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Report about the field developments in Aleppo, dimensions and the spillover



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Informational report

Monday the 1st of February 2016, at dawn, Al-Assad's forces supported by 'Shia' militias began their attack on the villages and towns in Aleppo's north with Russian air force support. The extensive military campaign aims at reach the two camps of Nuble and Al-Zahraa which the Free Syrian Army are besieging. The battles continue as the Shia militias have managed to partially end the blockade on the camps and some of their members have entered the camps.

The importance of the location

The geographical location

Nuble and Al-Zahraa draw their importance from their location on the road connecting Aleppo city and the border with Turkey. Afrin, which is under the control of the PYD (Democratic Unity Party), falls north west of Nuble. The pro-Assad villages are socially and militarily important as the local population are Shia and they are the only remaining local population that supports the regime in the rural north. For the regime the areas are a human resource and a launch point into Azaz. Based on the strategic importance of their location, the military forces in the two towns have been militarily prepared by Iran which has provided them with arms and supported them since the beginning of the revolution. Around 11 thousand youth from the two villages have been armed, and with them are around 30 leaders from the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, and members of the Lebanese Hezbollah. Ending the siege on the villages will enable more supplies and fighters to be sent to the regime fronts in the area. The danger lies in those fighters entering into an alliance based on shared interests with the PYD which would be destructive and dangerous for the revolutionary fighters in that area.

The field situation

The previous situation

until the date 01-02-2016, the free Syrian army and Al-Nusra Front surrounded the villages of Nuble and Al-Zahraa from 3 directions. The villages had only one outlet from the Afrin and its villages through which small amounts of supplies arrived. Al-Assad's airplanes would also deliver aid and supplies by parachuting the supplies.

The current situation

On the 2nd and 3rd of February 2016, the Iraqi forces (Al-Nijaba, Abu Al-Fadil Al-Abbas, and the Iraqi Hezbollah) made a relatively large progress in the direction of Nuble and Al-Zahraa from the east (the areas of Ihras, Wahshiyat, and Al-Shahabiyat) supported by the Al-Assad's special forces and Commandos forces. They managed to advance towards the border (Maarsta AlKhan and Hardartnein areas) taking control of the village of Tel Jabin. They were thus 3 kilometers from Nuble. The rebel forces were able to limit the speed of the Al-Assad forces advances but were not able to stop a part of the Al-Assad forces and the accompanying militias from reaching the villages of Nuble and Al-Zahraa to end the besiegement of these two towns. Communication was cut between Aleppo and its northern countryside, where the northern countryside is considered a human reserve source for the rebels in Aleppo. Al-Assad forces and the accompanying militias advancements a big move towards besieging Aleppo completely.

The military situation is generally not reassuring and the Russian air force is bombing violently which presents a huge threat to the civilian population.

Islamic State's stance

It is clear that Al-Assad forces are making a progress, and their backs are clearly visible to the Islamic State forces. The distance between them is not more than 3 kilometers, yet the Islamic State forces have not made any move to attack Al-Assad's forces; not a single bullet was fired towards Al-Assad's forces. At the same time, the Islamic State forces have sent the Free Syrian Army forces requests for them to join their ranks, and announce their allegiance to the Islamic State for them to help the rebel forces militarily, and this will not happen.

The presumed Russian plan

It is clear that there is an attempt to close the Turkish Syrian border, isolate cities from each other to capture them gradually beginning from Aleppo, then Hama, then the remaining countryside of Lattakia and its surround areas. The shape of the plan has developed along these lines:

1. It is believed that aims at cut off the supply lines for the city of Aleppo from the villages of Nuble and Al-Zahraa. The Russian air force also targets the long route leading to Bab El-Hawa border crossing point.

2. The plan is to reach Afrin and then surround Aleppo from the north and the east with the Kurdish PYD forces.
3. They are progressing towards Kwairus airport, Al-Sheikh Najar area heading towards the heating station, and thus surrounding Aleppo from the south east.
4. Progressing from Kawirus airport towards Tishrine Dam to meet up with the Syrian Democratic PYD later on with coverage from the Russian air force, and take control over Minbij, Jarablous, and then move towards the battle with Raqqah.

It is believed that the Russian attack on Jabal Al-Akrad, in the direction of Kanasba, aimed at closing the Turkish border from the side of Lattakia province. Following its isolation of the north, Russia will head towards isolating the rest of the provinces from each other: Aleppo, Idlib, Hama, then head towards Al-Rastan, and from there to divide Homs into two parts and gradually capture it.

It is worth noting that the battle to the supply lines in the south continues on the axis Deraa, Atman after Al-Sheikh Maskin area.

Russian will thus separate the liberated areas from each other to work on capturing them gradually.

Recommendations

1. Urgent military support is needed for the rebels in all of the northern and western countryside to open the road.
2. Open the border crossing points for humanitarian purposes.
3. Create united military factions on the ground from the existent brigades, such as the moderate opposition that resembles the Syrian Democratic Forces that can tame the PYD project and act as an alternative to the PYD as an ally.
4. Extending supply lines through military support to the united military forces formed.
5. Forming a coordination committee with direct connection to the specialized military parties.

6. Pressuring the MOC (Military Operations Centre) to expand the support to fronts fighting the regime not only those fighting Islamic State forces.



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