



WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 19 - 25 AUGUST 2019

WHOLE OF SYRIA SUMMARY

- **NORTHWEST** | Government of Syria (GoS) forces captured Khan Sheikhun and areas south of the city from Jaish al Izza. Inside the northwest enclave, a Hayyat Tahrir ash Sham (HTS) crackdown on perceived decent was underway. Elevated levels of conflict continued between Turkish and aligned groups on the one side and the People's Protection Units (YPG) on the other side in the Tal Rifaat pocket.
- **SOUTH & CENTRAL** | In response to attacks against GoS-aligned personnel, former opposition groups, and civilians in Daraa, GoS sent reinforcements to western areas of the Daraa governorate. GoS attempts to curb ISIS activities were also reported in central areas of the country. Israeli airstrikes also targeted a suspected Iranian site south of Damascus.
- **NORTHEAST** | Improvised explosive device (IED) and small arms fire attacks continued against Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). SDF troops withdrew from Ras al Ain and Tal Abiad this week.

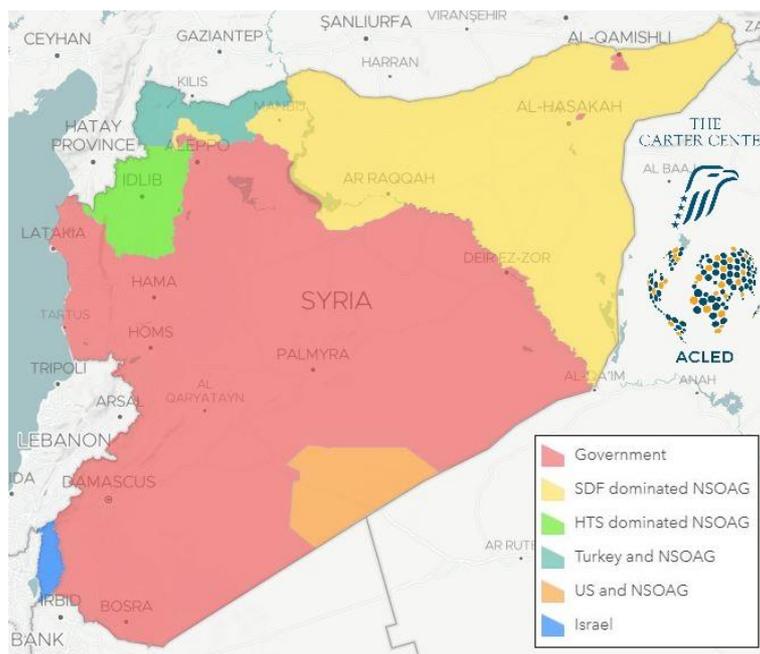


Figure 1: Dominant Actors' Area of Control and Influence in Syria as of 18 August 2019. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. For more explanation on our mapping, please see the footnote on page 2.

NORTHWEST SYRIA

Government of Syria (GoS) troops captured Khan Sheikhun and the area south of the town in northern Hama Governorate this week after the [withdrawal](#) of various armed groups, including Jaish al Izza, from the area on 23 August.² In the following days, GoS forces entered the main towns of Kafr Zeita, Latamenah and Morek, where a Turkish Military Observation post is located – now isolated from the rest of the Idlib de-escalation zone.

Sporadic fighting was recorded in some areas, as GoS forces consolidated their gains, including one event where a Russian national was killed in Khan Sheikhun. According to pro-government [sources](#), the individual was a private military contractor. Further north, GoS aerial and ground bombardments continued to impact major urban centers in southern Idlib throughout the week, [especially](#) Tah, Tamaniyah, Kafr Nabel, Jarjanaz, Maniz, and Mara'at al Numan towns, among others.

GoS attempted to recapture the Hayyat Tahrir ash Sham (HTS)/Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP) controlled hilltop stronghold of Kabani in Latakia Governorate during the week. [Several](#) aerial bombardments were conducted to support ground efforts there, although this action did not result in any changes in territory. Turkish-backed, Syrian opposition National Liberation Front (NLF) forces [launched](#) an anti-tank weapon against government forces in the area. Previous NLF support to HTS/TIP in Kabani had come from long-range artillery, rather than frontline activity.

HTS and other groups also shelled GoS-dominated areas as has been typical for previous months. GRAD rockets were [launched](#) at the Russian-operated Hmemeim Airbase in northern Latakia Governorate, while the Russian Center for Reconciliation and Conflicting Sides [reported](#) that shelling had targeted at least 14 government areas.³

¹ 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.

² Jaish al Izza had previously dominated the Khan Sheikhun pocket, but after last week's government advances reached the northern edges of Khan Sheikhun town, the group began withdrawing from the area on 19 August.

³ Benjamin, Aleppo, Sabiqla, Halasa in Aleppo governorate; Ayn al-Qantara, Saraf, Sanjeka, Chukurjak, Qalaat-Marza, Ardash-Dag, Kermel in Latakia governorate; Al-Wasita, Al-Salihiya in Idlib province; Tell-Metvazi in Hama province in Hama governorate.

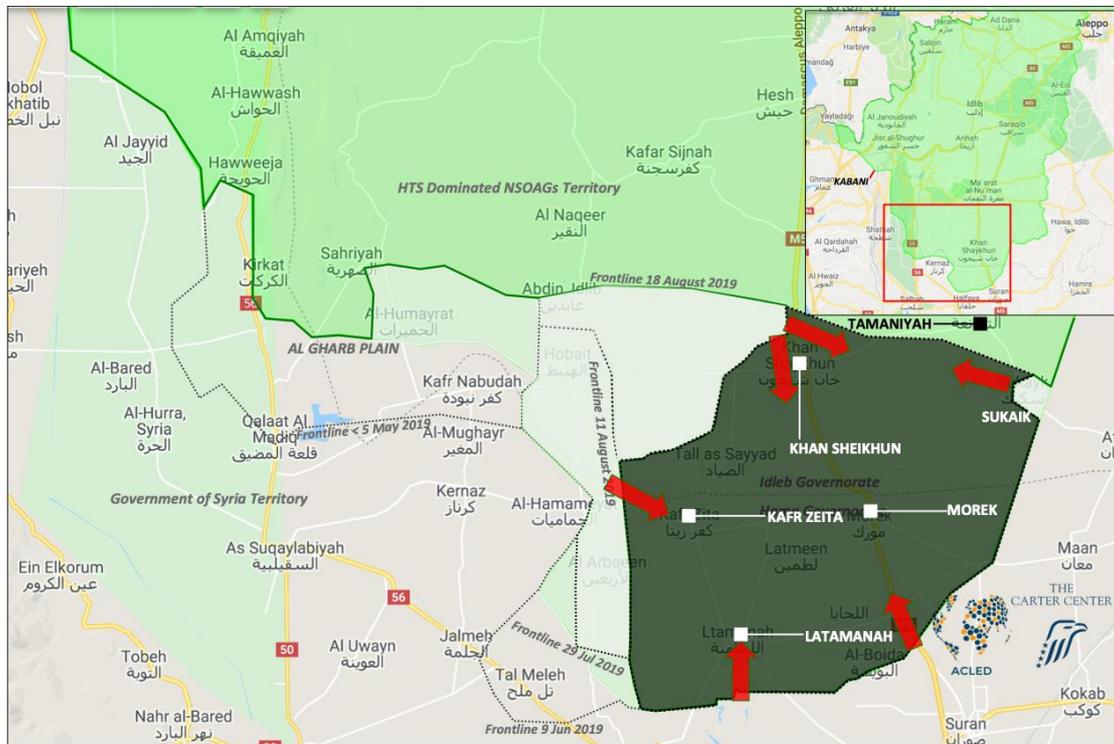


Figure 2: Frontlines in the northwest of Syria as of 25 August 2019 with recaptured areas in grey.

There were signs of an HTS crackdown on descent inside the Idlib enclave this week, with HTS authorities [arresting](#) several media activists in Idlib city and Bab al Hawa. In Idlib city, HTS also [arrested](#) a group suspected of planting improvised explosive devices (IED).

To the northeast, ongoing conflict was also reported in the Tal Rifaat pocket one week after a joint patrol between Russian and Turkish military forces.⁴ Eight frontline clashes between Turkish backed groups and the People's Protection Unit (YPG) were recorded in the [Kafr Khashir](#), [Hazwan](#), [Mare](#), [Jabul](#), [Maranaz](#) (x2), [Malikiyah](#), and [Ain Daqnah](#). Turkish backed forces also shelled [Maranaz](#) (x2), [Ain Daqnah](#), and [Malikiyah](#).

SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

In the South, GoS [sent](#) re-enforcements this week from Damascus to Daraa governorate. Additional personnel were posted at [several](#) checkpoints in Tal al Kheder, Dael, Shiekh Miskin, and Tal Ashtar towns.

However, despite this activity, five attacks against government-aligned personnel and civilians were recorded this week; in [Mzeireb](#) against local mayor, in [Sanamayn](#) and [Nahta](#) against alleged GoS informants, in [Tasil](#) against a government adviser, and in [Busra ash Sham](#) against a pro-government photojournalist.

⁴ The Tal Rifaat area is under joint control of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and GOS forces since late 2016. Russian forces also conducts joint patrols with Turkish troops in the area since 14 February 2019, and with SDF forces between 26 March 2019 and 10 April 2019.

For more on conflict dynamics on southern Syria, see our [‘Special Report: Conflict in Southern Syria | August 2018 – July 2019.’](#)

In central areas of the country, GoS forces conducted rocket and artillery bombardments, while Russian aircraft conducted several airstrikes, on suspected ISIS locations in the desert areas [between](#) Deir ez Zor and Mayadeen towns. These were the first Russian/Syrian airstrikes in the region since April and coincide with a major government anti-ISIS operation underway in southeast Deir Ez Zor governorate.

On the evening of 24 August, an Israeli airstrike targeted an alleged Iranian Republican Guard Corps (IRGC) site close to Kisweh town, south of Damascus. Pro-government [sources](#) reported that five Hezbollah members had been killed in the attack. The event prompted a [rare](#) acknowledgement from the Israeli government that they had conducted the strike to prevent a weaponized drone attack against Israel.

While Israeli action is common in Syria, with 54 recorded events this year so far, including five previously in the Kisweh area, this week’s activity was uncommon, as it was part of a region-wide series of strikes that occurred within a 24-hour period in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon.⁵ While this activity has been increasing in the previous two months, it is important to note that levels have been higher in the past, such as in January 2019, July 2018 and May 2018 (Figure 3).

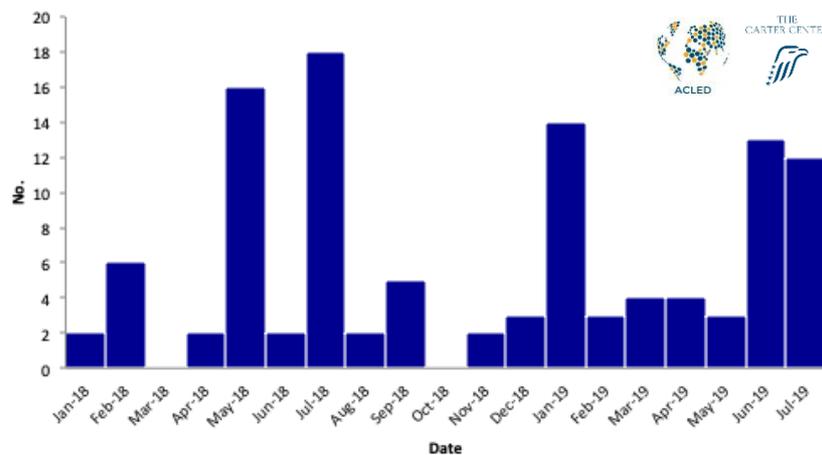


Figure 3: Recorded Israeli activity in Syria 2018 - 2019.

NORTHEAST SYRIA

Troop movements were seen along the Syrian/Turkish border this week. The US-backed SDF [withdrew](#) forces from the border town of Ras al Ayn and dismantled earth berms in the area. Pro-opposition sources also [reported](#) that the SDF withdrew 180 soldiers from Tal Abiad. Coalition aircraft [conducted](#) several flyovers in the area during the week. This activity follows increasing discussions

⁵ Other locations targeted by Israeli activity on 24 and 25 August include Lebanon (Bekka Valley and Southern Beirut) and Iraq (Qaim).

between the US and Turkey over a proposed “safe zone” along Syria’s northern border.

Low-level IED and small arms fire attacks against the SDF and aligned forces continued this week, with five events recorded in [Raqqqa](#), [Basira](#) (x2), [Hawayij](#), and [Sabha](#). In [Sheikh Hamad](#), south of Markadah town, an IED also detonated against a medical center, severely damaging it. An attack against a medical site in the northeast is rare, with no recorded cases in the previous two years.

Arrest operations continued in the northeast with three recorded in [Suwar](#), [Basira](#), and in the vicinity of [Tabqa](#), where a joint Global Coalition against Daesh and SDF force conducted a large operation involving up to 150 soldiers. Pro-government sources also [reported](#) that the SDF had imposed a curfew from 11pm until dawn and banned celebratory gunfire and carrying personal weapons in Basira.

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