
Turkish pilots involved in downing of Russian Su-24 arrested over links to coup attempt – minister

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Two Turkish Air Force pilots linked to the downing of a Russian Su-24 bomber in November have been detained in connection with the recent failed coup attempt in Turkey, the country's justice minister has said.

Trends [Coup attempt in Turkey](#)

"The pilots that downed the Russian jet were arrested," Haberturk TV channel quoted Turkish Justice Minister Bekir Bozdag as saying on Tuesday.

Earlier, AFP quoted an unidentified official as telling journalists that *"Two pilots who were part of the operation to down the Russian Su-24 in November 2015 are in custody."* The official stressed that the military pilots have been arrested over links to the coup, not because of the attack on the Russian plane.

The pilots find themselves among more than 7,500 other Turks, including 103 generals and admirals, who have been detained following the failed coup on July 15, according to figures given by the Turkish authorities. The instigators of the failed power grab are believed to be high-ranking air force officers.

No reports in the months since the incident with the Russian bomber had stated the aircraft had been downed by a two-seat version of the F-16 fighter jet, and it had been presumed that one pilot was responsible for attacking the Russian bomber with an air-to-air missile.

[@RT.com](#) Turkey reopens probe into suspected killer of Russian pilot <http://on.rt.com/7gy4>



However, the F-16 that ambushed the Russian warplane – which was attacking terrorist positions near the Turkish-Syrian border – was operating in a group of two fighters, so the second detained pilot could have been flying the other F-16 fighter jet.

The day after the coup attempt, the mayor of Ankara, Melih Gokcek, announced that the pilot who had shot down the Russian plane had taken part in the coup, and was a member of a secret “*parallel state*” organization allegedly headed by cleric Fethullah Gulen, who lives in self-exile in the US.

“It is a ‘parallel state’ that has ruined our relationship with Russia. It was an incident that involved one of the pilots of this structure, 100 percent. He was one of the participants in the coup,” the mayor told CNN Turk. Melih Gokcek stressed that *“our relations with Russia have been spoiled by these villains.”*

[@RT com](https://twitter.com/RT_com) Turkey demands double life sentence for Greek pilot over alleged jet downing in 1996 <http://on.rt.com/7d0r>



Gulen has denied all allegations about being involved in organizing the failed power grab.

On November 24, 2015, a Russian Su-24 frontline bomber was downed over Syrian territory by a Turkish air-to-air missile. One of the pilots, Lieutenant Colonel Oleg Peshkov, was killed by ground fire as he parachuted from the stricken plane.

In the absence of an apology from Ankara, Moscow introduced a broad package of restrictive economic measures against Turkey.

After the sanctions were introduced, Russian officials, including President Vladimir Putin, repeatedly stated that they would be lifted only on condition that Turkey apologized for the incident.

[@RT.com](#) 'Dear Mr. President': [#Erdogan](#) sends Putin 'first letter' since Su-24 shot down by Turkey <http://on.rt.com/7fhi>



In mid-June, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan [apologized](#) for the death of the Russian pilot in a formal letter to Putin and expressed readiness to restore relations with Moscow.

On June 30, President Putin signed a decree partially lifting restrictions on Russians' travel to Turkey.
