

# US ratchets up war rhetoric against Moscow following Turkish intercept of Russian jet

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US and NATO officials escalated their rhetoric against the government of Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday, seizing on disputed reports of incursions into Turkish airspace by Russian warplanes.

The Russian planes entered Turkish airspace near the town of Yayladagi, the Turkish government announced Monday.

Asked about the Russian maneuvers while addressing Spanish military leaders in Madrid on Monday, US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter reiterated his previous assertion that Russia's growing military involvement in Syria "is tantamount to pouring gasoline on the fire of civil war." He denounced Russian intervention in Syria as "way off track" and "doomed to fail."

"By taking military action in Syria against moderate groups targets, Russia has escalated the civil war, putting further at risk the very political resolution and preservation of Syria's structure of future governance it says that it wants," Carter said.

The reference to "moderate groups" is part of Washington's efforts to obscure the fact that it is opposed to any attacks on the Al-Nusra Front, which is affiliated with Al-Qaeda. The US and NATO powers are in an effective alliance with the organization and other Islamist militias in Syria that are being funded by Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey.

Carter's comments were part of a flurry of escalatory rhetoric coming from Western officials. While the basic facts about the Russian patrols remain disputed, the reports have been used by the Western powers to justify a further ratcheting up of tensions against Moscow.

"We're greatly concerned about it [Russian flights over Turkey], because it is precisely the kind of thing that, had Turkey responded under its rights, could have resulted in a shoot-down," US Secretary of State John Kerry said in remarks from Valparaiso, Chile on

Monday.

The top US diplomat went on to accuse Russia of lying and concealing the true reasons for its military involvement in the war. "Russia said it is going in in order to fight ISIL, Daesh. But it is clear from the bombing that has taken place right now that their motives are broader than that," Kerry said.

Kerry then warned that Russia must insist that Assad submit to political negotiations aimed at a transitional government. "I would say to Russia that their client who is in great trouble needs to know more directly what Russia has communicated to us and what is required of him," Kerry said.

The alternative was for the war to "continue to move in a direction that will almost certainly guarantee much more terrorism, much more conflict, and possibly the complete destruction of the state of Syria," Kerry said.

Russian officials responded by defending their intervention in Syria and vowing to intensify their operations. New contingents of Russian "volunteer" ground forces will soon be deployed to Syria, Russian officials said on Monday.

"Our airstrikes will not only continue, but grow in intensity," Russian military chief Andrei Kartapolov said during a press briefing on Saturday.

Russia's intervention in Syria is aimed at defending the interests of the Russian ruling elite in the country, including by preventing the fall of the Syrian government to the US-backed militias. This intervention is heightening the danger of conflict with the US and NATO powers.

It is American imperialism, however, that is primarily responsible for "pouring gasoline on the fire" in Syria. Along with its allies in the region, the US has stoked civil war with the aim of bringing down Assad, an ally of both Iran and Russia.

Faced with an escalating crisis of its entire policy in the Middle East, there are powerful factions within the US establishment that are now pushing for confrontation with Moscow. Anonymous White House and Pentagon officials cited by the *Wall Street Journal* insisted that the Russian maneuvers this weekend were “not an accident” and warned that Moscow must not “continue to test the waters in Syria.”

Based on the unnamed US government sources, the *Journal* asserted categorically that the Russian planes had activated their radar guided weapons systems after being confronted by Turkish jets, “locking on” to the Turkish planes.

These claims, which must be considered unsubstantiated given their murky origins, in themselves constitute a provocative stepping up of war rhetoric against Russia. The activation of weapons systems in this manner is a highly confrontational tactic. It is almost never employed during confrontations by Russian and NATO war planes in the Baltic and Eastern European regions, according to NATO officials.

If it is true, as Western commenters have claimed, that the incursions were intended to demonstrate Russia’s readiness to resist the imposition of a “no fly zone” over northern Syria by Turkey or other NATO powers, this only further highlights the extreme danger that the US-orchestrated war in Syria will give rise to a conflict between the US and Russia, both nuclear-armed powers.

The surging geopolitical tensions over Syria are finding expression in increasingly bitter infighting within the US political establishment.

Attacking the policies of the sitting Democratic administration from the right, US presidential candidate and former secretary of state Hillary Clinton said last week that she supports the imposition of a no-fly zone over Syria.

Several Republican presidential candidates have recently support a no-fly zone, including ex-Hewlett-Packard CEO Carly Fiorina, Ohio Governor John Kasich and New Jersey Governor Chris Christie.

“Anybody who agrees with allowing the Russians into the Middle East is just painfully naive,” Christie said on Sunday, in comments directed against the administration’s efforts to negotiate with Russia over terms for a postwar Syrian government.

There have also been calls from throughout the US foreign policy establishment for a much more aggressive policy in Syria, coupled with harsh criticisms of the White House for its readiness to negotiate with Putin.

In an editorial published in *American Interest* last week, Washington Institute for Near East Policy executive director Robert Satloff condemned the Obama administration for its “supine response to the most direct and serious Russian challenge to America’s global position in four decades, a nonchalant acceptance of Iran’s deployment of troops and materiel to the Mediterranean littoral, and a willingness to legitimize the continued rule of a maniacal despot responsible for more than a quarter million killed and the depopulation of nearly half his entire country.”

In his latest comment on the war, “The Long War in Syria: the Trees, the Forest, and All the King’s Men,” Center for Strategic and International Studies chief analyst Anthony Cordesman mocked the notion that “Syria can be brought back to some state of stability if only Assad would agree to leave and the United States and Russia could agree on how to approach the negotiations.”

“All the king’s horses and all the king’s men couldn’t put Syria back together by negotiating a solution from the outside even if there was one King instead of a divided mix of the United States, Russia, Iran, Turkey, Iraq, the other states surrounding Syria, the Arabian Gulf states, Egypt, and France and the other interested European powers,” Cordesman wrote.

Cordesman went on to insist that US policy makers “stop pretending that Syrian ‘moderates’ are strong enough to either affect the security situation or negotiate for Syria’s real fighters.” That is, the US should dispense with the pretense that it is not allied with Islamic fundamentalist organizations as part of its drive to control Syria and the entire Middle East.



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