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The head of the Revolutionary Guard general just hinted at a rift between Iran and Russia

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The head of Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has hinted at a conflict of interest between Russia and Iran over the fate of Bashar al-Assad, saying that Moscow’s intervention in Syria aims to secure its own interests.

Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari, who claimed that most of the Syrian people support Assad, said “the northern friend [Russia] who came to Syria to [provide] military support recently [did so to serve] its [own] interests.”

“[Russia] may not care if Assad stays as we do, but in any case [Moscow] is present [in Syria] now and may be compelled to stay out of ‘embarrassment’ or for other reasons,” Al-Arabiya quoted him as saying.

Jafari also said that Iran “does not see any alternative to Assad” — a position he said was shared by the country’s supreme leader and the IRGC, according to the Saudi-owned channel.

“There are some who do not understand this and are talking about an alternative to Assad.”

Iranian news outlets carried similar versions of Jafari's comments, which came during a speech delivered Monday at the "first Anti-America Forum" since the international agreement on Iran's nuclear program was inked in mid-July.

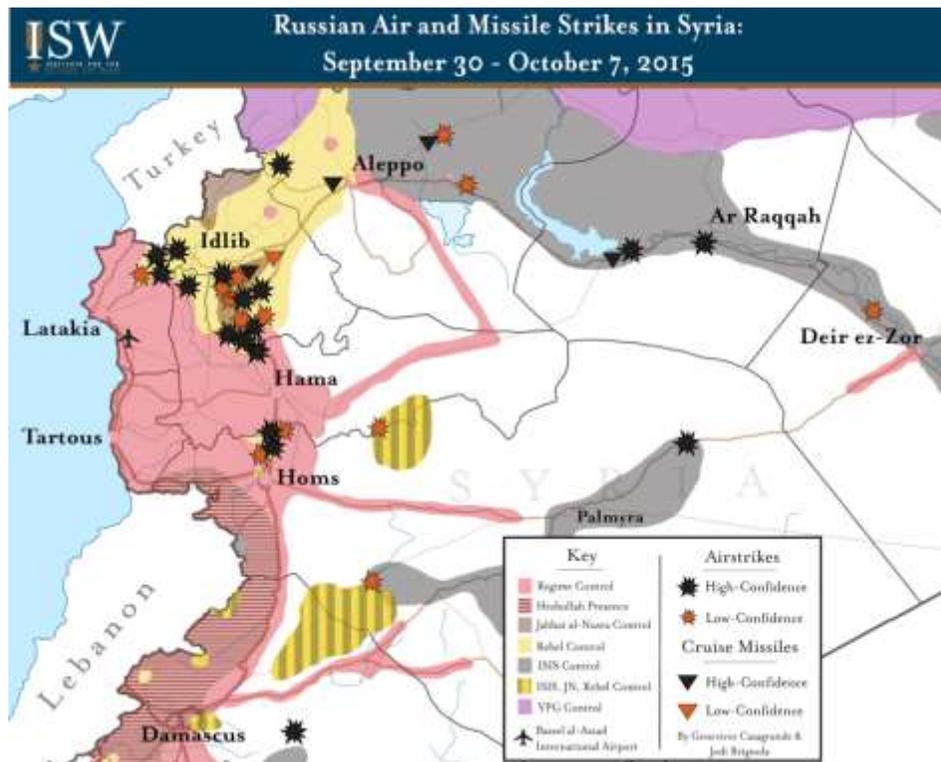
The Arabic-language Al-Alam news outlet quoted Jafari as saying that "Russia is following its interests in Syria."

"Assad's remainder in power may not concern it as it concerns us, but in any case it is helping the resistance."

Iran's Mehr News Agency offered another version of Jafari's quote, this time with him saying "our northern neighbor [Russia] is also providing assistance in Syria, but it is not happy with the Islamic resistance."

"In any case it is providing assistance on the basis of [our] shared interests. But it is not clear that Russia is aligned with Iran with regard to Syrian president Bashar al-Assad."

Russia began its aerial bombardment campaign in Syria on September 30, striking rebels in the Homs, Hama, Latakia and Idlib provinces while also claiming to have hit ISIS targets further east.



Despite Moscow's claim it was hitting ISIS, most of its airstrikes have been conducted in coordination with Syrian regime ground operations against rebels in the northwest of the country.

Just as Russia began its aerial bombardment campaign, reports began to emerge that Iran was deploying hundreds to troops to bolster the regime's offensives in northwest Syria, while IRGC Quds Force commander Qassem Soleimani conducted a tour of the frontlines.

On October 13, Pro-Hezbollah daily *Al-Akhbar* reported that the Iranian pointman had arrived in northern Syria to supervise the preparations for a massive offensive on the Aleppo front.

The Lebanese newspaper said that Iran had begun to deploy troops to Syria to take part in a major ground operation aimed at pushing towards the Turkish border.

Field sources told the daily that an unprecedented number of troops was being massed on the northern fronts adjacent to all of the militant positions from rural Hama to the Al-Ghab Plain and southern rural Idlib.



A rebel fighter stands on a hill overlooking al-Ghab plain, as he monitors the progress of the fighting from the Jabal al-Akrad area in Syria's northwestern Latakia province

Iran and Hezbollah have both made announcements that Russia is closely working with them as well as the Syrian and Iraqi governments under the auspices of a “4+1 coalition” aimed at coordinating joint military activity.

In the past month, at least 15 Iranian officers and soldiers have been killed in Syria, including General Farshad Hasounizad, the former head of the IRGC's elite Saber Brigade, and Hamid Mokhtarband, the former chief-of-staff of the 1st Brigade of Iran's crack 92nd Armored Division, which is considered the country's top armored unit.

Their deaths followed the dramatic killing earlier in October of IRGC general Hussein Hamdani, who was one of the IRGC's leading officers and the country's top military advisor in Syria.

