REPORT DESCRIPTION

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The Southern Flank After Syria: Tobruk and Port Sudan

After losing Syria, Russia is looking south: Tobruk in Libya and Port Sudan on the Red Sea, both stuck for the same reasons. Also here: the Libyan airfields that already work, the Haftar family, and why Burhan keeps the base on ice.

Sergey Konyashin · sergey@konyashin.com July 10, 2026

The search for Russian bases after Syria has led Moscow to two places: Tobruk in Haftar's Eastern Libya and Port Sudan on the Red Sea. This report, dated July 10, 2026, examines both side by side and shows why they are stalling in the same way and for the same reasons.

Eastern Libya: airfields first, the fleet later

In Libya the picture is lopsided. The airfields at Maaten al-Sarra, al-Khadim and al-Jufra are being rebuilt and already serve as the hub for Africa Corps flights deep into the continent. The port of Tobruk handles military cargo, including a January 2026 delivery under destroyer escort. But there is still no naval base, because Haftar has not given his consent. The report looks at why Tobruk is attractive yet poorly suited to the task, why Benghazi may be the better option, and why Susah remains only a hypothesis.

It also maps who stands on each side: the Ministry of Defense, Yunus-Bek Yevkurov, Africa Corps and Rosneft for Russia, and the Haftar family, with Khalifa, Khaled and Saddam each playing a role, for Libya. The Libyan file now also runs through Sergei Kiriyenko in the Presidential Administration.

Port Sudan: frozen, not abandoned

The Red Sea project dates back to 2017 and has stalled ever since. The report explains the legal dead end around ratification, the war that makes any fixed installation vulnerable, the technical limits of the port and its power supply, and the pressure from Washington, Cairo and Riyadh.

> Today, then, the Port Sudan base functions not as a facility under construction but as a bargaining chip in Burhan's hands. He is balancing between Moscow and Washington and uses the freeze on the agreement as an instrument of leverage — a gesture "toward the US" in exchange for Western support in his conflict with the RSF, while formally preserving the "strategic partnership" with Russia. This explains the cyclical pattern of "pause and resurrection": the subject comes back to life whenever a signal toward Moscow suits Burhan (around Russian–Arab summits, for example) and freezes again when a signal toward the West matters more.
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> *Sergey Konyashin, The Southern Flank After Syria: Tobruk and Port Sudan*
> *(Middle East Mirror, Démarche, July 10, 2026)*

What Russian bases after Syria really depend on

The conclusion ties the two cases into one story about Russian bases after Syria. In both, Russia deals not with a state but with one strongman who is balancing between Moscow and Washington. In both, the logistics Russia needs most already work, while the permanent naval facility remains on paper. What Moscow lost in Syria was a platform it controlled. What it is offered on the southern flank is access that can be withdrawn at any time.

What the report is based on

Satellite-based reporting on the Libyan airfields, assessments by the IISS, tearline and Aspenia, official statements from Moscow, Benghazi and Khartoum, and the author's own service in Sudan in 2014–2018. Figures the author could not verify are marked as such in the text.

ABOUT

I am Sergey Konyashin, a former Russian diplomat. I spent nearly a dozen years in the Russian Foreign Ministry, with postings in Yemen (2010–2013), Sudan (2014–2018) and Algeria (2019–2021), and left Russia in 2022, after Putin's invasion of Ukraine.

Démarche is my independent journal on Russian policy in the Middle East and Africa: analysis from inside the system, for readers outside it. I also write for *The Moscow Times*, *Republic*, *The Insider* and other independent outlets; see konyashin.com/elsewhere for that work.

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