



Quarterly Review | April through June 2021

**SYRIA SUMMARY**

- **NORTHWEST** | Violence continued between Government of Syria (GoS) armed forces and armed opposition groups in northwest Syria. Conflict between Turkish armed forces and Kurdish armed groups escalated in northern Syria. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham arrested its rivals within opposition-controlled territory.
- **SOUTH & CENTRAL** | The Syrian presidential election led to widespread protests in Dara'a Governorate. Attacks against GoS and former opposition groups escalated in southern Syria, leading to sieges in Quneitra and Dara'a Governorates.
- **NORTHEAST** | GoS armed forces and the predominantly Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) continued operations against ISIS. GoS and the Kurdish Autonomous Administration criticized Turkey for restricting the water flow of the Euphrates River, raising concerns of a water crisis in Syria and Iraq. Tensions between GoS and the SDF escalated into clashes in Qamishli city.

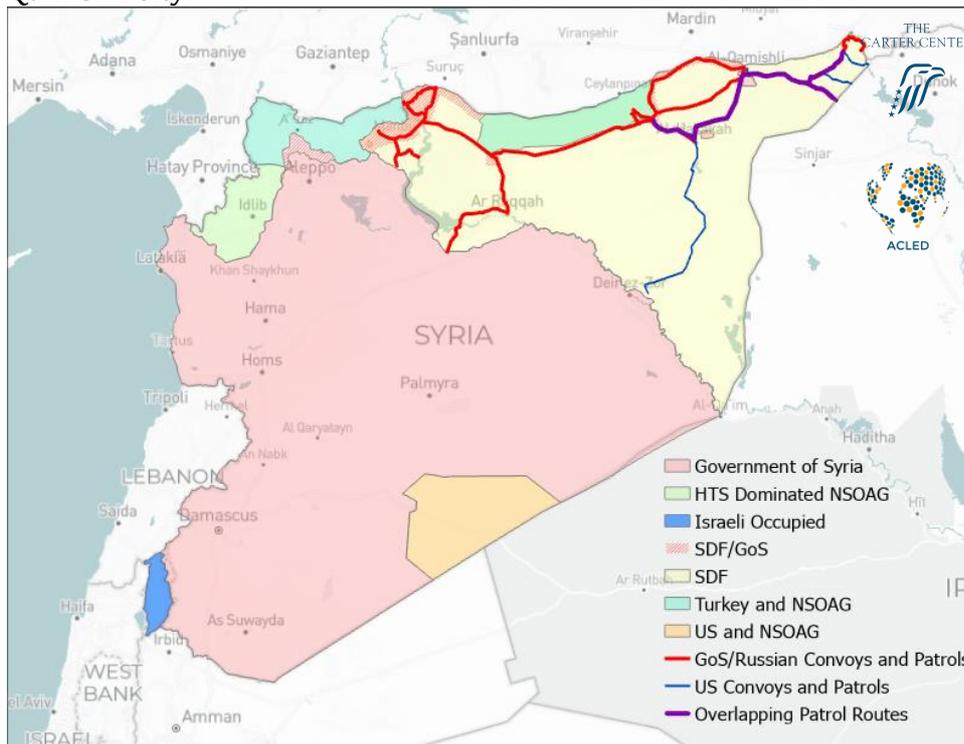


Figure 1: Dominant actors' area of control and influence in Syria as of 30 June 2021.-NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. Please see footnote 1 for more details.

For earlier weekly conflict summaries, please click [here](#). For an interactive map of historical areas of control in Syria, please click [here](#).

**OVERVIEW OF NORTHWEST SYRIA<sup>1</sup>**



Figure 2: Areas of control in northwest Syria. Data from The Carter Center and [ACLEED](#).

Although the Turkish-Russian joint patrols along the M4 highway in Idlib Governorate remain suspended,<sup>2</sup> the 5 March 2020 ceasefire remains in force with the absence of any new military operations. Clashes and shelling along the frontlines in northwest Syria remained consistent from April to June, driving tensions and impacting civilians in Government of Syria (GoS) and opposition-controlled territory.

<sup>1</sup> 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 [ACLEED](#).

<sup>2</sup> <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/1448db5d143a43c6a6570250c1329f10>

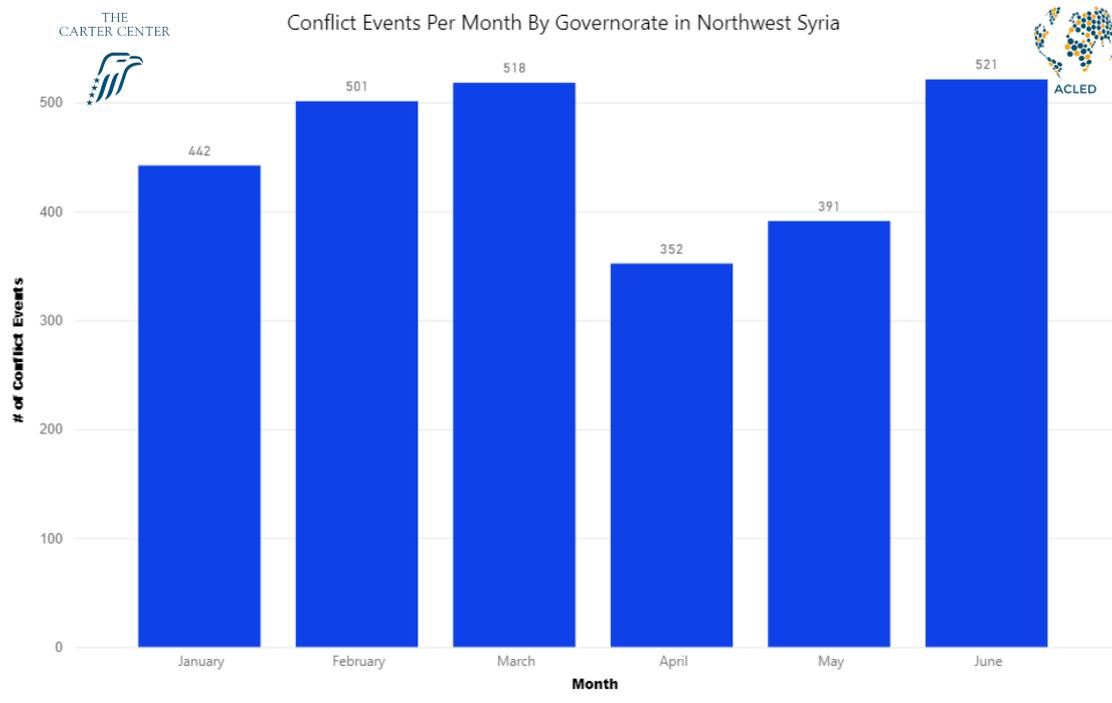


Figure 3: Comparison of conflict events between 1 January to 30 June 2021. Data from The Carter Center and [ACLED](#).

During the second quarter of 2021, 1,264 conflict events were recorded in northwest Syria, a decrease of nearly 200 conflict events from the first quarter of the year. The reduction of conflict events was primarily focused in Idlib Governorate, which accounted for only 540 conflict events in the second quarter compared to 716 conflict events in the first quarter. This reduction was largely driven by the decrease in reported conflict events between GoS armed forces and armed opposition groups. Tensions reached an apex in March over the bombing of the Bab al-Hawa border crossing and hospital within opposition-controlled territory, before tensions de-escalated in April.

In the second quarter of 2021, four conflict dynamics in northwest Syria are noteworthy: conflict between the GoS and armed opposition, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham’s (HTS) continued crackdown on rival armed groups, and fighting between Turkish armed forces and Kurdish armed groups.

## GoS Against Armed Opposition Conflict

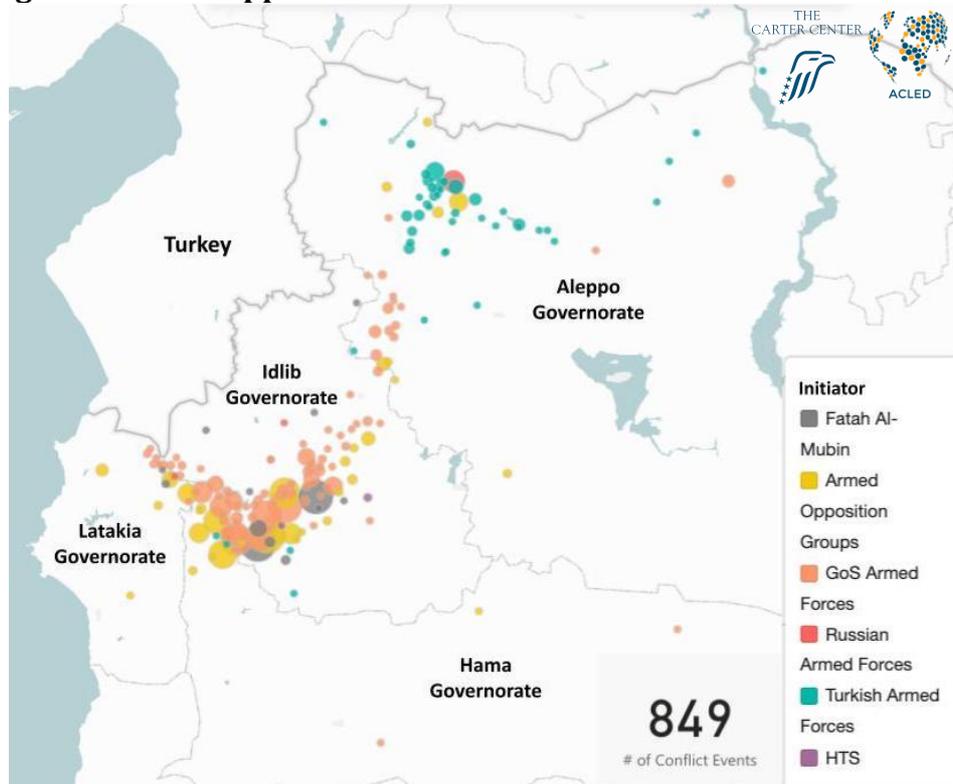


Figure 4: Conflict between Government of Syria armed forces and their supporters on the one side and armed opposition groups on the other between 1 April and 30 June 2021. Largest circle represents 47 conflict events. Data from The Carter Center and [ACLED](#).

Fighting between GoS armed forces and their allies on the one side and armed opposition groups on the other side has been concentrated primarily in the frontline areas near the Jabal Al-Zawiyah area, Idlib Governorate. June 2021 saw a notable increase of violence between the two opposing sides. Notably, Turkish armed forces took an increased role in the shelling exchanges and occasional clashes within Idlib Governorate as violence escalated in June. The increased Turkish involvement reportedly included Turkish armed forces responding to GoS shelling near their military outposts, and fighting alongside with armed opposition groups in the governorate. The increase in violence caused additional displacement of civilians along the frontlines of GoS and opposition-controlled territory.

The increase in violence coincided with verbal disputes between adversaries and supporters of GoS over the renewal of cross-border aid (called Cross-Border Mechanisms or CBM).<sup>3</sup> The Bab al-Hawa crossing in northwest Syria was used by the UN to deliver aid directly to northwest Syria and was set to expire in July 2021. On 9 July, the UN Security Council voted to renew the CBM mechanism for 6 months, with another 6-month extension following a review by the UN Secretary General.

<sup>3</sup> See The Carter Center’s paper on the topic here: [https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict\\_resolution/syria-conflict/the-july-2021-expiration-of-syrias-cross-border-humanitarian-aid-mechanism-potential-solutions.pdf](https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict_resolution/syria-conflict/the-july-2021-expiration-of-syrias-cross-border-humanitarian-aid-mechanism-potential-solutions.pdf)

## Turkish-SDF Conflict

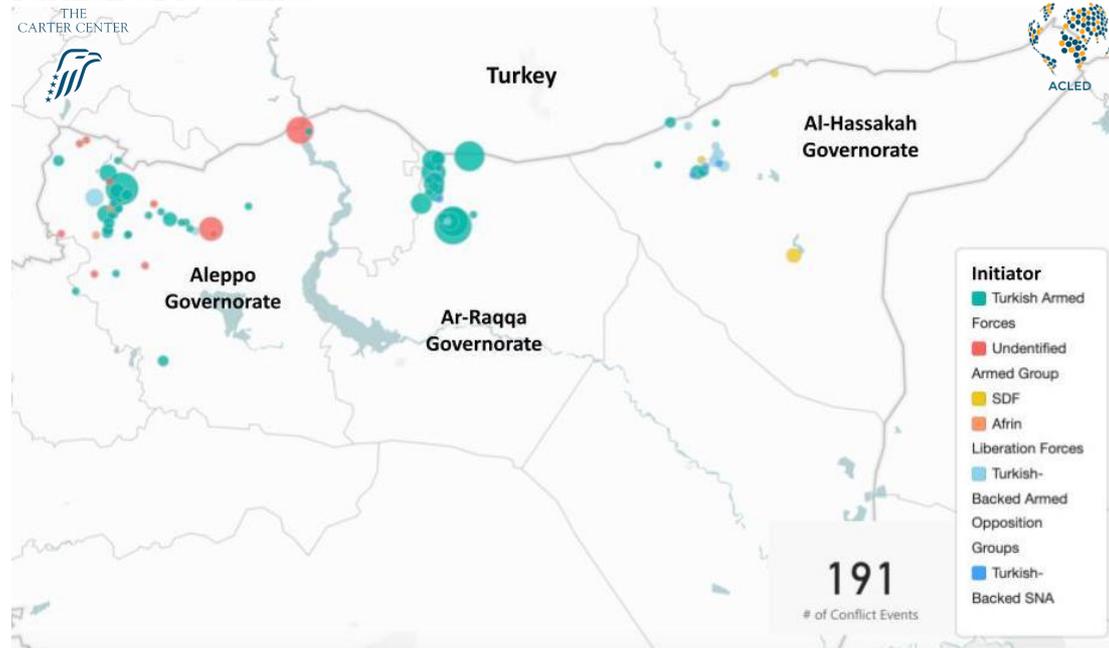


Figure 5: Conflict between Turkish armed forces and Turkish-backed armed opposition groups on the one side and Kurdish armed groups on the other between 1 April and 30 June 2021. Largest circle represents 17 conflict events. Data from The Carter Center and [ACLED](#).

Turkey's presence in northern Syria has often been condemned by GoS and the Kurdish Autonomous Administration (KAA). After three military campaigns between 2016-2019, Turkey controls most of northern Aleppo Governorate and parts of Ar-Raqqa and Al-Hassakah governorates often referred to as Operation Peace Spring (OPS) areas. Turkey justifies its control of territory in northern Syria as a secure zone along the border to prevent alleged threats from armed Kurdish groups.<sup>4</sup> During the reporting period, conflict increased between Turkish armed forces and Turkish-backed armed opposition groups on the one side and various Kurdish armed groups on the other. The increase in reported conflict events coincided with an increase in tensions with Turkish armed forces accusing the SDF of destroying a hospital in Turkish-held territory. Conflict between the two sides continues to occur on the frontlines in Aleppo Governorate and northeast Syria, and within Turkish-held Aleppo Governorate.

Shelling and clashes remain a frequent occurrence along the frontlines between Kurdish-controlled and Turkish-held territory. There was a notable escalation between June 21-June 30, accounting for more than half of the recorded conflict for June 2021. Of the 47 conflict events, 30 of these took place in Ar-Raqqa Governorate, with fighting concentrated in the Ain Issa and Tell Abiad areas on the western frontline between Kurdish-controlled territory and Turkish-held OPS territory. Tensions most likely escalated into mutual shelling after a rocket hit the Al-Shifa Hospital in Afrin, Aleppo Governorate on 12 June.<sup>5</sup> Turkish armed forces accused the predominantly Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) affiliate the People's Protection Units (YPG) of bombing the hospital, an accusation which the SDF and YPG denied. Increasing tensions over the attack prompted the head of the

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.voanews.com/world-news/middle-east-dont-use/ap-explains-turkeys-operation-olive-branch-afin-syria>

<sup>5</sup> <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/7a01276ad0a445fd90e1e84bbcd5df53>

Turkish-backed opposition group Syrian National Council call on Turkey to intervene and expel the SDF from Aleppo Governorate and all other regions in Syria.<sup>6</sup>

The Afrin Liberation Forces (HRE) is the primary Kurdish armed group operating within Turkish-held Aleppo Governorate. HRE claims to be independent from the SDF and has been denounced by them and Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG). Contrastingly, Turkey has accused the HRE of associating with the YPG. While the HRE does not appear often in data collected by the Carter Center and ACLED,<sup>7</sup> there have been consistent attacks against Turkish forces and Turkish-backed armed opposition groups by unidentified armed groups. While it is unclear whether HRE has committed these attacks, the resulting instability have increased tensions between Turkey and the various Kurdish groups, leading to concerns about potential Turkish retaliation against Kurdish-controlled territory.

### HTS Crackdown

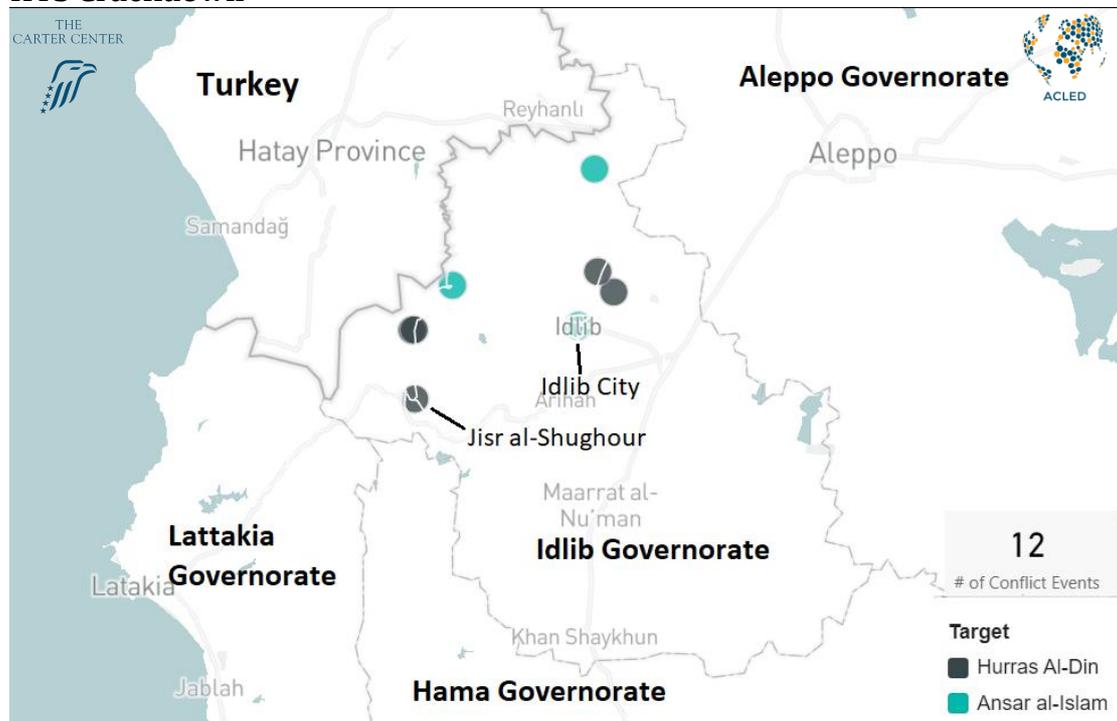


Figure 6: Hayat Tahrir al-Sham’s crackdown on rival armed groups in Idlib Governorate between 1 April and 30 June 2021. Data from The Carter Center and [ACLED](#).

HTS remains the most powerful anti-government armed group in opposition-controlled territory in northwest Syria. Since the July 2020 clashes with its rivals,<sup>8</sup> HTS has taken a hardline approach toward any independent armed group within its territory. In the second quarter of 2021, HTS primarily targeted remnants of the Al Qaeda-affiliated Hurras al-Din and Ansar al-Islam for arrest. On 27 June, HTS

<sup>6</sup> <https://syrianobserver.com/news/67224/for-sdc-turkey-and-assad-have-interest-in-shelling-afrin-hospital.html>

<sup>7</sup> ACLED’s publicly available data found at <https://acleddata.com/about-acleddata/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/f12a006dfaf84cc58a4348cbb23ab137>

called on Junud Al-Sham to either join HTS's organization or leave Idlib Governorate.<sup>9</sup> Facing pressure from HTS, Junud Al-Sham reportedly disbanded.<sup>10</sup>

HTS's crackdown on rival groups serves a two-pronged purpose—it allows the group to consolidate power and prevent the emergence of rivals while making it the only option for the international community to engage with. Notably, this crackdown coincides with HTS's "rebranding" as a moderate group to achieve international recognition. Additionally, HTS faces pressure from Turkey to control the anti-government groups operating in its territory, giving it further incentive to clear the area of rivals.<sup>11</sup> HTS's rivals have accused the group of trying to appease the U.S. by cracking down on 'extremist' groups.<sup>12</sup> HTS countered these allegations, claiming that it is only arresting leaders accused of crimes, and that it still supports any group that is anti-GoS.<sup>13</sup>

## OVERVIEW OF SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

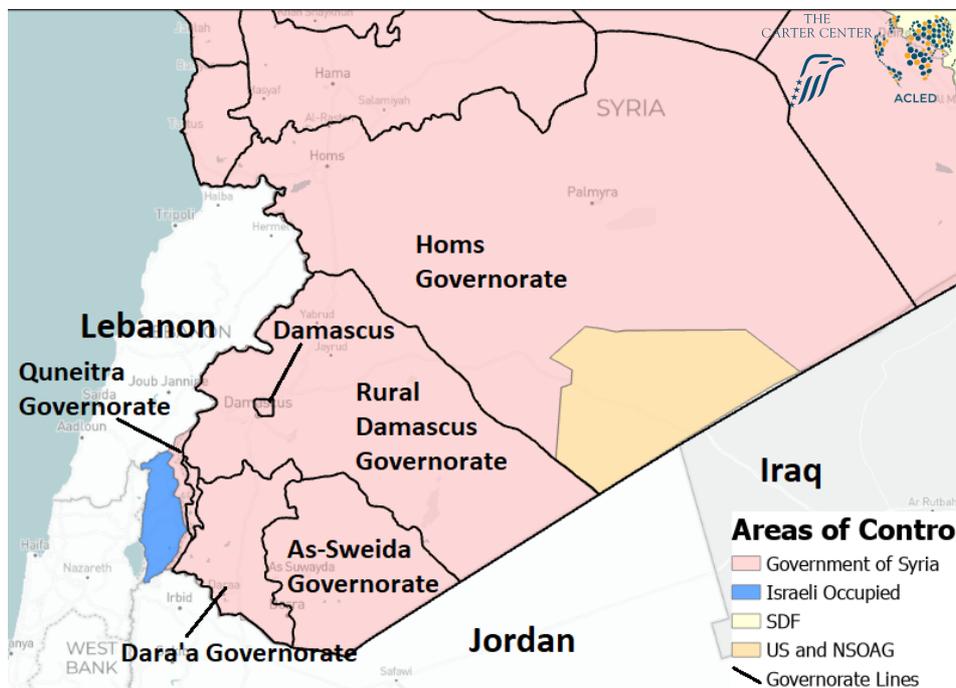


Figure 7: Areas of control in south and central Syria. Data from The Carter Center and [ACLED](#)<sup>14</sup>.

Conflict increased in south and central Syria during the second quarter of 2021 according to data from [ACLED](#) and The Carter Center. Violence remained concentrated in Dara'a Governorate, with 247 recorded conflict events, the majority of which were carried out by unidentified attackers against GoS officials and former opposition fighters.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/489992>

<sup>10</sup> <https://tinyurl.com/2mvub2sm>

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict\\_resolution/syria-conflict/idleb-armed-groups-may-2020.pdf](https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict_resolution/syria-conflict/idleb-armed-groups-may-2020.pdf)  
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/f12a006dfaf84cc58a4348cbb23ab137>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/07/syrian-jihadist-group-ramps-efforts-oust-rivals-idlib>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/07/syrian-jihadist-group-ramps-efforts-oust-rivals-idlib>

<sup>14</sup> Publicly available conflict data is available at [acleddata.com](http://acleddata.com)

The primary conflict dynamic remains the ongoing attacks against GoS figures and former opposition fighters in Dara’a Governorate. However, there was a notable increase in violence in Quneitra Governorate and tensions during the May GoS presidential election.

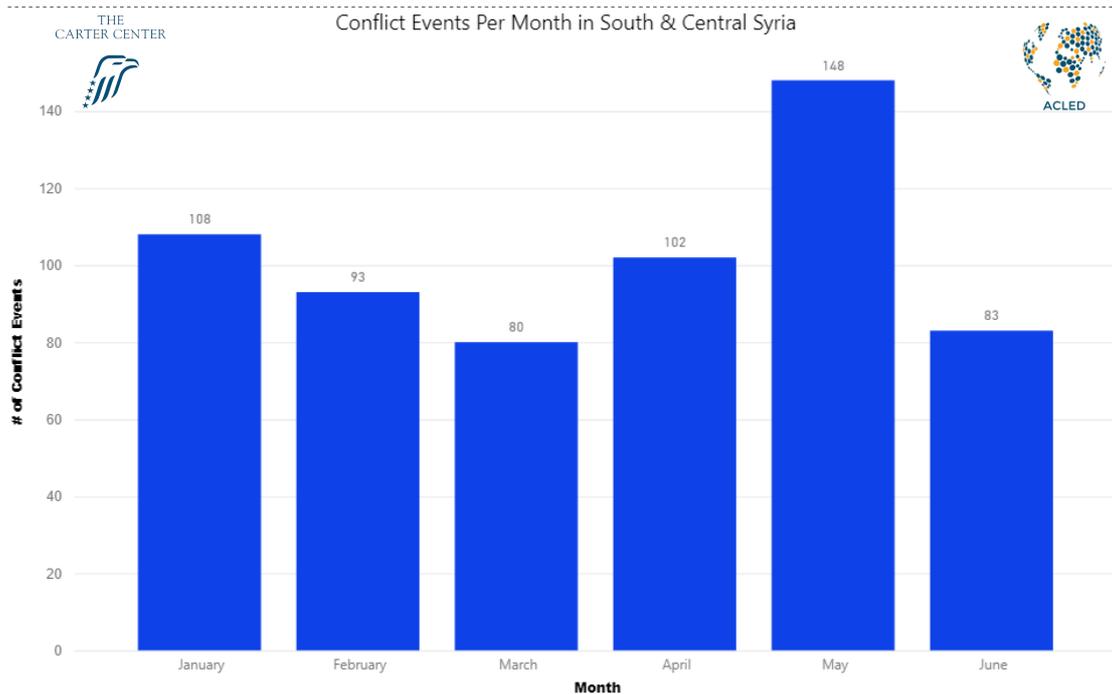


Figure 8: The number of conflict events in south and central Syria by month since January 2021. Data from The Carter Center and [ACLED](#).

### Syrian Presidential Election

The presidential election in Syria took place on 26 May 2021 in GoS-controlled territory. The Kurdish Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) criticized the election as contrary to UNSC resolution 2254<sup>15</sup> while Western countries and opposition groups described the election as neither free nor fair. However, analysts argued that the election served to assert and legitimize the authority of the government,<sup>16</sup> especially in areas that were retaken since the 2014 election. The election took place during a severe economic crisis affecting the country, as well as a standstill in the civil war. Bashar Assad was declared the winner of the election, winning 95% of the vote.<sup>17</sup> Russia, Iran, China, and Venezuela congratulated President Bashar Assad on his election victory.<sup>18</sup> The UN Special Envoy Geir Pedersen said that the election was not part of the political process established by UNSC resolution 2254, and reiterated the need for UN-administered election.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/syria/240520211>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/06/01/yes-assad-won-reelection-last-week-syrias-elections-serve-another-purpose/>

<sup>17</sup> <http://sana.sy/en/?p=235531>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/484672>

<sup>19</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/united-nations-special-envoy-syria-geir-o-pedersen-briefing-security-6>

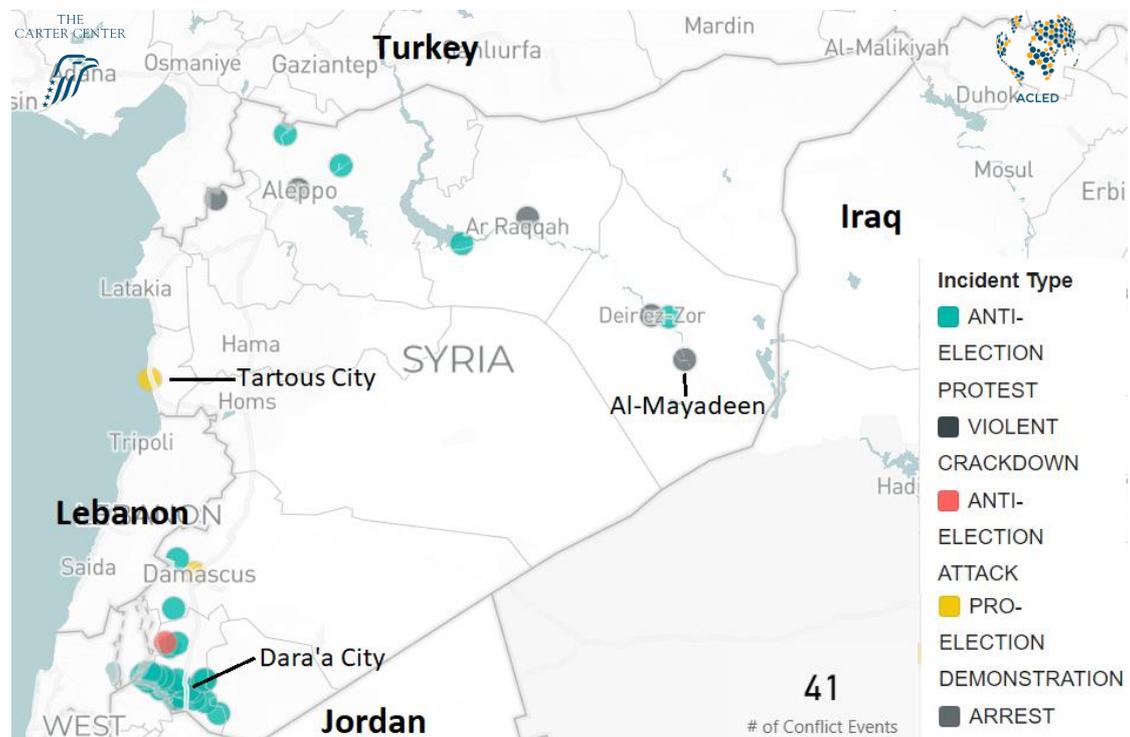


Figure 9: Conflict events related to the May Syrian Presidential Election. Data from The Carter Center and [ACLED](#).

Within GoS-controlled territory, the election was condemned by former opposition groups and their allies. Most anti-election demonstrations were held in Dara'a Governorate, where prominent former opposition groups and the Dara'a Tribal Council called for a boycott.<sup>20</sup> Threats against Baath Party members and attacks against government buildings led to the closing of polling stations in some towns in Quneitra and Dara'a Governorate.<sup>21</sup> The protests and demonstrations against the presidential election escalated tensions between GoS armed group and the former opposition in Dara'a Governorate.

### Tensions between GoS and the former opposition

During the reporting period, there were 143 attacks by unidentified armed groups against GoS and former opposition fighters. Although the attacks are by unidentified actors, GoS officials and former opposition blame each other for the attacks. Recorded attacks increased to 123 attacks in Dara'a Governorate, an increase of 29 attacks from the first quarter of 2021. Additionally, reports of similar attacks increased in Quneitra and As-Sweida governorates in south and central Syria. Violence was highest around the 26 May GoS presidential election, with 25 reported attacks between 20-27 May.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/483411>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/484177>

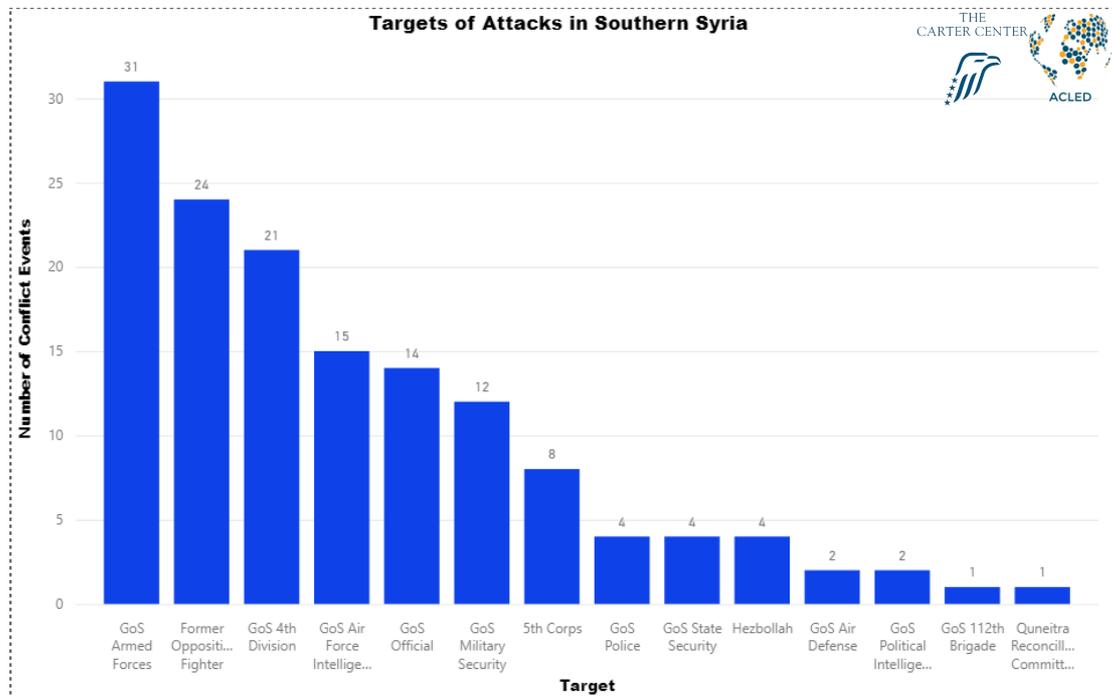


Figure 10: Attacks against GoS forces and former opposition groups (including assassinations) in south & central Syria since 1 April 2021 initiated by unidentified actors. Data from The Carter Center and [ACLED](#).

The violence led GoS armed forces and its allies to siege two towns: Um Batna, Quneitra Governorate and Dara’a city, Dara’a Governorate. The siege of Um Batna between 30 April-15 May was the first siege in Quneitra Governorate since the area was retaken in 2018. Unlike previous siege settlements in Dara’a Governorate, the agreement required 30 former opposition fighters and their families to leave for opposition-controlled territory in northwest Syria.

Dara’a city had been the site of tensions following the May presidential election. On 28 June a complete siege was imposed on the neighborhood of Dara’a Al-Balad, the former opposition stronghold district, with the roads, internet, and electricity cut off.<sup>22</sup> Notably, this siege was not caused by a specific attack as seen in Um Batna, Tafas, and most other sieges in southern Syria. Rather, the siege was implemented after the Central Committee of Dara’a, a group composed of former opposition fighters negotiating with Russia and the GoS about local governance grievances, refused to surrender their weapons to Russian armed forces.<sup>23</sup> The siege of Dara’a city was driven by three factors: the general instability following the 2018 reconciliation agreements,<sup>24</sup> the violence and rejection of the GoS Presidential election, and the change in Russian military leadership for southern Syria. Russia, which has typically been a mediator in Dara’a Governorate, was perceived by the former opposition as having led the siege.<sup>25</sup> Both the Um Batna and Dara’a sieges could potentially mean that the GoS and Russia are taking a new approach to former opposition fighters in southern Syria to assert GoS authority.

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.albawaba.com/news/assad-regime-imposes-full-siege-daraa-al-balad-1435845>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.horanfree.com/?p=9180>

<sup>24</sup> <https://coar-global.org/2021/07/05/dara-siege-russia-about-face-amps-up-pressure/>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.horanfree.com/?p=9202>

But the outcomes of the Dara'a city siege have yet to be seen. As of 20 July, the siege of Dara'a city is ongoing.

### OVERVIEW OF NORTHEAST SYRIA



Figure 11: Areas of control in northeast Syria. Data from The Carter Center and ACLED.

During the second quarter of 2021, there was a reduction in violence compared to the previous quarter, with a total of 857 recorded conflict events. Additionally, the number of reported ISIS-related events decreased following the various anti-ISIS operations by GoS and the SDF. GoS-SDF tensions escalated into a clash in Qamishli city, Al-Hassakah Governorate. With the relaxation of COVID measures, the SDF escalated its conscription campaign, leading to protests and anger within Kurdish-controlled territories. The environmental and humanitarian situation worsened as the water flow in the Euphrates River was severely reduced.

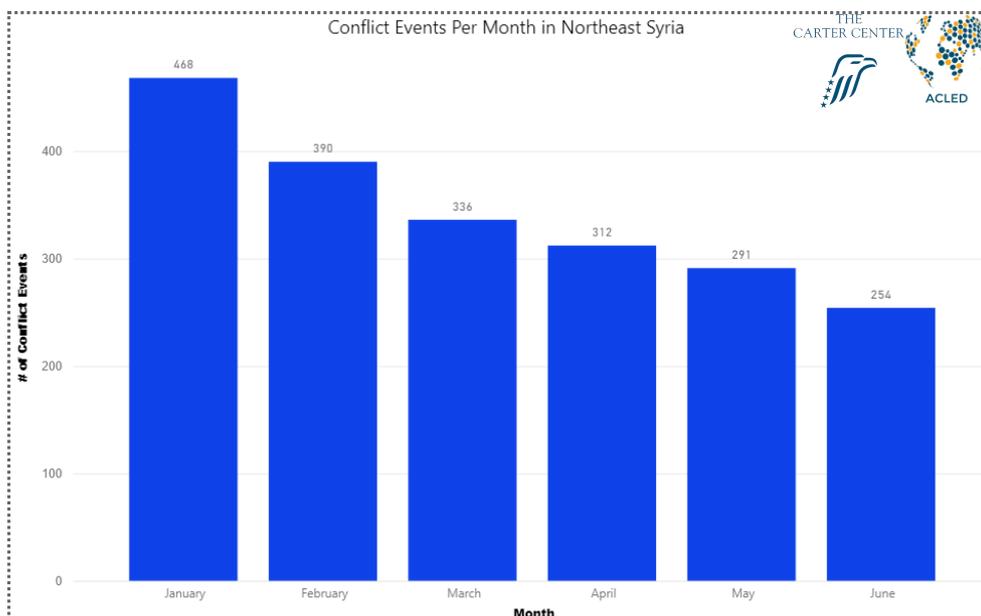


Figure 12: The number of conflict events in northeast Syria by month since January 2021. Data from The Carter Center and [ACLEL](#).

### The Battle Against ISIS

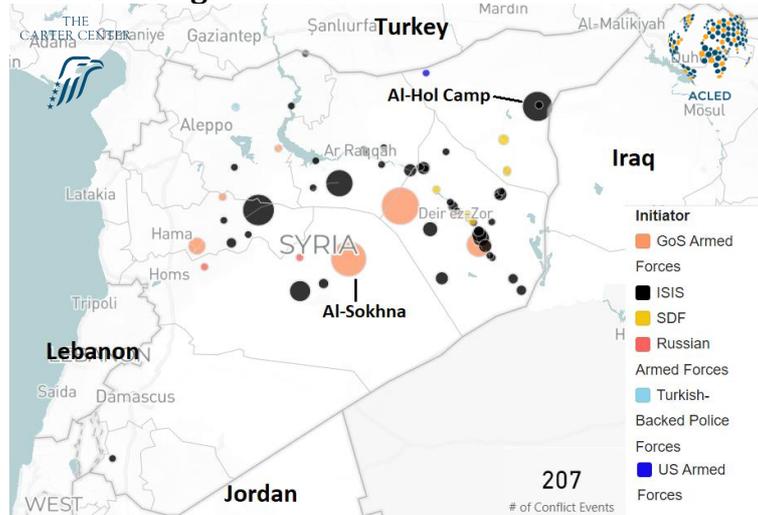


Figure 13: Conflict events involving ISIS in Syria between 1 April to 30 June 2021. Largest bubble represents 24 conflict events. Data from The Carter Center and [ACLEL](#).

During the second quarter of 2021, there was an increase in ISIS-related conflict events across Syria. Some military operations against ISIS have seen some success in reducing high-casualty attacks as well as decreasing violence.

Fighting between ISIS and GoS armed forces accounted for 139 conflict events. During the reporting period, GoS armed forces and its allies mobilized multiple military and militia forces to battle against ISIS in the Badia desert region. In addition, the SDF has launched multiple anti-ISIS operations in western Deir- ez-Zor Governorate, including along the Syria-Iraqi border.<sup>26</sup> Although ISIS still manages to conduct attacks, analysts have argued that the military operations against ISIS have led to a decrease in the number of casualties from ISIS attacks.<sup>27</sup> However, ISIS remains a potent threat that in central and northeastern Syria that has not been defeated despite the numerous military operations against it.

Notably, there was a decrease in violence within the Al-Hol camp, Al-Hassakah Governorate, where more than 65,000 mostly women and children associated with ISIS are interned. In the first quarter of 2021, there were 57 conflict events report in the Al-Hol camp, mostly involving ISIS supporters and remnants in the camp. Due to the high levels of violence, the SDF carried out a major security campaign in the camp between March-April which led to the arrest of 125 suspected ISIS supporters.<sup>28</sup> The security campaign has had some success, with only 24 conflict events reported in the Al-Hol camp during the second quarter of 2021. Despite the security campaigns, the larger questions around what to do with the remaining foreign ISIS fighters and the conditions of the camp still remain unresolved.

<sup>26</sup> <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/0c429c8793d94afeb8d630e49b6603ae>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.counterextremism.com/blog/isis-redux-central-syria-insurgency-june-2021>

<sup>28</sup> <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2021/07/06/At-least-eight-murders-in-a-month-in-Syria-s-camp-housing-ISIS-relatives-SDF>

## Conscription in KAA

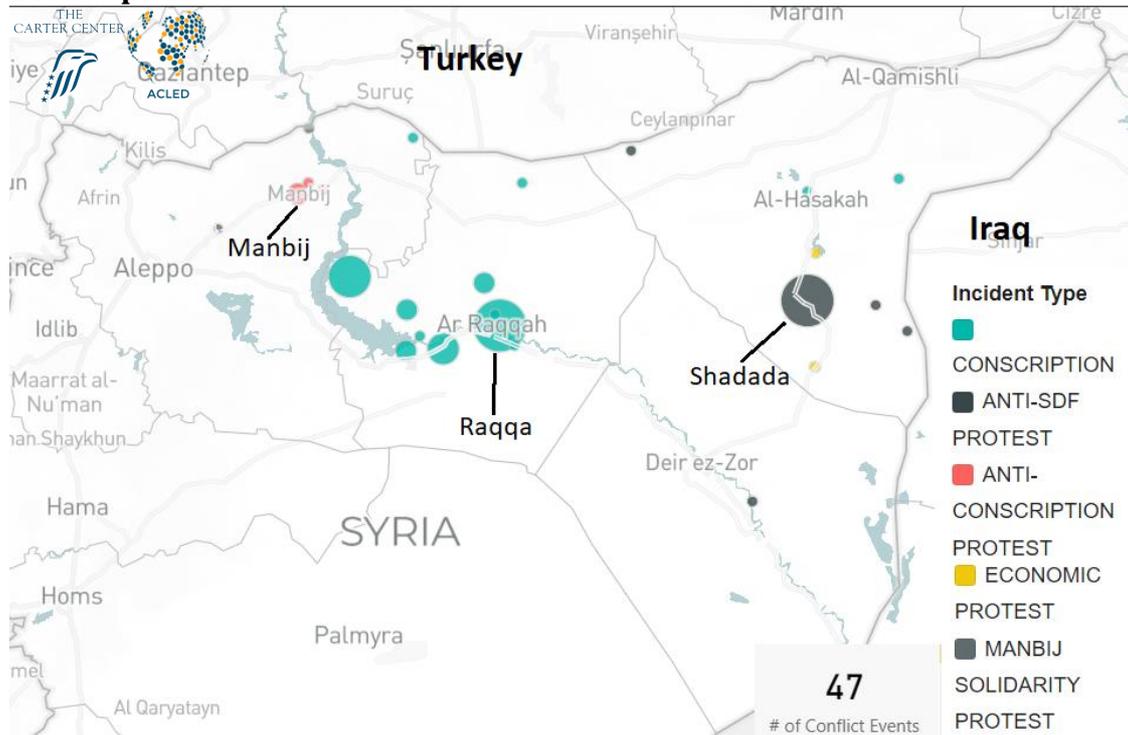


Figure 14: Protests and conscription-related events in SDF-controlled areas of Syria between 1 April to 30 June. Largest bubble represents 6 conflict events. Data from The Carter Center and [ACLEd](#).

In the second quarter of 2021, the KAA saw increased protests and criticism of its internal policies. The KAA's forced conscription campaign has drawn the most criticism, with occasional protests against rising fuel prices and discontent over the economic situation in northeast Syria.<sup>29</sup> In 2019, the KAA issued a controversial conscription law for territories under its control.<sup>30</sup> People in the region argue that the forcible recruitment and arrests by SDF have disrupted economic life.<sup>31</sup> A February 2021 report by the Syrian Network For Human Rights claimed that the conscription of teachers deprived half a million students of a proper education.<sup>32</sup> The SDF's conscription campaign escalated in mid-May, with most incidents of forced conscription concentrated in Ar-Raqqa Governorate.

Despite protests against forced conscription, the KAA continued with their conscription campaign. However, the KAA suspended its conscription policy following the 30 May-5 June unrest in Manbij, Aleppo Governorate, which resulted in the arrests and deaths of some protestors.<sup>33</sup> Some analysts have attributed the KAA's quick reaction to the Manbij events to the area's location on the frontlines of SDF-controlled and Turkish-held territory, leading to concerns that Turkey or

<sup>29</sup> <https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2021/06/autonomous-administration-reverses-decisions-to-calm-protests/>

<sup>30</sup> <https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2021/02/conscription-by-sdf-agonizing-raqqa-residents/>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2021/02/syria-conscription-sdf-is-army-volunteer.html?emailaddress=hariprasad%40gwu.edu#>

<sup>32</sup> <https://sn4hr.org/blog/2021/02/19/55948/>

<sup>33</sup> <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/0e42152fcf814685934def8e9dfa896f>

other groups could take advantage of the unrest.<sup>34</sup> While the KAA touts its human-rights centered Social Contract as an alternative to repressive rule under the Syrian government, incidents of forced conscription degrade its credibility and relationship with non-Kurdish groups living in its territory.

## Euphrates River Dispute

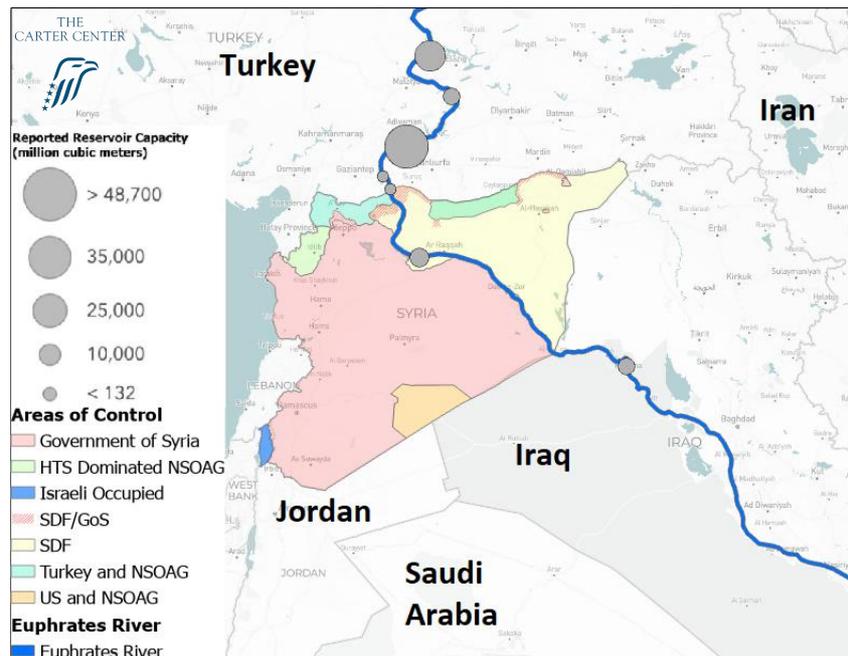


Figure 15: Dams along the Euphrates River. Dams are sized according to reported storage capacity of reservoir. Data from The Carter Center and NASA.

The Euphrates River flows through Turkey, Syria, and Iraq and is a crucial source of drinking water, hydroelectric power, and irrigation for these countries. The 1989 agreement between Turkey and Syria stipulates that the flow of water into Turkey must not fall below 500 cubic meters per second. In May 2021, the estimated water flow dropped to only 200 cubic meters per second.<sup>35</sup>

Turkey argues that the reduced water flow into Syria is due to ongoing drought in the region. However, the GoS and Kurdish groups accuse Turkey of withholding water and demand for it to be released.<sup>36</sup> Kurdish authorities have said they need to cut back on power use since water levels in the river are not high enough to power dams.<sup>37</sup> Water flow from a power station near the town of Ras al-Ain near the border with Turkey has been cut several times in the past year causing power shortages in Al-Hassakah city. Kurdish groups in the area blame Turkey, but

<sup>34</sup> <https://syriadirect.org/beyond-conscription-what-does-manbijs-unrest-reveal-about-sdf-rule-in-northeast-syria/>

<sup>35</sup> <https://npasyria.com/en/59265/>

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/05/syrian-government-calls-turkey-release-euphrates-water>

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/syria/290420213>

Turkey denies these accusations.<sup>38</sup> The SDF cut power to Turkish-held areas in retaliation.<sup>39</sup>

The struggle over the Euphrates River has implications beyond Syria. The water flow of the Euphrates also affects Iraq, the country furthest downstream, with pollution and low water levels being of particular concern. Scarce fresh water in the country contributes to other issues in the country such as social unrest.<sup>40</sup> Iraq does not have a binding water sharing agreement with any of the upstream countries, which leaves its water supply vulnerable.<sup>41</sup>

### GoS-SDF Tensions

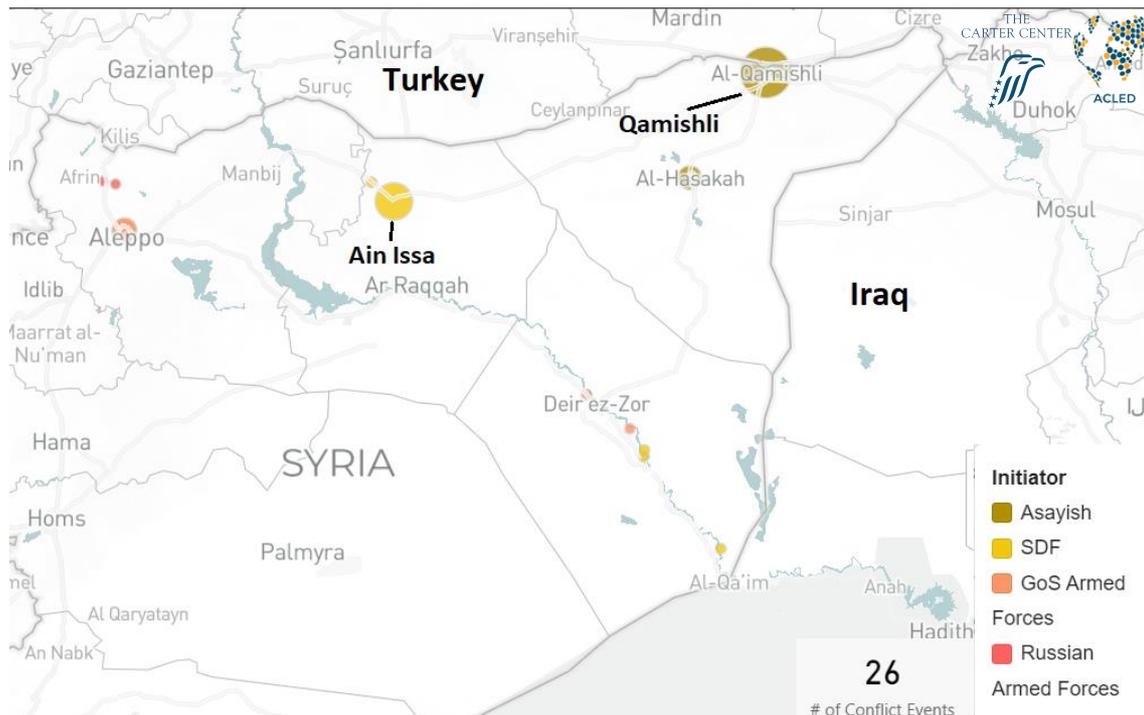


Figure 16: Conflict events between the SDF and GoS between 1 April to 30 June. Largest bubble represents 9 conflict events. Data from The Carter Center and [ACLED](#).

The relationship between the GoS and SDF remains a complex one. Both sides cooperate in trade and share frontlines due to tensions with Turkey. However, clashes remain a common problem, with both sides often adopting hostile rhetoric towards the other. Conflict between the two forces primarily occur in Qamishli and Al-Hassakah city, Al-Hassakah Governorate. Occasionally clashes occur in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate due to violence between smuggling networks reportedly connected to pro-government militias operating in the two territories,<sup>42</sup> but this remains relatively infrequent.

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/story/24393-UN-relief-head-says-water-cut-again-to-half-a-million-people-in-northeast-syria>

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/05/turkey-russia-pressure-sdf-restore-electricity-northeast-syria>

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/29072/in-iraq-water-crisis-deepens-threatening-the-country-s-future>

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/29072/in-iraq-water-crisis-deepens-threatening-the-country-s-future>

<sup>42</sup> <https://syrianobserver.com/news/51804/one-of-assads-most-prominent-businessmen-founds-militia-in-east-deir-ez-zor.html>

Qamishli and Al-Hassakah cities are under the control of the SDF while a few neighborhood pockets are under the control of the GoS. This has caused tension between the SDF and the GoS soldiers, occasionally escalating into clashes between the two sides. In the first quarter of 2021, GoS armed forces and the SDF besieged the other's neighborhoods in Aleppo and Al-Hassakah Governorate.<sup>43</sup> An agreement in February led to the end of the sieges, but tensions continued. Then, a spate of reciprocal arrests led to clashes between the SDF-affiliated Asayish (Internal Security Forces) and the GoS-backed National Defense Forces (NDF) between 20-25 April in Qamishli city. This resulted in the Asayish capturing the NDF-controlled Al-Tai neighborhood. A Russian mediated truce led to the arrangement of a SDF-Russian patrol in Qamishli city to prevent another outbreak of clashes. While conflict between the GoS and SDF have decreased since the April clashes in Qamishli, tensions remain prevalent in other cities in Al-Hassakah Governorate,<sup>44</sup> raising concerns of other clashes. As the KAA considers Russian-mediated dialogue with the Syrian government<sup>45</sup> on the future of the Kurds' territorial control, such disagreements between ground forces could sour engagement on the political level.

Although Russia has at times served as a mediator between GoS and the SDF, tensions between the KAA and Russia threaten to impact dynamics on the ground. An example of this can be seen with the temporary Russian withdrawal from GoS/SDF-controlled territory in Aleppo Governorate between 13-14 April.<sup>46</sup> The withdrawal only lasted a day, but was widely perceived as Russia using the threat of a Turkish invasion to pressure the SDF.<sup>47</sup> With these tactics, KAA has accused Russia of blackmail.<sup>48</sup> Despite the SDF's victory over NDF forces in Qamishli, the Kurdish group must still balance its tense relations with the GoS and Russia to deter further military actions by Turkey.

###

---

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.cartercenter.org/news/publications/peace/conflict-summary-quarterly-jan-mar-2021.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/490550>

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/07/kurdish-parties-split-over-russian-invitation-dialogue-syrian-government>

<sup>46</sup> <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/da53bac5490848c79d356cf94108241c>

<sup>47</sup> <https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2021/04/russias-pressure-tactics-against-us-backed-sdf-in-northeastern-syria/>

<sup>48</sup> <https://tinyurl.com/4fy46kb4>