

Russia Launches Rockets on Islamic State in Syria

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Free Syrian Army fighters carry a weapon during what they said was preparations for an operation to strike at forces loyal to Syria's president Bashar Al-Assad.

Four Russian warships in the Caspian Sea launched 26 rockets at Islamic State in Syria which hit their targets, Russia's Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and President Vladimir Putin said in a joint television appearance on Wednesday.

Russia started its air campaign in Syria saying it would target militant group Islamic State. But its planes have also bombed other rebel groups opposed to Syrian President Bashar Assad, Moscow's ally.

Western countries, Arab states and Turkey, who are waging their own bombing campaign against Islamic State but also want Assad to leave power, say Moscow is using Islamic State as a pretext to target Assad's other foes.

Russia says the Assad government should be the centerpiece of international efforts to combat extremism.

Putin said it was too early to talk about the results of Russia's operations in Syria and ordered Shoigu to continue cooperation with the United States, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Iraq on Syria.

On Wednesday the Syrian army and allied militia carried out ground attacks on insurgent positions in Syria backed by Russian air strikes.

"The president of France, Mr Hollande, voiced an interesting idea, according to which it would be possible, in his opinion, to try to unite the efforts of the government forces of President Assad and the so-called Free Syrian Army," Putin said.

France has repeatedly said that once a political transition had occurred and Assad had gone, government troops and moderate rebels would need to join forces to defeat Islamic State.

Shoigu said that on Tuesday Russia had summoned foreign military attaches in Moscow and suggested they supply Russia with any intelligence on Islamic State positions.

"Today we are expecting a reply from our colleagues and we hope they will tell us about those targets which they have," he said.

Shoigu also said Russia was ready to agree a document with the United States to coordinate actions in Syria.

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