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THE
CARTER CENTER



WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 29 JULY – 4 AUGUST 2019

WHOLE OF SYRIA SUMMARY

- **NORTHWEST** | Government of Syria (GoS) forces advanced in the Tal Mallah area of the Hayyat Tahrir Ash Sham (HTS)-dominated Idlib enclave this week, just prior to Syrian and Russian officials announcing a ceasefire on 2 August. An increase in conflict activity was recorded in the Tal Rifaat area between Turkish forces and aligned groups on the one side and the People's Protection Units (YPG) on the other.
- **SOUTH & CENTRAL** | Low-level attacks against GoS-aligned personnel and former opposition members continued in Daraa Governorate.
- **NORTHEAST** | Elevated levels of improvised explosive device (IED) activity continued in the northeast with at least seven incidents recorded. Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)/Global Coalition arrest operations against Daesh continued this week. Also, further Turkish shelling impacted two areas of northeastern Syria.

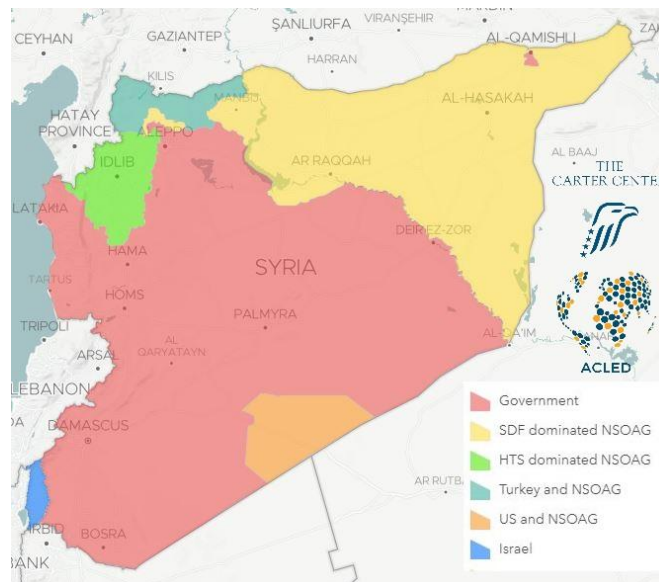


Figure 1: Dominant Actors' Area of Control and Influence in Syria as of 4 August 2019. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. For more explanation on our mapping, please see the footnote on page 2.

NORTHWEST SYRIA

This week, government forces recaptured the Tal Mallah area from various armed groups, including Hayyat Tahrir ash Sham (HTS). Following airstrikes and ground bombardments, GoS forces focused on the Zarkah and Hasraya villages, [re-capturing](#) the area by 29 July, seven weeks after it had been initially taken by HTS and others.

Despite several counter attacks by NSOAGs and HTS throughout the week, including an attack by [suicide vehicle born improvised explosive device \(SVBIED\)](#), the area remained in government control at the end of the reporting period. It is the first government advances in the HTS dominated Idlib pocket since 12 June, when GoS forces captured Qasabieyh and Qurutiyah villages (Figure 2).

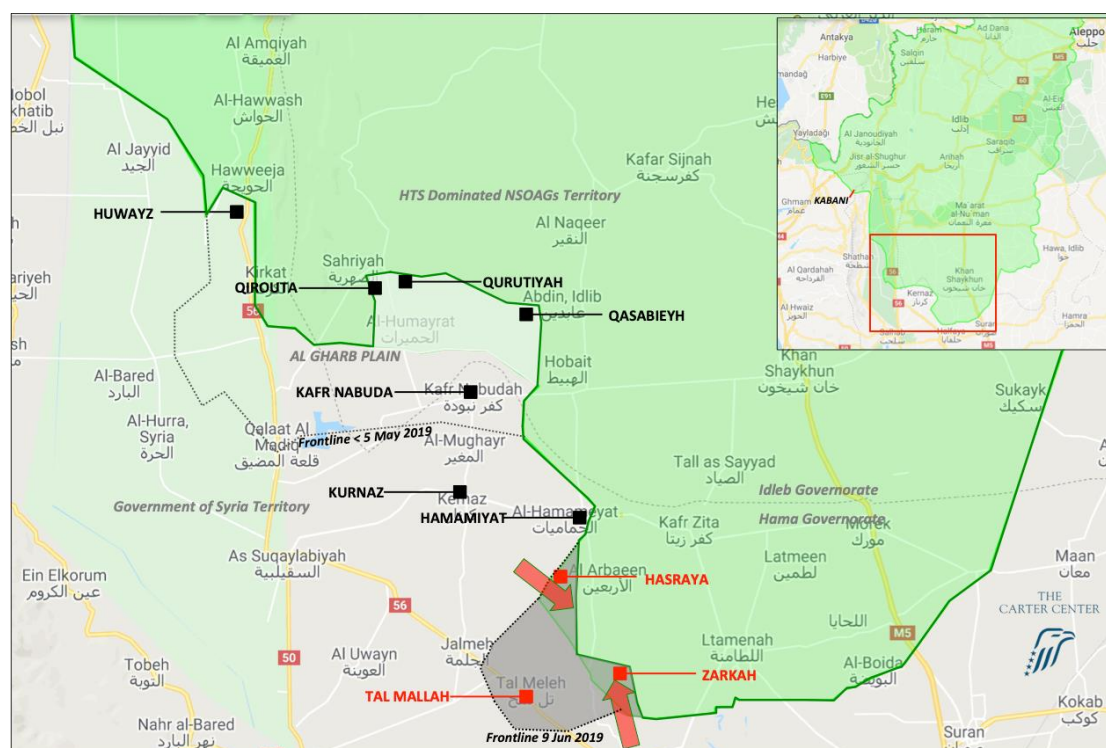


Figure 2: Current Frontlines in the northwest of Syria as of 4 August 2019 with government advances highlighted in red, and areas recaptured in grey.

The advances came just prior to a government [announcement](#) that it was implementing a ceasefire beginning midnight on 2 August 2019. Syrian officials stated that the ceasefire would halt offensive action in the Idlib de-escalation zone if groups in the zone abide by terms of the September 2018 Sochi ceasefire

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.

agreement.² While the announcement did not state the duration of the ceasefire, some pro-government [sources](#) have stated that it will continue until 16 August.

Government forces also continued to target the HTS/Turkistan Islamic Party hill-top stronghold of Kabani in Latakia governorate, launching at least five attempts to recapture the position. The attacks were supported by [airstrikes](#), throughout the week. However, no changes in territory were recorded.

Despite a drop in various opposition groups and HTS bombardments on government areas, low-levels of attacks continued. Several events were recorded after the ceasefire was implemented on 2 August, including pro-opposition sources [reporting](#) a weaponized drone being shot down over northern Hama on 4 August by GoS/Russian forces. Pro-government sources [reported](#) mortar shelling on Aleppo City on 3 August (Figure 3).

Further east, a spike in conflict was detected in the Tal Rifaat area,³ north of Aleppo City. Pro-opposition [sources](#) recorded six Turkish and allied group bombardments on Kurdish People Protection Units (YPG) positions in Akibah, Burj Qas, Harbel (x2), Kalotyah, Maranaz, Shiekh Issa, Sorhane, and Tal Rifaat. Frontline clashes between the sides were also recorded on the Maranaz front (x3), Shiekh Issa, and the Hazwan front. Also, the YPG reportedly carried out two attacks behind Turkish backed Euphrates Shield group frontlines in the [Kalfr Kalbin](#) and [Ablah](#) areas (Figure 3).

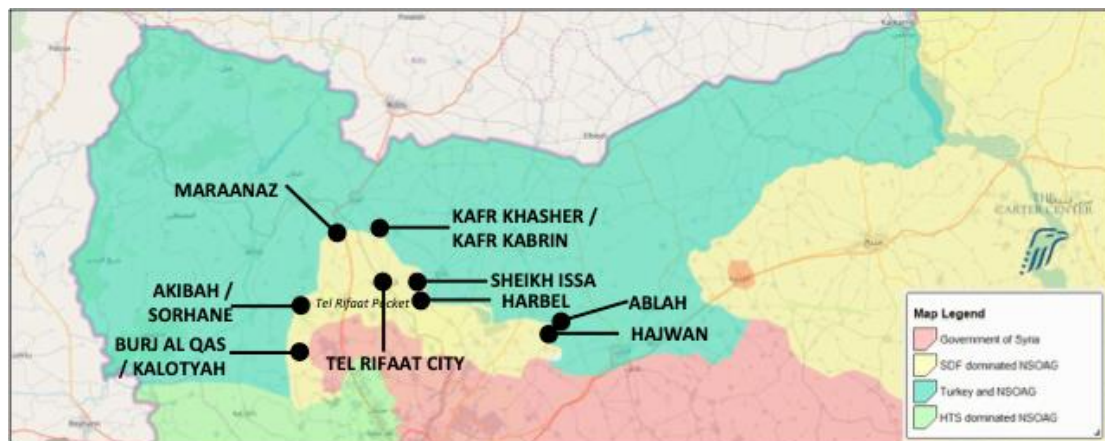


Figure 3: Location map of areas that saw conflict this week in the Tal Rifaat Pocket.

While periodic upticks in conflict are common for the area (as previously reported [here](#)), YPG attacks behind frontlines are less common, with only seven previous recorded cases in the past 12 months.

² Namely, that groups should withdraw their military forces and heavy and medium weapons 20km from frontlines and cease shelling government areas.

³ The Tal Rifaat area is under joint control of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and GoS forces since late 2016. Russian forces had also conducted joint patrols with Turkish troops in the area since 14 February 2019, and with SDF forces between 26 March 2019 and 10 April 2019.

SOUTH AND CENTRAL SYRIA

In southern Syria, ongoing low-level attacks against government-aligned personnel, former opposition armed group members, and civilians continued. Three attacks were recorded, including one against a former opposition group commander, now government 4th division member, in [Tal Shihab](#), a Baath party member in [Jleïn](#), and GoS soldiers on the [Tassil-Edwan Road](#). As previously reported, 249 incidents of small arms fire, improvised explosive device attacks, and kidnapping have been recorded since government forces recaptured the region in August 2018. Such activity has increased in southern Syria in 2019 (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Attacks against government aligned personnel, former opposition group members and civilians in southern Syria between August 2018 – July 2019.

In [As Sanamayn](#), prolonged clashes were recorded between GOS forces and an unidentified armed group on 3 August. In response, government sources [announced](#) they would begin a security operation in the town in the coming weeks.

In central areas of the country, ongoing ISIS activity was recorded with [two](#) ambushes against a GoS National Defense Force (NDF) patrol in the vicinity of Abu Kamal town, and against a government patrol west of Mayadeen town. Russian [media also](#) reported this week that three Russian nationals were killed near Tadmor city on 15 July in clashes with ISIS. It is unclear if they were service personnel or private contractors.

NORTHEAST SYRIA

Elevated levels of improvised explosive device (IED) attacks against US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) continued this week. Five incidents were recorded against SDF patrols in [Kherbet al Bin](#), [Saada](#), [Hamrat Buwaytiyah](#), [Khnez](#), and [Mishrif](#), while two devices detonated in residential areas in [Hasakeh City](#) and [Tabqa City](#).

As previously reported, the use of explosive devices has increased in the past month with 46 events recorded, compared to just 44 events the two months prior.

A concentration of this activity has occurred in just six locations; Raqqqa City (22), Hassakeh City (17), Shadadah (11), Shihiel (9), Taqba (9), and Basira (8). This represents nearly 50% of the 153 IED events recorded in northeast Syria this year so far (Figure 5).

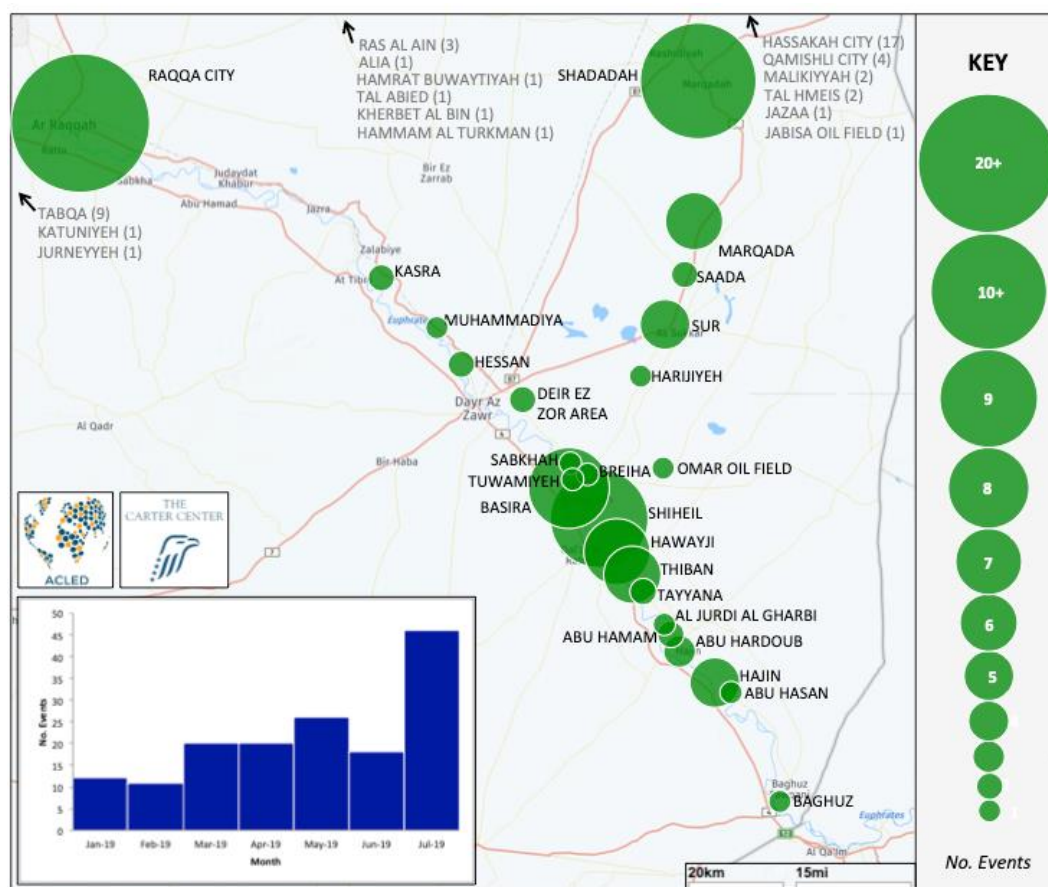


Figure 5: IED attacks in SDF held northeast Syria in 2019.

The Global Coalition against Daesh and SDF continued their arrest operations for suspected ISIS members in the northeast, with five operations recorded in Al Zawr, Basira, Sheheil, Tal Hmeis, and Thiban. International forces also disarmed two IEDs in Al Buqan Village near the Kisham Oil Field on 29 July. Such activity has occurred regularly since late March, after ISIS's last stronghold of Baghuz was captured by SDF forces.

For the second consecutive week, Turkish forces based in Turkey fired into Syria. The shelling of [Zor Maghar](#), east of Jarablus City, and the targeting of an SDF vehicle and positions in the vicinity of [Tal Abiad](#) by small arms fire and shelling, bring the total number of such events to 12 in 2019, five of which have occurred since 24 July. Such events coincide with growing [rhetoric](#) from Turkey's President Erdogan regarding intervening in northeast Syria as well as limited [troop movements](#) to the border near Sanliurfa.

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