

## Syria facing pressure amid UK, France naval drills

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*The Syrian government forces have occupied central areas of Syria's northern capital of Aleppo and are now involved in fights against rebels. The operation could last for several days due to high-density residences in the city.*

Experts believe that these fights mark a kind of a turning point in the confrontation, with the government forces enjoying lots of advantages over the enemy.

Many observers say that the outcome of the Aleppo battle will determine the winner of the [Syrian conflict](#). Political analyst Taleb Ibrahim shares this opinion.

"Such predictions sound quite reasonable. Rebels and those who support them have developed a strong coalition, featuring hirelings from different countries and members of foreign special forces, mainly from Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the US. Some reports say that the total number of rebels now stands at 15,000, not to mention those who joined the opposition after fleeing Jebel al-Zawiyah, Hama, and Damascus. Obviously, Aleppo is now facing a crucial fight which will determine the winner."

Meanwhile, the crucial fight for Syria seems to be joined by its foreign allies and rivals. Tehran held international talks on Syria which were attended by delegations from 20 countries. Iran looks annoyed with the fact that the West prevented it from using its political potential to settle the Syrian crisis. The talks resulted in Iran confirming its intention to host a meeting between the Syrian government and opposition.

This initiative sounds much like the one recently approved during the international conference in Geneva, when members of the UNSC as well as some European and Arab countries agreed to do their best to force the opposing sides to sit down for talks. The US objected Iran's presence at the Geneva conference. Tehran, however, looks ready to continue its diplomatic mission in Syria on August 14, when an urgent Islamic summit is scheduled to take place in Mecca. Tehran has called on partners not to miss this opportunity to help Syria begin a national dialogue.

It is worth mentioning that Great Britain and France are going to hold naval drills in the Eastern Mediterranean involving the two nations' fleets. The sides are going to have training exercises, naval maneuvers, and amphibious landings on Italy's island of Sardinia, as well as on the territories of Albania, Turkey and Cyprus.

It is evident that Syria is facing a new wave of military and political pressure. Libya was in a

similar situation a year ago. In both cases the countries staging the drills claim that they do it to be prepared for possible evacuation of Europeans from the region. Nobody knows how long the drills will last. It means that Great Britain and France believe that it is up to them to decide on the deadline for their warships to stay off Syria depending on how things unfold in the region.

Much depends on Syria's relations with Turkey, a member of NATO. Already strained, they become more complicated each day. Turkey's Foreign Minister on Turkey blamed President Bashar Assad for arming the separatist Kurdish Workers' Party, or the P.K.K. Its supporters have been involved in a guerilla war against the Turkish government, including on Iraqi territory. Ankara fears that Syria will turn into a new front where Kurds could continue their fighting for the united Kurdistan. Ankara sent tanks to the Syrian border to guard the territory. Turkey has a vast amount of experience in carrying out cross-border operations against Kurds. If tensions keep on growing nobody can be 100 per cent sure that Turkey won't decide to repeat such operations, especially in view of the British and French warships staying nearby.

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