



WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 3 - 9 FEBRUARY 2020

WHOLE OF SYRIA SUMMARY

- **NORTHWEST** | Government of Syria (GoS) forces captured the majority of the M5 highway between Khan Sheikun and Aleppo City this week. For a second consecutive week, there was an increase in conflict in the Tal Rifaat area. In Turkish-occupied areas of northern Aleppo Governorate, local groups continued extortion and kidnap operations against civilians.
- **SOUTH & CENTRAL** | In addition to continuing attacks against GoS-aligned personnel in southern and central Syria, a former reconciliation committee member was shot dead in Talbiseh town in Homs northern countryside. In the capital, an improvised explosive device (IED) detonated in the Qanawat area of the city. On 6 February, Israel conducted a series of airstrikes in various locations in and around Damascus.
- **NORTHEAST** | Turkish-backed groups and Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)/GoS Forces traded artillery and small arms fire throughout the week. On 4 February, an IED detonated against an oil tanker in eastern Raqqa Countryside. Small arms fire and IED attacks against SDF and aligned personnel continued in the Euphrates River and Khabour River Valleys. There was an increase in SDF arrest operations in al Hole camp after a camp resident's murder. On 6 February, GoS troops prevented a US military patrol from entering Tal Shamran near Tal Tamr in al Hasakah Governorate.

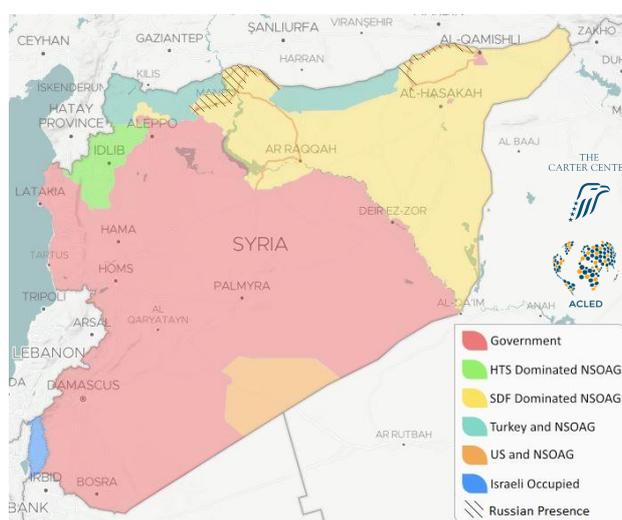


Figure 1: Dominant actors' area of control and influence in Syria as of 9 February 2020. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. Also, please see the footnote on page 2.

NORTHWEST SYRIA

GoS forces captured the majority of the M5 highway from HTS/opposition armed groups during the reporting period. Despite a short lived HTS/opposition counter offensive in the Ais town area at the start of the week, GoS had captured the entire length of the M5 highway between Aleppo City and Khan Sheikhun on February 11, after the reporting period ended,² It is the first time GoS have controlled the full length of the highway since 2012 (see Figure 2).

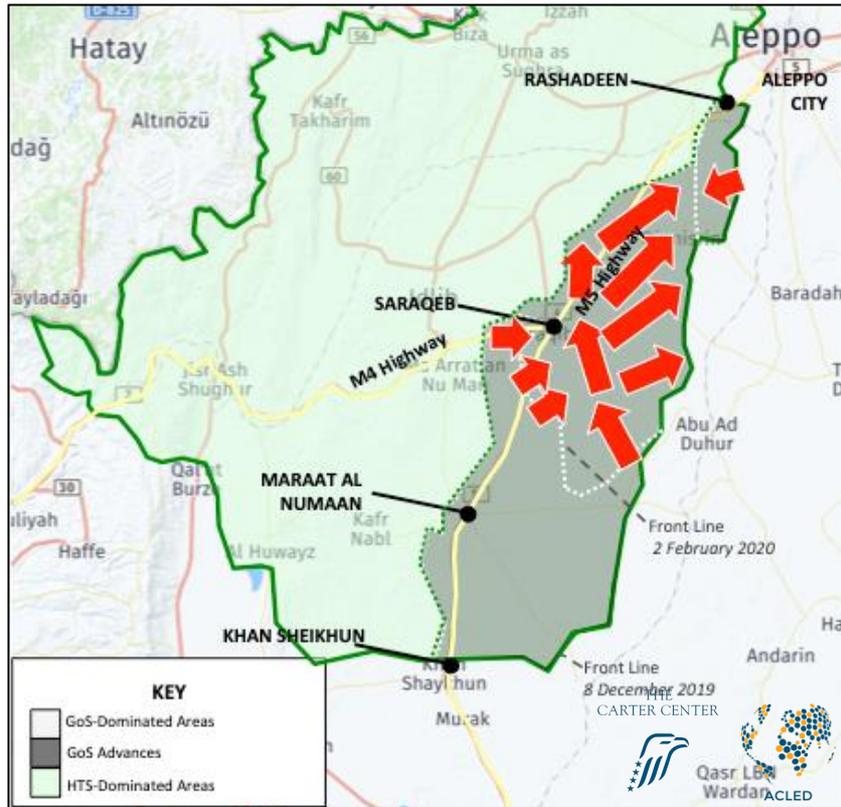


Figure 2: GoS Advances in Northwest Syria in 2020. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

The GoS offensive also surrounded four Turkish military observation posts in the vicinity of Saraqeb and Ais, some of which had only been established in January. On 6 February, GoS conducted airstrikes and shelling on a Turkish military observation post at the Taftanaz Airbase the same day it had been erected. Turkish media has [reported](#) that the GoS offensive has surrounded half of the 19 Turkish military observation posts in northwest Syria.

¹ Figure 1 denotes dominant actors' control and influence. Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah maintain military 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 Government control. The US continues to have a presence in the SDF-controlled east of country. The area around the convergence of the Syrian, Iraqi and Jordanian borders is a 55km radius zone established by the US that also includes a number of aligned local armed groups. Data collected is by the publicly available project ACLED.

² ACLED recorded that GoS captured the following areas: Abu Khaseh, Afes, Barna, Big Othmaniya, Buwaybiyeh, Dweira, ICARDA Research Facility, Jallas, Jeb Kas, Kassibeh, Kusniyeh, Maryuda, Rasafa, Rasm Eliss, Rasm al Sahreej, Rayan, Salamin, Saraqab, Shiekh Ahmad, Tal Bajer, Tal Heddiyeh, Tal Tuqan, Um Atba, Talafeh, Zeitan, and Zmar.

For a second consecutive week, there was an increase in conflict activity in the Tal Rifaat area. ACLED recorded 13 shelling exchanges between the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) and Turkish and aligned forces in Malikiyyeh (x2), Menagh Airbase, Maraanaz, Ein Daqneh, Zahraa, Nabul, Tabb Marash, Baylonah, Shawarighat al Arz (x2), Shiekh Issa, and Qalat Shawarighat. There were seven incidents of shelling last week. As previously reported, conflict in the Tal Rifaat periodically spikes, most recently in October 2019 (Figure 3).

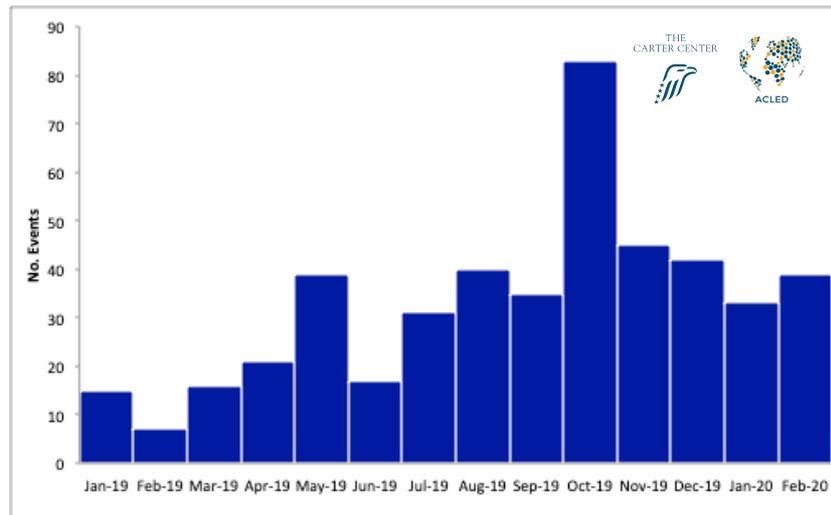


Figure 3: Conflict in the Tal Rifaat Pocket in 2019 and 2020. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

In the Turkish-occupied Operation Olive Branch areas, local groups continued their kidnap and extortion operations against civilians. In Maarata and Hamali, Ahrar al Sharqiyah detained a number of civilians during “security operations.” In Bulbul Mabtali, Turkish-aligned local groups kidnapped 30 civilians. In Semalka, Sultan Murad Division members abducted two women. This type of activities has remained elevated since April 2019.

SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

In Damascus, an improvised explosive device (IED) detonated in the Al Fahama neighbourhood of the Qanawat district of the city this week. The device targeted a civilian car travelling on Khalid Ibn Walid Street. The target of the attack was unclear. This is the first IED event in the capital in 2020 (Figure 4).

On 8 February, gunmen shot dead a former reconciliation committee member in former opposition-held town of Talbiseh in Homs Northern Countryside. This is only the 15th violent incident since the area came under GoS control in May 2018.

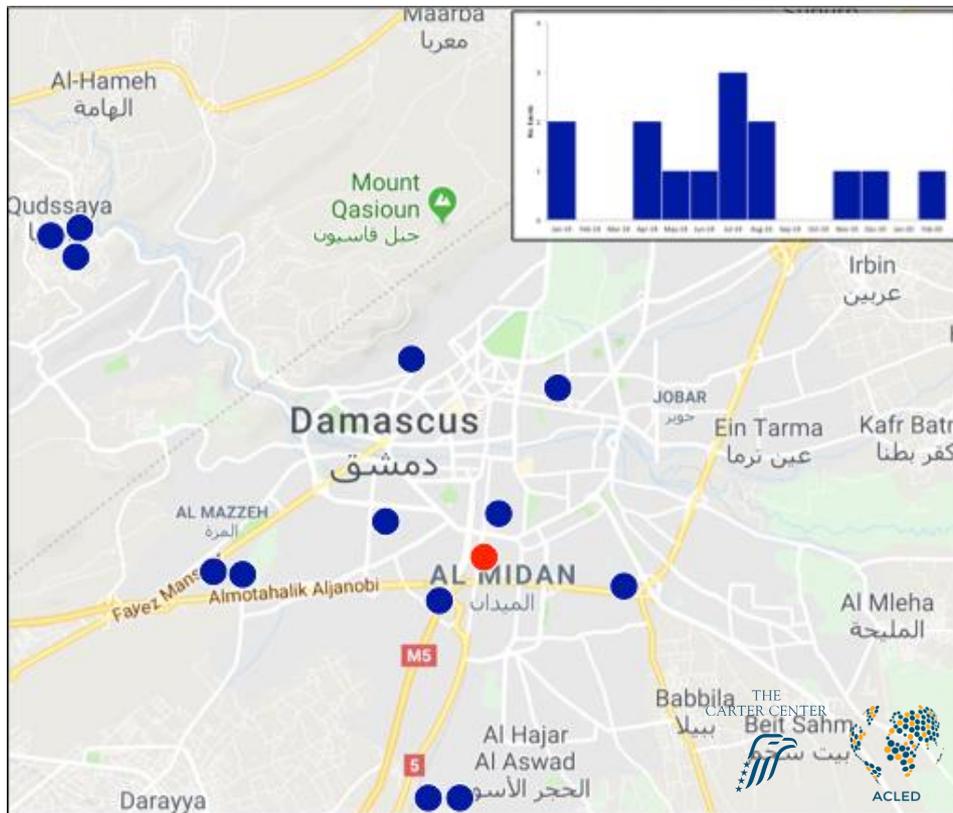


Figure 4: IED Activity in Damascus in 2019 (blue) and in 2020 (red). Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

In southern and central areas of the country, attacks towards GoS-aligned personnel continued. In Daraa, unidentified gunmen opened fire at GoS soldiers in Yadudh, Ankhel, Sanamayn, and Al Rayy, and against alleged GoS collaborators in Jasim and Mzeireb. In Homs, ISIS attacked a GoS checkpoint near the T3 pumping station. Pro-government media also [reported](#) the group ambushing a GoS patrol in the Badia desert near Sokhneh.

On 6 February, a series of Israeli airstrikes targeted GoS military locations across southern Syria. The attacks struck Mezzeh Airbase, At Tall, Sahnaya, Marj Sultan, Al Muqaylabiyah, Izra, Jamraya, and Kisweh (Figure 5).

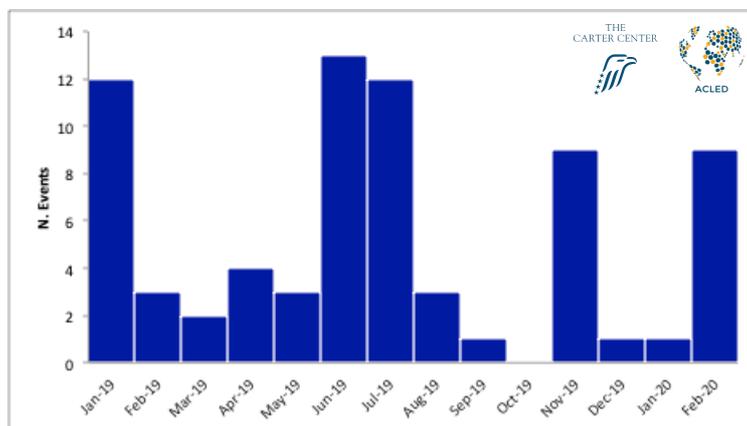


Figure 5: Israeli attacks in Syria 2019 and 2020. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

NORTHEAST SYRIA

Artillery and small arms fire exchanges between Turkish-backed Syrian opposition groups and Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)/GoS forces in the northeast increased this week. ACLED recorded 20 incidents,³ compared to 16 the previous week. One bombardment took place in the vicinity of a Russian military patrol between Abu Rasin and Tal Tamr. The Russian Center for Reconciliation and Conflicting Sides [reported](#) the patrol did not suffer casualties. Turkish-backed local groups also attempted to advance in SDF/GoS held areas southwest of Ein Issa and in Sayada in Menbej District without success.

On 4 February, an IED detonated against an oil tanker in the eastern Raqqa countryside. During the previous month, there was at least one attack per week on critical infrastructure in northeast Syria, especially water and oil facilities. There has been a trend of increasing attacks on such targets since October 2019.

Small arms fire and IED attacks on SDF and aligned personnel in the Euphrates River and Khabour River valleys also continued this week. ACLED recorded attacks on SDF patrols in Markada, Al Hole City, Hasakeh City, Hajin, Sweidan, and in farmland northeast of Raqqa City. Three attacks in Sabkhah, Tayyana and Hawayij also targeted civilians.

An increase in activity was detected from al Hole camp this period. On 6 February, SDF guards detained three female detainees of the camp for unknown reasons. Two days later, more female camp detainees were arrested when an Iraqi male camp detainee, who worked at the camp's market, was found stabbed to death.

For the fourth time in a month, US forces were involved in a standoff at a checkpoint with other military actors present in the northeast. On 6 February, a GoS military patrol prevented a US military patrol from entering Tal Shamran near Tal Tamr in al Hasakah Governorate. This follows a growing number of incidents of access denials by different military actors in the region.⁴ *Please note, this incident is different from a similar event on 12 February when a US patrol came under fire after being denied access through a GoS checkpoint east of Qamishli City. This event will be covered in next week's report.*

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³ In Um al Kayf Front (x3), Abu Rasin (x3), Tal Tamr, Al Amirat, Madhabaa, Um Sulybah, Muraykiz, Kherbet al Sha'er, Rubayat, Tal Ward, Qazali, Debs, Hishan (x2), Ain Issa, and Al-Khalidiyah

⁴ On 30 January, a US military vehicle prevented a Russian military patrol from passing through Tal Tamr town; on 23 January, US forces blocked a Russian Patrol in Tal Tamr; on 19 January, US forces blocked a Russian patrol driving to the Semalka border crossing in Mustafa Derek Village in the Malikiyeh Sub District of Hassakeh Governorate; on 20 December 2019, GoS forces prevented an American military convoy heading to the western countryside of Al-Hasakeh from passing through Quamishli city; and on 11 December, the US prevented a Russian patrol from passing through the Tall Allou area in the countryside of Qahtaniyyah in Al-Hasakeh Governorate.