

Video: Expanded Russian Military Presence in Syria. Russian Advisers Embedded in Syrian Army Units

Expands "Advise and Assist" Mission in Syria

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A Russian military adviser, Alexei Buchelnikov, was killed in Syria by a sniper from the ranks of militants, the Russian Defense Ministry announced on May 2. Buchelnikov was "a member of the group that had been training personnel of the Syrian artillery units."

Experts note that according to photo and video evidence the Russian military has recently expanded a number of military advisers embedded with Syrian army units as well as intensified efforts aimed at training Syrian military personnel.

These developments came amid a significant increase of the number of US troops and military equipment deployed in the Kurdish-held area in northeastern Syria and embedded with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Thus, both global powers involved in the war are increasing their activity on the ground in an attempt to speed up operations of their allies on the ground against ISIS.

Meanwhile, Russian military servicemen accompanied with members of the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) have visited the Runbar refugee camp in the Afrin Canton, a YPG-held area in northwestern Syria. Earlier this week, the camp came under shelling from Turkish military forces.

The visit of the Russian military delegation to the area followed reports that Russia was setting up observation posts in order to monitor Turkish actions against the YPG and population in the YPG held area in Afrin near the Turkish-Syrian border as well as actions of pro-Turkish militants in northern Aleppo. Photos from Afrin also show Syrian flags at the observation posts, confirming the presence of government forces.

The YPG-held areas in northern Syria could be visualized as three separate sections:

- The first is the Afrin Canton where government forces and Moscow have a notable influence.
- The second is the Manbij countryside where government forces, Moscow and Washington have been de-facto operating jointly since they prevented a possible Turkish military operation against the town of Manbij, controlled by the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) – the YPG is a core of this group;

- The third is the eastern bank of Euphrates where the United States and its coalition have a significant influence and deployed lots of forces on the ground.

This structure of relations formed during the war under the necessity of an urgent need to combat terrorist groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS in northern Syria and now is strengthening amid a constant threat of another Turkish military invasion in Syria that will be aimed against Kurdish militias.

Meanwhile, the SDF has got control over the important town of Tabqa in the province of Raqqah. An unknown number of ISIS terrorists are remaining in the ISIS-held part of the nearby Tabqa dam. In April 2017, pro-SDF and US sources argued that there were about 700-800 ISIS fighters inside the town. However, no photo or video evidence was released that could confirm that this number of ISIS members were neutralized inside the town. There is a notable chance that a majority of ISIS fighters has left the town of Tabqa via some kind of "open corridor" during the storm.

Meanwhile, the situation became relatively halt in northern Hama. This week, government forces have not made major attempts to reach the important town of Lataminah controlled by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham. Instead, government forces, led by the 5th Assault Corps, resumed operations in the countryside of Palmyra advancing on the Shumriyah Mountains. This could be linked up with an increased activity of US-backed militants along the Syrian-Iraqi border.

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