Erdogan Threatens War on the Syrian Arab Army (SAA)

Jihadi forces backed by Turkish infantry and artillery have launched a general counter-attack on the west flank of Saraqib, both north and south of the M-4 highway. Erdogan has now cast his fate openly with the terrorists to prevent the liberation of Idlib.

I am wrapping up this current Idlib-Aleppo battlefront report on Sunday, February 9th. You will find two earlier sections below, picking up the Idlib battle after the major city Maraat al-Numaan was taken on the M-5 highway.

The last three days have seen major SAA coalition gains, despite two days of bad weather where air strikes were not flown but the ground forces continued their methodical advance in clearing the Saraqib flanks of jihadi forces.

Syria’s 25th Special Forces Division continued pushing north up the M-5 to eventually meet the SAA elite 4th Division, Republican Guard, and Lebanon’s Hezbollah, pushing south to reconnect Damascus and Aleppo with their main logistics road critically needed for launching the final battle to clear Idlib.

Special Forces troops pushing up from Saraqib city have captured the key hilltop al-Ais position (365 meters high) that can observe M5 traffic both north and south and deep into its west flank. News photos showed the troops gaining the peak in darkness, freeing more Syrian territory from the grip of the US coalition terror proxies created to overthrow and carve up Syria.

At the end of the article, I have a 38 minute combat video link of the Saraqib fight, from the Abkhazia News crew where you will get a first hand look at some of the tactics used, including the full use of drones behind the battle lines to locate jihadi groups trying to hide with their equipment only to be followed and destroyed in their lairs, saving a lot of lives for the SAA.

Syrian coalition advancing with low casualties

The fighting morale of the jihadis in Idlib City will have to be affected by all those who never come home from the M-5 highway battle. Sunday, today, the planes were back in the air, striking targets of opportunity with the news that we saw no counter attacks against last week's gains.

Aleppo forces have been pushing south on the M-5 and appear in position to be able to connect with their compatriots pushing north. Turkey’s observation posts, designed to protect its proxy terrorists, have backfired with all of them in the current liberated areas surrounded and unofficial prisoners of the SAA.

Mr. Erdogan continues to ship more special forces and armor into the area, apparently to increase his bargaining hand at the negotiations he claims he wants to have. Fortunately, there have been no Turkish or Russian combat deaths reported in the last two days.

Erdogan has a weak hand, as the world has seen that he exploited his partnership in the Astana agreement by doing nothing to separate the various al-Qaeda groups from the Syrian militant ones. His plan to Balkanize northeast Syria into a Turkish de facto colony is not working out as he had wanted.

He incredibly has demanded that the Syrian Army leave Idlib, its own territory, by the end of February. That was considered a bad joke. Although he has mention he has a plan B and C, so do the Syrians and Russians. Putin has no intention of fighting in Syria indefinitely.
Iran has been deathly quiet in the Putin-Erdogan showdown, despite Iran having militias on the Aleppo western front in combat. This will be a delicate political situation to prevent its escalation.

Erdogan has already broken his agreement, so he is now “Turkey’s Trump,” in terms of what is the point of making a new deal with the guy that broke the last one? Everyone understands that Erdogan does not want all those unhappy jihadis coming back to into Turkey. Will he threaten to unleash them on Europe, or shift them to another front, maybe the Kurdish north to make more trouble?

The SAA allies take Saraqib with few casualties

We woke up this morning, February 6th to see that the Syrian army had completely taken Saraqib and its three Turkish observation posts. When I went to bed, they had cut the M-5 highway to the north, but this morning the battlemaps showed that Tiger Force unit continued on to take Afis and Sarmin to the west, blocking the escape road to Idlib.

The video reports were all in Arabic but showed truckloads of jubilant Syrian soldiers who had cleared Saraqib’s center and were redeploying to new positions. There have been no estimates of casualties on this fast moving battle.

Erdogan’s response was an amazing statement that if the Syrian army did not desist in retaking its own territory, Turkey would have to intercede to push them out. He might go down in history to have made such an outlandish demand.

Most considered this a big bluff, but there’s reports claiming that Russia would love to take the Turks on, as it has not forgotten the Russian pilot who was shot down and murdered by Turkish militants after he was captured.

That would make for one huge geopolitical mess when Russia and Turkey have a lot of joint interests at stake. Moscow knows that Idlib must be cleared of jihadis before any election can be held in the country, which is why Erdogan wants to keep the jihadis there. He has been a subversive partner to the Astana process, never honoring his word to separate the terror jihadists from the militant forces there.

The jihadi leadership in Idlib deployed some of their forces during the afternoon to counter attack on the west flank of the M-5 road below Saraqib, obviously trying to tie down Syrian forces in defensive positions there and threaten the critical supply road.

Another counterattack was launched north of Saraqib on both flanks of the M-5 in an attempt to bottle up the Syrian attack there. Later news came that a Turkish column with dozens of armored fighting vehicle had arrived in Taftanaz airbase in central north Idlib.

This appears to have been chosen by the Turkish military as a staging base, as it is equidistant from Idlib, Saraqib, and Aleppo so it can shift replacement equipment where needed, especially to be able to threaten a Syrian advance on the M-5 road.

I would bet the Turks want to keep the battle for the highway as drawn out as possible. That said, we had a morning report that part of the Saraqib assault forces had been detached to Aleppo. Ideally the best strategy would be retaking the M-5 from both directions to divide the fire power of the Idlib jihadis.

They have a huge disadvantage in that they will have to maneuver to attack over open territory where they will be subject to attack on the move and in their advance positions. Due to the effective air cover they have had, the Syrian Army has avoided losing a lot of its experienced combat troops.

The battle for Saraqib - February 5

Saraqib city in Idlib province is being attacked by the Syrian Army 25th Special Forces Division. One of the specialties it was trained in was night attacks, as the attacking force sustains fewer casualties from an entrenched opponent not known to have night vision capability.

This action will be another combined operations affair involving Syrian artillery, the 25th, both the Syrian and Russian air forces and their drones for both surveillance and combat operations. If nothing good has come out of the Syrian war, at least it has honed both countries’ fighting forces into being the most experienced counter-terrorism forces on the planet.

I cover the Part 1 of the second Idlib advance below, which I had stopped after Maraat al-Numaan was taken and the
advance got bogged down in bad weather for two weeks. We did not know if the 25th division might be split in half
to give Aleppo an attacking force to push the jihadis in the west back out of grad rocket range.

If so, we expected it would next start taking the M-5 highway going south, while the rest of the division continued
the attack north from Maraat al-Numaan up the M-5 which connects the western part of Syria from Damascus to
Aleppo.

I could not foresee the Syrian coalition making a final push to clear the entrenched jihadis out of northern Idlib until
they had the entire M-5 highway controlled, with all jihadis cleared out of its eastern side and a safe buffer on the
west. One cannot launch the final battle without completely secure lines of supply.

**The advance up M-5 highway from Maraat al-Numaan**

The SAA’s attacking strategy was not to battle their way on the M-5 north through a gauntlet of IEDs and anti-armor
missiles that would inflict losses which Syria cannot afford, especially among its best troops.

The attack was a right flank on a broad flank from around al-Numaan, as this compels the enemy to spread its forces
out more sparsely. This gives the respective air forces more opportunity to target them while they are on the roads
and to locate supply and command centers from traffic patterns and communications intercepts.

This advance moved west out of Syrian controlled territory east of the M-5, while simultaneously clearing all jihadi
forces on this flank. When that was completed, the SAA cut the M-5 at Khan al-Sobol, midway between Maraat al-
Numaan and Saraqib.

With the road cut, Syrian forces began moving north on the M-5 while clearing its western flank from enemy forces
to have the road usable for logistic supplies to sustain the Syrian attack. Jihadi and Turkish backed militants made
attempts to contest clearing this western flank, but the air forces played a key role in eliminating those units.

Further north, the Tiger forces had pushed up M-5, from Khan al-Sobol to the southern approaches to Saraqib and
had to stop while the right flank was cleared. That is when Turkey decided to put its forces into a blocking position
to stop the Syrian advance.

**Turkish outposts in Syria fail to intimidate SAA**

A ring of new Turkish observation posts had been quickly set up around the city as a “trip wire” for the Syrian army
not to cross. The Syrian army stopped its M5 north advance and began retaking towns and villages east and west of
the highway, starting to go around the Turkish outposts.

The next day a Turkish column with lots of armor and Turkish troops was attacked by air and seems to have
disappeared since then. Erdogan claimed the Syrian air force had attacked and that Turkey retaliated with heavy
shelling and F-1 bombing runs against the Syrian forces.

After Erdogan made the claim for which mysteriously there were no photos or video confirmations, he began back
pedaling on his threats to invade Syria if it did not stop clearing Erdogan’s favorite terrorists out of Idlib.

While Erdogan talked and threatened, the Syrian 25th Special Ops division flanked Saraqib on its west flank first,
cutting the M-4 highway, and then the following day cleared the eastern flank to within mortar range and swung
north to cut the M-5 road behind the Turkish observation post, making a bag of three of them that are surrounded
and isolated.

There is a secondary road open to the west to Idlib, what the infamous Sun Tzu called the golden bridge that should
always be left open for an enemy to break and flee.

If the jihadis cleared out in time, some might have made it to Idlib. For those who engaged in a night fight with the
25th, if they find themselves retreating west in the morning I suspect the planes will be on them, and there would be
no sense in letting them get back to Idlib to fight from the prepared defenses there.

**The Maraat al-Numaan campaign up the M-5 highway**

After the long delays since the successful south Idlib advance by the SAA, many Syria watchers were dismayed to see
the attack fizzle when Damascus had the advantage over defeated and dispirited jihadis facing them in the north.

Traditional military doctrine would have expected Assad to have had fresh troops lined up to kick off a stage two
advance to keep the momentum rolling northward before the jihadis dug themselves into newly prepared defensive lines that would be more costly to take. We were wrong.

While we waited with the winter weather conditions coming on, the Russian and Syrian air forces continued their systematic hunting down and precision bombing of terrorist and militant ammo and supply dumps, along with their command centers.

There had been talk of an Aleppo offensive, sorely needed as the battle lines there had left the jihadi formations west of the city within rocket range of the center of downtown Aleppo. As the SAA coalition bombing campaign rolled on in Idlib, it was just a matter of time before HTS forces in western Aleppo would start shelling the city to relieve pressure on Idlib, and they did.

The formerly named Tiger forces who have made major gains in defeating ISIS in the eastern and northeastern parts of the country had their command renamed 25th Special Forces Division. It is specially trained in launching night attacks, which have been effective in the past.

After a methodical westward advance into Idlib province along a broad front toward the M-5 highway to the next major city Maraat al-Numaan that dispersed the militant defensive forces, the SAA got close to being within shelling distance of the city.

Then the jihadi defenses seemed to have collapsed, either through attrition from the air attacks or the Idlib central command pulling troops northward to defend the Aleppo front. Some analysts have suggested that evacuation corridors that had allowed 350,000 Idlib residents get out of harm’s way allowed the Syrian coalition to be more aggressive with its firepower tactics.

The mad terrorists in Idlib city still had their civilian human shields as some protection from the worst bombing and wanted to save their fighting power for the major battle to come there.

**What will Turkey do as the jihadis go down?**

Mr. Erdogan has calmed down over the northeast Syria Kurdish front, after his endless claims of a hoard of Kurdish terrorists ready to attack Turkey from Syria, an hysterical show that no one believed. I never heard or read of a Kurdish terrorist attack anywhere along the Syrian northern border.

His attention had shifted to Libya, where he has invested Turkish proxy forces we think were pulled out of Syria and paid $3000 a month to fight for Tripoli when they were getting paid $400 inside Syria.

Erdogan also has big gas dreams in his eyes, with his sudden claim of having a joint economic zone with Libya extending between their two respective countries and through which the new Israeli operating gas platform had planned to build a pipeline. There will be a big political battle over that.

Here is the Abkhazian Network News Agency (ANNA) 38 minutes of combat video footage on the liberation of Saraqib city by the SAA and it allies. This is among the best footage I have seen during the war to show what has really gone on there. An appropriate age confirmation is required to watch it.

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