

Russia Not Evacuating Key Air, Naval Bases in Syria – FT

December 11, 2024



The Hmeimim Air Base in Syria's Latakia governorate. **Planet Labs / AFP**

There are no signs that Russia is withdrawing military assets from its main air and naval bases in Syria after the overthrow of Moscow ally Bashar al-Assad by Islamist-led rebels, the Financial Times [reported](#) Wednesday, citing satellite imagery and expert commentary.

“If an evacuation was happening, we would know,” Dara Massicot, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, was quoted as saying.

Russia is reportedly pulling back from smaller outposts in Syria while maintaining a presence at the Tartus naval facility and the Hmeimim air base, according to FT. CNN Turk [reported](#) Sunday that Russian troops had requested Turkey’s support for their safe exit from areas that do not include Tartus or Hmeimim.

Satellite images and transponder traffic showed heavy-lift aircraft arriving and departing Hmeimim over the past week, but analysts quoted by FT said their tempo is “not consistent with a hurried departure.”

Similarly, FT said no ships that would enable a maritime evacuation of equipment or personnel were seen arriving in Tartus. Meanwhile, it reported that the five vessels stationed there were holding positions about 10 kilometers (6.2 miles) offshore outside the range of mortar fire.

“The Russians don’t want them to get hit, so they pull them out to loiter at sea,” said Massicot.

Related article: [Russia Seeking Turkish Help Evacuating Soldiers From Syria – Reports](#)

Losing Tartus and Hmeimim would cost Russia both a permanent presence in the Mediterranean and a stop-off point for operations in Africa, where Moscow has military and economic interests.

The Kremlin has said the future of both bases was subject to discussions with Syria’s new leadership after Russian news agencies cited anonymous sources saying that the rebels had guaranteed their security.

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