

## **At least 53 civilians including over 20 kids killed in Russian air strikes in Syria**

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**Moscow:** At least 53 civilians, including 21 children, were killed and 18 others were wounded when Russian air strikes hit residential buildings in a village held by the Islamic State group in eastern Syria today morning.

### **File pic - Damage in the eastern Syrian city of Deir Ezzor during a military operation by government forces against ISIS**

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said that air strikes hit the village of Al-Shafah in Deir Ezzor province.

"The toll increased after removing the debris in a long day of rescue operation," Rami Abdel Rahman, head of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights told news agency AFP.

“The air strikes hit residential buildings,” Rahman added.

The Russian Defence Ministry confirmed launching air strikes in the province of Deir ez-Zor in eastern Syria. It said that six long-range TU-22M3 bombers launched airstrikes on targets of the Islamic State.

"After taking off from an airfield on the Russian territory, the aircraft hit terrorists strongholds and areas with high concentration of militants in the Euphrates valley," the Ministry said in a statement.

The destruction of all targets was recorded by unmanned aerial vehicles, the statement added.

Su-30SM and Su-35S fighter jets based at the Khmeimim airbase in western Syria provided air cover for the bombers, the Minister said.

The Russian military have launched dozens of strikes on terrorists in Syria since the beginning of November.

Russia is a close ally of Syria's President Bashar al-Assad, and in September 2015 began a military intervention in support of his government that has gradually helped Damascus regain territory.

Syria's Deir Ezzor is one of the last places ISIS jihadists hold territory in the country, after being driven from their major strongholds including their one-time de facto Syrian capital Raqa city. The oil-rich eastern province that borders Iraq was once almost completely under ISIS control, but the jihadists now hold just nine percent of Deir Ezzor.

They have faced two separate offensives there, one led by the regime with Russian backing and the other by the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, an alliance of Kurdish and Arab fighters. More than 340,000 people have been killed in Syria since the conflict began in March 2011 with anti-government protests.

According to the Russian Federation Council's Defence and Security Committee, the fight against the ISIS in Syria will possibly be over by the end of the year and Russia may be able to withdraw its air force.

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