The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Putin: Russia Ready to Cooperate With U.S. Coalition in Syria

By Anna Dolgov

November 27, 2015



Putin called the downing of the Russian plane a betrayal — suggesting on Thursday that Russian air strikes in northwestern Syria, where Turkmen forces are concentrated, were not aimed against those rebel groups, but against terrorists.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said Thursday his country is committed to cooperating with a U.S.-led coalition to fight the Islamic State terrorist group in Syria, according to the transcript released by the Kremlin.

"We respect the coalition that is headed by the Americans, and are ready to cooperate with it," Putin said. He added, however, that Moscow was "concerned" about whether the coalition was effective, and would have preferred to see a coalition led by the United Nations.

Speaking at the Kremlin after talks with French President Francois Hollande, Putin said the two countries have agreed to expand their bilateral cooperation on military strikes against Islamic State in Syria.

He also said Russia was willing to “avoid any strikes against those territories and those armed forces that themselves are willing to fight against terror.” The United States has accused Russia of using its air campaign to prop up the regime of Syrian President Bashar Assad by bombing anti-government insurgents rather than Islamic State targets.

Hollande's visit coincided with a souring of Moscow's relations with another member of NATO, Turkey, whose military downed a Russian Su-24 bomber on Tuesday, accusing it of violating Turkish airspace.

The incident followed Ankara's appeals to Russia to stop bombing Syria's Turkmen tribesmen, who are of Turkish descent and who are fighting against Assad, and to focus on the fight against terror.

Putin called the downing of the Russian plane a betrayal — suggesting on Thursday that Russian air strikes in northwestern Syria, where Turkmen forces are concentrated, were not aimed against those rebel groups, but against terrorists.

“We are hearing about some tribes that are close to Turkey — Turkmen and so on,” Putin said. “One has to wonder: What are representatives of Turkish terrorist organizations doing on that territory.”

France and Russia are seeking to expand the fight against Islamic State following terror attacks in Paris on Nov. 13, which resulted in 130 fatalities, and the downing of a Russian passenger plane over Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, killing all 224 people aboard. Islamic State has claimed responsibility for both attacks.

Putin said Russia's current tension with Turkey should not mar its cooperation with France.

“As is well known, Turkey is a member of the North Atlantic alliance, and France is also a NATO member, so we understand the situation France is in under these circumstances,” Putin said. “But Mr. President has expressed condolences to us in connection with the deaths of our servicemen, and we are very grateful to him for this.”

Contact the author at newsreporter@imedia.ru

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2015/11/27/putin-russia-ready-to-cooperate-with-us-coalition-in-syria-a50962