

Video: Turkish Forces Shell Syrian Army. US Claims Iran Prepares Attacks in Iraq

By [South Front](#)

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Syrian Army positions in the town of Saraqib came under joint shelling from the Turkish Army and Turkish-backed armed groups late on April 1. Strikes were carried out from the area of Almastumah, where Turkish military positions are located. The April 1 incident became the second attack on Syrian Army troops in the area in the last 3 days.

At the same time, Turkish forces continue their military buildup in the Idlib de-escalation zone. Two more convoys with armoured vehicles and artillery pieces crossed the border into Syria. Before the start of Ankara's Operation Spring Shield in February 2020, the number of Turkish troops in Idlib was estimated at 5,000. Syrian sources say that by April 2020 this number reached 7,000.

And there are no indications that Turkey is going to use this force to put an end to the presence of al-Qaeda-linked terrorist groups in the region. Rather, it sees these groups as important allies and the pillar of its policy aimed at strengthening its control over northwestern Syria and turning it into a quasi-state under a Turkish protectorate.

https://southfront.org/wp-content/uploads/video/IMR_02_04_2020.mp4

Just recently, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, one of the groups that Turkish forces protect from the Syrian Army, executed a civilian accusing him of spying for Syrian government forces. 68-year Rifaat Mahmoud al-Daqqah, a former member of the Syrian Parliament, was detained by militants in May 2019. Terrorists claimed that he was providing the Syrian military with information on terrorists' positions in the southwestern part of Greater Idlib, mainly around the town of Kabani.

Al-Daqqah, originally from the town of al-Janoudiyah, abandoned his position in the Syrian Parliament in 2011, in the early days of the crisis. Back then, militants pressured many officials and service members to defect by threatening their lives, families and businesses.

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham and other Idlib groups regularly arrest and execute civilians, accusing them of spying for Syria, Russia or Iran. In most cases, they do not bother to support these claims with any evidence, rather they use such claims as a pretext to terrorize and subjugate the local population.

These atrocities happen right under the nose of Turkish observation posts, which have supposedly been set up by the Turkish military to restore security in the region.

Nonetheless, it seems that Ankara has no problem with the execution of civilians, training of suicide bombers, arming of al-Qaeda-affiliated groups or public calls to cleanse a majority of the population living in the government-controlled part of Syria as long as organizations doing this serve its foreign policy interests.

On April 1, **Brig. Gen. Esmail Ghaani**, the commander of Iran's Quds Force, paid an unofficial visit to the Iraqi capital, Baghdad. He reportedly met with several influential Iraqi commanders and politicians, discussing with them the current security and political situation in Iraq. In March Brig. Gen. Ghaani visited Syria, where he inspected the frontlines in the northern province of Aleppo.

Ghaani succeeded former Quds Force commander **Brig. Gen. Qassam Soleimani**, who was assassinated in a US strike on Baghdad Airport in January 2020. His visit to Iraq comes amid the ongoing US effort to regroup its forces in Iraq and reinforce them with Patriot air defense systems. Two Patriot batteries are already there.

Meanwhile, US **President Donald Trump** announced that the US has "information" and "belief" that "Iran or its proxies are planning a sneak attack on U.S. troops and/or assets in Iraq." Top US officials often make such claims before conducting strikes on targets affiliated with Iran and/or before announcing a new round of sanctions.

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Michel Chossudovsky

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