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WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 19 - 25 July 2021

SYRIA SUMMARY

- Israeli airstrikes kill two Iranian-backed militia commanders in Aleppo and Homs Governorates.
- Protesters denounce kidnapping gangs in As-Sweida Governorate.
- The Government of Syria and former opposition fighters agree to end the siege of Dara'a city.
- The U.S. conducts airstrikes against ISIS near Al-Hassakah city.

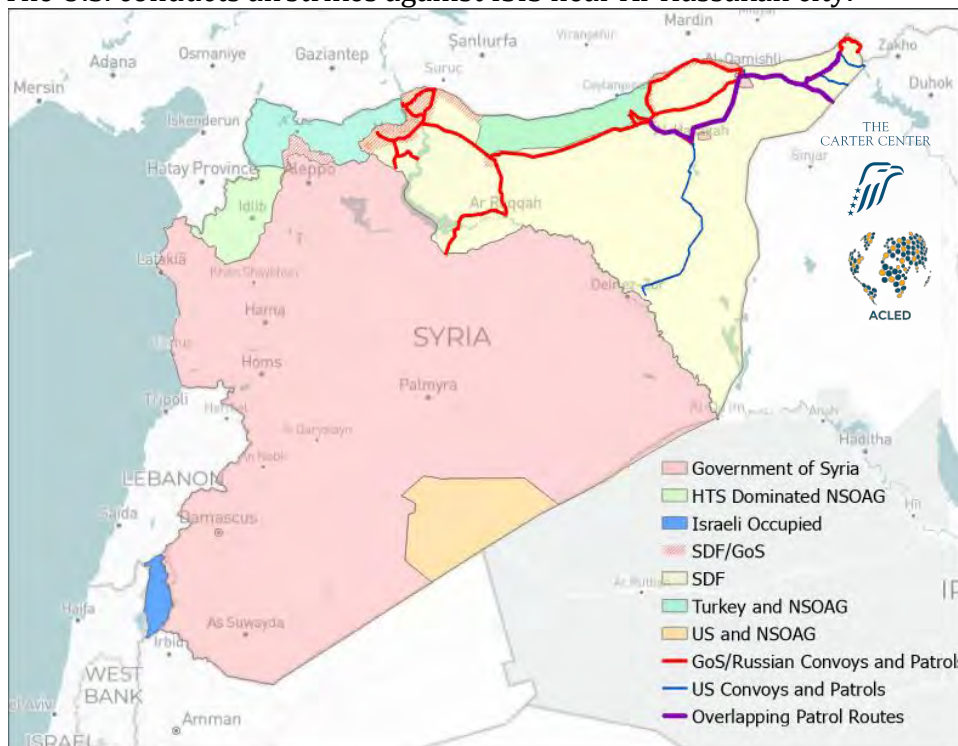


Figure 1: Dominant actors' area of control and influence in Syria as of 25 July 2021. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. Also, please see footnote 1.

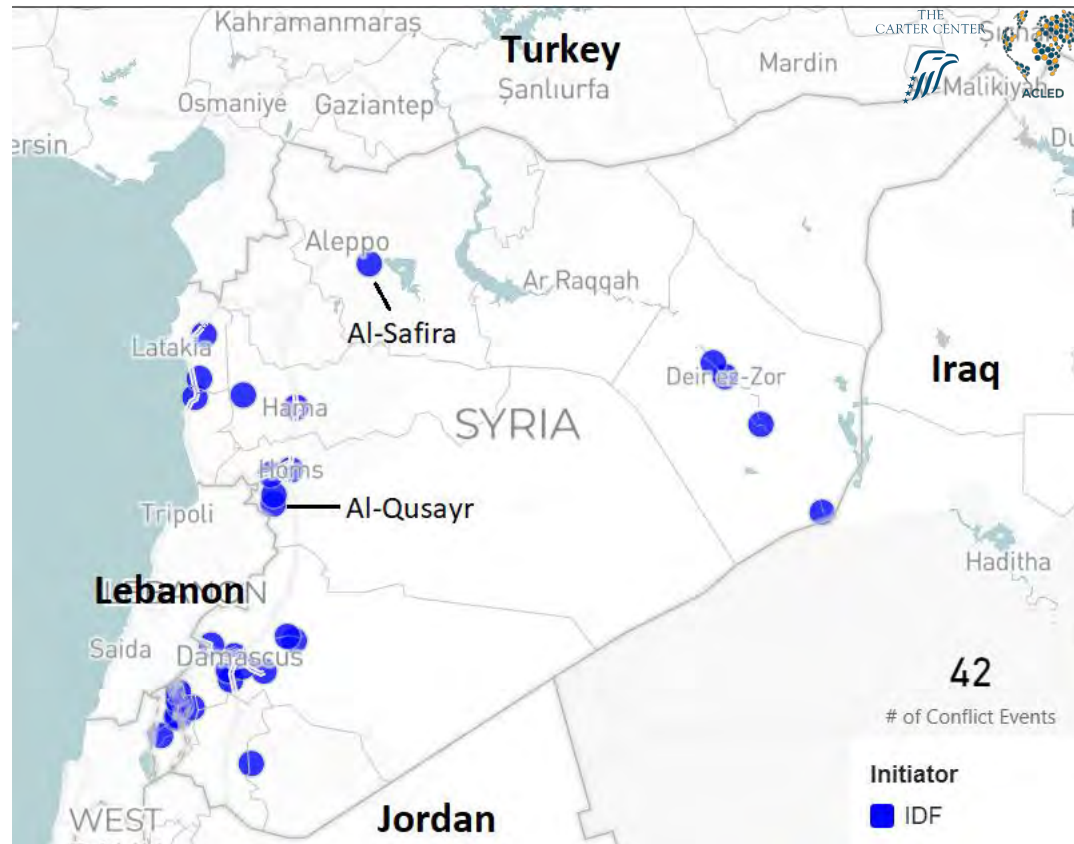
NORTHWEST SYRIA¹

Figure 2: Israeli airstrikes in Syria since 1 January 2021. Data from The Carter Center and ACLED.

Israeli Airstrikes

Israel conducts airstrikes frequently across Syria against Iranian and Government of Syria (GoS) targets, but rarely comments on its attacks.²³ In 2021, the pace of Israeli airstrikes has increased.

19 July

Israel conducted airstrikes against Iranian-backed militias near As-Safira, Aleppo Governorate.⁴ The commander of the Iranian-backed Afghan Fatemiyoun Brigade was reportedly killed in the airstrikes.⁵

¹ Figure 1 depicts areas of the dominant actors' control and influence. While "control" is a relative term 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 patrol 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 Iranian-backed militias refers to armed groups that are supported by Iran, like Hezbollah, and include militias from Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan, or Pakistan.

³ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/432892>

⁴ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/493978>

⁵ <https://syrianobserver.com/security/68266/iranian-backed-militia-leader-killed-after-israel-raids.html>

22 July

Israel conducted missile strikes against GoS and Hezbollah in Al-Qusayr, Homs Governorate, killing a senior Hezbollah commander.⁶ Russian armed forces announced that their air defense system intercepted most of the Israeli missiles.⁷

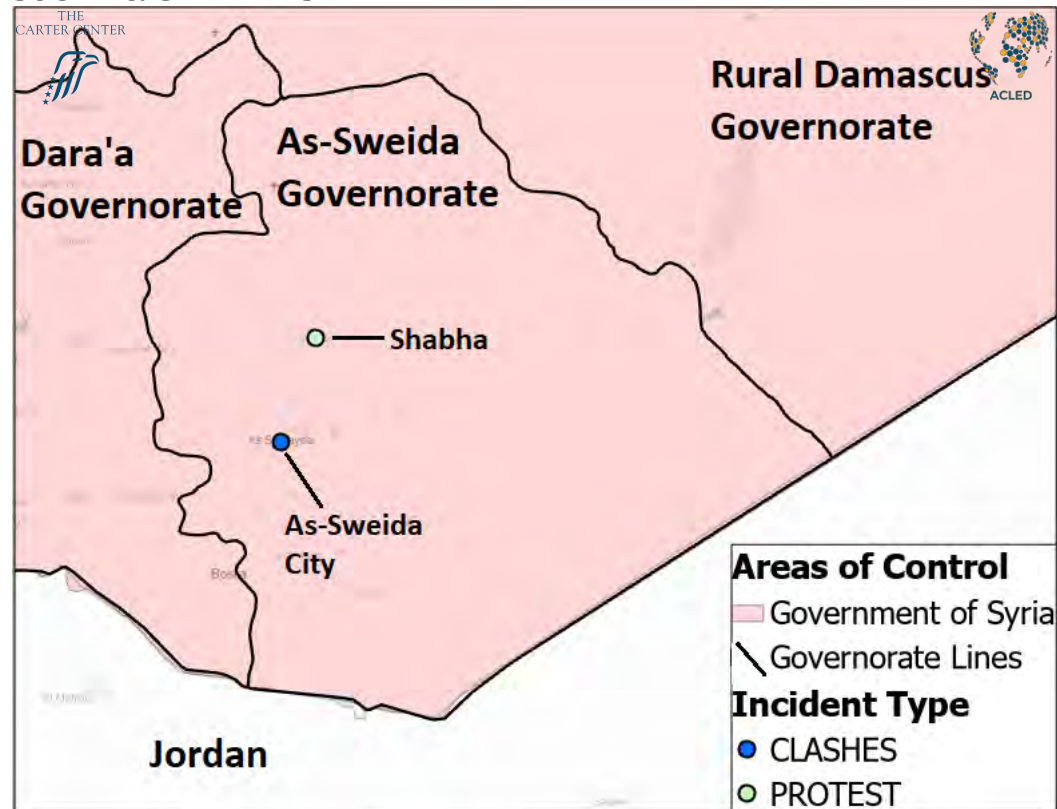
SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

Figure 3: Protests and clashes against kidnapping gangs in As-Sweida Governorate between 19-25 July 2021. Data from The Carter Center and ACLED.

Kidnappings in As-Sweida Governorate

Kidnapping gangs continue to remain a serious challenge in As-Sweida Governorate. Occasionally, these kidnappings cause major clashes between armed groups and tensions with authorities in Dara'a Governorate. Local residents have accused GoS military branches of turning a blind eye to the kidnapping gangs, and even supporting them.⁸ On 17 July, a family in Shabha clashed with a prominent kidnapping gang leader in Shabha, As-Sweida Governorate.⁹ The family lost three members in the clashes.

23 July

⁶ https://www.thenationalnews.com/mena/lebanon/2021/07/25/senior-hezbollah-member-killed-in-syria/?utm_source=iterable&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=2639456

⁷ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/494467>

⁸ <https://tinyurl.com/y5axsz52>

⁹ <https://suwayda24.com/?p=17182>

Residents of Shahba held a demonstration protesting against the prevalence of kidnapping gangs.¹⁰ The protesters also accused the GoS of supporting the various kidnapping and narcotics-trafficking gangs in As-Sweida Governorate.¹¹

The same day, a new As-Sweida-based armed group called the “Counter-Terrorism Force” reportedly clashed with an alleged GoS-connected kidnapping gang and freed a local resident in As-Sweida city.¹² Founded on 7 July, the Counter-Terrorism Force serves as the military branch of the new Druze political party “Syrian al-Liwa”.¹³ The armed group reportedly seeks to protect citizens of As-Sweida city from GoS and Iranian-affiliated armed groups and gangs.¹⁴ However, some journalists have argued that the new armed group is comprised of gang members.¹⁵

Update on the siege of Dara’a al-Balad

Since 24 June, GoS and Russian armed forces have besieged Dara’a al-Balad, a suburb in Dara’a city. On 24 July, the Central Committee of Dara’a and GoS negotiators reached an agreement to end the siege of Dara’a al-Balad. The agreement stipulated that the Central Committee would register individuals for a new settlement process and surrender some of their weapons. In return, the siege would be lifted and GoS Military Security would establish new checkpoints within the neighborhood.¹⁶ On 25 July, the GoS 4th Division and 25th Division dispatched additional reinforcements to the city, raising concerns that the agreement will not be implemented, and the siege will continue.¹⁷

NORTHEAST SYRIA

¹⁰ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/494372>

¹¹ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/494372>

¹² <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/494512>

¹³ <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/07/new-druze-political-party-military-faction-take-shape-suwayda>

¹⁴ <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/07/new-druze-political-party-military-faction-take-shape-suwayda>

¹⁵ <https://suwayda24.com/?p=17167>

¹⁶ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/494611>

¹⁷ <https://www.horanfree.com/?p=9464>

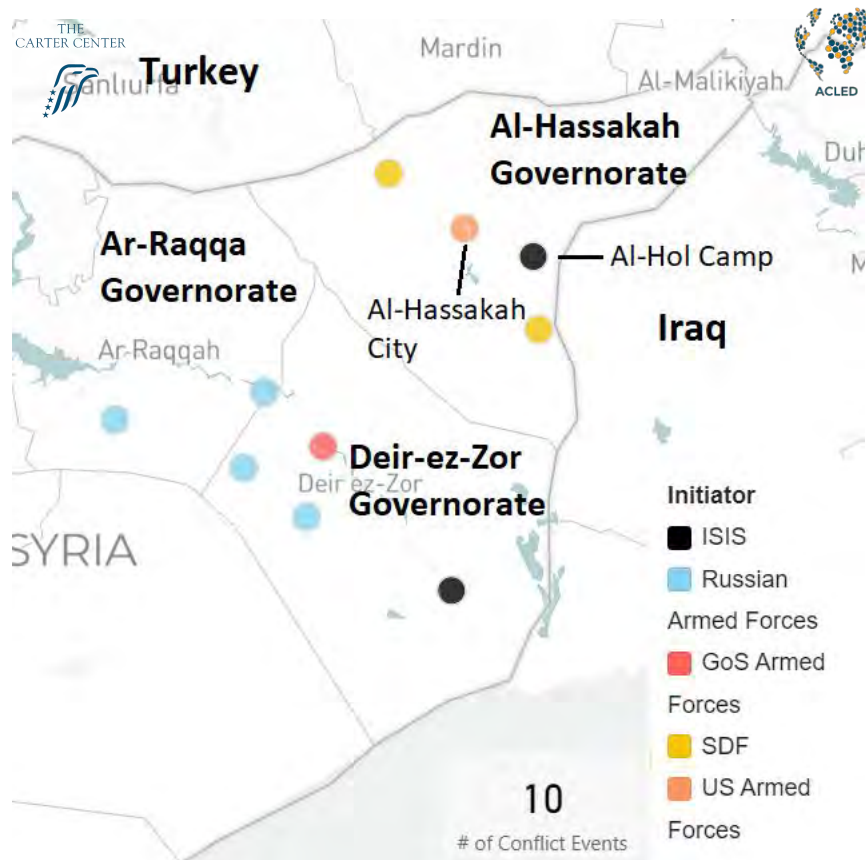


Figure 4: Conflict events involving ISIS in northeast Syria between 19-25 July 2021. Data from The Carter Center and ACLED.

The Battle Against ISIS

ISIS continued to be active in the Badia desert region of central and northeast Syria. ISIS has launched high-casualty attacks against the GoS armed forces and its allies. Multiple operations against ISIS have had limited success. Operations by the predominantly Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have exacerbated tensions with Arab tribes in territories under their control.

19 July

The SDF arrested an ISIS smuggling network in Al-Hol camp, Al-Hassakah Governorate.¹⁸

21 July

After the SDF was unable to storm a suspected ISIS hideout, U.S. armed forces carried out airstrikes against ISIS in the proximity of Al-Hassakah city, reportedly killing three ISIS fighters.¹⁹

23 July

ISIS claimed responsibility for killing a SDF leader in Abu Hamam, Deir-ez-Zor Governorate.²⁰

¹⁸ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/494052>

¹⁹ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/494244>

²⁰ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/494306>

For earlier weekly conflict summaries, please click [here](#). For an interactive map of historical areas of control in Syria, please click [here](#).

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