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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 Ilyushin 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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