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WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 27 April - 3 May 2020

SYRIA SUMMARY

- **NORTHWEST** | Hayyat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) faced protests after opening a controversial commercial crossing with Government of Syria (GoS). A fuel tanker explosion in Afrin killed 53 people. Infighting between Turkish-backed armed opposition groups escalated in Jarabulus, Aleppo Governorate.
- **SOUTH & CENTRAL** | Clashes between As-Sweida and Dara'a militias continued. Attacks against GoS personnel and positions continued in Dara'a Governorate. Israel attacked pro-Iranian militias and GoS positions across southern Syria. ISIS killed several GoS armed forces personnel.
- **NORTHEAST** | ISIS prisoners attempted to escape Ghoweran jail in Al-Hassakah Governorate. Violence against civilians continued across northeast Syria. Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) faced increased attacks from unidentified gunmen and Turkish armed forces. Coalition forces carried out their first airstrikes since 11 March.

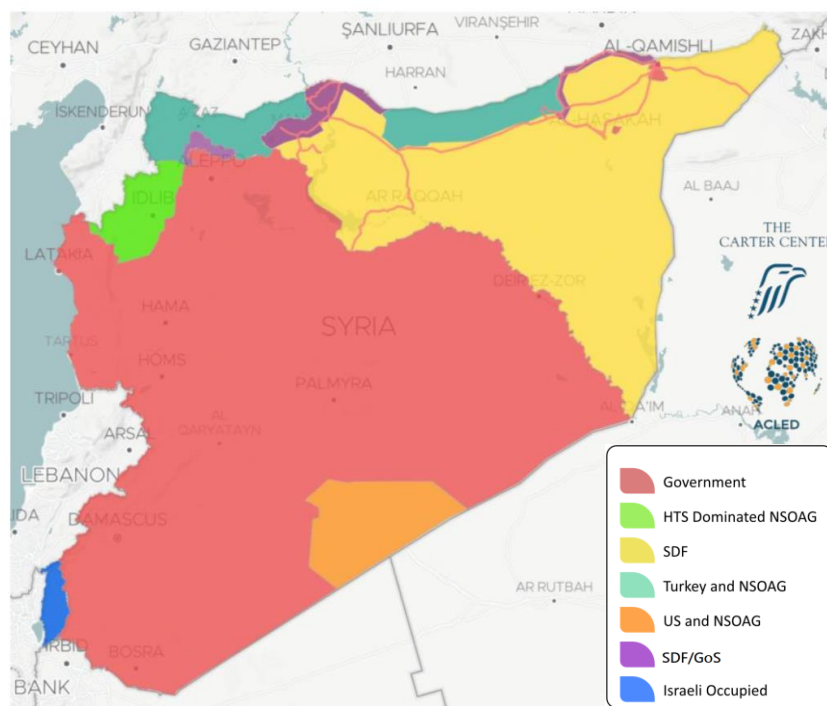


Figure 1: Dominant actors' area of control and influence in Syria as of 3 May 2020. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. Also, please see the footnote on page 2.

NORTHWEST SYRIA

After announcing plans to open a commercial crossing with GoS territory, protests erupted against HTS (see figure 2). Civilians protested the crossing over fears of normalization with GoS and of spreading COVID-19. On 30 April, Maaret al Naasan (Idlib Governorate) residents protested at the crossing and blocked commercial trucks attempting to cross into GoS areas. HTS violently dispersed the protests, killing one. Following the protests, HTS brought reinforcements to Maaret al Naasan. The same day, HTS announced that it had suspended the opening of the commercial crossing.² On 1 May, protests continued against HTS across Idlib and Aleppo Governorates in 10 locations.³ Smaller protests were recorded in 2 May in Kafr Takharim and Ariha in Idlib Governorate. On 3 May, HTS fighters set up a new checkpoint to inspect civilian documents and mobile phones. HTS attempted to open a crossing with GoS on 17 April, but delayed plans after protests.

On 28 April, a fuel tanker bomb exploded on Raju street near an open-air market in Afrin city, Aleppo Governorate. The bombing killed 53 people and wounded 50 others.⁴ Turkey blamed the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), while the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) blamed Turkish-backed armed opposition groups for the attack. On 29 April, Turkish armed forces closed all access to Afrin city.

This week, increased infighting between Turkish-backed armed opposition groups occurred within Turkish-held Euphrates Shield areas. On 1 May, Ahrar al Sham and Hamza Division fighters clashed as a dispute over control of smuggled goods turned violent in eastern Al Bab city in northern Aleppo Governorate. The same day, Turkish-backed Free Syrian Police clashed with Ahrar al Sharqiyah and Jaish al-Sharqiya in Jarablus city, Aleppo Governorate, after the latter two groups attacked a Free Syrian Police building the previous day. On 2 May, clashes escalated as more Turkish-backed armed opposition groups joined the fighting.⁵ Fighting continued until the Sharqiyah factions retreated from Jarablus and Turkish armed forces intervened.⁶ On 2 May, the opposition's Levant Front members and Hamza division personnel clashed near Al Bab after the Levant Front seized goods belonging to Hamza division.

This week, there were decreased levels of artillery bombardment. GoS forces

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 <https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/syria/02052020>

³ Ariha, Korin, Teftnaz, Maaret al Naasan, Idlib city, Bennsh, Kafr Takharim, Haranbush, Zardana Mashehad, and Kelly in Idlib Governorate, and Maarrata, Daret Azza, and Atareb in Aleppo Governorate.

⁴ <https://www.janes.com/article/95927/vbied-attack-in-turkish-controlled-northern-syria-underlines-threat-posed-by-likely-fringe-kurdish-militants>

⁵ Free Syrian Police were joined by the Syrian National Army, Jaysh al Islam, Levant Front, and 9th Division Special Forces. Ahrar al Sharqiyah and Jaish al Sharqiya were joined by Ajnad Sharqiya and 106th Division.

⁶ <https://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=162724>

bombarded nine locations in Idlib and Aleppo Governorates 25 times along frontline areas.⁷ Most of the shelling targeted opposition-held areas in Idlib Governorate. Two artillery bombardments by Turkish armed forces targeted Kurdish-controlled Tall Refaat in Aleppo Governorate on 29 April and 3 May.⁸

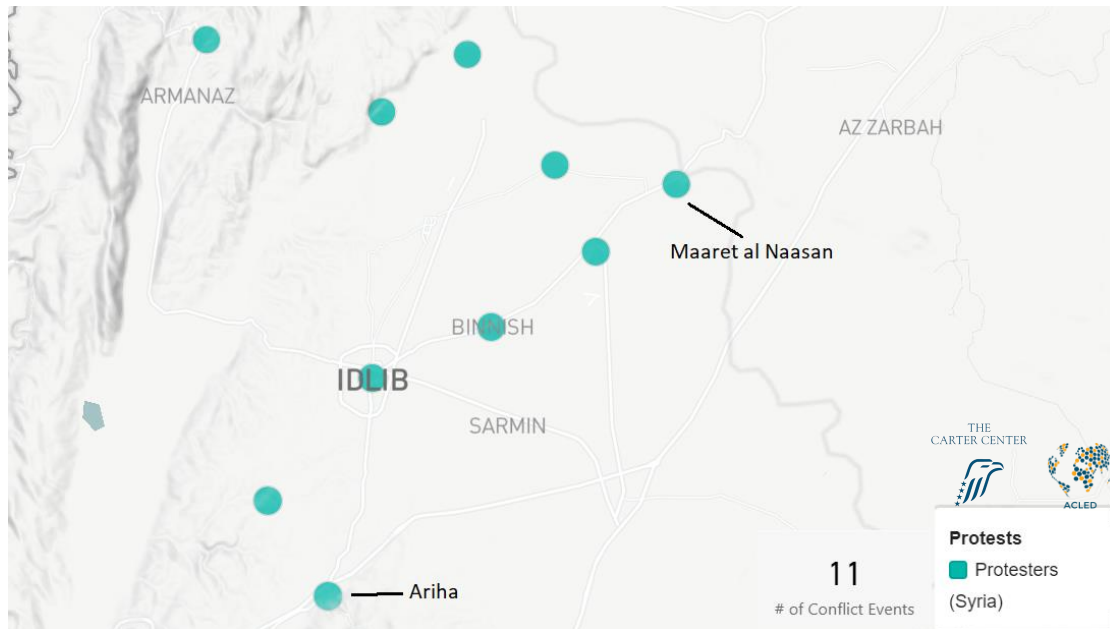


Figure 2: Protests against HTS in Idlib Governorate between 27 April 2020 to 2 May 2020. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

Tension in the Dara'a and As-Sweida Governorates continued this week. Two As-Sweida Communal Militia⁹ personnel died when they attempted to plant an improvised explosive device (IED) on the road between Sayda and Al-Gariya al-Sharqiya in the Dara'a Governorate. As-Sweida Communal Militia members clashed with Russian-backed Fifth Legion personnel from Busra Esh-Sham in the Dara'a Governorate.¹⁰ The conflict was later broken up by Russian military police.

Attacks against pro-GoS individuals and positions continued this week. On 30 April, unidentified gunmen attacked a GoS soldier on the western Ghariyeh – Kahil road in Dara'a Governorate. Two other attacks against GoS positions were reported on the outskirts of Sahwa in Dara'a Governorate and on the Ghadir al-Bostan – al-Malaqa road in Quneitra Governorate. On 2 May, the body of a civilian accused of working with Hezbollah was found in the countryside of Dara'a district within the Dara'a Governorate. The body was found with gunshot wounds.

There were an increased number of Israeli airstrikes across southern Syria. On 27 April, the Israeli Air Force targeted Lebanese Hezbollah and Iranian-backed

⁷ Ftireh (x6), Sfuhen (x4), Fleifel (x2), Kansafra (x6), Maaret al Naasan, Bara (x3), Kafr Taal (Aleppo), Kafr Amma (Aleppo), and Qoqfin.

⁸ <https://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=162881>

⁹ A local militia in As-Sweida Governorate created for community protection.

¹⁰ <https://syrianobserver.com/EN/news/57688/clashes-in-rural-daraa-between-fifth-corps-and-local-suweida-gunmen.html>

militias in Kisweh, Rural Damascus Governorate. On 1 May, the Israeli Air Force attacked four targets throughout southern and central Syria. Israeli airstrikes targeted Iranian-backed militias and GoS positions in Tall al Ahmar al Gharbi (Quneitra Governorate) and Tall al Ahmar and Marriya in western Dara'a Governorate. Israeli airstrikes attacked a Lebanese Hezbollah ammunition warehouse in Tadmor district, Homs Governorate. In 2020, there have been 35 recorded Israeli airstrikes across southern and central Syria (see figure 3).

Two attacks on 30 April were attributed to ISIS. An ISIS gunman assassinated a GoS Military Intelligence official in Kafr Nassij within Dara'a Governorate. An ISIS planted landmine exploded by a bus carrying GoS armed forces personnel, killing 6 soldiers, including an officer. These were the first ISIS attacks in Dara'a Governorate in 2020.

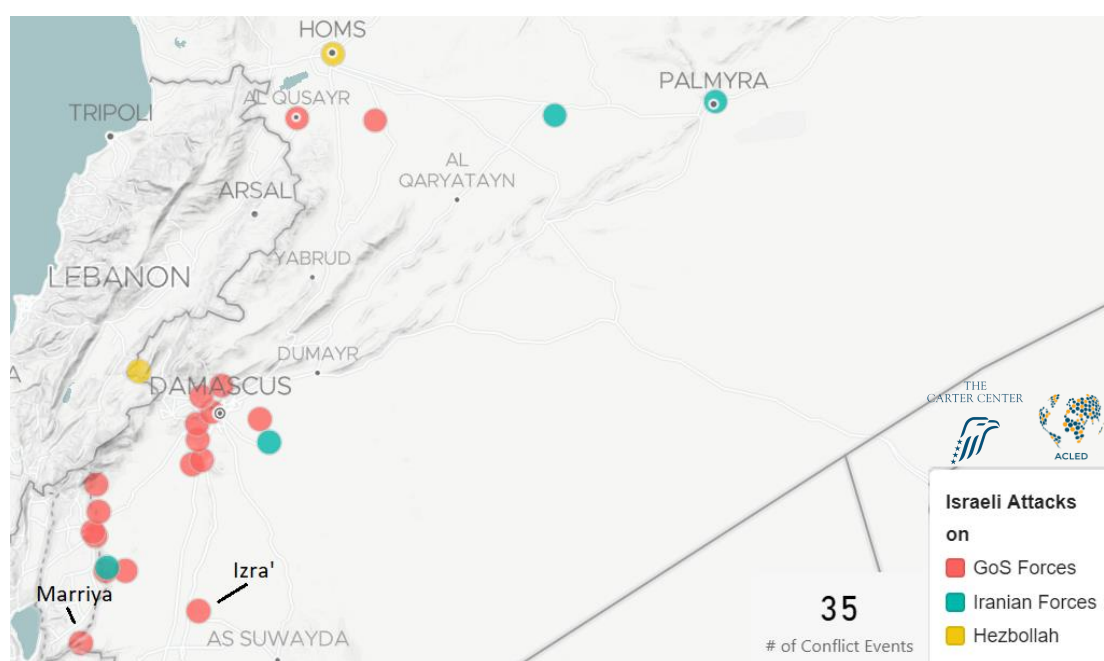


Figure 3: Israeli attacks in south and central Syria between 1 January 2020 to 2 May 2020. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

NORTHEAST SYRIA

This week, ISIS continued attacks across northeast Syria. On 27 April, ISIS fighters killed a GoS soldier in Ruhaybah, Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. On 28 April, 2 Iranian Quds Brigade members were executed by ISIS in Al Mayadin desert in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. On 1 May, ISIS fighters clashed with SDF members in the village of Daman. On 2 May, imprisoned ISIS fighters staged a jailbreak attempt briefly took control of the SDF-run Ghoweran prison in Hassakeh city, Al Hassakah Governorate.¹¹ By 3 May, SDF soldiers retook the facility and put down the riots.¹² Previously, jailed ISIS fighters attempted to escape Ghoweran prison on 29 March.

Nine conflict events targeting civilians were recorded this week in the north-east, the lowest for April 2020. Unidentified gunmen attacked civilians across north-

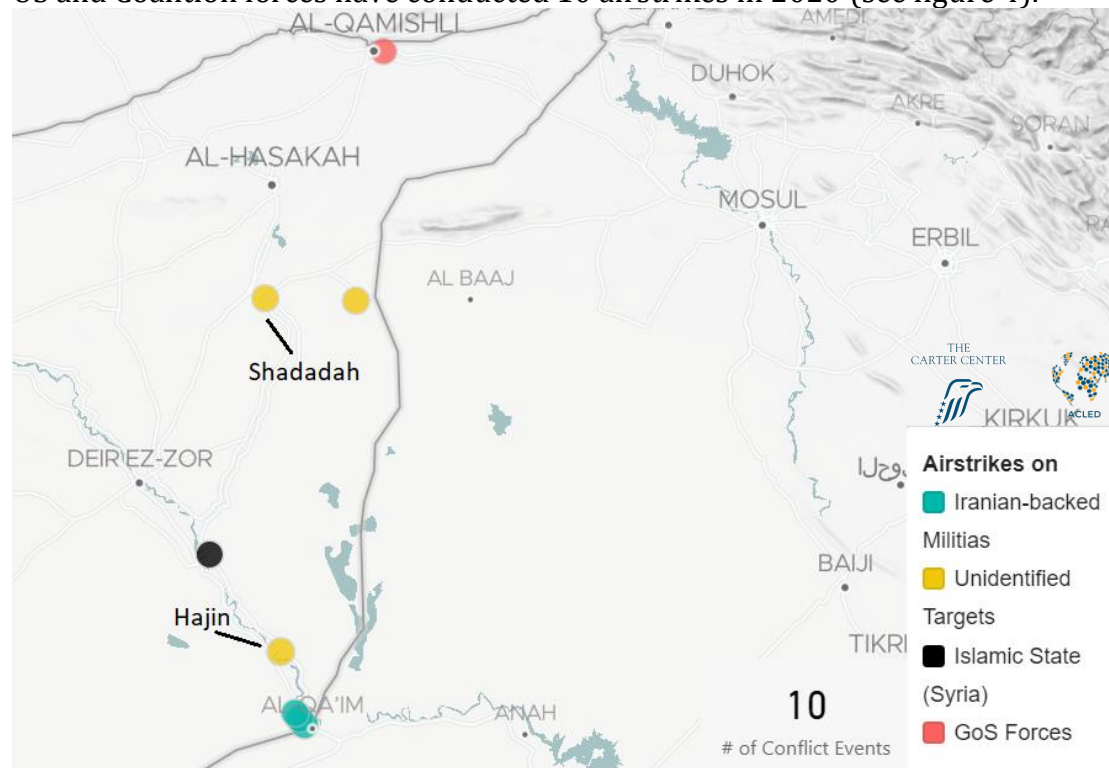
¹¹ <https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/2266381/isis-prisoners-agree-end-riot-syria-jail>

¹² <https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/930ef447-f886-4730-a654-be031f2febdb>

eastern Syria.¹³ Landmines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) hit civilians in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate on 28 April in Koniko Gas Field, and on 1 May in Basira. On 1 May, US armed forces shot and killed a civilian near Koniko Gas Field in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. On 2 May in Al Hassakah Governorate, pro-GoS armed forces looted civilian properties in Abu Rasin and Tal Tamer. The same day, Turkish-backed armed opposition groups under Operation Peace Spring (OPS) looted civilian property in Rashdat in Al Hassakah Governorate.

This week, the SDF faced increased attacks from unidentified and Turkish-backed armed opposition groups. On 27 April, unidentified gunmen attacked a SDF soldier in Shiheil, Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. On 28 April, unidentified gunmen killed a SDF soldier in Ar-Raqqa city, Ar-Raqqa Governorate. Two landmines targeted SDF soldiers in Albu Badran Deir-ez-Zor Governorate and Tell Abiad in Ar-Raqqa Governorate on 30 April. On 1 May, unidentified gunmen attacked a group of SDF fighters in Mansura, Ar-Raqqa Governorate. The same day in Ein Issa in Ar-Raqqa Governorate, Turkish armed forces and SDF fighters clashed after the latter entered Turkish armed forces controlled area. On 2 May, Turkish armed forces and the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army clashed with SDF fighters in Sharkrak in western Ar-Raqqa Governorate.

The Global Coalition Against Daesh carried out their first airstrikes since 11 March. On 30 April, Coalition forces carried out two airstrikes on the outskirts of Dashishah in Al Hassakah Governorate. Coalition forces carried out additional airstrikes in Shadadah in the same governorate on 1 May. The same day, US and Coalition forces arrested suspected ISIS fighters in Hajin, Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. US and Coalition forces have conducted 10 airstrikes in 2020 (see figure 4).



¹³ Civilians were targeted in Hole Camp in Al Hassakah Governorate, Al Hunayah in Ar-Raqqa Governorate, and Thiban in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate.

Figure 4: Airstrikes by US and Coalition forces in northeast Syria between 1 January 2020 to 2 May 2020. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

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