



WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 5-11 April 2021

SYRIA SUMMARY

- HTS initiated a new security campaign against its rivals in opposition-controlled territory.
- Israel conducted airstrikes against Iranian-backed militias in Damascus and Rural Damascus Governorates.
- The predominantly Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces continued operations against ISIS in northeast Syria.

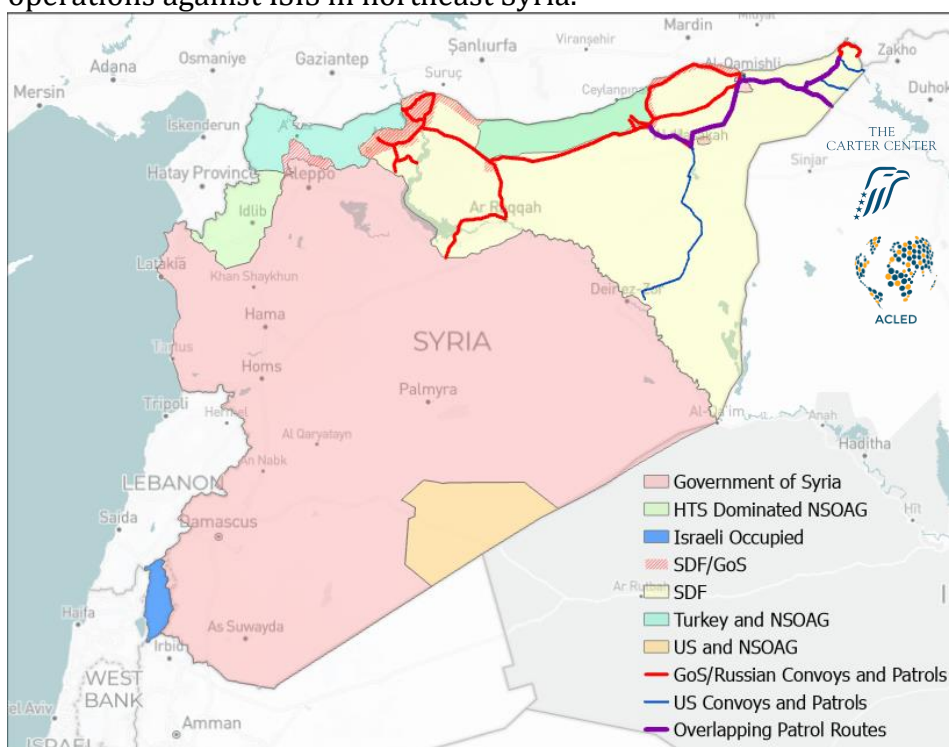


Figure 1: Dominant actors' area of control and influence in Syria as of 11 April 2021.-NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. Also, please see footnote 1.

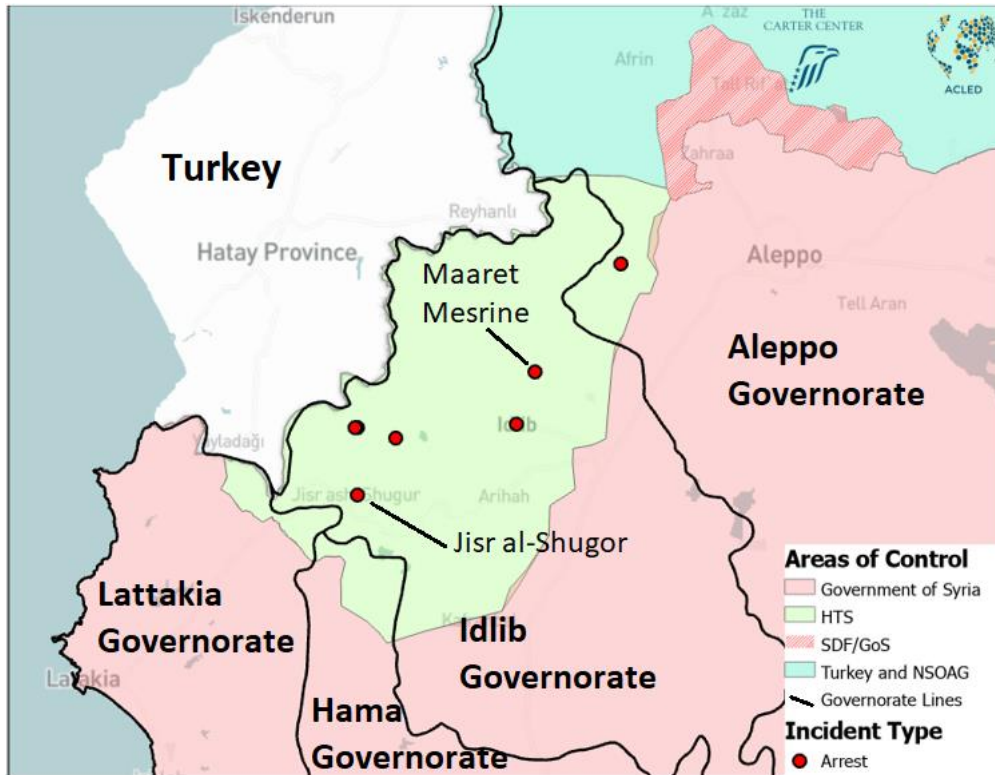
NORTHWEST SYRIA¹

Figure 2: HTS raids and arrests in opposition-controlled territory between 5-11 April 2021. Data from The Carter Center and ACLED.

HTS Crackdown

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) is continuing attacks against defectors from its own ranks and armed groups perceived as undermining its authority, particularly the Al-Qaeda affiliate Hurras al-Din (HD). The HTS crackdown on HD and other rival groups started in February 2021.² This campaign coincides with HTS's attempts to gain international recognition and present itself as a moderate part of the Syrian opposition.

5 April

¹ Figure 1 depicts areas of the dominant actors' control and influence. While "control" is a relative term in a complex, dynamic conflict, territorial control is defined as an entity having power over use of force as well as civil/administrative functions in an area. Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah maintain a presence in Syrian government-controlled territory. Non-state organized armed groups (NSOAG), including the Kurdish-dominated SDF and Turkish-backed opposition groups operate in areas not under GoS control. 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. Patrols are also depicted in the map to show the presence of actors that may have influence in an area. This is particularly relevant as US and Russian forces regularly patrol towns and routes in the northeast. While they do not control local administration or local forces, there is an assumption of a high degree of coordination with local de facto authorities. Data collected is by the publicly available project [ACLED](#).

² <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2021/02/syria-idlib-hayat-tahrir-al-sham-al-qaeda-arrest-weaken.html> , <https://tinyurl.com/xhc4kd2a>

HTS launched a security campaign targeting headquarters and fighters associated with HD and Ansar al-Islam³ located near Jisr al-Shughour and Idlib city, Idlib Governorate.⁴⁵

6 April

HTS announced the arrest of HD leader Abu Dhar al-Masri in Maaret Mesrine, Idlib Governorate. Al-Masri was thought to have been killed by a US drone strike on October 15, 2020.⁶

11 April

Abu Al-Abd Asheda, a former HTS and later Tansiqiyat al-Jihad leader, published a video criticizing HTS and its leader, Mohammed al-Jolani.⁷ In the video, he claimed that HTS undermined the opposition's defenses of Aleppo city in 2016, and denounced the conditions of HTS-run prisons.⁸ HTS has arrested routinely those criticize its policies or leader.

SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

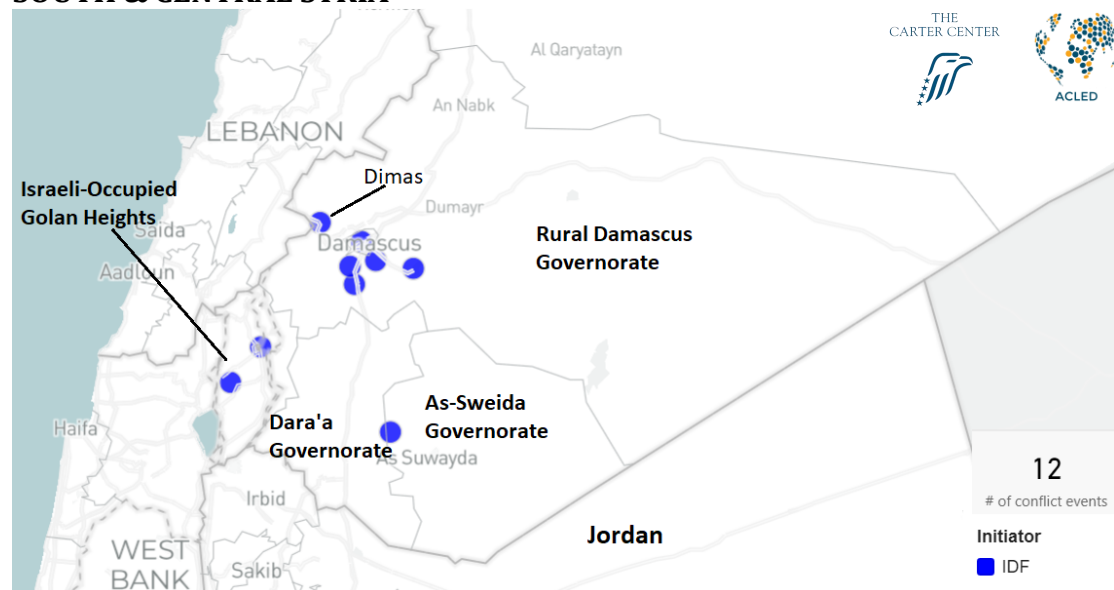


Figure 3: Israeli airstrikes in southern Syria since 1 January 2021. Data from The Carter Center and ACLED.

Israeli Airstrikes in Southern Syria

Israel regularly conducts airstrikes across Syria against Iranian and GoS targets, but rarely comments on its attacks.^{9 10 11} Attacks targeting Israeli armed forces in the occupied Golan Heights has also provoked response. In 2021, the pace of

³ <https://tinyurl.com/6wk5p8nh>

⁴ <https://tinyurl.com/6wk5p8nh>

⁵ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/471890>

⁶ <https://www.zamanalwsl.net/news/article/136159/>

⁷ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/473228>

⁸ <https://tinyurl.com/4v45dr2f>

⁹ Iranian-backed militias refers to armed groups that are supported by Iran, like Hezbollah, and include militias from Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan, or Pakistan.

¹⁰ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/432892>

¹¹ <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/syria-iran-israel-strikes-kill-fighters>

Israeli airstrikes has increased. Most Israeli airstrikes are conducted in cities near the Syria-Iraq border, Deir-ez-Zor Governorate.

8 April

Israel conducted airstrikes against GoS armed forces and Iranian-backed militias in Damascus and near Dimas, Rural Damascus Governorate.¹² Pro-GoS newspapers reported that 4 GoS soldiers were wounded in the airstrikes, while pro-opposition websites claimed 3 Iranian-backed fighters were killed.¹³ This was the 8th Israeli airstrike targeting Damascus and Rural Damascus Governorate in 2021.¹⁴ Pro-GoS newspapers said air defense forces responded and shot down some of the Israeli missiles.¹⁵ GoS reportedly filed a complaint with the UN Security Council and called upon the organization to hold Israel responsible for its “crimes and terrorism against the Syrian people”.¹⁶

NORTHEAST SYRIA

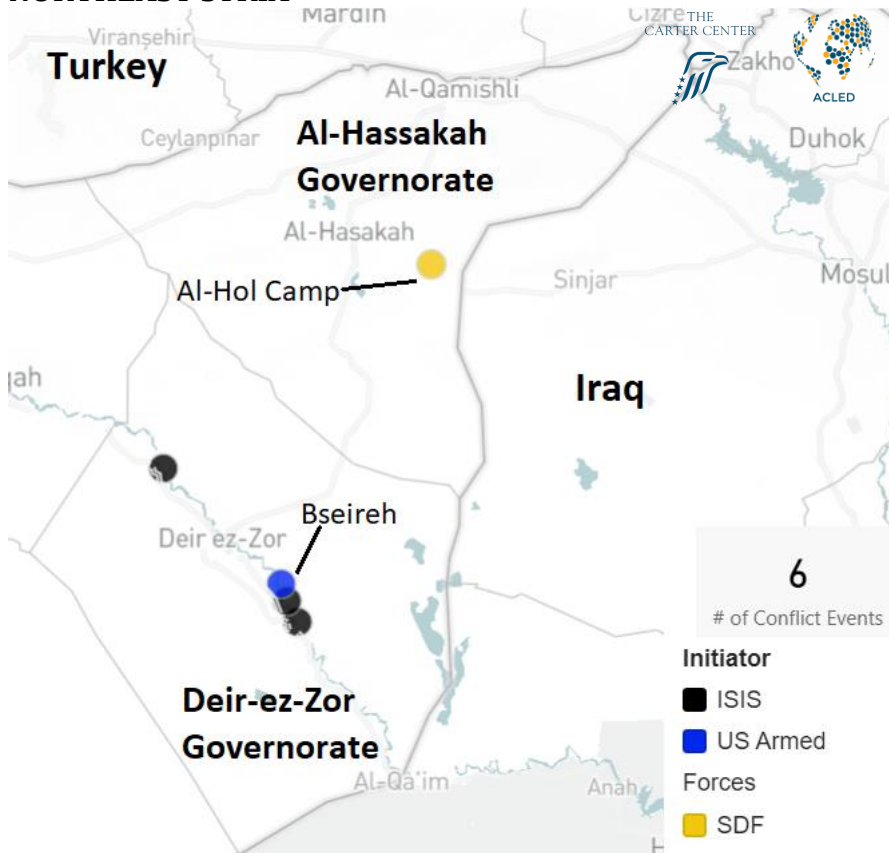


Figure 4: Conflict events between the SDF and US armed forces against ISIS 5-11 April 2021. Data from The Carter Center and ACLED.

The Battle Against ISIS

¹² <https://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/syrian-air-defenses-respond-to-strike-in-damascus-syrian-state-media-664455>, <https://tinyurl.com/ymezahbm3>

¹³ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/syria-says-4-soldiers-wounded-in-israeli-airstrikes-near-damascus/>

¹⁴ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/472500>

¹⁵ http://www.sana.sy/?p=1355009&tg_rhash=d4b381eabcd5f1

¹⁶ <https://sana.sy/en/?p=229149>

Since the start of 2021, there has been a sharp escalation of ISIS attacks,¹⁷ particularly in the Badia desert region of central and northeast Syria. Multiple operations against ISIS have had limited success. At times, operations by the predominantly Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have exacerbated tensions between the Kurdish Autonomous Administration (KAA) and Arab tribes in northeast Syria.

7 April

During an ongoing operation to clear Al-Hol camp, Al-Hassakah Governorate, of ISIS fighters, SDF arrested 4 people accused of smuggling weapons in the camp.¹⁸

9 April

An ISIS-planted improvised explosive device (IED) explosion killed 4 SDF fighters and a SDF commander in Shiheil, eastern Deir-ez-Zor Governorate.¹⁹ The same day, ISIS attempted but failed to kill a KAA official in Harmushi, Deir-ez-Zor Governorate.²⁰ The next day, ISIS issued a statement claiming responsibility for both attacks.²¹

10 April

U.S. armed forces working with the SDF arrested two local ISIS leaders in Bseireh, eastern Deir-ez-Zor Governorate.²²

For earlier weekly conflict summaries, please click [here](#).

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¹⁷ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-55887870>

¹⁸ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/472462>

¹⁹ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/472760>

²⁰ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/472919>

²¹ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/472919>

²² <https://npasyria.com/en/57339/>