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Russia's Syrian Airbase to House Permanent Military Squadron

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Russian Defense Ministry

Russia is to convert its Hmeymim airbase in Syria into a full-fledged military base with a permanent air force contingent, the Izvestia newspaper reported Thursday.

The change will be carried out as soon as Hmeymim's legal status has been clarified, said Franz Klintsevich, Vice-Chairman of the Russian Federation Council Committee for Defense and Security. The airbase's expansion has been made possible by a Russian-Syrian bilateral agreement, said Klintsevich. No nuclear weapons or heavy bombers will be sent to base as 'that would breach international agreements and provoke a lot of anger," he said.

New radio equipment and air control systems are to be installed at the base, while existing runways will be expanded so as to allow landing of An-124 strategic airlifters, said one source at Russia's Ministry of Defence.

The Hmeymim airbase in Latakia was converted in 2015 into a strategic center for Russia's

military operation against the Islamic State. The base features accommodation for roughly 1000 troops, an air traffic control tower, storage facilities, field kitchens, and refueling stations.

Currently, Hmeymim can accommodate up to 50 military aircraft. The base has remained in use since Russian President Vladimir Putin announced withdrawal of Russian troops from Syria in March 2016.

The Islamic State is a terrorist organization banned in the Russia.

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