

Video: Al-Qaeda Defeats Another Turkish-backed ‘Opposition’ Group

By [South Front](#)

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*On January 9, **Ahrar al-Sham** groups in northwestern Hama surrendered and dissolved themselves under pressure from **Hayat Tahrir al-Sham** (formerly *Jabhat al-Nusra*, the Syrian branch of al-Qaeda), according to local sources. Thus, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) imposed full control over the towns of al-Ankawi and Habit.*

Ahrar al-Sham is the core of a Turkish-backed coalition of militant groups known as the National Front for Liberation (NFL). However, neither other NFL factions nor Turkey intervened to support Ahrar al-Sham during the incident in northwestern Hama.

According to pro-opposition media, the defeated Ahrar al-Sham members will get an opportunity to withdraw to the region of Afrin after they hand over their heavy weapons to HTS.

The current focus of HTS attention is southern Idlib, in particular the town of Maarrat al-Nu'man, which is still in the hands of the NFL.

Last week, another Turkish-backed group, Nour al-Din al-Zrenki also suffered a defeat at the hands of HTS and lost all of its areas in western Aleppo.

The collapse of the so-called “moderate opposition” under HTS pressure caused a hysteria among pro-militant media activists and media outlets, which are now blaming Turkey and Russia for the current situation. According to this very theory, Ankara and Moscow allowed the HTS expansion in order to justify the resumption of anti-terrorist operations in the Idlib de-escalation zone area.

These rumors are fueled by the recent movements of Russian forces in the demilitarized zone near Idlib province. According to reports, Russian forces withdrew from their observation post in the town of Abu Dali in the government-held part of the northern Hama countryside to the nearby town of Tulaysiyah on January 9. Earlier, Russian troops started establishing a new military post in the Salba hill south of the town of Hayalin in northwestern Hama.

Some opposition activists described these movements as indicating Russian preparations for a military operation in Idlib.

On January 9, Turkey’s Defense Minister Hulusi Akar held a telephone conversation with his Russian counterpart Sergey Shoigu. According to statements from the sides, they discussed

the recent developments in the Idlib de-escalation zone as well as other regional security issues.

Meanwhile, the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have once again captured the village of Ash-Shafah in the Euphrates Valley from ISIS, according to pro-Kurdish sources. Now, the SDF is reportedly advancing on ISIS positions in the nearby village of Albu Badran.

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