



WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 28 OCTOBER – 3 NOVEMBER 2019

WHOLE OF SYRIA SUMMARY

- **NORTHWEST** | The Government of Syria (GoS) increased shelling and aerial activity in the Hayyat Tahrir ash Sham (HTS)-dominated northwest. Civilian demonstrations against HTS occurred in several locations in Idlib. There was also an increase in improvised explosive device (IED) activity in the Turkish-controlled areas of Aleppo Governorate. Elevated levels of conflict continued in the Tal Rifaat area.
- **SOUTH & CENTRAL** | Attacks against GoS-aligned personnel and former opposition members continued in central and southern Syria. In Quneitra Governorate, the Bustan Foundation was attacked for the third time in two months. GoS also conducted arrests around Damascus this week.
- **NORTHEAST** | Further changes in territorial control occurred in the northeast, as the Turkish-led invasion continues. IED attacks occurred in Tal Abiad, Hammam al Turkman, and Suluk. In addition to low-level attacks against Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in the Euphrates River and Khabour River Valleys, a clash between GoS-backed forces and SDF occurred near Deir ez Zor City.

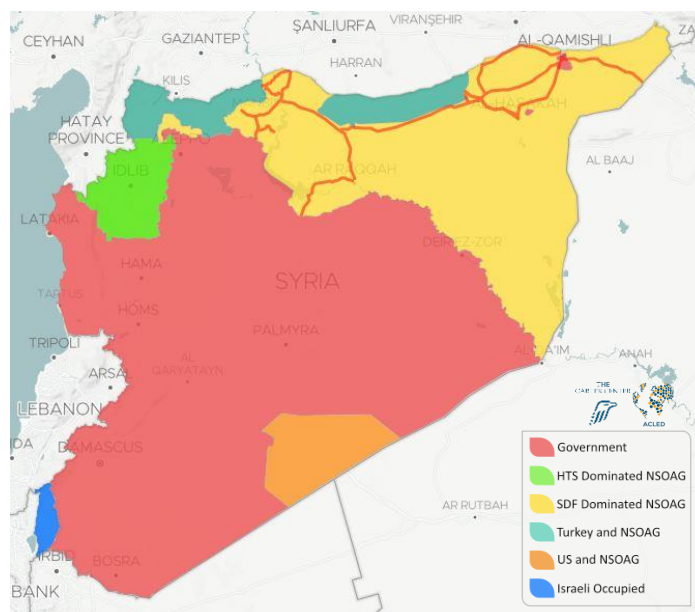


Figure 1: Dominant Actors' Area of Control and Influence in Syria as of 3 November 2019. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. Also, please see the footnote on page 2.

NORTHWEST SYRIA

In a departure from recent weeks, the GoS increased airstrikes in the northwest, with 50 events recorded in the Hayyat Tahrir ash Sham (HTS)-dominated enclave. GoS shelling levels also remained above the daily average of 2019 throughout the week (Figure 2).

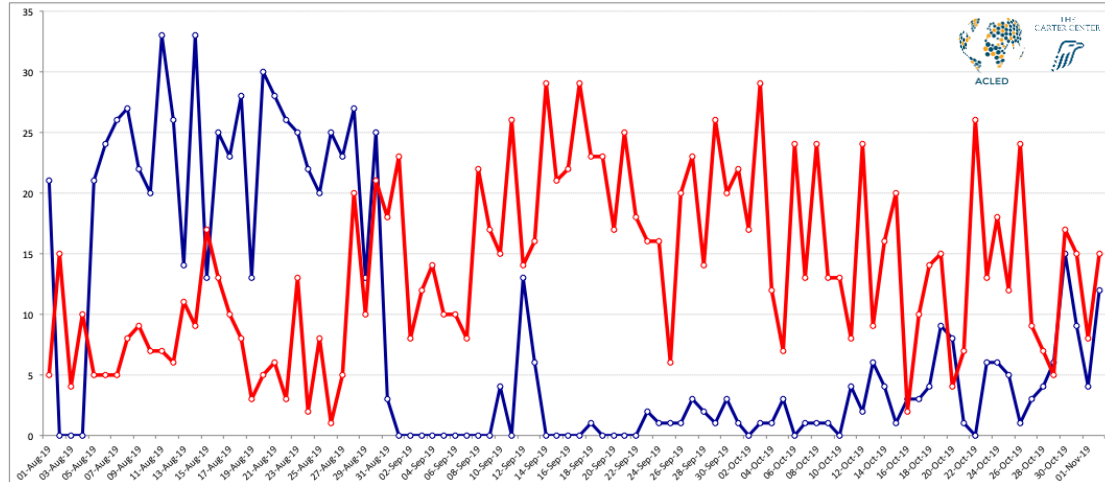


Figure 2: GoS aerial activity (Blue) and shelling (Red) in Northwest Syria since August 2019. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

The focus of GoS activity in the northwest was on the hill top town of Kabani, which saw 18 of this week's GoS airstrikes and shelling events, in addition to multiple armed clashes between GoS and aligned troops and HTS/Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP) members. Pro-government media [reported](#) that Russia also launched a cruise missile that struck the Kabani area on 1 November. No changes in territory were recorded.

For a second consecutive week, [evidence](#) of Hezbollah's involvement in the fighting in Kabani was also reported, with the death of a Hezbollah aligned Iranian adviser on 28 October. Pro-government [sources](#) also announced the arrival of the Russian-trained and backed 1st Division to northwest this week.

HTS and opposition group activity in GoS-dominated areas in the northwest remained steady this week, with the exception of an increase in armed clashes on 1 November that coincided with several HTS and TIP [attacks](#) behind GoS frontlines in the northwest of the Idleb enclave. There were 22 incidents of shelling and armed clashes recorded this week. The Russian Center for Reconciliation and Conflicting Sides [reported](#) opposition shelling impacted 14 settlements in the week (Figure 3).

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 Syrian government control. The US continues to have a presence in the SDF-controlled east of country. The 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 is sourced from ACLED.

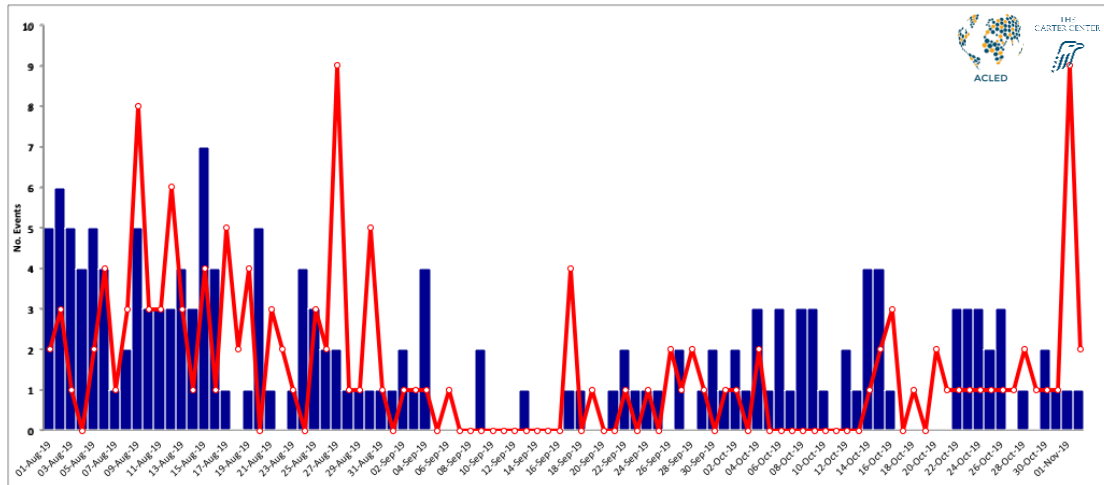


Figure 3: HTS and other groups shelling (blue) and armed clashes against (red) GoS held areas in Northwest Syria since 1 August. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

Inside the enclave, civilian demonstrations against HTS and its allied Salvation Government were reported in Idleb City, Maraat al Numan, and Benish on 1 November. The demonstrations occurred in areas that have had strong civil society networks in the past and come a week after HTS conducted several arrest operations against media activists in the northwest. In the past three months, HTS has arrested activists following demonstrations against the group.

An increase in improvised explosive device (IED) activity was reported in the Turkish-controlled areas of northern Aleppo Governorate on 31 October.² At least three vehicle born IEDs detonated in residential areas of Afrin town, Sharan, and Dweir Elhawa. Two IEDs detonated against a Faylaq al Sham vehicle in Sajou village and against a Sultan Murad Division location in Tal Elhawa.³ In Towryan and Tal Atiyeh villages, IEDs detonated without any clear target.

While IED activity is relatively common in the Turkish-backed areas of northern Aleppo (on average occurring 14 times a month), seven IED attacks in one day is uncommon for the region. Overall, IED use has been increasing steadily in 2019 (Figure 4).

Elevated conflict between the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) and Turkish and aligned forces in the Tal Rifaat area continued this week, with seven incidents of shelling and ground clashes recorded in the Maraanaz (x2 events), Al alqamiyyeh, Harbel, Malikiyyeh, Shawarighat al Arz, and Sheikh Issa areas. Levels of conflict have been heightened in the area for the past month and are currently at their highest point in 2019.

² The Operation Euphrates Shield areas are located between Jarablus and Azaz towns and the Operation Olive Branch areas are located in the Afrin District.

³ Faylaq al Sham and the Sultan Murad Brigades are two Turkish-backed Syrian groups part of the newly established National Army. They operate in northern Aleppo and the newly established Operation Peace Spring areas of northeast Syria.

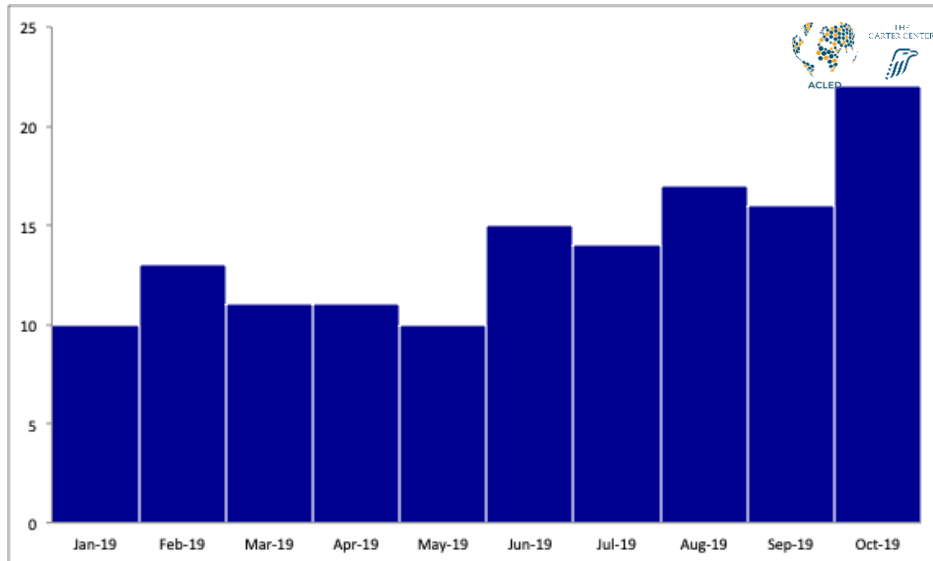


Figure 4: IED activity in Turkish backed areas of Northern Aleppo Governorate in 2019. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

Low-level attacks against GoS aligned personnel and former opposition members continued in the south. In Dael, Hrak, Mzireib, Ash Shajara, and Mlihet Elatash, unidentified gunmen shot dead two former opposition members, an alleged GoS collaborator, a former GoS policeman, and a local mayor. An Improvised Explosive Device (IED) also detonated against GoS military vehicle on the Jasim – Ankhel Road. Although it is only the 29th recorded IED event in southern Syria this year, nearly 70% (20) of these attacks have occurred in the past quarter alone (Figure 5).

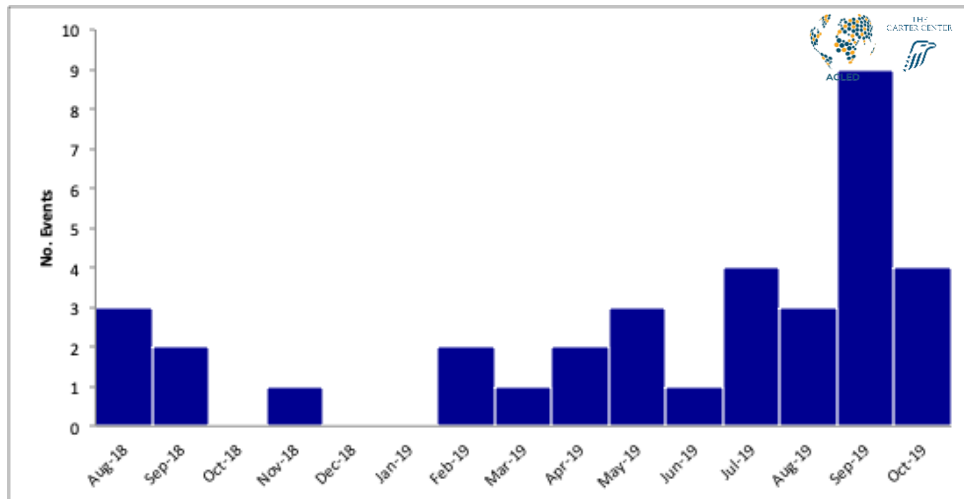


Figure 5: IED attacks in Southern Syria since August 2018. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

In Quneitra Governorate, unidentified gunmen set on fire several cars belonging to the Al-Bustan Foundation⁴ on 28 October in Khan Arnaba town. The incident follows two attacks against the Bustan Foundation and its allied militia, the Bustan

⁴ The Al Bustan Foundation is a Syria charity headed by Rami Makhoul, a US sanctioned individual.

Brigades, on 16 and 27 September in nearby Jbhat al Khashab town. These were previously reported [here](#).

Ongoing ISIS activity against GoS forces continued in central areas of Syria. On 29 October, ISIS ambushed a joint Syrian military/National Defense Force patrol in the al Kour Desert area east of Al Mayadeen. Pro-opposition sources also [reported](#) three IED attacks against a 17th Division Patrol near Abu Kamal, Deir Ez Zor, and between Sokhneh and Tadmor towns. ISIS activity remains elevated despite several GoS operations against ISIS in recent months (Figure 6)

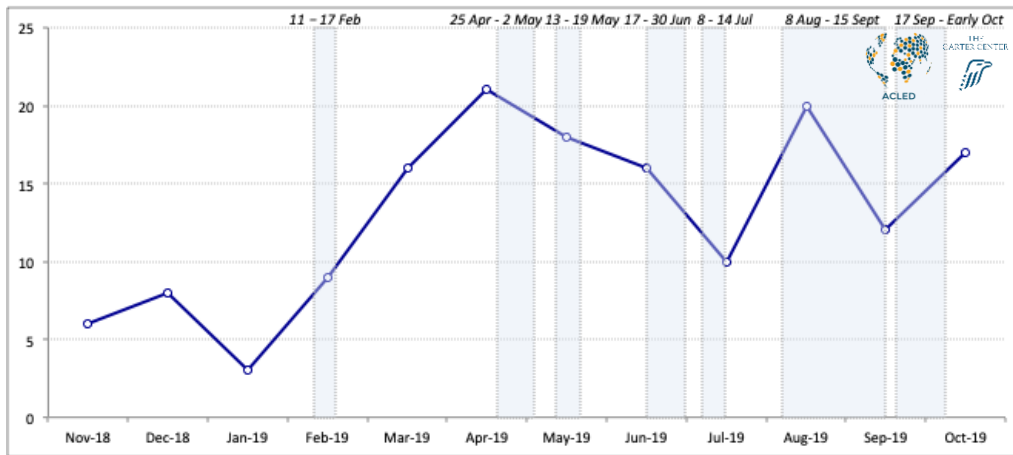


Figure 6: ISIS linked activity in GoS held Homs, Deir Ez Zor and Raqqa Governorates since November 2018, with GoS ISIS clearance operations in central Syria highlighted in blue. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

Further GoS arrests were reported around Damascus this week, with tens of civilians and former opposition members detained in raids in Harasta and Duma on 2 November. The moves come after arrest operations in Beit Saham, Babilla, Yarmouk Camp, Yalda, and Zabadani last week for unknown reasons. ACLED also reported several cases of sexual assault and rape against women by GoS forces in the Harasta, Duma, Misraba, and Hamouriyah area of Eastern Ghouta.

NORTHEAST SYRIA

Further changes in territorial control were reported in the northeast as part of the ongoing Turkish incursion into Hassakah and Raqqa Governorates. As part of a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) (MoU) signed by Turkey and Russia the previous week, Turkish-backed groups moved into 17 communities between Tal Abiad and Ras al Ain after the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) withdrew on 28 October.⁵

⁵ Areas in Al Hassakeh and Raqqa Governorates that changed from SDF control to Turkish backed groups control on 28 October were: Asadiyah, Al Qusayr, Aluk Sharkiyeh, Aniq al Hawa, Bir Nuh, Dallah, Halawa, Hilwah, Jamalo, Jan Tamr Gharbi, Katouf, Katouf Janoubi, Kherbit al Khadra, Khirbat Hammoud, Mdayna, Qarbit Farm, and Yaqodiyeh villages.

Turkish-backed groups⁶ captured an additional 52 communities⁷ from the SDF, but the SDF recaptured five communities⁸ from Turkish-backed groups, during the week.

During the fighting, 25 communities⁹ experienced prolonged ground clashes and/or shelling exchanges between the two sides throughout the week. GoS troops, deployed in areas between Ras al Ain and Tal Tamr last week, also clashed with Turkish-backed groups in the vicinity of Tal Tamr. In Abu Rasin, Turkish-backed groups captured 18 GoS soldiers on 29 October. The soldiers were repatriated on 1 November after [discussions](#) between Turkey and Russia. *For a summary of the above changes, see Figure 7 below:*

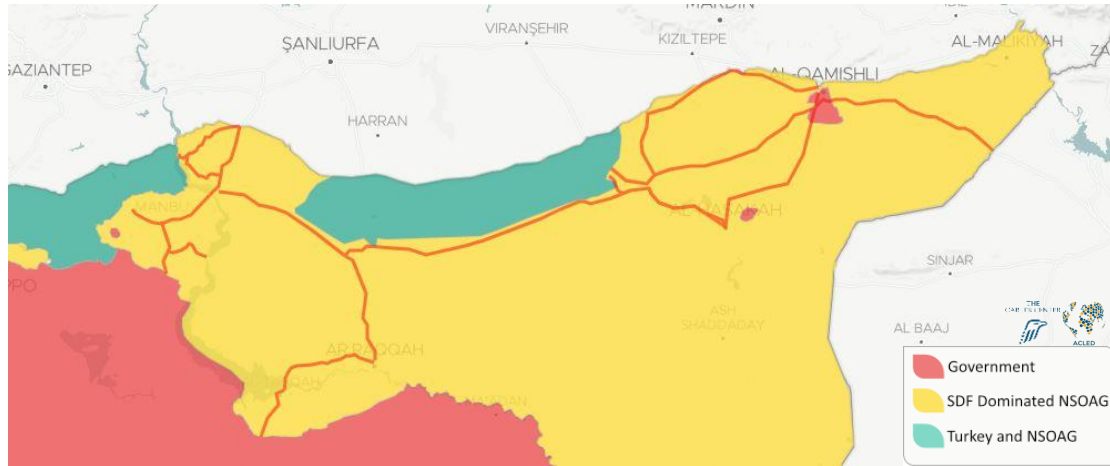


Figure 5: Recent Turkish and aligned group's advances into northern Syria in October and November 2019. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

Three IED attacks against Turkish-backed group locations or patrols occurred in Tal Abiad, Hammam al Turkman, and Suluk. The attacks come after four IED attacks in the same areas last week.

The US military conducted four patrols between Tal Tamr and Darbasiyah, in

⁶ Syrian opposition groups are fighting as the Syrian National Army (SNA), the main ground force of the Turkish-backed invasion – Operation Peace Spring in Northeast Syria. The SNA was established in October 2019 and is made up of the National Liberation Front and Syria National Army, two of the largest local Syrian opposition factions in the Turkish-backed areas of northern Aleppo Governorate (Operation Euphrates Shield and Operation Olive Branch). The SNA is under the command of the opposition's Syrian Interim Government (SIG).

⁷ Including Al Amirat, Assadiyah, Abbah, Aboush, Al Hajj, Al Muharrama, Al Matmouriyyeh, Al Silmasa, Al Nowihat, Abd al Hay, As Safeh, Al Sanqliya, Areeshah, Beit al Abda, Bab Ferec, Bab al Khair, Beit al Hawas, Bairir, Dada Abdal, Doudiyah, Khankhar, Khirbet Jammu, Khirbet Farraj, Hami Aishi, Inegil Hawa, Jamous, Jakima, Jan Tamr al Sharqi, Mahmoudiyah, Madhaba'a, Maqsa'a, Mubarakiyeh, Muraykiz, Morit, Qasemiyeh, Ramadan, Rihaniyet, Sinaqli, Shiekh Ali, Tal Amir, Tal al Daiabiyeh, Tal Al Asafirin, Tal Bayda, Tal Mohammad, Tal Qartal, Tal Al Shibli, Um al Safir, Western Abdel Salam, Western Darbasiyah Countryside, Um Asba, Um Erit, Um Haml, and Um Shaif

⁸ The five areas the SDF captured from Turkish backed groups were Rajla, al Hamra, Al Manakh, al Sibatiyyeh, and Abu Rasin.

⁹ Including; Areedah, Abu Rasin, Aniq El Hawa, Aziza (x2), Dawdi, Dardara, Jamilyeh (x2), Masheirfeh Sharqiyyeh, Nsweihat, Qasmiyah, Qahera, Rashadiyyeh, Salhiyah (near Tal Tamr), Sibatyah, Tal Tamr, Tal Warda (x2), Um al Keir, Near Ein Issa – Jabriyah road, Sharkrak, Tina, and western Suburbs of Tal Abiad.

Hamu Village near Qamishli City, in Qahtaniyyah village, and between Rmelan, Jawadiyah, Yarubiyah, and Al Malikiyah during the week. These are the first patrols by US forces in the northeast in the past three weeks. It is uncertain what security mechanism these patrols fall under as Russia also began patrolling areas in the northeast as part of their recent MoU with Turkey. Russian forces conducted patrols on 30 October near Qamishli city, and on 2 November between Amuda to Darbasiyah. Turkish troops accompanied Russian forces on the patrol from Amuda to Darbasiyah on 2 November.

In addition to attacks against SDF personnel stationed along the Euphrates River and Khabour River Valleys¹⁰, a prolonged armed clash between the GoS-backed National Defense Forces (NDF) and SDF occurred in Hussainiyah town near Deir Ez Zor City on 29 October. SDF forces were supported by US artillery and airstrikes. It is only the seventh time the two sides have clashed on the ground in 2019.¹¹

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¹⁰ At least 12 attacks were recorded in Shiheil (x6), Hawayij, (x2) Hajin, Jdid Ekeidat, Moezleh, and Thiban towns.

¹¹ After clashes between the SDF and GoS and aligned actors on 2 October (Bahra and Salhiyah), April (northeast outskirts of Deir Ez Zor City), and January (in Jdid Bakara, Jdid Ekeidat, and Khasham).