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WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 20 - 26 MAY 2019

WHOLE OF SYRIA SUMMARY

- **NORTHWEST** | Government advances in the Hayyat Tahrir ash Sham (HTS)-dominated Idlib pocket slowed this week after an HTS counter offensive on Kafr Nabuda town. Elsewhere, opposition bombardments on government areas widened to include the Hama Airbase and the Zahra power station.
- **SOUTH & CENTRAL** | Apart from the low-level attacks against government-aligned personnel in the south, an armed group temporarily took over a government base, the first such event since 2018. In Homs Governorate, ISIS's carried out two ambushes against government patrols near Tadmor City.
- **NORTHEAST** | The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) conducted security operations along the Euphrates River Valley this week. Small arms fire and improvised explosive device (IED) attacks against military actors in this area continued. Two IED attacks in Shadadah district and several arson attacks against agricultural fields also occurred across the northeast this week.

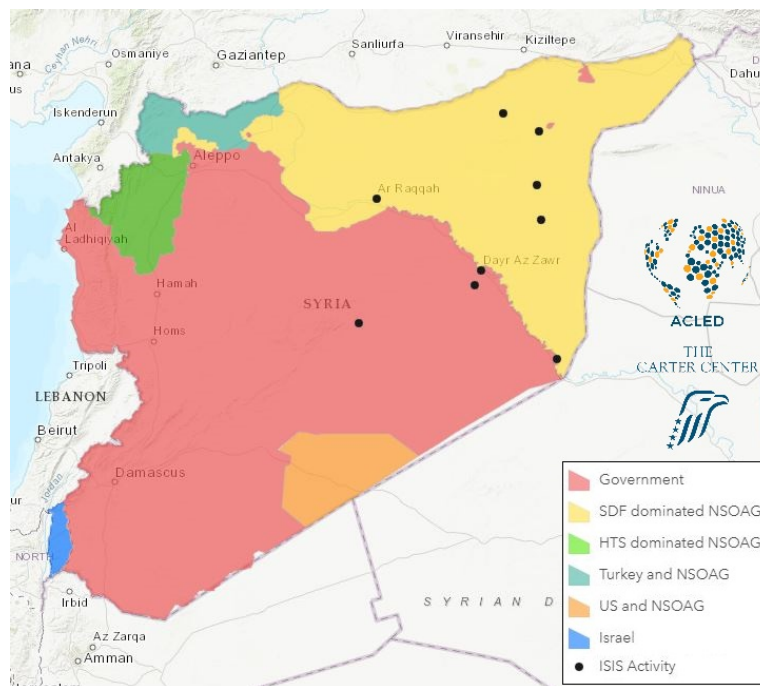


Figure 1: Dominant Actors' Area of Control and Influence in Syria as of 26 May 2019. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. For more explanation on our mapping, please see the footnote on page 2.

NORTHWEST SYRIA

The momentum of the Government of Syria's advance in the southwest corner of the Hayyat Tahrir ash Sham (HTS)-dominated Idlib enclave slowed this week despite advances in the previous two weeks, and ongoing aerial and ground bombardments² (Figure 2).

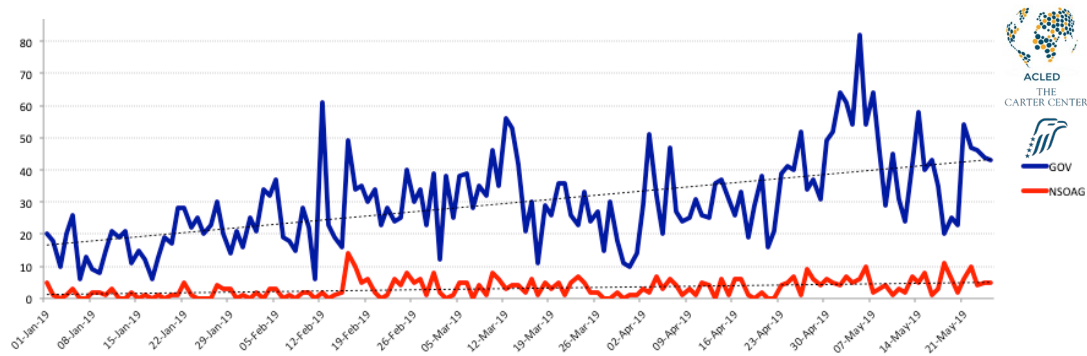


Figure 2: Reported Government (blue) and NSOAG (red) activity in the northwest of Syria in 2019 (bottom).

While momentum slowed last week coinciding with a prisoner exchange between HTS and the government on 17 May and a Russian [announcement](#) that a ceasefire would be applied to the northwest, a HTS counter-offensive in Kafr Nabuda town, likely contributed to the escalation of conflict this week.

After 24 hours of fighting and a government withdrawal, HTS and other opposition groups recaptured Kafr Nabuda town on 21 May. However, five days later, government forces, supported by aerial assets, reclaimed the town. At the time of writing, fighting was concentrated in areas to the east of Kafr Nabuda.

Further north, despite aerial strikes and barrel bombings, government forces failed to capture Kabani town in the Tufjat mountains in Latakia governorate (Figure 3).

HTS and other aligned groups also widened their bombardments of government-dominated areas this week. In addition to focusing on As Suqaylabiyah town (4 events), Aleppo City (3 events) and the Russian operated Hmemiem Airbase in Latakia Governorate (3 events), long-range GRAD rockets and weaponized drones also targeted Hama Airbase, and The Zahra Power Plant for the first time since November 2018.

¹ Figure 1 denotes dominant actors' control and influence. Russia, Iran, Hezbollah and Iraqi militias maintain a presence in Syrian government-dominated territory. Non-state organized armed groups (NSOAG), including the Kurdish dominated, US backed SDF and a variety of other groups operate in areas not under Syrian government control. The NSOAG labeled 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.

² 331 recorded events this week, building on the 339 events last week.

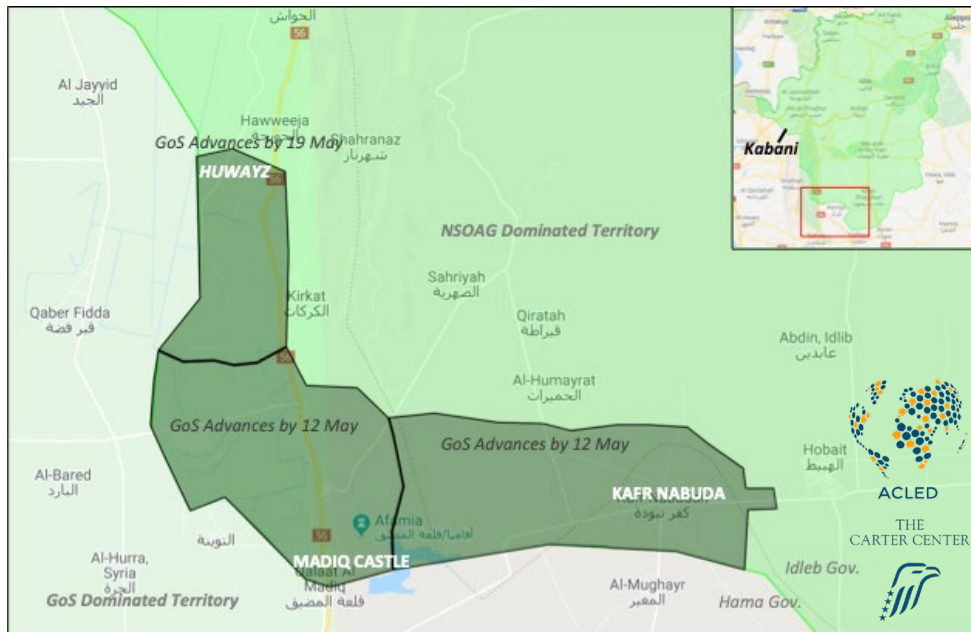


Figure 3: Areas taken by Government Offensive in the northwest of Syria by 26 May 2019

The humanitarian situation in the Idlib pocket continued to deteriorate. The UN [reported](#) that more than 200,000 people had been displaced from southern Idlib / Northern Hama governorates due to the fighting in May, some as far as Jarablus in the Turkish-dominated Euphrates Shield area. The [report](#) also stated that 20 health facilities, 25 schools, three IDP settlements and one refugee camp had been affected by the hostilities.

Government bombardments also resulted in setting crops on fire in the vicinity of [Al Naqir](#) and [Khan Sheikhun](#) towns. The civil defence organisation, The White Helmets, [reported](#) that they had responded to 38 fires in the Idlib and Hama governorates in the previous week alone. Such events are concerning for the long-term food security of the area.

SOUTH AND CENTRAL SYRIA

In the South, attacks against government-aligned personnel or former opposition fighters continued. Two small arms fire attacks were recorded, the first against a government checkpoint in As Sanamayn town, and the second against a former Mutaaz Bilah Army member in Mzeireb. These attacks bring the total number of attacks in southern Syria since January 2019 to 97. On average, each week five attacks have occurred against government forces in southern Syria (Figure 4).

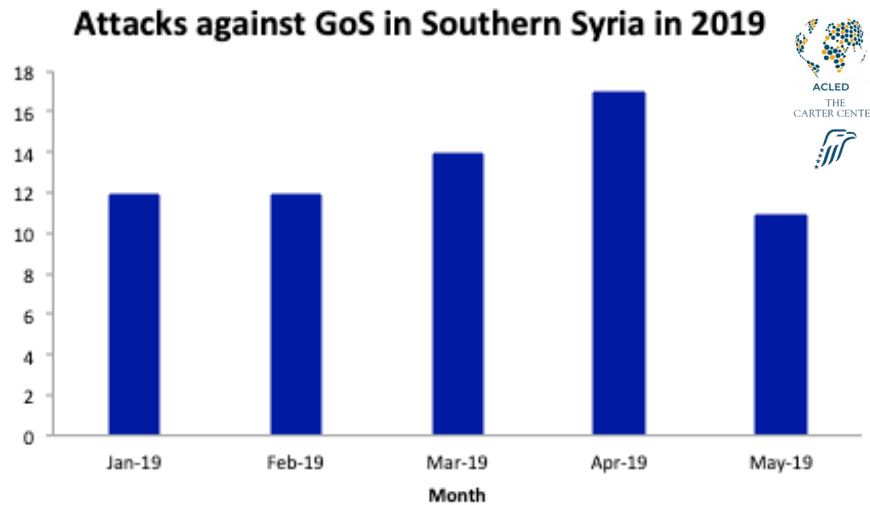


Figure 4: Attacks against government and aligned personnel in southern Syria (Daraa, Quneitra and As Sweida Governorates) in 2019.

Pro-government sources [reported](#) that an unidentified group assaulted a military intelligence base near Jileen town on 23 May, temporarily taking control of the town and holding a number of government intelligence officers hostage. This is the first case of a takeover of a government-dominated location since opposition groups held large parts of Daraa Governorate last year.

In central areas of the country, more ISIS attacks occurred this week. On 21 May, a contingent of ISIS fighters [ambushed](#) a Syrian Army patrol using small arms and anti-tank weapons near the Bushri mountain, east of Sokhneh town. Three days later, ISIS ambushed a government patrol near the T3 Pumping station area in the vicinity of Tadmor City. Several government soldiers were killed in both attacks according to pro-government [sources](#).

The attacks come a week after two ambushes killed as many as 20 government soldiers near the Sawane and Khounayfis phosphate mines on 15 and 17 May. The continuing ISIS activity also comes during an ongoing anti-ISIS operation in the deserts southwest of Deir Ez Zor city, and after the Government of Syria sent reinforcements to the area last week.

NORTHEAST SYRIA

In the northeast, Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) carried out at least four security operations in Al Sayjan, Al Shanan, Darnaj and Tayyana towns this week. This is in addition to operations that occurred [last week](#).

Despite these operations, small arms fire and improvised explosive device (IED) activity continued against military actors along the Euphrates River Valley in Basria, Hejneeh, Thiban, Al Hawayij, and in Tuwamiyeh town, where, on 18 May, US-led Coalition ground forces supported SDF members during a clash with suspected ISIS members.

Elsewhere in the northeast, ISIS carried out two suicide vehicle born IED (SVBIED) attacks in the Shadadah district of Al Hassakeh Governorate. The first attack involved a SVBIED driving into a joint coalition force / SDF convoy on the Al Kharafi Highway near Shadadah town resulting in at least eight casualties, while

the second involved a motorcycle SVBIED detonating in Tal Tamer town near Shadadah town.

At least three suicide attacks have been recorded in this area in the previous 12 months, most recently on 9 April 2019. Overall IED activity is frequent in the district, with 35 events recorded since January 2019.

Arson attacks against agricultural fields were also recorded across northeastern Syria this week. Crops were set on fire in Mhemideh town, Markada town, Hasakah City and [Raqqqa City](#). The perpetrators and relationship between the events are unknown. However, continued arson attacks could have a detrimental effect on the long-term food security of the region.

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