

Ankara Retracts: Turkey ‘Admits’ Russian Air Cargo to Syria Was Legal

By [Ria Novosti](#)

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The Turkish authorities recognize the legitimacy of the cargo seized from a Moscow-Damascus passenger plane but have a problem with its processing, a Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman said on Thursday.

“The Turkish side does not in principle question the legitimacy of the cargo that was seized but is unhappy with the transportation notification procedure,” spokesman Alexander Lukashevich said.

“Our Turkish partners have now effectively retracted the initial allegations that there was ammunition on board,” he added.

The Syrian Air airliner was forced to land in Turkey on October 10 over suspicions it was carrying weapons.

Turkish F-16 fighter jets forced down the Airbus A320 some three hours after it had taken off from Moscow’s Vnukovo international airport. Turkey eventually permitted the A320 to resume its flight after a five-hour inspection of the aircraft which resulted in the seizure of a number of items.

Moscow said there were no weapons on board, that the delivery was “entirely legal” and that Russia would demand the return of the equipment.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said, however, the “radar equipment” on board was “dual purpose,” meaning it could have both civilian and military applications.

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said the intercepted plane was carrying Russian-made military gear and ammunition destined for the Syrian military. Syria’s Foreign Ministry also claimed the jet had no weapons or illegal items on board.

Moscow has repeatedly blocked international sanctions against the embattled regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad over what it says is a pro-rebel bias. Tens of thousands of people have killed been since the outbreak of civil war in Syria in March 2011, according to opposition groups.

Russia has insisted its ongoing arms deliveries to Syria are of defensive equipment that cannot be used against civilians, relate to contracts signed long ago, and are in accordance with international law.

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