

Video: Syria's Upcoming Battle for Idlib

By [South Front](#)

Global Research, August 17, 2018

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On August 16, militant groups operating in western Syria declared the villages of Banah, Birnah, al-Ottomania, Hwair al-Eis, Tell Bajir, Judiyyah, Zummar and Jizrea in southwestern Aleppo part of a "military zone" and ordered civilians to leave the area within 48 hours.

Additionally, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (formerly Jabhat al-Nusra, the Syrian branch of al-Qaeda) and the Turkistan Islamic party had sent reinforcements to southwestern Aleppo.

Local sources link these developments to the ongoing preparations of militant groups to fend off a possible advance of the Syrian Arab Army on their areas in western Syria.

Meanwhile, four units of the Russian-backed 5th Assault Corps - the Assad Shield, the Mahardah Forces, the ISIS Hunters and the Ba'ath battalions - were deployed in the northern countryside of Hama. Earlier, at least four convoys of the Tiger Forces, including battle tanks and artillery pieces, arrived in the same area.

Pro-militant sources also reported that the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) and its allies have continued striking positions of the opposition in northern Hama and southern Idlib.

While Turkey is actively working to prevent a possible SAA advance in the area, the situation on the ground is clearly leading to a military escalation.

In the desert area at the administrative border between al-Suwayda and Rif Dimashq, the SAA further advanced on positions of the ISIS cells in the al-Safa area. Government troops captured a few positions southwest of Ardh Safa and advanced on Ardh al-Banat, Durs and Shir Tur al-Hawiyah.

On August 16, the Iraqi Air Force announced that its F-16 warplanes had carried out another airstrike on ISIS in Syria. According to the statement, the airstrike targeted an ISIS operations room killing and injuring ISIS fighters and spies, who were preparing to carry out terrorist attacks inside Iraq.

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