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## Assad's forces take significant territory from rebels near Damascus

By Andrew V. Pestano

5/19/2016

Syrian forces under President Bashar al-Assad took the key town of Deir al-Asafir near Damascus back from rebels on Thursday.

Assad's efforts were supported by Lebanese Hezbollah militants, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group. The government capture of the town has diminished the rebel's access to Damascus' Eastern Ghouta suburb.

The monitoring group said hundreds of families fled the area due to intense fighting. The towns of Zabdin, Nola, Bazina, al-Qantara, Harasta, Hosh al-Homsi, Hosh al-Dwer, Bala, al-Rakabia and al-Biad were also captured.

The capture of territory by government forces is one of the most significant advances by Assad's regime in 2016, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

Syria has been in the midst of a complex civil war in which the Islamic State, the Syrian government and multiple Syrian rebel groups fight for control of territory. The United Nations estimates up to 400,000 people may have died so far.