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WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 6 - 12 JANUARY 2020

WHOLE OF SYRIA SUMMARY

- **NORTHWEST** | Syria, Russia and Turkey agreed to implement a ceasefire in the northwest on 12 January. Additional Government of Syria (GoS) troop arrived in Aleppo City for the second consecutive week. In the Turkish-occupied areas of northern Aleppo Governorate, there was an increase of looting and extortion activities by opposition armed groups.
- **SOUTH & CENTRAL** | Residents from Karak and Nahta towns stormed GoS locations and detained more than 20 soldiers. ISIS harassment of GoS forces continued in central areas of the country. In Falita, Hezbollah and the National Defence Forces clashed at a checkpoint in an uncommon intra-GoS forces confrontation.
- **NORTHEAST** | Turkish-backed opposition armed groups and the US-supported Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) exchanged fire in Ain Issa, Tal Tamr, and Tal Abiad. Two improvised explosive device (IED) attacks targeted Turkish-backed forces in Arbain and Um Ashba villages. There was also a surge in SDF arrest operations against civilians, suspected ISIS members, and smugglers. Israeli airstrikes targeted various locations in Deir Ez Zor governorate on 9 and 10 January. Two attacks targeted individuals connected to the Omar Oil Field.

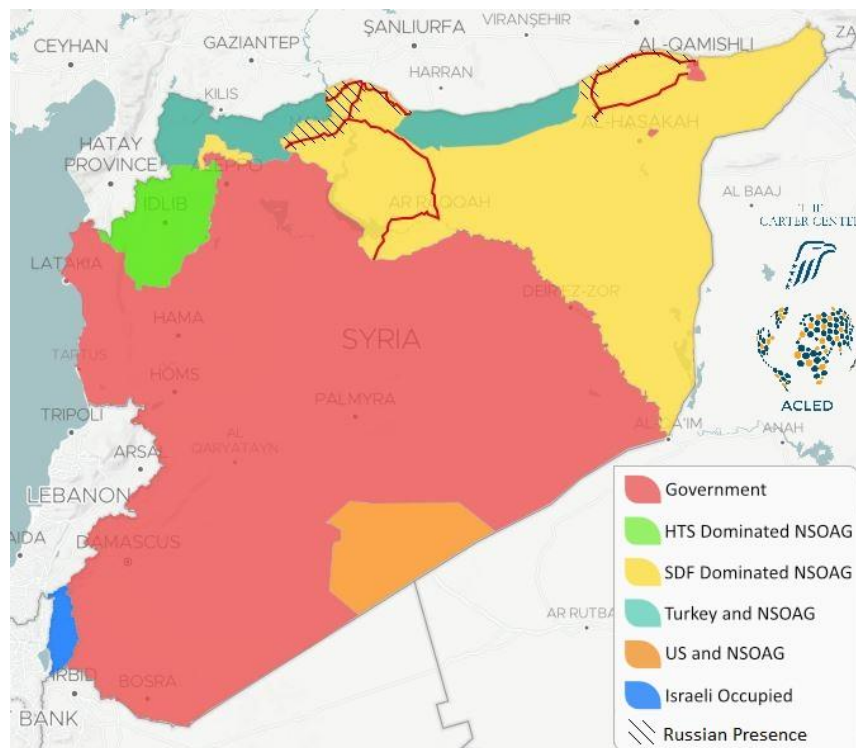


Figure 1: Dominant actors' area of control and influence in Syria as of 12 January 2020. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. Also, please see the footnote on page 2.

NORTHWEST SYRIA

On 12 January, the Syria, Russia, and Turkey [agreed](#) to implement a ceasefire in northwest Syria. The agreement comes after a slowdown in the most recent Government of Syria (GoS) offensive against Hayyat Tahrir al Sham (HTS) and other groups in the Idlib de-escalation zone.² Despite the announcement made on 9 January, GoS aerial and ground bombardments continued at elevated levels until the end of the reporting period (Figure 2).

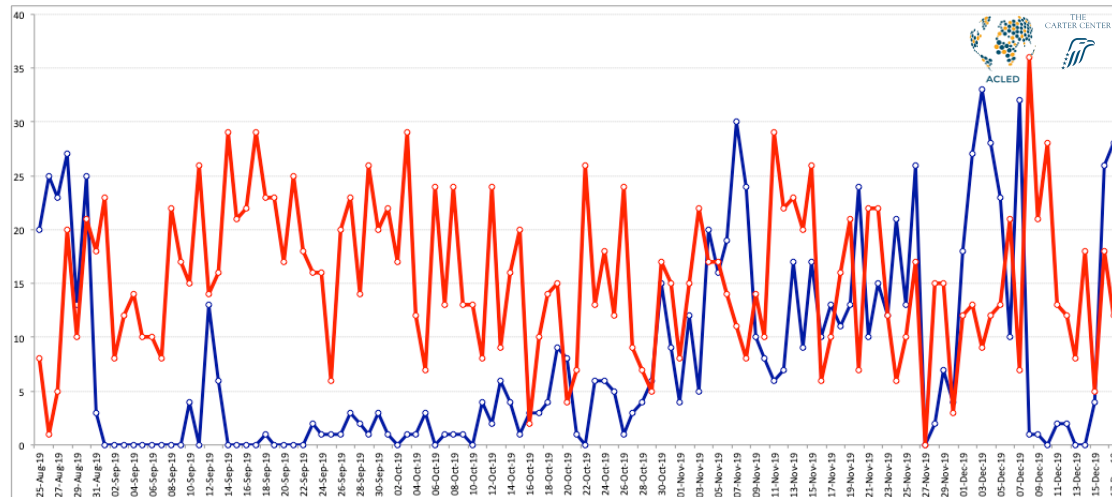


Figure 2: GoS Aerial (blue) and ground (red) bombardments in the northwest since August 2019. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

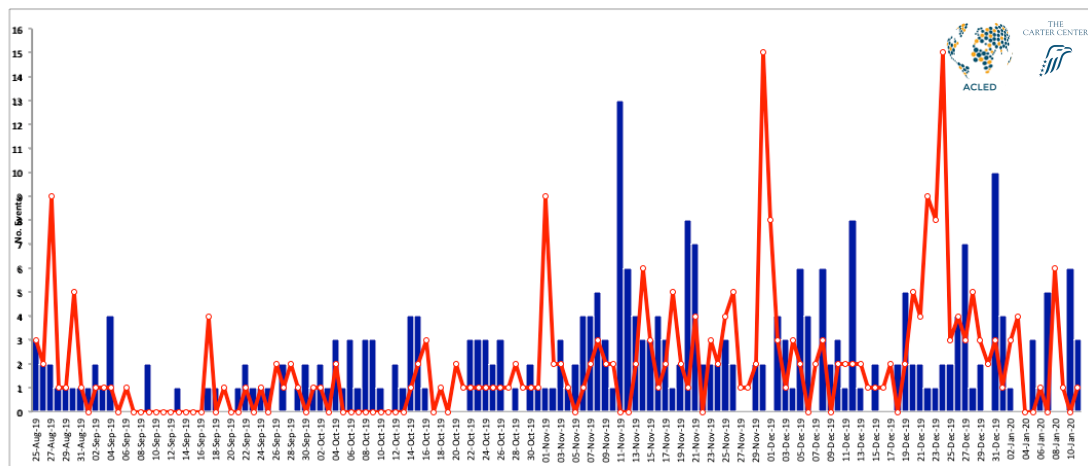


Figure 3: HTS and other opposition group shelling (blue) and ground clashes (red) in the northwest

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, despite growing Russian presence indicated by the hatched region of the map. 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 That also coincided with [poor](#) weather conditions, something that contributed to GoS [announcing](#) it was halting the offensive in the coming weeks.

since August 2019. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

HTS and other groups continued to shell GoS-dominated areas in the northwest up to the 12 January ceasefire deadline. This included targeting the Khalidiyah and new neighborhoods of Aleppo City on the [day](#) the ceasefire started (Figure 3). On 8 January, there were also two limited HTS advances against GoS positions in Delim and Barsa areas, east of Mara'at al Numaan.

Additional GoS troops arrived in Aleppo City this week following the previous week's re-enforcements. On 7 January, ACLED recorded several GoS infantry units traveling to western and southwestern frontlines. Pro-government media [reported](#) armored units, including tanks, arrived in Aleppo during the week. The same reports also mentioned GoS helicopters dropping leaflets over areas west of Aleppo City encouraging civilians to leave the area and announcing the opening of three humanitarian corridors.³ Pro-opposition sources tweeted [photos](#) of GoS multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS) arriving in Aleppo throughout the period, including from the 4th Division.

In the Turkish-occupied areas of northern Aleppo Governorate,⁴ there was an increase in opposition armed groups looting and extortion activities against civilians. In the Sheikh al Hadid area of Afrin city, the Turkish-backed opposition's Sultan Suleiman Shah Brigade kidnapped eight civilians, including a woman and two children, looted a civilian's home, and destroyed shops in order to excavate the area for antiquities. On 9 January, a commander of the Turkish-backed opposition Mutasim Brigade also seized shops from civilians in Afrin City. On 11 January, an unidentified local group established a checkpoint and looted passing civilian vehicles on the Raju-Qasim road in Afrin District. Similar activities have been reported since April 2019.

SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

On 11 January, residents of Karak and Nahta villages stormed GoS positions, detained more than 20 soldiers and seized their weapons. According to ACLED, the move was in reaction to the GoS detention of civilians from the two towns in the days prior. Pro-opposition sources [reported](#) that the GoS is engaged in negotiations over the release of their personnel. The events in Karak and Nahta are the most serious cases of civil disobedience in former opposition held areas since the GoS takeover of southern Syria in August 2018. These incidents are part of growing signs of civil discontent in southern Syria.⁵

Armed-group attacks against GoS and aligned personnel continued in Daraa Governorate. Unidentified gunmen opened fire on a checkpoint in Saida, attacked a military location in Mseifra, ambushed a 9th Division officer's vehicle in Jbab, and shot dead a 4th Armoured Division soldier in Mzeireb. Since September, such

³ The humanitarian [corridors](#) are in the Abu Thohur, al Hadar, and al Habit areas.

⁴ Operation Euphrates Shield and Operation Olive Branch.

⁵ As [reported](#) the previous week. ACLED also reported that graffiti in support of the residents of Karak and Nahta appeared in Al Muzayrib, Da'el, Tasil, Maaraba, and Maliha al Gharbiyah towns.

activity has steadily increased.

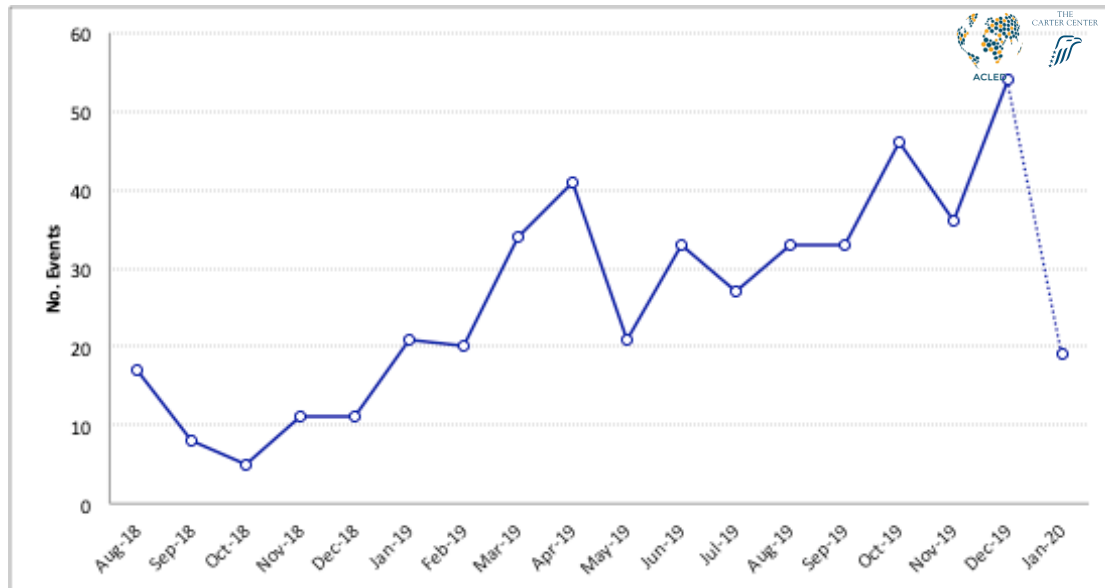


Figure 4: Attacks against GoS, former opposition members and civilians in southern Syria since Aug 2018. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

In the deserts of Homs and Deir ez Zor governorates, ISIS activity continued to impact GoS forces. On 6 January, ISIS groups targeted with mortars several GoS positions between Dweila and Jalaa villages in the Badiya area and attacked a GoS position near Harbisha. On 7 January, pro-government media [reported that](#) ISIS conducted a military operation against two GoS military buses in the Mayadeen area under the cover of heavy fog. At the end of the reporting period, GoS aircraft [conducted](#) airstrikes on ISIS positions in the Sokhneh desert. ISIS linked activity has increased in 2019 despite GoS anti-ISIS operations.

For the second consecutive week, conflict activity occurred in rural areas of the Qalamoun Mountains. On 7 January, Hezbollah and the GoS-aligned Qalamoun Shield Forces (a National Defence Force unit) clashed for several hours at the Aqabah checkpoint near Falita town. The reasons for the confrontation are unknown. This is the third case of clashes between Hezbollah and the NDF in the Qalamoun Mountains since July.⁶

NORTHEAST SYRIA

Ground exchanges between Turkish-backed opposition groups and the US-supported Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) continued in the northeast. Activity was focused in the vicinity of Ain Issa (x5 events), Tal Tamr (x3 events), and Tal Abiad (x 2 events).

There were also attacks against Turkey's Operation Peace Spring-aligned opposition armed groups. In Al-Arbain town, a car bomb detonated near a joint

⁶ After clashes in nearby Qara on 26 July and 3 September that were a the result of a disagreement between the two sides over control of smuggling in the area.

Turkish Military/Syrian National Army⁷ checkpoint. In Um Ashba village, a device detonated against a Turkish military patrol. In Suluk, an Ahrar al Sharqiyah commander was assassinated. Such attacks have continued since Operation Peace Spring began in late 2019.

There was also an increase in SDF arrest operations against civilians. In Dashishah, SDF arrested civilians after a raid in the city⁸. In Tal Brak, SDF arrested civilians for conscriptions related reasons. In Hawayij, Thiban, and Tayanna, SDF forces carried out an operation against smugglers (with GoS) with the support of US-dominated Global Coalition helicopters. In Daman and Mashikh towns, SDF forces arrested five men in possession of illegal firearms.

On 9 and 10 January, a series of suspected Israeli airstrikes targeted various locations in Deir Ez Zor governorate. Missiles struck Jalaa and Abbas towns twice, as well as an Iranian-aligned militia at the Al Bukamal border crossing. The events occurred a day after pro-government media [reported](#) an increase of Iranian troops and equipment in the Albu Kamal District.

Two IED attacks targeted individuals related to the Omar Oil Field. In the first, an IED detonated in front of an Omar Oil Field worker's house in Shiheil. In the second attack, a device detonated against an oil tanker as it crossed the Omar Oil Field Bridge. Attacks against individuals associated with the Omar Oil Field⁹ have become increasingly common over the course of 2019, especially the last quarter of the year (Figure 5).

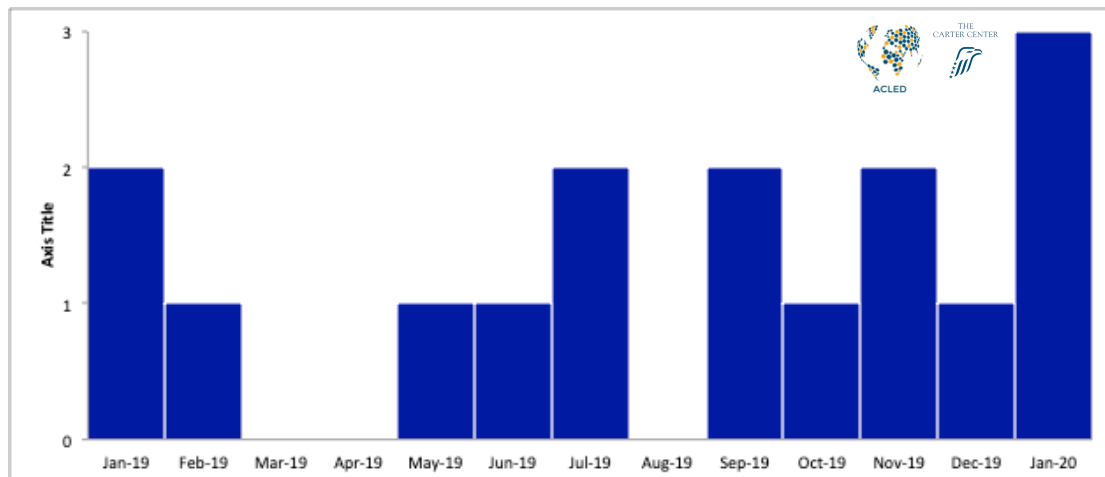


Figure 4: Attacks against individuals associated with the Omar Oil Field since Jan 2019. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

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⁷ As previously mentioned, The Syrian National Army is a Turkish-backed entity made up of several hundred Syrian armed groups under the control of the opposition's Syrian Interim Government.

⁸ For unknown reasons.

⁹ Individuals associated with the Omar Oil Field include civilians who work there, SDF guards, and oil tanker drivers.