in the Idleb pocket, 163 local humanitarian and civil society NGOs [released](#) a statement this week outlining the impact of the elevated levels of conflict on the humanitarian situation in Idleb, before calling on Russia and Turkey to abide by the September 2018 De-escalation Zone agreement.

In Latakia province, Syrian military forces [shot down](#) several drones outfitted to carry explosives over western frontlines on 15 March. This is the first time such devices have been seen since an attack on Russia's Hmeimim Airbase in [August 2018](#). In addition, a combination of HTS and other opposition armed forces carried out at least eight bombardments of government-controlled locations primarily in Tal Muraq, As-Suqaylabiyah, Suran and Tal Salhab. One HTS infiltration attack also occurred in the Shezer area on 11 March.

SOUTH SYRIA

Demonstrations occurred in As Sanamayn on 13 and 16 March, as well as Karak town on 13 March over the government's detention policy, as well as the escalation in conflict in Idleb governorate. These demonstrations follow last

week's protests in southern Daraa City and Tafs town over the Syrian government's ongoing arrest campaign and failure to provide adequate services.

The timing and location of the protests are notable, as they occurred in the week commemorating the start of the Syria protests in mid-march 2010. The protests also occurred in areas [influenced](#) by Russia rather than Government of Syria after the military takeover of Daraa in mid 2018.² There has been no recorded government reaction to these demonstrations at the time of writing.

In other areas, low level attacks against individuals continued. This included two attacks against former opposition group leaders that reconciled with the government in mid 2018 in Mzeireb and Tafas – the latter involving an improvised explosive device (IED) targeting an Al Moataz Bellah Division commander.

The opposition group known as the “Popular Resistance” also claimed two attacks this week. The first was an assassination of an Air-force Intelligence officer in Eastern Maliha town on 13 Marc. The second occurred on 15 March in Da’el town and involved a complex attack against an Air Force Intelligence site using small and medium size arms as well as grenades.

In the past month, at least five attacks in eastern Daraa have been linked to the group, all targeting Syrian military forces. Also, this brings the total number of direct attacks against individuals in the south of Syria by a variety of actors in 2019 to 27. The majority (15) of these have targeted Syrian military personnel or former opposition group leaders who “reconciled” with the government (Figure 4).

NORTHEAST SYRIA

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) made small advances against the last remaining ISIS pocket in Baghuz Faqwani town at the end of the reporting period. After heavy ground clashes and at least six coalition airstrikes, SDF took a large portion of the 700m2 encampment.

However, ISIS resistance against the SDF advance still remains. On 15 March, two female suicide bombers detonated themselves against SDF personnel who were in the process of transferring civilians from the Baghuz pocket. The attack resulted in at least nine fatalities and additional SDF fighters and civilians being injured. SDF advances were also slowed by landmines and improvised explosive devices, as well as continued large numbers of IDPs leaving the ISIS enclave. This week at least 5500 people left the area to al Hole Camp in Hassakeh governorate, bringing the total number of IDPs in the settlement to 67,795 people [according](#) to the United Nations, 90 percent of whom are women and children.³

Evidence of low-level conflict against the SDF in Deir Ez Zor continued this week, with at least 13 cases of violence recorded in four sub districts; Thiban (8), Basira

² For more on the different actor influence in the south, see the Humanitarian Access Team (HAT) Report “Dividing Daraa: Coordination or Competition in Syrian and Russian Government Negotiations in Southern Syria” from July 2018.

³ For more on the humanitarian situation in Al Hole Camp, see the UNOCHA’s Humanitarian Update [here](#).

(3), Ashara (1) and Hajin (1). During 2019, these districts have seen 96 (36%) conflict events out of a total of 295 events recorded since the SDF takeover of the region in 2018.⁴

WATCH LIST

The watch list outlines various dynamics the Carter Center is monitoring in the coming weeks:

NORTHWEST | Changes in types of conflict activity in the northwest, especially any increase in the number of airstrikes as well as any troop movements to frontline areas.

SOUTH | The ongoing protests against the government over detainees and arrests, especially in areas influenced by Russian forces, as well as any change in the number of attacks against individuals in the south.

NORTHEAST | Effects of the growing humanitarian situation from the Baghuz pocket on the security environment in northeast Syria, as well as any change in the levels of asymmetrical attacks against the SDF along the Euphrates River.

⁴ Excluding the Baghuz pocket. Sizable counts of activity in 2019 have also occurred in Abu Kamal (24 percent) and Susat (23 percent) sub districts.