

Gerasimov crowing over numbers killed in Syria could come back to haunt all of Russia

Opinion

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The war against ISIS and its planned Islamic Caliphate may be nearing the end of one phase but a longer and bloodier phase may be just beginning

MOSCOW, Nov 14, 2017 UBO – Speaking to Russia's Defense Ministry Board on November 7 about Russian military action in Syria, Chief of Russia's General Staff Valery Gerasimov spoke proudly of having killed over 54,000 members of illegal armed units including more than 2,800 natives of Russia and 1,400 from former Soviet Republics. Many of the dead were killed as a part of the Russian Air Force's close support of its own troops and those of the Syrian Arab Army and its allies. The Tass report of the Gerasimov statements gave no indication that the general said anything about some of the less obvious facts. First, an overwhelming majority of those killed were militant Islamists, mowed down by the latest Russian Sukhoi 24 bombers and other aircraft assigned to the support of Bashar al-Assad's Syrian government forces. Not only that, most of those doing the killing were at least nominally Russian Orthodox Christians. As the fighting dies down in Syria, many of the most hardened ISIS fighters are headed to homes all over Europe and Eurasia but the greatest number could be returning to the Russian Federation from whence they came. RFE/RL has released a new survey that shows that of ISIS new recruits since March 2016 the largest number came from Russia, with an almost equally large number from Saudi Arabia and almost 2,000 from France. As the battles in the last ISIS strongholds grind to a halt, 800 fighters have already returned to Tunisia, 760 to Saudi Arabia, 425 to the UK, and 400 to Russia. Those numbers are expected to swell with many of those returning determined to continue the battle, no matter where they are. The effort to establish an Islamist Caliphate may have been blunted but a much longer and more difficult battle may be just beginning.

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