

## **The Cessation of Hostilities**

April 21, 2016

Low level conflict between pro-government and opposition forces has persisted since the beginning of the cessation of hostilities on February 27, punctuated by two large escalations – one over the first weekend of April, and the second since the start of the Geneva talks on April 13. During the same period,

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The majority of significant fighting (involving location captures) has been between Jabhat al-Nusra and pro-government forces. A handful of opposition forces have assumed supportive roles in the fighting, including using anti-tank guided missiles against government targets. A large group of opposition units have been involved throughout the ceasefire period in fighting Kurdish forces in the Sheikh Maqsoud district of Aleppo city.

The map below shows known location captures in northwest Syria, color-coded by the initiating party (though some of these locations have changed hands multiple times). In

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that pushed the regime back in south Aleppo in the first week of April, thus signaling that the Syrian government depends on Russia's assistance to hold ground. As the airstrikes on Maarat an-Numan showed, there are still spoilers on the Syrian government side who do not seem interested in ending the war. Such spoilers are likely hoping that, if the fight continues, they can neutralize the moderate opposition, giving the world a choice between al-Qaeda/ISIS and the regime. These spoilers seem to hope that Russia is bluffing and, if the opposition were to prevail again, Russia will come back and help the regime.

### Main Takeaways

Media sources, and some on both sides of the conflict are suggesting that the ceasefire is over. However, the escalating violence is still relatively isolated and civilian safety is much improved since the ceasefire started. This should be capitalized on at all costs, and parties should not be allowed to give up on the peace process.