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WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 17 - 23 FEBRUARY 2020

WHOLE OF SYRIA SUMMARY

- **NORTHWEST** | Government of Syria (GoS) forces captured areas west and northwest of Aleppo city before focusing on the southeast of the HTS/opposition controlled Idlib enclave. Clashes between Turkish and GoS forces continued as Turkey also established five new observation posts in Idlib. Conflict in Tal Rifaat and extortion campaigns in Afrin District also continued.
- **SOUTH & CENTRAL** | Three improvised explosive devices (IED) detonated in Damascus this week. Attacks against GoS-aligned personnel in southern and central Syria continued, also affecting two humanitarian workers in Daraa Governorate. There were three armed attacks against GoS checkpoints in the Talbiseh area of Homs. ISIS activity in central areas of Syria continued.
- **NORTHEAST** | US forces were involved again in standoffs with other military forces: with GoS in Tal Barak and with Russian forces in Amuda. Elevated levels of conflict continued around the Turkish Operation Peace Spring area also known as the “buffer zone”. Attacks against SDF personnel continued along the Euphrates River Valley, also targeting two oil tankers.

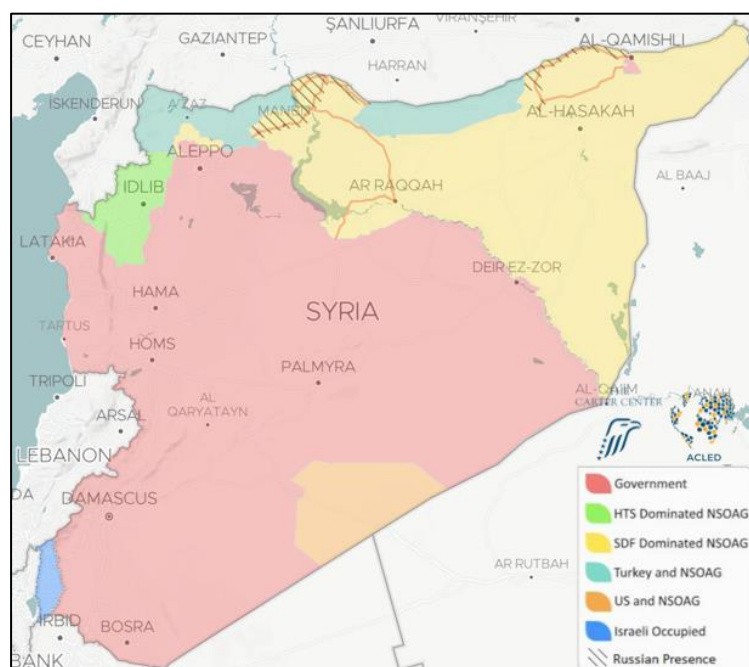


Figure 1: Dominant actors' area of control and influence in Syria as of 23 February 2020. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. Also, please see the footnote on page 2.

NORTHWEST SYRIA

Government of Syria (GoS) advances against Hayyat Tahrir al Sham (HTS)/opposition armed groups in northwest Syria continued. At the start of the reporting period, GoS made gains in areas west and northwest of Aleppo, pushing frontlines to some 20km west of the city.² At the end of the reporting period, GoS forces switched focus to the southeast portion of the HTS/armed opposition pocket (Figure 1). The UN has [recorded](#) 800,000 people displaced from the GoS offensive since 1 December 2019, 60% of whom are children.

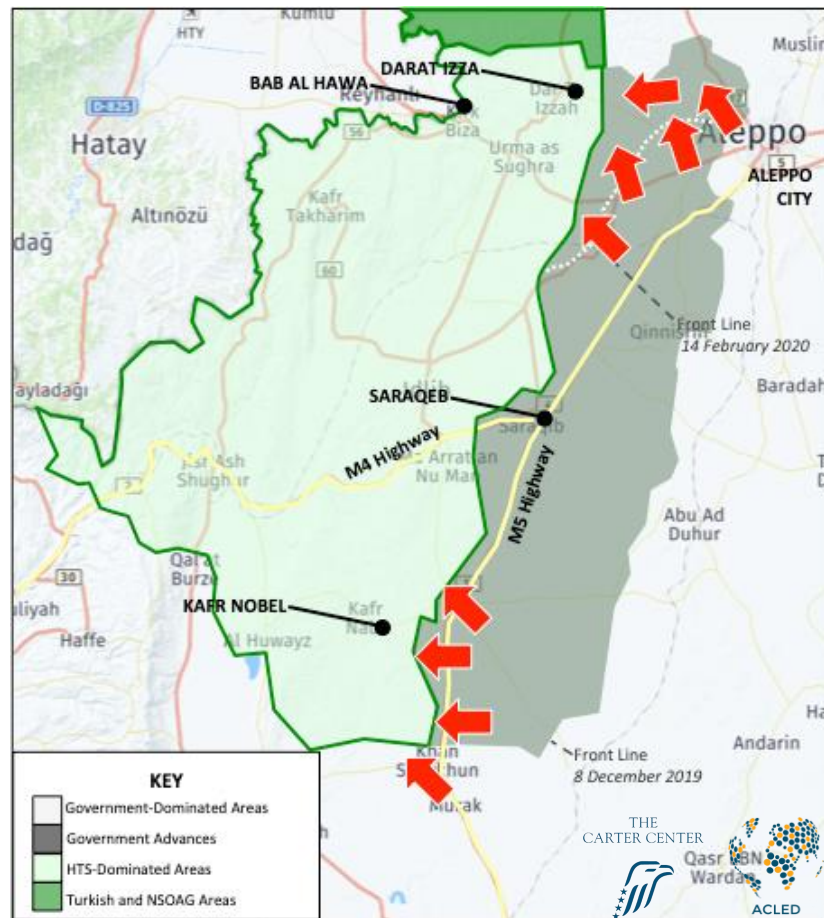


Figure 2: GoS Advances in Northwest Syria in 2020. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

GoS and Turkish military forces again clashed in northwest Syria. On 16 February, GoS shelling struck a Turkish military observation post in the Sheikh Aqil area of

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 GoS captured 29 locations; Al Salloum, Al Qasmiyah, Anjara, Bastron, Hur, Sheikh Aqil, Beit Ghazi, Bishqatine, Bshantra, Atareb, Hadi, Hoteh, Kafr Dael, Mara'at al Artiq, Layramoun, Al Zahraa, Shuwayhanah, Tal Nabi Noman, Tall Shuwayhanah, Adan, Babis, Biyounm Haritan, Hayyan, Kafr Hamra, Tal Msebin, Kafr Bassin, Yaqed el Adas, Awejel, Ajil, Al Rashdeen, Mansoura and Sadiyah.

Aleppo Governorate. On 20 and 22 February, Turkey shelled GoS positions in the vicinity of Saraqeb³ as well as clashed with GoS forces near Nayrab town. The clashes resulted in the death of two Turkish soldiers and an airstrike wounded five more according to a Turkish presidential [spokesperson](#). Turkish military reinforcements arrived into northwest Syria, with ACLED data recording 300 vehicles crossing into Syria in the previous week. Turkey also established five new military observation posts in Bsanqul, Tal al Nabi Ayoud, Bazabur, Mataram, and Nahliya. Since December, GoS attacks have targeted Turkish troops in northwest Syria (Figure 3).

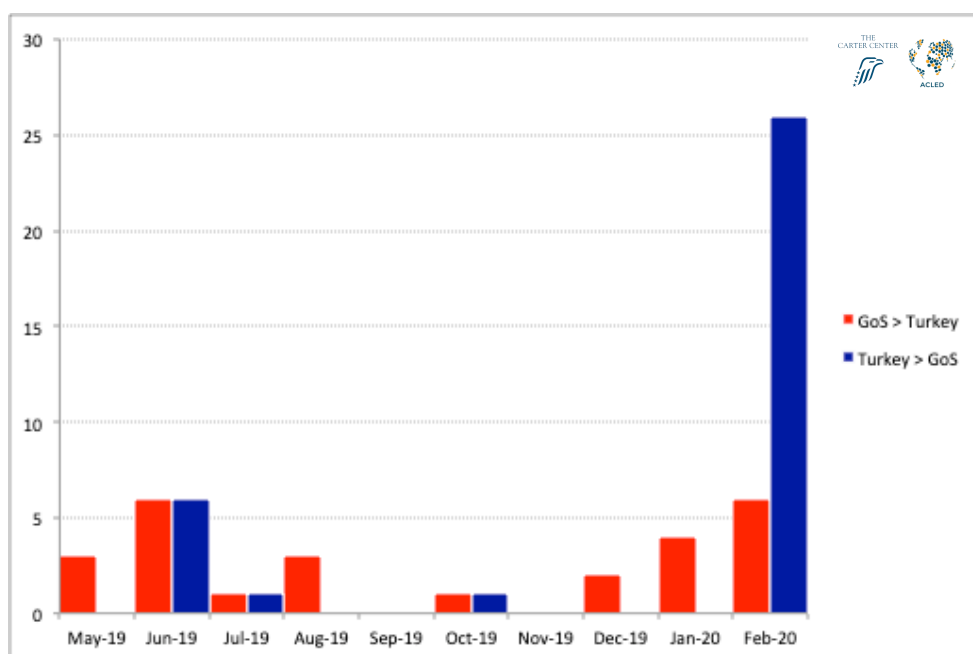


Figure 3: GoS attacks on Turkish military forces (red) and Turkish attacks on GoS forces (blue) in Northwest Syria 2019 and 2020. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

Elevated conflict between the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) and Turkish-backed Syrian opposition groups also continued in the Tal Rifaat pocket. Shelling exchanges affected 13 locations during the week,⁴ bringing the total conflict levels in the enclave in February to the second highest monthly count in the previous 12 months.

Turkish-backed opposition groups continued looting and extortion operations in the Operation Euphrates Shield and Olive Branch areas. In Bulbul and Raju, local groups arrested 10 civilians from both villages. In Bablit, the Hamza Division kidnapped two civilians.

SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

In Damascus three improvised explosive devices (IEDs) detonated during the week. On 16 February, a device detonated against a Republican guard patrol in the formerly opposition-held Saqba neighbourhood. Two days later an IED targeted a

³ In Afes (x2), Dadikhm, Nayreb, Saraqeb (x2), Maarat Alya, Saraqeb and Salma

⁴ Kafr Antoun (x3), Irshadia, Afrin Ziyara, Tel Rifaat, Deir Jamal, Maraanaz, Menagh, Aqibah, Kafr Naya, Mathanat Faisal, Nabul, Zahraa and Souq Kabir

civilian vehicle in the Mousallah area of Damascus. On 20 February explosives detonated under a military vehicle in the Marjeh neighbourhood bringing the total number of documented IED attacks in Damascus in 2020 to four.

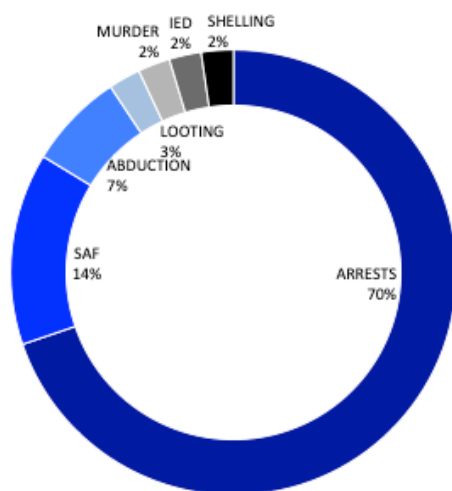


Figure 4: Types of incidents affecting humanitarian workers in GoS-held areas of Syria since 01 January 2018. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

In southern Syria, in addition to the steady attacks against GoS-aligned personnel,⁵ there was an increase in documented violence against civilians. In Mseifra, gunmen shot dead a former opposition judicial worker, on the Qayta – As Sanamayn road a group shot and wounded an alleged GoS informant, and on the Yadudeh – Mzeireb road, two local Oxfam humanitarian workers were shot dead. The Oxfam staff were returning from a needs assessment mission in the area. Such a targeted attack against humanitarian workers is highly unusual in GoS-controlled areas of Syria. Of the 43 events recorded by ACLED since 1 January 2018 that have affected humanitarian workers in GoS-held areas of Syria, just 10 have involved targeted violence. Of these, five were recorded in Daraa Governorate⁶ (Figure 4).

For the second time in February, ACLED recorded violence in the northern Homs countryside. On 22 February, unidentified gunmen attacked three GoS checkpoints in Talbiseh. This is the fourth attack in the town since November 2019.

In central areas of the country, ongoing ISIS activity targeted GoS forces. The group ambushed GoS patrols south of Deir Ez Zor city and in Tabiyet Jazira.

NORTHEAST SYRIA

For a second consecutive week, US forces were involved in standoffs with different military forces in the northeast. On 21 February, pro-government media [reported](#) that a GoS checkpoint prevented a US patrol from continuing on the Hassakah – Tal Barak road near Al Sibat village. A day later, ACLED data reported that US

⁵ Attacks included an IED detonation targeting a GoS military intelligence site in As Sanamayn, and an unidentified armed group clashes with GoS soldiers in the town later in the week. An IED also targeted a GoS Airforce Intelligence vehicle on the Nahta – Busra al Hrair road. Pro-opposition sources reported attacks in [western Daraa](#) and [Nasib](#).

⁶ On 1 February 2020 in Tafas, Daraa Governorate, unidentified gunmen shot dead a health worker and a companion as they traveled in the city; on 6 January, a group abducted two paramedics from al Manara Hospital on the Shahba Brigade in As Sweida Governorate; on 22 December 2019, an unidentified group abducted the director of Salkhad hospital in As Sweida Countryside; on 16 October, a gunman shot dead a doctor in his clinic in Jasim, Daraa Governorate; on 30 May, former opposition members opened fire on a Syrian Arab Red Crescent aid distribution in Saham al Golan in Daraa Governorate; on 24 April, unidentified gunmen shot and wounded a doctor in his home in Nawa, Dara Governorate; on 27 February 2019, the body of a dentist was found in Kafr village in As Sweida Governorate; on 30 June 2018, four humanitarian workers were detained in GoS held areas of Quamishli city (they were released in December 2018); and on 19 April 2018, a group shot at a UN field team in Duma city, Rural Damascus Governorate.

forces prevented a Russian convoy from passing to Amuda town on the M4 highway. These incidents occurred a week after a US military patrol came under small arms fire near Kherbet Hamu (Figure 5).⁷

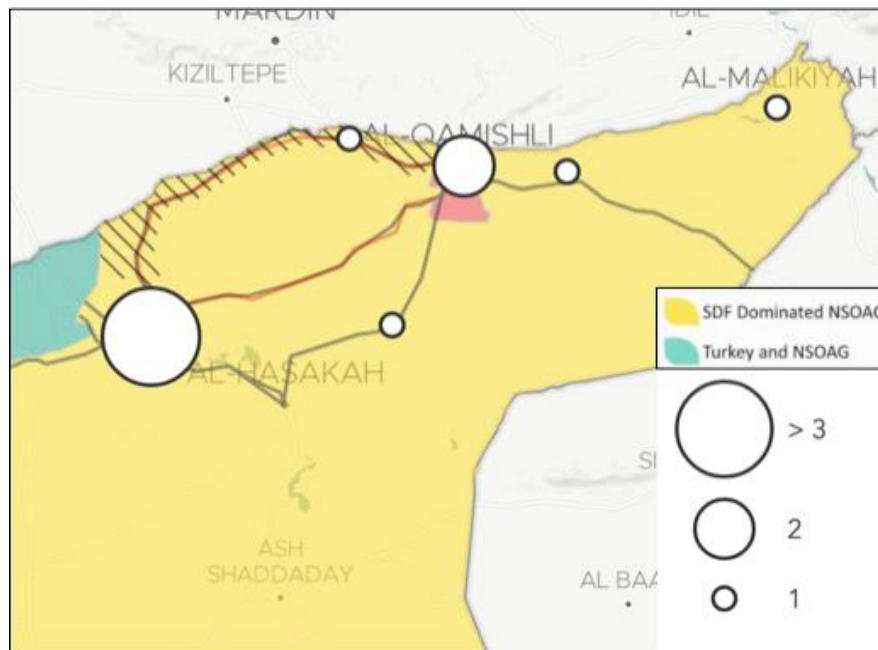


Figure 5: Locations where Russian, GoS, and US forces have prevented access to one another since December 2019. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

Artillery and small arms fire exchanges between Turkish-backed Syrian opposition groups and Kurdish dominated Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)/GoS forces around Turkish occupied Operation Peace Spring areas remained elevated this week, affecting at least 16 locations.⁸ As previously reported, there has been a steady increase of conflict between the two sides throughout the month.

Routine small arms fire attacks against SDF personnel along the Euphrates River Valley continued⁹ accompanied by an increase in IED attacks in the northeast. SDF patrols were targeted in Shiheil, the Wahdeh neighborhood in Ar Raqqa city and in Shuwayhan town. For the sixth time since late January, IEDs struck two oil tankers owned by the al Qaterji company in Salhabiyeh and in Markada.

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⁷ Previous similar events included: on 12 February, a GoS checkpoint prevented a US military patrol from passing through Kherbet Hamu village, soon after which the patrol came under small arms fire; on 6 February, a GoS military patrol prevented a US military patrol from entering Tal Shamran near Tal Tamr in al Hasakah; on 30 January, a US military vehicle prevented a Russian military patrol from passing through Tal Tamr town; on 23 January, US forces blocked a Russian patrol in Tal Tamr; 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 a US column heading to the western countryside of Al-Hasakeh from passing through Quamishli city; and on 11 December, the US prevented a Russian patrol from passing the Tall Allou area in Al-Hasakeh Governorate.

⁸ Exchanges in Dardara, Um al Kayf (x4), Arisha, Qasemiyah, Tawileh (x2), Abu Rasin, Um Harmala, Bir Keno, Koperlik, Al Mukhtar, Sleiviya, Maboujeh, Sharkrak Silos, Abu Khurayza, Ein Issa, and Qazali.

⁹ With attacks in Shiheil and Breiha.