



Weekly Conflict Summary
May 12-18, 2016

Clashes have continued in the Eastern Ghouta region of rural Damascus, despite a re-affirmation of the cessation of hostilities (CoH) at the ISSG ministerial meeting in Vienna (17 May 2016). Opposition forces, beleaguered by persistent infighting, withdrew from the town of Bzeineh (SE of Damascus, near the airport) following an assault by pro-government forces. This development leaves opposition forces in Dayr al-Assafir nearly surrounded.¹ This region of eastern Damascus has seen near constant fighting since the start of the CoH at the end of February.

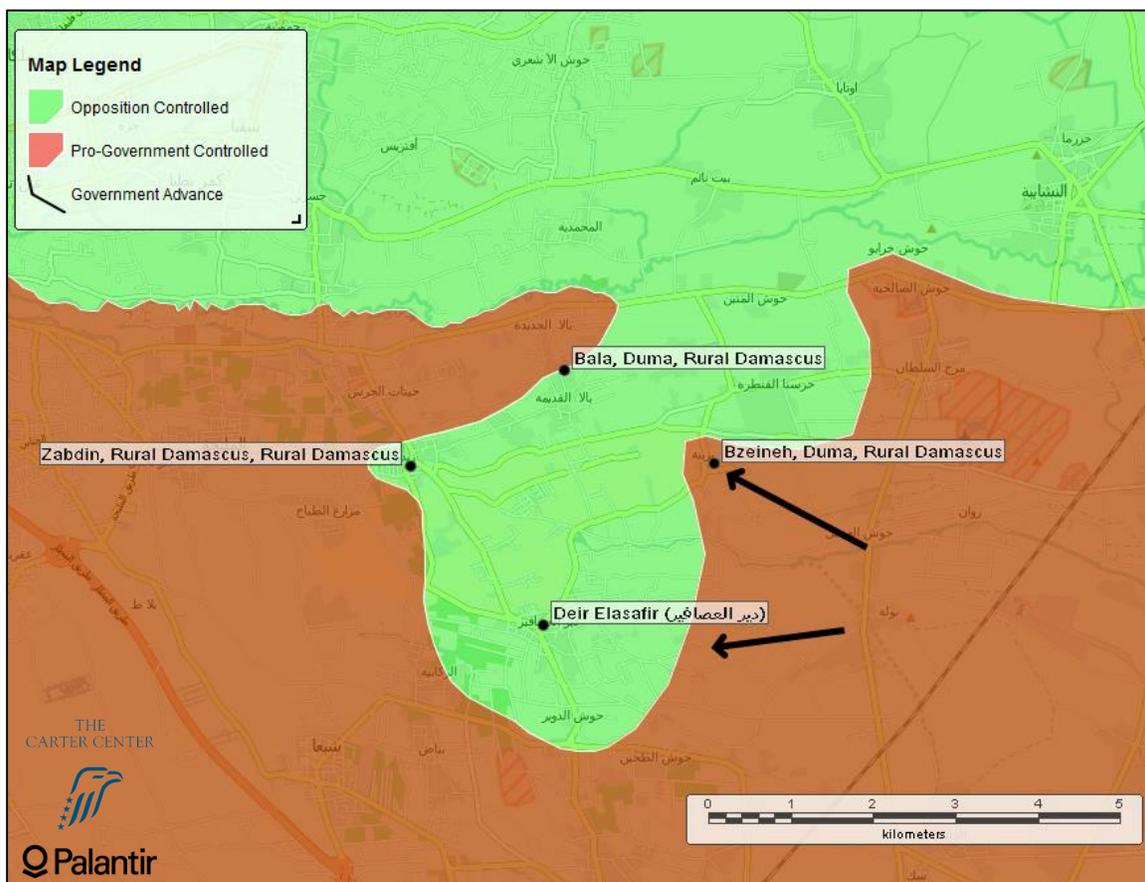


Figure 1: Front lines as of May 18, 2016.

Aleppo also saw a continuation of clashes, and remains the focal point for the majority of conflict activity throughout the country. Following an opposition advance, pro-government forces have pressured opposition forces in the southwestern suburbs of

¹ Note: Since the drafting of this report, pro-government forces have taken the town of Deir El-Asafir, and continue their advance into the pocket of opposition control in the area.

Rashidin and Khan Touman, but have yet to advance to their former positions. Airstrikes have continued on opposition positions throughout much of Aleppo city as well as the northern A'zaz pocket. Additionally, opposition forces have pushed eastward against ISIS positions to the east of A'zaz city.

In central Syria, ISIS has continued to press pro-government forces at the Tiyas Air Base near the Shaer gas fields, which it captured last week. Additionally, ISIS has engaged forces in the nearby Jazal gas field northwest of Tadmur (Palmyra). Pro-government forces have initiated a counter-offensive against ISIS positions in Shaer.

In the east of the country, an ISIS offensive against government positions in and around Deir Ez-Zor city has made limited gains, and succeeded in capturing at least one checkpoint. Government forces have responded with aerial bombardments on ISIS positions.

Conclusion

Despite the re-assertion of the CoH, opposition and pro-government forces remain locked in battle in key areas throughout the country. The fact that these back-and-forth front line changes have remained in relatively isolated areas offers hope that the cycle can be interrupted, but the risk of spillover will only increase with time.