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Russian General Blames Humanitarian Ceasefire for Loss of Palmyra

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Russian Defense Ministry

A prominent Russian army general has blamed President Vladimir Putin's "humanitarian ceasefire" in Aleppo for the Islamic State's recapture of the ancient city of Palmyra on Sunday.

"I understand it is necessary to ensure the safety of the population..." said Gen. Yuri Baluyevsky, the former head of Russia's General Staff. "But when these pauses last three weeks, and these militants – who are up to their elbows in blood – can restore their strength and are allowed to keep their personal weapons – well, that I don't understand."

Baluyevsky also called the defeat a blow to the "prestige" of the Russian and Syrian military forces, but said that he had no doubt Palmyra would be recaptured.

The Syrian army captured Palmyra from the forces of the extremist Islamic State (IS) in March 2016 with the help of Russian airstrikes. A month later, Russia organized an international press tour of the liberated city, which included a concert performance featuring Sergei Roldugin, a close friend and confidante of President Putin.

IS retook the city on Sunday, after a battle in which approximately 120 Syrian government soldiers were reportedly killed. The governor of Syria's Homs province, in which Palmyra is located, claimed that 80 percent of the city's population was evacuated before the army retreated.

Islamic State is a terrorist organization banned in Russia.

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