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WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 10 - 16 FEBRUARY 2020

WHOLE OF SYRIA SUMMARY

- **NORTHWEST** | Government of Syria (GoS) forces made further advances in northwest Syria, capturing the entire M5 highway and pushing frontlines 9km west from Aleppo City. Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS) and other opposition groups continued to resist GoS attacks, including with the use of man portable air defence systems (MANPADs) against GoS aircraft. Turkish military forces shelled multiple GoS locations in reaction to GoS shelling on one of its positions near Taftnaz. Elevated conflict between the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) and Turkish backed groups continued in Tal Rifaat.
- **SOUTH & CENTRAL** | Attacks on GoS-aligned personnel in southern and central Syria continued. Israeli airstrikes targeted GoS locations around Damascus for the second consecutive week.
- **NORTHEAST** | Attacks on SDF personnel continued in the Euphrates River Valley. On 12 February, a US patrol came under small arms fire near a GoS checkpoint. Turkish-backed Syrian opposition groups shelled various locations around Operation Peace Spring areas throughout the week.

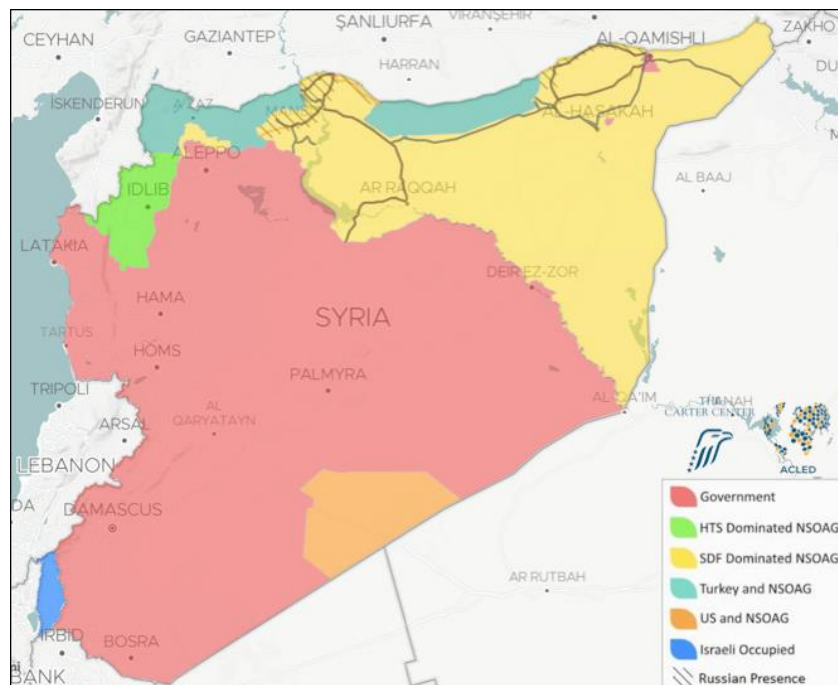


Figure 1: Dominant actors' area of control and influence in Syria as of 16 February 2020. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. Also, please see the footnote on page 2.

NORTHWEST SYRIA

GoS captured the remaining parts of the M5 highway under HTS/opposition group control, as well as the western outskirts of Aleppo city this week. GoS troops breached frontlines at Maraath al Nassan, before turning northwards, parallel with the M5 highway, and taking areas around Um Saghira and Kafr Nihal.² At the end of the reporting period, GoS/HTS frontlines were some 9km west from Aleppo City. For a summary of the above advances see Figure 2.

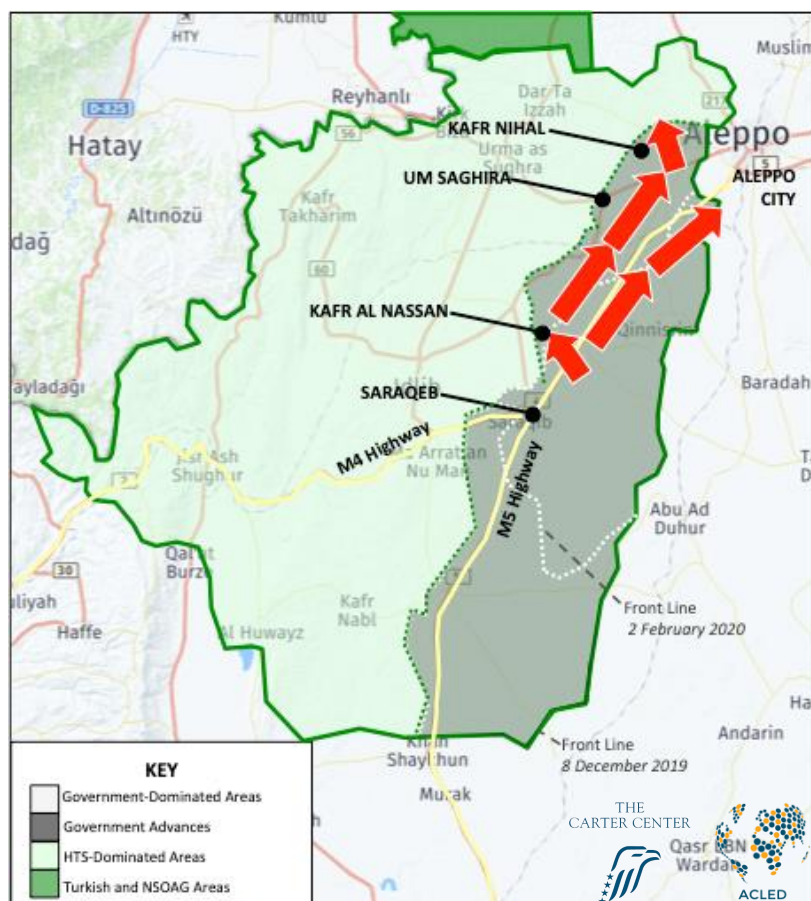


Figure 2: GoS Advances in Northwest Syria in 2020. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

Despite the loss of territory, HTS and other opposition group continued to resist GoS activity (Figure 3). They also shot down three GoS helicopters using MANPAD

¹ Figure 1 denotes dominant actors' control and influence. Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah maintain military 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. The area around the convergence of the Syrian, Iraqi and Jordanian borders is a 55km radius zone established by the US that also includes a number of aligned local armed groups. Data collected is by the publicly available project ACLED.

² ACLED data recorded that GoS captured 36 locations; Aleppo Police School, Al Amin Association, Al Rashdeen, Ajil, Awejal, Atareb, Al Klariyah, Al Shamiko, Al Madaen, Arada, Arnaz, Barqum, Electricity Association, Kafr Aleppo, Kafr Naha, Kafr Noran, Kafr Tuman, Khan al Asal, Khirbal Jazraya, Marret al Naasan, Masoura, Miznaz, Qanater, Qamari, Radwan Association, Regiment 46 Military Base, Rif al Mohandessin al Awal, Rif al Mohandessin al Thani, Sadiyah, Sheikh Ali, Um al Kubra, Sahafiyen, Um Al Saghira, Western Kafr Jum, Zahrat and Zurbah.

during the week.³ This is the first time MANPADs have been used against GoS aircraft in the northwest since 2018.

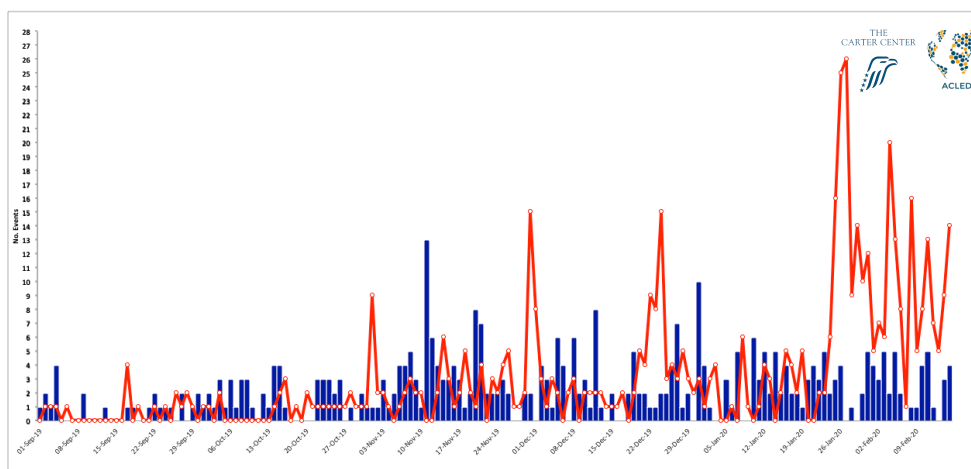


Figure 3: HTS and opposition frontline clashes with GoS (red) and shelling of GoS areas (blue) in Northwest Syria in 2020. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

For the second time this month, Turkish troops in northwest Syria were impacted by GoS activity. On 10 February, GoS shelling struck Turkish Military positions on the Teftnaz airbase. In response, Turkish armed forces shelled GoS positions in Nayrab, Jeb Ramleh, and around Saraqeb. In the days following the exchange, Turkish re-enforcements arrived in northwest Syria,⁴ and established new positions on the Regiment 111 Army base, Regiment 46 Army base, Atare, Jeineh, Termanin, Kafr Karmin, Maraat Tamasrin, and Deir Sunbul.

In the Tal Rifaat area, elevated conflict between the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) and Turkish and aligned Syrian opposition forces continued. There were 15 exchanges of artillery this week across Bashmra (x2 events), Daghelbash, Malikiyeh (x2), Sad al Shahba, Shawarighat al Arz (x2), Samouqa, Shiekh Issa, Maranaaz (x2), Hazwan, Tatemrash, and Kafr Antoun. So far, the month of February has the second highest levels of recorded conflict in the area in the past year.⁵

SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

Attacks against GoS-aligned personnel continued in southern and central Syria. In Daraa, small arms attacks targeted a 4th Division soldier and alleged local drug dealer in Jlein, and Airforce Intelligence checkpoints in Mseifra and Dael. On 11 February, ISIS ambushed a GoS military convoy in the Homs desert near Solkhneh. Such activity has been common in the previous 12 months.

For a second consecutive week, Israeli airstrikes targeted GoS military locations in Syria. On 13 February, Israeli missiles struck areas between Damascus International Airport and the Sayida Zeinab suburb as well as the 1st Armored

³ ACLED data recorded incidents over Qminas on 11 February, over Idleb on 13 February and over Qebtan al Jebal on 14 February.

⁴ ACLED DATA recorded 5 large convoys entering Syria throughout the week.

⁵ 54 events in February 2020. ACLED recorded 83 events in October 2019

Division Army Base near Kisweh. There have been regular Israeli airstrikes against military locations around Damascus in the previous two years (Figure 4).

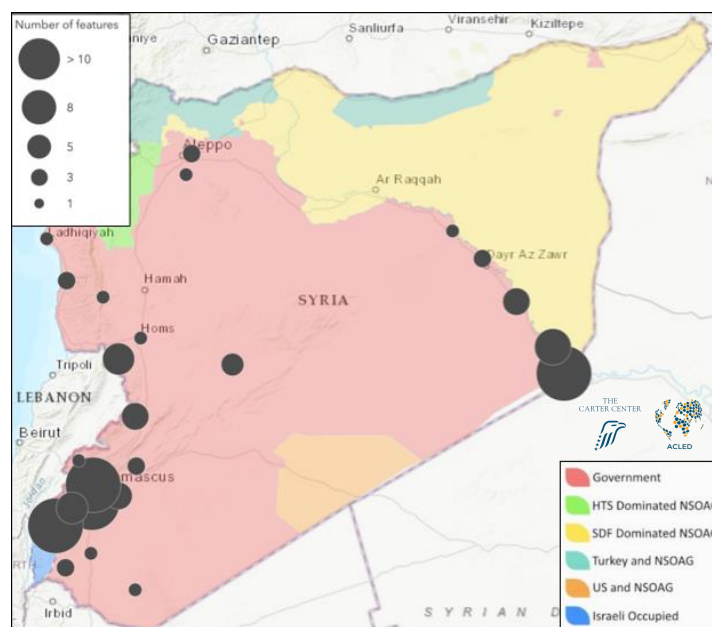


Figure 4: Israeli Airstrikes in Syria 2018 and 2020. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

NORTHEAST SYRIA

Artillery and small arms fire exchanges between Turkish-backed groups and Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)/GoS forces in the northeast increased again this week. ACLED recorded 26 events,⁶ compared to 20 and 16 events the previous two weeks. Turkish forces also shelled Dardara, Um Kayf, Sharbin, Tawila, Um Khair, Tal Tawil, Abu Rasin, and Um Waratha and Qurt Wayran in Menbej district. Activity has concentrated around Abu Rasin, Tal Tamr, and Ain Issa towns in 2020.

Small arms attacks on SDF personnel along the Euphrates River Valley continued this week. SDF patrols were targeted in Abu Rasin, Shiheil (x2), Thiban, and Basira. Unidentified gunmen also opened fire on an Asayish (SDF intelligence) building in Hawayij.

A car bomb detonated in the Sinaa neighborhood of Sukuk City causing 13 civilian casualties. Explosive device detonations have become increasingly common since the area was taken over by Turkish-backed groups during Operation Peace Spring in October 2019. Since then, ACLED has recorded 17 explosive detonations in Suluk sub district, compared to only 10 in the previous two years.

⁶ Tal Tamr (x2), Tawileh (x2), Tall Tawil, Dada Abdal, Um Harmala, Um al Kayf, Abu Rasin, Rubay'at, Alia, Leylan, Qasemiyeh, Tallat Owaysh, Al Arish, Um Ashba, Ein Issa Camp (x3), Aafdiko, Muallaqa, Saida, Kubralak, Al Khalidiyah, Qazali (x2), and the Sharkrak Silos.

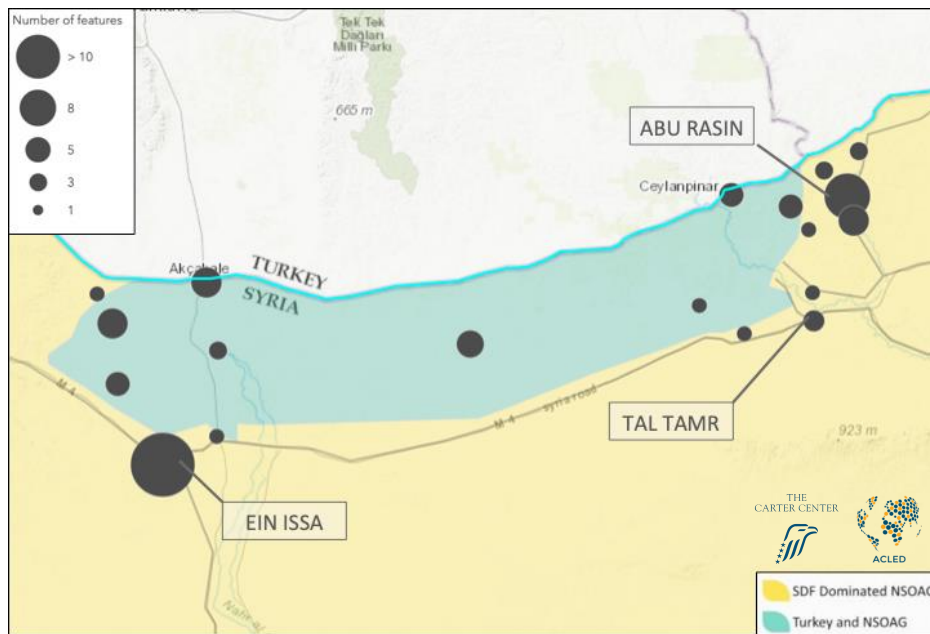


Figure 5: Shelling and armed clash activity around Operation Peace Spring in Northeast Syria. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

On 12 February, a US military patrol came under small arms fire near a GoS aligned National Defense Force (NDF) checkpoint in Kherbet Hamu Village in Qamishli Governorate. The patrol was stopped near the checkpoint after NDF forces and local residents from the village had prevented the convoy from passing the checkpoint. Open source videos [show](#) that a Russian military patrol was in the vicinity of the event. Despite growing numbers of events since December where US, Russian or GoS forces blocked access to one another in the northeast, this is the first time such an event has escalated into violence.⁷

Coalition forces were also involved in SDF raids against alleged ISIS members in the northeast of Syria. SDF and Global Coalition against Daesh forces arrested individuals in operations in Shiheil and Thiban towns. These operations took place a year after the two towns were re-captured by SDF forces.

Attacks again targeted oil infrastructure in the northeast this week. On 12 February, an IED detonated against an oil tanker passing on the Khurafi Road in al Hassakeh Governorate. This is the fifth attack in as many weeks against critical infrastructure in the northeast of Syria.

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⁷ Previous events of sides blocking access in the northeast included: on 6 February, a GoS military patrol prevented a US military patrol from entering Tal Shamran near Tal Tamer in al Hasakah Governorate; on 30 January, a US military vehicle prevented a Russian military patrol from passing through Tal Tamer town; on 23 January, US forces blocked a Russian Patrol in Tal Tamer; on 19 January, US forces blocked a Russian patrol driving to the Semalka border crossing in Mustafa Derek Village in the Malikiyeh Sub District of Hassakeh Governorate; on 20 December 2019, GoS forces prevented an American column heading to the western countryside of Al-Hasakeh from passing in Qamishli city; and on 11 December 2019, the US prevented a Russian patrol from passing the Tall Allou area in the countryside of Qahtaniyyah in Al-Hasakeh Governorate.