

## Dear Deeply Readers,

Our takeaway from this week in Syria's war: even when the regime claims a win resulting in cease-fire, it's not an easy one to stomach.

This week's handover of the Old City of Homs, from rebel groups to regime control, was [a symbolic and strategic victory](#). After a deal between government officials and rebel fighters – [reportedly brokered by the U.N.](#), with Iran at the negotiating table – President Bashar al-Assad was able to [brandish control](#) over Syria's third largest city on Friday. Once seen as the stronghold of Syria's revolution, Homs has now been cleared of Assad's armed opponents.

The [civilian residents of Homs have started to trickle back](#) into their neighborhoods, now flattened by years of regime shelling and urban warfare. That's emerging as a common scene across Syria, as pockets of the country return to calm – the result of strained and somewhat lopsided cease-fires. In Barzeh, a suburb of Damascus, [Syrians returning home told Syria Deeply they simply can't afford to rebuild](#); construction materials are up 400% from two years ago, in a town where the destruction was nearly complete. Four months after the cease-fire was declared, a local community official said just one-third of residents have returned.

In other parts of Syria, there's no end to the raging fight, no clear advantage for Assad's troops. On Thursday, [Syrian rebels flattened the Carlton Citadel Hotel in Aleppo](#), which the government had used as a makeshift army base. Earlier last week [a rebel attack on a government checkpoint](#) – similarly using subterranean explosives – killed an estimated 30 government soldiers, according to activists. The state of [the battle is holding back the final shipment of Syria's chemical weapons](#), with potentially deadly chemicals stuck behind rebel lines.

Rebel infighting continues to pit anti-Assad groups against each other, with devastating consequences. In the eastern province of Deir Ezzor, [clashes killed dozens of people and displaced an estimated 60,000 civilians](#), emptying local villages. One of the two groups, the al-Qaida-affiliated Jabhat al-Nusra, went on to say it would stop fighting its rival, the radical Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (specifically, it said it

had received orders from al-Qaida chief Ayman al-Zawahiri to stop fighting fellow Muslims, [according to Asharq al-Awsat](#)). In that same report, the Free Syrian Army – the relatively weaker but Western-friendly force on the battlefield – cast doubt on whether that agreement would hold. In the southern region of Deraa, [the killing of a local al-Qaida leader](#) was seen as the potential spark for a new round of intra-rebel clashes.

The Free Syrian Army, represented this week in an opposition tour of Washington, [asked the U.S. for anti-aircraft missiles](#) – a long-awaited tool to fight Assad’s air supremacy. The request came through Ahmed al-Jarba, the head of the Syrian National Coalition, who met with President Barack Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry this week.

Jarba tried to quell concerns that weapons given to his troops would end up in the hands of jihadis – despite the fact that [the FSA and Islamist groups often work together on the battlefield](#).

“We have a number of fighters who are elite and who are trained and who are trusted, and our friends know who they are,” [Jarba told the New York Times](#). While he ostensibly waits on the missile request, the U.S. [upgraded the diplomatic status](#) of his Syrian National Coalition and pledged \$27 million of additional nonlethal assistance to its armed contingent, the paper reports.

In an indirect boost to the opposition and direct jab to the Assad regime, [the U.S. said it would back a Security Council resolution](#) that aims to refer Syria to the International Criminal Court. The document, drafted by France, calls for an investigation of war crimes by the Syrian regime. But to take effect, it would need the support of Russia, one of the Assad regime’s most steadfast supporters.

Alongside any military and geopolitical machinations, the suffering of everyday Syrians grows more extreme. [According to a top U.N. aid official](#), more than 3.5 million Syrians are stuck in areas without access to food or aid, while nearly 3 million more are now refugees in neighboring countries. He also said the Syrian government was denying medical care to rebel areas by removing supplies from aid convoys.

Meanwhile, in Aleppo, Islamist groups have cut the power supply and [severed the water supply into the city](#) as a form of collective punishment for Assad’s aerial bombing of rebel areas.

One activist told us that Syrians can hardly feel the trickle of help from the outside world – by way of scale, it can scarcely make an impact in their daily struggles.

“We are simply left to die alone,” she said.

**Highlights from Syria Deeply:**

[The U.S. Upgrades the Status of Syria's Opposition. What Does That Mean?](#)

[Outside Syria's Bakeries, a Black Market Is on the Rise](#)

[Kidnapping Jeopardizes Southern Alliance Between FSA, Jabhat al-Nusra](#)

[My Syrian Diary: Part 4](#)

[Returning Home, Barzeh Residents Face the Cost of Rebuilding With Crucifixions in Raqqa, a Sign of Increasingly Violent Tactics At a Startup Refugee Camp, Supermarkets and Water Conservation Take Priority](#)

[Truant Students Skip School and Face Child Labor, Mistreatment](#)

[Q+A: 'Aleppo: Notes from the Dark,' Changing the Syrian Narrative](#)

**Headlines from the Week:**

Los Angeles Times: [In Syria, Activists in Raqqa Try to Confront Militant Islamist Group](#)

Spiegel: [Syria Regime Has Not Abandoned Chemical Weapons](#)

Wall Street Journal: [U.S. Sanctions Russian Bank Over Syria Conflict](#)

TIME: [Meet the Two Candidates Taking on Assad for Syria's Presidency](#)

Reuters: [Syrian Rebels Say a Would-Be Election Candidate is Captured](#)

AFP: [Saudis Postpone Arab League Talks on Syria](#)

Wall Street Journal: [One U.S. Backed-Rebel Group Cooperates With al-Qaida in Syria](#)

NPR: [A Survivor of the Crusades Comes Up Against the Syrian Civil War](#)

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Sincerely,

The News Deeply Team