

Deployment of Special Forces to Egypt 'Fake News,' Says Russian Senator

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Russia's Ministry of Defense has denied allegations that Russian special forces have deployed to Egypt in a bid assert the Kremlin's growing influence over neighboring Libya.

Reports that troops had been sent to an airbase in Sidi Barrani in Egypt, approximately 95 kilometers from the Libyan border, were quickly dismissed by Russian politicians and Defense Ministry representatives.

"There are no Russian troops in Sidi-Barrani [in Egypt] at all," Defense Ministry spokesperson Igor Konashenkov said Tuesday. "This is not the first year that such bogus stories from anonymous sources have entertained the public."

Vladimir Dzhabarov, First Deputy Chairperson of the Federation Council Committee on International Affairs, also denied the reports, dismissing the allegations as "fake news."

"Russia hasn't done anything," he said. "The Ministry of Defense has not confirmed

anything. This is fake news, no attention should even be paid to it."

U.S. and Egyptian sources who confirmed the deployment [to the Reuters news agency](#) said the move was likely in an effort to bolster Kremlin-backed Libyan general Khalifa Haftar, whose forces have struggled to maintain their hold over the Libya's primary oil ports.

Haftar, who operates in eastern Libya, is opposed to the UN-backed government in Tripoli. His troops initially wrested control of Libya's Oil Crescent — a series of strategically important oil fields and refineries — from rebel factions in September. He later lost the area to Islamist rebels, and has visited Russian officials periodically to ask for military assistance in his campaign.

Egyptian sources, who declined to comment on the Russians' mission in Egypt, [told Reuters](#) they had spotted a more than 20 members of Russian special forces, as well as a number of drones, approximately 100 kilometers from the border with Libya.

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The reports follow other allegations of Russian military involvement in the war-torn north African country. The head of Russian private security firm RSB-Group confirmed to Reuters on March 10 that "several-dozen" of its contractors had operated in a region of Libya under Haftar's control. He said that their mission had been completed last month.

Last month, Russian state-owned oil giant Rosneft signed a politically important exploration and deal with Libya's National Oil Corporation, a move that analysts say will strengthen Russia's political economic foothold in Libya.

Russia's overtures in Libya — and its increased influence over other Arab countries including Syria — has also concerned U.S. officials.

Speaking to the U.S. Senate's foreign relations committee on last Thursday, the chief of the Pentagon's Africa command said that Russia was trying to undermine Western influence in Libya in the same way it had done in Syria.

"Russia is trying to exert influence on the ultimate decision of who and what entity becomes in charge of the government inside Libya," General Thomas D. Waldhauser said.

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