

THE
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Post-Idleb Agreement Conflict Trends
November 16, 2018

The Russian-Turkish agreement on Idleb has succeeded in greatly reducing violence in northwestern Syria. Since the agreement came into effect on September 18, there have been no reported airstrikes in the region, and reports of conflict events of all types have been greatly reduced. However, low levels of violence have persisted along frontlines, accompanied by infighting between opposition groups and occasional minor incidents throughout much of Syria. Since the agreement, the majority of fighting has taken place against ISIS pockets in southern and eastern Syria. The following report details conflict trends throughout Syria since the Idleb agreement, providing maps of reported incidents, timelines of different conflict event types, and narrative summaries of major developments. A dynamic map of violent conflict events post agreement can be found [here](#).

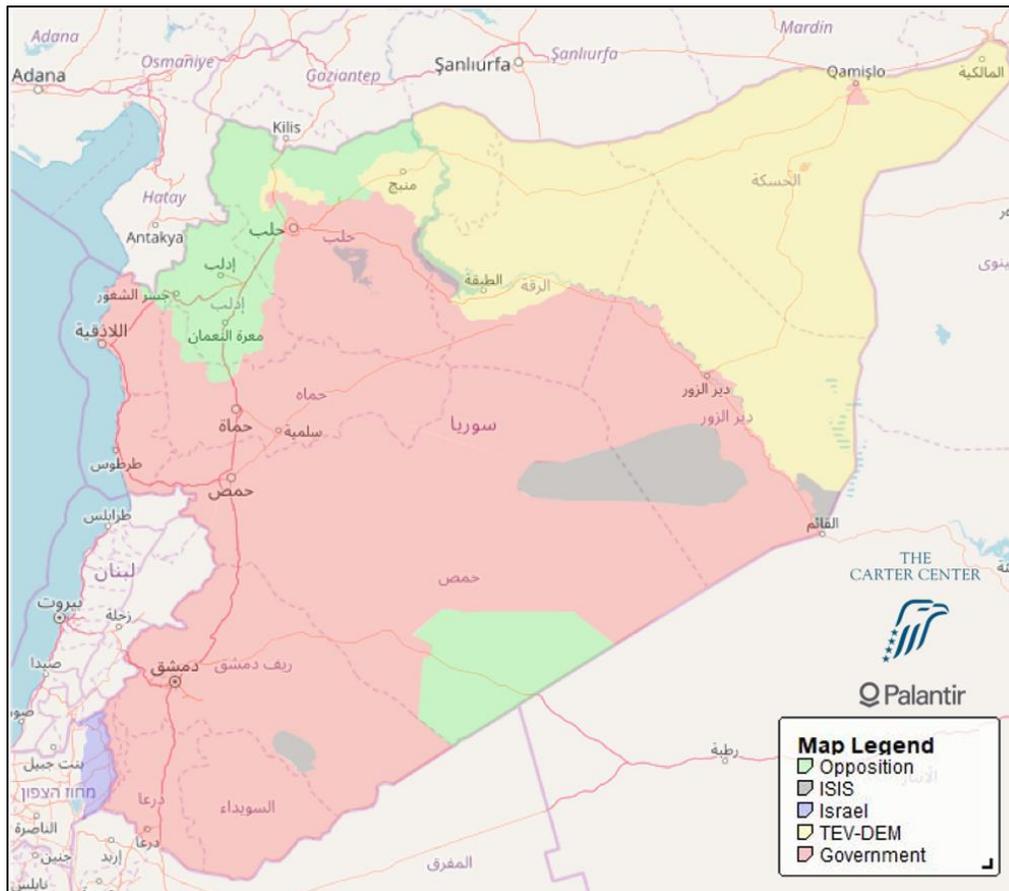


Figure 1: Areas of control throughout Syria as of November 14, 2018.

Conflict Events Post Idleb Agreement

Though conflict has diminished following the signature of the Idleb agreement, lower levels of conflict have persisted, largely focused on the northern Hama frontlines, with consistent lower-level fighting between Hai'yat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS, formerly al-Qaeda affiliated Jabhat al-Nusra) and the National Liberation Front (the largest armed opposition coalition).



Figure 2: Rates of reported conflict throughout Syria following the Idleb agreement. Violent events are highlighted in orange, while nonviolent events (protests) are in blue. Data from [ACLED](#) and The Carter Center.

There have been a significant number of conflict events along the north Hama frontlines, almost all of which involving pro-government forces firing mortars or artillery at positions held by Jaish al-Izza, one of the few armed opposition groups not included in the National Liberation Front coalition. Violence in this region represents a continuation of conflict patterns from before the Russian-Turkish agreement. Turkish and Russian observation points in this area appear to have had a positive effect on levels of violence, suggesting that an increase in coordination between Russian and Turkish forces in this area could forestall a larger outbreak of violence. There have also been consistent (though lower-level) incidents reported on the outskirts of Aleppo city, involving opposition groups firing on the northwestern outskirts of the city.

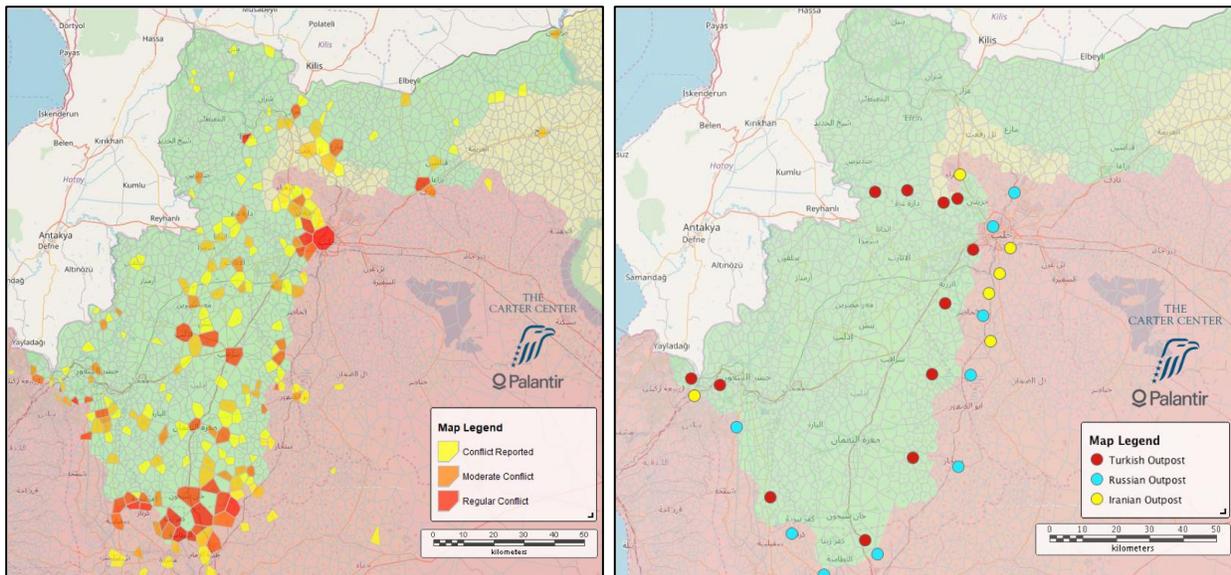


Figure 3: (Left) For a dynamic (zoomable) map of frontlines and reported conflict incidents throughout Syria click [HERE](#). The above map shows levels of conflict per administrative zone in northwestern Syria from September 18 through November 14, 2018. Data from [ACLED](#) and The Carter Center. (Right) the distribution of Turkish, Russian, and Iranian outposts.

Airstrikes

Airstrikes throughout Syria have been steadily diminishing throughout 2018. The Turkish intervention in Afrin, and the Syrian government’s offensives in Eastern Ghouta and southern Syria led to high levels of aerial bombardment throughout the first quarter of the year. Since the completion of these offensives, airstrikes have diminished significantly. The chart below shows airstrikes throughout Syria. The portion of data highlighted in orange represents airstrikes targeting ISIS. There have been no reported airstrikes targeting opposition positions since the the Russian-Turkish agreement.

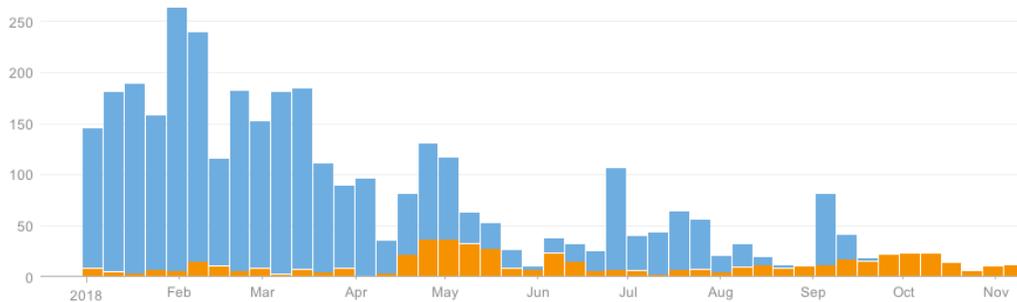


Figure 4: Airstrikes throughout Syria during 2018. Each bar represents one week. The portions of the timeline highlighted in orange represent airstrikes targeting ISIS. Data from [ACLED](#).

Immediately prior to the signing of the Russian-Turkish agreement in mid-September, there was a sharp increase in airstrikes targeting the Idleb pocket. This increase, seen as a precursor to the seemingly imminent government offensive on the opposition-held pocket, targeted frontlines in northern Hama, particularly the town of Kafr Zita (see map below), and western Idleb governorate in a region largely controlled by the Turkestan Islamic Party. It is noteworthy that these strikes appear to have avoided areas where Turkey has established observation posts in accordance with prior de-escalation deals.

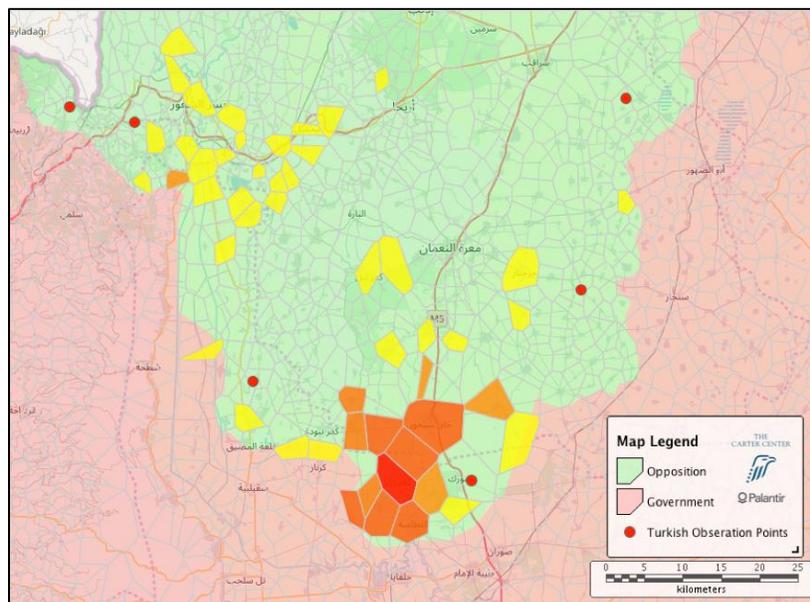


Figure 5: Intensity of airstrikes by administrative zone in northwestern Syria in the first half of September 2018. Data from [ACLED](#).

Infighting

With the cessation of airstrikes, much of the conflict in central Idleb has been due to infighting between HTS and the National Liberation Front. This fighting has taken place along front lines between territories dominated by each group, but has also taken the form of targeted attacks using improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Key points of infighting include Saraqeb, Idleb city, and Afrin, where anti-Turkey insurgents have consistently targeted Turkish and allied forces throughout the region.

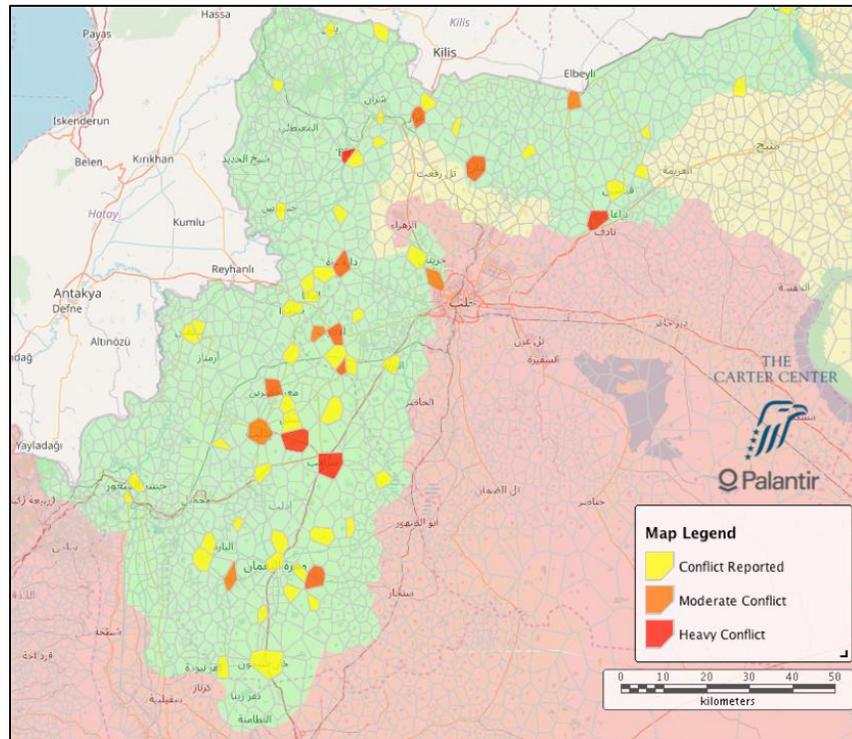


Figure 6: Instances of intra-opposition fighting and IED attacks per administrative zone from September 18 through November 10, 2018. Data from [ACLED](#)

Though these incidents of infighting form a relatively small portion of all reported conflict events, they have been consistent and appear to be slowly gaining in frequency (see timeline below). Many of those killed as a result of this infighting and IED attacks have been affiliated with HTS. It is likely that these attacks have been undertaken by Turkey or Turkish allied forces as a means of weakening HTS influence in the region. A more detailed conflict report focusing on trends in infighting is forthcoming.



Figure 7: Instances of infighting and IED attacks (in orange) in relation to all recorded post-deal conflict events. Data from [ACLED](#)

Protests and Demonstrations

In the lead-up to the Idleb agreement, activists organized large, widespread protests in opposition to the Syrian government’s stated intentions of beginning an offensive on the opposition-held pocket. These protests occurred on Fridays, and slowly diminished following the signing of the Idleb agreement when it became apparent that the deal was holding. Smaller protests have been common throughout Syria in opposition to detentions by various armed groups and violence against civilians.

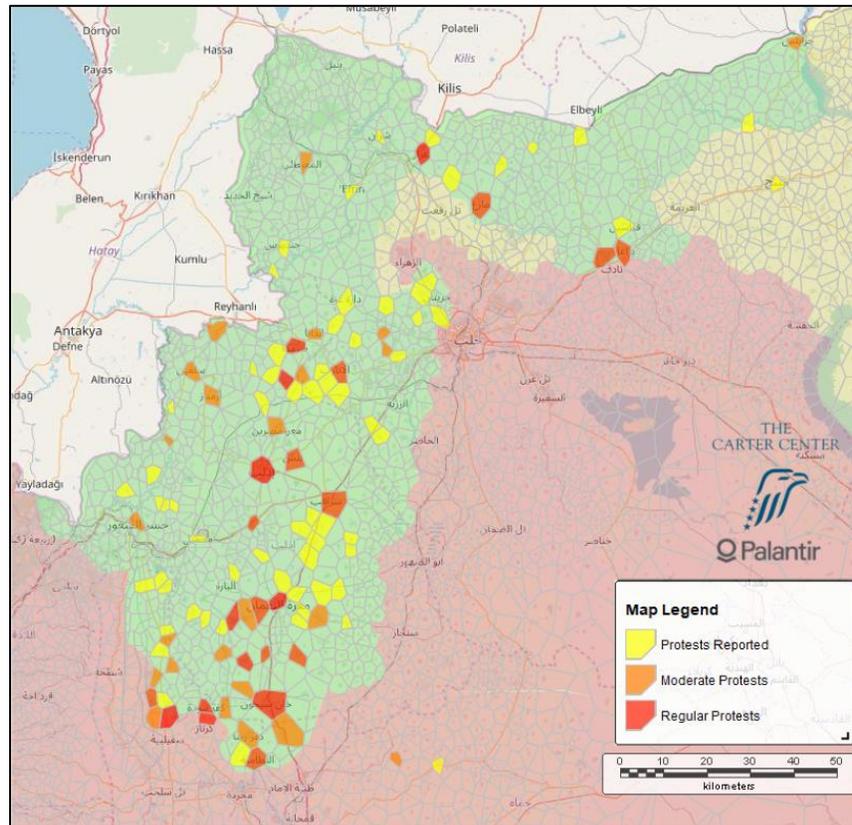


Figure 8: Protests and demonstrations by administrative zone from September 18 through November 10. Data from [ACLEd](#)

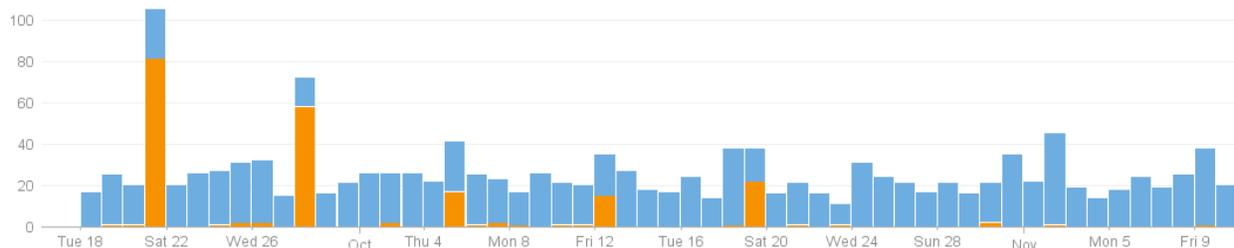


Figure 9: Timeline of protests and demonstrations (orange) in relation to all recorded conflict. Data from [ACLEd](#) and The Carter Center.

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