

Russia Increases Air Defenses in Syria to Protect Aircraft

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President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday authorized the deployment of Russia's most advanced surface-to-air missile systems, the S-400 Triumf (NATO reporting name: SA-21 Growler), to its air base in the Syrian region of Latakia, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said, RIA Novosti reported.

“By the decision of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, S-400s will be deployed to the Hmeymim airbase in Syria to provide comprehensive air defense,” Shoigu was quoted as saying. The move is an apparent response to the downing of a Russian Su-24 by an air-to-air missile from a Turkish F-16 interceptor close to the Turkish-Syrian border Tuesday morning.

The S-400 is Russia's top of the line air defense system, capable of intercepting targets up to 250 kilometers away. Their deployment coincides with two other measures intended to increase operational safety for Russian pilots bombing targets in Syria.

The first was the Defense Ministry's decision to assign Sukhoi Su-30 Flanker heavy fighter jets to escort all Russian bombers carrying out sorties in Syria — previously they have flown unescorted.

Russia has also assigned the flagship of the Black Sea Fleet, the guided missile cruiser Moskva to support the air grouping with its modified S-300 air defense units off the coast of Latakia.

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