

Moderate rebels take key southern base in Syria, dealing blow to Assad

---

09/06/2015



Rebels announced the capture of a strategic army base in southern Syria on Tuesday, in the latest of several sweeping offensives by forces battling President Bashar al-Assad.

A [coalition](#) of rebel factions known as the Southern Front took full control of the Brigade 52 base by early afternoon, said spokesman Issam al-Reis. Brigade 52 is the largest military installation in Daraa province, which borders Jordan, and is key to the defense of northern routes leading to the capital, Damascus.

“The base has been liberated, and we are in full control,” Reis said, speaking by telephone.

The loss of the base is another blow to Assad’s forces, which have recently suffered a string of battlefield defeats in a four-year-old conflict that has killed an estimated 220,000 people and displaced millions. A largely [Islamist rebel alliance](#) has seized most of northwestern Idlib province, while the Islamic State militant group has captured territory from government forces in the east.

[\[The Islamic State was dumped by al-Qaeda a year ago. Look where it is now.\]](#)

Tuesday’s attack marks another success for the largely moderate rebels fighting for the Southern Front, which has received weapons and financial backing from Arab countries. The umbrella group receives support from a military operations center in Amman, the capital of Jordan, a firm U.S. ally.

Emile Hokayem, a Middle East analyst at the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies, said the fall of Brigade 52 weakens government defenses around the capital. The assault also represents a glimmer of hope for moderate insurgent groups, which have been [overtaken](#) by hard-line Islamist factions such as al-Qaeda's powerful Syria affiliate, Jabhat al-Nusra.

"The Southern Front is now showing itself as an increasingly effective buffer against Islamist rebels as well as an effective means for applying pressure on the Assad regime," Hokayem said.

Officials from the Syrian government could not be reached for comment on Tuesday's assault.

---