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www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

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Russia flexes its military might in Syria

By Fred Pleitgen

May 6, 2016

Despite Russia's claim that it would withdraw most of its forces from Syria, it maintains a strong presence at its airbase near Latakia.

While some assets have been removed, others have been added. Here are Russia's main combat assets in Syria.

SU-34 Strike Aircraft



Two Russian SU-34s on the tarmac at Hmeymim base in northern Syria, May 4, 2016.

- SU-34 is Russia's most advanced fighter bomber. Its cockpit is fully digital and spacious for a military aircraft, made for long missions.
- The SU-34 is used for aerial bombardment of ground targets. It can carry both unguided and guided munitions and has a very large payload.
- It can hold about eight tons of weapons.
- CNN saw at least six such aircraft at the Hmeymim airbase and several were loaded with bombs and took off for combat missions while we were there.

SU-24 Strike Aircraft



A SU-24 Russian strike aircraft at the Hmeymim airbase in Syria, May 4, 2016.

- The SU-24s fly the majority of Russia's bombing missions in Syria. Like the SU-34, it is a strike aircraft, designed to combat targets on the ground.
- The SU-24 was developed during the Cold War and has been in use since the 1980s.
- In Syria, the Russian air force flies a modernized version of the plane with advanced targeting systems. Last year, one SU-24 was lost when it was shot down by a Turkish fighter jet causing an international incident between NATO and Russia.
- We saw around a dozen SU-24 aircraft at the Hmeymim airbase with many taking off for missions in a very short time span

SU-35 Jet Fighter



A Russian SU-35 takes off from the Hmeimim base in northern Syria, May 4, 2016.

- The SU-35's deployment to Syria is a direct result of the Turkish shooting down of a Russian SU-24 last year.
- The SU-35 is an air superiority fighter jet built for dog fights against enemy planes.
- In Syria, the Russians often keep SU-35s in the sky when their strike aircraft are on missions to ensure their safety.
- But the SU-35 has only a single seat cockpit with advanced avionics and targeting systems to fight several aircraft simultaneously.
- We saw at least six SU-35 with several taking off on missions at the Hmeymim airbase.

Mi-28 Helicopter Gunship



Russian Mil Mi-28 helicopter gunships fly above the Kremlin's cathedrals in Moscow, on May 7, 2014.

- The Mi-28 is the newest addition to Russia's air borne fighting force in Syria. It is a classical gunship, a two-seat attack helicopter with guided missiles and a powerful machine gun mounted under the cockpit.
- While the Mi-28 -- which NATO calls the "Havoc" -- has only been in Syria for a short time, one has already crashed near Homs in central Syria. Details of the incident are still under investigation but the Russian defense ministry recently said they believe human error by the pilot may have played a part in bringing the chopper down, killing both crew members.
- We saw Mi-28s constantly hovering over the Hmeymim base while we were there.
- They often gave protection to aircraft taking off from the air strip flying parallel until they were at a safe altitude. It is unclear how many of these helicopters are operated by Russia in Syria.

Mi-24 Gunship / Transport Helicopter



Mil Mi-24 Hind large helicopter gunships during a military parade rehearsal, May 7, 2015, Russia.

- The Mi-24 is one of the most well known Russian combat helicopters. In Syria Mi-24s -- which NATO refers to as the "Hind" -- are often used to support Syrian ground targets, attacking opposition forces with its powerful weaponry.
- The Mi-24 has a wide range of mostly unguided missiles and a very powerful machine cannon. It is operated by a crew of two -- a pilot and a weapons operator -- but can also take on several passengers in a compartment in its hull.
- Videos shot by Syrian rebels have shown the Mi-24 in combat over towns in the country.
- The combat helicopter went into service in the 1970s and was widely used in Afghanistan. The Russians use a highly upgraded version in Syria.