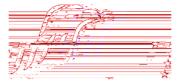
## THE CARTER CENTER.



## WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 22 June - 28 June 2020

## SYRIA SUMMARY

- NORTHWEST| Clashes erupted in Idlib Governorate between Hayyat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and a coalition of armed opposition groups organized around the
   There were reports of an increased Government of Syria (GoS), Turkish military and opposition militias buildup in Idlib and Hama Governorates. Clashes involving Turkish armed forces and Turkish-backed armed oppositions groups on the one side and Kurdish and GoS armed forces on the other continued this week. Multiple demonstrations and protests were held in Idlib and Aleppo Governorates.
- SOUTH & CENTRAL | Protests continued in As-Governorates. Clashes erupted between GoSarmed forces and the Russianbacked 5<sup>th</sup> The Israeli air force targeted GoS armed forces in As-Sweida Governorate.
- NORTHEAST | There were increased protests throughout the region. Iran
  expanded its presence in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. The Israeli air force
  struck GoS armed forces and Iranian-backed militias in Deir-ez-Zor
  Governorate. ISI Scontinued to conduct attacks in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate.



Figure 1: Dominant actors' area of control and influence in Syria as of 28 June 2020. NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. Also, please see the footnote on page 2.

## NORTHWEST SYRIA<sup>1</sup>

Clashes erupted in Idlib Governorate between Hayyat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and a coalition of armed opposition group organized around (Fathbatou) Operations Room.<sup>2</sup> On 22 June, HTS arrested a Hurras al-Din (HD) leader in Idlib city, Idlib Governorate.3 The HD leader had defected from HTSon 7 April. HTS had previously arrested a commander with Ansar al-Islam on 18 June. On 23 June, HD and other Fathbatou Operations Room armed opposition groups attacked a HTS checkpoint on the western outskirts of Idlib City. During the clashes, Fathbatou Operations Room armed groups brought military reinforcements around the western areas of Idlib city. The next day, HTS dashed with Fathbatou Operations Room fighters across villages on the western outskirts of Idlib city. The fighting between the armed opposition groups displaced civilians in the villages near Idlib city. Additional clashes took place on 25 and 26 June around Idlib city. On 26 June, a ceasefire was established between HTS and the Fathbatou Operations Room armed groups. 4 On 28 June, HTS ordered all non-HTS armed opposition groups to remove their military headquarters from Idlib city.<sup>5</sup> These clashes

Aleppo Governorate. On 24 June, Turkish-backed opposition National Liberation Forces (NLF) repelled GoS armed forces and GoS-backed militias<sup>8</sup> after the latter crossed the Hersh Benin frontlines near Jabal al-Zawiya in southern Idlib Governorate. Russian special forces were reportedly involved in the attack, <sup>9</sup> which would be a first incident of Russian involvement since the 5 March ceasefire agreement. <sup>10</sup> Two clashes were recorded on 25 June. The first took place between GoS armed forces and the NLF in Jabal al-Zawiya, the Idlib countryside, with Turkish armed forces shelling GoS positions. In the second incident, Turkish-backed opposition fighters clashed with the YPG on the Kafr Khasher frontlines in Aleppo Governorate. On 27 June, 4 armed clashes between Turkish-backed armed opposition groups and Kurdish forces were reported in Aleppo Governorate. In Maraanaz in the Aleppo countryside, the Turkish-backed opposition Syrian National Army (SNA) attacked YPG fighters and GoS armed forces amid a shelling exchange between the two sides. <sup>11</sup>

in nearby Ain al Arab city, Aleppo Governorate. On 26 June, Ain al Arab residents organized a protest in front of a Russian military base in Ain al Arab city due to Russian s

in Syria. The same day, demonstrations expressing support for President Bashar Assad took place in Al-Bukamal city, eastern Deir-ez-Zor Governorate, On 24 June. residents in Abu Hamam, Deir-ez-Zor Governorate, held a silent protest demanding better living conditions and better pay for teachers. On 25 June, protests against Turkish armed forces and Turkish-backed armed opposition groups occurred in Darbasiva and Western Alouk town within Al-Hassakah Governorate and Tell Abiad in Ar-Ragga Governorate. The next day in Tell Abiad. local residents held a demonstration against the transfer of wheat to Turkey. On 27 June, local residents protesting against deteriorating economic conditions and the transfer of wheat to Turkey took place in Hammam al-Turkman in the countryside of Ar-Ragga Governorate. The same day, a protest against Turkish armed forces was assembled at the Russian military base in Istrahat Wazir by Al-Hassakah city, Al-Hassakah Governorate. On 27 June, local residents in Shadadah city, Al-Hassakah Governorate, demonstrated against SDF and U.S. forces, which resulted in protesters burning tires and blocking streets in the city. In recent weeks, there have been increasing reports of protests across Syria due to the worsening economic situation in the country.

Iran expanded its presence in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. On 25 June, Iranian-backed militias began land purchases in Al-Bukamal and nearby towns in eastern Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. The reason for these purchases was not revealed. On 27 June, Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)-Quds Force commander Esmail Ghaani was reported to have visited Al-Bukamal and delivered a speech to Iranian-backed forces in the city. This was the first visit to Syria of an IRGC-Quds Force commander after the assassination of Qassem Soleimani on 3 January 2020. On 28 June, the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) opened new recruitment centers in eastern Al-Bukamal, reportedly requiring all internally displaced persons returning to the city to have a family member serve with an Iranian-backed armed group. The serve with an Iranian-backed armed group.

The Israeli air force carried out multiple airstrikes in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. On 23 June, the Israeli air force attacked GoSarmed forces and Iranian-backed militias in Kaba Jeb along the Sokhneh-Deir-ez-Zor highway in western Deir-ez-Zor Governorate, and in As-Sweida and Hama Governorates. On 27 June, Israeli airstrikes hit GoSarmed forces and Iranian-backed militias in Abbas town, Deir-ez-Zor Governorate, reportedly killing 6 Iranian-backed fighters. The town is close to the city of Al-Bukamal, which IRGC-GC Commander Esmail Ghaani visited this week (see above). <sup>21</sup> These were the first airstrikes Israel had conducted in northeastern Syria since 4 May 2020. Since 1 January 2019, Israel has conducted 4 airstrikes against Iranian-backed militias in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate (see figure 3).

ISIS continued to conduct attacks in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. On 22 June, ISIS prisoners rioted in Kasra jail in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. The prisoners demanded

<sup>18</sup> https://nedaa-sy.com/news/21034

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/irans-quds-force-commander-makes-first-visit-to-syria-since-qassem-soleimanis-assassination/

<sup>20</sup> https://nedaa-sy.com/news/21061

 $<sup>^{21}\,\</sup>underline{\text{https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-security-iran-usa/iran-news-agency-reports-visit-of-new-quds-chief-to-syria-idUSKBN23Y0KL}$