

# Turkey's downing of a Russian jet and the danger of world war

25 November 2015

1. The downing of a Russian fighter-bomber by Turkish fighter jets yesterday on the Turkish-Syrian border is a flagrant act of war. Turkish authorities have seized on the alleged Russian violation of their airspace to launch a monumental escalation of the proxy war in Syria between Islamist opposition fighters supported by NATO and the Russian-backed regime of President Bashar al-Assad. It threatens to provoke all-out war between Russia on the one hand, and Turkey and the rest of the NATO alliance on the other.

Turkish officials claimed that the Russian SU-24 had violated Turkish air space for one minute, while Russian officials said that it never left Syrian air space at all. The Turkish air force did not scramble jets to warn the Russian fighter or escort it back to Syrian air space, but, after allegedly warning the Russian jet for five minutes, shot it down.

It is unthinkable that Turkey would have taken a decision against a powerful neighbor, fraught with incalculable consequences, without direct prior approval from the US government.

2. US officials supported the Turkish downing of the Russian plane, making clear that they are willing to accept a direct military clash with Russia, a nuclear-armed power, in order to crush its intervention in Syria to defend the Assad regime.

At a press conference yesterday with French President François Hollande in Washington, Obama endorsed the downing of the Russian jet, claiming that Turkey “has a right to defend its territory and its airspace.” This amounts to a blank check to Turkish forces to attack Russian fighter jets again, should similar circumstances arise.

Obama then bluntly warned Russia not to attack Islamist opposition militias in western Syria that are supported by NATO: “I do think that this points to an ongoing problem with the Russian operations in the sense that they are operating very close to a Turkish border, and they are going after a moderate opposition that are supported by not only Turkey but a wide range of countries. And if Russia is directing its energies towards Daesh and ISIL, some of those

conflicts, or potentials for mistakes or escalation, are less likely to occur.”

After Obama spoke, former US Ambassador to NATO Nicholas Burns again made clear that the Turkish government had acted as a proxy for Washington by shooting down the Russian plane. He told PBS News that US officials were considering declaring a no-fly-zone in the Syrian-Turkish border area. This would mean shooting down Russian fighters overflying the area in order to protect the Islamist opposition forces—that is, doing precisely what Turkey did.

3. The comments of Obama and Burns underscore the fraud of Washington's claims to be waging a “war on terror” aimed at the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) militia. While claiming to oppose Islamist terrorism, Washington is in fact protecting Islamist militias in the Lattakia mountain areas that include the Al Qaeda-linked Al Nusra Front, as well as Chechen Islamist fighters. On the pretext of fighting ISIS, Washington is in fact recklessly pursuing its geopolitical ambitions, which in the Middle East currently center on removing Assad from power.

This is only one step in a further confrontation with any powers posing a military obstacle to the ambitions of US imperialism, including Assad's key allies, Russia and Iran, as well as China. Even as he was preparing to escalate the conflict in the Middle East, Obama exploited top-level summits in Asia over the past week to ramp up the US confrontation with China over its territorial claims in the South China Sea.

4. It is becoming ever clearer that ISIS itself emerged and was presented in the international media primarily in line with the shifting needs of the imperialist powers as a pretext for their wars. After the Obama administration sought to justify the pullout from Afghanistan by assassinating Osama bin Laden in 2011—when he was hiding in Pakistan, a key US ally—there was no clear target for the “war on terror.” Washington and the other NATO powers worked directly with Islamist militias as proxies, in the 2011 Libyan war and the beginning of the Syrian conflict.

The situation changed, however, when Washington and

Paris were forced to pull back from a planned war in Syria in 2013, due to its unpopularity and deep divisions in the foreign policy establishment. As the NATO powers sought to find a way to justify a war, the claim that they were fighting against Islamist terrorism—though completely belied by their actual record of relying on these forces—again became attractive to them as a way of marketing the war.

Though its operations were little different than the bombings and atrocities carried out by other Islamist militias in Syria, ISIS was selected for attack in the media, while other similar Islamist groups continued to enjoy tacit and even explicit US support.

Yesterday's events further darken the cloud of suspicion that hangs over the November 13 attacks in Paris, and the terrorists' astonishing ability to pull off an operation under the noses of the intelligence services. In fact, close connections exist between Islamist terror groups and the NATO powers. The security panic whipped up by ruling circles in Europe after the attacks, along with confusion sown over the phantom war with ISIS, helps these powers create the political climate for the pursuit of their ambitions through catastrophic global wars.

5. The timing of the shoot-down is highly significant, coming also against the backdrop of conflicts between Washington and imperialist powers in Europe, particularly Germany and France, over the degree of Russian involvement in a planned neo-colonial settlement of the Syrian war. Washington has moved to decisively scuttle European attempts to negotiate a deal with Russia.

After the ISIS attacks in Paris and November 14 talks in Vienna, Hollande announced plans to forge a united coalition of the United States, Russia, and the European powers to fight ISIS in Syria and negotiate the ouster of Assad on terms acceptable to all the major powers.

As Hollande arrived for talks with Obama in Washington, however, the downing of the Russian jet presented him with a *fait accompli*, cutting off his diplomatic overtures towards Russia. The attack, *USA Today* noted, "badly damaged France's drive to build an alliance with the United States and Russia to defeat the Islamic State in retaliation for the Paris attacks."

6. Since the US- and German-backed coup in Ukraine last year, the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) has repeatedly warned of the danger of world war. These warnings are being realized with extraordinary speed.

Today, the danger of war between nuclear-armed Russia and the nuclear powers of the NATO alliance is openly referred to in the media and by leading politicians. This danger does not, however, give pause to the reckless assertion of imperialist interests, above all by the United States. Instead, they are stepping up the war drive.

7. The Russian and Chinese regimes offer no counterweight to the ever more unhinged policies of the imperialist powers.

Events in Syria again point to the catastrophic geopolitical consequences of the dissolution of the USSR a quarter century ago. Moscow is desperate to defend its residual influence in the Middle East and to stop Islamist fighters from Chechnya and other regions of Russia from toppling Assad and returning to fight in Russia, where they can easily exploit the anger caused by disastrous social conditions and by the Russian-chauvinist policies of the Kremlin.

The warning made by Trotsky, that the restoration of capitalism in Russia would be followed by its transformation into a semi-colony, is being fulfilled. Putin's delusion that the offensive of imperialism can be answered by using Russia's military might is not only hopeless, it leads to catastrophic consequences. The policy of the Kremlin oscillates between surrender to imperialism and reckless military measures posing the danger of world war with the imperialist powers.

8. A world war is not only possible, it is inevitable, unless it is stopped by the emergence of a revolutionary movement in the international working class.

The war in Syria emerged and grew into an explosive proxy war, devastating the lives of millions and drawing in all the major powers in the region, as the imperialist powers sought to crush the Egyptian revolution that toppled Hosni Mubarak. The next political offensive of the international working class must base itself on the struggle for socialism against the looming danger of imperialist world war.

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