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WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 13 - 19 April 2020

SYRIA SUMMARY

- **NORTHWEST** | There were reduced levels of shelling exchanges among the warring parties. Tensions increased between Hayyat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and Turkish-backed opposition armed groups after a series of raids and arrests. Later, the groups released prisoners to defuse tensions. Protests were held against the Turkish-Russian joint patrols on the M4 highway, and against HTS's decision to open up a crossing with territories under the Government of Syria (GoS) control.
- **SOUTH & CENTRAL** | Attacks against GoS-aligned personnel increased this week in Dara'a Governorate, with multiple assassinations and attacks on GoS positions. After these attacks, GoS and the Russian military deployed additional military units to the governorate.
- **NORTHEAST** | Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) personnel and positions came under attack from unidentified gunmen. There was increased looting and property destruction by Turkish-backed opposition armed groups in Turkish-held Operation Peace Spring areas.

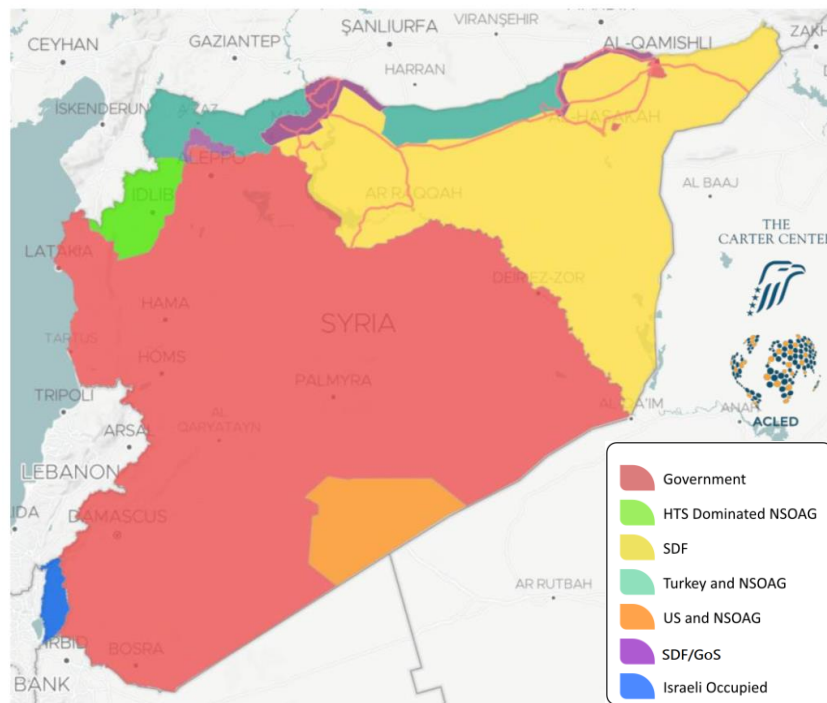


Figure 1: Dominant actors' area of control and influence in Syria as of 19 April 2020. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. Also, please see the footnote on page 2.

NORTHWEST SYRIA

The current reporting week saw reduced levels of shelling exchanges in northwest Syria. GoS-aligned forces engaged in 27 artillery exchanges in 21 locations.² Most of the artillery exchanges took place against HTS-dominated territory within the Idlib Governorate, with one striking Haddada within Lattakia Governorate and one striking Ankawi in Hama Governorate. GoS-aligned forces clashed with armed opposition groups on the Kafr Nobol frontlines in the countryside of Idlib Governorate on 13 April.

Tensions emerged on 13 April between HTS and Turkish-backed opposition factions after HTS arrested members of the Turkish-backed National Liberation Front (NLF) near the Saraqab frontlines in Idlib Governorate. HTS, NLF, and the Turkish-backed Al-Shams corps conducted series of arrests and raids against each other across the countryside of Idlib Governorate. Tensions were diffused after the armed groups released prisoners on 14 April.

On 13 April, protesters organized a sit-in near the towns of Nayrab and Turunbah (see Figure 2) on the M4 road to protest the Russia-Turkey agreement and their joint patrols. Turkish forces dispersed the protesters. HTS and the HTS-controlled Salvation government were accused of providing support to the sit-in.

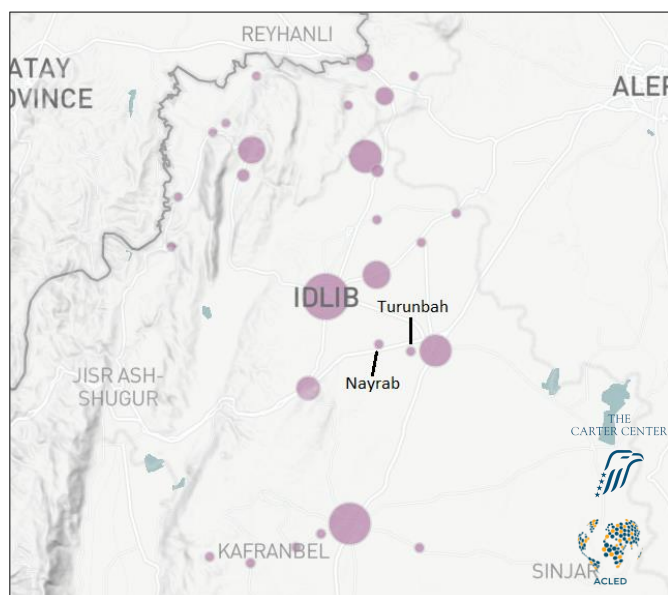


Figure 2: Protests in Idlib since 1 January 2019. Largest bubble is 32 protests and smallest bubble is 1 protest. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

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 Nayrab (x2), Haddada (Lattakia), Sarmin, Ankawi (Hama), Bara (x3), Kansafra (x3), Maarbalit, Qasr Hadleh, Mejazir, Afes (x2), Jabal al-Zawiya, Salhiyeh, Ftireh, Kafr Oweid, Teftnaz, Fleifel, Talhiyeh, Saraqab, Kafr Taal, al-Salhiyah, and Arnaba.

Protests erupted after HTS announced plans to open a crossing with GoS-controlled territory. On 17 April, HTS announced the opening of a new crossing which would have connected Sarmin and Saraqab, the latter of which is controlled by GoS.³ Civilians protested against the crossing over fears of aiding the GoS, of spreading COVID-19 and normalizing relations with GoS.⁴ HTS attempted to disperse protesters on 18 April. After public pressure, HTS delayed the opening of the crossing.⁵

During the reporting week, Turkish-backed factions clashed with the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) as well local militias. On 14 April, Turkish-backed opposition groups fought with the YPG in Kafr Khasher in Aleppo Governorate, near YPG-dominated areas. On 15 April, Turkish-backed opposition factions clashed with members of the Jarablus Communal militia. Fighting erupted after a dispute between a Turkish-backed faction and a local family escalated.⁶

SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

There were increased attacks against GoS-aligned personnel this week in Dara'a Governorate. Some government officials and civilians accused of aiding government security services were assassinated. On 13 April, a civilian accused of working with Syrian security services and Lebanese Hezbollah was killed in Mzeireb. On 15 April in Tassil, unidentified gunmen killed a man allegedly working with GoS security services. The same day, gunmen assassinated a member of Syria's air force intelligence agency near Nafeaa, while a volunteer with the 4th armored division was killed in Yadudeh. Additional attacks on government positions and soldiers in Dara'a Governorate were reported on 16 and 18 April. On 16 April, a government soldier was shot and killed in Nawa City. On the Busra Elharir-Izra' road, a GoS military vehicle carrying members of the 5th Corps was attacked.⁷ In the village of Khirbet Qias, a military officer was assassinated by an unidentified gunman. On 18 April, a commander with the 52nd Brigade of the Syrian Arab Army was killed in a hit-and-run attack.⁸ After these attacks, the Syrian government and Russian military deployed reinforcements to these areas on 18 April.

In Quneitra Governorate, a Syrian soldier was killed by An-Nasiriyah on 15 April. On the 17th, GoS forces arrested civilians in the area.

An Israeli drone bombed a Hezbollah military vehicle in Jdeidat Yabous in Rural Damascus Governorate. This is the second Israeli strike in the governorate this year, with the previous airstrike on 6 February targeting pro-Iranian armed groups in Al Tall, Marj Sultan, Mazzeh Military air base, and Sahnaya.

³ <http://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=160563>

⁴ <https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2020/04/after-controversy-and-repression-threats-hts-postpones-saraqib-crossings-opening/>

⁵ <https://tinyurl.com/y7v6nufd>

⁶ <http://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=160361>

⁷ <https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2020/04/increasing-assassination-attempts-against-regime-forces-members-in-daraa-in-last-two-days/>

⁸ <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/syrian-military-commander-assassinated-in-daraa/>

NORTHEAST SYRIA

Levels of shelling in Turkish-held Operation Peace Spring areas slightly increased this week with 5 exchanges in 5 areas.⁹ The previous week, 3 incidents of shelling by Turkish-backed forces were recorded. Three artillery exchanges by Turkish-backed opposition forces targeted Al-Khaldiyy, Houshan, and the M4 road near Ein Issa in Al-Raqqah Governorate on 15 April. The other two shelling exchanges happened on 17 April in Al-Hassakeh Governorate.

During the reporting week, increased levels of looting and property takeovers took place by armed actors. On 14 April, Turkish-backed opposition forces in Turkish-held Operation Peace Spring looted agricultural equipment in four areas within the Al-Hassakeh Governorate.¹⁰ Additional looting and property destruction occurred within the Al-Hassakeh Governorate by Turkish backed opposition forces occurred on 18 April. The civilian houses in Umm al Asafir, Faysaliyya, Daoudiyeh, Arshet Ras El Ein, and Malla Suleiman were looted by Turkish-backed armed opposition groups. The armed groups burnt down houses owned by individuals affiliated with the Autonomous Administration.

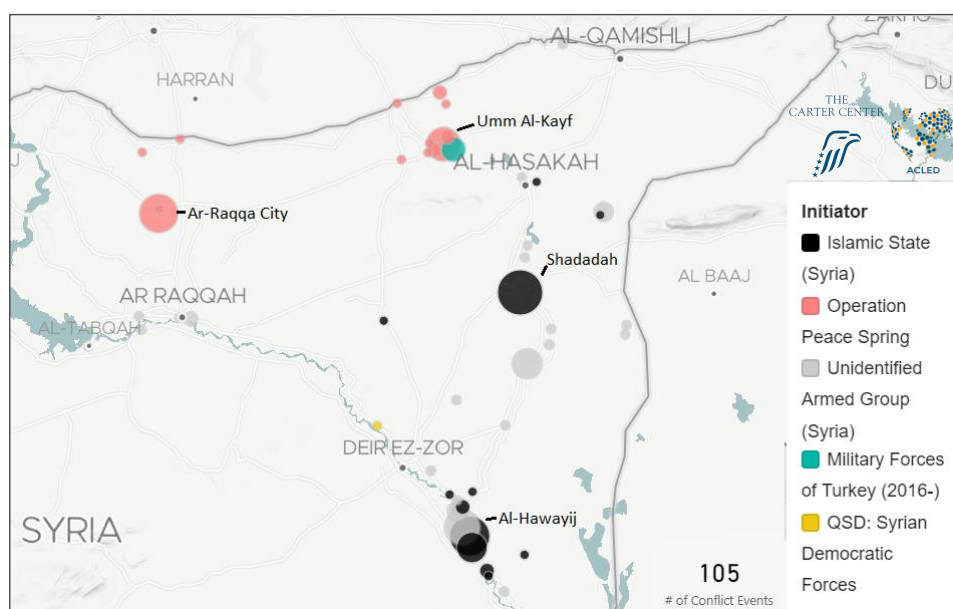


Figure 3: Attacks on SDF personnel and positions since 1 January 2020. The number of attacks against SDF personnel is highest in Ar-Raqqah city at 7, Al-Hawayij 7, Shadadah 9, and Umm Al-Kayf at 6.

Clashes against SDF increased this week, with the highest number of documented attacks against SDF personnel by unidentified actors since 23 February 2020. Armed groups and unidentified gunmen clashed with Kurdish controlled Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in 9 incidents in 9 areas during the reporting period.¹¹ On 13 April, gunmen riding a motorcycle attacked a SDF checkpoint near the Al-Hawayij village in Deir-ez-Zor. A similar attack targeted a member of the SDF's

⁹ Al-Khaldiyy, Houshan, the M4 road near Ein Issa, Bab al Faraj, and Dada Abdal near Abu Rasin.

¹⁰ In Daoudiyeh, Atamiye, Muraykiz, and rural Abu Rasin.

¹¹ Al-Hawayij, Al-Raqqah city (x2), Shiheil, Tuwaymin, Shadadah city (x2), Ruwayshid desert, Umm Ashba.

intelligence unit in the town of Shiheil in eastern Deir-ez-Zor. The same day, a SDF building was attacked in Ar-Raqqa city within the Ar-Raqqa Governorate. On 14 April, attacks occurred against SDF patrols in Al-Hassakeh Governorate. In Shadadah city, a SDF vehicle came under fire resulting in the death of 2 SDF fighters. On 16 April, SDF checkpoints and patrols were attacked in Al-Hassakeh and Deir-ez-Zor. Since 1 January 2020, the SDF has experienced the highest number of attacks in Ar-Raqqa city, Al-Hawayij, Shadadah, and Umm Al-Kayf (see Figure 3).

Convoys and patrols continued in Al-Hassakeh Governorate. Russian and Turkish military forces carried out a joint patrol in the vicinity of Darbasiyah on 13 April, with another Russian patrol taking place on the same day near Quamishli. Russian patrols in Tal Tamr and along the M4 highway near Alia were intercepted by US forces on 17 April, but these disputes ended without violence.

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