

Fake Report about New Russian Military Base in Syria

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The Russian Ministry of Defense debunked an Associated Press report that claims Russia establishes a new military base in Palmyra, Syria. Images about the UNESCO World Heritage Site and surroundings show an intermediate camp for Russian military personnel that helped clearing mines at the UNESCO World Heritage Site, noted Defense Minister Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov.

Russian Defense Minister Maj. General Igor Konashenkov stressed that media claims based on an Associated Press (AP) report about a new Russian military base in Palmyra, Syria were wrong. Moreover, Konashenkov added, Russia does not need any new bases in Syria. Konashenkov noted that the AP report cited a U.S.' cultural heritage protection organization as source for the claims that Russia was establishing a new military base in Palmyra, near the UNESCO World Heritage site.



Photo courtesy Valery Sharifulin, Tass.

The city of Palmyra and the UNESCO World Heritage site was [liberated from the self-proclaimed Islamic State \(a.k.a. ISIS, ISIL or Daesh\) in March 2016](#). Russian air forces and special forces participated in the liberation of the city.

After the city was recaptured, [Russia deployed engineer troops to help remove mines, improvised explosive devices and other hazards that were left behind by the fleeing ISIL troops in the city, in the ruins of the World Heritage site, Palmyra's Airport, and the surrounding region](#).

UNESCO explicitly expressed its gratitude for enabling UNESCO's and others' experts to assess the damage that had been done to the site by ISIL. Konashenkov commented on the AP report and associated claims about a new military base, saying:

"There have been no and are no 'new Russian bases' on the territory of Syria's Palmyra. The satellite photographs of the area's territory, published by UNESCO and mentioned by the agency... feature a temporary camp of units of the International Anti-Mine Center of Russia's Armed Forces, which earlier engaged in mine clearing in the historical part of Palmyra, and today [engage in mine clearing] in the locality of Tadmur. ... The deployment of the temporary camp until the end of the mine clearing effort has been agreed with the Culture Ministry and other state institutions of the Syrian Arab Republic."

✘ Konashenkov went into details about the temporary camp, saying that it included accommodation modules, a field hospital where aid is provided to local residents, as well as a field bakery whose products are also handed out to Syrians.

Konashenkov also commented on Russia's cultural contribution after the liberation of the city and the UNESCO World Heritage Site, saying:

"I want to note that the temporary camp of military engineers, the hospital and the bakery constitute no secret. More than 150 journalists of leading foreign media got familiarized with their work and made journalistic stories from there during the latest press tour on May 5, when Palmyra hosted a concert of Maestro Valery Gergiyev with the Mariinsky Theater orchestra. ... Besides, I will recall that jointly with foreign journalists, a numerous group of international UNESCO experts who flew to attend the concert visited the camp."



Photo courtesy SANA

Konashenkov also added that Associated Press representatives had been invited to the press tour on May 5 but that they for unknown reasons refused to take part in it then. He added:

"I believe that if journalists of the influential agency had personally visited Palmyra then and that temporary camp, today there would be no 'pseudo-sensation', invented by them, on construction by Russians of a 'new base in Palmyra.'"

The Russian Defense Minister also noted that Russia does not need another base in Syria, saying that it was neither needed, expedient or even economical. Konashenkov stressed that the Hmeim Air Base was fully sufficient and that Russian air forces could reach any point in Syria from there.

Moreover, he added, that the Hmeim air base is fully self-reliant and that there's no need for auxiliary bases. All crucial supplies such as fuel, ammunition or other items are delivered from Russia. Planes and helicopters undergo maintenance and repair work there too, he added.

What the Associated Press and spin-off articles based on the AP report failed to mention was that Russia operates legally in Syria. That is, in compliance with international law and authorized by the government of the Syrian Arab Republic. This means that even if Russia was establishing an additional base in Syria it would, in comparison to many other countries who engage militarily in Syria, be "legal".

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