Russia is attempting to align itself with France in the realm of ISIS terrorist attacks in Paris on November 13. Russia took steps to reassert its freedom of action in Syria as France expanded its anti-ISIS air campaign in response to the Paris attacks. On November 17, Russia launched air strikes against long-range strategic targets for the first time since its intervention in the Syrian Civil War and announced plans to deploy 12 additional fixed-wing attack aircraft. Russia also reportedly launched sea-based cruise missile strikes from both the Mediterranean and the Caspian Sea, although Moscow has not officially confirmed these attacks. Russia framed this escalation as a direct response to ISIS’s likely responsibility for the October 31 downing of Russian Metrojet Flight 9268. Russia’s use of long-range strategic bombers and missiles is, however, likely intended as a show of force for the U.S. and its NATO allies. Russia likely accelerated its announcement about the downed aircraft in order to garner sympathy and greater partnership with France. Russia may now see France’s accelerated air campaign in Syria as an opportunity both to draw a major U.S. ally into its proposed alternative counterterrorism coalition and to degrade NATO. Meanwhile, Russian-backed separatists escalated again in Ukraine, launching attacks with Grad rocket launchers for the first time since a September 1 ceasefire. Russian mobilization through proxies as well as with naval and air assets ranges beyond Syria in an increasingly aggressive pattern.

Syria, 11-12 NOV: Russia’s MoD officially announced that Russia’s longer-range strategic target strikes in the southwestern Deir-ez-Zor Province for the first time since the start of its air campaign in Syria on September 23. Local sources in Deir-ez-Zor Province reported Russian air attacks as early as October 28.

14 NOV: Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov announced that peace negotiations between the Assad regime and the “whole spectrum of opposition forces” in Syria were planned to begin on January 1, 2016. The announcement came directly after the current round of international talks in Vienna on a political solution to the Syrian Civil War.

17 NOV: The lower house of Russia’s parliament issued a statement calling on parliamentarians in Europe, North America, and the Middle East to create an “international anti-terror coalition” against ISIS, Al-Qaeda, Syrian Al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra, and Isaiah groups.

17 NOV: A Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) presentation to President Vladimir Putin indicated that a list of targets from Russia’s 120th Artillery Brigade are deployed near the Assad regime’s Militia base in the Qamishli area of eastern Syria.

17 NOV: Russia announced that 25 long-range Russian strategic bombers launched strikes against targets in Aleppo, Edlib, Ar-Raqaa, and Deir ez-Zor provinces. Russian military chief of staff Gen. Valery Gerasimov announced that Russia planned to incorporate these strategic bombers into the Russian air campaign in Syria in the near future, along with an additional 8 Su-34 and 4 Su-27 attack planes.

17 NOV: An unnamed U.S. official reported that Russia launched “about 20” cruise missiles into Syria from the Caspian Sea.

17 NOV: Russia’s Rostov-on-Don submarine reportedly launched Kalibr cruise missiles from the eastern Mediterranean against targets in Ar-Raqaa, Syria. The attack was carried out under an anonymous source close to the Russian MoD.

18 NOV: Russian long-range strategic bombers carried out a second day of strikes against Ar-Raqaa, Deir ez-Zor, Edlib, and Ar-Raqqi city.

18 NOV: An unidentified Russian defense source reported that Russia had recently deployed the Vizh-Kiral missile system in the Ar-Raqqah city area in order to counter ISIS threat in the region.

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