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Russia Bolsters Military Police Presence in Northern Syria Amid Fighting Flare-Up

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Russia, a close ally of the Syrian government in Damascus, maintains a military presence in northeastern Syria. **Ghaith Alsayed / AP / TASS**

Russia has sent additional military police units to the Raqqa province of northern Syria amid a flare-up in fighting between rebel groups there, the Kommersant business daily reported Monday, citing a top Russian official in Syria.

Russia, a close ally of the Syrian government in Damascus, maintains a military presence in northeastern Syria, one of the last rebel holdouts in the country's decade-long civil war, along with Turkey, which supports rebel factions. Shelling between Turkish-backed rebel groups and the opposition Syrian Democratic Forces broke out in the town of Ayn Issa this month, prompting mass civilian displacement and criticism of Russia's inaction.

Rear Admiral Vyacheslav Sytnik, deputy head of the Russian Center for the Reconciliation of Warring Parties in Syria, said that additional Russian military police units were deployed to Ayn Issa in an effort to stabilize the fighting.

“Additional units of the Russian military police have arrived in the Ayn Issa area [of the Raqqa province] to step up efforts to stabilize the situation. We call on the parties conducting mutual shelling to stop the escalation,” Kommersant cited Sytnik as saying in a statement.

Russia is in agreement with Turkey on the deployment of Russian-Syrian posts, Sytnik added.

Earlier this month, Moscow, Damascus and the Syrian Democratic Forces agreed to establish three joint posts in the Raqqa province.

Kommersant cited Arab media reports as saying that the Russian military hopes to convince the Syrian Democratic Forces to transfer part of the areas they control to Damascus as Ankara strengthens its positions on Syrian territory.

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