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Syria Transfers Aircraft to Russian Base Following Trump Strike

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Defense Ministry

Syria has moved most of its remaining aircraft to the safety of Russia's Hmeimim airbase, U.S. broadcaster ABC reported Thursday.

The planes were transferred after an attack by U.S. President Donald Trump on the government's Shayrat air base, an unnamed military source told the news outlet. The strike is believed to have destroyed roughy a fifth of the country's operational military jets.

Most of the Syrian government's operational fixed wing military aircraft will now stay at the base close to the city of Latakia, the official said. The base was leased to Russia as part of a 49-year agreement in January 2017.

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U.S. warships launched 59 Tomahawk cruise missiles at Syria's Shayrat airbase April 7.

Trump ordered the strike after a chemical weapons attack killed more than 80 civilians in the rebel-held province of Idlib in the country's north.

The United States, Britain and the EU have all blamed the attack on Syrian government forces, a claim which both Assad and the Kremlin deny.

Moscow denied that the chemical was dropped from Syrian or Russian planes, as per eyewitness reports, but said that a Syrian airstrike had hit a "terrorist warehouse" containing an arsenal of "toxic substances" hours before.

Presidential Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov slammed the attack as an "act of aggression against a sovereign nation," designed to draw public attention away from civilian deaths in Iraq.

President Assad instead told reporters that the gas attack had been faked.

"Our impression is that the West, mainly the United States, is hand-in-glove with the terrorists. They fabricated the whole story in order to have a pretext for the attack," he said in an interview broadcast by APF.

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