



WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 4 May - 10 May 2020

SYRIA SUMMARY

- **NORTHWEST** | There were increased armed clashes between Government of Syria (GoS) armed forces and armed opposition groups in Idlib Governorate. Turkish and Russian military forces conducted 4 joint patrols in northwest Syria. An opposition group raided the village of Al-Tanjara in GoS-controlled territory. The Israeli air force attacked pro-Iranian militia positions in Aleppo Governorate.
- **SOUTH & CENTRAL** | Pro-GoS personnel faced increased attacks in Dara'a Governorate. GoS brought military reinforcements to Mzeireb after an attack on a police station. Civilians continued to face violence in the region.
- **NORTHEAST** | ISIS attacked Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and GoS personnel in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. SDF and the Global Coalition Against Daesh raided and arrested ISIS fighters across northeastern Syria. The Israeli air force attacked pro-Iranian militia positions in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. Turkish-backed opposition armed groups carried out artillery bombardment in Ar-Raqqah and Al-Hassakah Governorates.

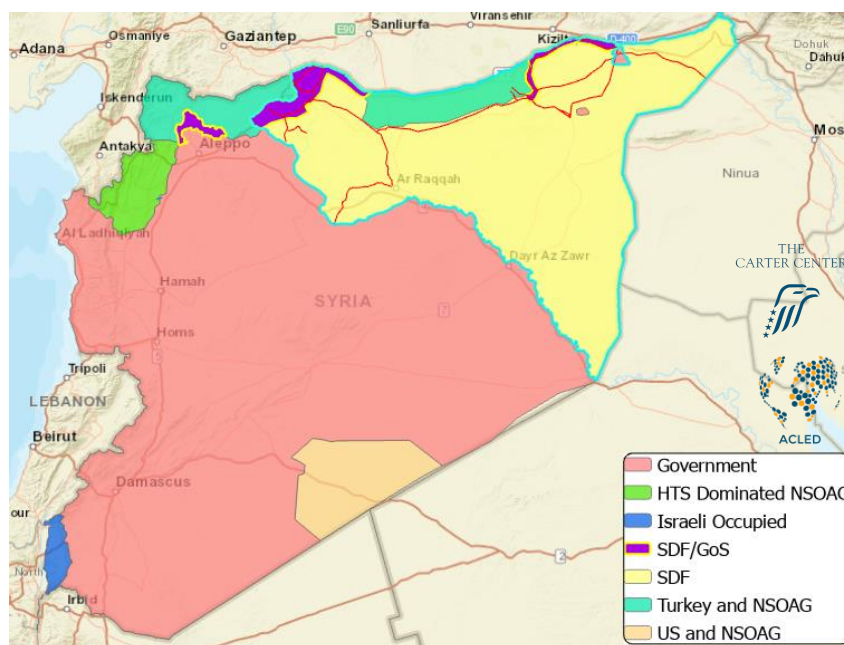


Figure 1: Dominant actors' area of control and influence in Syria as of 10 May 2020. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. Also, please see the footnote on page 2.

NORTHWEST SYRIA

This week, there were increased clashes between GoS armed forces and armed opposition groups in Idlib Governorate. On 4 May, they clashed on the Ruwaiha frontline in southern Idlib, and on 6 May on Afes frontline. Hayyat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) targeted pro-GoS forces with an anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) on 7 May in Kansafra, Idlib Governorate. In Saraqab, GoS armed forces captured 2 Jaysh al Ahrar fighters. Three additional clashes between GoS and armed opposition groups took place on 9 May on the Maaret Alia, Saraqab, and Ftireh fronts. This is the highest number of clashes in Idlib Governorate since 23-29 March 2020.

Turkish and Russian military units conducted 4 joint patrols in northwest Syria. On 6 and 7 May, Turkish-Russian forces patrolled the rural areas of Ain al Arab city in Aleppo Governorate. On 5 and 7 May, two of the joint patrols took place along the M4 highway between Turnabah town and to the outskirts of Masibin town in Idlib Governorate. This was the furthest that the joint patrols had travelled on the M4 highway as previous attempts were disrupted by protests in Nayrab (see figure 2).²

On 4 May, Ansar al-Tawhid, an armed opposition group, ended its affiliation with the coalition Wa harredh al Moa'mineen Operations Room.³ On 10 May, the Wa Harredh al Moa'mineen Operations Room shelled the Russian military base in Hmeimim, Lattakia Governorate.⁴ The same day, the Operations Room briefly took control of the village Al-Tanjara in northwest Hama Governorate within GoS-controlled territory.⁵ An estimated 21 GoS soldiers and 13 Operations Room fighters were killed in the fighting.⁶ GoS armed forces retook the town 24 hours later.⁷ This was the deadliest attack on GoS armed forces since the signing of the 6 March Moscow Agreement.

GoS and Russian armed forces arrested managers and technicians associated with Syriatel Telecom in Tartous city. The company is owned by Rami Makhlof, a prominent Syrian businessman and cousin to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.⁸

¹ Figure 1 denotes dominant actors' control and influence. Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah maintain a 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 GoS control. The US continues to have a presence in the SDF-controlled east of the country. The area along the junction of the Syrian border 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. Data collected is by the publicly available project [ACLED](#).

² The joint Turkish-Russian patrols are part of the Moscow Agreement between the two countries, stipulating joint patrols between al-Turnabah to Ain Hoor in Idlib Governorate. <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/382485>

³ A coalition of extremist armed opposition groups such as Hurras al-Din, Jabhat Ansar al-Din, Ansar al-Islam, and formerly Ansar al-Tawhid.

⁴ <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/jihadists-launch-attack-on-largest-russian-base-in-syria-2/>

⁵ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/383190>

⁶ <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/militants-attack-syrian-troops-edge-rebel-stronghold-70604869>

⁷ <https://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=164149>

⁸ <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/2268346/syrian-regime-expand-arrests-targeting-makhlof%e2%80%99s-senior-employees>

The arrests (see South & Central Syria section) followed a dispute over Makhlouf's tax liabilities to the GoS, tensions between pro-GoS elites, and Russian pressure for anti-corruption measures.⁹

On 4 May, the Israeli air force attacked pro-Iranian militia ammunition stores in As-Safira, Aleppo Governorate. This was the first Israeli airstrike in Aleppo Governorate since 27 March. Another airstrike by the Israeli air force was reported in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate in eastern Syria (see South & Central Syria).

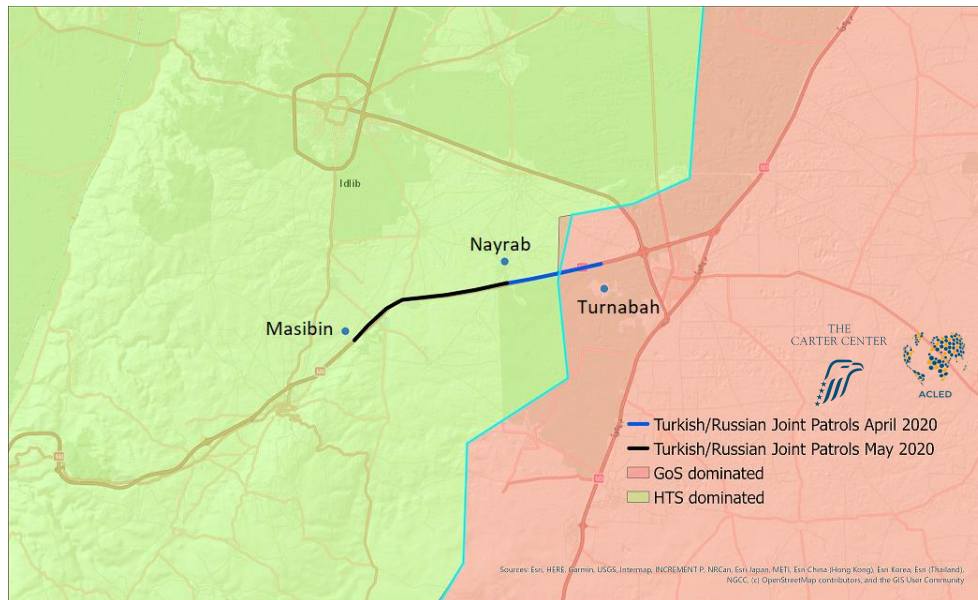


Figure 2: Turkish-Russian joint patrols along the M4 Highway in southern Idlib Governorate. All joint patrols begin near Turnabah. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

Attacks against pro-GoS personnel in Dara'a Governorate increased this week. GoS personnel faced three attacks on 4 May. Unidentified gunmen killed 2 GoS air force intelligence officers in Nahta in eastern Dara'a Governorate. In Mzeireb, unidentified gunmen attacked a police station, kidnapped nine GoS police officers, and executed them.¹⁰ This is the deadliest attack on GoS personnel in Dara'a Governorate in 2020.

Following these attacks, GoS brought additional military reinforcements to Mzeireb and other areas of Dara'a Governorate.¹¹ A sheikh in Eastern Shariqiya, allegedly connected to the GoS air force intelligence, was wounded. Unidentified gunmen attacked a GoS checkpoint in western Maliha and a 5th Corps convoy in Ash-Shajara town on 6 and 7 May respectively. GoS 4th Division units were targeted on 8 May in Karak, Dara'a Governorate, and Bait Jan in Rural Damascus Governorate.

⁹ <https://www.mei.edu/publications/rami-makhlouf-saga-poses-dangerous-challenge-assad>

¹⁰ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/381666>

¹¹ <https://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=163280>

Rami Makhoul associates and employees were arrested in Damascus (see Northwest Syria). On 4 May, GoS intelligence and Russian military police arrested members of “Al-Bostan Association” a registered charity with alleged links to pro-government militias, as well as the editor of the pro-government Al-Watan newspaper in Damascus.¹²

Civilians continued to face violence in southern and central Syria. On 4 May, the bodies of two civilians were found near Abtaa and Al-Ju’aylah in the countryside of Dara’a Governorate. On 5 May, unidentified gunmen killed a GoS armed forces defector near Jbib and Um Walad in Dara’a Governorate. Since 1 January 2020, ACLED has recorded 159 attacks against civilians across southern and central Syria (see figure 3).

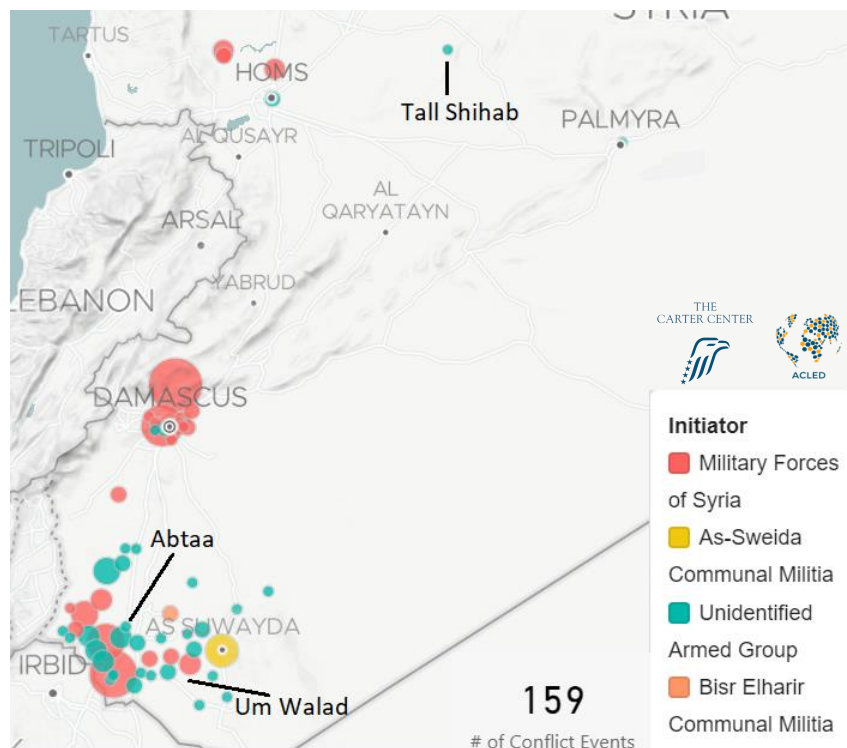


Figure 3: Attacks on civilians in south and central Syria between 1 January 2020 to 9 May 2020. Smallest bubble represents one conflict event. Largest bubble represents 27 conflict events. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

NORTHEAST SYRIA

This week, ISIS attacked SDF and GoS targets across Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. On 4 May, ISIS fighters fired a RPG at a SDF checkpoint in Basira. On 7 May, an ISIS gunman attacked a SDF military vehicle in Baghuz town. ISIS attacked GoS armed forces and pro-GoS militia vehicles near Ash Shula near the Deir-ez-Zor/Homs Governorate border.

Anti-ISIS operations continued this week. On 5 May, SDF arrested men accused of communicating with ISIS in the cities of Mansura and Jurneyyeh in Ar-Raqqa

¹² <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/2268346/syrian-regime-expand-arrests-targeting-makhoul%E2%80%99s-senior-employees>

Governorate. The next day, SDF arrested 4 people in the Tishrine neighbourhood of Ar-Raqqa city on charges of joining ISIS. Coalition forces and SDF captured a midlevel ISIS leader during a raid in the Deir-ez-Zor countryside on 6 May.¹³ On 8 May, SDF raided the Hol Camp section holding foreigners and detained several women. These anti-ISIS operations followed an increase in ISIS activities in northeast Syria during the past month.

On 4 May, the Israeli air force attacked pro-Iranian militia positions near Al Mayadin in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. Along with the attack in Aleppo (see Northwest Syria section), this is the seventh Israeli strike on pro-Iranian militias in the preceding two weeks, and the first airstrike in the Deir-ez-Zor Governorate since September 2019.

On 8 May, US armed forces within the Global Coalition Against Daesh established a new base in Jazaret Elbuhmeid in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. This is the first US base established in Syria since 4 November 2019.

On 4 and 8 May, Turkish-backed armed opposition groups operating in Turkish-held Operation Peace Spring (OPS) territory conducted 13 artillery bombardments in 11 locations in Ar-Raqqa and Al-Hassakah Governorates (see figure 4).¹⁴ The bombardments targeted GoS and SDF positions. On 9 May, Turkish-backed armed opposition groups looted civilian crops in 6 locations within Al-Hassakah Governorate.¹⁵

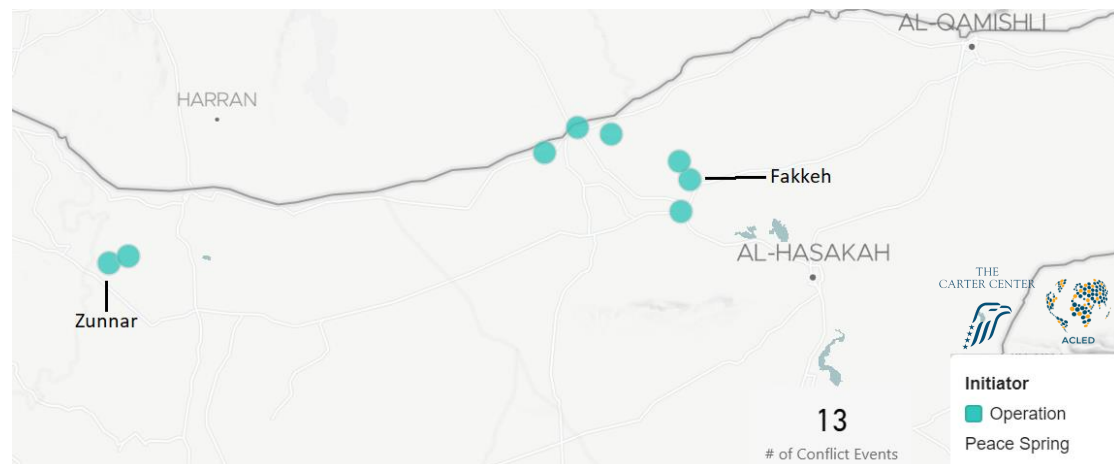


Figure 4: OPS artillery bombardment in northeastern Syria between 4-9 May 2020. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

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¹³ <https://www.voanews.com/middle-east/us-backed-forces-crack-down-resurgent-islamic-state>

¹⁴ Zannubah and Zunnar in Ar-Raqqa Governorate. In Al-Hassakah Governorate: Aziziyeh, Munakh, Fakkeh (x2), Tal Tamer, Dardara (x2), Qarainah, Qabbour, Abboush, and Qabr al Kabir.

¹⁵ Tal Baydar, Attia, Al-Asadiyah, Rihaniya, Daoudiyet Mala, Tall Sakhr, and Nadas.