

THE
CARTER CENTER



WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 4 - 10 MARCH 2019

WHOLE OF SYRIA SUMMARY

- **NORTHWEST** | Turkish Military patrols in the western portions of the Hayyat Tahrir ash Sham (HTS) dominated Idlib pocket on 8 March reduced conflict only for 24 hours.
- **SOUTH** | Two protests against government arrests in the south of Syria occurred in Daraa and Tafs during this reporting period. Both areas have the presence of Russian military police and former opposition members following the government re-establishing control in August 2018.
- **NORTHEAST** | No changes occurred this week in the Syrian Democratic Forces' (SDF) campaign against the last remaining ISIS pocket in Baghuz Village in southeast Deir Ez Zor Governorate, with the enclave still surrounded and large numbers of civilians continuing to leave the pocket.

Due to a transition to new mapping and analysis platforms, The Carter Center will be unable to produce maps temporarily. We hope that this move will result in better and more robust reporting in the near future. In the meantime, we thank you for your patience.

NORTHWEST SYRIA

Elevated levels of conflict continued to affect northern Hama and southern Idlib governorate frontlines between the Syrian government military and the Al-Qaida affiliated Hayyat Tahrir ash Sham (HTS) dominated groups. At least 182 incidents were recorded, building upon the 184 events recorded the previous week. These activities largely occurred in the southern Idlib subdistricts of Kafr Zeita, Madiq Castle, Suran, Tamanaah and Ziyara with over half of the reported incidents (114). The conflict continued to [impact](#) civilians and civil society alike, especially in Khan Sheikhoun town, where prominent media activist Nassif al Sermani was killed by an artillery shell explosion on 10 March.

HTS launched further attacks along Syrian government military frontlines after last week's notable attacks in Jebal Turkman and Massanah. Additionally, the Turkish-controlled opposition group, the National Liberation Front [attacked](#) a Syrian government checkpoint near Suqaylbiyah town on 8 March. The attack resulted in the death of at least five Syrian soldiers.

Turkish military patrols began in several locations in the [eastern](#) sections of the [buffer](#) zone around Eis, Saraqb, Tal Touqan, Maarat al Numan and Surman areas of the Idleb pocket on 8 March.¹ Though conflict events already were reduced to just 17 recorded events on 7 March, compared to 30 on 6 March, the respite was short lived, returning to typical levels by 9 March, with 27 events reported during the day.

SOUTH SYRIA

On 10 March, a [protest](#) of over 100 people began in the Old City area of Daraa City, in front of a newly installed statue of Hafaz al Assad,² [before](#) moving south into the formerly opposition-held neighborhood of Daraa al Balad. The gathering [expressed](#) anger at the continuing arrests of people by government security forces as well as the lack of service provision in the south.³

While the timing of the protest is significant, coming almost 8 years to the day after anti-government protests were first seen in the city that sparked the start of the Syrian protests in 2011, the current protests have been a regular occurrence in the Old City of Daraa since [January](#) 2019.⁴ This area is under the influence of Russian military police as well as former opposition fighters who have taken positions in the local security apparatus following the opposition's defeat in southern Syria in mid-2018.

On 7 March, a former opposition fighter was assassinated in Atman town.

NORTHEAST SYRIA

Despite heavy airstrikes, [shelling](#), and at least five prolonged ground clashes between ISIS and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) around the last ISIS pocket to the south of Baghuz Faqwani, no notable advances were recorded in the reporting period.

Large numbers of civilians in the pocket and booby traps in the surrounding area continue to hamper advances, as was reported last week. Civilians continued to leave the area, traveling north to al Hole camp in Hassakah Governorate. The camp already holds at least 65,000 civilians, 5,000 of whom do not have shelter [according](#) to the International Rescue Committee. The humanitarian emergency in northeast Syria has been highlighted repeatedly by the SDF.

In the area along the Euphrates Valley between Deir Ez Zor City and Baghuz village, landmine and improvised explosive device (IED) detonations continued. The six events this week bring the total of such incidents in 2019 to 48 and highlight the ongoing legacy of ISIS in these areas.

¹ As agreed in the September 2018 de-escalation agreement with Russia and Iran.

² The former president of Syria, and President Assad's father.

³ At least 5 cases of arrests have been recorded in Daraa this week.

⁴ And also reported in previous Weekly Summary Reports.

WATCH LIST

The watch list outlines various dynamics the Carter Center is monitoring in the coming weeks:

NORTHWEST | Changes in levels of routine conflict dynamics between government and opposing frontlines in the Idlib pocket, especially in northern Hama and south west Aleppo governorates. Signs of increasing Turkish patrols that could reduce violence.

SOUTH | Widening of protests against the government over arrests, especially areas controlled or influenced by Russian troops.

NORTHEAST | Effects of the growing humanitarian situation on the security environment in northeast Syria.