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WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 2 – 9 MARCH 2020

WHOLE OF SYRIA SUMMARY

- **NORTHWEST** | The Government of Syria (GoS) offensive in northwest Syria slowed this week, following a ceasefire brokered by Russia and Turkey on 5 March. Conflict between the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) and Turkey and aligned Syrian opposition group in Tal Rifaat decreased for the second consecutive week.
- **SOUTH & CENTRAL** | Attacks against GoS personnel in southern Syria continued this week. There was also a serious deterioration in security in As Sanamayn town. Unidentified gunmen attacked three GoS checkpoints in Rural Damascus Governorate. Israeli airstrikes attacked locations in Homs and Quneitra Governorate.
- **NORTHEAST** | Conflict decreased in Turkish occupied Operation Peace Spring areas. However, a car bomb detonated against a Turkish-backed group in Hammam al Turkman. Attacks on Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) personnel along the Euphrates River Valley continued.

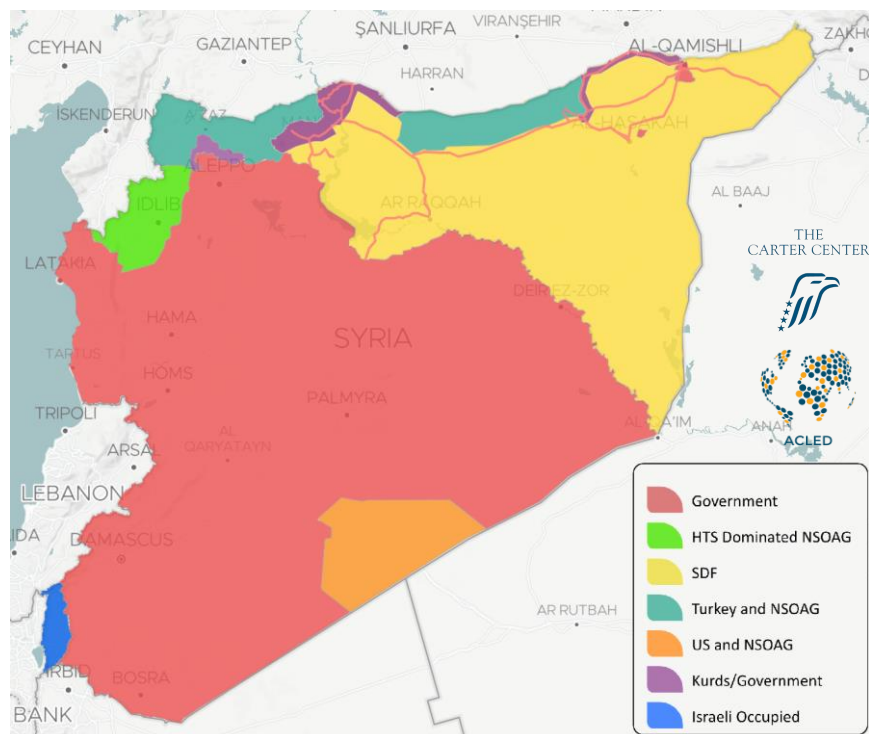


Figure 1: Dominant actors' area of control and influence in Syria as of 9 March 2020. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. Also, please see the footnote on page 2.

NORTHWEST SYRIA

The Government of Syria (GoS) offensive slowed in the Hayyat Tahrir al Sham (HTS) dominated northwest Syria this week. At the start of the reporting period, GoS forces captured Burayj, Maraath Mukhus, Tanjarah, Fleifel, Dar al Kabira, and Hazarin towns. GoS also took back Kafr Battikh, Shabour, Dadikh, Saraqeb, Turnabah, and Jobas towns from HTS/opposition groups after their capture the previous week. Turkish and Syrian military exchanges also continued in the northwest, with Turkish aircraft striking GoS positions in Yaqed Eladas, Maraath al Nusmaan, Mardikh and Saraqib. A GoS fighter jet was shot down above Jisr al Shaghur. GoS airstrikes targeted Turkish positions in Nayrab and in Kafrantinn.

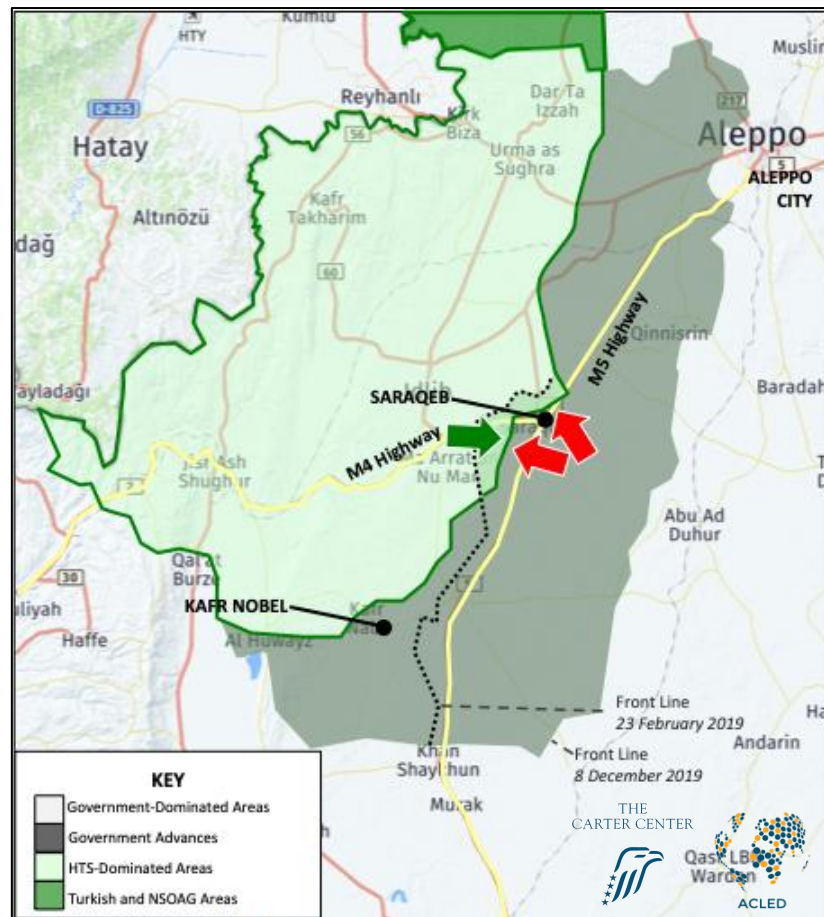


Figure 2: GoS Advances in Northwest Syria in 2020. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

On 5 March, Russia and Turkey [agreed](#) to implement a ceasefire in the northwest. In the two days after the ceasefire, conflict activity in the area significantly decreased. ACLED recorded no airstrikes across the region and just nine shelling exchanges. Turkey established two new observation posts in the northwest in Kafr

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 Syrian control. The US continues to have a presence in the SDF-controlled east of the country. The area around the border juncture of 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.

Naseh and Batabu towns on 5 March, and brought re-enforcements into Idleb on 6 and 7 March.²

In the Tal Rifaat area, levels of artillery and small arms fire exchanges between the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) and Turkish backed groups declined this week. ACLED recorded 13 shelling exchanges in 12 areas,³ a 50 percent decrease from the previous week's.

SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

In addition to continued attacks against GoS-aligned personnel in southern Syria,⁴ there was a deterioration in security in As Sanamayn town. Following an increasing number of attacks by unidentified gunmen on GoS forces in the town, GoS forces began a security operation there on 1 and 2 March. The operation began with GoS forces shelling various locations in the town. GoS then entered As Sanamayn with infantry and tanks before clashing with armed gunmen throughout the day. Protests in support of people in As-Sanamayn erupted in several locations in Daraa Governorate.

The situation was only resolved after Russia brokered an agreement between GoS and armed groups in the town that would allow military aged males to remain in the city rather than sent elsewhere in the country for national service. In the following days, GoS forces sent re-enforcements to As Sanamayn and placed GoS personnel in Daraa Governorate on heightened alert. The event is part of a growing trend of insecurity in southern Syria in the previous 12 months.

Gunmen also targeted GoS and allied personnel in Rural Damascus Governorate. In the Sayyeda Zeinab suburb, gunmen shot dead an Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) officer; in Zakiyeh town, a GoS 7th Division checkpoint came under small arms fire; and in Kanaker town, an armed group attacked a GoS checkpoint. ACLED has recorded only 16 cases of small arms attacks against GoS sites and personnel in the governorate during the previous year.

For a second consecutive week, there was an increase in Israeli attacks in Syria. Israeli fighter jets targeted GoS military positions in Kodneh, Al Khashniyyahm, and Qahtaniya towns in Quneitra Governorate. In Homs Governorate, Israeli airstrikes targeted Shayrat Airbase, Al Dab'a Airbase, and a Hezbollah location near Homs City on 4 and 5 March. Since November, Israeli activity in Syria has remained elevated (Figure 3).

² In one movement on 6 March, 150 military vehicles were brought in across the Kafr Lusin Border Crossing.

³ Exchanges were recorded by ACLED in Mare' (x2), Sheikh Isa, Harbal, Maraanaz, Malikiyyeh, Azzaz, Kaljibrin, Yalni, Jub al Hamir, Khalidiyeh, Kawukli and Arima,

⁴ With attacks against a GoS checkpoint in Tafas, a Airforce Intelligence checkpoint in Hrak (x2), a 4th division soldier in Mzeireb, a GoS soldier in Daraa City, an Airforce Intelligence checkpoint between Alma and Sura, a GoS checkpoint in Hit and a GoS military post in Sahwa village.

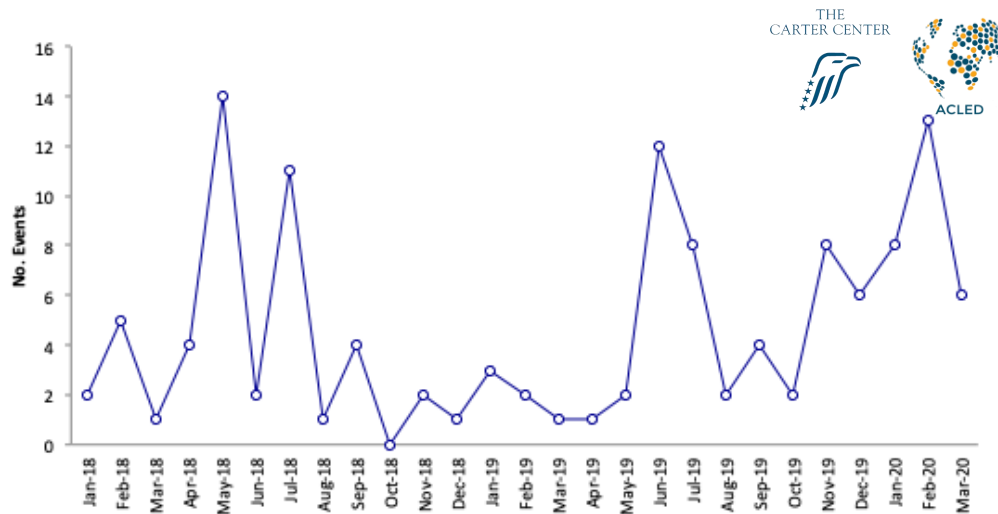


Figure 3: Israeli Activity in Syria since January 2018. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

NORTHEAST SYRIA

Low levels of shelling exchanges between Turkish-backed Syrian opposition groups and the predominantly Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)/GoS forces around Turkish occupied Operation Peace Spring areas continued this week. ACLED recorded 8 events in 6 areas⁵, which marks a decrease from the previous week's 10 events in 9 areas.

Inside the Operation Peace Spring area, a car bomb detonated against a Turkish-backed Syrian opposition armed group as it travelled in Hammam al Turkman town. It is only the sixth explosive detonation in the town since Operation Peace Spring began in October 2019. In the two years prior, only four improvised explosive devices were used in the city.

Along the Euphrates River Valley, small arm fire and improvised explosive device attacks against SDF and aligned personnel continued. Incidents were focused in Karama, Taqba, Basira, Shiheil, Al Asbah farms, Breiha, Thiban, and in Hajin, where a municipal council member was assassinated.

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⁵ Areas impacted by conflict were: Hawashia, Abu Rasin, Um al Kayf (x2), Tal Abiad countryside, Salibi (x2), and Ein Issa Camp.