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WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 15 - 21 March 2021

SYRIA SUMMARY

- Tensions escalated in the northwest after the Government of Syria (GoS) bombed a hospital in Atareb, Aleppo Governorate.
- In the south, a local militia ambushed and killed at least 20 GoS soldiers in Mzerieb, Dara'a Governorate.
- In the northeast, clashes continued between the Turkish armed forces and the predominantly Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces in Ain Issa, Ar-Raqqa Governorate.
- Protestors commemorated the 10th anniversary of the 2011 Syrian uprising.

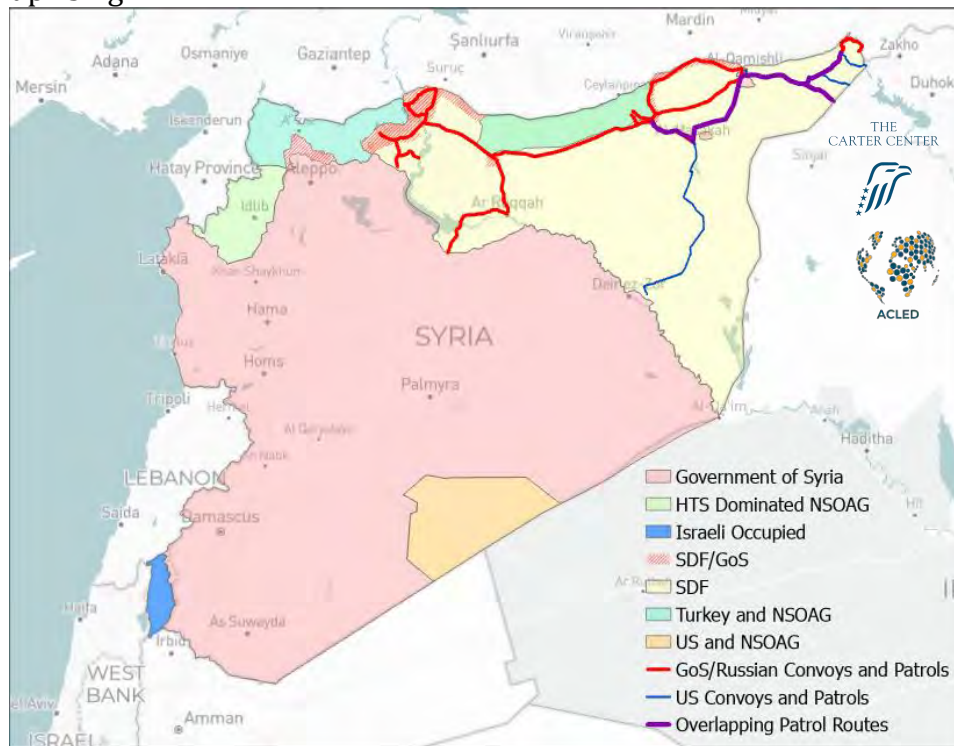


Figure 1: Dominant actors' area of control and influence in Syria as of 21 March 2021. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. Also, please see footnote 1.

NORTHWEST SYRIA¹

Figure 2: Clashes and shelling between GoS and Russian armed forces on the one side and armed opposition groups on the other between 15-21 March 2021. Largest bubble represents 4 conflict events. Data from The Carter Center and ACLED.

Fighting in Northwest Syria

Violence continued in northwest Syria. With the 5 March 2020 ceasefire continuing to weaken, Russia assumed a more active role in hostilities in the region. Turkey continued to build up its military presence there, while withdrawing its military bases from nearby Government of Syria (GoS)-controlled territory. Fighting has been primarily focused in the Jabal al-Zawiyah area, Idlib Governorate. In recent weeks, Russian armed forces have increasingly targeted Turkish-held areas in northwest Syria.²

16 March

The opposition's Fatah al-Mubin Operations Room³ shot and killed a GoS soldier and wounded several others near Kabani, northern Latakia Governorate.⁴

20 March

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.enabbaladi.net/archives/468333>

³ A coalition of armed groups, including Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, The Turkish-backed opposition National Liberation Front, and Jaysh al-Izza.

⁴ <https://tinyurl.com/6hsd4ssu>

GoS armed forces and armed opposition fighters clashed and engaged in shelling exchanges along the Al-Ghab plains of northern Hama Governorate, and the Jabal al-Zawiyah area, Idlib Governorate.⁵

21 March

GoS armed forces shelled a Syrian American Medical Society-run hospital in Atareb, Aleppo Governorate, killing 6 civilians.⁶⁷ The hospital had shared its coordinates with the UN as part of the deconfliction process,⁸ prompting condemnation from American and European officials.⁹ The same day, the Russian air force bombed the Bab al-Hawa crossing with Turkey.¹⁰ In response to these attacks, armed opposition groups shelled Russian forces in Maarat al-Numan, eastern Idlib Governorate.¹¹

SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

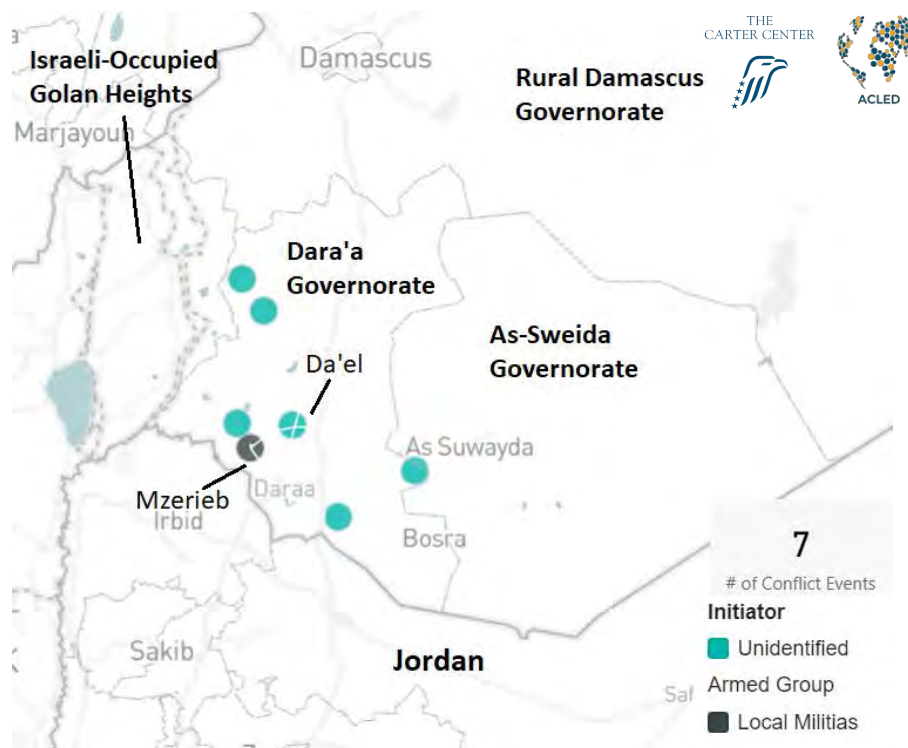


Figure 3: Attacks against former opposition fighters and GoS armed forces between 15-21 March 2021. Data from The Carter Center and ACLED.

Instability in Southern Syria

Since the takeover of Dara'a Governorate by the GoS in 2018, some former opposition commanders have gained prominence by leading influential political

⁵ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/467772>

⁶ <https://halabtodaytv.net/archives/182807>

⁷ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/syria-war-bomb-atareb-hospital-aleppo-assad-and-russia-attacks-medical-facilities/>

⁸ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/syria-war-bomb-atareb-hospital-aleppo-assad-and-russia-attacks-medical-facilities/>

⁹ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/468461>

¹⁰ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/468154>

¹¹ <https://tinyurl.com/4um5ue2f>

and military bodies. At times, tensions between those two sides have resulted in arrests and violence, such as the January-February standoff in Tafas, Dara'a Governorate. Tensions have been exacerbated by continuing attacks and assassinations of GoS officers and former opposition fighters, mostly by unidentified perpetrators.

16 March

At least 20 GoS 4th division fighters were reportedly killed when they attempted to arrest a former opposition leader in Mzerieb, Dara'a Governorate.¹² The former opposition fighter in question, Abu Tariq aka Muhammad Qasim Al-Subaihi, has frequently clashed with GoS armed forces, in May 2020¹³ and January 2021. After the attack, the GoS 4th Division shelled Mzerieb¹⁴ and destroyed Subaihi's house.¹⁵

17 March

A former opposition fighter who had joined GoS State Security was killed in an improvised explosive device (IED) explosion in Jasim, Dara'a Governorate.¹⁶

19-20 March

Unidentified gunmen killed 2 former opposition fighters near a GoS Air Force Intelligence checkpoint in Dael, northern Dara'a Governorate.¹⁷ The next day, unidentified gunmen shot and killed a GoS Air Force Intelligence captain near Nawa, Dara'a Governorate.¹⁸

NORTHEAST SYRIA

¹² <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/466684>

¹³ <https://tinyurl.com/8a77bzkf>

¹⁴ <https://www.horanfree.com/?p=8325>

¹⁵ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/467220>

¹⁶ <https://tinyurl.com/y3nnzpmy>, <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/466987>

¹⁷ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/467715>

¹⁸ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/468041>, <https://tinyurl.com/v49eu>



Figure 4: Turkish-held Operation Peace Spring territory in northeast Syria. Data from The Carter Center and ACLED.

Conflict in Ain Issa

Since the Turkish military intervention in northeast Syria with Operation Peace Spring (OPS) in September 2019, Turkish armed forces and Turkish-backed Syrian armed opposition groups have frequently clashed with the predominantly Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). In November and December 2020, conflict escalated between on one side the Turkish armed forces and Turkish-backed armed opposition groups against on the other side Kurdish armed groups across northern Syria, with a concentration in Ain Issa, Ar-Raqqa Governorate. Conflict deescalated after a Russia-SDF settlement which led to the deployment of GoS and Russian soldiers in the area. As tensions continue, Turkey has reportedly built four military bases near Ain Issa.¹⁹

16 March

The Turkish-backed opposition Syrian National Army (SNA) clashed with the SDF near Saïda village, Ar-Raqqa Governorate.²⁰

20 March

Turkish armed forces reported to have killed 14 SDF fighters in villages of Sidon and Maalak in the Ain Issa area.²¹

21 March

Turkish drones bombed SDF military outposts in the villages of Sidon and Maalak in the Ain Issa area. The drone strikes coincided with SNA clashes with the SDF.²²

¹⁹ <https://tinyurl.com/385f6ydf>

²⁰ <https://tinyurl.com/zp4f6whx>

²¹ <https://tinyurl.com/465sh4se>

²² <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/467968>

10-Year Anniversary

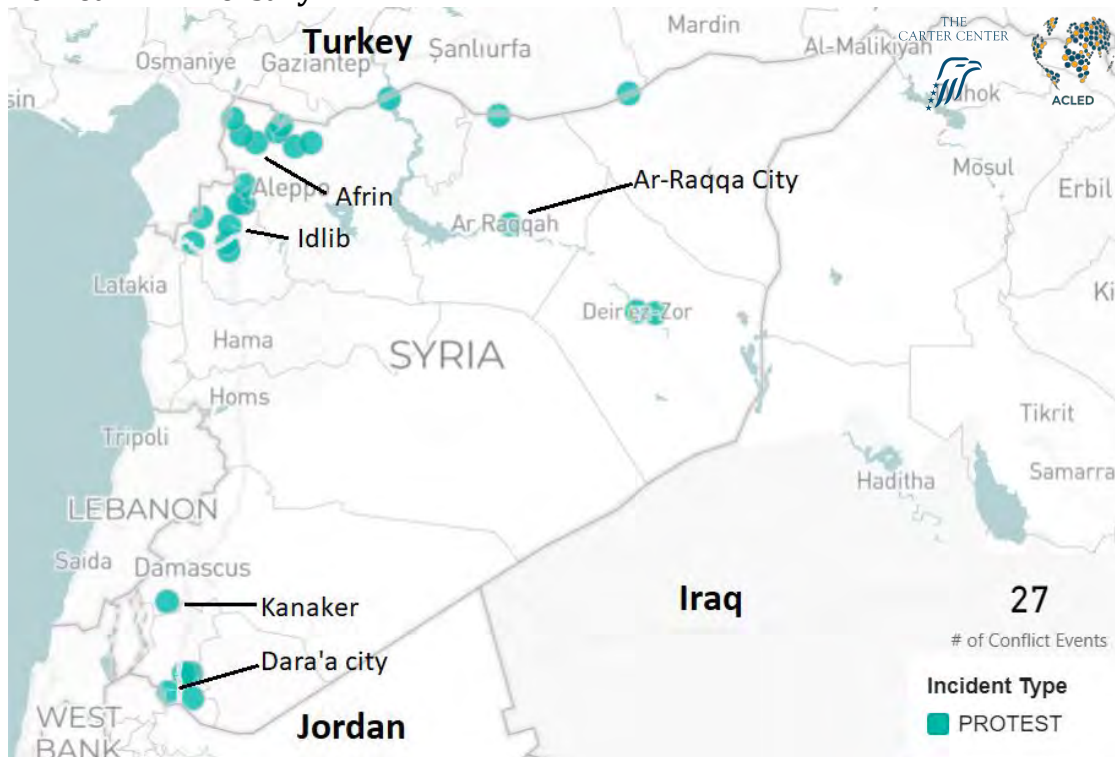


Figure 5: Demonstrations commemorating the 10-year anniversary of the 2011 Syrian revolution between 15-21 March 2021. Data from The Carter Center and ACLED.

On 15 and 18 March,²³ protestors gathered throughout Syria to commemorate the 10-year anniversary of the 2011 protests known as the Syrian revolution.²⁴ Demonstrations were reported in SDF-controlled territory, northeast Syria, and GoS-controlled territory. Protests reportedly continued throughout the week. In Dara'a Governorate, prominent former opposition figures joined the protests demanding that the GoS release detainees.²⁵

For earlier weekly conflict summaries, please click [here](#).

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²³ <https://tcf.org/content/commentary/politics-memory-ten-years-war-syria/>

²⁴ <https://tinyurl.com/f9cix8>

²⁵ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/467647>