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Hezbollah aids Syrian govt recapture of Kasab

June 15, 2014

Syrian government forces, assisted by Hezbollah, have retaken the village of Kasab on the border with Turkey and in the coastal heartland of President Bashar Assad's Alawite minority sect, an activist group and state media said.

The withdrawal of most rebel forces from the village - including some linked to Al-Qaeda - is another blow to an opposition that has been undermined by recent gains by Assad's forces and by infighting.

A number of fighters stayed behind in Kasab after the departure of most of the rebels, who included fighters from the Al-Qaeda-linked Nusra Front, the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said late Saturday.

Sunday morning, Syrian state television said government forces had "restored stability and security" to Kasab and engineering teams were removing mines and explosives planted by "terrorist gangs", the government's customary term for rebels.

The Observatory said clashes in the area continued from around midnight Saturday night, but did not give casualty figures.

Syrian government forces were assisted by the Lebanese Shiite militia Hezbollah as well as fighters of Syrian and foreign nationality, the Observatory said.

Rebel forces had taken Kasab, a majority Armenian Christian village, in March, the first time they were able to capture a settlement on the Mediterranean coast. One of Assad's cousins, a militia commander, was killed in fighting in the area.

Syria's coastal areas are the historic homeland of Assad's family and home to many members of his Alawite sect, an off-shoot of Shiite Islam. The rebels fighting to overthrow Assad are overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim.