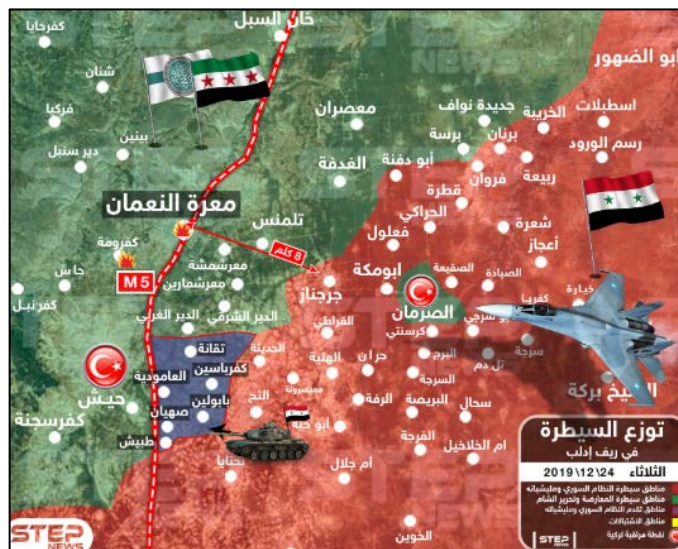


## Additional Syrian army attack against the rebel organizations (update)

So far, **over 40 towns and villages** have been taken over in the Syrian army offensive east and southeast of the city of Maarat Nu'man, near the M-5 highway **to Aleppo and Idlib**<sup>1</sup>. **In the ITIC's assessment, the objective of the Syrian army attack is to establish its presence on the M-5 highway leading northward, take over Maarat Nu'man, and prepare for the attack on Idlib, the rebel stronghold, with the aim of achieving a decisive victory in the campaign which has been going on for about seven months.** Despite the fierce resistance of the rebel organizations, **the Syrian army's advance was relatively quick.** The rebel organizations were forced to retreat to the area west of the M-5 highway and are now on the outskirts of Maarat Nu'man. The Syrian army's General Staff released an announcement stating its **determination to finish clearing the Idlib Province from terrorism.**



**Map of the control areas in the Maarat Nu'man region (updated to December 24, 2019). Green: Control area of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham and the other rebel organizations; Red: Control area of the Syrian army and the forces supporting it; Blue: The areas taken over by the Syrian army; Dotted red line: the Aleppo-Damascus highway (M-5); In the circle with the Turkish flag: a Turkish supervision post (Khotwa, December 24, 2019)**

<sup>1</sup> This document supplements the ITIC's Information Bulletin from December 24, 2019, "Additional Syrian army attack against the rebel organizations in the Idlib region (initial overview)."

## Syrian army General Staff's announcement on the campaign achievements so far

► On December 24, 2019, the Syrian army's General Staff announced that **over 320 square kilometers had been cleared in the attack and the Syrian army had taken over more than 40 towns and villages** in the area south and southeast of Idlib (the area of Maarat Nu'man). The operatives of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham and the other terrorist organizations suffered heavy losses and fled the area. Command posts and military equipment of the organizations were destroyed in the attack. **The Syrian army's General Staff is determined to finish clearing the Idlib Province from "terrorism."** Civilians are called upon to stay away from the areas where the rebel organizations are deployed and arrive in the areas controlled by the Syrian army (SANA, December 24, 2019).



Announcement of the Syrian army's General Staff on the attack in the area of Maarat Nu'man (SANA, December 24, 2019)



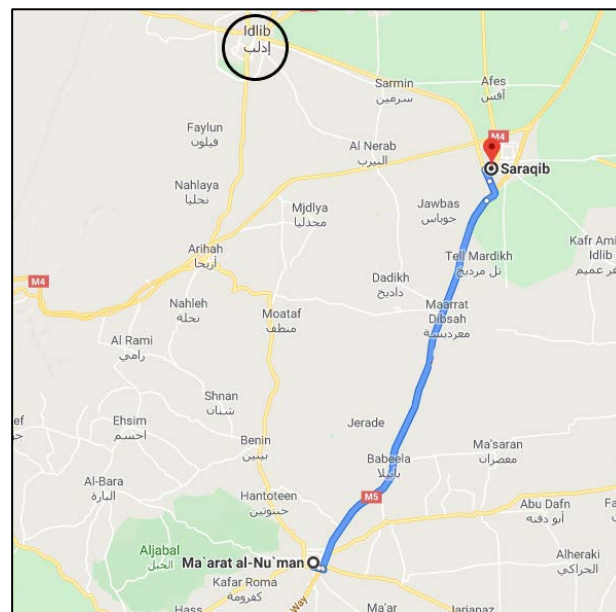
Vehicles destroyed by the Syrian army in Al-Tah, the stronghold of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham, south of Maarat Nu'man (SANA, December 24, 2019)



**Trench of the rebel organizations in Umm Jalal, southeast of Maarat Nu'man. The Syrian army took control of the village on December 20, 2019 (SANA, December 23, 2019)**

### **Syrian airstrikes along the M-5 highway, on the section leading northward**

► **On December 24, 2019**, it was reported that Syrian fighter jets **had carried out airstrikes along the M-5 highway**, on the section leading from Maarat Nu'man to Saraqib (15 km southeast of Idlib) (Edlib Media Center, December 24, 2019). In the ITIC's assessment, **the purpose of these airstrikes is to cut off this main artery, disrupting the supply route and the movement of the rebel forces, in preparation for the takeover of Maarat Nu'man** and for the movement northward to Idlib, the Syrian army's main strategic target.



**The main section of the road along which the airstrikes were carried out (Google Maps)**

## Summary of the losses since the beginning of the ground attack in the Maarat Nu'man area

► Since the beginning of the campaign in the Maarat Nu'man area on the evening hours of December 19, 2019, until December 24, 2019, **a total of 277 people had been killed**. Fatalities included **155 rebel organization operatives**, including 126 operatives of jihadi organizations (mainly operatives of the Headquarters for the Liberation of Al-Sham). Fatalities also included **122 soldiers and operatives of the Syrian army** and the forces supporting it (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, December 24, 2019).