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Russian Losses In Syria Four Times Higher Than Official Count — Reuters

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Russia's Defense Ministry has denied a Reuters report which claims that at least 40 Russians have died fighting in Syria this year alone.

The number given by Reuters is far higher than official figures given by the Defense Ministry, which puts the death toll this year at ten servicemen. The ministry says in total 32 Russian soldiers have died since September 2015, when Russia entered the conflict in Syria in support of President Bashar al-Assad's government forces.

Reuters based its estimate on accounts from families and friends of the deceased and local officials. In most cases, it was able to confirm the death by at least two sources, it said.

The deaths included 21 private contractors and 17 soldiers. Reuters was unable to determine the status of two other people.

It explained the discrepancy between its report and the official data as a reluctance by the

Kremlin to recognize losses ahead of elections next year. Moreover, Russia does not openly acknowledge that private contractors fight alongside its Armed Forces.

The ministry, however, denied the report, telling journalists: "This is not the first time Reuters has tried use whatever means to discredit Russia's Syria operation to root out Islamic State* terrorists and return peace to Syria."

** Islamic State is a terrorist organization banned in Russia.*

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