

## **Blow to ISIS: Turkish-backed Syrian rebels capture Dabiq town from terror outfit**

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**Beirut:** In a major blow to the jihadists, the Turkish-backed Syrian opposition forces have captured the significant town of Dabiq from the dreaded terror outfit Islamic State.

A commander of the Syrian opposition Hamza Brigade said Islamic State fighters put up "minimal" resistance to defend the northern Syrian town before withdrawing in the direction of the much larger IS-held town of al-Bab to the south.

Saif Abu Bakr said some 2,000 opposition fighters pushed into Dabiq with tank and artillery support from the Turkish army. The commander said the extremists left the town heavily mined.

Both Turkish and international coalition warplanes conducted airstrikes on Dabiq and nearby Arshak, the Turkish state-run Anadolu news agency reported.

The Islamic State group took control of the town, which had a prewar population of about 3,000 people, in August 2014.

The group's propaganda had boasted of the fight for the northern Syrian town, citing Islamic lore that it would be the scene of a major battle between crusaders and army of the Muslim caliphate that would herald Doomsday.

The group's English-language magazine, Dabiq, is named after the town, and in 2014 they said they had buried the American captive Peter Abdul-Rahman Kassig there.

The Turkish military intervened in the Syrian war in August this year under orders from Ankara to clear the border area from the Islamic State group and from U.S.-backed Syrian Kurdish forces linked Turkey's own outlawed Kurdish insurgency. The Turkish government describes both groups as terrorists.

Syrian opposition forces backed by Turkish ground and air forces have since expelled Islamic State militants from their last positions along the Syrian-Turkish frontier and are closing in on Al-Bab, one of the last remaining IS strongholds in Syria's contested Aleppo province.

Turkey has bused thousands of opposition fighters from other fronts in northern Syria to the frontier as part of operation "Euphrates Shield," named after the vital river that runs through the region.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights group, which monitors the conflict through a network of local contacts, said the extremist group had sent over 1,000 fighters to defend Dabiq last week before withdrawing hurriedly.

- (With inputs from AP)