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WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 27 JANUARY – 2 FEBRUARY 2020

WHOLE OF SYRIA SUMMARY

- **NORTHWEST** | Government of Syria (GoS) forces advanced in southern Idlib and Western Aleppo Governorates, reaching Saraqeb City by the end of the week. Hayyat Tahrir al Sham (HTS) and other opposition activity against GoS continued to increase, with a spike in armed clashes and suicide attacks. There was also an uptick in conflict in the Tal Rifaat pocket.
- **SOUTH & CENTRAL** | Attacks against GoS-aligned personnel continued this week, including an increase in improvised explosive device (IED) activity in southern Syria. In Quneitra, there was an attack against an Intelligence Officer near Hamdiyah, which was only the eighth attack against a GoS-aligned individual in the governorate in two and a half years. In Sayda, the body of a kidnapped Jordanian national was found.
- **NORTHEAST** | Turkish-backed groups made limited advances in areas southwest of Tal Abiad this week, the first advances since November. Attacks against SDF and aligned personnel continued along the Euphrates and Khabour River Valleys. For the third consecutive week, critical infrastructure was targeted in northeast Syria. There was an increase in small arms fire attacks targeting civilians. US military blocked a Russian military patrol from passing through an area in northeast Syria for the third time since September.

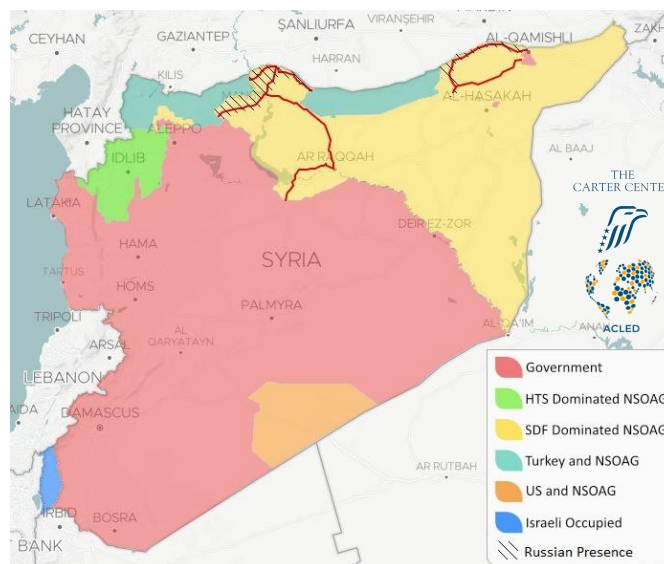


Figure 1: Dominant actors' area of control and influence in Syria as of 2 February 2020. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. Also, please see the footnote on page 2.

NORTHWEST SYRIA

GoS made further advances against HTS/opposition areas in Idleb this week. GoS captured Maraath al Numaan, before moving south and north along the M5 Highway. By the end of the reporting period, GoS forces had reached the M4 highway west of Saraqeb City. At the time of writing, GoS momentum had turned eastwards toward Saraqeb city.²

GoS forces also advanced in areas southwest of Aleppo City. Initially breaching frontlines in the Rashadeen 5 suburb, GoS forces advanced to the south and captured territory to Khalsa Village, 15km south of Aleppo City.³ ACLED data indicate that Iranian-backed groups were involved in the fighting (Figure 2).

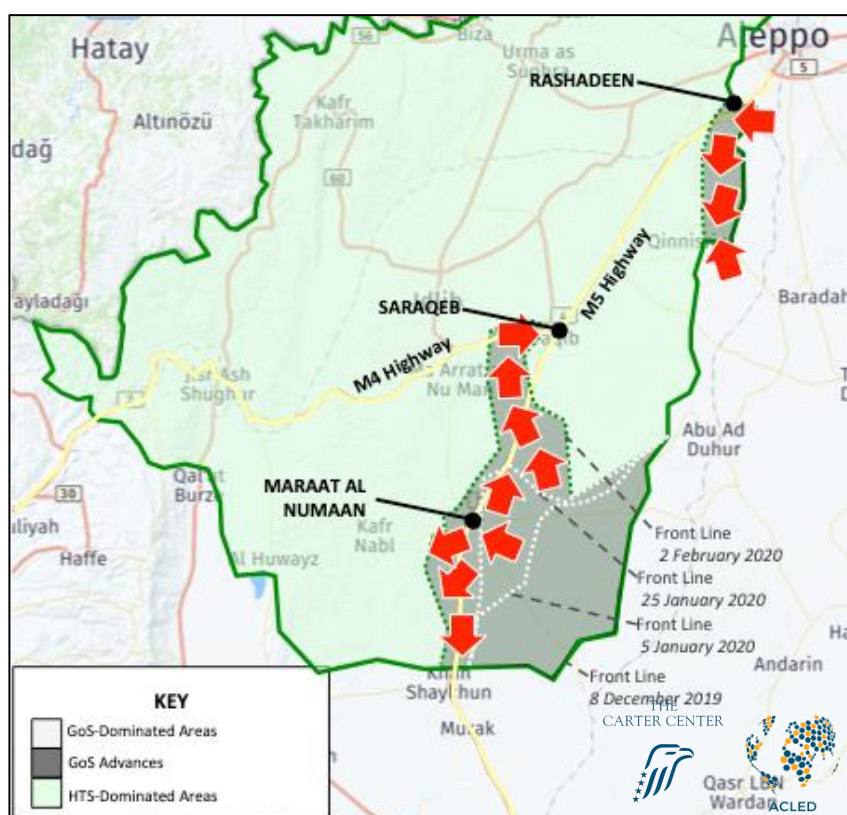


Figure 2: GoS Advances in Northwest Syria in 2020. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

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 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 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 collected is by the publicly available project ACLED.

² ACLED data recorded GoS capturing the following locations around Maraath al Numaan and the M5 Highway: Amiriyah, Amoudiyyeh, Armanaya, Babuline, Bsida, Dar Es Salaam, Hamdieh, Hatamiyeh, Heish, Jarada, Jbala, Jobas, Kafr Basin, Kafr Mazdeh, Kafr Uma, Khan Sabeel, Kherbet Ma'azyen, Luf, Maar Dibsi, Maar Hattat, Maasaran, Maraath al Numaan, Mardikh, Moqa, Qahriyyeh, Qamhana, Ruwaiha, Salihiyyeh, Sahyan, Tabish, Tal al Sheikh, and Taqana.

³ ACLED Data reported the following advances southwest of Aleppo City: Khaldiyyah, Khalsa, Khan Tuman, Marata, Qal'ajiyehm, Qarasi, Rashdeen, Sahaiyeen, and Tall Zaytoun.

HTS and other opposition group attacks on GoS controlled areas increased in reaction to GoS advances this week (Figure 3). HTS also made small counter-advances against GoS forces in Hmeira town and in the Sahafiyyen area of Rashadeen on 1 February. These areas remain contested at the time of writing. HTS also deployed five suicide vehicles against GoS and Iranian-backed forces in the Zahraa neighborhood of Aleppo (3) and in Kafr Uma town (2). This is the highest weekly count of suicide vehicle attacks in over a year.

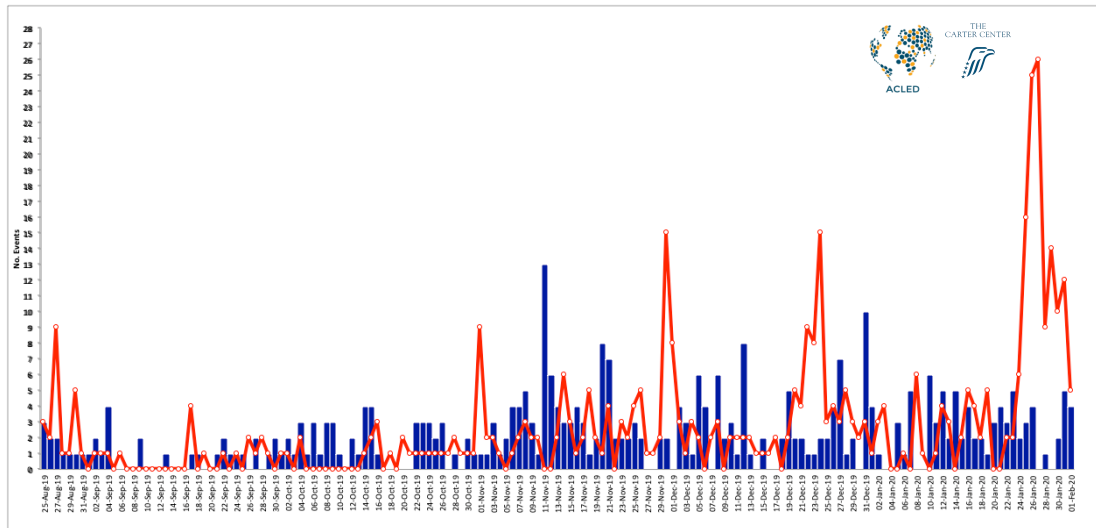


Figure 3: HTS and other opposition group shelling (blue) and ground clashes (red) in the northwest since August 2019. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

This week's conflict activity has contributed to further displacements of civilians in the northwest. According to data from ACLED, as many as 39,000 people fled from Maraat al Numaan and Saraqeb areas to northern Idlib and Turkish-backed areas in Aleppo Governorate. These figures are in addition to the 390,000 displaced by fighting in northwest Syria since 1 December 2019 [reported by the UN](#), and the 400,000 IDPs that are already present in northern areas of northwest Syria, displaced from fighting between May and August the previous year.

There was an increase in Turkish military activity in northwestern Syria this week. In the Tal Rifaat area, Turkish forces shelled YPG positions in Tal Rifaat town, Sorhane, Aqibah, Maraanaz (x2), Malikiyyeh, and Shawarighat al Arz throughout the week.⁴ The Turkish Military also established two new observation posts near Saraqib City and brought re-enforcements there by 1 February.

Attacks against Turkish-backed local groups also continued in Operation Euphrates Shield and Olive Branch areas. The Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) in Afrin claimed an attack against an opposition-aligned Syrian National Army⁵ patrol in Kobala. IEDs targeted Turkish backed groups in Sharan and on the Afrin-Janairis Road. A car bomb detonation in Azaz resulted in mass casualties in a residential area.

⁴ This coincided with local Turkish-backed groups in the Euphrates Shield area briefly advancing into eastern areas of the Tal Rifaat pocket close to Kharabishah, Shaalah, and Tall Rahal villages.

⁵ The Syrian National Army is a conglomeration of several hundred groups under the control of the opposition's Syrian Interim Government and backed by Turkey.

SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

There was an increase in improvised explosive device (IED) activity in southern Syria this week. Devices detonated in Eastern Ghariyah against a GoS Military Security member, in Yadudeh against a GoS 4th Division member, and in Dael against an alleged GoS intelligence collaborator. IED activity is not uncommon in these areas since the GoS takeover of southern Syria in August 2018 (Figure 4).

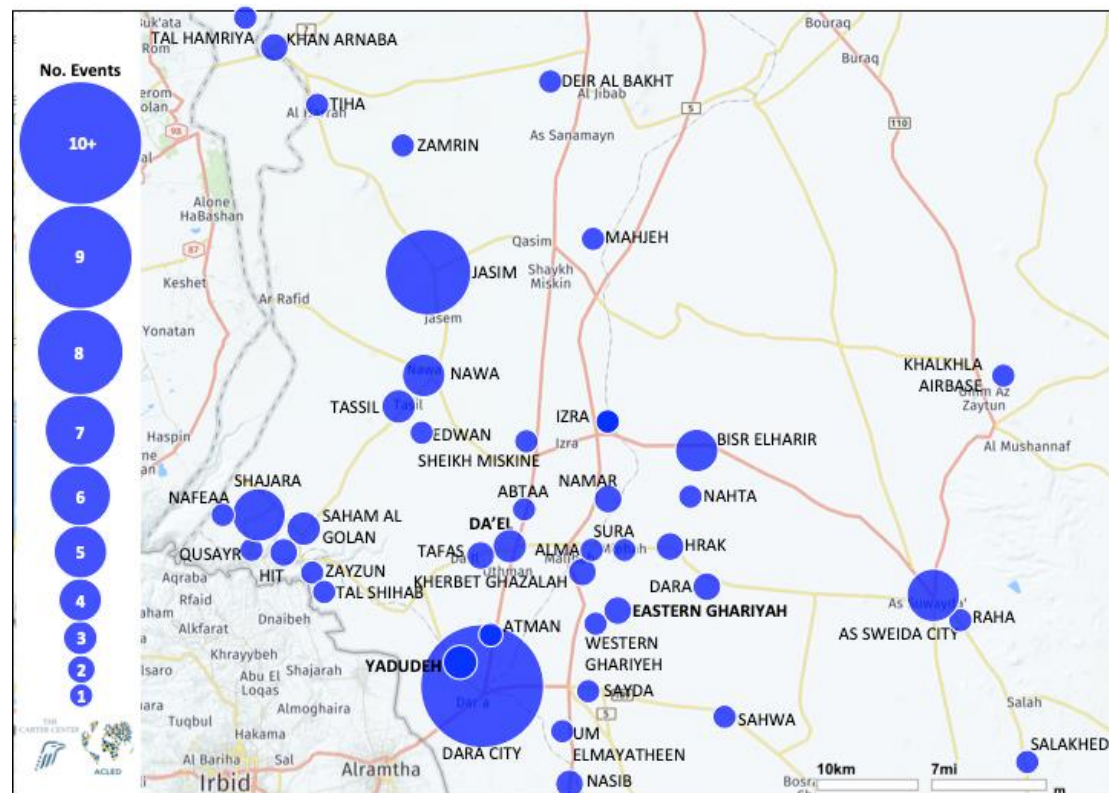


Figure 4: IED or landmine activity in Southern Syria since August 2018. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

In addition to small arms fire attacks against GoS-aligned personnel in Daraa Governorate,⁶ there was an attack targeting an Airforce Intelligence officer driving on the Baath–Hamdiyah Road in Quneitra Governorate. This is only the eighth attack against GoS aligned personnel in Quneitra Governorate recorded by ACLED in the previous two and a half years.

On 26 January, the body of a Jordanian national was found in Sayda town. The civilian, who had Syrian ancestry, worked as a truck driver and had been kidnapped in Hrak town a day earlier after crossing at the Nasib Border. It is the third time in four months that a Syrian national living outside of Syria was found killed in the area after similar events in September and December.

⁶ This week ACLED data recorded five attacks; In Karak where an unidentified group opened fire on an Airforce Intelligence checkpoint, in Jassim where a group shot at a state intelligence officer, in Saham al Golan where an armed group opened fire on a 4th Division vehicle near Saham al Golan, in Sayda, where gunmen shot at a 5th Corps commanders house and in Sanamayn, where an armed group and Military Intelligence members clashed for several hours in the town.

NORTHEAST SYRIA

Turkish-backed groups made limited advances in areas southwest of Tal Abiad this week. The opposition-aligned Syrian National Army captured Al Mardoud village by 1 February after brief clashes with the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). The advances represent the first since the slowdown in Operation Peace Spring at the end of November 2019. Shelling and armed exchanges between Turkish-backed groups and the SDF continued, focusing on Abu Rasin (x5) and Ariba abu Jarada (x2) amongst other areas.⁷

For the third consecutive week, attacks targeted critical infrastructure in northeast Syria. In Jdied Ekeidat village, an unidentified group hijacked a water tanker. Later in the week, an IED was dismantled at a water purification station in Basira town. As reported the previous week, attacks against critical infrastructure in the northeast, especially oil and gas facilities, has increased since October.

Small arms fire and IED attacks against SDF and aligned personnel along the Euphrates and Khabour River Valleys continued this week. Unidentified gunmen shot dead SDF-aligned individuals in Markada, Shadadah, Hole, Aweeja, and opened fire on SDF patrols in Hdidiyeh, Khayala, Takhihi, and Thiban. In Hussainiyah, residents clashed with Asayish (Kurdish police) following the death of a civilian and wounding of others earlier in the day by an SDF patrol. Residents also burned the SDF-aligned municipal council building. IEDs targeted SDF patrols in Jabal Abdul Aziz, in Hassakeh City (x2), Sosa, and Muhammadiyah. IED activity continued despite ongoing SDF security operations in the region.

There was also an increase of small arms fire attacks targeting civilians this week. Armed groups opened fire on civilians in Tayyana, Hawayij, Thiban (x2), Gharanij, and Shiheil. Levels of targeted attacks against civilians have remained elevated since July 2019 (Figure 5).

According to pro-government [media](#), US military again blocked a Russian military patrol from passing through an area in northeast Syria. On 30 January, a US military vehicle prevented a Russian military patrol from passing through Tal Tamr town. This is the third such incident within three weeks.⁸

⁷ Including Um al Khair, Um al Kayf, Nuwayhat, Assadiyah, Khalidiyah, Ishiraha Saqr, Safyan al Merdud, and Ain Issa. Turkish aircraft also conducted airstrikes against SDF positions in Tal Tamr.

⁸ After 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 19 January and in Tal Tamr on 23 January.

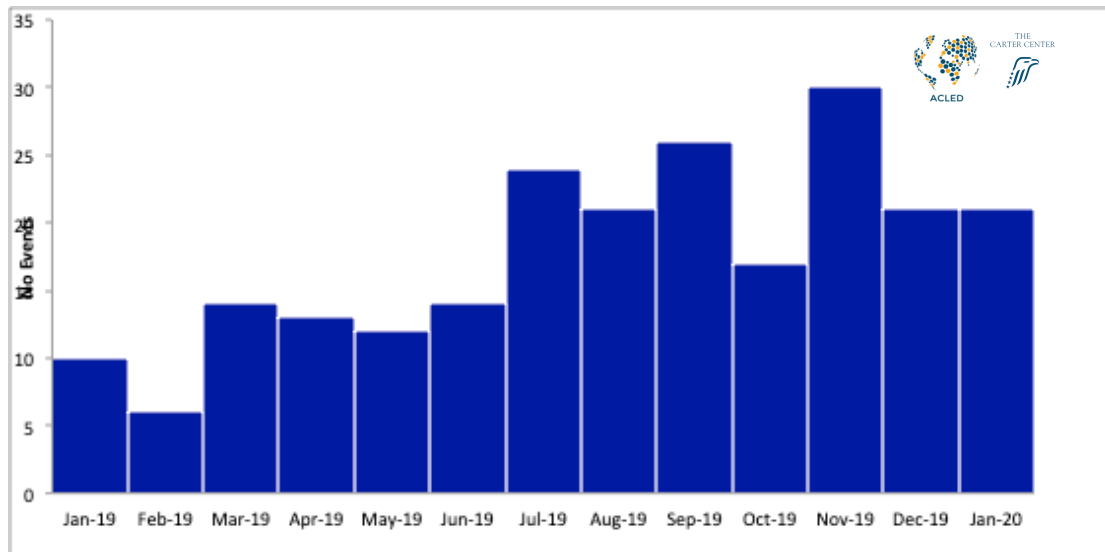


Figure 5: Attacks against civilians in Deir Ez Zor Governorate since January 2019 (excluding frontline clashes, airstrikes and shelling). Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

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