

Pretext to Wage War on Syria. Turkey and the Gulf of Tonkin Redux?

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Lyndon Johnson wanted war on Vietnam and got it.

The August 1964 false flag Gulf of Tonkin incident initiated full-scale conflict after Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution.

War was authorized without declaring it.

It's an American tradition. Big lies launch wars. Manufactured pretexts initiate them. Mass killing and destruction follow.

One nation after another is ravaged. Syria's next, then Iran, followed by other states on Washington's hit list.

On June 22, Turkey provocatively flew two warplanes at low altitude over Syrian airspace. It wanted a response and got it.

On June 23, Syria's [SANA](#) state media headlined "Military Spokesman: Anti-Air Defenses Intercepted a Target That Violated Syrian Airspace Over Territorial Waters, Shot It Down West of Lattakia," saying:

"At 11:40 AM on 22/6/2012, an unidentified aerial target violated Syrian airspace, coming from the west at a very low altitude and at high speed over territorial waters, so the Syrian anti-air defenses counteracted with anti-aircraft artillery, hitting it directly as it was 1 kilometer away from land, causing it to crash into Syrian territorial waters west of Om al-Tuyour village in Lattakia province, 10 kilometers from the beach."

Syria's military spokesman also said naval forces from both countries were "searching for the two missing pilots."

Some media sources said both crew members were rescued. Others said they're still missing.

On June 23, Turkey's [Today's Zaman](#) headlined "Turkey says Syria down(ed) its air force jet," saying:

The incident will "likely....worsen already strained relations between" both countries.

After a two hour security meeting, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan blamed Syrian forces for downing its aircraft. An official statement said:

"Following the evaluation of data provided by our related institutions and the findings of the joint search and rescue efforts with Syria, it is understood that our plane was downed by Syria."

Turkey "will determinedly take necessary steps" in response. No further details were given.

At the time of its report, Today's Zaman said both crew members were missing. It added that Ankara wouldn't "tolerate any action that it deemed violating its security."

Turkish TV reports said two military aircraft were on a reconnaissance mission.

In fact, Ankara acted provocatively. Perhaps it was at the behest of Washington. Turkey is a NATO member. A previous article explained it can invoke NATO Charter Articles 4 or 5.

Article 4 calls for members to "consult together whenever, in the opinion of any of them, the territorial integrity, political independence, or security of any" is threatened.

Article 5 considers an armed attack (real or otherwise) against one or more members, an attack against all, and calls for collective self-defense.

On June 23, [Reuters](#) headlined "Turkey warns it would respond decisively to Syria downing it aircraft," saying:

Erdogan's "initial comments and subsequent statement (were) measured in tone. He said Turkish and Syrian forces were working together to search for the two missing crew of the aircraft."

Turkish media also said Syria apologized for the incident.

"Turkish state television interviewed witnesses on the country's Mediterranean coast, near the Syrian border, who said they saw two low-flying fighter jets pass overhead in the morning in the direction of Syrian waters but only one return."

Syrian Foreign Ministry spokesman Jihad Makdissi said:

“There was no aggression.” Damascus confirmed “an unidentified target flying at very low range when it violated Syrian airspace.” He added that both sides were searching for missing crew members.

The [New York Times](#) said an official Turkish statement hadn’t “yet concluded that the Syrian action was provocative, and it acknowledged that Syrian rescue teams were cooperating in trying to locate the aircraft and crew.”

“But the statement also left open the possibility that Turkey, a NATO member, would respond militarily, an outcome that could further complicate and widen the Syrian conflict.”

Washington has longstanding regime change plans. In early 2011, it orchestrated Western-generated violence.

It wants Assad replaced by a subservient puppet leader. If events on the ground don’t succeed, expect war to follow.

The Obama and Erdogan administrations may have staged Friday’s incident. Whether it’s a pretext for full-scale intervention remains to be seen.

Events on the ground keep escalating dangerously. Anything may erupt anytime. Provocations are easy to stage.

Friday’s incident may indeed become a casus belli. If not, perhaps something greater is planned to give Obama another war he wants. What better way to silence his Republican critics who call him soft on Assad.

On June 22, [Foreign Policy](#)’s associate editor Uri Friedman headlined “How would NATO respond to Syria shooting down a Turkish plane?” saying:

“Could this incident — or an incident like it — trigger more aggressive action against Syria by the international community? After all, Turkey is a member of NATO....”

Its Charter affirms its all-for-one-and-one-for-all policy. Attacking one member is considered acting against all 28. Collective self-defense is called for.

On September 12, 2001, NATO invoked Article V for the first time. Will Syria be number two? If Turkey claims Damascus acted aggressively, will war follow?

“It is not an entirely unreasonable” possibility, said Friedman.

In April, Erdogan suggested he might invoke Article V. Whether he plans it now remains to be seen.

According to former UN Permanent Representative to NATO Kurt Volker, Article V gives NATO countries a chance to consult with one another on possible responses. It doesn't automatically suggest a military one.

“A response could be anything from a statement reiterating the inviolability of security guarantees to members coordinating activities so that they can respond to further attacks on Turkish interests.”

Volker doesn't think Friday's incident justifies war. At the same time, the ball advanced closer to initiating it without Security Council authorization.

One way would be by creating Syrian “safe zones,” providing greater opposition support, and conducting air strikes against strategic military sites.

“I do get the feeling,” he added, “that the patience of the international community is growing thinner.”

“I think we may be approaching a point at which this kind of coalition intervention is more thinkable than it was a couple of months ago.”

Atlantic Council managing editor James Joyner also doesn't believe Friday's incident justifies war.

“It would be one thing if Syria sent ground troops into Turkey and started shooting,” he said.

In contrast, “shooting down a plane that might have been surveilling Syrian air space is just a different animal than that.”

“This is more of a harsh words and sanctions kind of thing, and frankly there's not much more of that that we can do in terms of Syria.”

On June 23, UK government controlled [BBC](#) headlined “Turkish warplane downed by Syria ‘may have crossed border,’ ” saying:

Turkish President Abdullah Gul said its aircraft may have violated Syrian airspace. Doing so

isn't unusual for short distances at high speed, he added.

"It is routine for jet fighters to sometimes fly in and out over (other) borders....when you consider their speed over the sea," he claimed.

"These are not ill-intentioned things but happen beyond control due to the jets' speed."

Unexplained was that it's one thing for peaceful neighbors occasionally to violate each other's airspace without authorization.

No harm, no foul.

It's quite another given months of intense violence in Syria and Turkey's direct role.

Moreover, violating another country's airspace by trying to avoid its defensive capabilities at low altitude shows clear hostile intent.

Damascus has every right to consider these type actions aggressive and threatening. Turkey would react the same way. So would Washington, key NATO partners and Israel.

A virtual state of war exists in Syria short of officially declaring it. These type incidents can easily be used as pretexts for full-blown conflict. It remains to be seen if Washington has that in mind.

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