



WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 23 - 29 SEPTEMBER 2019

WHOLE OF SYRIA SUMMARY

- **NORTHWEST** | Elevated levels of Government of Syria (GoS) shelling continued on the Hayyat Tahrir ash Sham (HTS)-dominated Idlib enclave. Improvised explosive device (IED) activity targeted local armed groups and civilians in Turkish-backed area of Aleppo Governorate. Widespread civilian protests against the recent formation of the UN-backed Constitutional Committee occurred in several locations in the northwest.
- **SOUTH & CENTRAL** | An increase in attacks against GoS-aligned personnel, former opposition members, and civilians preceded the arrival of additional GoS forces in southern Syria. For the second time in a month, GoS forces seized property in former opposition areas around the capital. ISIS activity continued in central areas of the country.
- **NORTHEAST** | Civilian protests denouncing the government continued in GoS-held areas of Deir Ez Zor Governorate. For the fourth time in a month, airstrikes targeted Iranian-linked sites in Abu Kamal. The U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) continued a recruitment drive and security operations in the northeast. U.S. and Turkish forces conducted the third joint ground patrol during September in Ras al Ain town.

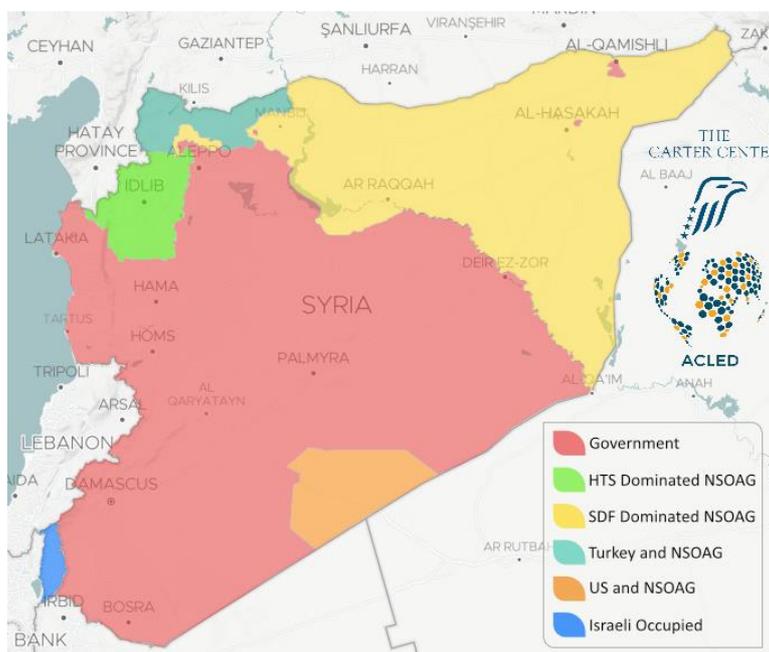


Figure 1: Dominant Actors' Area of Control and Influence in Syria as of 29 September 2019. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. Also, please see the footnote on page 2.

## NORTHWEST SYRIA

Elevated levels of Government of Syria (GoS) military activity continued to target the Hayyat Tahrir ash Sham (HTS)-dominated Idleb enclave this week, affecting at least 46 communities,<sup>2</sup> Aerial bombardment activity also increased during the period, with 10 strikes, compared to one the previous period.

A notable concentration of GoS activity was also seen in the HTS/Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP)-held Kabani and Sirmaniya towns, in northeast Latakia Governorate. These areas saw seven of this week's ten aerial bombardments (Figure 2).

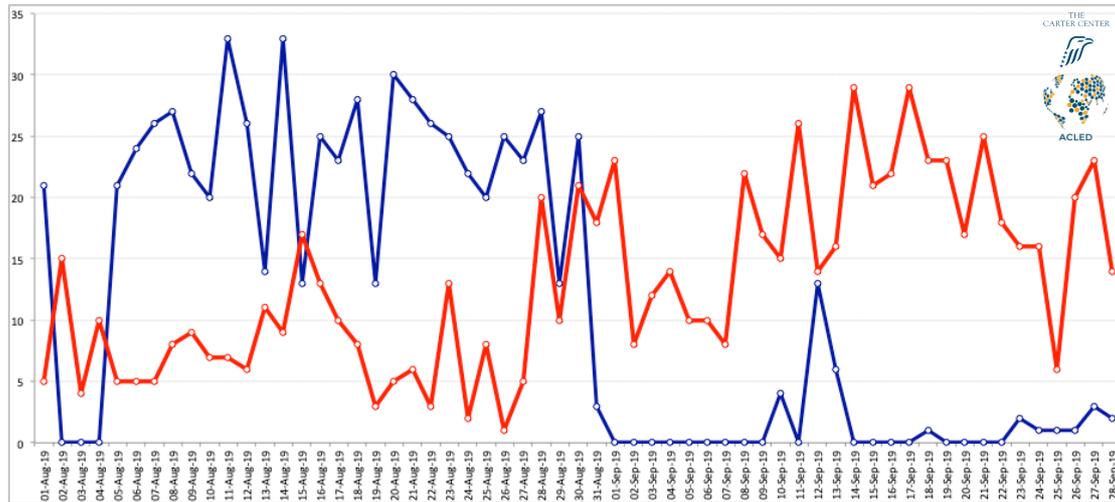


Figure 2: GoS Aerial Activity (Blue) and Shelling (Red) in Northwest Syria Since August 2019. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

Low levels of HTS shelling on GoS-dominated areas also continued this period, with five events impacting Jurin, Hamra, Aleppo, and Madaya (x2). Opposition shelling on GOS positions has remained at a reduced level since late August (Figure 3). In addition to shelling activity, six armed clashes between GoS forces and HTS and aligned groups occurred on frontlines in Janajiq, Ajaz, al Gharb, and Tal Sidi Jafar (x2). Al Qaeda-aligned Hurras al Din also clashed with GoS forces in the Zmar area of Aleppo Governorate. This is the fourth incident in three months of the group activity on HTS-controlled frontlines.<sup>3</sup>

<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.

<sup>2</sup> Building on last week's 139 shelling events on 77 communities.

<sup>3</sup> After two attacks against GoS forces also launched from HTS frontlines in June and July (as reported on [here](#)), and videos of a Hurras al Din-aligned Operations Room, and a HTS-aligned Operations Room coordinating together in fighting against GoS in August (as reported on [here](#)).

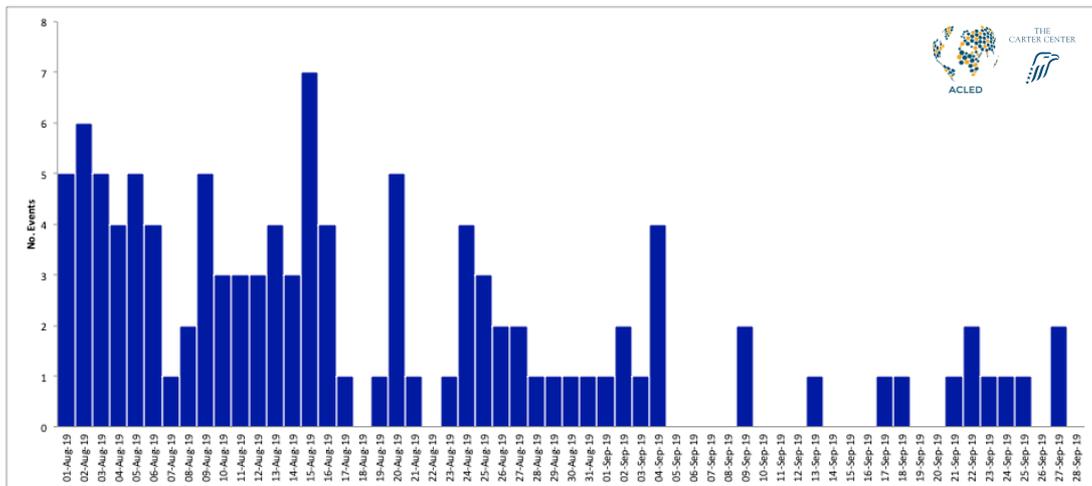


Figure 3: HTS and Other Groups Shelling of GoS Areas in Northwest Syria Since 1 August. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

In the Turkish-backed areas of northern Aleppo Governorate,<sup>4</sup> high levels of violence continued. In Afrin, Ahrar al Sham and Al Sham Corps units clashed for unknown reasons. Two Ahrar al Sham fighters were found dead in Terhin town as well. At least five improvised explosive device (IED) detonations also occurred against armed groups in Jandairis (Nour al Din Al Zinki) and Aghtrin (Jabhat al Sham), and against civilians in Kafr Kalbein, Azaz, and in Jandairis. In Jandairis a car bomb detonation damaged a nearby NGO-run medical center. Since June, IED activity has increased in Turkish-backed areas, with 16 events per month on average. This contrasts to the four months prior to June, with 11 events per month on average.

Widespread demonstrations also took place in the northwest on 27 September, with protests in Kafr Takharim, Maraat al Numaan, Killi, Jarablus, Sejjo, Sarmada, and Idleb City. Protestors denounced the recent formation of the UN-backed Constitutional Committee, calling for the overthrow of the Syrian Government and the release of detainees by GoS. Unlike previous demonstrations in the past month, none denounced HTS's rule.

Contingents of GoS troops arrived in the western and northwestern suburbs of Aleppo city, as well as southeastern areas of the Idleb enclave between 23 – 26 September. HTS re-enforcements also arrived to Adnan and Darret al Izza towns in northeastern Idleb. Turkish military units, including 15 armored vehicles, arrived to their observation post in Maar Hattat on 26 September.

## SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

An increase in attacks against government-aligned personnel, former opposition members and civilians occurred in southern Syria this week, with at least 10 events recorded.<sup>5</sup> Armed attacks against GoS-aligned actors occurred in Tal Shihab against an alleged GoS collaborator, in Eastern Maliha against a Mukhtar, in Tafas against an Airforce Intelligence officer and former opposition member, and twice in As-Sanamayn, where an armed group attacked a National Defence Force (NDF) site. Later in the week, NDF and local security forces in As-Sanamayn,

<sup>4</sup> Operation Olive Branch and Operation Euphrates Shield

<sup>5</sup> Compared to the previous period's already elevated seven attacks.

made up of former opposition members, also clashed for unknown reasons.

Events targeting civilians in southern Syria included an IED detonation in Daraa al Balad, a shooting in As-Sanamayn, a family dispute that escalating into an armed clash in Shajarah, and on the road between Western Ghariyeh and Saida towns, the body of a civilian was found on 24 September. The victim was later identified and had been based in Saudi Arabia for seven years prior to crossing into Syria using the Nasib Border Crossing from Jordan the same day he was killed. Conflict in southern Syria has remained elevated since April (Figure 4).

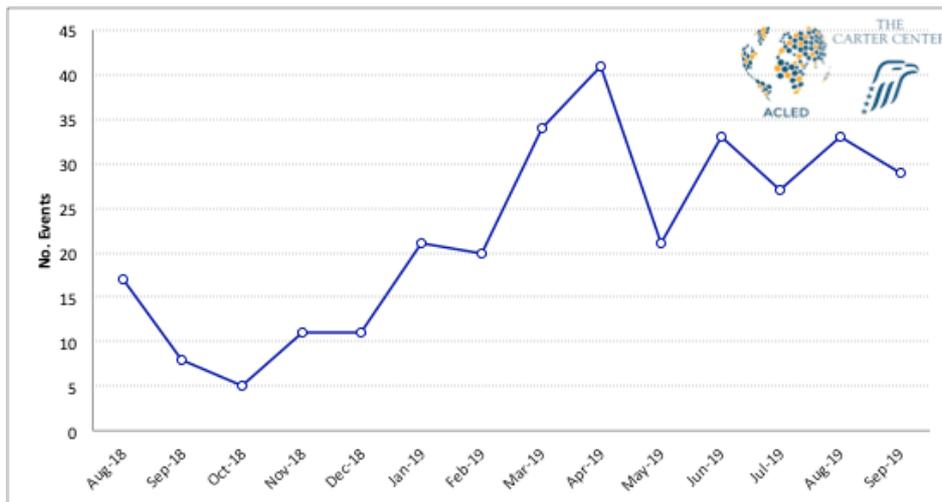


Figure 4: Attacks against GoS personnel, former opposition groups and civilians in southern Syria since August 2018. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

An IED detonated in Khan Arnaba town in Quneitra Governorate targeted the head of the Bustan Association on 27 September. The attack comes during a period of heightened tensions in the area, after the Syrian charity's armed wing, the Bustan Brigades, was involved in armed clashes with local security forces from nearby Jbhat al Khashab last week.

The GoS also dispatched re-enforcements from the 9<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division to Sanamayn town during the week.<sup>6</sup> The town has been the site of previous GoS troop movements, most recently in August.<sup>7</sup>

Further north, in the vicinity of Damascus, GoS arrest operations and property seizures were reported. In Duma City, the 4<sup>th</sup> Division and State Security seized two vacant properties that had previously belonged to Jaish al Islam commanders. In Duma, Jalaa, and Dhameer towns, GoS forces also conducted three large arrest operations for military aged males.<sup>8</sup>

Such activity has been consistently [reported](#) from former opposition areas around

<sup>6</sup> The 9<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division is one of the largest divisions in the Syrian military. Some commentators have [alleged](#) parts of the division, such as the 52nd Armoured Brigade, are linked to Hezbollah.

<sup>7</sup> The 4<sup>th</sup> Division and 5<sup>th</sup> Division (Different from the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps) have both sent re-enforcements to Sanamayn town in 2019 in addition to the 9<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division.

<sup>8</sup> The practice of property appropriation by the Syrian state is covered by counter-terrorism legislation, and has been detailed by the UN [here](#) (Page 16, Paragraph 80 & 81).

the capital in the past year, especially Eastern Ghouta<sup>9</sup>. This week's activity is the second time this month GoS forces have seized property in Eastern Ghouta.

Evidence of ISIS's enduring presence in central areas of the country was reported this week. The group conducted at least two ambushes against GoS and aligned troops near Mayadeen, one of which resulted in an Iranian Republican Guard Corps (IRGC) member being killed. ISIS also claimed three IED attacks against the GoS-aligned Palestinian Al Quds Brigade, east of Tadmor City, and two Syrian Army patrols near Sokhneh and in the Bishri Mountains. Pro-government sources [reported](#) the latter attack resulted in Russian Military casualties.

This week's ISIS activity comes two weeks after the completion of a month and a half long anti-ISIS campaign by GoS and the start of a new operation on 17 September. There have been 11 previous IED attacks recorded in 2019, seven of which have occurred just after and just prior to the recent GoS clearance operation<sup>10</sup> (Figure 5).

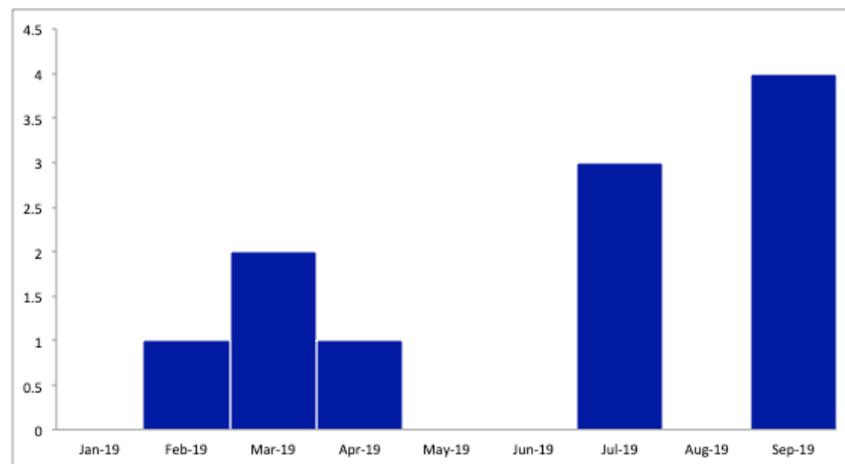


Figure 5: ISIS IED attacks in GoS held parts of Central Syria (Homs, Deir Ez Zor, and Raqqa Governorates) in 2019. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

## NORTHEAST SYRIA

Widespread protests were reported in the northeast of Syria this week. On 27 September, protests occurred in GoS-held Al Salhiyyah Asbah, and Muaayzillah towns. Similar to the protests on 20 September,<sup>11</sup> demonstrators called for the withdrawal of GoS from Deir Ez Zor Governorate. Unlike the previous week, demonstrations in support occurred in Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) held areas north of Al Salhiyyah, Asbah, and Muaayzillah. Local security forces prevented demonstrators from crossing into GoS held territory.

Demonstrations were seen in SDF-dominated Shadadah town and Hassakeh City on 24 and 28 September, protesting an upcoming ban of motorcycles in the two towns on starting 5 October for security reasons. This week, two IED attacks were reported against SDF personnel in Shadadah and the Abied Road, just south of

<sup>9</sup> Which was re-captured by GoS forces in 2018 from various groups including Jaish al Islam, Faylaq al Rahman, and HTS

<sup>10</sup> Three IED events occurred in late July, no events occurred in August (coinciding with the start of the GoS clearance operation), while four IED events occurred since 17 September, two days after the end of the August clearance operation.

<sup>11</sup> In Husseiniyah, Khasham, Mathlum, Mrat, Tabiyeh Jazira and Salhiyah towns.

Hassakeh city. This brings the total number of recorded explosive detonations in the two towns in 2019 to 16 and 30 respectively, 13 of which have involved motorcycle IEDs.

Low-level conflict continued in the northeast, with at least five attacks against SDF and aligned personnel in Tal Brak, Tal Hmeis, Shiheil, Hawayij, and Thiban. Four attacks also impacted civilians, in the Omar Oil Field, where an IED targeted an oil tanker, and in Tal Hmeis, Thiban, and Tayyana villages, where three civilians were shot and killed. A home break-in also occurred in the al Rusafa neighbourhood of Hassakeh city on 23 September, where a civilian was stabbed and killed.

For the fourth time this month, airstrikes targeted an Iranian-linked site in Abu Kamal on 28 September.<sup>12</sup> The attack remained unclaimed, although Israel is the only actor that consistently targets Iranian and aligned entities in Syria with airstrikes.

U.S. and Turkish forces conducted the third military ground patrol in northeast Syria on 24 September,<sup>13</sup> starting in Tal Abied and moving eastwards to Sluk Village. Later in the week, U.S. and Turkish forces conducted a joint aerial patrol over Tal Abied on 28 September. These activities are part of the agreed “[security mechanisms](#)” between Turkey, the U.S. and the SDF after a deal in late August.

SDF forces carried out further security operations this week, including conscription arrests in Ras al Ain, as well as joint SDF/Global Coalition Against Daesh raids targeting alleged ISIS members in Jasim and al Rez towns. Security personnel in Al Hol detention camp for ISIS families arrested 4 individuals suspected of preparing to smuggle residents out of the camp. Escapes from the camp are frequent, over 200 escaped in the month of August alone.

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<sup>12</sup> After last strikes on 3, 8 and 18 September.

<sup>13</sup> After two joint ground patrols patrol on 16 September and 8 September.