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WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 10 - 16 May 2021

SYRIA SUMMARY

- The violent extremist Ansar Abu Bakr Al-Siddiq Squadron killed a Turkish soldier in Idlib Governorate.
- Government of Syria (GoS) armed forces, Russia, and the Central Committee of Dara'a agreed to end the siege of Um Batna, Quneitra Governorate.
- GoS and the Kurdish Autonomous Administration criticized Turkey for restricting the water flow of the Euphrates River.

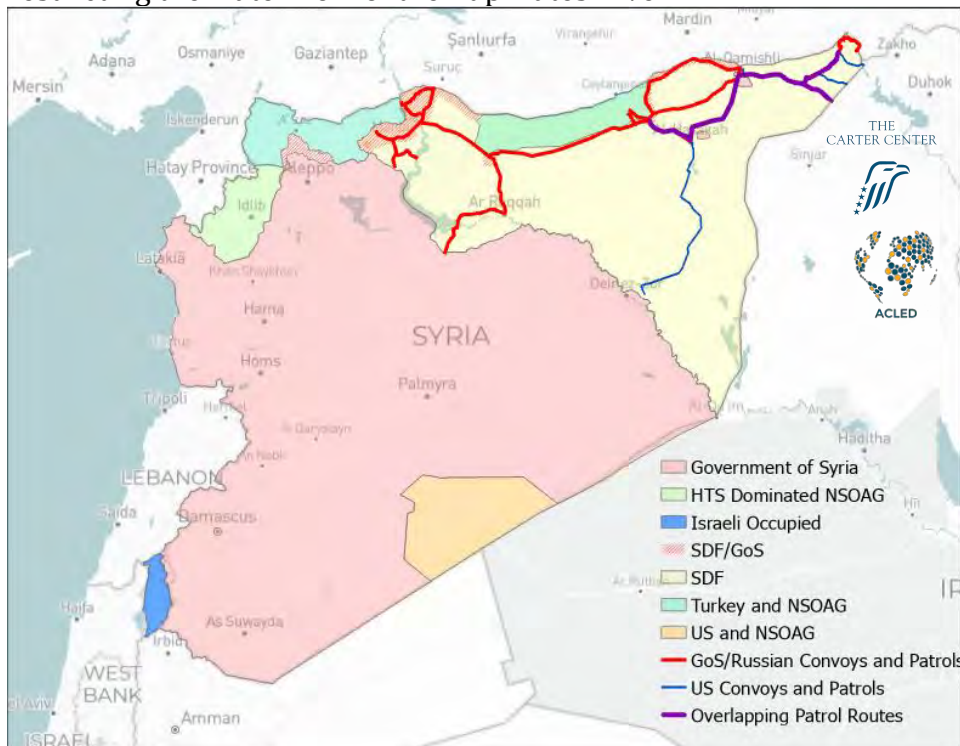


Figure 1: Dominant actors' area of control and influence in Syria as of 16 May 2021. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. Also, please see footnote 1.

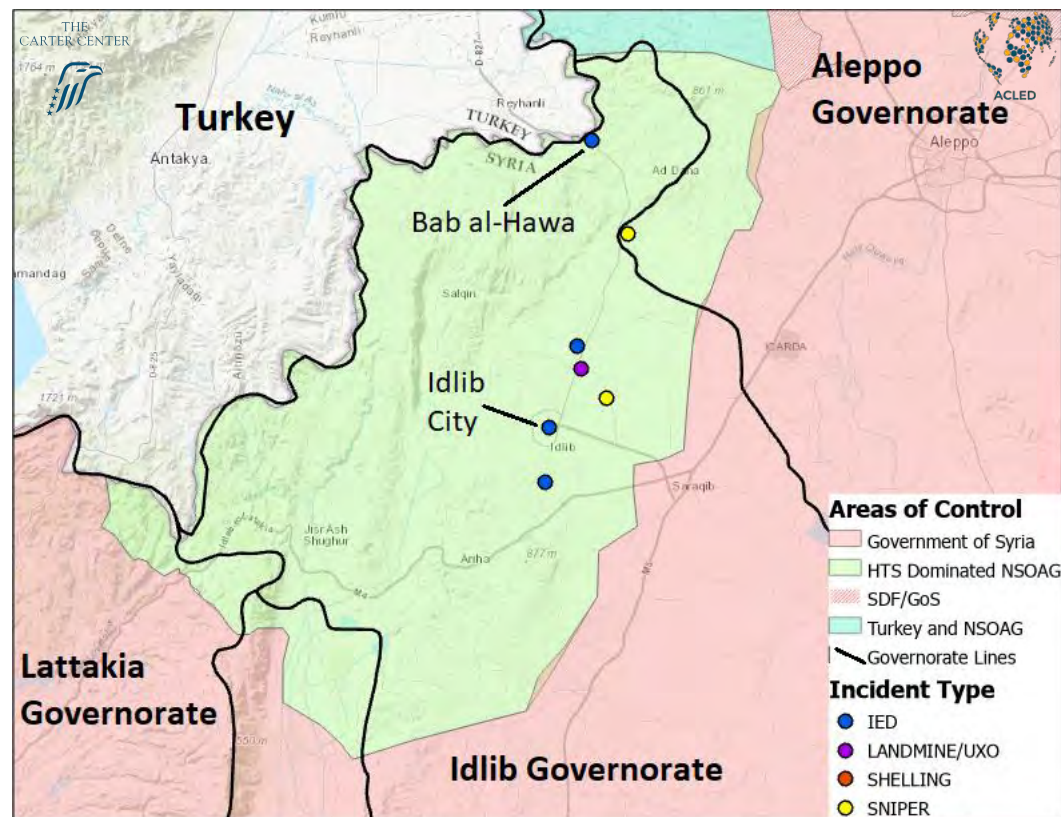
NORTHWEST SYRIA¹

Figure 2: Attacks by the Ansar Abu Bakr Al-Siddiq Squadron against Turkish armed forces since 1 January 2021. Data from The Carter Center and ACLED.

Attacks against Turkish Armed Forces

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) is continuing attacks against defectors and armed groups perceived as undermining its authority, particularly the Al-Qaeda affiliate Hurras al-Din (HD), in the northwest. The increasing Turkish presence during the past year and HTS's perceived acquiescence to the Turkish presence has seen the rise of armed groups that target HTS and Turkish armed forces in opposition-controlled territory.²

10 May

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](https://www.acleddata.com/).

² <https://www.cartercenter.org/news/publications/peace/conflict-summary-quarterly-jan-mar-2021.pdf>

A Turkish soldier was killed by an improvised explosive device (IED) explosion near the Bab al-Hawa crossing, Idlib Governorate.³ The next day, the violent extremists Ansar Abu Bakr Al-Siddiq Squadron took responsibility for the attack, claiming it was in response to a Turkish armed forces vehicle running over a child in Atareb, Aleppo Governorate.⁴ The armed group remains the most active anti-Turkish group in Idlib Governorate and has pointed to Turkey's cooperation with Russia to justify its attacks.

SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

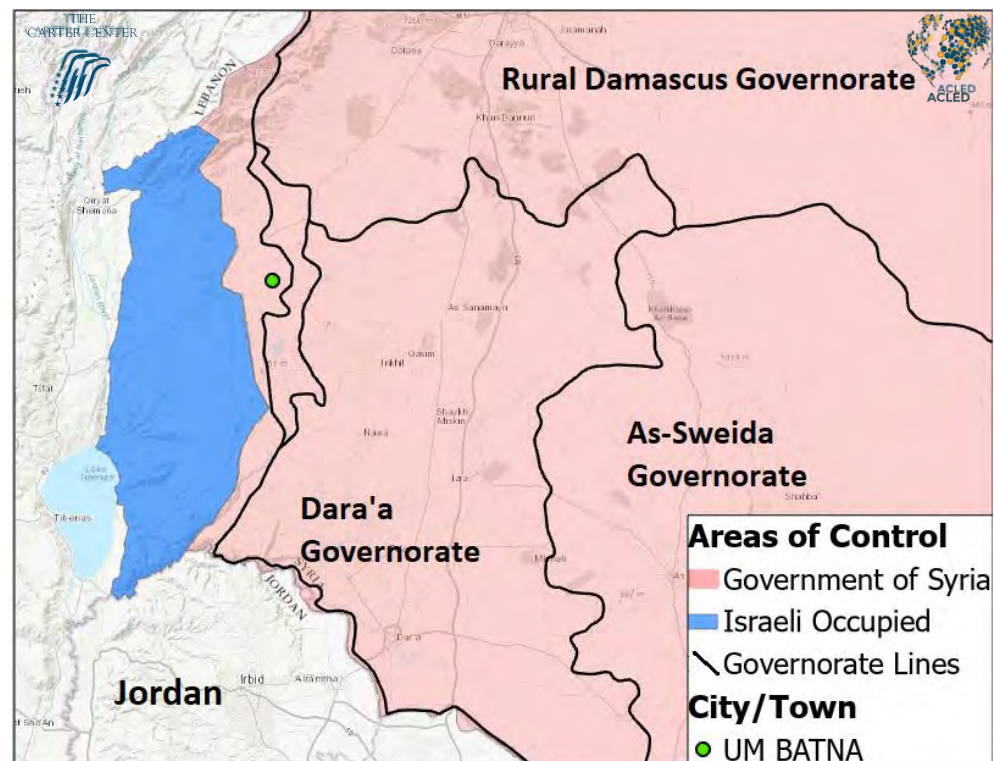


Figure 3: Location of Um Batna, Quneitra Governorate. Data from The Carter Center and ACLED.

Siege in Um Batna

Since the takeover of Dara'a and Quneitra Governorates by the GoS in 2018, tension between former opposition commanders, who have gained prominence by leading influential political and military groups, and GoS officials have resulted in arrests and violence in Dara'a Governorate. Mostly unidentified perpetrators have continued attacks and assassinations of GoS officers and former opposition commanders. Since 30 April, the town of Um Batna, Quneitra Governorate, has been under siege by GoS armed forces and Hezbollah.⁵

13 May

After negotiations between the GoS Military Security, Russian armed forces, and the Central Committee of Dara'a reportedly broke down, residents of Um Batna

³ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/481309>

⁴ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/481371>

⁵ <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/4a9a53439a594872bed1f231a09779d0>

fled the town to avoid potential military action.⁶ The GoS reiterated their threat to storm the town if the wanted individuals did not surrender.⁷

15 May

An agreement was reached to end the siege over Um Batna. 30 people, including the wanted fighters and their families, will be sent to opposition-controlled territory in northwestern Syria.⁸ In addition, GoS would reportedly release 2 detainees from the town.⁹

NORTHEAST SYRIA



Figure 4: The path of the Euphrates river in northeast Syria. Data from The Carter Center and ACLED.

Euphrates Water Dispute

The Euphrates river is the longest river in Syria and serves as a critical supplier of water for Turkey, Syria, and Iraq. The flow of the river has an important role in irrigating crops, providing drinking water, and in hydropower production. The Euphrates river has been a source of tension between Turkey, the Kurdish Autonomous Administration (KAA), and the GoS. Since the beginning of 2021, there has been a reduction of water flow from Turkey to Syria.¹⁰

⁶ <https://www.horanfree.com/?p=8936>

⁷ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/481841>

⁸ <https://halabtodaytv.net/archives/188294>

⁹ <https://npasyria.com/en/59375/>

¹⁰ <https://www.voanews.com/extremism-watch/water-drop-euphrates-river-increases-tensions-between-syrian-kurds-turkey>

The severe drop of water in the Euphrates river has significant implications for agricultural and environmental issues in northeast Syria.¹¹ The GoS and KAA accuse Turkey of withholding water.¹² On 11 May, the GoS Minister for Water Resources and his Iraqi counterpart discussed bilateral measures to pressure Turkey into restoring water flow.¹³ However, Turkey argued that the severe drop of water is due to a drought hitting the three countries.¹⁴ The continued shortage of water has caused concern among humanitarian officials, with the United Nations warning that it will affect 500,000 people in Al-Hassakah Governorate alone.¹⁵

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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¹¹ <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/05/syrian-government-calls-turkey-release-euphrates-water>

¹² <https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/syria/290420213>,

¹³ <https://npasyria.com/en/59265/>

¹⁴ <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/05/turkey-russia-pressure-sdf-restore-electricity-northeast-syria>

¹⁵ <https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/story/24393-UN-relief-head-says-water-cut-again-to-half-a-million-people-in-northeast-Syria>