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Syrian Turkmen Rebels Killed Russian Pilots Parachuting From Downed Plane

By Jason Ditz
November 24, 2015

After Turkish warplanes shot down a Russian Su-24 over northern Syria this morning, the two Russian pilots parachuted out. They were dead before they hit the ground, as US-backed Turkmen rebels opened fire on them while they were still in the air, killing both.

The rebels danced around the corpse of one of the Russian pilots in a video, cheering his death and shouting Allahu Akbar. Turkish officials had been railing against Russian airstrikes against the Turkmen rebels, claiming they amounted to international human rights violations and would not be tolerated.

Russia has been active in airstrikes in Latakia and Idlib, in northwestern Syria, aiming to help recover Syrian territory from a number of Islamist rebel factions, by and large allied to the al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra. The Turkmen group has gone unnamed in reports so far, and it is unclear how closely affiliated they are with this Islamist coalition.

That the group bragged about killing the Russian pilots and are openly brandishing US-provided weapons, however, can't be a good sign for US-Russian relations in the wake of this most recent incident near the Turkish border. President Obama has endorsed Turkey's attack as "self defense," despite the Pentagon confirming the plane was in Syria when attacked and conceding they were "unsure" if it ever violated Turkish airspace in the first place.