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WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 26 April - 2 May 2021

SYRIA SUMMARY

- Conflict between Turkish armed forces and the predominantly Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) continued in Aleppo Governorate.
- Government of Syria (GoS) armed forces and Hezbollah blockaded the village of Um Batna, Quneitra Governorate.
- Russian armed forces began patrols in Qamishli city, Al-Hassakah Governorate.

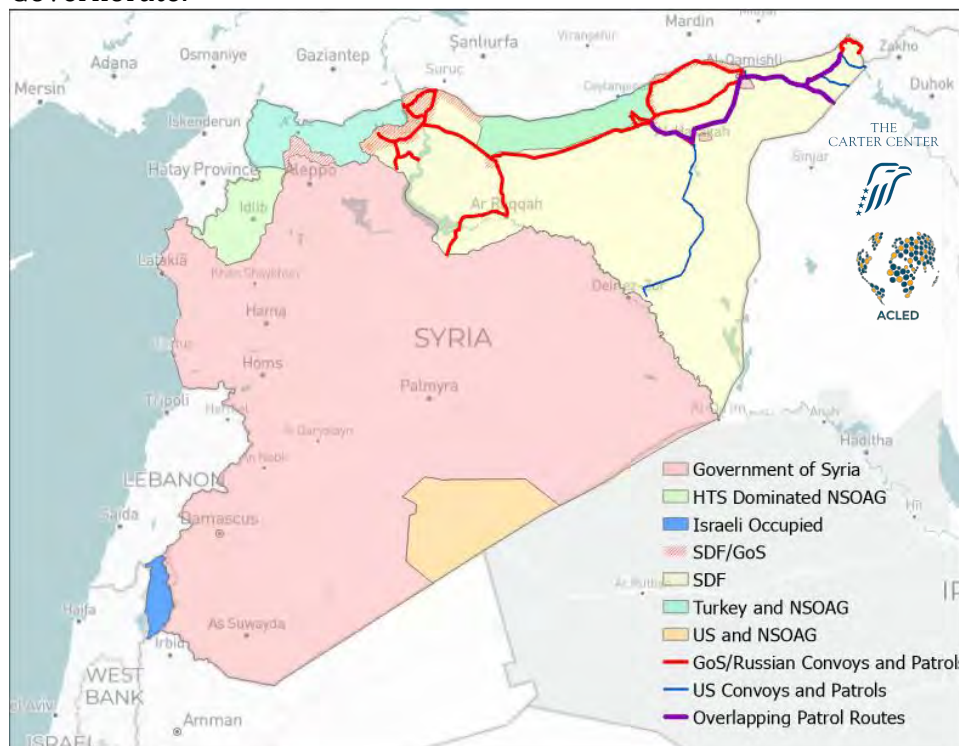


Figure 1: Dominant actors' area of control and influence in Syria as of 2 May 2021.-NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. Also, please see footnote 1.

NORTHWEST SYRIA¹

Figure 2: Conflict events between Turkish armed forces and Turkish-backed armed opposition groups on one side and the SDF on the other in Aleppo Governorate between 26 April and 2 May 2021. Data from The Carter Center and ACLED.

Conflict in Aleppo Governorate

After the 2016 Operation Euphrates Shield and the 2018 Operation Olive Branch Turkish incursions in northern Syria, Turkey has maintained control over most of northern Aleppo Governorate. Kurdish groups and the Government of Syria (GoS) have denounced Turkey's presence in northwest Syria, calling it a military occupation and accusing Turkey of ethnic cleansing against the Kurds. Turkey has justified its presence as needed to establish a secure zone along the border to prevent threats from Kurdish groups.²

29 April

Turkish armed forces bombed the villages of Ain Daqnah and Bilonya in the Shahba region, northern Aleppo Governorate.³ No casualties were reported in the attacks.

1 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](#).

² <https://www.voanews.com/world-news/middle-east-dont-use/ap-explains-turkeys-operation-olive-branch-afirin-syria>

³ <https://npasyria.com/en/58528/>

After the predominantly Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) shelled Afrin city, the Turkish-backed opposition Sham Legion clashed with the SDF in Mayasa and Burj Elqas, Aleppo Governorate.⁴ The Sham Legion claimed to have killed 15 SDF fighters in the clashes.⁵ The same day, Turkish armed forces and Turkish-backed armed opposition groups shelled GoS/SDF controlled territory across Aleppo Governorate.⁶

2 May

The SDF shelled Afrin city, Aleppo Governorate, reportedly killing a civilian.⁷

SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

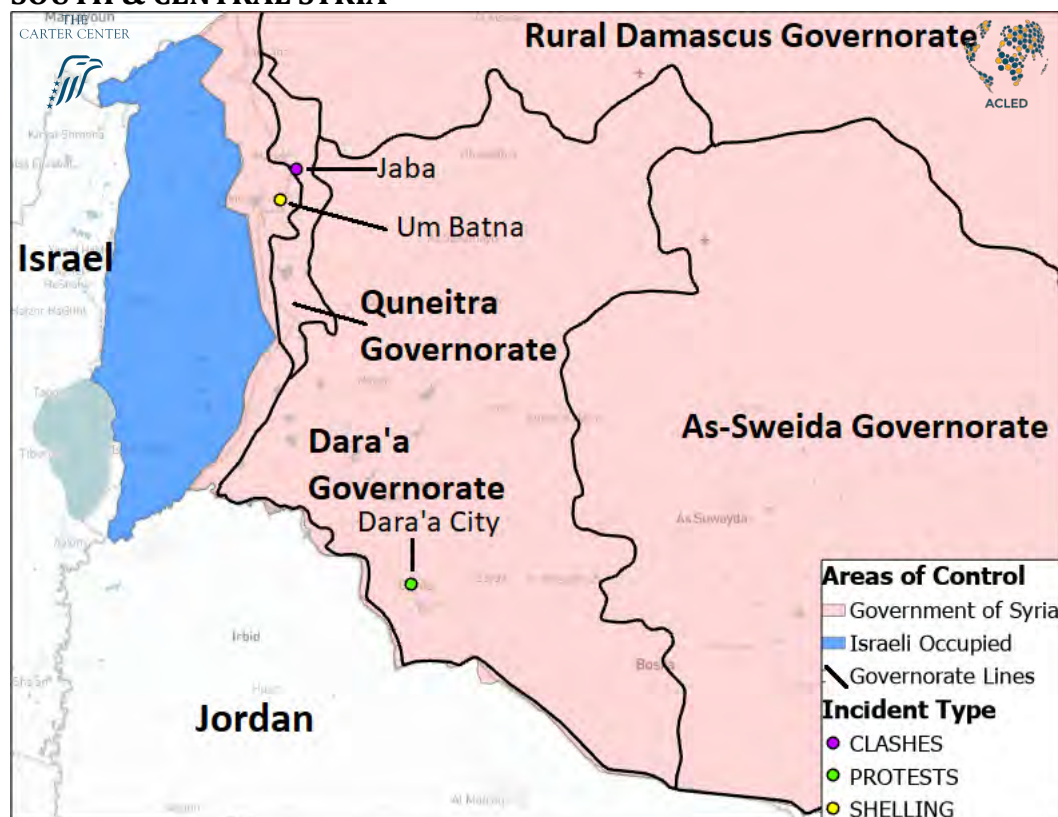


Figure 3: Conflict events related to the siege of Um Batna, Quneitra Governorate between 26 April and 2 May 2021. Data from The Carter Center and ACLED.

Siege in Um Batna

Since the takeover of Dara'a and Quneitra Governorates by the GoS in 2018, some former opposition commanders have gained prominence by leading influential political and military groups. At times, tensions between the 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. Violence is primarily concentrated in Dara'a Governorate, with lower levels of killings in Quneitra Governorate.

⁴ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/478914>

⁵ <https://tinyurl.com/dyc3hffz>

⁶ <https://sana.sy/en/?p=231396>

⁷ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/479189>

30 April

Unidentified gunmen attacked an Iranian-backed militia members in Jaba,⁸ central Quneitra Governorate.⁹ Other reports indicated that Hezbollah fighters were killed in the attack.¹⁰ The gunmen responsible for the attack reportedly fled to the nearby village of Um Batna, Quneitra Governorate.¹¹

30 April

In response to the attack in Jaba, the GoS armed forces and Hezbollah shelled the village of Um Batna.¹² As GoS armed forces and Hezbollah laid siege to the town, the GoS armed forces demanded that the residents evacuate from the village by 2 pm on 1 May,¹³ and the deportation of 10 people suspected of carrying out the attack.¹⁴

1 May

GoS armed forces and Hezbollah brought reinforcements to Um Batna, Quneitra Governorate.¹⁵ The same day, a demonstration in solidarity with Um Batna was held in Dara'a city.¹⁶

The Central Committee of Dara'a intervened in the dispute and began negotiations to end the siege.¹⁷ As part of the initial negotiations, the GoS armed forces released several civilians arrested from the village.¹⁸

2 May

Russian armed forces met with local leaders to negotiate an end to the siege of Um Batna.¹⁹

NORTHEAST SYRIA

⁸ Iranian-backed militias refers to armed groups that are supported by Iran, like Hezbollah, and include militias from Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan, or Pakistan.

⁹ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/478881>

¹⁰ <https://tinyurl.com/jeah7cuz>

¹¹ <https://tinyurl.com/yr7s4224>

¹² <https://tinyurl.com/2w8jj9fd>

¹³ <https://tinyurl.com/3sx6bkkc>

¹⁴ <https://tinyurl.com/yr7s4224>

¹⁵ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/479090>

¹⁶ <https://halabtodaytv.net/archives/187181>

¹⁷ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/479214>

¹⁸ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/479214>

¹⁹ <https://halabtodaytv.net/archives/187221>

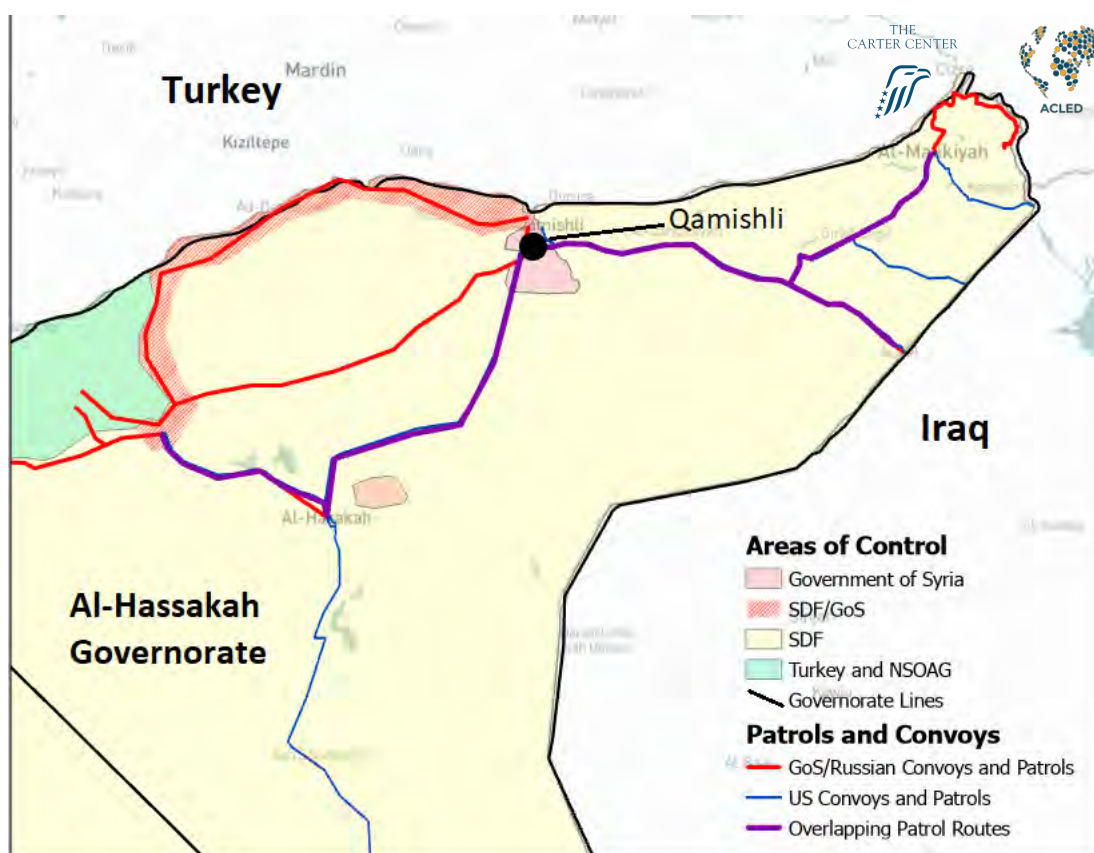


Figure 4: Qamishli city in Al-Hassakah Governorate. Data from The Carter Center and ACLED.

Aftermath in Qamishli

GoS armed forces and the predominantly Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces share control of key cities in Aleppo and Al-Hassakah Governorates. This has caused tension between the SDF and GoS armed forces, occasionally escalating into clashes between the two sides.²⁰ Since December 2020, minor clashes and arrests have occurred between the SDF and GoS. This has resulted occasionally in sieges between the two sides. Between 20-25 April, clashes broke out between the SDF affiliate Asayish (Internal Security Forces) and the GoS-backed National Defense Forces²¹ in Qamishli city, resulting in the capture of Al-Tai neighborhood.²²

26 April

There was a partial return of civilians to the Al-Tai neighborhood in Qamishli city, Al-Hassakah Governorate.²³ The same day, tribal elders from Ar-Raqqa and Tabqa cities, Ar-Raqqa Governorate, denounced the GoS for its role in the Qamishli clashes.²⁴

27-28 April

²⁰ <https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2020/04/what-is-behind-tension-between-kurdish-led-nes-and-syrian-regime-in-qamishli/>

²¹ GoS-backed militias refer to armed groups that are funded or in some way supported by GoS and coordinate with or fight alongside GoS armed forces, but are not part of the state-run military.

²² <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/ef050bcd93048dba0c9f53fcfca92bd>

²³ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/477195>

²⁴ <https://npasyria.com/en/58376/>

On 27 April, Russia announced that it would conduct patrols in Qamishli's neighborhoods to prevent any further conflicts.²⁵ The next day, Russian armed forces and the Asayish conducted a joint patrol in the Al-Tai neighborhood.²⁶

29 April

UN officials denounced the recent hostilities and called for both parties to adhere to the ceasefire in Qamishli.²⁷ UN officials estimated that between 15-20 thousand people were displaced due to the recent clashes.²⁸

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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²⁵ <https://tinyurl.com/erx2ee4v>, <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/477741>

²⁶ <https://npasyria.com/en/58449/>

²⁷ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/478426>

²⁸ <https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/syria/290420211>