

## **Russia confirms start of airstrikes in Syria**

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**Moscow:** Russian military jets carried out airstrikes against the Islamic State group in Syria on Wednesday for the first time, the defense ministry said.

The airstrikes targeted IS positions, vehicles and warehouses that Russia believes belong to IS militants, ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov told Russian news agencies.

Russia's upper chamber of parliament earlier on Wednesday gave the green light to President Vladimir Putin's request to send Russian troops to Syria.

Putin said the Russian air force will be supporting the Syrian army in its offensive operations.

Russia is "not going to plunge into this conflict head-on," Putin said, and Moscow will help Syrian President Bashar Assad's army as long as their offensive operation lasts.

Putin also said he expects Assad to sit down and talk with the Syrian opposition about a political settlement.

Russian lawmakers voted unanimously Wednesday to allow Putin to order airstrikes in Syria, where Russia has deployed fighter jets and other weapons in recent weeks.

Putin had to request parliamentary approval for any use of Russian troops abroad, according to the constitution. The last time he did so was before Russia annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula in March 2014.

The vote comes after Putin's meeting Monday with President Barack Obama on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly meeting in New York, where the two discussed Russia's recent military buildup in Syria. Speaking after his meeting with Obama, Putin kept the door open for airstrikes but ruled out ground action.

Putin and other officials have said Russia was providing weapons and training to Assad's army to help it combat IS. Russian navy transport vessels have been shuttling back and forth for weeks to ferry troops, weapons and supplies to an air base near the Syrian coastal city of Latakia.

IHS Jane's, a leading defense research group, said last week that satellite images of the base showed 28 jets, including Su-30 multirole fighters, Su-25 ground attack jets, Su-24 bombers and possibly Ka-52 helicopter gunships.

The Islamic State group has captured large parts of both Syria and Iraq.

- AP