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TWO-WEEK CONFLICT SUMMARY | 11 – 24 NOVEMBER 2019

WHOLE OF SYRIA SUMMARY

- **NORTHWEST** | The first advances of the Government of Syria (GoS) since August were reported in the southeastern parts of the Hayyat Tahrir ash Sham (HTS)-dominated northwest. Inside the enclave, widespread demonstrations took place against HTS and its civilian body, the Salvation Government. In Jarablus, the first suicide attack in over two years occurred on 19 November.
- **SOUTH & CENTRAL** | There were prolonged clashes between GoS personnel and armed groups. Also, the first civilian protests against Hezbollah's presence in southern Syria took place. Two waves of Israeli airstrikes targeted a Palestinian Islamic Jihad commander and Iranian-linked sites in and around Damascus.
- **NORTHEAST** | Territorial changes occurred in the northeast as the Turkish-led Operation Peace Spring continued. Russia and Turkey deployed additional patrols in Raqqah and Hassakeh governorates. In the Euphrates and Khabour River Valleys, attacks against SDF personnel continued. Also, improvised explosive devices (IED) targeted three areas of Qamishli city.

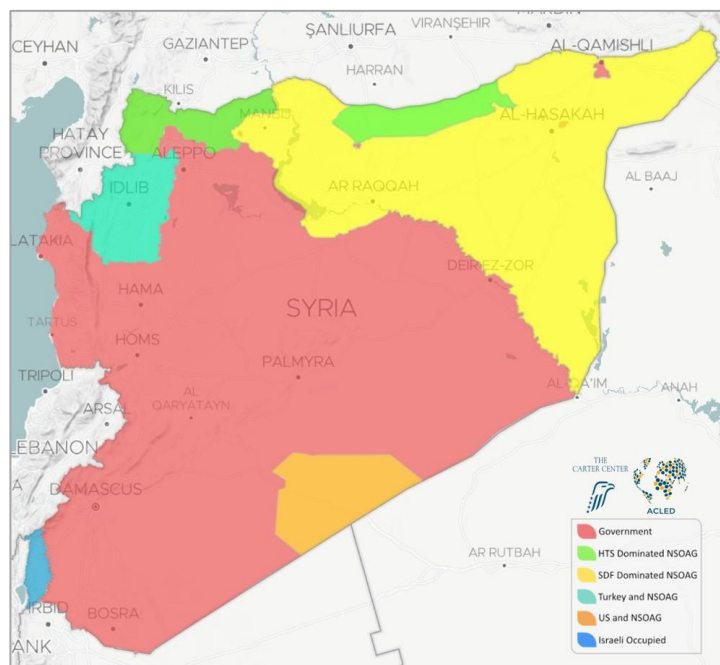


Figure 1: Dominant actors' area of control and influence in Syria as of 21 November 2019. Please see the footnote on page 2 for further details.

NORTHWEST SYRIA

GoS forces advanced in the Hayyat Tahrir al Sham (HTS)-dominated northwest during the reporting period. By 17 November, GoS had captured Tal Al Khaznah and Luwaybdah villages in the southeast of the enclave, before taking the National Liberation Front-controlled (NLF) Musheifra Shamaliyah, Um Al Khalil, and Ard al Zurzur villages by the end of the reporting period (Figure 2).

These are among the first GoS advances in the northwest since late August. The territorial captures were accompanied by aerial and ground bombardments in the wider northwest (Figure 3). This included one event where cluster munitions struck Qah IDP camp and a nearby hospital, both within the Harim district of Idlib Governorate.

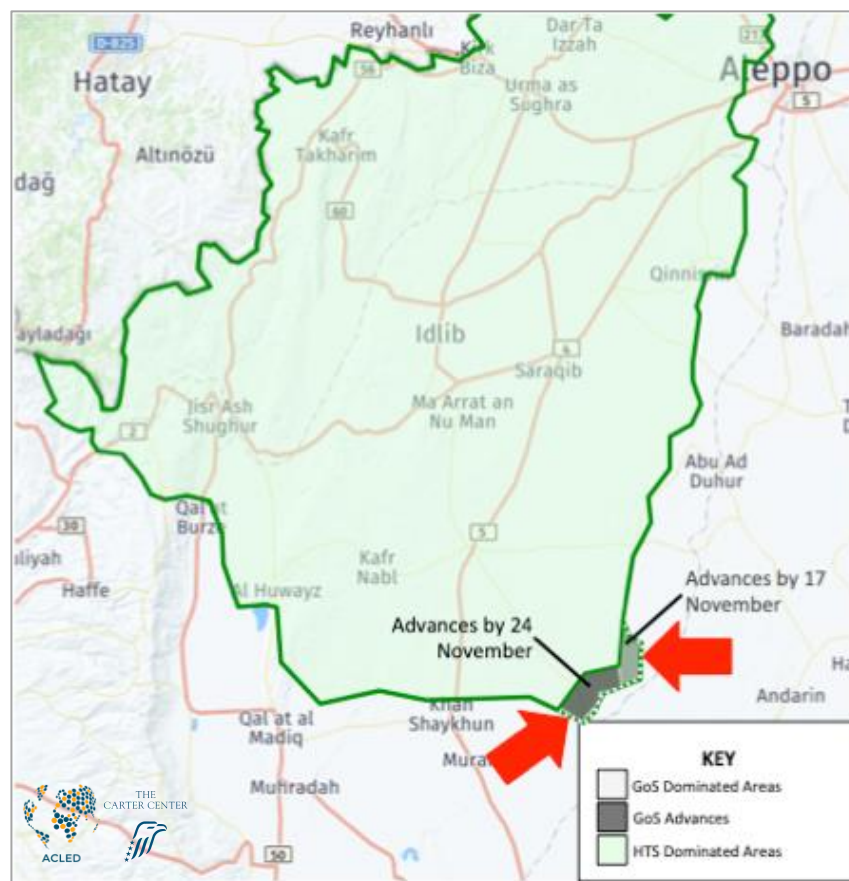


Figure 2: GoS advances in Idlib during the reporting period. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

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 the Turkish-backed opposition's Syrian National Army, operate in areas not under Syrian government control. The US continues to have a presence in the SDF-controlled east of country, though that is currently being redefined. The area along the 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 is collected by the publicly available [ACLED](#).

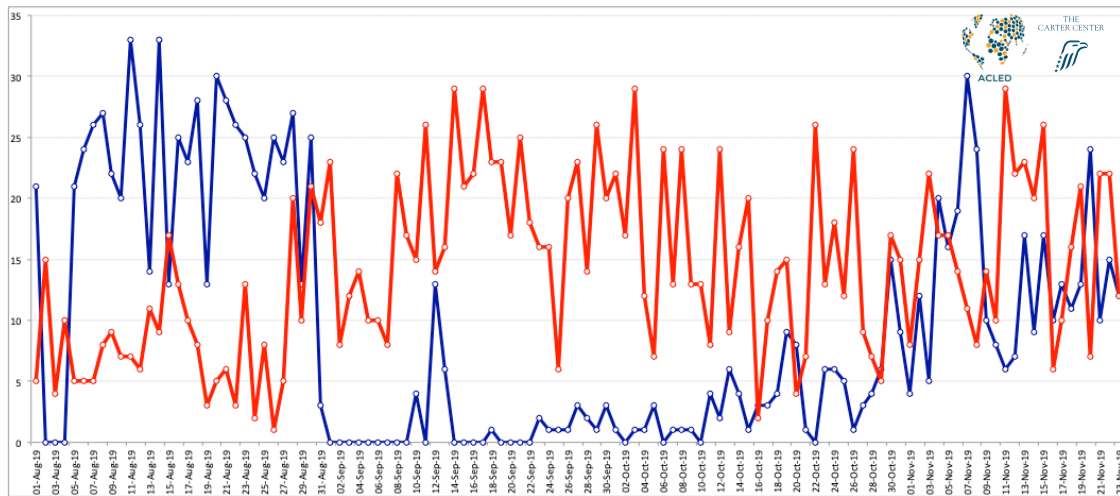


Figure 3: GoS aerial bombardments (blue) and shelling (red) in northwest Syria since August 2019. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

Attacks by HTS and other opposition groups against GoS-dominated areas in the northwest also increased during the period (Figure 4). Between 18 and 24 November, HTS bombarded eight GoS-controlled areas, including an Iranian weapons storage facility in Tal Darin, south of Aleppo city, on 21 November.²

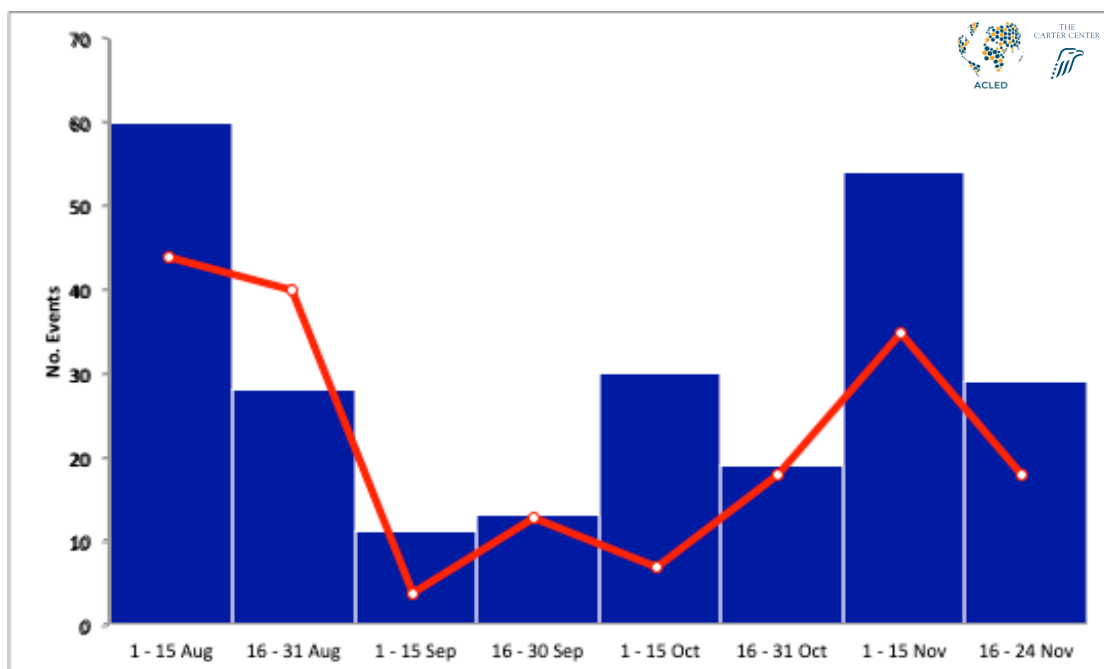


Figure 4: HTS and other groups shelling (blue) and armed clashes against (red) GoS held areas in northwest Syria since 1 August. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

For a third consecutive week, civilian protests continued against HTS. On 15 November, protests occurred in Maraath al Numaan, Maraath al Nasaan, Saraqeb, Idleb City, and Bannish. Protesters denounced HTS and its civilian body, the Salvation Government, regarding their recent decision to impose new taxes and increase fuel prices. Such protests have become common in the latter quarter of 2019.

² Areas targeted included Aleppo city (6 events), Frikeh, Jebal Azzan, Tal Dadin, Jurin, Luwaybdah, Jeb al Ahmar, and Magharat Merza.

In the Turkish-controlled area of Aleppo Governorate,³ security incidents targeted Turkish-backed Syrian opposition armed groups. This included in Azaz where a grenade detonated outside the Levant Front headquarters and in Al Bab where an unidentified gunman shot dead National Liberation Front (NLF) members outside the Al Kabir Mosque. No group has taken responsibility for these attacks. Such activity is routine in these parts of Aleppo Governorate.

In Jarablus city, a suicide bomb attack on 19 November near the Mahatta roundabout resulted in civilian casualties. Bomb explosions are relatively common in the city, with 11 events recorded by ACLED in 2019, but this is the first suicide bomb attack in Jarablus in over two years.

SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

In a break from routine hit and run attacks against GoS and GoS-aligned personnel,⁴ GoS personnel and armed groups engaged in sustained clashes in southern Syria during the reporting period. In the Gharaz area, Popular Resistance members clashed with GoS Military Intelligence units for nearly an hour. A day later, the same opposition group conducted armed attacks against a number of GoS checkpoints in Jasim town. In Haraa, the Popular Resistance also claimed involvement in an attack against GoS forces stationed in the town.

As highlighted in our report [“Update on Conflict in Southern Syria: August 2019 to July 2019”](#), sophisticated attacks against GoS personnel, such as this week’s prolonged clashes, have steadily increased since February 2019 (Figure 5).

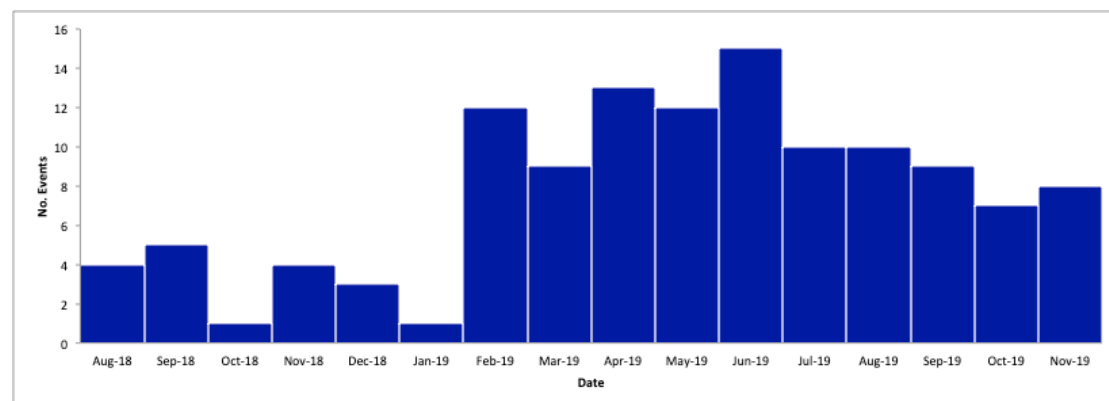


Figure 5: Clashes and attacks against fortified locations (i.e. checkpoints, military locations and convoys) in southern Syria since August 2019. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

Widespread civilian demonstrations also occurred in several locations in southern Syria. On 12, 13, and 15 November, protesters gathered in Saham al Golan, Dara al Balad, Ajami, Tal Shihab, and Zayzoun, calling for the release of GoS-held prisoners from Daraa Governorate and the removal of Hezbollah from southern Syria. Although protesters have called for the release of detainees in Daraa Governorate previously, these are the first anti-Hezbollah protests since GoS recaptured the

³ Operation Euphrates Shield and Operation Olive Branch Areas.

⁴ With attacks in Tafas (x3), Jasim, Ash Shajarah, Ankhal, As Sweida city, Um Mayathin, As Sanamyan, and Sahwa towns – the last two attacks also involved rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs).

governorate in August 2018.

A large contingent of the 9th Armoured Division arrived at various locations in Daraa Governorate in the previous two weeks, possibly in response to the protests. This is the third time GoS have brought re-enforcements to the governorate in 2019.

ISIS activity in central Syria also continued during the reporting period, with several attacks against GoS personnel. This includes an ambush against a GoS patrol in the vicinity of the T3 pumping station and ISIS ambushes against GoS convoys in [Al Ayyour](#) village (as reported by pro-government media), in eastern Hama Governorate, and near [Sokhneh](#). These attacks continue despite recent [reports](#) that GoS and Iraqi military forces were attempting to contain ISIS along the Iraqi / Syrian border.

On 12 November, an Israeli airstrike targeted the home of a Palestinian Islamic Jihad commander in the Western Mezzeh area of Damascus. The strike, in an affluent neighbourhood where international diplomats live and UN buildings are located, is the first time a Palestinian group in Syria has been targeted by Israel in over four years. The majority of Israeli attacks in Syria targets Iranian and Iranian-aligned actors in Syria. Of the 112 attacks in Syria involving Israel from 2018 to present day, 81 have targeted Hezbollah or Iranian sites. The remaining 31 attacks have struck GoS military sites.

On 20 November, widespread Israeli airstrikes targeted multiple Iranian and Syrian military locations around Damascus, including Damascus Mezzeh Military Airbase, Beit Saber, Sa'sa, Jdidet Artuz, Kisweh, Qudsayah, Sahnaya and near the Damascus International Airport. Pro-government media [reported](#) six Iranian nationals were killed in the attacks. The attacks occurred less than 24 hours after four rockets were fired towards Israel from southern Syria and follow similar patterns of retaliatory strikes by Israel.

NORTHEAST SYRIA

Territorial changes between the Turkish-backed opposition's Syrian National Army (SNA)⁵ and the US-backed and Kurdish dominated Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) took place in the reporting period as the Turkish-led Operation Peace Spring continued.

The SNA captured Ain Issa Camp, Arshet Ras al Ain, Kisreh, Khafiyeh, Mu'alaq, Salhiyeh, and Qasmiyeh from the SDF by the end of the reporting period. As part of the agreement between the SDF and the GoS earlier this month, the SDF advanced in Abu Rasin, Arisha, Aziziyeh, Bir Hamra, Tamah, Manakh, Rajla, Saida, Sibatiyyeh, and parts of Daoudiyeh. GoS armed forces also moved into Ain Diwar, Dashisha, Hab Hawa, Khardamiyeh, Tal Tawila Farms, Tawileh village, and Um al Khair by 19 November, areas previously held by the SDF. Additionally, the opposition's Syrian National Army and SDF clashed in 20 locations throughout the

⁵ The Syrian National Army is a Turkish-backed grouping made up of several hundred Syrian armed groups, currently under the control of the opposition's Syrian Interim Government. For more details on these groups, see our ["Special Report: Internal Conflict in Northwest Syria Sep 2018 to Aug 2019"](#).

northeast.⁶

Russian forces, including helicopters and jets, were deployed to Qamishli Airbase, Sarin Airbase, and western parts of the Ain al Arab Countryside. The Russian military also conducted six official joint patrols with the Turkish military in the Ain al Arab area on 13 and 18 November, in the Darbasiyah area on 11, 14, 20 and 23 November, and with GoS forces in the Tal Tamr area on 19 and 21 November. During the Russian and Turkish joint patrols on 13 and 18 November, civilians threw stones and a [Molotov](#) cocktail at Turkish military vehicles. Two US patrols occurred in the Malikeyyeh and Jaroudiyah areas of Hassakeh Governorate during the period.

Along the Khabour River and Euphrates River Valleys, SDF personnel sustained small arms fire and IED attacks. This included small arms attacks in Hasakeh city, Markada, Qamishli city, Shaqra, Shiheil, Tal Shayr, Thiban, and Tayyana villages. IEDs struck SDF personnel in Attala, Jurneyyeh, northern Hasakeh city, Raqqa city, and on the road between Hasakeh city and Tal Tamr. In Namilyeh village, suspected ISIS members ambushed a SDF patrol using small arms fire and IEDs. These attacks have grown steadily since July despite ongoing SDF security operations (Figure 7).

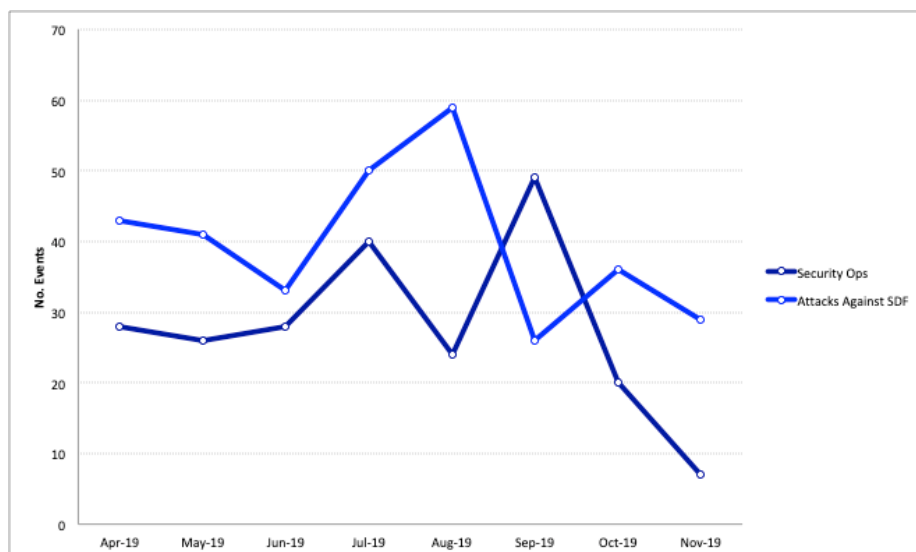


Figure 6: Targeted attacks against SDF security operations by suspected ISIS members in northeast Syria since April 2019. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

After a six-week hiatus, US-led Global Coalition Against Daesh activity against ISIS in the northeast resumed. In the towns of Thiban and Tayyana joint SDF and US raids were conducted against suspected ISIS commanders. US airstrikes also targeted boats on the Euphrates River near Thiban town. They are the first recorded actions since 6 October.

Lastly, on 11 November, three IEDs detonated in quick succession in different

⁶ Abu Khurayza, Bab al Kheir, Dardara, Faysaliyah, Hurriyeh, Hweish, Jurn Aswad, Mahmoudiyah, Manakel, Qa'ali, Qaranfil Faqwani, Qasemiyeh, Rashidiyeh, Rihaniyah, Sarung, Sharkak, Tal Tamr Northern Countryside, Tal Al Wardi, Um al Kayf, and Um Shu'ayfah.

parts of Qamishli city. The explosions in residential, predominantly Christian areas of the city, occurred on Al Wahda Street, near the Al Shabha Hotel, and outside the Qadisiyeh school. No group has claimed responsibility for the attacks. IED attacks are not uncommon in the city, with 14 incidents in 2019 to date. However, for three devices to detonate within the city in a day is unusual.

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