



WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 8 – 14 APRIL 2019

WHOLE OF SYRIA SUMMARY

- **NORTHWEST** | Elevated level of conflict involving the Hayyat Tahrir ash Sham (HTS)-dominated Idleb enclave and Turkish military patrols continued this week. Improvised explosive device activity also continued within the enclave. There were signs that a ceasefire agreement between Ahrar ash Sham and HTS in the Gharb Plain is under strain.
- **SOUTH & CENTRAL** | Asymmetrical attacks against individuals associated with the government in Daraa Governorate continued. Further north, ISIS ambushed a government aligned militia. Israeli airstrikes also targeted several sites near Masayaf town.
- **NORTHEAST** | Shootings and IED attacks against both the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and government of Syria continued this week in the Euphrates River Valley. Turkish forces have reportedly mobilized a large number of troops in the Euphrates Shield areas.

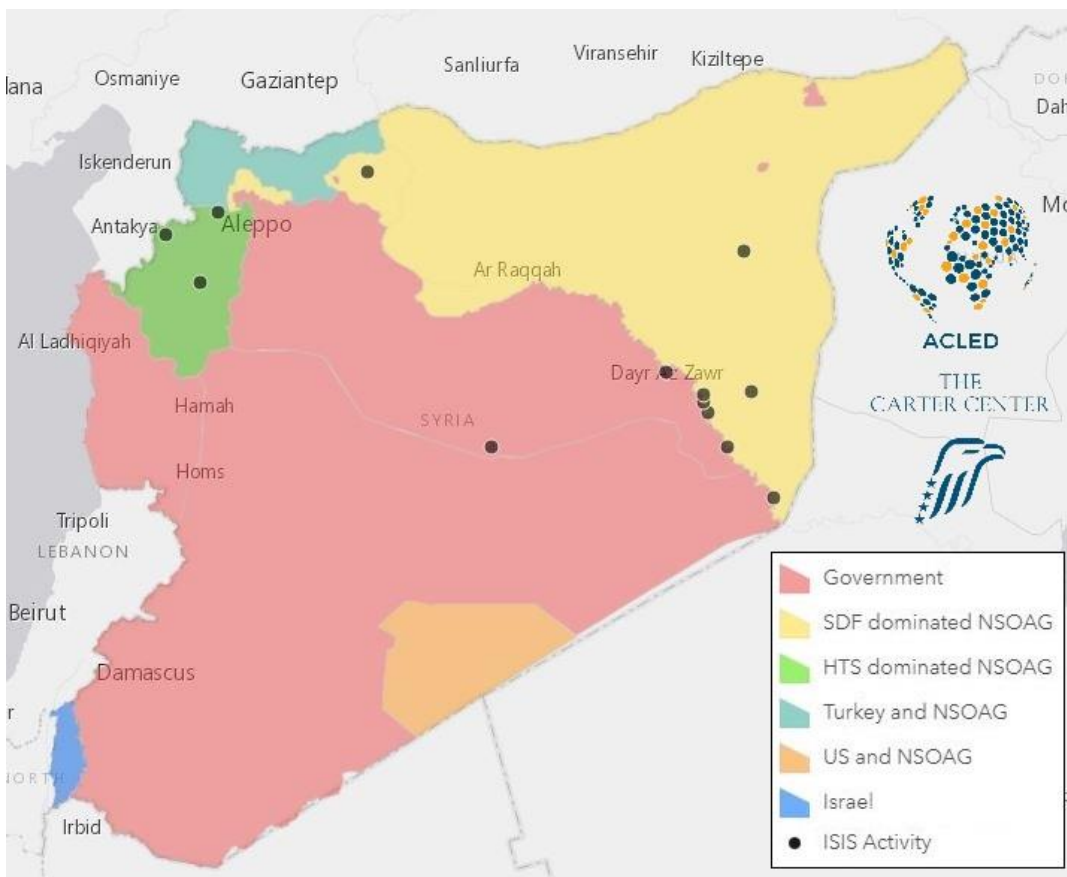


Figure 1: Dominant Actors' Area of Control and Influence in Syria as of 24 February 2019. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. For more explanation on our mapping, please see the footnote on page 2.

NORTHWEST SYRIA

Despite four Turkish Patrols this week, the overall level of violence in the Idleb de-escalation zone has remained elevated. (Figure 2).

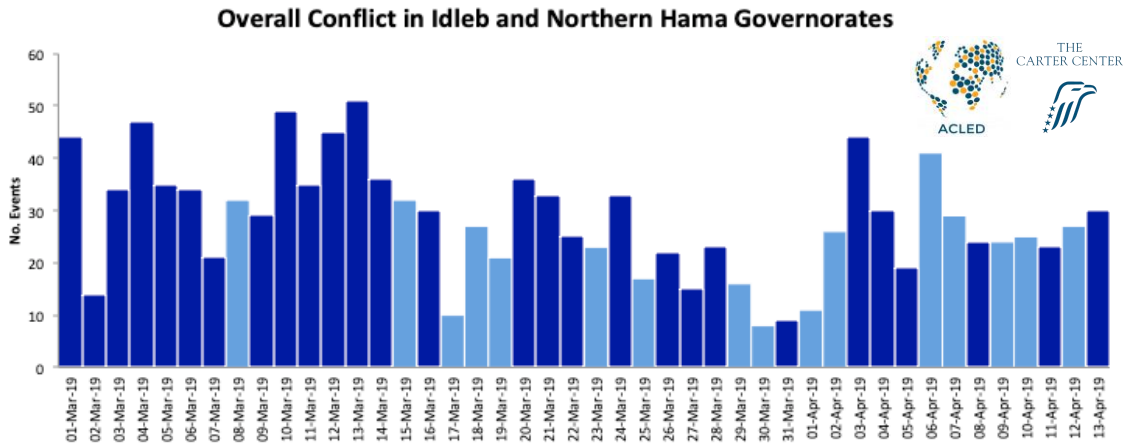


Figure 1: Conflict Levels on the Hayyat Tahrir ash Sham (HTS) dominated Idleb Pocket with days of recorded Turkish Patrols highlighted in light blue.

There were 182 incidents of shelling recorded, including one event where at least 70 artillery and rocket shells were fired on Tamanaah town on 12 April.

Syrian and Russian aerial bombardment also continued this week, especially along the M4 highway between Aleppo and Latakia cities, with at least four sorties reported. Russian Navy ships stationed in the Mediterranean Sea also [launched](#) several cruise missiles on HTS and Turkmenistan Islamic Party (TIP) positions in the Jisr al Shaghur.

Attacks by HTS and aligned groups were also recorded in northern Hama Frontlines, including two on 9 April close to Taybat Al Imam and Tiba Elemam towns. The first saw at least three suicide bombers detonate their devices during the assault, killing at least six Syrian soldiers. The second saw a suicide vehicle borne improvised explosive device detonated at a checkpoint in the town.

Over 100,000 people were [estimated](#) to have been displaced due to the conflict in the de-escalation zone area since February 2019.

Inside the pocket, growing IED activity also continued this week, with at least 19 events recorded, including one suicide attack against an HTS post in Darat Izza on 12 April. In the 48 hours between 8 and 9 April, six of these events were reported in or close to Idleb city.² No group has claimed responsibility for the attacks but HTS has regularly blamed ISIS elements for the incidents. However, this week's count brings April's IED attack total to 25 so far, one of the highest monthly figures

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

² The locations were Idleb City (4), Ariha (1) and Bennsh (1)

since September 2018 (Figure 3).

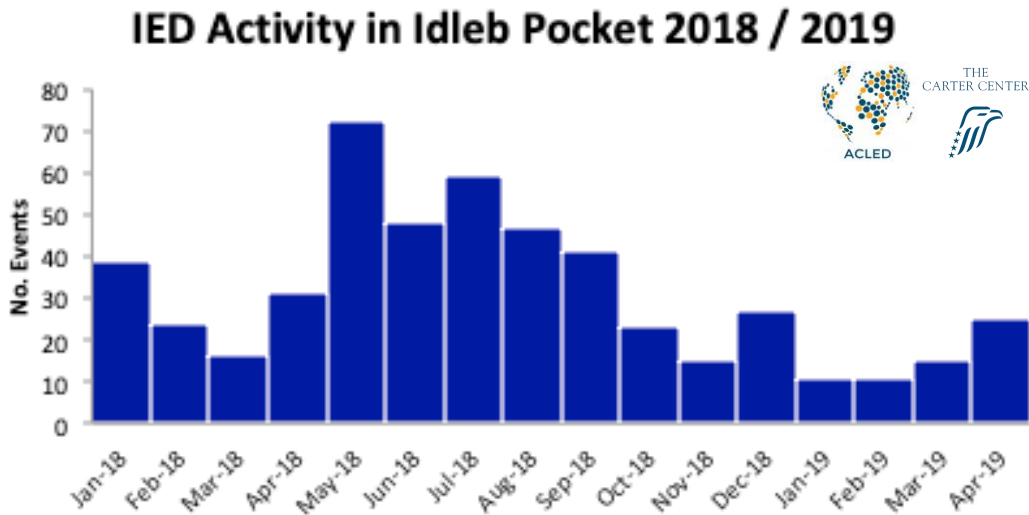


Figure 3: IED activity within the HTS dominated Idlib pocket 2018 / 2019.

Elsewhere, there were signs that a long-standing ceasefire agreement between HTS and Ahrar al Sham in the southwestern Al Gharb plane was under strain. On 9 April, armed skirmishes between HTS and National Liberation Front (NLF)-aligned, Ahrar ash Sham, occurred throughout the day after the former [arrested](#) 15 Ahrar ash Sham members at a checkpoint for firing mortars onto government positions without coordinating with the local HTS operations room.

The clashes on 9 April represent one of the most serious incidents between the two sides since an agreement was reached on 13 January following the HTS takeover of large parts of the northwest in a surprise offensive.

In the Turkish controlled areas of northern Aleppo governorate, ongoing IED activity continued. Seven incidents were recorded targeting Turkish backed groups in Qabasin (2), Azaz, Afrin, Al Bab, and in Bulbul, where an explosion targeted Turkish Military forces.

In addition, isolated clashes between different armed groups active within the de-escalation zone were also reported, including; armed clashes between the Levant Front and the Sultan Murad Division in Afrin city, a heavy machine gun fire and grenade attack on an Al Mu'tasim Brigade location close to Afrin, and an exchange of mortars and heavy machine guns between YPG elements and Turkish backed NLF members in Khalidyah town.

SOUTH AND CENTRAL SYRIA

In the south of the country, ongoing attacks against government-aligned personnel were recorded this week with four incidents recorded. This included two events that were claimed by the Popular Resistance group. The first was an RPG attack against the Baath party headquarters in the Shuhada neighbourhood of Daraa City on 11 April, and the second was an IED attack against a military

officer driving on the Zamrin – al Haraah road on 12 April.³

Further north on 12 April, ISIS ambushed a government aligned Palestinian group convoy in the Bir ‘Ali Area between Sokhneh and Deir Ez Zor governorate. At least 10 Liwa al Quds members were killed in the attack according to pro government [sources](#).

This is the fourth major ambush recorded against government-aligned forces along Sokhneh – Deir Ez Zor highway in 2019. Despite an anti-ISIS operation by government forces in early February 2019 that included heavy aerial support, ISIS activity has continued to be recorded in this area.

Israel was also active in the [something seems to be missing here]. Israeli Airstrikes also targeted four suspected Iranian weapons storage and development sites in the vicinity of Masayf town in Hama governorate. At least three Syria soldiers were killed in the attacks according to some [sources](#).

This was the fifth time the area had been targeted by Israeli airstrikes in the history of the conflict,⁴ and came some two weeks after Israeli airstrikes targeted several suspected Iranian locations in the environs of Aleppo to the northeast.

NORTHEAST SYRIA

Despite the collapse of the last remaining ISIS pocket in March, ongoing events associated with ISIS were recorded this week, including two Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) raids against suspected ISIS fighters in Harbisha village and in Takihi villages on 13 April. Coalition forces supported the raids and SDF forces arrived in helicopters. There were also eight hit and run shooting attacks and IED attacks linked to ISIS in Deir Ez Zor (3), Basira (3), Al Mayadin (1) and Thiban (1) sub districts.

The security threat from these ongoing attacks by ISIS and other actors has largely affected the SDF dominated areas along the northern banks of the Euphrates Valley. In 2019, 191 shooting and IED attacks against SDF aligned personnel have been recorded.⁵ Although dispersed along the river, notable concentrations of attacks have occurred between Basira and Hajin towns, that recorded 74 percent of the activity, as well as Raqqa City (13 percent).

At least 25 attacks involving shootings and IED attacks have occurred in government-dominated areas in 2019. However, this activity is more concentrated than attacks in SDF areas, with 80 percent of activity focused on just three areas; Deir Ez Zor, Mayadin and Abu Kamal (Figure 4).

³ For more on the attacks against government aligned personnel in the south, see last week’s Weekly Conflict Summary [here](#).

⁴ The recorded airstrikes occurred in September 2017, May 2018 (2) and July 2018.

⁵ Away from frontline areas with the campaign against ISIS, such as Susa and Baghuz.

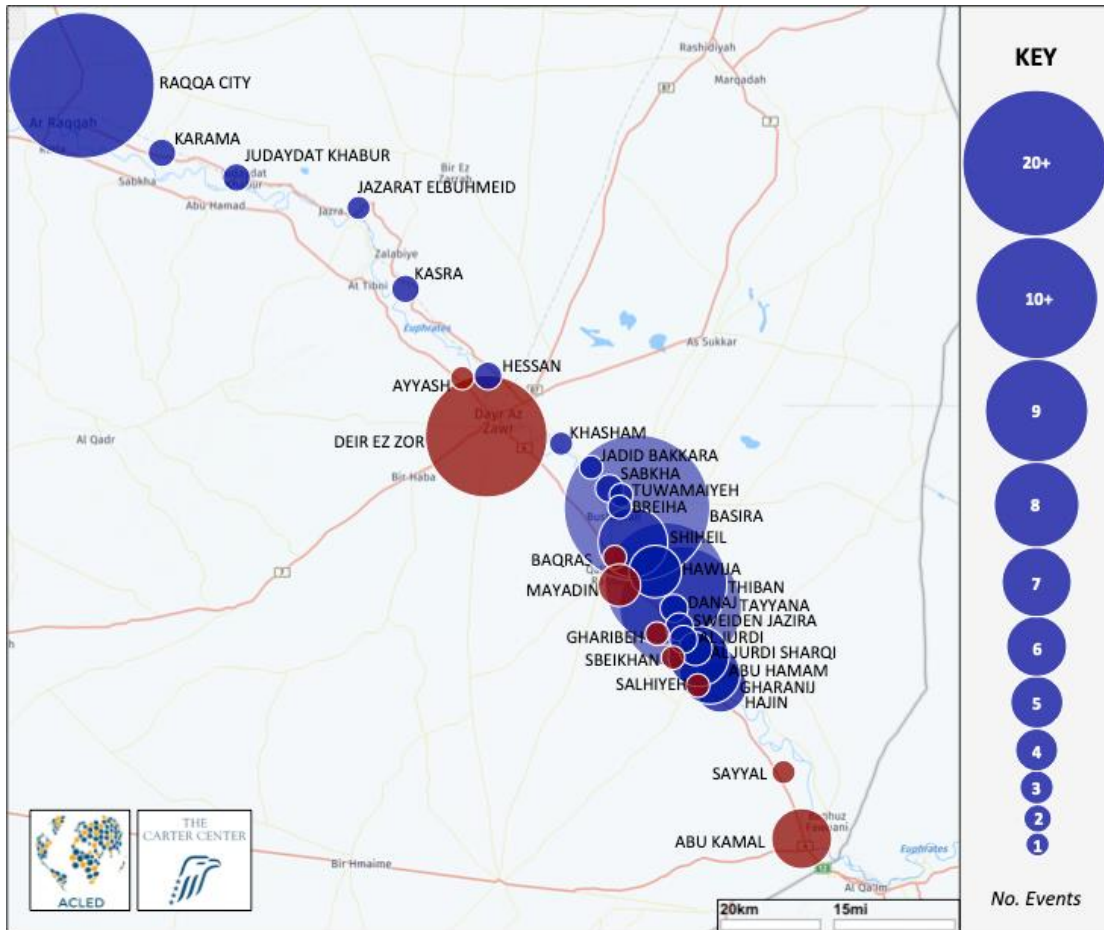


Figure 3: Asymmetrical attacks in the Euphrates River Valley against SDF (blue) and Government of Syria Military (red) in 2019 away from frontline areas.

The ongoing insecurity of the Euphrates Valley has resulted in unrest among the Arab populations in SDF-dominated areas. On 7 April, residents of Sharqra village demonstrated against theft, looting and the frequent raids by the SDF.

After last week’s riots in Derek and al Hole IDP camps, the SDF [announced](#) this week that a deal had been agreed to transfer at least 31,000 detainees with Iraqi nationality to Iraq. No timeframe was given for the transfer, but the move could ease the humanitarian burden on the SDF in the short term.

On 10 April, it was [reported](#) that a large Turkish military convoy entered the Turkish occupied Euphrates Shield area as part of a troop rotation with its garrison in the Jarablus area. This move does not appear to have changed dynamics in the area, with no detected change in the posture of Turkish-backed forces, or US-backed SDF forces along eastern frontlines.

US-backed coalition forces continued to remain in the nearby Kobane/Ain al Arab area to the east. There were also reports that several coalition armored vehicles arrived to Kobane airbase by 8 April, and [overflights](#) by coalition aircraft continuing throughout the week.

WATCH LIST

The watch list outlines various dynamics the Carter Center is monitoring in the coming weeks:

NORTHWEST | Any widening of Syrian government-initiated activity in the Idleb pocket as well as any increase in IED activity inside the pocket. Any changes in group dynamics, especially in the Al Gharb plain.

SOUTH | Increasing levels or a widening of low-level attacks against government-aligned individuals in Daraa Governorate, or growth in ISIS activity in Homs.

NORTHEAST | Deterioration of the security environment in northeast Syria following the collapse of the last remaining ISIS pocket in Baghuz, such as increasing shooting and IED attacks against military forces along the Euphrates Valley or a rise in civilian protests.