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Russia Dismisses Reports of Syria Casualties as 'Classic Disinformation'

February 14, 2018



Khalil Ashawi / Reuters

Russia has dismissed reports that hundreds of its citizens were killed in clashes with U.S.-led forces in Syria as "classic disinformation."

U.S. airstrikes are reported to have killed the largest number of Russians since the end of the Cold War on Feb. 7 when they targeted up to 200 mercenaries attempting to take over an oil refinery. The death toll is estimated to be as low as 11 and up to 217 private military contractors from Russia.

"Disseminated reports about hundreds, dozens of dead Russians is classic disinformation," Interfax quoted an unnamed Russian Foreign Ministry source telling reporters on Wednesday.

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The comments followed State Duma Defense Committee chairman Vladimir Shamanov

attacking the reports as “deliberately overstating the actual situation.”

“Unfortunately, there is no true and reliable information,” Shamanov was cited as saying by the state-run TASS news agency.

President Vladimir Putin’s spokesman Dmitry Peskov urged reporters not to rely on media estimates of the Russian mercenaries’ casualty numbers on Tuesday.

"Let's also be aware that there are quite a lot of our Russian compatriots in many of the world’s countries,” Interfax quoted Peskov as saying on a conference call with reporters.

Asked by the RBC business portal whether the Kremlin planned to mark the loss of Russian lives, Peskov responded with a question of his own.

“In what connection should the mourning be declared?” he was quoted as saying, continuing Moscow’s official denials that the killed fighters were part of the Russian military.

The open-source investigation collective Conflict Intelligence Team, meanwhile, added three names to the list of casualties it began collating on Tuesday.

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