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Russia Is Bombing Syrian Hospitals – NYT

The paper distilled data from Russian Air Force radio recordings and spoke to witnesses.

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War has been raging in Syria for more than eight years. **Muhmmad Al-Najjar / Zuma / TASS**

Russian jets have repeatedly bombed Syrian hospitals, including at least four in one day this spring, The New York Times reported, citing intercepted Russian Air Force radio recordings, witness accounts and data gathered by plane spotters.

Western states have accused Russia and its ally Syria of targeting civilians in northwest Syria, a charge that Moscow and Damascus deny, saying they are targeting militants. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's forces, backed by Russian air power, have been waging a six-month-long offensive in the Idlib region, the last major territory still in rebel hands after more than eight years of war.

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The NYT confirmed the four Russian airstrikes on May 5-6 through Russian Air Force radio transmissions obtained from an unidentified network of observers, flight-spotter logs and witness accounts.

"The spotter logs from May 5 and 6 put Russian pilots above each hospital at the time they were struck, and the Air Force audio recordings from that day feature Russian pilots confirming each bombing," the paper said.

The four targeted hospitals were part of a voluntary deconfliction list designed to prevent them from being attacked, which was provided to combatants including Russia. The United Nations, which sponsors the deconfliction list, in August launched an inquiry into the hospital bombings.

"The attacks on health in Syria, as well as the indiscriminate bombing of civilian facilities, are definitely war crimes, and they should be prosecuted at the level of the International Criminal Court in The Hague," the New York Times quoted Susannah Sirkin, policy director for the U.S.-based Physicians for Human Rights NGO, as saying.

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The paper quoted the UN's human rights office saying 54 healthcare facilities have been attacked since the Russian-backed offensive to reclaim Idlib launched in April. Physicians for Human Rights says there have been at least 266 attacks on medical workers in Syria since Russia intervened in the civil war in September 2015.

The NYT distilled months' worth of data into a 12-hour period to paint a "damning" picture for Russia, a permanent UN Security Council member.

The paper said Russia's Foreign Ministry did not directly respond to questions about the four hospital bombings, pointing instead to its past assertions that its warplanes target "accurately researched targets."

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