

Putin Orders Russian Military to Withdraw During Surprise Syria Visit

December 11, 2017



Bashar Assad and Vladimir Putin / Kremlin Press Service

President Vladimir Putin ordered Russian troops to withdraw from Syria during a surprise visit to a Russian airbase in the country on Monday morning, where he was greeted by Syrian President Bashar Assad.

The Defense Ministry [said](#) last week that the embattled country had been completely liberated of Islamic State (IS) militants, two years after Russia entered the war in support of Assad's regime. Russia this month also said that the war was drawing to a close — a claim the United States and opposition groups dispute.

Related article: [Russia's Defense Ministry Says Syria '100% Free of Islamic State'](#)

“I order the Defense Minister and the Chief of General Staff to proceed to withdraw Russian forces back to their points of permanent deployment,” Putin was [cited](#) by the state-run RIA

Novosti news agency as saying at the Khmeimim airbase.

If IS “raise their heads again,” the president added, “we will strike them with a force that they have never previously seen.”

Putin also said that conditions have been created in Syria “for a political resolution under the auspices of the United Nations.”

In turn, Assad thanked Russian pilots for providing air support during the war, calling their achievements “very important for the whole world.”

“On behalf of all of the people of the Syrian Arab Republic, I express my deep gratitude for the role your armed forces played,” the state-run TASS news agency [cited](#) Assad as saying.

Putin made the surprise visit en route to planned meetings in Cairo and Ankara with the Egyptian and Turkish presidents.

“Putin’s announcement of Russia’s partial withdrawal from Syria marks the victorious end of the military campaign but not of the Russian military presence and political involvement in the region,” Director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, Dmitri Trenin, [wrote](#) on Twitter.

Russia earlier this year [renewed](#) the lease on its Western Syrian airbase for an additional 50 years, where some Russian military will remain after the pullout announced by Putin on Monday.

The Islamic State is a terrorist group banned in Russia.

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