



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on August 19, 2016

Russian Bombers Hit ISIS and al-Nusra Targets in Syria From Base in Iran

Russia's Defense Ministry announced on August 16 that its bombers struck targets inside Syria after taking off from a base in Iran. "Flying with full bomb loads from Iran's Hamadan airbase, the aircraft carried out group attacks on Islamic State [ISIS] and Jabhat al-Nusra positions," the ministry said.

Britain's *Telegraph* newspaper noted that Jabhat al-Nusra is the former name of Jabhat Fatah al-Sham, a powerful rebel jihadist group previously affiliated with al-Qaeda.



Ali Shamkhani, the secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, confirmed that his country has offered Russia use of its bases for its air campaign against ISIS and al-Nusra forces in Syria, in a statement to Iran's IRNA news agency on August 16: "Cooperation between Tehran and Moscow against terrorism in Syria is of a strategic character. We must unite our potential and capabilities."

ABC News cited a statement from Alaeddin Boroujerdi, the head of the Iranian parliament's national security and foreign policy committee, who said that the Russians were using Iran's Shahid Nojeh air base, located about 30 miles north of Hamedan in a mountainous region about 220 miles southwest of Tehran.

Boroujerdi explained that the Russian Tu-22M3 bombers landed at the base only to refuel under the permission of the country's Supreme National Security Council. Using this base, instead of flying to Syria directly from Russia, allowed the bombers to carry a larger bomb load of more than 20 metric tons.

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"There is no stationing of Russian forces in the territory of the Islamic Republic of Iran," Boroujerdi emphasized.

TRT World reported that State Department spokesman Mark Toner told reporters that the United States was looking into whether the Russian operation violated UN Security Council resolution 2231, which prohibits the supply, sale, and transfer of combat aircraft to Iran.

"It's unfortunate but not surprising," Toner told reporters. "It speaks to a continuation of a pattern we've seen of Russia continuing to carry out air strikes, now with Iran's direct assistance ... that predominantly target moderate Syrian opposition forces."

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov defended his country's use of Iranian military bases for airstrikes in Syria, and rejected allegations that such use might be a violation of UN resolutions prohibiting the supply, sale, and transfer of combat aircraft to Iran. "In the case we're discussing there has been no supply, sale or transfer of warplanes to Iran," ABC News said, quoting Lavrov's statement at a Moscow news conference. "The Russian air force uses these warplanes with Iran's approval in order to take part in the counter-terrorism operation" in Syria.



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Hossein Kanani Moghadam, a former commander in Iran's Revolutionary Guard, stressed the very limited nature of Russia's use of the base in a statement to the AP. "It doesn't mean that Nojeh is a Russian air base," he said. "Iran just let them land there and refuel their aircraft, and everything is under the control of Iranians there."

Toner's statement that Russia's airstrikes "predominantly target moderate Syrian opposition forces" must be called into question. The lack of credible evidence that such "moderate" rebels even exist was addressed in an [article posted by *The New American*](#) in September 2014. As that article noted:

The supposed "[moderate](#)" rebels fighting Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad — self-styled jihadists whom the Obama administration and Congress plan to supply with even more support under the guise of battling the Islamic State (ISIS) — recently signed a non-aggression pact with ISIS (also known as ISIL), according to reports from human-rights groups and French news agency Agence France-Presse (AFP).

The article went on to explain:

As *The New American* has documented extensively, the "moderate" rebels have indeed worked closely with al-Qaeda, ISIS, and others — selling them weapons, collaborating on operations, and more. In fact, under the guise of training "moderates," Middle Eastern officials quoted in media reports [said Obama had actually trained dozens of ISIS fighters in Jordan](#).

An entire page on the White House website is headed by a quote from President Obama about "ISIL" (the administration's preferred acronym for ISIS) "and our comprehensive strategy to degrade and ultimately destroy the terrorist group."

Interestingly, one part of the president's proposed four-part strategy is "a systematic campaign of airstrikes against ISIL" and another part is "increased support to forces fighting ISIL on the ground."

The campaign of airstrikes calls for "working with the Iraqi" government," but mentions nothing about working with other governments that might be invaluable allies in the fight — Russia for one. As for the "increased support to forces fighting ISIL on the ground," the president's plan states:

Across the border, in Syria, we have ramped up our military assistance to the Syrian ["moderate"?] opposition. Tonight, I call on Congress again to give us additional authorities and resources to train and equip these fighters. In the fight against ISIL, we cannot rely on an Assad regime that terrorizes its own people — a regime that will never regain the legitimacy it has lost. Instead, we must strengthen the opposition as the best counterweight to extremists like ISIL, while pursuing the political solution necessary to solve Syria's crisis once and for all.

If Obama proposes to provide military assistance to a "moderate" Syrian opposition, he may want to enlist our best intelligence agencies in locating them, because they have been pretty invisible so far. In fact, even Obama's vice president, Joe Biden, said in a 2014 speech at Harvard:

The idea of identifying a "moderate middle" has been a chase America's been engaged in for a long time.... The fact remains that the ability to identify a "moderate middle" in Syria was — there was no "moderate middle" because the "moderate middle" are made up of shopkeepers, not soldiers.... What my constant cry was was that our biggest problem was our allies.... What were they doing? They were so determined to take down Assad and have a proxy Sunni-Shia war, what did they do? They poured hundreds of millions of dollars and tens, thousands, of tons of weapons into anyone who would fight. Except that the people who were being supplied were al-Nusra and al-Qaeda and



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extremist elements of jihadis coming from other parts of the world.

As *The New American's* foreign correspondent, [Alex Newman](#), observed:

Did you catch that? There were no moderate rebels in Syria, despite Obama's claims to be arming moderate rebels against Assad. Again, according to Biden, the anti-ISIS coalition was arming ISIS.

Apparently, the Obama administration thinks that providing arms to a non-existent "moderate middle" that is fighting the armies of Bashar al-Assad — who like Saddam Hussein was, is no threat to the United States — is somehow beneficial to the peace process in the Middle East. This despite the fact that, as we noted in [our article on December 11, 2015](#):

A report released by Amnesty International on December 7 says that ISIS has accumulated a large arsenal that includes U.S.-made weapons that the terrorist force has obtained from both the Iraqi army and Syrian rebel groups fighting against Bashar al-Assad.

Toner has criticized the Russians for allegedly targeting "predominantly ... moderate Syrian opposition forces," but if he can identify those forces, he must have unusual talents the rest of the Obama administration does not have. While Russian statements must always be somewhat suspect, if their defense ministry's statement that their aircraft "carried out group attacks on Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra positions" is eventually verified, then it appears that Russia is doing something the United States has so far not effectively done: attack the terrorists instead of supplying rebel forces who are working with the terrorists.

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