

Turkey shoots down Russian jet it says violated its airspace

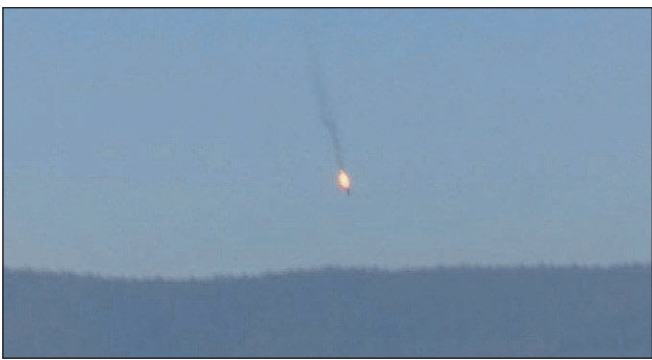
Associated Press

MOSCOW — Turkey shot down a Russian warplane on Tuesday that it said ignored repeated warnings and crossed into its airspace from Syria, killing at least one of the two pilots in a long-feared escalation in tensions between Russia and NATO. Russian President Vladimir Putin denounced what he called a “stab in the back” and warned of “significant consequences.”

The shoot down — the first time in half a century that a NATO member has downed a Russian plane — prompted an emergency meeting of the alliance. The incident highlighted the chaotic complexity of Syria’s civil war, where multiple groups with clashing alliances are fighting on the ground and the sky is crowded with aircraft bombing various targets.

“As we have repeatedly made clear we stand in solidarity with Turkey and support the territorial integrity of our NATO ally, Turkey,” NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg told a news conference after the meeting of the alliance’s decision-making North Atlantic Council, called at Turkey’s request.

The pilots of the downed Su-24 ejected, but one was killed by Syrian rebel fire from the ground as he parachuted to Earth, said the Russian general staff,



Haberturk TV via AP

This frame grab from video by Haberturk TV shows a Russian warplane on fire before crashing on a hill as seen from Hatay province, Turkey, on Tuesday.

insisting the Russian jet had been in Syrian airspace at the time.

One of two helicopters sent to the crash site to search for survivors was also hit by rebel fire, killing one serviceman and forcing the chopper to make an emergency landing, the military said.

Stoltenberg urged “calm and de-escalation” and renewed contacts between Moscow and Ankara. Russia has long been at odds with NATO, which it accuses of encroaching on Russia’s borders, as well as with Turkey’s determination to oust Syrian President Bashar Assad, a longtime Moscow ally.

In Washington, President Barack Obama said Turkey “has a right to defend its territory and its airspace.”

At a news conference with French President Francois Hollande, he said the incident underscored

the “ongoing problem” with Russia’s military operations in Syria, where the Russians have been targeting groups near the Turkish border. Calling Russia an “outlier” in the global fight against the Islamic State group, Obama said that if Moscow were to concentrate its airstrikes on IS targets, mistakes “would be less likely to occur.”

On Sept. 30, Russia began a campaign of massive airstrikes in Syria, which it says are aimed at destroying fighters of the Islamic State group but which Western critics contend are bolstering Assad’s forces.

Before Tuesday’s incident, Russia and the West appeared to be moving toward an understanding of their common strategic goal of eradicating IS, which gained momentum after the Nov. 13 attacks in Paris, as well as the Oct. 31 bombing of a Russian airliner over Egypt’s Sinai desert. The

Islamic State group claimed responsibility for both attacks.

Turkey said its fighter pilots acted after two Russian Su-24 bombers ignored numerous warnings that they were nearing and then entering Turkish airspace. In a letter to the U.N. Security Council and Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Turkey said the Russian warplanes violated its airspace “to a depth of 1.36 miles and 1.15 miles ... for 17 seconds” just after 9:24 a.m.

It said one of the planes then left Turkish airspace and the other one was fired at by Turkish F-16s “in accordance with the rules of engagement” and crashed on the Syrian side of the border.

Russia insisted the plane stayed over Syria, where it was supporting ground action by Syrian troops against rebels. Rebel forces fired at the two parachuting pilots as they descended, and one died, said Jahed Ahmad, a spokesman for the 10th Coast Division rebel group. The fate of the second pilot was not immediately known.

A visibly angry Putin denounced what he called a “stab in the back by the terrorists’ accomplices” and warned of “significant consequences” for Russian-Turkish relations. Hours later Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov cancelled a planned visit to Turkey on Wednesday.

Russia “will never tolerate

such atrocities as happened today and we hope that the international community will find the strength to join forces and fight this evil,” Putin said.

Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu insisted his country had the right to take “all kinds of measures” against border violations, and called on the international community to work toward “extinguishing the fire that is burning in Syria.”

But despite the harsh

words, some analysts believe that Russia and Turkey have reasons not to let the incident escalate, because of economic and energy ties and their common opposition to IS.

“Relations have been very strained between Russia and Turkey of late, so Moscow will be trying its utmost to contain the damage this might cause,” said Natasha Kuhrt, a lecturer in international peace and security at King’s College London.

Officer charged with murder in teen’s death; video released

CHICAGO (AP) — A white Chicago police officer who shot a black teenager 16 times last year was charged with first-degree murder Tuesday, hours before the city released a video of the killing that many people fear could spark unrest.

City officials and community leaders have been bracing for the release of the dash-cam video, fearing the kind of unrest that occurred in cities such as Baltimore and Ferguson, Missouri, after young black men were slain by police or died in police custody.

A judge ordered that the recording be made public by Wednesday. Moments before the footage was released Tuesday evening, the mayor and the police chief appealed for calm.

“People have a right

to be angry. People have a right to protest. People have a right to free speech. But they do not have a right to ... criminal acts,” Police Superintendent Garry McCarthy said.

The relevant portion of the video runs for less than 40 seconds and has no audio.

Laquan McDonald, 17, swings into view on a four-lane street where police vehicles are stopped in the middle of the roadway. As he jogs down the street, he appears to pull up his pants and then slows to a brisk walk, veering away from two officers who are emerging from a vehicle and drawing their guns.

Almost immediately, one of the officers appears to fire from close range. McDonald spins around and crumples to the pavement. The second officer simultaneously lowers his weapon.

The car with the camera continues to roll forward until the officers are out of the frame. Then McDonald

can be seen lying on the pavement, moving occasionally. At least two small puffs of smoke can be seen coming off his body as the officer continues firing.

Thanksgiving travel: Cheap gas but fears of terrorism

LOS ANGELES (AP) — That other Thanksgiving tradition — congested highways and jammed airports — is getting underway with gas prices low and terrorism fears high.

An estimated 46.9 million Americans are expected to take a car, plane, bus or train at least 50 miles from home over the long holiday weekend, according to the motoring organization AAA. That would be an increase of more than 300,000 people over last year, and the most travelers since 2007.

Among the reasons given for the increase: an

improving economy and the cheapest gasoline for this time of year since 2008.

Anyone trekking to a major airport should factor in 50 extra minutes on the road, according to the traffic date company INRIX — and that’s just getting to the airport, never mind getting through security.

Though there have been no changes to the nation’s terror alert status, the recent attacks in Paris, West Africa and elsewhere prompted the State Department to warn American travelers about the risks overseas.

On Tuesday, the head of the Transportation Security Administration, Peter Neffenger, boasted that the U.S. has the world’s best security and assured the public that TSA is “taking every measure to protect the millions of air travelers in the coming weeks.”

Airfares have increased just 69 cents on average since last year, according to the Airlines Reporting Corp.

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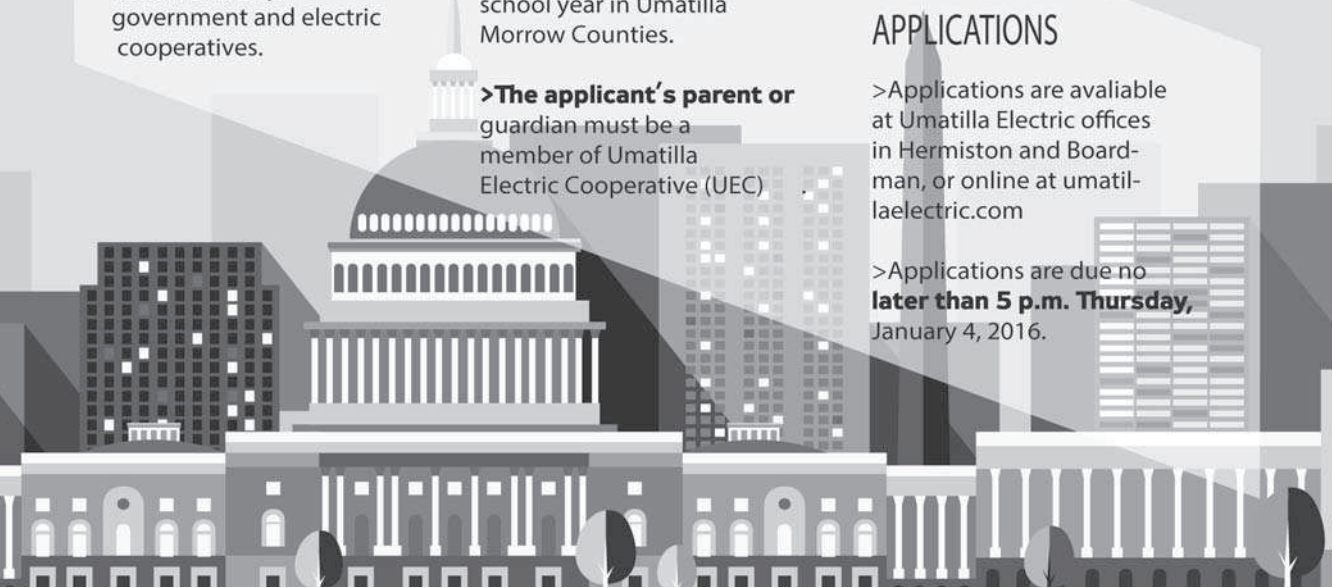
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