

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	1253
Land:	Syrien
Kilde:	The Carter Center
Titel:	Weekly Conflict Summary 30 March - 5 April 2020
Udgivet:	5. april 2020
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	5. maj 2020



WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 30 March - 5 April 2020

SYRIA SUMMARY

- **NORTHWEST** | Levels of Conflict in northwest Syria remained elevated for the second consecutive week, as Turkish military personnel and equipment continued to arrive to Idleb. Inside the Turkish-held areas of northern Aleppo Governorate, opposition armed groups continued their looting and extortion activity against civilians. An attack against an opposition affiliated National Police Officer highlighted the growing number of attacks against the entity in the previous month.
- **SOUTH & CENTRAL** | Tensions over kidnapping and clashes continue between communal militias Dara'a and As-Sweida. Government of Syria (GoS)-aligned personal faced continuing attacks in Daraa Governorate.
- **NORTHEAST** | Shelling exchanges around Turkish-held Operation Peace Spring areas increased, while Turkish-backed opposition armed groups and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) clashed on the ground. Jailed ISIS members staged a riot to escape a prison in Hassakah. ISIS also attacked SDF and pro-Iran forces in Deir-ez-Zor. Members of the Asayish (Kurdish Intelligence) and National Defense Forces (NDF) exchanged fire in Qamishli City.

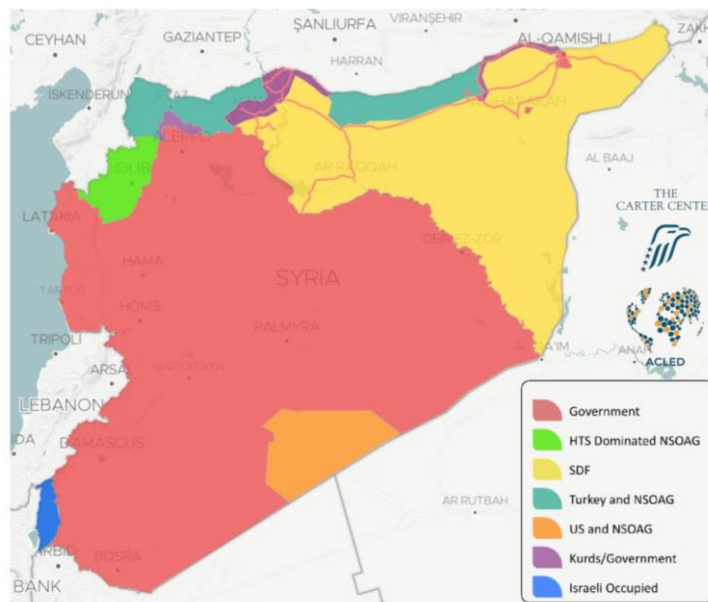


Figure 1: Dominant actors' area of control and influence in Syria as of 5 April 2020. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. Also, please see the footnote on page 2.

NORTHWEST SYRIA

For a second consecutive week, there were elevated levels of conflict activity in the northwest of Syria. The Government of Syria (GoS) shelled 14 locations, 26 times² during the week, compared to 22 locations targeted 36 times by shelling and small arms fire the previous week. Hayyat Tahrir al Sham and opposition groups also clashed twice with GoS forces.³ Since the start of the 5 March Russian/Turkish ceasefire, a third of all activity has occurred in just four areas; Ftireh (38), Bara (17), Kafr Amma (10), and al Sirmaniyeh (10) (Figure 2).

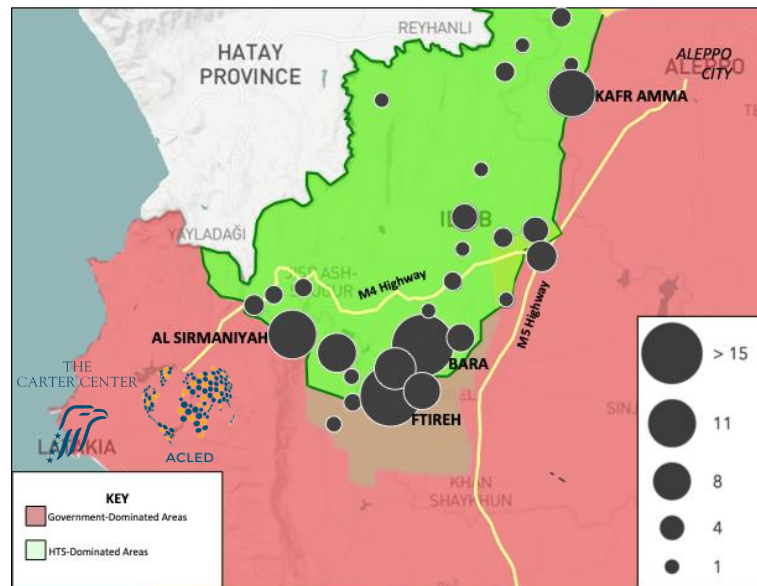


Figure 2 – Shelling or armed clashes in northwest Syria since 5 March 2020 Turkish / Russian Ceasefire. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

Turkey sent additional military re-enforcements into northwest Syria each day in the previous period. A total of 172 vehicles arrived through the Kafr Lussin border according to ACLED. The previous two months has seen the highest number of arrivals of Turkish troops into Northwest Syria for the past year.⁴ Turkey also conducted two patrols along the M4 highway on 30 and 31 March in the Ariha and Saraqeb sub districts.

Inside the Turkish-held areas of northern Aleppo Governorate, local opposition armed groups continued looting and kidnap-for-ransom activity against civilians. In al Bab, an opposition/unidentified local armed group murdered a civilian who

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 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 GoS shelled Afes (x2), Bara (x4), Kafr Oweid (x4), Kan Safra (x2), Sfuhen (x4), Ftireh (x4), Fleifel, Saraqeb, Sarmin, Majazir, Salhiyeh, Jebal Al Zawiyeh, Dar al Kabira, and Jebal al Turkman.

³ In Kafr Taal and Ftireh.

⁴ February and March 2020 witnessed 45 convoys arriving into northwest Syria, 3 more than the total recorded by ACLED in the 11 months prior to this.

they had kidnapped three days earlier. In Sufen, Al Sham Corps shot and wounded a civilian as they were evicting him from his house. In Maamal Ushagi and Mirkan, the Turkish-aligned opposition's Sultan Mohammad al Fatih and Levant Front groups kidnapped civilians. In Jandarisi and Raju, the opposition's Hamza division and Ahrar al Sharqiyeh extorted and intimidated local agricultural workers for payment. Such activity has been regularly recorded in ACLED data in the previous year.

For a second consecutive week, the Turkish-backed opposition's National Police Force was targeted in al Bab. On 31 March, unidentified gunmen opened fire on a policeman in al Bab city, wounding him. Attacks between opposition armed groups are frequently reported in Turkish-held areas of Syria. However, the previous month has seen an increase in attacks targeting National Police Forces in northern Syria (Figure 3).

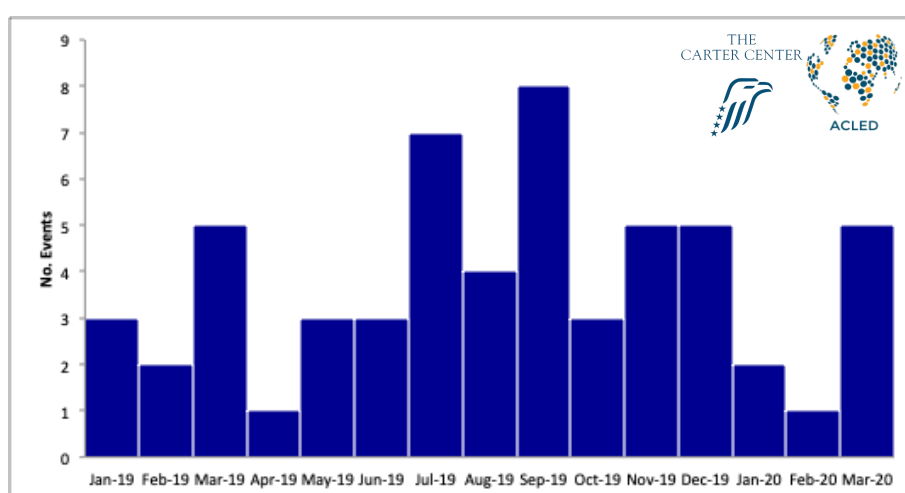


Figure 3 – Attacks by or targeting of National Police Forces in Turkish-held areas of Aleppo Governorate in 2019 and 2020. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

Tensions between pro-government communal militias in Dara'a and As-Sweida continued from the previous week. Clashes among such militias erupted on the outskirts of Qarayya town in As Sweida Governorate on 31 March after an unidentified armed group entered the town.⁵ A few days later, As-Sweida communal militias kidnapped men from Bistr Elharir town in Dara'a Governorate on 3 and 4 April. Later in the day on April 4, the Bistr ElHarir communal militia hijacked a bus carrying GoS armed forces and kidnapped the soldiers. According to ACLED, there have been six civilian abductions in southern Syria in 2020, a figure that is likely under reported (Figure 4).

On 31 March, Israeli jets struck Shayrat Air Base and Al-Daba Airbase in Homs Governorate. This brings the total number of Israeli airstrikes to 28 in 2020

⁵ The Bosra al-Sham communal militia [withdrew](#) from Qarayya on 4 April after meetings between Dara'a and As-Sweida dignitaries.

according to ACLED. This was the second time the Shayrat Air Base was targeted in March 2020.

The same day, ISIS activity returned to central areas of the country. The group captured and executed a GoS officer and two Syrian military personnel in the Homs desert. The most recent recorded case prior to this incident was in December.

Attacks against GoS-aligned personnel continued in Daraa Governorate. A local council member in Ankhel survived an assassination attempt, a GoS checkpoint in Hrak came under small arms fire attack, a GoS soldier was killed by an improvised explosive device (IED) in Nafeaa, and a former opposition member was killed in Jasim. There were also 5 attacks against civilians in Dara'a⁶ and a child was killed in Kanakar town in Rural Damascus after an unexploded ordnance detonated.

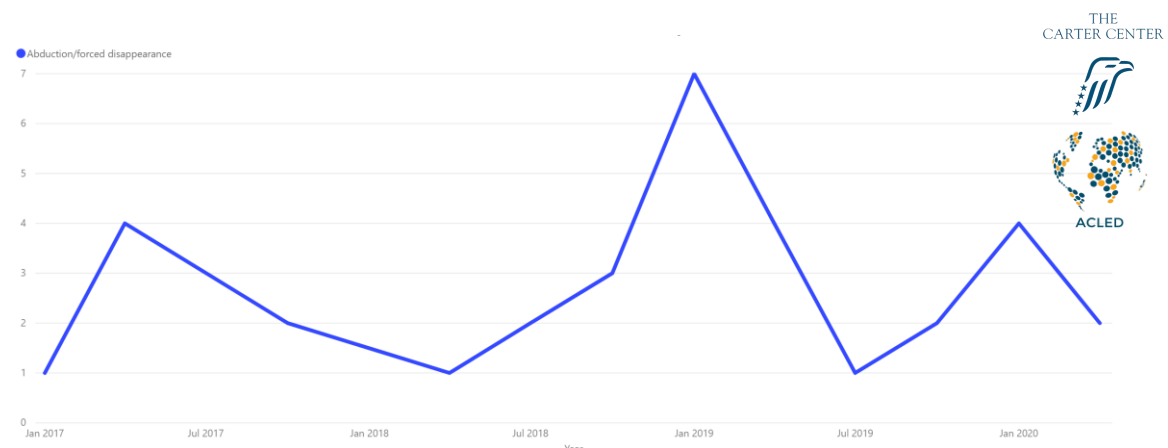


Figure 4: The number of Abductions/Forced Disappearances Events in Southern Syria recorded between 2017 – 2020. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

NORTHEAST SYRIA

There were increased levels of shelling between Turkish Armed Forces, Turkish-backed groups, the US-backed and predominantly Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), and GoS forces around the Turkish-held Operation Peace Spring area this week.⁷ A total of 30 exchanges in 18 areas were recorded by ACLED this week. The previous two weeks saw a combined 29 exchanges of fire. There were also ground confrontations between Turkish-backed opposition armed groups and the SDF on 30 and 31 March in the Ein Issa area of Northern Raqqa.⁹

On 29 March, jailed ISIS former fighters staged a riot and escaped from the SDF-run Ghoweran prison in Hassakeh. SDF managed to quell the riots the next day with US Coalition support. The SDF forces, supported by US Coalition aircraft, carried out raids and arrests over the next two days looking for escaped ISIS fighters.

⁶ Incidents were recorded in Hrak, Tafas (x2), Jasim, and Hit.

⁷ Areas impacted include: Tell Abiad (x6), Arab Hassan Kabeer (x2), Menbij, Um Adase, Sayada, Ein Issa (x3), Abu Rasin (x3), Rubay'at, Khirbut al Baqr, Qasemiyeh, Mahmudiyyeh, Bab Al Kheir, Tal Tamer (x2), Umm Al-Kayf, Tall Tawil, Mabrouka Camp, Al-Hurriyyeh, and Abdi Koy (x2).

ISIS also conducted three attacks on 2 and 3 April in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. The Iranian military and pro-Iranian groups faced attacks in Al-Bukamal,⁸ as ISIS targeted an SDF patrol in the Deir-ez-Zor countryside with a remote explosive device.

An SDF-aligned Asayish member⁹ was killed after a clash with the GoS's NDF at a checkpoint in Qamishly city on April 4 when Asayish vehicles passed through the NDF-run checkpoint without stopping. A civilian was also killed in the crossfire.¹⁰ It is the first record of GoS and SDF clashes in the city since September 2018 according to ACLED.

Russian military movements also continued in the northeast this week. Russian and Turkish military personnel conducted a patrol on April 2, through villages to the west of Darbasiyah. On 1 and 3 April, the Russian military patrolled Darbasiyah and Abu Rasin city. US forces prevented a Russian military convoy from entering Rmelan on 30 March.

On 4 April, gunmen kidnapped and killed civilians in Al-Mestah. Seven areas of Deir-ez-Zor saw civilians killed by unidentified armed groups or by landmines.¹¹

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⁸ The Liwa Fatemiyoun was attacked on 2 April. Harakat Hezbollah Al Nujaba was with the Iranian military on the 3 April.

⁹ Kurdish Intelligence.

¹⁰ Russian Military Police intervened to ease tensions between the two groups.

¹¹ Incidents recorded in: Namliyah, Basira (x2), Thiban, Sweidan Jazira, Ash Shula, and Darnaj.