# WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 15 - 21 March 2021

## SYRIA SUMMARY

- Tensions escalated in the northwest after the Government of Syria (GoS) bombed a hospital in Atareb, Aleppo Governorate.
- In the south, a local militia ambushed and killed at least 20 GoS soldiers in
- In the northeast, clashes continued between the Turkish armed forces and the predominantly Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces in Ain Issa, Ar-Ragga Governorate.
- Protestors commemorated the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 2011 Syrian uprising.

Figure 1: Dominant a area of control and influence in Syria as of 21 March 2021. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Arm 1 1 0 a4(a) 3(8) p[eag] (n) (1) 5(1) ET (1) 000000 59.0 (8) 0.8 re\( \) (1) 10 0 139 (8)

## NORTHWEST SYRIA1

Figure 2: Clashes and shelling between GoS and Russian armed forces on the one side and armed opposition groups on the other between 15-21 March 2021. Largest bubble represents 4 conflict events. Data from The Carter Center and ACLED.

# Fighting in Northwest Syria

Violence continued in northwest Syria. With the 5 March 2020 ceasefire continuing to weaken, Russia assumed a more active role in hostilities in the region. Turkey continued to build up its military presence there, while withdrawing its military bases from nearby Government of Syria (GoS)-controlled territory. Fighting has been primarily focused in the Jabal al-Zawiyah area, Idlib Governorate. In recent weeks, Russian armed forces have increasingly targeted Turkish-held areas in northwest Syria.<sup>2</sup>

### 16 March

The opposition Fatah al-Mubin Operations Room<sup>3</sup> shot and killed a GoS soldier and wounded several others near Kabani, northern Lattakia Governorate.<sup>4</sup>

# 20 March

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and influence. While

territorial control is defined as an entity having power over use of force as well as civil/administrative functions in an area. Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah maintain a presence in Syrian government-controlled territory. Non-state organized armed groups (NSOAG), including the Kurdish-dominated SDF and Turkish-backed opposition groups operate in areas not under GoScontrol. The area along the junction of the Syrian 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. Patrols are also depicted in the map to show the presence of actors that may have influence in an area. This is particularly relevant as US and Russian forces regularly have patrolled towns and routes in the northeast. While they do not control local administration or local forces, there is an assumption of a high degree of coordination with local defacto authorities. Data collected is by the publicly available project ACLED.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/468333

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> A coalition of armed groups, including Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, The Turkish-backed oppositionBT/F2 6.48 Tf1 0 0 1 89.

GoS armed forces and armed opposition fighters clashed and engaged in shelling exchanges along the Al-Ghab plains of northern Hama Governorate, and the Jabal al-Zawiyah area, Idlib Governorate.<sup>5</sup>

#### 21 March

GoS armed forces shelled a Syrian American Medical Society-run hospital in Atareb, Aleppo Governorate, killing 6 civilians. <sup>67</sup> The hospital had shared its coordinates with the UN as part of the deconfliction process, <sup>8</sup> prompting condemnation from American and European officials. <sup>9</sup> The same day, the Russian air force bombed the Bab al-Hawa crossing with Turkey. <sup>10</sup> In response to these attacks, armed opposition groups shelled Russian forces in Maarat al-Numan, eastern Idlib Governorate. <sup>11</sup>

### SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

Figure 3: Attacks against former opposition fighters and GoS armed forces between 15-21 March 2021. Data from The Carter Center and ACLED.

# Instability in Southern Syria

in 2018, some former

opposition commanders have gained prominence by leading influential political

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/467772

<sup>6</sup> https://halabtodaytv.net/archives/182807

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> https://www.cbsnews.com/ news/ syria-war-bomb-atareb-hospital-aleppo-assad-and-russia-attacks-medical-facilities/

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> https://www.cbsnews.com/news/syria-war-bomb-atareb-hospital-aleppo-assad-and-russia-attacks-medical-facilities/

<sup>9</sup> https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/468461

<sup>10</sup> https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/468154

<sup>10</sup>et/ archives/ 468154

and military bodies. At times, tensions between those two sides have resulted in arrests and violence, such as the

Figure 4: Turkish-held Operation Peace Spring territory in northeast Syria. Data from The Carter Center and ACLED.

## Conflict in Ain Issa

Since the Turkish military intervention in northeast Syria with Operation Peace Spring (OPS) in September 2019, Turkish armed forces and Turkish-backed Syrian armed opposition groups have frequently clashed with the predominantly