After Liberation of Syria's Palmyra from ISIS, Russia Completes Demining of the Ancient City

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Syria's ancient city of Palmyra, which was regained by Syrian army forces –supported by Russian air cover– from militants of the Islamic State (ISIS) last month, was declared free of land-mines and explosive devices.

Yury Stavitsky, commander of Russia's military engineers, addressed President Vladimir Putin in a televised video, saying: "As of today, the tasks to demine the ancient architectural part of Palmyra have been completed in their entirety."

"Now the units of engineers have moved on to demining the residential area of the town of Palmyra and the airport," Stavitsky said. "367 buildings, 40 hectares (99 acres) of land and 9.5 kilometers (5.9 miles) of roads were checked and 1,432 explosive devices destroyed."

Putin had personally ordered the demining, and the Kremlin has been keen to publicize the operation. "Pass on my gratitude to all the personnel: officers, rank-and-file, those providing security," Putin said.

In August 2015, satellite images confirmed the destruction of the Baal Shamin temple in Syria's ancient city of Palmyra, according to the United Nations, which condemned ISIS claims of destroying the temple.

The U.N. has slammed the destruction of the temple as a "war crime," and the act has raised concerns for the rest of the UNESCO World Heritage site.

Also, ISIS published images last August, showing militants placing explosives into the temple in order to destroy the ancient monuments arguing they are worshipped by people and must be smashed, according to ISIS ideology.

ISIS took over Palmyra after fierce battles with Syrian army forces in May 2015.

In March 2016, the pro-regime forces were able to impose full control over Palmyra downtown after ISIS extremists retreated towards the northern villages of Palmyra and its eastern outskirts. The group's leadership ordered its militants to withdraw towards its main bastion of Raqqa, northeastern Syria.

In the meantime, the United States said it is concerned by reports that Moscow is moving more military material into Syria.

"We think it would be negative for Russia to move additional military equipment or

personnel into Syria. We believe that our efforts are best focused on supporting the diplomatic process," Ben Rhodes, deputy national security adviser to President Barack Obama, said on Thursday at a news briefing in Riyadh where President Obama was attending a summit with Gulf Arab leaders.

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