
Posture of Syrian Regime and Allies: November 9, 2015



Key Take-Away: Russia shifted military assets into eastern Homs Province, positioning at least five attack helicopters at the T4 (Tiyas) Airbase in eastern Homs Province and additional rotary-wing aircraft at the Shayrat Airbase east of Homs City by November 4. These deployments position Russia to blunt an offensive by ISIS against pro-regime forces south of Homs City that began after ISIS seized the village of Mahin on November 1, 2015. ISIS's recent gains south of Homs threaten the strategic regime-controlled M5 Highway connecting Damascus to Homs as well as the regime-held provincial capital of Homs City. ISIS may seek to pressure Homs City in order to divert Russian and Iranian forces in Syria from their ongoing ground operations near Aleppo City. The advances in Homs have already driven an apparent shift in the Russian air campaign to expand the targeting of ISIS forces threatening core regime terrain as well as ISIS-held positions in eastern Syria more broadly.

8 - Shayrat Airbase

9 - T4 (Tiyas) Airbase

R - Mezze District and Airbase

T - Damascus International Airport

S - Sayyida Zeinab District

H - Tel al-Nasiriyah

J - Hama Military Airport

I - Qumhana

Russia has also forward-staged rotary-wing aircraft out of the Hama Military Airport in order to target rebel positions north of Hama City. Syrian rebels have been pushing back regime forces in the northern countryside of Hama Province despite the start of Russian air support to the Syrian regime on September 30. Rebel forces seized the strategic town of Morek on the border between Hama and Idlib Provinces on November 5. The redeployment of some rotary-wing aircraft to Homs Province may limit the amount of firepower that Russia has available to respond to the rebel offensive in northern Hama Province as well as pressure from ISIS southeast of Aleppo City.

The expansion of the Russian footprint in Homs and Hama Provinces positions Russia to further deepen its military involvement in the Syrian Civil War. The aggressive use of helicopter gunships to conduct reconnaissance-by-fire along active frontlines will provide Russia with valuable sources of additional intelligence on potential targets for fixed-wing airstrikes. Over the long-term, the deployments to the two airbases in eastern Homs Province could also provide Russia with new forward positions for an expanded air campaign against ISIS in far-eastern Syria or western Iraq. The forward-staging of Russian rotary-wing nonetheless brings Russian personnel closer to direct contact with ISIS, raising the risk that ISIS could deliberately target these forces in order to punish Russia for its involvement in Syria.