

Russia, Syria Hold First Joint Naval Drills

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More than 2,000 Russian and Syrian troops and around 10 vessels and boats took part in the drills. **Lev Fedoseyev / TASS**

Russia and Syria have held their first joint naval drills near Russia's naval facility in the eastern Mediterranean, the Russian Defense Ministry's Zvezda news channel <u>reported</u> Tuesday.

Russia has waged an air and sea campaign in support of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad since 2015, four years after Moscow's Middle East ally was thrown into civil war. Russia has maintained the Tartus military facility since 1971 and recently moved to expand its foothold there until 2092.

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More than 2,000 Russian and Syrian troops and around 10 vessels and boats took part in the drills at Tartus, Zvezda reported. Russian aircraft were also present.

They repelled a drone attack, an attack on a checkpoint and an attack by "scuba diving saboteurs," according to the report and video footage.

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The Russian and Syrian navies' tactical groups performed artillery fire and conducted join maneuvering at sea, Rear Adm. Alexander Yuldashev was <u>quoted</u> by Interfax as saying.

"On shore, the security and defense units will combat unmanned aerial vehicles [and] illegal armed groups," Yuldashev added.

Russia also maintains an air base in Syria, which it <u>plans to lease</u> from Damascus until at least 2066.

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