Hayyat Tahrir al Sham (HTS) has emerged as *the* key player in the northwest after widespread territorial gains against Harikat Nour al-Din al-Zinki in Western Aleppo and Idleb governorates.

The killing of Al Qaeda-aligned, formerly Idleb based, Abu

rapid defeat of Harikat Nour al Din al Zinki in so many areas

operatives from Idleb into Syrian government-controlled areas of Syria should be of concern.

Following last month s gains around Hajin town, Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) continued to advance south eastwards along the Euphrates River in Deir Ez Zor Governorate. By 6 January 2019, SDF forces had reached the village Al Shafah and were being supported by the US-led Coalition, de

of an immediate US withdrawal from Syria on 19 December 2018, now downgraded to a gradual pull out.⁴

At least 469 airstrikes by US-led Operation Inherent Resolve were recorded in Syria since mid-December until the end of the month, building on the 470 events recorded during the first half of December 2018, and representing a significant increase from earlier in the year.⁵ Additionally, two British Special Forces members were injured in an ISIS rocket <u>attack</u> near Deir ez Zor on 5 January. As such, it appears that the tempo of the anti-ISIS efforts in this part of Syria have yet to be affected by the developments of US policy in the past month.

However, ISIS demonstrated that it remains a considerable force, launching a complex attack on 1 January when a lar1 0 0 Tm0 g0 G()]TJETQq0.000008866 0 594.96 842.04