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Russia's Syrian campaign is part of larger confrontation with the U.S. and NATO. In addition to expanding the scope of its operations to bolster the regime of Bashar al-Assad, Russia issued an open challenge to NATO through repeated violations of Turkish airspace, the shadowing of U.S. Predator drones in Syria, and the launch of cruise missiles into Syria from the Caspian Sea through Iraqi airspace without warning the U.S. beforehand. Russia accelerated its efforts to court U.S. allies including Jordan and Israel and to pose as an alternative security guarantor in the region, demonstrating Russia's intent to override the US-led coalition effort. Likewise, Russia bolstered its military presence near Afghanistan, where the U.S. is preparing to draw down its forces, by announcing the deployment of attack helicopters to neighboring Tajikistan. In a snap ministerial meeting on October 8, NATO agreed to double the size of its Response Force and announced its preparedness to deploy ground forces to defend Turkey. It remains unclear whether or not this reaction by NATO will noticeably deter Russian aggression in the Middle East or conversely trigger an escalatory response. Meanwhile, Russia's escalated support to Syrian regime operations against rebels and Jabhat al Nusra in Syria show that Russia's main objective in the Middle East is not the anti-ISIS fight, but rather the formation of a Russian-Iranian alignment that will serve its broader aims.

**1) Eastern Mediterranean.** 01 OCT: The Russian ferry Aleksandr Tkachenko arrived in the Syrian port city of Tartus, where Russia has a naval facility. The ferry had left the Russian port city of Novorossiysk in September bound for Syria loaded with trucks carrying unknown contents.

02 OCT: An unnamed military source cited by pro-Kremlin media suggested that Russian warships that were recently deployed for an exercise in the eastern Mediterranean could be used to provide air defense for Russia's new airbase at Bassel al-Assad International Airport in Latakia Province.

05 OCT: The head of Russia's parliamentary defense committee stated that the Russian Black Sea Fleet could be used to shell targets on the ground in Syria or to blockade the Syrian Coast as required.

**2) Turkey.** 03-04 OCT: NATO and the Turkish Ministry of Defense announced that Russian fighter jets violated Turkish airspace over Hatay Province near the Syrian border.

**3) Syria.** 30 SEP-07 OCT: The U.S. State Department stated that 90 percent of Russian airstrikes have targeted Syrian rebels rather than ISIS or Al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra. According to U.S. officials, Russian jets also shadowed American Predator drones over Syria at least three times.

05 OCT: The head of Russia's parliamentary defense committee suggested that that Russian "volunteer" fighters would likely travel to Syria to fight in support of the Assad regime.

07 OCT: U.S. Ambassador to NATO LTG Douglas Lute (ret.) stated that a battalion-sized Russian ground force was currently stationed in Syria while unnamed U.S. officials reported that Russian "Smerch" MLRS and howitzers were used to support an offensive by pro-regime forces in northern Hama Province.

**4) Caspian Sea.** 07 OCT: Russia launched cruise missiles into Syria from the Caspian Sea without warning the U.S. The cruise missiles passed through Iranian and Iraqi airspace and some reportedly crashed in Iran.

**5) Israel.** 06-07 OCT: Russia and Israel held talks in Tel Aviv to discuss naval coordination off the Syrian Coast.

**6) Jordan.** 05 OCT: The speaker of Russia's upper house of parliament met with King of Jordan Abdullah II in Amman to discuss efforts to combat terrorism in the Middle East.

**7) Tajikistan.** 07 OCT: Russia announced it would deploy a group of Hind attack helicopters and Hip transport helicopters to Tajikistan, where Russia holds multilateral and bilateral defense obligations.

**8) Chechnya.** 02 OCT: Chechen governor Ramzan Kadyrov asked for President Putin's permission to deploy pro-Russian Chechen forces to Syria in order to combat ISIS alongside the Syrian regime.

05 OCT: Chechen governor Ramzan Kadyrov met with Afghan Vice President Abdul Rashid Dostum in Chechnya, where Kadyrov said that Afghanistan needed Russian help in combatting ISIS similar to Syria.

08 OCT: Chechen governor Ramzan Kadyrov announced that Chechen special police killed three "ISIS" militants returning from Syria.

**9) Belarus.** 06 OCT: Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka stated that Belarus does not need a Russian airbase two weeks after Russian President Vladimir Putin called for the establishment of such a base.