

Video: New Syrian Army Offensive in Idlib Becoming Inevitable as Militants Sabotage Joint Turkish-Russian Patrols

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On March 15, Russian and Turkish forces conducted a first joint patrol in Greater Idlib in the framework of the new de-escalation agreement reached in Moscow. The planned route of the patrol goes along the M4 highway, where a buffer zone was set to be created. However, in fact the patrol happened just a few km west of the government-controlled town of Saraqib. The entire buffer zone and a notable area to the south of it, a total of 750km², remains in the hands of terrorists. There were no signs of any withdrawal of heavy weapons or militants from the area.

The Russian military said that the patrol mission was shortened because of provocations by “radicals”. According to the released statement, terrorists used civilians, including women and children, as human shields.

The Russian side added that Turkey was given more time to get rid of the extremists and ensure the safety of further joint missions. Surprisingly, the Turkish Defense Ministry admitted that there were some measures taken to prevent possible provocations. Nonetheless, it did not bother itself with explaining what kind of difficulties the sides experienced. Maybe because the Turkish military column itself faced a hard time moving through supporters of radical groups deployed on the M4 highway. Radicals and their supporters have been blocking the part of the highway laying in southern Idlib since March 13.

https://southfront.org/wp-content/uploads/video/IMR_16_03_2020.mp4

Earlier in March, Turkish top officials repeatedly vowed to crush any force that would oppose the implementation of the new de-escalation agreement. The Turkish leadership easily forgot these declarations, when it appeared that the main obstacle to the implementation of the agreement were organizations directly or indirectly supported by Ankara. Unfortunately, there is nothing new in this behavior. Over the month, the Erdogan government has showcased itself as a consistent supporter of the seedlings of terrorism remaining in Idlib.

Meanwhile, Idlib armed groups continued undermining efforts of the Turkish media and diplomacy to paint them as a moderate opposition. On March 15, media affiliated with Hayat Tahrir al-Sham offered a bounty of \$25,000 to any person that would kill Evgeny Poddubny or Oleg Blokhin. Both of them are Russian war correspondents currently working on the frontline in Idlib and covering military developments there. Contrary to their Turkish and Western colleagues, they do not turn a blind eye to terrorist ideology and actions of Idlib

armed groups. Later 'Idlib democratic activists' upped the bounty offering to \$50,000 for anybody who would kill Poddubny. The amount of \$100,000 is proposed for the aforementioned journalist or any member of the Russian patrol mission captured alive.

At the same time, the National Front for Liberation, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham and other militant organizations intensified their recruiting campaign in northwestern Syria. Persons with a large amount of "free time" and in good physical condition now can join even Hayat Tahrir al-Sham's special forces unit, the so-called Red Bands. This fact is another confirmation of the heavy casualties suffered by terrorist groups during the past years of the war.

On top of this, the security situation is once again deteriorating in northern Syria. According to pro-militant sources, an IED attack hit a military convoy of Turkish-led forces near the town of Ras al-Ayn. Three militants and two Turkish soldiers were reportedly killed in the attack.

The recent Turkish-Russian de-escalation agreement allowed to put an end to military hostilities between the Syrian Armed Forces and the Turkish Army. However, its effect will be temporary and will not last for long if the issue of radicals in Greater Idlib is not solved in the nearest future.

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