

# Syria - Turks Fail to Take Al-Bab - “Rebels” Die in Infighting

By [Moon of Alabama](#)

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*This week the Turkish President Erdogan visited the Gulf states. He asked for bigger investment in Turkey and for cash for his project to occupy more parts of Syria. A week ago Erdogan had [claimed](#):*

“Al-Bab is about to be captured. Manbij and Raqqah are next,” Erdogan said, adding their number one priority was to form a safe zone in the country.

This week he brought his Army Chief of Staff Arak to the Gulf to declare victory. Several Erdogan friendly [media outlets](#) in Turkey (any other left?) [reported](#):

Operation Euphrates Shield has entered a new phase in al-Bab, as the offensive stage is over now that the town has largely been recaptured from Daesh. “The operation in al-Bab is over,” Chief of General Staff Hulusi Akar said at a press conference in Qatar on Wednesday during President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s trip to Gulf countries.

...

Silence now dominates the area that was once scene to heavy clashes. Turkish tanks patrol al-Bab’s streets and the Syrian opposition has pressed a major advance.

That claim was a huge lie. While Turkish forces had earlier taken some outskirts of Al-Bab and claimed to own 40% of the city they were by then [stuck](#) and later in full retreat.

Yesterday the Turkish forces lost the Al-Hikma hospital and the automatic bakery they had earlier captured and retreated from all inner districts of Al-Bab. At least [90% of Al-Bab](#) is still in Islamic State hands.

Geolocated video by the Islamic State and Turkish supported forces show that the Turks are back at their starting points at the outer city limits.



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As many as 430 Syrian civilians have been killed by Turkish forces and their auxiliaries. Just last week the MI-6 sponsored Syrian Observatory said that Turkish bombing [killed](#) more than 60 in Al-Bab. It confirmed videos posted by the Islamic State which showed killed children and destroyed houses. Unlike with every death cause by fighting between Takfiris and the Syrian Army no “western” main-stream media picked up on that.

Turkey started to invade Syria between Aleppo and Euphrates exactly six month ago. The aim was to prevent the Syrian Kurds from taking an east-to-west corridor along the Turkish border. Such would have closed off Turkey from further influence in Syria. The Turks had hired some of the Syrian “rebels” they had earlier supported to fight the Syrian government to now fight the Islamic State and the Kurds. The Takfiris of Ahrar al-Sham are their storm troopers.

The first three month showed some rapid progress. The Islamic State was bribed to move out of the northern Syrian areas without a fight and the Turks moved in. But in December they reached Al-Bab, a city east of Aleppo with originally some 60,000 inhabitants. There resistance from the Islamic State picked up and the Turkish progress stopped. Turkish armor, often placed without cover in sight of the front line, was destroyed in mass by Islamic State anti-tank missiles. Casualties climbed and the mercenaries of the FSA refused to continue the fight.

As of Thursday casualties number so far were at least 64 Turkish soldiers killed and 386 wounded. Of the FSA auxiliaries at least 469 were killed and 1,712 wounded. A dozen main battle tanks were confirmed as lost. Unofficial sources claim that more than 30 Turkish tanks were destroyed as well as 20+ armored infantry carriers – nearly two battalions wasted for no significant gain.

The Free Syrian Army mercenaries Erdogan hired to take on the Kurds and the Islamic State are now mostly useless. They do not fight efficiently but profusely waste ammunition for [spray-and-pray show offs](#) (vid).

To compensate for that Turkey injected its own special Forces and now has some 3,000 soldiers involved in the operation. But that did not help either – losses continued and no progress was made. Another 5,000 Turkish soldiers were [now send](#) (Tur) to join the operation. It was also announced that Turkey plans to erect three garrisons in Syria. On top of the eluding Al-Bab Erdogan now also wants to take the Islamic State held Raqqa and the Kurdish held Manbij.

His [plan](#) of a Raqqa operation is ludicrous. It would require to fight for and hold a corridor through Kurdish-Syrian areas:

Ankara's preferred plan of action envisages Turkish and U.S. special forces, backed by commandoes and Turkey-backed Syrian rebels entering Syria through the border town of Tel Abyad, currently held by Kurdish YPG militia, the newspaper said. The forces would effectively cut through YPG territory, before pushing on to Raqqa, which lies about 100 kilometers (60 miles) south.

Such a plan would require the United States to convince the Kurdish militia to grant the Turkey-backed forces a 20-kilometre (12-mile)-wide strip through YPG territory in order to push south, ..

The U.S. would not (and could not) hold back Kurdish forces from attacking such a long Turkish supply line.

But [who takes such announcements serious](#) anyway? After the alleged coup against him Erdogan kicked out every officer who was not, in his view, sufficiently loyal to him. His air-force was hurt the most. Allegedly only 0.4 qualified pilots per plane are available now instead of the regular 2-3. It takes up to a decade to train new pilots.

The ground army may be in slightly better shape but NATO's second biggest military is no longer the serious force it once was. The whole Turkish operation [is in disarray](#). Moreover – there is no plan for the day after or any exit strategy. Decisions and announcements change from day to day.

The current Turkish plans contradict the Astana agreements concluded with Russia, Syria and Iran. Only [a short, temporary role](#) for Turkish forces was agreed upon. Al-Bab was supposed to be taken by Syrian forces. Syria has officially protested at the UN against the Turkish invasion. But neither Syria nor Russia or Iran have started to fight the Turkish forces. "Just let the Turks bleed," seems to be their current slogan.

Erdogan set the date for a referendum in Turkey over a new constitution. The vote in April would legalize his quasi dictatorial powers. But the quagmire in Syria and the stalemate at Al-Bab will cost him. Why choose a dictator prone to lose his fights? Unconfirmed rumors are swiveling around claiming that Erdogan is trying to bribe the Islamic State to leave Al-Bab. Such a move would fit Erdogan's motives. He needs the victory and does not shy away from otherwise illegitimate methods.

South of Al-Bab the Syrian army is moving towards the Euphrates. It will cut off the Turkish forces path to Raqqa and Manbij. In north-east Syria formerly Turkish sponsored Takfiris

fight each other. Jund al-Aqsa, allied with Islamic State, is [mass killing](#) “moderate rebels” allied with Al-Qaeda. Hundreds of “rebel” fighters and prisoners have lost their lives in such infighting.

In the south “moderate rebels” and al-Qaeda try to attack the city of Daraa, held by regular Syrian forces. The attacks failed. Jordan closed its borders and no longer takes care of wounded “rebels”. The Military Operations Room in Jordan has [stopped](#) all supplies and payments to anti-Syrian forces. Only Israel is still secretly helping them.

Syrian government forces mop up isolated rebel strongholds near Damascus. Some Syrian army forces are moving to retake Palmyra. The east-Syrian garrison in Deir Ezzor, isolated and attacked by the Islamic State, is still holding out. Bigger operations against the Takfiris in the south and north-west are planned but the smart move now is to just sit tight and let the enemies, Takfiris as well as Turks, continue in their self destruction.

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