



Weekly Conflict Summary
May 19-25, 2016

Pro-Government forces continued their advance in Eastern Ghouta, capturing a large swath of territory controlled by the opposition. The areas captured have been held by opposition forces since early in the conflict, and represent a substantial portion of opposition territory in eastern Damascus. Pro-government advances in the area have been facilitated by continued infighting between Faylaq al-Rahman and Jaysh al-Islam. The two groups agreed to another ceasefire on May 24, and have since demolished roadblocks between their respective enclaves.

In addition to fighting in the eastern suburbs, fighting erupted in the outskirts of Darayya to the west of Damascus, with government forces conducting an offensive against opposition positions in the city. Government offensives in rural Damascus have led to a statement by opposition forces on May 22nd that they would withdraw from the cessation of hostilities if the offensives continue.

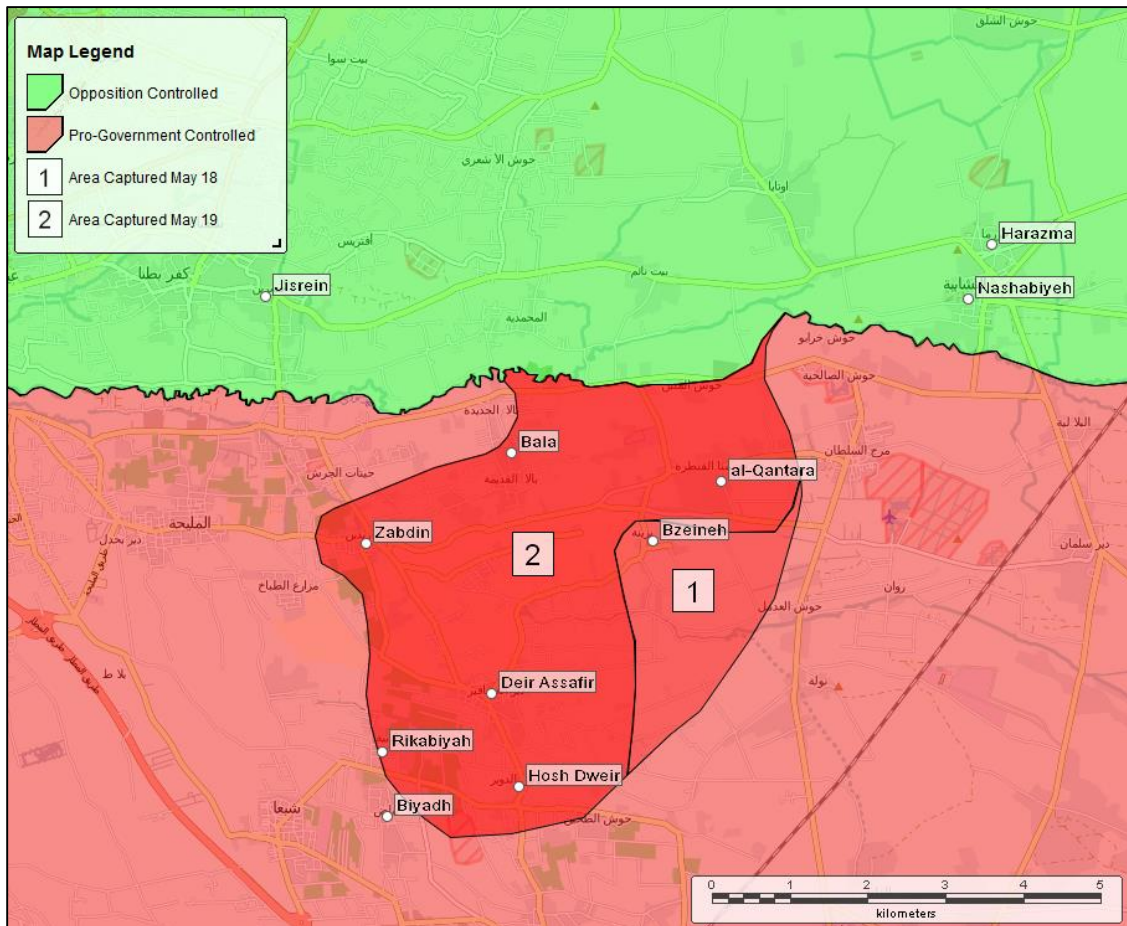


Figure 1: Areas of control in Eastern Ghouta as of May 25.

Front lines in Aleppo appear to have stabilized. There have been some reports of air strikes on opposition held portions of Aleppo city, as well as the opposition-held Kastillo road leading into Aleppo city, in addition to mutual shelling both within the city and outlying suburbs. Opposition forces from the Jaysh al-Fatah coalition continue to hold Khan Tuman to the southwest of Aleppo city, which has come under aerial bombardment since its capture three weeks ago.

In central and eastern Syria, ISIS forces launched an attack on pro-government positions in Deir Ez-Zor. Government positions have held despite a large-scale ISIS offensive on multiple fronts surrounding the city. Also, satellite imagery has confirmed heavy damage to Russian attack helicopters and vehicles at the Tayas (T4) airbase resulting from ISIS attacks on the base two weeks ago.

North of Raqqa, the SDF announced the start of a campaign to take northern Raqqa from ISIS. SDF troops, advancing from positions around Ayn Issa have made little progress thus far, but are currently pressuring ISIS positions along the road to Raqqa from both the west and east.

In southern Syria, opposition forces from the Southern Front advanced against the ISIS-affiliated Liwa Shuhada Yarmouk in southwest Daraa/Quneitra governorates. Advances have been limited so far, but operations are ongoing.

Conclusion

Pro-government advances surrounding Damascus represent a worrying escalation of violence that risks a serious collapse of the cessation of hostilities. Though opposition forces have yet to make a clear statement on the ultimatum they announced on the 22nd, any continued offensives by government forces will likely force an opposition response.