

Video: Battle for Northern Hama. US Troops at the Syrian-Jordanian Border

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Global Research, April 22, 2017

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Theme: [Terrorism](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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On April 20, the northern Hama frontline experienced a major breakthrough when government forces, led by the Syrian Army's Tiger Forces and 5th Legion, captured the strategic militant-held town of Taibat al-Imam.

Government forces had entered the town from the southeastern direction following intense artillery and air strikes and pushed members of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (formerly Jabhat al-Nusra, the Syrian branch of al-Qaeda) and allied militant groups to withdraw from the town after a 8-hours long battle. After the withdrawal of the so-called opposition, pro-militant media activists released a number of contradictory reports that up to 80 "regime soldiers" were killed in the clashes. Nevertheless, with no proofs this looked like a wishful thinking. In turn, two leaders of Jaish al-Izza, "Saher al-Saleh" and "Muhammad Jallad" were confirmed to be killed as a result of the artillery strikes.

HTS, Ahrar al-Sham and Jaish al-Izza sent large reinforcements to the area and launched a powerful counter-attack. Clashes were ongoing in the town during the night. By the April 21 morning, the Tiger Forces and the 5th Legion reportedly regained the initiative once again pushing militants from the town.

On April 20, government forces also attempted to advance on Halfaya and al-Tarabia but the attack was repelled. Since then, militant positions in Halfaya and in the nearby areas have been under artillery shelling.

If government forces fully secure the Taibat al-Imam, this will lead to a collapse of militant defenses around the town and Halfaya will become the next major target of the operation.

The 5th Corps leadership has reportedly opened its headquarters in the northern Hama countryside. The Syrian Arab Army's group is now working to increase the number of volunteers in its ranks in order to expand military operations across Syria. Commanders of the 5th Corps declared that the current objective of the Syrian Army is to liberate the entire countryside of Hama from HTS and its allies and then the eastern Salameya countryside from ISIS.

A Russian military adviser has been killed during clashes with militants in a Syrian government forces camp, the Russian Defense Ministry said in a statement on April 20. According to the ministry, Major Sergei Bordov was in the camp with a group of Russian military advisers training Syrian soldiers when the militant attack took place. Bordov helped

establish the defense line and directed Syrian troops during the clashes. It is not clear in which part of Syria the incident took place.

Ussoud Al-Shatkiah [one of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) groups] captured the Al-Alyaniyah area, east of the “abandoned military base” in the Syrian Desert, according to pro-militant sources. According pro-FSA sources, in the coming weeks Syria will witness a start of the widely expected military operation supported by US-led coalition forces and a direct participation of some Jordanian and US forces. The operation will aim to capture the Syrian Desert all the long to the strategic town of Al-Bukamal at the Iraqi-Syrian border. These forces will also work on destroying the Al-Khalid Army, a part of ISIS in the western Daraa countryside. FSA groups that will allegedly participate in the operation are the Army of Al-Asha’er, Ussoud Al-Shatkiah Army, and Maghawir Al-Thawra Army. Earlier reports appeared, that the US was concentrating troops and military equipment at the Syrian-Jordanian border.

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