





## NORTHWEST SYRIA

On 3 February the Syrian Revolution General Conference took place with the aim to consolidate and unify governance efforts in the northwest after the rapid expansion of HTS and its administrative body, the National Salvation Government, against a variety of other civil bodies, including the Syrian Interim Government, in Idlib. Coinciding with this, low numbers of internal conflict events in Idlib Governorate were recorded, just eight incidents, though it is unclear if the correlation is related to the Syrian Revolution General Conference. These figures contrast heavily compared to the previous week's 19 incidents, that included a high-profile suicide attack in Idlib City. While this week's reduction appears positive, more time is needed to assess if this week's change is a temporary development or part of a long-term shift in dynamics since last year, there has been a rise in asymmetrical attacks in the area, especially improvised explosive device (IED) events - 31 in January 2019 compared to 13 in December 2018.

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<sup>1</sup> Figure 1 denotes areas of control and ISIS influence, therefore depicting an area west of Deir Ezzor city composed of towns where ISIS fighters have launched frequent attacks against Syrian government forces and civilians. This is now labeled as "ISIS Influence". Additionally, areas in

Despite the observed decline in internal incidents reported, Maria Zakharova, the Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson [stated](#) ongoing concerns about HTS's activity in north west Syria, noting that HTS "have not discontinued their armed raids against the Syrian armed forces" and that "regular provocations in the north of Hama Province" occur.<sup>2</sup> The data shows that HTS and other organized armed group activity in government areas has grown in the last month, with at least 48 attacks and bombardments on government positions compared to 36 in December 2018 and 54 in November 2018.

On the other hand, government activity in the Idlib pocket has also remained elevated with 369 events linked to government forces recorded in the past month, primarily artillery and rocket bombardments (Figure 2). Since the September 2018 De-escalation Zone agreement, January 2018 has seen the second highest number of conflict events associated with the Syrian government, outpaced only by December 2018 (450 events). These bombardments continue to affect civilian populations in Idlib, with the council of Latamna town [declaring](#) a humanitarian state of emergency after IDP movements from the town this week.<sup>3</sup>

Russia also directed [comments](#) towards Turkey this week, calling for the country to "step up their efforts so as to eventually change the situation" in Idlib. This is one of the first times Russia has directly commented on Turkey's role in dynamics of the northwest since the implementation of the Idlib De-escalation zone agreement in September 2018.

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<sup>2</sup> For more on previous comments by Russia, see last week's Weekly Conflict Summary [here](#).

<sup>3</sup> For more on previous IDP movements due to government bombing, see [here](#).







Further [west](#), on 5 February, five civilians were killed in a landmine explosion that had been planted by ISIS in Rasm al Ahmar village in the Salamiyah countryside. Such events highlight the ongoing legacy of the group to affect the security environment in seemingly pacified areas of the country.

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