



WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 20 - 26 April 2020

SYRIA SUMMARY

- **NORTHWEST** | The Government of Syria (GoS) and opposition armed groups exchanged artillery bombardments at a heightened level. The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) attacked GoS forces in Hama Governorate. Tensions over protests along the M4 highway led to a clash between Hayyat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and Turkish armed forces. Disputes between Turkish-backed opposition forces escalated into clashes.
- **SOUTH & CENTRAL** | Tensions over abductions escalated in Dara'a and As-Sweida Governorates. Clans engaged in gunfights in Tafas. Attacks against pro-GoS personnel continued in Dara'a Governorate. Israel struck pro-Iranian militias near Palmyra.
- **NORTHEAST** | The lowest levels of shelling exchanges were recorded this week. There were increased level of ISIS attacks against Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and pro-Iranian militias. The Kurdish-run Autonomous Administration extended its COVID-19 curfew. Turkish-backed armed opposition militias clashed over disputes about tax revenue and loot sharing.

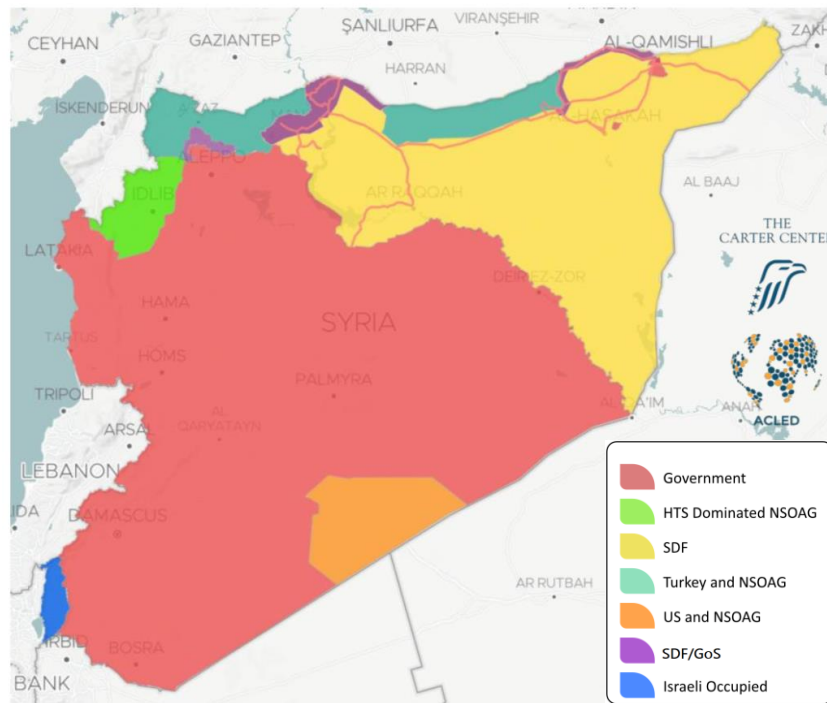


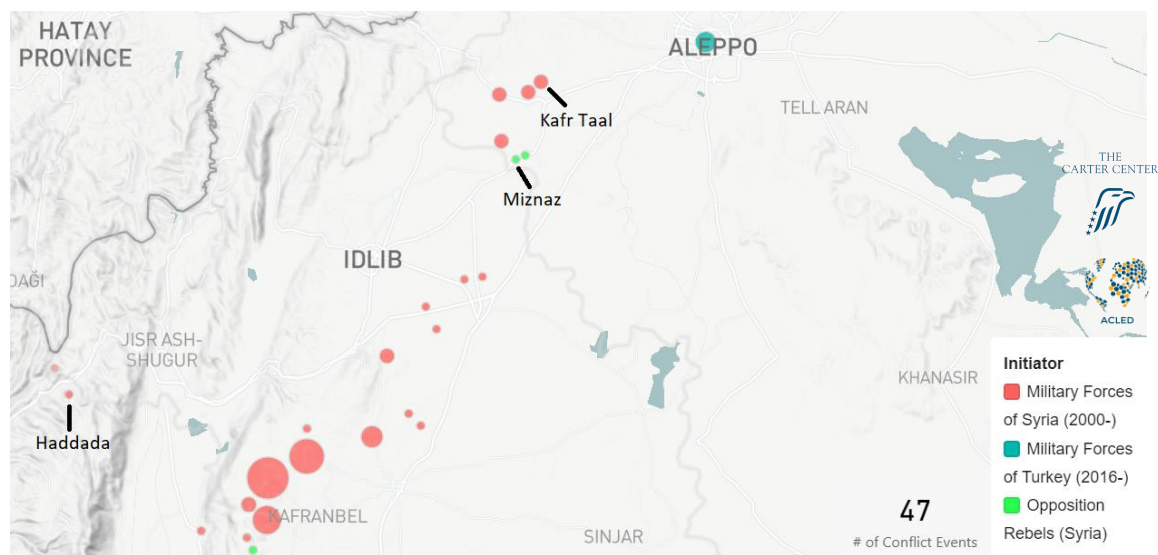
Figure 1: Dominant actors' area of control and influence in Syria as of 26 April 2020. NSOAG stands

*for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. Also, please see the footnote on page 2.*

## NORTHWEST SYRIA

This week, increased levels of shelling exchanges took place in northwest Syria. GoS forces engaged in 41 shelling exchanges in 22 locations along frontline areas (see figure 2).<sup>2</sup> Most of the shelling targeted opposition-held areas in the Idlib Governorate, with one incident striking opposition-held location in Lattakia Governorate (Haddada). On 22 April, armed opposition groups shelled the village of Miznaz and Kafr Aleppo within GoS-controlled territory in the Aleppo Governorate. An additional shelling of the western countryside of Aleppo was claimed by opposition groups under the Wa Harredh al Moa'mineen Operation Room. GoS responded by shelling the village of Bara in Idlib Governorate. Turkish armed forces responded on two separate occasions to GoS shelling near Turkish-held areas in northern Aleppo Governorate. On 22 April, Turkish forces attacked regime positions in the western countryside of Aleppo. On 23 April, Turkish forces again shelled the western countryside of Aleppo in response to GoS shelling of northern Aleppo Governorate.

GoS military forces clashed with armed opposition groups on the Fleifel frontline in Idlib Governorate on 23 April, but no advances were made.



*Figure 2: Artillery bombardment in northwest Syria between 20-25 April. Largest bubble represents 6 strikes, smallest bubble represents 1 strike. Data from ACLED and The Carter*

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> Ftireh (x4), Jabal al-Zawiya, Kansafra (x6), Kafr Oweid, Tuffahiyeh, San, Maarbalit (x2), Banin (x3), Al Salihyah, Afes, Fleifel, Bara (x5), Jarada, Kafr Amma (x2) (Aleppo), Atareb (x2) (Aleppo), Kafr Noran (x2) (Aleppo), Kafr Taal (x2) (Aleppo), Kafr Oweid, Nayrab, Haddada (Lattakia), Ruwaiha, Ankawi

*Center.*

This week, increased confrontations between ISIS and GoS-aligned forces took place within the Hama Governorate. On 20 April, an improvised explosive device (IED) planted by ISIS in Ithariyah hit a GoS armed forces vehicle. Clashes between GoS forces and ISIS took place on 23 April near the Boufayyad Dam in eastern Hama.

Turkish-backed opposition groups continued to engage in clashes between them within the northern Aleppo Governorate. On 20 April, members of the Levant Front as well as the Sultan Murad Division clashed in Afrin after a dispute between the fighters escalated. Another clash took place on 25 April between members of the Sultan Murad Division near Al-Bab city.

Clashes between Turkish-armed forces and HTS escalated following continued protests to stop the joint Turkish-Russian patrols on the M4 highway. On 26 April, Turkey attempted to disperse forcibly protesters in Al-Nayrab town in eastern Idlib, leading to the death of 2 protestors.<sup>3</sup> Following this, HTS militias attacked a Turkish military position near the area.<sup>4</sup> The Turkish military then struck a HTS vehicle with drone fire, killing at least 2 HTS members.<sup>5</sup> This was the first military confrontation between HTS and Turkish armed forces.

## **SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA**

Tensions in Dara'a and As-Sweida Governorates increased this week while reconciliation efforts continue. The body of a civilian was found on 20 April in the village of Al-Tha'ala (As-Sweida Governorate). The civilian was a member of a committee for resolving tensions between villages in Dara'a and As-Sweida Governorates. The same day, the residents of Bistr Elharir in northeast Dara'a Governorate kidnapped a man from As-Sweida to force the release of a Bistr Elharir (Dara'a Governorate) resident kidnapped in As-Sweida. This is the highest tensions have reached between residents of Dara'a and As-Sweida Governorates since the end of March when local communal militias fought over kidnappings.

On 21 and 26 April, clashes erupted in Tafas city in western Dara'a Governorate between two prominent clans – the Kiwan and Al-Zuabi clans.<sup>6</sup> The conflict between the clans occurred as a result of an older dispute between the groups.

Attacks against pro-GoS individuals continued this week in the Dara'a Governorate. Members of the GoS military intelligence were killed on 20 April in Sahm El Golan and injured on 22 April on the Da'el-Abtaa road. Former opposition fighters who had reconciled with the government were also targeted. A former opposition fighter who joined a Gos force was gunned down in the Yarmouk Basin

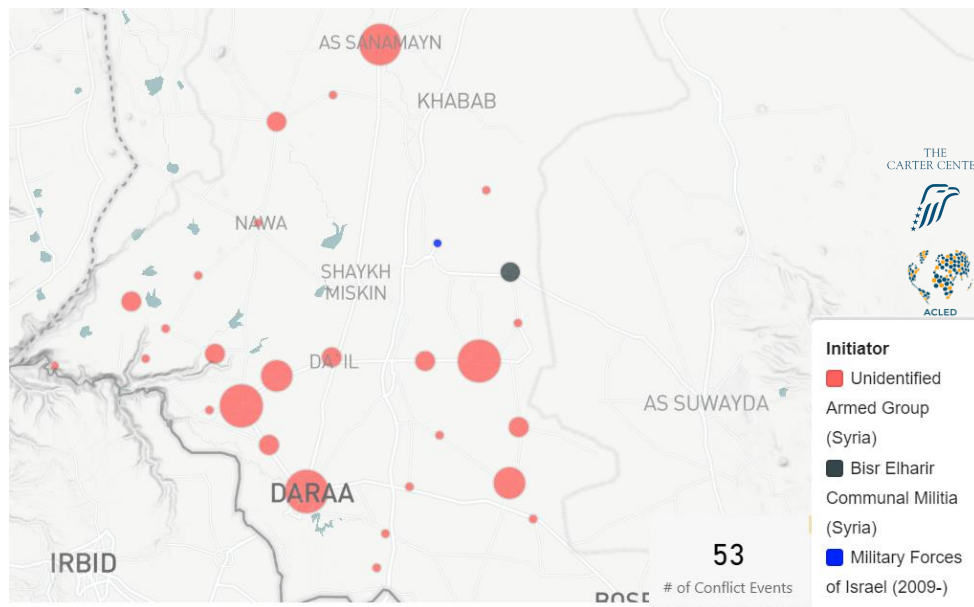
<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2020/04/26/world/middleeast/ap-ml-syria-turkey.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/turkish-drone-strikes-jihadist-rebels-in-idlib-after-attacks-on-military-post/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/2254791/turkish-drone-kills-two-tahrir-al-sham-militants-idlib>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=161836>

on 20 April. Another former opposition fighter who joined a GoS armed force was killed by unidentified gunmen in Um Walad. On 25 April, a former opposition fighter was shot in Jasim town. A civilian whose relatives had joined GoS armed forces survived a grenade attack by unidentified gunmen. Since the beginning of the year, attacks against GoS have been highest in Dara'a city, As-Sanamayn, and Mzeireb (see figure 3).



*Figure 3: Attacks on GoS positions in Dara'a Governorate between 1 January-25 April 2020. Largest bubble represents 4 conflict events. Smallest bubble represents 1 conflict event. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.*

On 20 April, the Israeli Airforce attacked pro-Iranian militia positions near Palmyra within the Homs Governorate. The previous Israeli Airforce attack against Palmyra was on 17 March 2017.

## **NORTHEAST SYRIA**

This week, ACLED recorded only one instance of shelling in northeast Syria, the lowest level of shelling recorded in 2020. On 25 April, the opposition's Syrian National Army (SNA) in the Turkish-held Operation Peace Spring area shelled Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) positions around Tal Tamer in Al-Hassakeh Governorate.

ISIS attacks against SDF and GoS forces increased this week. On 22 April, a SDF patrol clashed with ISIS fighters near the town of Zir in the east of Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. On the same day in the nearby area of Basira, ISIS fighters fought with SDF forces after the latter's vehicle was targeted with an IED. On 23 April, ISIS attacked an Iraqi Hezbollah unit in the Al Mayadin desert in the Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. ISIS was also presumed responsible for an attack on an SDF checkpoint within Basira city on 25 April. Since 1 January, Deir-ez-Zor has experienced the largest number of ISIS attacks in northeast Syria, with 46 recorded incidents (see Figure 4).

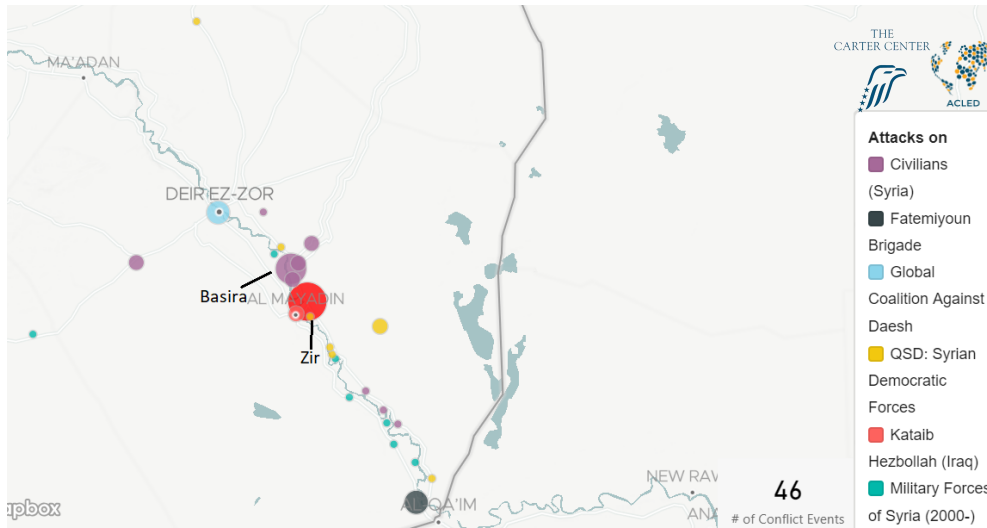


Figure 4: ISIS attacks against armed groups and civilians in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate between 1 January and 25 April 2020. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

On 21 April, the Autonomous Administration extended its COVID-19 curfew in north-eastern Syria for 10 additional days.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, they announced the easing of some restrictions regarding businesses, allowing them to operate during the curfew.<sup>8</sup>

Infighting among the Turkish-backed opposition forces continued in Turkish-held Operation Peace Spring Areas in Al Hassakeh Governorate. Members of the Turkish-backed Ahrar al-Sharqiya and the 20<sup>th</sup> Division clashed in western Ras al-Ain on 20 April.<sup>9</sup> Additional pro-Turkish opposition groups entered the fighting, such as the Mu'tasim Brigades and Northern Democratic Brigade. The dispute arose over arguments on how to distribute revenues from taxes imposed on the town's residents. Additional clashes took place on 21 April between different SNA factions in the villages of Umm Ashba and Tal Mohammad in the countryside of Ras al-Ain. Both clashes were over a dispute regarding the distribution of stolen goods.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://tinyurl.com/y9wztjps>

<sup>8</sup> <https://syriacpress.com/blog/2020/04/22/democratic-autonomous-administration-of-north-and-east-syria-extends-covid-19-curfew-for-second-time-but-eases-restrictions-on-businesses/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.syriaahr.com/en/?p=161830>