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WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 3 August - 9 August 2020

SYRIA SUMMARY

- **NORTHWEST** | There was a decrease in armed clashes in the region. Government of Syria (GoS), Turkey, and armed opposition groups deployed additional military reinforcements to the frontlines. Operations against ISIS continued in Hama and Aleppo Governorates. Turkey established a unified command center to coordinate its military operations in Syria. COVID-19 cases increased in the region.
- **SOUTH & CENTRAL** | Authorities in Dara'a Governorate implemented new measures to stop the spread of COVID-19. The Israeli air force struck GoS armed forces in Quneitra Governorate. Attacks against GoS soldiers and former opposition fighters decreased in Dara'a Governorate. ISIS launched an attack on GoS armed forces in the Badia desert region of Homs Governorate.
- **NORTHEAST** | Tensions escalated between the predominantly Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and Arab tribes in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. Unidentified gunmen continued to attack SDF forces in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. The SDF tried to control smugglers in the region. Medical clinics in al-Hol camp were closed after medical staff tested positive for COVID-19.

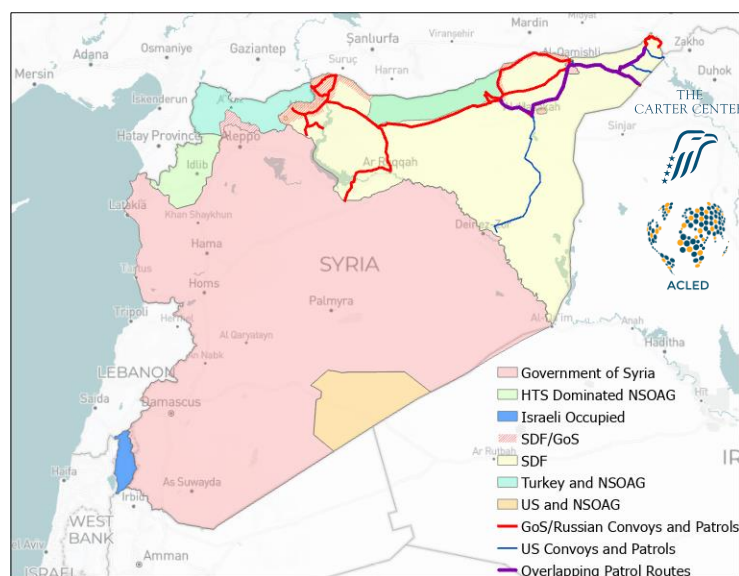


Figure 1: Dominant actors' area of control and influence in Syria as of 9 August 2020. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. Also, please see footnote 1 on page 2.

NORTHWEST SYRIA¹

There was a decrease in armed clashes between Government of Syria (GoS) armed forces and the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) on the one side and Turkish armed forces and armed opposition groups on the other. On 3 August, GoS armed forces clashed with armed opposition groups in Al-Haddadah, Latakia Governorate, reportedly resulting in the death of 12 GoS soldiers and 6 opposition fighters.² On 5 August, Turkish-backed armed opposition groups clashed with GoS armed forces and the YPG along the Tadif frontline, eastern Aleppo Governorate.³ On 6 August, clashes between GoS armed forces and armed opposition groups took place in Al-Haddadah, Latakia Governorate.⁴ On 8 August, a Hayyat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) sniper killed a GoS soldier on the Kafr Batikh frontlines, eastern Idlib Governorate.⁵

Operations against ISIS continued in Hama and Aleppo Governorates. Between 4 and 6 August, the GoS-backed⁶ National Defense Forces (NDF) clashed with ISIS near Jib Abyad⁷ and Juay'ed village, Hama Governorate.⁸ On 8 August, the Turkish-backed opposition's Syrian National Army (SNA) arrested members of an ISIS cell in northern Aleppo Governorate in Turkish-held Euphrates Shield territory.⁹

During the reporting week, GoS armed forces, Turkish armed forces, and armed opposition groups deployed reinforcements to the frontlines in northwest Syria. On 6 August, GoS moved forces into Idlib Governorate.¹⁰ On 5 August, GoS armed forces and GoS-backed militias deployed additional units in Kafrenbel and Jabal al-Zawiya in south-western Aleppo and southern Idlib Governorate respectively.¹¹ On 7 August, Turkish and GoS armed forces brought additional reinforcements to

¹ Figure 1, the Carter Center's areas of control map, depicts areas of the dominant actors' control and influence. While "control" is difficult to determine in a complex, dynamic conflict, territorial control is defined as an entity having power over use of force as well as civil/administrative functions in an area. Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah maintain a presence in Syrian government-controlled territory. Non-state organized armed groups (NSOAG), including the Kurdish-dominated SDF and Turkish-backed opposition groups operate in areas not under GoS control. 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. Patrols are also depicted in the map to show the presence of actors that may have influence in an area. This is particularly relevant as US and Russian forces regularly have patrolled towns and routes in the northeast. While they do not control local administration or local forces, there is an assumption of a high degree of coordination with local de facto authorities. Data collected is by the publicly available project [ACLED](#).

² <https://www.syriahr.com/en/177981/>, <https://www.straitstimes.com/world/middle-east/12-pro-regime-6-rebel-fighters-die-in-syria-clashes-monitor>

³ <https://www.syriahr.com/en/178293/>

⁴ <https://www.syriahr.com/en/178318/>

⁵ <https://www.syriahr.com/en/178648/>

⁶ Pro-GoS or GoS-backed militias refer to armed groups that are funded or in some way supported by GoS and coordinate with or fight alongside GoS armed forces, but are not part of the state-run military.

⁷ <https://www.syriahr.com/en/178008/>

⁸ <https://www.syriahr.com/en/178311/>

⁹ <https://nedaa-sy.com/news/21692>

¹⁰ <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/new-offensive-approaches-in-southern-idlib-as-syrian-army-troops-amass-along-front-lines/>

¹¹ <https://www.syriahr.com/en/178289/>

Jabal al-Zawiya area, Idlib Governorate.¹² On 8 August, armed opposition groups deployed additional forces to the Jabal al-Zawiya area, Idlib Governorate.¹³ On 9 August, Turkish armed forces established a new military outpost near Al-Haddadah Hill, northern Lattakia Governorate.¹⁴ The new outpost came after clashes between GoS armed forces and armed opposition groups in the area.¹⁵ Observers are concerned that the military buildup signals the collapse of the 5 March ceasefire.¹⁶

On 9 August, Turkey established a unified command center to coordinate its military operations in Syria.¹⁷ This followed a 23 July decision by Turkish President Recep Erdogan to set up a new military center to oversee the country's operations in Syria. The center is reportedly based in Hatay province in Turkey, which borders Syria.¹⁸

COVID-19 cases increased in northwest Syria. On 5 August, the HTS-dominated Salvation Government removed the quarantine on Sarmin town, Idlib Governorate, after the recovery of its COVID-19 infected patients. The town had been under quarantine since 25 July.¹⁹ On 9 August, doctors reported two new cases in Bab al-Salama in Turkish-held territory. As of 9 August, there were 45 COVID-19 cases in northwest Syria.²⁰

SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

On 4 August, authorities in Dara'a Governorate implemented new measures to stop the spread of COVID-19.²¹ The new measures came after the director of a hospital in Izraa contracted the virus. On 7 August, it was reported that a GoS's Palestinian Liberation Army general died from COVID-19.²² To date, there are 1,188 reported COVID-19 cases in GoS-controlled territory (see figure 2).²³ However, observers believe that COVID-19 infection numbers throughout Syria are significantly higher than what is officially reported.²⁴

¹² <https://www.hawarnews.com/en/haber/turkish-reinforcements-enter-jabal-al-zawiya-and-government-forces-reach-idlib-h18358.html>

¹³ <https://www.syriahr.com/en/178636/>

¹⁴ <https://tinyurl.com/y4ch8vmz>

¹⁵ <https://nedaa-sy.com/news/21710>

¹⁶ <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/08/turkey-syria-russia-fragile-ceasefire-in-idlib-may-collapse.html>

¹⁷ <https://www.syriahr.com/en/178883/>

¹⁸ <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/2438236/turkey-sets-center-coordinate-military-operations-syria>

¹⁹ <https://tinyurl.com/y2kprwu8>

²⁰ <https://www.syriahr.com/en/178918/>

²¹ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/405699>

²² <https://tinyurl.com/yxwbfwbb>

²³ <https://sana.sy/en/?p=199542>

²⁴ <https://www.mei.edu/publications/syria-facing-covid-19-catastrophe>

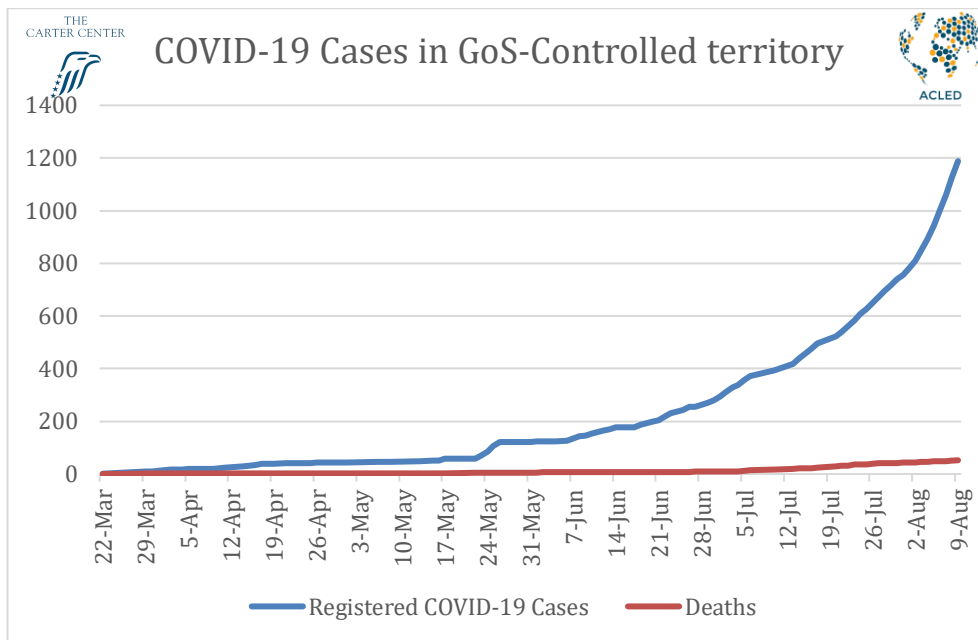


Figure 2: Reported COVID-19 cases in GoS-controlled territory. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

Attacks against GoS soldiers and former opposition fighters decreased during the reporting period in Dara'a Governorate. On 4 August, unidentified gunmen killed an alleged GoS informant in Tafas, Dara'a Governorate.²⁵ The same day, GoS armed forces deployed military reinforcements to Harra city, Dara'a Governorate, due to the security situation.²⁶ On 7 August, unidentified gunmen killed a GoS air force intelligence officer near Jilin, western Dara'a Governorate.²⁷ On 8 August, unidentified gunmen injured a former opposition fighter in Ankhel city, Dara'a Governorate.²⁸

On 5 August, ISIS launched an attack on GoS armed forces in the Badia desert region of Homs Governorate.²⁹ The attack coincided with attacks in Hama Governorate (see above). ISIS attacks have been concentrated in the Badia desert region in Homs Governorate, with 42 conflict events involving ISIS since 1 June 2019.

On 3 August, the Israeli air force struck GoS armed forces targets in Quneitra city, Quneitra Governorate. The airstrikes followed an attempted IED attack on Israeli targets in Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.³⁰ GoS armed forces said that the attack

²⁵ <https://www.syriahr.com/en/178130/>

²⁶ <https://www.syriahr.com/en/178123/>

²⁷ <https://www.syriahr.com/en/178499/>

²⁸ <https://www.syriahr.com/en/178768/>

²⁹ <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/isis-launches-big-attack-against-syrian-army-in-central-syria/>

³⁰ <https://www.dw.com/en/israel-launches-airstrikes-on-syrian-posts-hours-after-border-attack/a-54426134>

only caused material damage.³¹ Tensions in Israeli-occupied Golan heights have been aggravated following the assassination of a Hezbollah fighter on 20 July.³²

NORTHEAST SYRIA

Tensions escalated between the predominantly Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and Arab tribes in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. On 4 August, Arab tribesmen held demonstrations against the killing of a prominent tribal official and the lack of SDF protection in Al-Hawayij, Al-Shuhail, and Dhiban in eastern Deir-ez-Zor Governorate.³³ During the demonstrations in Al-Hawayij town, SDF fighters forcibly dispersed the protests, wounding 5 protesters.³⁴ Al-Hawayij is where unidentified gunmen assassinated an elder of the Akkidat tribe on 2 August, leading to the ongoing protests. Following the protests, the SDF imposed a curfew and established new checkpoints in eastern Deir-ez-Zor Governorate.³⁵ Between 5 and 8 August, the SDF launched raids to arrest alleged militants in eastern Deir-ez-Zor Governorate.³⁷ Local activists argue that the raids and arrests were driven by anti-Arab racism.³⁸ A Syrian Arab Tribal organization headquartered in Turkey condemned the SDF's actions and accused the group of carrying out the assassinations.³⁹ The SDF blamed GoS and Iran for fomenting unrest.⁴⁰ On 8 August, US armed forces mediated between the SDF and Deir-ez-Zor tribal leaders in Hajin, eastern Deir-ez-Zor Governorate.⁴¹ On 9 August, tribal dignitaries from Ar-Raqqa Governorate issued a statement condemning GoS, while also demanding that the SDF open an investigation into the killing of Arab tribesmen.⁴²

Attacks by unidentified gunmen against the SDF continued in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. On 4 August, an IED planted by an unknown group destroyed a SDF vehicle in Dhiban, Deir-ez-Zor Governorate.⁴³ On 6 August, unidentified gunmen killed a SDF officer in Hajin, Deir-ez-Zor Governorate.⁴⁴ On 7 August, unidentified gunmen shelled a SDF headquarters in the town of Dhiban, eastern Deir-ez-Zor Governorate.⁴⁵

The SDF cracked down on smugglers in the region. On 3 August, SDF gunmen fired on 3 smugglers bringing goods from GoS territory near Jadeed Ekaydat, Deir-ez-

³¹ <https://sana.sy/en/?p=199035>

³² https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/israel-says-it-thwarted-an-attack-on-its-northern-border-with-syria/2020/08/03/d9670354-d555-11ea-a788-2ce86ce81129_story.html

³³ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/406717>

³⁴ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/405697>

³⁵ <https://syria.liveuamap.com/en/2020/5-august-sdf-put-barriers-in-the-city-of-shahil-preventing>

³⁶ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/406717>

³⁷ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/406096>

³⁸ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/406717>

³⁹ <https://tinyurl.com/y6dzvb4t>

⁴⁰ <https://tinyurl.com/y2hvn3z>

⁴¹ <https://www.syriahr.com/en/178647/>

⁴² <https://www.syriahr.com/en/178786/>

⁴³ <https://www.syriahr.com/en/178010/>

⁴⁴ <https://www.syriahr.com/en/178459/>

⁴⁵ <https://www.syriahr.com/en/178585/>

Zor Governorate.⁴⁶ On 8 August, the SDF reportedly arrested smugglers bringing civilians from GoS-controlled territory to SDF territory.⁴⁷ On 9 August, the SDF-affiliated Asayish prevented the smuggling of ISIS prisoners from Al-Hol camp, Al-Hassakah Governorate.⁴⁸

On 4 August, the SDF closed clinics in al-Hol camp, al-Hassakah Governorate, after some of the medical staff tested positive for COVID-19.⁴⁹ Al-Hol and other large camps remain a particular concern as they lack the proper medical infrastructure and supplies to tackle the virus's spread.⁵⁰ As of 9 August, there were 101 COVID-19 cases in northeast Syria.⁵¹

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⁴⁶ <https://www.syriahr.com/en/177867/>

⁴⁷ <https://www.syriahr.com/en/178766/>

⁴⁸ <https://tinyurl.com/y2mwq6g8>

⁴⁹ <https://tinyurl.com/y33gkcg8>

⁵⁰ <https://syriadirect.org/news/mapping-coronavirus-in-syria-unofficial-cases-and-hot-spots/>

⁵¹ <https://www.hawarnews.com/en/haber/19-new-cases-with-covid-19-in-ne-syria-one-is-dead-h18444.html>