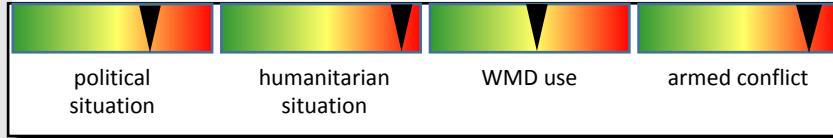
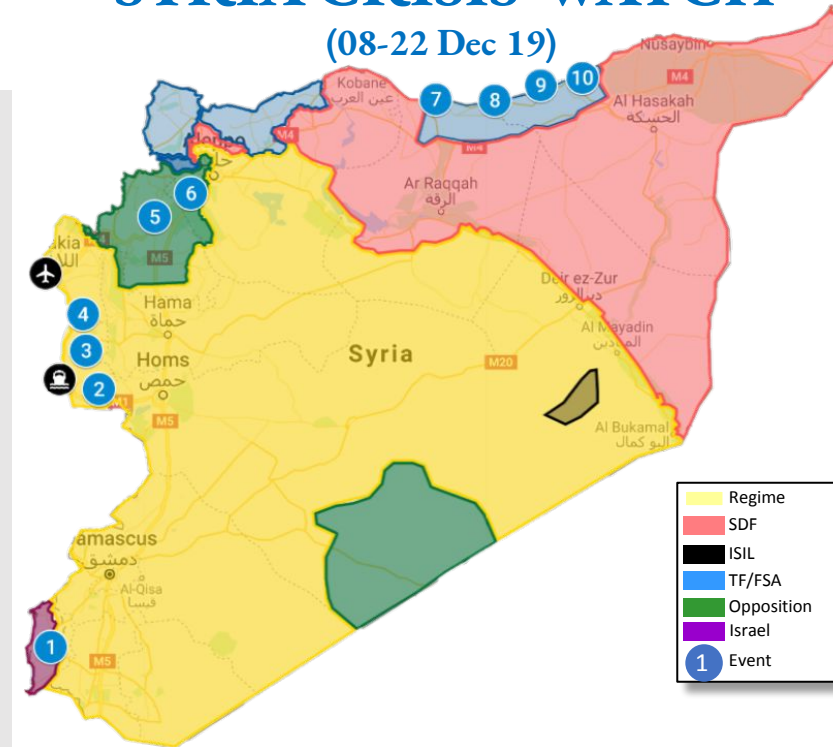




## SYRIA CRISIS WATCH

(08-22 Dec 19)



### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. Russian Military Opened Fire on an Israeli Aircraft.

19.12.2019 Russia has allegedly opened fire on Israeli aircraft that entered Syria's airspace in the southwestern part of the country, the Hebrew-language website Channel 12 reported. Citing the website Top War, the Channel 12 report said the Russian military opened fire on an Israeli unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) that was along the eastern axis of the occupied Golan Heights region. (The Syrian Observer) <http://bit.ly/2PLSM3E>

#### 2. Russia & Syria Signal West With Joint Naval Drills, "Hundreds" Of Airstrikes On Idlib.

22.12.2019 Multiple developments related to Russia's military role in Syria mean that the years-long conflict could once again become front and center for Washington during 2020. First, this week Russia and Syria conducted rare joint naval drills in the eastern Mediterranean at a moment Russian jets significantly increased airstrikes on jihadist-held Idlib province, reportedly conducting hundreds of missile strikes in the last five days, with regional reports saying Russian warships in the Mediterranean are firing sea-launched rockets as well. (Zero Hedge) <https://bit.ly/38WzCQe>

#### 3. Russia and China block UN plan for cross-border aid to Syria.

22.12.2019 Russia, backed by China, on Friday cast its 14th UN Security Council veto since the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011 to block cross-border aid deliveries from Turkey and Iraq to millions of Syrian civilians, reports Reuters. The resolution, drafted by Belgium, Kuwait and Germany, would have allowed cross-border humanitarian deliveries for a further 12 months from two points in Turkey and one in Iraq. But Syrian ally Russia only wanted to approve the two Turkish crossings for six months and had proposed its own draft text. (MEMO) <https://bit.ly/34Oglrz>

#### 4. Russia and Iran Get Closer on Security.

19.12.2019 Russia and Iran have affirmed closer ties in bilateral security and on their joint efforts in Syria despite U.S. lawmakers' passage of a bill that would slap new sanctions on the two countries over their support for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Iranian Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Shamkhani met Wednesday with Russian National Security Secretary Nikolai Patrushev in Tehran. (Newsweek) <https://bit.ly/2sd0jQ3>

#### 5. Erdoğan claims 50,000 people fleeing to Turkey from Syria's northwest: report.

19.12.2019 Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on Thursday said 50,000 people were fleeing Syria's northwestern region of Idlib to Turkey and slammed Muslim nations for not supporting his plans to resettle refugees in other parts of north Syria, Reuters reported. Turkey currently hosts some 3.7 million Syrian refugees, the largest refugee population in the world, and fears another influx from the Idlib region, where up to 3 million Syrians live in the last significant insurgent-held swathe of territory. (Turkish Minutes) <https://bit.ly/394dQKr>

#### 6. At least 25,000 people fled Syria's Idlib for Turkey over two days - media.

22.12.2019 At least 25,000 civilians have fled Syria's northwestern region of Idlib and headed towards Turkey over the past two days, Turkish state media said on Sunday, as Syrian and Russian forces intensified their bombardment of the region. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has vowed to recapture Idlib, pushing more people towards Turkey. On Thursday, Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said 50,000 people were fleeing from Idlib towards Syria's border with Turkey. (Reuters) <https://reut.rs/36YWBIB>

#### 7. Lack of refugee aid forced Turkey into Syria operation : Erdogan.

17.12.2019 A lack of international assistance to Turkey to support millions of refugees on its soil pushed Ankara to launch operations in northeast Syria, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Tuesday. Despite broad international criticism, Turkish forces in October launched a major cross-border raid to clear a so-called safe-zone of Kurdish fighters, who Ankara considers "terrorists". "Nobody seems inclined to help us," Erdogan told international leaders gathered for a Global Refugee Forum in Geneva. "When we haven't received the support we needed from the international community, we had to take care of our own self," he said of Turkey's operations into northern Syria since 2016. (France 24) <https://bit.ly/2POa2W1>

#### 8. EU condemns Turkey again while sticking to its position on the Kurdish administration in north-east Syria.

17.12.2019 An international conference took place last week in the European Parliament on the deteriorating humanitarian and military situation in North-East Syria following the Turkish invasion in beginning of October. The conference ended with a strongly worded condemnation of the invasion and a call to the EU and the international community to recognise the Autonomous Administration in the region (Rojava) and include it in the UN-led Constitutional Committee tasked to draft a new constitution for Syria. The Foreign Affairs Council condemned already on 14 October Turkey's military action in north-east Syria and urged Turkey to withdraw its forces, a call that has been ignored by Turkey. (The Brussels Times) <https://bit.ly/2EKINXF>

#### 9. Erdoğan: Syria's oil revenues should be used to fund Turkey's 'safe zone' project.

17.12.2019 Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has said that money gained from the Syrian oil fields should be used to fund Turkey's plans to establish refugee towns in a planned "safe zone" in northern Syria. "Let's together extract the oil from those oil wells and then by executing these projects in that terror region, let's settle these people who are currently refugees in their houses and schools that we build," he said. (Duvar) <https://bit.ly/2sbiUw0>

#### 10. Omar calls on US to investigate Turkey over possible war crimes in Syria.

18.12.2019 Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-Minn.) on Wednesday called for the State Department to investigate Turkey, citing allegations that the country's military forces used chemical weapons on civilians, a possible war crime that occurred during Turkey's incursion into northeastern Syria in October. In a letter to U.S. Special Envoy for Syria James Jeffrey, the freshman congresswoman said it was urgent that the U.S. determine whether a NATO ally intentionally targeted Kurdish civilians with white phosphorous, an incendiary chemical allowed in conventional warfare but banned against use for targeting individuals. (The Hill) <https://bit.ly/2PQT4qh>

### ASSESSMENT

*Latest joint naval drill with participation of Russian and Syrian navies marks a new stage in Russian ambitions in the Eastern Mediterranean in the post-Syrian war era. In order to ensure its presence and legitimacy in the region, Russia is and will likely use every tool to introduce Syria as a sovereign state among international community.*

*Turkey seems to lose the initiative completely to Russia in Idlib region and will try to take measures against the soon expected refugee flows to hit its borders. Within the same context, Erdogan will likely exploit this opportunity to blackmail Western States as he reiterated his claims that Western States betrayed Turkey concerning the support for refugees during the Global Refugee Forum in Geneva.*

*Additionally, Erdogan's proposal to use Syrian oil revenues to support Turkish safe zone plan is far from reality as the possession of Syrian oil fields is still one of the hot topics in the region.*



## SYRIA CRISIS WATCH

(02-08 Dec 19)

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. What can we learn from the escalating Israeli raids in Syria?

06.12.2019 On Wednesday afternoon, an Iranian ammunition depot in Al-Bukamal, Syria was hit by an airstrike. This attack comes after Israel reportedly conducted four air strikes in Syria between November 12 and November 20, according to the Russian Foreign Ministry. While Israel has reportedly carried out thousands of strikes in Syria and neighboring Iraq in recent years, the frequency, intensity, and toll of these recent attacks are unprecedented. (Brookings.edu) <https://brook.gs/347dyis>

#### 2. Russia, Israel discuss cooperation on Syria.

06.12.2019 Russian President Vladimir Putin and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Friday discussed the Russian-Israeli cooperation on Syria over the phone. The top officials discussed a number of topics on the bilateral agenda, the Kremlin said in a statement published on its official website. Putin and Netanyahu also discussed Russian president's planned visit to Israel in January 2020, the statement added. (AA) <https://bit.ly/2RuXkNi>

#### 3. Macron accuses Turkey of cooperating with ISIS proxies - live blog.

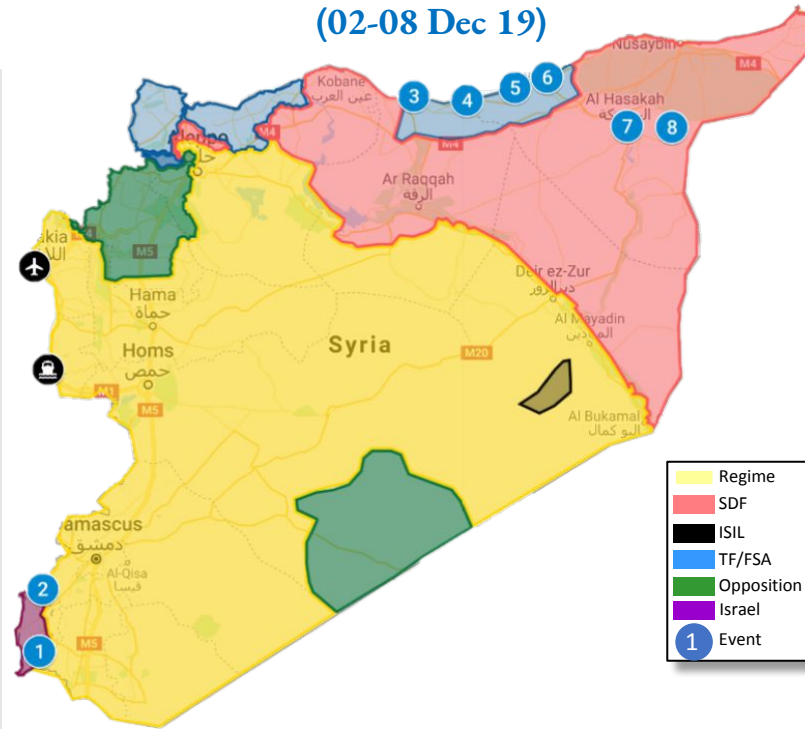
03.12.2019 The French president expressed concern regarding the lack of agreement by Nato members on the definition of terrorism, pointing to Turkey and its designation as terrorists of the Syrian Kurdish People's Democratic Forces (YPG), which make up the bulk of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), allies of the U.S.-led coalition against ISIS in Syria. Macron also accused Turkey of working with ISIS forces in Syria, where it has launched an offensive targeting the YPG. (Ahval) <https://bit.ly/352NZaE>

#### 4. Turkey agrees to NATO Baltic defense plan after Syria rift.

04.12.2019 Turkey joined its NATO allies in an agreement on a new defense plan for the Baltic countries and Poland on Wednesday, December 4, after threatening to block the initiative if other members of the alliance did not label a predominately-Kurdish Syrian militia as terrorists. "We met with President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan and agreed on NATO Defense Plan for the Baltics," Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda tweeted. (The Defense Post) <https://bit.ly/38lelil>

#### 5. Erdogan: Second Turkey-UK-France-Germany summit on Syria to be held in February.

05.12.2019 A second summit involving the leaders of Turkey, the UK, France and Germany on Syria will be held in February next year in Istanbul, Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan told journalists at a meeting with the heads of Turkish mass media in London after the end of the NATO summit. The NTV channel cited fragments of the interview. "We [the presidents of Turkey and France, the British prime minister and the German chancellor] made a decision to hold this four-way summit at least once a year. Now, we will hold the summit in February in Istanbul. We made the corresponding decision," the Turkish leader emphasized. (TASS) <https://bit.ly/2LxEkd8>



### ASSESSMENT

*Like as his previous ones Erdogan's new statements concerning to stall NATO's Baltic defense proposal were nothing more than a political game to increase its shrinking domestic support in Turkey. However, YPG seems to be the one benefited from this situation by not only refuting the thesis of Turkey that YPG is a terrorist organization but also consolidating its legitimacy among NATO member states. Besides, Turkish support to the Jihadi groups was told out louder by NATO Allies.*

*Israeli attacks targeting Iranian forces might escalate in harmony with the increasing intercourse between Israel and Russia. It is crystal clear that both sides are uncomfortable with the growing Iranian influence in Syria and looking for ways to diminish it. Turkey continue consolidating its presence by establishing police forces in the occupied areas of Northern Syria in line with the increasing presence of Russia but most importantly Syrian Regime throughout Turkish-Syrian frontier which were previously controlled by YPG.*

#### 6. Turkey to appoint 4,000 police officers to Syria.

07.12.2019 Turkey will be appointing 4,000 urban and rural police officers in Ras al Ayn and Tel Abyad in northern Syria, the governorate of southeastern border province of Şanlıurfa said in a statement. Turkish forces had taken control of the two Syrian towns as per the Sochi Accord Turkey signed with Russia, following its Operation Peace Spring into the Kurdish-controlled territories in northern Syria in October. Şanlıurfa Governor Abdullah Erin said in a meeting in Tel Abyad Turkish security forces would start training some 1,800 Syrian men within the week. Governor Erin said the second group would start training later, bringing the total force up to 3,500 to 4,000 officers. (Ahval) <https://bit.ly/2t04C1v>

#### 7. Russia and Turkey establish new military bases in Syria.

04.12.2019 The Russian Armed Forces have established a new military base in northern Syria after reaching an agreement with the Syrian Democratic Forces, which consists primarily of Kurdish fighters. According to Al Ekhbariya, Ankara has been reinforcing its military presence in Syria at the same time. The Turkish army has established two new military facilities near the city of Ras al-Ayn in north-eastern Syria, and the towns of Al Toulan and Al Kanhir in the Al Hasakah Governorate. (UAWire) <https://bit.ly/3582GSz>

#### 8. Russian forces in Syria, SDF discuss phase two in border security deal.

07.12.2019 Commander of the majority-Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), Mazloum Kobani and the commander of Russia's armed forces in Syria, Alexander Chaiko, discussed a second phase for the agreement between the SDF and the Syrian army regarding border security in northern Syria, pro-Kurdish Rudaw reported on Saturday. The SDF and Russia agreed on the deployment of Russian forces in Amuda, Tel Tamr and Ayn Issa during last week's meeting in Amuda near Syria's Hasakah province. The second phase will include the Syrian Border Guard units being deployed along the border from Kobani to Semelka, two towns along Syria's border with Turkey and Iraq respectively, Rudaw said. (Ahval) <https://bit.ly/2YAZRXS>

### OPINIONS

#### 1. A 'safe zone' in Syria was a lie.

03.12.2019 Adnan R. Khan: Turkey vowed to rid northern Syria of terrorists and create a 'safe zone' for refugees. Instead, terrorists have taken over. Almost two months after Turkish forces rumbled into Syria's north, the inevitable is now playing out: chaos. It's easy to forget in our rapid-fire news environment that two months is not a long time. The consequences of Turkey's actions are merely in their early stages, and by the looks of it, the future promises more disorder, more conflict and more tragedy. (Macleans) <https://bit.ly/3542a7Z>

#### 2. Turkey deserves the blame for what happened in Syria.

06.12.2019 Syria would have escaped more than eight years of warfare if Turkey had not intervened militarily and politically when Arab Spring anti-government protests erupted in March 2011. Without Turkey's early involvement, Damascus's crackdown would have ended the protests and the government would have initiated promised reforms. Syria would have emerged with a limited number of victims, little damage, few internally displaced and fewer refugees. Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan would have escaped the negative human, economic and political impacts of the war across their borders. (Irish Times) <https://bit.ly/2DZV60h>



## SYRIA CRISIS WATCH

(25 Nov-01 Dec 19)

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. Russia gives Israel green light to bomb Iranian forces in Syria.

25.11.2019 According to Israeli news agency Niv.net, Moscow was informed about the latest Israeli missile strikes on the outskirts of Damascus. The reason for that is allegedly tacit agreement between Moscow and Tel Aviv that gives Israel the right to attack Iranian military forces located in Syria. "Israeli-Russian coordination is based on the mutual interest of both countries. (UAWire) <http://bit.ly/2Y6xkt2>

#### 2. The Horrible Truth for Russian Wagner Mercenaries – the War in Syria that Nobody Talks About.

01.12.2019 Mercenaries of the Russian private military company Wagner, among which are also snipers from Latvia, allegedly tortured and murdered a Syrian man and desecrated his corpse. Several of the mercenaries have been identified by the independent media outlet Novaya Gazeta. In summer 2017, a video circulated the web depicting several Russian-speaking armed men, presumably Wagner mercenaries, beating a man of Arab appearance in civilian clothing with a hammer and laughing while doing it. (BM) <https://bit.ly/2Lcw2XW>

#### 3. Syrian Army launches big counter-offensive to retake lost areas in southeast Idlib.

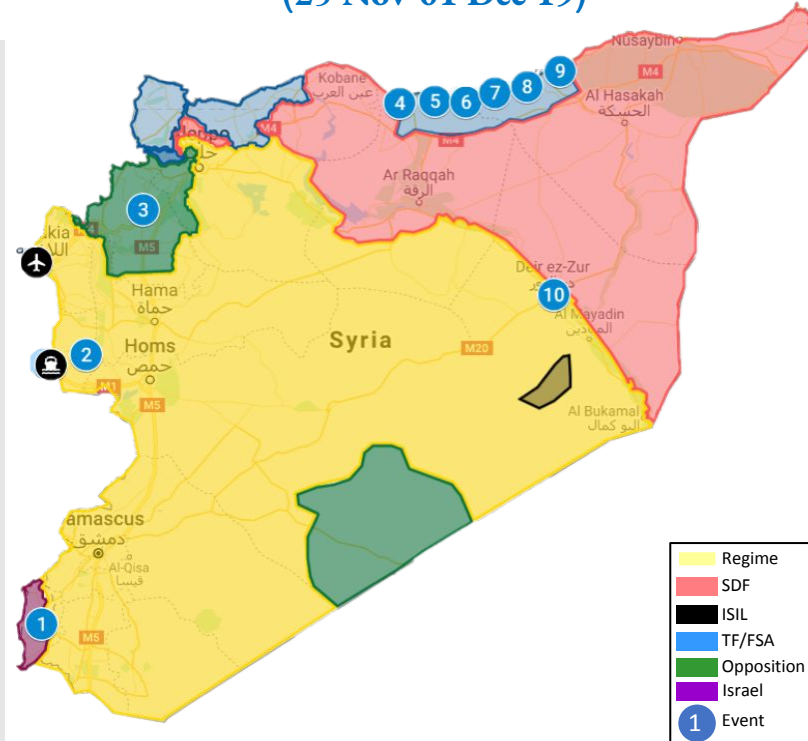
01.12.2019 The Syrian Arab Army (SAA) launched a big counter-offensive in the southeastern countryside of the Idlib Governorate last night in order to retake the areas they lost to the jihadist rebels on Saturday. According to a field report from southeastern Idlib, the Syrian Arab Army's first attack to retake the town of 'Ajaz was repelled by the jihadist rebels of Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham and the so-called "National Liberation Army" (AMN) <https://bit.ly/2Dz9CvV>

#### 4. Leaders of Turkey, Germany, France & Britain to discuss Syria before NATO summit.

29.11.2019 The leaders of Turkey, Britain, Germany and France will meet to discuss the situation in Syria before a NATO summit in London next week, the German government said on Friday. Chancellor Angela Merkel will get together with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, British PM Boris Johnson and French President Emmanuel Macron after she arrives in the British capital on Tuesday, AP quoted German government spokeswoman Ulrike Demmer as saying. (RT) <https://bit.ly/2rN4TEU>

#### 5. Turkey stalls NATO's Russia defense plans for eastern Europe over Syria.

27.11.2019 Turkey refused to support a NATO defense proposal for Poland and the Baltics until the inter-government military alliance offers stronger political support to combat a Kurdish militia group in northern Syria, four senior NATO sources have said. NATO requires formal approval from all of its 29 member states to deploy its military plan to defend Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland in the event of a Russian attack. Not having Ankara's approval could delay the defense process. (DW) <https://bit.ly/35Vw0vJ>



### ASSESSMENT

*Syrian Regime seems to focus on Idlib once again in order to capture the last Rebel/Jihadi stronghold. However, the challenge looks far beyond the capabilities of Syrian Forces unless Russia backs them by means of both air and ground support. Rebel/Jihadi groups still have the power to repulse the Syrian attacks and recapture the areas they have lost before.*

*Turkey is determined to block the NATO defense proposal concerning the Baltic States and Poland under the pretext of hindering the support given by its NATO Allies to YPG, which Turkey views as a terrorist organization. However, there are still doubts that if this is the only reason behind Turkey's motivation or recent Russian-Turkish convergence policy plays an important role in Turkey's decisions. Having been aware of Turkey's upper hand in the negotiations, its European Allies will do their best to persuade Turkey.*

#### 6. Macron Says Turkey Can't Expect Solidarity From NATO After Syria Offensive.

28.11.2019 French President Emmanuel Macron and NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg held a press conference in Paris ahead of the NATO leaders meeting in London on 3-4 December. Turkey cannot expect solidarity from NATO allies and at the same time launch an offensive in Syria, French President Emmanuel Macron said during a press conference with NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg in Paris. (Sputnik) <https://bit.ly/2LcVJaP>

#### 7. HRW says Turkey's north Syria 'safe zone' not safe.

28.11.2019 Human Rights Watch on Wednesday denounced abuses including executions and home confiscations in a Turkish-controlled swathe of northern Syria, where Ankara says it wants to resettle Syrian refugees. Turkey last month established what it has dubbed a "safe zone" in a 120-km-long strip of land it seized from Syrian Kurdish fighters along its southern border. New York-based watchdog urged Turkey and its Syrian proxies to investigate "human rights abuses, in many cases potential war crimes," in the area running 30 km deep into Syrian territory. (Arab News) <https://bit.ly/2Y4jd7m>

#### 8. Turkey says Syria op to continue until goals met.

27.11.2019 Turkey will press ahead with its anti-terror operation in northern Syria until its goals are reached, said the country's National Security Council on Nov. 26. The council also said that Turkey expects the U.S. and Russia to fulfill their agreements with Ankara as soon as possible to clear terrorists from areas of northern Syria, including Tal Rifat and Manbij. (Hurriyet Daily News) <https://bit.ly/2P1qNLN>

#### 9. Russian-Turkish Military Tension in Northeast Syria.

29.11.2019 Tension rose Thursday between the Russian army and Turkish-backed Syrian opposition factions near the town of Ain Issa, considered a self-governed Kurdish administration in the northeast of Syria. Moscow announced that Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation Army General Valery Gerasimov held talks with his Turkish counterpart, General Yasar Guler, on the developments in Syria. "During the talks, they exchanged viewpoints on the situation in Syria," the Russian news agency Tass said on Thursday. Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said that Moscow and Ankara maintain constant contacts that help them iron out differences arising during the Syrian operation. "Our militaries and diplomats are in contact almost around the clock, which helps us resolve issues," she told reporters. (Al Awsat) <https://bit.ly/35VSRqH>

#### 10. Trump Warms to Syria Kurds Again, Alarming Russia and Turkey.

30.11.2019 "I don't have an end date" for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Syria, Gen. Kenneth McKenzie, the head of U.S. Central Command, told a press conference Saturday. It seems, then, that Donald Trump's controversial decision last month to withdraw all American forces from the combat zones in northern Syria has fizzled out. On Wednesday, the American forces even got a boost from armored forces that included three tanks and three other armored vehicles in addition to a logistics unit that crossed into Syria from the Kurdish region. According to McKenzie, these forces, in cooperation with the Kurdish militias, will broaden their operations against the Islamic State in the Deir el-Zour province. (Haaretz) <https://bit.ly/2P1jmUT>



## SYRIA CRISIS WATCH

(18-24 Nov 19)

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. Israel says intercepts rockets fired from Syria.

19.11.2019 Israel's military said its missile defence system shot down four rockets fired from Syria towards Israel early on Tuesday. Minutes earlier, sirens warning of incoming rocket fire sounded in the area of the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. "Four launches were identified from Syria towards Israeli territory which were intercepted by the Israeli air defence systems," the army said. "No hits on Israeli communities were identified." (Reuters) <https://reut.rs/2KLDEAI>

#### 2. 23 killed as Israeli strikes in Syria, 16 of them likely Iranian – war monitor.

21.11.2019 At least 23 "fighters" were killed in Israel's predawn airstrikes in Syria Wednesday, 16 of them likely Iranians, according to a Syrian war monitor. The Israel Defense Forces launched the strikes against Iranian and Syrian targets around the capital of Damascus and on the Syrian Golan Heights in response to a Tuesday morning rocket attack. (The times of Israel) <http://bit.ly/2qEzQu4>

#### 3. Syria accuses Turkey of breaching agreements reached in Astana and Sochi.

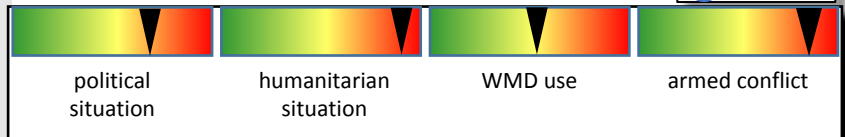
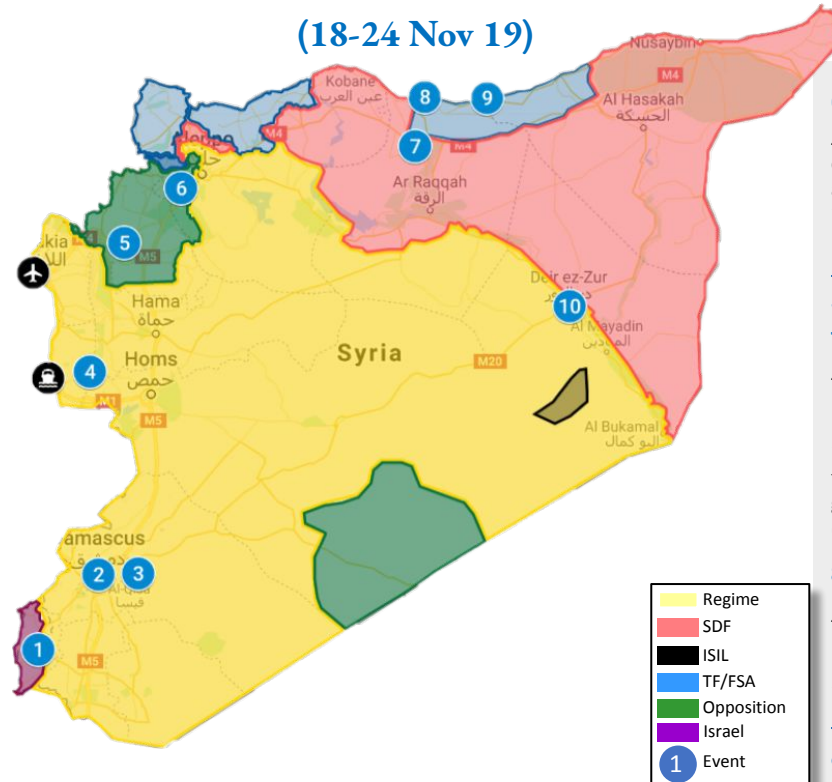
17.11.2019 Damascus has appealed to the international community to put pressure on Ankara for Turkey to cease its aggressive action in northeast Syria which the government says run counter to the agreements reached in Astana and Sochi, the Syrian Foreign Ministry said in a statement issued on Thursday. "The Syrian Arab Republic staunchly condemns criminal attacks committed by Turkish occupation forces at Syrian people and is calling on the international community to exert influence over Ankara to cease its aggression," the SANA news agency quoted the statement as saying. (TASS) <https://bit.ly/37BvdS0>

#### 4. Man who filmed beheading of Syrian identified as Russian mercenary.

22.11.2019 A Russian-speaking man who filmed the torture and killing of a prisoner in Syria has been identified as a member of Wagner, a Russian private military company with ties to the Kremlin that has aggressively expanded into the Middle East and Africa in recent years. The Kremlin said on Thursday it had no knowledge of the incident. "This has absolutely no relation to Russian soldiers, no matter what is being published about it," said Dmitry Peskov, a spokesman for Vladimir Putin. (Zaman Alwsl) <https://bit.ly/2OgsSEI>

#### 5. Russia, Turkey plugging away at Syria's northeast, Idlib.

22.11.2019 Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan clinched a deal Oct. 22 on northeastern Syria to halt the Turkish offensive against the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) — which Ankara deems a terrorist organization — implying their withdrawal from some areas east of the Euphrates River and from the towns of Tel Rifat and Manbij west of the river. On Oct. 29, Moscow informed Ankara that 34,000 Kurdish militants and more than 3,200 heavy weapons were removed from a 30-kilometer-deep (19-mile-deep) strip of land in Syria on the Turkish border. (AI Monitor) <https://bit.ly/2qwMfQU>



### ASSESSMENT

While all parties are focused on Northern Syria, Israel continues its strikes targeting Iranian elements, which it considers as a threat to its security, despite of Russian warnings. Latest Israeli air strikes reveal its determination that it will never tolerate Iranian presence in Syria.

Although Russia says that YPG members left the safe zone in Northern Syria, Turkey seems not to be convinced with the Russian statements. Following unsuccessful negotiations with the US, Turkey seems also not happy with its new ally, Russia, in Syria concerning the safe zone agreement. Amid ongoing recrimination among parties, Turkey threatens to resume its operation that in reality has never stopped by means of proxies.

#### 6. Russian and Syrian government forces kill 14 civilians in Idlib strikes.

20.11.2019 Syrian coalition forces killed at least 14 civilians, including eight children, in strikes on Idlib province, a UK-based activist and monitoring group said. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's forces, using ground-to-ground missiles, on Wednesday killed at least eight civilians, including four children, in an attack on a makeshift camp for the displaced of Qah village, near the Turkish border, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. (ME) <https://bit.ly/33gYPkv>

#### 7. 'The refugee camp is burning': American aid worker reports assault by Turkey-backed forces in Syria.

22.11.2019 Turkish-backed militias on Saturday attacked a Syrian refugee camp guarded by Kurdish and Arab fighters, an on-scene aid worker said. "The refugee camp is burning," said David Eubank, an American whose Free Burma Rangers provide humanitarian relief in war zones. "We are here giving medical help as we can," he told the Washington Examiner. "The Turk/FSA forces are close." The Turkish-backed Free Syrian Army attacked the Ein Issa camp, which is guarded by the Syrian Democratic Forces, Eubank and multiple local sources reported. (Washington Examiner) <https://washex.am/2DagLTa>

#### 8. Turkey establishes 145-km-long, 30-km-deep safe zone in Syria: Defense minister.

21.11.2019 Turkey has established a safe zone 145 kilometers in length and 30 km in depth in northern Syria, Defense Minister Hulusi Akar said on Nov. 21, noting that Ankara and Moscow have talks on the continued presence of YPG members in the region despite the latter having informed Ankara that a total of 34,000 YPG members left the region. (Hurriyet Daily News) <https://bit.ly/2qIrl51Z>

#### 9. Bild: Turkey gave German tanks to mercenaries in NE Syria.

22.11.2019 Bild newspaper wrote on Friday that German tanks have been used by mercenaries in the 30 km occupied by Turkey in Northeast Syria. The article was titled "Which game is Turkey playing with German tanks?" A spokesman for the Turkish-linked mercenaries speaking to the newspaper confirmed that the tanks were being used by them. The Spokesperson said: "Turkey provided us with military equipment including tanks." (ANF) <https://bit.ly/2qGzPpt>

#### 10. IS exploited Turkey's Syria invasion, drawdown of U.S. troops: Pentagon report.

19.11.2019 Islamic State has exploited Turkey's incursion into northeastern Syria and the drawdown of U.S. troops from the region, according to a report published on Tuesday by the Pentagon's Inspector General, adding that the militant group will likely have the "time and space" to target the West. Citing the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), a report published by the Inspector General said, "ISIS exploited the Turkish incursion and subsequent drawdown of U.S. troops to reconstitute capabilities and resources within Syria and strengthen its ability to plan attacks abroad." (Reuters) <https://reut.rs/2XH2HtM>



## SYRIA CRISIS WATCH

(11-17 Nov 19)

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. Israel targets senior leaders of Islamic Jihad in Gaza and Damascus.

13.11.2019 In a rare targeted strike against Gaza, Israel killed on Tuesday a top commander from the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine. In a response to the rockets fired earlier at Israeli cities, including Tel Aviv, according to both Palestinian and Israeli media. Dailynewsegypt) <http://bit.ly/2XjED01>

#### 2. Russian air strikes 'kill nine civilians in northwestern Syria'.

17.11.2019 Russian air strikes killed at least nine civilians on Sunday in the northwestern Syrian province of Idlib, according to a UK-based activist group. Five civilians were killed in the village of al-Malaja in southern Idlib, while four others were killed in the town of Saraqeb in the east, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. (ME) <https://bit.ly/2OmMuWm>

#### 3. Russian Commandos Take Over Sprawling Base In Syria Moments After US Abandoned It.

17.11.2019 Even as American forces are controversially "securing" select oil fields in the Deir Ezzor region of eastern Syria, they are simultaneously continuing withdrawal from northern Syria near border areas in keeping with Trump's prior ordered draw down amid the Turkish military operation against Kurdish militias. (Zero Hedge) <https://bit.ly/32W8sVA>

#### 4. Turkey starts repatriation of foreign Daesh fighters in Syria.

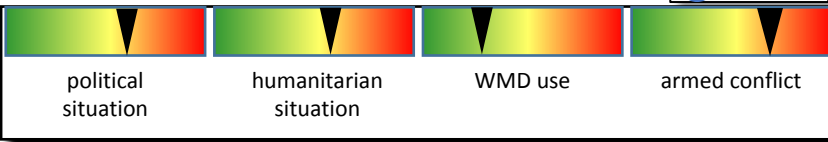
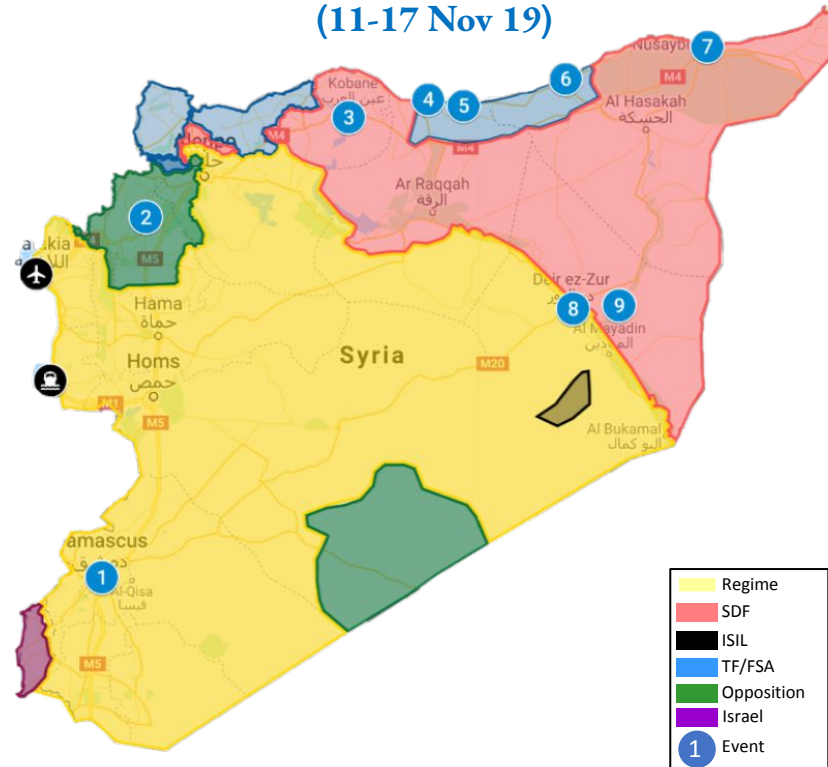
11.11.2019 Turkey has begun repatriation of foreign fighters in Syria who fought for Daesh, with one from the US having been deported and seven Germans soon to follow, a spokesman for the Turkish Interior Ministry said. The repatriation of foreign fighters comes amid a significant ongoing debate within European and Western countries in particular regarding whether they should allow the former militants, as well as their children, back into their countries. (MEMO) <https://bit.ly/2QncEem>

#### 5. Turkey says it captured an 'important' figure within Islamic State group in Syria.

13.11.2019 Turkey's interior minister said Wednesday that his country's forces have captured an "important" figure within the Islamic State group, in Syria. Suleyman Soylu said the suspect is still being interrogated but did not identify the person or provide further details. "We recently captured an important man within the (IS) in Syria. (The Globe and Mail) <https://tgam.ca/2NV7tk7>

#### 6. Russia, Turkey conduct sixth patrol in northeastern Syria.

15.11.2019 The Russian military police and the Turkish forces have conducted the sixth patrol in northeastern Syria, aided by helicopters of the Russian Aerospace Forces, the Russian Defense Ministry informed on Thursday. "The sixth joint patrol of the Russian military police and the Turkish Armed Forces has conducted joint patrolling of a new area of the Syrian-Turkish border in northeastern Syria. (TASS) <https://bit.ly/2ppMaxE>



### ASSESSMENT

*Russia continues to consolidate its presence in Northern Syria by deploying its troops and aircrafts into the bases abandoned by the US forces. Although denied by Russian officials latest news concerning the establishment of a new Russian Air Base in Qamishli reveals Russia's long lasting ambition to extend its influence all through NATO's southern borders thanks to a NATO member state, Turkey, which shows the success of Russian diplomacy.*

*Both the US and Turkey seem happy regarding their agreement on the ISIL captives issue. While the US gets rid of the burden of captured ISIL terrorists, Turkey gains a very important blackmailing asset against Europe especially. It is highly likely that Turkey will deport more ISIL terrorist in the near future until Erdogan gets what he wants from the EU capitals.*

#### 7. Russia seems set to establish new military base in northeast Syria.

15.11.2019 Russia may be eyeing a long-term lease for an airfield in the Syrian city of Qamishli, raising speculation that it's planning a third military base in the country. First reported by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), the potential development suggests Russian forces have established a headquarters near the Qamishli airport in northeastern Syria near the Turkish border as part of ongoing efforts to convert it to a permanent air base. (Al Monitor) <https://bit.ly/2NRNFOW>

#### 8. Turkey has weeks to change course on S-400s and Syria or face sanctions - Bloomberg.

15.11.2019 Turkey has just weeks to change course in northern Syria and row back on its deployment of Russian S-400 air defence missiles, or it will face sanctions, Bloomberg quoted an influential U.S. senator as saying. There was no sign of a breakthrough on any of the major issues marring U.S.-Turkish relations this week when Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan visited Washington. (Ahval) <https://bit.ly/2Qy3eNj>

#### 9. US and Europe clash over fate of Isil suspects in Syria as Turkey begins deportations.

15.11.2019 The US clashed with Europe on Thursday over the fate of Islamic State members detained in Syria, as Turkey drew up a list of a thousand suspects it planned to deport. European countries are refusing the return of hundreds of fighters and thousands of their family members being held by the Western-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in northern Syria. Mike Pompeo, US Secretary of State, told foreign ministers yesterday they needed to "hold them to account", in a meeting of the international coalition against Isil in DC. (Telegraph) <https://bit.ly/2Xn5Oa5>

### OPINION

#### Turkey's Syria Invasion: German Research Report Says Illegal on All Counts.

15.11.2019 Turkey's latest military offensive in northern Syria has triggered a heated discussion about the legality of the use of force. While operation 'Peace Spring' has been dubbed 'unlawful' by most commentators, the community of states has so far focused its criticism on the military, security, and humanitarian dimensions of the invasion. Germany, which is traditionally skeptical of the use of military force abroad, has raised some tentative concerns over the legality of the operation. (Just Security) <https://bit.ly/2qckYTH>

#### Strategies of Turkish Proxy Warfare in Northern Syria.

The main effect of Turkey's proxy warfare strategy is that it has effectively resurrected the 'revolutionary' cause (toppling Assad) of Syria's civil war, albeit now under strong Turkish influence and with a powerful undercurrent of national Islamism. This will ensure long-term Turkish influence in northern Syria via an array of 'secular revolutionary armed groups' and 'nationalist Islamist armed groups' (see Figure 1). Such influence is currently being expanded east of the Euphrates river. While Turkey's strategy was successful in Afrin (north-west Syria) and the Al-Bab - Jarabulus area (north Syria), it remains work in progress east of the Euphrates river, and limited in Idlib (north-west Syria) by HTS's historical affinity with Al-Qaeda, the group's independence and the personality of its leader. (Clingendael) (<http://bit.ly/330vFG2>)



## KEY EVENTS

### 1. Israel officially confirms its support for Syrian Kurds.

08.11.2019 The Jewish state is already assisting the Syrian Kurds and will continue to do so, said Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Tzipi Hotovely. "Israel has received many requests for aid in diplomatic and humanitarian matters. We are aiding them in various channels," The Jerusalem Post cites Hotovely as saying. (UAWire) <http://bit.ly/2Q9iWJA>

### 2. Putin, Erdogan discuss implementation of memorandum on Syria.

09.11.2019 The presidents of Russia and Turkey, Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdogan, focused on Syria in a phone call requested by Turkey, the Kremlin press service said on Saturday. "In the context of implementation of the memorandum of understanding between the Russian Federation and the Turkish Republic, passed at the summit meeting in Sochi on October 22, [they] emphasized it was crucial to continue coordinated steps aimed at stabilization in northeastern Syria, in strict compliance with the principles of its territorial integrity, sovereignty and unity," the statement said. (TASS) <https://bit.ly/2CvXKdK>

### 3. Erdogan says Turkey has captured one of Baghdadi's wives.

06.11.2019 Turkey has captured one of the wives of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, more than a week after the former leader of the Islamic State (IS) group killed himself during a raid by US special forces, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has announced. "The United States said Baghdadi killed himself in a tunnel. They started a communication campaign about this," Erdogan said on Wednesday. "But I am announcing it here for the first time: we captured his wife and didn't make a fuss like them. (Middle East Eye) <https://bit.ly/2WXIP5a>

### 4. Turkey's Syria aggression signals NATO brain death - Macron.

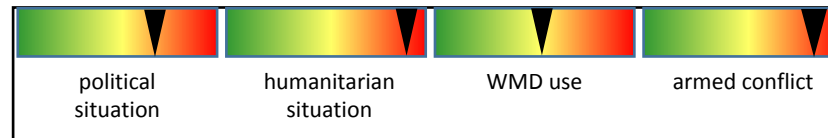
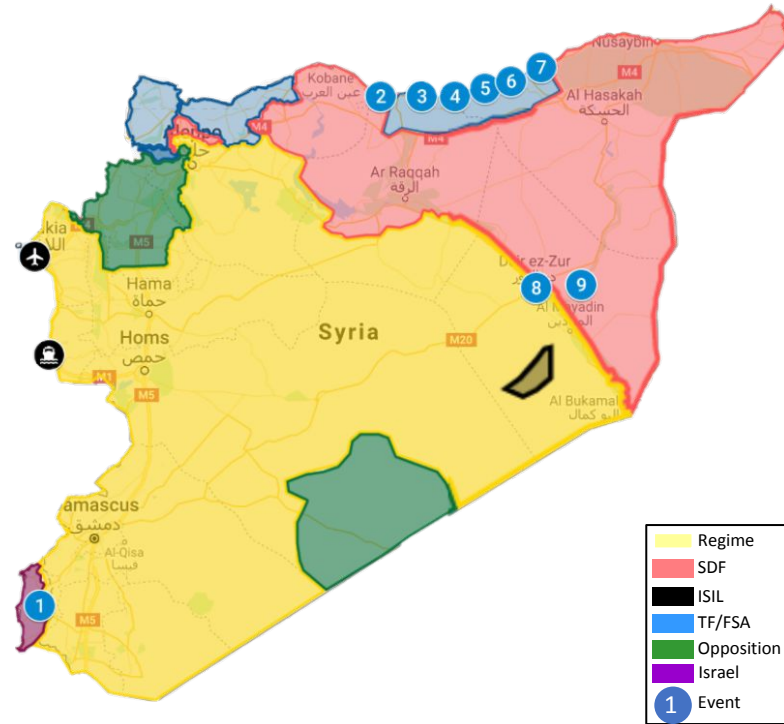
07.11.2019 The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation has been experiencing a "brain death" due to weakening planning and coordination in the alliance, and Turkey's aggression in Syria has clearly shown this, French President Emmanuel Macron said in an interview published in the Economist on Thursday. (Ahval) <https://bit.ly/33ySH8a>

### 5. Turkey says it will participate in Syria summit with Britain, France and Germany.

09.11.2019 A Syria summit will be held in London in early December between the leaders of Turkey, France, Germany and Britain, the Turkish presidency said on Friday. "It was decided to organise this four-way summit on the sidelines of the NATO summit scheduled in London on December 3 and 4," Anadolu state news agency quoted President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's advisor Ibrahim Kalin as saying. (The National) <https://bit.ly/2pNxDfC>

# SYRIA CRISIS WATCH

(04-10 Nov 19)



## ASSESSMENT

*Despite Erdogan's statements that he didn't make a fuss like Trump concerning the capture of Bagdadi's wife, it seems that Erdogan makes effort to defuse strong criticism against himself within US public and strengthen Trump's hand before his visit to US. It is highly likely that convergence of Russian and Turkish policies in Syria will be the main topic during discussions.*

*Accusations between the US and Turkish sides continue. While US side is blaming Turkey for using the US arms against SDF, Turkey states that US is financing SDF with the oil revenues. On the other hand, Macron criticizes Turkey for undermining Alliance's solidarity by acting without consulting to NATO Allies. Russia appears to get the best out of the quarrel.*

### 6. US Uses Syria's Oil to Support Kurdish Forces: Turkey.

09.11.2019 Turkey has strongly blamed the US for using the Syria's oilfields to support the Kurdish forces in the Middle Eastern country, saying that Washington has not hidden the fact. "We're closely following the statements coming from the US. And they're openly saying they are there for the oil resources. We're talking about a country that doesn't hide the fact they are there for the oil resources," Turkish FM Mevlut Cavusoglu said (Basnews) <https://bit.ly/2X6uHXC>

### 7. Russian military police conduct patrols along two routes in Syria near Turkish border.

10.11.2019 A convoy of the Russian military police conducted patrols along two routes near the Syrian-Turkish border on Saturday, including near the town of Kobani (Ain al-Arab), Major-General Yuri Borenkov, chief of the Russian center for reconciliation of the conflicting sides in Syria, told reporters on Saturday. "On November 9, Russian military police continued to conduct patrols on the Kobani-Dalak-Magara route in the Aleppo province and the Ain Isa-Sweidia-Kabir route in al-Hasakah province," he said. (TASS) <https://bit.ly/32Ap3xX>

### 8. Washington calls 'credible' reports Turkey misused US-supplied weapons in Syria incursion.

07.11.2019 The US is investigating whether Turkey violated agreements with Washington about the use of US-provided weapons and equipment, including whether Ankara improperly transferred US-supplied weapons to its proxies in Syria, groups that some US officials say may have committed war crimes as part of the Turkish-led incursion targeting America's Kurdish allies, according to CNN. (Turkish Minute) <https://bit.ly/2Cqbsid>

### 9. US-Kurdish Patrols in Northeast Syria Anger Turkey.

06.11.2019 Tensions emerged again on Tuesday between Washington and Ankara after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan charged that American forces have failed to commit to the "safe zone" agreement in northeastern Syria. Erdogan said the US was still holding joint patrols with Kurdish forces there. Despite Erdogan's charges, the situation remained calm in Washington, which appeared to be still abiding by the implicit agreement reached between Erdogan and US President Donald Trump on northeastern Syria. (Aawsat) <https://bit.ly/2WXGqHX>

## OPINION

### 1. Israel's Occupation of Lebanon Failed. Turkey's Invasion of Syria Probably Will, Too.

07.11.2019 Operation Peace Spring, as the Turkish government has dubbed its invasion of northern Syria, brings to memory an earlier invasion in the Middle East in the midst of a civil war in an attempt to create a buffer zone that would supposedly bring peace: the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. The Israeli experience in Lebanon holds lessons for the Turkish invasion of Syria today. First, it suggests that states will often use a humanitarian pretext to advance their geopolitical interests. In the case of Israel and Lebanon, officials justified the initial invasion partly by offering assistance to Christians who were depicted as a persecuted minority in an Arab Muslim-dominated state. (Foreign Policy) <https://bit.ly/2K5ri60>

## KEY EVENTS

### 1. Russian air strike kills six civilians in Syria'

**02.11.2019** An air strike Saturday by key Damascus ally Russia killed six civilians including a child in the embattled opposition bastion of Idlib in northwestern Syria, a war monitor. The strike hit the village of Jabala in the south of the Idlib region, taking the lives of all six from the same family, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. (Mail Online) <https://dailym.ai/2PHLDBW>

### 2. Religious Extremist offensive in Latakia proves they are still dangerous despite battlefield setbacks.

**02.11.2019** The jihadist rebels launched a surprise offensive in the northern countryside of the Latakia Governorate on Friday. This surprise operation resulted in the capture of several points, including Tal Rasho and Tal Ballout, by Jaysh Al-Izza, Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham and the Turkestan Islamic Party. (AMN) <https://bit.ly/36pSDcN>

### 3. President Erdogan: Turkey will relaunch Syria operation if Kurds don't withdraw.

**30.10.2019** Speaking during a televised speech to parliament, Mr. Erdogan said that the Syrian Democratic Forces had not withdrawn 30 kilometers from the north-eastern Syrian border as agreed under last week's agreement with the Kurdish forces and Russia in the Black Sea resort of Sochi. The president said that Turkey "reserves the right to carry out another operation" if the area is not cleared or if its forces come under attack. (The National) <https://bit.ly/329ndnl>

### 4. Turkey says its forces captured 18 Syrian soldiers in northeastern Syria.

**31.10.2019** Turkish military forces captured 18 Syrian government soldiers in northeastern Syria, Turkey's defense minister said Thursday, in one of the most dramatic examples of an increasingly muddled battleground following the withdrawal of U.S. forces from the area. (Stripes) <https://bit.ly/2WCQg1H>

### 5. Turkey to send home foreign IS group fighters captured in Syria.

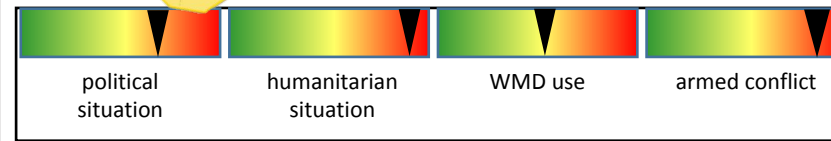
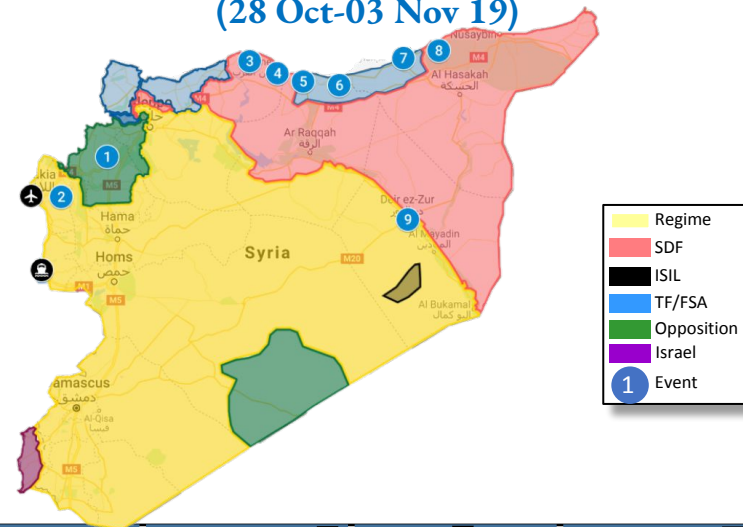
**02.11.2019** The Turkish government said on Saturday it would send foreign Islamic State fighters captured in Syria back to their countries of origin, despite the unwillingness of notably Europe states to take them in. "We are not going to keep them until the end of time," Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu told reporters. "We're not a hotel for Daesh," he said, using another name for Islamic State. (France 24) <https://bit.ly/2JLTcnA>

### 6. Over a dozen killed in car bomb attack near Turkey-Syria border.

**03.11.2019** At least 13 people have been killed in a car bomb explosion in a Syrian town on the border with Turkey, according to the Turkish defence ministry. The blast on Saturday ripped through a crowded market in Tal Abyad, a town controlled by Turkish-backed opposition fighters. "Based on first findings, 13 civilians were killed and around 20 others injured" in the explosion, Turkey's defence ministry said in a statement. (Al Jazeera) <https://bit.ly/3287K7j>

# SYRIA CRISIS WATCH

(28 Oct-03 Nov 19)



## ASSESSMENT

*Having all parties focused on Northern Syria, Idlib area seems to remain calm except some clashes in Latakia. However, latest offensive by Jihadi Groups in Latakia reveals that they are still capable to carry out effective operations against Regime forces and control the territory.*

*Despite so called ceasefire sporadic clashes continue between Turkish backed groups and SDF and Regime forces. Capturing of 18 regime soldiers and killing several of them by Turkish backed groups shows that tension in the region still very high and the agreement is still fragile. Before the deadline of 150 hours arrived Russia continued to reinforce its forces in the region, in order to prevent possible future clashes between parties.*

*After taking over the responsibility of the ISIL captives from the U.S., Turkey is highly likely to exploit them as a valuable asset to blackmail the Western countries. Latest statements by the Turkish Interior Minister saying that Turkey will send them to their home countries can be seen as a clear evidence of it.*

*U.S. bill imposing sanctions on Turkey over Syria, especially the ones targeting the assets of Erdogan family and his inner circle, gives the opportunity to Russia strengthen its ties with Turkey and consolidate its influence in the region.*

### 7. Russia sends additional forces and armored vehicles to northern Syria.

**02.11.2019** The Russian Defense Ministry has transferred additional forces and armored vehicles to northern Syria to participate in joint patrols of border areas with Turkey in accordance with the Russian-Turkish agreement, reports RIA Novosti. About 300 military police personnel and 20 armored vehicles have reportedly been deployed to northern Syria to participate in joint patrols with the Turks. According to the agreement, daily Russian military police patrols will take place in at least ten settlements on pre-determined routes, the development and approval of which is currently being carried out jointly with the Turkish side. (UAWire) <https://bit.ly/34q8uWL>

### 8. First joint patrolling of Russia and Turkey in Syria lasts four hours.

**01.11.2019** Russia and Turkey have finished the first joint patrolling in northeastern Syria, the Turkish Ministry of National Defense informed on Friday. "As planned, Turkish and Russian units have finished the first joint patrolling in the region of Derbesia, with support of unmanned aerial vehicles. <...> Turkish and Russian units have carried out patrolling in to the depth of 10 km [from the Turkish border into Syria] covering the distance of 87 km," the communique informs. (TASS) <https://tass.com/world/1086593>

### 9. US House advances bill imposing sanctions on Turkey over Syria.

**30.10.2019** The United States House of Representatives on Tuesday overwhelmingly approved legislation aimed at imposing sanctions on Turkish military and government officials over Ankara's military operation against Kurdish forces in northeast Syria. The 403-16 vote is the latest rebuke of Trump's decision to withdraw US forces from northeast Syria and leave Kurdish allies without military support as Turkey launched an operation in the area. (Al Jazeera) <https://bit.ly/3389DC9>

## OPINION

### 1. Turkey-Syria offensive: What are 'safe zones' and do they work?.

**02.11.2019** The Turkish plan is designed in part to house Syrian refugees in a secure area along its border with Syria, as well as to keep it free from Kurdish fighters it regards as terrorists. The concept seems simple, in theory. But in practice - as conflicts from Bosnia and Rwanda to Iraq and Sri Lanka have shown - making safe zones work is more difficult. (BBC) <https://bbc.in/2WCRc6d>

### 2. Turkey's Syria offensive is a nationalist political campaign.

**01.11.2019** Domestic political concerns are driving Turkey's offensive in northeast Syria, and the nationalist fervour whipped up by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and pro-government media has silenced nearly all dissent and put Kurds in the crosshairs. Most observers agree that growing frustration with the presence of Syrian refugees and the economic strains they have put on Turkey played a key role in local election losses that Erdoğan's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) suffered in Istanbul and other major cities this year. (Ahval) <https://bit.ly/328LYA9>



## KEY EVENTS

### 1. Russia: US move to control Syrian oil fields 'banditry'.

27.10.2019 Russia has slammed as “banditry” plans by the United States to deploy more forces in Syria, accusing the administration of President Donald Trump of seeking to seize the Arab country's oil resources under false pretexts. Trump and Pentagon chief Mark Esper confirmed Thursday that, while Washington was pulling some troops out of Syria following Turkey's military incursion into northern parts of the country, it was still sending in additional troops to ensure oil facilities in eastern Syria would not fall into the wrong hands. (Press TV) <https://bit.ly/2oi7qoo>

### 2. Statement from the President on the Death of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

27.10.2019 Last night, the United States brought the world's number one terrorist leader to justice. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is dead. He was the founder and leader of ISIS, the most ruthless and violent terror organization in the World. The United States has been searching for Baghdadi for many years. Capturing or killing Baghdadi has been the top national security priority of my Administration. U.S. Special Operations forces executed a dangerous and daring nighttime raid into Northwestern Syria to accomplish this mission. (White House) <https://bit.ly/31N5ylv>

### 3. Russia Deploys Large Number Of Troops, Equipment In Northern Syria.

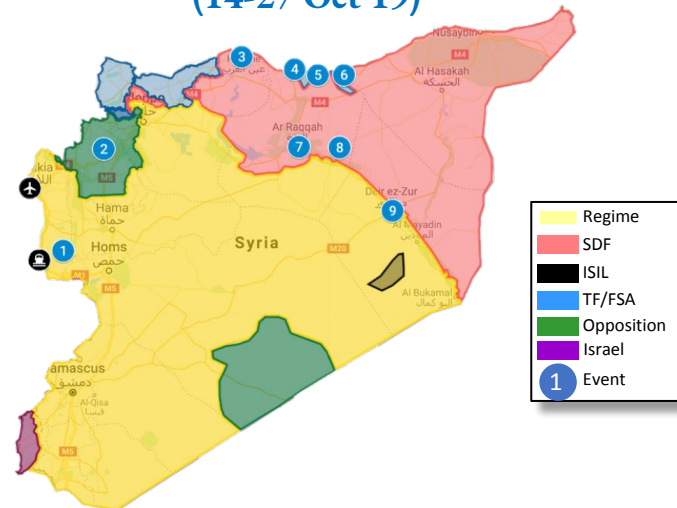
26.10.2019 276 more Russian Military Police officers and 33 additional equipment pieces will be deployed in Syria, Russia's state media reported. These forces will likely participate in security operations along the Syrian-Turkish border to the east of the Euphrates River. Additionally to the deployment in Kobane, the Russian Military Police already started carrying out patrols near the city of Qamishly. (ZeroHedge) <https://bit.ly/36ahiSo>

### 4. Full text of Turkey, Russia agreement on northeast Syria.

22.10.2019 Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, have agreed to push back Kurdish fighters from a “safe zone” along the Turkey-Syria border, after marathon talks in Sochi. The meeting on Tuesday centred on the security situation in northeast Syria following the launch of Turkey's cross-border operation on October 9 aimed at driving the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), which Ankara considers “terrorists” from the area. (Al Jazeera) <https://bit.ly/2PoGEP0>

### 5. NATO defense ministers criticize Turkey's northern Syria incursion.

24.10.2019 NATO defense ministers on Thursday, October 24 criticized Turkey for its military operation in Syria, which is being coordinated with Russia, but recognized there was little they could do to sanction their strategically important ally. The first day of a two-day meeting in Brussels was dominated by the issue, with Turkey isolated among the 29 NATO member states because of its Operation Peace Spring incursion against Kurdish-led fighters it considers “terrorists” but who are key in the ground fight against Islamic State in Syria. (The Defense Post) <https://bit.ly/2PpeQtw>



## ASSESSMENT

*Conflicting statements from the U.S. officials and the President Trump concerning the presence and the numbers of U.S. troops reveal the continuing disagreement which paves the way for Russia and Syria consolidate their power in Northern Syria. On the other hand, Trump's statement about securing the oil fields from possible ISIL attacks gives the clear message that Russian and Syrian presence should be limited to Northern Syria.*

*Although the details surrounding the operation are still emerging, questions still remain particularly regarding Baghdadi's location very closed to the Turkish border and involvement of different parties such as Kurdish militias, Iraqi intelligence service in the operation. Furthermore, the biggest question is operational capacity and future intentions of autonomous and self-financing ISIL cells which might not be suffered from Baghdadi's death.*

*Despite hard criticism from individual NATO member states, NATO has no choice but to declare solidarity with Turkey as it still uses its Russian and as well as refugee card to blackmail the Alliance and the EU. Additionally, Germany's proposal to establish an international force for the safe zone is something late since Germany was among those objecting the U.S. demands for additional troops.*

*Agreement between Russia and Turkey is a clear success of the Russian diplomacy. Russia not only got the upper hand and stopped Turkish advance but also force Turkey to recognize Assad as the legitimate party. Emphasizing on Adana agreement also leaves the door open to force Turkey later to withdraw its forces from the occupied territories when the region is secured from terrorist threat. Accordingly, it would not be a surprise to see PYD/YPG militias wearing Syrian regime military uniforms and turning back to the Northern Syria.*

### 6. Turkey rejects German defense minister's Syria 'security zone' proposal.

25.10.2019 German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas was in Turkey on Saturday for talks with his Turkish counterpart, Mevlut Cavusoglu, in Ankara, where he pressed the Turkish government for a durable cease-fire in northeastern Syria. Cavusoglu, at a news conference alongside Maas, rejected a plan from Germany's defense minister calling for an international “security zone,” saying the proposal was not realistic. (DW) <https://bit.ly/364o785>

### 7. U.S. Says Turkey Has Promised to Contain ISIS Fighters in Syria.

25.10.2019 The U.S. said Turkey has offered assurances that Islamic State fighters in the part of northern Syria occupied by Turkish forces are “under their control.” Defense Secretary Mark Esper said he received the information from his Turkish counterpart, Hulusi Akar, during a two-day meeting of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in Brussels. “I've spoken to the Turkish defense minister – he informs me that all the ISIS prisoners in prisons in their area are under their control and, actually, he informed me that they've been able to recollect some of them,” Esper told reporters on Friday in Brussels. “So that's good news.” (Bnnbloomberg) <https://bit.ly/2WgUEDc>

### 8. SDF Announces Withdrawal from Turkey-Syria Border.

27.10.2019 The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) announced on Sunday that it would withdraw from the Turkey-Syria border, adding that it accepted the Ankara-Moscow agreement in this regard. Earlier this month on October 22, Turkey and Russia announced an agreement between the sides to renew the Adana Pact, according to which, the Kurdish forces must withdraw from the border areas and let Ankara and Damascus to cooperatively take control of the region. (Basnews) <https://bit.ly/2pm65xx>

### 9. President Trump says 'we're doing very well' in Syria, Turkey.

25.10.2019 President Donald Trump continued to defend his sudden decision to pull U.S. troops out of northern Syria on Friday morning, saying the administration is doing “very well” amid the conflict. “We're doing very well in Syria with Turkey and everybody else that we're dealing with. We have secured the oil. We have a lot of oil,” Trump told reporters at the White House on Friday. “We just did a great thing in Syria where we're getting our troops out. We took over oil.” (ABC News) <https://abcn.ws/2Wig7r>

## OPINION

### Putin wins in Syria, but he is not the only one.

26.10.2019 Russian leader achieved his goals in meeting with Turkish president, while Erdogan was forced to give up on most of his objectives in northeastern Syria; meanwhile, Islamic State is busy rebuilding, unfettered by beleaguered Kurds or recently departed Americans. The agreement Russian President Vladimir Putin forced on Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Tuesday is a clever compromise that serves the vital interests of all parties, primarily Putin and Syrian President Bashar Assad. If the agreement is carried out in full – the massacre of the Kurds will be avoided, and Erdogan will not be free to settle Sunni Syrian refugees loyal to him on the Turkish-Syrian border or expel the the Kurds from the area. Erdogan's strategic goal was to settle the border area with Syrian refugees who fled to Turkey at the beginning of the country's civil war. (Ynet) <https://bit.ly/2Pn8kLG>





(07-13 Oct 19)

## KEY EVENTS

### 1. Israel ready to assist Syrian Kurds.

**11.10.2019** Israel strongly condemns the Turkish invasion of the Kurdish areas in Syria and warns against the ethnic cleansing of the Kurds by Turkey and its proxies, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a Facebook post. "Israel is ready to provide humanitarian assistance to the courageous Kurdish people," he wrote. The EU has also condemned the Turkish army's operation to purge the Syrian regions bordering on Turkey of Kurdish militia, which Ankara considers terrorist groups. (NYTimes) <http://bit.ly/2oB5XtD>

### 2. Syria troops sent north to 'confront' Turkey attack — state media.

**13.10.2019** The Syrian army has sent troops to "confront the Turkish aggression" in the north of the country where Ankara is battling Kurdish-led forces, the state news agency SANA said Sunday. "Syrian ... army units move north to confront Turkish aggression on Syrian territory", SANA said, without giving further details. The report came as a Kurdish official said on condition of anonymity that "negotiations" were under way between the Kurds and the Damascus government. (The Jordan Times) <https://bit.ly/2J415o3>

### 3. Divided UN fails to agree on Turkey's Syria offensive.

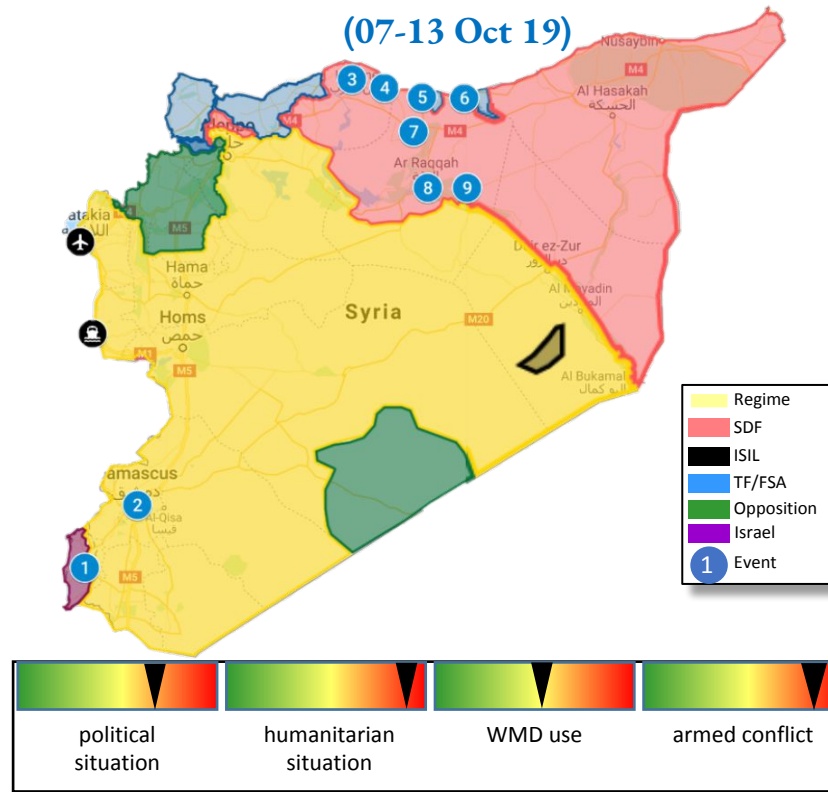
**10.10.2019** A split UN Security Council on Thursday failed to agree on Turkey's offensive in northeast Syria, with European members urging a halt to military action. But Syria's ally Russia urged "restraint" and "direct dialogue" between the two countries. Russian officials said Moscow was not prepared to sign off on the statement presented by the Europeans. (DW) <https://bit.ly/2pcGGGS>

### 4. Turkey's plan to flood Europe with millions of refugees if it is condemned for attacking Syria is a real and dangerous threat, officials warn.

**11.10.2019** Turkish threats to send millions of Syrian refugees to Europe's doorstep if sanctioned or condemned for its military intervention in northeast Syria are credible, European and Turkish security officials told Business Insider Friday. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan threatened to unload many of the estimated 3.6 million Syrian refugees currently in Turkey after European capitals responded with concern over this week's decision to send the Turkish military into Syria to push a Kurdish separatist group off the border. (Insider) <https://bit.ly/35yZvIP>

### 5. Arab League Condemns Turkey's Syria Incursion, Calls for UN Action.

**12.10.2019** Arab League foreign ministers condemned Turkey's military incursion into northern Syria. The League's secretary general, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, said the group is calling on the U.N. Security Council to take action against Turkey. At a meeting Saturday in Cairo, Arab League Secretary General Ahmed Aboul Gheit called Turkey's military action an "invasion" and an "aggression" against an Arab state. (VOA) <https://bit.ly/2pndXhJ>



## ASSESSMENT

-Turkish Operation Peace Spring continues in full swing amid fierce criticism from international community and contradictory statements by different U.S. officials. However, there is no substance beyond ostentatious remarks or statements. Because, parties to the incursion benefit from this situation in one way or another. Noting there is no place for romanticism in the international relations, the reasons for these comments are as follows:

- President Trump fulfills his promise to bring back US soldiers from conflict zones that have no benefit to the Americans. In his own words, from "stupid endless wars" in the Middle East.
- Assad and Putin limit Kurdish territorial gains in the Northeastern Syria. Instead of using force after leveling Idlib, they will inherit control of the region from Turkish forces. Based on incursion, Kurds will consent to Assad's terms. In the end, the regime will likely appear as the savior of the Kurds and re-consolidate its legitimacy within international community.
- Russia enjoys testing limits of NATO when an Ally takes unilateral action much to the distaste of all other Allies, coming as a continuation to a full series of actions exhibiting slide of axis of the country towards East.
- The greatest beneficiary, Erdogan uses this incursion to:
  - Get rid of the biggest issue that decrease rate of votes he gets: [Syrian refugees](#)
  - Consolidate support (real or pretended) to his regime from electors and parliament by creating a rally-around-the flag effect through a war-like situation, a tactic that has served him well on multiple occasions so far.
  - Finds excuse / pretext to attribute reasons of economic failures to external powers' sanctions, statements, threats.
- The losers in this theatrical performance are the Kurds and the EU. The former is obvious reasons. The second is being sacrificed to a political game between Trump, Erdogan, Putin and Assad to bear the consequences of this act and Erdogan's threats to allow millions of Syrian refugees pass to Europe, the greatest fear used by European politicians to show how clever they are and how well they manage the issue to ask for more votes.
- As Israel has great concerns over Iran's role in the region, apparently Israeli interests and those of the US are not fully aligned in this initiative. Israel itself and its diaspora will likely increase pressure on the US to do more in Syria and increase its efforts to break the Iranian influence and expel Iranian proxies.

### 6. France and Germany halt arms exports to Turkey over Syria offensive.

**13.10.2019** France and Germany have announced a suspension of arms exports to Turkey in response to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's military operation against Kurdish fighters in Syria. The French government made the announcement on Saturday evening hours after German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said Berlin had stopped exports to Ankara. "Against the backdrop of the Turkish military offensive in north-eastern Syria, the federal government will not issue new permits for all armaments that could be used by Turkey in Syria," Mr Maas told newspaper Bild am Sonntag. (The National) <https://bit.ly/2MbK0tZ>

### 7. Syria: '785 IS affiliates escape camp' as 130,000 people flee Turkish forces.

**13.10.2019** The terror group said it was behind a car bombing on Friday in Qamishli, the largest city in Kurdish-held northern Syria, which allowed some of the thousands of IS fighters held in Syria to escape. On Sunday, the Kurdish-led authority said 785 foreigners affiliated with IS escaped the Ain Issa camp after it was shelled by Turkish forces and their allies, the UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) said. (Sky News) <https://bit.ly/2oCx1Zt>

### 8. U.S. Military On Turkey Attack In Syria: 'I Can't Explain Why They Did What They Did'.

**11.10.2019** The U.S. military has laid out the many reasons why Turkey had wanted to go ahead with a planned incursion targeting Pentagon-backed Kurdish forces in northern Syria, but ultimately struggled to explain why they chose to do so. In a joint press conference, Defense Secretary Mark Esper and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chair Army General Mark A. Milley answered an array of questions regarding the military's decision to step aside as a NATO ally and a local partner in the fight against the Islamic State militant group (ISIS) opened a new front in Syria's multi-sided war of more than eight years. (Newsweek) <https://bit.ly/2INnNAo>

### 9. Trump: Turkey will face 'swift, strong, and severe' sanctions if it doesn't protect religious minorities in Syria.

**12.10.2019** President Trump said he warned Turkey it would face economic sanctions if it does not protect religious minorities in northern Syria while it conducts military operations there. The president's decision earlier this week to withdraw American troops from northern Syria, thereby opening the region to an invasion by Turkey, was met with consternation among Trump's usually loyal evangelical supporters. Trump attempted to assuage their fears that Syria's minority Christian community would suffer increased persecution as Turkish forces clash with other actors in the region. (Washington Examiner) <https://washex.am/35wbkLj>

## OPINION

### IS response to Turkey's incursion into Syria.

**12.10.2019** IS appears to have reactivated its covert cells in NE Syria, having put them (mostly) on a back-burner since the second "raid of attrition" in early August. Since #Trump's volte-face, IS cells have been engaging in unusually impactful, costly & daring ops. An inghimasi op in Raqqq; a major car bombing in Qamishli; accelerated assassinations throughout the northeast—this is not business as usual. Critically, while IS supporters have largely welcomed Turkey's campaign (some enthusiastically but most only tentatively), IS itself has not commented on the matter, aside from a brief note on the second-last page of its newspaper. (Charlie Winter Twitter) <https://bit.ly/2IKxW0c>

## KEY EVENTS

### 1. Putin announces end of conflict operations in Syria, calls for political solution.

**04.10.2019** Russian President Vladimir Putin has announced that large-scale military operations by the Russian armed forces in Syria are over, and has stressed on the need for a political solution and settlement for the conflict in the country. Putin also said that Syria, which descended into civil war following Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad's crackdown on protests in 2011, has almost been liberated and purged of opposition forces. (MEMO) <https://bit.ly/31S9Zw1>

### 2. Russia: Israeli Raids on Syria Destabilize Situation.

**04.10.2019** "Regarding arbitrary Israeli airstrikes on the Syrian territory, we have never concealed a negative attitude towards such actions that further destabilize the situation and could lead to an escalation," Russia's top diplomat said in an interview with Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, which was published on Thursday. (Fars News) <https://bit.ly/31QLsYr>

### 3. Putin calls on Iran, Saudi Arabia not to use Syria as arena for confrontation.

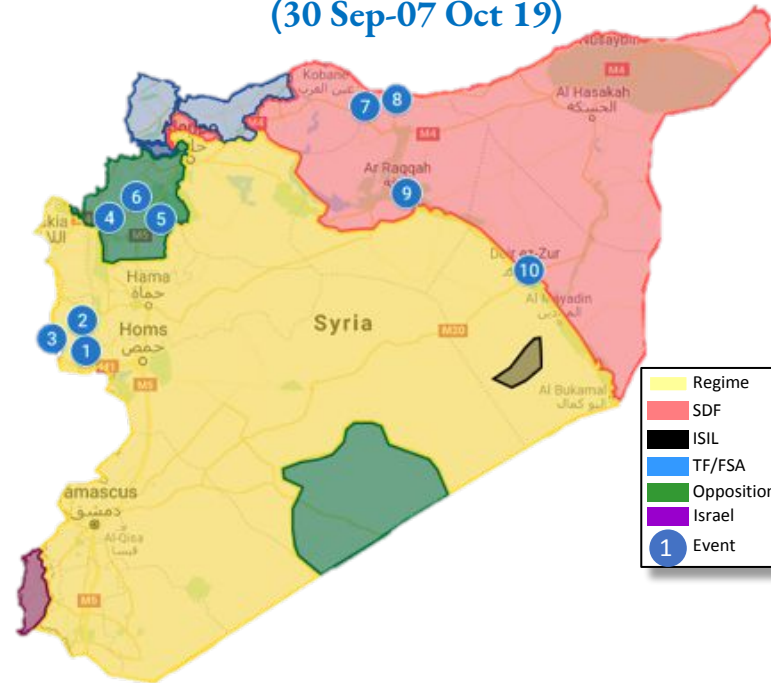
**04.10.2019** Russia calls on Iran and Saudi Arabia to refrain from using Syria's territory as an arena for confrontation, Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Thursday at a plenary session of the Valdai international discussion club. "The confrontation between the region's biggest and most influential countries cannot but have an effect on the entire situation in that part of the globe, including on the situation in Syria. (TASS) <https://bit.ly/30QK5aT>

### 4. Russian Air Force carries out strategic attack to eliminate Al-Qaeda bases in Idlib.

**05.10.2019** According to a military report, the Russian Air Force carried out two attacks on the Hurras Al-Deen bases in the towns of Tal Agher and Ballisa, which are both located in the eastern countryside of the Idlib Governorate. According to Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) the strikes resulted in the death of at least nine militants, including a half dozen terrorists from the Hurras Al-Deen group. (AMN) <https://bit.ly/35e9y15>

### 5. Trump Endorses Turkish Military Operation in Syria, Shifting U.S. Policy.

**07.10.2019** In a major shift in United States military policy in Syria, the White House said on Sunday that President Trump had given his endorsement for a Turkish military operation that would sweep away American-backed Kurdish forces near the border in Syria. Turkey considers the Kurdish forces to be a terrorist insurgency, and has long sought to end American support for the group. But the Kurdish fighters, which are part of the Syrian Democratic Forces, or S.D.F., have been the United States' most reliable partner in fighting the Islamic State in a strategic corner of northern Syria. (NYTimes) <https://nyti.ms/35eTbBF>



## ASSESSMENT

- Following a phone call with Erdogan, White House expressed consent to a probable Turkish operation to Northeastern Syria that will allow Turkish troops establish a safe zone 20-30 kilometers in the immediate south of its borders with Syria. Accordingly Turkey will take responsibility of 11K+ ISIL militants, 70K ISIL family members currently under SDF managed camps and detention centers. Erdogan promised to move more than 1 million Syrians living in Turkey to this safe zone and cleanse borders from terrorist elements.

- The probable motivations behind this move may be to defuse pressure within Turkish society against Syrian refugees and increase historic low popular support to Erdogan rule by attracting nationalist and conservative votes.

- The operation will be conducted after US troops in the region are pulled which is assessed will take some two weeks. It will highly likely be limited to YPG abandoned areas, as recommended by the U.S., and will not face any serious resistance which was the case in Afrin.

- This move has potential to push Kurds ally with Assad. But one thing that is certain is that US leave the Syrian theater to Russians.

### 6. Turkey Sponsors Unification of 'Moderate Factions' in North Syria.

**05.10.2019** Ankara sponsored on Friday the unification of "moderate opposition factions" operating in north Syria under the umbrella of the Syrian National Army. The move is expected to pave the way for dismantling Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, an al-Qaeda offshoot previously known as al-Nusra Front, and which controls large swaths of territory throughout Idlib province. (Aawsat) <https://bit.ly/30P96TF>

### 7. Turkey threatens solo army operation into northeast Syria.

**05.10.2019** Turkey's president, in his strongest warning yet, threatened on Saturday to launch a military operation into northeastern Syria, where US troops are deployed and have been trying to defuse tensions between Washington's two allies - Turkey and the Syrian Kurds. Recep Tayyip Erdogan's threats were a warning that a US-Turkish deal to secure Syria's troubled border with Turkey was faltering. He said a Turkish military operation against the US-backed Kurdish forces could begin "maybe today, maybe tomorrow". (The Telegraph) <https://bit.ly/2LJM4fb>

### 8. Turkey boosts Syria border troops as Erdogan flags incursion.

**06.10.2019** Turkey reinforced army units at the Syrian border hours after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan signaled an imminent cross-border operation against US-backed Kurdish militants in Syria. Turkey sent additional armoured vehicles and troops to the border town of Akcakale late Saturday, across from Tal Abyad in Syria, according to state TV television TRT. Mr Erdogan said earlier in the day that Turkey was ready to start a military operation in northern Syria to claim areas from the Kurdish militant group YPG and may act "as soon as today or tomorrow." (The National) <https://bit.ly/30T4LyF>

### 9. SDF says ready for 'all-out war' if Turkey invades northern Syria.

**06.10.2019** The U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have warned that they are ready to defend their territories in northern Syria should Turkey follow through with its plans for an invasion. The SDF on Saturday said it would "not hesitate to turn any unprovoked [Turkish] attack into an all-out war," the Syrian pro-government news website Al-Masdar News said. The statement from the Kurdish-majority umbrella organisation came shortly after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on Saturday said Turkey will soon launch an air and ground military operation into northeast Syria targeting the U.S.-backed Kurdish militia. (Ahval) <https://bit.ly/35azsTx>

### 10. ISIS carries out attack against Syrian troops in Deir Ezzor.

**05.10.2019** According to a statement released by the terrorist group, the Islamic State planted a roadside bomb along the Syrian Army's supply route in the Badiyah Al-Mayadeen area of western Deir Ezzor. The attack resulted in the death of one Syrian Arab Army officer. This latest attack by the Islamic State comes just a month after the Syrian Arab Army carried out a large-scale operation in this area to eliminate the terrorist group's cells. (AMN) <https://bit.ly/336nNmP>

**KEY EVENTS**

**1. Israel is jamming Syrian air defense systems in preparation for new attacks.**

26.09.2019 Over the past 24 hours, the Syrian radar and air defense systems have experienced disruptions in their work which are believed to have been caused by the electronic warfare systems installed on Israeli warplanes. During this period, Israeli planes were detected near the Syrian borders. (UAWire) <http://bit.ly/2mPshP8>

**2. Russia Believes Turkey's Desire for "Safe Zone" in Syria Justified: Lavrov.**

29.09.2019 Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has said that Turkey's desire for a "safe zone" in neighboring Syria is justified. Lavrov made the comments on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in New York on Friday, where he noted that Russia is in meetings with both Damascus and Ankara for talks on the matter. (Basnews) <https://bit.ly/2mFtWHi>

**3. Syrian Air Force hammers jihadist bases in northeast Latakia.**

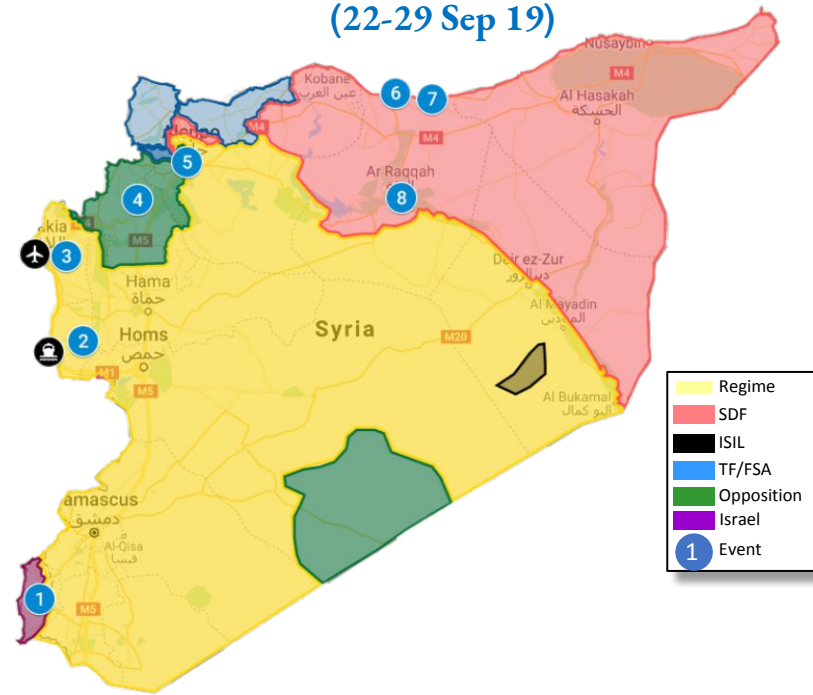
28.09.2019 Led by attack helicopters, the Syrian Air Force repeatedly targeted the religious extremist rebels around the town of Kabani, inflicting heavy damage on the latter's defense in the process. The Syrian Air Force is recently active in northeastern Latakia and is expected to launch offensive in the area in the coming weeks. (AMN) <https://bit.ly/2nAvyCC>

**4. Turkey prepares for military operation against Hayat Tahrir Sham if efforts to dismantle it fail.**

29.09.2019 Ankara informed opposition factions to prepare for an upcoming operation against HTS (formerly Jabhat al-Nusra) and other radical factions in Idlib, led by "Huras al-Din" and "Ansar al-Tawhid" in case of the failure of peaceful ways to dismantle HTS. According to the sources, Hayat Tahrir Sham showed flexibility in dealing with Ankara's demands pointing out that "there are certain arrangements including identifying who to protect the area, and which factions are allowed to enter Idlib." (Qasioun-news) <https://bit.ly/2okABqB>

**5. Areas northeast of Aleppo witness renewed clashes between the Kurdish Forces and the Turkey-backed and loyal factions.**

28.09.2019 Aleppo Province, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights: fronts of the northern countryside of Aleppo are witnessing renewed clashes, between the Kurdish Forces against the Turkey-loyal factions, where clashes broke out between both parties early Saturday in al-Daghalbash area west of al-Bab city in the northeastern countryside of Aleppo, and the Syrian Observatory published on the 27th of September 2019 that the Syrian Observatory monitored night clashes with medium and light weapons; between the Kurdish Forces deployed north of Aleppo against the Turkey-loyal factions, in Kafirkhasher area southwest of Azaz city in the northern countryside of Aleppo, but no confirmed information about casualties so far. (SOHR) <https://bit.ly/2ohjB4E>



**ASSESSMENT**

*-After the announcement of a new agreement between Syrian Regime and opposition, Turkey has to play it safe since any kind of aggression against Syrian territory will be seen as breach of the peace process by international community. Additionally, Erdogan's failure to meet with Trump during the UN General Assembly reveals that Erdogan's blackmailing about safe zone seems to be neglected by the U.S. side.*

*- Turkey is likely aiming to receive support from international community by driving the idea to provide safe housing to Syrian refugees forward and use it as a pretext to legitimize its ambitions to create a safe stretching across its southern borders.*

**6. Turkey Plans To Occupy Northeast Syria With \$27 Billion Program.**

29.09.2019 In its latest stunt apparently designed to encourage refugees to believe that Turkey will provide them housing that is nicer than what most people in Turkey have, Turkey has floated the idea of a \$27 billion program for taking over part of northeast Syria. Calling this a "safe zone," Turkey says that its security concerns give it a right to occupy part of Syria. Ankara has talked up the "safe zone" for months, but only now has it floated an ambitious settlement program for 1 million Syrians with modern housing that is the largest of its sort in history. (Jerusalem Post) <https://bit.ly/2mQ2KWe>

**7. Turkey's Erdoğan eases off Syria invasion after failing to secure meeting with Trump.**

29.09.2019 When Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan travelled to New York for the UN General Assembly this week media from his home country touted the visit as a last opportunity for the United States to make good on the Syrian safe zone project agreed last month. Erdoğan and top officials from his government had spent the last month warning that they had not only a "b" but also a "c" plan so set in motion if they believed Washington was stalling them. (Ahval) <https://bit.ly/2m9xHV4>

**8. U.S. Thanks Russia, Turkey, Others For New Syria Agreement, Leaves Out Iran's Role.**

23.09.2019 The United States has welcomed the United Nations' announcement of a new agreement between Syria's government and opposition, expressing gratitude to members of the international community who helped—except for Iran. U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres announced on Monday the formation of a "credible, balanced and inclusive Constitutional Committee that will be facilitated by the United Nations in Geneva." (Newsweek) <https://bit.ly/2nHJDxu>

**OPINIONS**

**1. Russia-Turkey-Iran plan for Syria shuns Kurds, US.**

28.09.2019 The breakthrough in the Syrian Constitutional Committee overshadowed other topics considered at the latest summit among the presidents of Russia, Iran and Turkey in Ankara. In addition to agreeing on the constitutional procedure, the three leaders postponed a final military operation in Idlib, giving Turkey another chance at "cleansing" the Syrian province from Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria. (The Arab Weekly) <https://bit.ly/2m9z71Q>

**2. How America Can Win Turkey Back from Russia by Using Syria.**

22.09.2019 For years, Turkey's collaboration with Russia bedeviled Washington but now a rift has emerged that can push both sides towards a divorce if acted on decisively. To be sure, the Trump administration expresses mixed signals about its overall policy in Syria. President Trump himself wants to see an end to American military commitments following the defeat of the Islamic State, a move initially enacted but then retracted. Others wanted to see an American footprint remain to combat Iranian influence and ensure ISIS does not reconstitute itself following a U.S withdrawal. (National Interest) <https://bit.ly/2m0MrVU>



## KEY EVENTS

### 1. Russia, Turkey, Iran View Israeli Attacks on Syria as Destabilising.

16.09.2019 Russia, Turkey and Iran consider Israeli military attacks on Syria as destabilizing and leading to increased tensions in the region, according to a joint statement by the leaders of the three countries after the summit in Ankara on Monday. "The presidents consider Israeli military attacks in Syria as destabilizing, violating the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country, as well as leading to increased tensions in the region," the Russian-language version of document, published on the Kremlin's website, reads. (Sputniknews) (<http://bit.ly/2moUuvD>)

### 2. Russia authorizes Syria to use S-300 missile systems against Israel.

18.09.2019 After repeated incidents of Israel attacking targets in Syria despite certain agreements with Russia, the Syrian military has received permission to use its Russian-made aerial defense systems against Israel, provided that Syria takes responsibility for the consequences, reports Russian news outlet Avia.pro citing its source. "Russia has authorized the Syrian military to bring the S-300 to full combat readiness and attack Israeli aircraft if there is the slightest threat," the source claimed. (UAWire) (<http://bit.ly/2kZaUKO>)

### 3. Russian fighter jets thwart Israeli attack on Syria

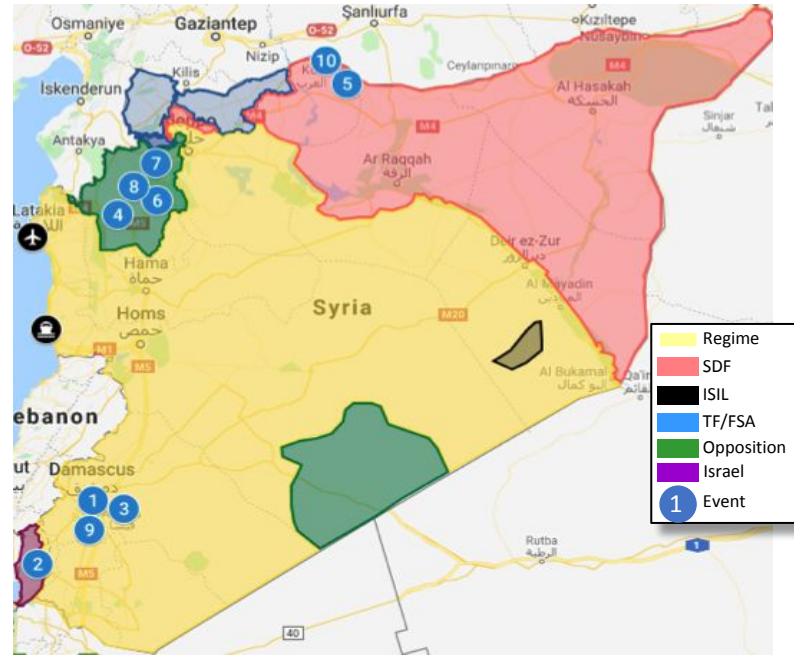
20.09.2019 Russian fighter jets blocked Israeli planes and drones which were trying to carry out another attack on Syria, claims the Russian news outlet Avia.pro. Thursday night, as Israel was preparing another series of strikes on the Damascus suburbs, two Russian fighter jets took off from the Russian military airbase Khmeimim, located in Latakia province, and headed for the south of Syria. According to Avia.pro, these planes thwarted Israeli strikes on the Syrian capital and its suburbs. According to several reports, at least two Russian fighter jets took off from the Khmeimim Airbase at around 20 pm on Thursday and headed southeast. (UAWire) (<https://bit.ly/2kyxvhk>)

### 4. Russia in Review: The Kremlin Controls the Pace of Operations in Syria's Idlib.

20.09.2019 The Kremlin is setting conditions to enable new pro-regime offensive operations against Greater Idlib Province in Northern Syria, including the deployment of a new battalion-sized element from the Wagner Group. The Kremlin is likely unwilling to expend the large amount of resources required to enable Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to retake all of Greater Idlib Province. Instead, Russia will likely use the Russian Air Force, Special Forces, and Wagner Group to enable limited operations in service of its own more limited objectives in Syria, such as protecting its Hmeimim Airbase on the Syrian Coast. (ISW) (<https://bit.ly/2kWm4A9>)

### 8. Erdogan Says Syria 'Safe Zone' Could Host 3 Million People.

19.09.2019 Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan claimed on Wednesday that up to 3 million Syrian refugees currently living in his country could be returned to a "safe zone" he is seeking to establish in northern Syria. (Syrianobserver) (<http://bit.ly/2m8rs3a>)



## ASSESSMENT

- At the end of the day, it seems that Esad would regain the control of Idlib. Nevertheless he should not take it for granted as the Syrian Army and pro-Syrian forces together do not have enough power. He still has to rely on Russian and Iranian support both of which are likely to continue, though limited and with a focus on their own priorities such as protecting Khmeimim (Russian) Air Base.

- It is crystal clear that Turkish and Russian interests in Syria are completely different. Russian actions on the field manifests this brightly despite the positive messages given to the media by both states' officials.

- As we assessed before, Turkey can not commence an operation and set up a safe zone without a green light from the US. Still, Erdogan continue his rhetoric for domestic politics to boost up his support.

### 6. Jihadists use force to block civilians from fleeing to government areas in Idlib.

20.09.2019 For six straight days, the jihadist rebels from Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham have blocked civilians from fleeing to the government-held areas in the Idlib Governorate. According to a new report from the neighbouring Hama Governorate, several civilians were targeted with gunfire by Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham militants near the Abu Duhour Crossing. One of the main reasons is their suspicion that these people worked as spies for the government. (AMN) (<https://bit.ly/2m2fj6o>)

### 7. Jihadi groups still refuse to withdraw from the "demilitarized" area.

22.09.2019 Hayyat Tahrir al-Sham, the jihadi organization of Hurras al-Dien, and other jihadi organizations and groups continue to refuse to withdraw from the "demilitarized" area, the International highway of Damascus – Aleppo, and the International highway of Aleppo – Latakia, in accordance with the agreement that emerged from the trilateral summit of the heads of Russia, Iran, and Turkey, which puts Turkey in a new embarrassing position in front of its Russian ally, due to its control of the decision in areas of control of Hayyat Tahrir al-Sham and the factions within "Putin – Erdogan" area. (SOHR) (<https://bit.ly/2m8gyuh>)

### 8. Putin says Russia will support Syrian army in Idlib.

16.09.2019 Russia will support the Syrian army in limited operations to reduce tensions and eliminate terrorist threats in the region, said Russian President Vladimir Putin in a briefing following the triple summit on Syria with Turkey and Iran in Ankara on Monday. "The situation in Idlib is concerning. The area is almost completely under control of groups allied with Al Qaeda. Our accords don't include terrorist organisations. We are prepared to take any steps to keep the civilian population from harm," Putin said. (Ahval) (<http://bit.ly/2ku5NCe>)

### 9. Syria summit demonstrates Turkey's growing dependence on Russia.

17.09.2019 Turkey is more dependent on Russia than ever to safeguard its interests in the Syrian conflict. At a Turkish-Russian-Iranian summit September 16 in Ankara, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan failed to get assurances from Russian President Vladimir Putin to stop a military offensive by Syrian government forces in Idlib province, which borders Turkey. The fighting could send up to 1 million refugees into Turkey, Turkish officials estimated. Ankara is under growing domestic pressure because of the 3.6 million Syrians it already hosts. (The Arab Weekly) (<http://bit.ly/2kWyRld>)

### 10. Turkey is prepared for possible Syria border operation, Erdogan says.

21.09.2019 Turkey is ready to act on its southern border with Syria, President Tayyip Erdogan said, after warning that it could take unilateral steps if the U.S. does not establish a "safe zone" in northeast Syria this month. "Our preparations along our borders are complete," Erdogan told reporters in Istanbul on Saturday before departing to attend a U.N. General Assembly meeting. NATO allies Turkey and the U.S. have started joint land and air patrols along part of the border strip, but Ankara says Washington is moving too slowly to establish a sufficiently large safe zone to push Syrian Kurdish forces from the border. (Reuters) (<https://reut.rs/2m7lMqa>)

**KEY EVENTS**

**1. Russia prevented Israeli airstrikes in Syria, Putin warned Netanyahu.**

14.09.2019 Moscow has reportedly moved to prevent Israeli airstrikes in Syria, with Russian President Vladimir Putin warning Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu against the strikes. Putin told Netanyahu that allowing Israeli strikes on Syrian military assets would undermine Moscow's relations with Damascus, the Arabic edition of the UK-based Independent newspaper reported on Friday. The report comes after Netanyahu met with Putin in the resort city of Sochi on Thursday to discuss "security coordination" in Syria. According to an unnamed Russian source cited in the report, Moscow has also threatened to use its "fighter jets or the S-400 air defense system" in order to counter any Israeli aircraft striking Syria. (Press TV) <https://bit.ly/2lW32tD>

**2. Moscow Says Syrian War has Ended.**

14.09.2019 Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has declared that Syria's war is over despite limited hotbeds of anti-government fighters. In an interview on Friday with Trud newspaper, Lavrov said: "The Syrian war has ended. The country is returning gradually to normal peaceful life. Separate hotbeds of tension remain on territories not controlled by the Syrian government, for example, in Idlib and east of the Euphrates." Lavrov emphasized the importance of "comprehensive humanitarian assistance in Syria and pushing the political process forward to achieve reliable and long-term stability in the country, as well as in the Middle East region as a whole." (Al Awsat) <https://bit.ly/2kKrgad>

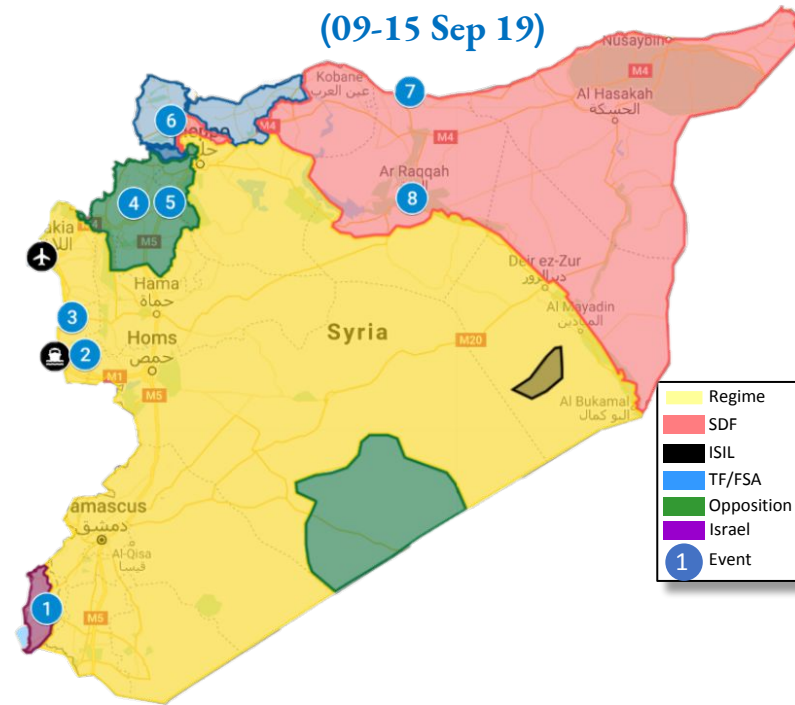
**3. Russian Envoy Insists on Forming Syria's Constitutional Committee in September.**

11.09.2019 Moscow hopes the formation of the Syrian Constitutional Committee will be completed by the end of September, announced Mikhail Bogdanov, the Russian president's special envoy for the Middle East and African countries and Deputy Foreign Minister. Bogdanov said that Moscow discussed with a number of foreign ministers, including the Turkish FM, the committee's formation. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov expressed confidence that forming the committee will be completed soon, noting that the disagreements were on a "name or two" in the third list that the UN should have submitted. (Al Awsat) <https://bit.ly/2lV03B1>

**4. The US Designates Hurras al-Din as Terrorist Organization.**

10.09.2019 Today, the President signed an Executive Order modernizing and strengthening sanctions authorities to combat terrorism. Today's Executive Order is the most significant update of terrorist designation authorities since the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, and will enable the United States to more effectively sanction the leaders of terrorist organizations and those who train to commit acts of terrorism.

The State Department is moving aggressively to implement these new authorities. Today, the Department designated Hurras al-Din, an al-Qa'ida-affiliated group in Syria, as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (US State Dept) <https://bit.ly/2kitzRA>



**ASSESSMENT**

*Putin's statement concerning the prevention of Israeli airstrikes in Syria is his first significant/unreserved objection. This might related to the Israeli elections, aiming to help Netanyahu to boost his nationalist votes in order to avoid any unpredictable political changes in Israel which would not be in favor of Russia.*

*Russia accelerates its political efforts to encourage the international community to join the reconstruction of Syria as the arms conflict will come to an end in the near future. Russians know that the legitimacy of the Assad regime and the stability of the country highly depends on the level of the support from the international actors.*

**5. New checkpoint opened in Idlib de-escalation zone in Syria.**

14.09.2019 According to the chief of the Russian center for reconciliation of conflicting sides in Syria Alexei Bakin, the militants who were unwilling to surrender are continuing to break the ceasefire. The Syrian government ensured the functioning of the humanitarian corridor and the Abu al-Duhur checkpoint starting on September 13, so that civilians could leave the Idlib de-escalation zone and so that militants from the zone could lay down arms, Major General Alexei Bakin, the chief of the Russian center for reconciliation of conflicting sides in Syria, told reporters on Saturday. "Starting on September 13, the Syrian government provided operation of a humanitarian corridor and the Abu al-Duhur checkpoint for the civilian population's voluntary and unimpeded exit from the Idlib de-escalation zone and for those militants who are willing to surrender arms," Bakin said. "Points providing urgent treatment, drinking water, hot meals, medicines and daily necessities were equipped for those who are fleeing the area controlled by illegal armed groups. Vehicles were arranged to take people to safe areas," the general added. (TASS) <https://bit.ly/2kAVUTy>

**6. Turkey's President Wants Europe to Share Refugee Burden From Syria.**

13.09.2019 Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is warning Europe to share the refugee burden or face a new wave of migrants, as Turkey fears a new influx of Syrian refugees. Erdogan's threat coincides with a surge of migrants entering Greece from Turkey. (VOA) <https://bit.ly/2kBeefi>

**7. Turkey says U.S. stalling on Syria 'safe zone', will act alone if needed.**

10.09.2019 Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said on Tuesday that Washington is stalling in its agreement to create a "safe zone" in northeast Syria, and repeated that Ankara was ready to act on its own if necessary to push back Kurdish fighters. (Reuters) <https://reut.rs/2lSp55x>

**8. U.S. will not send additional troops to Syria for joint patrols with Turkey.**

14.09.2019 The United States will not send additional troops to Syria to conduct joint patrols with Turkey in a planned safe zone being established according to a deal agreed last month, the Voice of America reported on Friday citing a senior U.S. military official. "We're not going to increase our presence on the ground in order to conduct those patrols," the VOA quoted McKenzie as saying. The U.S. general said that the number of American troops could fluctuate slightly as forces rotate into and out of Syria. (Ahval) <https://bit.ly/2mhKzrU>



## KEY EVENTS

### 1. Syria condemns launching US-Turkish joint patrols in the Syrian al-Jazeera region.

08.09.2019 The Syrian Arab Republic condemns in the strongest terms launching joint patrols by the US administration and the Turkish regime in the Syrian al-Jazeera region in a flagrant violation of international law and the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic," an official source at the Foreign and Expatriates Ministry said Sunday in a statement to SANA. (SANA) <https://sana.sy/en/?p=172937>

### 2. Druze delegation headed to Syria to 'meet regime officials' detained at Jordan border by Israel.

05.09.2019 Israel detained scores of Druze men at the Jordan border on Thursday morning as the delegation sought to meet Syrian regime officials in Damascus, according to Israeli media. Carrying Syrian flags - now synonymous with Bashar al-Assad's regime - the convoy was stopped by Israel at the Sheikh Hussein border crossing, after the members of the Druze community attempted to enter Jordan with the aim of reaching Syria. Israeli police said they warned the Druze community not to visit Syria, saying this "would compromise the security of the State and its citizens". (The New Arab) <http://bit.ly/2lciS2>

### 3. Russia keeps close eye on US-Turkey talks on security zone in northeastern Syria — Lavrov.

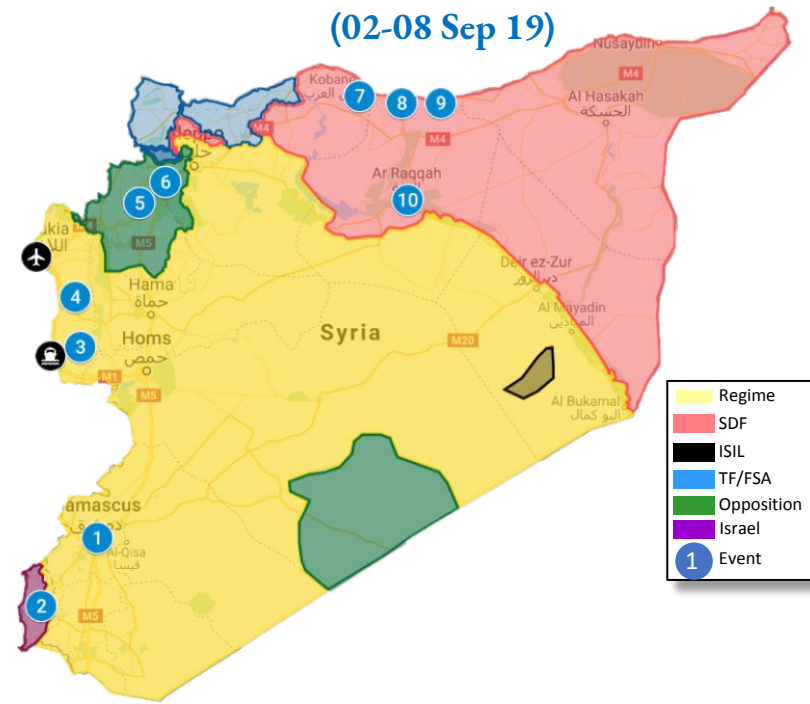
02.09.2019 "We are keeping a close eye on the talks between the United States and Turkey on security at the Syrian-Turkish border. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who visited Russia last week and had talks with President Vladimir Putin, informed in detail about these talks, about the problems that so far defy resolution," he said. (TASS) <https://tass.com/politics/1076044>

### 4. Top US national security adviser: Iranian tanker seized by UK now off coast of Syria.

07.09.2019 US national security adviser John Bolton on Friday shared a satellite image of an Iranian tanker off the coast of Syria, after the Iranian government denied that it was the vessel's final destination. The Iranian tanker— Adrian Darya 1, formerly known as the Grace 1 — was seized in July by the UK in Gibraltar, due to evidence that the vessel was attempting to carry oil to Syria in violation of European Union sanctions against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime. (CNN) <https://cnn.it/2kxH7c3>

### 5. US Forces Kill Dozens of Militants in Syria Strikes Despite Idlib Ceasefire.

02.09.2019 US forces attacked militant leaders in Syria on Saturday, the Pentagon said, in what a battlefield monitor called a missile strike that left at least 40 dead. The US Defense Department said the attack targeted leaders of Al-Qaeda in Syria north of Idlib. It did not say what kind of weapon was used or give any details. The missiles targeted leaders of militant groups and allied factions near Idlib, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. (The Syrian Observer) <https://bit.ly/2m0FsvT>



## ASSESSMENT

*Erdogan continues to blackmail the U.S. concerning the quick establishment of a safe zone in North Eastern Syria. However, this time around Turkey has no chance but to compromise with the U.S. as North Eastern Syria completely differs from the previous operation areas of Turkey due to U.S. presence in the region.*

*The U.S. air operations in Idlib is likely aiming to give a clear message to Russian and Turkish sides that even in Idlib they are not alone and they have to consider that the U.S. is still in the game.*

### 6. Moscow Concerned, Puzzled Over US Airstrike in Syria's Idlib.

02.09.2019 The Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement on Monday that it was concerned and puzzled by Washington's recent airstrike in Syria's Idlib, slamming the move as "inconsistent" and "contradictory." "Inconsistent and contradictory steps that the United States makes in Idlib cannot but cause bewilderment and concern. On the one hand, US representatives ... call for halting escalations in Idlib ... On the other hand, they conduct an airstrike, which results in large-scale damage and victims", the Russian Foreign Ministry said. (Sputnik) <https://bit.ly/2koVS0Z>

### 7. Turkey, US conduct first joint patrol for Syria safe zone.

08.09.2019 Turkey and the US military personnel completed the first joint ground patrol as planned for establishment of a safe zone east of Euphrates in Syria, Turkish National defence ministry said on Sunday. Turkey-US joint patrols will continue in the coming days to stick to the schedule for establishment of Syria safe zone, Turkey's National Defence Ministry said Sunday. (TRT World) <https://bit.ly/2kzEtTc>

### 8. Turkey cites disagreements with U.S. even as joint Syria patrols begin.

08.09.2019 Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan, speaking hours after joint U.S.-Turkey patrols began in northern Syria, said on Sunday Ankara and Washington have constantly disagreed over establishing the planned "safe zone." "We are negotiating with the U.S. for the safe zone, but we see at every step that what we want and what they have in mind is not the same thing," he said. "It seems that our ally is looking for a safe zone for the terrorist organization, not for us. We reject such understanding." (Reuters) <https://reut.rs/2k5umFl>

### 9. Turkey will begin establishing safe zone in Syria by end of September.

05.09.2019 "Turkey is determined to actively initiate the formation of a safe zone in Syria along the eastern line of the Euphrates River in its own way by the last week of September," Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said. (TRT World) <https://bit.ly/2kbbO6Q>

### 10. SDF carry out new raid operation against people accused of 'communicating with ISIS cells'.

08.09.2019 Syria Democratic Forces raided al-Kassar gathering on the outskirts of al-Busayrah city in the eastern sector of Deir Ezzor countryside, a person and arrested 3 of his sons, two of whom were members in the ranks of SDF who sued to be part of the "Islamic State" Organization, and in the same context, forces from SDF backed by Coalition helicopters raided the house of a person in the Western Jafar village north of al-Tabaqa city in al-Raqqa countryside, and arrested 2 displaced people from Hama countryside on charges of "dealing with sleeper ISIS cells in the area," (SOHR) <https://bit.ly/2lDU2cE>



## KEY EVENTS

### 1. Lavrov calls Turkey's interest in ensuring security in northeast Syria absolutely legal.

01.09.2019 Russia believes that Turkey's interests in ensuring security and therefore its plans to set up a zone under its control in northeast Syria are absolutely legal, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said in an interview with the "Moscow. Kremlin. Putin" program on the Rossiya-1 television channel (Tass) <https://tass.com/politics/1075936>

### 2. Russia announces ceasefire in northern Syrian.

31.08.2019 The Russian Defence Ministry yesterday announced a ceasefire in northwest Syria, which will come into effect today. The Russian news agency Sputnik quoted the Russian Reconciliation Centre as saying that "the ceasefire in Idlib, Syria will start on 31 August". (MEMO) <https://bit.ly/2LohrrX>

### 3. Syrian-Russian air strikes hit rebel-held northwest Syria, nine killed.

28.08.2019 Jets believed to be Syrian or Russian on Wednesday struck a main rebel-held city in northwest Syria, killing at least nine civilians, in stepped up strikes on the last rebel bastion in that part of the country, residents and rescuers said. The air strikes hit Maarat al-Numan, from which tens of thousands of people have fled in the last two weeks fearing an imminent assault by advancing Russian-backed Syrian troops. (Reuters) <https://reut.rs/2PODWMB>

### 4. Turkey continues to send armored vehicles to the Syrian border amid the ongoing tensions in Idlib province in northern Syria, Turkey's Anadolu news agency reported.

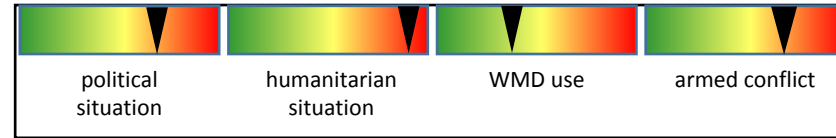
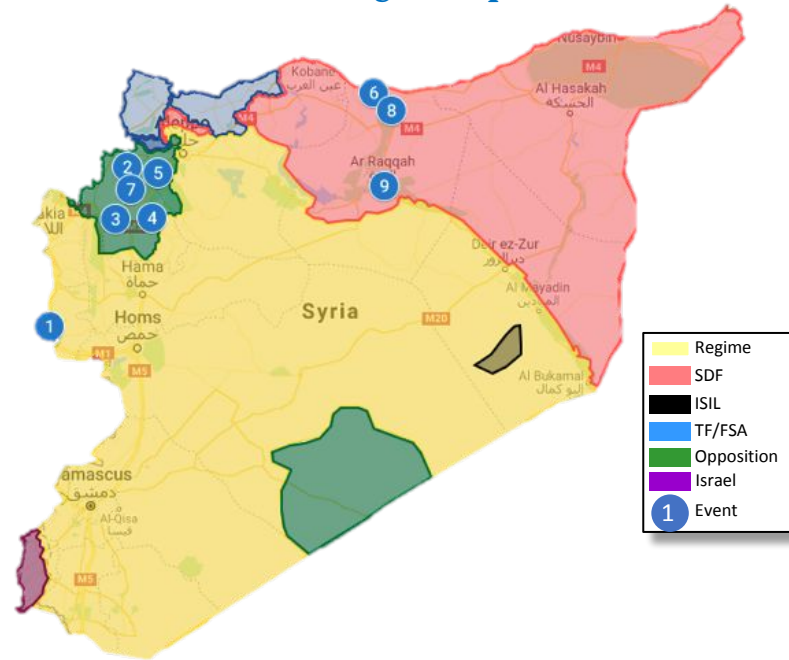
30.08.2019 A group of tanks and armored infantry vehicles from various units of the Turkish army has reached the Antakya district of the Hatay Province, bordering the Syrian province of Idlib, Turkey's Anadolu news agency reported. (Sputnik) <https://bit.ly/2Lhb1fn>

### 5. Russia assured Turkey of no attacks on posts in Syria: FM Çavuşoğlu.

30.08.2019 Turkey's foreign minister said on Aug. 30 Russia had assured Turkey its observation posts in northwest Syria would not be attacked. Speaking in Oslo, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu warned that continued attacks by Russian-based Syrian government forces in rebel-held Idlib province could unleash another wave of Syrian refugees to Europe. He added that Turkey's military, which backs some Syrian groups, would leave the region only when a political solution was found. (Hurriyet Daily News) <https://bit.ly/2MSUzUH>

### 6. Turkey demands smaller Syria safe zone in US negotiations.

01.09.2019 Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan told reporters that Turkey would demand a smaller safe zone in Syria. His comments follow meetings with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin in Moscow. Erdogan said: "I told Defense Minister Hulusi Akar that we should begin to work with what (the Americans had proposed). (Arabnews) <https://bit.ly/2Z3QmT>



## ASSESSMENT

*Regarding the Russian support to Turkey for the safe zone in Northern Syria and assurance for the safety of the Turkish Forces in Idlib, Erdogan's visit to Russia seems to pay off. Russia aims to kill two birds with one stone since increasing level of Turkish influence in the region would consolidate Russian influence in the future.*

*Having learned from Manbic example Turkey seems to agree on the U.S proposal concerning the depth of the safe zone in order not to lose the window of opportunity this time around.*

### 7. Syria war: US missile strike on 'al-Qaeda leaders' in Idlib.

31.08.2019 The US says it has carried out an attack on leaders of a group it calls al-Qaeda in Syria, in the country's rebel-held Idlib province. US Central Command said the operation had targeted those "responsible for attacks threatening US citizens, our partners and innocent civilians". No details were given but other reports say some 40 people died in a missile strike on a jihadist training camp. It was hit just after Syrian government forces began a truce in Idlib. (BBC) <https://bbc.in/2lTYnsg>

### 8. Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan threatens unilateral action to create Syria 'safe zone'.

01.09.2019 Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has threatened to send his troops into Syria unilaterally if the United States does not agree to give it control of a proposed safe zone along the border. "We do not have much time or patience regarding the safe zone which will be established along our entire border east of the Euphrates," Mr Erdogan said at a graduation ceremony at the National Defence University in Istanbul. "If our soldiers do not control the region within a few weeks, we will put our own operation plan into effect." (The National) <https://bit.ly/2LdR6O6>

### 9. SDF and Kurdish YPG forces to pull from Turkey-Syria border strip: SDF.

27.08.2019 The Kurdish YPG militia and U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) are set to withdraw from a 5-14km wide strip along the border with Turkey, SDF spokesman Mustafa Bali said on Tuesday. As per U.S.-Turkish talks, the width of the border strip into Syria will vary, and will include rural areas or military positions, not cities or towns, Bali told Reuters. (Reuters) <https://reut.rs/2HBuhBQ>

### 10. Turkey-US ops centre on Syria safe zone 'fully operational'.

24.08.2019 A Turkey-US operations centre aimed at establishing and managing a safe zone in northeastern Syria is fully operational, according to the Turkish defence minister. The centre will help coordinate the establishment of a buffer between the Turkish border and Syrian areas controlled by the US-backed Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG). (Al Jazeera) <https://bit.ly/2ZcF9ku>

## OPINION

### 1. Why Israel bombed Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon this weekend.

26.08.2019 Striking targets in at least three nations this weekend, Israel escalated conflict with Iran (without actually bombing Iran). Two factors are at play here: Iranian efforts to attack Israeli territory and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's electoral interest in appearing resolute. The new Israeli action is significant. In Syria, Israeli warplanes killed two members of the Lebanese Hezbollah. Israel says the individuals were supporting an Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps plot to launch explosive-laden drones into Israel. The Israelis say that the specific Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps unit responsible was the Quds Force, led by Qassem Soleimani. (Washingtonexaminer) <https://washex.am/2LePZhh>

**KEY EVENTS**

**1. Israel strikes Iranian targets in Syria.**

25.08.2019 The Israeli Air Force carried out airstrikes on Iranian drones in Syria on Saturday evening, August 24, reported the press service of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). According to the Israeli military, these drones were equipped with explosives and Iran wanted to attack the north of Israel using these drones. (UAWire) <https://bit.ly/2KUT9a0>

**2. How Russia could facilitate China's role in rebuilding Syria.**

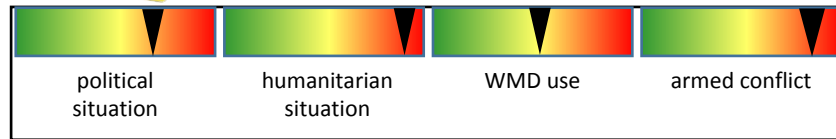
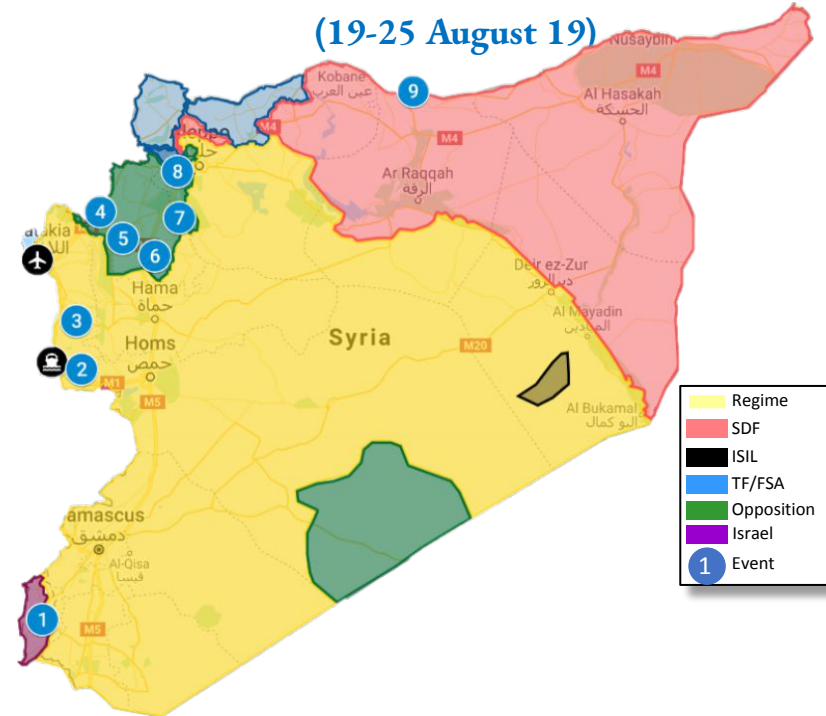
23.08.2019 When Chinese President Xi Jinping traveled to Russia in early June, he and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin signed joint statements addressing everything from protecting giant pandas to partnering in e-commerce. During the state visit, they also discussed providing assistance for Syria's recovery, something they have both been investigating for some time. Shortly after their meeting, Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Al-Mualllem visited China with a view toward paving the way for more active participation by Beijing in Syria's economic reconstruction, which is currently expected to cost \$350 billion (AI Monitor) <https://bit.ly/2PbqDF9>

**3. Putin's Mercenaries Are Using Syria As A Training Ground.**

20.08.2019 Up to 2,500 Wagner troops are believed to be fighting for Russia and Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad. Wagner Group is only the latest advance in Russia's flirtation with private warfare. While not the first state to engage in foreign adventures with mercenaries, Russia is setting a dangerous new trend—namely, using mercenaries solely for combat rather than for logistical and peripheral support of their armed forces. (Lobe Log) <https://bit.ly/2MCFZAd>

**4. Assassination of Hurras al-Din Commander in Idlib.**

23.08.2019 Suhaib Abu Khallad al-Mohandes al-Urduni, a commander of al-Qaeda-affiliated Horas al-Din, was assassinated in the morning of August 22 in Idlib's city center. Opposition sources said that unknown operatives had planted a magnetic improvised-explosive device under Abu Khallah's car, which was parked near his apartment in the al-Jamiy'a district. The explosion killed the terrorist and injured another person. (South Front) <https://bit.ly/33ULIfG>



**ASSESSMENT**

*There is a clear temporal correlation between the U.S.-Turkey Agreement and the increasing tempo of the regime offensive. Turkey's shift in its strategic orientation left her in limbo. Just for an example, Turkey has a dilemma to allocate sufficient military power to the East of Euphrates (to the Kurds) or to the West of Euphrates (to her prior commitments to Russia). Syrian Air Force attack to Turkish convoy is a clear message from Russia against the recent U.S.-Turkey Agreement on safe zone and joint operation center. Possible refugee flow, the safety of Turkish forces in Idlib and safe zone will likely be the main topics of the surprise meeting between Erdogan and Putin.*

*M5 highway connecting from Damascus to Aleppo will highly likely be the axis of advance of the possible Syrian offensive in Idlib. If manages to control the M5 highway, Syrian regime will easily control the rest of the Idlib area and consolidate its control in North Western Syria.*

**5. Turkey says air strike hit Syria convoy, killed three.**

19.08.2019 Turkey said an air strike on a Turkish military convoy in northwest Syria killed three civilians and wounded 12 on Monday as Syrian troops advanced against rebels inside a key town. Syrian government air strikes hit near the convoy that was approaching front lines in Idlib province, two Turkey-backed rebel sources and a war monitor said. (Reuters) <https://reut.rs/2HoQe7e>

**6. Attack on Turkish convoy in Syria strains Ankara's alliance with Moscow.**

24.08.2019 Turkey and Russia have cooperated for years in Syria despite conflicting interests in the war but attacks on a Turkish military convoy and a Turkish observation post in Idlib province put unprecedented pressure on the alliance between the two powers. Syrian government air strikes hit near the Turkish convoy August 19 as it approached front lines in Idlib. Ankara said the convoy was on its way to one of 12 Turkish observation posts in the province when the vehicles, which numbered about 40 and included tanks, Agence France-Presse reported, came under attack. (Arab Weekly) <https://bit.ly/2ZIT1d9>

**7. Turkey's Erdogan to visit Moscow after convoy targeted in Syria.**

23.08.2019 President Recep Tayyip Erdogan will visit Moscow on Tuesday for a meeting with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin, the Turkish presidency has said, days after a Turkish convoy was nearly hit by air raids in the Syrian province of Idlib. (Aljazeera) <https://bit.ly/2NxiEIQ>

**8. Secret Syrian deal between Russia and Turkey uncovered.**

22.08.2019 Russia and Turkey have signed secret agreements regarding Syria. Confirmation of this was given in Turkish parliament, reports the Russian news outlet Rambler.ru. Ünal Çeviköz, vice president of the primary opposition force in the country – the Republican People's Party – has obtained documents confirming that closed-door agreements have been signed between the countries. Moscow has supposedly agreed to allow forces loyal to Turkey to attack the Kurdish armed groups. Çeviköz managed to get hold of the information through a "parliamentarian's inquiry", Nordic Monitor reports. The opposition MP said that Turkey has agreed to withdraw its troops and equipment from Syria's Idlib province, which is controlled by opposition groups. (UAWire) <https://bit.ly/2Zcnjy9>

**9. Turkey-US ops centre on Syria safe zone 'fully operational'.**

24.08.2019 A Turkey-US operations centre aimed at establishing and managing a safe zone in northeastern Syria is fully operational, according to the Turkish defence minister. The centre will help coordinate the establishment of a buffer between the Turkish border and Syrian areas controlled by the US-backed Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG). (AI Jazeera) <https://bit.ly/2ZcF9ku>





# SYRIA CRISIS WATCH

(12-18 August 19)

## KEY EVENTS

### 1. ISIS ambush kills several Syrian soldiers near Palmyra.

17.08.2019 The Islamic State (ISIS) carried out a new ambush along the Palmyra-Deir Ezzor Highway this week, targeting a Syrian military convoy as it was traveling east from the ancient city. According to a local report, the Syrian convoy, which was comprised of mostly military personnel from the National Defense Forces (NDF), were traveling along this roadway when a group of Islamic State terrorists ambushed their troops. The report added that a number of soldiers were killed or wounded as a result of this Islamic State ambush. (AMN) <https://bit.ly/2ZahvV0>

### 2. US issues warrant to seize Iranian oil tanker Grace 1.

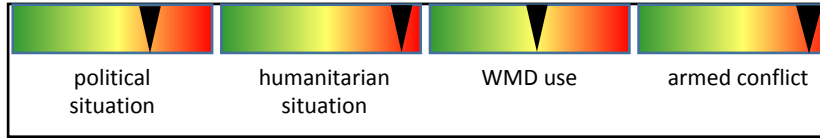
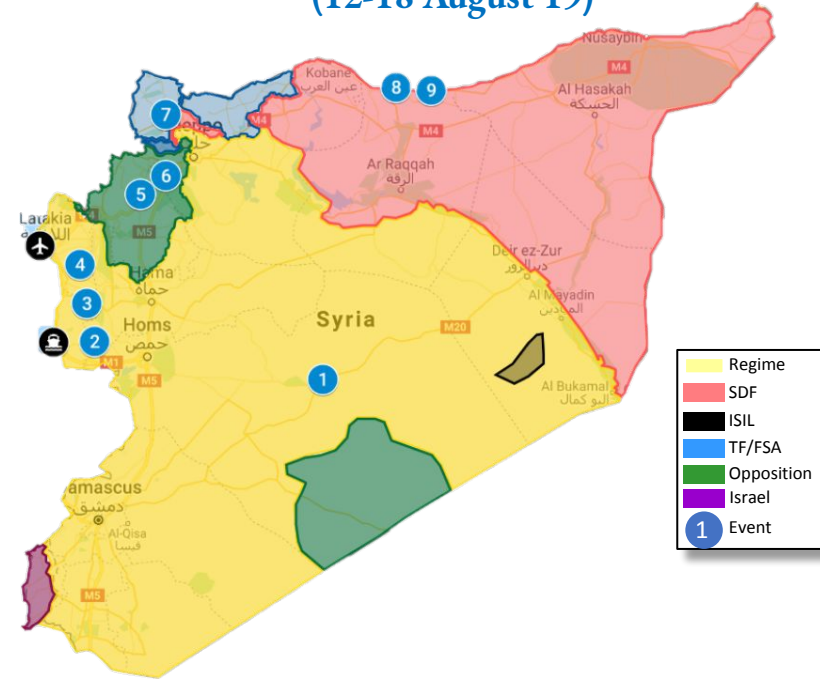
17.08.2019 The United States has issued a warrant for the seizure of an Iranian oil tanker captured by British Royal Marines in Gibraltar last month for allegedly violating international sanctions. The Grace 1 vessel, which was ordered to be released by the Gibraltar Supreme Court after 43 days in detention, shifted position but remained anchored in the British Mediterranean territory late on Friday. (Al Jazeera) <https://bit.ly/30aFkJw>

### 3. Russian Ship Carrying Heavy Military Equipment, Tanks Heading to Syria.

13.08.2019 The English-language Al-Masdar news website quoted maritime naval observer Yoruk Isik as saying that the Russian ship, Ropucha class landing ship Azov 151, has passed the Bosphorus Strait en route to the Port of Tartous in Western Syria. It noted that since the Russian vessel is very heavy, it is most probably carrying heavy military equipment such as tanks. (Farsnews) <https://bit.ly/2Z0CWso>

### 4. Russia Warns Turkey on Idlib: Approval of Damascus Must be Received.

18.08.2019 Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia Maria Zakharova made a statement regarding a possible military operation in the east of Euphrates last evening (August 15). Touching upon Turkey's stance in Syria and commented on President and ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) Chair Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's statements on "an operation in the east of Euphrates" in Syria. In the statement published on the official website of the Foreign Ministry of Russia, Maria Zakharova has emphasized that "the approval of Damascus has to be received for all counter terrorism activities to be undertaken in Syria" and stated the following in brief: "The situation in Syria continues to be tense. The most difficult situation is in the Idlib de-escalation zone. (Bianet) <https://bit.ly/31N3Sj6>



## ASSESSMENT

*Regime operations, backed by Russian air support in greater Idlib area, continues increasingly. Lasting Russian LST (Landing Ship Tank) traffic in Tartus port reveals a possible large scale offensive against the Rebel and Jihadi forces in Idlib.*

*Recent agreement between the U.S. and Turkey, concerning a safe zone in Northern Syria seems to progress faster than expected. However, in the light of previous agreement between two NATO Allies in Munbici, Turkey should not expect a quick solution in the near future. The joint operation centre is likely nothing more than to gain time and try to calm down the Turkish side.*

### 5. More than 60 casualties of the regime, factions, and the Jihadis in the violent clashes on the western and eastern areas of Khan Shaykhun city.

18.08.2019 As part of the hysterical escalation by the regime and its Russian ally: nearly 1200 air and ground strikes target the countryside of Hama, Idlib and Latakia. Clashes continue at a violent pace on the western outskirts of Khan Shaykhun city in the southern countryside of Idlib, between the regime forces with Russian support against the rebel and Islamic factions and jihadi groups. (SOHR) <https://bit.ly/2TGvN5P>

### 6. Syrian opposition downs regime warplane in Idlib.

14.08.2019 Opposition groups and anti-regime armed groups in Syria said Wednesday that they had downed an Assad regime warplane in the Idlib de-escalation zone of northwestern Syria. The Fatah al-Mubin – joint operations room of the opposition and anti-regime armed groups – said that the regime was trying to hit rural parts of northern Hama and southern Idlib with the Su-22 warplane. (AA) <https://bit.ly/2N9y6Ls>

### 7. Future of Syria on the table when Russia, Turkey and Iran meet.

15.08.2019 The leaders of Turkey, Russia and Iran will meet next month to try to resolve differences over Syria that have prevented them from imposing a peace deal. The meeting of the countries' presidents in Ankara on September 11 "would discuss all aspects of the Syrian crisis", Alexander Lavrentyev, Russia's special envoy for Syria, told Tass news agency. The meeting will mark the second time this year that Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Russia's Vladimir Putin and Hassan Rouhani of Iran have met to discuss their intervention in Syria. (The National) <https://bit.ly/2KDe8xX>

### 8. Turkey says Syria safe zone centre to be operational next week.

17.08.2019 A joint Turkish-US operation centre to establish and manage a safe zone in northeast Syria will be fully operational next week, Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar said on Friday. Ankara and Washington have also agreed in general terms about control and coordination of air space in the region, Akar said. (TRT World) <https://bit.ly/2ZhpsoQ>

### 9. Turkey, U.S. disagree on five issues over northern Syria safe zone.

17.08.2019 While Turkey and the United States agreed on the establishment of a safe zone in northern Syria, there are still disagreements between the two allies over five important issues, pro-government Yeni Şafak reported on Saturday. Turkey and the United States announced last week that they had decided to establish a joint operation centre in Turkey for the planned safe zone, which Ankara sees essential for Turkey's national security. (Ahval) <https://bit.ly/2Mo2ZD1>



## KEY EVENTS

### 1. Syrian media: Israel attacked army position in the Syrian Golan Heights.

01.08.2019 Syria accused Israel of attacking an army position in the Syrian Golan Heights on Thursday, causing damage but no casualties. The Israelis apparently were targeting Hezbollah militants who reportedly were in the area. It's not clear whether it was an air attack or surface-to-surface missile. Syria's official news agency, SANA, reported that the attack occurred at 2 p.m. Thursday. SANA reported that it was a rocket that hit Tal Braiqa. Hebrew-language media said residents on the Israeli side of the Golan Heights reported loud explosions. (UPI) (<http://bit.ly/2TOWyq0>)

### 2. Russia, Turkey and Iran's joint statement rejects Kurds' 'separatist' agenda in Syria.

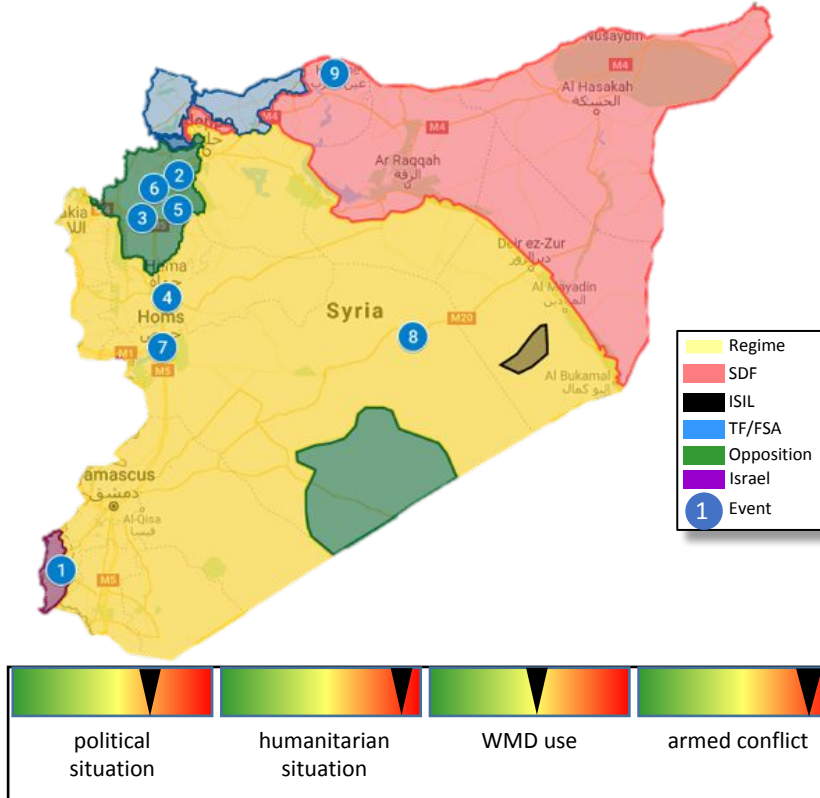
02.08.2019 Turkish, Russian, and Iranian leaders released a joint statement regarding the situation in Syria in a trilateral summit organised in the Kazakh capital of Astana on Aug. 2. The 13th round of meetings on Syria was focused on the situation in Idlib, the last rebel-held enclave in Syria, and northern Syria controlled by U.S.-backed Kurdish forces, as well as the situation in northern Syria, where Kurdish-led autonomous areas are under threat of Turkish attack. An agreement signed by Turkey and Russia last September prevented regime attacks on the province, which is home to an estimated 3 million people, including hundreds of thousands of refugees. Assad regime forces backed by Russia have launched intensive bombing and ground attacks this year on Idlib after Moscow said Turkey had failed to live up to its agreement to remove "extremist" opposition groups from the agreement's de-escalation zone in southern Idlib. (Ahval) (<https://bit.ly/2YJ4zoM>)

### 3. Russia welcomes Syria regime's Idlib truce decision.

02.08.2019 Moscow's Syria envoy said on Thursday that Russia has welcomed a decision by the Syrian government to agree to a truce in the northwestern region of Idlib. "Of course, we welcome the Syrian government's decision to introduce a truce," Alexander Lavrentyev was quoted as saying by Russian news agencies after the first day of peace talks in the Kazakh capital Nur-Sultan. He said it was now up to jihadists and rebels to honour previous peace agreements. (SBS) (<https://bit.ly/2GJbG6k>)

### 4. Joint military operations by Russia and Turkey in Syria.

29.07.2019 Chief of the Main Operational Directorate of the Russian General Staff of the Russian armed forces, Sergei Rudskoi stated on Monday that Turkey and Russia are conducting joint "pinpoint operations" against armed groups in Syria. Turkey has used the anti-regime groups for its own purposes since the beginning of the Syrian war. Now, according to Russian sources, it is preparing for air strikes against the armed groups together with Russia. Rudskoi said that the Russian military was "taking action with the help of our Turkish counterparts" to establish the locations of the "firepower, military vehicles, weapons and equipment depots of the terrorists" and to carry out pinpoint operations. (Hayat Tahrir al-Sham).(ANF) (<https://bit.ly/2YJwSPL>)



## ASSESSMENT

*In the light of previous truce decisions between the Regime and the rebel groups, new truce attempt in Idlib is unlikely to last long as Idlib contains several different groups with several different ideologies and backers. With the latest truce decision Syrian regime is likely aiming to alleviate increasing level of criticism by the international community and blame rebel or terrorist groups for any violation of ceasefire. Additionally, reorganizing its troops ahead of a decisive offensive might be another reason.*

*Even the Turkish government decides to launch an offensive to establish a safe zone in Northern Syria, it is highly unlikely to take a unilateral action without having an agreement with the U.S. in the region.*

### 5. Damascus Accepts New Ceasefire in Greater Idlib.

01.08.2019 In a surprise move, Damascus accepted a new ceasefire in Greater Idlib, despite the recent Syrian Arab Army (SAA) advance in the terrorist-occupied region. The Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) announced the ceasefire in a press release late on August 1. A military source told the state-run agency that the ceasefire will be implemented as long as Idlib's militants remain committed to the demilitarized zone agreement. (AMN) (<https://bit.ly/2yDylwt>)

### 6. Turkish-Backed Militants to not Fulfil Demilitarized Zone Agreement Demands.

03.08.2019 In an official statement, the Turkish-backed coalition openly said that it will take advantage of the ceasefire to train and reorganize its members. It also warned the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) of any violation. "We will rest our arms and give our fighter the opportunity to heal their wounds, to accommodate their families, to prepare and train for what's yet to come while our hand remains on the trigger to respond to any foolish act our enemy could think of," the statement reads. The NFL followed the footsteps of its key ally, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), completely ignoring the terms of the Sochi agreement which are essential for the success of the ceasefire. Under the agreement, which was reached last September, all heavy weapons and terrorists should withdraw from the 15-20km demilitarized zone around Idlib. (South Front) (<https://bit.ly/2yCChOk>)

### 7. Explosions in al-Shayrat Airbase kill more than 30 members of the regime forces.

03.08.2019 The death toll continues to rise to more than 30 due to the violent explosions in the ammunition explosion in al-Shayrat Airbase in the southeastern countryside of Homs. The explosion took place on the afternoon of 3 August. The death toll is expected to rise because there are some of the wounded are in critical situation, The causes of the explosion are still unknown whether it was fabricated, caused by targeting, or by a technical defect. (SOHR) (<https://bit.ly/2ZqPQMp>)

### 8. Turkey to launch offensive in Kurdish-controlled area in northern Syria.

04.08.2019 Turkey will carry out a military operation in a Kurdish-controlled area east of the Euphrates in northern Syria, Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said on Sunday, its third offensive to dislodge Kurdish militia fighters close to its border. Erdogan said both Russia and the United States have been told of the planned operation, but did not say when it would begin. It would mark the third Turkish incursion into Syria in as many years. (Reuters) (<https://reut.rs/33aUujl>)

### 9. Turkish Security Council Mulls Syrian Operation, Despite Washington's Warnings.

30.07.2019 Turkey's National Security Council met Tuesday to decide whether to launch a military offensive into Syria against the YPG Kurdish militia. With Washington backing the YPG and warning against any unilateral action, the two NATO allies could be on a collision course. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan chaired the meeting, which brought together his military and intelligence chiefs. In a statement released after the six-hour session, the national security council claimed terrorist groups were exploiting a power vacuum in the Syrian territory bordering Turkey, posing an increasing security threat. The council agreed to create a "peace corridor" to protect Turkey. (VOANews) (<http://bit.ly/2yF3GyQ>)

**KEY EVENTS**

**1. Israel missile strike targets Syria military positions near Golan Heights.**

24.07.2019 An Israeli missile attack targeted Syrian military positions held by the government and its allies early on Wednesday, July 24, Syria's state news agency said. The missiles were fired into the south of the country close to the Golan Heights, an area of Syria occupied and annexed by Israel. "The Israeli enemy launched an aggression after midnight against the Tal al-Harra area," the SANA news agency said Wednesday, adding that there were reports of damage to property. (TheDefencepost) (<http://bit.ly/2yhT2OD>)

**2. 6 Iranians Among Dead in Israeli Strike on Southern Syria.**

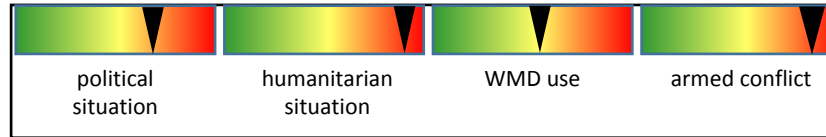
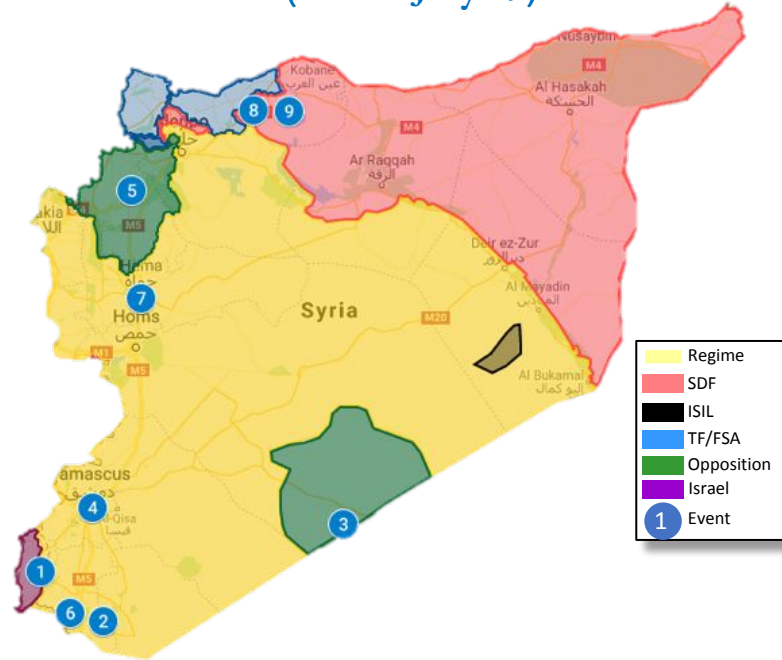
27.07.2019 Six Iranians fighting for the Syrian regime were among those killed in reported Israeli missile strikes in southern Syria this week, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has said. Israeli missiles targeted "military positions and intelligence facilities belonging to Iran and (pro-Iranian) militias" in the southern provinces of Daraa and Quneitra, it said. State media also reported that the "Israeli enemy launched an aggression" against military positions held by the government and its allies in Daraa province, without mentioning casualties. The Observatory said Thursday the strikes had killed six Iranians and three pro-regime Syrian fighters. (Aaswat) (<http://bit.ly/2K2A8QY>)

**3. Syria's Rukban camp dwindles after five-month Russian siege: residents, aid workers.**

28.07.2019 The population of Rukban camp in a U.S.-protected desert zone in southeast Syria has dwindled to a quarter of the more than 40,000 who lived there five months ago due to Russian moves to block supplies, Syrian aid workers, diplomats and residents say. The fate of the camp and its residents, living near a Pentagon-run base close to the Jordanian and Iraqi borders, highlights the tussle for influence in the region between Russia and the United States. It also exposes the same strategy of years of bitter siege imposed on former opposition bastions by Moscow and Syrian President Bashar al Assad's forces to push rebels to capitulate. (Reuters) (<https://reut.rs/2MkHlPe>)

**4. Russia urges BRICS nations to take part in rebuilding Syria.**

26.07.2019 Moscow urges all partners in the BRICS group of nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) to take part in work towards post-war restoration of Syria, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told a BRICS foreign ministerial session on Friday. "It is crucially important to support the processes of Syria's post-conflict restoration. We urge participation in this activity and note in this connection efforts taken by our Chinese and Indian friends," the Russian diplomat said. The main tasks for the settlement in the Arab republic are restoration of sovereignty and territorial integrity, extermination of the remaining terrorists, assistance in the return of refugees with an advance of the political process led by the Syrians themselves in line with Resolution 2254 of the UN Security Council, Lavrov reiterated. "The launch of a constitutional committee that is expected shortly will be a crucial stage on this path," the top diplomat stressed. (TASS) (<https://bit.ly/2GyUBfn>)



**ASSESSMENT**

*Russia's call to BRICS countries to take part in post-war reconstruction of Syria, could be seen as the mastermind's attempt to set the scene for the following step which excludes Western role in the Syrian future.*

*It was assessed that a safe zone under full Turkish control is highly unlikely, yet might be Turkish dominant as part of a US-led coalition in our most recent Crisis Watch. This seems to be under discussion and the parties are far to find a common ground.*

*The world is apparently indifferent to the humanitarian crisis in Idlib, a densely populated city, under heavy bombardment of the regime forces and Russia. This emboldens Syria and Russia to take over the last rebel-held territory at any price.*

**5. Crisis in Idlib: Russia And Syria Step Up Airstrikes Against Civilians.**

24.07.2019 Syrian and Russian bombing campaign against civilian sites in the rebel-held province intensified on a marketplace in northern Syria, more than 33 people were killed and more than 100 wounded by an airstrike. Syrian and Russian forces also destroyed across two residential blocks in the centre of Maarat al-Numan, while many people reportedly still buried under an apartment building as night fell. The past four months in 2019 have taken an especially brutal toll across much of the province with the Russian-led bombing decimating civilian infrastructure. Rescue efforts were frequently stopped as jets circled the town in the south of Idlib province, the last corner of the country to remain in opposition hands. (Eurasiareview) (<https://bit.ly/2LSddLV>)

**6. Several Syrian soldiers killed after jihadist suicide attack in Daraa.**

27.07.2019 Several Syrian Arab Army (SAA) soldiers were killed on Saturday morning when a jihadist rebel detonated his suicide belt in northeastern Daraa. According to a military source in the town of Izra'a, the jihadist rebel detonated his suicide belt during an army raid on his group's hideout in the town of Mlihit Al-Atash. The military said the jihadist sleeper cell was loyal to the terrorist group Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, who once controlled much of northeastern Daraa. (AMN) (<https://bit.ly/2LLGQya>)

**7. Jihadist special forces devastated in joint Syrian-Russian attack in northwest Hama.**

27.07.2019 The jihadist special forces from the Ansar Al-Deen terrorist group were wiped out in a joint Russian-Syrian airstrike on a large hilltop in the northwestern countryside of the Hama Governorate this morning. According to the preliminary details revealed to Al-Masdar, the jihadists were preparing to storm the Syrian Arab Army's (SAA) positions near the large hilltop of Tal Malah when Russian and Syrian air force jets struck the militants. Shortly after the attack near Tal Malah, several jihadist pages mourned the death of eight militants killed. (AMN) (<https://bit.ly/2YsR3kU>)

**8. Turkey has 'no patience left' with U.S. on Syria safe zone.**

24.07.2019 Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said on Wednesday that new U.S. proposals for a safe zone in northern Syria fall short and Turkey was running out of patience as Washington appears to be stalling in efforts to seal an agreement. Cavusoglu also said that U.S. military officials meeting with a YPG leader on Monday - the same day as Jeffrey's talks at the Foreign Ministry - indicated Washington was not sincere. The U.S. Embassy in Ankara said in a statement later on Wednesday that the two sides were committed to accelerated and concrete progress on the Manbij roadmap, adding that Jeffrey had "forthright, positive, and productive" talks during his visit. (Reuters) (<https://reut.rs/30WsEpu>)

**9. Turkey determined to destroy 'terror corridor' in Syria.**

26.07.2019 Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Friday his country is determined to destroy what he called a "terror corridor" in northern Syria — regardless of whether or not Turkey and the United States agree on the establishment of a so-called "safe zone" there. (Associated Press) (<http://bit.ly/2OpLGDz>)



## KEY EVENTS

### 1. Israel Calls On Russia to Remove Hezbollah from Golan Heights.

17.07.2019 Political sources in Tel Aviv on Tuesday revealed that the Israeli government has demanded several times in recent months the Russian authorities to work on emptying the Syrian Golan Heights from Lebanese Hezbollah activists. The sources said Hezbollah had set up armed cells in the eastern part of the Golan Heights, which were working to achieve two objectives: imposing military control of the Syrians and supporting the regime against the opposition forces; and plotting armed operations against Israel, which has been controlling the western part of the Golan since its occupation in 1967. (aawsat) (<http://bit.ly/30E0cZA>)

### 2. Can Russia, the US find new basis for cooperation in Syria?

19.07.2019 Russia and the United States, together with Israel and the Gulf states, regardless of their opposing attitudes to Assad, still share common goals and interests in Syria. The Iran-controlled "crescent," which embraces Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, is a nightmare to the Americans, Israelis and Arab Gulf monarchies. Moscow, in turn, views Iran as a strategic partner in Syria, yet it is anxious about Tehran's unilateral attempts to cultivate proxies among the Syrian military and security services, as well as business and religious communities, that further fuel Russian-Iranian competition on the ground. (Al Monitor) (<http://bit.ly/32F3D41>)

### 3. UN humanitarian chief tells Russia to stop bombing Syrian hospitals.

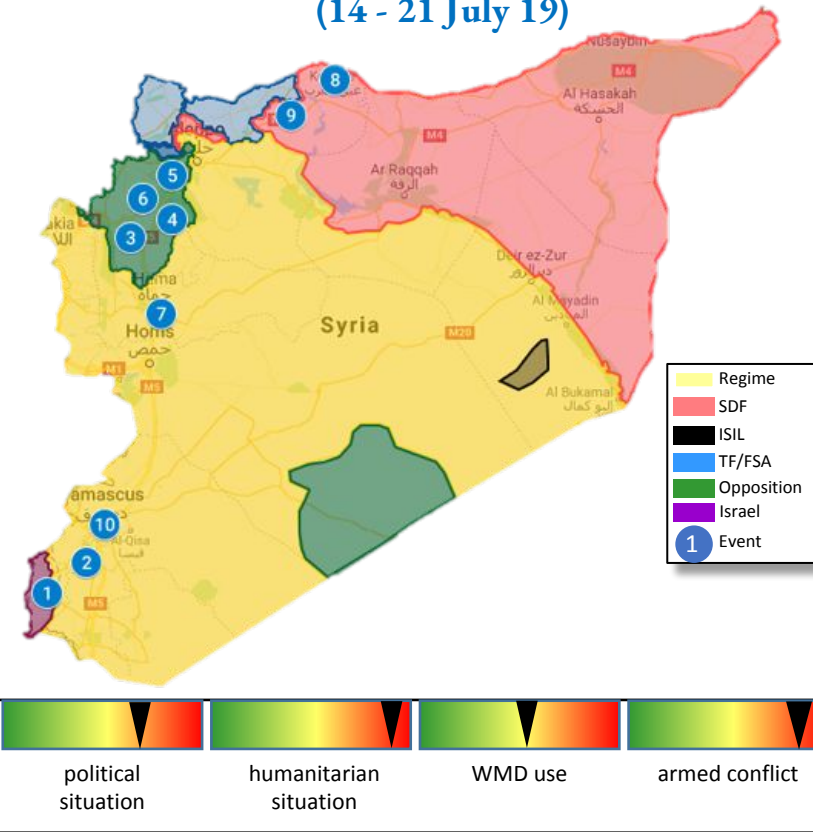
19.07.2019 Russia on Thursday opposed a United Nations Security Council resolution calling for an end to attacks on health facilities in Syria's Idlib region, diplomats said after the latest meeting over violence in the country's last major opposition bastion. The outcome led to a rare statement following the meeting by the UN's humanitarian chief, Mark Lowcock. "The carnage must stop," he said. (The Arab Weekly) (<https://bit.ly/2M2qFvS>)

### 4. Syrian rebels say Moscow deploys ground forces in Idlib campaign.

18.07.2019 Russia has sent special forces in recent days to fight alongside Syrian army troops in northwestern Syria where they have been struggling for more than two months to seize the last opposition bastion, senior rebel commanders said. Moscow, a staunch ally of President Bashar al-Assad, denied on Thursday that it had sent special forces to Idlib, maintaining that Russia has no ground troops in Syria. (Reuters) (<https://reut.rs/2y1p29A>)

### 5. Air Strikes Kill 18 in Syria's Idlib: Observatory.

21.07.2019 Air strikes killed at least 18 people, including seven children, in rebel-held Idlib region in northwestern Syria on Sunday, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported. In the northwest, the Observatory said Syrian government air strikes killed 12 people, including five children, in the village of Urum al-Jawz in western Idlib province. Four more people, including two children, were killed in strikes on Kfarouma in the south of the province. (NYTimes) (<https://nyti.ms/2Z6UPSA>)



## ASSESSMENT

*It is crystal clear that US will never let Turkey to establish a safe zone under its full control, however this safe zone might be materialized by heavy Turkish participation as part of an US-led coalition.*

*As we assessed earlier, at the end of the day, Syrian regime will highly likely regain the control over Idlib with the support of Russia and Iran, however it will most likely not be so easy and take time due to resistance by opposition groups and factors as the Moscow's delicate game in Syria between Iran and Israel.*

*Latest developments in middle east especially in Syria are perfect samples of proxy war between the US and Russia, however until now there happened no crucial incidents between these two crucial actors and this is a indication that regardless of their opposing attitudes to Assad, they still share common goals and interests in Syria.*

### 6. Russian, Syrian forces launch largest attack of year on jihadist stronghold.

20.07.2019 The Syrian and Russian forces launched their largest attack of the year over the key town of Khan Sheikhoun in southern Idlib. According to a military source in the nearby Hama Governorate, the Russian and Syrian forces launched more than 30 air and missile strikes on Khan Sheikhoun, hitting several sites belonging to the jihadist rebels of Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham. The source said the Syrian and Russian forces launched this massive assault on Khan Sheikhoun in response to the heavy attack conducted by Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham and Jaysh Al-Izza on the government stronghold of Mhardeh the day prior. (AMN) (<https://bit.ly/2Y5JuRg>)

### 7. HTS Suffers Heavy Losses in Another Failed Attack in Northern Hama.

21.07.2019 According to the available information, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) attacked the SAA's positions around the town of Qasabiyeh in the early hours of July 21. However, army units were able to repel the large attack after more than five hours of heavy clashes. Muraselon, a pro-government news outlet, said that the army killed 19 militants of HTS. The terrorist group also lost three pick-up trucks, two battle tanks and a BMP-1 armored vehicle in the failed attack. (South Front) (<https://bit.ly/32BVZHH>)

### 8. Will Erdogan risk an operation in Syria?

17.07.2019 The crisis between Turkey and the United States over Ankara's purchase of Russian S-400 air defense systems may have pushed the Turkish threat of a military incursion into northern Syria against the Kurdish Peoples' Protection Units (YPG) into the background for a time. The topic, however, is back on the agenda as Ankara beefs up its military presence along the Syrian border, leading to fresh speculation that an operation by Turkey is imminent. There is also a sense of urgency on the Turkish side after Britain and France responded positively to President Donald Trump's call to send troops to lands held by the YPG with US support. (Al Monitor) (<http://bit.ly/2JKi7Z2>)

### 9. Jeffrey in Ankara Next Monday to Discuss Safe Zone, Manbij Roadmap.

20.07.2019 US Special Representative for Syria Engagement, James Jeffrey is expected in Ankara next Monday to discuss the latest developments in Syria, including the US withdrawal, the safe zone in the eastern Euphrates and the implementation of the US-Turkish roadmap in Manbij. Diplomatic sources told Asharq Al-Awsat that the US official's visit to Turkey was planned following a telephone conversation held last Thursday between Turkey's presidential spokesperson Ibrahim Kalin and US National Security Adviser John Bolton. (Aawsat) (<http://bit.ly/2M6f3rN>)

## OPINION

### Opinion: Dangerous Liaisons: Russian Cooperation with Iran in Syria

16.07.2019 As tensions escalate between the United States and Iran in the Middle East, Russia is engaged in covert and overt cooperation with Iran in ways that undermine U.S. national security interests. This analysis of commercial satellite imagery at Tiyas Airbase in Syria indicates the scope and proximity of Russian and Iranian military ties. If Washington wants to contain Tehran and prevent further Iranian expansion, U.S. policymakers will need to increase pressure on Moscow to curb Tehran's activities in countries like Syria. (CSIS) (<https://bit.ly/2JBCXJP>)



## KEY EVENTS

### 1. Netanyahu threatens Iran with Israeli planes that can 'reach everywhere' in the Middle East.

09.07.2019 As tension mounts over Iran's nuclear program, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has warned Tehran that Israeli warplanes can strike anywhere in the Middle East, "including Iran and Syria." "Iran has threatened recently to destroy Israel," Netanyahu said in a video clip posted on Tuesday. "It is worthwhile for them to remember that these planes can reach everywhere in the Middle East, including Iran and Syria." Netanyahu delivered his stern lecture while standing in front of an F-35 fighter jet at Nevatim Airbase in central Israel. (RT) <http://bit.ly/2YShj9w>

### 2. Getting Iran Out of Syria Is No Easy Task.

09.07.2019 Israeli air power isn't enough. And it's not clear the Russians could do it even if they were willing. Israel has undertaken at least 200 air raids against Iranian targets in Syria since 2017. Mossad head Yossi Cohen said at a security conference in Herzliya recently that Israel's objective is to make Iran "reach the conclusion that it is just not worth it" to continue its project in Syria. (WSJ) <https://on.wsj.com/2LXVD86>

### 3. Moscow builds settlement for Russia's officers in Latakia.

13.07.2019 Russia in July has finished the construction of a military settlement in coastal Latakia province, such a move to be followed by other settlements since the Russian military presence had been agreed for half a century in the war-torn country. A military source provided Zaman al-Wasl with fresh satellite images for three buildings, each one includes 20 flats. More buildings to be constructed very soon, the source added. (Zaman Al Wasl) <https://bit.ly/2XXxOE7>

### 4. Factions target Aleppo city and warplanes continue escalation in Hama - Idlib countryside causing more destruction of public facilities.

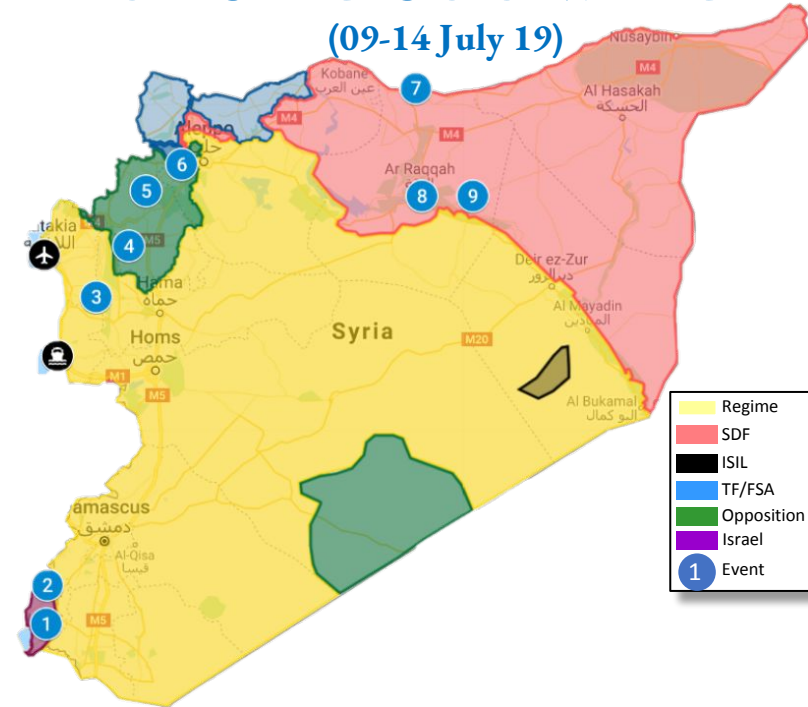
13.07.2019 Maarat al-Nu'man water pumping station and the city's water reservoir went out service, as after being targeted by airstrikes by the Russian warplanes, as part of the systematic policy by the Russians and the regime to target vital facilities and public facilities, and in the same context, air and ground bombardments continue within "Putin-Erdogan" area. (SOHR) <https://bit.ly/2Ggek2>

### 5. Syrian Army Repelled Large Attack in Northern Hama.

10.07.2019 On 10 July, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (formerly Jabhat al-Nusra, the Syrian branch of al-Qaeda) and its allies launched a surprise attack on positions of the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) in northern Hama and captured the town of al-Hamameyat and the nearby hill. On July 11, the SAA and the National Defense Forces, backed up by Russian and Syrian warplanes, launched an attack to take back the town. According to pro-government sources, SAA and NDF units successfully broke the militants' defense and recaptured al-Hamameyat. (South Front) <https://bit.ly/2xQowLa>

# SYRIA CRISIS WATCH

(09-14 July 19)



## ASSESSMENT

*In line with Germany's previous political and military patterns of attitude and behaviour, Germany's decision not to send additional troops to Syria can be considered as stating the obvious. However, in order to maintain good relationship with the U.S., Germany might choose to subsidize monetarily its allies rather than providing troops on the ground.*

*Long lasting Syrian war could no more be considered as a conflict between the Assad Regime and the rebels, but a show of power between two big powers, the U.S. and Russia. Israeli Prime Minister, giving a speech in front of an F-35 challenging Iran, appears to be also a response to Russian S-400 delivery to Turkey, which reveals the first steps of imminent armament race in the region.*

### 6. Stalled Idlib campaign shows limits of Russia and Syria's power.

14.07.2019 According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor, 2,443 people have been killed since April 30. Despite the heavy bombardment, Mr Al Assad's troops have been unable to make any significant advances against Al Qaeda-linked militants and other extremist groups who dominate Idlib province, the last significant area held by opposition forces. (The National) <https://bit.ly/2LmZYHt>

### 7. Turkey to begin military operation in Syria after S-400s installed - report.

12.07.2019 Turkey's impending installation of the first Russian S-400 system near the Syrian border and a military build-up in the southeast of the country signal Ankara's intent to launch a military operation in its neighbour shortly, Bülent Aydemir wrote for the Habertürk news website. According to Aydemir, there are other signs that indicate Turkey has been preparing for a military assault. The military has suspended all reassignments and holidays of Turkish troops deployed in east and southeast Turkey for three months. It has also been transferring armoured vehicles to the border region, Aydemir said, adding that Turkish ground troops are expected to enter Syria from the Akçakale border town. (Ahval News) <http://bit.ly/2Y5vdYH>

### 8. Germany rejects Trump's call for ground troops in Syria.

08.07.2019 Germany on Monday rejected demands by the United States to deploy ground troops in Syria, a stance likely to anger President Donald Trump who wants Chancellor Angela Merkel to commit to a bigger military role in the Middle East (Reuters) <https://reut.rs/2X1YTVf>

### 9. Rumour: U.S. airstrikes are ready to start hitting Iranian targets in Syria.

10.07.2019 There are rumours that U.S. airstrikes are ready to start hitting Iranian targets in Syria. There are additional reports that the Turkish military vehicles have entered Syria. There is speculation of troop-build up ahead of an invasion. (FX Street) <https://bit.ly/2YS9SPN>

## OPINION

### Is Russia behind Syria's security apparatus reform?

11.07.2019 The latest appointments and changes in the top echelons of Syria's military and security institutions have been viewed in the region as the result of Russian military pressure on Damascus. It's likely that Moscow does indeed seek to transform Syria's security institutions and to diminish Iranian influence in the country. However, the actual role of Russia should not be overestimated. Such staff-related changes are frequently due to the Syrian regime's efforts to redistribute authority and, possibly, to receive benefits from foreign actors amid controversies between Damascus' allies. The latest dramatic change took place July 7, though it has not been confirmed by pro-Bashar al-Assad media outlets. One of Assad's confidants, Maj. Gen. Ali Mamlouk, a Sunni and the head of the National Security Bureau, was appointed vice president for security affairs. Another influential official, Maj. Gen. Jamil Hassan, an Alawi and the head of the Air Force Intelligence Directorate, resigned. (Al Monitor) <https://bit.ly/2LPdUEN>



## KEY EVENTS

### 1. Syria accuses Israel of 'heinous aggression' after airstrikes.

02.07.2019 Syria has accused Israel of "heinous aggression" after alleged Israeli airstrikes killed several civilians. "Israeli authorities are increasingly practising state terrorism," the foreign ministry said in a statement carried by the official Sana news agency on Tuesday. "The latest heinous Israeli aggression falls within the framework of ongoing Israeli attempts to prolong the crisis in Syria," it added. (Theguardian) (<http://bit.ly/2JxoVaP>)

### 2. Russian experts: S-300 missile systems ineffective in Syria.

03.07.2019 The Russian S-300 aerial defense systems delivered to Syria demonstrated their utter ineffectiveness during an attack by the Israeli Air Force in the early hours of 1 July, writes the Russian news site Avia.pro. The ineffectiveness of Syria's S-300 is most apparent in light of the fact that they are currently considered the most long-range anti-air systems in Assad's army, the site notes. UAWire) (<http://bit.ly/2xC9hp6>)

### 3. Israel can attack Syria at any time, Arab experts say.

05.07.2019 After purported Israeli attack on targets near Damascus and Homs, in which 4 civilians were said to have been killed, Egyptian analyst warns region on brink of greater conflict, saying that while each side is trying to hold its nerve, 'war is inevitable' Hamad stresses that the Arab position had deteriorated and the balance of power in the region "unfortunately" did not allow a proper response to confront the "Zionist enemy." (Ynetnews) (<http://bit.ly/2xB4xQC>)

### 4. At least 544 civilians killed in Russian-led assault in Syria.

07.07.2019 At least 544 civilians have been killed and over 2,000 people injured since a Russian-led assault on the last rebel bastion in north-western Syria began two months ago, according to rights groups and rescuers. Russian jets joined the Syrian army on 26 April in the biggest offensive against parts of rebel-held Idlib province. The Guardian) (<https://bit.ly/2L7oGqr>)

### 5. Russia Increases Airstrikes in Syria.

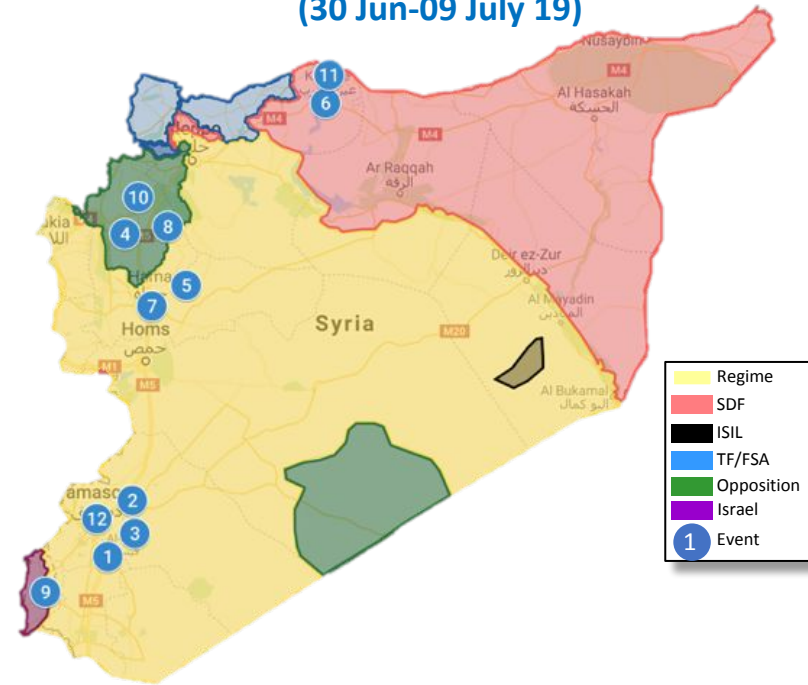
06.07.2019 The Russian Air Force carried out dozens of airstrikes over terrorists' centers in Hama and Idlib provinces this week after a relatively quiet end to the month of June, the Arabic-language al-Masdar News quoted Russian Army source as saying. The source said the recent rise in Russia's military activities comes just days after collapsed ceasefire talks with the Turkish Armed Forces with regard to the situation in Northwestern Syria. (Fars News) (<https://bit.ly/2RXGKE3>)

### 6. Lavrov: Russia calls for direct talks between Syrian Kurds, Damascus.

03.07.2019 Moscow is calling for direct talks between the Kurdish administration in northern Syria and the government in Damascus, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Wednesday. (K24) (<https://bit.ly/30ly6BZ>)

# SYRIA CRISIS WATCH

(30 Jun-09 July 19)



## ASSESSMENT

**The decision of France and UK to send additional special forces to Syria to pick up the slack as US troops withdraw is welcomed as a major victory for the US. Yet, the support seems to be marginal and far from being sufficient. Other Allies, including Germany, seems to turn a blind eye.**

**Russian backed Syrian Forces is likely to continue their attacks against the Rebel and Jihadi forces in Idlib, paying little attention to humanitarian consequences and the reaction of the international community and Turkey thereof. For the time being, any conflict between Turkey and the Syrian Regime seems unlikely as long as Russia continue to mediate.**

**As long as the Syrian Regime is unable to control Hezbollah, Israeli air strikes will likely to continue incrementally. Recent Israeli air strikes can be considered as pre-emptive in nature to prevent possible Hezbollah attacks to newly planned settlements in Golan Heights.**

### 7. The Islamic factions shell positions of the regime forces in the NW of Hama.

07.07.2019 The Islamic factions shell positions of the regime forces and gunmen loyal to them in the north-western countryside of Hama in conjunction with the continued ground and aerial bombardment by the regime's and Russian warplanes on "Putin – Erdogan" area. SOHR monitored rocket shelling today evening carried out by the Islamic factions using Grad rockets that targeted regime forces in both northern and western countryside of Hama. (SOHR) (<https://bit.ly/2NAT9i>)

### 8. Turkish, Russian, Iranian summit in August will focus on Idlib - Turkey.

05.07.2019 Turkish, Russian, and Iranian leaders will discuss the situation in Syria in a new trilateral summit to be organised in Turkey in August, Presidential Spokesman Ibrahim Kalin said on Thursday, Anadolu Agency reported. (Ahval News) (<http://bit.ly/2S9v8hr>)

### 9. Syria's Russian-made missile strikes northern Cyprus.

01.07.2019 Turkish Cyprus said on Monday that the object that exploded on its territory overnight was a Russian-made missile likely launched by the Syrian government, Turkish newspaper Hürriyet Daily news reported. Turkish Cypriot Foreign Minister Kudret Özersay pointed out that the missile landed shortly after Israel conducted airstrikes against Damascus and Homs, and that the Syrian government air defence system includes Russian-made S-200 missiles, which fell on Turkish territory a year ago. (Ahval News) (<http://bit.ly/2S69MkY>)

### 10. Russia, Turkey still defending own interests in Syria.

03.07.2019 Battles between Syrian regime forces and the armed opposition in Idlib and northern Hama provinces continue, with heavy regime shelling of opposition-held cities and towns. Russian and regime airstrikes are bombarding opposition and Turkish surveillance posts, killing civilians and paramedics on a daily basis. But opposition forces seem to be giving as good as they get, or better. (Al monitor) (<http://bit.ly/2XuWUpq>)

### 11. Britain, France Agree to Send Additional Troops to Syria.

09.07.2019 Britain and France will commit to troop increase, a U.S. administration official confirmed. Neither the timeframe for the deployment nor the exact number of additional troops is clear, the official said, adding that "overall we have been disappointed" in efforts to persuade U.S. allies to commit additional resources to the ongoing fight against the Islamic State terrorist group in Syria. (Foreign Policy). (<https://bit.ly/2G3x1Y2>)

### 12. US call for Syria troops divides German coalition.

07.07.2019 Discord broke out in German Chancellor Angela Merkel's ruling coalition Sunday, after the United States urged the country to send ground troops to Syria as Washington looks to withdraw from the region. A clear rejection of the American request came from Merkel's junior coalition partners, the Social Democrats (SPD). But deputy conservative parliamentary leader Johann Wadepuhl told news agency DPA that Germany should "not reflexively reject" the US call for troops. "Our security, not the Americans', is being decided in this region," added Wadepuhl, seen as a candidate to succeed Ursula von der Leyen as defence minister if she is confirmed as European Commission chief. (Daily Mail) (<https://dailym.ai/2Xt7lV>)

## KEY EVENTS

### 1. Israeli air strikes on Syria undesirable, says Russian security official.

25.06.2019 Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev said on Tuesday that Israeli air strikes on Syria were undesirable. Israel has repeatedly attacked what it describes as Iranian targets in Syria and those of allied militia, including Lebanon's Hezbollah. The strikes have caused friction between Israel and Russia, which apart from Iran is Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's other major foreign backer. (Reuters) <https://reut.rs/2Jlu4D8>

### 2. No consensus in Israel-US-Russia summit over Iran role in Syria.

29.06.2019 Israel hosted a trilateral summit with the United States and Russia in Jerusalem to discuss "regional security" with a focus on the role of Iran in Syria but public statements from the participating officials indicated that they have failed to reach a consensus. (The Arab Weekly) <http://bit.ly/2JfUvKf>

### 3. Israel missile strikes near Syria capital and Homs kill 4 civilians.

30.06.2019 Four civilians, including a toddler, were killed and 21 injured in Israeli missile strikes near Damascus late Sunday, June 30, Syria's state news agency SANA reported. An AFP correspondent in Damascus reported hearing loud explosions during the night. The Syrian news agency said the missiles struck near Damascus and in Homs province. (The Defense Post) <http://bit.ly/2xoMWeB>

### 4. Putin Talks Syria, Iran, Venezuela with Trump at G20.

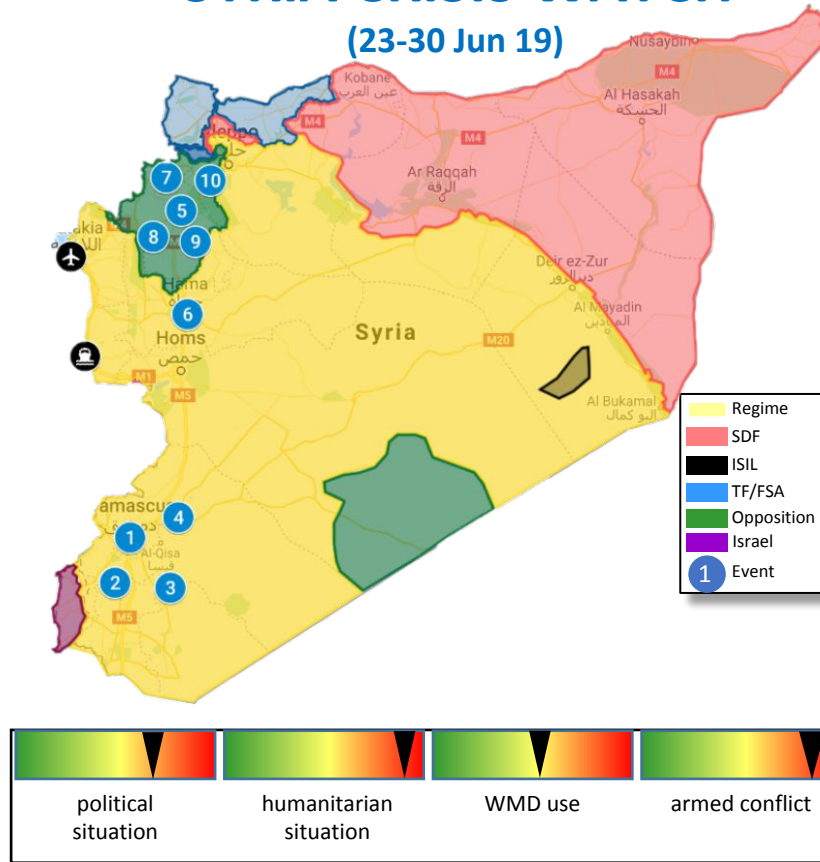
28.06.2019 Russian President Vladimir Putin discussed opposing positions on the Syrian civil war, the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Venezuela, tensions with Iran, and other international issues with U.S. President Donald Trump at the G20 summit Friday, Russian media reported. The 80-minute Osaka, Japan, meeting occurred behind closed doors and the two world leaders kept most of the discussion private. (Breitbart) <https://bit.ly/2FHs4E5>

### 5. Idlib offensive stalls, as Russia-Iran divisions bubble over.

28.06.2019 The failure of a recent Russian-backed offensive into opposition areas of northern Syria has highlighted the regime's reliance on Iran for security and exposed a potentially damaging rift between Moscow and Tehran, analysts have told The New Arab. (The New Arab) <https://bit.ly/2FHh4E>

# SYRIA CRISIS WATCH

(23-30 Jun 19)



## ASSESSMENT

- *Recent Israeli air strikes raise doubts about the efficiency and reliability of the Syrian air defence systems which were said to be reinforced by sophisticated Russian missile systems. In this case two options come into mind, either Israel has the technology to get over the Russian missile systems or Russia tolerates Israeli air strikes for some reasons.*
- *Syrian regime is likely testing the Turkey's reaction by targeting Turkish observation posts in order to move on the next step to control the last remaining parts of north eastern Syria. On the other hand, it should be in mind that Syrian regime can not initiate an attack without Russian consent and the reason of this approval would be a signal to Turkish authorities not to step back about S-400 decision despite pressure from western countries, especially the US.*

### 6. Jihadists suffer tremendous losses in failed attack against Syrian Army.

29.06.2019 Led by Jaysh Al-Izza and Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham, the jihadist rebels stormed the Syrian Army's defenses at the towns of Jalmeh and Huwayz in north-western Hama. However, their attacks on these two towns would end in disaster as the Syrian Arab Army was able to repel both of the militant attempts while killing more than 20. (AMN) <https://bit.ly/2XEoMeS>

### 7. Attacks on Turkish observation post in Syria's Idlib kill soldier - ministry.

27.06.2019 One Turkish soldier was killed and three others were wounded on Thursday when their observation post in Syria's Idlib region was attacked by shelling and mortar fire, the Turkish Defence Ministry said. The attacks were launched from territory controlled by Syrian government forces and were judged to have been carried out deliberately, the ministry said in a statement. (Reuters) <https://reut.rs/2J1LANC>

### 8. Turkey says observation post in Syria's Idlib attacked, no casualties.

29.06.2019 A Turkish observation post in the Idlib region of northern Syria was attacked by mortar fire launched from territory controlled by Syrian government forces, Turkey's defence ministry said on Saturday, adding that there were no casualties. The ministry said a Russian representative in the region had "immediately intervened" to stop the attacks but warned that it had completed preparations to "give the necessary response" if the attacks continued. (Reuters) <https://reut.rs/2RKIKzi>

### 9. Syria's Idlib out of Turkish containment and control - Arab Weekly.

30.06.2019 Turkish concern for the Syrian northwestern province of Idlib and President Erdoğan's condemnation of Russian and regime war crimes are equally motivated by national concerns as they are internationalism, wrote journalist James Snell in the Arab Weekly. The eight-year long ongoing battle along Turkey's border in neighbouring Syria is not one that Ankara can turn a blind eye to, however, it is both beyond Turkish containment and entirely out of the country's control, the article underlined. (AhvalNews) <http://bit.ly/2FlanUO>

### 10. Opinion: A delicate balance of power in Syria's last opposition stronghold.

28.06.2019 The delicate balance of power in Syria's northwestern province of Idlib appears unsustainable and, to say the least, it is difficult to predict how events will unfold. The Russian-backed Syrian regime offensive to take over the country's last remaining "de-escalation zone" seems to have lost some steam. (GSA) <https://bit.ly/2Lrs3rE>

(16-23 Jun 19)

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. Israel unveils illegal 'Trump' settlement in Golan Heights.

17.06.2019 Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has unveiled an illegal settlement in the occupied Syrian Golan Heights named after US President Donald Trump. Netanyahu yesterday inaugurated the settlement – called “Ramat Trump”, Hebrew for “Trump Heights” – hailing the US President as a “great friend” of Israel. (Middle East Monitor) (<http://bit.ly/2KzWjAX>)

#### 2. What the US and Israel can expect from next week's meeting with Russia.

20.06.2019 At a memorial ceremony in Israel on Wednesday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that Israel would next week host a formal meeting with three national security advisors: John Bolton from the U.S., Nicolay Patrushev from Russia, and Meir Ben Shabbat from Israel. (The Hill) (<http://bit.ly/2Yg70LW>)

#### 3. The Other Big Story: With world's eyes on Iran.

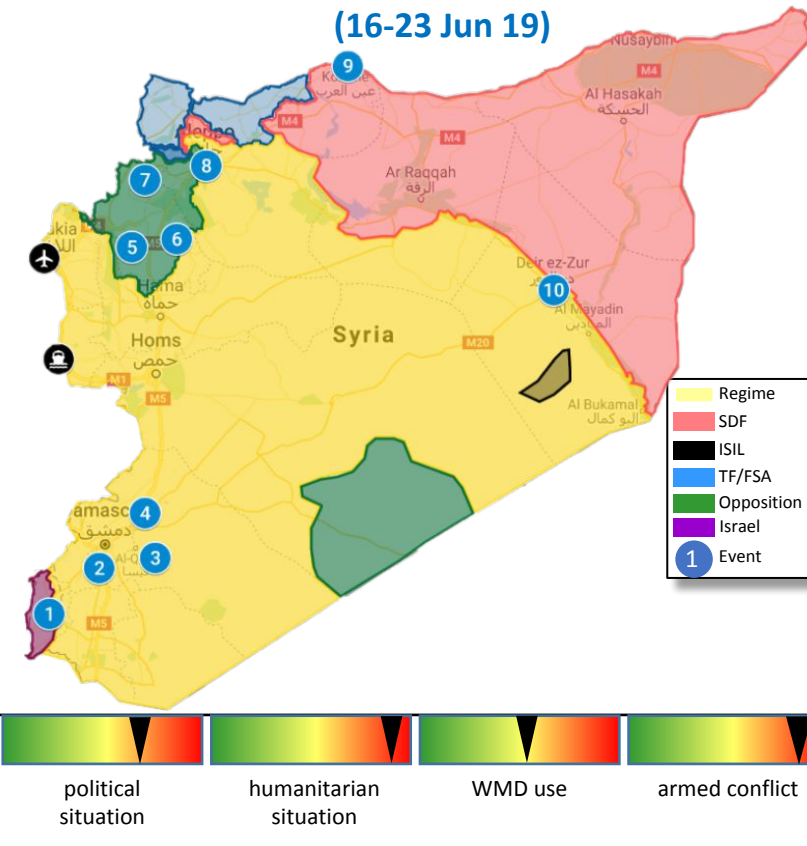
21.06.2019 With attention focused on the US-Iran confrontation in the Gulf, Russian President Vladimir Putin is scrambling to prevent a conflict between Turkey and Syria over Idlib, which is already a massive international crisis. This week the top UN humanitarian official, Mark Lowcock, said Idlib is “a humanitarian disaster unfolding before our eyes,” with 230 civilian deaths, including 81 children, over just the past six weeks, and 330,000 displaced. (Al Monitor) (<https://bit.ly/2FEtAHd>)

#### 4. In Syria, An Opportunity for US-Russian Cooperation.

20.06.2019 The U.S. and Russia may be at odds from Ukraine to North Korea, but they appear to be much more aligned in Syria, where neither wants to see Iran gain a substantial foothold. As the Syrian civil war winds down, Moscow wants to make sure that it – not Tehran – remains the primary benefactor of President Bashar Assad; that it retains its bases at Tartus and Hmeimim; and that Iran's presence in the Middle East is curbed. (GPF) (<https://bit.ly/2ZL9i6r>)

#### 5. U.S., Israel, and the Russian Challenge in Syria.

21.06.2019 On Monday, the American, Russian and Israeli National Security Advisors are expected to gather in Jerusalem for an unprecedented meeting on regional security issues. This trilateral initiative presents a unique opportunity for the United States and Israel to work together to address the Russian challenge in the Middle East. (Kennan Institute) (<https://bit.ly/2IEoNH>)



### ASSESSMENT

*Until now, following two different initiatives, the UN and the Astana processes, for the post-war Syrian transition have proved to be of no use. The meeting which is expected to take place between the US, Russia and Israel might be promising as it is crystal clear that no initiative in the region has likelihood of success contrary to each other's will.*

*The US-Iran confrontation in the Gulf has been picked recently and Israel and US has been pressuring Iran to leave Syria. Turkey has also serious problems regarding the observation points in idlib.*

*In line with these recent developments it is highly likely that Iran and Turkey will be the losing parties of the long lasting Syrian War.*

#### 6. Russia, Turkey must stabilise Syria's Idlib without delay - UN chief.

19.06.2019 The United Nations on Tuesday urged Russia and Turkey to immediately stabilise northwest Syria's Idlib province, where a Russian-backed Syrian government offensive is creating a humanitarian disaster, according to multiple reports. “I am deeply concerned about the escalation of the fighting in Idlib, and the situation is especially dangerous given the involvement of an increased number of actors,” UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres told reporters, according to Reuters. (Ahval) (<https://bit.ly/2J1ls4I>)

#### 7. A framework for European-Russian cooperation in Syria.

17.06.2019 After more than eight years of conflict in Syria, it is now clear that there won't be a near-term political transition away from Bashar al-Assad. This is a reality that Europeans, by and large, now accept. This does not mean, however, that Europeans are prepared to re-engage with Syria's new landscape without conditions. On the contrary, European policy remains focused on the need to secure still meaningful gains and European tools, including sanctions, reconstruction funding and any political legitimization remain tied to this end. (ECFR) (<https://bit.ly/2WXiz2m>)

#### 8. ISIS ambush kills over 10 Syrian, Palestinian soldiers in eastern Syria.

23.06.2019 ISIS reportedly carried out ambush along a road in the Al-Mayadeen countryside of Deir Ezzor which resulted in the death of over ten Syrian soldiers from the National Defense Forces (NDF) and Palestinian-led Al-Quds Brigade. These Islamic State ambushes have become frequent in central and eastern Syria, prompting the Syrian military to send reinforcements to these fronts in order to quell these attacks. (AMN) (<https://bit.ly/2ZJQ0xZ>)

#### 9. Syria Thanks Russia, Iran and China for Support in War, But Wants Turkey and U.S. to Leave.

18.06.2019 Syria's top diplomat thanked Russia, Iran and China for their support in the country's civil war, but warned Turkey and the United States should be among the first international powers to withdraw. At a meeting alongside his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi, Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Muallem reiterated on Tuesday his stance that “all foreign troops must leave Syria,” specifying that “it concerns, first and foremost, the U.S. and Turkish troops,” according to the state-run Tass Russian News Agency. (Newsweek) (<http://bit.ly/2YasTMO>)

#### 10. Syrian Air Force destroys jihadist base in western Aleppo.

22.06.2019 The Syrian Arab Air Force (SyAAF) reportedly carried out an attack on a base belonging to Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham near the town of Muhandiseen. The report said the Syrian Air Force heavily damaged the base, a nearby vehicle maintenance facility, and Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham checkpoint near Muhandiseen in western Aleppo. (AMN) (<https://bit.ly/2Kv0fmB>)



## SYRIA CRISIS WATCH

(10-16 Jun 19)

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. US, Israeli, Russian security chiefs to meet in Jerusalem.

14.06.2019 Barring last-minute changes, senior Israeli and American officials will meet in the United States next week to prepare for a trilateral summit of the heads of the US, Russian and Israeli national security councils. National security advisers John Bolton, Nikolay Patrushev and Meir Ben-Shabbat will convene June 24 in the Israeli capital to discuss the post-war order in Syria. "At some point, Assad will also have to decide," a top Israeli military source told Al-Monitor on condition of anonymity. "Will he continue to be an Iranian stooge and aspire to be [Hamis leader] Ismail Haniyeh when he grows up, or would he rather regain his independence and stand on his own two feet?" (Al Monitor) <http://bit.ly/2RkOShj>

#### 2. OPCW: Syrian Regime Refuses Access to Chemical Weapons Investigators.

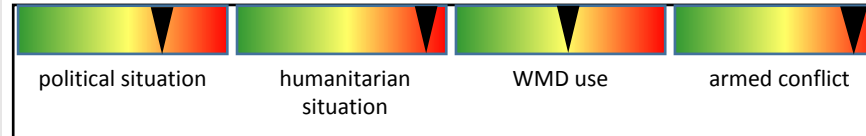
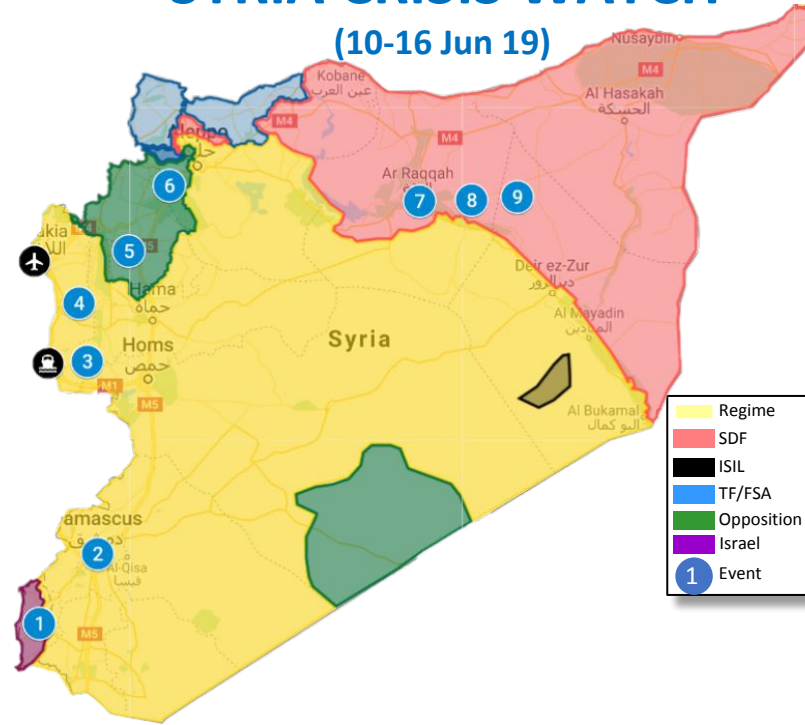
12.06.2019 Syrian regime officials have refused access to a newly-created chemical weapons investigation team formed to identify perpetrators of attacks with banned munitions, the organization's top official said in remarks published on Wednesday. (Aawsat) <http://bit.ly/2IRWuUG>

#### 3. Russian media: Israel jamming Syrian aerial defense systems due to poor missile success rates.

16.06.2019 The Russian site Avia.pro claims to have learned that the actual success rate of Israeli attacks on targets in Syria is only 30-40%. "In light of this, Israel has begun to jam the Syrian aerial defense systems, in order to somehow improve the effectiveness of the attacks," the authors write, without specifying their sources. Israel has not actually commented on its use of electronic warfare systems in an attack on Syria's Al-Harra province. (UAWire) <https://bit.ly/2Ffa1on>

#### 4. Putin's envoy says Russia ready to consider Kurdish rights in Syria.

15.06.2019 The Russian President's Special Representative for the Middle East and Africa, Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov, says Russia is ready to consider the rights of the Kurdish people in a new Syria. Kurdistan 24 spoke with Bogdanov on Tuesday where he stated that Damascus' relationship with the Syrian Kurds must be renewed. He underlined the importance of discussions between Arab and Kurdish representatives from different organizations. According to the deputy foreign minister, Russia is ready to work for the constitutional rights of the Kurds to solve the Syrian issue. However, the Syrian Kurds are unlikely to accept anything less than autonomy in the country's northeast. (Kurdistan 24) <https://bit.ly/2lkWopA>



### ASSESSMENT

*Russia, with its multifaceted political efforts with the US, Israel, Turkey and the Kurds, is wisely looking for ways to keep the US and Israel out from Russian spheres of influence while trying to exploit the dissatisfaction among Turkey and the Kurds due to inconsistent US policy.*

*Latest attacks to Turkish Observation Posts reveals the ineffectiveness and vulnerability of Turkish troops in Idlib without Russian assurance. Although Turkish officials states that Turkey will retaliate any further Syrian Regime attacks, it is clear that Turkish forces, which are deep inside the Syrian territory, are far from countering its opponents without air and ground fire support.*

#### 5. Turkey, Russia dispute facts after attack on Turkish outpost in Syria.

13.06.2019 Russia and Turkey, the two countries responsible for a rickety agreement to keep the peace along Syria's last major frontline, gave sharply conflicting accounts on Thursday of an attack on a Turkish military outpost. Turkey said one of its observation posts in Idlib province had come under deliberate attack from Russian-backed Syrian government forces. Three Turkish soldiers were wounded from 35 mortar shells fired on the post. (Reuters) <https://reut.rs/2MwI7oN>

#### 6. Turkey retaliates against regime attack on outpost in Syria's Idlib.

16.06.2019 Turkish Defence Ministry says the Syrian regime attacked an observation point which was established after an agreement between Turkey and Russia to protect civilians from attacks in Syria. Forces belonging to regime leader Bashar al Assad attacked a Turkish observation point in Syria's Idlib province and it was retaliated with heavy weapons, Turkish Defense Ministry said on Sunday. (TRTWORLD) <http://bit.ly/2lPFsqx>

#### 7. The United States sent heavy weapons, armored vehicles to Syrian Kurds.

14.06.2019 The United States has just sent 200 trucks filled with weapons and armored vehicles to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), U.S.-backed Syrian Kurdish forces in the fight against Islamic State, the Russian state-funded news outlet Sputnik reported on Thursday, citing an SDF source. (Sputnik) <https://bit.ly/31APWTb>

#### 8. Raqqa security deteriorates as US drawdown threatens northern Syria stability.

14.06.2019 The ongoing drawdown of U.S. troops from northeast Syria has made Coalition allies' sustained commitment to the counter-ISIS mission significantly more difficult, according to a European diplomat with responsibility in the region.

The Americans initially asked their European allies to contribute ground troops for the proposed safe zone between SDF-held territory and the Turkish border. The European diplomat's government turned that request down, citing legal limitations of the defeat-ISIS mission.

"And then it was a counter-ISIS mandate. They changed it when they realized we wouldn't do the safe zone," the diplomat said. "So now it's down to stabilization money ... They've given up on us when it comes to forces," he said. (The Defence Post) <https://bit.ly/2WNxgkb>

#### 9. SDF busts ISIS sleeper cell responsible for several terrorist attacks in Raqqa.

15.06.2019 According to reports, the SDF's intelligence units uncovered the Islamic State sleeper cell in Raqqa after a series of terrorist attacks that targeted their forces and locals in the city. During the operation, the SDF managed to arrest seven members of the terrorist group, while also seizing the contents inside the sleeper cell. (AMN) <https://bit.ly/31xLKDP>

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. U.S. seeks Russian support on Iran at key Israel meeting - source.

05.06.2019 The United States believes Russia may be more amenable than in the past to addressing U.S. and Israeli concerns about Iran's influence, including in Syria, when national security leaders meet in Jerusalem this month, a U.S. official said on Tuesday. The United States announced last week that John Bolton, White House national security adviser, would meet his Israeli and Russian counterparts in Jerusalem in June. The U.S. official said the goal of the talks would be "to see how we can potentially work together to get rid of the primary irritant in the Middle East, which is the Islamic Republic of Iran." (Reuters) (<https://reut.rs/2EWMxUP>)

#### 2. Syria: Iran is not leaving, Despite US and Israel Pressure.

05.06.2019 Syrian official told Russian media that there are no plans for Iran to reduce its troop levels in the country, even if the US and Israel seek to offer Russia a deal. Speaking to Izvestia and later reported in Russia's TASS news agency, the report seeks to downplay rumors that an upcoming US, Israel and Russia trilateral meeting in Israel would examine Iran's presence in Syria. (JPost) (<http://bit.ly/31jRpx1>)

#### 3. Russia's role in Syria's ongoing conflict cannot and should not be ignored.

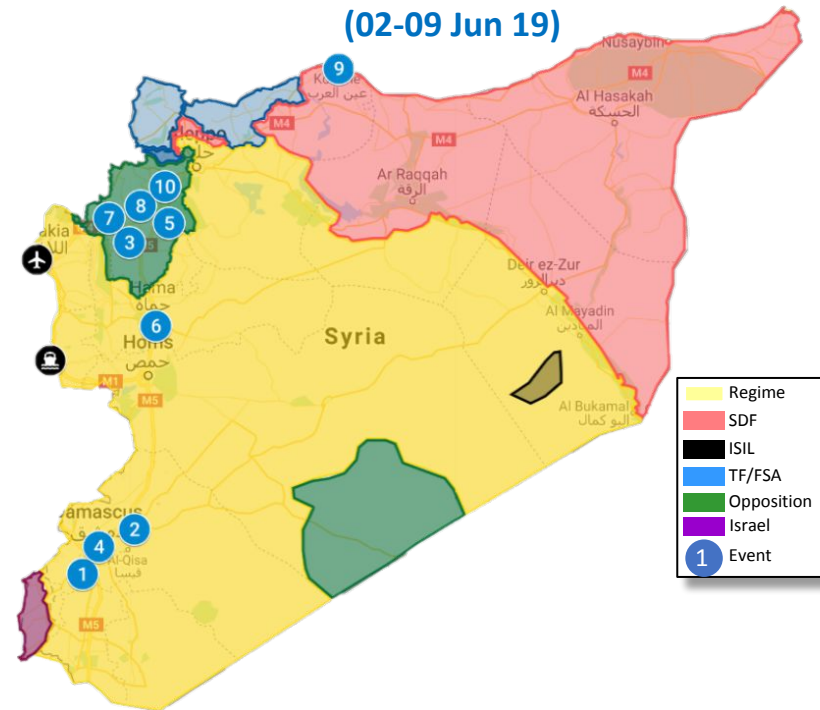
08.06.2019 "The assault on Idlib province, mainly by Russian and Syrian regime forces, is a vast atrocity unfolding before the eyes of an uncaring world. Compared to their entirely appropriate condemnations of Iran, Hezbollah and the Assad regime, Arab nations have also had less to say about Russia's actions. (The National) (<https://bit.ly/2EYtYji>)

#### 4. Russia Studying Alternative Options in Syria.

04.06.2019 Head of the Syrian Negotiations Commission Nasr al-Hariri said parties supporting regime leader Bashar Assad were now looking for alternative options four years after choosing to become involved in the Syrian conflict. Hariri told Asharq Al-Awsat that although Russia stood by Iran in backing the regime, Moscow recently started to realize that its two partners are a heavy burden, particularly due to US sanctions. (The Syrian Observer) (<https://bit.ly/2XB4HTq>)

#### 5. Russia halts UN Security Council statement on Syria's Idlib.

04.06.2019 Russia blocked the U.N. Security Council on Monday from issuing a statement sounding alarm about the increasing fighting in and around Syria's Idlib province and the possibility of a humanitarian disaster, a council diplomat said. The U.N. says an estimated 3 million people are caught in the crossfire. It called for humanitarian access, safe return for refugees and for following international humanitarian law on protecting civilians. (Miami Herald) (<https://hrld.us/31hesZk>)



### ASSESSMENT

- Russian veto in the UN Security Council and non-stop bombardments in Idlib shows that Russia is determined not to lose its upper hand in Syrian theatre and continue its support to Syrian Regime to regain the last Jihadist and the Rebel held part of country even to the expense of a humanitarian crisis.
- Latest news about possible Russia-US agreement on Syria that Russia is likely eager to take constructive steps to end the long-lasting Syrian war, which might exclude Iranian presence in Syria and even include alternative options without Assad. Yet, Iranian exclusion should not be taken for granted.
- Moreover, the statements of the US special envoy on the responsibilities of the new Syrian safe zone, indicates that the US want to solve the issue only with Russia.

#### 6. Syrian Army kills over 150 jihadists, Turkish-backed rebels in 72 hours: report.

08.06.2019 According to a Syrian Arab Army (SAA) field report, their troops have killed over 150 fighters from Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham, the National Liberation Front, and Jaysh Al-Izza while losing at least 50 soldiers in Northwestern Hama since Thursday. Among the 150 militants killed in northwestern Hama were three commanders from Jaysh Al-Izza. The commanders were identified by the group as the former Syrian National Team goalkeeper Abdel-Bassit Sarout, Yasser Al-Hilal, and Mohammad Khaled Al-Sabbagh. A source from the Syrian military said more than half the militant casualties were members of Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham; this includes a large number of foreign combatants as well. (AMN) (<https://bit.ly/2QXv9nT>)

#### 7. Syrian regime bombardment of Idlib kills 10 during Eid.

05.06.2019 Airstrikes and shelling by regime forces killed 10 civilians in Syria's northwest on Wednesday, as residents marked the holiday of Eid al-Fitr, a war monitor said. The bombardment of Idlib province and neighbouring areas has killed more than 300 people since late April, according to the Observatory. It also displaced nearly 270,000 people in May alone, according to the UN. A total of 24 health facilities and 35 schools have been hit in the latest escalation, according to the UN's humanitarian office. (The New Arab) (<https://bit.ly/2QXxSO9>)

#### 8. Turkey and Russia tussle in Syria's Idlib.

03.06.2019 The past few weeks have seen the worst fighting this year in Idlib province, Syria's last rebel-held stronghold. In September, Ankara and Moscow agreed to establish de-escalation zones in Idlib, with Turkey agreeing to shoulder the responsibility of keeping rebel groups there under control. Russia and President Bashar Assad's government have criticised Turkey for failing to fulfil its part of the deal, with HTS since gaining control of much of the province. "If Ankara changes its mind on purchasing S-400s, it is highly likely that the first Russian response to such a decision will be speeding up the Idlib operation." (Ahval News) (<http://bit.ly/2l6F2gl>)

#### 9. US: 'No role' for European powers in new Syria safe zone.

07.06.2019 The United States' envoy to Syria has announced that the country has a general plan to establish a proposed safe zone on the Turkish-Syrian border, but that European countries will not have a role to play in it. (Middleeastmonitor) (<http://bit.ly/31kKHXF>)

#### 10. Trump calls on Russia, Syria to stop bombing Idlib province.

03.06.2019 U.S. President Donald Trump on Sunday urged Russia and Syrian government forces to stop bombing Syria's Idlib province, following a Friday Kremlin statement that signaled Moscow would continue to back a month-long Syrian government offensive there. On Friday, the Kremlin said it was Turkey's responsibility to stop rebels in Syria's Idlib province from firing on civilian and Russian targets. The offensive in Idlib is the biggest escalation of the war between Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and rebel opponents of his government since last summer, and has raised fears of a humanitarian crisis as Syrians displaced by the fighting seek shelter at the Turkish border. (Reuters) (<https://reut.rs/2QXpL4d>)

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. Three soldiers killed after Israel attacks Syrian military positions near Golan Heights.

02.06.2019 Three soldiers have been killed in Syria after Israel attacked military positions there, the war-torn country's state-run media has reported. Warplanes struck at bases and arms depots in the southern Quneitra region, an unnamed official told Syria's SANA news agency. (The Independent) <https://ind.pn/2WFIQDda>

#### 2. Top US and Russian Diplomats Discussed Ways to End Syria War.

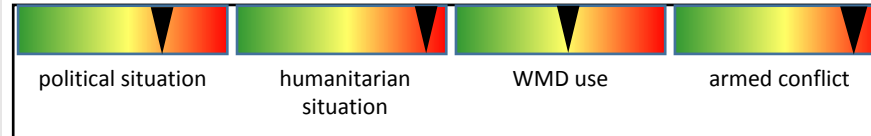
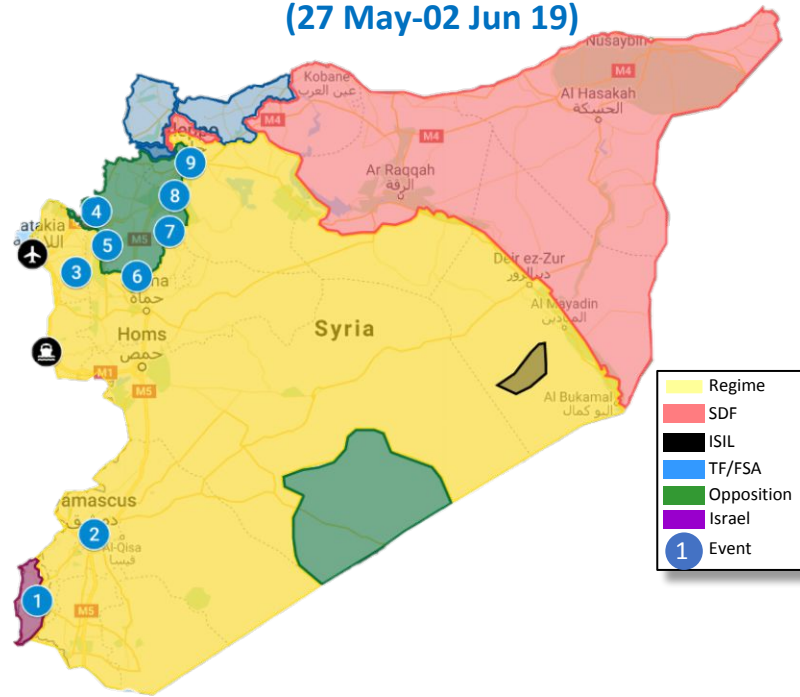
29.05.2019 Top U.S. and Russian diplomats discussed step-by-step implementation of a 2012 roadmap to U.N.-supervised elections in Syria that could allow a Syrian government "to move back into the international community," the U.S. envoy for the war-torn country said Wednesday. The June 30, 2012, Geneva agreement on a blueprint for peace in Syria was approved by representatives of the U.N., Arab League, European Union, Turkey, and all five veto-wielding Security Council members — the U.S., Russia, China, France and Britain. (New York Times) <https://nyti.ms/2Mo6JFw>

#### 3. Russia's Large Airlifters Arrive in Syria, Likely Carrying Heavy Weapons.

01.06.2019 "Two Antonov An-124 airlifters arrived at the Hmeimim Airbase in Southwestern Lattakia on Friday evening," the Flight Tracker website said. The An-124 is the largest airlifter to ever travel to Syria, which indicates they are likely transporting some heavy weapons to the Syrian military, it added. The move by the Russian Air Force came just weeks after the Syrian Army launched a large-scale offensive North-West of Hama province. (Fars News) <https://bit.ly/2EIDZkz>

#### 4. Pressure on Turkey, as regime onslaught on Idlib continues.

31.05.2019 Bashar al-Assad's regime and Russia continued to bomb and shell the opposition province of Idlib this week, resulting in thousands of more Syrian civilians being forced to leave their homes. Amid this titanic wave of death and destruction, pressure has increased on Turkey to do more to ease the humanitarian situation. (The New Arab) <https://bit.ly/2Z52uOr>



### ASSESSMENT

- With the Russia's statement passing all responsibility of Idlib to Turkey, Turkey is being forced to make a tough choice between confronting the biggest refugee flow since the beginning of the Syrian war or engaging in a rocky road fighting or convincing the jihadist, both might produce social, military or political backlash for her.
- Differences of opinion between Trump administration and the US Senate, gives the opportunity to Russia to play its game in Northern Syria facing even no international pressure. Bringing the heavy airlifter into play reveals that Russia will highly likely speed up its operational tempo for a decisive war for the last Rebel/Jihadist remaining part of the country.

#### 5. Syria NGOs say Idlib attacks triggering mass displacement amid UN indifference.

31.05.2019 Syrian NGOs decried on Friday the inaction of the international community to mounting violence in Idlib, saying it had triggered the biggest wave of displaced people since the war began. As well as killing dozens of civilians, the recent bombardments by Syrian and Russian forces in northwest Syria have pushed 300,000 people towards Turkey's border, the NGOs said at a press conference in Istanbul. (The New Arab) <https://bit.ly/2KIJ5Y1>

#### 6. Russia says an end to fighting in Syria's Idlib is Turkey's responsibility.

30.05.2019 The Kremlin said on Friday it was Turkey's responsibility to stop rebels in Syria's Idlib province from firing on civilian and Russian targets, signalling it would continue to back a Syrian government offensive there despite Ankara's protests. Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan told his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin late on Thursday that he wanted a ceasefire in Idlib to prevent more civilian deaths and a refugee influx to Turkey. (Reuters) <https://reut.rs/2W3TVne>

#### 7. Russia resumes bombings in Syria after negotiations with Turkey fail.

01.06.2019 Russian aircraft continued the bombing of the North-West regions of Syria after the talks between Russian military and Turkish Army to reach the ceasefire failed, reports Al Masdar News with reference to Syrian military sources. (UAWire) <http://bit.ly/2XlpURn>

#### 8. U.S. calls Russian, Syrian air strikes 'reckless escalation' in Syria.

28.05.2019 The United States continues to be alarmed by Syrian government and Russian air strikes in northwest Syria and believes they are a "reckless escalation" of violence, the State Department said on Tuesday. Hundreds of members of the U.S. Congress signed a letter to President Donald Trump last week arguing that the United States should remain engaged with the conflict in Syria. (Reuters) <https://reut.rs/2JRii67>

#### 9. Tensions Grow Between Russia, Iran in Syria.

27.05.2019 Russian military police last week reportedly carried out a raid against Iranian-backed militiamen stationed at Syria's Aleppo international airport, local media reported. In the aftermath, several Iranian militia leaders were arrested in what was seen as the latest episode of tensions between Iranian and Russian forces in Syria. (VOA) <https://bit.ly/2K8dF6L>

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. Media: Russia has disrupted Israel's radars.

23.05.2019 The Russian news site Avia.pro claims that Russia's "Krasukha" electronic warfare systems have disrupted the Israel Defense Force's radars. The site presents arguments to support its theory: the regular flights by Israeli reconnaissance aircraft in the Golan Heights region, and at least three cases of blimps being launched in the same territory to observe the positions of Syrian aerial defense systems. (UAWire) <http://bit.ly/2EwjWG0>

#### 2. Israel plans to name settlement on occupied land after Trump.

22.05.2019 Israel plans to name a new settlement after Donald Trump on land it captured from Syria, as a token of gratitude to the US president for recognizing its contested claim to the occupied territory (The Guardian) <http://bit.ly/2Wq4d5g>

#### 3. Russian weapon tests in Syria.

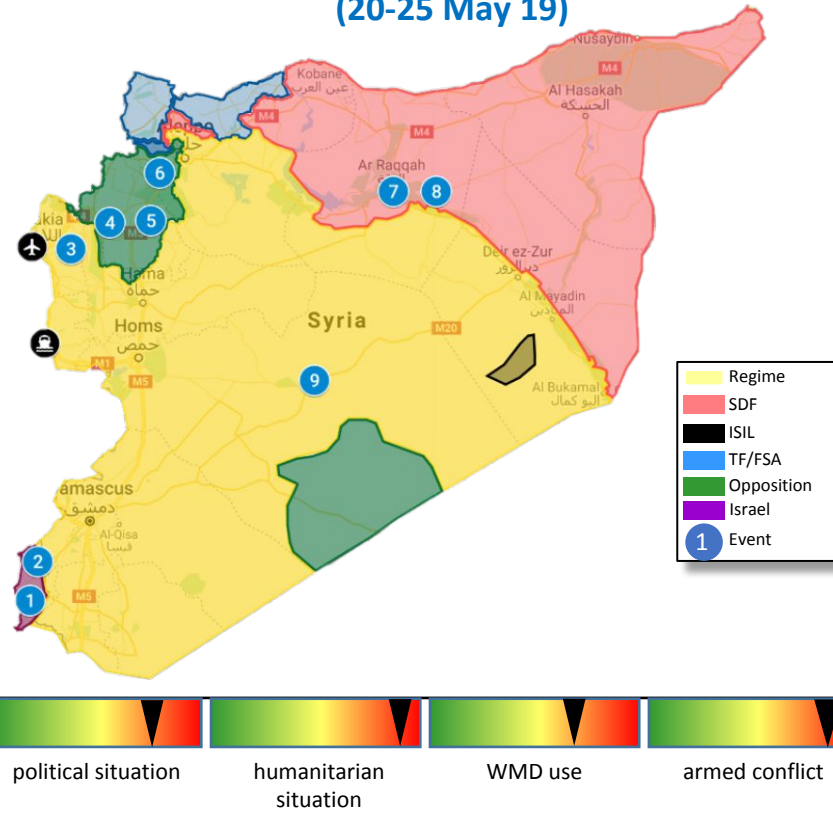
23.05.2019 Russia has been testing its military capabilities as part of its intervention in the Syrian conflict, with a view to strengthening its power and selling its weapons abroad, writes Bassel Oudat in Damascus. Russian President Vladimir Putin said last week that Russian military operations in Syria had been very beneficial because they had revealed flaws in Russian jets and helicopters. (Al Ahram) <https://bit.ly/2HCpFM9>

#### 4. Syrian military launches massive attack across Idlib-Hama axis.

26.05.2019 The Syrian military unleashed a powerful assault across the Idlib-Hama axis in the evening of 25 May, targeting several areas under the control of the jihadist and Turkish-backed rebels. (AMN) <https://bit.ly/2M6sKs5>

#### 5. Idlib offensive tests strength of Russia-Turkey ties in Syria.

20.05.2019 Moscow is increasingly concerned and restless over Turkey's moves in northern Syria. Russia's active support of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's Idlib offensive indicates Moscow thinks ongoing talks between Turkey and the United States over northeast Syria could lead to the balance of power shifting in Washington's favor. (Al Monitor) <https://bit.ly/2WXGiuT>



### ASSESSMENT

- The multiplicity of the actors in Syria, and their efforts to maximise their gains on a field where interests of actors clash brings about newer dilemmas. The situation in Hama-Idlib axis can be said to be one of those points of contention that calls for very fundamental decision making especially by Turkey.
- In this regard, Turkey's efforts to use its guardianship role in Idlib to preserve its area of influence to stem expansion of Kurdish region in Northern Syria, consequences of a probable great operation to the jihadist / rebels to result in a human flow with dubious backgrounds to Turkey, Russian leniency to Turkey's current stance in Idlib based on its will to buy S-400 air defence systems and finally the repercussions of such purchase that could include ousting of the country from the Western bloc headed by US requires well meditated steps by Turkey.

#### 6. Turkey not withdrawing posts in Syria after regime attacks.

23.05.2019 Turkey will not evacuate its military observation post in northern Syria's Idlib, the last opposition and rebel stronghold in the region, after a suspected Syrian regime attack this month, Turkish Defence Minister Hulusi Akar said. (TRT World) <http://bit.ly/2YJ1Tns>

#### 7. Proxy conflict in Syria could escalate amid rising US-Iran tensions.

26.05.2019 As depicted in "The Shia Mapping Project," an interactive map produced by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Iran's militias fit into a pattern of Shia military-religious activity. In Syria, groups in Iran's orbit include Iraqi militias that crossed the border to fight for Assad and Afghan fighters, some of them children, sent to the regime's aid. (The Arab Weekly) <https://bit.ly/2QmFnOk>

#### 8. Alleged Use of Chemical Weapons by the Assad Regime in Northwest Syria.

21.05.2019 The United States continues to closely watch the military operations by the Assad regime in northwest Syria, including indications of any new use of chemical weapons by the regime. Unfortunately, we continue to see signs that the Assad regime may be renewing its use of chemical weapons, including an alleged chlorine attack in northwest Syria on the morning of May 19, 2019. (U.S. Department of State) <https://bit.ly/2VHADxk>

#### 9. ISIS ambush kills several Syrian soldiers in eastern Syria.

25.05.2019 For the second time this week, the Islamic State (ISIS/ISIL/IS/Daesh) terrorist organization has carried out an ambush against the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) in the vast Badiya Al-Sham region. This ambush resulted in the death of several Syrian Arab Army soldiers and the hospitalization of many others.(AMN) <https://bit.ly/2X77O5x>

### OPINION

#### Turkey squeezed between Russia, US in Syria.

24.05.2019 Russia is still trying to keep Turkey on board to create deeper fissures in NATO and between Turkey and the United States. That also means that Turkey cannot tear away from the S-400 deal that easily. Turkish foreign policy had never been so squeezed between Washington and Moscow and at the mercy of both or either of them. While the disastrous consequences of Erdogan's foreign policy and its adverse effects on the economy are imminent, the election rerun in Istanbul has become even more important. (Al Monitor) <http://bit.ly/2wkwJGT>

## KEY EVENTS

### 1. Israel strikes Iranian and Hezbollah bases in Syria.

18.05.2019 Violent explosions rocked the areas near Damascus on the evening of May 17. According to the reports, the Israeli Air Forces conducted air raid against Iranian and Hezbollah bases in Syria. Earlier, the Syrian news agency SANA reported that the Syrian Army's air defense systems managed to down several missiles fired from the direction of the Quneitra province and the Golan Heights. SOHR, Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, reported three explosions in Al Kisweh area, south-west of the Syrian capital. (UAWires) (<http://bit.ly/2JPYeA5>)

### 2. Russia begins to rebuild Syria's military from scratch.

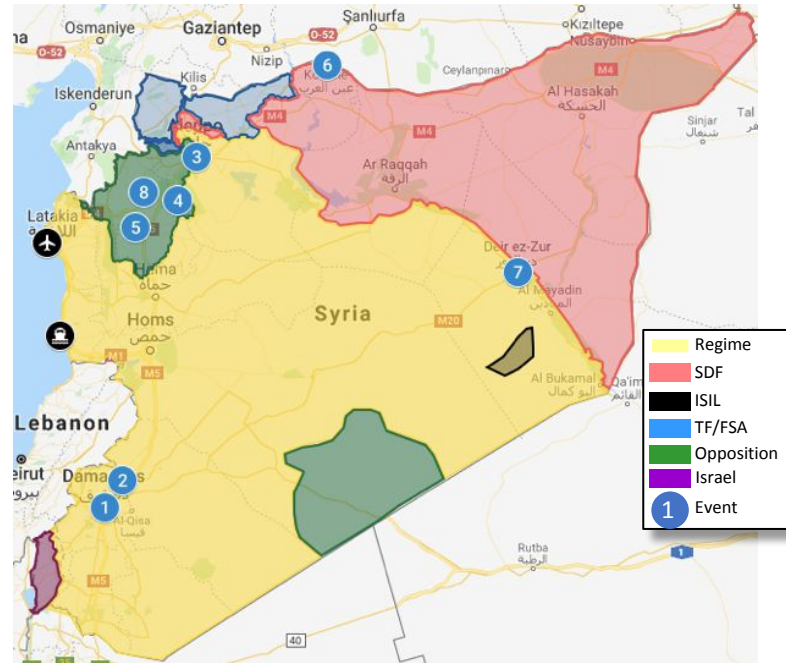
19.05.2019 Russia is helping the Syrian regime rebuild its military after eight years of war showed the dire state of the armed forces. The regime is looking to embark on a post-war transformation from an informal, militia-heavy force to a professional military. (The New Arab) (<https://bit.ly/2VCuCZc>)

### 3. Russia's military gamble in Syria is paying off handsomely.

16.05.2019 The great victory train clattered across eight time zones and back before groaning into a military-exhibition ground outside Moscow last month. It pulled car after car of trophies from Syria, as well as wagon loads of patriotism and conspiracy theories. Here was a pockmarked American-made Humvee; there pickup trucks turned into battering-rams for suicide car-bombers. Various home-made bombs included one hidden in a can of Russian beer. Amid the fanfare of military bands, veterans on the platform recounted how Russia had intervened in 2015 to stop Syria falling into the hands of jihadists, notably Islamic State (IS), who had been secretly armed by NATO. (The Economist) (<https://econ.st/2YxH9vQ>)

### 4. Russian, Turkish presidents agree to working group on northwest Syria.

15.05.2019 The Turkish foreign minister has said Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, have agreed to bring together a working group as soon as possible to deal with the conflict in northwest Syria, Reuters reported on Wednesday. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu's words on Wednesday came after fighting flared up between Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's forces and rebel groups in the northwest Syrian province of Idlib. (Ahval) (<https://bit.ly/2HCxVe5>)



## ASSESSMENT

- Although Turkish side accuses Assad regime to sabotage the Russian-Turkish agreement, it is crystal clear that Assad regime can not get into action in Idlib without support and permission of Russia. It is probable that Russia is exploiting Turkey's achilles' heel (Idlib) in order to blackmail Turkey concerning the US crack down on S-400 issue.
- Continuation of Israel attacks on Iranian targets inside Syrian territory reveals the likely Russian condonation due to recent Russia-Iran dispute started to come to light.

### 5. Turkey and Russia discuss reducing tension in Syria's Idlib.

14.05.2019 Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar and his Russian counterpart discussed ways to reduce tension in Syria's Idlib province, the Turkish Defense Ministry said on Tuesday, after the biggest military escalation in northwest Syria in nearly a year. Russia has backed the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, while Turkey has backed some rebels in Syria's eight-year civil war, but they have recently worked together to try to contain fighting in the country's northwest. That effort has been strained by the surge in violence in Syria's last major insurgent stronghold in recent weeks. (Reuters) (<https://reut.rs/2w8laRR>)

### 6. Syrian Army storms key town in northeast Latakia as HTS claims chlorine gas attack.

19.05.2019 The Syrian Arab Army (SAA) launched a new attack to capture the key town of Kabani in the northeastern countryside of the Latakia Governorate. During this barrage of missiles, the militants (Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham and the Turkestan Islamic Party (TIP)) accused the SAA of using chlorine gas against them. No advance has been reported so far by SAA. (AMN) (<https://bit.ly/2QeQF7o>)

### 7. SDF cleans ISIS Sleeper Cells.

18.05.2019 Syrian democratic forces announced to have killed a whole ISIS terrorist cell made of 6 members including cell-commander in ash-Schaddadi, Deir ez-Zor. The units seized quantities of weapons and ammunition, including AK-74, handguns, grenades and explosives belts. (LIVEUAMAP Syria) (<https://bit.ly/2HqSnQj>)

### 8. Erdogan accuses Assad of sabotaging the Russian-Turkish agreement.

15.05.2019 In a conversation over the phone, Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan discussed the escalating tensions in the city of Idlib in northwestern Syria. During the call, Erdogan stressed that countering terrorism cannot justify attacks on civilians, schools and hospitals, said Fahrettin Altun, director of the Turkish presidential administration's communication department. Erdogan also expressed concern that ceasefire violations in the de-escalation zone had reached alarming proportions in the last two weeks. He accused Syrian President Bashar Assad of sabotaging Turkish-Russian agreements on Syria with his actions in Idlib. (UAWire) (<http://bit.ly/2VOpwOH>)

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. 270 hours of the intense escalation.

11.05.2019 270 hours of the intense escalation resulted in 7750 air and ground strikes to show regime advances in 7 towns and a hill and displace more than 300 thousand civilians. The regime forces raised the number of areas they controlled in the past few days to 7 areas, they are: Qal'aat al-Madiq, al-Karakat, al-Twynya, Kafr Nabudah, al-Bana, Tal Osman and al-Mestriha (SOHR) <http://www.syriaahr.com/en/?p=127436>

#### 2. Russian Warplanes Absent over Idlib after 12 Days of Escalation.

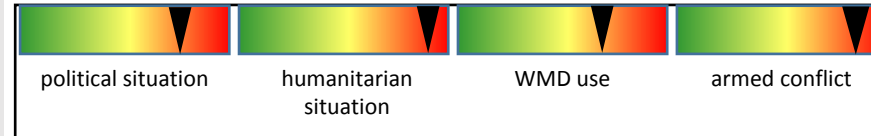
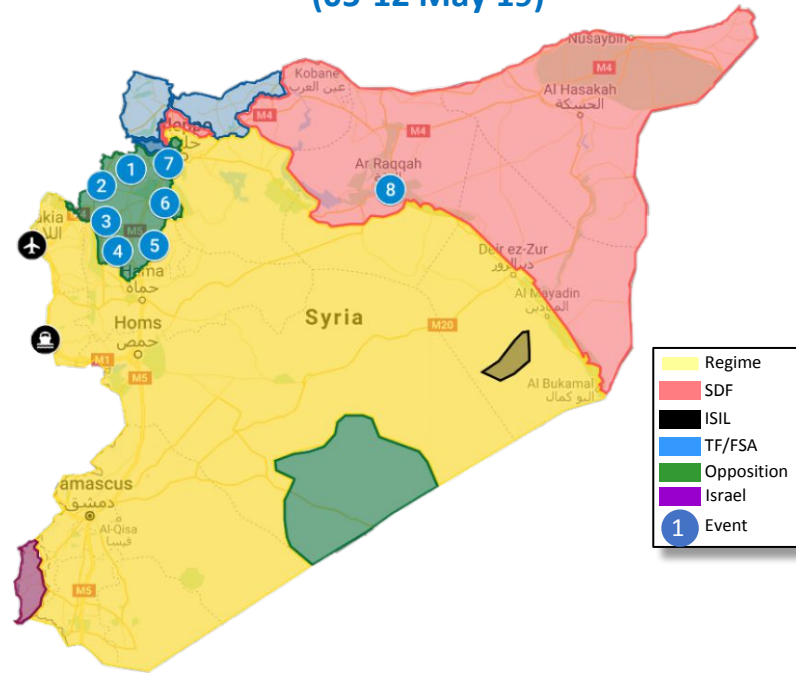
12.05.2019 After targeting by about 2200 airstrikes in 12 days of the fiercest escalation, Russian warplanes have been absent from the airspace of the de-escalation area for more than 12 hours. However, heavy rocket shelling by the regime forces continue targeting Al-Hbit town in the southern countryside of Idlib, also exchange of targeting by heavy and medium machine guns takes place in Kafr Nabudah area in the northern countryside of Hama. (SOHR) <https://bit.ly/2Q4LlTu>

#### 3. Russian-Syrian forces pound Idlib, Turkey shifts attention to Kurdish positions.

12.05.2019 Days after Syrian peace talks wrapped up in Kazakhstan, a major offensive was launched by Syrian and Russian forces, striking at the north-western Syrian province of Idlib and the nearby countryside of Hama, in pursuit of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the al-Qaeda affiliate in the Syrian battlefield. The timing of the operation was surprising, coming after a statement by Russian President Vladimir Putin, who, speaking April 27 in China, said no full-fledge invasion of Idlib would happen because of the massive refugee crisis that it would trigger into Turkey and beyond. (Arab Weekly) <https://bit.ly/2vUuREK>

#### 4. 'Grave Humanitarian Crisis' Unfolding in Syria's Idleb as Bombing Hits Homes and Hospitals.

10.05.2019 Tens of thousands of Syrians have been forced to flee their homes following a regime offensive in Hama province, while the situation in Idlib remains dire with hospitals and homes targeted in suspected Russian bombing, the UN has warned. The World Health Organisation (WHO) said 150,000 people have been forced from their homes in Hama and southern Idlib in a ten-day bombardment.(The Syrian Observer) <https://bit.ly/2E2SnDL>



### ASSESSMENT

- *Weak opposition from the international community, especially the US administration, seems to encourage Russia and the Syrian Regime to increase level of ambition in Idlib. Uncorroborated claims about Turkey's offer to bring two important highways into Regime use will highly likely speed up the Regime control in broader Idlib area rather than stopping the violence.*
- *Syrian Regime will highly likely intensify its efforts to weaken the US backed SDF authority in Northeastern by exploiting the increasing anti-Kurdish protests in the region, especially following the withdrawal of US forces from Syria.*

#### 5. Sources: Turkey Contacts Russia over Escalation in Northwest Syria.

11.05.2019 Ankara and Moscow have been holding extensive talks on the situation in Syria's Idlib and the countryside of Hama and Aleppo, diplomatic sources told Asharq Al-Awsat on Friday. "Ankara is attached to a ceasefire only in exchange for rapidly reopening to traffic the two strategic highways running through the province," the sources said. (Aawsat) <http://bit.ly/2Yr3s9k>

#### 6. Only Trump can save Syria's Idlib, but time is running out.

09.05.2019 There is little that can stop the brutal assault underway in northwest Syria, where Russian, Iranian and Assad regime forces have launched a major military offensive as millions of civilians flee for their lives. But the record shows that if President Trump acts to try to halt the slaughter, it will have real impact on the ground. Even a presidential tweet could save lives. Time is of the essence. (Washington Post) <https://wapo.st/2HffE7m>

#### 7. Congress' Syria panel warns against Trump withdrawal plan.

10.05.2019 The Trump administration should stop withdrawing troops from Syria, where the Islamic State terrorist group already is reconstituting itself and Iran is undeterred in seeking to expand its influence, a congressionally mandated panel of experts is telling lawmakers. The panel concluded that the drawdown nonetheless "undermines confidence in the American commitment to Syria." It also notes that numerous Islamic State militants and their families remain detained in Syria, and that if their fate is unaddressed, they could in the long run boost the terrorist group's resurgence. (Politico) <https://politi.co/2E5fhKP>

#### 8. Anti-Kurdish Protests in East Syria Could Endanger US Plans.

09.05.2019 The Kurdish-led force now faces protests by local Arab tribesmen in Deir el-Zour province demanding better services, jobs and a bigger role in decision-making in the predominantly Arab, oil-rich and fertile region. Though limited to about a dozen villages for now, the demonstrations are a growing challenge to the U.S. and its local partners at a time when President Donald Trump plans to reduce America's military presence in Syria. Arab officials demanded, among other things, the release of SDF-held detainees, stopping the flow of oil from the province, giving Deir el-Zour fighters within the SDF a bigger role, ending compulsory conscription into the SDF and improving electricity and fuel services. (NYT) <https://nyti.ms/30aQz5i>

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. Russia Pressures Iran to Pull out Sophisticated Drones from Syria.

04.05.2019 Moscow has started exerting pressure on Tehran to reduce its presence in Syria by demanding that Iran pull out Revolutionary Guards from military bases there and remove its sophisticated drones, Israeli intelligence sources said Friday. The DEBKAF website, an Israeli intelligence and security news service, reported that “surprising Russian changes have begun to be noticed against Iran’s presence in Syria.” (Al Awsat) <https://bit.ly/2J2SROg>

#### 2. Russia’s Payback Will Be Syria’s Reconstruction Money.

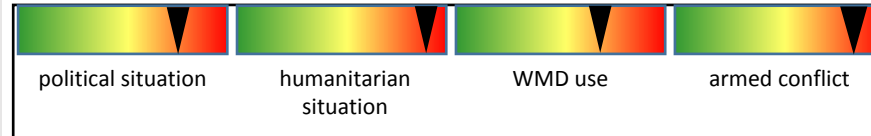
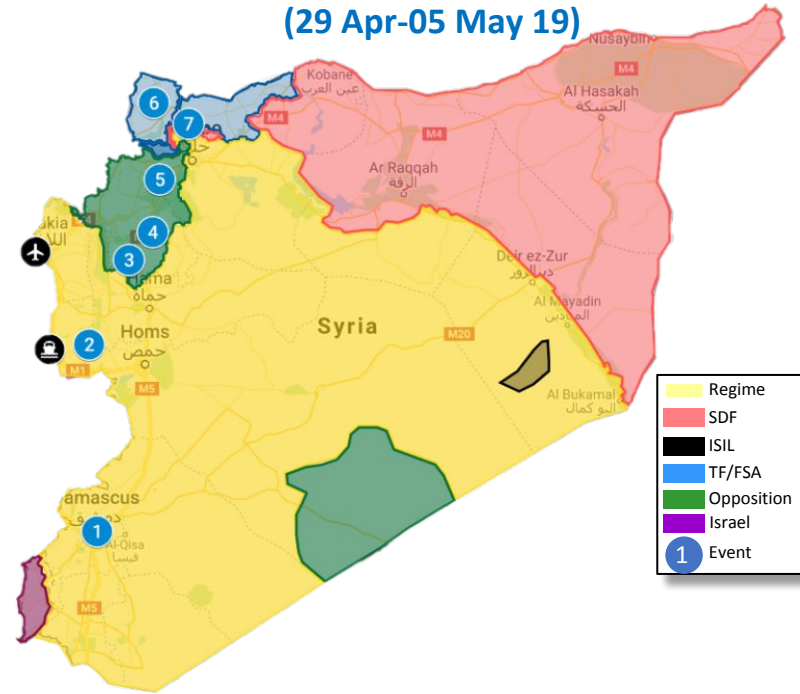
05.05.2019 Russia had several motivations when it intervened in Syria on behalf of President Bashar al-Assad in September 2015. Almost four years later, with rebels having mostly abandoned calls for regime change and losing large swaths of their enclaves, Russia has achieved most of its short- and medium-term goals in Syria. A growing number of signs suggest Moscow is now shifting focus to another objective: The Kremlin would like Syria to provide it a financial windfall. (FP) <https://bit.ly/2H6wK7L>

#### 3. More than 226 airstrikes end the 5th day of the most violent aerial escalation ever on the areas of the Russian – Turkish truce.

05.05.2019 The aerial and ground escalation is still continuing in its 5th day on both Hama and Idlib countryside, where the warplanes and helicopters are continuing their violent and heavy bombardment in conjunction with the continued ground shelling by the regime forces. The number of raids by the Russian warplanes on Hama, Idlib and Aleppo countryside also rose to 67 since morning. (SOHR) <http://www.syriaahr.com/en/?p=126694>

#### 4. Russia, Turkey Should Increase Patrols in Syria’s Idlib.

01.05.2019 Russia and Turkey should uphold the ceasefire and increase patrolling in Syria’s Idlib de-escalation zone, UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen said at a Security Council meeting. “The situation is relatively more stable after the ceasefire that was agreed upon through Turkey and Russia... We encourage Turkey and Russia to continue to uphold the ceasefire and also to increase patrolling in the area. We believe this is a key,” Pedersen said on Tuesday. (Sputnik) <https://bit.ly/2WuE3LK>



### ASSESSMENT

- Increasing numbers of violent Russian and Syrian bombings in Idlib in line with Turkey’s recent diminishing interest for the area reveals an imminent full-scale Regime operation. High level warnings from both the UN and the US also verifies this premise.
- Turkey is likely aiming to consolidate its presence in Northwestern Syria rather than Idlib as it intensifies its political efforts both with Russia and the US respectively for Tell Rifat and Eastern Euphrates region.

#### 5. U.S. Calls on Russia, Syria, Avoid Large Scale Military Offensives.

30.04.2019 The United States on Tuesday warned against an escalation of violence in northwest Syria, saying any such action “will result in the destabilisation of the region.” “We call on all parties, including Russia and the Syrian regime, to abide by their commitments to avoid large scale military offensives, return to a de-escalation of violence in the area, and allow for unhindered humanitarian access,” the U.S. State Department said in a statement. (NYT) <https://nyti.ms/2ZXmG8n>

#### 6. U.S. Showing Flexibility on Planned Syria Safe Zone: Turkish Minister.

03.05.2019 The United States is showing some flexibility in its approach to a planned safe zone to be established in northeast Syria along the border with Turkey, Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar said on Friday on broadcaster NTV. The U.S. special envoy for Syria held talks this week in Ankara. Turkey wants to set up a safe zone east of the Euphrates river after the majority of U.S. troops pull out of the country. (NYT) <https://nyti.ms/2GWXiuL>

#### 7. Turkey, Russia reviewing deployment in Syria's Tel Rifaat region: Turkish VP.

05.05.2019 Turkish and Russian officials are reviewing deployment of their forces in the Syrian border region of Tel Rifaat, Turkey’s Vice President Fuat Oktay said on Sunday, a day after cross-border fire from the area killed one Turkish soldier. Two separate attacks on Saturday by Kurdish militants from Tel Rifaat and northern Iraq killed a total of four Turkish soldiers and wounded two others, Turkey’s defense ministry said. (Reuters) <https://reut.rs/2WqsAwz>

### OPINION

#### Hard Truths in Syria. Brett McGurk

May-June 2019 Washington must accept some hard truths.

The first is that Assad is not going anywhere. A second, related truth is that the Arab states will now reengage with Damascus. The United States must also accept that Turkey, although a treaty ally, is not an effective partner. Finally, the United States must recognize that Russia is now the main power broker in Syria.

Given these hard truths, the United States will fail if it continues to pursue grand objectives in Syria. As the United States leaves, the SDF will need a new benefactor that can help it maintain its ability to hold northeastern Syria and protect it from Iran and Turkey. Unfortunately, the only viable candidate for this role is Russia. (Foreign Affairs) <https://fam.ag/2DCLclt>



(22-28 Apr 19)

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. Netanyahu says he'll put Trump's name on new Golan Heights settlement.

28.04.2019 Israel's prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Tuesday that he will name a new community on the Golan Heights after Donald Trump, as thanks for the U.S. president's decision this year to recognize Israel's sovereignty over the strategic plateau it won in a brief 1967 war with Syria. He said he will 'bring to the government a resolution' after the April 19-27 Passover holiday, 'calling for a new community on the Golan Heights named after President Donald J. Trump.' (DailyMail) <https://dailym.ai/2WcplbY>

#### 2. Israel frees two prisoners to Syria after Russian mediation.

28.04.2019 Israel released two prisoners on Sunday, sending them back to Syria in what Damascus described as Russian-mediated reciprocation for the repatriation of the body of a long-missing Israeli soldier. Russia, a key Damascus ally, this month handed Israel the remains and personal effects of Zachary Baumel, who was declared missing in action along with two other Israeli soldiers following a 1982 tank battle with Syrian forces in Lebanon. (Reuters) <https://reut.rs/2UHyal2>

#### 3. Full-scale assault on Syria's Idlib "not expedient", says Russia's Putin.

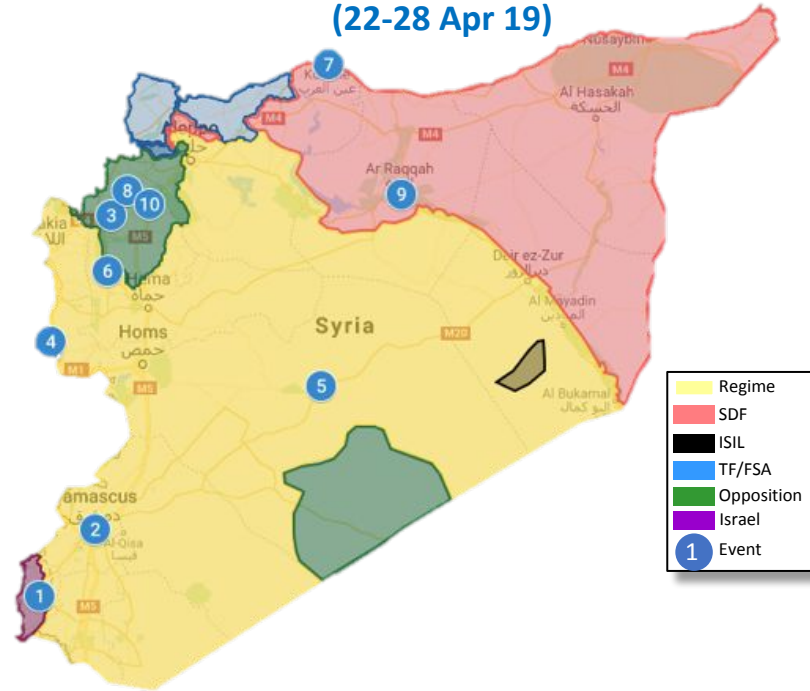
27.04.2019 A full-scale assault against militants in Syria's Idlib province "is not expedient now" and civilians' security needs to be taken into account, Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Saturday. Speaking in Beijing, Putin said Russia would work with the Syrian opposition to finalise the make-up of a constitutional committee, part of efforts to secure a political settlement of the conflict. Russia has helped forces loyal to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad take back most of the country in the eight-year-old war but fighting continues. (Reuters) <https://reut.rs/2PAU1ku>

#### 4. Syria signs 49-year contract for operation, overhaul of Tartus port with Russia's Sroytransgaz.

25.04.2019 The Syrian authorities have concluded a 49-year investment contract with Russian company Sroytransgaz for the expansion and operation of the port of Tartus, transport minister Ali Hamud said. A total of \$500 million (€449.5 million) will be invested in the reconstruction of the port, including the expansion of the port in the north and the construction of new infrastructure. (PortSEurope) <https://bit.ly/2DCOFm6>

#### 5. Iraqi Intelligence Official: Baghdadi is Hiding Near Palmyra, Planning to Enter Iraq.

28.04.2019 Notorious ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is currently hiding in the mountainous area of Abu Rujmayn southeast of the ancient Syrian city of Palmyra, an Iraqi intelligence official revealed on April 27, according to al-Khaleej. The Iraqi official said that al-Baghdadi, who is currently surrounded by few loyal fighters from Iraq, Tunisia and Saudi Arabia, is trying to enter Iraq. (SouthFront) <https://bit.ly/2Py0xc1>



### ASSESSMENT

- *In order to prevent a Turkish- US rapprochement to establish a safe zone in northern Syria, Russia will highly likely exploit Idlib issue and give a green light to Syrian Regime to commence a full scale operation in idlib.*
- *Tartus port contract between Syrian authorities and a Russian company reveals that Russia will dominate the upcoming reconstruction period of war torn Syria.*

#### 6. After the death of 5 civilians by the Russian bombardment last night, tens of ground and aerial strikes target Qal'aat al-Madiq since morning.

28.04.2019 The Syrian Observatory published hours ago that the heaviest escalation continues on its 8th consecutive day within areas of the dilapidated Russian –Turkish truce and the demilitarized area of Erdogan – Putin, where SOHR monitored 2 raids by the Russian warplanes on Sunday noon, targeted places in Qal'aat al-Madiq town in the northwestern countryside of Hama, while rocket shells launched by the factions this morning Fell on places in al-Suqaylabiyah town in the northwestern countryside of Hama. (SOHR) <https://bit.ly/2UMzCdt>

#### 7. U.S. and Turkey negotiate plan for their troops to jointly patrol safe zone in Syria.

25.04.2019 The United States and Turkey are negotiating a plan for their troops to jointly patrol a safe zone about 20 miles wide along Syria's northeastern border with Turkey, according to officials from both countries. The proposed arrangement, including withdrawal from the zone of Syrian Kurds, who have been crucial U.S. allies in the fight against the Islamic State, marks a step back from initial Trump administration hopes that coalition allies or local security would secure the area. (Washington Post) <https://wapo.st/2ULo2z0>

#### 8. Russia Says Time is Running Out For Syria's Lat Rebel Region As It Joins Iran and Turkey For Talks.

25.04.2019 Russia warned this week that it was growing impatient with the persistent presence of jihadis in the last Syrian province to be held by insurgents as it sat down with Turkey and Iran for talks. Vladimir Safronkov, Moscow's permanent Russian representative to the United Nations, warned a Security Council session Wednesday that militant groups such as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham—formerly Al-Qaeda's Nusra Front—remained active in Syria's northwestern province of Idlib despite Turkish assurances that they would be removed. (Newsweek) <http://bit.ly/2UM1cau>

#### 9. Amnesty Criticizes U.S.-Led Coalition's 'Indiscriminate' Actions In Raqqa.

26.04.2019 According to Amnesty International, the U.S.-led coalition's offensive against ISIS in Raqqa killed about 1,400 more civilians than the U.S. military has acknowledged. Amnesty produced names of more than 1,000 people reported killed from June to October 2017 in the northern Syrian city. The group says that it has directly verified 641 of those and that its researchers have "credible" reports of an additional 600. (NPR) <https://n.pr/2XSGFmy>

#### 10. Opinion: Can Russia deliver a deal for Idlib between Turkey, Syria?.

23.04.2019 The Syrian army considers assaults on the parts of Aleppo covered by the Idlib de escalation zone necessary because of civilian casualties it blames on terrorists' fire. The government ordered its forces — deployed north, southwest and northwest of the city — to stay on high alert. Reportedly, Assad sent reinforcements to the Aleppo front to maintain security in the area and, potentially, to enable a campaign against local radical groups. This campaign in the Aleppo region, heavily influenced by Iran and its associates, may have a limited scale and be carried out without Russia's participation. (Al-monitor) <https://bit.ly/2W9wbPz>



## SYRIA CRISIS WATCH

(15-21 Apr 19)

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. Media Claims Israel's New Missile May Outsmart Russia's S-300 in Syria.

20.04.2019 Israel's newest "Rampage" missiles are designed to outsmart the Russian S-300 air defence systems, deployed in Syria last October, and destroy highly protected targets like bunkers, Telepolis' journalist Florian Rötzer claims. In a Friday article, Rötzer cited Israeli media as reporting that the country's Air Force deployed the air-to-surface supersonic rocket for the first time a week ago, having allegedly destroyed a large hangar and three buildings in Syria's Hama Province. (Sputniknews) <http://bit.ly/2IKzRC>

#### 2. Islamic State attacks kill 27 Syria pro-regime fighters in 48 hours.

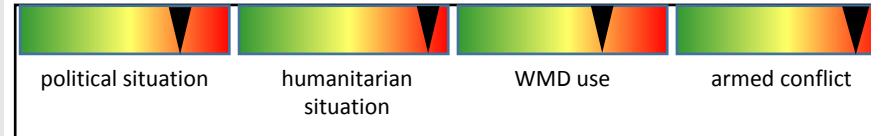
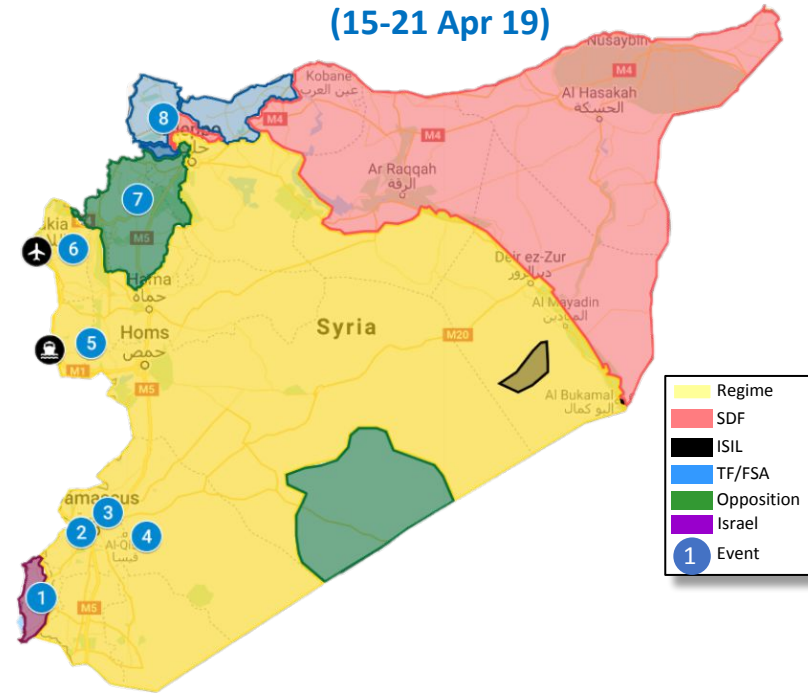
20.04.2019 Attacks by Islamic State group fighters deep in the Syrian Desert killed 27 Damascus troops and allied fighters over the past 48 hours, a monitoring group said on Saturday. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the dead included four senior Syrian army officer. (SOHR) <http://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=125062>

#### 3. Russia, Iran Compete For Control Over Syrian Regime Regions.

18.04.2019 The "cold war" between Russia and Iran in the Syrian regime area continues as military operations against opposition factions receded, after the restoration of Damascus Ghouta and Syrian southern, according to a report. (Al Awsat) <https://bit.ly/2ZhrYuW>

#### 4. Kazakhstan to host Syria talks with Iran, Turkey and Russia.

16.04.2019 Kazakhstan said it will host new talks on Syria, backed by Iran, Russia and Turkey in effort to put an end to the eight-year conflict that paralysed the country, media reports noted on Tuesday. Kazakhstan's foreign ministry confirmed in a statement that delegations from the Syrian regime as well armed opposition groups will take part in the meeting, scheduled for 25 and 26 April. (The New Arab) <http://bit.ly/2UsTWA>



### ASSESSMENT

- Recent Israeli missile strikes and air raids targeting Iranian and affiliated entities, militias and sites to include Hezbollah have not prompted Russia to activate S-300 air defence systems. The tension arising from this Russian inaction has further escalated covert competition between two parties to have more say over Syrian regime, extend their area of influence ahead of political process and reconstruction phase of the war-torn country.
- High level Iranian shuttle diplomacy between Syria and Turkey likely aims at finding a common between sides regarding problems awaiting solution ahead of upcoming Astana meeting. Those problems include inter alia YPG domination in eastern Euphrates, the situation in Idlib and the future of Turkish dominated areas in northern Syria.

#### 5. Moscow Close To Finalizing Deal To Lease Syria's Tartus Port For 49 Years.

21.04.2019 Syrian President Bashar al-Assad met senior Russian officials for talks in Damascus on April 20, with both countries' state media saying a deal was close to lease out Syria's Tartus port to Russia. Russia's Foreign Ministry said Assad met over two days with Moscow's special envoy to Syria, Aleksandr Lavrentiev; Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Vershinin; Deputy Prime Minister Yury Borisov; and several Defense Ministry officials. (RFE) <https://bit.ly/2UN16nX>

#### 6. Russia Is Trying To Fly Military Planes Into Venezuela Via Syria Again.

15.04.2019 Malta has refused a new Russian request to use its airspace to fly military aircraft from Syria to Venezuela this month, BuzzFeed News has learned. The move comes weeks after Malta, a member of the European Union, approved a similar Russian request, and Russian military planes and personnel were spotted on the airport tarmac in Venezuela's capital, Caracas, as the country continues to experience protests and political unrest. (BuzzFeed News) <https://bit.ly/2IAEQ1>

#### 7. The regime forces retaliate jihadi attacks within demilitarized zone.

20.04.2019 Attacks by the jihadi groups within "Putin – Erdogan" demilitarized zone killed 26 of the regime forces on Saturday. The latter, in retaliation, escalated their shelling within the areas of the Russian – Turkish truce, and the demilitarized zone, where they targeted by more than 40 missiles in the southern countryside of Idlib, targeted heavily by rocket shells, in the southern, eastern and south-eastern countryside of Idlib. (SOHR) <http://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=125107>

#### 8. Iran moves to facilitate Turkey-Syria understanding ahead of Astana summit.

18.04.2019 Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif paid an official visit to Turkey on April 17, following his visit to Syria the previous day. Although bilateral issues were a part of the agenda of Zarif's meetings in both countries, the timing of the trip and the content of his talks in Damascus and Ankara indicated that his diplomatic tour was, more than anything else, related to the international efforts to solve the Syrian crisis. (Al-monitor) <http://bit.ly/2VgDpnA>

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. Russian military leave key positions in northern Syria.

11.04.2019 The Russian military left Tel Rifaat, a key city in the Aleppo province in northern Syria, reports AL-Masdar News. The Russian military left the city after a week of joint maneuvers with the armed forces of Turkey. Despite the withdrawal of the Russian military, the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) refused to leave the village and strengthened its defense positions in the Tel Rifaat area. It is also reported that Turkey could not agree with Iran on the withdrawal of troops from the suburbs of Aleppo. (UAWire) <https://bit.ly/2Dd1IMZ>

#### 2. Putin and Erdogan to discuss fresh Syrian offensive in Moscow.

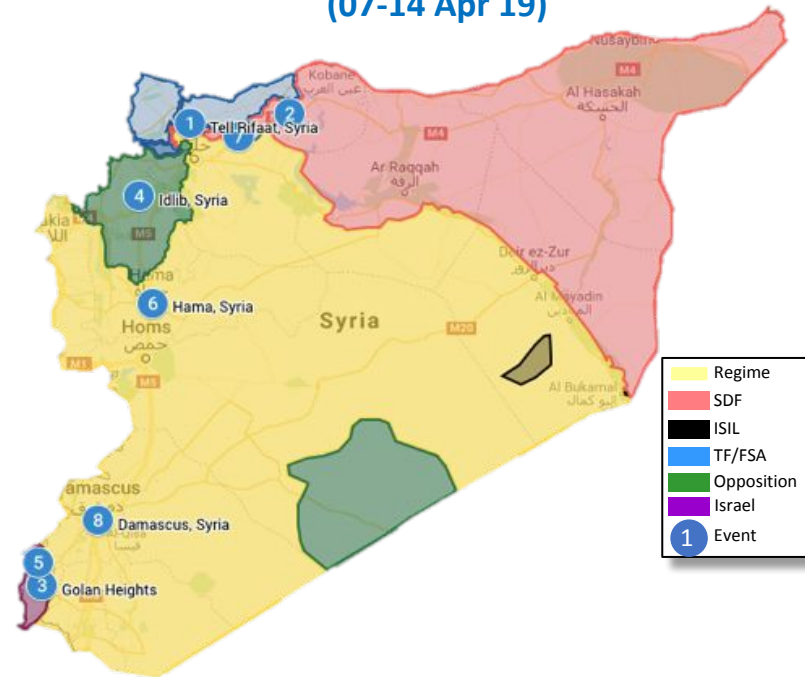
08.04.2019 Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said his army is ready to launch an offensive against Kurdish groups in northern Syria and that he will discuss the plans with Russian President Vladimir Putin. "Our preparations on the border are finished, everything is ready for an operation," Mr Erdogan told reporters before flying to Moscow on Monday morning. "We can begin it at any moment." The Turkish president's comments came ahead of his third meeting with Mr Putin this year. (The National) <https://bit.ly/2Ii7pth>

#### 3. US decision on Golan Heights violates UN Security Council resolutions – Putin.

08.04.2019 The US' decision to recognize Tel Aviv's sovereignty over the Israeli-occupied Syrian Golan Heights region violates UN Security Council resolutions – a position that Moscow has already made clear, Russia's president said. Following a meeting between Vladimir Putin and his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Moscow on Monday, the Russian leader stated that it's been presented in a statement by Russia's Foreign Ministry. The [US] move violates respective UN Security Council resolutions,". (RT) <http://bit.ly/2UkArtT>

#### 4. Russian Air Force unleashes largest attack of the year on Idlib.

15.04.2019 The Russian Air Force pounded the Idlib Governorate with over 30 airstrikes last month, mostly targeting the areas controlled by the jihadist rebels of Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham. According to a military source in the nearby Latakia Governorate, the Russian Air Force repeatedly struck Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham's positions along the Idlib-Hama Highway. Over the last 24 hours, the Russian Air Force has launched airstrikes inside the Idlib, Homs, and Deir Ezzor governorates. (AMN) <https://bit.ly/2X9pNrq>



### ASSESSMENT

- *In accordance to our earlier assessment, Trump's Galon Height decision was a bolster to Netanyahu and it looks like to be a success as Netanyahu is the forerunner according to the election results despite curicial corruption allegations about him.*
- *Russia might support Turkey in a possible operation in Northern Syria, aiming to pull Turkey much more to its side. A possible operation supported by Russia will surely further strain the relations between Turkey and the USA. Erdogan, on the other hand, can use this opportunity to increase his internal popular support, reinforce his "We are at war" rhetoric and create a rally around the flag effect.*

#### 5. Russia, Turkey, Iran back Syrian territorial integrity.

10.04.2019 Lawmakers from Russia, Iran and Turkey are calling for Syria's territorial integrity to be preserved as remarks from Israel and the United States have renewed long-standing land disputes. The legislators from parliament foreign affairs committees met Wednesday in Moscow for a special session on Syria. Russian state news agency RIA-Novosti quoted Iranian parliament member Heshmatollah Falahatpishe as saying the discussion "was a good beginning." Falahatpishe continued: "We confirmed the necessity of preserving the territorial integrity of Syria, especially regarding the Golan Heights." (Dailymail) <https://dailym.ai/2IDWolt>

#### 6. Israel attacks Syrian Masyaf despite Russian S-300 anti-aircraft systems.

13.04.2019 Early morning on Saturday, April 13, the Israeli air force flew low over the southern Lebanese city of Sidon. According to the Lebanese news agency NNA, the flight was accompanied by a strong roar and frightened the sleeping population of the city. This happened after, according to the Syrian agency SANA, Israeli aircraft fired rockets at a military base near the city of Masyaf in the province of Hama. While hitting the targets in Syria, the Israeli military aircraft had been in Lebanese airspace. (UAWire) <http://bit.ly/2IpxRBl>

#### 7. Turkey's Erdogan to Discuss Possible Operation in Syria With Putin: RIA.

08.04.2019 Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said he planned to discuss a possible Turkish military operation in Syria when he visits Moscow for talks with President Vladimir Putin on Monday, Russia's RIA news agency reported. "Our preparations on the border are finished, everything is ready for an operation. We can begin it at any moment. I will discuss this issue among others face-to-face (with Putin) on my visit to Russia," Erdogan was cited as saying. (NYTimes) <https://nyti.ms/2Z7BVex>

### OPINION

#### 8. How America's relationship with Turkey fell apart.

11.04.2019 The US and Turkey have quarreled over the Kurds, a Middle Eastern ethnic group, in years past. But the conflict in Syria showed that the disagreement persists — and remains deadly. Trump has said that he wants to withdraw US troops from Syria, but his advisers warned that Turkey would likely launch a full-scale invasion to rid the Kurds from northern Syria. Washington, then, seeks Ankara's guarantee that it won't attack America's allies there if US troops come home. Without a guarantee for the Kurds' safety, and to fight off any ISIS remnants, Trump has reportedly decided to keep around 1,000 troops in Syria. (Vox) <https://bit.ly/2ItIeqT>

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. Russia's Lavrov calls for closure of Syria camp near US base.

01.04.2019 Russia's top diplomat called Sunday for the immediate closure of a desert camp near Syria's border with Jordan housing tens of thousands of displaced people in dire conditions. "According to UN observers who visited the camp, most of the displaced people there want to return home, including to territories controlled by the Syrian government," Lavrov said. (Mail Online) <https://dailym.ai/2KhK24S>

#### 2. Israel's Netanyahu says plans to annex settlements in West Bank if re-elected.

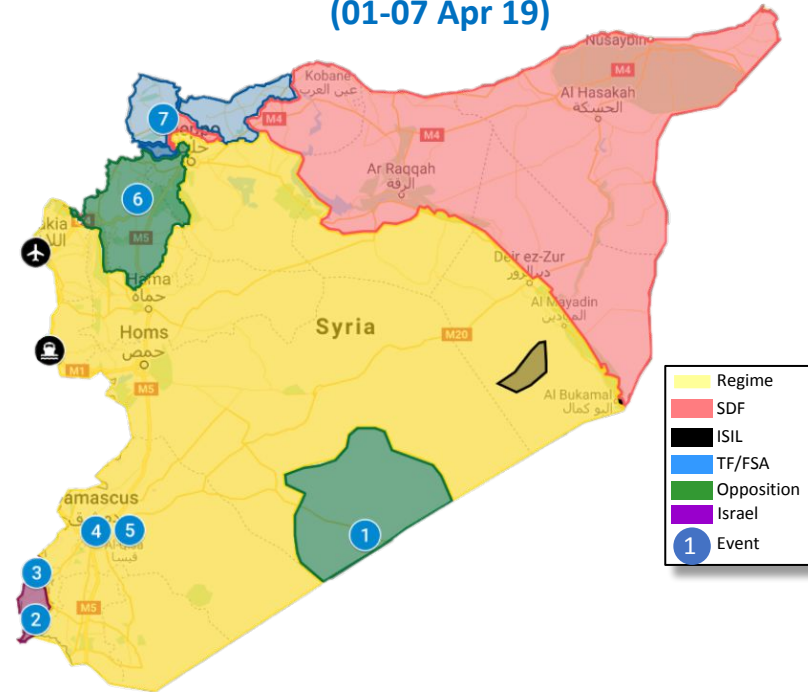
06.04.2019 Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Saturday that he would annex Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank if he wins another term in office, a last-minute pre-election promise likely to enrage Palestinians and the Arab world. (NYTimes) <https://nyti.ms/2Inv6zg>

#### 3. Syria vows to recapture Golan from Israel 'by all means'.

07.04.2019 As protests against US recognition of Israeli sovereignty continue across war-torn country, FM Muallem promises to 'liberate every inch' of its territories. Syria will not shy away from using force to reconquer "every inch" of the Golan Heights, the country's foreign minister threatened Thursday. (Times of Israel) <http://bit.ly/2Kcgu8F>

#### 4. Joint Statement on Syria.

05.04.2019 Two years on from the horrific chemical weapons attacks that took place in Khan Sheikhoun, and almost one year since the attack in Douma, we the United States, United Kingdom and France warn against, and remain firm in our resolve to respond appropriately to, any use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime. The regime's history of repeatedly using chemical weapons against its own people cannot be disputed, and we remain determined to hold it accountable for indiscriminately killing innocent men, women and children with these heinous weapons. These attacks violate international norms, have caused extreme suffering, and contributed to a worsening of the already acute humanitarian crisis in Syria. (U.S. Department of State) <https://bit.ly/2FVl7tK>



### ASSESSMENT

- *Golan Heights issue continues to draw attention of the international community and will likely to go on along similar lines till the end of the Israeli elections. While Israeli politicians exploit the situation to gain domestic support in elections, Syrian Regime seeks to gain national and international support for her territorial unity.*
- *Joint statement by the U.S., U.K. and France concerning the use of chemical weapons, likely aim to give a clear message to Syrian Regime and its backers that they will not be tolerated anymore for chemical use in a possible operation targeting Idlib.*

#### 5. Syrian Coalition demands regime accountability for chemical attack on Khan Sheikhoun.

05.04.2019 On the second anniversary of the chemical weapons attack on Khan Sheikhoun, the Syrian National Coalition has called for justice and for the case to be sent to the International Criminal Court. The Syrian Coalition stressed the importance of holding accountable the Assad regime and all those responsible for war crimes in Syria, in order to prevent impunity on the second anniversary of the chemical weapons attack on Khan Sheikhoun. (Syrian Observer) <https://bit.ly/2WWGtm5>

#### 6. Fire exchange between Syrian Regime, rebels leaves 15 dead.

07.04.2019 The fire exchange between the Syrian regime and rebels in northwestern Syria on Sunday resulted in the killing of 15 people in the area, reports said. The recent attacks in the region have violated a Russian-Turkish ceasefire deal which was signed only seven months ago. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights revealed that 45 people had been killed in the last five days alone, most of them by government's shelling of rebel-held areas, as cited by Reuters. (Basnews) <https://bit.ly/2OTkCZZ>

#### 7. U.S., Turkey intensify war of words over Syria, Russian missiles.

05.04.2019 A war of words between NATO allies the United States and Turkey has intensified, with the sides disputing the readout of a meeting of the countries' foreign ministers regarding Syria. The State Department said Pompeo had warned Ankara of "potentially devastating consequences" if Ankara were to launch an offensive in Syria and urged the "swift resolution" of legal cases involving "unjustly detained U.S. citizens" in Turkey. (RFL/RL) <https://bit.ly/2FYT4ON>

### OPINION

#### Putin plays Syria card in Israeli and Turkish elections.

05.04.2019 Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, with less than a week remaining in the highest stakes election of his career, took one of his few remaining precious campaign days to visit Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow, and it appeared to pay off for both leaders. "After he milked the March 25 celebration with President Donald Trump in the White House, Netanyahu is looking toward Putin, who is still venerated by many former Soviet Union citizens who moved to Israel," writes Ben Caspit. (Al-Monitor) <https://bit.ly/2YRZuI9>

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. Trump Signs Decree Recognizing Israeli Sovereignty Over Syrian Golan.

26.03.2019 U.S. US President Donald Trump, Monday evening, signed a decree recognizing Israel's sovereignty on the Syrian Golan Heights, occupied by Israel since 1967. This came following a joint press conference with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, at the White House, in Washington, DC, Wafa reports. (IMEMCNews) <https://goo.gl/F8eANW>

#### 2. EU rejects US recognition of Israeli control over Golan.

27.03.2019 The European Union says it will not recognize Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights. The EU Foreign Affairs Department said in a statement Wednesday that it was the "unanimous position" of all 28 member states not to change their stance in line with U.N. resolutions that identify the Golan Heights as occupied territory and reject the seizure of land by force. (Washington Post) <https://goo.gl/9yWduw>

#### 3. Russia, Turkey Stress Importance of Forming Syria Constitutional Committee.

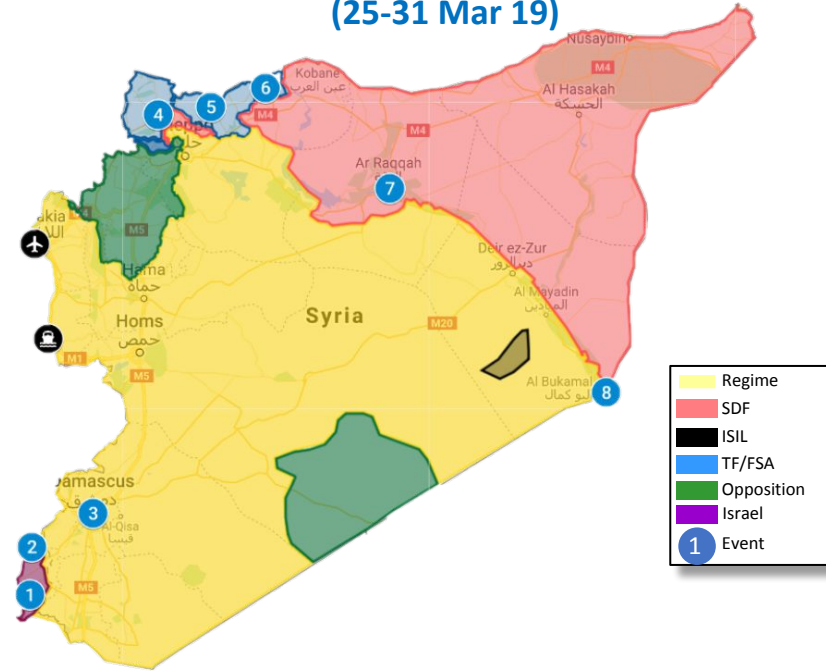
30.03.2019 Moscow and Ankara have agreed to step up work to establish Syria's Constitutional Committee, and have renewed their commitment to implement the Sochi deal on establishing a demilitarized zone in the northwestern province of Idlib. Russian FM Sergei Lavrov revealed that the Syrian regime and the opposition have agreed on some names for the Constitutional Committee. (Al Awsat) <https://goo.gl/HeVTz5>

#### 4. Turkey opens military operation control center in eastern Syria.

31.03.2019 Turkish Minister of Defense, Hulusi Akar, and the head of the military department took part in the opening of the Joint Operational Center for the management of the planned "anti-terrorist operation" in Syria's territory, located east of the Euphrates River, reports Anadolu. (UAWire) <https://goo.gl/JmZCvM>

#### 5. Turkey to solve Syria issue on the field after polls: Erdoğan.

30.03.2019 Turkey's president said that they will "definitely" solve Syria issue on the field after the local elections in Turkey. Erdoğan said that those who wish to close Turkey's southern borders with a terror corridor will never find a chance to do that. (Hurriyet Daily News) <https://goo.gl/RqvshW>



### ASSESSMENT

- Lacking military capacity to confront Israel, Syrian Regime will likely bring the issue of Golan Heights to the attention/action of the United Nations Security Council. Having garnered broad international support to include that of Russia and China, Syria will likely spearhead an action against Trump's decree recognizing Israel's sovereignty of Golan Heights. This is crucial in that such decision can constitute a start for newer conflicts in the Middle East and such role has the potential to make Assad legitimate again in the eyes of other Middle Eastern societies.
- Possible Turkish operations in Northern Syria will aim to alter deteriorating perception of ruling party among Turkish Society as became evident in local elections yesterday. Such move will likely reinforce Erdogan's "We are at war" rhetoric and create a rally around the flag effect.

#### 6. SDF General Commander: 'Decision to Liberate Afrin by Force Has Been Made'.

30.03.2019 General Commander of the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) said on March 28 that the group had taken the decision to liberate the area of Afrin from the Turkish military and its proxies by force. (South Front) <https://goo.gl/Z6GmFX>

#### 7. Briefing With Special Representative for Syria Engagement and Special Envoy for the Global Coalition To Defeat ISIS Ambassador James Jeffrey.

25.03.2019 This is not the end of the fight against ISIS. That will go on, but it will be a different kind of fight. ISIS has lost much of its capability to project terrorist power and to have a recruiting base in an area that it controls, so it's a very, very important development.

The U.S. policy in Syria is to ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS. Secondly, to ensure a political process that will give us a different kind of government that will encourage people to come back and be a decent player in the international arena, unlike what we've seen from Syria in the last eight years. And then thirdly, the removal of all Iranian-commanded forces from the entirety of Syria. (U.S. Department of State) <https://bit.ly/2WoGxL2>

#### 8. U.S.-backed forces declare end of ISIS 'caliphate'.

25.03.2019 U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces said March 23 the Islamic State had been defeated in Baghouz, Syria, marking the end of the militant group's self-declared "caliphate." (The Washington Post) <https://goo.gl/kPUqTH>

### OPINION

#### Trump's only reasonable choice in Syria.

29.03.2019 A permanent ground force in Syria is not necessary for American security, and it puts U.S. troops needlessly in harm's way. This degree of escalation would only make great power conflict with Russia or regional war with Iran more likely.

The only reasonable course is to move forward with the complete withdrawal of U.S. forces from Syria that Trump promised in December. (The Hill) <https://bit.ly/2U4QFf6>

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. In major shift, Trump says time for U.S. to recognize Israeli sovereignty over Golan”.

21.03.2019 U.S. President Donald Trump said on Thursday it was time to recognize Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights that Israel seized from Syria in 1967, marking a dramatic shift in U.S. policy and giving a boost to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the middle of his re-election campaign. “After 52 years it is time for the United States to fully recognize Israel’s Sovereignty over the Golan Heights, which is of critical strategic and security importance to the State of Israel and Regional Stability!” Trump wrote on Twitter. (Reuters) <https://goo.gl/zYdNtY>

#### 2. Russia, Iran and Syria slam Trump's Golan Heights comments.

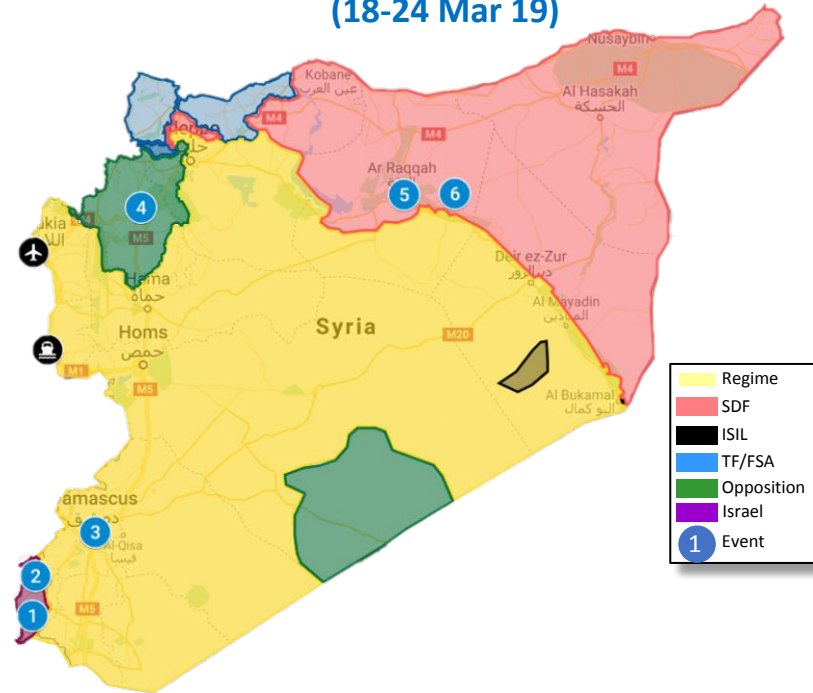
22.03.2019 Europe alongside Russia, Syria and Iran warned against any unilateral moves. A host of countries on Friday criticized President Donald Trump's announcement that the United States intends to unilaterally recognize Israeli sovereignty over the occupied-Golan Heights. (DW) <https://goo.gl/4MTLhv>

#### 3. Russian Defence Minister Travels to Damascus to Deliver Putin Message to Assad.

20.03.2019 Russia's Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu landed in Syria on Wednesday to deliver a message to Syria's president from Vladimir Putin, according to media reports. Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu and Bashar al-Assad discussed issues “related to fighting international terrorism along with various aspects of Mideast security and post-conflict settlement”. (The New Arab) <https://goo.gl/ncgQC7>

#### 4. Russian airstrikes kill 5 civilians in Syria's Idlib.

21.03.2019 Five civilians were killed and five others injured in overnight airstrikes in Syria's northwestern Idlib province, according to sources with the White Helmets civil defense agency. According to a pro-opposition warplane observatory, the attacks were carried out by six Russian warplanes that took off from Khmeimim airbase in the country's western Latakia province. (AA) <https://goo.gl/JEJUdM>



### ASSESSMENT

- *Despite growing numbers of international opposition against the U.S. statements concerning the annexation of Golan Heights by Israel, Trump continues to add fuel to the flame. In line with the previous Jerusalem decision taken by Trump, Golan issue will likely end up in the same way.*
- *Latest visit by the Russian Defence Minister to Syria is likely aiming to give a clear political message to the U.S. and its allies that Russia will continue its support to Syrian Regime as the tension increases due to Golan issue. High level visits may continue in the upcoming days.*

#### 6. Syrian Regime Threatens US-backed Kurdish Forces.

18.03.2019 The Syrian regime has threatened the US-backed Kurdish forces with military defeat if the Washington's Kurdish allies did not agree to a return of a state authority. President of the Syrian regime Bashar al-Assad is reportedly seeking the retake of the two major territories, which are currently controlled by the Syrian Kurdish forces, after the Islamic State (IS) is fully defeated in the country. (Basnews) <https://goo.gl/tiGg6x>

#### 7. Amendments to the Terrorist Designations of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.

21.03.2019 The Department of State has amended the terrorist designations of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) to include Amaq News Agency, Al Hayat Media Center, and other aliases. (U.S. Department of State) <https://bit.ly/2TVz7SR>

### OPINIONS

#### 1. Collision Avoidance: The Lessons of U.S. and Russian Operations in Syria.

20.03.2019 Since the beginning of Russia's intervention in September 2015, the war in Syria has been a major potential flashpoint in the increasingly adversarial U.S.-Russian relationship. To mitigate the risk, senior U.S. defense officials have prioritized practical mechanisms to deconflict U.S.-Russian military activities and to limit the threat of inadvertent escalation or confrontation. Key regional players like Israel and Turkey have created similar deconfliction procedures. Nevertheless, Syria's crowded battlefield has witnessed a number of deadly incidents and near-misses, including the inadvertent downing of a Russian Il-20 military intelligence collection aircraft by the Syrian military in September 2018 and a brazen assault by Russian private military contractors on an outpost manned by U.S. special operations forces in February 2018. (Carnegie) <https://goo.gl/Lj1gsN>

#### 2. Russia seeks to hold reluctant Turkey accountable in Syria.

20.03.2019 Turkey, which is badly pressed to fulfill the commitments it made to Russia during the Sochi negotiations on Syria, and to the local opposition to the Syrian regime, which it promised to protect at Idlib, is now trying to find a way to extricate itself from being stuck between Russia and the Syrian rebels. When Turkey's campaign to create a buffer zone east of the Euphrates River did not work out, Russia succeeded in dragging Turkey back to the Idlib agenda. On March 3-4, Russia and Turkey signed a new accord to follow up on the issues discussed during the Iran, Russia and Turkey summit Feb. 14 in Sochi. (Al Monitor) <https://goo.gl/6LBspq>

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. For First Time U.S. Refers to Golan Heights as “Under Israeli Control”.

14.03.2019 The United States referred to the Golan Heights as an area “under Israeli control,” instead of “occupied territory,” for the first time in its latest annual human rights report, published on Wednesday by the State Department, Axios reported. Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) visited the Golan Heights on Monday with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and vowed to “start an effort to recognize the Golan as part of the State of Israel.” (The Tower) <https://goo.gl/SZvww6>

#### 2. Russia returned the SU-25 attack aircraft to Syria.

15.03.2019 The Russian Armed Forces again deployed Sukhoi SU-25 attack aircraft to Syria after a year’s interval. Images from civilian satellite company ImageSat International released a new photo showed returned SU-25 attack aircraft at Khmeimim air base in Syria. (Defence Blog) <https://goo.gl/rFbub2>

#### 3. As IS Fight Nears End, Violence Flares on Other Syrian Front.

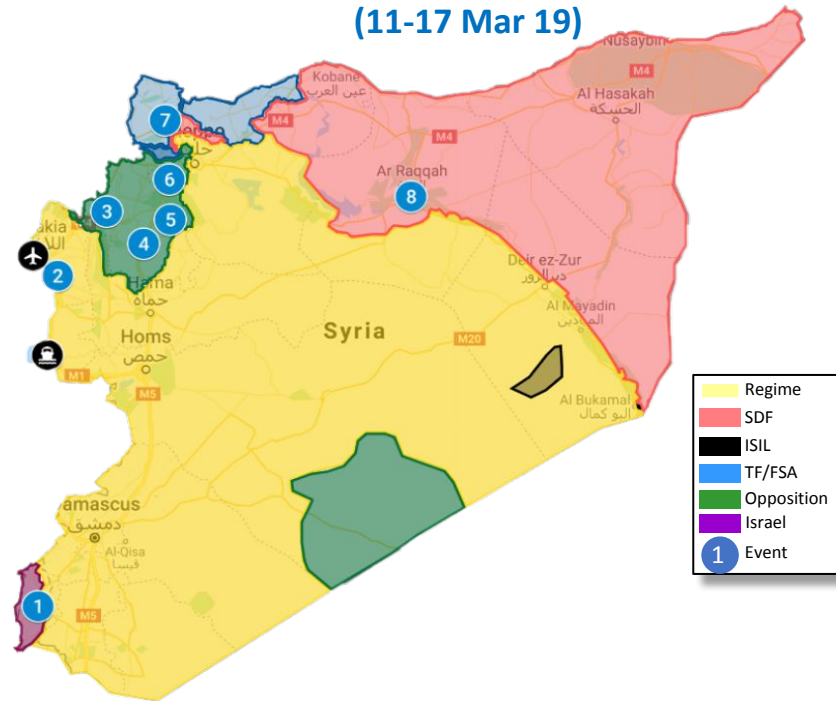
12.03.2019 The U.S. deputy ambassador at the United Nations, Jonathan Cohen, last month expressed American concern over the increase in government airstrikes and other violence in Idlib. (The New York Times) <https://goo.gl/dTdTth>

#### 4. Escalation of Attacks Against Idlib, Syria.

14.03.2019 The United States views with grave concern escalating violence in recent days in Idlib and neighboring areas prompted by Russian and Assad regime airstrikes and artillery. Despite Russia’s claims to be targeting terrorists, these operations have caused dozens of civilian casualties and have targeted first responders as they attempt to save lives on the ground. (U.S. Department of State) <https://bit.ly/2Ten8KE>

#### 5. Russia restarts bombing campaign over rebel-held Syrian city of Idlib.

15.03.2019 Russian jets have bombed the last-remaining Syrian rebel stronghold, threatening a ceasefire reached to prevent a humanitarian disaster. (The Telegraph) <https://goo.gl/zSE2AU>



### ASSESSMENT

- Increasing numbers of attacks targeting Idlib together with the redeployment of SU-25s could be seen as a strong indication of an intensive operation backed by Russia despite Russian-Turkish agreement and the U.S. opposition.
- The U.S. statements concerning the annexation of Golan Heights by Israel are likely aiming both to exploit the Achilles’ heel of the Syrian Regime and to seek support from Jewish community as presidential elections approach.

#### 6. Turkish columns head to observation posts in the triangle of Idlib – Latakia – north-west of Hama.

17.03.2019 Turkish military column entered from Kherbet Eljoz in the northern countryside of Idlib, and headed to the Turkish observation post in Eshtabraq in Jisr Al-Shughur countryside, then to the Turkish posts in Sahl Al-Ghab with the purpose of monitoring the demilitarized areas. (SOHR) <https://goo.gl/tVxiPH>

#### 7. U.S. sees Turkish offensive in Syria as unnecessary - U.S. official.

13.03.2019 The United States is not discussing a Turkish offensive in northeast Syria with Turkey and believes no such operation is needed to address Ankara’s security concerns, a U.S. official told Reuters on Wednesday, dismissing media reports to the contrary. (Reuters) <https://goo.gl/a4bkmY>

#### 8. Joint Statement on the Eighth Anniversary of the Syrian Conflict.

15.03.2019 Eight years ago today, tens of thousands of Syrians took to the streets to claim the right to express themselves freely, call for reform, and demand justice. The Assad regime’s brutal response, and role in the conflict that followed, resulted in the largest humanitarian crisis since World War II. The statement was released by the Governments of the United States of America, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom. (U.S. Department of State) <https://bit.ly/2VZIOJQ>

### OPINION

#### Escalating violence in Syria’s Idlib threatens truce reached by Turkey, Russia.

13.03.2019 The alarming violence in the Idlib region threatens to unravel a truce reached between Turkey and Russia last year that averted a bloody assault by the government to retake the province, the last major rebel stronghold in war-torn Syria, The Associated Press reported. The escalation raises fears once more of a major assault by the forces of President Bashar al-Assad. Idlib has been in the hands of opposition forces for years, even as Assad’s military has succeeded in retaking other rebel enclaves one after the other. The province is now home to some 3 million people, many of them displaced from other former opposition territory. Earlier this year, al-Qaeda-linked militants took over the province, squeezing out most other factions after clashes with Turkey-backed opposition fighters. (TM) <https://goo.gl/BMnUkI>

## SYRIA CRISIS WATCH

(04-10 Mar 19)

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. US, Russia military chiefs discuss Syria.

04.03.2019 The chiefs of the US and Russian militaries met in Austria on Monday to discuss the situation in Syria, where a residual US military force will remain following the territorial defeat of the Islamic State group. General Joseph Dunford, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, met with General Valery Gerasimov, the chief of the Russian General Staff, in Vienna, Dunford's spokesman Colonel Pat Ryder said. (Mail Online) <https://goo.gl/68DCCa>

#### 2. Armies of Turkey, Russia patrol around Syria's Idlib.

08.03.2019 Turkey and Russia began joint patrols in and around the northwestern Syrian city of Idlib on Friday under a deal reached last fall between the two countries. The patrols will stretch from northern Idlib city to southern Aleppo, Turkey's Defence Minister Hulusi Akar said. Maintaining the ceasefire in Idlib is a significant step for securing stability in Syria, he added. (TRT World) <https://goo.gl/6etaAv>

#### 3. Russian airstrikes pound Syria's Idlib, despite ceasefire agreement with Turkey.

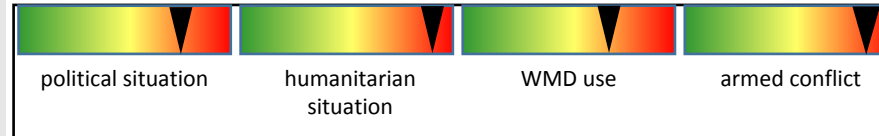
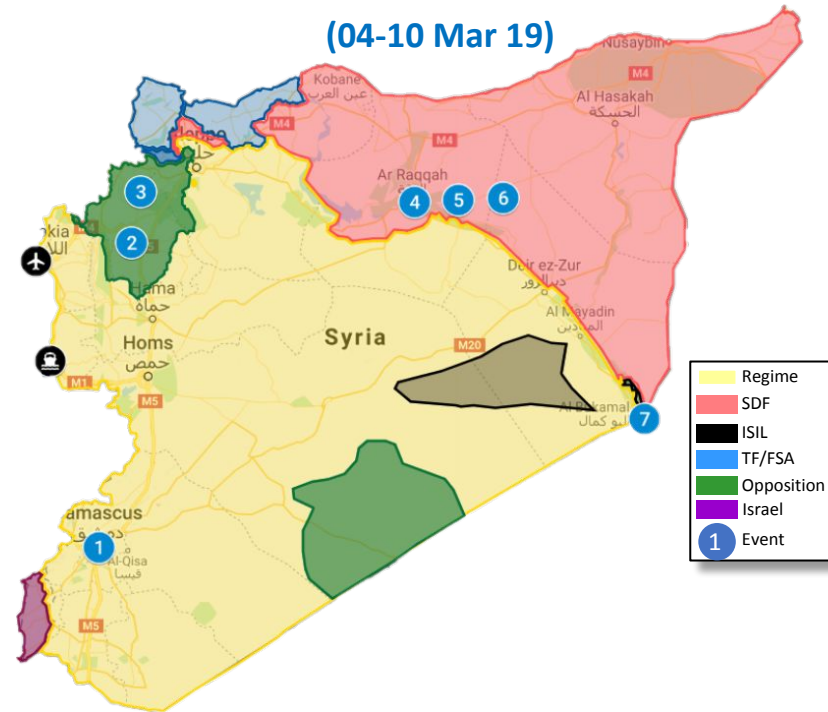
10.03.2019 Russian airstrikes hit Syria's Idlib on Saturday, despite reportedly reaching an agreement with Turkey hours earlier to reinforce a ceasefire across the opposition province. Syria's White Helmets reported that at least two people died, including a rescue worker, following a double tap bombing on al-Muntar in Idlib. (The New Arab) <https://goo.gl/4mnGwo>

#### 4. US shifts weapons from Iraq to Syria.

04.03.2019 The Pentagon rerouted millions of dollars' worth of weapons and vehicles from Iraq to Syria in the second half of 2018, Al-Monitor has learned, as US-backed forces cornered the last remnants of the Islamic State (IS). (Al Monitor) <https://bit.ly/2Hev1gR>

#### 5. Support for Germany's Request for Lebanon to Extradite Syrian General Jamil Hassan.

05.03.2019 The United States continuously seeks to shed light on abuses committed by the Assad regime, including its use of torture, and calls for the regime to allow for unhindered access of independent monitoring organizations to detention centers. (U.S. Department of State) <https://bit.ly/2VUiFvN>



### ASSESSMENT

- Although reaching an agreement with Turkey on Idlib, Russia, with the latest airstrikes, is likely aiming to show its determination that it will not tolerate Turkey anymore for any kind of delay or discrepancy.
- Trump seems to be convinced by his security advisers on the necessity of the U.S. military presence in Syria or his latest statement is a mandatory disclosure to persuade its European and Middle Eastern allies who are unwilling to provide military support for the planned multinational peace force that would perform in northeastern Syria.

#### 6. Trump says he agrees '100%' with keeping U.S. troops in Syria.

05.03.2019 Two months after declaring all U.S. troops are leaving Syria, President Donald Trump wrote to members of Congress that he now agrees "100%" with keeping a military presence in Syria. (NBC News) <https://nbcnews.to/2Hdph70>

#### 7. Victory Over Islamic State Remnants Proves Elusive.

08.03.2019 Since SDF officials estimated in late February that no more than 1,000 people remained in the bombed-out farming community on the banks of the Euphrates River, the Pentagon estimates about 20,000 people have fled. Separately, the International Rescue Committee warned Friday the al-Hol displaced-persons camp was being pushed to a "breaking point" by the exodus from Baghuz, with 12,000 people arriving in just a 48-hour period, pushing the camp's population to more than 65,000. (VOA) <https://goo.gl/1qwkAW>

### OPINIONS

#### 1. Russia and Iran: Economic Influence in Syria.

08.03.2019 Russia and Iran, the two main military allies and enablers of the Syrian regime, are engaged in competition over access to the Syrian economy, with a particular focus on opportunities to obtain reconstruction contracts. In addition to lines of credit and the supply of vital strategic products, Russia and Iran are pursuing a larger role in the Syrian economy by agreeing investment contracts for their major companies and conglomerates. Moscow and Tehran seek partial compensation for their military interventions in Syria, and both adopt an opportunity-based approach to the Syrian market. Russia demands unconditional international support for the reconstruction of Syria to stabilize the security of the country and to allow the return of refugees. (Chatham House) <https://goo.gl/Dk78Ja>

#### 2. Accountability for the Syrian Regime: An Overview.

05.03.2019 Despite the latest political and military developments in Syria in favour of Assad, the European Union and the U.S. are still working to hold the Syrian government accountable. In fact, over the past six months, significant progress has been made in the direction of justice and accountability for the crimes committed by the Syrian regime and actors that support it. This post provides an overview of the most recent efforts—through domestic national proceedings and sanctions—of holding individuals and corporate actors accountable for those crimes. (Lawfare) <https://goo.gl/EQF9VA>

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. Netanyahu tells Putin that Israel is determined to continue attacks against Iran in Syria.

28.02.2019 Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow. At the meeting in the Kremlin, the Israeli Prime Minister said that Israel "is determined to continue attacks against Iran and its attempts to entrench military in Syria." According to Netanyahu, Iran and its allies are the biggest threat to the security of the region. Netanyahu visited Moscow for the first time after the incident with the Russian Il-20 military aircraft in Syria in September 2018 (UAWire) <https://goo.gl/1XL2RP>

#### 2. Russia: No Plan for Joint Operations in Syria.

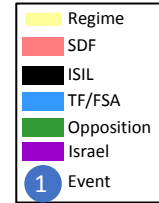
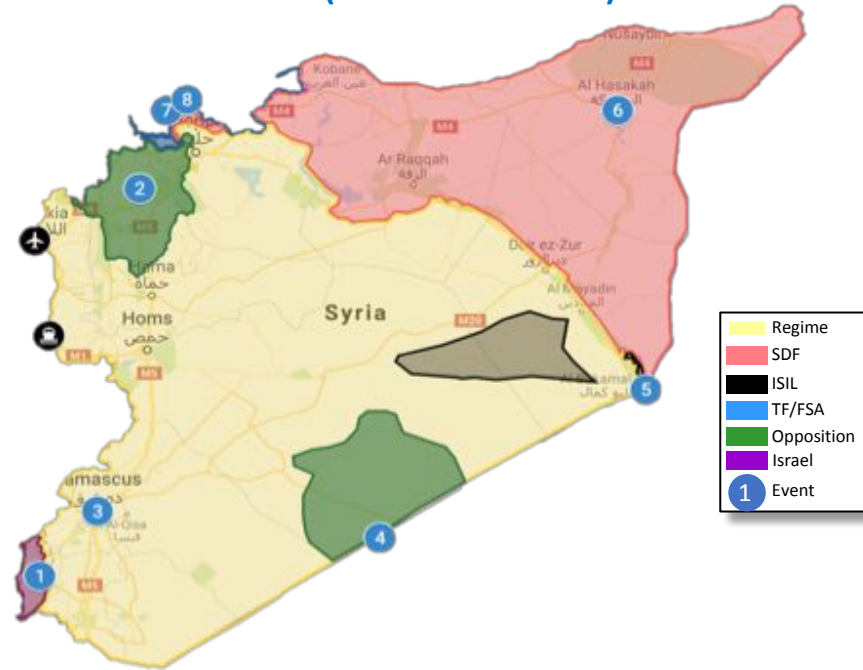
25.02.2019 Moscow, Tehran and Ankara have no plans to carry out joint military operations in Syria, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said in an interview with Vietnam's national broadcaster Vietnam Television, China's CCTV and Phoenix TV. "We don't plan to carry out any military operations in Syria that would involve Russia, Turkey and Iran," Lavrov was quoted as saying by TASS news agency on Sunday. (Financial Tribune) <https://goo.gl/xQ99kA>

#### 3. Russia tells Syrian asylum seekers: You need to go home.

28.02.2019 In pre-war Syria, Safaa Al-Kurdi sold wedding dresses. Fed up with the conflict, the mother-of-three fled Damascus four years ago and sought asylum in Moscow. Now, Russia is saying she must go home. According to the U.N. refugee agency, nearly 5.5 million Syrians have fled a war that has raged over seven years. In 2015, when Moscow launched a military operation in Syria, Russia granted temporary asylum to 1,924 Syrians. (Reuters) <https://goo.gl/7T22im>

#### 4. US denies Russia-protected buses access to Syria's Rukban camp to evacuate refugees.

02.03.2019 The US has rejected a joint request by Moscow and Damascus to let them evacuate refugees stranded in the Rukban camp within the US-controlled zone in Syria to areas under Damascus' control, the Russian military said. The first column of buses accompanied by Russian military police set off for the camp on Friday. They were supposed to enter through one of the two mobile checkpoints opened by the Russian and Syrian forces last month and ferry the refugees to other parts of Syria for permanent resettlement. (RT) <https://goo.gl/YYP56n>



### ASSESSMENT

- While the U.S. intensifies its efforts to convince its European partners to build up a coalition force for the proposed safe zone along the Turkey's border, Russia and Turkey insist on to be in charge for the control of the area. It is highly likely that a safe zone along the Turkey's border will be established as the main discussion continues on who will be in charge rather than its necessity.
- Trump's declaration vs reports from ground related with ISIS's defeat is another indication that Trump himself would like to withdraw U.S. soldiers from Syria contrary to U.S. top officials' assessments.

#### 5. Trump Declares ISIS '100%' Defeated in Syria. '100% Not True,' Ground Reports Say.

28.02.2019 President Trump declared on Thursday that "we just took over 100 percent" of territory controlled by the Islamic State in Syria — a claim that reports from the battlefield suggested was 100 per cent untrue. The battle was continuing on Thursday when officials with the Syrian Democratic Forces, an American-backed militia of Kurdish and Arab fighters, were told of Mr. Trump's announcement. SDF officials said that fighters were about a week away from declaring victory, with the caveat that the delicate situation could change (The New York Times) <https://goo.gl/D8DrDw>

#### 6. By clan mediation, SDF and Asayish release about 283 former ISIS members from their jails and prisons.

02.03.2019 The number of former fighters of ISIS who were detained in previous periods rose to 283 by 2 March 2019. Those were detained in prisons of SDF and Asayish in al-Hasakah city, Ayn Issa area, and other areas east of Euphrates and were released after tribal mediation. (SOHR) <https://goo.gl/dTM5k8>

#### 7. Cavusoglu: Turkey Coordinates With Russia, US Details of Future Syrian Safe Zone.

25.02.2019 Turkey continues to coordinate with Russia, the United States and Iran the details of the prospective safe zone on the border with Syria, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu told Sputnik. "We're working on it. We haven't decided yet on its size. We're working with Russia, with the US, and with Astana partners. Our technical teams met several times. We appreciate that Russia understands Turkey's security concerns, as partner and ally. So we are working on it", the minister said. According to him, Turkey will control the future safe zone, but Ankara will continue to work with the Russian military on the issue. "It is just outside our border, so it should be led by Turkey. But we have been always working with Russia, and we will continue, including Russian security and military people," Cavusoglu added. (SputnikNews) <https://goo.gl/pozHsV>

#### 8. Policy Analysis; A Turkish 'Safe Zone' in Syria: Prospects and Policy Implications.

01.03.2019 Establishing such a zone in the northeast would give Ankara and the United States a unique opportunity to work together, provided Washington can convince its European allies to participate as well. On the other hand, a unilateral Turkish safe zone could become an arena of contention between the Assad regime and Ankara, between Turkish-sponsored Arab groups and the YPG, and between Kurds and returning Arab refugees. (Washington Institute) <https://goo.gl/b8Be3j>



### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. Iran: We reached 90% of our goals in Syria, Israeli strikes had no impact.

23.02.2019 Iran has reached 90% of its goals in Syria, proving that Israel's military campaign against the Islamic Republic's military positions in the war-torn country has had no "strategic impact", an Iranian official said on Saturday. (i24News) <https://goo.gl/spiXtA>

#### 2. Lavrov says Russia could police Syria-Turkey safe zone.

24.02.2019 Russian military police could be deployed in a proposed "safe zone" along Syria's northern border with Turkey, Russian news agencies cited foreign minister Sergei Lavrov as saying to Chinese and Vietnamese media on Sunday. (MEMO) <https://goo.gl/XyCXG4>

#### 3. Russia, US Maintain Consultations on Syria Along With Military Contacts.

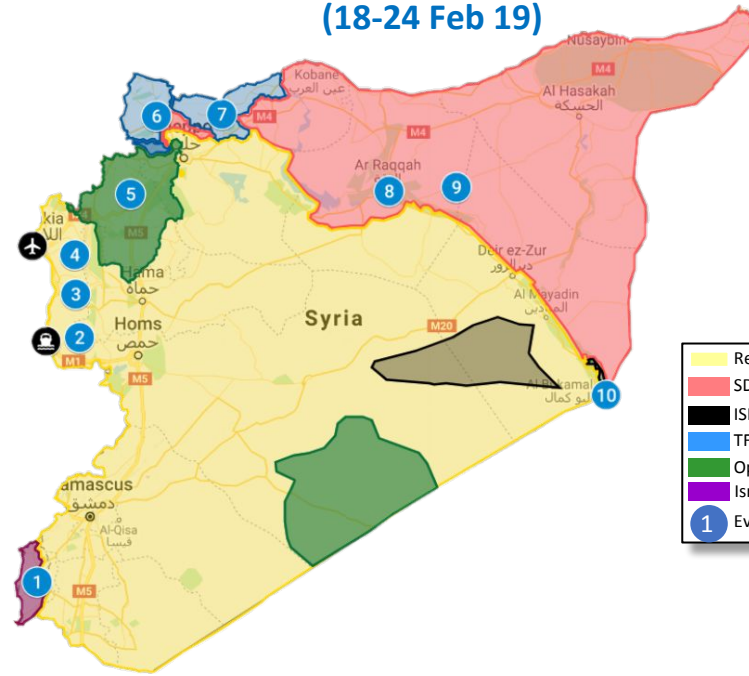
24.02.2019 Russia and the United States, apart from regular contacts via the deconfliction channel in Syria, have also been involved in closed consultations on various aspects of the Syrian conflict settlement, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said. According to the minister, such a dialogue is necessary to prevent unwanted incidents since the United States retains a military presence in Syria, albeit without the consent of the legitimate government. (Sputnik) <https://goo.gl/VU9CYf>

#### 4. Russia Responds to Trump's Latest Syria Move.

22.02.2019 Russia has responded to the White House's latest announcement in regards to U.S. policy in Syria, expressing confusion over what appeared to be the latest turn in President Donald Trump's strategy there. Putin initially welcomed Trump's decision to withdraw, but Putin has grown skeptical amid conflicting statements from Washington, and his spokesperson appeared puzzled by the latest twist. (VOA) <https://goo.gl/Ry9wak>

#### 5. The regime forces continue their shelling within " Putin – Erdogan " demilitarized area.

24.02.2019 The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) monitored renewed shelling targeting areas of the Russian – Turkish truce. On the night of 22 February, the regime forces had targeted by rockets the eastern sector of Idlib countryside. (SOHR) <https://goo.gl/eS3stB>



### ASSESSMENT

- While the U.S. intensifies its efforts to convince its European partners to build up a coalition force for the proposed safe zone along the Turkey's border, Russia and Turkey insist on to be in charge for the control of the area. It is highly likely that a safe zone along the Turkey's border will be established as the main discussion continues on who will be in charge rather than its necessity.

#### 6. Russia 'open to Turkish ops in Syria under Adana Agreement'.

18.02.2019 Erdoğan, Putin and Rouhani have once again met in the Russian city of Sochi to determine the fate of Syria. Putin's spokesperson Dmitry Peskov gave an interview right after the trilateral summit. He said "Now Turkey is saying "I will establish a safe zone, there will be a special arrangement and so on. (Hurriyet Daily News) <https://goo.gl/6B3Gj8>

#### 7. Erdogan says safe zone on Syria border must be under Turkey's control.

23.02.2019 Any safe zone along Turkey's border with Syria must be under Turkish control, President Tayyip Erdogan said on Saturday in an interview with broadcaster CNN Turk. He was speaking after a senior U.S. administration official said on Friday Washington would leave about 400 U.S. troops in Syria, a reversal by President Donald Trump that could pave the way for U.S. allies to keep troops there. (Reuters) <https://goo.gl/ewqMkZ>

#### 8. Syria war: US to leave 200 troops for peacekeeping after withdrawal.

22.02.2019 The US military will keep 200 troops in Syria to serve as a peacekeeping force after it pulls out most of its soldiers, the White House says. President Donald Trump has come under fierce criticism for his decision last December to withdraw 2,000 troops. (BBC) <https://goo.gl/pVBkM1>

#### 9. Commander of US-backed forces fighting ISIS asks US to keep troops in Syria.

22.02.2019 The commander of the US-backed and Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces is asking the US and its coalition partners to provide air support and keep up to 1,500 troops in Syria as part of an effort to stabilize the country. The SDF commander made his comments during a visit to Northern Syria by Gen. Joseph Votel, the head of US Central Command, which oversees all US military operations in the region. (CNN) <https://goo.gl/9p9qHf>

#### 10. Baghus: IS-Bastion in Syria.

23.02.2019 The desperate situation led the IS leaders to allow hundreds of people to withdraw from besieged Baghus on Friday. Among the men, women and children handed over to the Syrian Democratic Forces outside Baghus on Friday are extremists, their families and some of the most determined supporters of the terrorist group that once came from around the world to join. (ZDF) <https://goo.gl/GW7FTz>

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. Syria Reports New Israeli Strikes Just as Russia Calls Attacks 'Unlawful' and 'Illegitimate'.

11.02.2019, The state-run Syrian Arab News Agency and the pro-government Al-Ikhbariya news station have reported a series of Israeli strikes near the town of Tel al-Durayya in the southwestern province of Al-Quneitra. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said Monday, according to the state-run Sputnik News agency. "I am not saying that Israel's unlawful attacks on targets in Syria, including targets that are in one way or another linked to Iran, are legitimate and can be justified. "No, we condemn them, they are illegitimate," he added. "But this does not mean, again, that we should not care about the security of Israel." (Newsweek) (<https://goo.gl/2T5vYY>)

#### 2. Netanyahu confirms latest Israeli Strike in Syria.

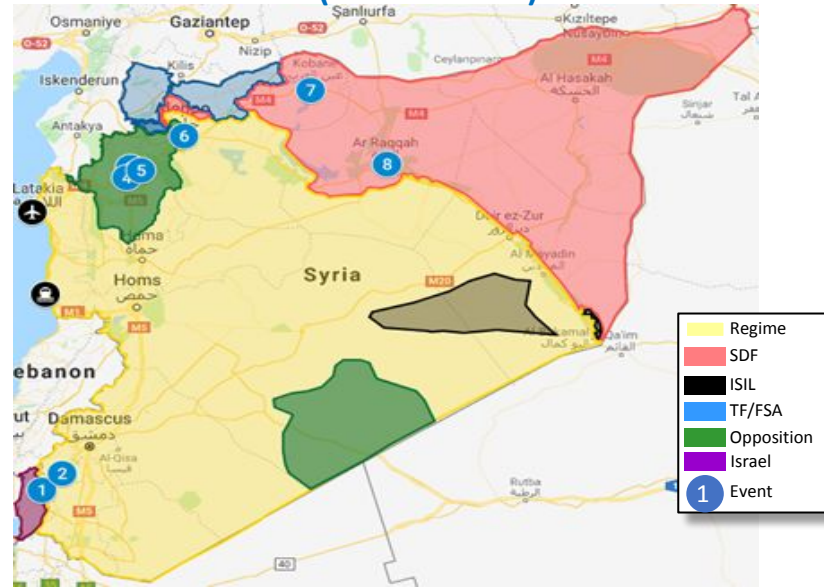
12.02.2019 Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Tuesday that Israeli forces had carried out another strike in Iran-aligned Syria, a day after the Syrian army said an Israeli drone fired missiles near a demolished hospital and an army observation post. "We are operating every day, including yesterday, against Iran. (Reuters) (<https://goo.gl/WbxjAD>)

#### 3. Putin, Macron agree to continue coordination on Syrian peace process

17.02.2019 Russian President Vladimir Putin and his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron agreed during a phone conversation to continue coordination of the two countries in order to facilitate the peace settlement in Syria, the Kremlin said Saturday. (Xinhuanet) (<https://goo.gl/Cucqr9>)

#### 4. Putin, Rouhani and Erdogan demand US withdrawal from Syria.

15.02.2019 The presidents of Russia, Iran and Turkey have said in a joint statement that a full US withdrawal from Syria will facilitate stability and security in the country. Vladimir Putin, Recep Erdogan and Hassan Rouhani met in Sochi on 14 February to discuss the situation in Syria as a whole, as well as the situation in the Idlib province specifically, which remains the final stronghold for terrorists in the country. In a press conference at the end of the meeting, Putin observed that "there are still no major changes in the territory". Concerning the US withdrawal, he said, "We presume that it is still happening". (UAWire) (<https://goo.gl/rTk3Vz>)



### ASSESSMENT

- Latest statement made by Sen. Lindsey O. Graham is a clear indication that US will not withdraw from Syria completely. If US request for troops would be accepted by the European Countries especially France, UK and Germany, Turkey's operation plan against East of Euphrates will run into more hurdles.
- Latest Israel attacks in Syria against Iranian targets show that Israel will continue operations in Syria despite Russian opposition.
- Imminent implosion of Daesh in Eastern Euphrates requires extreme caution. The steps that will follow military action should be well calculated so as not to create conditions amenable to create a new extreme group taking its place. In this regard, dealing with returnees in their countries of origin will likely dominate internal agenda of European States in the coming weeks.

#### 5. Russia, Turkey agree on decisive action in Syria's Idlib.

11.02.2019 Russia and Turkey agreed on Monday that they needed to take decisive measures to stabilise the situation in Syria's Idlib province after talks between the two country's defence ministers, Russia's RIA news agency reported. The announcement, made after talks between Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu and Turkish Defence Minister Hulusi Akar in Ankara and outlined in a joint statement. (Reuters) (<https://goo.gl/W8pg5k>)

#### 6. Denmark rejects Trump's plea, won't take back ISIS fighters captured in Syria.

16.02.2019 According to the DPA news agency, citing representative of Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen, Copenhagen won't take back Daesh fighters to stand trial in the country. Earlier on Sunday a spokeswoman for Germany's interior ministry addressed the US president's appeal. "In principle, all German citizens and those suspected of having fought for so-called Daesh\* have the right to return", she said, adding, however, that the condition for that was consular access for the suspects. (AMN) (<https://goo.gl/EW1r8B>)

#### 7. SDF Official: We are Ready to Consider the Deployment of Egyptian Troops in the East of Euphrates.

16.02.2019 The Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) is ready to consider the deployment of Egyptian troops in its areas east of the Euphrates River in order to prevent any attack by Turkey, Riad Darar, a co-chairman of the Kurdish-dominated council told the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) on February 17. It remains unclear if Cairo is willing to deploy troops in the northeastern part of the country. (South Front) (<https://goo.gl/8yBAXw>)

#### 8. Report: U.S. to Ask European Leaders to Deploy Troops to Syria.

16.02.2019 The U.S. will reportedly ask European leaders to contribute troops to northeastern Syria in order to create a "buffer zone" as U.S. troops withdraw from the region, The Washington Post reported. Officials told the Post that the Pentagon ideally wants European countries to contribute a total of 1,500 soldiers. (The Daily Beast) (<https://goo.gl/aKk9zp>)

#### 9. Trump's Syria Withdrawal Order Forces Allies to Weigh Return of ISIS Detainees.

14.02.2019 President Trump's abrupt decision to withdraw American troops from northern Syria provoked widespread fears over a future resurgence of the Islamic State. But it may yet have a silver lining: Other countries have signaled they are willing to take back their citizens who joined the terrorist group but are now detained in makeshift camps. (NYT) (<https://goo.gl/Wczdbp>)

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. Russia demands that Israel stop bombing Syria.

09.02.2019 TASS reports, quoting the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia, Sergey Vershinin that Moscow consider Israel's strikes against Syrian targets unacceptable and demanded they stop. According to the diplomat, Israel's attacks "add to the destabilization of the situation" and "nobody should do anything in Syria that does not support antiterrorist goals." (UAWire) <https://goo.gl/2kgJHt>

#### 2. Putin, Erdogan, Rohani Set For Sochi Summit On Syria.

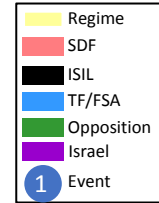
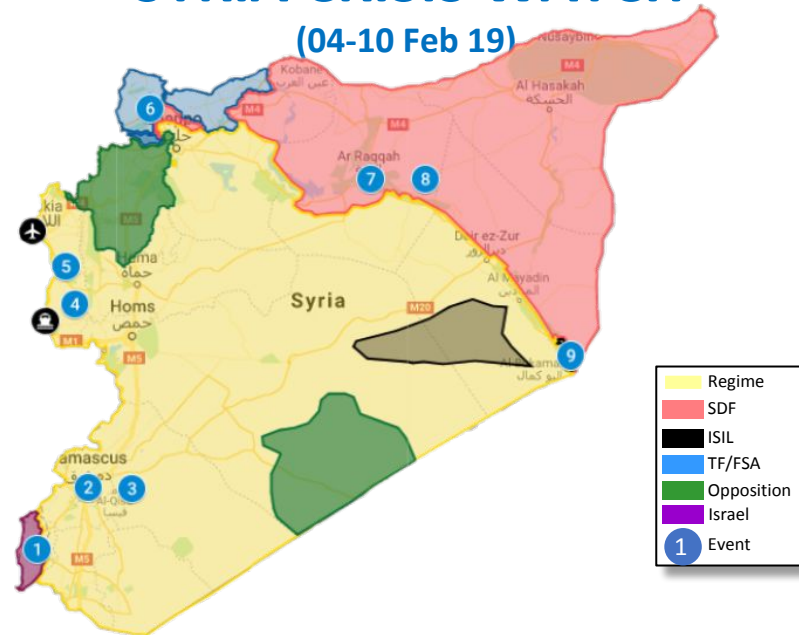
04.02.2019 The leaders of Russia, Iran, and Turkey are scheduled to meet in the Russian Black Sea resort of Sochi on February 14 to discuss the situation in Syria, according to Turkish and Russian state media. The reports on February 3 did not give full details of the planned meeting of Russian President Vladimir Putin, Turkish leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and Hassan Rohani of Iran. (RFE) <https://goo.gl/rNu14s>

#### 3. Deadly Infighting Erupted Between Russian-backed and Iranian-allied Fighters.

08.02.2019 Support from Russia and Iran allowed Assad to remain in power and gain control of more territory than any other warring party in Syria, including the U.S.-backed Kurdish fighters in the northern part of the country. Ahram Online reported Friday that Moscow and Tehran are currently competing for influence over the Assad regime and territory in the country. (Breitbart) <https://goo.gl/g75hCH>

#### 4. Russia Lobbies for Syria to Rejoin Arab League.

08.02.2019 Russia is lobbying the Arab League to re-admit Bashar al-Assad's Syria as a member, say diplomats based in the region. The Kremlin is eager to re-legitimize Assad's regime quickly, hoping that will help in the pursuit of funds to rebuild the war-shattered country and consolidate Assad's grip on power. The Kremlin has been focusing its pro-Assad diplomacy on Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Iraq and Saudi Arabia, aiming to pave the way for a re-admission at next month's Arab League summit in Tunis. (VOA) <https://goo.gl/Ry9wak>



### ASSESSMENT

- *Having received the support of some European and the Middle Eastern capitals, the U.S. seems to accelerate its political efforts in return for Russian successful steps to end the Syrian war.*
- *Possible deal between ISIL and SDF as witnessed previously in Raqqa might cause remaining ISIL terrorists to resurrect elsewhere.*
- *International Coalition should not give respite to this battle hardened terrorists, which otherwise could be a reason for further instability in the region.*
- *Next phase in war against ISIL will be dealing with returnees in their countries of origin.*

#### 5. Russia says Syrian S-300 weapons system operational by next month.

06.02.2019 A day after Israeli firm ImageSat International (ISI) revealed that Syria's S-300 air missile defense system may be operational imminently, Russia informed Israel and other relevant parties that it intends to get it ready for use by next month, the Lebanese newspaper Al-Akhbar reported Wednesday. (i24) <https://goo.gl/bEhWiA>

#### 6. Russia wants Turkey to do more to clear fighters in Syria's Idlib.

07.02.2019 Russia has demanded that Turkey do more to tackle hardcore fighters in Syria's Idlib province and fulfil promises it made as part of a deal with Moscow last year. Ankara pledged to disarm and remove Hay'et Tahrir al-Sham dominating there, according to the deal, which prevented the Russia-backed Syrian government from launching a major military operation in the region to wipe the group once affiliated with al-Qaeda. (Al Jazeera) <https://goo.gl/tZQhMA>

#### 7. Joint Statement on Syria.

06.02.2019 We, the Foreign Ministers and representatives of Egypt, France, Germany, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America, met today in Washington to continue our work in support of the UN's efforts to achieve a political solution to the conflict in Syria on the basis of UN Security Council Resolution 2254. (U.S. Department of State) <https://goo.gl/gmiPum>

#### 8. Foreign Terrorist Fighters in Syria.

06.02.2019 The United States appreciates the contributions the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have made on behalf of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. As they liberated territory from ISIS with courage and resolve, the SDF took into custody hundreds of foreign terrorist fighters from dozens of countries around the world. Through their efforts, ISIS is now weakened and on the run, and the world is a safer place. (U.S. Department of State) <https://goo.gl/h1pQr8>

#### 9. Details of Preliminary Agreement Between ISIL and the US-led Coalition Revealed.

09.02.2019 The US-led coalition and ISIS leaders in the middle Euphrates River Valley have reached an initial agreement after days of negotiations, the Deir Ezzor 24 outlet reported on February 9 citing special sources. (South Front) <https://goo.gl/pc3m5i>

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. Russia revives old agreement to end Syria-Turkey dilemma.

03.02.2019. Russian President Vladimir Putin recently brushed the dust off an old Syrian-Turkish treaty, known as the Adana agreement, taking it out of the Syrian archives where it had been stored — barely remembered and not enforced — since the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in 2011. That agreement averted a Syrian-Turkish confrontation in 1998 and Putin apparently thinks that, if revisited, it can avoid war in 2019. (The Arab Weekly) <https://goo.gl/1NWUpS>

#### 2. Russia Turn Against Iran in Syria.

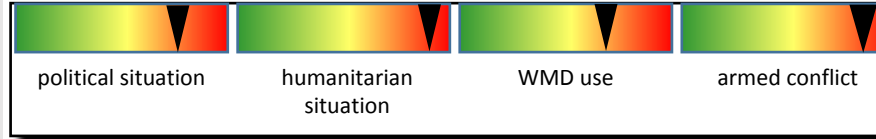
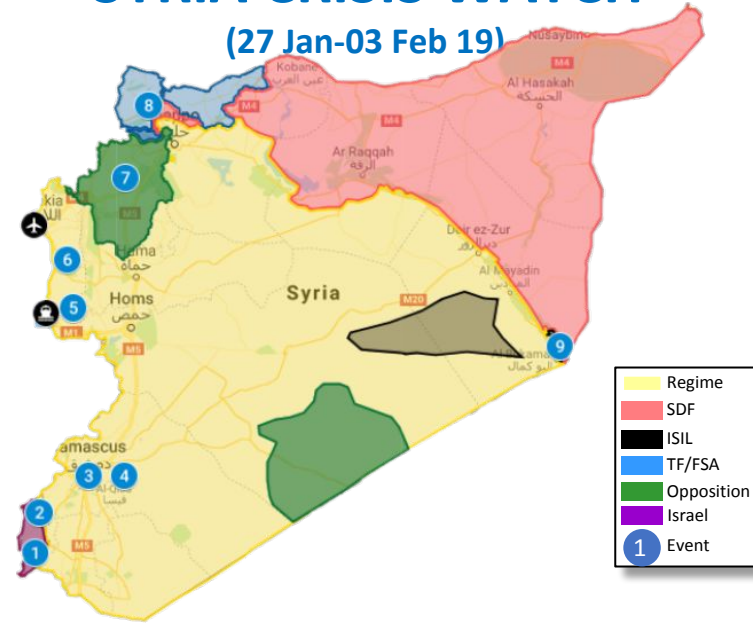
02.02.2019 Israeli Minister of Immigration and Absorption Yoav Galant announced at the end of January that his government had achieved diplomatic success. He said that Jerusalem has a plan to squeeze the Iranian military out of Syria, and that Israel can count on Russia's support in this. (UAWire) <https://goo.gl/UVRMZB>

#### 3. Angela Merkel: Israel has 'right' to defend itself against Iran in Syria

28.01.2019 German Chancellor Angela Merkel told Israeli public radio that it was "important and right" that Israel defends itself from Iranian forces in Syria. "Iran has policies that are threatening to Israel," Merkel told Kan Reka radio. Asked about recent Israeli airstrikes against Iranian targets in Syria, she said "Israel must secure its existence." Germany was also working to ensure that Iranian forces do not approach the Golan Heights near the Israeli border, she added. (DW) <https://goo.gl/t8Mz9v>

#### 4. ISIS could reclaim land in 6 to 12 months without military pressure, warns Pentagon draft report.

02.01.2019 A draft Pentagon report warns that without continued pressure, ISIS could regain territory in six to 12 months, according to two U.S. officials familiar with the draft. The draft says ISIS is intent on reconstituting a physical caliphate and that with ungoverned spaces in Syria and no military pressure, the terror group could retake land in a matter of months, according to the officials familiar with the report. (SOHR) <https://goo.gl/qcWikD>



### ASSESSMENT

- *Erdogan`s statement regarding low-level contact with the Syrian government may be accepted as a success of Russia, as we assessed last week that Putin`s aim was to pave the way to start a dialogue between Turkey and Syria. In this context, one should expect high level diplomatic contact between Turkey and Syria in the upcoming months.*
- *Referring to the Adana agreement, Putin probably aims to provide a legal basis for Turkey`s buffer zone demand, exclude the U.S. and also start a dialogue between Turkey and Syria.*

#### 5. Turkey to create 'safe zones' in Syria - with or without US support.

28.01.2019 Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has insisted he will go ahead and form a "safe zone," an area designed to protect civilians and curtail refugee outflows in conflict regions, along the Syrian border within months - with or without the support of the U.S and other allies. (FoxNews) (<https://goo.gl/mp2pif>)

#### 6. Erdogan says Turkey has maintained contacts with Damascus.

03.02.2019 Turkey has maintained low-level contact with the Syrian government, President Tayyip Erdogan said on Sunday.. Erdogan suggested on Sunday that Turkey also had direct contacts with the Syrian government. "Foreign policy with Syria continues at a lower level," he told broadcaster TRT in an interview, adding that intelligence services operated differently to political leaders. "Leaders may be cut out. But intelligence units can communicate for their interests," Erdogan said. "Even if you have an enemy, you should not break the ties. You may need that later." (Reuters) (<https://goo.gl/s5bZv8>)

#### 7. Where is Baghdadi? Inside the hunt for the elusive ISIS leader, the world`s most wanted man.

02.02.2019 Rumors ran rampant this past week – starting in Syria and spreading across social media in a matter of minutes – that notorious ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi may have been seized by the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) as they ran the brutal insurgency from its final pockets of territorial control. Only it would prove to be yet another false alarm. "These reports are baseless, with no evidence," Kino Gabriel, the SDF spokesperson and General Command of the Syriac Military Council, told Fox News. "He has not been captured." (Fox News) <https://goo.gl/Ap4cEX>

### OPINION

#### What Putin Really Wants in Syria

01.02.2019 Russia received the best possible gift from the Trump administration right before Christmas and now has a free hand to determine the future of its troubled Middle Eastern ally. With the United States preparing to exit the Syrian conflict, the Kremlin's strategy won't change much. That's because it was never about Syria from the beginning. Projecting the effects of Russia's Syria campaign beyond the Middle East was always the Kremlin's goal. The conflict was always perceived as a tool to showcase ambitions that assert Russia as a global power. Moscow perceives U.S. President Donald Trump's abandonment of Syria as a victory that adds greatly to its political capital. (FP) <https://goo.gl/xM1u1c>

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. Russia Says Israel Must End Attacks on Syria.

23.01.2019 Russia has warned Israel from taking military action against suspected Iranian targets in Syria, arguing that such operations have fostered further instability in the war-torn country. (Newsweek) <https://goo.gl/bNW4gs>

#### 2. Syrian S-300 Systems were “inactive” during Israeli Missile Attack-Iranian MP.

25.01.2019 Heshmatollah Falahat-Pisheh, head of the Iranian parliament's national security and foreign policy commission, claimed that the Russian-made S-300 missile defence system, which is deployed in Syria, was “inactive” during a recent Israeli missile attack on Damascus, according to the Islamic Republic News Agency (Sputniknews) <https://goo.gl/sRZZZS>

#### 3. Syria says Turkey must pull troops to revive security pact.

26.01.2019 Syria said on Saturday it was ready to revive a landmark security deal (Adana Deal) with Turkey that normalized ties for two decades before the 2011 conflict if Ankara pulled its troops out of the war-torn country and stopped backing rebels. (Reuters) <https://goo.gl/fikkPW>

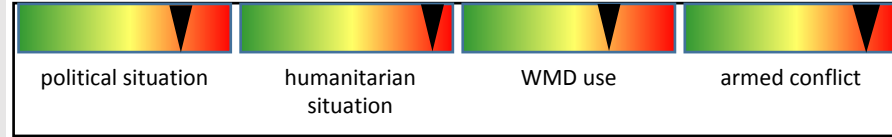
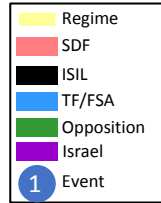
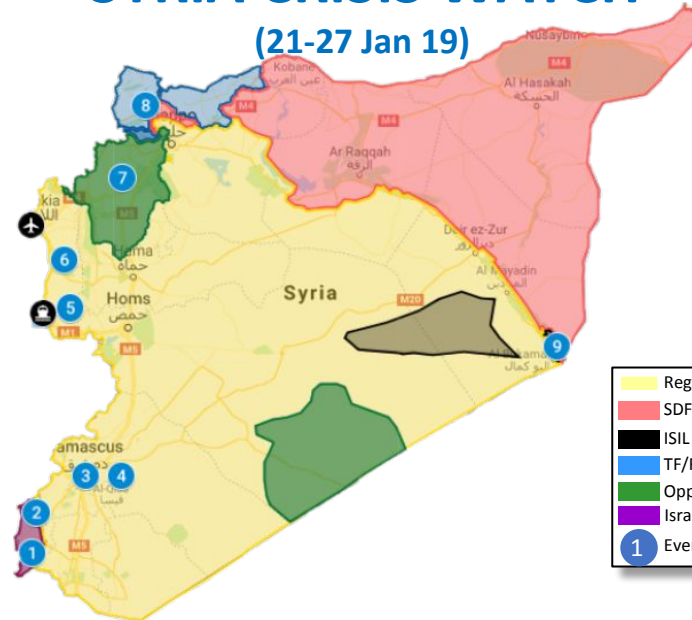
#### 4. Syria conflict: What do the US, Russia, Turkey and Iran want?.

23.01.2019 Russia:

— Who it supports: Moscow has long backed the Assad regime. It has provided government troops with air support and weapons and given it diplomatic backing at the UN and in international peace talks. Russia also has troops on the ground. (DW) <https://goo.gl/ic11Uu>

#### 5. Russia Urges Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria to Return Syria to Arab League.

27.01.2019 Tunisian Foreign Minister Khemaies Jhinaoui declared Saturday that Syria's “natural place” is within the Arab League as his country prepares to host the organization's annual summit on March 31. He made his remarks after receiving in Tunis Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who is on a tour of North African countries. (Al Awsat) <https://goo.gl/b2TFhS>



### ASSESSMENT

- *Following talks with the European capitals, Russia now expands its efforts to the capitals of Arab league, aiming the re-legitimization of Assad Regime.*
- *With referencing the Adana agreement, Putin likely aims not only to provide a legal basis for Turkey's buffer zone demand and exclude the U.S. but also pave the way to start a dialogue between Turkey and Syria. Later on, this move will also provide the opportunity to Erdogan to withdraw Turkish Forces without coming in for criticism by its supporters, if Russia forces Turkey to leave Syria.*

#### 6. Putin and Erdogan Make Joint Plan for Syria.

24.01.2019 Weeks after President Donald Trump announced that he would pull all U.S. troops out of Syria, the leaders of Russia and Turkey sat down to make their own plans for the country that would exclude the U.S. (Newsweek) <https://goo.gl/6cENaf>

#### 7. Russia and Turkey to act to stabilize Syria's Idlib province: Putin.

23.01.2019 Russian President Vladimir Putin held talks with Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan on Wednesday after which the Russian leader said the two men had discussed how they planned to stabilize the situation in Syria's Idlib province. He said Turkey was doing a lot to try to remedy the situation, but that more action by both Ankara and Moscow was required to “liquidate the actions of terrorist groups.” (Reuters) <https://goo.gl/D6dpuv>

#### 8. Turkey won't let Syria safe zone be turned into 'swamp'.

22.01.2019 President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Turkey would take necessary steps in Syria, if promises given by the US are not kept and almost all preparations have been completed for an operation in Syria. Erdogan said Turkey would take necessary steps in Syria, if promises given by the US are not kept and almost all preparations have been completed for an operation in Syria. (TRT World) <https://goo.gl/eMvqn7>

#### 9. U.S. Special Forces Enter Syria to Hunt Down Baghdadi.

27.01.2019 A unit of U.S. special forces has entered Syria from Iraq in order to hunt down ISIS leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, who is reportedly besieged in a narrow pocket in the middle Euphrates River Valley, the al-Araby al-Jadeed outlet reported on January 27 citing a senior Iraqi official. (South Front) <https://goo.gl/JtafYB>

### OPINION

#### Why Putin referenced the Adana agreement signed by Turkey, Syria

26.01.2019 Russian President Vladimir Putin spoke on the Adana agreement signed between Ankara and Damascus in 1998 during his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's visit to Moscow this week to encourage both sides to cooperate together for the future of Syria, wrote Burhanettin Duran in his article for pro-government Daily Sabah. (Ahval) <https://goo.gl/td3BgZ>

(14-20 Jan 19)

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. Russia to Israel: No more air strikes on Damascus airport.

19.01.2019 Russia has sent a message to Israel that it would not tolerate further air strikes in the vicinity of the Damascus International Airport, the Al-Quds Al-Arabi newspaper reported on Friday. (AS7)

<https://goo.gl/YkANvK>

#### 2. Israel, in rare move, announces attacks on Iranian targets in Syria, delivers warning.

21.01.2019 Israel confirmed early Monday that its military attacked Iranian targets in Syria, in a rare statement on such an operation. "We have started striking Iranian Quds targets in Syrian territory," the military statement said. "We warn the Syrian Armed Forces against attempting to harm Israeli forces or territory." (Foxnews) <https://goo.gl/VsFHaa>

#### 3. Agreement Reached Between HTS and NLF.

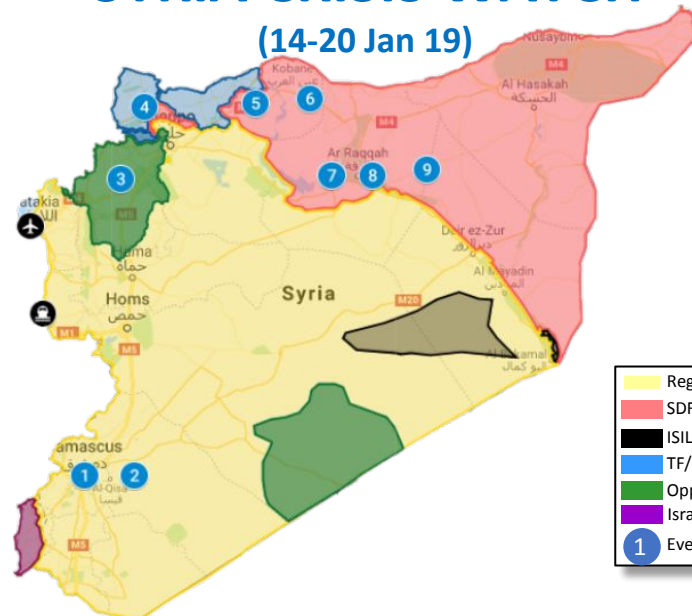
19.01.2019 Tahrir Al-Sham and the factions of Hama reached understanding with the mediation of an Islamic corps close to Turkey about letting the fighters of the National Liberation Front stay in Sahl Al-Ghab. (AMN/SOHR) <https://goo.gl/ZX2MkD> <https://goo.gl/Q9Aq4j>

#### 4. Erdogan: Turkey to set up 'security zone' in Syria.

15.01.2019 Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said his country would set up a security zone in northern Syria as suggested by US President Donald Trump as both leaders sought to ease growing tensions. Addressing his deputies on Tuesday, Erdogan said he held a "quite positive" telephone conversation with Trump late on Monday where he reaffirmed "a 20-mile [32-km] security zone along the Syrian border ... will be set up by us". (Aljazeera) <https://goo.gl/TVssMe>

#### 5. Turkey's Erdogan says 20 killed, including five U.S. soldiers, in Syria's Manbij blast.

16.01.2019 Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said 20 people were killed in the bomb attack in northern Syria on Wednesday, including five U.S. troops. The attack appears to be the deadliest on U.S. forces in Syria since they deployed on the ground there in 2015. (Reuters) <https://goo.gl/YWRfx7>



### ASSESSMENT

- *Despite Russian warnings Israel continues its airstrikes targeting Syrian soil. Israel is likely aiming to show that even the Russian presence in Syria will not deter Israel in her fight against Iranian elements threatening Israel.*
- *Two leaders, Trump and Erdogan, continue to blackmail each other by using the social media and the media outlets in order to strengthen their hands before reaching a deal on Syria issue. A plan concerning the establishment of a buffer zone in northern Syria reminds the no flight zone in northern Iraq after the Iraq war.*
- *Agreement between the HTS and NFL in Idlib is an effort to give area to NLF in exchange of providing security to HTS. This came as a reaction to new Syrian Arab Army deployment with tens of thousands of soldiers to Idlib and Hama.*

#### 6. Russian military began patrolling around the Syrian Manbij.

19.01.2019 Russia conducts independent and joint patrols around the Syrian city of Manbij located in the north-east of the Aleppo Governorate. According to the local sources of the Turkish news agency Anadolu, Russian military patrol independently in some places and "together with the so-called el-Bab Military Council formed by YPG forces" in other places. (UAWire) <https://goo.gl/QC9n7r>

#### 7. Trump threatens to 'devastate Turkey economically' if it attacks Kurds in Syria.

14.01.2019 President Donald Trump threatened Turkey with devastating sanctions if America's NATO ally attacked Kurds following a U.S. troop withdrawal from Syria. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu responded, saying that nothing could be achieved with economic threats and that partner nations shouldn't communicate over social media, Reuters reported Monday. (CNBC) <https://goo.gl/ouC2kN>

#### 8. Trump, Erdoğan discuss Syria after Trump threatens to 'devastate Turkey economically'.

14.01.2019 President Trump spoke Monday with Turkey's president a day after threatening to "devastate Turkey economically" if it attacks the Kurds in Syria. Trump and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan "discussed several bilateral issues, including ongoing cooperation in Syria as U.S. forces begin to withdraw, and other topics for future cooperation," White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said in a statement. (The Hill) <https://goo.gl/PklqCb>

#### 9. Turkey is Not Reliable Partner in Syria - Ex-US Envoy to Coalition.

18.01.2019 Former US Special Envoy for the Global Coalition to defeat the Daesh terror group Brett McGurk said in a column on Friday that Turkey is not a reliable partner in Syria as the United States prepares to withdraw military forces from the country. (Sputnik) <https://goo.gl/eLHmyT>

### OPINION

#### Iran-Russia Cooperation Grows Beyond Syria

19.01.2019 Syria is symbol of Russo-Iranian cooperation and there are numerous facts to prove it. However, there are also other theaters where Moscow and Teheran have successfully cooperated for years. Their deep-rooted partnership in the South Caucasus and the energy-rich Caspian Sea is a good example of this growing trend. (Eurasia Review) <https://goo.gl/n7Pu2h>



## KEY EVENTS

### 1. Syria: Israeli missiles hit Damascus airport warehouse.

12.01.2019 Syrian air defenses shot down missiles fired by "Israeli military planes" at around 11.00 p.m. local time (2100 UTC), Syria's official SANA news agency reported, citing a military source. "Only a ministry of transport warehouse at Damascus international airport was hit," SANA said. (DW) <https://goo.gl/8gAk3H>

### 2. Russia Says US Leaving Syria Step in the Right Direction.

12.01.2019 Russia has cautiously welcomed the United States' planned withdrawal from Syria but noted Washington's extensive history of intervention across the globe, in light of Moscow facing Western accusations of its own meddling abroad. (Newsweek) <https://goo.gl/Rt2uiY>

### 3. Putin, Merkel Agree To Coordinate Syria Peace Efforts Amid U.S. Troop Pullout.

10.01.2019 Russian President Vladimir Putin and German Chancellor Angela Merkel have agreed in a telephone call to coordinate efforts to work toward peace in Syria, the Kremlin says. (Radio Free Europe) <https://goo.gl/xYsnp>

### 4. Russia to Fire Missiles Near Syria.

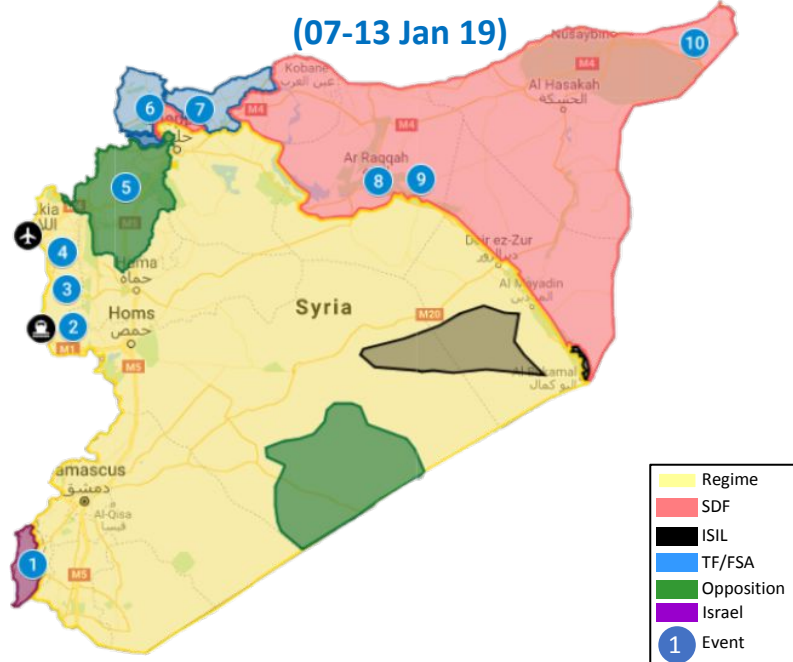
09.01.2019 Russia has planned a missile test off the Mediterranean coast of Syria, where President Donald Trump's plans to withdraw troops have become mired in political disputes at home and abroad. A notice to airmen circulated Wednesday, stating, "The Russian naval drills (the practical missile firing exercise) will be held on January 9-10, January 16-17, January 23-24 and January 30-31," the state-run Tass Russian News Agency reported. (Newsweek) <https://goo.gl/BukpFE>

### 5. Calls for Turkey to intervene, as HTS capture more opposition areas in northern Syria.

09.01.2019 Elisabeth Tsurkov commented: 'HTS are looking to take control of all opposition territories in Idlib and Aleppo from the Turkish-backed National Liberation Front. This has been in part motivated by Turkey's failure to back the rebels in Aleppo province against the jihadi force. Dislodging HTS from the region will now require either regime takeover, direct Turkish intervention or a Turkish-backed offensive of the 'National Army', a rebel force Turkey trained to fight against [the Islamic State group] and the Kurds in northern Aleppo. (The New Arab) <https://goo.gl/ceehuy>

# SYRIA CRISIS WATCH

(07-13 Jan 19)



## ASSESSMENT

- *Russia, not only continues multifaceted political dialogues with the U.S., Turkey and the European capitals but also flexing its muscles by military drills ahead of possible U.S. withdrawal from Syria to show that it is the only capable actor to bring the Syrian War to an end.*
- *Latest statements by the Turkish President and several top officials, concerning the impending Turkish operation targeting YPG and continuing troop movements to the border areas, are likely aiming to strengthen Turkey's hand ahead of the bargains with the U.S. side, which will be held next week.*
- *HTS's recent advances in Idlib reveals the inefficiency of Turkey and Turkish backed groups in the area and gives the opportunity to Syrian Regime to intervene in the region.*

### 6. Turkey's Erdogan warns US of 'grave mistake' in making conditions for Syria withdrawal.

08.01.2019 Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who considers the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) terrorists, said Turkey would "not make concessions" and said preparations for an offensive were nearly complete. "John Bolton has made a grave mistake on this issue," a furious Mr Erdogan told parliament as the US national security adviser arrived in Ankara for talks with Turkish officials. "The (YPG's) fight with Islamic State in Syria is a huge lie." (The Telegraph) <https://goo.gl/ReeUtB>

### 7. Turkey Stands By Deal To Buy Russian Missiles, Attack Kurds In Syria.

10.01.2019 Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu says Turkey may buy U.S. Patriot missile systems if conditions are right, but insists such a deal would be impossible if Washington forces Ankara to cancel its agreement to purchase S-400 anti-aircraft missiles from Russia. (Rferl) <https://goo.gl/ouupgi>

### 8. Contradicting Trump, Bolton says no withdrawal from Syria until ISIS destroyed, Kurds' safety guaranteed.

06.01.2019 Speaking during a visit to Israel, Bolton said that certain "objectives" must be achieved before a pullout could take place. "The timetable flows from the policy decisions that we need to implement." Bolton acknowledged that pockets of the Islamic State remain undefeated and that a quick U.S. pullout could endanger U.S. partners and allies in the region, as well as U.S. forces themselves. (Washington Post) <https://goo.gl/rhv4eu>

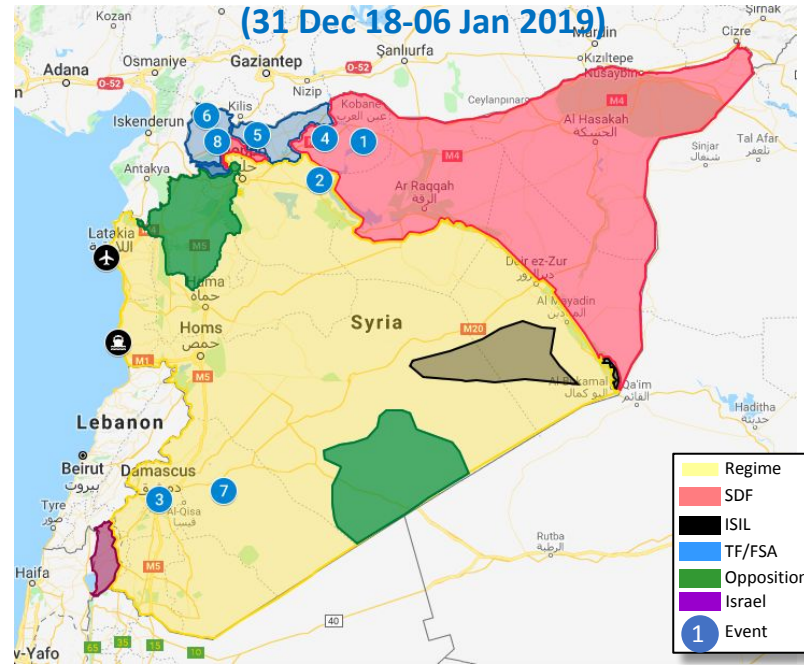
### 9. US Willing To Work With Russia To Protect Kurds In Syria.

12.01.2019 Following National Security Advisor John Bolton's humiliating trip to Turkey this week wherein he was snubbed by President Erdogan for seeking "new conditions" on Trump's Syria pullout, Bolton has signaled the US could work with Russia to ensure the enduring protection US-backed Kurds once American forces exit. (Zero Hedge) <https://goo.gl/Q1zV8r>

### 10. US-led coalition says Syria withdrawal has begun.

11.01.2019 Coalition begins pulling out troops, a US military spokesperson says, without elaborating on locations or timetables. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that the coalition had started scaling down its presence at Rmeilan airfield in the northeastern province of Hasakeh. The withdrawal of troops also coincided with a trip to the Middle East by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to reassure allies about the US plans to withdraw troops from Syria. (Al Jazeera) <https://goo.gl/sHnqa6>

(31 Dec 18-06 Jan 2019)



### ASSESSMENT

- *The recent US officials' statements indicate that a round the corner US withdrawal is highly unlikely. Latest condition (protecting US ally, i.e. Kurds) for a possible withdrawal, presents an impasse for Turkey, thus, provides US administration a face saving pretext for a longer stay despite previous withdrawal decision.*
- *It becomes more evident that, without US air and logistical support, Turkey cannot carry out an operation against ISIS, but YPG. Thus, YPG pursued multifaceted diplomacy for a sufficient protection against Turkey.*
- *YPG was swift to hand over Manbij to Syrian Regime in order that what happened in Afrin does not repeat. Ironically, Turkey seems to be content with this development.*

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. US asks Turkey to 'not slaughter' Kurds, following American troop withdrawal from Syria.

04.01.2019 "The importance of ensuring that the Turks don't slaughter the Kurds, the protection of religious minorities there in Syria. All of those things are still part of the American mission set," Pompeo told Newsmax, a US news and opinion site popular with conservatives".(The New Arab) <https://bit.ly/2RAyH7>

#### 2. Bolton warns Turkey against attacking Kurdish fighters after US pullout from Syria.

06.01.2019 White House National Security Adviser John Bolton added a new condition on Sunday to the US withdrawal from Syria, saying Turkey must agree to protect the US's Kurdish allies. Bolton also said all 2,000 US forces may not be withdrawn, AFP reported. He said the withdrawal would take place in northeastern Syria, while some forces may remain to the south at the al-Tanf garrison as part of efforts to counter Iran's presence.(Middle East Eye) <https://bit.ly/2Vvlp5r>

#### 3. Kurds Make 'Secret Offer' to Damascus.

06.01.2019 The top commander of the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), Sipan Hemo, has recently visited Damascus and Moscow to make a "secret offer" on the group's approval to hand over the border area with Turkey to the "Syrian State" in exchange for forming a local administration under Russian guarantees, informed sources told Asharq Al-Awsat on Friday. The sources said the YPG is aiming to strike a deal on "filling the gap" following the US decision to withdraw from Syria, and to also cut off any Turkish interference in the north and northeast of Syria.(Al Awsat) <https://bit.ly/2C3Trpd>

#### 4. 400 YPG militants withdraw from Manbij, says Syrian regime.

02.01.2019 Nearly 400 Kurdish militants have withdrawn from Syria's Manbij near the border with Turkey, days after the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) appealed to Syrian government for support against a threatened Turkish offensive, Russia Sputnik news reported, citing the Syrian army. (Ahval) <http://tinyurl.com/ybst676a>

#### 5. Turkey Seeks Major U.S. Military Support to Adopt Fight in Syria.

04.01.2019 Turkey is asking the U.S. to provide substantial military support, including airstrikes, transport and logistics, to allow Turkish forces to assume the main responsibility for fighting IS militants in Syria, senior U.S. officials say. The Turkish requests are extensive that, if fully met, the American military might be deepening its involvement in Syria instead of reducing it, the official added.(WSJ) <https://on.wsj.com/2GVmBwz>

#### 6. Turkey-US Tensions Threaten to Resurface Over Syria.

03.01.2019 Tensions between the U.S. and Turkey are threatening to resurface following President Donald Trump's apparent walking back of his commitment to immediately withdraw U.S. troops from Syria and end support for a Syrian Kurdish militia. Analysts suggest Ankara also is likely to be alarmed by growing calls for the creation of a buffer zone between Turkish and YPG forces along the Syrian border. South Carolina Sen. Lindsay Graham, speaking to reporters after meeting with Trump, said the president was considering such a move.(VoA) <https://bit.ly/2FhQeFa>

#### 7. Syrian opposition urges countries not to reconcile with Assad.

06.01.2019 Syria's chief opposition negotiator said on Sunday he was surprised by countries rebuilding ties with the Syrian government and urged them to reverse their decision. Arab states, including some that once backed rebels against President Bashar al-Assad, are seeking to reconcile with him after decisive gains by his forces in the war, aiming to expand their influence in Syria at the expense of non-Arab Turkey and Iran. (Reuters) <https://reut.rs/2C3Acfg>

### OPINION

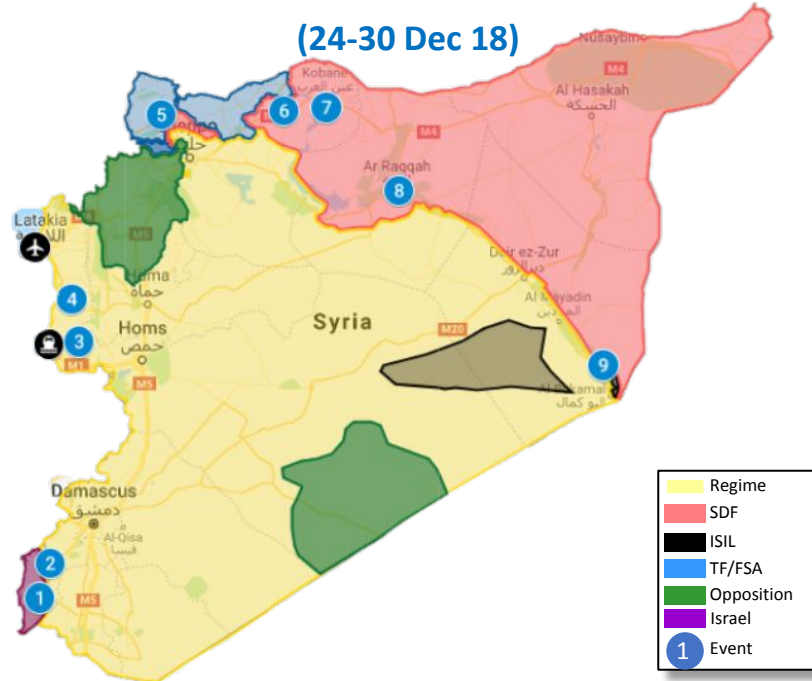
#### Trump's Syria withdrawal snatches defeat from the jaws of victory.

03.01.2019 The Turks want to replace a Kurdish-led force of about 60,000 fighters, known as the Syrian Democratic Forces. They have also claimed to U.S. officials that they have 50,000 Syrian opposition forces under their control, but that is wildly overstated. The Turkish-backed opposition is closer to 5,000, U.S. officials say, and many have extremist connections. (WP) <https://wapo.st/2FaLeTr>



## SYRIA CRISIS WATCH

(24-30 Dec 18)



### ASSESSMENT

- With the latest airstrikes targeting Syrian soil, Israel is likely aiming to show that her determination to fight against Iranian elements in Syria will continue even without the U.S. presence in the region.
- Turkey's decision to postpone a military operation targeting Manbij and east of Euphrates river reveals that Turkish side was not also expecting such a decision made by Trump and caught off guard. Any military operation aiming to establish and maintain a YPG-free zone throughout the whole border seems far from Turkey's current capabilities.
- YPG's move to hand over the areas under its control to Syrian Regime narrow downs Turkish options for a military operation due to the possibility of a conflict with Syrian and Russian Forces.

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. Report: Israel preparing for comprehensive war in Syria.

24.12.2018 Russia's Nezavisimaya Gazeta said that Israel is preparing for a comprehensive war on Syria following the US' withdrawal from the country. The newspaper quoted Israel's former defence minister Avigdor Lieberman as saying that "the United States' withdrawal from Syria greatly increases the likelihood of a large-scale conflict in the north, whether in Lebanon or Syria". (MEMO) <https://goo.gl/zStetF>

#### 2. The Latest: Israeli official says Israel carried out strike.

26.12.2018 An Israeli security official has confirmed that Israel carried out an overnight airstrike in Syria, saying a series of Iranian targets were hit. Earlier Wednesday, Russia criticized the airstrikes, saying they had endangered civilian flights. (ABC News) <https://goo.gl/MLwZfG>

#### 3. Russia, Turkey reach understanding on coordination in Syria following U.S. withdrawal.

29.12.2018 Russian and Turkish officials on Saturday came to an understanding on coordination of military activities in Syria following a high-level meeting in Moscow, CNN news reported. (Ahval) <https://goo.gl/XtvNzr>

#### 4. Russia Planning for Int'l Conference on Syria Refugees.

28.12.2018 The Russian Foreign Ministry announced on Thursday that it was working in coordination with the United Nations to hold an international conference on Syrian refugees. "The UNHCR says that 82 percent of displaced Syrians want to return if the circumstances allow for it," said Tsarikov. (Al Awsat) <https://goo.gl/wk1XCh>

#### 5. Turkey Vows No Slowdown in Fight Against ISIS After US Pullout From Syria.

25.12.2018 Ibrahim Kalin, spokesman for President Recep Tayyip Erdogan dismissed concerns that the withdrawal ordered by US President Donald Trump would allow Islamic State to regain territory. "As part of the global coalition to defeat ISIS, we would like to express again that we will not allow such a thing to happen on Syrian soil, Iraqi soil or Turkish soil," Kalin told a news conference. He added that there would be no disruption or slowdown of the fight against the militant group. (Algemeiner) <https://goo.gl/ApwXkw>

#### 6. Syria troops enter Kurdish town with Turkey military offensive looming.

28.12.2018 The Syria army said today that its fighters entered the town of Manbij after Kurdish fighters appealed to the regime for help in the face of the imminent threat of attack from Turkey. (MEMO) <https://goo.gl/A9Zfjt>

#### 7. Erdogan says Turkey has no business in Syria's Manbij if YPG militia leaves.

28.12.2018 Turkey will have nothing left to do in the Syrian town of Manbij once "terrorist organizations" leave the area, President Tayyip Erdogan said on Friday, hours after the Syrian army said it had entered the town. (Reuters) <https://goo.gl/ekrCMY>

#### 8. Defense Dept. says US troop withdrawal from Syria is 'deliberate, well thought-out'.

28.12.2018 The next phase of US support to the Coalition's operation in Syria is a deliberate, well thought-out, mutually supportive, and controlled withdrawal of forces while taking all measures possible to ensure our troops' safety and protection. (U.S. Department of Defense Twitter Account) <https://goo.gl/696x69>

#### 9. Violent fighting between the SDF and Daesh.

30.12.2018 SDF supported by International Coalition continue its movements from and to the frontlines against the "Islamic State" organization in the eastern countryside of where ISIS enclave is located (SOHR) <https://goo.gl/Pe4VFF>

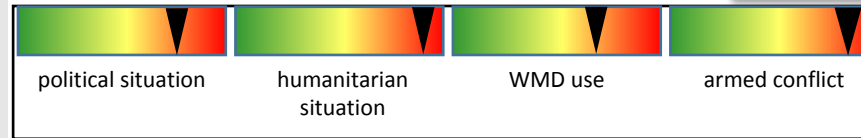
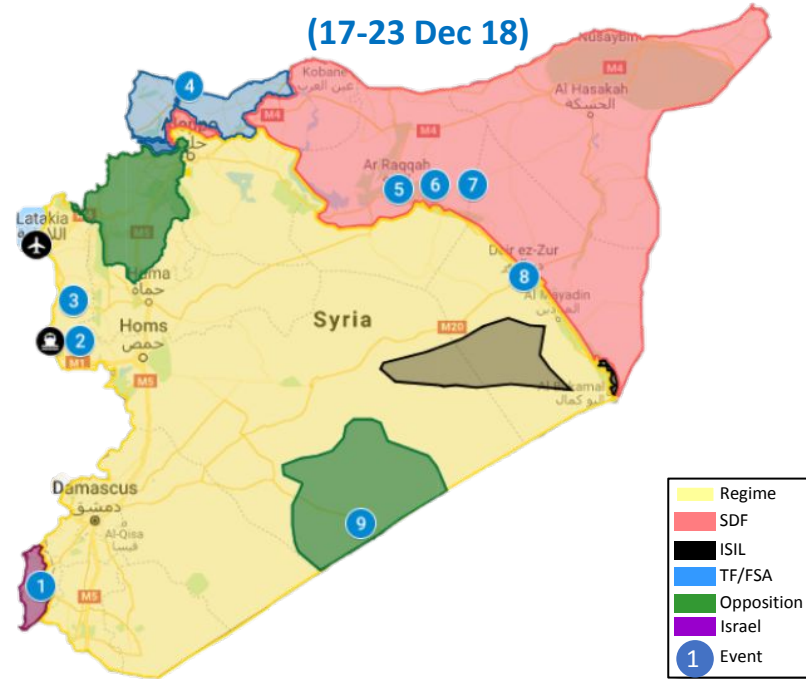
### OPINION

#### Could U.S. Withdrawal from Syria Lead to War Between Russia and Turkey?

26.12.2018 Analysis of President Donald Trump's December 19 announcement that U.S. military forces would withdraw from Syria within 30 days has rightly focused on the potential adverse consequences for the unfinished campaign to defeat the Islamic State (ISIS), and on identifying the geopolitical winners and losers. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, who was already in a strong position, is finally free of any meaningful threat from Washington. His principal backers, Russia and Iran, have gained prestige and regional influence. Meanwhile, the closest U.S. partners in Syria – the Kurds, but also Britain and France – have been left holding the bag. (Just Security) <https://goo.gl/dBHsMg>

## SYRIA CRISIS WATCH

(17-23 Dec 18)



### ASSESSMENT

- *In the light of previous statements, concerning the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Syria, made by the U.S. President Trump, it is still early to say that the U.S. forces will leave Syria completely. However, the resignation of Brett McGurk and the increasing military preparedness of Turkey and Syria against SDF-led by YPG increase the possibility of such a move.*
- *Although Turkey satisfied with Trump's decision, this will weaken her hand against Putin as Turkey has long been taking advantage of the U.S. presence to balance Russian pressure over Turkey. On the other hand, SDF will likely look for a way to agree with the Syrian regime to prevent any Turkish intervention.*

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. Netanyahu: We will step up our efforts against Iran in Syria after US pullout.

20.12.2018 Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed Thursday that Israel would step up its fight against Iran's military presence in Syria, amid concerns that the US military's announced pullout from the war-torn country would limit the Jewish state's ability to operate there. (TimesofIsrael) <https://goo.gl/yE7uvi>

#### 2. Kremlin Refutes Reports About Russian-US Agreement on US Withdrawal From Syria.

21.12.2018 Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov refuted on Friday media reports that the US decision to withdraw troops from Syria was a result of talks between Russia, the United States, Israel and some Arab states. (Sputnik) <https://goo.gl/MYAzdu>

#### 3. Moscow Plans to Expand Tartus Base, Supports Bashir's Visit to Damascus.

17.12.2018 A senior Russian military official revealed plans to expand his country's industrial-military structures in Syria's city of Tartus, in addition to the ongoing extension of the Russian military base there. (Al Awsat) <https://goo.gl/X25E72>

#### 4. Turkey Reportedly Redeploys Troops to Border With Syria Amid US Pullout.

23.12.2018 Turkey has started sending military reinforcements to the border with Syria and to the Arab Republic itself, reported the Turkish Demiroren News Agency (DHA). According to it, a Turkish military convoy, moving through Kilis district, consisted of tanks, howitzers, and busses full of commandos. (Sputnik) <https://goo.gl/L6RRVN>

#### 5. SDF Discuss Releasing Almost 3,200 ISIS Prisoners.

20.12.2018 Top officials of the Syrian Democratic Forces, the Kurdish-led and American-supported militia fighting the Islamic State in eastern Syria, met on Wednesday to discuss the option of releasing about 1,100 Islamic State fighters and 2,080 relatives of the group's members, according to Rami Abdul Rahman, the head of the Syrian Observatory on Human Rights. (The New York Times) <https://goo.gl/HFEqmi>

#### 6. U.S. troops to be pulled out of Syria quickly, White House says.

19.12.2018 The United States will move quickly to withdraw all forces from Syria, the White House abruptly announced Wednesday, as President Trump defied warnings from his top advisers and upended plans for a continued mission against the Islamic State. (The Washington Post) <https://goo.gl/6VVTvg>

#### 7. US envoy Brett McGurk quits over Trump Syria pullout.

22.12.2018 Brett McGurk, the US special presidential envoy for the Global Coalition to Defeat IS has quit over President Donald Trump's decision to pull troops from Syria. Before Mr Trump's announcement he had insisted that the US would continue working against IS in Syria. (BBC) <https://goo.gl/AMTH2g>

#### 8. Syrian regime sends reinforcements east after Trump's pullout plan.

23.12.2018 Syrian troops have sent reinforcements to the eastern province of Deir az-Zour close to an enclave controlled by the Islamic State group and along the front with US-backed Kurdish-led fighters, a war monitor and pro-government pages on social media said on Saturday. The reinforcements arrived after US President Donald Trump on Wednesday announced he was pulling all 2,000 U.S. troops out of Syria. (The New Arab) <https://goo.gl/xKRw6a>

#### 9. Russian Forces to Set up Military Base Near Al-Tanf in Southeastern Syria.

23.12.2018 The activists in Syria's Desert reported that a number of Russian military vehicles along with military hardware and pre-fabricated rooms have been dispatched to the Syria Desert in Southeastern Syria. Arabic Sky News pointed to the Russian convoy, and said that the Russian forces are planning to build a military base in the region. (Fars News) <https://goo.gl/4BH9qg>

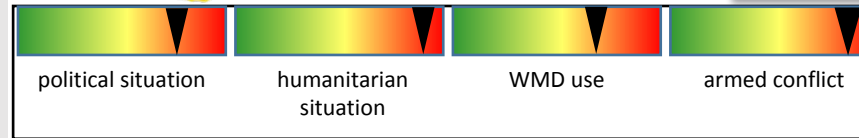
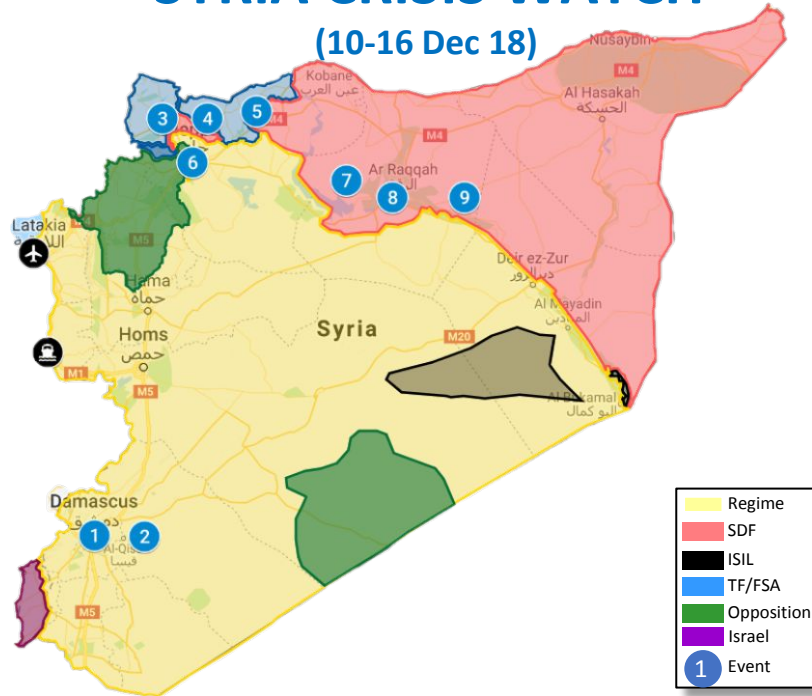
### OPINION

#### How Trump's Syria Withdrawal Helps Putin, Hurts Allies

22.12.2018 The sudden action has had global ripple effects that left allies in Syria scrambling and Russia enjoying a victory lap. Gen. James Mattis submitted his resignation from Trump's Cabinet, writing that the president had the right to have a secretary of defense "whose views are better aligned to yours." The combination of the Mattis resignation and the decision to pull out of Syria takes Trump's foreign policy to a crossroads. (OZY) <https://goo.gl/HZEJ2G>

## SYRIA CRISIS WATCH

(10-16 Dec 18)



### ASSESSMENT

- Turkish President Erdogan's statements concerning a new offensive targeting YPG in the eastern Euphrates river are meaningful in terms of timing as he has just kicked off his local election campaign.
- U.S. will likely counter any Turkish offensive by targeting the Turkish backed rebels which might also trigger a bigger conflict in the area. Syrian regime will likely turn out to be the only gainer in this case.

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. Russia's New Rules Of Engagement In Syria.

15.12.2018 Syria will adopt a new rule of engagement with Israel now that Russia has taken a tougher and clearer stance on the conflict between Israel and the "Axis of the Resistance". Henceforth, Damascus will be responding to any Israeli strike. If it damages a specific military target it will reply with a strike against a similar objective in Israel. (Zero Hedge)

<https://goo.gl/QRM6ED>

#### 2. Iran, Russia, Turkey to meet UN envoy next week on Syria: UN.

14.12.2018 The United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura will hold talks with high-level officials from Iran, Russia and Turkey in Geneva early next week on setting up a constitutional committee, a UN statement says.

(Aljazeera) <https://goo.gl/Y18DBP>

#### 3. Erdogan: Turkey will launch new military operation against YPG in Syria.

12.12.2018 Turkey will launch a new military operation in Syria within days against a US-backed Kurdish militia that Ankara considers a "terrorist group", Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Wednesday. (MEE)

<https://goo.gl/Jbmr4Z>

#### 4. U.S. Threatens FSA: Don't Participate in Turkey Attack on Northeastern Syria.

16.12.2018 In a message allegedly sent to different FSA factions and to the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (SMDK), Washington vowed to strike any group that would participate in the attack and to end its relations with it. (South Front) <https://goo.gl/J7uUvP>

#### 5. EU expects Turkey to refrain from 'unilateral' Syria military action, Mogherini says.

15.12.2018 The European Union's chief diplomat on Saturday, December 15 said the bloc expects Turkey to refrain from any unilateral action in Syria, where Ankara has threatened a new offensive east of the Euphrates river.

(The Defense Post) <https://goo.gl/jgMv32>

#### 6. Russia: We have Irrefutable Evidence of Aleppo Chemical Attack.

10.12.2018 Russia strongly condemned US statements refuting Moscow and Damascus' claims on the recent chemical attack on Syria's Aleppo on November 24, indicating it has irrefutable evidence that the attack had taken place. (Al Awsat) <https://goo.gl/brmXPe>

#### 7. US warns Turkey not to attack Syria.

12.12.2018 The US called on Turkey to not follow through on threats to attack US-backed forces in Syria Wednesday, an incursion the Pentagon warned could threaten US personnel and derail the fight against ISIS. (CNN)

<https://goo.gl/pMhA3F>

#### 8. YPG Leader to Asharq Al-Awsat: We Are Ready to Work With Damascus to Deter Ankara.

15.12.2018 The leader of the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), Siban Hamo, said he believed that Russian officials were "pleased" with the Turkish army's threats to the YPG and the US troops in northeastern Syria, adding that Damascus was not taking any initiative to defend the Syrian border. (Al Awsat)

<https://goo.gl/C5DkNJ>

#### 9. SDF Accuses Russia of Pushing Turkey to Attack Syrian Kurds.

16.12.2018 The US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) has accused Russia of pushing Turkey to attack the Syrian Kurdish forces in Manbij and the east of Euphrates, a report said in Sunday. "Russia has frozen the campaign on Idlib because Turkey pledged to fight Kurds in Manbij and East of the Euphrates. Russia did it in Afrin and wants to repeat the scenario. (Bas News)

<https://goo.gl/wkaQb1>

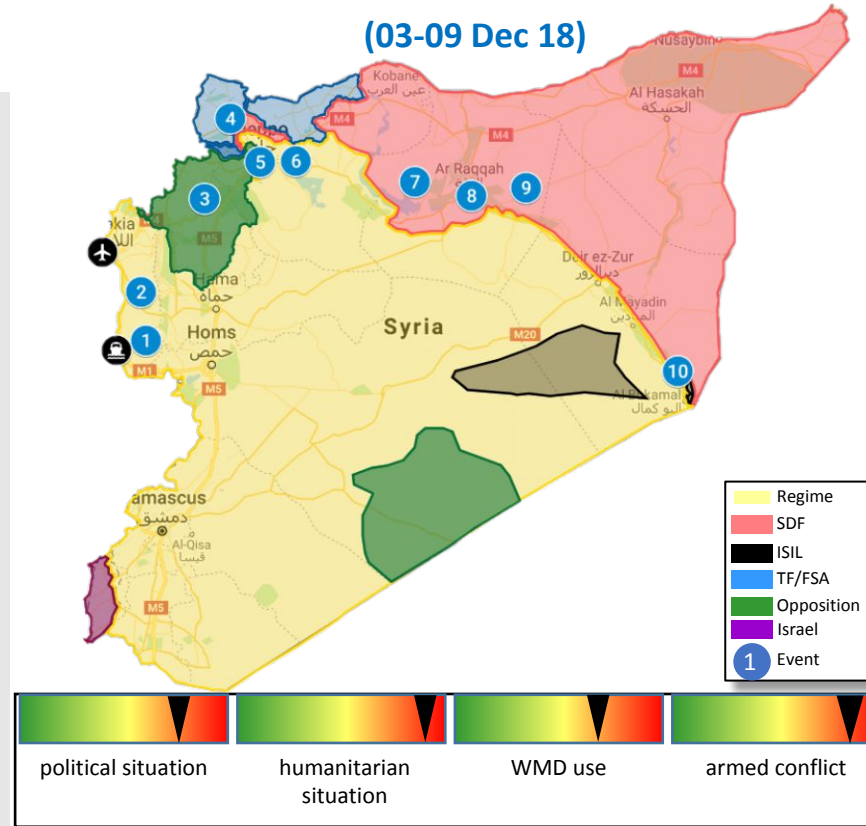
### OPINION

#### Turkey Plans Fresh Offensive in Syria

14.12.2018 On Wednesday, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned of an impending military operation in Kurdish-held areas of northern Syria, and began amassing troops along Turkey's southern border. Such a move would represent a major escalation between Turkey and America's Kurdish partners in northern Syria, and directly undermine ongoing U.S. efforts to eradicate the Islamic State (IS). Accordingly, the U.S. immediately cautioned Turkey against "unilateral" action. (FDD) <https://goo.gl/SSqifs>

## SYRIA CRISIS WATCH

(03-09 Dec 18)



### ASSESSMENT

- Tension between the U.S. and Russia escalates by accusing each other on several issues as the Syrian civil war tends to turn into a Cold War between two powers.
- The U.S. is likely aiming to take advantage of the failing Astana process to convince Turkey to take side with the U.S. On the other hand, accusations by the Russian MoD concerning the ISIL petrol transportation through Turkey reveals the Russian determination to have a firm grasp on Turkey even by blackmailing.

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. Russian Campaign Against 'US Plan' to Divide Syria.

06.12.2018 Moscow has widened its accusations against Washington in what appeared to be an organized military and diplomatic campaign aimed at countering US moves in the East Euphrates region. (Al Awsat) <https://goo.gl/WnJyVK>

#### 2. Russian army chief says oil transported from Syria to Turkey funds ISIL.

05.12.2018 The Russian intelligence services regularly observe convoys transporting oil from eastern Syria to Turkey and Iraq, with the proceeds from the transactions used in the financing of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Chief of the Russian General Staff Gen. Valery Gerasimov said in a written statement issued on Wednesday, Sputnik International reported. (Turkishminute) <https://goo.gl/VWv3a5>

#### 3. Russia, Turkey seek to break deadlock in Syria over Idlib.

05.12.2018 During the recent G-20 gathering in Buenos Aires, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan met on the margins to discuss what's arguably the most delicate issue in their bilateral relations in Syria: Idlib. (Al Monitor) <https://goo.gl/EA4aov>

#### 4. "Syria resolution requires U.S.-Turkey cooperation" - U.S. Syria envoy meets Turkish defence minister.

07.12.2018 James Jeffrey, the U.S. Special Representative for Syria Engagement, faced significant demands on Friday as he met with senior Turkish government officials, local news sources have reported. (Ahval) <https://goo.gl/YhBLWf>

#### 5. US aims to suppress OPCW probe with claim of 'staged' Aleppo chlorine attack— Russian MoD.

08.12.2018 The Russian military says it has "irrefutable evidence" incriminating the rebels in the November gas attack on government-controlled Aleppo. Earlier, the US alleged it was a false-flag operation staged by Syria and Russia. (RT) <https://goo.gl/iNypoz>

#### 6. US accuses Russia of lying on Syria attack to undermine truce.

07.12.2018 The United States accused Russia on Friday of helping fabricate a story about chemical weapons use by Syrian rebels as a pretext to undermine a shaky truce. (AFP) <https://goo.gl/mHahtv>

#### 7. Russia's Air Defense will Increase the Threat to the US Troops in Syria.

05.12.2018 President Donald Trump's nominee for head of Central Command has warned that the potential introduction of even more advanced Russian air defenses in Syria could threaten U.S. forces deployed there. (Newsweek) <https://goo.gl/ivyfi5>

#### 8. US Syria envoy: Let's pull the plug on Russia-led talks.

03.12.2018 Citing the failure of the Astana parties — Russia, Turkey, and Iran — to advance efforts for a Syria constitutional committee at a meeting last week, Jeffrey said the United States would propose getting rid of the competitor to the UN-led Geneva process when UN Syria envoy Staffan de Mistura departs at the end of the year. (Al Monitor) <https://goo.gl/XJDyWJ>

#### 9. Briefing With Special Representative for Syria Engagement Ambassador James F. Jeffrey.

03.12.2018 We were hoping — following up from the Istanbul conference — that the Russians, the Iranians, and the Turks would be able to finalize the third list of members to this constitutional committee, and that was a primary goal of the Astana meeting last Thursday. They didn't succeed. (U.S. Department of State) <https://goo.gl/n5gRMV>

#### 10. Despite the intense Coalition bombing, ISIL regains control of most of Hajin".

08.12.2018 The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) monitored the continuation of violent clashes in the last enclave ISIL holds, Hajin town. In a recent attack with support of Coalition, SDF had managed to control more than 70% of the town. However, ISIL was able to exploit the weather conditions and conduct counter attack to regain control of most of the town. Currently, violent clashes are concentrated in al-Hawwamah area located on the outskirts of Hajin town. ISIL tries to keep SDF away of Hawwamah to secure Hajin. (SOHR) <https://goo.gl/9Hqft5>

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. Syria accuses Israel of conducting missile strikes near Damascus.

01.12.2018 Syrian foreign ministry says it complained to UN about 'Israeli aggression' that struck south of Damascus, Damascus has accused Israel of launching strikes into Syria this week, in what a monitor said were the first such missiles to target the country since Syria's army upgraded its air defence system after the downing of a Russian plane in September. (Middleeasteye) <https://goo.gl/NmKYS4>

#### 2. Work on Syrian constitutional committee continues.

02.12.2018 The work on forming the Syrian constitutional committee continues, despite it being difficult and requiring constant consultations, Russian President Vladimir Putin told reporters during the press conference on the outcomes of the G20 summit. (TASS) <https://goo.gl/pK38qW>

#### 3. Heavy clashes breakout in northern Hama after Syrian Army, rebels trade attacks.

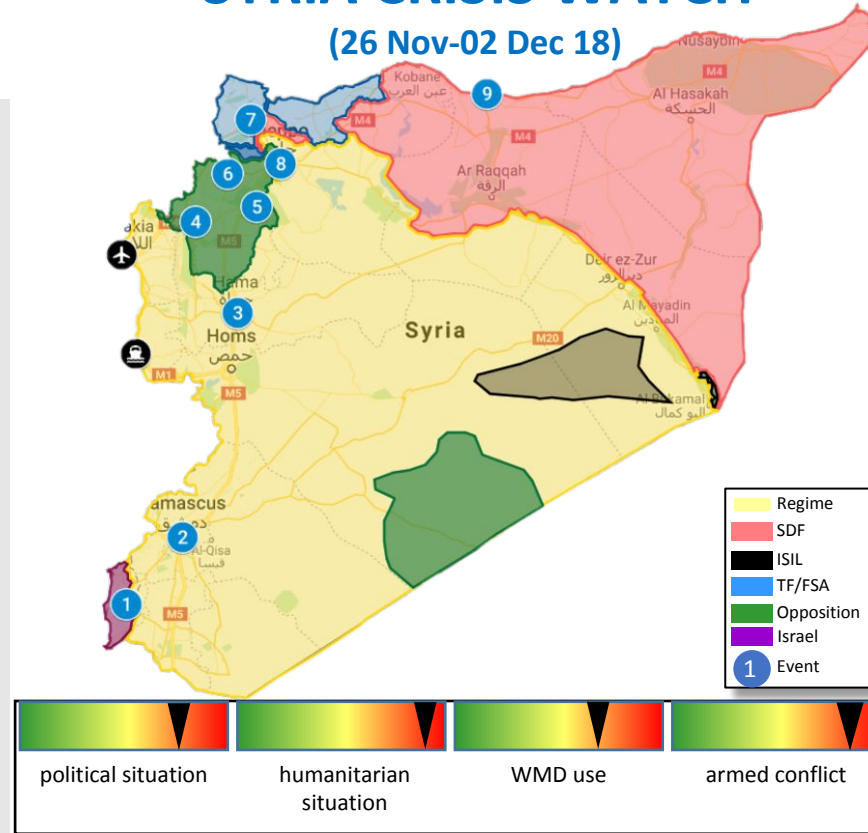
01.12.2018 A series of intense clashes broke out in northern Hama on Saturday evening after the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) opened fire on the jihadist rebels inside the demilitarized zone. (AMN) <https://goo.gl/M6gJ7D>

#### 4. 15,000 Al-Qaeda-Linked Terrorists Remain in Idlib Province.

30.11.2018 There are about 15,000 Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (formerly Jabhat al-Nusra) terrorists in the province of Idlib and Russia is ready to provide the Syrian government with help to eliminate them, Alexander Lavrentiev, Russian presidential envoy for Syria, announced during a press conference on the sidelines of the Astana talks on November 29. (South Front) <https://goo.gl/VwNj9q>

#### 5. Turkey's Erdogan tells Putin he wants new summit on Syria's Idlib.

01.12.2018 Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan told Russian President Vladimir Putin on Saturday he should hold another summit to discuss the situation in Syria's Idlib province where the two countries are trying to create a sustainable demilitarized zone. (Reuters) <https://goo.gl/HpVyDZ>



### ASSESSMENT

- *Russia is likely increase the tension and continue to put pressure on Turkey by making several statements concerning the demilitarized zone in Idlib. Latest Russian airstrikes targeting the rebel groups in Aleppo reveals that Russia will highly likely take similar steps for the Idlib. President Erdogan's attempt to start a new initiative requires strong and visible steps on the ground rather than promises in order to convince Putin.*
- *The US looks determined to set up observation points along Turkish-Syrian border despite Turkey's strong opposition. Turkey will likely raise the tone of its objections in the coming days.*

#### 6. Russia Threat: Putin to resume Syria airstrikes - ceasefire with Turkey facing collapse.

29.11.2018 Russia has threatened to resume its bombing campaign against "Islamist insurgents" who have failed to withdraw from their Syrian enclave as a ceasefire deal struck with Turkey teeters on the brink of collapse. Kremlin envoy Alexander Lavrentyev said. (Sunday Express/Newsweek) <https://goo.gl/LfDyPv> <https://goo.gl/f3wGuK>

#### 7. Turkey will not allow fait accompli in Syria'

27.11.2018 In a statement after meeting in the capital Ankara, the National Security Council said that Turkey has always supported Syria's territorial integrity and political unity and stressed that the biggest threat to a political solution in Syria is the terrorist presence east of the Euphrates River. (AA) <https://goo.gl/zh1V6c>

#### 8. Russia bombs Syrian insurgents after alleged use of chlorine.

26.11.2018 Russian and the Syrian authorities accused the opponents of Syrian President Bashar-al Assad of shelling Aleppo with chemical munitions. Russian air force struck their positions in retaliation. (UAWire) <https://goo.gl/vsAvov>

#### 9. U.S. Setting Up Observation Posts in Syria to Keep ISIS From Entering Turkey.

27.11.2018 U.S. forces are establishing observation posts in Northeast Syria to further deny escape routes to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. The observation posts will be set up to deter ISIS fighters that try to flee the middle Euphrates River valley into Turkey to the north. The move follows close consultation and collaboration with Turkey, both at the military and State Department levels. (U.S. Department of State) <https://goo.gl/HntkWD>

### OPINION

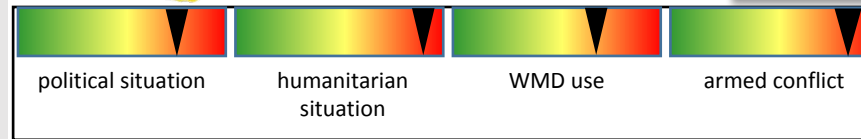
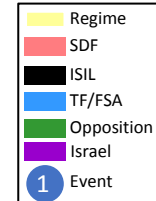
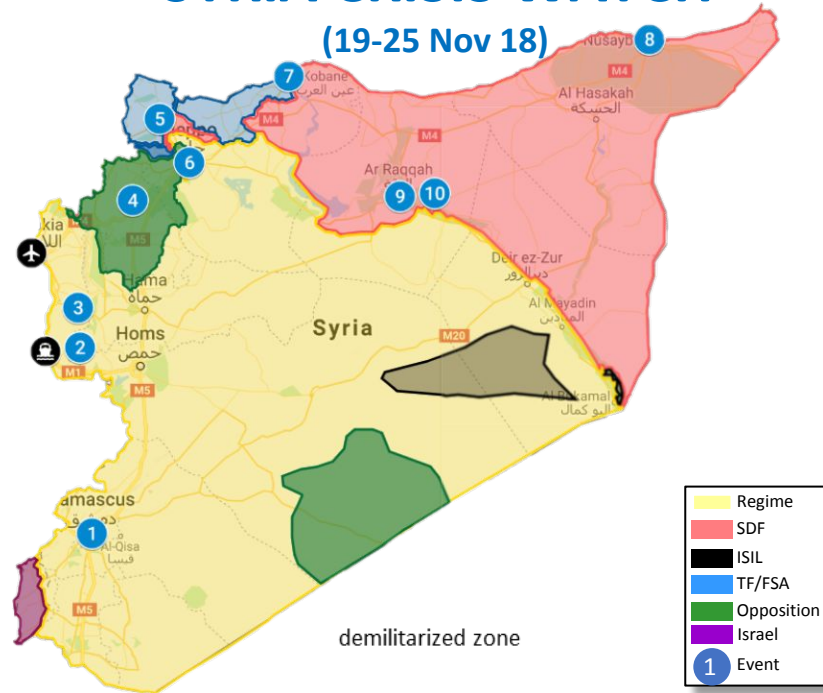
#### Opinion: Russia Completes Syrian Air Defenses, Troubles Israel, U.S.

01.12.2018 Russia has completed a comprehensive air defense system in Syria that constrains the United States' ability to operate in the country and in the eastern Mediterranean, according to a new report published by the Washington-based Institute for the Study of War. The report paints a stark picture of increasing Russian entrenchment in Syria. The Russian moves include the deployment of S-300 and S-400 missiles and other weapons systems as well as electronic warfare capabilities in Syria. (Jerusalem Post)

<https://goo.gl/9eBDFm>

## SYRIA CRISIS WATCH

(19-25 Nov 18)



### ASSESSMENT

- *Alleged use of CW by rebels in Aleppo might be exploited by the regime to undermine the demilitarized zone process in Idlib and to be used as a pretext to start an offensive against rebel groups in the area.*
- *The US plan to set up observation points along Turkish-Syrian border is probably aiming to deter possible Turkish attacks targeting YPG.*
- *Russia is likely taking advantage of the new US sanctions targeting Syrian regime and its close ally Iran to persuade/put pressure on Iran to withdraw its forces from Syrian territory and accelerate political process in Syria.*

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. Russia, Iran, Turkey to hold Syria talks next week.

19.11.2018 Russia, Iran and Turkey will hold the next round of talks on Syria's conflict on 28 - 29 November in the Kazakh capital Astana, Kazakhstan's foreign minister confirmed on Monday. (The New Arab) <https://goo.gl/4FNrAo>

#### 2. Russia offered Israel deal to remove Iran from Syria in return for US sanctions relief.

21.11.2018 Russian President Vladimir Putin offered Israel a deal which would see Iranian-backed forces removed from Syria in return for relief from recently re-imposed US sanctions on Iran. (MEMO) <https://goo.gl/aTyim2>

#### 3. Islamic State acting as US 'ally' for regime change in Syria, suggests Lavrov.

24.11.2018 The Islamic State terrorist organization (outlawed in Russia) is allied with Washington, in carrying out the objective of regime change in Syria, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov suggested after talks with his Portuguese counterpart Augusto Santos Silva on Saturday. (TASS) <https://goo.gl/7VPnNX>

#### 4. Moscow, Ankara must take swift decisions on Syria's Idlib: Russian defense chief says.

20.11.2018 Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu says Moscow and Ankara need to take swift decisions to support a demilitarized zone in Syria's northwestern province of Idlib, which has so far held off a government offensive on the last major terrorist stronghold in the country. (Press TV) <https://goo.gl/dxETA8>

#### 5. Turkey against planned US observation points in Syria.

24.11.2018 Turkey has repeatedly conveyed its "discomfort" to the U.S. officials over their country's planned observation points in northern Syria, Turkish defense minister said on Saturday. "We have stated that the observation points to be established by the U.S. troops on the Syrian border will have a very negative impact [...] and in the course of our discussions we expressed that it could lead to a perception that 'U.S. soldiers are somehow protecting terrorist YPG members and shield them'," he added. (AA) <https://goo.gl/FPHpgM>

#### 6. Russian MoD Confirms Chlorine Used in Aleppo Attack, Dispatches Army Chem Team

25.11.2018 Russian military chemists arrived in the Syrian city of Aleppo, at which militants fired shells filled with poisonous agents on Saturday, Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov told reporters on Sunday. (Sputnik) <https://goo.gl/5UfWcg>

#### 7. Turkish Armed Forces Conduct Operations against its Proxies in Syria.

22.11.2018 The Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) and several Free Syrian Army (FSA) groups are preparing to launch an operation against "corrupt elements" within the FSA in the city of Jarabulus in the northern Aleppo countryside. According to reports, a curfew was imposed inside Jarabulus ahead of the expected operation. (South Front) <https://goo.gl/vG3U35>

#### 8. Turkey transports rebels from Idlib to Nusaybin.

25.11.2018 According to Syrian pro-government newspaper al-Watan, the Turkish military has transported a significant number of rebels from the demilitarized zone in the Syrian province of Idlib to a tent camp in the Turkish city of Nusaybin on the border of the two countries, al-Watan reported on Saturday, citing local sources. (AMN) <https://goo.gl/Ysmgvv>

#### 9. U.S. Setting Up Observation Posts on Syria-Turkey Border.

21.11.2018 The U.S. military is setting up several observation posts in Syria beside the border with Turkey. The purpose of the OPs is to provide Turkey with military intelligence of any terrorist elements moving into Turkey from Syria, said Mattis, speaking at a Pentagon press briefing on 21 November 2018. (U.S. Department of State) <https://goo.gl/YDpMLZ>

#### 10. US sanctions alleged Russia-Iran scheme to send oil to Syria.

20.11.2018 The Trump administration on Tuesday (20 November 2018) announced new sanctions designed to disrupt an alleged Iranian and Russian scheme to ship oil to Syria, billing it as part of Washington's "maximum pressure" campaign on Tehran and a push to cut off fuel supplies for Syrian leader Bashar Assad. (The Hill) <https://goo.gl/H9MLh5>



(12-18 Nov 18)

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. US to oppose UN motion condemning Israeli control of Golan Heights.

16.11.2018 Israel captured the Golan Heights from Syria in 1967 in a move that was never recognized internationally. The US will oppose for the first time a UN resolution that calls for Israel to end its occupation of the Golan Heights, in a symbolic move on an issue that Israel has been lobbying hard for since Donald Trump entered office. (The Guardian) <https://goo.gl/c9BKtG>

#### 2. Syrian Regime Arrests Hundreds in Areas Covered by Russian 'Guarantees'.

14.11.2018 Syrian regime security forces arrested at least 342 citizens from former opposition-held areas where reconciliation and settlement has been recently reached based on Russian assurances, announced the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights in a report. (Aawsat) <https://goo.gl/vNczRU>

#### 3. Russian Cruise Missile Destroyers Conduct Anti-Submarine Drills Near Syrian Coast.

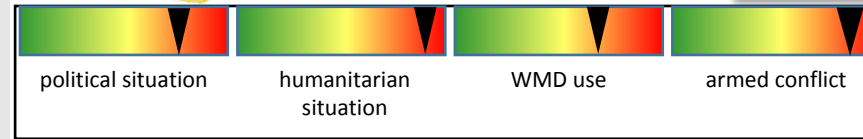
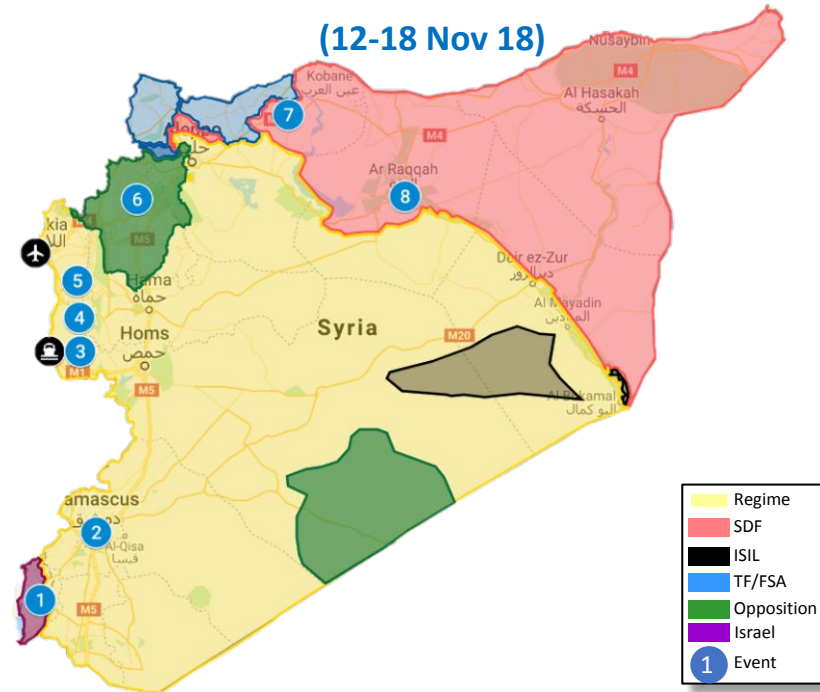
16.11.2018 As sporadic fighting between jihadists and Syrian government forces is reignited this week along the outskirts of the contested territory, the war could once again be thrust back into the media spotlight as ground zero for a great power confrontation between Moscow and Washington. Russia is once again flexing its muscles by conducting military exercises off Syria's coast in the Mediterranean. (Zero Hedge) <https://goo.gl/M1t7i8>

#### 4. Russian army: Nearly 270,000 Syrian refugees returned home.

16.11.2018 The Russian military said nearly 270,000 Syrian refugees have returned home in recent months. Moscow and the government in Damascus have been encouraging refugees to repatriate, arguing that the violence has subsided. (Mail Online) <https://goo.gl/UjTc9i>

#### 5. Russia Says Kurds must be part of political process in Syria.

13.11.2018 Syria's Kurds should have a place in the country's political process, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov said on Monday. "When talking about political process and drafting the constitution, it has been rightly assumed that Kurdish representatives must be included instead of being pushed away, which only fuels separatist sentiment," Bogdanov told the Russian news site Sputnik. (Ahval) <https://goo.gl/PS9Dq1>



### ASSESSMENT

- Increasing numbers of clashes and casualties between the Syrian Army and the armed groups in Idlib will likely end up in a decisive conflict soon which has the potential to trigger exacerbation in Turkish –Syrian crisis.
- With the latest statements about the recognition of Kurds as a legitimate party in Syrian politics, Russians are likely aiming to isolate the US by dissuading another US ally in the region like they did in the case of Turkey.
- Although Russia is trying to assure the international community on the success of its refugee return project, it will highly likely remain limited in achieving its goals as long as Assad regime stays in charge.

### 6. Shelling and Attacks: Idlib's Deal at the Verge of Collapse.

12.11.2018 Idlib governorate's "Sochi" deal is now at the verge of collapse, triggered by the continuance shelling and attacks conducted by the Assad's forces and allied militias against the opposition factions, the last of which was the attack against one of the "Jaysh al-Izza" posts in rural Hama, where 23 died, and others got injured. (Enab Baladi) <https://goo.gl/tgNVMo>

### 7. Turkey says U.S. support for Syrian Kurdish YPG a "big mistake".

18.11.2018 The United States' support for the Syrian Kurdish YPG militia is a "big mistake", Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said late on Saturday, adding that the issue had strained ties between the NATO allies. (Reuters) <https://goo.gl/5epZL1>

### 8. Briefing on Syria.

14.11.2018 Amb. James Jeffrey

U.S. goals in Syria are;

- enduring defeat of ISIS,
- a reinvigorated and irreversible political process in Syria led by the Syrian people and facilitated by the UN,
- de-escalation of the conflict that will include all Iranian-commanded forces departing from the entirety of Syria. (U.S. Department of State) <https://goo.gl/PMLLds>

### OPINION

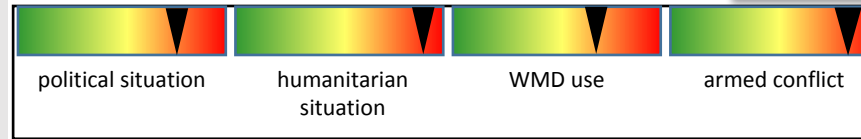
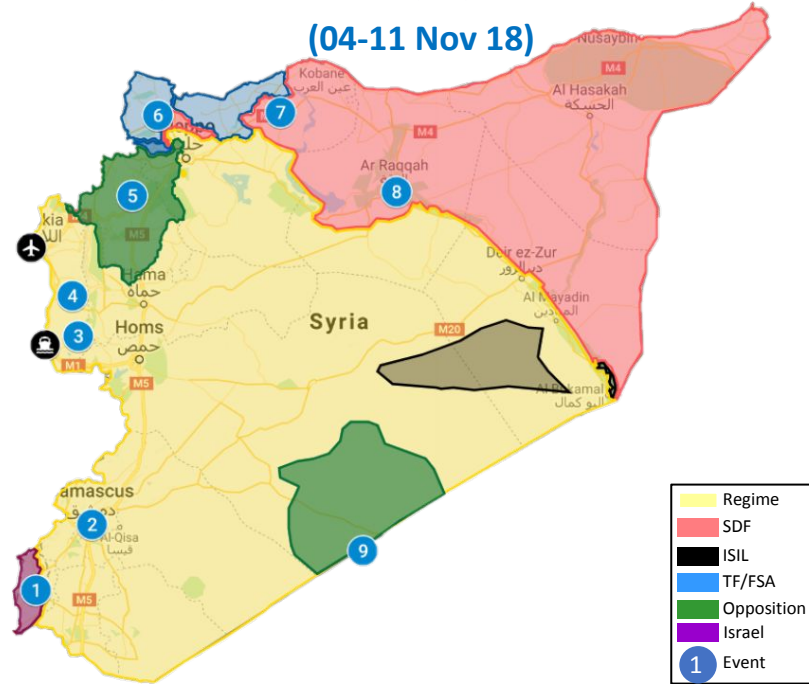
#### 1. Russia Slams US Role in Syria.

17.11.2018 Moscow has intensified its rhetoric against American military movements in Syria, accusing the US of using internationally banned weapons in air strikes on Deir Ezzor. The Americans have resumed intense air attacks on Deir Ezzor villages on the eastern bank of the Euphrates "with the use of white phosphorous munitions," Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova stated Friday. She said in her weekly briefing that this was not the first time that the US-led Coalition has used banned weapons. The Syrian foreign ministry sent two letters to the UN Secretary-General and to President of the UN Security Council, which urged "ending such attacks, investigating these crimes, and punishing the culprits," Zakharova told reporters in Moscow. (Al Aawsat) <https://goo.gl/M5KmRD>



## SYRIA CRISIS WATCH

(04-11 Nov 18)



### ASSESSMENT

- *After meeting up with top European leaders, Russia continues its efforts to persuade close allies Iran and Syria of a political solution to the long-lasting conflict. However, non stop infighting between the Syrian Army and the rebel groups reveals Syria's continuing efforts to bring the role played by Turkey in disarming the rebel groups in question.*
- *US' reward offer for top PKK terrorists is highly likely an attempt to distinguish YPG from PKK terrorist organization and persuade Turkey to recognize YPG as a legitimate party in the Syrian conflict.*

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. Israeli Air Force Shuns Attacks in Syria Since S-300 Delivery – Lawmaker.

05.11.2018 Ksenia Svetlova, who sits on the Israeli parliament's defense committee has confirmed that Israeli warplanes had not approached Syria's airspace since Russia supplied it with S-300 missile systems. (Sputniknews) <https://goo.gl/vdDAjA>

#### 2. Putin pivots to Europe for next play on Syria.

09.11.2018 While US officials spoke last week about "contesting more actively" Iran's actions in Syria, Russia pressed ahead with a new diplomatic initiative involving Europe. Russia's envoy for Syria, Alexander Lavrentiev, met Nov. 6 with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad after arriving from Tehran. "The focus," reports Maxim Suchkov, "was the Russian-Turkish memorandum on Idlib signed in Sochi on Sept. 17; the formation of the Constitutional Committee; Syria's postwar restoration; and the creation of conditions for the return of refugees. (Al Monitor) <https://goo.gl/Pm73Ck>

#### 3. Russian specialists reconfigure S-300 systems in Syria.

07.11.2018 Allies Russian technical specialists have completed the reconfiguration of S-300PM/PM-2 air defense systems to the export version S-300PMU-2 Favorit and returned to Russia, a military-diplomatic source told TASS on Wednesday. (TASS) <https://goo.gl/TcE7L8>

#### 4. Working with US Would be Ideal.

06.11.2018 Moscow's top diplomat has said he wished the United States would have supported his country in their mutual battle against the Islamic State militant group (ISIS), which has resisted attempts to eradicate it in Syria. (Newsweek) <https://goo.gl/kxGwiN>

#### 5. Both Regime Forces and Rebels Violate Turkish-Russian Truce.

11.11.2018 Violations continue in the areas of the Turkish – Russian truce applied in Aleppo, Hama, Idlib and Latakia provinces, and expand in various times and wider places, amid the guarantors' decreasing ability to restrict them. (SOHR) <https://goo.gl/EJSYx1>

#### 6. U.S. must break from Syrian Kurds after PKK reward offer - Turkey.

07.11.2018 Turkey gave a guarded welcome on Wednesday to a U.S. decision to offer millions of dollars to help capture three top Kurdish PKK militants but said Washington must also break its alliance with Kurdish militias in northern Syria. (Reuters) <https://goo.gl/DXvrWk>

#### 7. Turkish-US Rapprochement Accelerates; Key Issues Unresolved.

09.11.2018 U.S. military support of the Syrian Kurdish militia, the YPG, in its war against Islamic State remains an open wound in bilateral ties. Despite Ankara's intense lobbying for Washington to change its stance toward the YPG and give it the same designation as the PKK, the U.S. appears unmoved. (VOA) <https://goo.gl/Mp6F8Y>

#### 8. US Syria Envoy Says US to Contest Iran Activities in Region.

07.11.2018 Washington will focus on pressuring Iran financially and contesting its activities in Syria, Iraq and Yemen where the Persian nation enjoys broad influence, the U.S. envoy to Syria said Wednesday, adding that Tehran should eventually withdraw all Iran-commanded forces from Syria. (VOA) <https://goo.gl/8gHWXn>

#### 9. Russia, US and Jordan in talks on emptying Syria's Rukban refugee camp.

08.11.2018 "Jordanian-US-Russian talks have begun with the aim of finding a fundamental solution to Rukban by ensuring the right conditions of their voluntary return to their cities and towns," Foreign Ministry spokesman Majed al-Qataneh said. "Jordan supports the Russian plan to create the conditions that allow the emptying of the camp," he said in a statement. (ME Eye) <https://goo.gl/zmuRFQ>

### OPINION

#### 1. Russian takeover in the Middle East? US fears missiles may suppress key ally in Syria conflict.

08.11.2018 Russia, who has a strategic relationship with both Israel and Iran, has delivered a modern S-300 surface-to-air missile system capable of shooting down Israeli planes. The US fears Russia's power in the Middle East as new missiles protecting Iran in Syria may deter Israel from attacking its arch-enemy, despite previously allowing strikes to take place. (Sunday Express) <https://goo.gl/e5NTJT>



## KEY EVENTS

### 1. German Media Questions Israeli Claim on New Strikes in Syria Post S-300 Delivery.

02.11.2018 This week, a senior Israeli official claimed that the Israeli military has conducted attacks in Syria after the September 17 incident which led to the accidental destruction of a Russian reconnaissance aircraft by Syrian air defenses over the Mediterranean. (Sputniknews) <https://goo.gl/jsvsto>

### 2. UN chief names new envoy to Syria.

31.10.2018 United Nations chief Antonio Guterres has informed the Security Council that he wishes to appoint Norwegian diplomat Geir Pedersen as the next special envoy to Syria, diplomatic sources told AFP Tuesday. (SOHR) <https://goo.gl/XGXZge>

### 3. Russia's Network-Centric Warfare Capability: Tried and Tested in Syria.

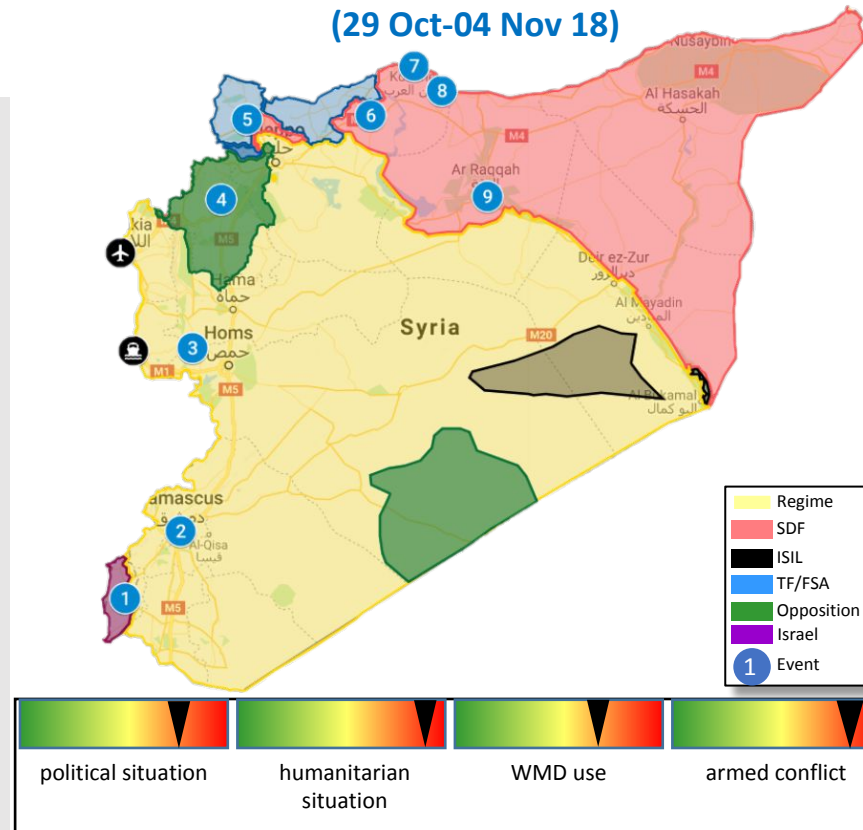
30.10.2018 Since initiating the reform of the Russian Armed Forces in 2008, Moscow has paid close attention to the development of its own network-centric warfare capability. Elements of this version of network-centric approaches to combat operations have involved strengthening electronic warfare (EW) capacity, modernizing infrastructure, reforming structures, as well as boosting and streamlining command and control, among other features. (Eurasia Daily Monitor) <https://goo.gl/QA49UH>

### 4. Russia says Deal with Turkey Working, Syria Disagrees.

30.10.2018 Allies Russia and Syria appear to be at odds over whether Turkey is abiding by an agreement regarding the removal of Islamist militant fighters from a rebel-held province, just as Turkish strikes prompted Syrian Kurds to appeal to both Washington and Damascus for support. (Newsweek) <https://goo.gl/aDu1o2>

### 5. Turkish intelligence transfers more than 700 Syrian fighters of the factions under its command to areas in front of the eastern Euphrates and SDF-controlled areas.

03.11.2018 The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights obtained information from intersected sources that the Turkish intelligence services have transported more than 700 members of the factions loyal to them and under their command; from the countryside of Aleppo towards areas in front of the east of Euphrates River. (SOHR) <https://goo.gl/DDvJcJ>



## ASSESSMENT

- *The roadmap agreed in Sochi giving role to Turkey has not been well received by Syria. It is likely that Syria will continue efforts that will bring the role played by Turkey in disarming the rebel groups in question.*
- *Having found a temporary solution to Idlib issue, Turkey seems to shift its attention to the east of Euphrates. Any future Turkish operation against Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) led by YPG in northern Syria not only increases the tension with the US but also highly likely gives Assad the opportunity to regain Idlib.*

### 6. Trump, Erdogan discuss northern Syria: Turkish presidency.

01.11.2018 Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan and U.S. President Donald Trump discussed Manbij and Idlib in northern Syria in a call on Thursday and stressed their determination to strengthen ties, Erdogan's office said. Turkish and U.S. forces began joint patrols on Thursday in the Manbij region, a source of friction in recent years after Kurdish forces took part of the area in a U.S.-backed offensive to drive out Islamic State in 2016. (Reuters) <https://goo.gl/BMjuds>

### 7. Turkey says 'plans complete' for assault on Kurd militia in Syria.

30.10.2018 Turkey has completed preparations for a new operation in northern Syria to "destroy" a US-backed Kurdish militia that Ankara considers a terrorist group, President Erdogan said Tuesday. Erdogan appeared to indirectly confirm Turkish state media reports that Turkey's military fired artillery shells at YPG positions east of the Euphrates in the Kobane region of northern Syria on Sunday. (Daily Mail) <https://goo.gl/V6BE1R>

### 8. US says Turkey's attack in Syria puts Americans at risk.

01.11.2018 The U.S. expressed "great concern" over Turkey's shelling of U.S.-backed Kurdish fighters in an area of northern Syria where American forces are embedded, an offensive that has added a new strain to the NATO allies' already rocky ties. (Stars and Stripes) <https://goo.gl/DNhDPu>

### 9. Tribes of Raqqa, Deir Ezzor call on fellow Arabs to fight US-backed forces.

03.11.2018 Sheikh Bashar Faysal Al-Huwaydi, leader of one of the largest tribes in northern Syria, was assassinated by unknown assailants after leaving an SDF commander meeting in Raqqa city. Accusing SDF for assassination, the tribes of Al-Raqqa and Deir Ezzor call on Arabs within the SDF to defect. If they refuse, they will be labeled an enemy. (AMN) <https://goo.gl/vNvt5p>

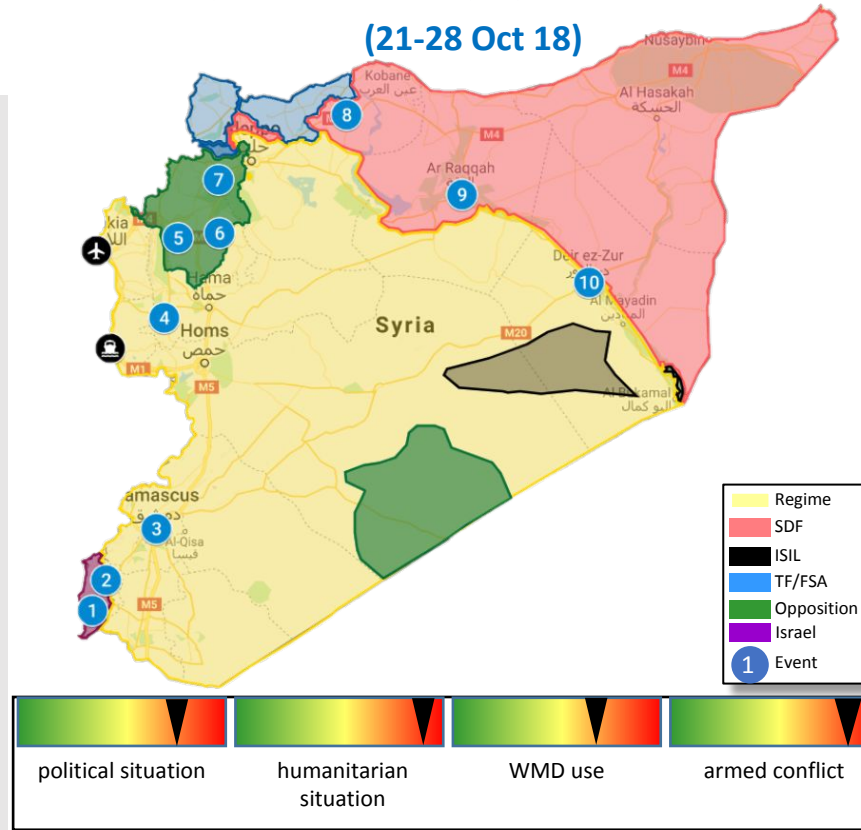
## OPINION

### 1. Russia Isolated? US And Britain Excluded From Syria Summit.

03.11.2018 There were several takeaways from the recent Quadrilateral Summit in Istanbul on finding a peaceful settlement to the war in Syria. Russian President Vladimir Putin convened with his counterparts from Turkey, Germany and France for a two-day summit last weekend in a convivial and constructive atmosphere. Evidently from the Quadrilateral Summit in Istanbul, Moscow is far from isolated. (Zero Hedge) <https://goo.gl/UBiFZA>

## SYRIA CRISIS WATCH

(21-28 Oct 18)



### ASSESSMENT

- Meeting by Russia, Germany, France and Turkey is the latest Russian attempt of seeking alternative to UN efforts in Syria as Russia wants to be the dominant power in Syria's future.
- As Russia continues to augment Syrian air defence systems, for the time being Israel reacts only by making cautious statements. However, experience shows that Israel will most likely destroy any asset which will threaten its population and territory.

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. Russian Air Defense Boost to Syria Seen Unlikely to Shield Iran's Forces from Israel.

22.10.2018 Israel is expressing confidence that it can pursue attacks on Iran's forces in Syria even after Iranian partner Russia transferred an advanced air defense system to Syrian territory earlier this month. (VOA) <https://goo.gl/Evu8cV>

#### 2. Russian military, UN mission conduct first joint patrol of Israeli-Syrian border.

26.10.2018 The Russian military police and a UN mission have conducted their first joint patrol of the Golan Heights region at the Israeli-Syrian border, Deputy Commander of the Russian Forces in Syria Lt. Gen. Sergei Kuralenko has told reporters. (TASS) <https://goo.gl/AKzpFg>

#### 3. Syrian Regime Blocks Constitutional Committee Lineup as it Shells Idlib.

26.10.2018 The Syrian regime rejected on Friday the lineup of a committee proposed by the United Nations to draw up a new constitution. The special envoy has been working since January on the make-up of a committee to thrash out a new constitution and which would have 150 members: 50 proposed by the Syrian regime, 50 by the opposition and 50 by the UN, to include representatives of civil society and technical experts. (Aawsat) <https://goo.gl/2zKvK6>

#### 4. Four Russian S-300 batteries located in northwest Syria.

26.10.2018 Israeli company ImageSat International reports that 4 batteries for the S-300 missile system, delivered from Russia, are deployed in the northwest part of Syria in the area of Masyaf in the province of Hama. (UAWire) <https://goo.gl/tC5vww>

#### 5. Russia, Turkey, France and Germany call for lasting ceasefire in Syria.

28.10.2018 The leaders of Russia, Turkey, France and Germany have called for a lasting ceasefire in Syria following violence in last remaining major rebel stronghold. A constitutional committee should meet by the end of the year, the leaders of the four countries, who gathered for a summit in Istanbul, said. (Independent) <https://goo.gl/v2W28G>

#### 6. Putin: Russia to help Damascus contain terror threat in Idlib.

27.10.2018 Should radicals ... launch armed provocations from the Idlib zone, Russia reserves the right to give active assistance to the Syrian government in liquidating this source of terrorist threat,' the Russian President vowed during a summit on Syria in Istanbul, according to Sputnik news agency. (IRNA) <https://goo.gl/z4VqcF>

#### 7. Syrian Army attack spreads across southern Idlib as jihadists refuse to leave buffer zone.

27.10.2018 The jihadist rebels were supposed to withdraw on October 15th from the designated demilitarized zones in the provinces of Aleppo, Idlib, Hama, and Latakia; however, these groups chose to remain in the area and strengthen their front-lines. Both Syrian Army and rebel forces in Southern Idlib are now firing missiles at one another in a bid to weaken the other's resolve. (Al Masdar News) <https://goo.gl/TZQzsg>

#### 8. US troops in Syria came under fire from a suspected close ally's proxy fighters.

25.10.2018 A U.S. patrol came under fire in the Syrian region of Manbij, allegedly from Turkey's local proxy forces. American officials with Operation Inherent Resolve confirmed to Military Times that coalition forces exchanged fire with an unknown armed group on Oct. 15 near Manbij. Manbij has been a flash point in relations between the U.S. and Turkey, with coalition troops caught in the middle of a geopolitical rivalry between the two NATO allies. (Business Insider) <https://goo.gl/pqriKk>

#### 9. Russia Cannot Replace US In Middle East, Jim Mattis Tells Arab Forum.

27.10.2018 Pentagon chief Jim Mattis told Arab leaders on Saturday (27 October 2018) that Russia is no replacement for the United States in the Middle East following Moscow's military intervention in Syria. He was speaking as Russian President Vladimir Putin was due to hold talks in Istanbul with the leaders of France, Germany and Turkey on Saturday seeking to find a lasting political solution to the seven-year civil war in Syria. (NDTV) <https://goo.gl/3XCR6B>

#### 10. U.S. coalition says it hit Islamic State fighters in Syria mosque after reports of civilian deaths.

21.10.2018 The U.S.-led coalition said on Sunday (21 October 2018) it had killed militants in eastern Syria by striking a mosque that Islamic State used as a base, after reports of dozens of civilian deaths. (Reuters) <https://goo.gl/xXDrtS>



(15-21 Oct 18)

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. Border crossing between Israel and Syria opens for first time in 4 years.

15.10.2018 A border crossing between Syria and Israel reopened four years after it closed. The move marked a de facto recognition by Israel that dictator President Bashar Assad has returned to govern in southern Syria, after he defeated rebel groups in the area earlier this summer. (timesofisrael) <https://goo.gl/sg6N7X>

#### 2. U.N. Syria Envoy, Staffan de Mistura, Announces Resignation.

17.10.2018 The United Nations' chief mediator for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, said Wednesday that he would step down at the end of November after four years and four months in the role, becoming the third diplomat to leave the job since Syria's civil war began in 2011. (The New York Times) <https://goo.gl/LwuiBD>

#### 3. Russia delivers advanced S-300 system to Syria to thwart IDF strikes.

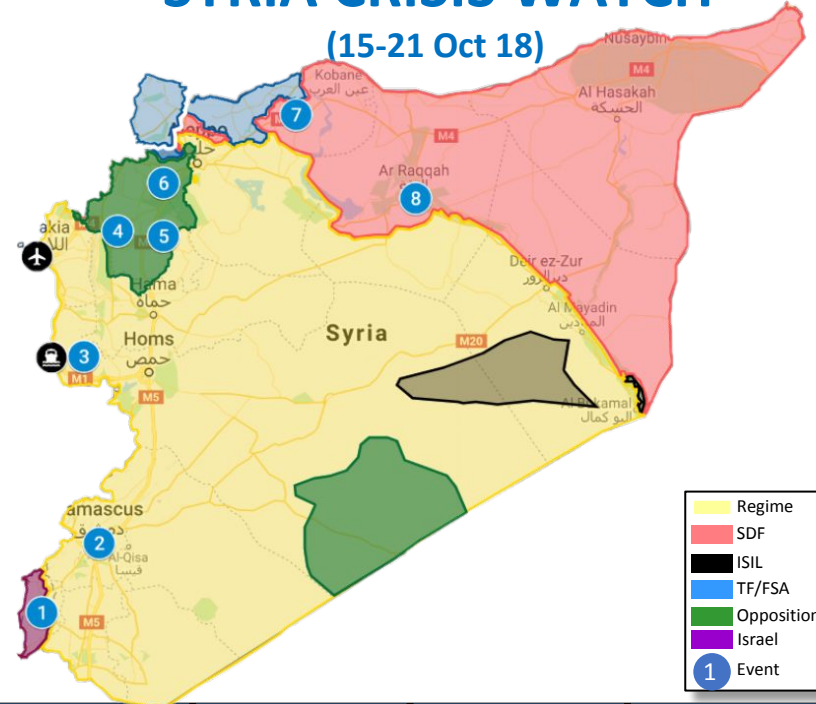
19.10.2018 Russia has reportedly delivered a more advanced version of its S-300 missile defense system to the Syrian military as part of its effort to thwart Israeli airstrikes against Iranian-backed forces throughout the war-torn country, the Russian daily Izvestia reported on Friday. (i24 International) <https://goo.gl/9npmuc>

#### 4. Status on Idlib de-escalation zone.

19.10.2018 Commenting on the Idlib de-escalation zone, Putin said that "Not all heavy weapons are withdrawn, not all militants of terrorist groups, of ISIS, of Jabhat al-Nusra are withdrawn but Turkish partners do everything they can to implement their obligations." (AMN) <https://goo.gl/NfRNJU>

#### 5. Russia, Turkey extend deadline to clear Syria's demilitarized zone.

18.10.2018 Russia and Turkey agreed Thursday to allow opposition groups more time to exit Syria's western Idlib province as they work to establish a demilitarized zone, the United Nations said. Jan Egeland, senior adviser to the U.N. special envoy for Syria, said it was a "relief" there had been no further violence in the region amid the attempt to set up the zone.. (UPI) <https://goo.gl/hhGW83>



### ASSESSMENT

- *Russia continues to put pressure on Turkey to fulfil its obligations on clearing the demilitarized zone from terrorist groups such as ISIL and HTS. However, as long as these groups maintain their presence nothing will change for Turkey even they withdraw from the demilitarized zone. Russia highly likely exploit this issue until Syrian Regime captures the whole region.*
- *Russia is highly likely aiming to strengthen its position in Idlib against the US by entering important NATO allies, such as Germany and France alongside Turkey, to the Syrian equation.*

#### 6. Four-way Syria summit to convene on Oct 27 in Turkey.

19.10.2018 A first-of-its kind summit with the participation of leaders from Turkey, Russia, Germany and France will be convened in Istanbul on Oct. 27 in which recent developments in Syria with a special emphasis on Idlib, as well as projections for a political settlement will be discussed in depth. (Hurriyet Daily News) <https://goo.gl/5YdPag>

#### 7. Turkey Threatens to Move on Syria's Manbij.

18.10.2018 Turkish President Erdogan is warning of military action against a key U.S. ally in the disputed Syrian city of Manbij, as bilateral tensions threaten to resurface between the NATO partners. "We will do what is necessary," was Erdogan's message to U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo when they met Wednesday in Ankara, according to Turkish Foreign Minister Cavusoglu. (VOA) <https://goo.gl/4kE4vj>

#### 8. U.S. general says conditions for Islamist extremism still linger.

16.10.2018 The United States' top military officer said on Tuesday that little progress had been made in dealing with the underlying conditions that have given rise to armed Islamist militants, even as military gains have been made against groups like Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. (Reuters) <https://goo.gl/2SvqTy>

### OPINIONS

#### 1. Russian soft power places Moscow at the centre of Syria's chaos.

18.10.2018 As the Syrian war morphed from national insurgency to international power play, Russia established itself as one of the defining influences in the conflict. Moscow's soft power has drawn the focus of negotiations away from UN talks in Geneva to the Kremlin-mandated peace processes in Kazakhstan and the southern Russian resort town of Sochi. (Middle East Online) <https://goo.gl/KYwZLB>

#### 2. Russia's grand strategy: how Putin is using Syria conflict to turn Turkey into Moscow's proxy.

16.10.2018 From NATO's perspective, the political rapprochement between Russia and Turkey has so far been seen as tactical. But the conversion of this rapprochement into a growing asymmetric interdependence that favours Russia is casting doubt on Turkey's already fragile commitment to the Western alliance. (Washington Institute) <https://goo.gl/Xo6NhW>

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. Israel will continue Syria strikes despite S-300, Netanyahu tells Moscow.

09.10.2018 Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he told Russia's vice premier in talks on Tuesday that Israel must continue to hit hostile targets in neighboring Syria, despite Moscow's decision to equip Damascus with advanced air defense missiles. (timesofisrael) <https://goo.gl/RqMGzE>

#### 2. Three Russian S-300PM battalion sets delivered to Syria free of charge.

08.10.2018 Russia has donated to Syria three battalion sets of S-300PM missile systems of eight launchers each, a military diplomatic source told TASS on Monday. The S-300 systems underwent capital repairs at Russian defense enterprises, are in good condition and are capable of performing combat tasks," the source said. (TASS) <https://goo.gl/T8B76D>

#### 3. Russia Warns US is Playing Dangerous Game by Dividing Syria.

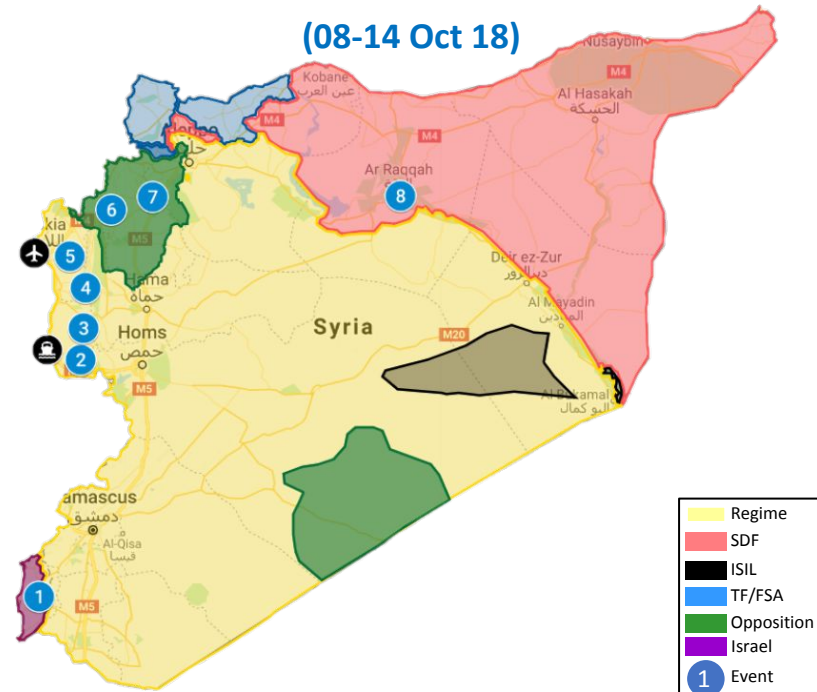
12.10.2018 Russia's top diplomat, Russia Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, has accused the United States of trying to permanently divide Syria by supporting Kurdish separatism, a move he called illegal and a violation of the war-torn country's sovereignty. (Newsweek) <https://goo.gl/fn66Ws>

#### 4. Russia presses Europe to break with Trump and help rebuild Syria.

12.10.2018 Russia is urging Germany and France to break ranks with their American ally and help rebuild Syria so that refugees can go home, a senior adviser to the Russian government said. (Zaman Alwasl) <https://goo.gl/Aiv6Lh>

#### 5. Russian S-300 systems in Syria to be operated by Iranian specialists.

12.10.2018 The Israeli military intelligence website, DEBKAFfiles, notes that Russia was clearly planning to let Iranians operate the anti-air defense system all along, since it sent Syria S-300PMU-2 systems, exactly the same model which Iran received from Russia in 2016. (UAWire) <https://goo.gl/rBMT8r>



### ASSESSMENT

- It is well-known that Idlib will not stay calm so long as Turkey having difficulties with the extremist. Syrian Regime and Russia will likely try to exploit Hayat Tahrir al-Sham issue to start the operations again.
- Russia continues to augment Syrian air defence system with S-300PMs possibly as a precaution against any further escalation with U.S. and Israel.
- Russia uses Syrian theatre as a test-bed to demonstrate and test its military technologies which improves its market share in defence sector.

#### 6. Turkey says Syria rebels pull heavy arms from Idlib province.

10.10.2018 Turkey said a planned buffer zone in the northwestern Syrian province of Idlib has been cleared of heavy weapons as part of a deal reached between Moscow and Ankara. "The pullout of heavy weapons from the de-militarized zone was completed on October 10," the Turkish defense ministry said in a statement. (The Defense Post) <https://goo.gl/kiFTX6>

#### 7. Turkish-Russian Deconfliction Agreement on Idlib Faces Difficulties with Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, Local Administration.

13.10.2018 The Russian-Turkish deconfliction agreement on the northern Syrian governorate of Idlib is facing difficulties with the withdrawal of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) militants from the demilitarized zone and the local administration in the governorate. (South Front) <https://goo.gl/PWgx3X>

#### 8. U.S. Finally Reveals What It Really Wants Now in Syria.

11.10.2018 Addressing the Jewish Institute for National Security of America's, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that "defeating ISIS, which was once our primary focus, continues to be a top priority, but it will now be joined by two other mutually reinforcing objectives. These include a peaceful and political resolution to the Syrian conflict and the removal of all Iranian and Iranian-backed forces from Syria." (Newsweek) <https://goo.gl/cCZBgP>

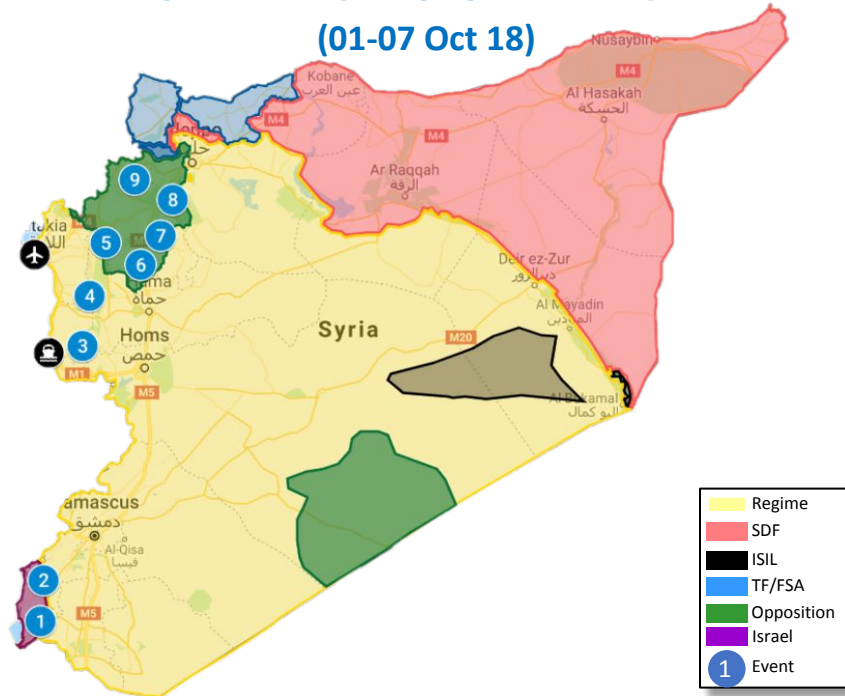
### OPINIONS

#### 1. Russia is Winning the Information War in Iraq and Syria.

08.10.2018 Moscow is "better than us" in using social media to shape the strategic landscape, says a former deputy commander of the West's anti-ISIS coalition. A senior general in the international fight against ISIS has a pointed warning for Western governments with troops in Iraq and Syria: You're being played by the Russians. (Defense One) <https://goo.gl/g4Qs66>

#### 2. A Strengthening Shiite Axis Paradoxically Gives Peace between Syria and Israel a Chance.

10.10.2018 It is clear that Iran's proxy forces would prefer to create a new Syria in accordance with their strategic interests, yet there is a clear point of contention between Iranian expansionist policies and the other regional and international powers' interests in the country. Russia would prefer to see a political arrangement between all involved parties; Assad intends to focus on rebuilding a Syria completely under his control; and Saudi and Israeli foreign interests are dedicated to preventing the realization of Iran's intentions in the region. (Washington Institute) <https://goo.gl/Xo6NhW>



**ASSESSMENT**

- *Syrian war will likely evolve into an armament race between the US and Russia following the delivery of new F-35s to Israel by the US as a response to Russian S-300 move to support the Syrian air defence systems.*
- *For the time being, Russia seems content with Turkey's efforts to enforce the demilitarized zone agreement in Idlib, which gives Russia and Syria the opportunity to reinforce their forces. Deployment of S-300s in Syria is highly likely not only aiming to deter Israeli airstrikes but also possible US-led airstrikes in case of a combined Russian-Syrian operation targeting Idlib.*

**5. Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham and National Front for Liberation Reach Reconciliation Agreement After Series of Armed Clashes.**

06.10.2018 The former branch of al-Qaeda in Syria, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), and the Turkish-backed National Front for Liberation (NFL) reached a reconciliation agreement after a series of armed clashes in the western Aleppo countryside. Under the agreement, both groups will withdraw their weapons from civilian areas and release all the militants who were captured during the clashes. (South Front) <https://goo.gl/QyB38X>

**6. Turkey Requests the Personal Information of Idlib's Factions' Troops and an Inventory of Their Weapons.**

06.10.2018 On Friday (October 5), a source from the "Free Army" told Enab Baladi that the Turkish intelligence services ordered all factions including "Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham" to deliver a report of each troop, including a personal photo, the name and other related personal information, in addition to conducting a process of inventory of the weaponry, of all types; light, medium and heavy. (Enab Baladi) <https://goo.gl/seQowR>

**7. Turkish-backed Groups Began Withdrawing Heavy Weapons from Demilitarized Zone Around Idlib.**

06.10.2018 A commander of a pro-opposition armed group told the Reuters news agency that two Turkish-backed Free Syrian Army (FSA) groups, namely the Free Idlib Army and Faylaq al-Sham began withdrawing their heavy weapons from the demilitarized zone. (South Front) <https://goo.gl/QsZrkd>

**8. Russia and Turkey fulfilling their agreement on Syria's Idlib.**

04.10.2018 The Russian leader confirmed that both Russia and Turkey are fulfilling their commitments. "We are working together with our Turkish partners. We see that they are treating these agreements very seriously, fulfilling their commitments, freeing or at least facilitating the process when militants from different radical groups are leaving this zone and when heavy weaponry is withdrawn," Putin said at a press conference after Russian-Austrian talks. (TASS) <https://goo.gl/8VQane>

**9. Erdogan: Turkey Won't Leave Syria Until its People Hold Elections.**

06.10.2018 Turkey will not leave Syria until the Syrian people hold an election, Turkish President Erdogan said on Thursday. "Whenever the Syrian people hold an election, we will leave Syria to its owners after they hold their elections," he said. (TASS) <https://goo.gl/8VQane>

**KEY EVENTS**

**1. US to send Israel more F-35s after Moscow supplies S-300s to Syria – reports.**

06.10.2018 The US will reportedly provide Israel with more F-35s after Russia supplied Syria with S-300 missile systems. Moscow's move came in response to the downing of a Russian military plane, which it partly blamed on Israel. (RT) <https://goo.gl/tDcQ7E>

**2. Russia Trying to Mediate Between Iran & Israel as Syria Tensions Simmer.**

06.10.2018 Tensions between Tehran and Tel Aviv took a turn for the worse this week, with Israel vowing to continue its attacks against the alleged Iranian presence in Syria. Meanwhile, a senior Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps commander has warned that Israel would be destroyed by Hezbollah and its government would be forced to "flee into the sea." (Sputnik) <https://goo.gl/po7zSd>

**3. Russia Says Its Syrian Air Defenses Can Track Aircraft In Europe, Israel.**

05.10.2018 Russia says its enhanced air defense system in Syria can spot aircraft on airfields in Europe and Israel. "Russia will jam satellite navigation, on-board radars and communication systems of combat aircraft, which attack targets in the Syrian territory, in the regions over the waters of the Mediterranean Sea bordering with Syria," Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu threatened. (Nationalinterest) <https://goo.gl/jvRwvt>

**4. Russia deployment of S-300 in Syria risks military escalation: France.**

05.10.2018 Russia's deployment of the S-300 anti-aircraft defense system in Syria risks fueling military escalation and hindering prospects for a political solution to the seven-year conflict, France's foreign ministry said on Friday. "France notes with concern the delivery by Russia of sophisticated anti-aircraft capabilities for the benefit of the Syrian regime," Foreign ministry spokeswoman Agnes von Der Muhll told reporters in an online briefing. (Reuters) <https://goo.gl/VoN5Es>

## SYRIA CRISIS WATCH

(24-30 Sep 18)

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. Russia ramps up anti-Israel measures in Syria for possible war of attrition.

29.09.2018 Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov announced on Friday, Sept. 28 that Russia had already handed over advanced S-300 missile defense systems to Syria. Netanyahu responded to the Russian disclosure by calling the S-300 handover to Syria "irresponsible." (DEBKA) <https://goo.gl/P9YVpA>

#### 2. Russia delivers advanced anti-aircraft system to Syria.

29.09.2018 Russia announced earlier this week that it would supply the anti-aircraft missiles after Syrian forces responding to an Israeli air strike on 17 September mistakenly shot down a Russian military reconnaissance plane, killing all 15 people on board. Russian officials said Syria's outdated S-200 systems weren't sophisticated enough to identify the Russian plane as a friendly one. (The New Arab) <https://goo.gl/3GMGoR>

#### 3. Syrian Opposition Sources Leak Details of Deconfliction Agreement on Idlib.

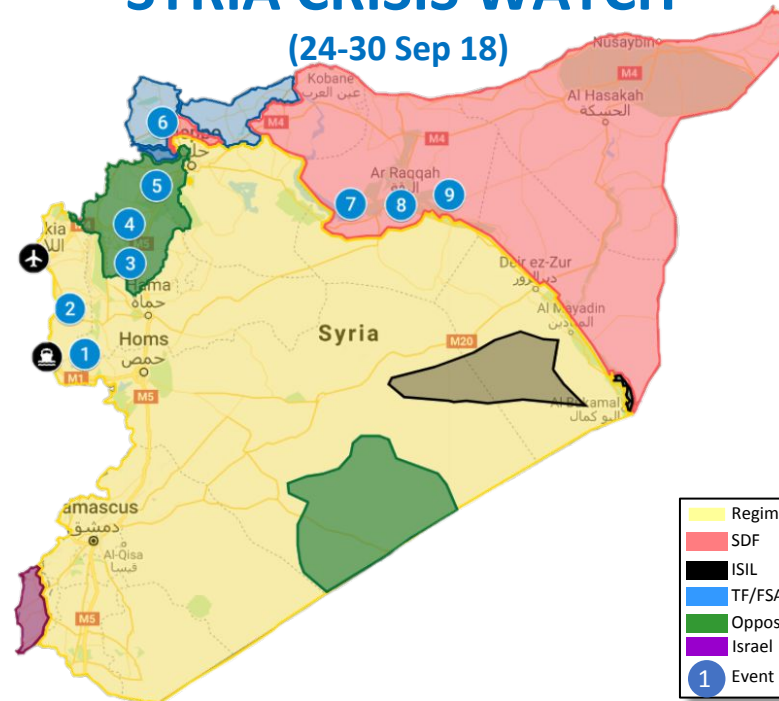
29.09.2018 Accordingly, the 15-20km demilitarized zone will be located within the opposition-held areas in northwestern Syria. From its side, the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) will not withdraw any unit or weapon from the frontlines. The radical groups that will be forced out from the demilitarized zone are Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), Horas al-Din and the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP), according to the Nedaa Syria report. (South Front) <https://goo.gl/eCEGF5>

#### 4. Leaders of Germany, Turkey, France, Russia to meet at Syria summit in October: Merkel.

28.09.2018 Leaders from Turkey, Russia, Germany and France will come together at the first summit of its kind in a bid to extensively discuss recent developments in Syria, German Chancellor Angela Merkel has announced while hosting President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Berlin. (Hurriyet Daily News) <https://goo.gl/Uuzgji>

#### 5. Pro-Turkey rebels start pullout from Syria's Idlib under deal.

30.09.2018 The rebel group Failaq al-Sham has begun withdrawing from a demilitarized zone in northern Syria. It is the first to do so under a Russian-Turkish deal aimed at averting a large-scale government offensive. (DW) <https://goo.gl/XaUf6u>



### ASSESSMENT

- *Despite the strong US and Israel opposition, Russia is exploiting downing of its plane to replace the Syrian air defence systems with the more sophisticated S-300s, which will pose danger to both US-led coalition and Israeli airplanes.*
- *Turkey seems to convince some of the rebel groups in Idlib. However, the success of Turkey and the demilitarized zone agreement is strictly tied to the reaction of the radical groups such as Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), Horas al-Din and the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP).*

#### 6. Turkey's Erdogan vows to impose secure zones east of Euphrates in Syria.

24.09.2018 Turkey will take action east of the Euphrates river in Syria and impose secure zones as it has done in the northwest of the country, President Tayyip Erdogan said in comments broadcast on Turkish media on Monday. Earlier this year, Turkey carried out a military operation to seize control of Syria's Afrin region from the Syrian Kurdish YPG militia, which Ankara considers a terrorist organization. The YPG also controls the Syrian region east of the Euphrates. (Reuters) <https://goo.gl/MWLR89>

#### 7. Trump administration warns Russia of 'major mistake' if it supplies Syria with advanced missiles.

25.09.2018 Russia announced Monday that the Syrian government will be supplied with S-300 missile defense systems amid the downing of a Russian plane by Syria last week, a move the Trump administration calls a "major mistake." Trump administration urged Russia to reconsider the move, warning that that supplying Syria with an advanced missile defense system would be a "major mistake" and "significant escalation". (Fox News) <https://goo.gl/BRvNTs>

#### 8. Bolton: U.S. forces will stay in Syria until Iran and its proxies depart.

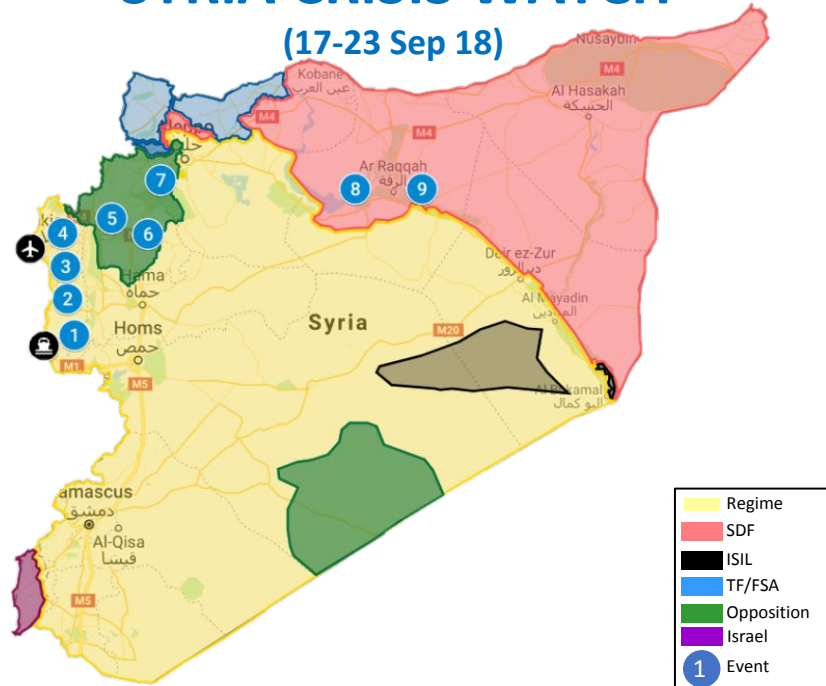
24.09.2018 White House national security adviser John Bolton said that the United States wouldn't be leaving Syria so long as Iranian forces continued to operate there. The legal basis the U.S. military relies on to operate in Syria is a 17-year-old law from Congress that authorized the American armed forces to go after the perpetrators of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, namely al-Qaeda and any associated organizations. The authorization says nothing about Iran. (Washington Times) <https://goo.gl/xrKRAq>

#### 9. Senate panel advances Syria sanctions that also target Russia.

26.09.2018 The Senate Foreign Relations Committee advanced the latest legislative effort to hit Russia with new sanctions. The bill would impose sanctions against the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad over "war crimes" and "crimes against humanity" in Syria, including his use of chemical weapons. It would also extend sanctions to individuals and entities supporting Assad's government and its war effort — a prohibition that by definition includes countries such as Russia and Iran.. (Washington Post) <https://goo.gl/F5JHnk>

## SYRIA CRISIS WATCH

(17-23 Sep 18)



### ASSESSMENT

- *Having signed an agreement with Turkey, Russia, not only delayed possible US led coalition intervention in Idlib but also burdened Turkey with clearing the area from terrorist groups, which requires Turkey to reinforce the area militarily. Besides, Putin, by this political move, managed to keep Erdogan in line.*
- *Russia might use the downing of the Russian plane to put pressure on Israel to deter its future air operations targeting Syrian regime assets as happened previously in the event of downing of Russian jet by Turkey.*

### 6. 'Expect the worst': Russia-Turkey deal over military buffer zone in Syria's Idlib met with scepticism.

19.09.2018 Russia and Turkey have forged a surprise deal which they claim will stave off an offensive to retake Syria's last remaining opposition stronghold, agreeing to establish a demilitarised zone between government and rebel forces and joint patrols to enforce the compromise. (Independent) <https://goo.gl/Ah9Qqo>

### 7. Turkey faces perilous mission in northern Syria — and possible disaster if it fails.

22.09.2018 As the chief backer of Syria's embattled opposition, Turkey now faces a perilous task. It must disarm its rebel allies in Syria's Idlib province, under a new agreement with Russia, and eliminate the hardcore jihadists in their midst. If not, Syrian and allied Russian forces have threatened an all-out assault to retake the territory (The Washington Post) <https://goo.gl/K71LGX>

### 8. USS Harry S. Truman Carrier Strike Group Begins Operations in U.S. 6th Fleet.

19.09.2018 The Harry S. Truman Carrier Strike Group has commenced operations in the U.S. 6th Fleet area of operations to continue support to NATO allies, European and African partner nations, coalition partners, and U.S. national security interest in Europe and Africa. The strike group includes the flagship, USS Harry S. Truman, the guided missile cruiser USS Normandy and guided missile destroyers from Destroyer Squadron 28. (U.S. Department of Defense) <https://goo.gl/xVzmDj>

### 9. Coalition Effort Aims at Stability in Iraq, Syria.

18.09.2018 In Syria, ground operations for Phase 3 of Operation Roundup have begun, and Syrian partner forces continue clearance of the Middle Euphrates River Valley, according to the OIR spox. The coalition has supported the SDF through air support, as well as training and equipment. Additionally, in liberated areas, the coalition trained internal security forces to maintain the peace and security. (U.S. Department of Defence) <https://goo.gl/AmCXCT>

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. Russia blames Israel for missile strike that downed Russian plane.

18.09.2018 Russia's Defense Ministry warned it could retaliate against Israel on Tuesday after one of its surveillance aircraft with 15 people on board was brought down by a Syrian surface-to-air missile over the Mediterranean Sea. (CBS) <https://goo.gl/UrXbwT>

#### 2. Israel showed Russia proof Syria to blame for downed plane - Israeli military.

21.09.2018 Israel has provided Moscow with proof it bore no responsibility for bringing down a Russian plane in Syria, an Israeli military official said on Friday. (DW) <https://goo.gl/dFJpL5>

#### 3. Putin Calls Downing of Russian Plane in Syria 'Tragic' and Absolves Israel.

18.09.2018 Despite anger by the Russian military, fears of a Russia-Israel confrontation were dampened by Russia's president, Vladimir V. Putin. He blamed "a chain of tragic accidental circumstances," and not just Israel, for the downing of the plane, an Ilyushin Il-20 surveillance aircraft. (NYT) <https://goo.gl/UxcWd4>

#### 4. 'Criminal negligence' or disregard to Russia-Israel ties: MoD details chronology of Il-20 downing.

23.09.2018 "We believe that the blame for the Russian Il-20 aircraft tragedy lies entirely with the Israeli Air Force," said spokesman Major General Igor Konashenkov, before revealing a detailed account of events leading to the downing of the Russian Il-20 military aircraft on September 17. (RT) <https://goo.gl/Nsnh73>

#### 5. Hurras al-Dien and the National Liberation Front show different stance towards Putin – Erdogan agreement.

23.09.2018 The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitored contrast in attitudes towards the Russian – Turkish agreement that was reached, on establishing a demilitarized area extends from the north-eastern countryside of Lattakia to the western countryside Aleppo passing through both Idlib and Hama countryside. (SOHR) <https://goo.gl/WP9N6N>



## KEY EVENTS

### 1. US, Britain, France Vow 'Stronger Response' if Syrian Regime Uses Chemical Weapons Again.

10.09.2018 The United States, Britain and France vowed on Monday that they would have a "much stronger response" compared to previous ones should the Syrian regime use chemical weapons once again. (Aawsat) <https://goo.gl/d2iS5z>

### 2. Syria blames Israel for 'attack on Damascus airport'.

16.09.2018 Israel launched missiles at a target near the Syrian capital of Damascus, the state-run Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) on Sunday. But an independent war monitor said the missiles were heading for an Iranian arms cache. (DW) <https://goo.gl/dFJpL5>

### 3. Russian warships lurking off Syria are probably hanging around for cruise missile strikes in a major offensive.

13.09.2018 Russia recently gathered its forces in the Mediterranean for combat exercises. The drills have since concluded, but Russian naval assets remain in the area. US defense officials suspect that the Russian navy is hanging around in the area to launch cruise missile strikes should senior leadership order a strike as Moscow's partners in Syria prepare for a massive assault on the last rebel stronghold. (BI) <https://goo.gl/pJhWcg>

### 4. Russia helping Syria restore and modernize its air defense system.

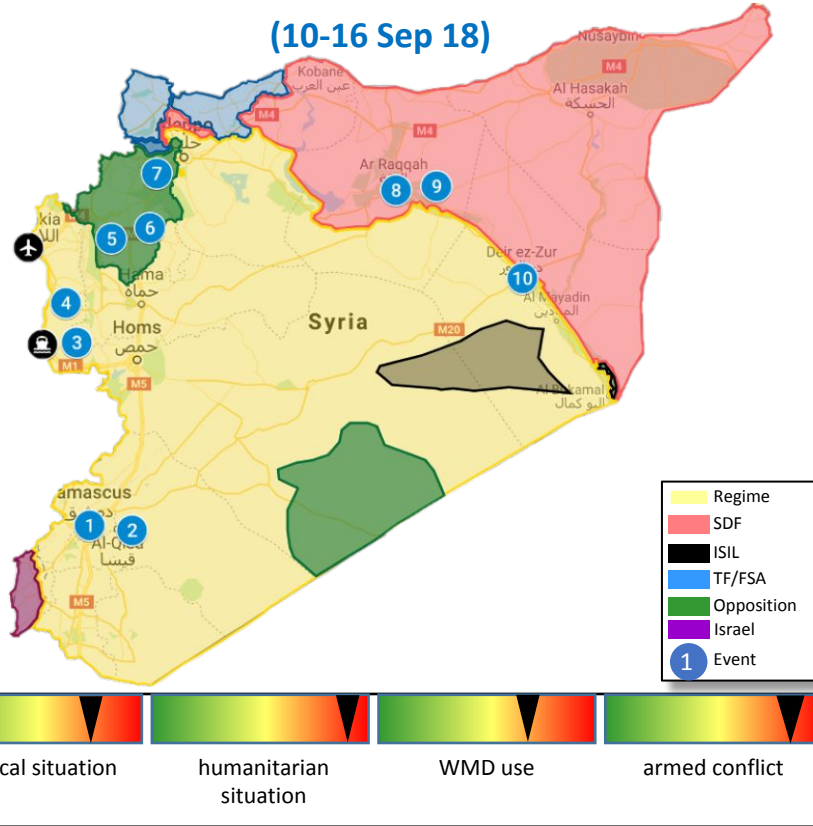
10.09.2018 Russia is helping Syria restore and modernized its air defense system, Russia's Ambassador to that country, Alexander Kinshchak, told TASS on Friday. "We are helping our Syrian partners to restore, modernize and boost the efficiency of the integrated air defense system," he said when asked how well Syria is protected against possible airstrikes by Western nations. (RA) <https://goo.gl/7KBxaV>

### 5. The 'Final Offensive' In Syria by Putin and Assad Suddenly Looks Like It's On Hold.

14.09.2018 Just a week after Syria's northern Idlib province seemed on the brink of a massive military assault by the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad backed by Russian air power, has not happened and looks like it is on hold. (DB) <https://goo.gl/cgWP1k>

# SYRIA CRISIS WATCH

(10-16 Sep 18)



## ASSESSMENT

- *Suspended Idlib offensive demonstrates that international reactions seems to work for the time being but highly likely not last for long. Besides, Russia seems not to lose its influence over Turkey. Putin, being aware of that Erdogan will plunge into a quest to find new alliances, highly likely make new moves to keep Turkey on Russian - Iranian axis.*
- *Against the deal made between Russia and Turkey, having encouraged by the recent statements of its Western Allies concerning implications of Idlib offensive, Turkey continues to reinforce its observation posts around Idlib to deter any further attack.*

### 6. Turkey sides with U.S. in Syria, sends fresh weapons to rebels.

12.09.2018 Turkey is tacitly siding with the United States against Russia and Iran in Syria by sending fresh weapons supplies to Syrian rebels to help them stave off an impending offensive by the Moscow- and Tehran-backed Assad regime. (The Washington Times) <https://goo.gl/q1oerY>

### 7. Turkey Is Responsible for Separating out Islamists in Syria, Russian Envoy Says.

12.09.2018 Russia hopes for a peaceful resolution of the situation in Syria's rebel-held province of Idlib but believes it is up to Turkey to separate Islamist militants from the moderate opposition, Russia's Syria envoy said on Tuesday. (The Moscow Times) <https://goo.gl/BVvXqR>

### 8. US senator claims Britain's MI6 is planning a fake chemical weapons attack on Syria.

11.09.2018 Fresh off a sitdown with Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, Virginia state senator Richard Black turned up on Arab TV last week making an extraordinary claim about one of the US' closest allies. Mr Black said Britain's MI6 intelligence service was planning a chemical weapons attack on the Syrian people, which it would then blame on Mr Assad. (The Independent) <https://goo.gl/uLCCxK>

### 9. Marine F-35 aircraft carrier arrives in Middle East after Russia threatened US forces in Syria.

11.09.2018 USS Essex, a small, flat-deck aircraft carrier used to launch US Marine Corps F-35B stealth jets that can take off almost vertically, just arrived off the horn of Africa after Russia threatened US forces in Syria in the latest military buildup between the world's two greatest nuclear powers. (Business Insider UK) <https://goo.gl/yv266a>

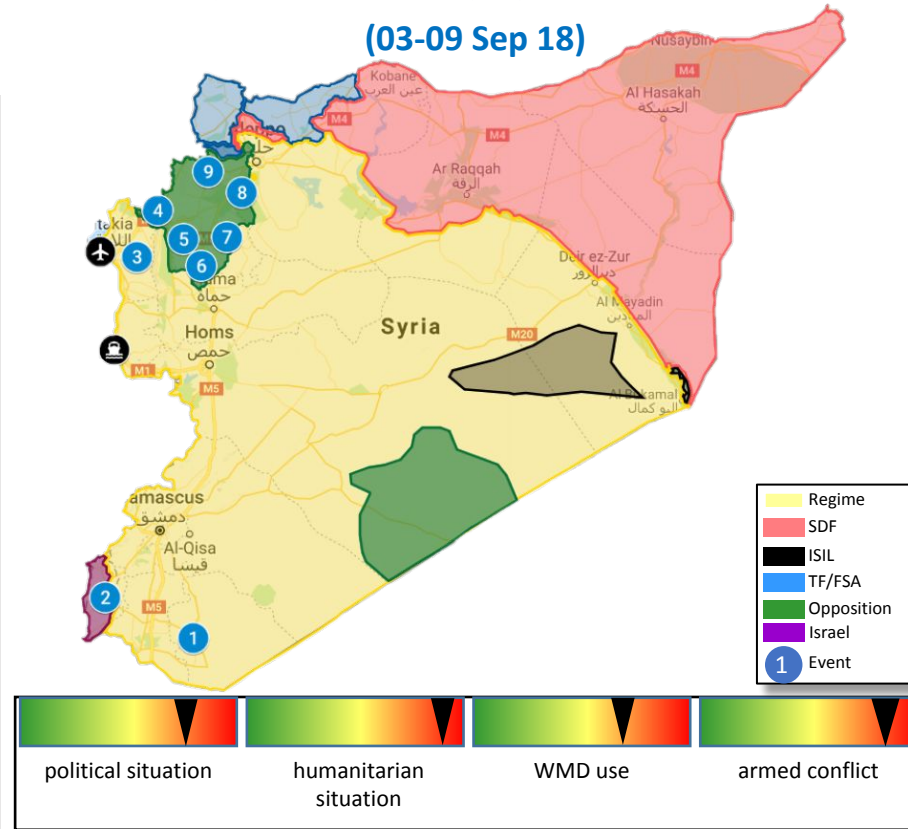
### 10. Russian Air Force unleashes powerful assault against ISIS in eastern Syria.

11.09.2018 Since entering into peace talks with Turkey on the Idlib situation, the Russian Air Force has concentrated their efforts on the Islamic State's last pockets in eastern Syria. Third day in a row, the Russian Air Force launched airstrikes over the Al-Safa and Badiya Al-Sham regions of eastern Syria which further enabled Syrian Arab Army to make advances in these two pockets. (AMN) <https://goo.gl/inadSg>



## SYRIA CRISIS WATCH

(03-09 Sep 18)



### ASSESSMENT

- *Erdogan's futile attempts in Tehran Summit to reach a ceasefire in Idlib, revealed disagreements between Turkey and the other parties of the Astana Process, Russia and Iran. It is highly likely Erdogan, being alienated by Putin, in the coming days, will plunge into a quest to take side with the US in order to deter Russian-Syrian attacks in Idlib.*
- *Turkey continues to reinforce its observation posts in Idlib to deter/counter any possible Syrian attack. However, Turkish Forces, without air cover, will be left unprotected against Syrian attacks unless Russia give the green light. Statements made by Turkish side show that Erdogan is eager to play Russian roulette which will endanger the Turkish Forces in Syria.*

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. Violent clashes continue between ISIS, the regime forces and Hezbollah in Rif Dimashq.

08.09.2018 In continuing operations since 25th of July 2018, regime forces and Hezbollah has killed 211 IS militants while advancing to Tlul al-Safa area near the administrative border of al-Suwaidaa province. (SOHR) <https://goo.gl/Pz7F88>

#### 2. Israel Reveals Size of its War Against Iran In Syria And Says It May Soon Get Bigger.

05.09.2018 While Israel has routinely declined to claim responsibility for many of the operations, a senior military official told reporters Tuesday that Israeli warplanes had launched up to 200 aerial attacks, mostly against arms shipments and military positions. (Newsweek) <https://goo.gl/GK8EIE>

#### 3. Russian marines land on Syrian shores in massive Mediterranean drills.

08.09.2018 Russia has staged large-scale military exercises in the Mediterranean Sea near Syria, involving both its Navy and Air Force. The Marines used helicopters, fast-attack craft and armored vehicles while landing from major amphibious ships under the cover of dozens of Russian combat aircraft. (RT) <https://goo.gl/EL9b5Y>

#### 4. Syria and Russia resume Idlib air strikes.

09.09.2018 Russian and Syrian jets resumed intensive strikes in Idlib and Hama on Sunday, residents and rescuers said, as Damascus stepped up its assault on the rebels' last major stronghold after a Russian-Iranian-Turkish summit failed to agree a ceasefire. (MEMO) <https://goo.gl/Aox6gp>

#### 5. Russia, Iran and Turkey fail to agree on a ceasefire in Syria.

08.09.2018 At the summit in Tehran on Friday, September 7, Russia, Iran and Turkey failed to agree on a unified approach to the upcoming Syrian government troop's attacks in the province of Idlib. The final declaration of the meeting does not mention any specific actions, reports Deutsche Welle. Erdogan sought to include the ceasefire provisions the joint final statement, while Russia and Iran insisted on continuing military operations in Idlib. (UAWire) <https://goo.gl/GMXK1k>

#### 6. Turkey will not watch killing in Syria from sidelines: President Erdoğan.

08.09.2018 Turkey will not watch the killing of tens of thousands of innocent people in Syria to further the regime's interests, Turkey's president said late September 7. In a Twitter message in Turkish, English, Russian and Arabic, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said Turkey would neither watch from the sidelines nor participate in such a game "if the world turns a blind eye to the killing of tens of thousands of innocent people [in Syria]". (Hurriyet Daily News) <https://goo.gl/AtXNnY>

#### 7. Turkey's military presence the only guarantee to prevent Idlib assault - Presidential spokesperson.

08.09.2018 Turkish presidential spokesperson İbrahim Kalın said on Saturday in Daily Sabah that Turkey has 12 military posts in Idlib established under the Astana Agreement. "The presence of Turkish soldiers there is probably the only guarantee to prevent any major assault because the Russian jet fighters and the regime ground forces cannot afford attacks while Turkish soldiers are there; we know that they do not care about civilians and legitimate, moderate opposition forces," he said. (Ahval) <https://goo.gl/TkN2Y1>

#### 8. Turkey Deploys Large Number of Military Vehicles to Syria's Idlib.

09.09.2018 According to Turkish media, outlet Sol news agency, tens of Turkish troops and a total of 300 military vehicles were deployed to Syrian city overnight on Saturday. The news agency pointed out that the Turkish military, as part of preparations for any conflicts with the Syrian army in Idlib, has also stationed counter-air defense missiles so that the Syrian jets will not be able to bombard the city. (Basnews) <https://goo.gl/wYWBZ5>

#### 9. U.S. has seen evidence of Syria preparing chemical weapons in Idlib: envoy.

06.09.2018 There is "lots of evidence" that chemical weapons are being prepared by Syrian government forces in Idlib in northwest Syria, the new U.S. adviser for Syria Jim Jeffrey said on Thursday (6 September 2018), as he warned of the risks of an offensive on the country's last big rebel enclave. The White House has warned that the United States and its allies would respond "swiftly and vigorously" if government forces used chemical weapons in the widely expected offensive. (Reuters) <https://goo.gl/VKt6eA>

## SYRIA CRISIS WATCH

(27 Aug-02 Sep 18)

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. Iranian Military Says Will Stay In Syria Despite U.S. Demands For Exit.

29.08.2018 Iran will maintain its military presence in Syria despite demands from the United States and Israel that it withdraw, Iran's military attaché in Damascus has said. (RADIO FREE EUROPE) <https://goo.gl/5XwvUE>

#### 2. Russian Navy, Warplanes Start Massive Drills in Mediterranean.

01.09.2018 According to the Russian Defense Ministry, the drills will involve 26 warships from the Northern, Baltic, Black Sea Fleets and the Caspian Flotilla, including two submarines, and 34 long-distance, military transport and naval aircraft. The exercises will also involve Tu-160 strategic bombers, Tu-142 and Il-38 anti-submarine warfare planes, as well as Su-33 and Su-30SM fighter jets. (SPUTNIK) <https://goo.gl/v1jgtE>

#### 3. Putin to attend Syria peace talks in Iran.

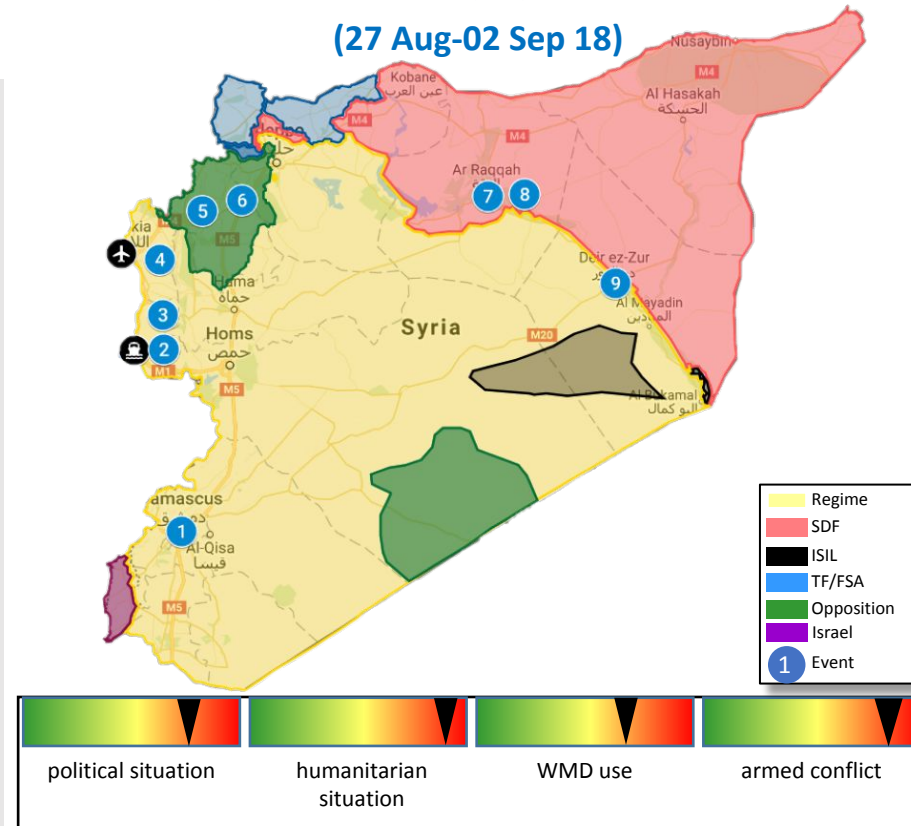
31.08.2018 Preparations are under way for Russian President Vladimir Putin to attend Syria peace talks with his Turkish and Iranian counterparts in Tehran next week, the Kremlin says. Russia and Iran, major military backers of Syria's leadership, have been working with Syrian opposition supporter Turkey to maintain safe zones for civilians in the war-torn country. (9NEWS) <https://goo.gl/V3PGt8>

#### 4. More Advanced Russia-Made Air Defense Systems Arrive in Syria to Counter Possible US Attack.

01.09.2018 The Arabic-language website of Sputnik reported that the Russia-made Tor-M2U short-range air defense missile systems (ADMS) have been sent to Russia-run Hmeimim airbase in the coastal province of Latakia after the Russian Defense Ministry warned about a possible massive missile attack by the US-led coalition on Syria. (FARS NEWS) <https://goo.gl/3hqr9U>

#### 5. Russia and Turkey agreed on joint operation in northern Syria.

30.08.2018 Russia and Turkey agreed to prepare an operation against the militant group al-Nusra Front, in the Syrian region of Idlib, together with forces of the Syrian President, Bashar Assad, stated the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergey Lavrov, TASS reports. (UAWIRE) <https://goo.gl/B2ivB1>



### ASSESSMENT

- Prior to Idlib offensive, Russia increases its preparedness both politically and militarily. Russia not only reinforces military bases in Syria with more sophisticated air defence weapons, but it also responds to the US and its allies with a huge drill/show of force in the EMED to deter possible allied military offensives.
- There is a common stance among Turkey, EU and US against an operation in Idlib due to probable humanitarian crisis. However Turkish designation of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham as a terrorist organisation may be a sign that Turkey could not convince Russia against such move. A secondary purpose for Turkey could be to prevent possible allegations concerning ties with terrorist groups.

#### 6. Turkey blacklists jihadist group as Idlib operation looms.

31.08.2018 Turkey on Friday officially designated the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) jihadist group as a "terrorist" organisation, ahead of an anticipated operation by the Syrian regime in the province of Idlib, much of which is controlled by the group. (THE DAILY MAIL) <https://goo.gl/dZQC5R>

#### 7. The Secretary's Special Representative for Syria Engagement, Ambassador James Jeffrey, and Special Envoy for Syria, Joel Rayburn, Travel to Israel, Jordan, and Turkey.

31.08.2018 The Secretary's newly appointed Special Representative for Syria Engagement, Ambassador James Jeffrey, will travel to Israel, Jordan, and Turkey, September 1-4. In Israel, Ambassador Jeffrey will meet with senior government officials to discuss shared interest, in reference to Syria, in maintaining Israel's security while countering Iran's destabilizing activity throughout the region. (U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE) <https://goo.gl/KU4qM7>

#### 8. U.S., Syrian security officials met in Damascus: official report.

28.08.2018 A U.S. delegation including security and intelligence officials visited Damascus in June and met Syria's security chief, an official in the regional alliance backing President Bashar al-Assad said on Tuesday. (REUTERS) <https://goo.gl/ijx1Pq>

#### 9. ISIS Revenge Ops Against Defectors in the east of Deir-ez Zor.

02.09.2018 ISIS still controls an enclave stretching from Hajin to al-Baghuz on the eastern banks of Euphrates River in the eastern countryside of Deir Ezzor and it still remains as sleeper cells in separate areas in the countryside Deir Ezzor and its Desert west of Euphrates. (SOHR) <https://goo.gl/PpEjvs>

### OPINION

#### 1. Russia has a plan for Syria. The U.S. needs one, too.

30.08.2018 The war in Syria seems to be entering its final days, as President Bashar al-Assad's government forces close in on one of the country's last opposition-led provinces. And U.S. President Donald Trump, focused on trade wars across three continents and political wars at home, still doesn't seem to have figured out what role the United States should be playing in the conflict or its aftermath. (REUTERS) <https://goo.gl/6Qi2qS>



(20-26 Aug 18)

### KEY EVENTS

#### 1. Netanyahu still hopes U.S. will recognise Israel's Golan claim.

23.08.2018 Netanyahu's intelligence minister said that U.S. recognition on the Golan issue could be forthcoming within months. But in a Reuters interview during a visit to Israel this week, Trump's national security adviser John Bolton said "there's no discussion of it, no decision within the U.S. government" (REUTERS) <https://goo.gl/X36Hhz>

#### 2. Russia, Turkey Agree on Idlib Plan.

25.08.2018 A round of talks between Russia and Turkey, resulted Friday in determining the agreements between the two countries on the next stage for Syria. In a joint press conference with his Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov referred to an agreement between the two parties to push forward the political settlement in Syria as well as resolving disagreements on a number of issues.(AL AWSAT) <https://goo.gl/rkrY2y>

#### 3. Russia accuses UK of backing a false flag chemical attack in Syria.

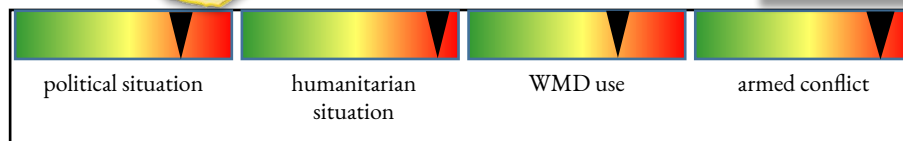
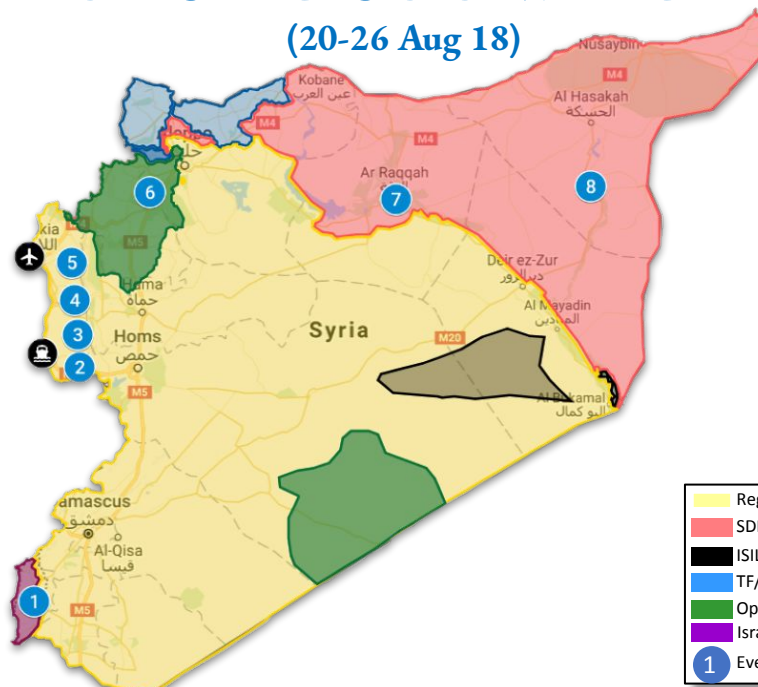
25.08.2018 Moscow claims planned 'provocation' by jihadist group in Idlib, with support of British special services, will be used as pretext for Western strikes on Assad. (THE TIMES OF ISRAEL) <https://goo.gl/rxgqe8>

#### 4. Three Russian warships steaming to Syria for Idlib operation.

25.08.2018 Turkey sighted 3 Russian warships passing through the Bosphorus on Thursday, Aug. 23, on their way to the Syrian port of Tartus for the start of the offensive to take Idlib, the last Syrian rebel stronghold. (DEBKA FILE) <https://goo.gl/AjFTmi>

#### 5. How Many Russian Troops in Syria?

23.08.2018 Russia has revealed the full extent of its military intervention in Syria. The Russian Defense Ministry released a video Wednesday which said that the country has sent up to 63,012 servicemen to help battle rebels and jihadis (UKRINFORM) <https://goo.gl/47rPbm>



### ASSESSMENT

- *Russia, being aware of the challenges they will face in Idlib, not only trying to persuade the parties to meet on a common ground on Idlib issue, but also gain the necessary time to Syrian Regime to complete its preparations for the impending Idlib operation. Turkey seems facing a dilemma whether to host a new influx of refugees/militants or be left in a position defending terrorist groups in Idlib.*
- *In view of the former statements by U.S. and UK, possible chemical attacks in Syria may become part of a political game to change internal agenda in respective countries.*

#### 6. Syria's Al-Qaida Leader Vows to Fight On in Rebel Province.

22.08.2018 The leader of Syria's al-Qaida affiliate, Al-Golani says state-sponsored surrenders of rebel groups, similar to those that recently occurred elsewhere in Syria, won't happen in Idlib as such actions would be considered "treason" by his al-Qaida-linked (THE NEW YORK TIMES) <https://goo.gl/P51wLf>

#### 7. Trump Aide Bolton: Putin Told U.S. He Can't Get Iranian Forces Out of Syria.

22.08.2018 U.S. President Donald Trump's National Security Adviser John Bolton, on a visit to Israel, said Wednesday that Russian President Vladimir Putin told the U.S. that Moscow could not bring about the withdrawal of Iranian forces from Syria. (HAARETZ) <https://goo.gl/A6s2po>

#### 8. US military will stay in Syria after ISIS is defeated.

26.08.2018 Former US ambassador to Bahrain William Roebuck said "We are prepared to stay here, as the president has made clear, to ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS. We remain focused on ensuring the withdrawal of Iranian forces and their proxies as well.". (AMN) <https://goo.gl/M5Dkhy>

### OPINIONS

#### 1. Prisoners of Idlib.

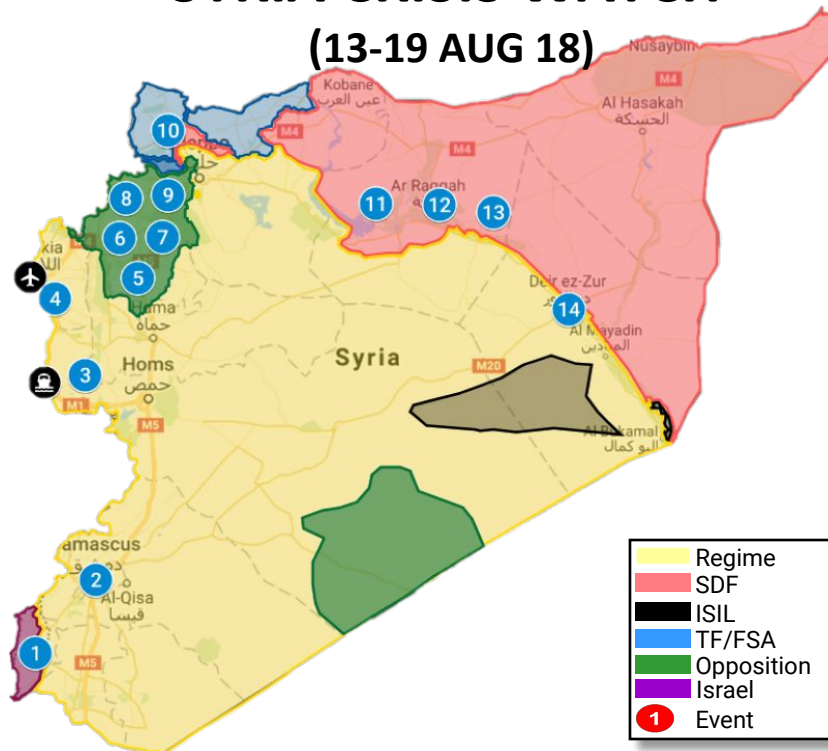
24.08.2018 The Syrian province of Idlib now stands nearly alone, the last bastion of opposition control in Syria. Its fate is almost certainly sealed — the province will fall under Syrian regime control in the next year or two. But the nature of its fall, whether it goes down in a violent cataclysm that spreads refugees and jihadis across the region or whether its leaders are able to peacefully negotiate its re-entry into Syria, is far from certain. (WAR ON THE ROCKS) <https://goo.gl/a733cZ>

#### 2. Turkey amasses force of Syrian rebel factions at Idlib

23.08.2018 Bargaining between Russia and Turkey on a potential military operation at Idlib, Syria keeps getting bogged down in endless debate over distinguishing "moderates" from "terrorists." Turkey obviously has no plans to leave the areas it controls and is busy trying to consolidate the clashing groups under one roof. (AL MONITOR) <https://goo.gl/nLLXpu>

# SYRIA CRISIS WATCH

(13-19 AUG 18)



**Assessment:**

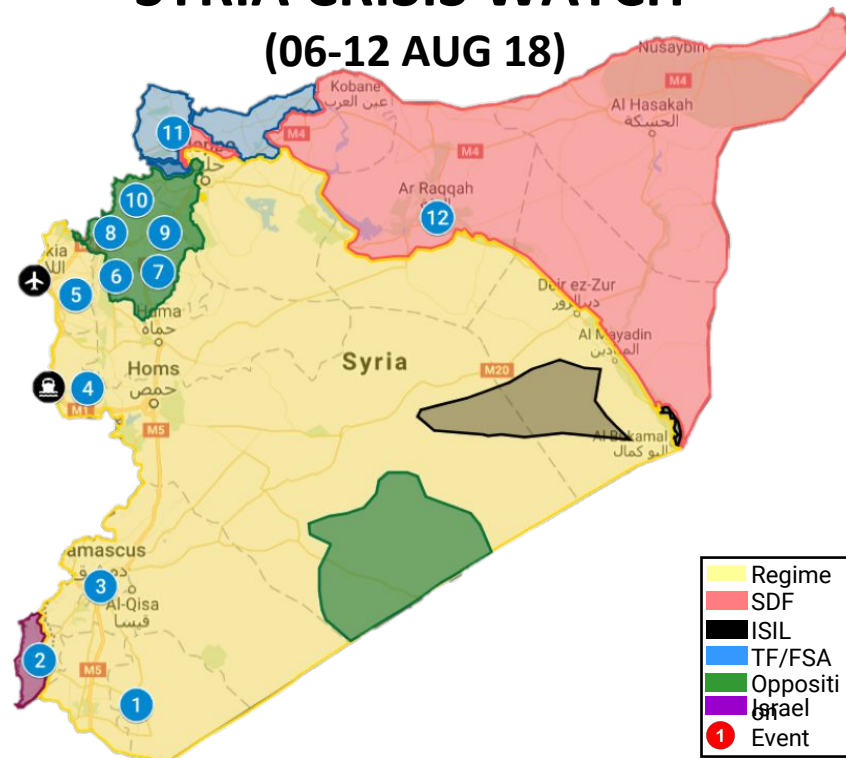
- As Russia makes call to Europe to support approaching reconstruction phase in the Syrian war, the US continues to reiterate its firm stand on a political solution including both constitutional reform and free and fair elections on the basis of UNSC resolutions. There is need for a common ground between Russia and US on the future of Syria and the Assad regime which (if possible) will be a driving force for a more effective post-conflict reconstruction and state / nation building.
- US decision on cutting \$230 million in stabilization funds initially destined for Syria will not only weaken the reconstruction efforts but will also ignite a new friction between the Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates, and Turkey, which sees Syrian Democratic Forces, led by YPG, as a terrorist organization.

- Russia establishes 4 block posts on the border between Syria and Israel.** 15 August 2018. The Russian military police deployed four of its eight posts on the Syrian side of the demilitarized zone located near the Israel-controlled Golan Heights. The representative of the Russian Ministry of Defense also stated that on the territory of Golan Heights there will be no Russian troops. As soon as work on the block posts will be finished, "Russia will hand them over to Syria." (UAWire) <https://goo.gl/rZPkbC>
- Opinion: Russia, Iran and Syria: strange and strained alliances.** 19 August 2018. The rapprochement between Tehran and Moscow is unlikely to survive far beyond the operational needs to keep Assad in power in Damascus, each side support for its own egoistic reasons. What happens when Syria's war ends and Moscow starts to look beyond today? (MEO) <https://goo.gl/7WHH27>
- Putin urges Europe to help rebuild Syria so refugees can return.** 18 August 2018. Russian president Vladimir Putin has called on Europe to contribute to the reconstruction of Syria to allow millions of refugees to return home. "We need to strengthen the humanitarian effort in the Syrian conflict," he said on Saturday, ahead of a meeting with his German counterpart Angela Merkel. (Guardian) <https://goo.gl/HDUK9x>
- Russia says drone attacks on its bases in Syria are increasing.** 17 August 2018. Russian air defense assets in Syria have downed 45 drones targeting their main base in the country, its military said Thursday, after an attack by the Islamic State group on a Syrian army base a day earlier killed seven troops.(BI) <https://goo.gl/nVb3mw>
- Jaber Ali Basha Succeeds Hassan Soufan in Ahrar Al-Sham Leadership.** 17 August 2018. The Ahrar al-Sham group appointed Jaber Ali Basha as general commander after the resignation of Hassan Soufan, the group's previous commander. This came after a meeting of the group's high command represented by The Shoura Council, according to an internal statement, which outlined a number of decisions as well. Those included "concentrating the movement's efforts in the coming stages on military preparations and repelling the expected assault on the liberated areas" and "activating work on the National Front for Liberation and making the national conference a success, arriving at the unification of the revolution's forces based on a single authority for the Syrian revolution."(Enab Baladi) <https://goo.gl/EuhiCV>
- Idlib Governorate in the Face of Assad's Threats and Russian-Turkish Understandings.** 14 August 2018. On August 10, Idlib suffered an intensified aerial shelling which led to the death of more than 15 civilians. A "Free Army" commander said that the shelling came as an answer to the security campaign launched by "Tahrir al-Sham" and the "National Front for Liberation" in the past few days, during which dozens of regime-affiliated personalities were arrested. (Enab Baladi) <https://goo.gl/4x1VMO>

- Turkey hopes to find solution on Syria's Idlib with Russia.** 14 August 2018. Turkey's foreign minister said on Tuesday he hoped his country and Russia could find a solution over the northern Syrian region of Idlib, a rebel-held enclave which the Syrian government says it aims to recapture.(Reuters) <https://goo.gl/hmgiD1>
- New Russian-Syrian Military Convoys Sent to Idlib.** 16 August 2018. The Syrian army dispatched new military convoys to Northern Syria to prepare for an imminent operation in Idlib province. Field sources reported that the convoys, accompanied by the Russian forces, include missile-launchers, artilleries, arms-loaded vehicles and other military equipment and have been dispatched to Northern Syria through the Hama-Homs highway. (Fars News) <https://goo.gl/CwxWSt>
- ISIS Defeated in Syria, Al-Nusra Front Next.** 14 August 2018. Russia has said the Islamic State militant group (ISIS) was virtually defeated in Syria and revealed the next main target for its operations there. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov condemned U.S. sanctions against his country as well as Iran and Turkey, fellow participants of a tripartite Syrian peace process based in the Kazakh capital of Astana. In addition, he said that Washington was standing in the way of their progress as they focused on taking out another mutual enemy. (Newsweek) <https://goo.gl/avMuVb>
- Erdogan: Turkey Hits Final Stage of Preparations for New Operations in Syria.** 13 August 2018. Turkey has reached the final stage of preparations for its new military operations in the neighboring Syria, the country's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Sunday. The president noted that 250,000 people have returned to the places, where Turkey had held its military operations. (Sputnik) <https://goo.gl/MsJaZv>
- Syrian Democratic Council Holds New Talks with the Assad Regime.** 15 August 2018. The joint head of the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC), Riad Darar, said that the council had held a second meeting in Damascus with officials from the Assad regime, saying that they focused on the concept of "local administration, the possibility of their participation, and the future outlook for the concept of decentralization."(The Syrian Observer) <https://goo.gl/F4wWBn>
- Secretary Pompeo's Meeting With UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura.** 15 August 2018. Secretary Michael R. Pompeo and UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura met privately in Washington. They discussed UN progress on forming a constitutional committee. They agreed that all parties needed to move ahead on the political track and that any discussion of reconstruction was premature absent a political solution leading unalterably to both constitutional reform and free and fair elections as described in UN Security Council Resolution 2254.(U.S. Department of State) <https://goo.gl/KuDpVJ>
- Syria Stabilization Efforts Continue With Coalition Contributions.** 17 August 2018. Since April, the Department has elicited approximately \$300 million in contributions and pledges from Coalition partners to support critical stabilization and early recovery initiatives in areas liberated from ISIS in northeast Syria, including a generous contribution of \$100 million by Saudi Arabia and \$50 million pledged by the United Arab Emirates. As a result Secretary Pompeo has authorized the Department of State to redirect approximately \$230 million in stabilization funds for Syria which have been under review. (U.S. Department of State) <https://goo.gl/ui31ts>
- ISIS largest attack on Al-Omar Oilfield.** 19 August 2018. On the night of 17 August, at least 20 "infiltrators" of the "Islamic State" Organization attacked the largest military base of the International Coalition in Al-Omar field in Syria. The conflict lasted until the dawn of 18 August and warplanes of the International Coalition provided support in repelling the attack. (SOHR) <https://goo.gl/dZbQuf>

# SYRIA CRISIS WATCH

(06-12 AUG 18)



**Assessment:**

- *As the Syrian Regime continues to deploy more forces to Idlib area, Turkey accelerates its efforts to form a united front. The reason of such move is a transition into political phase rather than an escalation which might threaten innocent lives in the 1,5 million city.*
- *Turkey will have hard time to achieve its goals due to several reasons:*
  - *Difficulty of convincing militant groups to join the united front,*
  - *Heavy economic crisis resulting in devaluation of Turkish Lira,*
  - *Syrian operational success that liberated more forces to be massed in Idlib,*
  - *Russian political resolve to maintain Assad's authority in Syria,*
  - *The Kurds' agreement with the regime and their siding with it in Idlib.*
- *Taking these into account, Russia's pressure on Turkey to solve the Idlib issue on the table will likely fail.*

**1. Syrian Army Restores Control of Al-Suwayda's Administration Border as ISIS Terrorists Retreat.** 12 August 2018. The Syrian Arab Army (SAA) and local fighters imposed control of the administrative border between the governorates of al-Suwayda and Damascus in the framework of their military operations against ISIS, according to the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA). Accordingly, the remaining fighters of ISIS are now fully besieged in the area of al-Safa in the northern countryside of the governorate.(South Front) <https://goo.gl/28oJv2>

**2. Opinion: As ringmaster, Russia runs Israel-Iran balancing act in Syria.** 06 August 2018. Russia is continuing efforts to enforce an agreement designed to stabilize the situation at the border between Israel and Syria. Under the agreement, Iranian forces and their proxies are pulling back from southern Syria in exchange for Damascus' resumption of control of the Syrian-Israeli border and Israeli recognition of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's authority over Syrian territory according to the 1974 borders.(Al Monitor) <https://goo.gl/rgHRLI>

**3. Issuance of Death Notices in Syria.** 06 August 2018. US condemns the Syrian government's growing admissions over the deaths of thousands of political prisoners in its custody. Since the Syrian uprising began in 2011, at least 117,000 Syrians have been detained or forcibly disappeared, according to numerous human rights organizations. The vast majority of them are believed to be in regime custody, across a network of prisons where regime officials torture and murder civilians to intimidate and silence any opposition to Assad's rule. (U.S. Department of State) <https://goo.gl/FXcVY2>

**4. Moscow calls upon western states to lift coercive economic sanctions on Syria.** 08 August 2018. Russia called on western countries to end the coercive unilateral economic sanctions imposed on Syria and facilitate the return of displaced Syrians to their home. Speaking at a meeting in Moscow today, Chief of the National Centre for State Defense Control, Mikhail Mizintsev, reiterated the Russian Defense Ministry's call upon western states to end sanctions imposed against Syria and send funds allocated to help displaced Syrians return to their country. Mizintsev highlighted the procedures taken by the Syrian government to facilitate the return of displaced Syrians abroad to their home, noting that such measures indicate the Syrian state's keenness on achieving that objective.(SANA) <https://goo.gl/zvGf2U>

**5. Russia downs 4th armed drone in 3 days targeting its Khmeimim air base in Syria.** 11 August 2018. A drone, apparently carrying explosives, has been downed on approach to Russia's Khmeimim air base in Syria from the militant-held de-escalation zone in Idlib, becoming the fourth such incident in three days, the military said. Moscow and Damascus have repeatedly pointed out that the remaining terrorist and illegal militant presence in Syria centers in the US-controlled areas, while those liberated by Syrian government forces areas are slowly recovering and joining the statewide. (RT) <https://goo.gl/uH5a9o>

**6. YPG/PKK terrorists, Syrian regime collaborate on Idlib.** 11 August 2018. Over the last two weeks, the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) deployed more than 1,300 fighters in the government-held areas of the northern governorate of Aleppo, the Turkish Anadolu Agency reported on August 12. According to the State-run news agency, these fighters will participate in an upcoming attack of the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) and its allies on the remaining positions of the militants around the city of Aleppo. (AMN) <https://goo.gl/XwYAX8>

**7. Russia Gives Turkey a One-month Window to Resolve Idlib Conflict.** 04 August 2018. Moscow gave Ankara until the Russian-Turkish-French-German summit scheduled for September 7 to settle the Syrian Idlib conflict, informed sources told Asharq Al-Awsat. In turn, Ankara pressed opposition factions in northern Syria to unite and form a National Front for Liberation (FNL), which is set out to include about 70,000 fighters according to informed estimates.(Awsat) <https://goo.gl/ndREu2>

**8. Lavrov to pay a key visit to Ankara to discuss Syria, Idlib.** 09 August 2018. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov will pay a visit to the Turkish capital on Aug. 13 and Aug. 14 where he will hold talks with Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu on recent developments in Syria and other regional issues. One of the top issues the two ministers will discuss will be the Syrian regime's preparations for a massive assault into the rebel-held northwestern province of Idlib, a territory designated as a de-escalation zone by Turkey, Russia and Iran. (Hurriyet Daily News) <https://goo.gl/HNd4wR>

**9. Syrian Regime Idlib Offensive Could Lead to 700,000 Displaced.** 08 August 2018. United Nations-led health agencies warned on Wednesday that an expected Syrian regime offensive against opposition factions in the Idlib region could displace more than 700,000 people. (Albawaba) <https://goo.gl/EbnGjg>

**10. Syrian Regime Recruits 'Reconciliation Men' to Attack Idlib Countryside.** 11 August 2018. Opposition factions in the province of Idlib have been gearing up to confront regime forces, which began recruiting new fighters from areas they recently controlled in southern Syria. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said regime forces recruited more than 3,800 persons from the countryside of Daraa and Quneitra, adding they plan to enlist more fighters in the two provinces which they have recently controlled through military operations and "reconciliation" agreements.(Aawsat) <https://goo.gl/RaUj25>

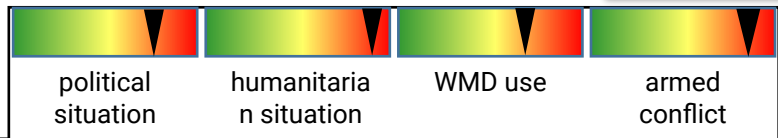
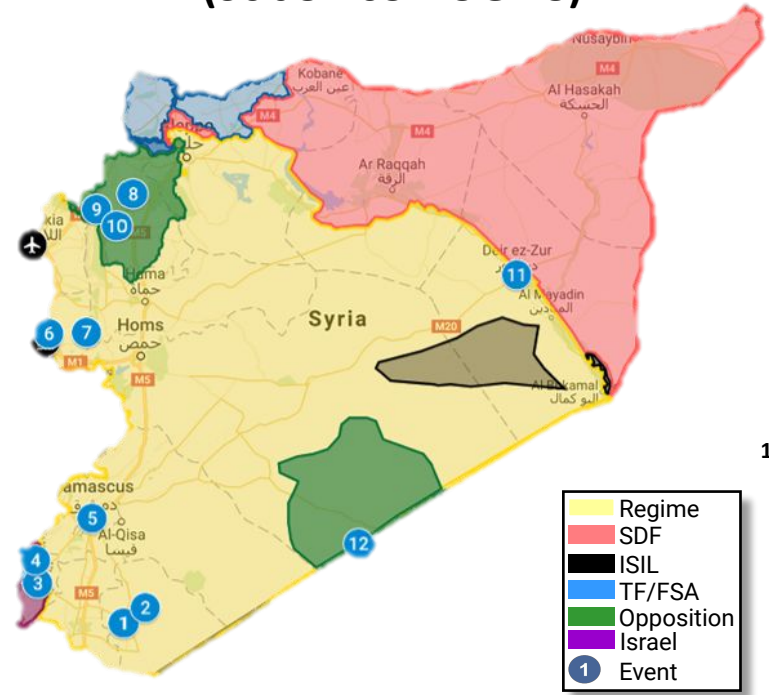
**11. Syrian rebels build an army with Turkish help, face challenges.** 12 August 2018. A "National Army" being set up by Syrian rebels with Turkey's help could become a long-term obstacle to President Bashar al-Assad's recovery of the northwest - if they can end factional rivalries that have long blighted the opposition. The effort is at the heart of plans by the Turkish-backed opposition to secure and govern a strip of territory that forms part of the last big rebel stronghold in Syria.(Reuters) <https://goo.gl/zre1a8>

**12. CENTCOM: Investigation Into Insider Attack On Marine In Syria Was 'Inconclusive'.** 10 August 2018. U.S. Central Command released a statement on Friday saying that its investigation into the Feb. 17 shooting of Marine Sgt. Cameron Halkovich by a member of the Syrian Democratic Forces. CENTCOM, however, said in a statement that the investigation into the incident led by a U.S. Marine colonel was "unable to conclusively determine if a U.S. Marine was shot intentionally by a Syrian Democratic Forces guard, or if he was shot as the result of a negligent discharge."(Task&Purpose) <https://goo.gl/4CGnDh>

# SYRIA CRISIS WATCH

(30 JUL-05 AUG 18)

- Syrian Army's elite unit heads to Sweida to finish off ISIS.** 04 August 2018. According to a military source in Damascus, the Syrian Arab Army's elite 42nd Brigade (Ghiath Forces) of the 4th Armored Division has left the Daraa Governorate for the Badiya Al-Sham region of Al-Sweida, orders to redeploy. The unit has been reportedly tasked by the High Command to lead the final battle against the Islamic State (ISIS) in northeast Al-Sweida. The 42nd Brigade will likely start their offensive in the Badiya Al-Sham region in the coming days. (AMN) <https://goo.gl/8iGhgn>
- ISIS Cells Carry Out Surprise Attack On Khalkhalah Airbase.** 02 August 2018. On August 1, ISIS attacked the government-held airbase of Khalkhalah in the province of al-Suwayda. The ISIS-linked news agency Amaq claimed that more than 45 SAA soldiers and officers were killed and 2 warplanes and 6 unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) of the Syrian Air Force were destroyed during the clashes inside the base. However, a source in the airbase said that the SAA lost four troops and the Syrian Air Force lost no aircraft. (South Front) <https://goo.gl/Zc4fE1>
- Israel Strikes ISIS near Golan Heights.** 03 August 2018. On August 2, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) claimed that warplanes of the Israeli Air Force had bombed several fighters of the ISIS-affiliated Khalid ibn al-Walid Army near the occupied Golan Heights. Seven militants were killed in the strikes according to the Israeli media. Meanwhile, the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) conducted its first patrol along the separation line between Syrian and Israeli forces. (South Front) <https://goo.gl/DmPW2x>
- Russia: UN peacekeepers back on Golan Heights-Syria frontier.** 02 August 2018. U.N. peacekeepers returned on Thursday to patrol the frontier between Syria and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights for the first time in years, Russia's Defense Ministry announced — Moscow's latest achievement in efforts to negotiate a solution to the crisis along the volatile border. Col. Gen. Sergei Rudskoy of the Russian General Staff told reporters at a press conference in Moscow that the U.N. peacekeepers, aided by Russian forces, conducted their first patrolling mission in the area earlier in the day. The development also marked the first time that Russian forces, a major ally of the Damascus government, where involved in the patrols. (Fox News) <https://goo.gl/N7uwpC>
- U.N. plans talks with Iran, Russia, Turkey on Syria constitutional panel.** 31 July 2018. The United Nations Special Envoy for Syria plans talks with Iran, Russia and Turkey in September to start finalizing the composition of the body intended to draft a new Syrian constitution, a statement said on Tuesday. Staffan de Mistura, attending two-day talks with the three powers in Russia, has received lists from the Assad government and opposition on proposed candidates for the Constitutional Committee. (Reuters) <https://goo.gl/d5fk6b>
- Russian Envoy: Iran Plays very Important Role on Fighting Terrorism in Syria.** 31 July 2018. Russia cannot force Iran to leave Syria where his presence is in line with the international law and plays an important role for combating terrorism in the country, Russian Ambassador to Israel Anatoly Viktorov said. (Sputnik News) <https://goo.gl/9CCVbM>



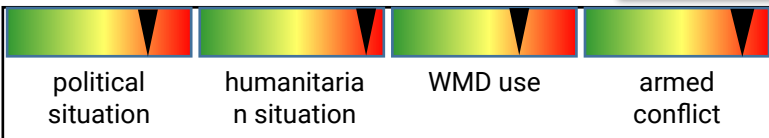
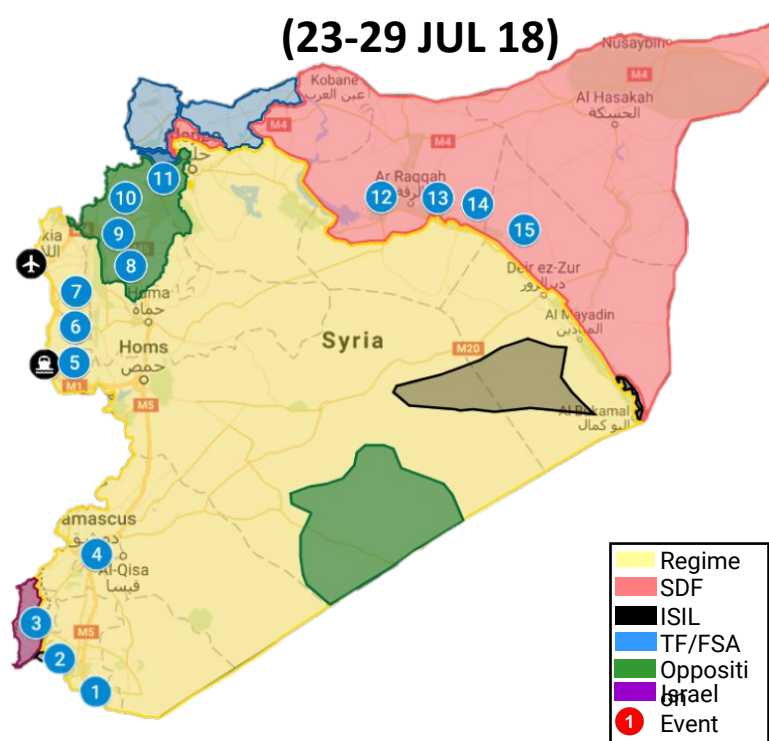
**Assessment:**

- Russia maintains its key position among warring parties in Syria and continues to influence political arena as ISIS threat diminishes and reconstruction phase approaches. However, several factors such as Israel's firm opposition to Iran's presence in Syria, Sunni opposition and SDF presence in the north (backed by Turkey and the U.S. respectively) and existence of some 9 million refugees mostly in the neighbouring states proposed to return to the war-torn country show the volatility of the situation and impracticability of a Pax-Russia.
- As its operations wind down along the Euphrates River and Southwest Syria, SAA began concentrating its forces south of Idlib pocket, under Russian GBAD umbrella while holding talks with SDF. Meanwhile, Turkey tries to unite opposition, its sole ally at the theatre, before Idlib offensive commences. However, its relations with the U.S. are at historical low which means it will likely be on its own in the upcoming war. If SAA crushes opposition in the Idlib this will diminish the effect of proxies considerably in the 7-year-long Syrian conflict.

- Russia: Syria: Electronic warfare tools on U.S. troops in Syria.** 01 August 2018. American troops deployed in Syria are increasingly having to defend themselves against Russian jamming devices—electronic attacks with potentially lethal consequences, according to U.S. military officials and analysts. Officers who have experienced the jamming say it's no less dangerous than conventional attacks with bombs and artillery. But they also say it's allowing U.S. troops a rare opportunity to experience Russian technology in the battlefield and figure out how to defend against it, according to Foreign Policy. (UNIAN) <https://goo.gl/iQxO18>
- Turkey Merges Militant Groups under the brand: National Front for Liberation.** 02 August 2018. Turkish-backed militant groups— the National Front for Liberation, the Syrian Liberation Front, the Suqour al-Sham Brigades, Jaysh al-Ahrar and the Damascus Gathering — merged forming a new faction in northwestern Syria. The faction is branding itself as a fully new group, but it's name is the National Front for Liberation. (South Front) <https://goo.gl/Zc4fE1>
- Jihadist rebels begin fortifying Jisr Al-Shughour as Syrian Army builds up forces.** 05 August 2018. The jihadist rebels of Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) and the Turkestan Islamic Party have begun fortifying their positions around the Jisr Al-Shughour District and specifically built trenches and dens around the Jisr Al-Shughour in preparation for the Syrian Arab Army's (SAA) upcoming offensive. The military source speaking to AMN added that the SAA reconnaissance drones captured images of the jihadist rebels moving their forces to this front and building up their fortifications. (AMN) <https://goo.gl/b6vxPU>
- Tiger Forces to redeploy to Al-Ghaab for upcoming Jisr Al-Shughour offensive.** 05 August 2018. According to a military source in Damascus, the Tiger Forces will redeploy from southwest Syria to the Al-Ghaab Plain in order to lead the offensive to retake the Jisr Al-Shughour District in southwest Idlib. This offensive has been in the works for several months, but was put on hold after the Astana Peace Talks. At the Astana Peace Talks earlier this year, Turkey and Russia agreed to setup observation posts to halt the fighting and allow safe passage for civilians. However, the Turkish observation posts have done little to end the fighting, which is one of the reasons why the Syrian Arab Army and Russian military have shifted their attention to the Jisr Al-Shughour front. (AMN) <https://goo.gl/5eiUUr>
- Security Forces Continue Pursuit of ISIS Remnants, OIR Deputy Commander Says.** 31 July 2018. Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve's deputy commander for strategy and support Maj. Gen. Felix Gedney (GBR) pointed out that SDF have declared the northern Jazira region cleared. Planning is ongoing for operations to clear the last remaining pocket of ISIS-held territory east of the Euphrates River in Hajin in the vicinity of Abu Kamal, Gedney said. Leaders from the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and the SDF are discussing opportunities to enhance partnerships ahead of the final clearance of the middle Euphrates River valley, particularly for border security operations and cross-border fire support, which comprised key SDF successes in Dashisha, Gedney added. (U.S. CENTCOM) <https://goo.gl/cFr9S8>
- Russia confirms Syrian refugee proposal sent to United States.** 05 August 2018. In a letter, Moscow said it was ready to discuss with Damascus safety guarantees for refugees stranded at Rukban. Russia's defence ministry confirmed it proposed working with the United States on funding the return of Syrian refugees to their homes in the war-torn country, but the proposition was reportedly rejected. The proposal, which came in the form of a letter addressed to the senior US military general in July, referenced an informal refugee camp in Rukban, the ministry said in a statement on Saturday. The poorly equipped camp, home to at least 55,000 Syrians, is located in a desert area near the convergence of the Iraqi, Syrian and Jordanian borders. In the letter, the Russian chief of staff, General Valery Gerasimov, said Moscow was ready to discuss with Damascus safety guarantees for refugees stranded at Rukban, as well as creating conditions for their return home. (Al Jazera) <https://goo.gl/uDi4W6>

# SYRIA CRISIS WATCH

(23-29 JUL 18)



**Assessment:**

- After pro-regime forces clear the triangle between Syria, Jordan and Israel from militants/rebels, Syria-Israel tension will highly likely go down. U.S. and Israel will continue to exert pressure on Russia and Syria to keep Iranians and Hezbollah out of Syria.
- Russian and Assad Regime's next target is Idlib. Turkey will make a conference with the rebel groups operating in Idlib after the tenth tour of Astana Talks and shape its policies accordingly. In the coming days, Turkey will highly likely dominate the headlines in the context of the Syrian war.
- The Syrian Regime also takes steps for negotiations with the Syrian Democratic Forces which Turkey views as an extension of the PKK terrorist organization. Both sides will likely agree on a federal structure or a limited autonomy for the Kurds.

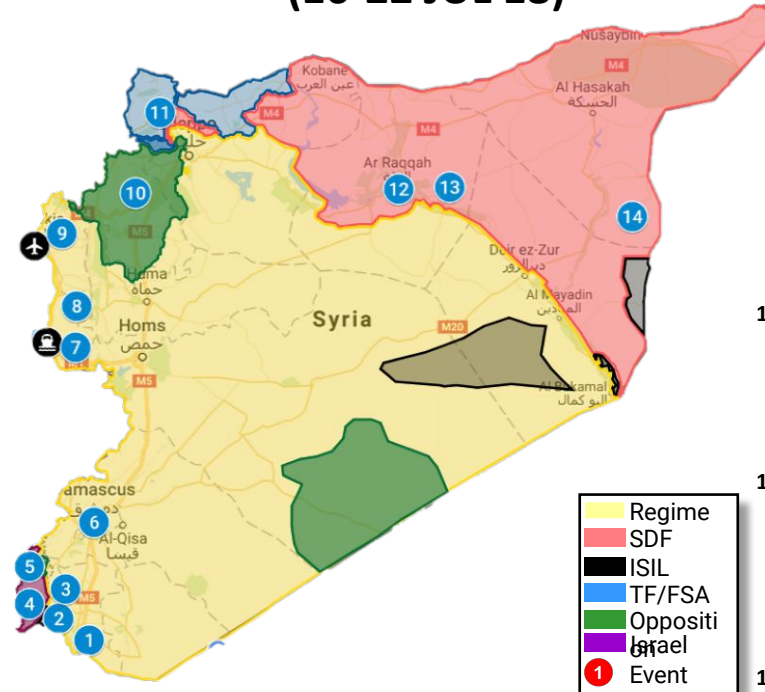
- 1. Russia Discusses Syrian Refugee Return Plan With Lebanon.** 25 July 2018. Russia is talking to Lebanon about Moscow's plans for the mass return home of Syrian refugees, the Lebanese prime minister's office said on Tuesday (24 July 2018), adding Lebanon hoped the Kremlin's initiative would tackle what it called a "displacement crisis". The UN refugee agency UNHCR says there are about a million Syrians in Lebanon, around a quarter of its population. The Lebanese government puts the number at 1.5 million.(The Moscow Times) <https://goo.gl/tTvcWX>
- 2. ISIS Cornered in the Pocket along Jordanian and Israeli Border.** 28 July 2018. Warplanes of the Syrian Arab Air Force (SyAAF) and the Russian Aerospace Forces are bombing the last positions of the Khalid ibn al-Walid Army in the towns and villages of Abidin, Kuwayyah, Ma'arriyah, al-Qusayr and al-Shajarah. These positions are expected to collapse in the upcoming days, if not hours, effectively putting end to ISIS presence in Western Daraa.(South Front) <https://goo.gl/xpD6gh>
- 3. Israel shoots down Syrian fighter jet it says entered Israeli airspace.** 24 July 2018. The Israeli military shot down a Syrian fighter jet after it entered Israeli airspace on Tuesday afternoon, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) said, raising fears of further military escalation in the region. Syria said its jet was conducting an operation against "terrorist groups" when it was hit by Israeli fire, according to a state media report. (CNN) <https://goo.gl/uVLuTC>
- 4. Opinion: Russia-U.S. Syria Deal Hits Trouble as Post-Summit Tensions Grow.** 28 July 2018. One of the main deals announced between Russian President Vladimir Putin and his U.S. counterpart Donald Trump at their summit last week in Helsinki – coordinated steps to help stabilize the situation in Syria – is already running into trouble. This week, Moscow accused the U.S. of sabotaging the deal. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and a top general set off on an emergency diplomatic tour Monday to Israel, Germany and France to try to get the effort back on track. (Bloomberg) <https://goo.gl/aoNVpo>
- 5. Russia and West spar over reconstruction of Syria.** 28 July 2018. Russia and the West sparred over the reconstruction of Syria on Friday. France's U.N. Ambassador Francois Delattre made clear at a Security Council meeting that the European Union will not participate in rebuilding Syria "unless a political transition is effectively carried out — with constitutional and electoral processes carried out in a sincere and meaningful way." (Fox News) <https://goo.gl/35FoUc>
- 6. Russian Military Needed in Syria Long Term, Assad Says.** 27 July 2018. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad said on Thursday that Syria's agreement with Russia over the Hmeimim military base was signed to last over 40 years, indicating that the relationship between the two countries was of a long-term nature, Interfax reported.(The Moscow Times) <https://goo.gl/9XYyA7>
- 7. Opinion: The Ramifications of Russia's Short-Term Syria Strategy.** 26 July 2018. Russia's unannounced negotiations with Israel demonstrate a Russian interest in maintaining stability in Southern Syria, yet Putin may not prove up to the task of navigating a successful compromise between two deeply opposed regional interests.(The Washington Institute) <https://goo.gl/apBijH>

- 8. Russia Sends More Military Supplies to Syria for Upcoming Idlib Offensive.** 25 July 2018. Russian heavy laden flag ship Ro-Ro Sparta was spotted crossing the Mediterranean Bosphorus en route to Syria's Tartus, carrying military cargo mostly ammunition, shells and missiles, the AMN reported. The recent cargo is expected to be specifically sent to boost the Syria Army's upcoming assault on the terrorist-controlled Idlib province. (Fars News) <https://goo.gl/Ri6A2b>
- 9. Military factions operating in Idlib meet in Ankara to discuss the future of the town.** 29 July 2018. Military factions operating in Idlib leaders meet in the Turkish capital Ankara to discuss the future of the province in the coming days. A military source participating to the meeting told Enab Biladi today that the meeting was organized upon request of Turkish side to the factions to come to Ankara and discuss the roadmap for the province.(Enab Biladi) <https://goo.gl/k4CXiZ>
- 10. Russia-Turkey ties face 'moment of truth' over Syria's Idlib.** 27 July 2018. Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan met on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit in Johannesburg, South Africa. As was anticipated ahead of the talks, their agenda was dominated by serious concerns on part of the Turkish leadership over the situation around Idlib as well as the Kurdish issue in Syria. (Al Monitor) <https://goo.gl/cBZEdf>
- 11. Syria will have to take into account Turkey's interests while liberating Idlib — expert.** 27 July 2018. The liberation of Syria's Idlib province from terrorists will require rather difficult negotiations with Turkey, because this de-escalation zone is its responsibility, Head of the Center of the Near and Middle East at the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies Vladimir Fitin told TASS on Friday. "Turkey has many other interests [in Idlib]. First of all, it wants not only to preserve but also to expand the buffer zone on the border with Syria, and it needs the absence of counteraction on the part of both the US and Russia," Fitin stressed. (TASS) <https://goo.gl/dmYPpR>
- 12. Syrian Kurds say they will 'chart roadmap to decentralized Syria' with Damascus.** 27 July 2018. The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) said it and the government had decided to "form committees on various levels" to develop negotiations, end the violence engulfing Syria and chart a road map to democracy and decentralization. However, while they have mostly avoided direct conflict, they have articulated sharply opposing visions for the future, with the Kurds seeking autonomy in a decentralized state, and Damascus wanting to restore full central control.(Reuters) <https://goo.gl/Z84K15>
- 13. General Says He Has Reservations About More U.S.-Russia Cooperation.** 22 July 2018. The U.S. general overseeing the fight against Islamic State expressed firm reservations about President Donald Trump's hopes of working more closely with Russia in Syria, where Moscow has played a central role in thwarting Washington's attempts to force President Bashar al-Assad from power.(WSJ) <https://goo.gl/y9Tofn>
- 14. Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve Monthly Civilian Casualty Report.** 26 July 2018. The Coalition conducted a total of 29,826 strikes between August 2014 and end of June 2018. During this period, based on information available, CJTF-OIR assesses at least 1059 civilians have been unintentionally killed by Coalition strikes since the start of Operation Inherent Resolve.(CJTFOIR) <https://goo.gl/v2RkLh>
- 15. US, France introduce new Syria chemical weapons sanctions.** 25 July 2018. The United States and France have taken joint action to sanction individuals and entities connected with Syria's chemical weapons program, the Treasury Department announced in a statement Wednesday (25 July 2018). The US action will affect five entities and eight individuals. On Sunday (22 July 2018), France's government extended a similar freeze on 24 entities and individuals from the same network. (CNN) <https://goo.gl/dt8vU2>

# SYRIA CRISIS WATCH

(16-22 JUL 18)

- Syrian Army launches final assault against ISIS in southwest Syria.** 22 July 2018. Having secured almost the entire province of Daraa, the Syrian forces have shifted focus to the far western flank where the Islamic State controls a swath of land all the way to the Occupied Golan Heights. The battle against the terror group was launched from two axes and by the Tiger Forces and 4th Armored Division. (AMN) <https://goo.gl/Ppbb3f>
- ISIS captures 6 villages in from Opposition Forces in Southern Syria.** 21 July 2018. Militants of the ISIS-affiliated Khalid ibn al-Walid Army entered 12 villages on July 20, and six villages on July 21 in the western Daraa countryside and the governorate of al-Quneitra, according to the ISIS-linked news agency Amaq. This occurred after the withdrawal of the Free Syrian Army and Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham. (AMN) <https://goo.gl/99DV1c>
- Fighters in Western Quneitra Fully Surrender to Syrian Army.** 20 July 2018. According to pro-government sources, members of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham and Free Syrian Army have fully surrendered to the Syrian Arab Army in Western Quneitra and a radical part of them has accepted an evacuation agreement. Additionally, the militants will hand over two observation posts near the villages of Umm Batinah and Ruwaybidah, inside the demilitarized zone, to the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force, established by UN Security Council Resolution 350 on May 31, 1974 to separate Syrian and Israeli forces. (South Front) <https://goo.gl/HkhPWH>
- Syrian 'White Helmets' flee to Jordan with Israeli, Western help - officials.** 22 July 2018. Hundreds of members of Syria's "White Helmet" civil defence group have fled advancing government forces and been spirited over the border into Jordan with the help of Israeli soldiers and Western powers. (Reuters) <https://goo.gl/FcAetf>
- Syrian Government Forces Seize Strategic Hill Facing Israeli-Occupied Golan Heights.** 17 July 2018. Syrian state media says Syrian forces have taken control of the strategic Tel al-Haara hill that overlooks the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, as they continue their offensive against rebel positions in the southwest of the country. Hilal Khashan, who teaches political science at the American University of Beirut, told VOA he thinks Syrian government forces were allowed to retake towns and villages near the Golan Heights as part of an agreement between the U.S., Russia and Israel. (VOA) <https://goo.gl/YMx8T9>
- Russian and Syrian authorities set up centre for refugees returning to Syria.** 18 July 2018. Russia's Defence Ministry said on Wednesday that Russian and Syrian authorities had set up a refugee centre in Syria to help refugees return home from abroad. The ministry said in a statement that the Centre will "monitor the return of all temporarily-displaced people and Syrian refugees from foreign countries to their places of permanent residence". (Reuters) <https://goo.gl/VMwS9M>
- Russia: Trump and Putin worked out Syrian refugee deal during summit.** 20 July 2018. Russia's Defense Ministry said it had sent a proposal to Washington to jointly organize the return of the refugees under a deal agreed to by the president and the Russian strongman. (New York Post) <https://goo.gl/36GBRF>



Yellow	Regime
Red	SDF
Black	ISIL
Blue	TF/FSA
Green	Opposition
Purple	Israel
Red circle with number	Event



**Assessment:**

- After clearing the Southern Syria from the last remnants of the rebels, Syrian Regime will highly likely desire targeting Idlib area, the safe haven for the rebels. However, what was discussed concerning Syria between Putin and Trump in Helsinki will seal the fate of the area and the Turkish presence in Syria.
- Following the Trump- Putin meeting, French President Macron also took steps to cooperate with Russia within the context of Syrian war. As it becomes clear that Assad will stay in power after the end of the Syrian War, other Western powers will likely follow the same path accepting the continuation of former regime and the Russian game changer role in reconstructing post-war Syria.

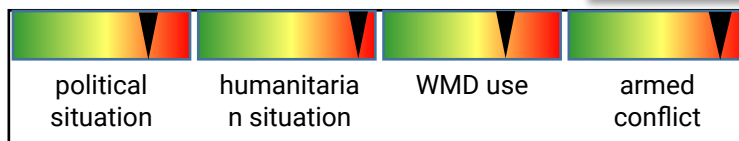
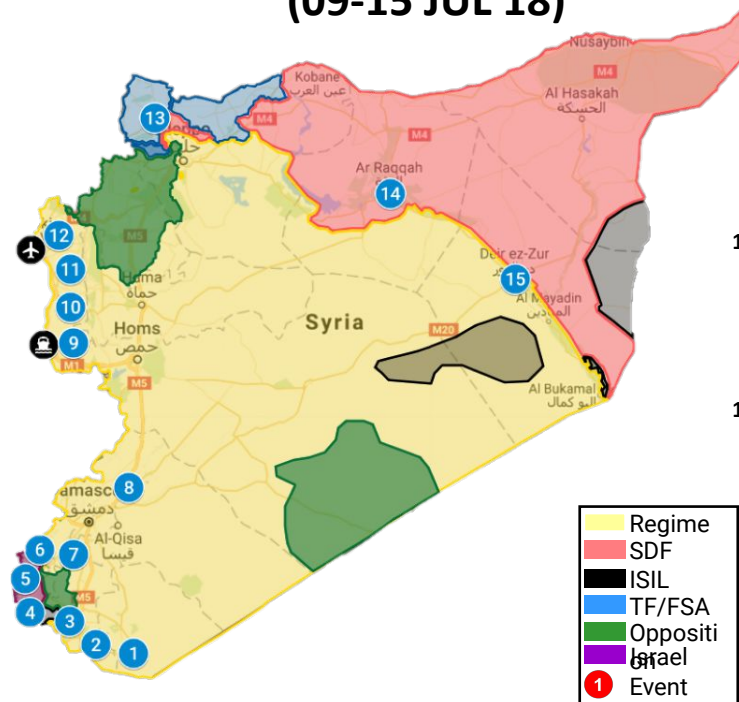
- Opinion: Can Russia and Iran Solve Syria?** 19 July 2018. Russia's special presidential envoy for Syria Alexander Lavrentiev traveled to Tehran to discuss Monday's U.S.-Russia summit in Helsinki with Supreme National Security Council of Iran Deputy Secretary Ameer Saeed Irvani and convey Moscow's ongoing support for the Syrian military in a seven-year civil war. "Russia and Iran will continue to support the Syrian Army in the war to eliminate terrorism." Lavrentiev said. (Newsweek) <https://goo.gl/qMi7JM>
- Putin, Macron discuss implementation of joint initiative on humanitarian aid to Syria.** 21 July 2018. Russian President Vladimir Putin and his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron have discussed a number of pressing global and regional issues over the phone, the Kremlin press service reported on Saturday. "Particular attention was paid to the humanitarian aspects of the Syrian settlement, including the implementation of the joint Russian-French initiative to provide humanitarian assistance to the population in Eastern Ghouta," the Kremlin said. The Russian Defense Ministry reported earlier in the day that Russia's Antonov An-124 Ruslan military transport plane had delivered 44 tonnes of humanitarian cargo from the French Chateauroux airport to Syria's Hmeymim airfield. (TASS) <https://goo.gl/EY2qvf>
- Transfer of Authority to HTS in Al-Fu'ah and Kafarya [in the North of Idlib].** 20 July 2018. In the province of Idlib, up to 6,500 civilians and members of the local National Defense Forces have been evacuated from the besieged government-held towns of al-Fu'ah and Kafarya. Under the same agreement, HTS is also set to release dozens of women and children who were captured by its fighters during Idlib offensive in 2015. The another side of the story is that this decision will de-facto transfer control of al-Fu'ah and Kafarya to HTS. (South Front) <https://goo.gl/HkhPWH>
- Turkey wary of US-Russia deal on Syria.** 17 July 2018. The summit between US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin in Helsinki was watched very closely in Turkey. Ankara's focus, however, was on what it may produce for Syria, rather than the issues that created a storm in the United States and Europe. The implications of any US-Russian deal for northern Syria are at the heart of Turkish fears. Reports that Washington is working with Moscow to secure an accord for northern Syria between the Assad regime and the Kurds in areas currently controlled by the YPG are increasing Ankara's concerns. (AI Monitor) <https://goo.gl/s9ldzx>
- DoD Policy Chief Urges U.S.-Russian Collaboration on Mutual-Interest Issues.** 21 July 2018. The Pentagon's chief policy maker, John C. Rood, undersecretary for defense for policy, addressed the Aspen Security Forum about the need for the United States and Russia to seek common collaboration on issues of national security concern as such opportunities might arise. One such opportunity has been the "deconfliction" line in Syria between the United States and Russia, where the U.S. military is working to defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, while Russia defends the Syrian president's regime in a civil war. (U.S. DoD) <https://goo.gl/Ci2s8Q>
- Centcom Commander: Success in Defeating ISIS Lies With Coalition Partners, Allies.** 19 July 2018. In the U.S.-led campaign to defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, the center of gravity remains the coalition network of allies and partner nations, the commander of U.S. Central Command told Pentagon reporters. "Russia's support and protection has allowed the Syrian regime to escape full accountability for their use of chemical weapons and the horrendous violence against their own people, and has exacerbated the human suffering for hundreds of thousands [of people] in the western part of the country in particular," Votel said. (U.S. DoD) <https://goo.gl/vZauhf>
- US-led Coalition Announces Recent Advances by SDF in Northeastern Syria.** 20 July 2018. On July 20, the US-led coalition in Syria announced in an official statement that entire region of al-Dashisha has been liberated by the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). The region was the last foothold of the terrorist group in the northeastern governorate of al-Hasakah, according to local observers. (South Front) <https://goo.gl/7W2vHa>



# SYRIA CRISIS WATCH

(09-15 JUL 18)

- Syrian Army Regained Control of Daraa City.** 13 July 2018. In the evening of July 12th, units of the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) and the Russian Military Police entered the southern, militant-held part of Daraa city de-facto restoring the government control of the area. At the same time, militants started surrendering their remaining positions south of the city. These developments are a part of the reconciliation reached between the leaders of militant groups and the Damascus government with assistance of Russia. (South Front) <https://bit.ly/2KQWmc9>
- Opposition: Despite deal, Syria, Russia besieging us in Daraa.** 12 July 2018. The Syrian opposition in Daraa has accused the regime and Russia of besieging areas they control in the province despite an agreement reached with Moscow to allow fighters to leave the area. A spokesman for the opposition in Daraa; Hussein Abu Shaima said: "There are fears that the delay in implementing the displacement clause, which allows fighters and civilians to leave the province, aims to get rid of them by storming the areas and making arrests." (The Middle East Monitor) <https://goo.gl/sPGkFS>
- Western allies plan White Helmets evacuation from Syria.** 14 July 2018. As Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad's regime violently assaults the southern region of Syria, an area formerly protected by the Trump administration, the members of the all-volunteer rescue organization known as the White Helmets are in danger of assassination. Once favorites to win the Nobel Peace Prize for their life-saving efforts in rebel-held territory throughout Syria's brutal seven-year war, these rescue workers are now in need of rescuing themselves. (CBS NEWS) <https://goo.gl/xmXak3>
- Israel Attacks Syrian Army Positions in Golan Heights.** 12 July 2018. Israeli aircrafts fired several missiles targeting Syrian army positions in Quneitra province and air defenses thwarted the attack, Syrian state media reported. This came less than a day after a Patriot missile intercepted a drone which infiltrated into northern Israel on Wednesday with some parts of the UAV falling in the Sea of Galilee. (The Jerusalem Post) <https://goo.gl/91ofst>
- Kremlin says Iran's presence in Syria a top issue at Trump-Putin meeting.** 14 July 2018. Russian President Vladimir Putin's foreign affairs adviser Yuri Ushakov said Friday that Syria and the Iranian presence there will feature high on the agenda of the summit between Putin and US President Donald Trump in Helsinki on Monday. Russia has warned it would be unrealistic to expect Iran to fully withdraw from the country. (The Times of Israel) <https://goo.gl/LqMnoU>
- After Putin meeting, Iranian says Tehran in Syria to stay.** 13 July 2018. A top foreign policy adviser to Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said Friday after a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin that Iranian forces will remain in Syria despite protests from Israel and the Trump administration. (Washington Times) <https://goo.gl/enirLh>
- Putin, Netanyahu meet for Syria-focused talks in Moscow.** 11 July 2018. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow on Wednesday for talks focusing on Iranian presence in Syria — an issue that is expected to top the agenda of the upcoming U.S.-Russian summit. (Stars and Stripes) <https://goo.gl/3XVkB4>



**Assessment:**

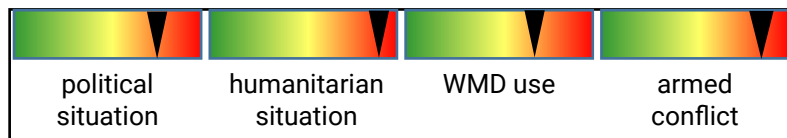
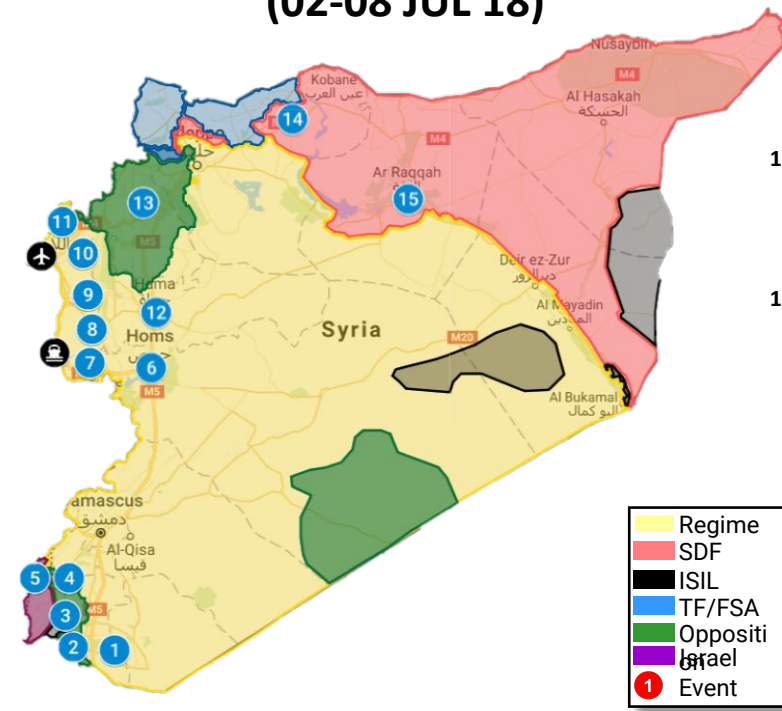
- Syrian Forces, supported by Russian military, will highly likely put an end to rebel presence in the south of the country soon, which will provide physiological advantage to the Regime as the area known as the starting point of the rebellion in Syria.
- With the increasing numbers of high-level visits to Russia, Putin appears as the most popular leader ahead of Trump-Putin meeting in Helsinki. Several analysts discuss that Putin has already gained an upper hand over Trump and he will fight an uphill battle against Putin. Containing Iranian expansion in Syria will likely be the most important topic for the U.S. side whereas Assad's legitimacy will likely appear as the Russian's number one priority. The meeting will also have an impact on the future of Turkish presence in Syria.
- Israel is increasingly projecting its hard and soft power in order to put an end to Iranian presence in Syria. If Russian - Iranian negotiations and Helsinki talks fails to meet Israeli demands, escalation of the conflict might be expected including spillover risk in the region.

- Moscow, Damascus to ink accord on instructing Syrian cadets in Defense Ministry's schools.** 13 July 2018. Russia and Syria are planning to sign an intergovernmental agreement on training minors from the Arab republic in the Russian Defense Ministry's educational institutions. A decree to this effect issued by Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev has been posted on the official legal information website. The training of young Syrian students is due to be free of charge, with all costs paid for by Russia. (TASS) <https://goo.gl/1QzkUC>
- Opinion: Here's What a Trump-Putin Deal on Syria Could Look Like.** 13 July 2018. President Trump has signaled his interest in winding down the U.S. military presence in that country's long and tragic civil war. In exchange, according to press reports, President Trump may ask Putin to contain Iran's influence in Syria, a huge gift given the scale of Iran's presence in the country, and the critical role it has played in the Assad regime's military gains since 2015. (The National Interest) <https://goo.gl/iFHmNg>
- Opinion: Putin Sees Trump as an Easy Mark on Syria.** 13 July 2018. Trump is reportedly eager for a deal in which Russia would use its influence to contain Iran's expanding military presence in Syria, especially close to Israel's northern border. In exchange, the United States would consent to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's re-conquest of most of the country, acknowledge Russia's role as Syria's dominant outside power, and commit to the withdrawal of several thousand U.S. troops from Syria. (Foreign Policy) <https://goo.gl/YCX1gX>
- Russia Builds Ties to Iran and Israel Amid Syria Feud.** 12 July 2018. Ali Akbar Velayati, the international affairs adviser to Iran's Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, visited Putin as part of a three-day visit to Moscow at a time of heightened international tension between Tehran and Israel. "The regional cooperation between the front of resistance, led by Iran, and Russia in countering terrorism and its sponsors in Syria and other countries of the region is an excellent example of Iran-Russia cooperation, which could be justified only by strategic and long-term relations," Velayati told reporters. (Newsweek) <https://goo.gl/n6ANFT>
- Russia's Black Sea Fleet To Hold Missile Drill Off Syria's Coast Ahead Of Trump-Putin Summit.** 09 July 2018. According to the latest Notice to Airmen (NOTAM), the Russian Navy's Mediterranean task force will host naval exercises off the coast of Syria for several weeks. Naval exercise began on July 11, just five days before Russian and US Presidents Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump meet in Finland's capital of Helsinki to discuss the complicated situation in Syria. (ZeroHedge) <https://goo.gl/aE2avg>
- Turkey Has Made a Quagmire for Itself in Syria.** 13 July 2018. The Turkish military has discovered it's much easier to invade Syria than to govern it. Turkey succeeded at driving its Kurdish enemies away from its own border and at connecting swaths of Syria controlled by Ankara's Syrian partners to the east and south of Afrin. But Turkey, without quite realizing it, also made itself the de facto ruler of this part of Syria. The responsibility seems more of a quagmire than the Turkish government originally expected. (Foreign Policy) <https://goo.gl/xgbNgW>
- Meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS at NATO HQ.** 12 July 2018. U.S. Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg hosted a meeting with the foreign ministers of select members of the Coalition to Defeat ISIS on the sidelines of the NATO Summit on July 12. Ministers welcomed the continued efforts and progress by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to liberate the remaining pockets of ISIS-held territory in eastern Syria. (U.S. Secretary of State) <https://goo.gl/oMYrPE>
- U.S. Coalition Says It 'May Have' Launched Syria Strike That Killed Scores of Civilians, According to Monitor.** 13 July 2018. The U.S.-led coalition against ISIS said it may have conducted a strike that killed dozens of civilians in eastern Syria. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that "at least 54" people were killed in U.S.-led coalition airstrikes targeting ISIS near an ice factory at the Muzan junction, just east of Al-Soussa in the eastern province of Deir Ezzor. (Newsweek) <https://goo.gl/4KfTQk>

# SYRIA CRISIS WATCH

(02-08 JUL 18)

- Syrian Army prepares for major showdown in Daraa city.** 8 July 2018. The Syrian Arab Army's (SAA) long-awaited battle for Daraa city is approaching, as several units redeploy to the provincial capital. Now, with the rebels retreating to the provincial capital, the Syrian Army has shifted their focus to Daraa city, where they are expected to launch their next major assault in the province. (AMN) <https://bit.ly/2ueLlpF>
- Southern Syria Deal to Be Implemented in Three Stages.** 7 July 2018. Southern Syria deal which the opposition factions in Daraa governorate have sealed with the Russian side is put into force to be implemented in three stages; the first of which started on Friday, July 6. The deal is to be implemented in three stages, the first of which is the factions' retreat from Nassib border crossing; the second is Assad's forces entry to the area of Khrab al-Shahem from Nassib; the third phase starts from Khrab al-Shahem towards the Yarmouk Basin. Yesterday, Friday, Assad's forces have declared their complete control over Nassib border crossing. (Enab Baladi) <https://bit.ly/2KZNqX5>
- Is the U.S. about to give up on its adventure in Syria?** 6 July 2018. We arrive at a couple of unpleasant truths. One, it is now beyond serious question that the U.S. has knowingly and opportunistically supported these jihadists for some years in its campaign to destabilize the Assad government. Two, Israel, which prefers unstable Arab neighbors, has long found disruptive Islamists camped opposite the Golan Heights to be convenient buffers. Its support for them, in various forms, is an open secret. Russia is the only nation that has working relations with all others involved — Syria, Iran, Israel, and the U.S. — and is talking to all sides. (Salon) <https://goo.gl/QZop9t>
- Western Daraa Militants Join Negotiations Following Russian Warning.** 7 July 2018. Following the Russian warning, FSA groups representing the towns of Inkhil, Jasim, al-Harrah, Nawa and Namar joined the negotiation with Russia, according to the pro-opposition news outlet. However, several commanders of the FSA in the western Daraa countryside and al-Quneitra rejected the agreement. The failure of the ongoing negotiation will likely force Russia and the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) to launch a large offensive in western Daraa against the FSA and HTS. (South Front) <https://bit.ly/2ubOCGz>
- Israel threatens Syria over Golan deployment, extends refugee aid.** 5 July 2018. An Israeli cabinet minister warned Syria and its backer Russia on Thursday that Israel could attack Damascus' forces if they try to deploy in a demilitarized border zone while advancing against rebels in the region. (Reuters) <https://goo.gl/rzUJsm>
- Islamic State Says Its Leader's Son Was Killed in Syria.** 3 July 2018. A son of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of the Islamic State, was killed during an attack by the group's fighters in the central Syrian province of Homs, the group's news agency, Amaq, announced Tuesday.(The New York Times) <https://nyti.ms/2NBvLgP>
- New Russian private military company operates in Syria.** 6 July 2018. A new private military company (PMC) called "Patriot" has been active in Syria at least since spring 2018, and is presumably connected to the Russian Defense Ministry, reported the TV channel Dozhd, citing a source in military circles. (UAWire) <https://goo.gl/9cJ6vK>



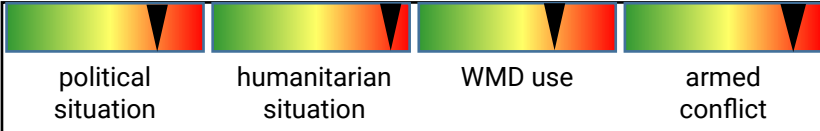
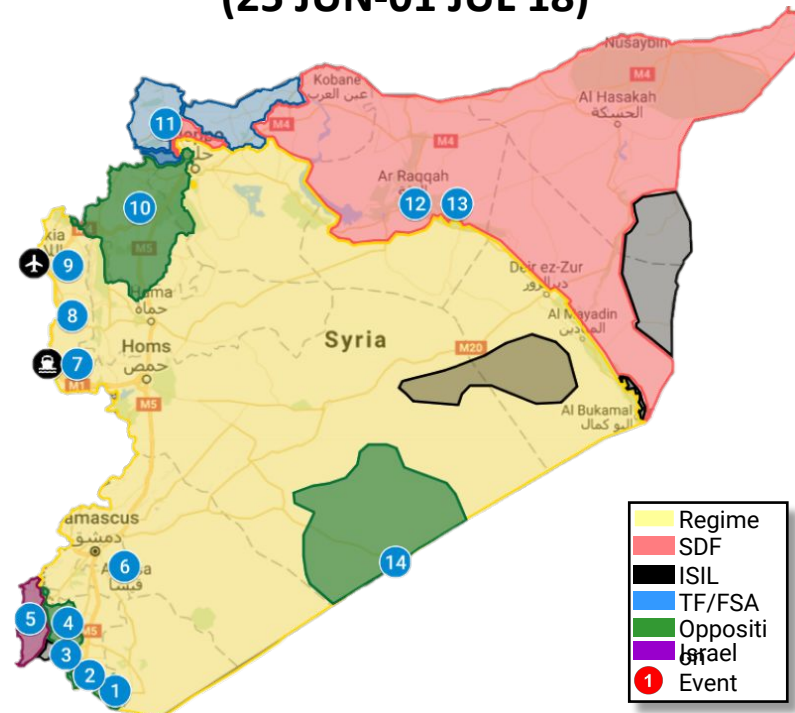
**Assessment:**

- As the Syrian-Russian offensive continues progressively in the southwest, rebels, having lost all their external support, have no option other than to relocate. The regime forces are expected to launch their next major assault to the provincial capital, Daraa city.
- Several allegations have started spreading around as the Trump-Putin meeting approaches. Iranian and its proxy Hezbollah's presence and Kurdish territorial gains in Syria will likely be the most important topics for the US side whereas Assad's legitimacy will likely appear as the Russian's number one priority. The meeting will also have an impact on the future of Turkish presence in Syria.

- Russia blocks Security Council statement on Syria.** 5 July 2018. Russia on Thursday blocked the UN Security Council from adopting a statement on the situation in southwestern Syria, where rebels are under intense bombardment, diplomats said after an urgent meeting requested by Sweden and Kuwait. (The Times of Israel) <https://goo.gl/uo78pi>
- Complete Iranian withdrawal from Syria is 'absolutely unrealistic'.** 4 July 2018. Sergey Lavrov says Putin and Trump will discuss situation in southern Syria on July 16; US said to seek full Iranian pullout, as does Israel. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Wednesday that it would be "absolutely unrealistic" to expect Iran to completely withdraw from Syria.(The Times of Israel) <https://goo.gl/ADtffN>
- Russia Denies Syrians Asylum.** 3 July 2018. Despite eight years of civil war that has killed hundreds of thousands and ravaged Syria, Russia's Supreme Court incredulously declared that Zakria Timbut has nothing to fear in returning to his homeland. Fearing for his life, Timbut fled Syria in 2013, entered Russia on a business visa, and then sought temporary asylum.(Human Rights Watch) <https://goo.gl/ifdbJp>
- OPINION - We already gave Syria to Putin, so what's left for Trump to say?** 5 July 2018. Washington and Moscow have repeatedly issued joint statements outlining principles for addressing the conflict and reducing its horrific humanitarian consequences. Yet over and over again, the Russians have betrayed their commitments. Neither Obama nor Trump has been prepared to impose any consequences on the Russians. Both wanted out of Syria, not to be embroiled in it. And both permitted Putin to become the arbiter of events. So what should Trump do when he and Putin meet in Helsinki on July 16?(Washington Post) <https://goo.gl/aagmca>
- Civilians in Northern Hama Denounce Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham Preparations for New Attack.** 7 July 2018. A public committee representing the civilians in the northern and northeastern Hama countryside released an official statement, in which it stressed its rejection for Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) plans to launch a military operation against the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) from there. A day earlier, HTS declared the northern Hama countryside a "military zone" and called on the civilians there to evacuate the area immediately. (South Front) <https://bit.ly/2ugheOG>
- Turkey Warns Syria About Action Against Idlib.** 3 July 2018. A senior adviser to Turkey's president, speaking to VOA on condition of anonymity, declared Ankara would not stand by if Damascus moved on Idlib. A former senior Turkish diplomat Aydin Selcen commented on the matter that Turkey will be determined to avoid this enclave being overrun, as those people have nowhere to go but to Turkey. Moreover, Turkey will not want this to happen, as it would cause major security and humanitarian problems.(VOA) <https://goo.gl/3Rdqqg>
- Senator Lindsey Graham Makes Surprise Manbij Visit, Calls For US to Maintain Syria Presence.** 4 July 2018. US Senators Lindsey Graham and Jeanne Shaheen visited Manbij, Syria. Senator Graham said he would tell President Trump it was important to keep US forces there. The increased US military presence in Manbij comes amid news that President Trump may be looking to reach an agreement with President Putin on the withdrawal of US forces from Syria at their upcoming meeting in Helsinki. (MSN) <https://goo.gl/gmkRzG>
- Erdoğan adviser warns of U.S.-Russia plans for Syria.** 4 July 2018. Senior adviser to Turkish President Erdoğan, İlnur Cevik, warned against reported plans by the United States and Russia to ensure the survival of the Assad regime in Syria and give power to Kurdish groups in a new security structure. He added that there are also claims that a YPG official will be given the post of Syria's oil minister and that the United States will have a permanent presence in Syria's west. If this is the case, then it is quite clear that the U.S. has had a change of heart and is no longer pushing for a solution in Syria without the Assad regime. (Ahval) <https://goo.gl/rCT6Uc>

# SYRIA CRISIS WATCH

(25 JUN-01 JUL 18)



**Assessment:**  
Syrian-Russian offensive in south, which has already triggered a humanitarian disaster, is highly likely result in the transfer of the rebels in Daraa to Idlib soon. Jordan will likely have a huge trouble to deal with this new influx of refugees without the help of international community.

Although U.S. seems that it can live with Assad in the future, for Israel's security it will not tolerate pro-Iran existence in Syria. Israel might act more aggressively in Syrian soil should the situation dictates. U.S. will continue to distance itself from soup of sunni Islamist/extremist fractions gathered under FSA flag which will have dire consequences for the countries that provided and continue to provide safe haven for them.

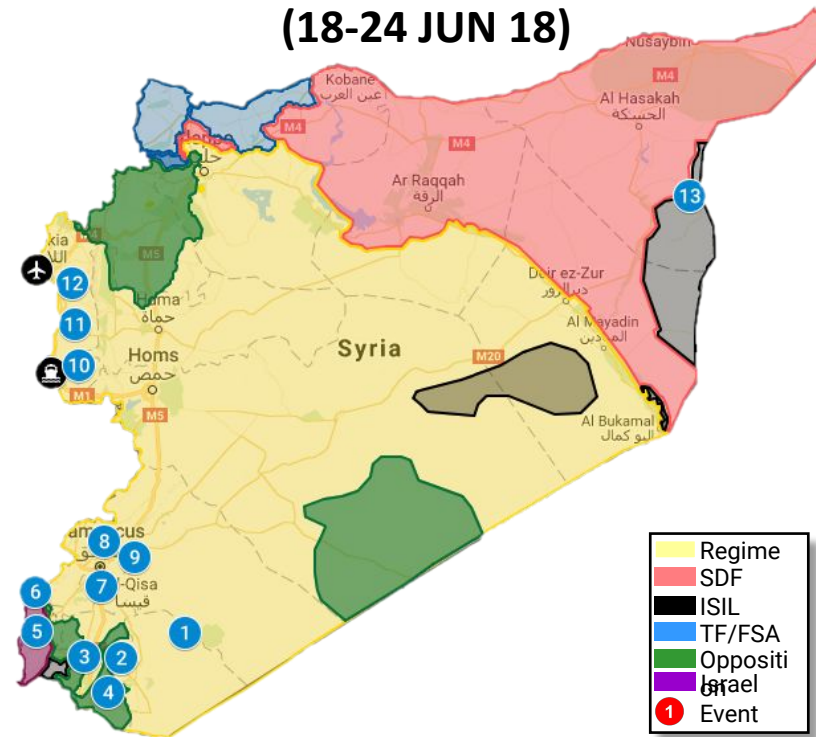
On the other hand, Russia might push for extending regime's authority to pre-crisis areas at the Helsinki Summit.

- 1. Russian airstrikes hit southwest Syria, breaking ceasefire deal.** 25 June 2018. About 6,000 civilians have already fled their homes near the front lines across Daraa and Quneitra, according to the UN. The Syrian regime's main military ally, Russia, carried out airstrikes Sunday in the country's southwest, defying a cease-fire pact with the U.S. and Jordan, as forces aligned with President Bashar al-Assad pushed to capture one of the last opposition strongholds. (The Wall Street Journal) <https://goo.gl/Fna7Eo>
- 2. Russia committed to deal on southern de-escalation zone in Syria.** 28 June 2018. Russia remains committed to the agreements on the southern de-escalation zone in Syria, Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on Thursday. "We confirm the need to fulfill these provisions, including on the fight against terrorists - Al Nusra and the Islamic State (terror group, outlawed in Russia)," Zakharova said. (TASS) <https://goo.gl/XSRc6s>
- 3. Daraa rebels in talks with Russia as Syrian government forces advance.** 30 June 2018. Insurgents looking to hand control over to Russian military police rather than to Assad's army and allied militias. As more rebel-held towns and territory in Syria's southwest fall to advancing government forces, Syrian rebels said on Saturday that they are negotiating with Russia about surrendering. (Middle East Eye) <https://goo.gl/ZEjKxE>
- 4. Over 160,000 flee regime offensive in southwestern Syria.** 30 June 2018. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) says tens of thousands of people have fled an upsurge in fighting between the regime and its allies, and rebels in Syria's southwest. The UN has condemned the latest fighting. More than 160,000 people have been forced to flee in southwestern Syria since Damascus launched an offensive to recover an area near the borders with Jordan and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. The UN warned earlier this week that 750,000 people were at risk in Daraa. (TRTWorld) <https://goo.gl/Yit7z1>
- 5. Israeli Army on High Alert in Golan Heights as Syria Intensifies Op in Daraa.** 30 June 2018. In light of the intensified battles in southern Syria the Israel Defense Forces have been put on high alert in the disputed area of the Golan Heights, Haaretz reported. Reacting to a massive influx of Syrian asylum-seekers in Israel's north, Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman said that even though Tel Aviv wouldn't accept refugees, it was ready to provide humanitarian aid. (Sputniknews) <https://goo.gl/AJXzrX>
- 6. Israeli missiles hit near Damascus Airport - SANA, monitor.** 26 June 2018. Syrian state news agency SANA said two Israeli missiles hit in the vicinity of Damascus international airport in the early hours of Tuesday morning, without giving further details. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said Syrian air defence systems failed to intercept the missiles which targeted weapons depots and warehouses belonging to non-Syrian militias loyal to the (Syrian) regime. (Reuters) <https://goo.gl/idtiZf>
- 7. Trump-Putin Helsinki July Meeting Focuses on Syria.** 30 June 2018. The Syrian conflict will take center stage during the much anticipated summit between US President Donald Trump and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin in July. The Kremlin announced on Friday that the two leaders will hold detailed discussions on Syria during their July 16 summit in Helsinki. (Al Bawaba) <https://goo.gl/t1SqOY>

- 8. Opinion: Russia hints at long-term military presence in Syria.** 29 June 2018. Russian President Vladimir Putin may decide to leave military forces in Syria "for quite some time," Moscow's top diplomat said Friday. "We do not like artificial deadlines, but we have been consistently reducing our military presence in Syria," Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told Channel 4 News, a British-based outlet. (Washington Examiner) <https://goo.gl/PNHu7>
- 9. Russia reportedly begins large-scale military withdrawal in Syria.** 29 June 2018. Russian troops, warplanes and attack helicopters have been pulled off the battlefield in Syria over the last several weeks, in a move Moscow claims is the beginning of the end of the country's involvement in the war-torn nation. Just over 1,100 Russian soldiers and over 20 jet fighters and attack helicopters have been withdrawn from front line positions inside regime-controlled territory in Syria, Russian President Vladimir Putin said Friday. (The Washington Times) <https://goo.gl/d2fdhy>
- 10. Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham continues its security operations in Southern Idlib.** 30 June 2018. Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) and other factions operating with it continue their security operations in the areas of Sarmin, Maasaran and the eastern countryside of Idlib, in search for sleeper cells of Daesh and the cells that carry out the anonymous assassinations, abductions and murders in Idlib countryside, within the security chaos which have been continuing for more than 2 months. Since 26 April, 195 persons in Idlib countryside and both Aleppo and Hama countryside, 123 fighters of Syrian nationality belonging to HTS, al-Sham Corps, the Islamic Movement of Ahrar al-Sham, Jaysh al-Izza, and other factions operating in Idlib, and 23 fighters of Uzbek, Asian, and Caucasian nationalities have been assassinated in the same way. (The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights) <http://www.syriaahr.com/en/?p=96716>
- 11. What Erdogan's Victory Means for Turkey, the Kurds, and Syria.** 29 June 2018. Though Erdogan will not change his policies toward Assad, he could leverage his relationships to seek an accommodation from the Russians, the Syrians, and the Iranians in the following way: by seeking to return the Syrian refugees who have settled in Turkey back to Syria—and specifically by returning them to Afrin, Syria. Erdogan did not want the United States to defend the Kurds in Kobani for the very simple reason that he perceived what was happening in Syria as a duplicate of what happened in Iraq. (CFR) <https://goo.gl/utteDi>
- Trump privately floats plan to make a deal with Putin on Syria.** 28 June 2018. By allowing the Russians to help Assad take back this region, Trump believes he can expedite the removal of US forces if certain conditions are met. The President's desire to exit Syria as soon as possible has raised concerns among US allies in the region, particularly the rebel Syrian Democratic Forces, and could embolden the forces of the Syrian regime, Iran and Turkey, all of which have mostly resisted attacking US allies in Syria due to concerns about US retaliation. (CNN) <https://goo.gl/RvAL4F>
- How Trump Could Sell Out Syria to Putin.** 29 June 2018. First, Putin would need to assure Trump during their upcoming meeting that Assad's offensive in the southwest will soon conclude, and that he would send in Russian forces to enforce a de-escalation zone. In return, he would ask Trump to quickly move U.S. forces out of Syria, allowing him to declare victory. (The Atlantic) <https://goo.gl/PFieKu>
- British fighter jets bomb Syrian forces.** 30 June 2018. British forces have bombed Syrian troops near Syria's borders with Iraq and Jordan, according to the Sunday Times of London. A Syrian army officer was reportedly killed and seven others were injured. Britain's Ministry of Defense refused to identify the target, but said the strike was a "wholly proportionate response." (New York Post) <https://goo.gl/Hxif8E>

# SYRIA CRISIS WATCH

(18-24 JUN 18)



**Assessment:**

Russia and the US-Israel negotiations seem to result in the Hezbollah-Iran withdrawal from the Golan border area. However, in return Syrian Regime is likely get the permission to start an operation against Southern Front. In the upcoming days rebel groups in Daraa might be forced to sign an agreement like the other groups experienced in the past. Russian - Israeli rapprochement is likely to negatively affect Russian - Iranian alliance and could jeopardise Russian gains in Syrian theater.

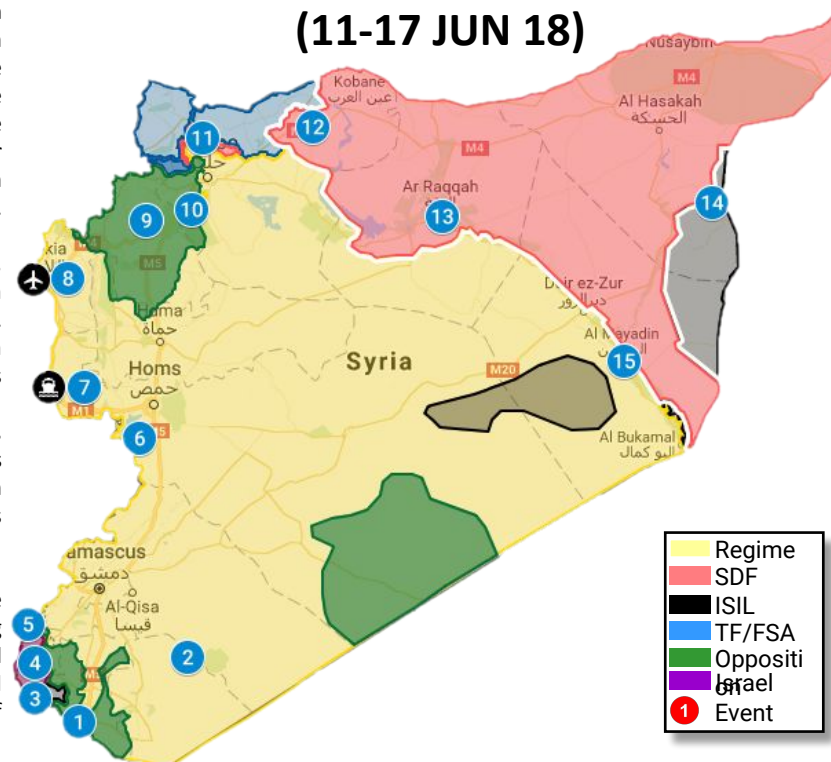
- Government Forces Pressure Daesh Cells on Multiple Fronts.** 21 Jun 2018. Fighters of the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) and the Tiger Forces have liberated the villages of Musaykah and al-Dallafa from militant groups in northeastern Daraa. Thus, they de-facto besieged the militant-held are of al-Lajat and cut off supply lines to it. Government forces also achieved notable gains against ISIS cells in eastern al-Suwayda. Despite this, hundreds of ISIS members are still reportedly operating in the desert area. (South Front) <https://bit.ly/2MVkEiC>
- Thousands flee as Syrian regime drops napalm and phosphorus on rebel-held south.** 23 Jun 2018. The Syrian government has stepped up its offensive to recapture areas of the country's south over the weekend with an aerial offensive involving barrel bombs, missiles and outlawed munitions, forcing as many as 20,000 civilians to flee. (The National) <https://goo.gl/wBDJ8H>
- Syrian rebels say U.S. won't intervene in south Syria.** 24 Jun 2018. The United States has told Syrian rebel factions they should not expect military support to help resist a Russian-backed government offensive to regain opposition-held parts of Syria bordering Jordan and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. According to Reuters, the U.S. government said to rebels that "you should not base your decisions on the assumption or expectation of a military intervention by us". (Reuters) <https://goo.gl/FasUQV>
- First Russia air strikes hit south Syria since 2017 truce.** 23 Jun 2018. Russia bombed rebel-held areas in Syria's south late Saturday for the first time since it agreed on a ceasefire there nearly a year ago. Russia, the United States, and Jordan agreed in July of last year on a de-escalation zone in rebel-controlled parts of southern Syria that would tamp down hostilities there. Since then, Moscow's warplanes – active in Syria since 2015 – had refrained from bombing rebel positions in the south. (AFP) <https://goo.gl/ShQjAj>
- Iran, Hezbollah Pull Back From Israeli Border At Russia's Request, Syrian Watchdog Group Says.** 21 Jun 2018. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) said that Iran, Hezbollah and other Tehran-backed militias in Syria were headed 40 kilometers (25 miles) away from the border, in response to Russian demands following previously reported negotiations between Moscow and Israel. Iran's withdrawal also comes as Assad's forces have launched an offensive on Syria's rebel-held southwest region. (Newsweek) <https://goo.gl/LuoWIK>
- Tensions flare between Russian and Iranian forces in Syria.** 18 Jun 2018. Tensions between Russian and Iranian forces have started to spread to the Syrian army. It has been noted that some Shiite units have begun wearing Syrian army uniforms and have continued the hostilities. Specifically, they have donned the uniforms of the 4th Panzer Division, which is under the command of Maher Assad, the Syrian president's brother.(UAWire) <https://goo.gl/usmhhA>

- The Status on the Establishment of A Committee Tasked With Drafting A New Syrian Constitution.** 21 Jun 2018. Representatives of the Syrian government and opposition are expected to have a meeting on a constitutional committee on July 10, according to Qadri Jamil, a leader of the so-called Moscow platform of the Syrian opposition. However, there is still a problem with forming the list of opposition representatives. In other words, some Turkish-backed groups are ignoring this initiative. Separately, Russian Presidential Envoy for Syria Alexander Lavrentyev said that the Kurds will be represented in the constitutional committee. (South Front) <https://bit.ly/2MVkEiC>
- Syrian regime committed war crimes in Syria's Ghouta - UN.** 20 Jun 2018. The United Nations said Wednesday that the Syrian regime and rebel forces both committed war crimes during the five-year regime siege of the Eastern Ghouta suburbs of Damascus and the two-month offensive to retake the area from insurgents earlier this year.(TRT World) <https://goo.gl/bLHui1>
- The April gas attack used European equipment.** 22 Jun 2018. A Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson has claimed that the April gas attack on the Syrian city of Douma was launched using equipment produced in Western Europe. In a press conference Friday, Maria Zakharova said the Kremlin had proof linking the gas attack—which killed at least 70 people—to Europe and showed reporters pictures of what she alleged was the equipment in question, Russian state-run news agency Tass reported. (Newsweek) <https://goo.gl/zRJoAm>
- Opinion: Russia's cautious role in Syria.** 20 Jun 2018. What is Russia doing in Syria? Is it protecting the regime of its ally Bashar al-Assad from falling? Is it protecting its own geopolitical interests alongside Iran's in the Middle East against the United States' hegemony? Is it really bothered by the rise of Islamists and terrorists, as Russian President Vladimir Putin claims? The Arab Spring changed the face of domestic politics and foreign policies in many countries, from Tunisia to Bahrain. However, one of the major conclusions this conflict brought to light is an unusual, more confident Russian participation in the Middle East – in fact, its first since the fall of the Soviet Union. (Open Democracy) <https://goo.gl/oobzGU>
- Moscow Reinforces Missile Capabilities in Syria.** 19 Jun 2018. Moscow continued to reinforce its missile capabilities in Syria despite its assertions that large-scale military operations in the war-torn country have ended. Russian media reported Monday that Russian navy cruisers, supplied with Kalibr missiles, crossed the Bosphorus Strait and entered the Mediterranean Sea on their way to the Syrian port of Tartus. Moscow did not officially announce the reasons behind bolstering its missile capabilities in Syria. Experts instead said the cruiser activity was part of the re-positioning of Russian forces and reinforcement of capabilities in the Mediterranean. (Al-Awsat) <https://goo.gl/F9KZpn>
- Kremlin: Putin, Netanyahu Agree to Boost Israel-Russia Coordination in Syria.** 18 Jun 2018. Russia's President Vladimir Putin agreed to strengthen coordination on Syria with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during a phone call on Friday, the Kremlin said in a statement. The two leaders discussed "the situation in Syria in the context of joint efforts to ensure security around the Syrian-Israeli border," and they "voiced readiness to strengthen coordination on Syria, including on combating international terrorism," said the Kremlin. (The Algemeiner) <https://goo.gl/LdfS9>
- Syrian Democratic Forces Capture Strategic Crossing on Border with Iraq, Meet with Iraqi Officers.** 23 Jun 2018. The US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) reached today the Syrian-Iraqi border east to the town of Dashisha and captured the Syrian side of the Tell Safouk border crossing, according to the Syrian pro-opposition news outlet Enab Baladi. (South Front) <https://bit.ly/2luox1i>

# SYRIA CRISIS WATCH

(11-17 JUN 18)

- Russia warns the US against using 'tough measures' against Syrian government forces.** 15 Jun 2018. The American military should not use "tough measures" against the Syrian Army. Russia will analyze the situation in the de-escalation zones in the south-west of the country and draw appropriate conclusions, RBC news agency reports, quoting the Deputy Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Russian Federation Council, Vladimir Jabarov. According to Jabarov, the use of "tough measures" against the Syrian military by the U.S. "is absolutely unacceptable". (UAWire) <https://goo.gl/2gxxvm>
- Syrian Air Force to Carry Out Airstrikes against Daesh Positions in al-Qara.** 16 Jun 2018. Warplanes of the Syrian Air Force have carried out airstrikes on Daesh positions in the area of al-Qar'a in north-eastern al-Suwayda. Government forces have been carrying out a military operation against ISIS in the area since early June. However, they have achieved only a limited success so far. (AMN) <https://bit.ly/2HWcQtg>
- Syrian army boosts air defenses near Golan frontier: pro-Assad commander.** 08 Jun 2018. Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah will remain in Syria as long as Syrian President Bashar al-Assad wants it there, the group's leader said on Friday, defying renewed U.S. and Israeli pressure to force Tehran and its allies to quit the country. (The New York Times) <https://nyti.ms/2JrcVL4>
- The Art of the (Russian-Israeli) Deal.** 15 Jun 2018. On June 1, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vasily Nebenzya told the press that he "believes" that his country and Israel reached an agreement regarding "certain disengagement in the southwest of Syria." Other sources reported that the agreement will include the withdrawal of Iranian and Iranian-backed forces from the Syrian-Israeli border in return for implicit Israeli acceptance of the Syrian forces' redeployment there. (Atlantic Council) <https://goo.gl/JgfPiS>
- Putin, Netanyahu discuss situation near Syria-Israeli border.** 16 Jun 2018. The Kremlin says President Vladimir Putin and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have discussed "the situation in Syria in the context of joint efforts to ensure security around the Syrian-Israeli border" on a Friday call. The conversation follows up on the two leaders' talks in Moscow and the Israeli defense minister's visit to Russia last month. (Fox News) <https://goo.gl/iLBTnQ>
- Opinion: Russian-Iranian Dispute, Preparation for Settlement in Syria.** 13 Jun 2018. As Syria attempts to reach a final settlement in Syria, some contradictions appeared in the Iranian priorities. Russian experts considered that the aim of these movements was to send messages to the regime and Iran that Moscow is serious in its suggestion of the necessity of offering clear compensations by the regime and Iran to launch the settlement. (Al-Awsat) <https://goo.gl/R3MP1x>
- U.S. charges Russians with violating sanctions by sending jet fuel to Syria.** 14 Jun 2018. The United States has charged five Russians and three Syrians with breaking U.S. sanctions by sending jet fuel to Syria and with money laundering by making money transfers through the U.S. financial system to pay for the fuel deliveries. (Reuters) <https://goo.gl/fG6ait>



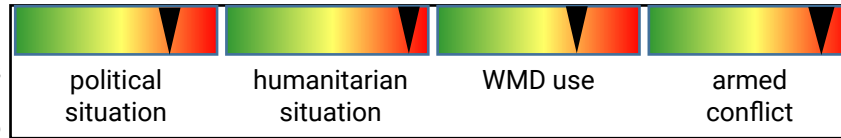
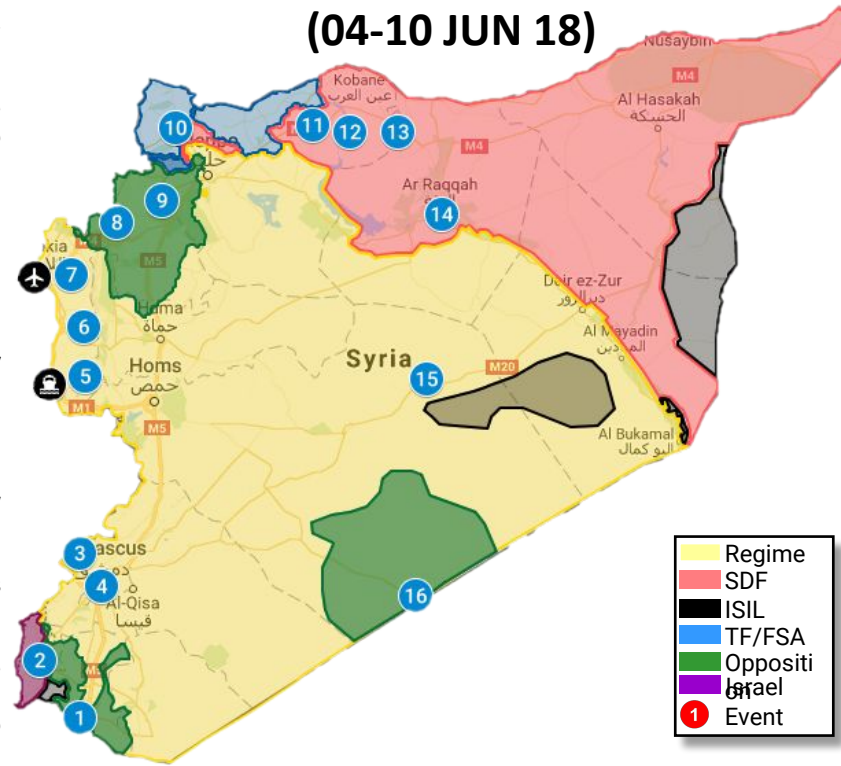
## Assessment:

- Russian efforts to help Assad consolidate state power on its territories gained momentum. Russia's negotiation attempts in northern Aleppo with Turkey and in southern Syria with Israel increase the tension with Iran and its proxy Hezbollah.
- Turkey is progressively consolidating its gains in Northern Syria with the final joint takeover of control in Tall Rifa'at.
- Turkish negotiations with US over Manbij has also gained more substance. Following the general political agreement last week, the meetings in Stuttgart will direct efforts to reach on a mutually agreed implementation plan.

- Russia Accuses the U.S. of Staging Another Chemical Attack in Syria.** 11 Jun 2018. The Russian military has warned that the United States is helping Syrian rebels stage a chemical weapons attack against civilians, which it claims will be used as cover to carry out airstrikes against government targets. The Russian military has a history of issuing pre-emptive statements accusing anti-government forces of laying the groundwork for so-called "false flag" operations to invite U.S. airstrikes. (The Moscow Times) <https://goo.gl/m28BUV>
- 2.5 million more people may flock to Turkey from Syria's Idlib: UN.** 12 Jun 2018. The U.N. humanitarian agency's top official for Syria, Panos Moutmtzis, has expressed concerns about recent airstrikes in rebel-held Idlib province, warning that "we may have not seen the worst of the crisis" in Syria even after seven years of war. He added that "with this escalation, with this deterioration, we worry about seeing really two and a half million people becoming displaced more and more toward the border of Turkey if this is to continue". (Hurriyet Daily News) <https://goo.gl/kJK4SY>
- The southern sector of Aleppo countryside witnesses tension in the vicinity of the Turkish observation point between Hayyat al-Sham and Al-Sham Corps.** 16 Jun 2018. A state of tension occurred between Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and Al-Sham Corps near the Turkish observation point in Al-Eis area in the southern sector of Aleppo countryside. This happened against backdrop of an attempt by HTS to restore points in the vicinity of the Turkish observation point after they withdrew earlier, leaving control to Al-Sham Corps. (The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights) <http://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=95520>
- Turkish-Russian Negotiations Continue on the Forces to be Stationed in Tall Rifa'at.** 16 Jun 2018. Turkish – Russian negotiations to be carried out by local parties in the northern countryside of Aleppo, about Tall Rifa'at and the areas where Iranian forces reside have resumed. Discussions are taking place to get the Iranians out of the area along with the regime forces, and for the entry of a Russian – Turkish joint force, and preventing the entry of any faction of the Syrian rebel and Islamic factions. (The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights) <http://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=95495>
- U.S. and Turkish military representatives meet at U.S. European Command.** 14 Jun 2018. In accordance with Manbij Roadmap and Manbij Security Principles, a series of meetings were held by Turkish and U.S. military representatives at U.S. European Command in Stuttgart, June 12-13. The U.S. and Turkish military officials who participated in the discussions agreed on a proposed Manbij implementation plan that will be recommended to senior U.S. and Turkish leadership for further discussions. (EUCOM) <https://goo.gl/upmWYT>
- Trump administration releases funding for Syria's 'White Helmets'.** 14 Jun 2018. The United States will release some \$6.6 million in previously frozen funding for a humanitarian aid group in Syria. (The Hill) <https://goo.gl/ixhXNq>
- Syrian Democratic Forces Continue its Advance towards Dashisha.** 17 Jun 2018. The US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) continued its advance towards the town of Dashisha near the Syrian-Iraqi border, according to the Hawar News Agency (ANHA). Earlier, the SDF had captured the village of Tell al-Jabir, 4km to the west of Dashisha after heavy clashes with Daesh fighters, who withdrew towards the border town after failing to repel US-backed forces attack. (South Front) <https://bit.ly/2M05Kq3>
- Daesh Prepare for Newer Attacks against regime and its allies.** 16 Jun 2018. "Daesh" organization in the west of the Euphrates River, will carry out new offensives against the regime forces and their allies of Iranian forces, within the deserts of Deir Ezzor and Homs, where the organization seeks to exhaust the regime, distract it and inflict the greatest number of casualties. (SOHR) <http://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=95509>

# SYRIA CRISIS WATCH

(04-10 JUN 18)



**Assessment:**

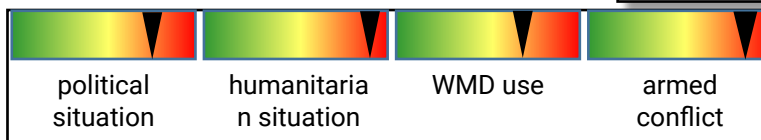
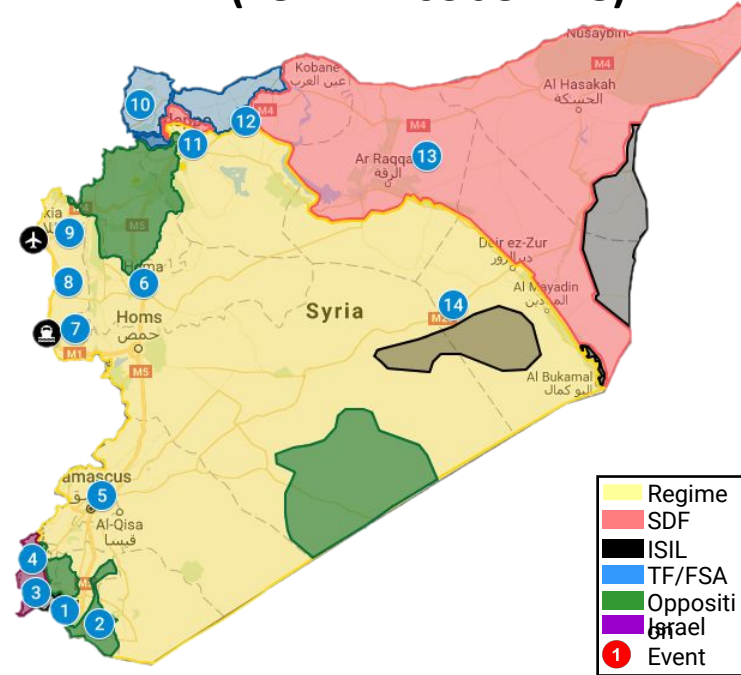
- Russia accelerates diplomatic efforts to solve the Syrian conflict. Current negotiations between Russia and US concerning Iranian presence, the latest talks between parties in Finland, and Russian - Israeli talks testify for a transition into political solution phase.
- Assad regime has entered the consolidation phase with the help of Russia. Facing such reality and US stance towards Kurdish gains, the Kurds will likely try to solve their differences directly with Assad increasingly.
- Despite Russian testing waters and hard military options utilized by Israel, neither Iran nor its proxy Hezbollah have intention to withdraw from Syria, as they openly expressed. The situation will likely evolve into a direct confrontation with Israel. This can be cushioned by Russian intervention by new incentives for both entities.

- Iran Says Fighters Won't Leave Syria Despite Russia's Deal With Israel.** 04 Jun2018. A top Iranian military official has said that his country's troops will not withdraw from Syria, despite reports that Russia and Israel had reached a deal that would see Iranian militias retreat from the southern part of the country. Iran is investing in Syria's infrastructure and appears determined to maintain a long-term presence in the country. (Newsweek) <https://goo.gl/3Kq7bw>
- Will Iran Agree to Be Kept Away From the Golan Border in Syria?** 07 Jun2018. Iran's ability to sit on the Golan border depends largely on Russia, which provides air cover and a certain degree of deterrence against Israel. Two things seem clear. First, Israel is quite determined to prevent Iran from recreating in southern Syria what it has done in southern Lebanon with Hezbollah. Second, Russia has no desire to see Iran threaten Israel or fully control Syria. (carnegie-mec.org) <https://goo.gl/qSk3ts>
- Hezbollah Leader Says to Stay in Syria.** 08 Jun2018. Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah will remain in Syria as long as Syrian President Bashar al-Assad wants it there, the group's leader said on Friday, defying renewed U.S. and Israeli pressure to force Tehran and its allies to quit the country. (The New York Times) <https://nyti.ms/2JrcVL4>
- President al-Assad to Mail on Sunday: UK publicly supported White Helmets that are a branch of Al Qaeda, US and UK existence in Syria is invasion.** 10 Jun2018. In an interview given to Britain's Mail on Sunday published on Sunday morning, President al-Assad asserted that the alleged chemical attack in Douma was staged by the UK, France, and the US. He stressed that the presence of the US and the UK in Syria is illegal and constitutes invasion as it breaches the sovereignty of Syria. Assad also reiterated that every inch of Syrian territory will be liberated. (SANA) <https://goo.gl/kt3ieA>
- Russia-US military summit could ease tensions over Syria.** 07 Jun2018. General Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Russia's chief of the military's General Staff, General Valery Gerasimov, will meet in Finland's capital on Friday on "the initiative of both countries," according to the Finnish military. And while the public can only speculate on planned topics of discussion, "the main goal of this meeting is to diffuse tensions and clear up a lack of understanding between sides," Aleksey Leonkov, a Russian military expert, told RT. (RT) <https://goo.gl/6THtr5>
- Russian military will stay in Syria to protect interests.** 07 Jun2018. The Russian military will stay in Syria as long as it is in Moscow's interests, President Vladimir Putin said Thursday. The Kremlin is seeking to be the decisive voice in any postwar settlement. (The Washington Times) <https://goo.gl/Y8pi61>
- Russian Defense Minister invites CIS allies to take part in Syria settlement.** 06 Jun2018. Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu has told his colleagues from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) bloc that their nations are welcome to participate in restoring peaceful life in Syria. (RT) <https://goo.gl/tXjPo>

- More Fighter Groups in Idlib Plan to Unite to Strengthen Their Position.** 08 Jun2018. The Syrian Liberation Front (SLF) and several Free Syrian Army (FSA) groups, including Jaysh al-Izza, Jaysh al-Ahrar and the Suqour al-Sham Brigades, are planning to merge their forces in order to form a unified group in the province of Idlib. Idlib militant groups are uniting larger groups in order to strengthen their position ahead of the expected developments after the SAA finishes dealing with militants in southern Syria. (South Front) <https://bit.ly/2xYhtTX>
- Suspected Russian Air Strikes Kill Dozens In Syria.** 08 Jun2018. Suspected Russian air strikes in a rebel-held region in Syria have killed at least 44 people overnight, a war monitoring group says. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said nine children were among those killed when air strikes hit the area of Zardana in the northwestern Idlib Province late on June 7. The Russian Defense Ministry dismissed the group's comments. The attack was the deadliest in the region this year. (The Middle East Institute) <https://goo.gl/1TEtMa>
- Turkey Announces New Migration Statistics for Syrian Refugees.** 08 Jun2018. The Turkish migration department has announced that Syrian refugees in the country have reached a total of 3,583,434. The statistics found that the number of Syrians is increasing. In 2016 there were 2,834,441 and in 2017 this number reached 3,426,786. (The Syrian Observer) <https://goo.gl/nGJgiC>
- Mattis' Bilateral Meeting With Turkish Minister of Defense.** 08 Jun2018. Secretary of Defense James N. Mattis met with Turkish Minister of Defense Nurettin Canikli on 7 June 2018 at the NATO Defense Ministerial. Secretary Mattis praised bilateral efforts in Syria to develop a sustainable long-term arrangement in Manbij to address Turkey's security concerns, ensure stability and security in the region, and remain focused on the fight against ISIS. (U.S. Secretary of Defense) <https://goo.gl/XDatTX>
- U.S.-Turkey Joint Statement (on Manbij).** 04 Jun2018. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu and U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo met on June 4 in Washington, D.C. They considered the recommendations of the Turkey-U.S. Working Group on Syria pertaining to the future of our bilateral cooperation in Syria on issues of mutual interest, to include taking steps to ensure the security and stability in Manbij. They endorsed a Road Map to this end and underlined their mutual commitment to its implementation. (U.S. Secretary of State) <https://goo.gl/PDoslX>
- YPG Forces Withdraw from Manbij.** 06 Jun2018. the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) announced that their "military advisers" will leave the town. The militia claimed that its forces withdrew from Manbij in November 2016, but the military advisers remained to work with the Manbij Military Council (MMC). (South Front) <https://bit.ly/2sF3DR5>
- Kurdish Leadership Declares Readiness for Direct Negotiations with Damascus.** 07 Jun2018. Mays al-Kareidi, a spokeswoman for the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC), made an official statement announcing that the SDC is ready for direct negotiations with Damascus. (South Front) <https://bit.ly/2JLhOOW>
- Russia's deal south of the capital Damascus helps ISIS in the Syrian Desert and escalates its activity.** 09 Jun 2018. The "Islamic State" organization since its departure on 22nd of May 2018, from the south of the capital Damascus, started attacking the regime forces and their allies intensively, after being supplied by members due to the deal between the Russians and the regime. (The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights) <http://www.syriahr.com/en/?p=94782>
- U.S. to Dismantle Base in Exchange for Iranian Withdrawal From Southern Syria, Report Says.** 04 Jun2018. Negotiations are being held to close down an American military base on the Syria-Iraq border in exchange for Iranian withdrawal from southern Syria, the London-based Asharq Al-Awsat reported Sunday. (Haaretz) <https://goo.gl/tkFkrR>

# SYRIA CRISIS WATCH

(28 MAY-03 JUN 18)



### Assessment:

- Currently Russia appears as the main actor leading the policies both in Syria and the broader Middle East region. However, Israel's security concerns and its firm stand on Iranian threat clearly dominating the Russian policies in Syria.
- Whether the Southern Front lay down its arms and hand over the area to Syrian Regime or continue fighting will likely be clear following the trilateral meeting between the US-Russia and Jordan, depending on the concerns of Jordan and Israel.
- Cavusoglu - Pompeo talks are likely to ease the tensions between Turkey and U.S. over Manbij but will negatively effect Turkish - Russian relations.

- 1. Russia tells Iran to immediately remove militias from Syrian-Israeli border.** 30 May 2018. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Wednesday said foreign militias should leave southwestern Syria as soon as possible, state media outlet TASS reported. Lavrov said that only Syrian troops should be stationed in rebel-held Daraa province, a region adjacent to the Israeli border that has emerged as a flashpoint in a wider standoff between the Jewish state and Iran. (The Times of Israel) <https://goo.gl/Pt1YPv>
- 2. Russia-US-Jordan Talks on Syrian South De-Escalation Zone to Be Held Next Week.** 01 June 2018. Trilateral Russia-US-Jordanian meeting in Amman on the southern de-escalation zone in Syria will take place next week at the level of deputy foreign ministers. The meeting is expected to be focused on preventing Iran's presence in the area – the main concern of neighbouring Israel and handing over the control over Syria's southern de-escalation zone to the Syrian government and the Russian military police after the local militants laid down heavy weapons. (Sputnik) <https://goo.gl/XPzQu7>
- 3. Iran Wants to Stay in Syria Forever.** 02 June 2018. Israel is pressing Russia, the main powerbroker in Syria, and other international players to get Iran to leave Syria, threatening more strikes on Iranian positions near its border at the Golan Heights or anywhere inside the country should it remain. But Tehran is intent on recouping its investment of blood and treasure. (Foreign Policy) (<https://goo.gl/zKzvMJ>)
- 4. Russia OKs Israeli strikes on Iranian targets deep inside Syria.** 01 June 2018. Israel and Russia have reached an agreement green-lighting Israeli strikes on Iranian targets in Syria, as well as the withdrawal of Tehran-backed troops from Syria's border with Israel, according to an Arabic media report Friday. (The Times of Israel) <https://goo.gl/Lg4Rn7> However, both Israeli and Syrian officials denied reports concerning an agreement was reached between regional and other powers over the situation of southwestern Syria. (Haaretz) <https://goo.gl/VhQZXF>
- 5. President al-Assad: We will liberate every part of Syria.** 31 May 2018. During an interview with Russian RT President al-Assad said: "We're going to deal with SDF by two options: the first one, we started now opening doors for negotiations, this is the first option. If not, we're going to resort to liberating by force. We don't have any other options, with the Americans or without the Americans." (SANA) <https://sana.sy/en/?p=139186> Following this statement "Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) has said a threat by President Bashar al-Assad to use force will lead to more losses and destruction." (Aljazeera) <https://goo.gl/F17XV7>
- 6. Renewed artillery shelling by the regime forces targets 5 villages and towns in the northern sector of Hama countryside.** 03 June 2018. The regime forces and gunmen loyal to them tend to target agricultural lands and crops, in the vicinity of the towns, cities, and villages which are located in the southern sector of Idlib, Shal Al-Ghab and the north of Hama. (The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights) <http://www.syriaahr.com/en/?p=94143>

- 7. Russia sends latest missile warship near Syria where war games are about to begin.** 01 June 2018. Russia has entered its latest missile corvette into service with Moscow's Mediterranean Fleet, a powerful formation of warships involved in the war in Syria and currently preparing for annual summer war games. The relatively small vessel, Buyan-M-class missile corvette Vyshny Volochyok, makes up for what it lacks in size with its high-speed maneuverability and an arsenal of advanced Kalibr-NK cruise missiles capable of hitting targets at sea or land. (Newsweek) <https://goo.gl/KgMpNU>
- 8. Russia is building trust with Syrian rebels on the ground.** 30 May 2018. Over the past two months, the Syrian government and its allies have succeeded in fully recapturing the rebel-held areas surrounding Damascus, many of which had been outside government control since 2012. While the result seemed inevitable, the speed of the offensives was aided by a novel Russian policy tool: the use of Russia's North Caucasian military police to provide safe passage for rebels and civilians from these areas to Idlib province in Syria's northwest. This strategy has proved highly effective for Moscow. (The Middle East Institute) <https://goo.gl/1TEtMa>
- 9. Russia is Weapons Testing Unmanned Ground Vehicles in Syria.** 31 May 2018. Earlier this month, the Russian Ministry of Defence announced that their newest unmanned tank was operational, and had been tested successfully in Syria. The new automated tank, called the Uran-9, is only the latest of the technological experiments by the Russian military in Syria. Vladimir Shamanov, the head of the Defence Committee for the Russian Parliament, was quoted as saying: "As we helped the brotherly Syrian people, we tested over 200 new types of weapons". (Albawaba) <https://goo.gl/qvMAJC>
- 10. YPG claims killing of "large number" of Turkish soldiers and Turkish-backed militia in Afrin.** 02 June 2018. The Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) released a statement claiming that "a large number" of Turkish soldiers and Turkish-backed militia were killed during operations in the Syrian area of Afrin during the previous two days. The YPG added that 3 of its members were killed in the clashes. (South Front) <https://bit.ly/2LiuJ00>
- 11. Clans announce the formation of ally units of the regime army for 'expelling the Turkish, US and French forces from Syria'.** 03 June 2018. A meeting of hundreds of dignitaries and notables of Syrian Arab clans from various Syrian areas took place in Dayr Hafir area in the eastern countryside of Aleppo. In its final statement, it announced the formation of units under the name "Popular Clannish Resistance" to serve as ally forces of the Syrian regime army with an to expel the Turkish, US and French forces from the Syrian territory. A number of officials of the regime and a number of officers of the regime forces also attended this vast conference. (The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights) <http://www.syriaahr.com/en/?p=94141>
- 12. Turkey says YPG may withdraw from Syria's Manbij by end of summer.** 30 May 2018. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said ratifying of the pre-agreed roadmap for cooperation on Syria's Manbij will be at the top of the agenda during his visit to Washington on June 3-4. Cavusoglu said: "This action plan [on withdrawal of YPG/PKK] could be applied by the end of summer. Turkish and American soldiers will jointly supervise the withdrawal." (TRTWorld) <https://goo.gl/zHbJ2u>
- 13. Trump Had Power to Attack Syria Without Congress, Justice Dept. Memo Says.** 01 June 2018. The Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel declared that Mr. Trump could lawfully and unilaterally direct airstrikes targeting Syria installations because he determined that doing so would be in the national interest, and because the attack would carry little risk of escalation. (NY Times) <https://goo.gl/aMaEck>
- 14. Syrian Army and Iranian forces prepare to launch a large offensive against ISIS soon.** 02 June 2018. Al-Masdar News reported that several units of Iranian-backed forces were redeployed from southern Syria to new positions in the eastern governorate of Deir Ezzor to launch a large-scale attack to eliminate the remaining fighters of ISIS in the Homs desert. (South Front) <https://bit.ly/2HfZDer>