
RUSSIA WANTS TO BOOST AIR FORCE PRESENCE IN TAJIKISTAN

28.12.2016

Reuters, 27 Dec 2016

Russia wants to expand its air force deployment to Tajikistan and is in talks with Dushanbe for joint use of an air base in the former Soviet republic, the Russian ambassador to Dushanbe said on Tuesday.

Russia already has an infantry base near Dushanbe with up to 7,000 troops stationed there and last year deployed four attack and transport helicopters to a nearby Ayni air base.

Ambassador Igor Lyakin-Frolov told reporters the Russian and Tajik governments were in talks over an agreement that would allow Russia joint use of the Ayni base and to expand its presence there.

Tajikistan, which borders Afghanistan, is seen by Russia and the West as a possible conduit for Islamist militants. The Ferghana Valley, a fertile and densely populated strip of land that straddles Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, is considered to be the heart of Islamist militancy in Central Asia, whose main target is Russia.

Moscow last year launched a campaign of air strikes in Syria to help President Bashar al-Assad take on various rebel groups as well as the Islamic State militant group.

In November Russia's security service said it had arrested 10 people from Central Asia with links to Islamic State who planned to carry out attacks with firearms and explosives in Moscow and St Petersburg.

Kaynak/Source: