THE
CARTER CENTER

**WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 3 – 9 JUNE 2019**

## WHOLE OF SYRIA SUMMARY

- **NORTHWEST |** Government forces made advances in the southwest corner of the Hayyat Tahrir ash Sham (HTS)-dominated Idleb pocket. HTS and other opposition groups conducted a counter attack focused on Tal Mallah. Attacks were also recorded in the Turkish-controlled Euphrates Shield and Olive Branch Areas.

- **SOUTH & CENTRAL |** In addition to low-level attacks against government-aligned personnel in the south, ISIS claimed to have conducted an attack on the Nimr – Gherbet Khazalah Road this week, the first since 2018. ISIS activity against government patrols was also recorded in central areas of the country. In Rastan town, in northern Homs Governorate, anti-government graffiti appeared.

- **NORTHEAST |** Routine small arms fire and improvised explosive device (IED) activity against Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and their allies continued despite large-scale security operations in previous weeks. Further north, an IED attack occurred in Hassakeh City.

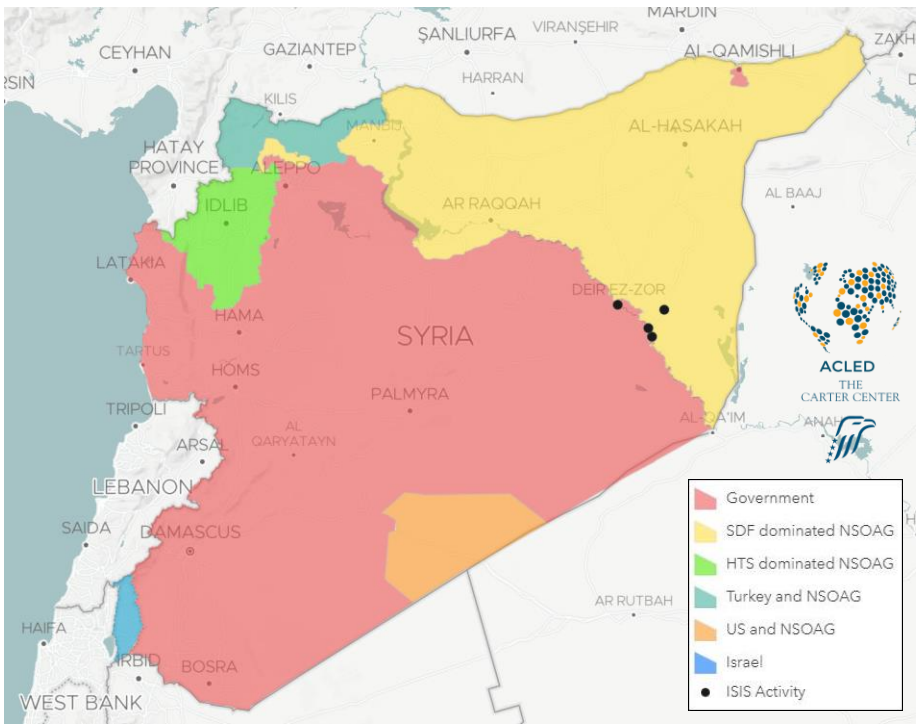


*Figure 1: Dominant Actors' Area of Control and Influence in Syria as of 9 June 2019. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. For more explanation on our mapping, please see the footnote on page 2.*

## NORTHWEST SYRIA

This week, Government of Syria (GOS) forces made advances in the southwest corner of the Hayyat Tahrir ash Sham (HTS)-dominated Idleb enclave. On 3 June, GOS Tiger Forces captured al Qasabieyh town to the north of Kafr Nabuda, before turning west and taking Qurutiyah village a day later. Currently, fighting is concentrated around Qirouta village.

However, late on 5 June, HTS and the Turkish-Backed National Liberation Front (NLF) launched a major counter offensive south of Kurnaz town after an IED detonated at a fortified government location. Advancing to Tal Mallah, the HTS and the NLF temporarily took Jabain and Kafr Yahoud villages, south of this location. A day later, advances were made westwards from Tal Mallah to the eastern areas of Jalamah town where fighting continues (Figure 2).

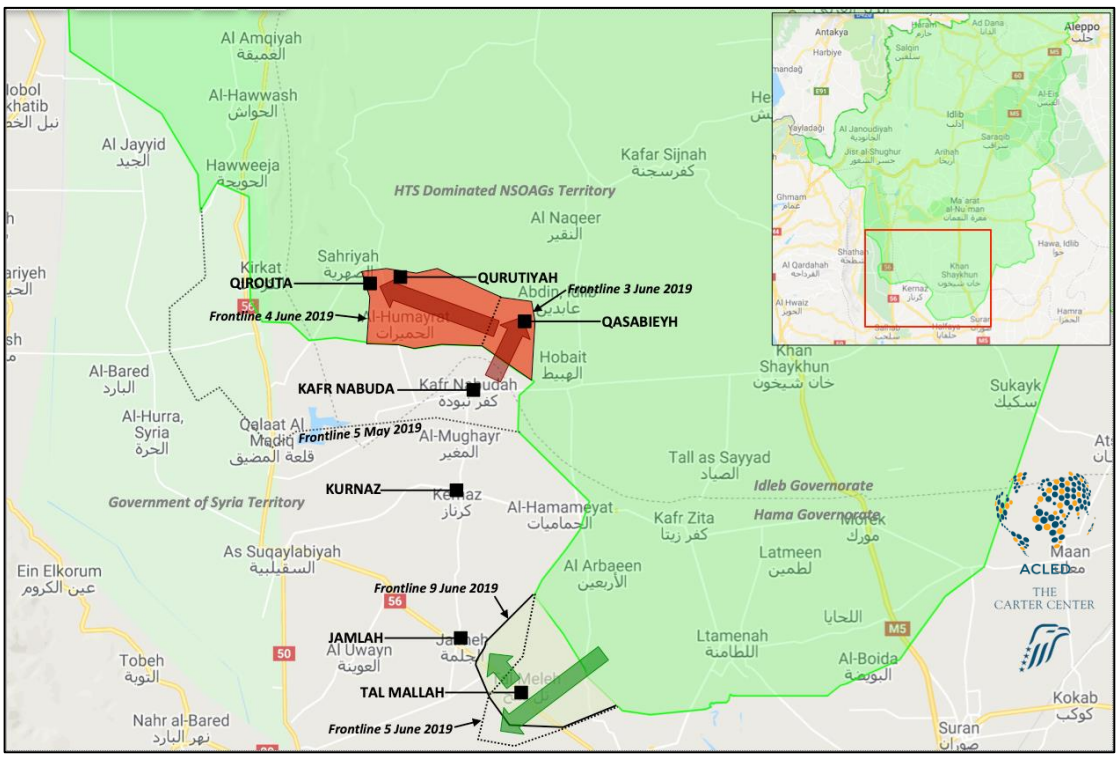


*Figure 2: Changes in Territorial Control in the northwest of Syria as of 9 June 2019.*

This activity coincided with elevated levels of airstrikes and shelling between both sides. A total of 227 events were recorded this week including 149 airstrikes and barrel bombings, as well as reported uses of internationally prohibited cluster munitions (Figure 3). Russian military advisers were pictured in Kurnaz town, assisting government forces, while a number of child soldiers were also pictured

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

being used by HTS in their latest action in northwest Syria this week.

*Figure 3: Total Conflict Activity in Northwest Syria in 2018/9*

HTS and other allied groups continued their shelling bombardments on government-dominated areas. This included Hama Airbase and the Jub al Rablah Helicopter base being struck by at least six long-range rockets and artillery bombardments. The latter was also targeted by weaponized drones for four consecutive nights. Aleppo City also saw three shelling bombardments in the Halab al Jadida, Manadaniyeh and Tishreen areas, while seven other government-held areas also witnessed bombardments during the week.[2]

Inside the HTS-dominated pocket, HTS began a new recruitment drive, arresting individuals as well as publishing recruitment posters across various locations in Idleb Governorate. They also continued to enforce local security in the region, with the group's police killing an alleged criminal during an arrest operation in Kafr Taal on 3 June.

Further north, several attacks were recorded in the Turkish-controlled Euphrates Shield/Operation Olive Branch areas in northern Aleppo. This included the 'Afrin Liberation Forces' reporting four separate ambushes against Turkish military and affiliated local forces on 5 and 6 June in the Sherawa, Jindires, Shera, and Azaz areas. Elsewhere, unidentified gunmen ambushed a local Turkish-backed NLF policeman driving between Afrin and Ma'btali on 8 June. This attack follows a day after two people were shot at a checkpoint near a Turkish-controlled training center in Ma'btali town.

Conflict between different actors in regularly reported is these areas, with Afrin, Azaz, Jindires, Shera, Sherawa, and Ma'btali towns recording 41% (65) of the 159

[2] As Suqaylabiyah, Hiyalin, Mustarihah, Qamhana, Salba, Shiekh Hadid and Shezer

conflict events recorded in the Turkish-controlled districts of Azaz and Afrin in 2019 so far. This activity has also remained consistent in 2019, with an average of 31 reported events occurring each month (Figure 4).

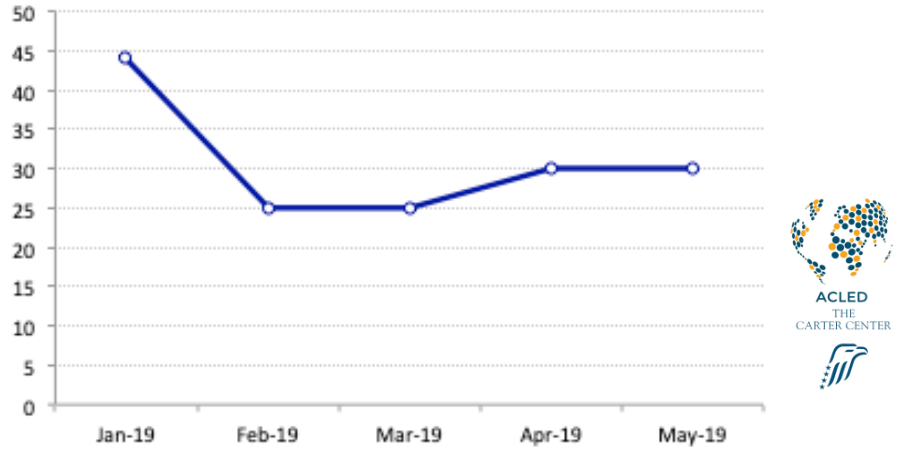


*Figure 4: Total Conflict Activity in Azaz and Afrin Districts.*

## SOUTH AND CENTRAL SYRIA

In southern Syria, attacks against government and aligned personnel, as well as former opposition members, continued this week. In Daraa Governorate, three events were recorded; in Saham al Golan, where Daraa Popular Resistance assassinated a former Ahrar ash Sham member, in Um Walid village where a Ba'ath party headquarters was attacked with small arms fire, and in Bosra al Hrair where an IED attack was recorded.

In As-Sweida Governorate, groups also targeted two intelligence buildings in As-Sweida City with rocket propelled grenades (RPGs) in separate attacks, while on 4 June, a 15th Special Forces Division[3] officer was assassinated in the Tareeq al Hajj area in western Sweida Governorate as he travelled in the area.

As reported on previously, such attacks have become increasingly common in southern Syria since November 2018, with 134 incident recorded. While over 80% of these incidents typically occur in Daraa Governorate, increasing numbers of attacks have been recorded in As Sweida Governorate, with nine incidents in the past month . This is one more than was recorded in January, February, March and April combined (Figure 5).

[3] The 15th Special Forces Division is a Syrian Military force based in As-Sweida Governorate.

*Figure 5: Attacks against Government and aligned forces in Daraa, As Sweida and Quneitra Governorate since August 2018.*

Elsewhere, ISIS claimed an IED attack between Nimr and Kherbet Ghazalah against a joint government/Iranian Republican Guard Corps (IRGC) patrol. While claimed by the official Telegram channel, the location of the attack is unusual, occurring outside their historically controlled area of the Yarmouk Basin in the southwest. Even at the height of their local affiliate's control, the Khalid Bin Walid Army's, their territory extended only as far north as Ahu Thaker and Tassil towns (Figure 6). However, if ISIS's responsibility for the events is confirmed, it would represent the first time ISIS activity has been recorded in southern Syria since the government takeover of the south in July 2018.

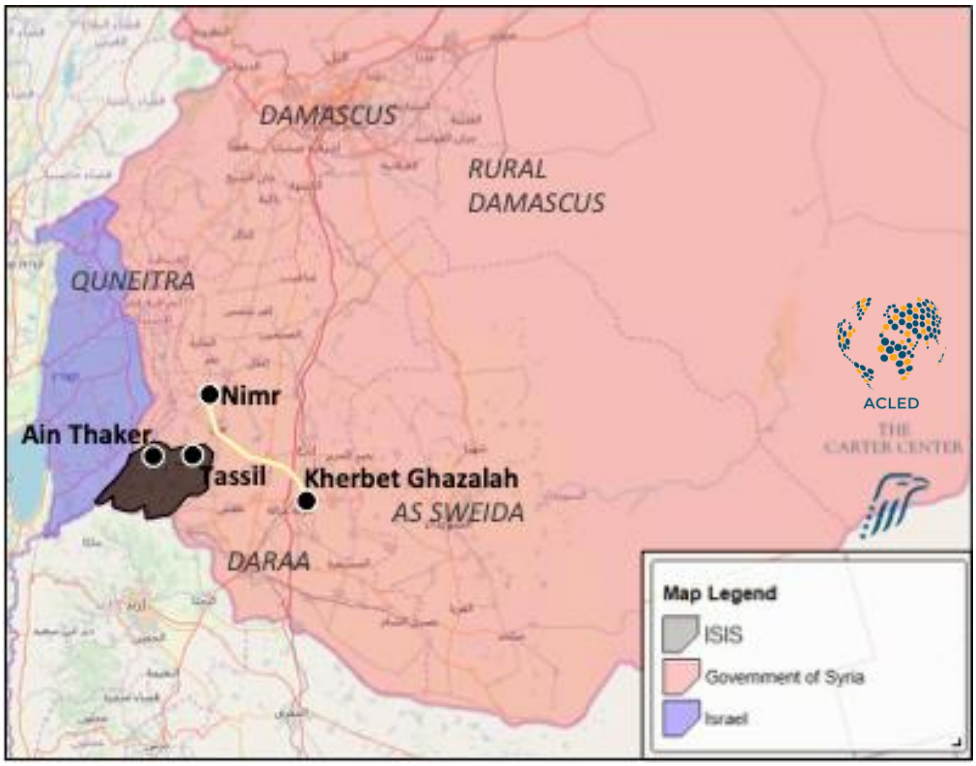


*Figure 6: Greatest extent of Khalid Bin Walid Army (ISIS) held areas in southern Syria mid 2018, with Nimr – Kherbet Ghazalah Road highlighted.*

ISIS activity was also recorded in central areas of the country. This week ISIS

ambushed government patrols in Harbisha town, al Boleel and Toob Villages in Deir Ez Zor Governorate, as well as in Rasafah in ar Raqqa Governorate. Pro-government reports also recorded attacks south of Homs City on 8 Jun and close to the T3 Station in eastern Homs a day later. Such activity continues previously mentioned trends of increasing ISIS activity in this area of Syria, and raised concerns from the government of Syria (Figure 7).

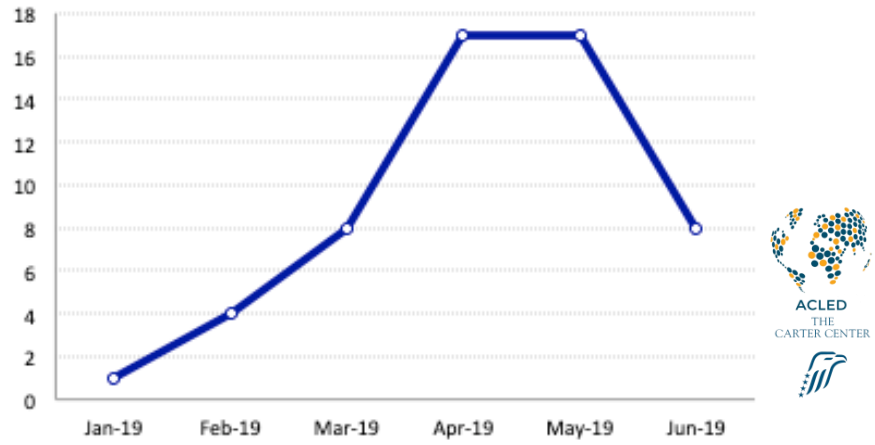


*Figure 7: Timeline of ISIS Attacks in Central Syria in 2019.*

On 5 June, reports claimed that anti-government graffiti appeared in Rastan town in northern Homs Governorate that called for people "to continue the revolution" and "overthrow the government". This is the first incident in the former opposition hub since it was taken by government forces after a surrender deal was agreed with the dominant opposition groups present in Homs in May 2018.

**NORTHEAST SYRIA**

Attacks against Syrian Democratic Forces and aligned actors continued along the Euphrates River Valley this week. Five small arms firing incidents and IED attacks were recorded in Basira (2), Shiheil (2), and Tayib al Fal village – all in Basira sub district. The attacks come despite the SDF conducting several large-scale security operations in recent weeks.

Two agricultural fires were recorded in the vicinity of Darbasiyah and Azaziyeh towns in Ras al Ein district. In the past three weeks, these incidents have become increasingly common in the northeast, due to a variety of factors such as arson, climate, and poor emergency service provision. The fires continue to raise long-term food security concerns.

An IED attack was recorded in Hasakeh City on 8 June when a device planted in a motorcycle detonated near the Basil Roundabout in the Ghoweran neighborhood. This is the seventh IED event in the city in 2019 so far. However, five of these have occurred since 8 May 2018 (Figure 8).

*Figure 8: Timeline of IED attacks in Hassakeh City 2018/9.*