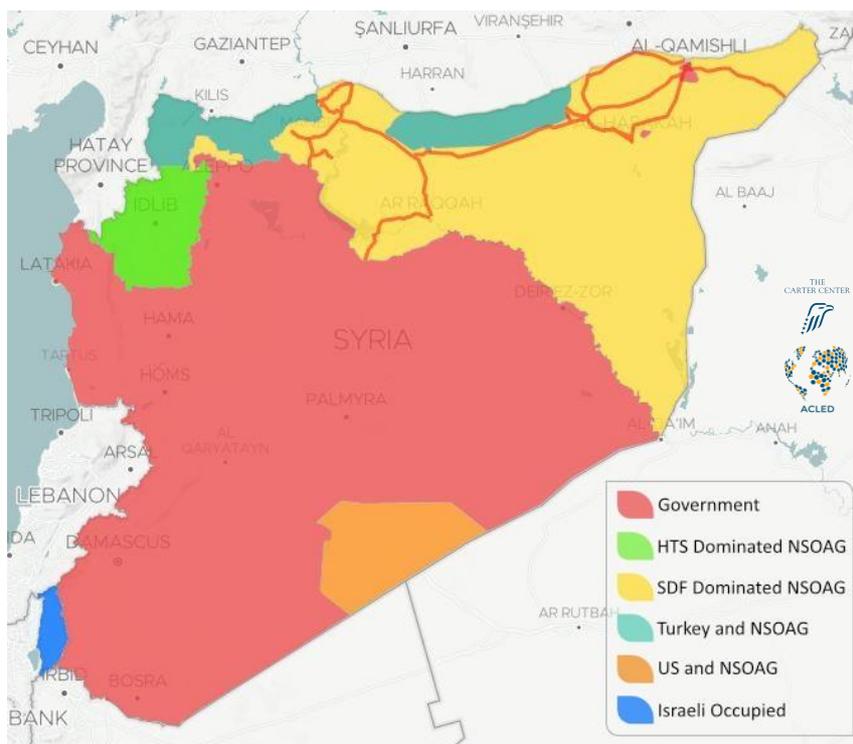




**WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 4 - 10 NOVEMBER 2019**

**WHOLE OF SYRIA SUMMARY**

- **NORTHWEST** | Government of Syria (GoS) aerial activity increased in the Hayyat Tahrir ash Sham (HTS)-dominated northwest this week. Inside the de-escalation zone, 14 civilian demonstrations were held in reaction to HTS action in Kahr Takharim. In the Turkish-occupied areas of Aleppo Governorate, elevated levels of conflict continued, and local armed groups continued extortion and looting activities.
- **SOUTH & CENTRAL** | ISIS-linked activity continued in southern Syria this week in addition to attacks against GoS-aligned personnel and former opposition members. Two improvised explosive devices (IED) struck the Damascus area, and two GoS-aligned personnel were assassinated in western Homs Governorate.
- **NORTHEAST** | Advances from Turkish-led Operation Peace Spring slowed in the northeast of Syria this week. However, Turkish-backed Syrian opposition groups looted civilian property in newly seized areas. US and Russian military patrols continued in the northeast.



*Figure 1: Dominant actors' areas of control and influence in Syria as of 10 November 2019. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. Also, please see the footnote on page 2.*

## NORTHWEST SYRIA

GoS/Russian airstrikes increased in the Hayyat Tahrir al Sham (HTS)-dominated northwest with 124 events recorded in comparison to 50 events in the previous week. This is the first time the number of airstrikes have exceeded the incidents of shelling since late August.

GoS continued shelling the de-escalation zone, with 103 events recorded (Figure 2). Nearly 65% (143) of GoS aerial and shelling this week focused on just seven sub-districts.<sup>2</sup> The US State Department [condemned](#) the escalation in activity in a statement on 8 November, which also documented the impact on a school and hospital.<sup>3</sup>

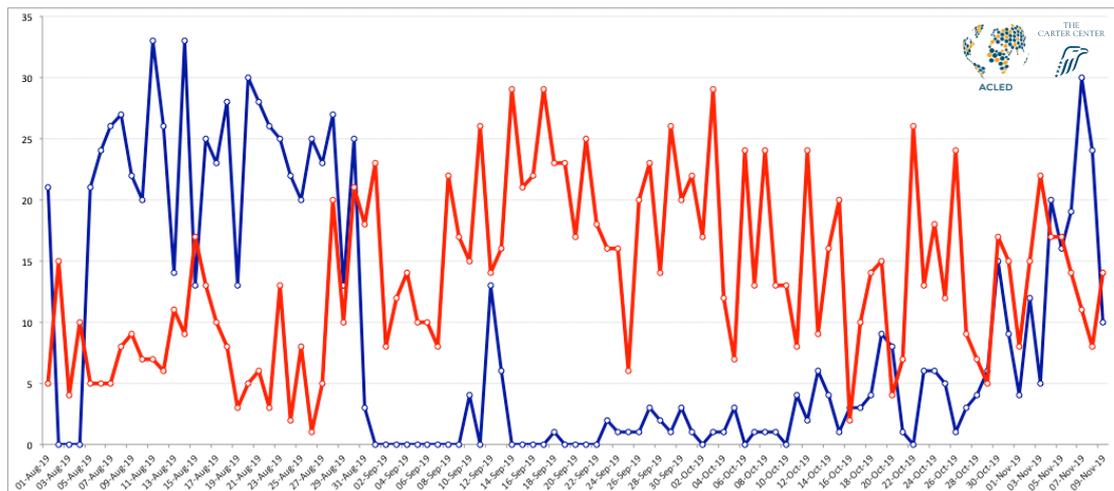


Figure 2: GoS aerial activity (Blue) and shelling (Red) in Northwest Syria since August 2019. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

HTS and other opposition groups continued shelling and attacking GoS-controlled areas in the northwest, with 33 incidents recorded. This is a slight increase from 22 incidents of shelling and armed attacks the previous week, but within the range of activity reported in the previous three months (Figure 3).

<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 government control. The US continues to have a presence in the SDF-controlled east of the 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 collected is by the publicly available project ACLED.

<sup>2</sup> The sub-districts in northwest Syria impacted by GoS aerial and shelling activity this week were: Kafr Nobel (31 events), Heish (28), Madiq Castle (21), Jisr al Shughur (19), Tamanaah (16), Badama (15), Maraat al Numan (13), Jebel Saman (8), Kansaba (8), Zarbah (8), Khan Sheikhun (7), Ziyara (7), Ariha (6), Saraqab (6), Atareb (5), Ehsem (5), Haritan (4), Idleb (4), Janudiyeh (3), Suqaylabiyeh (2), Daret Izza (2), Rabee'a (2), Sarmin (2), Abu Thohur (1), Hama (1), Latakia (1), Sanjar (1), and Shat-ha (1).

<sup>3</sup> With pro-opposition media [reporting](#) this had occurred in Shanan town.

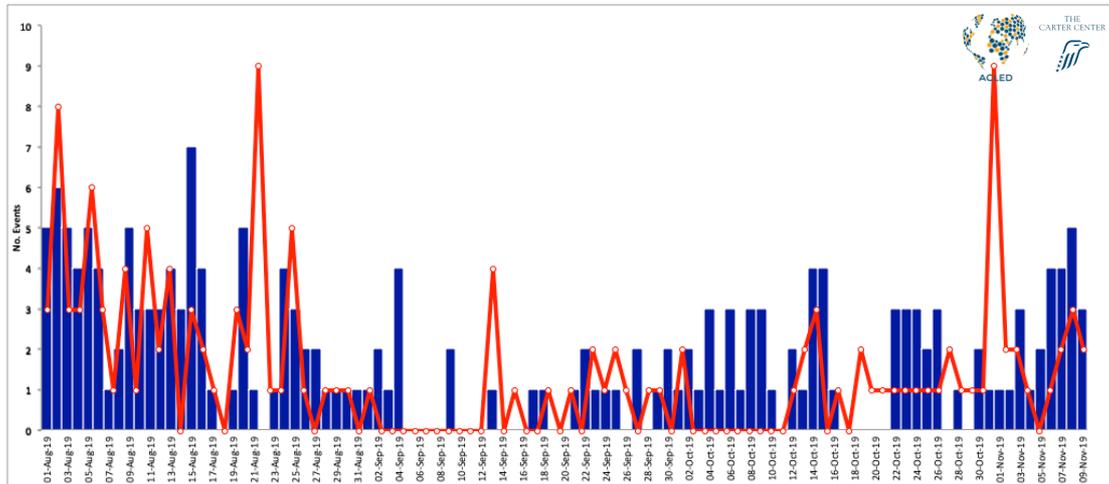


Figure 3: HTS and other groups shelling (blue) and armed clashes against (red) GoS held areas in Northwest Syria since 1 August. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

Inside the Idleb de-escalation zone, civilian demonstrations continued against HTS and its civilian body, the Salvation Government. On 7 November, following clashes between HTS and the opposition's Syrian National Army-aligned Al Sham Corps<sup>4</sup> in Kafr Takharim, HTS cordoned the town and began shelling the area.

Following the attack, protests erupted in support of Kafr Takharim's civilian residents in Kelli, Maraath al Numan, Atareb, Isqat, Teftnaz, Idleb City, Armanaz, Sarmada, Ariha, Hazano, Salqin, Saraqeb, Kafr Dael, and Kafr Uma. Demonstrators denounced HTS during the protests, including its leader Abu Mohammad Al Jolani.

In the past three months, the number of anti-HTS demonstrations has increased in the northwest, often occurring in areas that have had a strong civil society presence in the past (Figure 4).

Elevated levels of conflict continued within the Turkish-occupied areas of northern Aleppo Governorate<sup>5</sup>, with armed attacks against Turkish-backed actors in Mreimin Afrin, Al Bab (x2), and on the Jarablus–Ghandora road. Two Turkish backed groups, the Levant Front and Ahrar Al Sharqiyeh, also clashed in Afrin City on 6 November. After the previous week's increase in improvised explosive device (IED) activity, five more IED attacks targeted the opposition's Syrian National Army patrols in Shamarin, Al Ra'ee (x2 events), Kaljibrin, and Jarablus. Conflict levels (especially IED attacks) in Turkish-occupied areas have increased since July.

Turkish-backed groups in northern Aleppo Governorate continued their looting and extortion activity this week. In Kakhara and Kahira villages, the Sultan Suleiman Shah brigade abducted several civilians and demanded an unspecified ransom to their families for their release. In Jandaris, the Hamza Division conducted a similar operation. Unidentified Syrian National Army factions also kidnapped an oil merchant from Raju, looted a historical site in Arnada town, and

<sup>4</sup> The opposition's Syrian National Army is a Turkish-backed entity made up of several Syrian armed groups. For more details, see our "[Special Report: Internal Conflict in Northwest Syria Sep 2018 to Aug 2019](#)".

<sup>5</sup> The Operation Euphrates Shield areas between Jarablus and Azaz towns and the Operation Olive Branch areas of the Afrin District.

confiscated several olive trees in Shiekh al Hadid. The Syrian National Army, Sultan Suleiman Shah Brigade and the Hamza Division are also active in Turkey’s Operation Peace Spring in northeast Syria and have been linked to similar looting and extortion actions there.

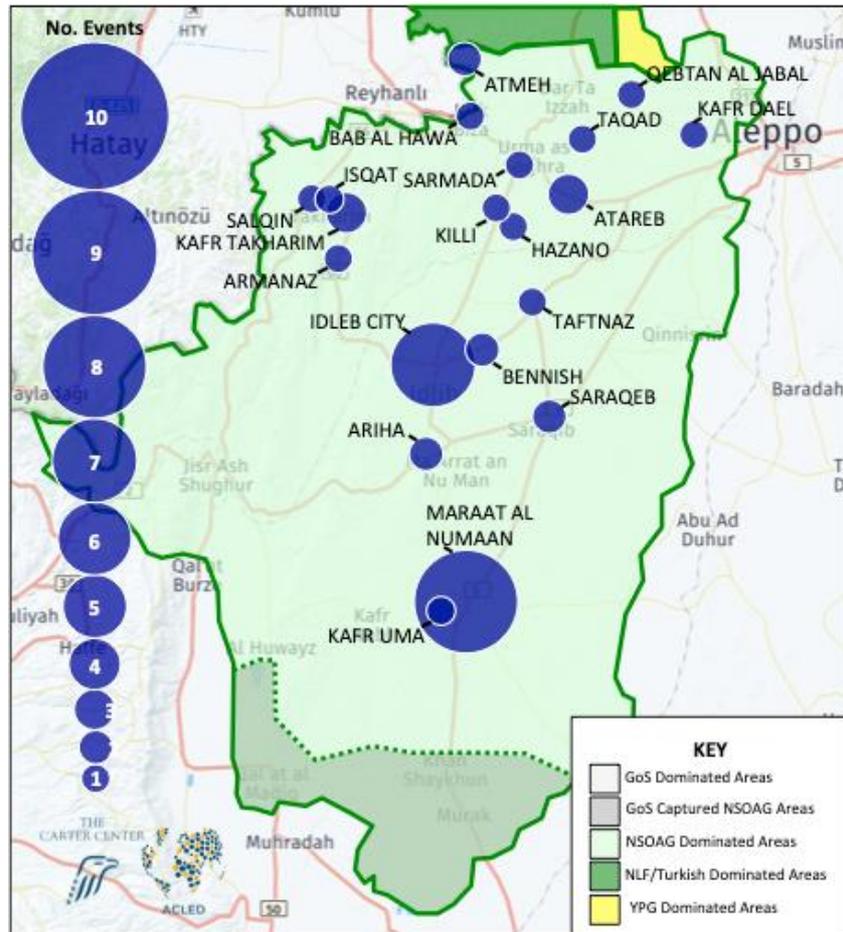


Figure 4: Anti-HTS protests in northwest Syria in 2019. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

### SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

Two ISIS-linked attacks were recorded in southern Syria this week in addition to continued low-level attacks against GoS-aligned personnel and former opposition members.<sup>6</sup> On 5 November, pro-government sources [linked](#) an assassination of an intelligence officer in Ankhil town to ISIS. Later in the week, an IED targeted a bus in Rakhim village. The bus was transporting GoS troops between Dara and Skaka villages in As Sweida Governorate.

ISIS later [claimed](#) the IED attack with a video. The group also announced its new southern affiliate, The Houran Division of Waliyat al Sham, and [pledged](#) allegiance to Abu Ibrahim Al Hashami Al Qurayshi, the new ISIS leader.<sup>7</sup> While it is not uncommon for ISIS to claim activity outside of their former areas of control, there

<sup>6</sup> With attacks reported in Daraa City, Yadudah, and Tassil against former opposition commanders and in Mzeireb against an alleged Hezbollah collaborator.

<sup>7</sup> It is the first time in over a year ISIS has released a video focused on southern Syria. Several ISIS affiliated groups in Southern Syria previously operated under the entity Jaish Khalid Ibn Al Walid (made up of Liwa Shuhada al Yarmouk, Jaish al Jihad, and Harikat al Muthanna al Islamiya).

is a growing concentration of ISIS-claimed activity in eastern Daraa Governorate (Figure 5).

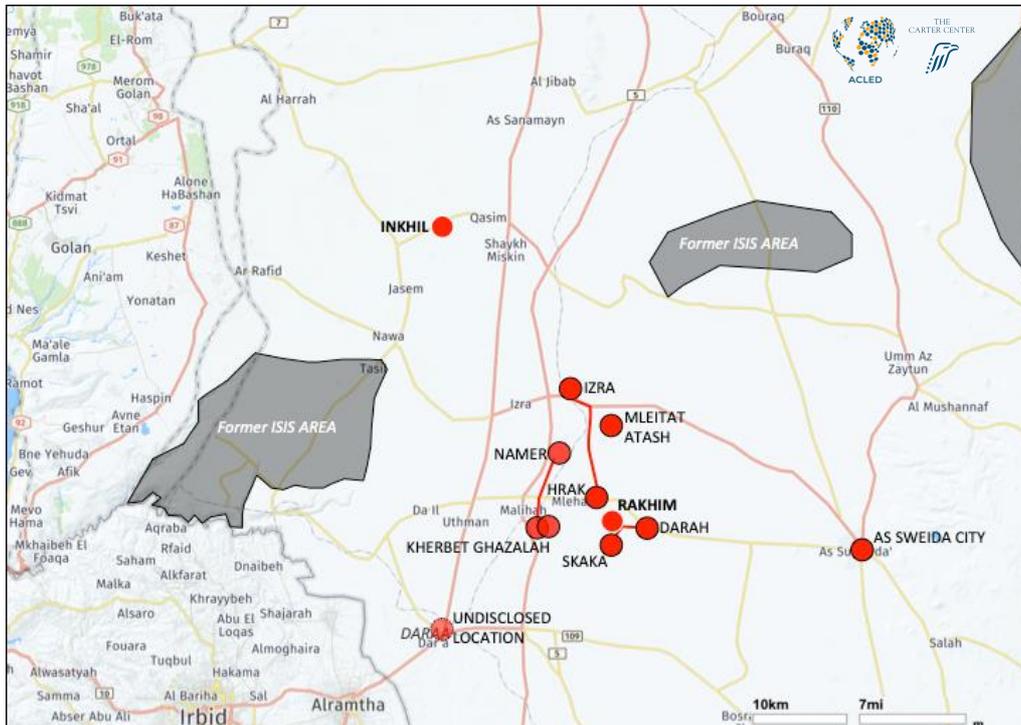


Figure 5: ISIS-linked activity in Southern Syria in 2019. This week's attacks are highlighted in bold. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

In central areas of the country, ISIS activity continued. Pro-government sources [reported](#) two clashes between ISIS and National Defence Forces (NDF) in the T2 Pumping Station and Arwad Dam areas of Homs Governorate. The Syrian Air force also conducted airstrikes against suspected ISIS locations near Sokhneh town and the Badia al Sham area.

Two IED detonations were also reported in former opposition areas around the capital this week. On 6 November, an IED impacted a bus transporting Republican Guard troops in the northern Qudsaya suburb, and, on 9 November, a device detonated against a GoS checkpoint in the Kafr Batna area of Eastern Ghouta. The group Sarayya Qasioun later claimed the second attack in an [online](#) statement. This is only the fourth attack linked to the group in Damascus in 2019.<sup>8</sup>

In western Homs Governorate, two uncommon assassinations of GoS-aligned personnel were recorded this week. On 4 November, unidentified gunmen shot dead a government employee in the Ikrima neighborhood of Homs City, and a former Jaish al Tawhid commander was shot dead in-front of his house in the former opposition-held Talbiseh town. Prior to these events, only six attacks on government employees or former opposition members had been recorded in Homs Governorate in 2019.

## NORTHEAST SYRIA

<sup>8</sup> All previous attacks have involved IED detonations against GoS personnel. Previous attacks were conducted on 16 April, in Qudsaya, 24 April, in Nahr Eshe and 22 July, in al Qadam.

Changes in territory slowed in the northeast despite the ongoing Turkish-backed incursion into Hassakah and Raqqa Governorates. No opposition's Syrian National Army advances were recorded during the week. Instead Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and GoS advances against Turkish-backed groups occurred in the Bir Issa, Mashrafah, Masoudiyeh, Qantari, Shakrak and Um Sha'ifa areas. These advances are in addition to the advances of the SDF the previous week.<sup>9</sup>

Turkish and aligned group's shelling, aerial bombardments, and ground clashes with SDF and GoS forces continued in elevated numbers. At least 29 locations were impacted by violence during the week, an increase on the previous week's 25 areas that experienced conflict.<sup>10</sup>

Further incidents of Turkish-backed opposition's Syrian National Army looting and confiscating civilian property in Operation Peace Spring areas were reported this week. This included in Ras Al Ain where Hamza Division looted flour from bakeries. Jaish al Islam and the Mutasim Brigades also took over residential and commercial business in the town after evicting residents. In Tal Al Abiad, Levant Front members evicted Armenian residents before taking over their houses, and Suqour al Sham looted grain silos in Alia Village. Looting and confiscation have regularly occurred in Syrian National Army areas of influence, especially in the Turkish-backed areas of Northern Aleppo Governorate.

Signs of the ongoing US presence in northeast Syria were reported this week. On 4, 6, 7 and 9 November, US troops patrolled through Malikiyeh to the Semalka Border Crossing, from Jnidiyyeh to Swaydiyah, Kerziro to Qarrah Chouk Mountains, from Rmailan to Yarubiyah, Kazero and Swaydiyah, and from Qamishli City to Sarmaskh respectively. The US also established a base on the former GoS 113 Air Defense Brigade Base in Deir Ez Zor Governorate on the eastern banks of the Euphrates River.

US military action continued to occur separately from Russian and Turkish activities in the northeast. On 7 November Russia [conducted](#) an aerial patrol above Ain Issa, Raqqa, and Tabqa. On 8 November, a joint Turkish/Russian patrol [travelled](#) between Qamlishli and al Malikiyah. In one village, Qahtaniyyeh, residents threw stones at the joint patrol. It is the third official Russian ground patrol since 30 October.<sup>11</sup>

Low-level attacks against SDF personnel along the Euphrates and Khabour River Valleys continued, with events recorded in Hasakeh City (x2), Yarubiya, Akeirishi, Tal Shayr, and Shiheil. In Basira, suspected ISIS members shot at a civilian's house who had refused to pay a ransom of \$10,000 to the group.

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<sup>9</sup> The five areas the SDF captured from Turkish backed groups were Rajla, al Hamra, Al Manakh, al Sibatiyyeh, and Abu Rasin.

<sup>10</sup> This week, conflict was recorded in; Abu Rasin, Ain Issa, Ain Issa – Jabaliyeh road, Aniq al Hawa, Areesha, Areshet Ras al Ain, Aziziyeh, Bab Kheir, Bir Issa, Daoudiyeh, Dardara, Hisheh, Khaladiyeh, Khafiyeh, Mahmoudiyeh, Manajir, Qantari, Qasemiyeh, Ras al Ain, Rashidiyeh Darbasiyeh, Soda, Shakrak, Sawami, Tal Mohammad, Tal Tamr, Tal Tamr and Ras al Ain road, Tal Ward Sharqi, Tikri, and Zaydiyeh,

<sup>11</sup> After a Russian patrol on 30 October and a joint Russian/Turkish patrol on 2 November.