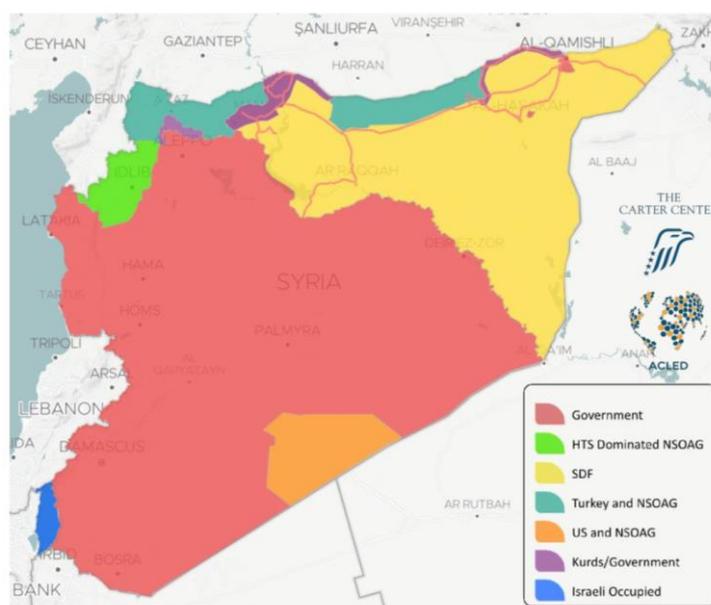




**WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 16 - 22 MARCH 2020**

**WHOLE OF SYRIA SUMMARY**

- **NORTHWEST** | For the second consecutive week, levels of conflict in the northwest remained low. Turkey continued to send personnel and equipment into northwest Syria and established four new observation posts. Turkey also conducted four patrols along the M4 highway. Again, protesters blocked the highway at Jisr Ariha. In the Turkish Operation Euphrates Shield areas and the Tall Rifaat area, there were increases in conflict activity.
- **SOUTH & CENTRAL** | There were signs of increased resistance against GoS's presence in southern Syria, with three coordinated attacks in Alma, Nawa and Jlein.
- **NORTHEAST** | Attacks against infrastructure targeted the Qatariji Company near Raqqa City, as well as municipal buildings in Shadadah and Tabqa. Inside the Turkish Operation Peace Spring area, opposition armed groups continued to loot commercial, residential, and public buildings. Opposition armed groups also protested in Ras al Ain and Tal Abiad over Turkey not paying their salaries. Attacks against mainly Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) militias in northeast Syria also continued.



*Figure 1: Dominant actors' area of control and influence in Syria as of 21 March 2020. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. Also, please see the footnote on page 2.*

## NORTHWEST SYRIA

Reduced levels of conflict continued in northwest Syria as the 5 March Turkish/Russian ceasefire agreement remained in place. For the second consecutive week, there were no cases of GoS/Russian airstrikes in the northwest. On the ground, there were just nine shelling exchanges in eight locations<sup>2</sup>, and three ground clashes<sup>3</sup>.

Turkey continued to send personnel and equipment into northwest Syria. According to ACLED, five military convoys totaling 310 vehicles crossed into Syria at the Kafr Lussin Border during the week.<sup>4</sup> The highest number of Turkish military crossings into northwest Syria in the past year was recorded during the past two months (Figure 2). Turkey also established new military observation posts in Jeineh, Bsanqul, Kafr Noran, and Ram Hamdan towns during the reporting week. GoS brought re-enforcements to the northwest, with contingents of military personnel arriving in the Jabal Zaiyah area of Idleb, as well as Saraqab frontlines. Iranian backed militias and Hezbollah also arrived in the Saraqab area.

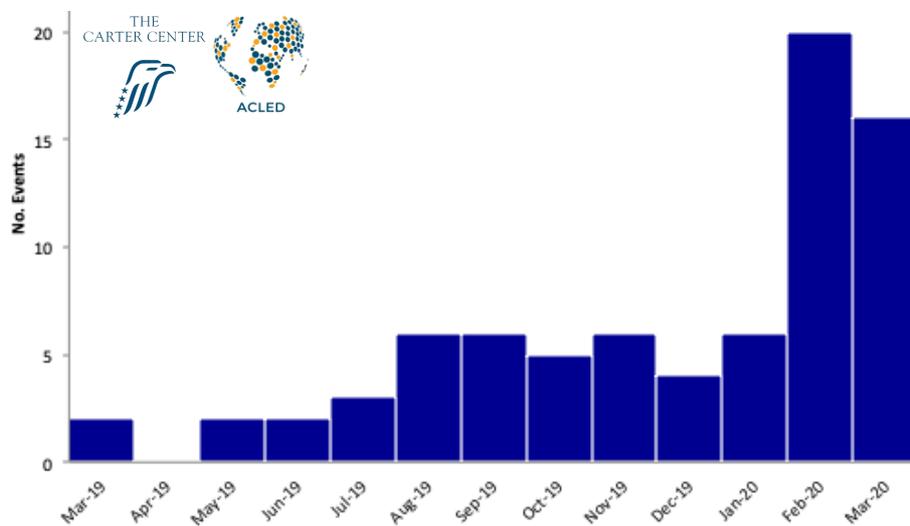


Figure 2: Turkish Military Arrivals to Northwest Syria. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

Turkey also conducted four military patrols along the M4 highway in the Ariha district of Idleb as part of the 5 March Russia/Turkey agreement. However, resistance against these patrols continued. Civilian protesters erected earthen barriers over the highway near Nayrab town, blocking access for the joint patrols, adding to the barriers placed last week near Jisr Ariha. Two improvised explosive

<sup>1</sup> 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 control. The US continues to have a presence in the SDF-controlled east of the country. The area along the border junction 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.

<sup>2</sup> GoS shelled Ftireh (x2), Sfuhen, Najiyeh, Hadadah, Khadra and Kabani. HTS/Opposition groups shelled GoS locations in southern Idleb Governorate and Najiyeh

<sup>3</sup> in Bara, Fitireh and Hazarin

<sup>4</sup> This builds on the previous two weeks of Turkish Military arrivals and brings the total number of Turkish military vehicles entering northwest Syria since 5 March to 710 according to ACLED.

devices (IEDs) also detonated as a Turkish patrol passed Mhambal on 19 March, a first against a Turkish patrol according to ACLED data.

In the Turkish backed Euphrates Shield areas of Northern Aleppo, violence targeting civilians increased. In Basuta, the opposition's Hamza Division shot and killed a civilian at a checkpoint; in Afrin, an armed group kidnapped a civilian living in the Sinaa neighborhood; and in Jandarisi, an armed group shot and killed an internally displaced person (IDP) travelling near the town. Two IEDs also detonated in residential areas in Afrin and Azaz.

Also, conflict levels remained elevated in the Tal Rifaat area for a second consecutive month. ACLED recorded 21 shelling exchanges in 18 areas<sup>5</sup>. Last month saw the highest recorded conflict levels in the enclave in over a year.

## **SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA**

This week, three separate, coordinated armed attacks took place against GoS locations in the region.

On 16 March, gunmen attacked simultaneously multiple Air force Intelligence checkpoints in Alma and Sura towns in eastern Daraa Governorate. Two days later, in Nawa, in western Daraa Governorate, gunmen attacked multiple locations, including a political security branch and a military security building. On the same day, in nearby Jlein town, widespread armed clashes erupted between the 5<sup>th</sup> Division and local residents after GoS security units fired on three local reconciliation committee members and former opposition group commanders. The three-committee members had arrived to mediate between local residents who were protesting a newly established 5<sup>th</sup> division checkpoint in the Masakin Jlein area. GoS then shelled the town for hours before a secession of hostilities could be negotiated.

This marked the second such violent flareup in southern Syria. On 1 March, prolonged clashes between GoS and former opposition armed groups in As Sanamayn led to the GoS forces to encircle the town and to shell it. These clashes come a week after GoS sent re-enforcements to southern Syria to improve security. Since the start of 2020, attacks against fortified GoS locations in southern Syria (i.e., checkpoints, government buildings and bases) have increased (Figure 3).

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<sup>5</sup> Tal Rifaat, Soghunaka (x2), Aqibah (x2), Shiekh Issa, Harbal, Kafr Antoun (x2), Deir Jamal, Shirawa, Shiekh Issa, Ziyara Afrin, Maraanaz, Tatemrash, Shawarighat al Arz Rashideh, Al Malikeyyeh front, Tal Ajar, Al Alqamiyyeh, and Mare'.

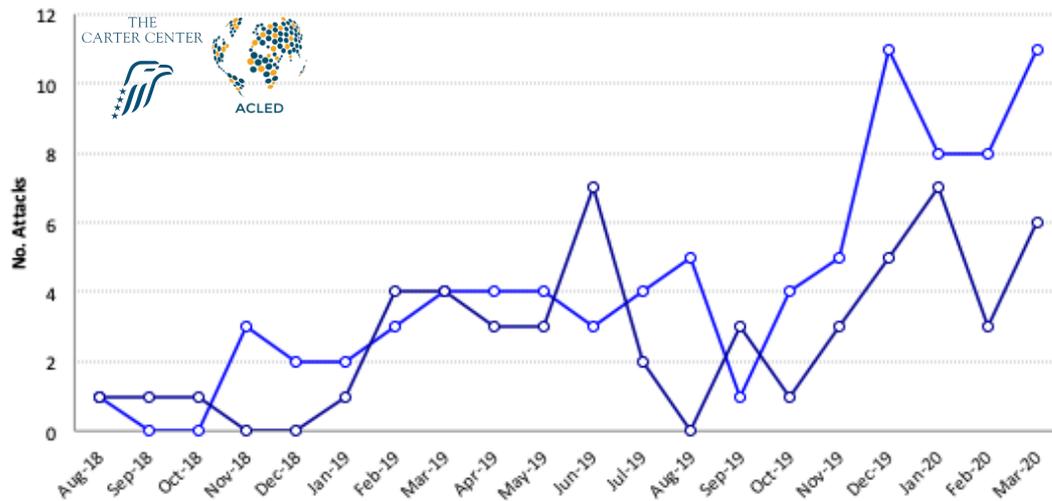


Figure 3: Attacks against GoS checkpoints (Light Blue) and GoS Sites/Buildings/Bases (Dark Blue) since August 2018. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

## NORTHEAST SYRIA

Attacks against infrastructure in the northeast continued this week. In Shadadah, an IED detonated near the traffic management building. In Taqba, a device detonated in the local fire station and, for the second consecutive week, an IED detonated targeting a Qatirji Oil Company truck on the Minkhar road near Karama. According to ACLED, in the last 12 months, 53% of all attacks against infrastructure in northeast Syria have occurred in three locations; in Raqqa City, the Omar Oil Field and Shiheil (Figure 4).<sup>6</sup>

Around Turkish occupied Operation Peace Spring areas, shelling and small arms fire exchanges between Turkish-backed groups and the joint largely Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and GoS forces continued.<sup>7</sup> GoS sent reinforcements to Ain Issa town during the week. On 18 March, ACLED recorded 150 GoS military vehicles arriving in the town.

Inside Operation Peace Spring, Turkish-backed opposition armed groups protested in Ras al Ain and Tal Abiad on 17 March against their salaries not being paid by Turkey. The opposition groups burned tires and blocked traffic. These are the first protests against Turkey since Operation Peace Spring began. Turkish-backed opposition armed groups also continued looting in the Turkish occupied parts of NE Syria. They looted agricultural equipment and generators in Knihar, Drak, and al Said villages. They also looted public buildings in Um Ashba.

Attacks against the SDF and civilians also continued in the northeast. Armed groups attacked SDF patrols or checkpoints in Markada, Raqqa City, Al Zar, Abu Rasin, Qantarj, and Basira. Gunman also shot and killed civilians in Darnaj and Hawaii, resulting in the victims' families retaliating against IDPs living in Shiheil

<sup>6</sup> According to ACLED, there were 45 attacks on oil infrastructure, 34 attacks on public buildings, and 5 attacks on water and electricity sites since 1 January 2019, with 21% (18) of these incidents targeting Ar Raqqa City, 19% (16) the Omar Oil Field, and 13% (11) the Shiheil area.

<sup>7</sup> With events focused on Tal Ward Sharqi, Rubayat, Abu Rasin, Um al Kayf, Tawileh, North of Ein Issa (x2), Hushan, Khalidiyeh, Khirbat Karm, Salib, Arida Abu Jarda, and Qazali.

who allegedly were responsible for the attack on the village.

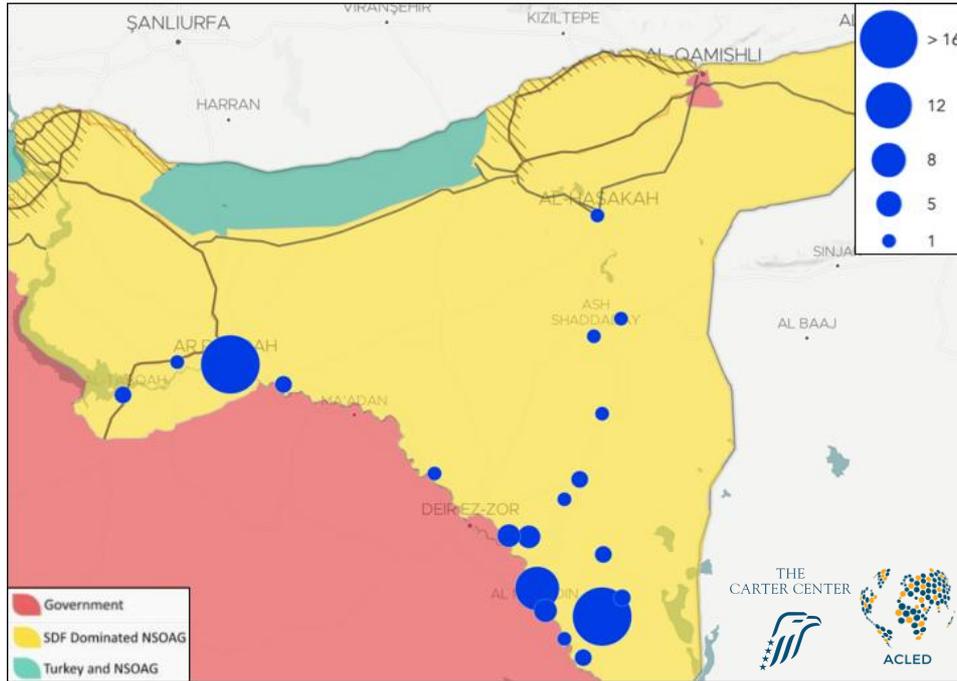


Figure 4: Attacks against oil infrastructure, public buildings and water and electricity sites in northeast Syria since 1 January 2019. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

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