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As Syrian Army Gains Ground, Putin Defends Airstrikes

12/10/2015



Amid criticism from the United States and the West towards the Russian intervention in Syria, the Russian President Vladimir Putin defended his country's latest operation in the war-torn country saying that it's aimed at "stabilizing the Syrian government" and creating a "political compromise".

"When a division of international terrorists stands near the capital, then there is probably little desire for the Syrian government to negotiate, most likely feeling itself under siege in its own capital," Putin said in an interview with Russian state television Rossiya One TV Sunday.

His comments come as the Syrian military, with the support of the Russian air force, advanced in the center of the country and gained ground against the terror coalition of Army of Conquest, which is led by Syria's al-Qaida wing al-Nusra.

Earlier on Sunday, Syria's state news agency SANA said the military took control of Tal Skik, a highland area in Idlib close to positions held by the insurgents along a major highway connecting Syria's major cities, after an "extensive military operation" on the ground backed by Russia airstrikes against "terrorist organizations" in the area.

The U.S. and its allies say that Russia have been bombing moderate rebels in Syria who are fighting the Islamic State group, but Moscow and Putin deny the allegations and stress that the intervention in Syria is only meant to neutralize the threat of the extremists, whether the Islamic

State group or al-Qaida. Putin also called on other countries, including the U.S., to "unite efforts against this evil."

Putin stressed that militants were "at the edge of Damascus" and that without Moscow's support for President Bashar Assad there was a danger that "terrorist groups" could overrun Syria.

The U.S. and 10 of their regional allies have been bombing the Islamic State group in Syria and Iraq since September last year and have yet to stop the group's expansion. Meanwhile, the Russian airstrikes, in coordination with the Syrian army, have managed to destroy several Islamic State group command centers.

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