

## Video: Syrian Army Recaptures Saraqib from Erdogan Forces as Syrian-Turkish Conflict in Idlib Intensifies

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*Turkey and Syria are in a state of undeclared war. Ankara shied away to declare the war officially and the scale of its operations is much lower than in the event of a full-scale open conflict. However, Turkish forces, including troops, battle tanks and artillery, illegally entered Greater Idlib, provided local al-Qaeda-linked groups with weapons and equipment, and together with them attacked the Syrian Army.*

Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar had the audacity to describe these actions as self-defense efforts. He claimed that Operation Spring Shield, as Ankara calls its action in Idlib, was launched in response to the February 27 attack on Turkish troops and the operation is in his words “successfully” ongoing. Akar forgot to mention that the killed Turkish personnel were embedded with al-Qaeda members and already involved in attacks on forces of the Syrian government. This kind of hypocrisy is not surprising. Earlier, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan claimed that the Turkish military had entered Syria under a request from the “Syrian people”; apparently he wanted to say al-Qaeda but forgot how to pronounce the names of the multiple Syrian affiliates of the group properly.

[https://southfront.org/wp-content/uploads/video/IMR\\_02\\_03\\_2020.mp4](https://southfront.org/wp-content/uploads/video/IMR_02_03_2020.mp4)

Therefore, official Turkish propaganda claims that the military action in Idlib started after February 27, while in reality clashes between Turkish-led forces and the Syrian Army have been ongoing since February 24. In the period from February 24 to March 1, the Turkish Army and radical militants captured Nayrab, Saraqib, and stopped the Syrian Army advance near Kafr Nabul recapturing several small villages near it. However, they were not able to achieve any military breakthrough on the ground.

The Turkish military tries to avoid sending its troops into an open fight. Rather, it employs waves of al-Qaeda members, including suicide bombers, supported by massive artillery and drone strikes as the main tool of warfare against the Syrians. According to the March 1 remarks by Defense Minister Akar, Turkish forces had destroyed a drone, 8 helicopters, 103 tanks, 19 armored personnel carriers, 72 artillery pieces and rocket launchers, three air-defense systems, 15 anti-tank weapons and mortars, 56 armored vehicles, nine ammunition depots, and neutralized 2,200 Syrian soldiers in the aforementioned period. Later on the same day, the Turkish Defense Ministry claimed that Turkey had shot down two Su-24 warplanes (later confirmed by the Syrian military) and destroyed 3 air defense systems operated by the Syrian government. The Turkish side even claimed that the Su-24 attack aircraft (which are designed for a close air support) were downed in response to an

attempted attack on Turkish aircraft.

This remarkable nonsense highlights the scale and type of Turkish propaganda efforts regarding the conflict. Fully in the framework of this approach, the Turkish state blocked social media on February 27 in an attempt to hide Turkish casualties in Idlib. Tried to force Twitter and Facebook to remove photos of destroyed Turkish military equipment and ordered security raids in the Turkish branch of the Russian news agency Sputnik over its 'wrong coverage' of Idlib developments. Videos and photos showing Turkish soldiers and Turkish-backed militants involved in torturing and abusing captured Syrian soldiers come unnoticed by mainstream media or were described by Turkish sources as fake.

In a separate development, Turkish state media announced that Turkish artillery and drones had targeted the Al-Nayrab military airport, on the outskirts of Aleppo city.

In response to these actions, the Syrian military declared that it will shoot down hostile aircraft in Greater Idlib. The Syrian Air Defense Forces immediately turned this promise into reality engaging Turkish unmanned combat and reconnaissance aerial vehicles. According to Russian media, at least 6 Turkish drones were shot down. However, the visual evidence allows to confirm only one Anka combat drone downed in the area. When the video of the drone's remnants first appeared online, Turkish-backed groups even claimed responsibility for the downing of aircraft claiming that it was a Syrian warplane. Later, they were forced to change the story.

On March 1, the Syrian Army and Hezbollah, that had recently suffered casualties in eastern Idlib, launched an attack on Turkish-led forces in the area of Nayrab. By the evening of that day, they have regained Kafr Battikh, Dadikh, San and Jawbas. They have also forced Turkish-backed militants to retreat from the eastern part of Saraqib. According to pro-government sources, at least 300 militants were killed or injured in the recent clashes in this area only. This number, as well as, those provided by Turkey is overestimated.

On March 2, units of the 25th Special Mission Forces Division (formerly the Tiger Forces) regained full control of Saraqib after the mighty Turkish Army and its al-Qaeda friends had fled the area.

The recent developments demonstrate that if Turkey continues avoiding employing its own troops in direct fighting, its forces appear to be not able to deliver a swift, devastating blow to the Syrian Army and achieve the goal declared by its top leadership: to force Syrian troops to retreat from all the areas liberated from al-Qaeda since October 2018.

It is likely that Turkey is trying to deliver as much damage as possible to strengthen its negotiating position before March 5, when Erdogan is set to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin to discuss the situation in the region.

At the same time, Turkey is trying to get support from the EU by sending migrants to Europe and blackmailing the bloc with a new migration crisis.

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