

WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 3 - 9 FEBRUARY 2020

WHOLE OF SYRIA SUMMARY

NORTHWEST | Government of Syria (GoS) forces captured the majority of the M5 highway between Khan Sheikhun and Aleppo City this week. For a second consecutive week, there was an increase in conflict in the Tal Rifaat area. In Turkish-occupied

NORTHWEST SYRIA

GoS forces captured the majority of the M5 highway from HTS/opposition armed groups during the reporting period. Despite a short lived HTS/opposition counter offensive in the Ais town area at the start of the week, GoS had captured the entire length of the M5 highway between Aleppo City and Khan Sheikhun on February 11, after the reporting period ended.² It is the first time GoS have controlled the full length of the highway since 2012 (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: GoS Advances in Northwest Syria in 2020. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

The GoS offensive also surrounded four Turkish military observation posts in the vicinity of Saraqeb and Ais, some of which had only been established in January. On 6 February, GoS conducted airstrikes and shelling on a Turkish military observation post at the Taftanaz Airbase the same day it had been erected. Turkish media has [reported](#) that the GoS offensive has surrounded half of the 19 Turkish military observation posts in northwest Syria.

¹ Figure 1 denotes the " z " e

For a second consecutive week, there was an increase in conflict activity in the Tal Rifaat area. ACLED recorded 13 shelling exchanges between the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) and Turkish and aligned forces in Malikiyyeh (x2), Menagh Airbase, Maraanaz, Ein Daqneh, Zahraa, Nabal, Tabb Marash, Baylonah, Shawarighat al Arz (x2), Shiekh Issa, and Qalat Shawarighat. There were seven incidents of shelling last week. As previously reported, conflict in the Tal Rifaat periodically spikes, most recently in October 2019 (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Conflict in the Tal Rifaat Pocket in 2019 and 2020. Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

In the Turkish-occupied Operation Olive Branch areas, local groups continued their kidnap and extortion operations against civilians. In Maarata and Hamali, Ahrar al Sharqiyah detained a number of civilians during "security operations." In Bulbul Mabtali, Turkish-aligned local groups kidnapped 30 civilians. In Semalka, Sultan Murad Division members abducted two women. This type of activities has remained elevated since April 2019.

SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

In Damascus, an improvised explosive device (IED) detonated in the Al Fahama neighbourhood of the Qanawat district of the city this week. The device targeted a civilian car

Figure 4: IED Activity in Damascus in 2019 (blue) and in 2020 (red). Data from ACLED and The Carter Center.

In southern and central areas of the country, attacks towards GoS-aligned personnel continued. In Daraa, unidentified gunmen opened fire at GoS soldiers in Yadudh, Ankhel, Sanamayn, and Al Rayy, and against alleged GoS collaborators in Jasim and Mzeireb. In Homs, ISIS attacked a GoS checkpoint near the T3 pumping station. Pro-government media also [reported](#) the group ambushing a GoS patrol in the Badia desert near Sokhneh.

NORTHEAST SYRIA

Artillery and small arms fire exchanges between Turkish-backed Syrian opposition groups and Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)/GoS forces in the northeast increased this week. ACLED recorded 20 incidents,³ compared to 16 the previous week. One bombardment took place in the vicinity of a Russian military patrol between Abu Rasin and Tal Tamr. The Russian Center for Reconciliation and Conflicting Sides [reported](#) the patrol did not suffer casualties. Turkish-backed local groups also attempted to advance in SDF/GoS held areas southwest of Ein Issa and in Sayada in Menbej District without success.

On 4 February, an IED detonated against an oil tanker in the eastern Raqqa countryside. During the previous month, there was at least one attack per week on critical infrastructure in northeast Syria, especially water and oil facilities. There has been a trend of increasing attacks on such targets since October 2019.

Small arms fire and IED attacks on SDF and aligned personnel in the Euphrates River and Khabour River valleys also continued this week. ACLED recorded attacks on SDF patrols in Markada, Al Hole City, Hasakeh City, Hajin, Sweidan, and in farmland northeast of Raqqa City. Three attacks in Sabkhah, Tayyana and