
RUSSIA BARRED FROM FURTHER USE OF IRAN MILITARY BASE

-

24.08.2016

DW, 23 August 2016

Russian fighter jets had temporary permission to fly missions over Syria from Iran. Then Iran's parliament said no. The relationship between Iran and Russia has always lacked trust.

Foreign forces were based in Iran for the first time since World War II. Images of Russian planes launching for Syria from the Hamadan airbase in northwestern Iran contradicted the claims of independence from outside influence that Iran's rulers have taken pains to maintain since the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

The foreign use of military installations is forbidden by Iran's constitution. On Tuesday, legislative chairman Ali Larijani accused Defense Minister Hossein Dehghan of "disrespecting parliament." A week earlier, Dehghan had refused to respond to a request from 20 MPs to detail the military relationship with Russia. "This is not a matter for parliament," he wrote.

Three days later, the defense minister made the surprising announcement that the military cooperation was over.

Dehghan accused Russian state television of "boasting" and an "unbecoming attitude" regarding public disclosure of the cooperation. Russia wanted to show its strength, he said: "This was not agreed to."

"Parliament, the public, the media, the experts: No one knows exactly what was arranged with Russia," Sadegh Zibakalam, a political scientist from the University of Tehran, told DW. "We also don't know what we want in Syria."

The Omran effect

Foreign policy decisions are made under the authority of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei and are rarely discussed in public. However, the presence of Russian fighter jets in Iran was cause for concern both inside and outside the country.

Shortly after the agreement with Russia was disclosed, a video surfaced of Omran, a 5-year-old badly wounded in Aleppo in a Russian sortie. Iranian media did not explicitly connect that image with those of Russian jets launching from Iranian soil, but they did sharply criticize the attack on civilians. Additional pressure came from the United States. Russia may have violated UN Security Council Resolution 2231, State Department spokesman Mark Toner said. The resolution forbids the sale, delivery or transfer of fighter jets to Iran.

Professor Zibakalam is skeptical of Iran's and Russia's mutual interests in Syria. The Iranians want to work with President Bashar al-Assad to bolster their common allies in the Arab world. Russia wants to check US influence in the region.

"I presume the goal of this cooperation was to directly provoke the US," Zibakalam said. "Certain Iranian institutions, especially the Revolutionary Guard, are concerned about a possible warming of relations between Iran and the US following the nuclear deal. Defense Minister Dehghan is a member of the Revolutionary Guard." Iran's rulers distrust Russia. "Russia has profited - both strategically and economically - the most from the tense relations between Iran and the West in the four decades since the revolution," he added. "At the same time, Russia has agreed to every Security Council resolution against Iran, despite its veto power."

Iran has no interest in open conflict with Russia. Following Dehghan's harsh words, Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Ghasemi tried to smooth things over, saying Iran had limited Russia's access to the airbase on Russia's request. "It was a specifically authorized mission, which is for now over," Ghasemi said. He didn't rule out future Russian missions in Syria from Iranian territory should the "situation in the region" so determine.

Kaynak/Source: