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Syria After Assad: From Player to Instrument

Russia has kept two bases in Syria and lost almost all else, from its client regime to its role between Israel and Damascus. Also here: the August 2026 memorandum, wheat and oil, Iran, Turkey's upper hand, and Moscow's last lever at the UN.

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September 18, 2026

Russia in Syria after Assad has given up almost everything except two bases. This report, dated September 18, 2026, follows that retreat to the memorandum of August 9, 2026, under which Khmeimim and Tartus are to become joint training centers, and argues that Syria has turned from an object of Russian policy into a transit node for Africa.

Three contractions and one relationship

The report traces how a contingent of some 7,500 spread across dozens of sites shrank to three bases in December 2024, lost Qamishli in January 2026 and was reduced to two training facilities in August. It shows why the whole relationship now rests on Putin and al-Sharaa alone, why Moscow cannot act as patron of the Alawites or the Druze, and how it traded away its Kurdish position. The author sets this against what he saw as a diplomat in Yemen under Saleh and in Sudan under Bashir.

Bread, fuel and the wider region

What keeps Russia in Syria after Assad is no longer military force but wheat and oil. The report then widens the frame: how the loss of Syria changed relations with Iran, how Turkey now sets the limits of the Russian presence, and why the talks between Syria and Israel go ahead without Russia.

“ Russia has no part in any of these configurations. What was Russia’s principal asset in the region for ten years has vanished entirely — the deconfliction channel with Israel over Syrian airspace, which had operated since September 2015. It served as the main proof of Russian indispensability: Moscow held it up to Washington and to Arab capitals alike as evidence that regional security could not be constructed without it. The channel is now void of meaning — Russian combat aviation does not operate in Syria, so there is nothing to keep apart — and the function of coordinating between Damascus and Jerusalem has been taken over by the United States. For Russia’s standing in the Middle East, the loss of that role is in my assessment even more significant than the change in the status of the bases themselves.

Sergey Konyashin, Syria After Assad: From Player to Instrument
(Middle East Mirror, DémarCHE, September 18, 2026)

What Russia in Syria after Assad can still do

The closing section explains why a frozen, low-intensity conflict between Syria and Israel suits Moscow best, what it will say in public, and where its one remaining lever lies: the veto in the UN Security Council. The author draws here on his own work in Khartoum, where he held consultations on mutual support in international organizations.

What the report is based on

Official statements from Damascus, Moscow and Ankara, reporting by Reuters and SANA, trade and shipping data, and the author’s own experience in Russian embassies in the Arab world, from Sanaa to Khartoum.

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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