



THE MOST EFFECTIVE RUSSIAN AIRCRAFT AGAINST ISIS IS SU-25, SAYS NATIONAL INTEREST

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While top-of-the-line Sukhoi Su-30SM Flanker-H fighters and Su-34 Fullback bombers have captured the lion’s share of attention, the single most effective Russian aircraft deployed to Syria is the venerable Su-25 Frogfoot. The Russian air force has deployed a dozen of the slow, low-altitude flying tanks to its base in Latakia. But it’s not clear which version of the jet Russia has sent to Syria, however it’s probable that these are the latest Su-25SM version of the aircraft.

“The Russian air force will use the Frogfoots to support the Assad regime in the same way the USAF is using the A-10 Warthog to support the Iraqi government,” one veteran U.S. Air Force aviator told me. Another senior Air Force official agreed. “Frogfoots are the best air-to-ground platform for this type of fight for sure.”

The much-vaunted Su-34 Fullback bomber is not likely to play a significant role—four aircraft are just not enough. “Four jets are not enough to fly ‘sustained sorties,’ certainly not twenty-four hour

ATO [Air Tasking Order] ops,” a third Air Force official said. “I'd guess that they are flying two-ship missions, hitting targets two to three times per day or night, tops. But... It's the Russians, so you never really know. “

The Su-30SM multirole fighter is not likely to play a significant role either—given their limited numbers and lack of a genuine mission. “The Su-30s are really an air-to-air platform so I could see them in an escort role,” the second Air Force official said. “But, why would you need to escort your own fighters in a permissive environment? ISIS doesn't have any fighters of note... But the coalition does...”

That means most of the genuine combat operations will fall to the dozen Sukhoi Su-24 Fencer bombers and Su-25s. While the Su-24 is a good long-range battlefield interdiction aircraft, it is not particularly well suited for working closely with ground troops at “danger close” distances. However, the Su-25—like its American A-10 Warthog counterpart—was purpose-built as a close air support aircraft in the tradition of the Soviet Union's much-venerated Ilyushin Il-2 Sturmovik from the Second World War.

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