
PUTIN: RUSSIA COULD REDEPLOY FORCES IN SYRIA WITHIN HOURS IF NEEDED

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Russia could redeploy its forces in Syria in a few hours, Vladimir Putin has said, three days after his surprise announcement that the countrys military involvement in Syrias civil war would be wound down.

Of course, if required Russia will be ready in just a few hours to increase its forces in the region to a size that is adequate to meet the situation and use our full arsenal of options, the Russian president said at a ceremony in the Kremlin to honour pilots who served in the five-and-a-half month mission.

We dont want to do that, military escalation is not our preferred route, and so we are hoping that all sides will show common sense and that both the authorities and the opposition will adhere to the peace process.

Putin said on Monday that, despite the announced pullout, Moscow would keep active the airbase near the Syrian city of Latakia, from which it has run its bombing raids. He added on Thursday that the advanced S-400 missile defence system would be kept in Syria.

During Thursdays Kremlin ceremony, Putin said the Russian military had spent around 33bn roubles (£336m) on the mission in Syria, describing the outlay as fully justified and necessary. He also announced that four servicemen had died during the operation.

Im sure that we will see new and serious successes in the near future, Putin told the audience. In particular, he said he hoped that Palmyra would soon fall to forces loyal to the Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad. Russian forces would continue to carry out airstrikes against Islamic State, al-Nusra Front and other terrorist groups, he added, and would keep providing a wide range of aid to Syrian government forces.

Russia has frequently stated that its goal in Syria is to eliminate terror groups and cripple Russian

jihadis who have travelled to Syria to fight. However, the main goal appeared to be shoring up the Assad regime, with many of the Russian bombing raids carried out against more moderate groups fighting the Syrian army. Moscow was also determined to have a voice in the international discussion on the future of Syria. Putin on Thursday claimed Assad, a longstanding Russian ally, had shown a sincere desire to achieve peace.

In an interview with the Komsomolskaya Pravda newspaper, Viktor Bondarev, the commander in chief of the Russian air force, said about 700 Russian servicemen would receive some kind of medal for their participation in the Syria mission. He declined to say how many planes had returned from the Middle East and how many would remain.

Kaynak/Source: