

Video: Turkish Drones Falling in Idlib. ‘Moderate Rebels’ Gas Themselves by Mistake

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Early on March 5, the Israeli Air Force carried out a series of airstrikes on targets in the Syrian provinces of Homs and Quneitra. According to the Syrian military, the attack was conducted from Lebanese airspace at 00:30 local time. Israeli warplanes used two civilian flights of Qatar Airways as a cover for their strikes. The Syrian side claimed that it had intercepted all the hostile missiles. However, ground explosions were reported in Quneitra. Therefore, at least some of them in fact did hit their targets.

The previous Israeli strikes on Syria took place on March 2 and February 23. On March 2, an Israeli attack helicopter destroyed a vehicle in the province of Quneitra after Israeli troops in the Golan Heights had reportedly come under sniper fire. On February 23 Israeli warplanes targeted positions of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad group in Damascus.

‘Entirely by chance’ the increase of Israeli military actions in Syria came amid the escalation of the Syrian-Turkish conflict in Idlib.

On March 4, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the Turkistan Islamic Party and other al-Qaeda-linked groups supported by the Turkish Army made another attempt to recapture the town of Saraqib, located on the M4-M5 highways crossroad, from the Syrian Army. Despite the intense artillery and air support from Turkey, al-Qaeda members failed to achieve their goal.

https://southfront.org/wp-content/uploads/video/IMR_05_03_2020.mp4

Supporters of the 25th Special Forces Division and Hezbollah deployed there claim that Turkish-led forces suffered notable losses in the clashes but provide no particular numbers. Video evidence from the ground confirms that pro-government forces recaptured a T-90 battle tank that they had lost earlier in the same area.

Syrian troops also entered the village of Afis north of Saraqib but failed to fully secure it. The village remains contested. If Turkish-led forces keep control over it, they will be able to carry out attacks on vehicles moving via the M5 highway from Saraqib to Aleppo.

Earlier on the same day, 2 Turkish soldiers were killed and 6 others were injured in Syrian Army artillery fire in eastern Idlib. In response, the Turkish military tried to shoot down a Syrian Su-22 warplane bombing al-Qaeda positions west of Saraqib. Turkish supporters claim that an anti-air missile was launched by an F-16 fighter jet. However, most likely this was a MANPAD launched from one of Turkey’s so-called ‘observation posts’ in the area. During the past weeks, Turkish soldiers were repeatedly spotted launching MANPADs at

Syrian and Russian aircraft. The Russian Defense Ministry officially says that Turkish observation posts have merged with terrorist bases and have been used to carry out attacks on government-controlled areas. Nonetheless, Turkish soldiers surrounded by the Syrian Army continue enjoying safety and receiving supplies. This is another demonstration of the fact that modern conflicts often take strange forms.

Setbacks in southern and eastern Idlib forced Turkey and its proxies to shift the focus of their military efforts. Late on March 4, Turkish-backed al-Qaeda forces attacked positions of the Syrian Army in western Aleppo. By the morning of March 5, they had captured the village of al-Sheikh 'Aqil and al-Rraqim Hilltop. The control over these positions will allow them to shell the western suburb of Aleppo city more effectively.

Since the start of Turkish military actions in Idlib in February, the Syrian military had shot down 13 Turkish military UAVs, pro-government sources claim. According to them, this number includes 7 Bayraktar TB2 and TAI Anka combat drones. It should be noted that only a part of these claims has been confirmed by visual evidence.

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham militants tried to stage a chemical provocation in eastern Idlib, but poisoned themselves, the Russian Defense Ministry reported on March 4. According to the report, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham members were planning to stage the incident on March 2nd during the Syrian Army advance in the western part of Saraqib by blowing up canisters with a chemical substance, but a canister leak caused casualties among the militants themselves.

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