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The Phony War on ISIS

By Justin Raimondo
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The downing of a Russian warplane by the Turks raises several questions, which can all be rolled into one big one: In the war against ISIS, which side is Turkey – and NATO – on, anyway?

Now let's list the subordinate issues that cause us to question what's really going on in Syria:

- How can the Turks claim they didn't know it was a Russian plane they were shooting down?
- If the incident was an error on Turkey's part, why are they refusing to apologize?
- Even if we accept the Turkish version of events – that the Russian plane drifted into Turkish airspace for a grand total of nineteen seconds – how does this justify their action?
- Did the Turks act alone, or did they get the green light from NATO?
- Are the Turks buying oil from ISIS?

To begin with, the very idea that the whole thing was a big mistake, and that the Turks didn't know it was a Russian pilot flying that plane, is too ridiculous to take seriously. For the Turks to make such a claim should cause us to automatically disregard whatever else they say about this incident. Putin claims the plane was clearly marked, but even if that's not quite the truth – and it may not be – the Russians agreed to coordinate the flight paths of their war planes with the Americans, so as not to create just such an incident as this one. As Putin put it:

“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. Why did we pass this information to the Americans? Either they were not controlling what their allies were doing, or they are leaking this information all over the place.”

And it just so happens that the former Vice Chairman of the Joints Chiefs of Staff, Admiral James Winnefeld, was paying a visit to Ankara when the Russian plane went down. A coincidence, of course....

In short: the Americans had the exact flight path of the Russian plane. They knew where and when it would be flying: are we supposed to believe they didn’t communicate this to the Turks, their NATO allies? That this was an orchestrated event – orchestrated by Washington – seems almost beyond dispute.

This is why the Turks refuse to apologize, and instead warn the Russians that they are “playing with fire.” They were simply following orders – and that those orders were coming from Washington is implied by President Obama’s defense of the Turkish actions. “Turkey,” he declared, “like every country, has a right to defend its territory and airspace.” While this is certainly true, the question of how it may do so and under what circumstances it’s okay to shoot down a plane that may have intruded on its airspace is not quite as cut-and-dried as he would have us believe.

Article 51 of the United Nations charter says military action against an intruder is justified only in case of an “armed attack.” Yet the Turks are claiming no such thing: therefore, the act of shooting down the Russian plane was clearly a violation of international law. Period.

While NATO’s commander is standing “in solidarity” with Ankara, the Turks violated NATO’s own rules of engagement. Article 5 of the NATO treaty limns the UN Charter, triggering military action as a consequence of an “armed attack.”

Furthermore, there is the question of the machine-gunning of the ejected Russian pilots by the US-supported “Free Syrian Army,” which resulted in the death of one of them. As retired Maj. Gen. Charles J. Dunlap, Jr., puts it:

*“It is extraordinarily well-settled that the **law of war** prohibits making anyone parachuting from a distressed aircraft the object of attack, and that doing so is a **war crime**. There is no real dispute among experts as to this reading of the law.”*

Not that this would be the first war crime the Turks have committed.

Finally, there is the question at the base of all this: in the war against ISIS, which side are the Turks on, anyway?

The main enemy of the Turks in Syria isn’t ISIS, but the Kurds. Turkish forces have been attacking Kurdish positions and leaving the Islamic State alone.

The Turks have been facilitating the growth of the jihadist movement – including ISIS, as well as al-Qaeda – from the very beginning. As Joe Biden told a Harvard audience last year:

“They poured hundreds of millions of dollars and thousands of tons of weapons into anyone who would fight against Assad. Except that the people who were being supplied were al-Nusra and al-Qaeda and the extremist elements of jihadis coming from other parts of the world. We could not convince our colleagues to stop supplying them,” President [Recep Tayyip] Erdogan told me, he’s an old friend, said, ‘You were right. We let too many people (including foreign fighters) through.’ Now they are trying to seal their border.”

But it looks like they aren’t trying very hard. According to a former ISIS fighter, the Turks are allowing ISIS transit through Turkish territory in order to attack the Kurds:

“‘ISIS commanders told us to fear nothing at all because there was full cooperation with the Turks,’ said Omer of crossing the border into Turkey, ‘and they reassured us that nothing will happen, especially when that is how they regularly travel from Raqqa and Aleppo to the Kurdish areas further northeast of Syria because it was impossible to travel through Syria as YPG [National Army of Syrian Kurdistan] controlled most parts of the Kurdish region.’”

The Turkish media has exposed Turkish Prime Minister Recep Erdogan’s gun-running activities, which supply ISIS with Turkish weapons and ammunition. As the Associated Press reports:

“In May, the Cumhuriyet paper published what it said were images of Turkish trucks carrying ammunition to Syrian militants. The images reportedly date back to January 2014, when local authorities searched Syria-bound trucks, touching off a standoff with Turkish intelligence officials. Cumhuriyet said the images were proof that Turkey was smuggling arms to rebels in Syria.”

The editors of *Cumhuriyet* have been arrested and held for questioning, just like dozens of journalists who have crossed paths with Turkish Prime Erdogan’s increasingly authoritarian regime.

Erdogan’s Islamic Development Party (AKP) is intent on reversing Turkey’s secularist path, and instituting Islamic law: ideologically, the Islamist AKP is sympathetic to ISIS, its goals if not its exact methods.

And it isn’t just ideology that links Erdogan and ISIS: money is also a factor – a big factor. Putin laid out the charge in a press conference in which he said:

“Vehicles, carrying oil, lined up in a chain going beyond the horizon resembling a living oil pipe. Day and night they are going to Turkey. Trucks always go there loaded, and back from there – empty. We assume that the top political leadership of Turkey might not know anything about this [illegal oil trade]. Hard to believe, but it is theoretically possible.”

Methinks I detect a bit of sarcasm in that last sentence: of course Erdogan knows about the oil trade with ISIS. There are reports that his son is directly involved.

The West's war on ISIS is completely phony. Our efforts, and those of our ally, Turkey, aim at overthrowing Syria strongman Bashar al-Assad – a goal we share with ISIS as well as our subsidized “moderate” rebel sock puppets. With Russia's entry into the fight, the phoniness of the anti-ISIS campaign is underscored: Washington is clearly much more interested in countering the Russians than in undermining ISIS.

The “war on terrorism” was never about stopping terrorism: it was always about securing US global hegemony and crushing dissent on the home front. The Syrian civil war has proved that beyond the shadow of a doubt.

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