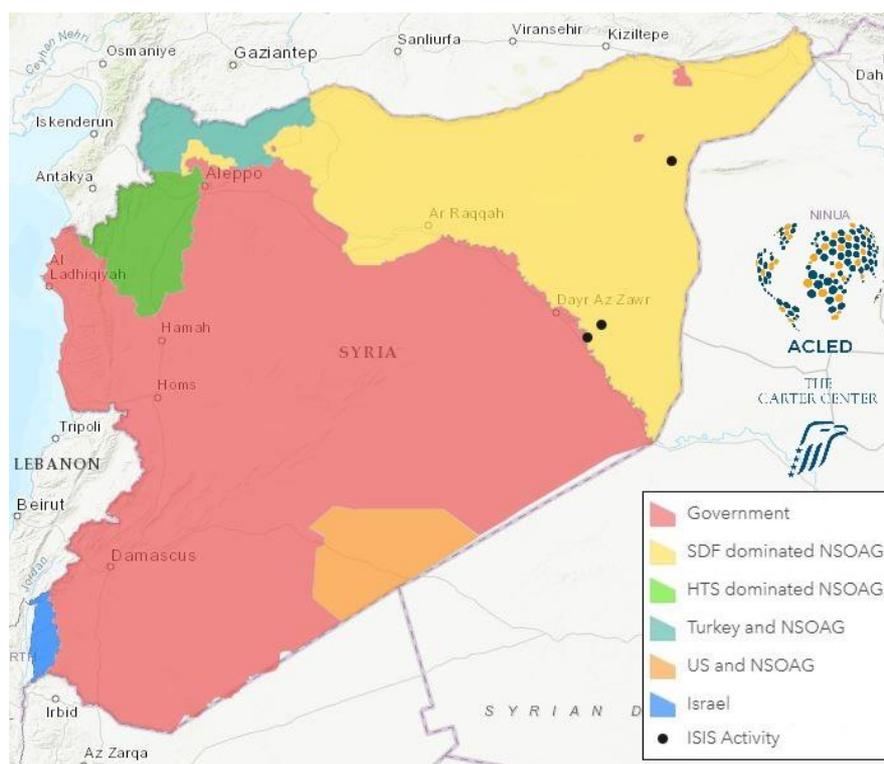




**WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 13 - 19 MAY 2019**

**WHOLE OF SYRIA SUMMARY**

- **NORTHWEST** | Government forces continued to advance in the southwest corner of the Hayyat Tahrir ash Sham (HTS)-dominated Idlib pocket this week, capturing locations along Highway 56.
- **SOUTH & CENTRAL** | Low-level attacks against government-aligned personnel continued in the south, while in Homs Governorate, evidence of ISIS's enduring presence was once again evident. Two Israeli airstrikes also targeted suspected Hezbollah-affiliated sites, south of Damascus and in Quneitra Governorate.
- **NORTHEAST** | Despite a Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) anti-ISIS operation along the Euphrates River Valley this week, small arms fire and Improvised Explosive Device (IED) attacks against military actors in this area continued. Elsewhere, an IED detonation in Menbej City highlighted the growing frequency of such attacks in the previous two months.



*Figure 1: Dominant Actors' Area of Control and Influence in Syria as of 19 May 2019. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. For more explanation on our mapping, please see the footnote on page 2.*

## NORTHWEST SYRIA

Government advances continued in the southwest corner of the Hayyat Tahrir ash Sham (HTS)-dominated Idlib pocket this week. After the previous week's capture of Mudiq Castle and Kafr Nabudah, government and aligned forces pushed further north along Highway 56, taking Hamra, Huwayz, Meidan Ghazal and Muhajereen towns. Shelling and aerial bombardment accompanied this advance, with 339 events reported this week, primarily targeting the southern areas of the enclave (Figure 2).

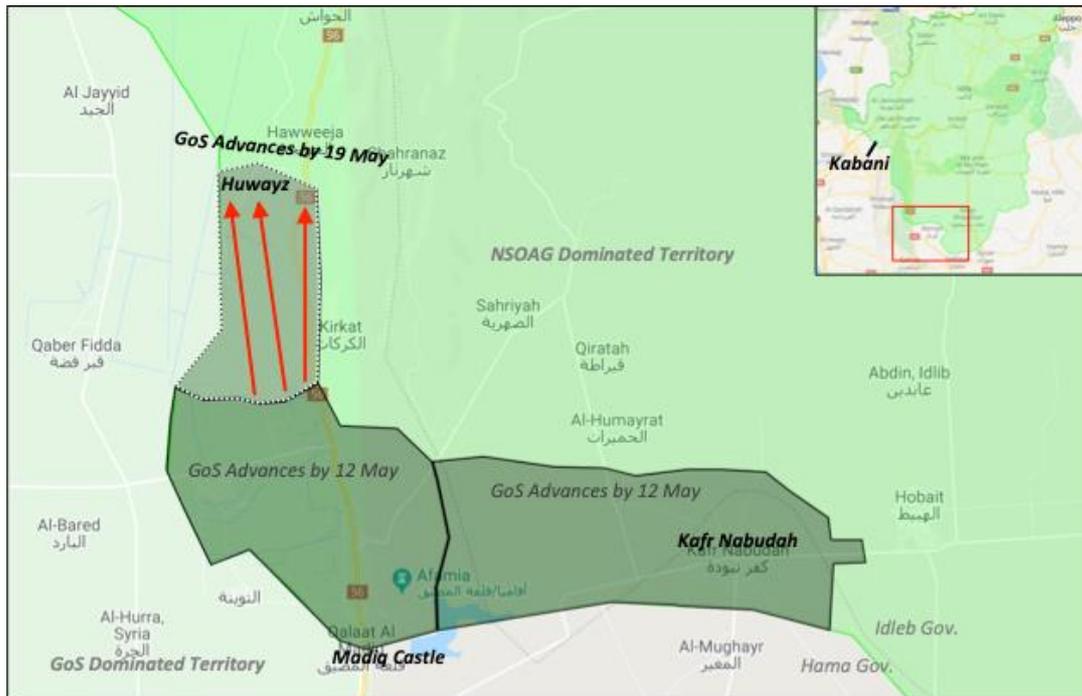


Figure 2: Government Advances and Direction of Government Offensive (red arrows) in the northwest by 19 May 2019

Further to the northwest, government forces also launched an assault against the fortified Kabani town in the Tufjat Mountains in Latakia governorate. However, despite 96 reported airstrikes and barrel bombings, and 12 artillery bombardments, government forces failed to make advances.

Toward the end of this week, the momentum of the government forces' advance slowed. This coincided with a prisoner exchange between HTS and the government at al Eis town on 17 May, in which nine captured government soldiers were exchanged for 27 government held prisoners according to pro-government [sources](#). On 19 May, Russia [announced](#) a ceasefire in the northwest in the coming

<sup>1</sup> Figure 1 denotes dominant actors' control and influence. Russia, Iran, Hezbollah and Iraqi militias maintain a presence in Syrian government-dominated territory. Non-state organized armed groups (NSOAG), including the Kurdish dominated, US backed SDF and a variety of other groups operate in areas not under Syrian government control. The NSOAG labeled 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.

week.

HTS and other aligned groups continued their bombardment of government-dominated areas with 19 events recorded, half of which occurred in As Suqaylabiyah town and Aleppo City. Long-range GRAD rockets again targeted the Russian operated Hmemeim Airbase in Lattakia Governorate.

Non-HTS aligned opposition groups also transferred fighters to the frontlines this week, [including](#) the Turkish backed factions of Shuhadaa Badr, Al Jabha Al Shamiyah and Ahrar al Sharqiya. The Turkistan Islamic Party also [acknowledged](#) its presence on northern Hama frontlines.

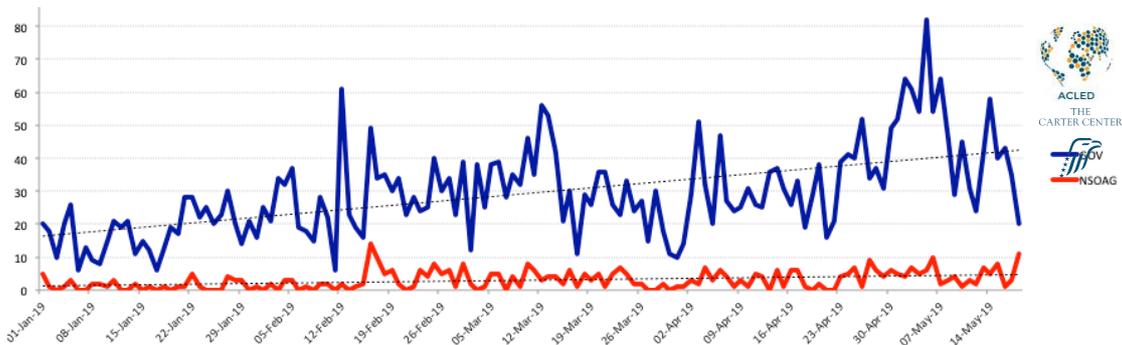


Figure 3: Documented Government (blue) and NSOAG (red) activity in the northwest of Syria in 2019 (bottom).

The humanitarian situation in the Idleb pocket continued to deteriorate this week. Health facilities in the northwest were again impacted by the offensive, bringing the total number of destroyed or damaged sites in the previous three weeks to 18. A further 49 have suspended operations due to the rise in conflict.

## SOUTH AND CENTRAL SYRIA

Attacks against government-aligned personnel and former opposition fighters continued this week with three attacks recorded. Two of these involved hit and run attacks against National Defence Force (NDF) personnel in As Sweida governorate (Atil and Samma al Hneidat villages), while on 19 May, a sustained small arms fire attack [targeted](#) a Syrian Army patrol in Sanamayn town in Daraa Governorate.

In central areas of the country, ISIS activity against government forces continued. On 15 and 17 May, ISIS ambushed government forces patrolling the desert areas close to the Sawane and Khounayfis phosphate mines, between Tadmor and Sokhneh cities. According to pro-government [sources](#), as many as 20 government soldiers were killed in the attack. Later in the week, ISIS and government forces clashed in the Muhasan and Qetet Elbuluil areas, south of Deir Ez Zor City. As part of an ongoing anti-ISIS campaign, government forces [sent](#) further re-enforcements to the central desert areas at the end of the week

In the south, Israel conducted two airstrikes against Hezbollah targets. On 17 May, Israeli warplanes struck a suspected Hezbollah weapons storage site close to Kisweh town, south of Damascus. A day later, Israeli airstrike struck the Brigade

90 base in Qunietra governorate.

## NORTHEAST SYRIA

The US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) [launched](#) a widespread security operation along the northern Euphrates River Valley this week. On 15 May, SDF forces arrested at least 42 individuals and confiscated weapons caches in areas south west of Deir Ez Zor City. At least 20 of the arrests occurred in Shiheil town, the site of anti-SDF protests in recent weeks. With a reported 5,000 SDF fighters taking part in the operation, it is one of the largest security operations in the northeast since the fall of ISIS' last remaining pocket in Baghuz at the start of this year.

However, despite this activity, small arms attacks and IED activity against the SDF and its allies continued this week. Four attacks were recorded against military patrols in Tuwamiyeh, al Hawayij, Daman and Basira towns. As [previously](#) reported, these areas between Deir Ez Zor and Baghuz towns have been a focus of this activity in 2019.

Elsewhere in the northeast, a vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) was detonated in Menbej City. On 16 May, a VBIED detonated close to the US-backed Menbej Military Council building in the Nadja neighbourhood of the city and resulted in at least 8 casualties. ISIS later claimed the attack. Despite being the 49<sup>th</sup> IED attack in the city since January 2018, it is of concern that the frequency of explosive attacks in the city has increased in the previous two months (Figure 4).

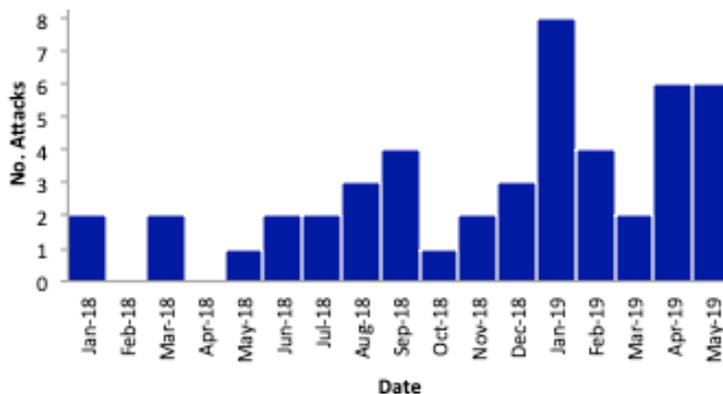


Figure 4: IED activity in Menbej City in 2018 and 2019.