

# Syria and Turkey Face War as Syrian Arab Army Poised to Take Idlib

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*Tensions between Damascus and Ankara have never been higher over the past nine years. Turkey's [President Tayyip Erdogan](#) threatened on February 5, to declare war on Syria if the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) does not withdraw from the territory liberated from terrorists in Idlib province.*

“The attack on our soldiers the day before yesterday was a turning point in Syria for [Turkey](#),” he said, referring to seven Turkish soldiers killed on February 4. Four Turkish military convoys were trying to establish a new control point in Jobas but retreated after the Syrian forces captured the town and attacked them.

On February 6, the SAA attacked a terrorist position in the suburbs of Saraqeb, and the Turkish military defended the terrorist position through the use of heavy artillery; however, this clash between SAA and Turkish forces resulted in the SAA advancing into Saraqeb.

## **Erdogan and Turkish position**

“We hope that the process of the regime pulling back behind our observation posts is completed in the month of February,” [Erdogan](#) told members of his AK Party. “If the regime does not pull back during this time, Turkey will have to do this job itself. We are determined to continue our operations to ensure the safety of our country, our nation and [our brothers in Idlib](#),” he warned while adding the Turkish military would carry out air and ground operations in Idlib, when necessary.

A source in the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates told the Syrian Arab News Agency on February 5, that Erdogan lied when he claimed that his troops entered northern Aleppo as a part of [the 1998 Adana agreement](#).

“Syria stresses that the Adana agreement requires coordination with the Syrian government as it is an agreement between two countries, therefore Erdogan, according to the requirements of the agreement, cannot act separately,” the source said, adding “the Adana agreement to ensure border security between the two countries is indeed aimed at combating terrorism, but what Erdogan is doing is protecting his tools, the terrorist groups, which he provided and still has with various forms of support.”

On February 4, three [Turkish convoys](#) entered Syrian territories from Kafr Lusain crossing, bringing the number of vehicles brought in from February 2 to 400. Five other convoys have

entered since then and headed to Idlib and Aleppo. Turkish forces, which invaded Idlib in 2017, have repeatedly tried to prevent the Syrian forces from recovering Syrian territory.

## **Russian position**

The Russian Defense Ministry stated that the Turkish troops were hit because of their failure to communicate with the Russian military, as per agreement.

The [Russian Reconciliation Center for Syria](#) has called upon armed groups to abandon terrorism and seek a peaceful settlement, which Russia can guarantee by laying down their arms.

**President Vladimir Putin** spoke by phone with Erdogan after the Turkish soldiers were killed, along with one civilian contractor. Erdogan stressed that Turkey would continue to use its right of self-defense against similar attacks, according to a statement by the Turkish Communications Directorate.

Putin and Erdogan have a relationship based on shared interests in energy, economics, and security. Neither of them will likely allow Idlib to destroy their ties, even though their interests in Syria diverge. Russia is the deal-maker in Syria, and we saw Putin in shuttle diplomacy flying to [Damascus](#) last month, and then he flew on to [Istanbul](#).

## **US position**

**Secretary of State Mike Pompeo** condemned the attack by Syria on the Turkish soldiers. He declared the US “fully supports Turkey’s justified self-defense actions.” Pompeo said the assault on al-Qaeda held Idlib is ‘unjustifiable’, and supports the Turkish position of keeping Saraqeb in the terrorist’s hands.

Pompeo further said that the US considers Syria’s attempt to take towns from al-Qaeda ‘[unjustifiable and ruthless assaults](#).’ This is in keeping with US policy in Syria to support Radical Islamic terrorist groups enough that they can continue to attack the Syrian government forces. From the first day of the Syrian conflict, ‘regime change’ has been the only US foreign policy.

The Facebook page of the [US Embassy in Damascus](#), an institution no longer existing in Syria, posted a statement by [Pompeo](#) and changed its cover image to “IDLIB”.

## **Who is in control of Idlib today?**

Saraqeb, and the rest of Idlib province which has not been liberated, is a well-known stronghold of al-Qaeda-linked groups like [Hayat Tahrir al-Sham](#) (HTS) and the [Turkistan Islamic Party](#) (TIP). These groups are Turkish supported jihadists, and although HTS is a new name, it was formerly Jibhat al Nusra, which was the Al Qaeda affiliate in Syria. TIP is sponsored by Erdogan personally, and are the Chinese Uyghurs who he imported from China specifically to create an Islamic state in Syria.

The United Nations estimates that as many as 3 million civilians may be trapped in the area ruled by jihadists, who have oppressed the civilians who have no recourse but to try and survive under Radical Islam, which is not a religion or a sect, but a political ideology.

## **The Syrian Arab Army advances**

The SAA has made consistent advances in Idlib province, and this has caused Turkey and the US to panic. The SAA has taken village after village, and now stand poised to clear the highway linking [Latakia to Aleppo](#) (M4), as well as the highway linking [Aleppo to Damascus](#) (M5). Ground troops and airstrikes have been utilized to achieve its goal to [liberate](#) all Syrian territories, and are 8 kilometers away from the city of Idlib.

## **The underwater pipeline attacked**

In [June 2019](#), sabotage attacks damaged five underwater pipelines off the Mediterranean coastal town of Baniyas, south of Latakia. On February 3, explosives damaged the underwater pipelines once again, which are used to pump oil into one of Syria's two petroleum refineries. No group has claimed responsibility, which leads experts to assume this was a state-sponsored attack and not a terrorist group. Syria's oil minister, [Ali Ghanem](#), said that divers planted the underwater charges in the pipeline which sits 3 kilometers offshore and at a depth of 23 meters undersea. "The aim of the attack is to cease (oil) imports into Syria," said Ghanem.

Underwater divers, using sophisticated underwater charges, and in such depths lend credence to the assumption of a well trained sophisticated team from a foreign country. These are the very pipelines used to pump in the oil from the Iranian ship that had been detained by the UK at the best of the US last summer.

## **The Homs oil and gas facilities attacked, again**

Drones were used in a sophisticated and synchronized attack on [three Syrian oil and gas facilities](#) on February 4, which hit the Al-Rayyan Natural Gas Station, the Ebla Gas Laboratory, and the Homs Refinery. Once again, these attacks have not been claimed by any group. Firefighters battled blazes caused by the explosions triggered by the drones attack. All three facilities are in central Homs province. Syrian civilians have been suffering from lack of gasoline, cooking gas, heating oil, and electricity, all of which are caused by US-EU sanctions which prevent Syria from importing petroleum and gas products. The US and UK have seized an Iranian tanker at sea who might deliver fuel to the Syrian civilians. This US-UK policy has been designed to make the civilians suffer, which has resulted in Syrians leaving as economic migrants, which Germany has been tasked to support.

The city of Homs and the surrounding areas have been under control of the Syrian government since 2017, and there are no terrorist groups present. Besides underwater diving specialists and underwater explosive specialists, there are also expensive and sophisticated drones in use, apparently by foreign countries seeking to increase the suffering and deprivations of the Syrian civilians.

Before 2011, Syria exported around half of the 350,000 barrels of oil is produced per day; however, production now has plummeted to around 24,000 barrels a day, which is a fraction of domestic needs. Thusly, there exists a vital need to import petroleum and gas products. The largest oil field is now in the hands of the US Army, and President Trump is openly proud of stealing the Syrian oil.

Last month, near-simultaneous attacks carried out by drones hit three oil and gas installations in central Syria, while in [December](#) the attacks targeted the oil refinery in

Homs.

## **The end game**

The liberation of Idlib province approaches and the proxy war will likely be settled in backroom negotiations, and not on the battlefield.

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