



WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 6 – 12 MAY 2019

WHOLE OF SYRIA SUMMARY

- **NORTHWEST** | Government forces began advances in the southwest corner of the Hayyat Tahrir ash Sham (HTS)-dominated Idleb pocket this week. Elsewhere, government troops have been deployed to the Tall Rifaat area, a week after an increase in conflict there.
- **SOUTH & CENTRAL** | Low-level attacks against government-aligned personnel continued in the south, while in As Sweida Governorate, two protests were held over the ongoing fuel crisis. In the capital, an explosive device was detonated in the Midan area.
- **NORTHEAST** | Small arms and explosive attacks against military actors continued along the Euphrates River valley this week. Protests occurred in communities between Deir Ez Zor City and Baghuz village for a third consecutive week

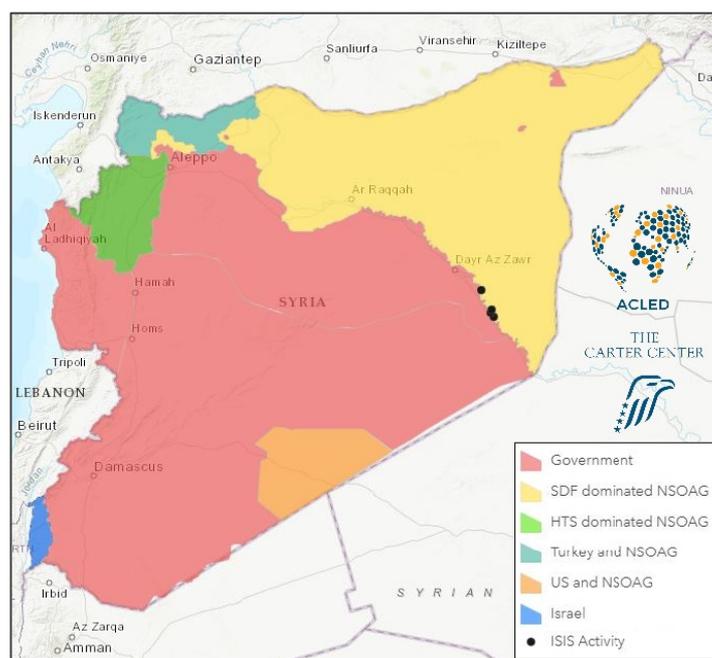


Figure 1: Dominant Actors' Area of Control and Influence in Syria as of 12 May 2019. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. For more explanation on our mapping, please see the footnote on page 2.

NORTHWEST SYRIA

Following early indications of government action in the northwest in previous weeks, this week saw the beginning of government advances into the Hayyat Tahrir ash Sham (HTS)-dominated Idlib pocket. In conjunction with high levels of aerial and ground bombardments (400 events this week), government and aligned forces² broke through frontlines at Tal Uthman hill, north of Suqlabiyah town. Government forces then advanced on the opposition hub of Kafr Nabudah town, to the east, taking it on 8 May (Figure 3).

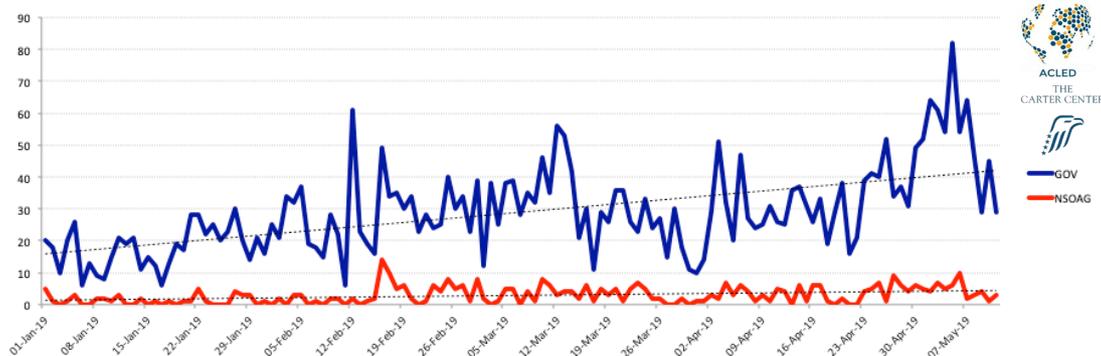


Figure 2: Government (blue) and NSOAG (red) activity in the northwest of Syria in 2019.

HTS and other opposition groups withdrew from villages around Madiq Castle,³ allowing the government to regain control of the southwest corner of the enclave by 10 May. By the end of the week, government forces had also captured Shar'ah and Msheirah Shamaliah towns. At the time of writing, government activity was focused on two fronts, northwards along the Shahshabu mountain range that leads to Jebal Zawiyah, and eastwards, towards Al Habit town on the Khan Sheikhoun axis (Figure 3).

Despite the loss of territory, HTS and other opposition groups⁴ continued their shelling campaign on government-dominated areas. This week saw an increase in this activity compared to previous weeks, with at least 13 bombardments impacting the towns of Jeb al Ahmar, Maghir, Karim, Braideel, Sheikh Hadid, Sökkariyah, Sifafiyeh, Hiyalin, Tel Sakkin as well as Aleppo City.

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. The visualization is based on data collected by ACLED and The Carter Center.

² This includes [Russian troops](#), Russian Private Military Contractors, as well as [Hezbollah](#), one of whom was killed in fighting in Idlib this week.

³ Including Shiekh Idris, Bab el Taqa, Ja'ata, Kirkat, Tal Harash, and Tweini towns.

⁴ Including the Wa Harredh al Moa'mineen Operations Room – made up of the groups Hurras al Din, Ansar al Tawheed, Ansar al Din and Ansar al Islam – the Turkish backed National Liberation Front (NLF), Jaish al Izza, Jaish al Ahrar, Jaish al Nasr, Hamza Brigade, and Ahrar al Sham.

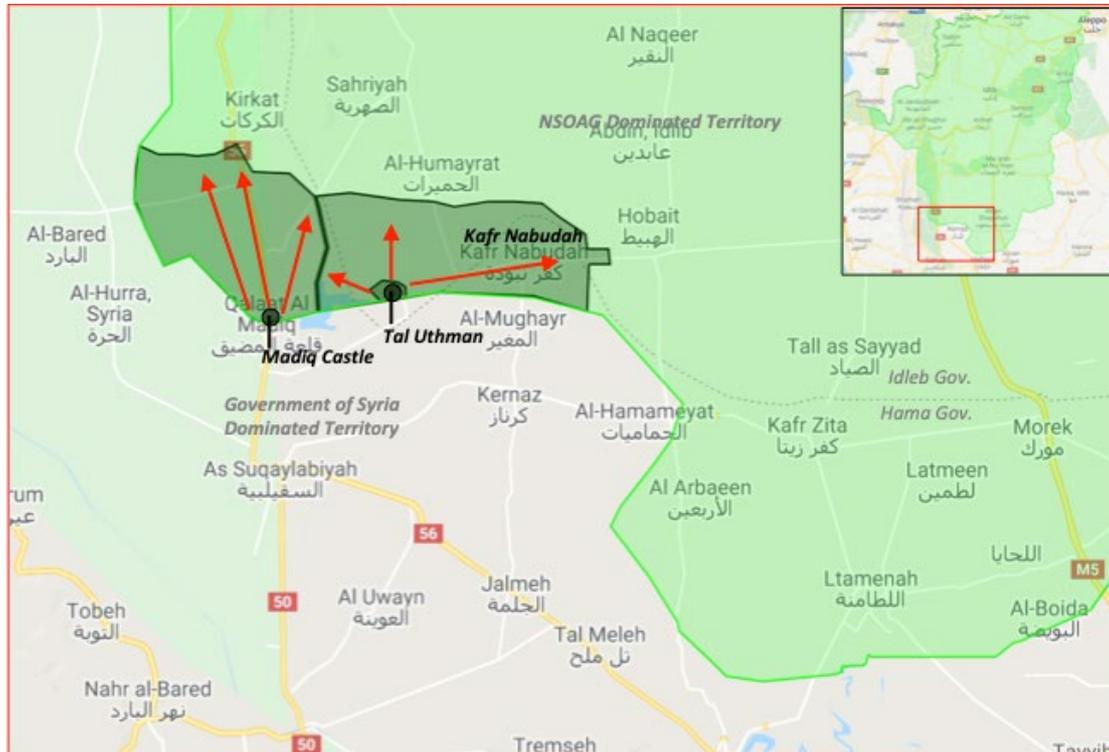


Figure 3: Direction of Government advances (red arrows) in northwest Syria May 2019.

Long-range Grad missiles also targeted Nayrab Airbase near Aleppo City, government locations near Maghir and Suqalabiyah towns, as well as toward the Russian operated Hameimim Airbase in Lattakia Governorate.

At least one HTS attack was recorded behind government lines in the Tal Rasha area of Lattakia Governorate on 12 May. The incident involved several suicide attackers assaulting a government position and resulted in a number of casualties according to pro-government [sources](#).

This week's activity continued to impact the civilian population in the northwest. Large IDP movements were recorded from southern areas to northern areas of the northwest. UNOCHA [stated](#) up to 180,000 people have been displaced from southern Idlib since 29 April. Further two medical facilities were taken out of service by [airstrikes](#), while Syrian civil defence centres across opposition-held northern Hama continued to be [affected](#) by the conflict.

Elsewhere in the northwest, low levels of conflict were recorded in the Tal Rifaat area,⁵ with just three instances of shelling exchanges between the YPG and Turkish backed opposition groups. Such activity is in contrast to the previous week's spike in conflict, that resulted in Turkish backed opposition groups'

⁵ The Tal Rifaat area is under joint control of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and government-aligned forces since late 2016. Russian forces had also conducted joint patrols with Turkish troops in the area since 14 February 2019, and with SDF forces between 26 March 2019 and 10 April 2019.

temporarily taking over three villages in the enclave.

Two contingents of government troops arrived in the Tal Rifaat area this week. The first arrived on 6 May with as many as 200 soldiers and armoured units stationed in Ard Ahras town, south of Tal Rifaat city. The second, saw a contingent from the 30th division arrive to Tal Rifaat City a day later. These were the first government troop movements to the area this year.

SOUTH AND CENTRAL SYRIA

Low level attacks against government-aligned personnel and former opposition fighters in the south continued this week with four attacks recorded. Three occurred in Daraa Governorate; targeting a former Free Syrian Police commander in Daraa al Balad, a contingent of National Defence Force members on the road from Izra to Bosra al Harir, and an Airforce Intelligence officer in Um Elmayathin town. One attack also occurred near Al Thaala town in As Sweida Governorate, where two Syrian soldiers were killed at an ad hoc checkpoint.

Civilian frustrations from the ongoing fuel crisis in Syria have resulted in unrest in As Sweida Governorate. On 7 May, a brawl broke out at a fuel station in Taara town with residents from the nearby Al Dur town due to the fuel restrictions. A day later, a [protest](#) over the lack of fuel in As Sweida Governorate occurred in front of the municipal council building in central As Sweida City. The protest ended without violence.

Finally, in the capital, another improvised explosive device (IED) attack was recorded on 11 May. The device detonated in the Al Zahira area of the Midan neighbourhood in southern Damascus City. Unlike the most recent events the previous month, no group claimed the attack. This now brings the total number of IED attacks in the capital in 2019 to six. Four of these have occurred in the previous month.⁶

NORTHEAST SYRIA

Small arms attacks and IED activity against military actors along the Euphrates River Valley continued this week. In the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)-dominated areas, 12 attacks against patrols were recorded in Sabkha, Sur, Hajin Shiheil (3), Basira (2), Harajiyeh, Kishkiyeh, Tayyana and Thiban.

On the south bank, suspected ISIS members attacked government forces, in the Al Mayadin desert areas south of Deir Ez Zor City, near Baqras, Quriyeh, and in Ashara, where ISIS members ambushed a joint Syrian Iranian Republican Guard Corps (IRGC) patrol on 9 May that required Russian aerial support. The attacks occurred despite an ongoing anti-ISIS operation beginning last week in the desert areas between Deir Ez Zor City and the Iraqi border.

For a third consecutive week, protests occurred in communities between Deir Ez

⁶ 15, 16 and 24 April in addition to this week's event.

Zor and Baghuz towns.⁷ These continued to focus on SDF arrest policies, the lack of provision of basic services, the high prices of goods, and the perceived unfair distribution of local oil resources, especially to government areas.

⁷ In Tayyana, Abu Hardoub, Shiheil, Basira, Daman, and Thiban towns.