



WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 12 - 18 AUGUST 2019

WHOLE OF SYRIA SUMMARY

- **NORTHWEST** | Government of Syria (GoS) Tiger Forces advanced in the Idleb enclave this week, reaching the northern edges of Khan Sheikhun by the end of the reporting period. Despite the first joint Russian-Turkish patrol since late March occurring in the Tal Rifaat area, elevated levels of conflict continued between Turkish and allied Syrian armed groups on the one side and the People's Protection Units (YPG) on the other.
- **SOUTH & CENTRAL** | Attacks against GoS personnel, former opposition groups, and civilians continued in Daraa Governorate. ISIS activities continued in central areas of the country.
- **NORTHEAST** | Improvised explosive device (IED) and small arms attacks against Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) continued this week, including an ISIS-claimed car bomb detonation in Qamishli city. A reduction in the number of cross-border conflict events was noted this week. However, Turkish drone activity was reported.

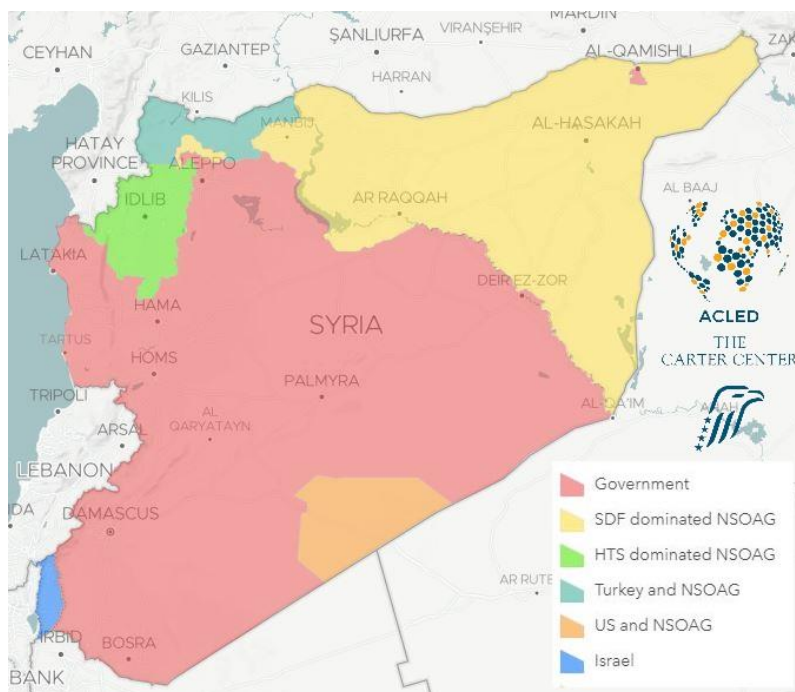


Figure 1: Dominant Actors' Area of Control and Influence in Syria as of 18 August 2019. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. For more explanation on our mapping, please see the footnote on page 2.

NORTHWEST SYRIA

Government troops made further advances into the Hayyat Tahrir ash Sham (HTS)-dominated Idleb enclave this week, capturing areas to the [north](#) and [east](#) of Habit town, as well as the northern outskirts of Khan Sheikhun, [close](#) to Tal Nimr. To the southeast of the enclave, GoS forces also made minor advances in the northwest areas of Sukaik town.

The advances occurred despite heavy resistance by various opposition armed groups,² with [several](#) uses of anti-tank weapons and suicide vehicle [attacks](#). Video evidence also surfaced of [coordination](#) between the HTS-aligned Fatah al Mubeen and Al Qaeda aligned Wa-Harid al Muminin Operations rooms. This is the first time such coordination has been documented in 2019.³ At the time of writing, fighting between GoS forces and opposition armed groups remains focused to the north and west of Khan Sheikhun and to the northwest of Sukaik.

Further north, GoS forces focused efforts on the hilltop town of Kabani in the northeast of Latakia Governorate. Airstrikes and barrel bomb bombardments targeted the HTS/Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP) stronghold. However, no changes in territory were reported (Figure 2).

Just after the reporting period ended, [pro-opposition](#) and [pro-government](#) sources reported that various fighting groups had withdrawn from areas south of Khan Sheikhun on 20 August.

HTS and other armed groups continued their bombardment on GoS-controlled areas. Armed groups in the Turkish backed National Liberation Front (NLF) [conducted](#) rocket bombardments on GoS areas, while GRAD rockets also were fired towards the Russian-operated Hmemeim Airbase in northern Latakia Governorate on [four](#) occasions this week. A Syrian Air force jet was also shot down above Tamaniyah town on 14 August, its pilot was [captured](#) by HTS within 12 hours. The Syrian Ministry of Defense later [reported](#) that the aircraft had been hit by a surface to air missile. It was the second such [event](#) in Idleb in as many months.

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 Including HTS, Jaish al Izza, National Liberation Front, Ahrar al Sharqiya and Ahrar ash Sham.

³ Although indicators had been seen in the previous month when Al Qaeda aligned Huras al Din conducted a number of attacks behind government frontlines along HTS controlled areas, as previously reported [here](#).

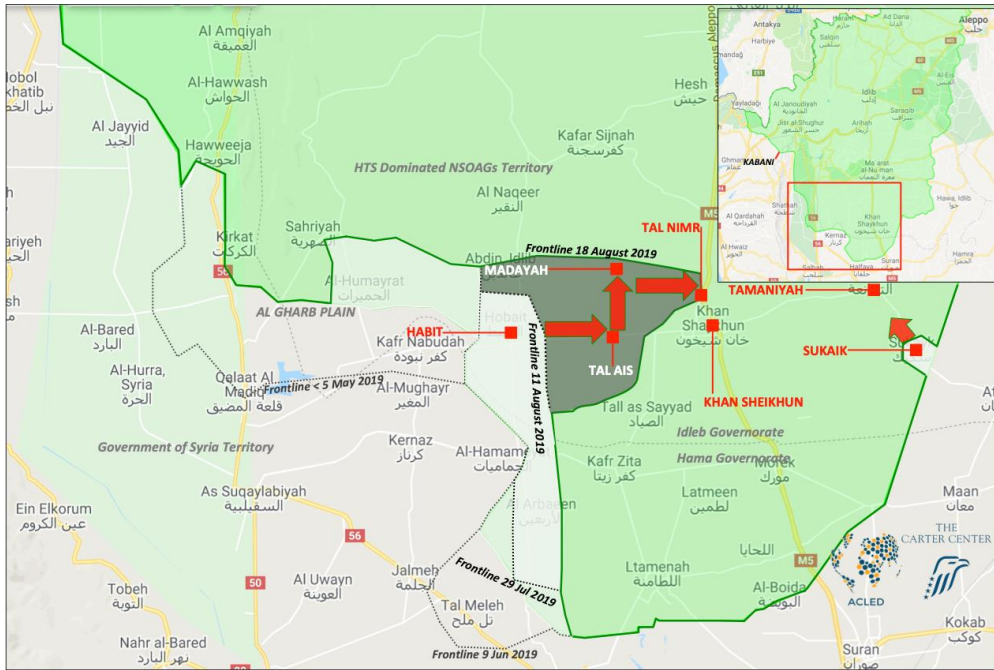


Figure 2: Frontlines in the northwest of Syria as of 18 August 2019 with GoS advances highlighted in red and recaptured areas in grey.

Elsewhere, Russian and Turkish military forces [conducted](#) a joint patrol in the Harbel and Sheikh Issa areas of the Tal Rifaat pocket on 14 August.⁴ It is the first joint-patrol in the area since March and follows growing conflict levels in the pocket during the previous month. However, despite the joint patrol, ground clashes between the People’s Protection Units (YPG) and Turkish-backed local groups resumed later the same day near [Maranaaz](#) and [Harbel](#). In the following days, heavy machine gun and shelling exchanges were recorded in [Shiekh Issa](#), [Hawzan](#), [Maranaaz](#), and in [Tal Madik](#), where shells struck [close](#) to a Russian Military Police location (Figure 3).

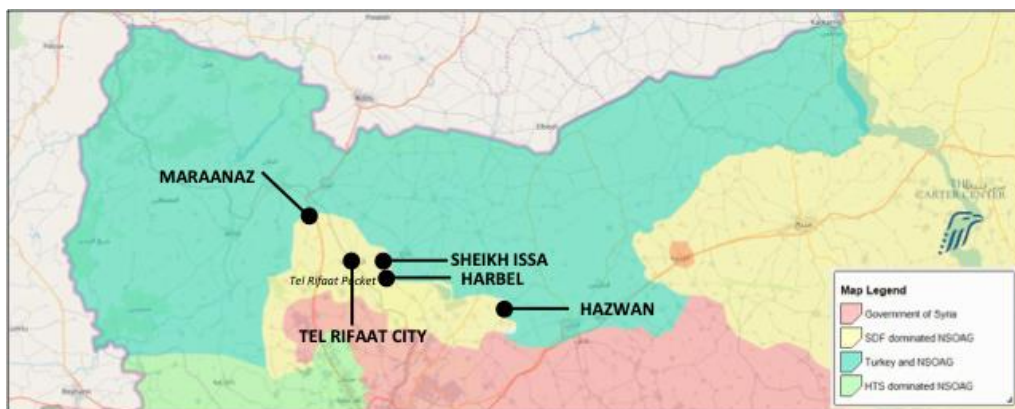


Figure 3: The Tal Rifaat Pocket

SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

In Daraa Governorate, ongoing trends of small arms fire and improvised explosive

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

device (IED) attacks against GoS-aligned personnel, former opposition group members, and civilians were recorded during the week. Three attacks were recorded in [Tal Shihab](#), [Daraa City](#) and [Ash Shajarah](#), targeting 4th Division soldiers, an Imam, and a local mayor respectively. As previously [reported](#), such attacks have increased in 2019 (Figure 4).

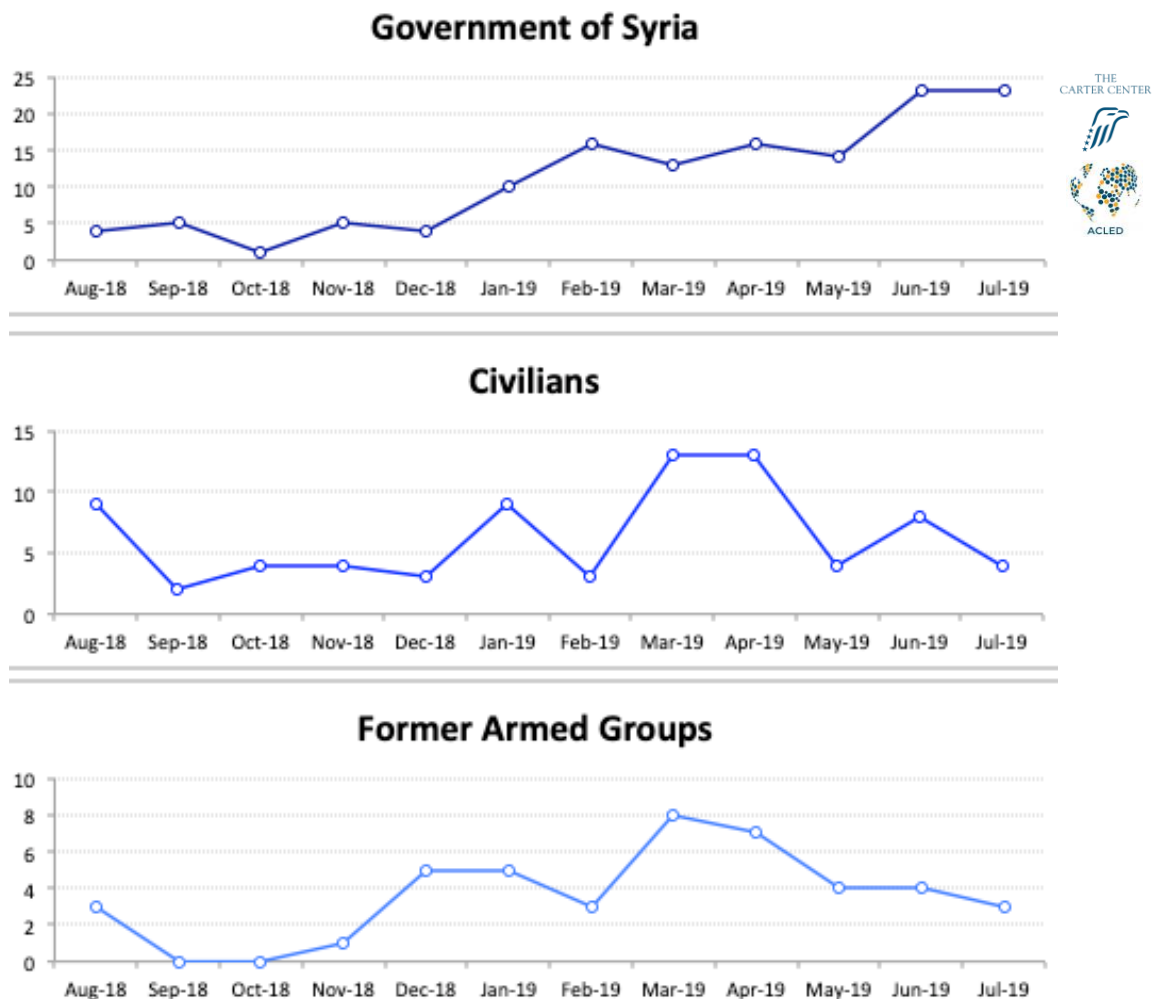


Figure 4: Groups affected by conflict in southern Syria from August 2018.

In central areas of the country, there was evidence of ISIS's enduring presence with at least three ambushes against GoS forces near [Tadmor City](#), East of [Mayadeen](#) City and in [Kabajib](#) Village, southeast of Deir Ez Zor city. Such activity continues to affect security despite multiple GoS clearance operations throughout 2019, most recently seen last week in the vicinity of the T3 pumping station. There are also [reports](#) of the Russian military establishing a small base in the vicinity of Jalaa town for anti-ISIS operations.

In the south, explosions occurred in the vicinity of Masyaf town in Hama Governorate on the evening of the 15 August. There were conflicting reports about the source of the explosions, with pro-government [sources](#) stating it was due to a missile fired from Lebanese airspace, Russian [media](#) reporting the event as an accidental mortar firing, while pro-opposition [reports](#) indicating it as either a drone attack or an [Israeli](#) airstrike. In the previous 12 months, the majority of conflict events in the Masyaf area have involved GRAD rocket bombardments from

opposition groups in Idleb (8) or Israeli airstrikes (3).⁵

NORTHEAST SYRIA

Small arms fire and improvised explosive device (IED) attacks against US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) were recorded this week. Four incidents were recorded on the [East Kalta Road](#) (north of Raqqa), on the Panorama roundabout in [Hassakeh City](#), in [Darnaj](#) village in the Euphrates River Valley, and in [Qamishli](#) city, where a car bomb detonated in the SDF held Arbouya area of the city on 18 August.⁶ ISIS later [claimed](#) the event as a suicide attack.

Car bombs are uncommon in the Qamishli, with this attack being only the fifth recorded incident since February 2018. However, four of the five car bomb events since this time have occurred since 17 June 2019 (Figure 5).

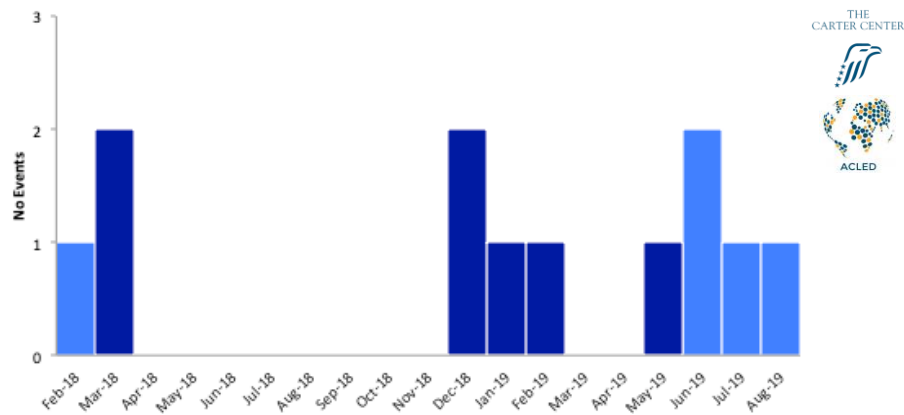


Figure 5: IED activity in Qamishli City since Feb 2018, with car bomb events shown in light blue.

[There were reports](#) of Turkish drones monitoring the northern Syria border this week. This activity comes a week after a US military delegation [met](#) Turkish officials to discuss a proposed “safe zone” along Syria’s northern border on 12 August 20, 2019.

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⁵ The remaining events were a mass brawl between government-aligned militias, a shooting death of an intelligence official and a car bomb targeting a Syrian military commander.

⁶ Qamishli City is within the SDF-controlled area, but the GoS maintains a small military contingent in the city and controls a few buildings and checkpoints.