

Russia Awaits Kremlin Reaction to Islamic State Downing of Helicopter

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The  **Moscow Times**

Russian officials are expected to respond harshly to the Friday incident that saw a Russian Mi-35M helicopter shot down by the Islamic State in Syria.

Russia will not leave the attack unanswered, the Kommersant newspaper reported Monday, citing two scenarios outlined by high-ranking sources within the Russian government.

In the first scenario, Russia would significantly increase the number of air strikes using frontline bombers, fighter jets and cruise missiles that are already deployed at Russia's Syrian airbase. Such a scenario might have a negative impact on partial cease-fire brokered in coordination with the United States, Kommersant reported.

The second scenario would involve about 15 Su-33 and MiG-29 fighter jets, and about 10 military helicopters currently based on the Admiral Kuznetsov cruiser. The cruiser might be mobilized in August if ordered to by the Russian General Staff, Kommersant reported.

A Russian Mi-35M helicopter was shot down on Friday by the Islamic State near the Syrian city of Palmyra, Russian media reported. Both pilots were killed.

The Russian pilots operating the Mi-35M — one of the new helicopters transferred to the Khmeimim airbase in March — had noticed a large group of rebel fighters attacking Syrian forces in eastern Palmyra, the Kommersant newspaper reported Monday.

The helicopter attacked the rebels that had managed to break through the Syrian defense, Kommersant reported, citing Defense Ministry representatives.

When the Mi-35M ran out of ammunition and tried to turn back to the Russian airbase, a missile hit the helicopter's tail — the aircraft caught fire and began to spin and fall. It exploded upon impact.

The pilots' bodies were recovered by Syrian soldiers and returned to the Khmeimim airbase.

Islamic State is a terrorist organization banned in Russia.

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