

Five Dead as Syrian Rebels Down Russian Helicopter Near Aleppo

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Shamil Zhumatov / Reuters

A Russian Mi-8 military helicopter has been shot down in the Syrian province of Idlib, the Russian Defense Ministry's press service confirmed Monday.

The helicopter's five man crew, consisting of three servicemen and two officers, have been confirmed killed, said Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov.

The helicopter was returning to a Russian airbase in the regime-held stronghold of Latakia after dropping humanitarian supplies to civilians trapped in the rebel holdout of Aleppo, the Defense Ministry said. Russia is conducting what it claims to be a humanitarian mission to assist the almost 300,000 civilians trapped in the city after Russian-backed Syrian forces surrounded it last month.

The helicopter came under fire from ground positions in the neighboring Idlib province, between Aleppo and the government-held region of Latakia. Peskov later told reporters that

the crew was killed in action.

Unverified photos circulating on social network Twitter appeared to show the body of a Russian pilot being dragged through the dirt by Syrian rebel forces, as well as his burnt Russian-government identification cards, an Orthodox icon, and a photo of the pilot's wife.

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