

Global Hot Topics

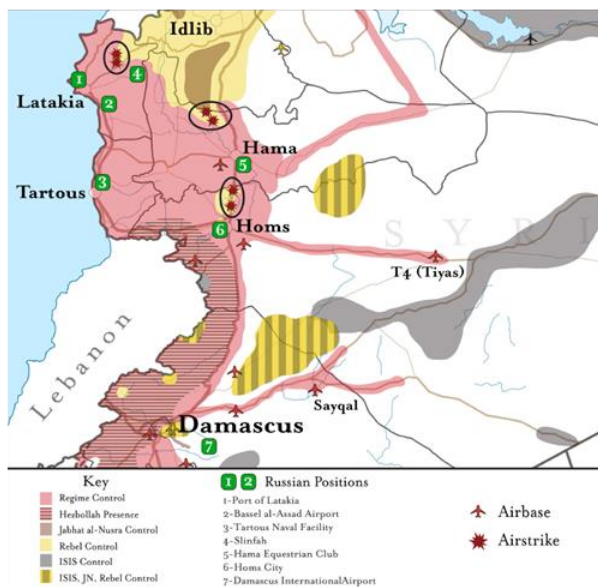
Syria: Russian airstrikes woes

Yigit Engin, Alvaro Ortiz and Tomasa Rodrigo. BBVA Cross Emerging Markets Unit and Garanti Economics

As we warned in our previous report (see [Russian military presence on the rise](#)), Russia began to fight in Syria. On September 30, Russia generated airstrikes in Homs and Latakia. US Secretary of Defense told that it seems the Russian airstrikes did not target ISIS, but the rebel town of Talbisah (north of Homs) and al-Nusra's territory. Today, the second wave of Russian aerial operations hit the rural provinces near northwestern town of Jisr al-Shughour (near Turkey's Hatay) controlled also by al-Nusra. Besides, latest news on Iranian forces and Chinese advisors could complicate the crisis driving the conflict to a new proxy war. The foreign policy by neighbor countries (Turkey and Gulf countries) can also be affected.

Syria: Recent Russian Movements

Source: ISW



Russia took the hard power role in Syria

Following the rise of military presence in Syria during the last weeks (see [Russian military presence on the rise](#)), Russian planes carried out its first air strikes in Syria yesterday. Their targets were mainly Syrian opposition locations around the central cities of Hama and Homs and support missions for Syrian regime planes in north-west Syria, near Latakia.

Moscow claims that it was targeting ISIS forces but the strikes were carried mainly out of ISIS controlled areas. In fact, the attacks targeted on locations controlled by groups including hardline Islamist rebels Ahrar al-Sham, the al-Qaida-aligned al-Nusra, and affiliates of the US-backed Free Syrian Army. Russia informed the United States and Israel of the strikes shortly before, asking their militaries to avoid Syrian airspace during that time.

The movement by Russian forces will reinforce the Syrian regime forces by increasing their fighting power in the north and Alawite cities securing the entire Damascus and the southern border.

More actors can join the play...

In addition to increasing Russian military presence, Lebanese sources claimed that hundreds of Iranian forces arrived in Syria ten days ago to take part in ground operations. Besides, Lebanese Hezbollah will also fight in the north supporting the Assad regime forces. Chinese also sent military advisers to serve alongside Russian troops. Thus, the Syrian territory could become more insecure due to increasing proxy rivalry between different actors, especially Russia and the US.

.... Bringing consequences on the rest of the neighborhood

Russian intervention in the Civil War will yield four consequences in the neighborhood, Turkey and Gulf countries can be also affected:

- **There will be a softening of the anti-Assad stance mainly driven by Turkey and the Gulf countries:** from the very beginning of Syrian Civil War, Turkey and the Gulf Countries have expressed themselves clearly in the anti-Assad camp. However, the Russian military deployments into Syrian territory will challenge this strong stance. In fact, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said, "A transition process without Assad or with Assad is possible" after his meeting with President Putin in Moscow on September 23. In contrast, the Saudis maintains their position so far
- **The Turkish 'safe zone' initiative could be now out of question:** Russian air operations in the north and increasing military presence in Latakia and Tarsus will deter Turkey and the US to establish a 'safe zone' between Afrin and Kobane, both of which are controlled by PYD (the Kurds).
- **Syrian Kurds can be benefited from Russian intervention:** The YPG militias (armed organization of PYD) are reported to get ready to take the control of Jarabulus, the only remaining gate of ISIS near Turkish border. If successful, the southern border of Turkey would fall into PYD's control facilitating the YPG march to the west of Euphrates (Turkey's red line).
- **There are important energy projects at risk:** As Turkish and Russian positions in Syria clash; projects as the Turkish Stream pipeline can remain in Stand-by. Besides, some new alternative energy routs may emerge.

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