

Downed Turkish Fighter Jet is the Result of NATO Aggression, not Syrian Action

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The facts concerning the incident in which a Turkish fighter jet was shot down by Syrian air defences last week have yet to be proven. However, what we can say is that the warplane was brought down in Syrian territorial waters. Its two pilots are believed to have ejected and are uninjured, although they have not yet been located since Friday's crash.

Damascus claims that the military aircraft violated its airspace, thus giving it the right to shoot it down. Istanbul has admitted that the RF-4E Phantom jet did enter Syrian airspace "for a short time" but that it exited before being hit. The fact so far that the wreckage was subsequently located in the Mediterranean Sea within Syrian territorial waters tends to support the claim of legitimate defensive action by Syria. The precedent for such Syrian action is well established.

Last year, for example, Iran shot down an American spy drone that had violated the Islamic Republic's airspace. No one then argued against Iran's right to take defensive measures on that occasion. Even hawkish American politicians, who regularly condone the assassination of Iranian nuclear scientists, were muted on Iran's downing of prized Pentagon technology – underscoring the legitimacy of defensive action by a nation whose territorial space is violated.

Moreover, one doesn't have to imagine too hard how Washington, London or other NATO members would respond if an Iranian or Syrian military aircraft were to cross into their territories.

Yet the American-led NATO alliance has leapt to condemn Syria over the downed Turkish warplane. NATO this week convened an emergency meeting in Brussels to discuss the incident. The organization's general secretary Anders Fogh Rasmussen emerged after the meeting to issue a statement condemning Syria for what he called "a completely unacceptable act". NATO member Turkey had hastily called the Brussels gathering under the military umbrella's Article 5 provision that an attack on one member is an attack on all.

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Ryyip Erdogan had earlier denounced Syria over an alleged "hostile act". Turkey is claiming that its warplane was shot down in international airspace – albeit having entered Syrian airspace – and that the aircraft then crashed in Syrian waters. The fact that Rasmussen pointedly avoided media questions on that specific claim suggests that there is no evidence to back it up. Flight control data would be easily available to support the Turkish claim, but the fact that NATO shied away from the crucial point over where exactly the Syrians fired on the Turkish jet implies that Syria's case is correct.

Nevertheless, NATO persists in condemning Syria. The military alliance said the shooting down of the fighter jet was “another example of the Syrian government’s disregard for international law, human lives and peace”.

Such condemnation is cloyingly rich coming from the same alliance that made a mockery of international law last year when it distorted UN Security Council Resolution 1973 from one mandating a No Fly Zone over Libya to “protect human rights” into a green light for a seven-month aerial bombing campaign on that country. The NATO blitzkrieg on Libya involved drone strikes, cruise missile launches and over 11,000 bombing sorties. The civilian death toll is unknown but it could be as high as 50,000 because the NATO bombers struck urban centres, apartment blocks, food stores and public infrastructure and utilities such as water and electricity stations. Just one of these bombing missions at a farming community in Zlitan resulted in as many 80 civilian deaths – just one of many NATO acts in Libya that would constitute a war crime. NATO’s criminal destruction of Libya paved the way for the collapse of a popular government and the roadside lynching of its leader Muammar Gaddafi. Libya now lies in ruins under a state of lawlessness overseen by feuding armed militia whom NATO’s illegal intervention has imposed on the suffering people of the North African country.

Is that what NATO’s general secretary Rasmussen considers as regard for international law, human lives and peace?

The reaction of Turkish PM Erdogan is particularly instructive of NATO’s cynical double standards and moral bankruptcy. Two years ago, in May 2010, a civilian Turkish aid ship transporting vital humanitarian provisions to the besieged Palestinian people of Gaza was attacked by Israeli commandos. Unlike the disputed downing of the Turkish warplane, the Israeli stormtroopers hijacked a civilian aid vessel in international waters – an act of piracy – and proceeded to murder unarmed civilians onboard the Mavi Marmari. The butchery was captured in glaring detail on CCTV. If ever there were a case of “hostile action” the Israeli attack on the Turkish aid convoy is it.

Initially, the Turkish leader strongly condemned Israel’s act of lawlessness on the high seas. He could hardly do anything less, given the enormity of the crimes. But despite promising a robust response at the time, the Turkish leader and the government have since let the whole matter slip into oblivion.

The striking anomaly in the reaction to the downed warplane off the Syrian coast is telling. In the case of the Mavi Marmara aid ship, there were no Turkish calls for an emergency NATO meeting to assess what was undeniably a gratuitous attack by Israel on a NATO member – made all the more grave because that act resulted in nine civilian deaths. There was no hastily convened meeting in Brussels; there was no strongly worded condemnation from NATO against Israel’s patent act of international aggression.

By this comparison, Erdogan and his NATO allies show themselves to be self-serving hypocrites of the first order. But their moral bankruptcy is exposed even further with a few more facts concerning the downing of this Turkish attack aircraft. Bereft in the Western mainstream media is the crucial context of this incident. The buzzing – if not violation – of Syrian territory by a Turkish warplane comes after 15 months of unrelenting covert aggression by Turkey and other NATO members inside Syria. Turkey has been providing land bases for Jihadi mercenaries from Libya, Saudi Arabia and Iraq to invade Syria and wage a terrorist campaign to destabilise the government of Bashar Al Assad.

Turkey along with NATO's leading members, the US, Britain and France, is involved in a covert war of aggression against Syria that is being funded with over \$100 million from the anti-Syrian monarchies of Saudi Arabia and Qatar. This terrorist campaign has involved no-warning car bombs in Damascus, Aleppo and other cities claiming hundreds of lives. It has involved kidnappings, shootings and sabotage of oil pipelines. And there is credible evidence that the civilian massacres in Houla and Qubair were the work of NATO-backed mercenaries, not the Syrian army as Western politicians and their media mouthpieces were quick to allege.

This criminal assault on Syria and its citizens by NATO and its proxies is clearly a clandestine campaign to elicit regime change. This is part of a long-term Western plan to rewrite the political map in the Middle East for the conquest of oil and subjugation of countries that are deemed resistant to Western hegemony in the region. What is happening in Syria has to be seen in the context of US-led NATO wars of occupation in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya. The overthrow of the Assad government in Damascus is part of the bigger Western war plan on Iran and geopolitical rivals of Russia and China.

The cynical concern for international law and human rights that NATO powers espouse over countries that it is targeting for regime change is in stark contrast to their lack of concern over crimes against humanity committed by Israel or by the Arab monarchs towards their own people peacefully protesting for such rights. Why are Washington, London and Brussels not calling for international sanctions on the regimes in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain?

What NATO wants is an "act of war" that it can pin on Syria, thus giving the NATO war machine the pseudo legal right to launch an overt military campaign on that country - as opposed to the 15-month covert campaign of aggression that has so far proved ineffective in dislodging the popularly supported Assad government.

The hypocritical, histrionic reaction of Turkey and its NATO allies over the latest downing of a Turkish warplane off the Syrian coast is more reflective of their criminal war agenda across the Middle East than the actual circumstances of the incident.

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