

Russia builds four new air bases in Syria, deploys another 6,000 troops

Description

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Contrary to Moscow's promises, the Russian military is not pulling out of Syria, but adding four more air bases (one shared with Iran) and 6,000 more troops.

On Dec. 11, 2017, Russian President Vladimir Putin, followed by Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu, announced that the Russian military was to withdraw from Syria to home bases. DEBKAF's military and intelligence sources report that the reverse happened. A small number of units were indeed sent home, but they were sooner replaced, and instead of two bases – the air facility at Hmeimim and the naval installation at Tartus – four more Syrian air bases are being reconstructed and adapted for the use of the Russian air force.

The attached map illustrates their locations:

1. The Tiyas Military Airbase (also known as T-4) in the Homs Governorate west of Palmyra, is the largest in Syria. The Russians are massively converting it into their main center of aerial operations in central Syria. Tyas will also provide backup as needed for Khmeimim, if drone, missile and mortar attacks recur.
2. Palmyra (or Tadmor) Airport provides air support for operations in eastern Syria including the Deir ez-Zour province. Moscow has agreed to share it with Iran. The Revolutionary Guards Al Qods chief Gen. Qassem Soleimani is planning to make Palmyra the main assembly center for the transfer of pro-Iranian Iraqi Shiite militias from southern Iraq to Syria.
3. From Hama Military Airport west of Hama, the Russians will exercise control from the air of central Syria and the northern and central highways to Damascus. Still more importantly, this airport's location places it just 125km as the crow flies (173km by road) from Russia's Tartus naval base on the Mediterranean coast.
4. Shayrat, at Homs (which became notorious as the target of a massive US Tomahawk attack last year) is the main landing site for air transports which bring the Russian and Iranian forces troop

reinforcements, weapons and spare parts.

More than 6,000 additional Russian military personnel are assigned to the four renovated bases in Syria – most of them air force and special operations personnel. Some have arrived.

The attached map shows how the new layer of Russian bases in western, central and eastern Syria faces the chain of military locations the Americans have decided to keep in northern Syria. The two powers are evidently in a race for bases in Syria. In strategic terms, the two powers are dividing a large swath of Syria between them as regions of influence, leaving any future ruler in Damascus with just about half of Syrian territory under government control.