

Russia Launches New Air Base in Former U.S. Syria Stronghold

November 14, 2019



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The Russian military has announced a new combat helicopter and air defense base in a formerly U.S.-controlled northern Syrian stronghold, the state-run TASS news agency [reported](#) Thursday.

U.S. troops [left](#) the city of Qamishli, the administrative center of the self-proclaimed Kurdish autonomy in northern Syria, last month as Turkey launched an assault against Kurdish forces. Russia and Turkey later [clinched](#) a deal pushing the Kurdish YPG fighters south of the frontline and launched joint patrols of the area.

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The Russian base — called an aviation commandant's office — will allow helicopters to expand their area of patrols, its chief Timur Khodzhayev was [cited](#) as saying by the state-run TASS news agency.

Khodzhayev said the commandant's office will ensure "uninterrupted flights, safety of helicopters and protection and defense of the territory," which expands to the Hasaka province on the Turkish-Iraqi border.

The base includes air defense systems and a flight control room, as well as pre-flight training and medical facilities, Khodzhayev added.

"Military police, special equipment, vehicles and fuel to ensure uninterrupted flights have also been allocated," he was quoted as saying.

Footage published by the Russian Defense Ministry-run Zvezda news channel shows the first group of helicopters arriving in Qamishli.

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A Pantsir surface-to-air weapon protected the airspace over Qamishli's civilian airport as an Mi-8 gunship and transport helicopter landed there, it [reported](#). Two Mi-35 attack helicopters provided air support.

"It's a historic moment, our aviation group will be permanently active at the Qamishli airport as of today," a Zvezda reporter said.

Russia and Turkey have carried out five joint patrols in northeast Syria since announcing the agreement to remove the Kurdish YPG militia from the area. Ankara [sees](#) YPG as terrorists linked to a Kurdish separatist movement within Turkey.

Syrian government forces moved back into border regions held by Kurdish fighters as a result of the Russian-Turkish deal.

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