

The Battle of Daraa against ISIS, Al Qaeda and FSA: Hezbollah Special Forces Will Participate

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Global Research, June 21, 2018

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Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Military and WMD](#), [US NATO](#)
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The battle of Daraa against the "Islamic State" (ISIS) group (known under the name of Jaish Khaled Bin al-Waleed), al-Qaeda and the "Free Syrian Army" is happening without doubt. The Syrian government won't take into consideration the US menace to bomb the Syrian Army, or Israel's threat - Israel which is supporting Jihadists for years offering to these finance, intelligence information and medical assistance - to prevent the Damascus forces from reaching the borders. Damascus will also ignore the Russian-US-Jordanian agreement of protecting and respecting the de-escalation zone for very long.

Damascus asked its special forces under the command of General Suheil al-Hassan (known as al-Nimer - Tiger) to move to Daraa. These forces have been operating exclusively under the Russian military command over the entire Syrian geography. The Syrian government is also gathering anti-air missile units in Daraa and in also at the back of the front around Damascus and have commanded its strategic missile units to be ready to intervene offering protection to the ground forces. This indicates the forthcoming battle is expected to be harsh and doesn't exclude the intervention of the regional forces in Syria.

The Syrian command ignored the US and the Israeli requests to exclude Hezbollah and the Iranian allies from being present in Daraa. Thus, the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad asked Hezbollah al-Ridwan Special Forces to take positions in Daraa and around it to participate in the forthcoming attack.

Sources on the ground believe the US is not expected to pull out of al-Tanf crossing between Syria and Iraq - as requested by Damascus in exchange of Hezbollah and Iran absence in Daraa - because Israel believes the battle is not going to take place. Therefore, the Syrian government has decided to engage in the Daraa' battle and remove all jihadists from the south to regain total control of the territory or even impose a negotiation by force to reached a withdrawal of the US forces from al-Tanf.

READOUT

June 18, 2018

Secretary Pompeo's Call with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov

The below is attributable to Spokesperson Heather Nauert:

Secretary Pompeo and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov spoke by phone today. The two discussed issues and concerns related to Syria and the bilateral relationship. Secretary Pompeo reemphasized the U.S. commitment to the southwest ceasefire arrangement that was approved by President Trump and President Putin one year ago. He noted that it was critical for Russia and the Syrian regime to adhere to these arrangements and ensure no unilateral activity in this area.

The Syrian Army is also aiming to end the southern battle so it can move all offensive forces to the north and al-Badiya afterwards, to attack the remaining ISIS forces present in that part of Syria.

The US faces a dilemma with thousands of trained, supported and funded Syrian proxies militias in the border area between Syria and Iraq. These militias can be a burden if the US decides to withdraw because they are Arab and non-Kurdish forces. Thus, any agreement that returns al-Tanf to the central government means the retreat of these thousand militants to the area controlled by the Kurdish forces in al-Hasakah northern province, also under US occupation forces' control. This may cause ethnic battles between the Kurds and the Arab tribes of the region who refuse Kurdish dominance, especially bearing in mind that Ankara and Damascus look at the Kurdish cooperation with the occupying forces with a very hostile approach. Moreover, it is evident that no occupation force is destined to remain forever in an occupied country and that, sooner or later, the occupier historically knows that it will face popular resistance.

As for the Russian position in relation to the battle of Daraa, the military sources in the south of Syria said the Syrian Brigadier Suhail al-Hasan would not be present in the region without a special request from Russia. The "Tiger" forces are Special Forces operating under the command of Russia with the consent and agreement of President Bashar al-Assad. Therefore, Moscow does not want any jihadist forces working with Israel or with the US to retain territory in Syria. Moreover, Russia is not aiming for a partial victory in the Levant now that the useful part of Syria (the most populated geographic area of the country) is liberated, with the exception of the north. This is why the south becomes a necessity that must be liberated.

Russia has bigger plans in the Levant: during my visit to the city of Palmyra and its surroundings, the presence of thousands of Russian troops is striking, indicating that Moscow is sending new infantry and special forces in very large numbers. This large presence has not been announced.

This could also indicate that Russia does not want the US to maintain a long-term sphere of

influence in Syria and also wants to remain the only force in Syria as its sphere of influence. This perception of Russia's approach towards Syria's allies is complicated and difficult to achieve today. Moscow can't hold the ultimate decision of who can stay or leave in Syria. Moreover, for the time being, Russia considers that all the allied forces – including Hezbollah and Iran and its allies – are absolutely necessary as long as there are US forces occupying the country.

Turkey is not a threat or a dilemma for Russia. Moscow and Ankara have reached various understandings since the battle of Greater Aleppo, the battle of Ghouta and then the battle of Afrin and the Turkish spread in Idlib and its environs, with the aim to strike and “divide” al-Qaeda (the most radical “Hurraas al-Deen” split from “Hayat Tahrir al-Sham” under Abu Mohammad al-Joulani at the request of Turkey).

Russia and Turkey consider the US as the biggest threat in Syria because of the “regime change” intention and the partition projects the US is capable of promoting, and the desire to create for the Kurds a special entity, not for the love of the Kurds, but to keep pressure on both Ankara and Damascus.

Thus, the battle of the south is coming despite the [Israeli harassment](#) and striking the allied forces of Iran fighting ISIS in Albuqmal and its request – in vain – to see Hezbollah away from Daraa. Israel is trying to disrupt the stability of Syria but has failed to attract any serious attention to its necessity because the strategic goal today is to liberate the south. Assad is not worried about Israel's concern and is far from respecting Israel's border security and the 1974 demarcation line in the occupied Golan heights.

Damascus is working with its allies to liberate the south with no hesitation, free from any influence or threats of any magnitude, because the time has come to end al-Qaeda and ISIS in the south first, so that the army can move towards the eastern desert and concentrate on the US and Turkish occupation forces in the north.

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