

THE
CARTER CENTER



WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 5 - 11 AUGUST 2019

WHOLE OF SYRIA SUMMARY

- **NORTHWEST** | Government of Syria (GoS) advanced further in the Idleb enclave this week, in the Zakah, Habit, and Sukaik areas, days after a ceasefire was ended. Elsewhere, elevated conflict levels continued in the Tal Rifaat pocket between Turkish and aligned groups on the one side and the People's Protection Units (YPG) on the other.
- **SOUTH & CENTRAL** | In addition to low-level attacks against government-aligned personnel continuing in Daraa Governorate, GoS-aligned international personnel were killed in central areas of Syria. In Damascus, a break-in targeted the residence of a National Defence Force (NDF) member and his family, resulting in their deaths.
- **NORTHEAST** | Ongoing improvised explosive device (IED) and small arms fire attacks against Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) continued this week.

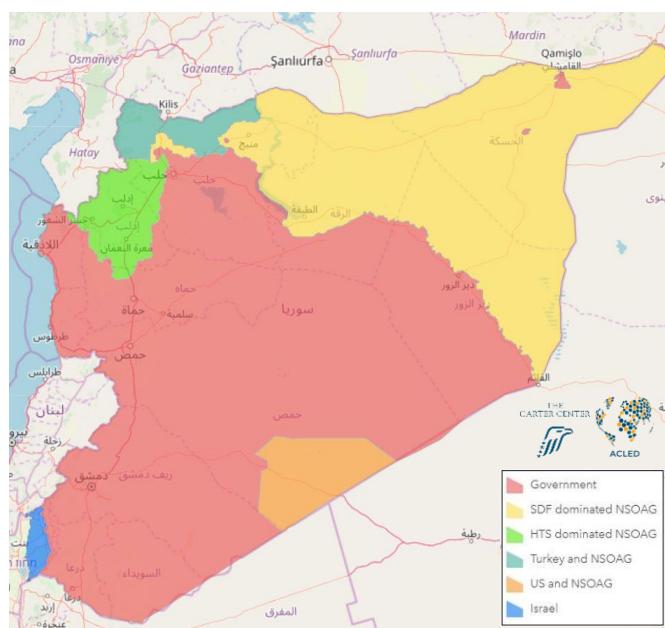


Figure 1: Dominant Actors' Area of Control and Influence in Syria as of 5 August 2019. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. For more explanation on our mapping, please see the footnote on page 2.

NORTHWEST SYRIA

Government of Syria (GoS) forces advanced in the Hayyat Tahrir ash Sham (HTS)-dominated Idlib enclave this week. After last week's capture of Tal Mallah, GoS troops capitalized on their momentum to take Zakah town by 6 August. In the following days, GoS forces on the Kafr Nabuda front also began ground operations eastwards towards Habit town. Advancing from the south and west, GoS forces, supported by Russian and Syrian warplanes, took the towns of Jaysat and Maghar al Hammam, before reaching Habit by 11 August. Conflict remains focused on the eastern edges of this town at the time of writing, with at least one HTS suicide car bomb [deployed](#) at the end of the week.

On the southeast frontlines of the enclave, GoS advanced towards Sukaik town on 10 August where fighting also continues at the time of writing (Figure 2). This is the first GoS advancement on the eastern side of the enclave since the Abu Dhohur offensive ended in February 2018. Notably, these advancements occurred days after the Syrian government [announced](#) it cancelled a ceasefire agreement made on [2 August](#).

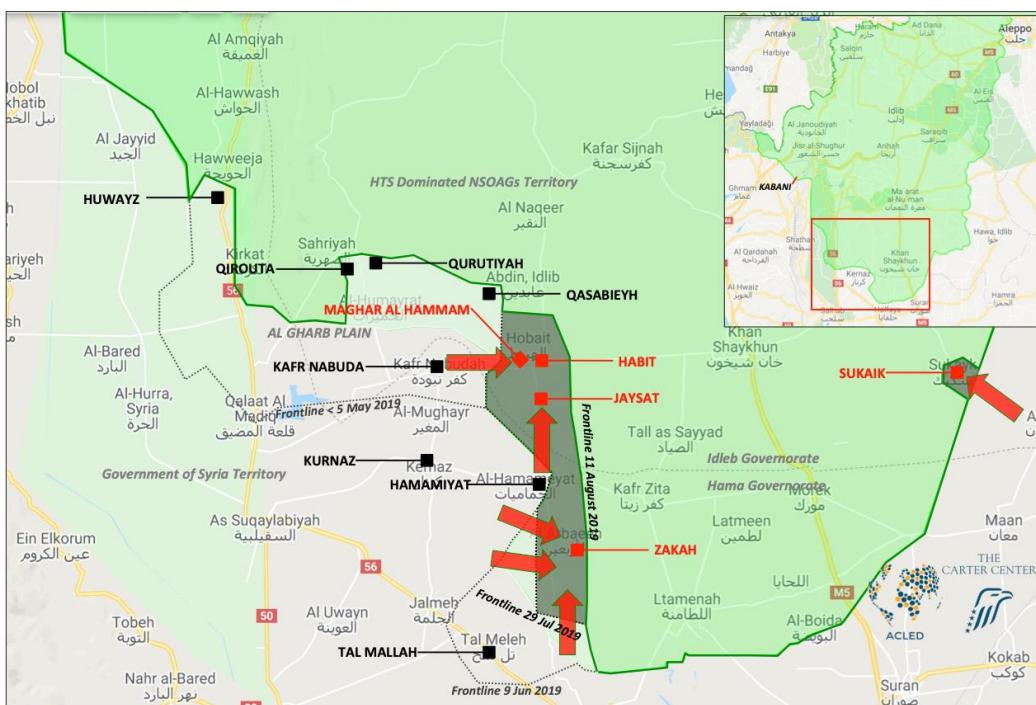


Figure 2: Frontlines in the northwest of Syria as of 11 August 2019 with GoS advances highlighted in red and recaptured areas in grey.

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.

Elsewhere, GoS forces also continued their focus on the HTS / Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP) controlled town of Kabani in the northeast of Latakia governorate. At least six airstrike sorties, three barrel-bomb attacks, and one rocket salvo were recorded on the hill-top stronghold during the week, before government ground forces launched three waves of [assaults](#). At the time of writing, the GoS forces had not taken Kabani yet.

HTS and other groups continued to bombard GoS-held areas. The Russian Center for Reconciliation and Conflicting Sides [announced](#) that up to 30 settlements in government-controlled areas had been impacted by shelling originating from within the Idlib pocket. Media [sources reported](#) the further use of weaponized drones in northern Hama.

Elsewhere, elevated levels of conflict continued in Tal Rifaat and the surrounding area² following the previous week's spike. Pro-opposition sources [recorded](#) at least four instances of shelling and three ground clashes between Turkish-aligned armed groups and the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) in Ain Daqnah, Aqiba, Harbel, Malikiyah, Maranaz (x2), Marea, Miyyasa, Shawarighat al Arz, Shiekh Issa, Tal Rifat, and Zernayta towns northwest of Aleppo City.³ These clashes are concerning, especially given Turkey's recent [rhetoric](#) about a military intervention against Syrian Kurdish forces.

SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

Attacks against GoS-aligned personnel, former opposition group members, and civilians continued in southern Syria this week. At least four incidents were reported, including against Air Force Intelligence officials at [checkpoints](#) in Shiekh Saad and [Sanamayn](#), and Syrian military personnel [near](#) Nasib and [Nawa](#) towns. These attacks have grown steadily since government forces recaptured southern Syria in August 2018, in particular against Sanamayn and Nawa (Figure 3). An average of seven attacks per week have taken place against GoS-aligned personnel, former opposition groups, or civilians.

In central areas of the country more international personnel were killed in clashes with ISIS following last week's [announcement](#) that Russian nationals had been killed near Tadmor in July. This week, pro-government sources reported that an Iranian Republican Guard Corps personnel was [killed](#) near Abu Kamal. In the deserts of Mayadeen in Deir Ezzor province a Lebanese national was [killed](#) in clashes with ISIS. These reports are a reminder of the various armed groups operating in seemingly pacified areas of the country. These reports coincide with the [start](#) of GoS clearance operations near the T3 oil pumping station in eastern Homs governorate.

² 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.

³ Building on last week's 11-recorded events. For more see [here](#).

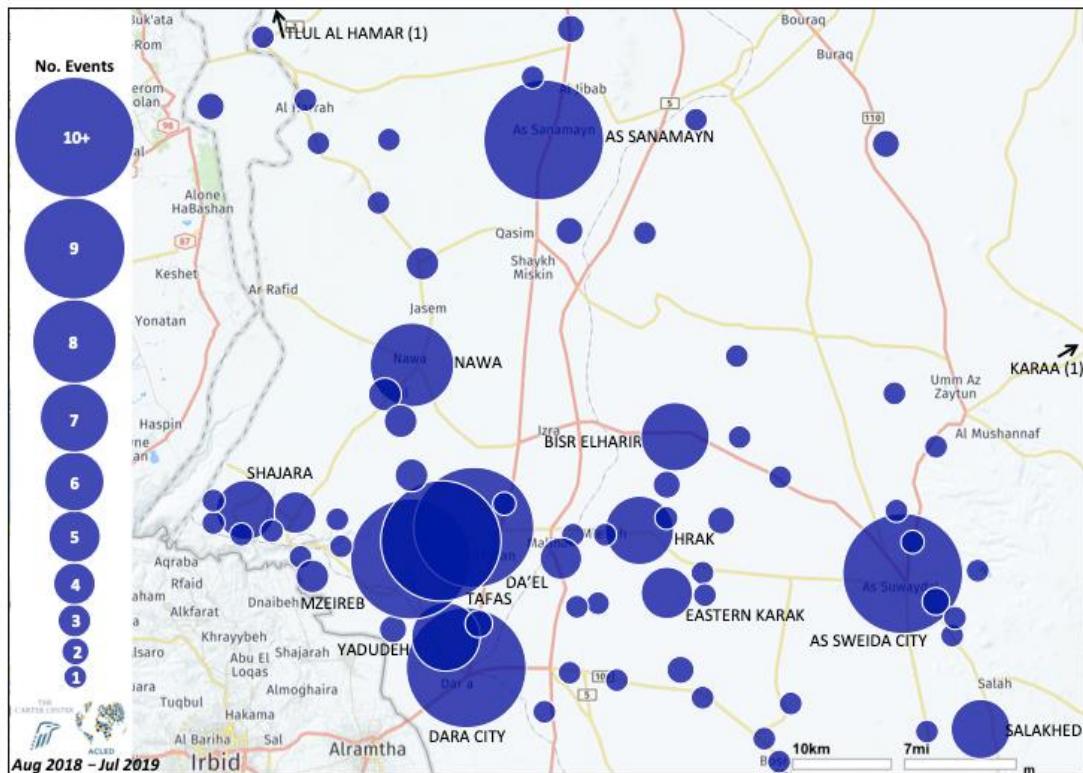


Figure 3: Documented conflict activity against GoS-aligned personnel, former opposition group members, and civilians in southern Syria since August 2018.

According to a UN reporting service, in the capital's northeast Tadamon district on 11 August, unidentified actors shot dead an off-duty National Defence Force (NDF) soldier and four family members after breaking into their residence. The motivations for the attack is not known. Although this was the first such incident in the area since 2017, GoS-aligned personnel were targeted in the neighbouring Ish al Warwar neighbourhood in April 2019 as a result of tensions between GoS armed groups.

NORTHEAST SYRIA

At least six small arms fire and improvised explosive device (IED) attacks against US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) were recorded this week in [Raqqa](#), [Shiheil](#), [Kahtani](#), [Thiban](#), [Basira](#) and [Shadadi](#). On August 8, at least two mortar shells exploded in the SDF-held town of Hawij Ditayb, located 25km northwest of Deir Ez Zor city. The incident, rare in the Euphrates River Valley since the fall of the last ISIS stronghold in late March 2019, did not result in any casualty.

US-led Global Coalition against Daesh aircraft conducted at least two monitoring sorties in the vicinity of Ras al Ain on [5](#) and [6](#) August, an area in which reported activity has been rare. This follows an increase in shelling from Turkish forces based in Turkey into northern Syria in the past month.⁴ Notably, half of the 11

⁴ Since 24 July 2019, nearly half of the recorded Turkish Military shelling and shootings into Syria have taken place.

recorded, Turkish-initiated events in 2019 have occurred in or close to Ras al Ain (Figure 4). The Coalition sorties occurred just prior to a 7 August [meeting](#) between the US military and Turkish officials over the proposed “safe zone” in northeast Syria.



Figure 4: Turkish-initiated shelling into northern Syria in 2019.

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