



WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 8 - 14 March 2021

SYRIA SUMMARY

- Turkey relocated part of its military presence from western Aleppo Governorate to Idlib Governorate.
- Attacks against former opposition fighters and Government of Syria (GoS) armed forces continued in Dara'a Governorate.
- The predominantly Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) continued operations against ISIS in northeast Syria.

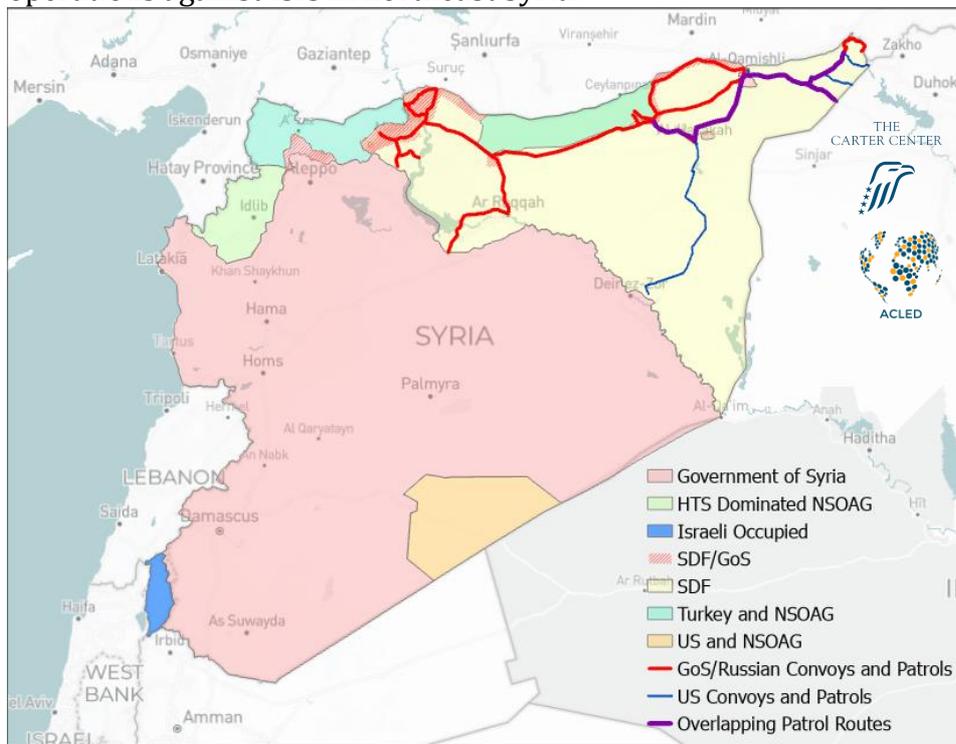


Figure 1: Dominant actors' area of control and influence in Syria as of 14 March 2021. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. Also, please see footnote 1.

NORTHWEST SYRIA¹

Figure 2: Turkish military bases and attacks against Turkish armed forces in Idlib Governorate since 5 March 2020. Data from The Carter Center and ACLED.

Turkish Entrenchment in Idlib Governorate

The M4 highway is a strategic roadway that runs through opposition-held territory in northwest Syria. As per the 5 March 2020 ceasefire agreement between Russia and Turkey, a 12-kilometer wide security corridor along the M4 highway in Idlib Governorate was to be formed and patrolled jointly by Turkey and Russia. After several attacks along the M4 highway, Russia suspended its participation in the joint patrols until the highway is secured. Since September 2020, Turkey has conducted solo patrols along the M4 highway in Idlib Governorate. (For a history of the joint patrols in Idlib Governorate, see The Carter Center's tracker [here](#).) Turkey's presence in Idlib Governorate is controversial,

¹ Figure 1, the Carter Center's areas of control map, depicts areas of the dominant actors' control and influence. While "control" is difficult to determine 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 have patrolled 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](#).

with extremist armed groups denouncing Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) for allowing the M4 patrols.

9 March

Turkish armed forces announced that they would redeploy their forces from bases in western Aleppo Governorate to the Jabal al-Zawiyah area, Idlib Governorate.² The Jabal al-Zawiyah area witnesses frequent shelling and clashes between armed opposition groups and Government of Syria (GoS) armed forces. The Turkish military would relocate bases near the M4 highway,³ as part of Turkey's effort to secure the roadway.⁴

13 March

The violent extremist Ansar Abu Bakr al-Siddiq Squadron attacked a Turkish armed forces convoy with an improvised explosive device (IED) near Idlib city.⁵ The group claimed it was in revenge for Turkish armed forces allegedly killing a child.⁶

SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

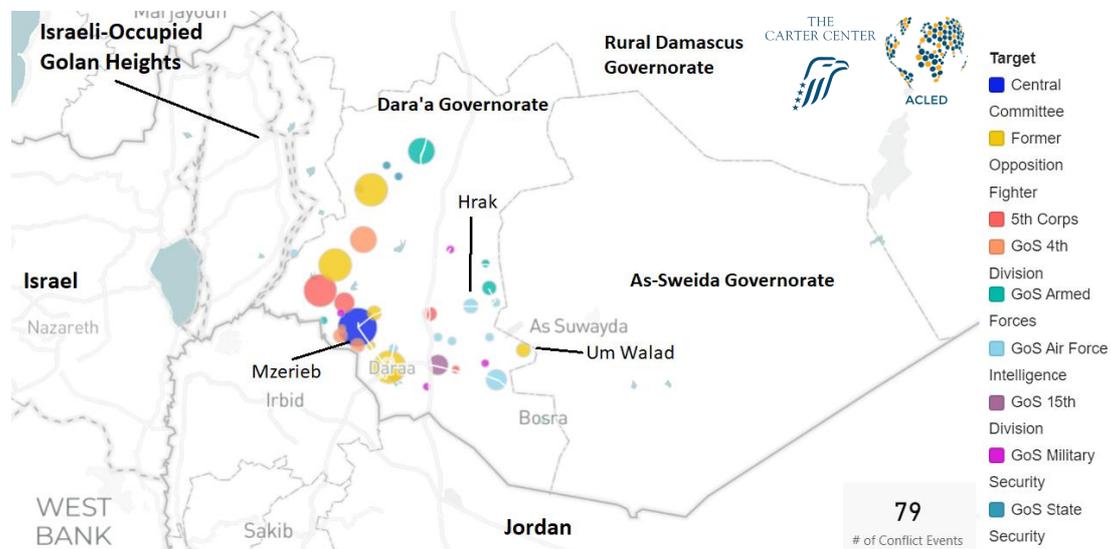


Figure 3: Attacks against former opposition fighters and GoS armed forces since 1 January 2021. Largest bubble represents 6 conflict events. Data from The Carter Center and ACLED.

Instability in Southern Syria

Since the takeover of Dara'a Governorate by the GoS in 2018, some former opposition commanders have gained prominence by leading influential political and military bodies. At times, tensions between those two sides have resulted in arrests and violence, such as the January-February standoff in Tafas, Dara'a Governorate. Tensions have been exacerbated by continuing attacks and

² <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/464858>

³ <https://npasyria.com/en/55684/>

⁴ tinyurl.com/1iaxo307

⁵ <http://www.aymennjawad.org/2020/12/ansar-abu-bakr-al-siddiq-squadron-operations>

⁶ <http://www.aymennjawad.org/2021/03/the-first-video-of-the-abu-bakr-al-siddiq-squadron>

assassinations of GoS officers and former opposition fighters, mostly by unidentified perpetrators.

9 March

Unidentified gunmen killed a GoS 4th Division officer near Mzerieb, western Dara'a Governorate.⁷ This was the first reported killing of a GoS 4th Division soldier since the siege of Tafas.⁸

10 March

A former opposition fighter and his son were killed by unidentified gunmen in Um Walad, Dara'a Governorate.⁹

14 March

Unidentified gunmen killed a GoS armed forces officer near Hrak, eastern Dara'a Governorate.¹⁰

NORTHEAST SYRIA



Figure 4: ISIS related conflict events in northeast Syria between 8-14 March 2021. Data from The Carter Center and ACLED.

The Battle Against ISIS

Since the start of 2021, there has been a sharp escalation of ISIS attacks,¹¹ particularly in the Badia desert region of central and northeast Syria. ISIS has conducted high-casualty attacks against the GoS armed forces and its allies. The uptick of ISIS-related incidents has been a concern to all parties in northeast Syria. Although multiple operations have been undertaken to eliminate the group, these

⁷ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/464692>

⁸ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/464692>

⁹ <https://tinyurl.com/y653fxvr>

¹⁰ <https://halabtodaytv.net/archives/182148>

¹¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-55887870>

operations have had limited success. At times, operations by the predominantly Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have exacerbated tensions between the KAA and Arab tribes in northeast Syria.

10 March

Detainees affiliated with ISIS killed 2 people and wounded 2 others in the Al-Hol camp, Al-Hassakah Governorate.¹² The Al-Hol camp remains unstable, with at least 42 killings reported since 1 January 2021.¹³ Due to the frequent killings, GoS and Russia accused the SDF of losing control of the Al-Hol camp.¹⁴

12 March

During a raid, the SDF reportedly killed the ISIS leader for Deir-ez-Zor Governorate and 9 other ISIS fighters in Al-Sabha, Deir-ez-Zor Governorate.¹⁵ The same day, ISIS attacked a SDF headquarters in Thiban, Deir-ez-Zor Governorate, killing 1 SDF fighter.¹⁶

13 March

The SDF clashed with and killed 8 ISIS fighters during a raid in the village of Elhisan, northern Deir-ez-Zor Governorate.¹⁷ US armed forces reportedly provided aerial support during the clashes and raid.¹⁸

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

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¹² <https://halabtodaytv.net/archives/181806>

¹³ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/466109>

¹⁴ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/465404>

¹⁵ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/465605>

¹⁶ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/465573>

¹⁷ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/465614>

¹⁸ <https://npasyria.com/en/55889/>