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3.2. Russia

For information regarding Russia's involvement in Syria prior to November 2024, see section 1.3.3. of the EUAA COI Report Syria – Security Situation (October 2024).

When the government of Bashar Al-Assad was toppled, Russia, with its primary focus on the Ukraine war, had limited resources at its disposal for Syria.505 As a result, Russia was unable to offer substantial military support to the Assad government apart from some airstrikes.506

Following the fall of Assad's government, which reportedly came unexpectedly for Russia, Moscow engaged in actions that were described as 'largely reactive'.507 While granting asylum to the former president, Russia shifted to a more balanced,508 albeit cautious, stance towards the country's new rulers.509 Ahmad Al-Sharaa, the leader of the transitional administration, for his part emphasised that he did not want Russia to exit from Syria in a way that undermined Russia-Syria relations,510 describing them as 'strategic'511. Agreements were reached to guarantee the safety of Russian diplomatic staff and to reduce Russian military personnel.512 Later in December 2024, Russia reportedly withdrew its forces from all positions in the country's interior, including Qamishli513 and the frontlines in northern Syria,514 as well as from sites in the Alawite Mountains.515

As of early 2025, Russia still operated two military bases in Syria, namely Hmeimim Airport516 and the Tartous Port in western Syria.517 These bases had not been damaged during the advance of the opposition factions.518 The new Syrian Transitional Administration provided guarantees to avoid any harm to these bases,519 its leader Al-Sharaa initially stating that he would not rule out permitting the Russians to remain.520 As of late January 2025, the transitional authorities have not forced a full exit of Russian forces from Syria.521

However, around mid-December 2024, there were media reports of satellite images suggesting that Russia was preparing to withdraw large amounts of military gear and personnel from Syria.522 Since mid-December 2024, Russian Antonov AN-124 cargo planes and Iyushin IL-76 aircraft have made regular flights from Hmeimim to al-Khadim, a base in Libya.523 Moreover, in late January 2025, Russian cargo have begun to transport military equipment out of the port of Tartous.524

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