COVID-19, analysts are concerned that smuggling by armed opposition groups in the region will exacerbate the spread of the virus.[13]

On 25 July, HTS clashed with former Hurras al-Din (HD) gunmen in Dana and Tal 'Adah, Idlib Governorate, and Atareb, Aleppo Governorate. According to HTS, the clashes were part of an operation to attack a large organized criminal gang in the region. Local accounts report that the operation arrested former HD leader, Abu Yahya al-Jazayri, who was previously reported dead in a US drone strike in June 2019.[14] During the fighting, HTS arrested some fighters,[15] and 2 civilians were killed in the crossfire.[16]

ISIS attacks continued across northeast Syria during the reporting period. On 20 July, two ISIS fighters killed a fighter from the predominantly Kurdish-Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Hajin town, Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. On 23 July, an ISIS planted landmine killed a civilian in Baghuz, Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. On 24 July, ISIS fighters ambushed GoS-backed National Defense Forces (NDF) and Quds Brigade militia fighters in the Bishri Mountain area, Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. A Quds Brigade commander was reportedly killed during the clashes.[29] There have been 96 ISIS attacks since 1 January 2020 in northeastern Syria, predominately focused around Deir-ez-Zor Governorate (see figure 4).

Figure 4: ISIS attacks in northeast Syrian since 1 January 2020. Largest bubble represents 9 conflict events. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

On 21 July, during a patrol in northern Al-Hassakah Governorate, a US military vehicle overturned, killing a US soldier inside.[30] This was the first reported death of a US soldier in Syria since 5 April.

New COVID-19 cases were reported in the region. On 23 July, the Kurdish-run

The SDF faced criticism over its conduct. On 20 July, villagers in Al-Shahail, al-Busayrah, Dhiban, Merkada, and other towns in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate