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Russian pilot rescued by Syrian commando unit

25/11/2015



A Russian military pilot whose plane was [shot down by Turkey and crashed in Syria](#) arrived on Wednesday at an air base in Latakia province after being rescued by a Syrian army commando unit, Syrian and Russian officials said.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu told Russian news agencies that the man was rescued in a 12-hour operation which ended in the early hours on Wednesday and is now “safe and sound” at Russia’s air base in the government-controlled area in Syria.

Turkey shot down the Russian warplane on Tuesday, saying it ignored repeated warnings after crossing into its airspace from Syria. One of the two pilots was killed and captured by Syrian rebels who said they were searching for the other. The incident inflamed tensions between Turkey and Russia, and Russian President Vladimir Putin warned of “significant consequences.”

A statement from the Syrian armed forces on Wednesday said a special unit carried out overnight a “qualitative” operation with the Russian forces and rescued one of the two pilots.

Russian President Vladimir Putin also confirmed a second pilot has been rescued.

In a statement carried by Syria’s official news agency SANA, the army said the Syrian and Russian forces penetrated into the areas where “terrorists” are entrenched at a depth of 4.5 kilometers and rescued the pilot. It said he is in “good health.”

Russia’s ambassador to France also said that the second pilot is in the hands of the Syrian army. Ambassador Alexander Orlov said on Europe-1 radio that one of the pilots was wounded, then killed on the ground by

“jihadists.”

He said the other “managed to escape and be rescued by the Syrian army.” He didn’t elaborate.

Orlov accused Turkey of being an “accomplice” of Islamic State extremists and playing an ambiguous role in Syria’s civil war.

The Russian warplane catches on fire before crashing onto a hill in Turkey. Photo: EPA

However he played down concerns of escalation of violence among the international players involved in Syria.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Wednesday that his country does not wish to escalate tensions with Russia over the downing of the plane.

Speaking at an Organisation of Islamic Cooperation economy meeting in Istanbul, Erdogan said that Turkey favors “peace, dialogue and diplomacy.”

Erdogan however defended his country’s move to shoot down the plane saying: “no one should expect Turkey to stay silent to border violations or the violation of its rights.”

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