



WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 24 FEBRUARY – 1 MARCH 2020

WHOLE OF SYRIA SUMMARY

- **NORTHWEST** | The Government of Syria (GoS) offensive in northwest Syria changed focus to southern areas of the Hayyat Tahrir al Sham dominated enclave. Turkish and GoS military forces traded fire in the northwest for a second consecutive week. Conflict in the Tal Rifaat area reached the highest levels in 12 months. Two explosions struck Al Bab city, bringing the total for 2020 to four.
- **SOUTH & CENTRAL** | Improvised explosive devices (IED) struck Damascus again this week. There was an increase in attacks on GoS-aligned personnel in southern Syria. In Quneitra Governorate, there was an increase in Israeli against GoS and Palestinian targets.
- **NORTHEAST** | For the first time in five weeks, there was a reduction in conflict levels around the Turkish occupied Operation Peace Spring areas. Attacks on Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) personnel continued along the Euphrates and Khabour River Valleys, including an SDF-aligned municipal building in Hajin.

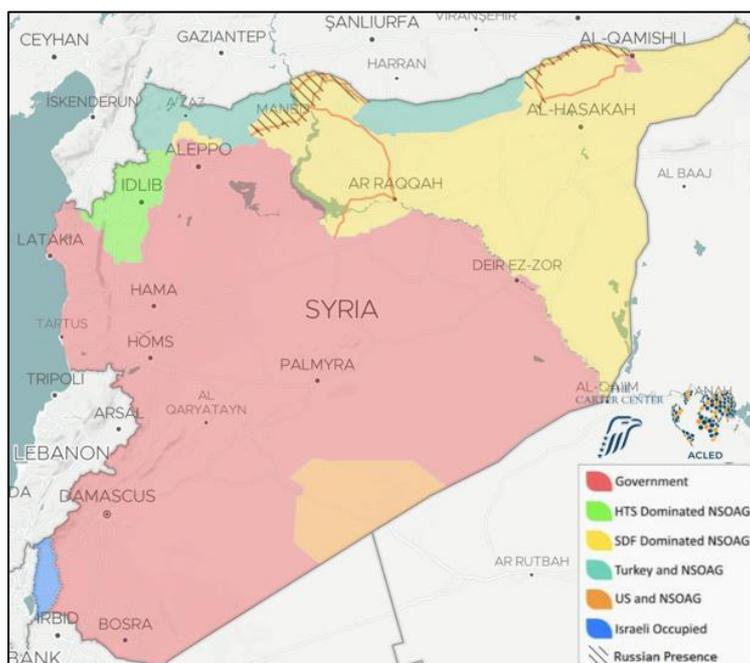


Figure 1: Dominant actors' area of control and influence in Syria as of 29 February 2020. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. Also, please see footnote 1 on page 2.

NORTHWEST SYRIA

The focus of the Government of Syria (GoS) offensive against the Hayyat Tahrir al Sham (HTS) dominated northwest Syria switched focus this week. After the previous week's gains in areas west of Aleppo City, GoS forces captured large areas in the south of the enclave, in the vicinity of Kafr Nabol town. Over 42 locations were captured in this maneuver,² including seven areas³ that were taken after opposition groups withdrew.

However, between 27 and 29 February, HTS, Ansar al Tawhid, Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP), and other opposition groups staged a counter offensive against 12 newly captured GoS locations in Hama and southern Idleb.⁴ Backed by Turkish airstrikes and shelling, these groups also captured parts of Saraqeb City, Turnabah, Afes, Jobas, and San, which had been under GoS control for nearly a month since their capture in late January and early February.⁵

On 28 and 29 February, the Turkish military also targeted 12 GoS positions behind northwest frontlines using airstrikes⁶ and shelling⁷. These strikes came in the days after GoS airstrikes targeted Turkish military positions in the Idleb countryside, Kansafra, and near Balyun, where as many as 34 Turkish soldiers were killed on 27 February. As reported [previously](#), there has been growing levels of direct conflict between the GoS and Turkish military in northwest Syria in the previous month.

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 around the borders juncture of 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 GoS forces captured Qastun, Mozra, Kan Safra, Hawash, Jirn, Jisr Beit Ras, Amiqa, Midan Ghazal, Shahranaaz, Shir Maghar, Haweeka, Ankawi, Dironeh, Rasha, Sholin, Jabal Shashabo, Ftireh, Hawarte, Kawkabah, Milaja, Sehriyah, Kafr Musa, Fleifel, Baarbu, Um Sir, Maar Tamater, Jbala, Azziziyah, Bsaqla, Deir Sunbul, Has, Nazarin, Sahab, Kafr Nobel, Qa'urah, Kafr Sajna, Maraath Harma, Suth al Deir, Tal al Nar, Arnaba, Maraath Sin and Tal Bruma.

³ Al Qahera, Tanjarah, Shirkeh, Uraymah, Badriyah, Jub Suleinman and Um Nir.

⁴ Turkish backed opposition groups captured newly GoS seized areas of al Hallubah, Doqmaq, Kafr Oweid, Qulaydin, Sfuhen, Zakoom, Qoqfin, Kafr Battikh, Shabour, Dadikh, Mejazir and Maraath Alia by 29 February.

⁵ GoS captured Saraqeb on 6 February, Turnabah on 3 February, Afes on 6 February, Jobas on 30 January, and San on 2 February.

⁶ Turkish Airstrikes targeted Maar Shurin, Mardikh, Maraath al Numaan, Hama Countryside, Zarbah, Khan Al Sabeel, Nayrab airbase, Maasaran and southwest of Aleppo City.

⁷ Turkish shelling struck the Safira military base southeast of Aleppo, Maraath al Numan, Maar Dibsi, Khan al Sabeel, and Hama Airbase

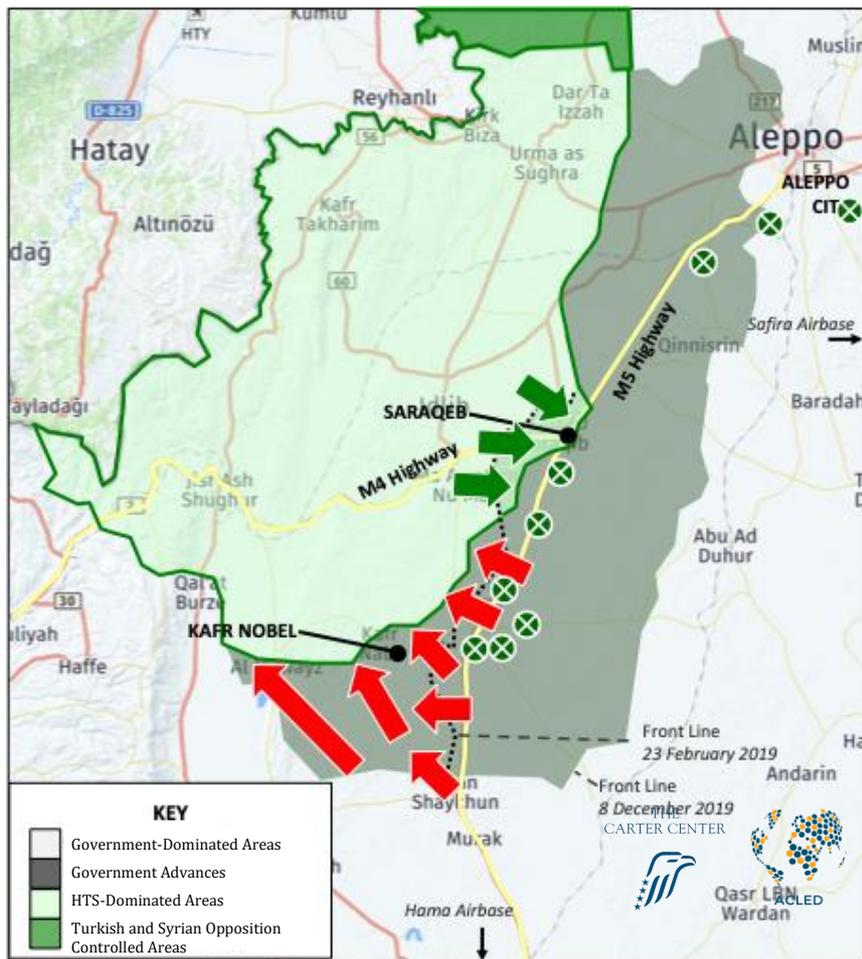


Figure 2: GoS Advances in Northwest Syria in 2020 and Turkish attacks behind GoS frontlines (green circles). Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

In the Tall Rifaat area, elevated levels of artillery and small arms fire exchanges between the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) and Turkish backed groups continued. Thirty-two exchanges in 23 areas were recorded by ACLED during the week,⁸ double the previous week. This month experienced the highest number of conflict events between the two sides in over 12 months (Figure 3).

In Al Bab, two improvised explosive devices (IEDs) detonated on 24 and 27 February. The devices appeared to target civilians. There have been only two other cases of explosions in the city this year to date. However, in 2019, 44 IED attacks struck the city.

⁸ Tal Rifaat (x3), Shiekh Nasser, Kafr Naya (x2), Shiekh Helal, Um Hosh, Kashtaar, Hussayah, Sad al Shahba, Samouqa, Halisa, Wardiya, Alaqsah, Harbel, Maraanaz (x2), Marat Um Hosh, Deir Jamal, Ziyara, Al Maikiyyeh (x3), Shiekh Issa (x2), Oqayba, Mayasa, Shawarighat al Arz (x2), and Menagh Airbase (x2).

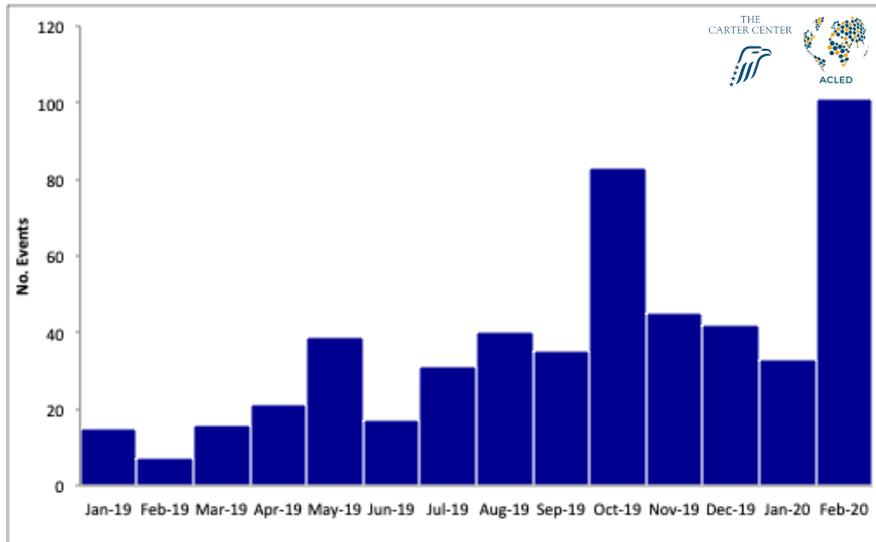


Figure 3: Conflict in the Tal Rifaat Pocket 2019 to 2020. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

There was an increase in attacks against GoS aligned personnel across southern Syria this week. In Mseifra, unidentified gunmen clashed with Airforce Intelligence members at a checkpoint near a military intelligence site in Saham al Golan, against an Airforce Intelligence building in Daraa City, against a former opposition commander in Dara al Balad, and an attack against checkpoints in Kanakar in Rural Damascus. IED attacks also targeted GoS military vehicles on the Jlein – Shiekh Saad Road, in the Shuhada and Daraa al Balad neighbourhoods of Daraa City, and in Western Malika against a Hezbollah linked individual. Attacks against GoS personnel in southern Syria have remained elevated since September 2019 (Figure 4).

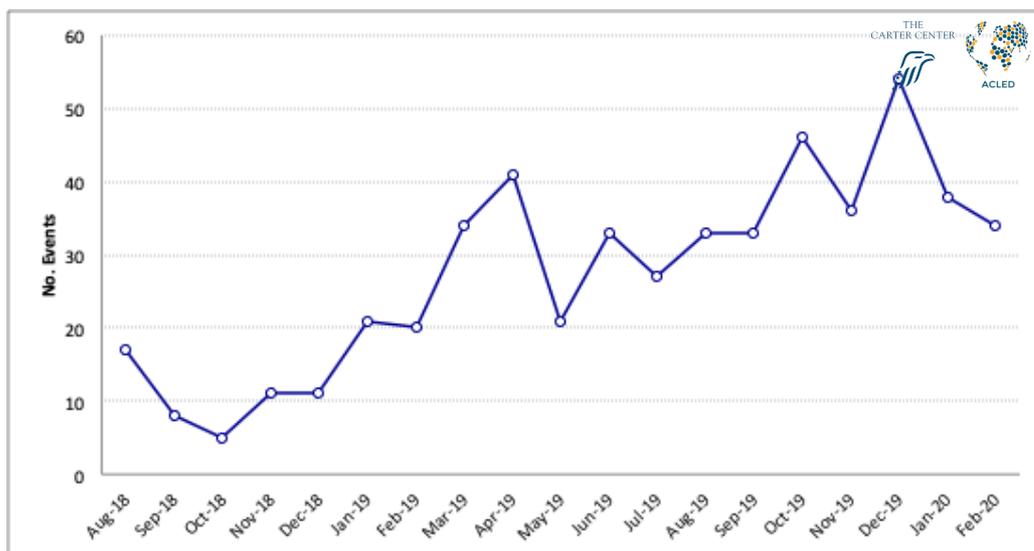


Figure 4: Conflict since the GoS captured southern Syria in August 2018. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

Elsewhere in the south, there was an increase in Israeli attacks in Quneitra Governorate this week. On 27 and 28 February, Israeli aircraft and artillery units

shelled GoS military positions in Hurriyeh (x2), Al Qahtaniya (x2), Quneitra City (x2), and in Hadar, where they struck a GoS-aligned, Popular Resistance for the Liberation of Golan (PRLG) group vehicle. As [reported](#) earlier this month, Israeli attacks regularly target GoS locations across southern Syria. However, it is only the second time that the PRLG has been attacked by Israeli strikes.⁹

IEDs detonations again struck areas around Damascus. On 25 February, an IED detonated against a vehicle in the Qanawat neighbourhood. On 29 February, there were two explosions near the Al Raya institute in the northern Qudsaya suburbs. Of the six IED attacks recorded in Damascus by ACLED in 2020, five have occurred in the previous two weeks.

NORTHEAST SYRIA

There was a reduction in artillery and small arms fire exchanges between Turkish-backed opposition groups and US-backed, predominantly Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)/GoS forces around Turkish occupied Operation Peace Spring areas this week. Only 10 events in 9 areas were recorded by ACLED, which is half the number compared to the previous week. It is the first time in 5 weeks conflict around Operation Peace Spring areas has decreased.

Small arms fire and IED attacks against SDF personnel along the Euphrates and Khabour River Valleys continued this week. There were attacks against SDF patrols in Shadadah, al Izba (x2), Markada and Hawaii. In Hajin, an IED detonated inside the garage of an SDF-aligned municipal building on 29 February. It is the most southerly attack against an SDF aligned-building since March 2019 (Figure 5).¹⁰

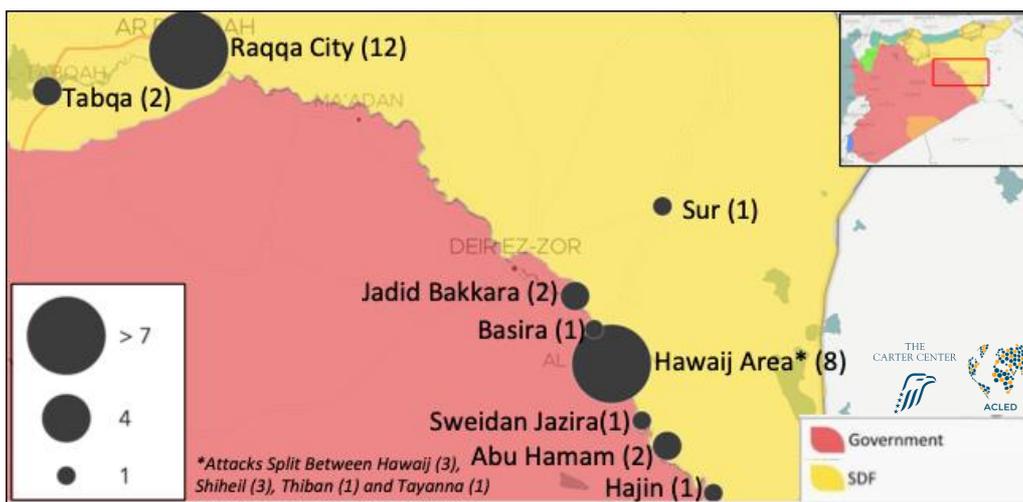


Figure 4: Attacks against SDF-affiliated buildings in northeast Syria since 24 March 2019. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

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⁹ On 21 July 2019, a missile struck the vehicle of a commander of the Popular Resistance for the Liberation of the Golan in Sa'sa' in Rural Damascus Governorate.

¹⁰ When the last ISIS stronghold in Syria, Baghuz al Fawqani, was captured by SDF forces on 23 March 2019.