Russian Military Activity: October 14 - 21, 2015

Russia reached an understanding with the U.S. on air safety guidelines in Syria on October 20, but Russia's aggressive maneuvers against U.S. aircraft and violations of Turkish airspace are likely to continue in order to keep U.S. air power in the Middle East in check. Russia hosted Bashar al-Assad in Moscow on October 20 in order to re-assert Russia's position as Assad's top sponsor. Russia continued efforts to project military force elsewhere in Middle East at the expense of U.S. influence in the region. Russia called for an expansion of technical military cooperation with Egypt and Iraq and established a "hotline" with Israel to deconflict air operations in Syria. Russia is using the sale of attack helicopters in multiple instances as a platform by which to compete with the U.S. for military partnerships. Meanwhile, Russia reinforced its strategic partnership with Iran by agreeing to host a senior military delegation in Moscow in late October. New reports that Cuba has deployed forces to support Russia's campaign in Syria would further underscore the emergence of a Russian coalition in the Middle East that will compete with the U.S. led coalition if confirmed. Russia will likely continue to aggressively confront the U.S. and its allies until the U.S. withdraws from Syria or takes more direct steps to challenge Russia's freedom of action.

Russia also pursued deeper bilateral and multilateral military alliances in the former Soviet Union. Moscow revealed plans to establish a joint "military organization" with Belarus in response to NATO activity in Eastern Europe. Russia signed an agreement with other former Soviet states to form a joint border patrol force, possibly for deployment to the Afghan-Tajik border, which President Vladimir Putin framed as a gateway for terrorists to Afghanistan's counterinsurgency than the presence of U.S. troops. Russia views the Afghan-Tajik border as another front for military competition with the U.S.

1) Cuba. 14 OCT: An unnamed U.S. official reported that Cuban paramilitary and Special Forces had been deployed to Syria, possibly to fight alongside pro-regime forces. The White House and State Department have not confirmed the report.

2) Afghanistan. 15 OCT: Russian presidential envoy to Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov said that "material assistance" would help Kabul conduct a counterinsurgency more than U.S. troops, following a recent statement revealing Moscow's intention to sell Hind attack helicopters to Afghanistan.

3) Israel. 15 OCT: Russia's MoD announced the creation of a "hotline" with the Israeli Air Force to deconflict air operations in Syria.

4) Syria. 15-21 OCT: Russia continued its air campaign in Syria, claiming airstrikes against targets in Hama, Idlib, Latakia, Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, and Deir ez-Zor provinces.

5) Turkey. 16 OCT: Turkish forces downed a Russian-made drone that crossed into Turkish airspace from Syria, according to U.S. and Turkish officials.

6) Iran. 16 OCT: Russia announced that a senior Iranian military delegation would visit Moscow at the end of October to discuss bilateral military cooperation following a meeting between the Russian and Iranian deputy defense ministers in Beijing.

7) Kazakhstan. 16 OCT: President Putin signed an agreement with leaders of other former Soviet republics to form a joint border patrol group for deployment to the Afghan-Tajik border.

8) North Caucasus. 17 OCT: Russian security forces killed four reported militants in Khasavyurtovsky District, Dagestan, northwest of the capital of Makhachkala.

9) Egypt. 19 OCT: Russian ambassador to Egypt Ilya Morgunov met with Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi in Baghdad, where he called for the expansion of bilateral relations including in the realm of intelligence sharing and arms trading.

10) Georgia. 19 OCT: Russian authorities detained 22 suspected members of banned Islamist group Hizb ut-Tahrir, many of whom were reportedly involved in recruitment.

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12) Moscow. 19 OCT: Russian authorities detained 22 suspected members of banned Islamist group Hizb ut-Tahrir, many of whom were reportedly involved in recruitment.

13) Belarus. 21 OCT: Russian authorities detained 22 suspected members of banned Islamist group Hizb ut-Tahrir, many of whom were reportedly involved in recruitment.

14) Southern Military District. 21 OCT: Around 1,200 soldiers from Russian motorized rifle brigades were placed on alert for low intensity near Volgograd involving Phalanger fighting vehicles, Hind attack helicopters, T-72B3 tanks and Grad MLRS.