

Video: Turkish Proxies Once Again Turned Afrin City Into Battle Zone

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On May 28, an intense fighting erupted between Turkish-backed militant groups in the Turkish-occupied city of Afrin. The clashes started after Hamza Division militants shot and killed a child and an owner of a shop that had refused to loan goods to them. The killed persons appeared to be affiliated with Jaish al-Islam. In response, fighters of the group attacked Hamza Division positions in the city center forcing them to flee Afrin. 3 Hamza Division members, a Jaish al-Islam member and 3 civilians were killed in the clashes. At least 6 civilians were also injured.

The situation de-escalated by the end of the day after the Hamza Division released a statement promising to launch investigating into the incident and hold the fighters involved in the attack on the shop accountable. Early on May 29, Hamza Division fighters reportedly started returning to the Afrin city center.

Looting, street firefights and extortion racket are an ordinary part of the daily life in the Turkish-controlled part of northern Syria. On May 25, two units of the Murad Division clashed with each other in al-Bab and south of the town, near the Abu Zindin crossing with the government-held area. At least one militant and several civilians were injured in the incident that was caused by the struggle for the smuggling route among local commanders.

https://southfront.org/wp-content/uploads/video/IMR_29_05_2020_ENG.mp4

Turkish-backed militant groups do not care about possible civilian casualties as a result of their criminal activity. The only difference of the Afrin case is that the civilian killed by the Hamza Division appeared to be affiliated with a rival militant group.

A one more security problem for Turkish-led forces is regular attacks by Kurdish rebels. At least nine militants were killed and two others were injured in IED explosions, sniper attacks and ambushed carried out by the Kurdish-led Afrin Liberation Forces in the Afrin region on May 17, May 18, May 19, May 23 and May 25.

On May 28, the Turkish Army and the Russian Military Police held a 13th joint patrol along the M4 highway in southern Idlib. This time the patrol reached the eastern entrance of Kafr Shalaya, which is located a half way from the government-controlled town of Saraqib and the city of Jisr al-Shughur, which is in the hands of al-Qaeda-linked militants.

The expanded length of the joint patrols is a positive signal showing some progress in the Russian-Turkish cooperation to create a security zone along the M4 highway. However, the

presence of radicals near Jisr al-Shughur and the recent attack on a Turkish military patrol there demonstrate that the full implementation of the de-escalation deal is still far away.

The Syrian Army and pro-government locals blocked a US military convoy near the town of Tell Tamr and forced it to retreat back to the al-Hasakah countryside on May 27. Over the past months, US forces have been fully squeezed from the territory west of Tell Tamr and now government forces are working to limit their movement even further. In response, the US-led coalition is trying to implement a similar approach towards the Russian Military Police near al-Hasakah.

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