## Operation Aleppo

Back Ground Material Related to Chapters 3, 4, 5. 6 and 8 On Russian operations in Syria 2015-16

To Buy Operation Aleppo in paperback or Kindle e-book, visit:

www.amazon.co.uk or www.amazon.com (then search Operation Aleppo by Tim Ripley

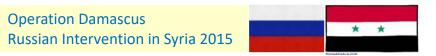
# Operation Damascus

Russian Intervention in Syria - 2015



Version: Updated 26<sup>th</sup> November 2015

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Russia's Objective in Syria

Russian President Vladimir Putin has set the objective of the Russian intervention as:

Defeating "terrorism" in Syria by restoring the legitimate government's (of President Bashar al Assad) control of the country's territory.

Putin laid out his aims at the UN General Assembly on 28<sup>th</sup> September and then to the Russian State Duma (parliament) on 30<sup>th</sup> September when it approved the intervention

Putin told the UNGA that the world should come together to fight Islamic State in the same way as it joined forces to fight Hitler in the Second World War. He insisted that defeat of Isis and other "terrorists" can only be achieved by support of the "legitimate government" of Syria.

Putin said the Assad regime was "fighting valiantly against terror face to face in Syria". Up to now the Syrian forces had been struggling almost alone, said Putin.



1st October 2015
Russian Foreign Minister
Sergey Lavrov defined
"terrorist groups" as:
"If it looks like a terrorist, if it acts like a terrorist, if it walks like a terrorist, if it fights like a terrorist, it's a terrorist, right?"



Operation Damascus Russian Intervention in Syria 2015



# Putin Makes his Move -Strategic Preparation

### May 2015

ISIS take Palmyra airbase and threaten regime control of strategic gas fields and the distribution pipe network that supplies Damascus

#### June 2015

During build up to Iran-US nuclear agreement, Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei meet Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov to discuss worsening situation in Syria

### July 2015

Syrian Army Offensives in Hama Province fails to dislodge rebel gains

Bashar al Assad requests additional military assistance from Russia and Iran

Russian President Vladimir Putin meets with envoy from Iranian Supreme Leader to discuss situation and agree to launch intervention

Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps Quds Force Commander, Major General Qassem Soleimani, dispatched to Moscow on 21st July to meet Russian defence minister and senior Russian generals to plan operation

### August 2015

Plan agreed and first Russian supply ships start sailing from Russian Black Sea Fleet ports with first material to begin building airbase and other logistic facilities in Syria

### September 2015

Russian air force opens "air-bridge" to Lakatia airbase in north west Syria and deployment of Russian air group begins 28<sup>th</sup> September – Putin attends UN General Assembly in New York and meets US President Barack Obama 30<sup>th</sup> September -Russia offensive air strikes begin







## Sources and Methods

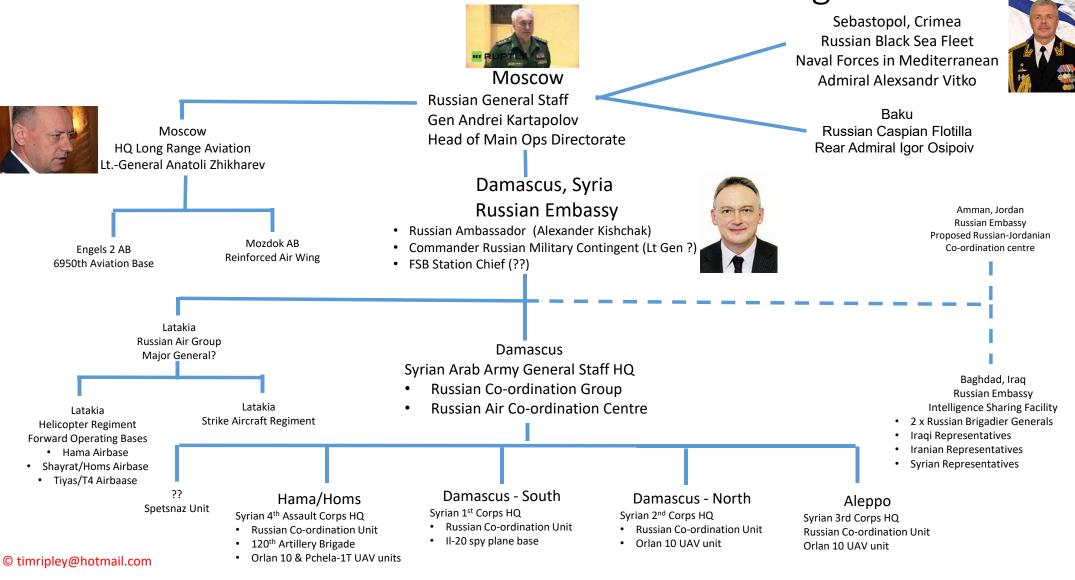
This Briefing has been compiled from multiple sources, including:

- 1. Open source web-based tracking of aircraft and ships
- 2. Analysis of news media still and video imagery
- 3. Analysis of social media still and video imagery from Syria, Turkey and Russia
- 4. Syrian and Russian government news products
- 5. Google Earth and other commercial satellite imagery



**QUESTION MORE** 

## Russian Chain of Command and Strategic Links





Su-34 Strike Bomber 4 deployed KAB-500S GLONASS-guided bomb

Su-25SM/UB Attack Jet 960<sup>th</sup> Attack Aviation Regiment 12 deployed Unguided bombs and rockets

Su-30SM Fighter Jet 120<sup>th</sup> Aviation Regiment 4 deployed Air-to-Air Missiles

Su-24M Strike bomber 6980<sup>th</sup> Guards Air Base 12 deployed Laser guided/Unguided bombs

II-76 transport Aircraft2 deployedIntra-theatre Transport



2 dep Intra-

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# Russian Air Group in Syria – November 2015

Offensive Operations Begin 30<sup>th</sup> September

Daily strike sortie rate: 30-50 (by Air Group in Syria)

25 (by aircraft based in Russia

Targets hit per day: 50 to 80 during October

125+ in November



Mi-17AMShT Armed Utility 562<sup>nd</sup> Army Aviation Base Helicopter 4 deployed Rockets and guns

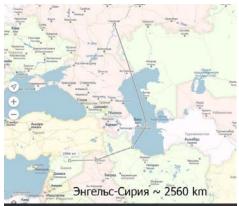
Mi-24P Attack Helicopter 562<sup>nd</sup> Army Aviation Base 12 deployed Anti-Tank Guided Missiles Rockets and guns

Russian Intervention in Syria 2015



## Russia-based Strike Aircraft committed to Operations in Syria

On 17<sup>th</sup> November 2015 Russian launched a long bomber strike on Syria



Route from **Engels Airbase** to Syria by Tu-95 and Tu-160s



6 x Tu-95 Bombers Armed with Kh-55 cruise missiles

5 x Tu-160 Bombers Armed with Kh-55 cruise missiles

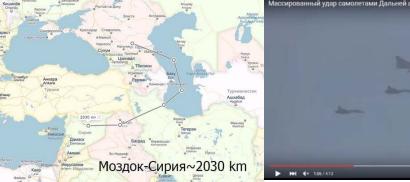


Route from Mozdok

Tu-22M3 bombers and

Airbase to Syria by

12 x Tu-22M3 bombers armed with "iron" bombs and Kh-55 cruise missiles and 4 x Su-27SM strike jets with laser guided bombs



Su-27SM

Route from Kola to Syria by 2 x Tu-160 bombers on 20th November

### From 17<sup>th</sup> November

The Russian Air Force committed to launching 34 aircraft on each day into Syria from Mozdok and Engels airbases. These are a mix of 25 Tu-22M3s, Tu-95, Tu-160s bombers, as well as 4 x Su-27SM and 8 x Su-34 strike jets. These aircraft participated in four days of strikes between 17-20<sup>th</sup> November. Then the bomber operations paused

## Russian Group of Forces in Syria – November 2015

The main elements of the Russian Group of Forces in Syria, include

- Command Group and co-ordination teams (based in Russian Embassy in Damascus and with Syrian Arab Army Headquarters in Damascus, Homs, Hama and Aleppo)
- Air Group (with 4 x Su-34, 4 x Su-30SM, 12 x Su-24 and 12 x Su-25 combat aircraft)
- Helicopter Group (12 x Mi-24 attack, 4 x Mi-17 utility helicopters)
- Airlift Contingent (An-124, Il-76 and Tu-154 aircraft)
- Air Base Protection Force (army troops from 74<sup>th</sup> Separate Motorised Rifle Regiment with 7 x T-90 tanks, 35 x BTR armoured troop carriers)
- Tartus Port Protection Force (Guard troops drawn from 810 Separate Naval Infantry Brigade)
- S-400 Air Defence Regiment (based at Latakia, from 25<sup>th</sup> November)
- Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Units (1 x Pchela-1T UAV, 3 x Orlan 10 UAV)
- 120<sup>th</sup> Guards Artillery Brigade (6-12 x D30 122mm howitzers, 6+ x2A65 Msta-B 152-mm, ?x Smersh MLRS, ? x TOS-1A)
- Logistic Support Group (operating ammunition and fuel stores)
- Black Sea Fleet contingent in Eastern Mediterranean (providing logistic sealift and air defence "umbrella" over Latakia and Tartus regions)
- Caspian Sea Flotilla (cruise missile strike support)

### TOTAL PERSONNEL COMMITTED

In Syria: 2,500 air force, 3,000 naval infantry and army personnel. Total 5,500+

(this up by 2,000 since the start of the operation in September)

In Support: Crews of navy vessels, 3,000. Air force & logistics, 5,000

TOTAL: 13,000+ in Syria and in support







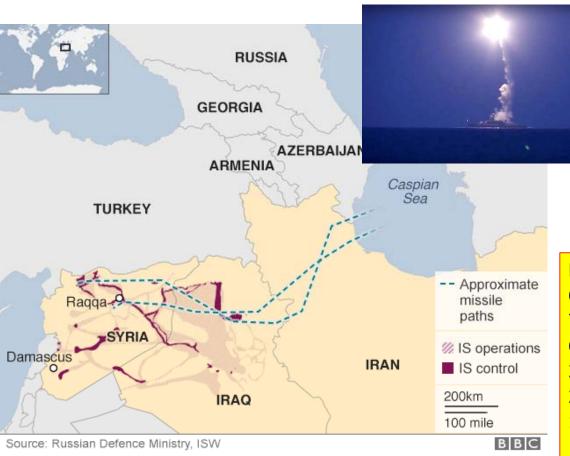




Operation Damascus Russian Intervention in Syria 2015



Russian Naval Forces in Syria Theatre, October 2015



Russian Navy
Caspian Sea Flotilla
7th October 2015
Cruise Missile Strike
26 x 3M-14T Kaliber NK
20th November 2015
18 x 3M-14T Kaliber NK

### Caspian Sea Flotilla

Tatarstan	frigate
Dagestan	frigate
Astrakhan	corvette
Volgodonsk	corvette
Mahachkala	corvette
Grad Sviyazhsk	corvette
Uglich	corvette
Veliky Ustyug	corvette
MAK-160	corvette

Operation Damascus Russian Intervention in Syria 2015

3M-14T Kaliber NK



Russian Naval Forces in Syria Theatre, November 2015



Smetlivy Kashin Class Guided Missile Destroyer

Ladnyy Krivak Class Frigate



Pytlivyy Krivak Class Frigate



Donuzlav Survey Ship

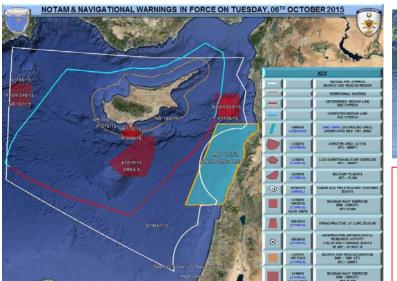


Nanuchka-III **Guided Missile** Corvette Mirazh



Moskva Slava Class Guided Missile Cruiser 24th November deployed to Syrian coast to provide air defence coverage of Russian air operations over Syria

Black Sea Fleet deployed Naval Force off Syria in last week of September to conduct missile firing exercise and air defence "umbrella" for forces ashore at Latakia and Tartus





Rostov-on-Don Kilo class diesel Submarine (3M-14T Kaliber NK capable) Reportedly participated in 17<sup>th</sup> November mass missile strike on Syria. Not confirmed by Russian MOD.

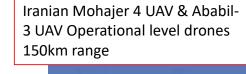
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## Russian/Iranian Intelligence Gathering Assets in Syria Theatre



Russian Orlan 10 Tactical UAV Up to 140km range



Iranian UAV base inside Lebanon Be'eka Valley

Russian Auxiliary Intelligence Gathering Ship Kildin



Russian Yakovlev Pchela-1T Tactical UAV 60km range

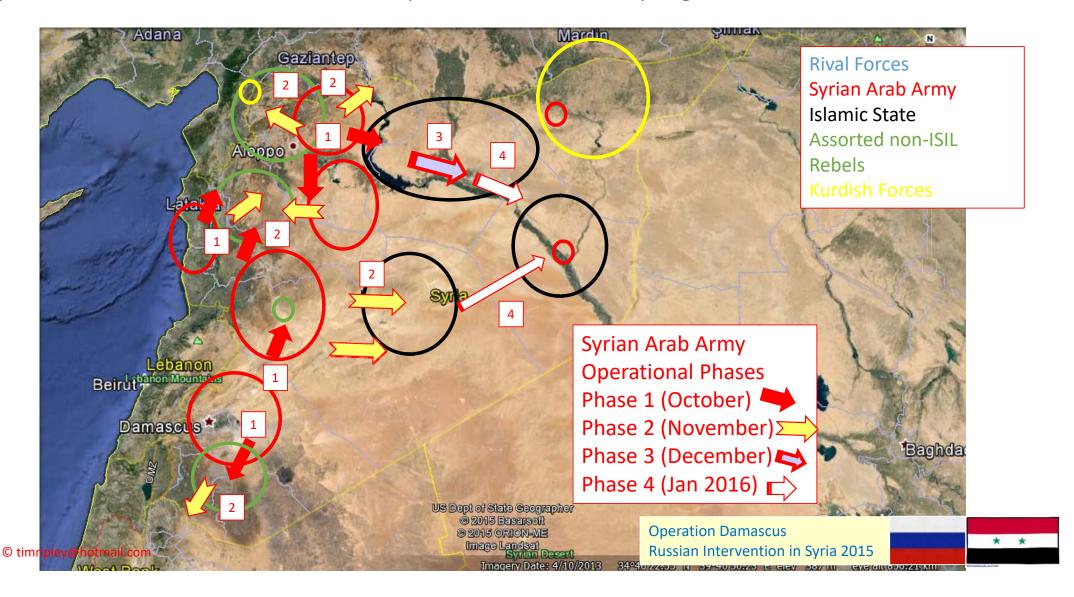
Russian II-20 Signals intelligence gathering aircraft

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## Operation Damascus – Russian/Syrian/Iranian Campaign Plan



# Campaign Progress - 1

### Week 1: 30 Sept to 6 Oct

- Russian air strikes against fixed targets
- Syrian artillery strikes on rebel positions

### Week 2: 7 Oct to 14 Oct

- Russian cruise missile strikes on north west Syria
- Low level Russian Mi-24 attack helicopter strikes on Shal al Ghab and Hama front line
- Syrian forces penetrate 5-6 km across Shal al Ghab and on Hama frontline

#### Week 3: 15 Oct to 22 Oct

- Syrian forces advance on Shal al Ghab and Rastan pocket, making limited gains
- Syrian troops push 6km south and 10km east from Aleppo
- Syrian troops, backed by Russian airstrikes in first battles against ISIS forces to east of Aleppo in attempt to break siege of Kweires airbase.
- President Assad travels to Moscow to meet President Putin

### Week 4: 23 to 29 Oct

- Syrian forces continue to advance east and south of Aleppo
- ISIS fighters put in intense resistance, including widespread use of IEDs.

  Counter-attack south of Aleppo to cut Syrian Army's only supply route to Hama
- Intense fighting in Shal al Ghab, and on Homs and Hama fronts, including widespread use of airpower and artillery









# Campaign Progress - 2

### Week 5: 30 Oct to 5 Nov

- Syrian forces re-open supply route to Aleppo
- Syrian and Hizbullah forces capture 10 villages and swing west to threaten main Idlib-Aleppo highway
- Rebel forces counter-attack south of Idlib toward Morek
- Intense fighting in northern mountains of Latakia province
- Russians establish Mi-24 helicopter base at Tiyas and launch intensified air offensive against Palmyra to support SAA advance
- Russian air force airlifts Christian militia from NE Syria to fight on Palmyra front
- ISIS plant bomb on Russian airliner over Sinai

#### Week 6: 5 Nov to 12 Nov

- Syrian and Hizbullah forces continue advance to south of Aleppo and then begins to swing west to drive towards Idlib
- Syrian troop with Russian Mi-24 support begin offensive against Palmyra
- Rebel forces continue local offensives in north Hama, taking back a number of villages
- Kweires Airbase relieved 11<sup>th</sup> November

### Week 7: 12 Nov to 19 Nov

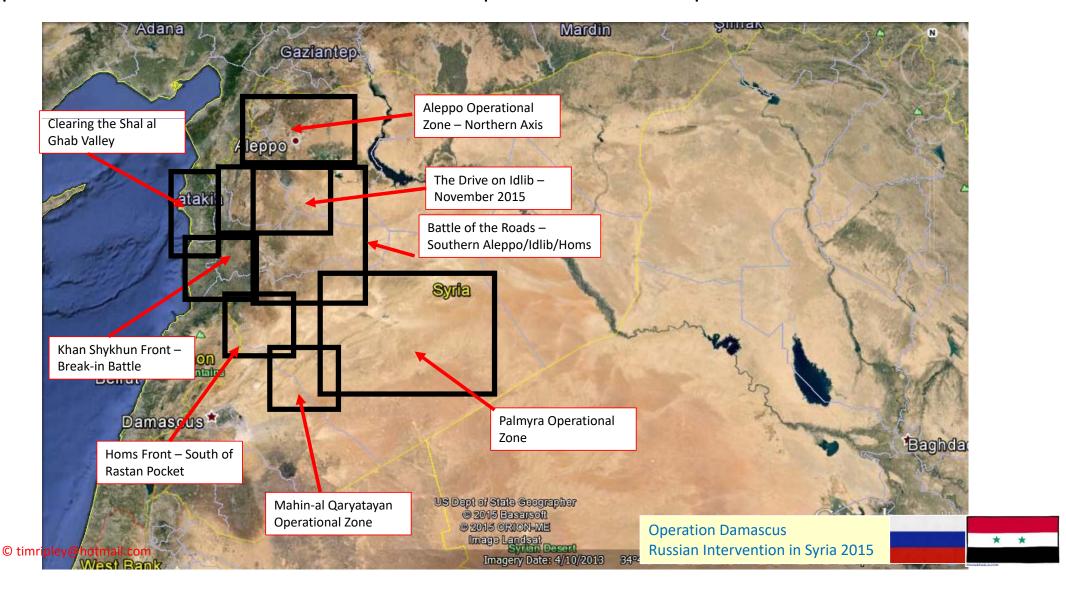
- Russia formally declares downing of airliner over ISIS attack to be terrorist bomb
- 30+ Russia bombers launch strike on Syria, for four days.
- Further Russian ship-launched cruise missile strikes
- Syrian troops continue offensives against ISIS east of Aleppo, around Palmyra and at Mehin.
- Russian artillery joins battle at Mehin

### **Week 8: 19 Nov to 26 Nov**

- Russian Bombers fly around British to attack Syria
- Syrian troops take Mahin from ISIS and advance from Kweires to cut Mare Line
- Heavy fighting in north Latakia between Syrian and rebel fighters
- Russian Su-24 shot down by Turkish F-16, pilot killed. Navigator rescued by CSAR
- Russian deploys S-400 air defence system to Latakia



## Operation Damascus – Detailed Operational Maps

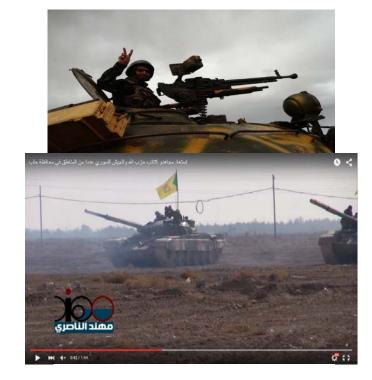


# Syria Main Offensive Effort

### **October-November 2015**

### The Drive on Idlib

- This is aimed at liquidating the main enclave held by non-ISIS rebel groups
- Involves elite 4<sup>th</sup> Mechanised Division, which was redeployed from Damascus for operation
- Allegedly commanded by Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Major General Qassem Suleimani
- Significant Lebanese and Iraqi Hizbullah support, including T-72 tank units
- A high % of Russian Air Force support
- During October, the offensive pushed 25km south of Aleppo
- Since start of November, offensive has broaden and is now taking place across 10km front aimed at cutting Idlib-Aleppo Highway, before heading to Idlib
- 14-15<sup>th</sup> November, Offensive reaches Idlib-Aleppo and paused.
- Air strikes and artillery fire continue to hit targets around Idlib in preparation for renewed offensive. The liberation of two Shia enclaves north of Edlib will be the first objective.
- In mid November, Rebel forces mounted counter-attacks in southern flank of Syrian troops.





# Secondary and supporting Syrian Offensives

### **Aleppo Operational Zone – Northern Axis**

- This is aimed at relieving Kweires airbase and breaking an ISIS siege
- Kweires airbase relieved 11<sup>th</sup> November
- Exploitation operations to north towards al Bab and eastwards to Dayr Hafer. Both operations aimed at cutting off ISIS from Turkey

### **Clearing the Shal al Ghab Valley**

- This aimed at driving back rebel forces from Latakia province
- Also serves to 'attract and fix' rebel forces from elsewhere in Idlib.

### Palmyra/Mahin/Al Qaryatayn Operational Zone

- This opened in November, probably promoted by ISIS offensive aimed at cutting Homs/Damascus highway
- Offers potential to capture ISIS enclaves of Palmyra and Al Qaryatan and inflict first major psychological defeat on ISIS







## Static and Stalemated Front Line Zones

### Khan Shykhun Front – Break-in Battle

• Was first Syrian major offensive, in early October

### Homs Front – South of Rastan Pocket

• Was second Syrian major offensive, in early October

### Both operations now scaled back and rebel forces have counterattacked

- They ran into heavy resistance from rebels armed with TOW antitank missiles
- They now receive lower % of Russian air support
- These operation have "pulled" rebel fighters away from Aleppo and defence of Idlib



## Syrian-Russian — Assault Tactics in Shal al Ghab



#### 30 Sept - 7 Oct

#### Phase 1 - Preparation

- Fixed wing air strikes on fixed postions
- UAV reconnaissance of rebel firing positions
- Harrassing fire

#### 7 -13 Oct

#### Phase 2 - Suppression

- Tanks and infantry manoeuvre in front of rebel villages to draw fire and make rebels break cover to man defences, exposing them to air attack and ground fire, exposing them to air surveillance by UAV and helicopters
- UAV close reconnaiss ance of rebel positions
- RuAF low level (under 100ft) Mi-24 "stalks" over frontline to hunt down and kill TOW crews, mortar teams and 'technical' gun vehicles, when they break cover
- Direct fire from tanks and ZSU-23-4s

#### 13-16 Oct

#### Phase 2 – Assault

- Tanks lead infantry assault up to edge of villages
- Infantry clear houses and secure villages
- Clean up after battle, collecting weapons, bodies and intelligence
- RT News team invited to film "liberation"

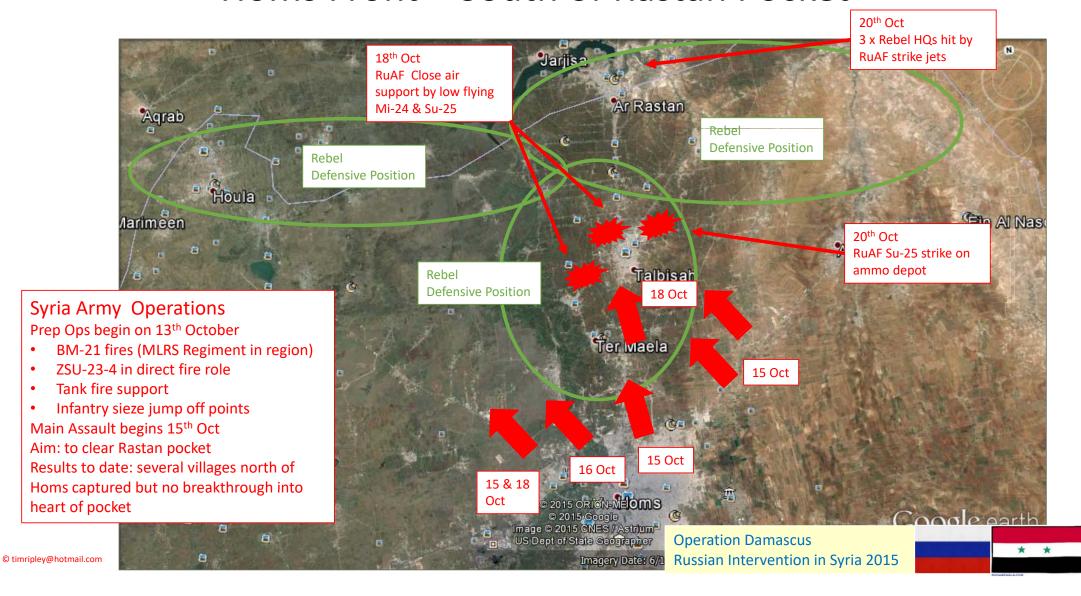
#### ASSESSMENT

- Syrian forces dependent on firepower and air support
- Syrian forces have heavy ammunition (of all types) consumption rates
- Russian helicopters only able to operate at low level due to rebels lack of MANPAD SAM
- To date no Syrian breakthrough of rebel defences
- Syrian/Russian tactics essentially attritional in nature

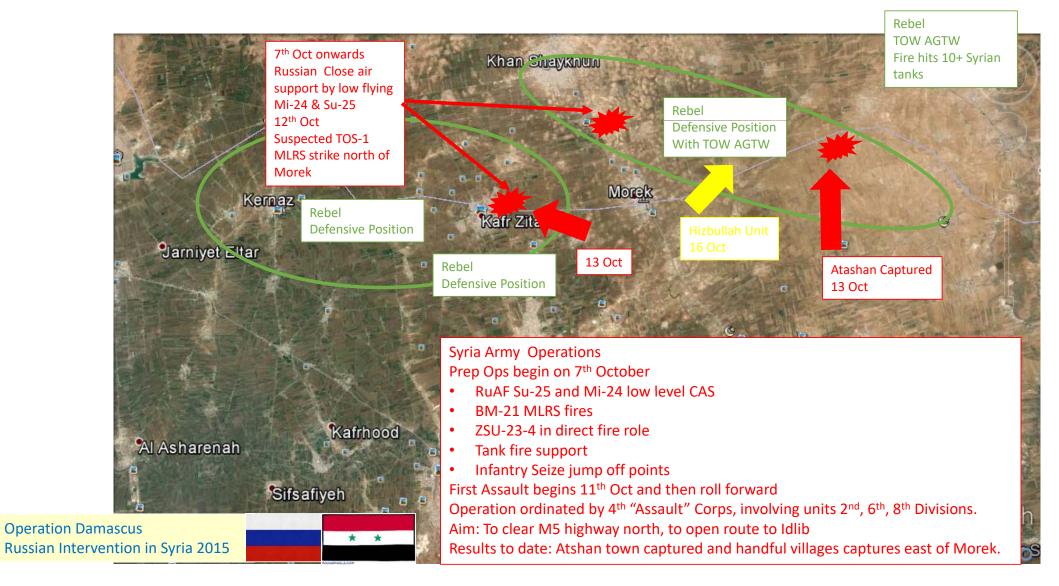
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## Homs Front – South of Rastan Pocket



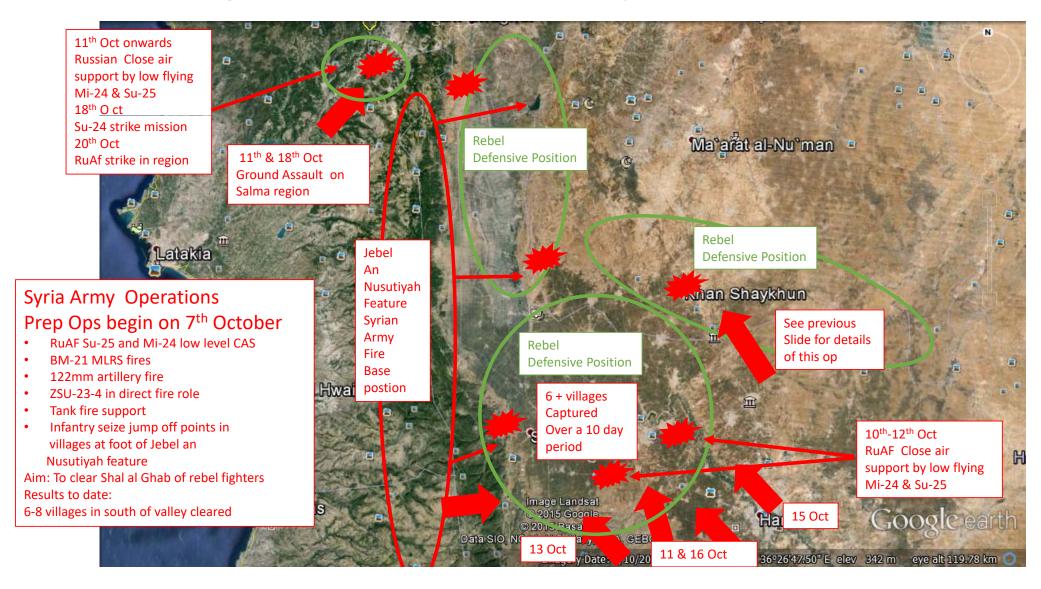
## Khan Shykhun Front — Break-in Battle



# **Operation Damascus**

\* \*

## Clearing the Shal al Ghab Valley



### Syria Army Operations Prep Ops begin on 10<sup>th</sup> October

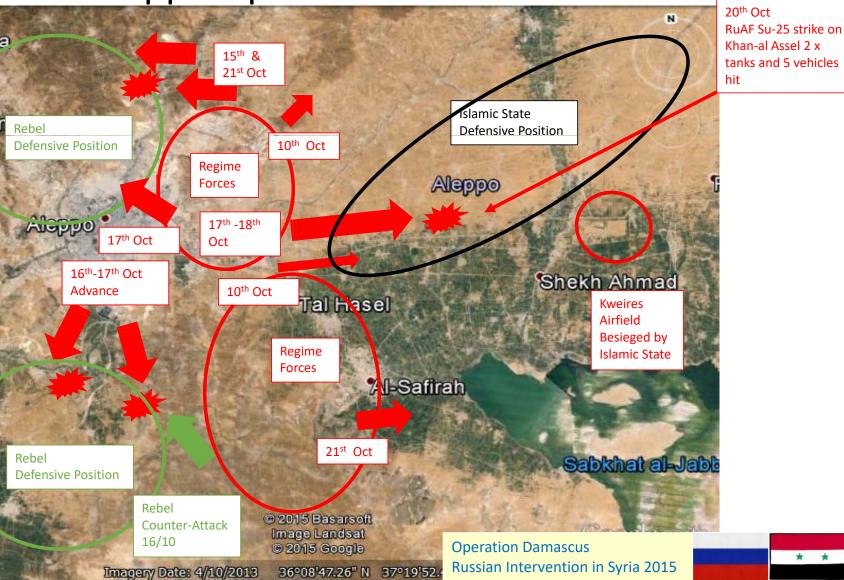
- RuAF Su-25 strike missions
- RuAF Su-24 strike missions
- BM-21 MLRS fires
- 122mm artillery fire
- ZSU-23-4 in direct fire role
- Tank fire support
- Mohajar UAV support
- Iranian and Hizbullah infantry reported around Aleppo

19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> Oct – focus of RuAF air support south of Aleppo but all at medium altitude 20<sup>th</sup> Oct – Syria AF Mi-24 medium altitude strikes

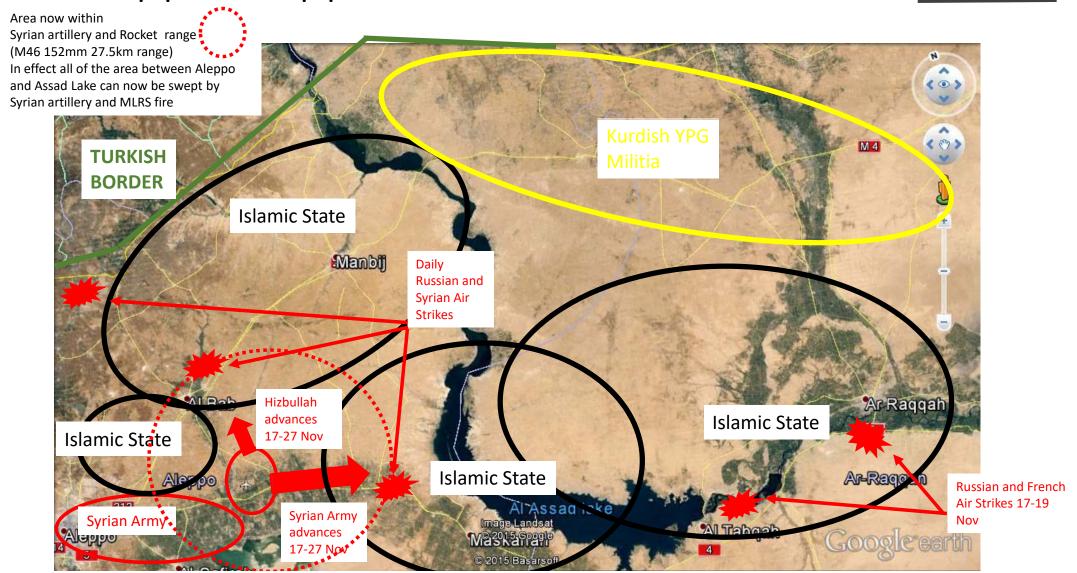
Aim: To break through to Kweires airfield and open road south to Idlib Results to date: Syria Army units advance 6km east and 5-7km south of Aleppo

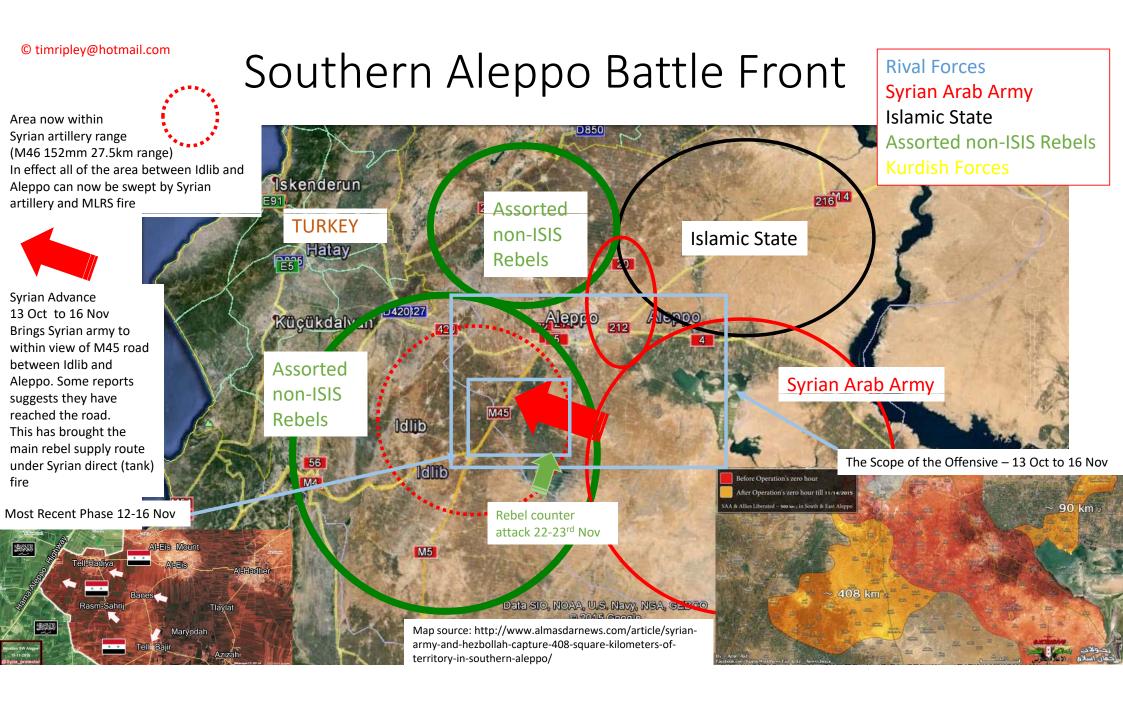
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Aleppo Operational Zone

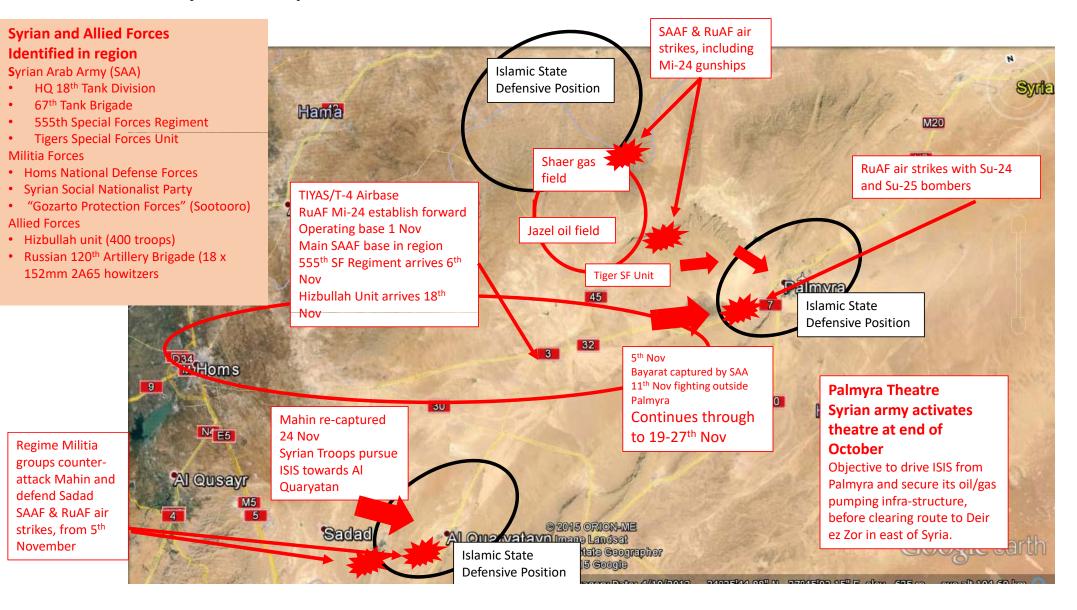


# Aleppo-Raqqa Front, November 2015





# Palmyra Operational Zone

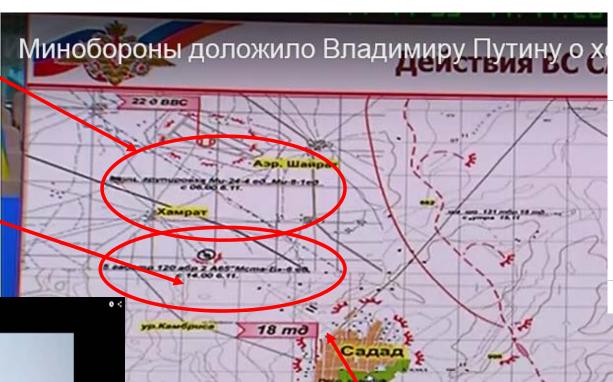


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Shayrat Air Base Russian Air Force 4 x Mi-24 (attack helicopters) and 1 x Mi-8 transport (helicopters) From 6<sup>th</sup> Nov

Russian Army 5th battery of 120th artillery brigade 6 x 152mm 2A65 MSTA-B howitzers, from 6<sup>th</sup> Nov

# Tactical Situation Around Mahin



Video imagery of Mi-24 and
2A65 howitzers in Syrian desert
11<sup>th</sup> November 2015
https://www.youtube.com/wat
ch?v=bSKEbje2S88&feature=yo
utu.be

Sadad HQ Syrian 18<sup>th</sup> Division leading offensive against



images of 2A65s shot in Syrian in Russian ownership earlier in September

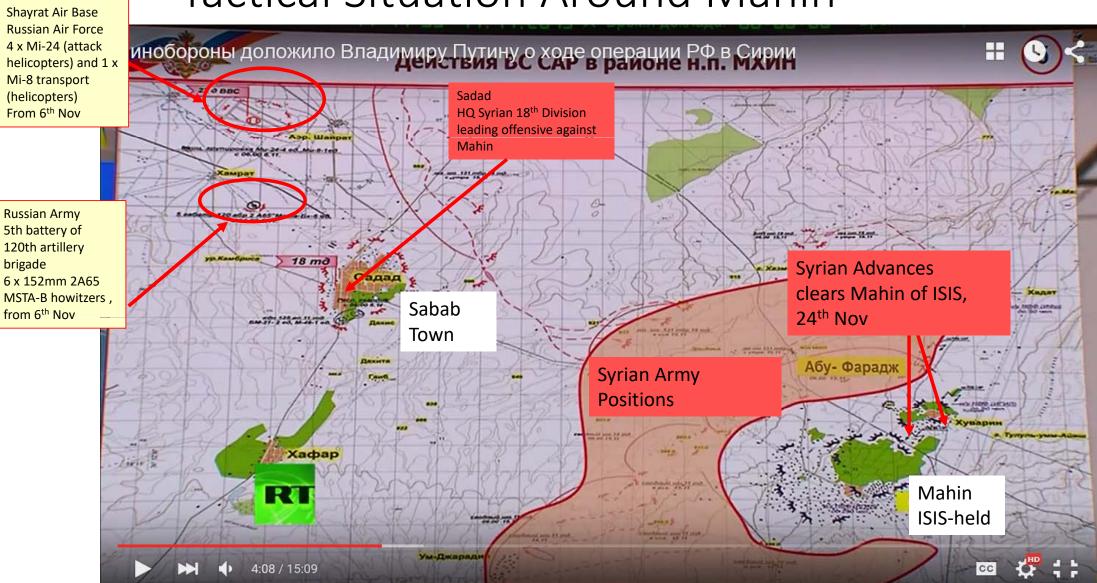
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http://ruslanleviev.livejour nal.com/44827.html?page=

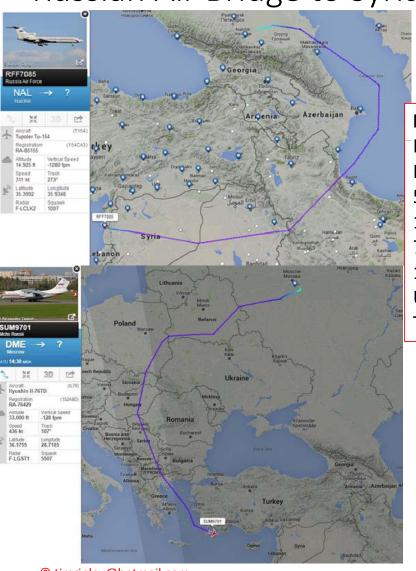
Syrian Army Positions

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Tactical Situation Around Mahin



## Russian Air Bridge to Syria

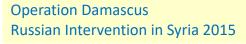


### **Russian Airlift**

Russian airbases to Damascus/Latakia Began early September 2015 58 x An-124 sorties 11 x II-76 sorties 7 x II-62 sorties

18 x Tu-154/214/134 sorties Up to 6<sup>th</sup> November 2015

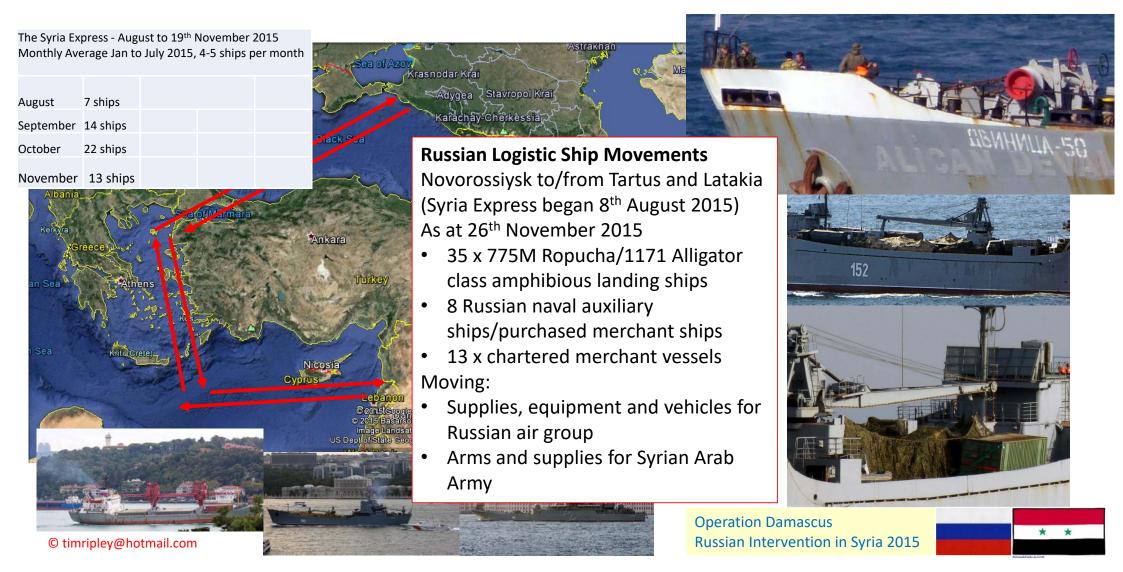
Total 96 airlift sorties





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## Syria Express – Russian Supply Ship Traffic to Syria



# Tehran-Syria Air-Bridge, Sept-Oct 2015

