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CARTER CENTER



**Weekly Conflict Summary**  
May 18-24, 2017

This reporting period, intra-opposition strife continued in Aleppo province but has eased in Rural Damascus. Evacuation deals continued, most notably in Damascus and Homs. Coalition warplanes struck pro-government Iranian-backed militias in the southeastern Syrian desert as the groups advanced against FSA forces in the area. ISIS forces continued to crumble on fronts in Aleppo, Homs, and Raqqa.



Figure 1 - Areas of control in Syria by May 24, with arrows indicating advances since the start of the reporting period

## Opposition Strife

After weeks of clashes between Jaysh al-Islam and groups aligned with Hai'yat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS, formerly al-Qaeda-affiliated Jabhat al-Nusra) in the opposition-held Eastern Ghouta pocket near Damascus, struggles between opposition forces in the area seem to have calmed down. Jaysh al-Islam fighters returned to fronts against pro-government units in Beit Nayem and launched attacks on al-Rihan neighborhood in Damascus, while Faylaq al-Rahman resumed clashes against pro-government formations in Arbin (see map below).

Figure 2 – Map of areas of control around Damascus and the Eastern Ghouta by May 24

Even as Eastern Ghouta fighting quieted, new intra-opposition clashes between Faylak al-Sham against Levantine Front and the Sultan Murad Brigades erupted in the northern Aleppo countryside east of Al-Rai. On May 23, Levantine Front forces attacked and captured Faylaq al-Sham positions in Kafr Ghan, Baraghideh, and Sheikh Rih after accusing them of working with HTS. Levantine Front and Sultan Murad Brigades stated that a portion of Faylak al-Sham's subunit, Liwa Fursan al-Thawra (formerly part

Evacuees were split, with some moving to Idlib and others to Jarablus. Opposition forces still control the al-Rastan pocket north of Homs city.

Amidst reports of fighting on May 18 and 21 between HTS and ISIS in Yarmouk Camp south of Damascus, ISIS reached an agreement with the Syrian government to hand over control of its territory in Yarmouk Camp to pro-government forces in exchange for the evacuation of ISIS fighters and their families to ISIS-controlled territory in eastern Syria. The agreement is to be concluded within the next month and will first remove wounded fighters and persons needing medical treatment. HTS reached a similar agreement earlier, and has already begun evacuation of fighters from some positions within Yarmouk Camp. The two agreements struck separately with ISIS and HTS would leave Yarmouk Camp under the complete control of pro-government forces, primarily Palestinian paramilitary groups.

### **Daraa conflict**

On May 22, pro-government forces launched another counterattack on al-Manshiyeh district in Daraa city. Fighters from the local opposition operations room, al-Bunyan al-Marsous, foiled the attempt, destroying a tank, striking a warplane, and demolishing a munitions warehouse in nearby Sajneh in the process. Syrian government and Russian forces conducted airstrikes throughout the clashes.

### **De-escalation and containment**

The “de-escalation” zones (Daraa, Eastern Ghouta, Idlib, Homs) have largely been ignored during this reporting period as conflict in Daraa has continued in high intensity, Eastern Ghouta fights between pro-government and anti-government elements escalated, and airstrikes on Idlib province remained consistent. Notably, the opposition-held al-Rastan pocket of northern Homs has not seen any escalation.

### **Al-Tanf Strike**

On May 17, pro-government, Iranian-backed militias began to move along the highway in Syria’s eastern desert towards Iraq. These forces included Syrian Military Security Falcons, Hezbollah, Syrian Hezbollah, Kita’ib Sayyed al-Shuhada,





Figure 4 - Map of areas of control in the eastern countryside of Aleppo by May 24

In the countryside of eastern Hama and Homs, ISIS forces launched repeated attacks at various points along the strategically-important Khanaser-Ithriya-Salamiyeh road. The road constitutes the sole overland route connecting government-controlled areas in Aleppo with coastal, central, and southern areas of Syria. On May 18, ISIS attacked two majority-Shi'a villages near the Ithriya-Salamiyeh road, Aqareb al-Safi and Mabuja. Pro-government forces eventually recaptured the villages, though the damage from ISIS was high. The Syrian government also initiated an attack against ISIS in the Shomariyah mountains.

Around Tadmor (Palmyra), pro-government forces attempted to advance from the silos between Tadmor and Sokhneh, making some progress along the highway through the desert. Pro-government forces, including the newly-formed 5<sup>th</sup> Corps, captured the Arak Gas Fields to the east of Tadmor on May 23. Pro-government forces also gained territory to the southeast of Tadmor in the hills near the Talila Reserve. Pro-government forces also started to advance beyond Jabal Abtar along the Damascus-Tadmor highway to the south.

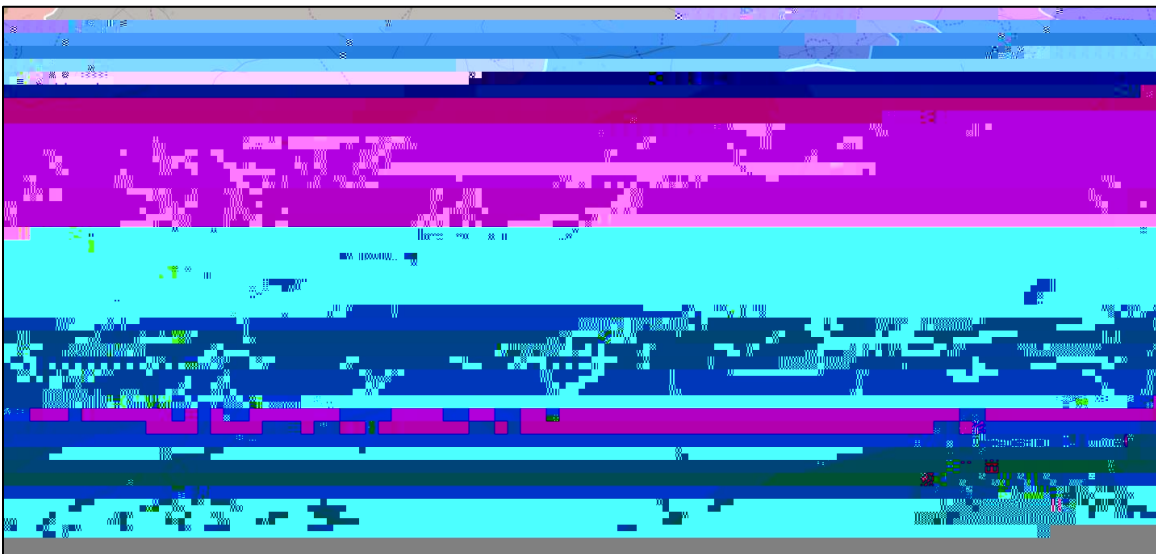


Figure 5 - Map of areas of control in eastern Homs by May 24



