

Moscow Says 'Part' of Its Diplomatic Personnel in Syria Evacuated By Plane

By [AFP](#)

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DSKC_MID_Russia / Telegram

Russia's Foreign Ministry said it had evacuated some of its diplomatic staff from Syria on Sunday, a week after the fall of Bashar al-Assad.

"On December 15, the withdrawal of part of the personnel of the Russian [diplomatic] representation in Damascus was carried out by a special flight of the Russian Air Force from the Khmeimim airbase" in Syria, the ministry's crisis situations department said on Telegram.

The ministry said the flight arrived at an airport near Moscow without specifying how many people were aboard.

The flight also carried members from the diplomatic missions of Belarus, North Korea and Abkhazia, a Moscow-backed separatist region of Georgia, the department said.

"The Russian Embassy in Damascus continues to function," said the press release published on Telegram.

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Following an 11-day offensive, a rebel coalition dominated by the Islamist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) overthrew al-Assad, who fled to Russia along with his family.

His fall from power was a serious setback for Moscow, which was along with Iran the main ally of the former Syrian president and which had intervened militarily in Syria since 2015.

The fate of Russia's two military bases in Syria — the Tartus naval base and the Hmeimim military airfield — is now uncertain.

The sites are key to Russia maintaining its influence in the Middle East, in the Mediterranean basin and as far as Africa.

On Wednesday, a Kremlin spokesperson said Moscow was in contact with the new authorities in Syria regarding the bases' future.

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