



WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 30 SEPTEMBER – 6 OCTOBER 2019

WHOLE OF SYRIA SUMMARY

- **NORTHWEST** | Elevated levels of Government of Syria (GoS) shelling and aerial bombing continued in the Hayyat Tahrir ash Sham (HTS) dominated Idlib enclave. Russia also conducted airstrikes for the first time on Hurras al Din positions. In the Turkish-backed areas of northern Aleppo Governorate, two main opposition factions announced their unification. In the Tal Rifaat pocket, there was an increased level of conflict .
- **SOUTH & CENTRAL** | In addition to low-level violence in southern Syria, a rocket struck Daraa City. Groups loyal to the GoS clashed for the second time within a month in Kharab Shaham town. ISIS activity continued in central areas of the country.
- **NORTHEAST** | A statement by the White House implying US forces would not intervene if Turkey invaded northeast Syria contradicted an agreement reached earlier between the U.S. and Turkey over a security zone along the Turkish-Syrian border. For the third consecutive week, civilian protests denouncing GoS presence took place in Deir Ez Zor Governorate. The fifth suspected Israeli airstrike within a month struck an Iranian site near Abu Kamal. In Al-Hol Camp, a major disturbance included armed clashes.

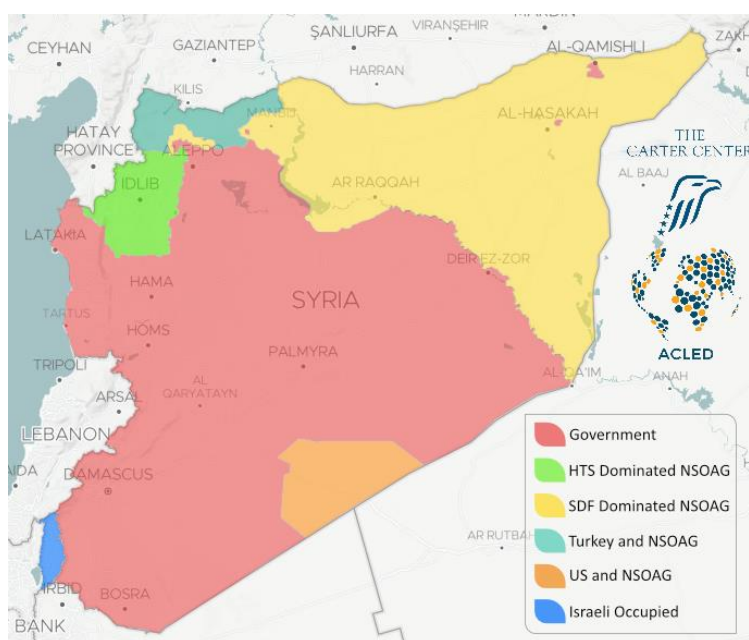


Figure 1: Dominant Actors' Area of Control and Influence in Syria as of 6 October 2019. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. Also, please see the footnote on page 2.

NORTHWEST SYRIA

Elevated levels of Government of Syria (GoS) shelling continued in Hayyat Tahrir ash Sham (HTS)-dominated northwest during the reporting period. GoS aerial bombardment also continued, with 10 events recorded (Figure 2).

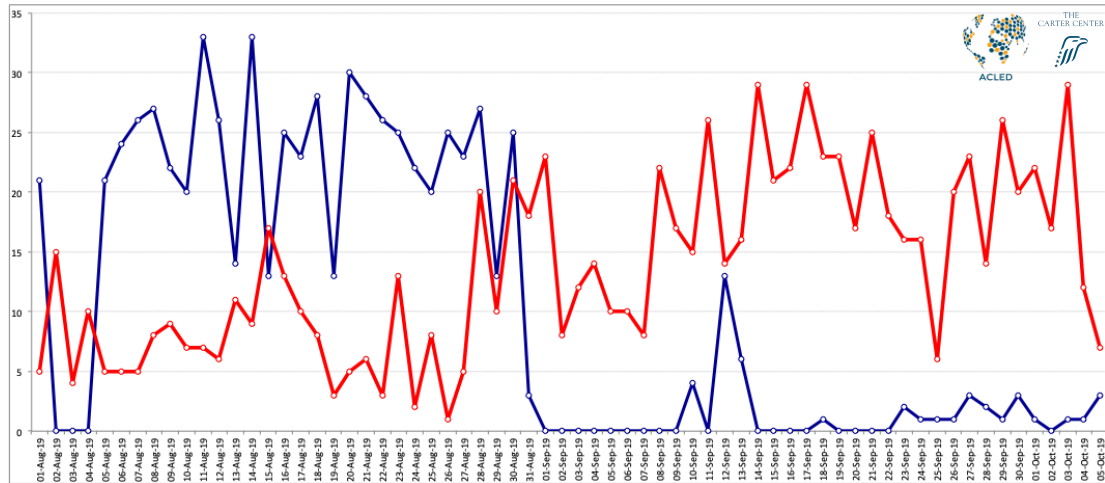


Figure 2: GoS Aerial Activity (Blue) and Shelling (Red) in Northwest Syria Since August 2019. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

In addition to southern areas of Idlib governorate, GoS activity also occurred in Kabani and Sirmaniya towns this week. The hilltop towns in northeast Latakia Governorate, held by HTS and aligned Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP), were targeted with seven of this week's 10 airstrikes. On 5 October, the Russian Airforce also conducted airstrikes on joint Al Qaeda-linked Hurras al Din/Ansar al Tawhid locations in Tal al Aghar and Ballisa villages in Idlib Governorate. The strike is the first recorded incident of Russian forces targeting the group, and [follows](#) two US led airstrikes on Hurras al Din in August and June this year.

According to ACLED, HTS and other groups shelled GoS-dominated areas, accounting for five to ten incidents this reporting period. Four armed clashes between GoS forces and HTS plus other groups took place on frontlines in Saraf, Jabal al Turkman, and Tal Jafaar. An HTS sniper also shot and killed a GoS soldier in the Layramoun frontline in the west of Aleppo City.

The Russian Reconciliation Center for Conflicting Sides [reported](#) 30 incidents of shelling during the week against 22 government-held settlements² HTS and other

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 This week's settlements struck by HTS and other group shelling included: Binyamin, Sabikiyah (Aleppo Governorate); Nahshebba, Dagdan, Saraf, Ain al-Qantara, Muqatal, and Sandran (Latakia Governorate); Khan Shaykhoun, Abu Dali, Hwain al-Kebir, Niha, al-Qasabiyah, Dreiba, Tell As, Herbet Abdi, and Sukoriyah (Idlib Governorate); and Kara Jurn, Kafer Nbuda, Qarutiyah, Tell Mawtazi, and al-Hwash (Hama province). Notably, several of these locations were captured from

opposition groups activity towards government-held areas has remained low since late August (Figure 3).

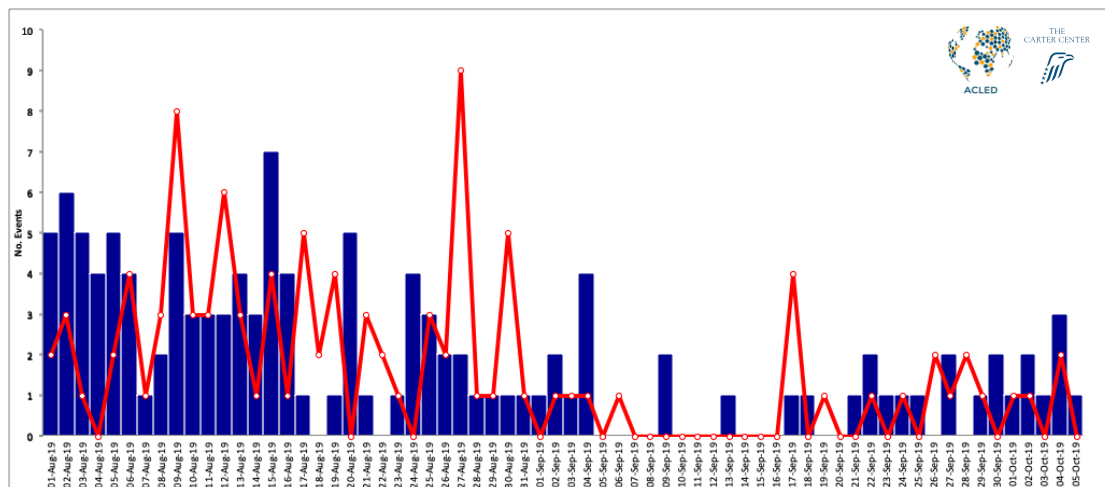


Figure 3: HTS and Other Groups Shelling (blue) and armed clashes against (red) GoS Held Areas in Northwest Syria Since 1 August. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

During the reporting week, the two main factions within the Turkish-backed Operation Olive Branch and Operation Euphrates Shield areas of northern Aleppo Governorate [announced](#) their merger to form The National Army of Syria. The move will see the National Liberation Front (NLF) and the Syrian National Army (SNA) become one entity under Syrian Interim Government control. The NLF and SNA include a large number of groups including former HTS-aligned groups such as Nour al Din al Zinki and Ahrar ash Sham, and Turkmen majority groups such as the Sultan Murad Brigades.

However, despite the announcement, at least two clashes between NLF and SNA-aligned groups were recorded in northern Aleppo Governorate. This included clashes between an unidentified group and an NLF-aligned Levant Front member in Afrin City and between Ahrar al Sham and Sharqiya Army members in Jandar. Four improvised explosive devices (IEDs) also were detonated in Qabasin town, near the Ar Ra'ee border crossing, Tarhin village, and in Zayadiyah, where a device struck an SNA member's vehicle. As previously [reported](#), intergroup clashes and IED activity has increased in the Turkish backed areas since June.

In the Tal Rifaat pocket, an increase in conflict between the Kurdish People's Protections Units (YPG) and Turkish-backed groups based in the Euphrates Shield area was reported. At least 14 shellings and armed exchanges occurred on frontlines, impacting the Al Baylonah, Aqibah, Deir Jamal, Ein Daqneh, Harbal, Kafr Khasher, Malikiyah, Menagh (x5), Shawarighat al Arz, and Sharan areas. Increased conflict between the two sides have become common in the area in 2019. Pro-government media [reported](#) that a Russian military patrol arrived in the pocket on 6 October.

For a second consecutive week, widespread demonstrations occurred in various locations in the northwest. On 4 October, at least four protests took place in Idlib

city, Bennish, Maraat al Numaan, and Kafr Takharim, calling for the release of detainees from GoS prisons, the overthrow of the Syrian Government, and denouncing the HTS rule in the northwest. These protests have increased in the past two months despite HTS crackdowns, most recently in mid-September.

SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

Small arms fire against GoS-aligned personnel, former opposition groups and civilians continued in southern Syria. At least eight events occurred in Sayda against an alleged GoS informant, in Busra al Harir against an National Defence Force (NDF) member, on the Nahta–Hrak road against an alleged 4th Division informant, in Daraa al Balad against an alleged Hezbollah recruiter, in Daraa al Balad against a GoS military intelligence officer, and in Saham al Golan, Dael and Abtaa towns, where civilians were targeted by violence.

An improvised explosive device (IED) was detonated on the Saham al Golan–Jlein road striking a 5th Corps member who had also been a former opposition commander. This brings the total number of IED events in southern Syria since the area came under GoS control in August 2018 to 34, nearly 65% (22) of which have occurred since April of this year (Figure 5).

In the Daraa Al Balad neighbourhood of Daraa City, an uncommon rocket struck on 30 September. It was unclear who initiated the strike. This is only the fifth time that shells have struck southern Syria since the area came under GoS control in August 2018. Three of these five events have occurred in Daraa City.

In Kharab Shahem, armed clashes occurred between two GoS-aligned groups on 4 October. Following a personal dispute, members of the 4th Division opened fire on Military Security members in the town. This is the second case of inter-GoS clashes in southern Syria within a month.³

In GoS-controlled central areas of the country, at least three attacks were attributed to ISIS this week. This included an IED detonation against a GoS vehicle in the Mayadeen desert, clashes between ISIS and GoS troops in the Ash Shula area of Deir Ez Zor, and an armed clash between ISIS and the Syrian military between Sokhneh and Tadmor on 4 October. The clashes were so intense that GoS aerial support was required. Such activity continues despite the start of a new GoS anti-ISIS operation on 17 September.

³ After the Bustan Brigade and local security forces clashed in Jbhat al Khashab town in late September as reported on [here](#).

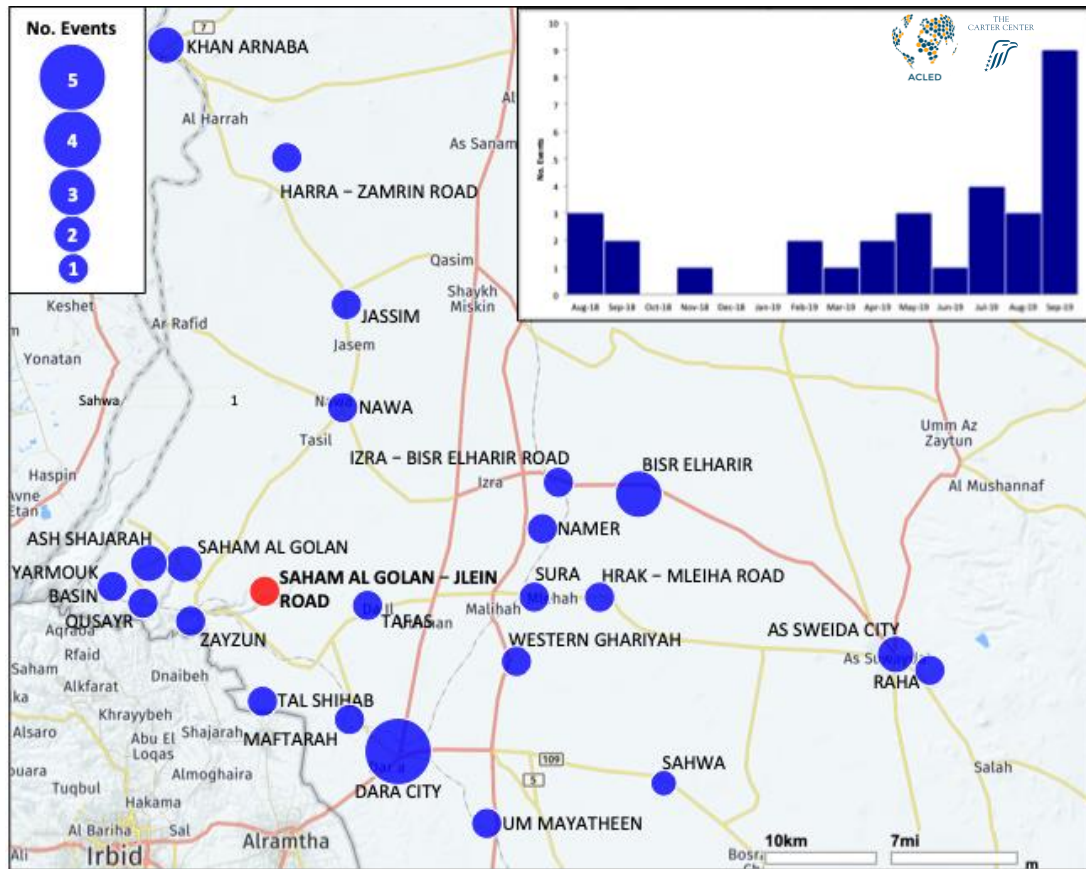


Figure 5: Recorded IED events in southern Syria since August 2018 with this week's events highlighted in Red. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

NORTHEAST SYRIA

On 6 October, the White House released a [statement](#) stating “Turkey will soon be moving forward with its long-planned operation into Northern Syria” and that “the United States Armed Forces will not support or be involved in the operation” or “be in the immediate area”. The announcement followed a late night phone call between President Trump and President Erdogan of Turkey and is in stark contrast to developments between the two countries since late August, when they agreed to implement [security mechanisms](#) for a de-militarized zone along the Syrian/Turkish border.

As part of this agreement, joint US/Turkish aerial and ground patrols had been conducted in areas between Tal Abiad and Ain Issa, including one this week on 4 October.⁴ The US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and its allies had begun to withdraw personnel from several locations along the border and dismantle defensive berms and ditches as part of the agreement. Ditches and berms were removed also in the vicinity of Ras al Ain area on 29 September. No Turkish troop movements to the Syrian border were seen during the week.

Please note, the developments following the White House statement fall outside of

⁴ With at least four to date, including this week on 4 October, itself following three joint ground patrols patrol on 24 September, 16 September and 8 September.

this reporting period, and will be discussed in next week's weekly report.

For a second consecutive week, protests took place in SDF-dominated areas of Hassakeh city on 29 and 30 September, denouncing a ban on motorbikes in the city for security reasons. Authorities began implementing the ban on 5 October.

Further demonstrations also occurred in three SDF-held areas of Deir Ez Zor governorate⁵ on 4 October. Similar to previous weeks, protesters called for a withdrawal of GoS from Deir Ez Zor Governorate. In reaction to the protests, a demonstration of support to GoS presence in the northeast took place in Deir Ez Zor City, while additional GoS and Iranian-linked troops were transferred to Salhiyyah, Hussainiyah, and the Hatla area of Deir ez Zor City, the sites of anti-government protests in the past month.

For the fifth time in the past month, suspected Israeli airstrikes struck an Iranian-linked site in Sbeikhan village near Abu Kamal on 30 September.⁶ The strikes coincided with the re-opening of the Abu Kamal/Al Qaim Border Crossing with Iraq on the same day.

In Al-Hol Camp,⁷ a major disturbance occurred on 30 September, involving armed clashes between female ISIS members and local security forces after the latter intervened during a knife attack against an Indonesian woman and an Iraqi national.⁸ Casualties on both sides were reported. This is the first armed clash inside the camp.

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⁵ In Muaayzilah, Asbah and Maamal

⁶ After last strikes on 3, 8, 18 and 28 September.

⁷ Al-Hol Camp in northeast Syria holds Syrian, Iraqi and foreign women and children who previously lived in ISIS dominated areas of Syria and who are suspected of being the wives and children of ISIS fighters. The camp is guarded by the SDF.

⁸ That resulted in the death of the Indonesian woman and the wounding of an Iraqi National. The attack occurred after an ISIS court inside a camp sentenced the two to death for breaking ISIS religious rules.