

## Video: Turkish Forces Clash with Their Own Proxies on M4 Highway in Southern Idlib

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*On April 13, the Turkish Army and its proxies from the so-called Free Syrian Police clashed with supporters of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham and other radical Idlib groups east of the town of Nayrab on the M4 highway.*

According to sources loyal to Hayat Tahrir al-Sham a few hundred members of the Free Syrian Police and a few dozen Turkish troops were involved in the operation. After a series of clashes with radicals, they removed an improvised protest camp set up east of Nayrab. At some moment, Turkish forces even appeared to be engaged in a firefight with Hayat Tahrir al-Sham militants, but the situation quickly de-escalated and the protest camp blocking the highway re-appeared a few km to the west of its previous location.

Pro-Turkish media immediately branded the April 13 developments as a heroic attempt to de-block the M4 highway and finally launch joint Russian-Turkish patrols along the entire pre-agreed to M4 security zone. This explanation is far from reality. The de-escalation deal remains far from any kind of real implementation. The area of the supposed security zone is still in the hands of al-Qaeda-linked militants.

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Ankara had no opportunity to ignore the radicals' nest east of Nayrab because it could put an end to even the current 'limited' format of the joint Russian-Turkish patrols. All 3 previous joint patrols took place in the limited area between Saraqib and Nayrab because of security reasons. If the camp east of Nayrab was not removed, even such patrols would be no longer possible.

However, even this limited move caused a new wave of tensions between Turkish-controlled armed groups and their more independent allies. A firefight erupted between members of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham and Turkish proxies from Faylaq Sham near the village of Msibin on the M4 highway.

Earlier, tensions between members of Turkey's Syrian National Army and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham-led forces were reported north of Daraat Izzah in western Aleppo.

Any Turkish attempts to de-block the M4 highway west of Nayrab will likely lead to a larger escalation in the area and may lead to more attacks on Turkish forces in Greater Idlib. The previous two IED attacks happened just after joint Turkish-Russian patrols west of Saraqib. The situation in Greater Idlib is in stalemate.

On the one hand, Ankara cannot continue ignoring attempts of groups that it funds to undermine its own attempts to implement the de-escalation deal with Russia at least formally. On the other hand, it does not want to use force to neutralize radicals in southern Idlib because the very same militants are the core of its influence in this part of Syria.

An explosion erupted on a natural gas pipeline in the area of al-Shadadi in the province of al-Hasakah. The incident happened just near the al-Jisba oil field controlled by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the US-led coalition. According to Kurdish sources, it remains unclear what group was behind the attack. Nonetheless, it is no secret that ISIS cells have recently increased their activities within the SDF-held area on the eastern bank of the Euphrates.

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