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Bloody Fighting as Syrian Islamists, Kurds Turn On Each Other

By Jason Ditz

August 2, 2013

Fighting between al-Qaeda-linked Islamist factions and Syria's Kurdish militias continues to escalate today, with reports that 12 al-Qaeda fighters were killed early Friday morning in heavy fighting with the YPG militia.

The al-Qaeda fighters have been contesting control of multiple Kurdish towns and one of the towns, Ras al-Ayn, is facing heavy shelling from Islamist fighters. 22 Kurdish fighters are said to have been killed in the past several days, and a number of Kurdish civilian casualties were also reported.

The YPG issued a call to arms earlier this week, calling on all able-bodied Kurds to take up arms to resist the loss of control over their towns to rebel fighters. Jabhat al-Nusra has taken at least 200 Kurdish civilians hostage since then.

With West Kurdistan, the Syrian northeast, awash in oil it is considered a vital territory for the rebels to seize financially. At the same time, the clashes with the Kurds seem to be distracting much of their force from the ongoing civil war, allowing the Assad government to make significant gains in Homs.