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Russian Military Repels Coordinated Drone Attack in Syria

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Sergei Bobylev / TASS

Russia's Defense Ministry reported Monday that radical Islamists had attacked Russian military installations in Syria with the help of combat drones over the weekend.

After two years of air strikes in support of the Syrian regime, President Vladimir Putin declared victory over terrorists during a surprise visit there last month, announcing a partial military withdrawal. Militant attacks on Russia's bases in Khmeimin and Tartus have continued since the announcement.

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Militants reportedly used 13 combat drones equipped with explosives to strike Russia's Khmeimin airbase and Tartus naval base, the Interfax news agency reported.

“For the first time, the terrorists have used multiple unmanned combat aerial vehicles with a range of more than 50 kilometers and the use of modern tracking technologies directed by GPS,” a military spokesman was cited as saying by Interfax on Monday.

The military reported that none of the drones hit their targets — seven were destroyed by the Pantsir-S air defense system, while six others were intercepted by Russia’s radioelectronics forces.

Russian military officials have claimed that the technology to operate the drones was likely transferred from a third country.

Some Russian members of parliament have accused Western countries of coordinating the attacks on Khmeimim, the state-run RIA Novosti news agency reported.

No radical groups have taken responsibility for the attacks, though military sources say that they were likely carried out by Ahrar al-Sham, a terrorist organization banned in Russia, the Kommersant business daily reported.

Russia’s Khmeimim airbase previously suffered a coordinated drone and artillery attack on New Year’s Eve. The Defense Ministry said that two Russian soldiers were killed in the attack but denied media reports that seven planes had been destroyed.

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