

NATO and Turkey defend shoot-down of Russian jet

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During remarks issued jointly with Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu Monday, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg staunchly defended the shooting down of a Russian bomber jet by Turkish forces last week.

The NATO alliance “fully supports Turkey’s efforts to defend its territorial integrity and its airspace,” Stoltenberg stated. “Turkey has the right to defend itself and [its] air space,” he concluded.

Stoltenberg announced that in response to the shoot-down, NATO will step up its support for Turkey’s military defenses, and will make specific decisions about new NATO force deployments to Turkey in the immediate future.

He also declared that NATO had to prepare for far-flung military operations along both its southern and eastern flanks.

Stoltenberg’s comments followed a similarly categorical defense of the shoot-down by Davutoglu, who stood side-by-side with Stoltenberg.

“The Turkish-Syrian border is a national security border, and it is also a NATO border. Its violation was also a violation against NATO,” Davutoglu said. “No country should ask us to apologize.”

Both leaders’ remarks included ominous references to future incidents similar to last week’s shoot-down, with their language clearly implying a belief that further hostile engagements and accidents will occur among the various militaries contending for a parcel of Syria.

“If there are two coalitions functioning in the same airspace against ISIL, these types of incidents will be difficult to prevent,” Davutoglu said.

Stoltenberg warned repeatedly that new “risk reducing mechanisms” are necessary to regulate the war operations being carried out by an array of

governments inside Syria.

The NATO secretary also acknowledged that explosive incidents and outbreaks of fighting between the various powers are virtually inevitable, and called for safeguards designed to contain such outbursts short of a full-blown war.

Even as he sought to defend the shoot-down as simply a matter of military procedure, in the next breath Davutoglu all but openly admitted that the strike was carried out by Turkish forces as a political move, in response to Russia’s targeting of Turkmen militias backed by Ankara.

Davutoglu insisted that Russian planes in the area of the shoot-down have not been bombing ISIS, also known as Daesh. “There is no single Daesh position in this part of Syria. The bombardment that was done [by the Russian plane] was not against Daesh,” Davutoglu said.

The Turkish Prime Minister denounced Russia for bombing Idlib, saying that ISIS has no presence there, and also accused Russian planes of striking a humanitarian supply convoy bound for Aleppo.

Almost simultaneously with Davutoglu’s denunciation of Russian raids against Idlib, new information emerged indicating that US Special Forces have been running a secret operations center out of the city for months.

According to a report published Monday in the *Guardian*, Idlib has provided a base of operations for combat operations led by US commandos. US forces based out of Idlib have been directly leading the fighting, in contradiction to the repeated assurances of the Obama administration that US forces have not been involved in ground combat.

In light of these revelations, the fact of Russian bombing runs against Idlib underscores the immense

dangers posed by the growing NATO and Russian interventions in the country. Given the secret character of the US base, the Russian strikes could easily have resulted in significant US casualties.

In their statements Monday, the NATO and Turkish leaders couched their remarks in conciliatory phrases. Turkey has gone so far as to retrieve and return the remains of one of the Russian pilots to Moscow, CNN reported Monday.

Despite such symbolic gestures of sympathy towards Moscow, the essential content of Davutoglu and Stoltenberg's remarks was to defend the shoot-down, presenting the strike as a standard procedural response to any intrusion of Turkish airspace.

Available evidence strongly suggests, however, that the shoot-down was ordered by the Turkish government in advance, after consultations with the US and NATO leadership, as an intentional provocation. The Russian plane had crossed into Turkish airspace for mere seconds before being shot down, leaving little choice but to conclude that Turkish forces were under orders to seize on any excuse to carry out such a strike.

The shoot-down incident has served to throw a wrench in negotiations between the Western powers and Russia, through which certain factions of the European bourgeoisie have sought to forge a rapprochement with Moscow over Syria.

From the beginning, these diplomatic maneuvers were viewed with suspicion and hostility by the more hardline militarist and anti-Russian elements within the ruling elite. Given that the main political effect of the shoot-down has been to scuttle these talks, and prepare conditions for a fresh military escalation embracing broad areas of both Syria and Iraq, it is not difficult to detect the hand of US and NATO elements behind the incident.

Russia has responded to the shoot-down by deploying new air-to-air missiles onboard its fighter jets over Syria in addition to anti-aircraft missile units. These developments come on the heels of new US deployments of F-16 dogfighters to the Turkish-Syrian border.

Having employed the stick, NATO is preparing a new round of diplomatic pressure against Russia as the complement for imminent escalations of its military and covert operations in the Middle East and Eastern Europe.

NATO conferences on Tuesday and Wednesday will focus on "engaging Russia on a practical and political level," Stoltenberg said.

Wednesday's talks will be preceded by the likely announcement of Montenegro's admission into the NATO alliance, a development which will mark a further expansion of Western control over the former Yugoslavia, at the expense of Russia.



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