

# Putin accuses US of colluding in downing of Russian plane

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Tensions between Russia and the United States continue to escalate, after Russian President Vladimir Putin accused Washington of handing Ankara details of the flight path of the Russian plane downed by Turkey in Syria on Tuesday. US President Barack Obama signed a defence bill handing over hundreds of millions of dollars to militias fighting Russian-backed forces in Ukraine and Syria.

The Russian Su-24 bomber was shot down by a Turkish fighter jet based on claims that it had entered Turkish airspace for around 17 seconds. One of the two pilots was killed by gunfire from Turkmen forces in Syria as he parachuted from the burning jet. The other was rescued by Russian and Syrian Special Forces, with the loss of one marine rescuer—prompting Putin to accuse Ankara of acting as “accomplices of terrorists.”

At a joint press conference with French President Francois Hollande in the Kremlin, Putin accused the US of passing on to Turkey details of where Russian planes were flying. He said, “The American side, which leads the coalition that Turkey belongs to, knew about the location and time of our planes’ flights, and we were hit exactly there and at that time.”

Washington is responding to the shoot-down of the Russian jet by provocatively escalating its funding of proxy forces fighting Russia.

Yesterday, reports emerged that the \$607 billion National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) includes hundreds of millions of dollars to arm forces in Ukraine and Syria. It includes \$300 million for the security forces of the Ukrainian regime, which has fought a bloody civil war against Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine. There are also nearly \$500 million to train “moderate rebels” fighting the Russian-backed regime of President Bashar al-Assad in Syria.

Turkey’s response has been equally bellicose.

Erdogan bluntly told Putin, “Shame on you. Those who claim we buy oil from Daesh [ISIS] are obliged to prove it. If not, you are a slanderer... I think if there is a party that needs to apologize, it is not us.”

“Those who carry out a military campaign with the pretext of fighting Daesh are targeting anti-regime opponents,” he said. “You say you are fighting Daesh. Excuse me, but you are not fighting Daesh. You are killing our Turkmen kinsmen.”

Erdogan said he might speak with Putin at a climate summit in Paris next week, but Putin has so far refused to contact him without receiving an apology, his aide Yuri Ushakov said Friday.

Previously, Erdogan had told *France 24* television: “If we had known it was a Russian plane, maybe we would have warned it differently.”

The NATO powers’ bellicose response to the downing of the Su-24 bomber directly poses the danger that their conflicts with Russia will escalate into all-out war. They provoked an angry retort from Putin.

He dismissed the claim that the Turkish government would not have shot down the plane had it known it was Russian, as suggested by Erdogan on French television, as “rubbish.” It was “not possible” that the downed plane could not have been identified as a Russian jet. Russian planes, he said, “have identification signs and these are well visible.”

“If it was an American aircraft, would they have struck an American?” he asked. “What we hear instead is they have nothing to apologise for... One gets the impression that the Turkish government is consciously driving Russian-Turkish relations to a deadlock.”

Putin again asserted that Turkey was buying oil from Islamic State. There was “no doubt” that oil from “terrorist-controlled” territory in Syria was making its way into Turkey, he said. “We see from the sky where

these vehicles are going. They are going to Turkey day and night.”

He accused Turkey of sponsoring terrorism: “These barrels are not only carrying oil but also the blood of our citizens because with this money terrorists buy weapons and ammunition and then organise bloody attacks.”

On Wednesday, Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu announced that the Russian military will send its S-400 missile system to Syria’s Latakia province, bordering Turkey, and is deploying the guided missile cruiser Moskva to the area. The S-400 system can hit targets 250 miles away.

Putin said of the decision, “We did not have those systems in Syria because we believed that our air force was working at an altitude which would not be reachable by terrorists... We didn’t even think that we could receive a strike from a party that we thought to be our partner... we thought Turkey to be a friendly country.”

Russia has been engaged in a bombardment of the border region occupied by Turkmen forces.

Major economic sanctions are being imposed by Russia against Turkey. Russia is Turkey’s second-largest trading partner, at \$30 billion, while Turkey is one of the biggest foreign destinations for Russian tourists.

Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev stated Thursday that Moscow would be looking to cut economic ties with Turkey and scrap investment projects within two days in response to an “act of aggression against our country.”

Economic Development Minister Alexei Ulyukayev said that sanctions would affect TurkStream, the proposed gas pipeline from Russia to Turkey announced by Putin last December, and the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant, Turkey’s first nuclear power plant that was to be built by Russia.

Russia’s Defence Ministry announced Thursday that it had suspended all “channels of interaction” with Turkey’s military, including a hotline set up to avoid clashes in Syrian airspace.

Russia’s tourist board has also suspended all tours to Turkey, which could cost the Turkish economy \$10 billion. On Friday, there were calls to ban imports of all Turkish produce. The Russian media reported that trucks carrying Turkish goods were stranded at the

border.

In the city of Krasnodar, dozens of Turkish workers were rounded up and arrested for supposed visa violations. In the southern Kuban region, Russia’s Migration Service said it had arrested and deported 39 Turkish businessmen attending an agricultural trade fair.



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