

Video: Al Qaeda in Syria Expands Further in Idlib De-escalation Zone

By [South Front](#)

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*Units of the Russian Military Police have started patrolling the surroundings of the northern Syrian city of Manbij in the Aleppo governorate, near the border with Turkey, spokesman **Yusup Mamatov** told media on January 8.*

“Today we started patrolling the security zone near the city of Manbij and its surroundings. The task is to ensure safety within the zone of responsibility, to control the positions and movement of armed groups,” he stressed adding that the route of military police patrols will change regularly.

The spokesman added that during their missions Russian servicemen are receiving information from locals about weapons caches and unexploded ordnances left after the area’s occupation by militants.

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (formerly Jabhat al-Nusra, the Syrian branch of al-Qaeda) continued its expansion within the Idlib de-escalation zone. After a successful capture of the opposition-held areas in western Aleppo, the terrorist group has kicked off an advance in southern Idlib.

On January 8, Hayat Tahir al-Sham (HTS) attacked positions of its competitors near the town of Maaret-Naaman. According to some reports, HTS intends to capture the entire Idlib de-escalation zone area and to disband groups, which resist to obey. Meanwhile, the Turkish-backed National Front for Liberation (NFL) slammed HTS for attacking NFL-linked factions and vowed to attack the group. Nonetheless, so far NLF declarations have resulted in no progress in preventing the HTS expansion.

ISIS has been in fact defeated in Syria and the Turkish government is ready to put forward its strategy of restoring peace in the country, Turkish **President Recep Tayyip Erdogan** said in an article published by the New York Times. Erdogan stressed that Turkish military operations in the country played an important role in preventing terrorist attacks in Turkey and Europe. However, he expressed his concern that “some outside powers may use the organization’s remnants as an excuse to meddle in Syria’s internal affairs.”

Erdogan also described decision of US **President Donald Trump** to withdraw troops from Syria as a right one, but slammed the US-led coalition for indiscriminate bombing causing civilian casualties during its operations. The President said that Turkey has “a comprehensive strategy to eliminate the root causes of radicalization”.

“The first step is to create a stabilization force featuring fighters from all parts of Syrian society. Only a diverse body can serve all Syrian citizens and bring law and order to various parts of the country,” Erdogan said. “In this sense, I would like to point out that we have no argument with the Syrian Kurds.”

However, according to him, many young Syrians had no other choice but to join the People’s Protection Units, a Kurdish militia whom Turkey considers to be “the Syrian branch of the P.K.K. [Kurdistan Workers’ Party].”

“Following the United States withdrawal from Syria, we will complete an intensive vetting process to reunite child soldiers with their families and include all fighters with no links to terrorist organizations in the new stabilization force,” he said adding that “ensuring adequate political representation for all communities” is Turkey’s another priority.

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