



Russia reached an understanding with the U.S. on air safety guidelines in Syria on October 20, but Russia's aggressive maneuvers against U.S. aircraft and violations of Turkish airspace are likely to continue in order to keep U.S. air power in the Middle East in check. Russia hosted Bashar al-Assad in Moscow on October 20 in order to reinforce Russia's position as Assad's top sponsor. Russia continued efforts to project military force elsewhere in Middle East at the expense of U.S. influence in the region. Russia called for an expansion of technical military cooperation with Egypt and Iraq and established a "hotline" with Israel to deconflict air operations in Syria. Russia is using the sale of attack helicopters in multiple instances as a platform by which to compete with the U.S. for military partnerships. Meanwhile, Russia reinforced its strategic partnership with Iran by agreeing to host a senior military delegation in Moscow in late October. New reports that Cuba has deployed forces to support Russia's campaign in Syria would further underscore the emergence of a Russian coalition in the Middle East that will compete with the U.S.-led coalition if confirmed. Russia will likely continue to aggressively confront the U.S. and its allies until the U.S. withdraws from Syria or takes more direct steps to challenge Russia's freedom of action.

Russia also pursued deeper bilateral and multilateral military alliances in the former Soviet Union. Moscow revealed plans to establish a joint "military organization" with Belarus in response to NATO activity in Eastern Europe. Russia signed an agreement with other former Soviet states to form a joint border patrol force, possibly for deployment to the Afghan-Tajik border, which President Vladimir Putin framed as a gateway for terrorists to expand into Central Asia. Russia made overtures to Afghanistan, suggesting that Russian military assistance would be more effective at supporting Afghanistan's counterinsurgency than the presence of U.S. troops. Russia views the Afghan-Tajik border as another front for military competition with the U.S.

1) Cuba. 14 OCT: An unnamed U.S. official reported that Cuban paramilitary and Special Forces had been deployed to Syria, possibly to fight alongside pro-regime forces. The White House and State Department have not confirmed the report.

14 OCT: Russian Deputy Defense Minister Anatoly Antonov met with the Cuban ambassador to Russia to discuss bilateral military cooperation.

2) Afghanistan. 15 OCT: Russian presidential envoy to Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov said that "material assistance" would help Kabul conduct a counterinsurgency more than U.S. troops, following a recent statement revealing Moscow's intention to sell Hind attack helicopters to Afghanistan.

3) Israel. 15 OCT: Russia's MoD announced the creation of a "hotline" with the Israeli Air Force to deconflict air operations in Syria.

4) Syria. 15-21 OCT: Russia continued its air campaign in Syria, claiming airstrikes against targets in Hama, Idlib, Latakia, Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, and Deir ez-Zour provinces.

16 OCT: Deputy chief of staff of the Russian military Andrey Kartapalov said that Russia could establish a single military base in Syria that included naval, air and ground "components."

20 OCT: An artillery strike killed at least three Russians fighting with pro-regime forces in Latakia Province, according to a senior pro-Assad military source.

20 OCT: The U.S. and Russia signed a memorandum of understanding on air safety in Syria and agreed to create a working group to implement the agreement.

20-21 OCT: Russian President Vladimir Putin met with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Moscow, where they discussed the possibility of a political settlement in Syria. Putin spoke over the phone with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Saudi King Salman to discuss the Moscow meeting, which was Assad's first known overseas visit since the start of the Syrian Civil War.

5) Turkey. 16 OCT: Turkish forces downed a Russian-made drone that crossed into Turkish airspace from Syria, according to U.S. and Turkish officials.

6) Iran. 16 OCT: Russia announced that a senior Iranian military delegation would visit Moscow at the end of October to discuss bilateral military cooperation following a meeting between the Russian and Iranian deputy defense ministers in Beijing.

21 OCT: The Iranian Navy's Damavand frigate and Joshan and Peykan patrol torpedo boats arrived at Russia's Astrakhan Oblast reportedly to partake in joint naval drills in the Caspian Sea.

7) Kazakhstan. 16 OCT: President Putin signed an agreement with leaders of other former Soviet republics to form a joint border patrol group to manage "crisis situations" during a summit in Kazakhstan, possibly for deployment to the Afghan-Tajik border.

8) North Caucasus. 17 OCT: Russian security forces killed four reported militants in Khasavyurtovsky District, Dagestan, northwest of the capital of Makhachkala.

9) Egypt. 19 OCT: President Putin's chief of staff Sergey Ivanov announced Russia's intention to sell Egypt \$1 billion-worth of helicopters and equipment for its two new Mistral-class helicopter carriers.

19 OCT: Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu said Russia was prepared to build the capacity of the Egyptian military during a phone call with the Egyptian defense minister.

10) Georgia. 19 OCT: The leader of the Russian-backed breakaway Georgian state of South Ossetia said the time was right for a referendum on accession to Russia during a meeting with President Putin's aide Vladislav Surkov.

11) Iraq. 19 OCT: Russian ambassador to Iraq Ilya Morgunov met with Iraqi Prime minister Haider al-Abadi in Baghdad, where he called for the expansion of bilateral relations including in the realm of intelligence sharing and arms trading.

12) Moscow. 19 OCT: Russian authorities detained 22 suspected members of banned Islamist group Hizb ut-Tahrir, many of whom were reportedly involved in recruitment.

13) Belarus. 21 OCT: Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu announced that Russia and Belarus planned to begin forming a joint "military organization" in 2016 in response to NATO activity in Eastern Europe.

14) Southern Military District. 21 OCT: Around 1,200 soldiers from Russian motorized rifle brigades were placed on alert for live fire drills near Volgograd involving Flanker fighter-bombers, Hind attack helicopters, T-72B3 tanks and Grad MLRS.