The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Western-Backed Syrian Rebel Group Says Hit by Russian Airstrikes

September 30, 2015



A chandelier hangs in a house damaged by what activists said was a barrel bomb dropped by forces loyal to Syria's president Bashar Al-Assad in Maarat Al-Nouman, Syria, Sept. 29.

Russian air strikes in northwest Syria which Moscow said targeted Islamic State fighters hit a rebel group supported by Western opponents of President Bashar Assad on Wednesday, wounding eight, the group's commander said.

He said the fighters were hit in the countryside of Hama province, where the group has a headquarters.

"The northern countryside of Hama has no presence of ISIS at all and is under the control of the Free Syrian Army," Major Jamil Saleh, who defected from the Syrian army in 2012, told Reuters via Skype.

Saleh said his group had been supplied with advanced anti-tank missiles by foreign powers opposed to Assad.

Russia's Defense Ministry said it launched air strikes against Islamic State in Syria after President Vladimir Putin secured his parliament's unanimous backing to intervene to prop up Kremlin's closest Middle East ally.

A U.S. official said targets in the Homs area appeared to have been struck by Russian warplanes, instead of areas held by Islamic State.

The Homs area is crucial to President Bashar Assad's control of western Syria. Insurgent control of that area would bisect the Assad-held west, separating Damascus from the coastal cities of Latakia and Tartus, where Russia operates a naval facility.

"In the early morning this aircraft conducted air strikes in Latamneh city. One targeted a civilian area, and the other targeted al-Izza," Saleh said, referring to his group which he said were set up around two years ago and has 1,500 fighters.

He declined to give further details on the exact location of the strike but said the bombs hit a cave which the group used as a headquarters and was near the front line with the regime in northern Hama countryside.

"Each strike had 8-10 missiles and there were two strikes so there is no way it was an accident," he added.

Moscow gave Washington an hour's notice of the strikes, which set in motion Russia's biggest play in the region since the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, a U.S. official said.

A U.S.-led coalition has already been bombing Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, but Putin derided U.S. efforts to end the Syria war at the United Nations on Monday, suggesting a broader and more coordinated coalition was needed to defeat the militants.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2015/09/30/western-backed-syrian-rebel-group-says-hit-by-russian-airstrikes-a49962