

THE
CARTER CENTER



WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 1 - 7 APRIL 2019

WHOLE OF SYRIA SUMMARY

- **NORTHWEST** | Despite further Turkish Military patrols this week, elevated levels of conflict continued to occur in the HTS-dominated Idlib enclave. Inside the pocket, despite a reduction in improvised explosive device attacks since September 2018, such activity has increased steadily in 2019.
- **SOUTH** | Six asymmetrical attacks against individuals associated with the government occurred in Daraa Governorate this week, bringing the total number of these types of events since August 2018 to 72. This activity has focused increasingly on Daraa City and western areas of the governorate.
- **NORTHEAST** | In addition to ongoing clearance operations in the Baghuz area, several high-profile improvised explosive device incidents were recorded, including in Raqqa City, Tabqa City and Hassakeh Governorate.

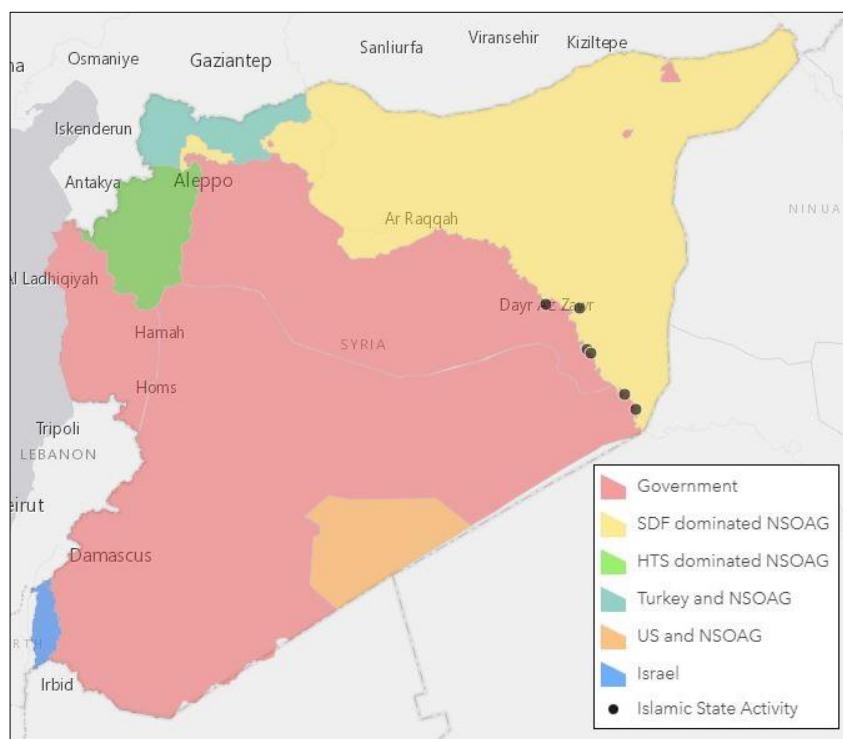


Figure 1: Dominant Actors' Area of Control and Influence in Syria as of 7 April 2019. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. For more explanation on our mapping, please see the footnote on page 2.

NORTHWEST SYRIA

Elevated levels of shelling and airstrikes in the HTS-dominated Idlib de-escalation zone continued this week. 171 incidents were recorded, which is in line with the weekly average of 178 since 1 February 2019. This activity occurred despite four Turkish patrols this period (including two on 2 April). This builds on eight patrols in March but continues to have little deterrence on overall violence in the pocket in the past month (Figure 2).

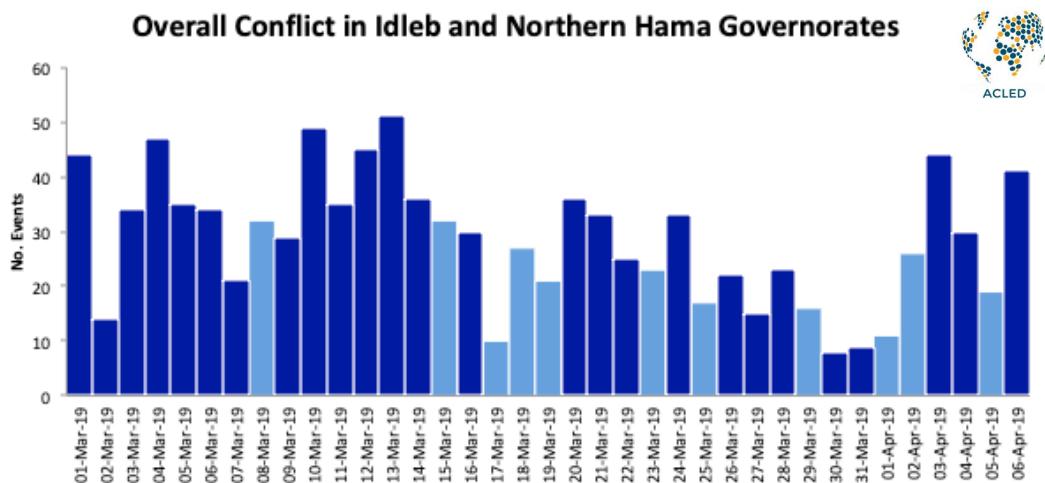


Figure 2: Timeline of Syrian Government and NSOAG activity in Idlib / Northern Hama Governorates since 1 March 2019. Days of Turkish Military Patrols Highlighted in Light Blue. Data from the publicly available dataset by [ACLED](#).

Government of Syria and allied military activity has consistently targeted the same six sub-districts in the enclave in the past month. Since 6 March, nearly 80 percent (612) of recorded activity has occurred in the southern Kafr Zeita, Khan Shiekhun, Madiq Castle, Maraat an Numan, Suran, Tamannah and Ziyara sub-districts. By contrast, opposition-initiated activity towards government-dominated areas in the past month was less concentrated, with just over 80% of activity spread between 10 sub-districts.²

Ongoing improvised explosive device (IED) activity continued inside the pocket. This week saw six detonations in Abzemo (2), Ariha, Atareb, Maraat an Numan and Tal Adah towns, bringing the total number of IED attacks in 2019 to 43. The number of recorded IED attacks has declined since the Russian backed de-escalation zone agreement was established in September 2018, and further reduced following HTS's takeover of large parts of the pocket at the start of this

¹ Figure 1 denotes dominant actors control and influence. Syrian government areas also include the presence of aligned actors such as Russia, Iran, Hezbollah and Iraqi militias. Areas outside of Syrian government, ISIS and SDF influence and control have been labeled non-state organized armed group areas due to the variety of groups operating in these areas. Of note, the NSOAG labeled area along the border with Iraq and Jordan denotes the US led coalition's 55km de-confliction zone that contains a number of aligned local armed groups. Data from the publicly available [ACLED](#) Syria dataset.

² The sub districts were Madiq Castle (21), Jebal Saman (12), Muhradah (11), As Suqaylabiyah (9), Shatha (7), Tamanaah (7), Suran (6), Kansaba (5), Abu Thohur (4) and Hadher (4).

year (Figure 3).

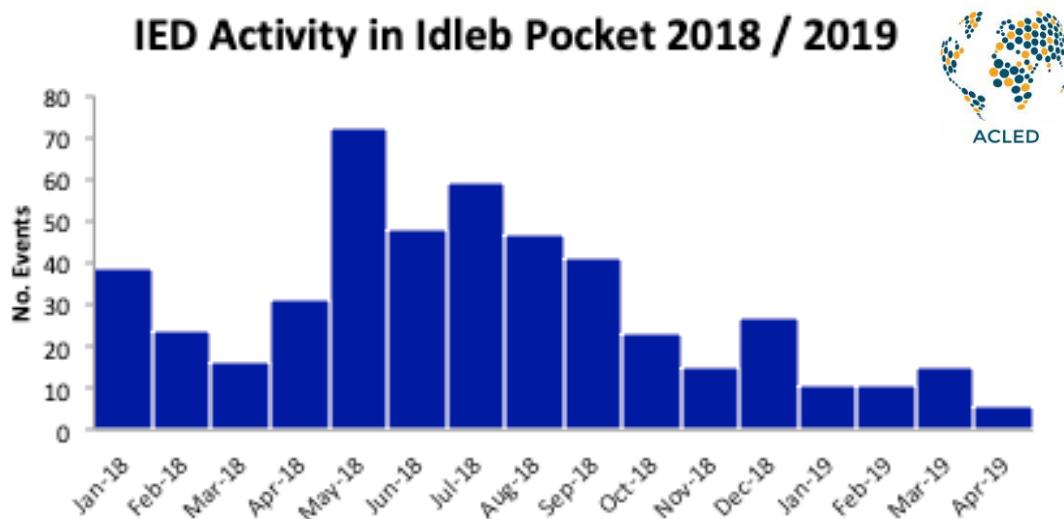


Figure 3: Timeline of IED activity in Idleb HTS dominated pocket since 2018 and 2019. Data from the publicly available dataset by [ACLED](#).

However, despite the low numbers, IED activity has become more concentrated in 2019, especially on Idleb City, with nearly 50 percent of the 43 recorded events occurring in just three places – Idleb City (35 percent), Ad Dana town (7 percent) and Sarmin town (7 percent). The remainder of incidents were spread between 20 other locations. By contrast, the last three months of 2018 saw 50 % of the 65 events spread between six places – Atareb (12 percent), Ad Dana (11 percent), Maraat an Numan (10 percent), Idleb City (8 percent), Maraat Tamasrin (5 percent) and Saraqb (5 percent), and the remaining events were spread between 26 locations.

SOUTH SYRIA

A spike in attacks against government-aligned personnel was recorded in Daraa Governorate this week, with eight attacks (six shooting, one grenade and one improvised explosive device (IED)) recorded against Syrian Army, Airforce Intelligence, Hezbollah and former opposition group members in Mseifra, Karak, Kharab Shahem, Al Sourah, Hriak, Sanamayn, and Bisr al Harir. This is compared to five reported in the previous period. This brings the total number of these attacks to 72 since August 2018.³

These attacks have occurred in over 30 locations around the governorate since August, with a concentration of events (61 percent) recorded in six areas; Daraa City, As Sanamayn, Dael, Tafs, Mzeireb and Yadudeh towns. Just one location in eastern Daraa Governorate – Karak town – has seen a focus of attacks since 2018. Typically, the activity has involved shooting (67 percent) or Grenade (11 percent) attacks – with IED activity just making up 8 percent of events.

³ In August 2018, Daraa Governorate came under government dominance.

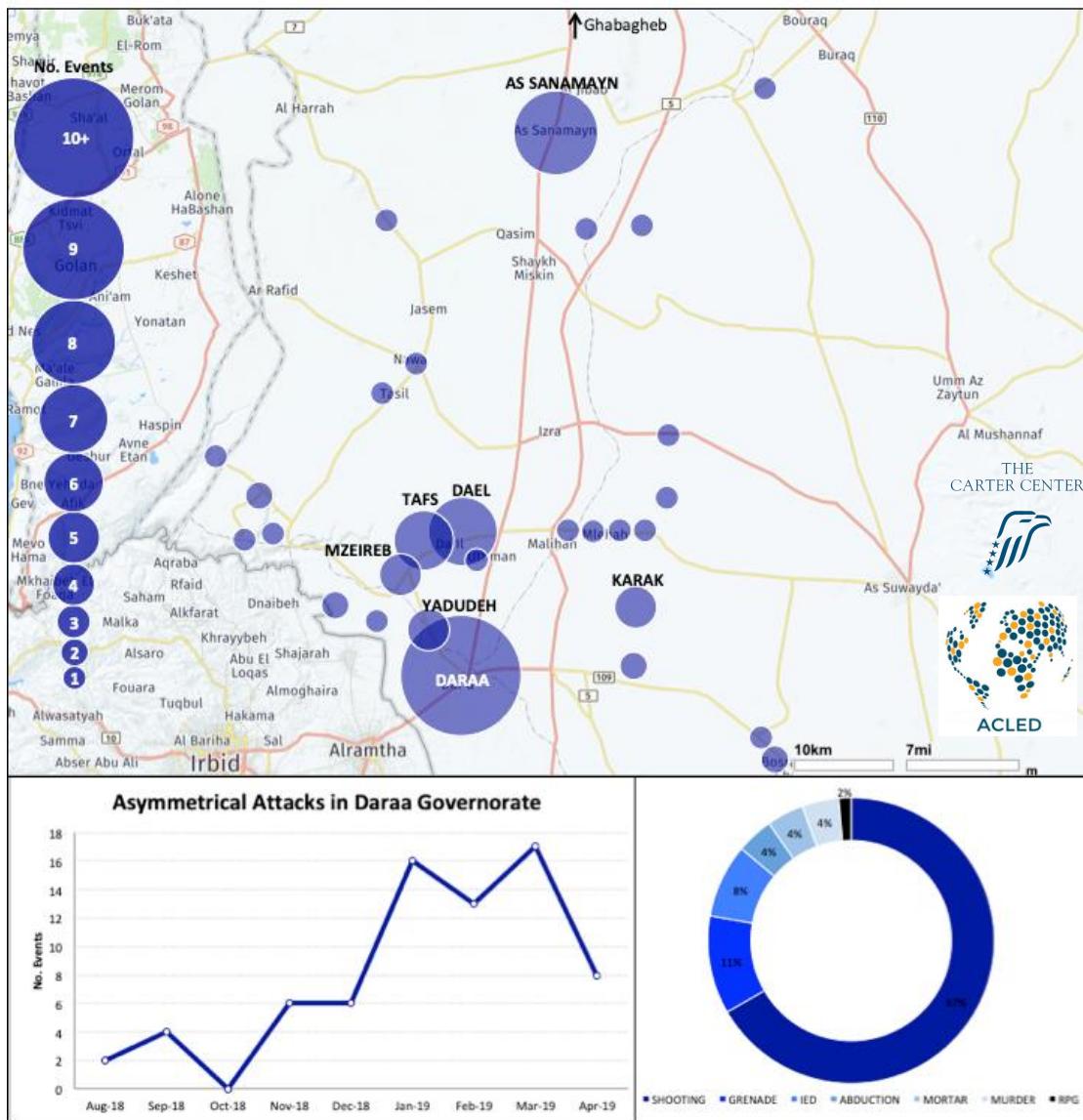


Figure 4: Reported asymmetrical attacks against government-aligned personnel in Daraa Governorate (top), timeline of reported asymmetrical attacks in Daraa Governorate 2018/2019 (left) and distribution of asymmetrical attacks in Daraa Governorate by type (right). Data from the publicly available dataset by [ACLED](#).

Several Syrian government military locations in Eastern sections of the governorate have re-enforced their position with berms and other defensive barriers this week. A high level [meeting](#) also took place on 2 April between various national and local governance and security personalities to discuss the situation in southern Syria.⁴

⁴ This included the Director of the National Security Bureau (Ali Mamluk), The Syrian Minister of Defense (Maj. Gen. Ali Ayoub), the Head of the Information branch of Syrian Military Intelligence (Maj. Gen. Kifah al Milhem), former commander of Jaish al Thawra and current head of the Fifth Cops in Daraa Governorate (Ali Murshid al Bardan), as well as former opposition council members from Tafs, Daraa Al Balad, Shajarah, Jassim and Nawa towns, according to some [sources](#).

NORTHEAST SYRIA

Ongoing clearance operations continued around the former ISIS pocket of Baghuz Faqwani this week. The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) conducted at least two-arrest operations in the Baghuz Farms area, one of which resulted in the capture of an ISIS commander. Coalition aircraft also conducted at least 12 airstrikes against residual ISIS members in the Jahfa hills, to the east of the village.

However, despite the collapse of ISIS, several high profile attacks linked to ISIS elements were recorded elsewhere in the northeast. On 2 April, armed clashes between the SDF and ISIS members erupted in central Raqqa City before four of the group detonated their explosives, killing at least 14 people. Elsewhere, in Tayyana, near Thiban town, a group of ISIS members clashed with a SDF aligned People's Protection Units (YPG) checkpoint, before one ISIS member detonated explosives at the site on 4 April. Finally, in Hussain town, a suicide attacker on a motorbike [detonated](#) at an SDF checkpoint on 6 April.

While suicide attacks have not been uncommon in Deir Ez Zor and Raqqa Governorates in the past year, with at least 39 incidents recorded, they have typically been focused on frontline areas, as ISIS retreated.⁵ In the case of Raqqa City, it is only the second suicide attack since late 2017 (after a suicide attack against an SDF headquarters occurred on 7 January 2019), while in Tayyana and Hussein towns, the events were the first suicide attacks on record.

An IED detonation was also [recorded](#) in Tabqa City on 7 April, only the sixth in the past 12 months. However, five of these occurred in 2019 (two in January, two in March and one in April). In Kishka village, Al Malikeyyeh district, in the far northeast in Hassakah Governorate, Kurdish forces [dismantled](#) two IEDs on 2 April. This was the first time in over 12 months such devices have been seen in the Malikeyyeh district.

On 5 April, a [riot](#) occurred in a holding camp for ISIS members in the Al Malikeyyeh area that led to SDF intervening and coalition aircraft [supporting](#) monitoring efforts during the incident. By the end of the day, the situation was resolved and no escapes had been reported. However, the situation highlights the ongoing security concerns associated with the various locations where suspected ISIS members and associated people are held.

WATCH LIST

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

NORTHWEST | Any widening of government-initiated activity in the Idlib pocket

⁵ At least 26 percent of the 39 suicide attacks in the past year were recorded in Baghuz, 15 percent in Hajin town, 10 percent in Abu Kamal city, 10 percent in Sosa Village, 5 percent in Basria village and 5 percent in Kasra. The remaining 29 percent occurred in 10 other locations.

as well as increasing levels or further concentrations of IED activity within the enclave.

SOUTH | Increasing levels or a widening of low level attacks against government-aligned individuals in Daraa Governorate, especially outside of the six main hubs where such activity has typically occurred.

NORTHEAST | Any changes to the security environment in northeast Syria following the collapse of the last remaining ISIS pocket in Baghuz. This includes any signs of how ISIS will attempt to project strength, both physically and psychologically, or further security incidents involving any of the holding camps for ISIS members and associated people.