The Civilian Toll of Russia’s Bombing Campaign

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<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/10/russia-airstrikes-syria-civilians-us/411478/>

Exactly three weeks after Russia [decided to launch airstrikes in Syria](http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/09/russia-parliament-approval-airstrikes/408148/), the country’s campaign has already been criticized for [hitting non-ISIS targets](http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/10/russias-syria-campaign/408634/), its [violations of Turkish airspace](http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/10/a-russian-violation-of-turkish-airspace/408934/), and allowing its planes [to fly too close to American ones](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/russian-us-aircraft-close-encounter-syria_561eb2fee4b050c6c4a40ace), as well as a [misfiring of cruise missiles](http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/10/russian-missiles-fly-too-close-to-sun-land-in-iran-by-mistake/409726/) from the Caspian Sea that mistakenly landed in Iran.

On Tuesday, some light was shed on the civilian toll of Russia’s bombing campaign. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 370 people [have been killed by Russian warplanes](http://www.nytimes.com/reuters/2015/10/20/world/europe/20reuters-mideast-crisis-syria-toll.html?ref=reuters&_r=0) since September 30. Of that number, 34 percent have been civilians—127 people, including 36 children and 34 women.

When held against [one assessment of the airstrikes](http://www.syriahr.com/en/2015/06/about-3000-people-including-162-civilians-killed-in-us-coalition-airstrikes-on-areas-in-syria/) by the American-led coalition, which started in September 2014, the Russian numbers come more clearly into view. Back in June, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights noted that of 3,000 people who had been killed by coalition airstrikes in Syria, 162 were civilians. (At the time, the British-based monitoring organization “re-expressed its strong condemnation” of the United States and its international partners.)

The figures in Tuesday’s report did not include an overnight [Russian airstrikes](http://bigstory.ap.org/article/5ddfc5a27f4e4d27a37a6d8439b2617a/activists-russian-airstrikes-kill-dozens-northwest-syria) in Syria’s Latakia province that killed a high-ranking commander of a Syrian rebel group that had received American-made weapons. According to some reports, at least [15 civilians were killed](http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/10/20/us-mideast-crisis-syria-latakia-idUSKCN0SE0M420151020) in the sustained bombardment.

Also, on Tuesday, CNN reported American military pilots have [been warned against reacting](http://www.cnn.com/2015/10/19/politics/us-pilots-russian-planes-syria/) to Russian planes over Syrian skies. After some recent close calls, the two countries are working to iron out a technical agreement so that pilots will maintain contact with each other in the air.