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WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 6 - 12 April 2020

SYRIA SUMMARY

- **NORTHWEST** | Levels of conflict in northwest Syria remained elevated for the third consecutive week. The Turkish military continued to shell areas around northern Aleppo Governorate. In Turkish-held areas of Aleppo, opposition armed groups engaged in intragroup clashes over property and smuggling disputes. Government of Syria (GoS)-backed forces clashed with opposition armed groups but made no advances.
- **SOUTH & CENTRAL** | The Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham (ISIS) launched attacks on GoS positions in the east of Homs Governorate. GoS-aligned personnel and officials continued to be targeted in Dara'a Governorate.
- **NORTHEAST** | The SDF imposed new security measures to combat the spread of COVID-19. Landmines and remote-controlled explosions killed 10 people in the Euphrates River Valley. ISIS attacked GoS positions in Deir-ez-Zor.

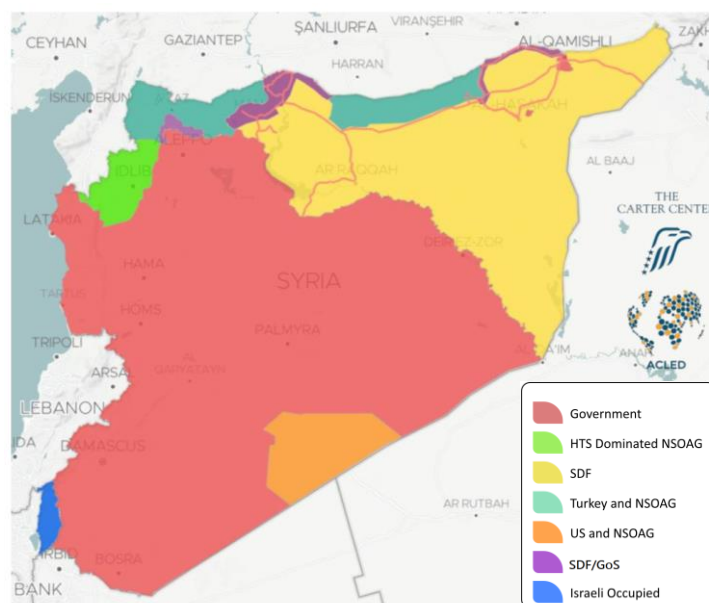


Figure 1: Dominant actors' area of control and influence in Syria as of 12 April 2020. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. Also, please see the footnote on page 2.

NORTHWEST SYRIA

For the third consecutive week, there were elevated levels of conflict activity in the northwest of Syria. The Government of Syria (GoS) shelled 17 locations, 28 times around the Hayyat Tahrir al Sham-dominated enclave. Most of the shelling exchanges took place in Idlib Governorate, with 3 exchanges in Lattakia Governorate, and 4 in Aleppo Governorate.² (Figure 2) GoS shelling exchanges on 6 and 7 April hit the perimeter of a Turkish observation post in Sarmin, Idlib. This is the 5th time in 2020 that pro-Syrian government forces targeted Turkish observation posts in Idlib.

GoS and aligned groups clashed with armed opposition groups 6 times this week. On 6 April, opposition groups attacked GoS positions in the Government-controlled district of Ma'arrat An Nu'man. The remaining armed clashes took place in the frontline areas of the Aleppo and Idlib Governorates. No advances were made by either side.

On 10 April, Syrian Military and GoS-aligned armed groups, with the help of Russian airstrikes, clashed with ISIS fighters in the Rahjan area of the Hama Governorate. According to ACLED, this is the first time since 2018 that ISIS fighters engaged in an armed clash with pro-Government forces in the Hama Governorate.

The Government of Turkey and aligned opposition groups shelled 27 locations, 32 times, primarily in the A'zaz district of Aleppo Governorate.³ On 7 April, the Turkish-backed Levant Front (JaS) clashed with Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) near Afrin. The clash began after a YPG vehicle ran through a JaS checkpoint.

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 Bara, Ftireh (x4), Haddada (Lattakia) (x2), Sfuhen (x4), Badama, Jabal al-Zawiya (x2), Kansafra, Afes, Sarmin (x2), Al Qasr (Aleppo), Taqad (Aleppo) (x2), Jarada, Kafr Amma (Aleppo) (x2), Kafr Oweid, Saraqab, Tardeen (Lattakia), and Al Qasr (Aleppo)

³ Harbal, Tall Refaat (x3), Sheikh Isa (x2), Shawarighat al Arz, Samouqa, Tanab, Harbal, Sawghankah, Basufan, Bene, Ziyara, Irshadiyah, Menagh Military Airport, Sheikh Helal (x2), Al-Malikeyyeh, Deir Jamal, Kafr Antoun, Kashtaar, Maraanaz, Oqayba, Kafrnaya (x2), Ahras, Tall Qarah, Maratet Um Hosh, Tal Sussin, Ein Daqneh, and Sumaqieh – according to ACLED.

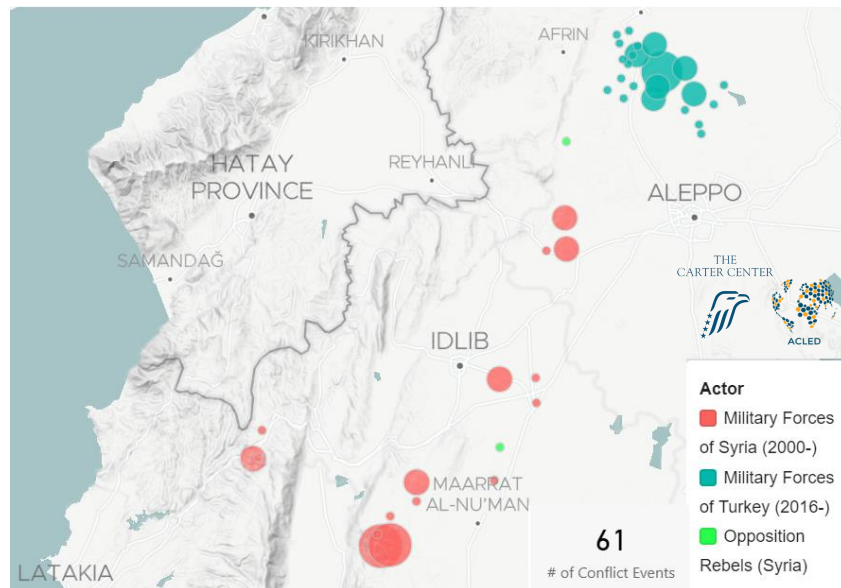


Figure 2: Incidents of Shelling in northwest Syria between 6 April and 11 April. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

Factions of the Turkish-aligned opposition Syrian National Army (SNA) engaged in intergroup clashes in Turkish-held areas in northern Aleppo Governorate. On 8 April, armed men of the Sultan Suleiman Shah Brigade fought each other over disputed ownership of a civilian house in Basuta, Afrin. Four Brigade members were wounded. A dispute over drug trafficking between JaS and Ahrar al Sham in Al Bab, Aleppo Governorate also erupted into clashes. Similar incidents were reported in other parts of Afrin as armed groups fought over loot sharing and property ownership.⁴

SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

In the Homs Governorate, clashes between ISIS and GoS-aligned groups erupted near Sokhneh town on 9 and 10 April. On 9 April, ISIS launched attacks on GoS positions and military convoys in the Sokhneh countryside. Fighting continued until 10 April, when the attack was repelled by the Syrian Army, pro-government armed groups, and the Russian Air Force. After fighting ended, GoS and Russia reinforced their military positions in Sokhneh and along the Homs-Deir-ez-Zor road. The GoS captured the town of Al Sokhneh from ISIS in 2017.

Attacks against GoS-aligned personnel continued in Dara'a Governorate. (Figure 3) Unidentified gunmen attacked a police outpost in Dara'a on 6 April, and a Ba'ath Party official was killed on 7 April in Nawa. On 9 April, a Syrian-Palestinian with alleged links to the GoS Airforce Intelligence was assassinated in Muzayrib.

⁴ JaS and Jaysh al Islam fought over possession of a house in Ashiqibar, Afrin. Al Sham Corps members opened fire at a Jaysh al Nukhba vehicle following disputes over loot sharing.

Infighting also occurred in Rural Damascus on 8 April, when a GoS-Military Security unit opened fire and wounded a member of the GoS-4th Division over a money-laundering dispute in Wadi Barada.⁵

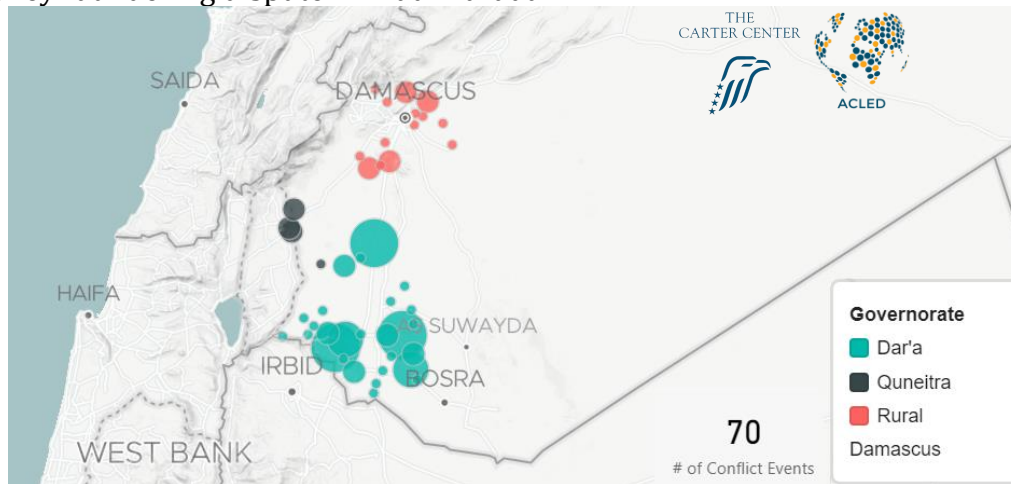


Figure 3: Attacks on GoS and pro-Government militias in southern Syria since January 1, 2020. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

NORTHEAST SYRIA

Levels of shelling in the Turkish-held Operation Peace Spring areas decreased this week. In three incidents of shelling, the Turkish Armed Forces and the opposition's Syrian National Army fired on Manakh town and Umm Al-Kayf in Al-Hasakeh Governorate, and on Kor Hassan in Al Raqqa Governorate.

The Kurdish dominated Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)-led Autonomous Administration in North-eastern Syria announced new security measures on 6 April to curb the spread of COVID-19.⁶ This included extending the curfew period until April 21, as well as fines for violations. The SDF also announced it was suspending its mandatory military conscription until July. The same day, in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate, clashes erupted between the SDF and communal militias in Elhisan village after some residents opposed the curfew. SDF members continued enforcing the COVID-19 curfew, arresting residents in Shadadah in Al-Hasakeh Governorate over curfew violations.

ACLED recorded 6 events involving landmines or improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in the Euphrates River Valley.⁷ These incidents killed 10 people, including three civilians, four members of the pro-Government Quds Brigade, 2 GoS National Defence Forces members, and 2 SDF militias.

⁵ <http://nedaa-sy.com/en/news/19696>

⁶ <https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/45311f22-ba8d-4cf7-be5c-6259db4fddb4>

⁷ Al Arasi, Ash Shula, Al Mayadin, 93rd Brigade Army Base, Baghuz, and Wadhah.

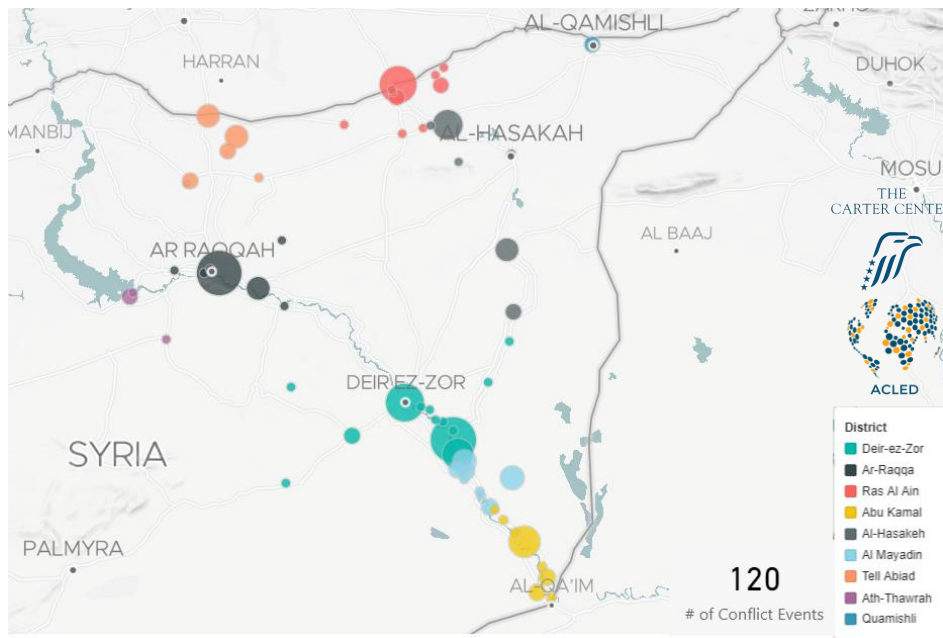


Figure 4: Landmines and IED related attacks in northwestern Syria since January 1, 2010. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

On 6 April, ISIS attacked government positions in Abbas, Al-Sayyal, and Jalaal near Deir-ez-Zor. On 6 April, ISIS cells in Zir executed a woman they accused of working with the GoS. The same day, ISIS fighters attacked an ambulance carrying SDF fighters in the Deir-ez-Zor countryside. ISIS also claimed an attack on 2 guards at al-Hole camp in Al-Hasakeh Governorate.

On 6 April, members of pro-Turkish opposition's Sultan Murad group in Ras Al-Ain fought with each other over a dispute regarding looted goods.⁸ This has been part of a larger trend of infighting by pro-Turkey opposition groups in the Turkish-held parts of Syria.

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⁸ <https://syriacpress.com/blog/2020/04/06/syria-two-groups-of-sultan-murad-division-fighters-clash-over-a-looted-washing-machine-near-rish-ayno-ras-al-ayn/>