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Russian Military Says Syria Naval Facility Operating Normally

By The Moscow Times

June 27, 2013

The Russian military on Thursday denied media reports that personnel had been withdrawn from its naval maintenance and supply facility in Syria, Russian news agencies reported.

The daily Vedomosti on Wednesday cited an unidentified source saying that neither servicemen nor civilian Defense Ministry personnel were currently stationed at the naval facility in the Syrian port of Tartus.

But the Defense Ministry press service said the modestly sized and equipped facility had long since been manned by civilians and that they had not been withdrawn.

"These personnel continue to work in the usual regimen. And there is no talk of evacuating them," RIA Novosti quoted the Defense Ministry's press service as saying in a statement.

The ministry press service said it could not immediately provide the statement.

The Tartus facility is a foothold in Syria, where 100,000 people have been killed in a civil conflict, and Russia's only military base outside the former Soviet Union.

Russian warships occasionally call there for supplies and minor repairs.

Russia has shielded Syrian President Bashar Assad during the conflict, supplying what it says are purely defensive weapons and blocking Western-backed U.N. Security Council resolutions meant to pressure him to end the bloodshed.

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