

The Carter Center

# Conflict in Southern Syria

August 2018 – July 2019

August 2019





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the year since the government of Syria (GoS) takeover of southern Syria in August 2018, a steady growth in low-level conflict has been recorded, with at least 249 violent incidents against GoS and aligned personnel, former opposition members, and civilians. Just over 60% of these incidents have been recorded since March 2019, an average of seven per week.

Over half of the total number of recorded attacks in southern Syria occurred in the following 10 locations: As Sweida City (35), Daraa City (21), As Sanamayn (17), Tafas (15), Da'el (13), Mzeireb (13), Nawa (8), Bistr Elharir, (7), Hrak (7), and Yadudeh (7).

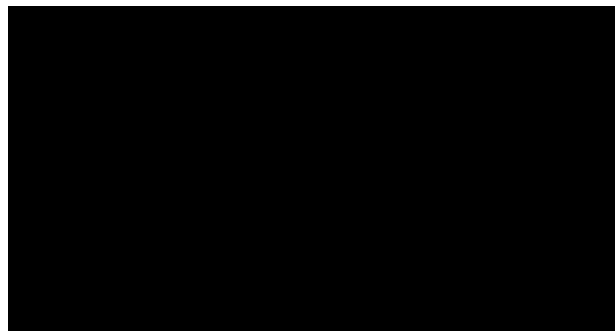
Since August 2018, conflict has gradually migrated to the south and southeast of the region, especially in a belt between Daraa and As Sweida cities.

Over 55% of the recorded incidents involved small arms or heavy machine-gun attacks. Landmine detonations, improvised explosive device (IED) activity, and various criminal events also made up sizeable proportion of activity. Over a third of the attacks targeted moving vehicles (36), fortified locations (28), or checkpoints (25), actions that require considerable experience to execute successfully and have been frequent in the past month.

The range of locations, the types of weapons used, and the nature of the victims suggest that multiple conflict actors are present in southern Syria. At least 18 different GoS (12) and former non-state organised armed groups (NSOAGs) (6), including ISIS and Hayyat Tahrir Ash Sham (HTS), were involved.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Since January 2019, there has been a steady growth in low-level conflict targeting the government of Syria (GoS) and aligned personnel as well as former opposition members and civilians in southern Syria. This activity comes over a year after the GoS, with the assistance of Russia, used a mix of military and political negotiation tactics to retake large parts of Daraa and Quneitra governorates from various non-state organised armed groups (NSOAGs).<sup>1</sup> While conflict in southern Syria constitutes a small percentage of overall conflict in Syria, the dynamics of ongoing incidents are nonetheless significant.



By reviewing conflict data collected by the Carter Center's Syria Conflict Mapping Project and publicly

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*Including Hayyat Tahrir ash Sham (HTS) and the local ISIS affiliate Jaish Khalid Ibn Walid, itself an umbrella of Liwa Shuhada al Yarmouk, Jaish al Jihad, and Harikat al Muthanna al Islamiyah.*

available data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED)<sup>2</sup> from Aug. 1, 2018, to July 31, 2019,<sup>3</sup> this report aims to document the current conflict dynamics present in southern Syria. It is important to note that while the Carter Center and ACLED strive to record all available conflict-related information, given the restrictive reporting environment in Syria and limitations of data collection, some incidents may not have been recorded. In addition, what is publicly documented does not account for what goes undocumented. Therefore, figures presented in this report should be viewed as a representation of the situation rather than an exact depiction of events.

## 2 | FREQUENCY OF ATTACKS

Since August 2018, at least 249 violent incidents were recorded against GoS-aligned personnel, former opposition group members, and civilians in southern Syria. After an initial decline in the three months following the GoS offensive that reclaimed southern Syria, conflict activity there has steadily grown since the start of 2019 (Figure 1). Over 60% of the attacks have occurred since March 2019.

## 3 | GEOGRAPHICAL SPREAD OF ATTACKS

The vast majority of documented attacks in the past 12 months have occurred in Daraa Governorate, with As Sweida (62) and Quneitra (4) governorates together recording nearly 27% of the remaining activity. Exploring the data further, 10 locations have recorded nearly 60% of the total number of attacks in the south: As Sweida City (35), Daraa City (21), As Sanamayn (17), Tafas (15), Da'el (13), Mzeireb (13), Nawa (8), Bistr Elharir, (7), Hrak (7), and Yadudeh (7). The remaining 40% of activity was split among 66 other locations (Figure 2).

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<sup>2</sup> [Data Export Tool](#) /data.

<sup>3</sup> Note that the following incident types have not been included in this study: agreements, assaults/brawls, change to armed group, demonstrations, government arrests/detentions, headquarters established, mass graves discovered, movement of forces, non-violent transfer of territory / government regain territory, population displacement, property destruction/looting, protests, riots, security operations/measures, and unexploded ordnance events. Also, Israeli activity has not been included specific intervention in Syria





## 4 | WEAPON TYPES

Over half of the recorded incidents in southern Syria involved small arms fire or heavy machine guns. Landmine detonations (28), improvised explosive device (IED) activity (24), and criminal activities<sup>7</sup> (24) also made up a sizeable number of activities (Figure 4).

Of concern is the increasing use of IEDs in 2019, a weapon that requires significant expertise to construct, prepare, and successfully deploy









While there is a clear and growing focus on attacking the government of Syria and its allies, the steady



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### **SYRIA CONFLICT MAPPING**

Since 2012, the Carter Center’s Conflict Resolution Program has endeavored to analyze open-source information related to the Syrian conflict, with the goal of assisting conflict responders with up-to-date, detailed analysis of developments in the country.

Using publicly available sources, as well as information gleaned from regular consultations with stakeholders, the Center has documented and mapped 122,000 conflict events in Syria as well as the ever-changing relations between armed groups. For more information, visit our website at [www.cartercenter.org](http://www.cartercenter.org).

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