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Russia Slams 'Outrageous' U.S. Airstrikes in Syria

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Russia has maintained a military presence in Syria since 2015, when the Syrian government asked Moscow to assist in its fight against rebels and extremist groups. **Delil Souleiman/ AFP**

Russian officials have condemned the United States' airstrikes in Syria, accusing Washington of an "outrageous" violation of the country's territorial integrity on Friday.

U.S. President Joe Biden directed airstrikes overnight against infrastructure facilities in eastern Syria belonging to what the Pentagon said were Iran-backed militant groups, killing at least 22 fighters. In its statement, the Pentagon added that the airstrikes were a response to recent attacks on U.S. and coalition forces in Iraq.

"We strongly condemn such actions and call for Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity to be unconditionally respected," Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told reporters.

Washington's move was "extremely outrageous," Senator Sergei Tsekov, a member of the upper-house Federation Council's foreign affairs committee, told the RBC news website.

“Now, if someone struck a blow on U.S. territory, what would that look like? They strike at the territory of a sovereign republic without the consent of Syrian leadership, ”he said.

Senator Vladimir Dzhabarov, first deputy chairman of the Federation Council’s foreign affairs committee, told RBC that the U.S. strikes might have been justified, despite not being asked to do so by Damascus, if they had been targeting terrorist groups. However, they struck at territory where Syrian militias supported by Iran were allegedly located.

Dzhabarov added that “the Americans need a small, minor, but victorious war far from American borders in order to divert the attention of their people from problems that have accumulated there.”

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said the U.S. warned Russia about the airstrike just minutes before it happened.

"This sort of warning — when strikes are already underway — gives (us) nothing," Lavrov said.

The Kremlin, meanwhile, said it was “closely monitoring” the situation in Syria, according to RBC.

Last week, Russia’s presidential envoy to Syria told the state-run TASS news agency that the U.S. has yet to make a specific offer for cooperating with Russia in Syria.

Russia has maintained a military presence in Syria since 2015, when the Syrian government asked Moscow to assist in its fight against rebels and extremist groups.

AFP contributed reporting.

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