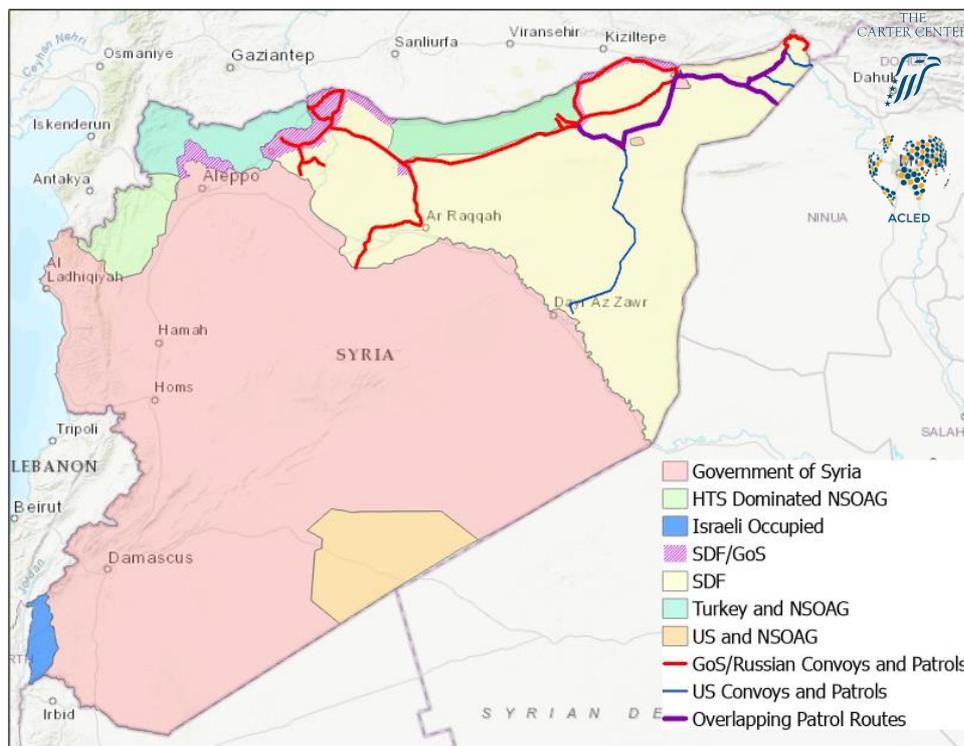




MONTHLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | August 2021

SYRIA SUMMARY

- Internal tensions within the Turkish-backed opposition's Syrian National Army persist.
- Government of Syria (GoS) armed forces shell the neighborhood of Dara'a al-Balad, Dara'a Governorate.
- Turkey conducts drone strikes against the predominantly Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces in northeast Syria.



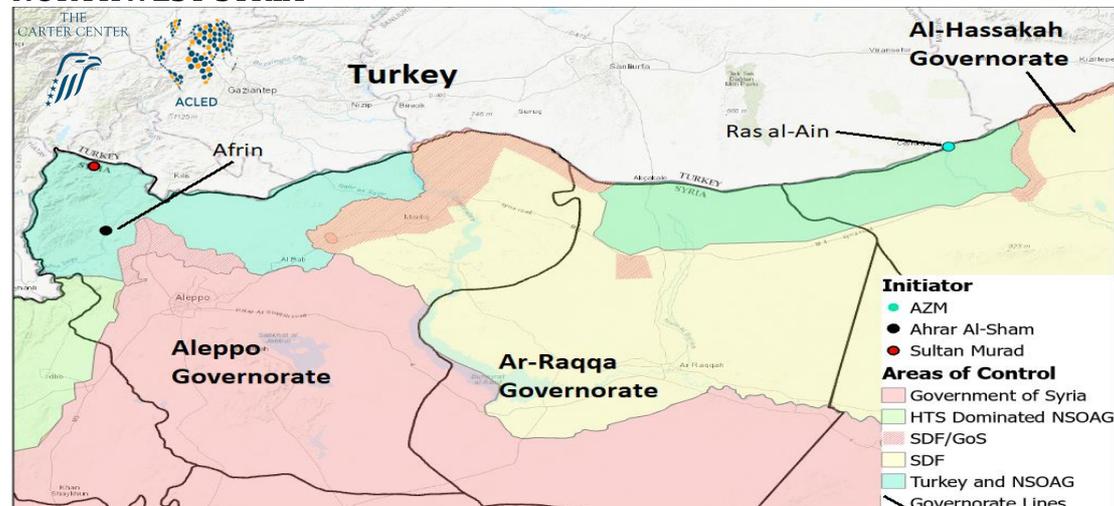
NORTHWEST SYRIA¹

Figure 2: Infighting among Turkish-backed armed opposition groups between 1-31 August 2021. Data from The Carter Center and ACLED.

Internal Dynamics of the Turkish-backed Armed Opposition

In Turkish-held territory in northern Syria, infighting among components of the Turkish-backed opposition Syrian National Army (SNA) is common. Despite efforts to mediate some of these infightings, disputes between the various armed groups occasionally escalate into clashes. Analysts have argued that the weak SNA institutions lack proper hierarchy and clear structure to stop the infighting.² In July 2021, a new alliance of Turkish-backed groups in the SNA formed the “Azm-United Operations Room”³ to integrate the armed groups and bring stability to Turkish-held Aleppo Governorate.

On 7 August, the Azm Operations Room ordered all its affiliated factions to resolve any judicial issues or disputes within 20 days.⁴ On 20 August, five additional SNA factions announced that they have joined the Azm Operations Room.⁵ However the next day, three armed groups threatened to leave Azm, criticizing the coalition for its failure to have equitable representation.⁶ To avoid violence, Azm and the armed groups agreed to SNA-led mediation.⁷

¹ Figure 1 depicts areas of the dominant actors’ control and influence. While “control” is a relative term in a complex, dynamic conflict, territorial control is defined as an entity having power over use of force as well as civil/administrative functions in an area. Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah maintain a presence in Syrian government-controlled territory. Non-state organized armed groups (NSOAG), including the Kurdish-dominated SDF and Turkish-backed opposition groups operate in areas not under GoS control. The area along the junction of the Syrian border with Iraq and Jordan is a 55km de-confliction zone, established by the U.S.-led coalition that also includes a number of aligned local armed groups. Patrols are also depicted in the map to show the presence of actors that may have influence in an area. This is particularly relevant as U.S. and Russian forces regularly patrol towns and routes in the northeast. While they do not control local administration or local forces, there is an assumption of a high degree of coordination with local de facto authorities. Data collected is by the publicly available project [ACLED](#).

² <https://syrianobserver.com/features/63871/security-chaos-faction-infighting-in-northern-aleppo.html>

³ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/504455>

⁴ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/504455>

⁵ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/506686>

⁶ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/507722>

⁷ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/507722>

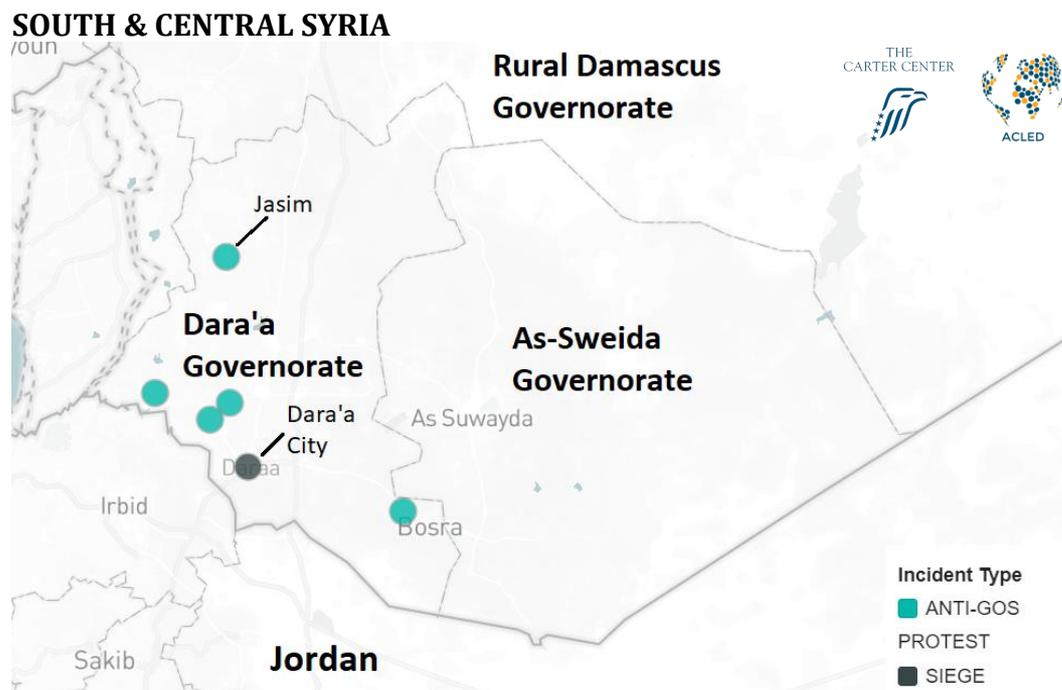


Figure 3: Reported demonstrations against the siege of Dara'a al-Balad between 1-31 August 2021. Data from The Carter Center and ACLED.

The Siege of Dara'a al-Balad

Since 24 June, Government of Syria (GoS) and Russian armed forces have besieged Dara'a al-Balad, a neighborhood of Dara'a city. On 24 July, the Central Committee of Dara'a, a group composed of former opposition fighters negotiating with Russia and the GoS about local governance grievances, and GoS negotiators reached an agreement to end the siege of Dara'a al-Balad. The agreement stipulated that the Central Committee would register individuals for a new settlement process and surrender some of their weapons. In return, the siege would be lifted and GoS Military Security would establish new checkpoints within the neighborhood.⁸ However, the agreement broke down and resulted in GoS Fourth Division shelling Dara'a al-Balad.

4 August

Two prominent former opposition commanders wanted by GoS announced their departure from Dara'a Governorate, saying they left to prevent additional fighting in Dara'a al-Balad.⁹

15 August

GoS armed forces fired at civilians attempting to leave Dara'a al-Balad through Saraya checkpoint, the only open entrance out of the neighborhood.¹⁰ Following these reports, Russian armed forces escorted civilians out of the neighborhood.¹¹

⁸ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/494611>

⁹ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/503197>

¹⁰ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/505428>

¹¹ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/505463>

18 August

Demonstrations demanding the end of the siege were reported across Dara'a Governorate.¹² The same day, the Central Committee asked Russia to return to the 2018 settlement agreement.¹³

24 August

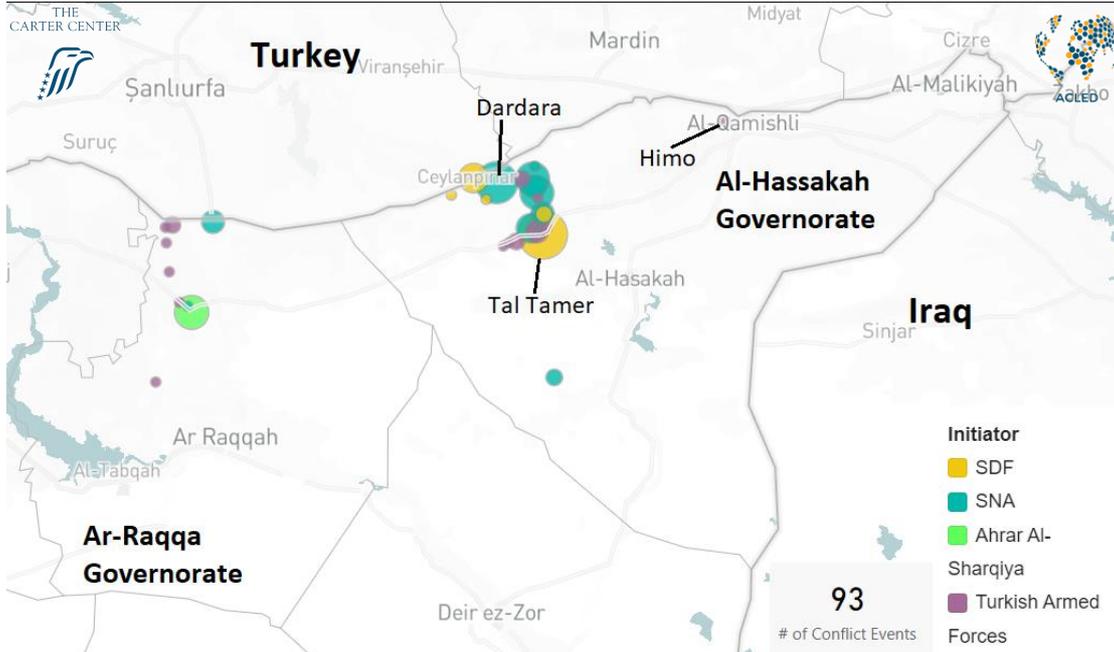
Russian armed forces and the Russian-backed 8th Brigade entered Dara'a al-Balad to prevent further clashes as negotiations continued.¹⁴ The same day, 15 former opposition fighters left Dara'a Governorate for opposition-controlled territory in northern Syria.¹⁵

28 August

The GoS Fourth Division continued to shell Dara'a al-Balad.¹⁶ The 8th Brigade mediated a new possible agreement, but the Central Committee reportedly declined.¹⁷ The same day, demonstrations in solidarity with Dara'a al-Balad were held in Jasim, Dara'a Governorate.¹⁸

29 August

As negotiations reached a standstill, the Central Committee called for a general mobilization across Dara'a Governorate to stop the ongoing campaign against Dara'a al-Balad.^{19,20}

NORTHEAST SYRIA

¹² <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/506274>

¹³ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/506265>

¹⁴ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/507612>

¹⁵ <https://tinyurl.com/uy9fzaph>

¹⁶ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/508240>

¹⁷ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/508479>

¹⁸ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/508487>

¹⁹ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/508560>

²⁰ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/508690>

Figure 4: Clashes between Turkish armed forces and Turkish-backed armed opposition groups on the one side and the SDF on the other between 1-31 August 2021. Largest bubble represents 21 conflict events. Data from The Carter Center and ACLED.

SDF-Turkey Clashes

Turkey justifies its control of territory in northern Syria as a secure zone along the border to prevent alleged threats from armed Kurdish groups.²¹ Shelling and clashes along the frontlines between Turkish armed forces and Turkish-backed armed opposition groups on the one side and GoS armed forces and the predominantly Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) on the other side are frequent.

14 August

The SNA clashed with the SDF near Dardara, northern Al-Hassakah Governorate.²²

19 August

A Turkish drone bombed the SDF headquarters in Tal Tamer, western Al-Hassakah Governorate,²³ killing an unspecified number of SDF fighters.

20 August

Turkish shelling killed 3 SDF fighters and a Women's Protection Unit (YPJ) commander in Tal Tamer.²⁴

22 August

A Turkish drone strike reportedly killed a SDF commander²⁵ near the village of Himo by Qamishli, Al-Hassakah Governorate.²⁶

26 August

Turkish armed forces conducted two drone strikes against the SDF near Tal Tamer.²⁷ This has followed a pattern of increased drone use against the SDF and their allies across northeast Syria.²⁸

For earlier conflict summaries, please click [here](#). For an interactive map of historical areas of control in Syria, please click [here](#).

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²¹ <https://www.voanews.com/world-news/middle-east-dont-use/ap-explains-turkeys-operation-olive-branch-afrin-syria>

²² <https://tinyurl.com/42h9uycf>

²³ <https://tinyurl.com/kf7jxyhd>

²⁴ <https://anfenglish.com/news/ypj-commander-among-victims-of-turkish-attack-in-til-temir-54302>

²⁵ <https://www.voanews.com/europe/reported-turkish-drone-attacks-over-syria-raise-kurdish-concerns>

²⁶ <https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/story/25345-Turkish-drone-targets-vehicle-near-northern-Syrian-town-of-Qamishlo:-Source>

²⁷ <https://tinyurl.com/4878uw94>

²⁸ <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/09/syrian-kurdish-parties-feel-abandoned-us-wake-turkish-backed-attack>