

**Critical Discourse Analysis: How the Washington Post  
and Moscow Times Reported the Russian Airstrikes in  
Syria**

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## 1. Introduction

Although newspapers are commonly presented as an impartial representation of the facts, all texts include some level of bias, and readers should be aware that their opinions can be manipulated both blatantly (e.g. open support for a political party) and covertly through the use of language. This paper will use Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to demonstrate how two seemingly neutral news reports leave their readers with vastly different interpretations of the same event. The analysed articles discuss the September 2015 Russian air strikes in Syria and were taken from the *Moscow Times* (MT) and the *Washington Post* (WP). They are examined within the general framework of Fairclough (1992), with specific emphasis on intertextuality, the representation of social actors, and the interconnectivity between the texts and society at large. The reports are found to proffer differing slants, with the WP article demonstrating a strong hostility to the Russian air strikes, while the MT has a slight pro-Russia bias.

## 2. Context of the Russian Air Strikes

Since 2011, the nation of Syria has been in a state of civil war. President Bashar al-Assad's government forces have faced multiple rebel groups, who in some instances have also fought each other. A group commonly referred to as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has taken advantage of this chaos, seizing huge swathes of land in both countries. The emergence of ISIS has internationalized the conflict, with its violent interpretation of Sharia law publicised through numerous videos depicting brutal executions, often of foreigners. In September 2014, the US and its coalition partners began air strikes against ISIS in Syria, while also funding anti-Assad rebel forces. Assad, a long-time ally of Russia, requested help from Russian President

Vladimir Putin, who had recently antagonised the West with his country's annexation of Crimea, followed by military support for pro-Russian groups in the 2014 Ukrainian Civil War. The Russian air strikes in Syria began on 30 September 2015.

### 3. Texts

The two analysed texts are taken from 30 September 2015 and are the first reports in both publications regarding the commencement of Russia's bombing campaign:

- 1) *Russia Begins Air Strikes in Syria* (MT, Russia) – Appendix 1
- 2) *Russia begins airstrikes in Syria; U.S. warns of new concerns in conflict* (WP, USA) – Appendix 2

These articles were chosen to represent the differing media reaction in two of the key international agents in the Syrian Civil War: Russia and the United States. Importantly, both publications are based in the capital cities of their respective countries, allowing the journalists closer access to the decision makers and a better perception of the collective mood surrounding the seat of government. The MT prides itself on its independence, having previously criticised “US hegemony” and the western media, while also being labeled as a “militant anti-Putin” publication (The Guardian, 2015). The WP has been accused of both left- and right-wing bias, although the general consensus seems to be a centrist publication with a moderate leftist slant.

When the above articles were released, both publications were daily English language newspapers, although the MT has since changed to a weekly format. The WP is sold nationally across the United States, whereas the MT is distributed freely within the Moscow area only. Gentzkow and Shapiro (2006) note the strong consumer demand for slant in newspapers, with highly elastic sales figures when newspapers change bias. It could therefore be asserted that the

WP is more likely to pander to the ideologies of its readership than the MT. With its status as Russia's only English-language newspaper, coupled with its free circulation policy, the MT has no direct competition, inelastic demand, and thus less reason to tailor its slant to the market. This is consistent with the findings of this report.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

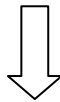
To investigate language at the discourse level, Stubbs (1983: 1) advocates the examination of text beyond the sentence, towards “larger linguistic units, such as conversational exchanges or written texts,” while paying particular attention to “language in use in social contexts.” For such an examination to be considered a CDA, Van Dijk (2003) contends it must also focus on social or political problems, and that explanations of discourse structures within their social narrative should be given priority over simple descriptions. CDA thus attempts “to show how discourse is shaped by relations of power and ideologies” (Coulthard et al, 2000: 117-118). Among the goals of such investigations are “to make more visible these opaque aspects of social practice,” (Fairclough et al., 2011: 358) and to enforce change through the identification of previously covert bias or prejudice.

Each CDA can use a completely different set of analytical approaches. Fairclough et al. (2011: 357) note that, “CDA is not a discrete academic discipline with a relatively fixed set of research methods.” It could be asserted that such flexibility allows CDA practitioners to utilise the widest range of tools available and use their own judgment regarding which procedures best reveal bias in text. However, CDA is not without opposition. The term *critical* is described as “little more than a rallying cry demanding that researchers consider ‘whose side they are on.’”

(Hammersley, 1997: 251). This claim is supported by Haig (2004), who warns discourse analysts to avoid the pitfall of looking for exploitation and inequality where none exists.

This paper uses the analytical framework set out by Fairclough (1992). The texts are examined in the following order:

Discourse Practice



Text



Social Practice

This analytical structure allows the texts to be examined within the context of a wider running narrative, before analysing them at the sentence, phrase, or word level. These findings are then assessed to see how the texts fit within society (1992: 231).

## 4.2 Intertextuality

Following Fairclough's analytical framework, this paper first investigates intertextuality, which Vahdani and Saeed (2015: 875) describe as the concept "that every text is interpretable through the background knowledge of other texts." More specifically, it investigates *external intertextuality*, i.e. backstories mentioned within the text (Richardson, 2007). Carter and Greenberg (1965: 33) note the importance of omission in the perceived accuracy of the media. Thus, to examine the effects of external intertextuality on the reader, this paper first looks at

which backstories were picked for inclusion and which were omitted. Following this analysis, instances of external intertextuality common to both articles are assessed qualitatively by determining whether the language used regarding the wider narratives is biased.

## **4.2 Referencing Social Actors**

Section 5.2 is devoted to an analysis of the key social actors in the story. Every author has to choose which social actors to include and how to represent them (Fairclough, 2003: 145). The first part of this analysis deals with the frequency of representation, which allows us to draw conclusions about the authors' perceived importance of the main social actors. If one participant in the story is mentioned significantly more than another, it is reasonable to assume she or he is seen as being more central to the narrative. Richardson (2007) speaks of the importance in the lexis used regarding the social actors, especially the metonymy, while Caldas-Coulthard (1992) notes how writers distance themselves from concepts by giving voices to others rather than reporting the thought or idea directly in the text. The final part of Section 5.2 is a qualitative analysis of the metonymy, including an investigation regarding whether the terminology used to describe social actors is dependent on thoughts being reported directly or via a third party.

## **4.3 Culture and Ideology**

The final part of Section 5 investigates the interconnectivity between the texts and society. The relationship between newspapers and the general public is two-way, with the views of both affecting the other (Chibnall, 1977; Richardson, 2007). Furthermore, Blackwell (2005) claims the story believed by the reader is partly down to the ideological framing of the event, and partly imagined by the reader. The cultural differences in Russian and American society are therefore hugely relevant when considering the texts. Enikolopov et al. (2010: 2) use statistical evidence

from 1990s Russia to suggest there is a “larger effect of media on political outcomes in a country with weak democratic institutions.” With Vladimir Putin acting as the de facto president of Russia for the previous 15 years and showing no signs of losing that position, such democratic weakness implies the Russian media holds more sway over the electorate than its western counterparts and is therefore more likely to be strictly monitored by the government. From this, one could postulate the MT is less likely to be overtly critical of Putin’s government without strong evidence of wrongdoing.

Morris and Peng’s (1994) geopsychological study on the fundamental attribution error says that Americans have a strong tendency to blame others directly for their actions, rather than taking into account situational factors, which is a psychological feature more common in collectivist societies. They attribute this to the higher levels of individualism in capitalist societies. Belin (2000: 4) notes “the media, like most citizens, tend to rally around their country’s political leaders in times of war.” Combining these findings suggests the WP is unlikely to consider the story from Putin’s perspective, a finding made in this paper.

## **5. Findings**

### **5.1 Intertextuality**

Fairclough (1992: 117-118) refers to intertextuality as instances “where specific other texts are overtly drawn upon within a text.” Due to the long-lasting and highly fragmented nature of the conflict in Syria, there are multiple cases of what Richardson (2007) calls external intertextuality, i.e. frequent referencing to events outside the main narrative of the Russian airstrikes. All cases of intertextuality uncovered during this investigation are shown in Appendix 3, and a summary of the cases discussed in detail is included below.



Table 5.1.1 – Intertextuality

Subject	Washington Post	Moscow Times
Russia-Assad Dialogue	<p>“<b>Assad’s apparent request to Moscow for military assistance</b> seems a last-gasp appeal for help from what was a dying regime,” he said.</p>	<p>Russia’s participation in anti-terrorist operations in Syria is being carried out on the basis of international law and <b>in accordance with an official request from the Syrian president,</b>” state news agency RIA Novosti quoted Putin as saying at his Novo-Ogaryovo residence outside Moscow</p>
Authorisation from Russian Parliament	<p><b>The resolution came without warning in the Federation Council,</b> Russia’s higher body of parliament, where 162 senators voted unanimously in support after a closed-door discussion — similar to a vote last year to green-light Russian military force in Ukraine.</p>	<p>Air strikes began just hours after <b>Putin received a fast-tracked authorization</b> to use force in Syria from the Federation Council.</p>
Assad’s Recent Military Defeats	<p>“<b>Amid the regime’s major losses</b> . . . Assad’s apparent request to Moscow for military assistance seems a last-gasp appeal for help from what was a dying regime,” he said.</p>	<p>The Kremlin’s stated political objectives are to fight terrorism and prop up Assad’s embattled government after a series of <b>setbacks against the Islamic State and Western-backed opposition groups.</b></p>
New Baghdad Intelligence Centre	-	<p>The Defense Ministry on Wednesday said that <b>air strikes would be coordinated with Syria, Iraq and Iran via a recently established intelligence center in Baghdad.</b></p>
Putin Talks to UN	<p>It also raises the stakes over competing visions for Syria outlined this week at the United Nations, where <b>Putin insisted that Syria’s embattled government is the key to stability after four years of bloodshed</b> and Obama warned that the “status quo” cannot stand.</p>	<p>In his address to the UN, <b>Putin proposed the creation of a broad international coalition to fight the Islamic State in Syria.</b></p>

Predictably, the WP pays more attention to the role of the US in the conflict, with the MT more concerned with Russian affairs. The WP references both the recent US-Russia military

talks and the US bombing campaign in Syria, whereas neither of these backstories is deemed worthy of inclusion in the MT article. Conversely, the MT seeks to legitimise Russia's military intervention by stating that, "air strikes would be coordinated with Syria, Iraq and Iran via a recently established intelligence center in Baghdad." The WP omits this information, glossing over the element of international coalescence in Russia's actions. This is a theme running throughout the WP article: any suggestion of Russia helping the international community is downplayed, and its role delegitimised.

When assessing the legality of Russia's intervention, the WP uses more negative language vis-à-vis the MT. While the MT describes "an official request from the Syrian president" for Russian airstrikes, the WP opts for "an apparent request." The use of the word *apparent* immediately casts doubts on the existence of such an appeal, which leaves the reader with the impression that one or both of the parties may be untrustworthy. Conversely, the MT's use of *official* conveys the lawfulness of Russia's actions. When describing the Russian Parliament's approval process, the MT says "Putin received a fast-track authorization," a statement that hints at efficiency and legitimacy. Discussing the same process, the WP says "The resolution came without warning." Again, the linguistic differences are stark. *Without warning* leaves the reader with the impression that Russia acted in a sneaky, deceitful manner, while the word *resolution* suggests a mere expression of intent, rather than the legally-binding *authorization* used by the MT.

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's position as both an ally of Moscow and an enemy of Washington is also encapsulated within the interpretations of the wider narratives. The WP tells of his "regime's major losses," whereas the MT uses the softer term "setbacks." This is consistent with the US view of Assad as a president in need of ousting, with *major losses* hinting

at danger for his rule, potentially with a regime change to come. Conversely, *setbacks* are minor, temporary inconveniences, concordant with Putin's support of Assad remaining as president. Such inconsistencies between the two texts are further highlighted when discussing Putin's recent appearance at the UN, with the MT referring to his speech as a proposal for "the creation of a broad international coalition to fight the Islamic State in Syria." This is a laudable goal, in contrast with the WP's description of "competing visions," as "Putin insisted that Syria's embattled government is the key to stability." By *insisting*, Putin is seen more as a unilateral decision maker demanding his own way. The American newspaper chooses to highlight the differences in international opinion, whereas the Russian article stresses Putin's desire to reach a solution. Lastly, while the MT describes "air strikes ... against the Islamic State," the WP casts doubt on this, with its assertion that, "U.S. officials dispute Moscow's claim that its aircraft targeted the Islamic State."

## 5.2 Social Actors

Table 5.2.1 shows the frequency of appearances each of the main social actors makes in the texts, with all unique occurrences counted, regardless of the metonymy. Where the actor is mentioned twice in the same sentence, it needs to be assessed whether it relates to two separate thoughts (included) or whether it represents paraphrasing (not included). Although the total word count is similar in both articles, separate columns showing (number of references/total word count)\*100 are included, ensuring fairness in the comparison of data between the articles.

**Table 5.2.1 - Frequency of Social Actors**

<b>Social Actor</b>	<b>WP – No. of references</b>	<b>WP - % of total words</b>	<b>MT – No. of references</b>	<b>MT - % of total words</b>
Vladimir Putin	4	0.319	15	1.236
Barack Obama	4	0.319	1	0.082
Bashar al-Assad	12	0.957	7	0.577
Russia/Government/Officials	23	1.834	19	1.565
US/Government/Officials	19	1.515	6	0.494
Syria/Government/Officials	3	0.239	4	0.329
Russian Military	7	0.558	15	1.236
American Military	2	0.159	1	0.082
Syrian Military	2	0.159	1	0.082
Anti-Assad Rebels	13	1.037	5	0.412
ISIS	13	1.037	9	0.741

**Total number of words: WP – 1,254      MT – 1,214**

The most telling difference between the two articles is the frequency with which the two presidents are mentioned, a decision made by the authors either consciously or subconsciously, as per Fairclough (2003). Vladimir Putin's domination of Russian politics is evident in the MT article, with 15 mentions, whereas the WP only refers to him on 4 occasions. US President Barack Obama is spoken of only once by the MT, relegating him to a bit part in the story, whereas the WP references Obama with the same frequency (4) that it references Putin. This shows some degree of ethnocentrism on behalf of the WP, with the American president deemed equally as worthy of inclusion as the man who ordered the air strikes that are the apparent focus

of the story. The WP uses collective terms representing the nation of Russia (e.g. the Kremlin, Moscow) 23 times, which could be an attempt to dehumanise the decision making process, taking it away from Putin and attributing it to an ambiguous group, e.g. “Russia’s stated intention to cooperate.”

When assessing the frequency of occurrence, the reader is also left with differing explanations for why Russia entered the conflict. The Russian government’s claim that intervention was in response to the growth of ISIS is supported by the MT, with almost twice as many mentions for ISIS (9) as anti-Assad rebels (5). In the WP, unnamed US officials accuse Russia of not targeting ISIS, but instead focusing their strikes on anti-Assad rebels. The WP mentions these rebel groups 13 times, which suggests the newspaper is aligning itself with that viewpoint, whereas the MT prefers to gloss over the possibility that Putin might be lying. The WP mentions ISIS the same number of times (13) as it does the rebels, which on the surface suggests equal importance in the story for both parties. However, this masks the reality behind the numbers, with 5 of the WP’s references to ISIS casting doubt over whom the Russian Air Force was actually targeting. This demonstrates the main limitation behind rudimentary quantitative analyses of social actors: merely counting the frequency does not allow one to differentiate in situations where a social actor is referenced for two or more different purposes.

Richardson (2007) speaks of the importance in assessing the lexis used to represent the social actors, thus the metonymy of four selected parties was analysed: President Assad, ISIS, the anti-Assad rebels, and the Russian Air Force. These actors were chosen because of their importance in the conflict, and the differing phraseology used in both newspapers to represent them. Table 5.2.2 shows a list of all terms used to describe these four actors.

Table 5.2.2 Metonymy for Selected Social Actors

Washington Post	Moscow Times
Russian warplanes Russian air power <i>Its aircraft</i> <i>Russian aircraft</i> <i>Russian airplanes</i> <i>Russian aviation</i>	Russian air force Russian aircraft <i>Russian warplanes</i>
Islamic State Al-Qaeda offshoot	Islamic State Terrorists Islamists <i>Islamic State</i>
A key Russian ally Assad <i>President Bashar al-Assad</i> <i>Assad</i> <i>President Assad</i>	President Bashar Assad Assad An embattled ally <i>Assad</i> <i>Syrian President</i>
Hom's civil defense force Rebel factions backed by the West Rebel group Factions against the Assad government Anti-Assad rebels <i>Opponents of Syria's embattled president</i> <i>U.S.-backed units</i> <i>Tajammu al-Aaza</i>	Other opposition groups Western-backed opposition groups Anti-Assad rebels

Non-italics denote the author's voice.

Italics denote part of reported speech (direct or indirect).

Caldas-Coulthard's (1992) assertion that writers use different voices to distance themselves from opinions is demonstrated with the varying lexis used to describe the Russian airplanes involved in the bombing. When the voice comes from the writers of the texts, the WP refers to "Russian warplanes" and "Russian air power," two terms that invoke images of the destructiveness of war, but by quoting Russian sources, it distances itself from the more neutral "aircraft," "airplanes," and "aviation." This slant is consistent with the overall tone of the text:

the WP is keen to link Russia's actions with the chaos of war. The reverse is true of the MT, which uses the softer terms "air force" and "aircraft" when voiced by the writer. Such language mitigates the devastation in the mind of the reader.

The WP only refers to Assad as president when quoting from other sources, a sign the newspaper is trying to distance itself from the thought of Assad as the legitimate president of Syria. In the newspaper's voice, he is only called "Assad," or "a key Russian ally." The MT makes reference to "President Bashar Assad," also calling him "an embattled ally." This wording suggests a desire to inform the reader of Assad's status as both legal ruler of Syria and friend of Russia. The metonymy used to describe the non-ISIS groups fighting Assad is also of interest. The MT refers to them as "anti-Assad groups," and "Western-backed groups," which, coupled with the language used to describe Assad, suggests they are Russian enemies. The WP uses more varied language and names certain groups, possibly in an attempt to humanise them. Readers are more likely to sympathise with "Hom's defence force" than they are "other opposition groups."

Another aspect of the WP's phraseology is the omission of any variant of the word *terror*. Despite 13 references to ISIS, the closest the WP comes to describing it as a terrorist group is the phrase, "an Al-Qaeda offshoot." Conversely, the MT refers directly to ISIS as "terrorists." Terrorism is a highly negative term, and its absence from the WP suggests an attempt to underplay the potential benefits of Russia's actions, while its inclusion in the MT could be an aspiration to achieve the reverse effect.

### **5.3 Culture and Ideology**

After investigating the discourse practice and text, the final part of Fairclough's (1992) analytical framework is the examination of the social practice. Chibnall (1977) and Richardson's

(2007) assertion of a two-way relationship between newspapers and society is examined by gauging the ways in which the findings in Sections 5.1 and 5.2 are either restricted by societal constraints, or intended to influence the general public.

Religion plays a major part in both American and Russian society. With this in mind, it is interesting to note the use of the terms “Islamist” and “holy war,” which appear in the MT, but not the WP. Such terms give the reader a strong indication that religion is a key factor in this story. The lack of religiousness in the WP article could be another sign that the publishers are keen not to be seen as supportive towards the Russian efforts. With the US being a predominantly Christian nation, and religiosity seen as a prerequisite for holding power, invoking the image of a Christian-Muslim holy war could evoke sympathy towards Russia, another country with a Christian majority. The WP therefore avoids doing this, demonstrating the importance of the framing of the event, as per Blackwell (2005). Future investigations could use corpus analysis to confirm whether the WP consistently omits phrases relating to religion when discussing the war in Syria.

Although some of the lexis used by the MT to describe the social actors and intertextuality demonstrate signs of a pro-Russia slant, overall the article is reasonably balanced. Russia is referenced negatively on occasion, and evidence that Putin lied about Russian ground troops being used in Syria is discussed. This supports the suggestion of the MT being an independent publication, although it is noticeably more sympathetic to Putin than the western media. The WP shows virtually no attempt to consider events that could justify Russian intervention, consistent with claims of Americans being more susceptible to making the fundamental attribution error (Morris and Peng, 1994). Russia’s actions are viewed with regards to their effects on the US, with the air strikes being called “an affront ... (to) President Obama,”



with ethnocentric reasoning used throughout the article, e.g. “The introduction of Russian air power ... took place with scant notice to the U.S. government.” Presumably every government in the world received “scant notice,” but the WP reports it as a direct insult to the US. Even in a post-Cold War era, anti-Russian sentiment in the US remains high, and the WP appears keen to gratify its readership with such slanted reporting.

## **6. Summary of Findings**

This CDA provides evidence that both the WP and MT articles were written from different ideological and cultural standpoints. Using Fairclough’s (1992) analytical framework, the discourse practices employed by the two newspapers were first investigated through their intertextuality. The WP includes more references to the US viewpoint, whereas the MT omits these, preferring instead to focus on the international collaboration that preceded the airstrikes. The reasons for such differences are likely to be multifarious and complex, but they do provide evidence of ethnocentrism by the WP, and a desire from the MT to legitimise the actions of the Russian government. These findings are strengthened further, with an analysis of the language used in mutual cases of intertextuality: the MT describing Russian actions with more positive words than the WP.

To fulfil the second section of Fairclough’s suggested framework, both the frequency and the metonymy used to describe the social actors were investigated. This uncovered further evidence of ethnocentrism on behalf of the WP, with American participants referenced more frequently than in the MT. Evidence of covert bias in the WP was also discovered, with the writers frequent use of negative terms to describe Russian or pro-Russian social actors. Interestingly, ISIS is described by the WP in moderate terms, which could be a further sign of

bias. This story is largely about ISIS becoming an enemy of Russia, so the sudden softening of language towards the group would suggest a desire to undermine Putin's actions. An analysis of the metonymy used to describe ISIS in WP articles relating to American bombing campaigns against the group would help to clarify this.

Fairclough recommends finishing with an examination of the social and ideological practices that affect the texts. Religion was introduced as a theme by the MT, but not the WP. The omission of religion in the WP could be seen as an attempt to deflect support from an opposing but predominantly Christian nation. Another potential reason for this omission is that separation of religion and state is seen as fundamental to the American political process and therefore irrelevant to a political discussion. Despite this possibility, the overall tone of the WP article was slanted against Russia, with a tendency to consider every action based on how the US would be affected. The MT article appears more balanced, although some of the lexis used offered evidence of a mild pro-Moscow slant.

## **7. Conclusion**

The findings in this study were consistent with expectations. The WP article demonstrates bias in favour of the ideological position of the US government, while considering all aspects of the story with regards to how they will affect the US. The MT article exhibits a more independent outlook, although some of the language used is pro-Russian. Belin (2000: 4) notes the tendency of media to "rally around" their countries in times of war, which provides the possibility that all discoveries of ideological bias in this study could be temporary. A CDA of texts regarding mutual US-Russian interests in a non-war setting would provide stronger evidence of the ideological standpoints of the two newspapers.

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[Accessed November 12, 2015].

## Appendix 1 – Moscow Times Article

<http://www.themoscowtimes.com/article/russia-begins-air-strikes-in-syria/536327.html>

# Russia Begins Air Strikes in Syria

- By [Matthew Bodner](#)
- Sep. 30 2015 20:53
- Last edited 20:55



Alexei Nikolsky / RIA Novosti / Kremlin / Reuters President Putin said on Wednesday the only way to fight terrorists in Syria was to act preemptively.

The Russian air force began to launch air strikes in Syria against the Islamic State and other opposition groups on Wednesday, in a move that President Vladimir Putin described as an anti-terrorist action conducted in accordance with international law.

"Russia's participation in anti-terrorist operations in Syria is being carried out on the basis of international law and in accordance with an official request from the Syrian president," state news agency RIA Novosti quoted Putin as saying at his Novo-Ogaryovo residence outside Moscow.

"The only true way to combat international terrorism ... is through pre-emption, [by] fighting and destroying terrorists in territories that they already occupy, instead of waiting for them to come to our homes," Putin said.

Air strikes began just hours after Putin received a fast-tracked authorization to use force in Syria from the Federation Council, Russia's upper house of parliament. The authorization came after weeks of Russian military buildup at two bases in Syrian territory controlled by President Bashar Assad.

The Kremlin's stated political objectives are to fight terrorism and prop up Assad's embattled government after a series of setbacks against the Islamic State and Western-backed opposition groups.

However, though the Russian rhetoric was aimed against Islamists, U.S. officials on Wednesday said Russia's initial targets were located far from any Islamic State territory.

Russian aircraft have in recent weeks been deployed to an airfield in the government stronghold of Latakia, while ships from the Black Sea Fleet have ferried men and hardware to a small Russian naval station at Tartus, some 90 kilometers to the south.

Following the vote by the Federation Council, the head of the presidential administration, Sergei Ivanov, said the request for authorization to deploy force in Syria came after "[Assad] asked the leadership of our country for military assistance."

"We are talking only about the operation of the Russian air force. As our president has said, the use of ground forces is excluded, and the military purpose of the operation is limited to providing air support to the Syrian government forces in countering the Islamic State," Ivanov said, the Interfax news agency reported.

The Defense Ministry on Wednesday said that air strikes would be coordinated with Syria, Iraq and Iran via a recently established intelligence center in Baghdad.

Unidentified Defense Ministry sources told Interfax that only Russian officers and soldiers who volunteer for duty in Syria would be sent. The head of Russia's General Staff, Colonel General Nikolai Bogdanovsky, said no conscripts would be deployed, Interfax reported.

## Support at Home

The Kremlin's announcement that it was taking the fight to the Islamic State, which has around 2,400 Russian citizens reportedly fighting for it — mainly from the predominantly Muslim-populated republics of Chechnya and Dagestan — drew strong support from the Russian Orthodox Church.

The Church's head, Patriarch Kirill, said a "responsible decision" had been taken "for the protection of the Syrian people from calamities inflicted by the iniquity of terrorists," according to a statement published on the Church's website.

A spokesman for the Moscow Patriarchate, Vsevolod Chaplin, was quoted by the Interfax-Religion news service as calling the flight against Islamic extremism "a holy war."

Likewise, Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov, a bombastic and outspoken supporter of Putin and his policies and himself a Muslim, said he was happy to see Russia intervene in Syria, but was disappointed ground operations were ruled out.

Kadyrov promised to join the first wave of ground forces, if they were deployed. Chechen fighters loyal to Kadyrov and Putin are believed to have taken part in fighting in eastern Ukraine, where Kremlin-backed rebels have been fighting Ukrainian government forces.

The last time the Federation Council authorized Putin to use force abroad was in March 2014, just before Russia's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine. The authorization was revoked in late June 2014, at Putin's urging.

Putin's request for permission to use force in Syria was unexpected and passed through the Federation Council quickly, and with no dissenting votes. 162 of the 170-member body voted yes, while eight legislators were not present for the vote.

The chairman of the Federation Council's defense and security committee, Viktor Ozerov, told the Russian News Service on Wednesday that Putin submitted his request to the legislative body on Monday while in New York attending the United Nations General Assembly.

In his address to the UN, Putin proposed the creation of a broad international coalition to fight the Islamic State in Syria. Later, Putin met with U.S. President Barack Obama behind closed doors to discuss Syria, among other things.

A Russian official in Baghdad notified the U.S. just one hour before Moscow launched air strikes in Syria, and requested that U.S. aircraft avoid Syrian airspace, U.S. State Department spokesman John Kirby said Wednesday.

### Limited Action

The announcement that the Russian air force would begin air operations in Syria sparked a stream of comments on social media comparing it to the Soviet Union's 1979 decision to send troops to Afghanistan to support a struggling socialist regime there.

The Afghan war, which lasted more than nine years, saw around 15,000 Soviet troops die, and prompted the rise of virulent and violent Islamist extremism in the region.

Russian officials of all stripes were adamant Wednesday that the country's military actions in Syria would be limited to air strikes and that no Russian soldiers would be deployed to fight alongside Assad's army against the Islamic State or Western-backed opposition forces.

"We won't enter a risk zone, where we would be dragged into a long-term conflict or when our servicemen's lives are at stake," the head of the Federation Council's foreign affairs committee, Konstantin Kosachyov, told the Rossiya-24 television channel, according to a transcript by the Sputnik news agency.

However, there is already some indication that Russian forces are on the ground fighting for Assad's survival. Videos appeared online earlier this month reporting to show Russian equipment operated by Russian soldiers engaging in combat in Syria.

Following the strikes, U.S. officials said that the Russian warplanes had hit targets in the Homs region, an area contested by anti-Assad rebels, but not the Islamic State.

Analysts polled by The Moscow Times on Tuesday about what Russia's so-called "red line" might be for a full-scale open intervention in the four-year-old Syrian civil war said that operations were likely to be restricted to air strikes.

However, Yuval Weber, an assistant professor of international relations at Moscow's Higher School of Economics told The Moscow Times on Wednesday that by declaring limited involvement in Assad's war, Russia was repeating U.S. mistakes early in the Vietnam war.

"By committing to an ally facing a determined and indigenous foe, President Putin is putting himself in a similar position to President Johnson regarding South Vietnam in late 1964, early 1965," Weber said.

Weber said that when nations commit limited military force, and stake their prestige on the outcome of the conflict, the incentive becomes to increase their military commitment to protect their reputation.

Though Russia's move might simply be a bid to save an embattled ally, it might also be a bid to reverse Moscow's status as a global pariah after its actions in Ukraine. "The larger strategic issue is whether [this] is an attempt to create issue linkage with Ukraine: genuinely help the U.S.-led coalition in the Middle East to gain concessions in Europe," he said.



## Appendix 2 – Washington Post Article

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/russias-legislature-authorizes-putin-to-use-military-force-in-syria/2015/09/30/f069f752-6749-11e5-9ef3-fde182507eac\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/russias-legislature-authorizes-putin-to-use-military-force-in-syria/2015/09/30/f069f752-6749-11e5-9ef3-fde182507eac_story.html)

# Russia begins airstrikes in Syria; U.S. warns of new concerns in conflict

MOSCOW — Russian warplanes began airstrikes in Syria on Wednesday, adding an unpredictable new element to a four-year-old war that has already drawn in the United States and allies, fueled a refugee crisis and expanded the reach of the Islamic State.

In Washington, the dramatic escalation of Russia's military involvement was viewed as an affront just two days after President Obama and Russian President Vladimir Putin [sat down](#) to discuss means for negotiating the deep differences in their countries' approaches to the conflict in Syria.

The strikes sharply increase tensions with Russia as U.S. officials dispute Moscow's claim that its aircraft targeted the Islamic State, the brutal extremist group that controls much of Syria and Iraq. Instead, U.S. officials said the strikes appeared to target opponents of Syria's embattled President Bashar al-Assad, a key Russian ally. Those hit include U.S.-backed units that were trained and armed by the CIA, officials said.

Accusing Russia of "pouring gasoline on the fire," Defense Secretary Ashton B. Carter vowed that U.S. pilots would continue their year-long bombing

campaign against the Islamic State in Syria, despite Moscow's warning to keep American planes away from its operations.

"I think what they're doing is going to backfire and is counterproductive," Carter said.



**Did the Russians really strike the Islamic State?VIEW GRAPHIC**

The introduction of Russian air power — which took place with scant notice to the U.S. government — threatens to upend U.S. strategy in Syria at a time when U.S. military officials say they are beginning to discern hints of progress against the Islamic State, a heavily armed al-Qaeda offshoot that is also known as ISIS and ISIL.

It also raises the stakes over competing visions for Syria outlined this week at the United Nations, where Putin insisted that Syria's embattled government is the key to stability after four years of bloodshed and Obama warned that the "status quo" cannot stand.

*[This is Russia's air power in Syria]*

U.S. officials were particularly irked that they didn't get much warning of the strikes, even as they make plans to resume military talks with Russia about Syria as early as next week. Discussions have been halted since last year over Russia's support for separatists in Ukraine.

Earlier Wednesday, a Russian general posted in Baghdad showed up at the U.S. Embassy there, officials said, and told the American defense attache that airstrikes would begin about an hour later.

Russia's Defense Ministry said Russian aircraft had conducted about 20 sorties targeting the Islamic State, according to the news agency Interfax.

The Syrian state-run news agency reported that Russian planes had attacked "dens" of the Islamic State in Rastan, Talbiseh and other towns around Homs, the strategic city that Assad hopes to claim as he seeks to defend areas remaining under his control.

Ground level: On the scene of controversial Russian airstrikes in Syria



The actions, quickly criticized by Washington, add an unpredictable element to a multilayered war.

But U.S. officials expressed doubts in the hours after the strikes about Russian claims that the sorties targeted the Islamic State. Areas around Homs, a former hotbed of the popular revolt that began against Assad in 2011, are not known as strongholds for the group, which controls a vast swath of territory across Syria and Iraq.

*[\[Ukraine's president uses world stage to jab Putin\]](#)*

Nidal Ezddin, a representative of Homs's civil defense force, said a series of Russian strikes killed 36 people around Homs. "These bombings were not against ISIS," he said. "They were for ISIS."

Civil defense officials and activists also reported that some of the Russian strikes were accompanied by barrel bomb attacks by Syrian air force helicopters.

The strikes cap weeks of Russian military buildup in Syria, where Assad is battling both the Islamic State and rebel factions backed by the West. Assad's forces are blamed for fueling the war that has forced more than 4 million people to flee the country, many of whom are joining a wave of asylum seekers and migrants flooding Europe.

Forces loyal to Assad hope to lay claim to Homs province, a key link between the capital, Damascus, and government strongholds on the Mediterranean coast, including the key port city of Latakia. Russia has a naval facility at Tartus, about 50 miles south of Latakia.

Charles Lister, a visiting fellow at the Brookings Doha Center, said the strikes may be an attempt to weaken Assad's principal adversary rather than the Islamic State.

"Amid the regime's major losses . . . Assad's apparent request to Moscow for military assistance seems a last-gasp appeal for help from what was a dying regime," he said. "How far Russia is willing to go to defend its proxy interests now remains to be seen, but certainly, the dynamics of the conflict have taken a huge shift today."

*[Russia's strategy in Syria could be work in progress]*

The strikes appeared to have also hit groups backed by the United States, including rebels who have been trained by the CIA. A U.S. official said there was "no reason to doubt reports from the region that coalition-backed forces

from Hama were hit,” a reference to a rebel group known as Tajammu al-Aaza based in that western Syrian province.

The leader of that group, Jamil al-Saleh, [told](#) the news organization ALSouria.net that the Russian strikes had pounded his organization’s base in Lataminah, a town roughly 30 miles north of Homs. Saleh was an officer in the Syrian army before defecting.

The U.S.-backed group also posted a [video](#) that shows fighter jets streaking across the sky seconds before the base is rattled by explosions.

*[\[Graphic: Were Russian airstrikes really aimed at the Islamic State? \]](#)*

The CIA has trained thousands of fighters at secret bases in Jordan in an effort to bolster moderate factions against the Assad government. A Russian strike on U.S.-backed units will only intensify pressure on the Obama administration to respond.

Speaking at the United Nations, Secretary of State John F. Kerry said the United States would have “grave concerns” if Russian airstrikes hit moderate U.S.-backed opposition forces fighting Assad rather than the Islamic State.

Also on Wednesday, Kerry told Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov that the strikes run counter to Russia’s stated intention to cooperate on [“deconfliction,”](#) or ensuring that mishaps do not happen in the air.

*[\[Moscow vs. Washington amid the Syrian misery\]](#)*

Putin spokesman Dmitry Peskov defended Russia’s actions after its parliament approved a resolution authorizing the use of force in Syria. “Russia

will factually be the only country to carry out this operation on the legitimate basis of the request of the legitimate government of Syria,” he said.

The resolution came without warning in the Federation Council, Russia’s higher body of parliament, where 162 senators voted unanimously in support after a closed-door discussion — similar to a vote last year to green-light Russian military force in Ukraine.

Sergei Ivanov, the Kremlin chief of staff, said that the resolution was strictly limited to the use of Russian aviation in Syria and that ground troops would not be sent into battle.

### *[\[Putin defends Russian arms flow to Syria\]](#)*

While Russia has supplied arms to Assad for years, direct intervention seemed unlikely until early this month when Russian aircraft, tanks and troops were spotted in Syria.

Speaking in Moscow, Putin said he hoped Assad would be open to political compromise.

“I know that President Assad understands that and is ready for such a process. We hope that he will be active and flexible and ready to compromise in the name of his country and his people,” Putin told reporters, according to the Reuters news agency.

Critics say that the Kremlin is using the Syrian crisis to escape international isolation after its annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in March 2014, and to divert attention at home from the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

The strikes also come as the Obama administration considers changes to its Syria strategy, including a possible expansion of military assistance to anti-Assad rebels and a new focus for [a troubled effort](#) to train an independent force to fight the Islamic State.

*Murphy and Ryan reported from Washington. Daniela Deane in London, Hugh Naylor in Beirut, Carol Morello and Karen DeYoung at the United Nations, and Greg Miller, Thomas Gibbons-Neff, Dan Lamothe and William Branigin in Washington contributed to this report.*



## Appendix 3 - Intertextuality

Subject	Washington Post	Moscow Times
Russia-Assad Dialogue	<p><b>“Assad’s apparent request to Moscow for military assistance</b> seems a last-gasp appeal for help from what was a dying regime,” he said.</p>	<p>Russia's participation in anti-terrorist operations in Syria is being carried out on the basis of international law and <b>in accordance with an official request from the Syrian president,</b>” state news agency RIA Novosti quoted Putin as saying at his Novo-Ogaryovo residence outside Moscow</p>
Authorisation from Russian Parliament	<p><b>The resolution came without warning in the Federation Council,</b> Russia’s higher body of parliament, where 162 senators voted unanimously in support after a closed-door discussion — similar to a vote last year to green-light Russian military force in Ukraine.</p>	<p>Air strikes began just hours after <b>Putin received a fast-tracked authorization</b> to use force in Syria from the Federation Council.</p>
Russian Military Buildup	<p><b>The strikes cap weeks of Russian military buildup in Syria,</b> where Assad is battling both the Islamic State and rebel factions backed by the West.</p>	<p><b>The authorization came after weeks of Russian military buildup at two bases in Syrian territory</b> controlled by President Bashar Assad.</p> <p><b>Russian aircraft have in recent weeks been deployed</b> to an airfield in the government stronghold of Latakia,</p>
Assad’s Recent Military Defeats	<p><b>“Amid the regime’s major losses . . . Assad’s apparent request to Moscow for military assistance</b> seems a last-gasp appeal for help from what was a dying regime,” he said.</p>	<p>The Kremlin's stated political objectives are to fight terrorism and prop up Assad's embattled government after a series of <b>setbacks against the Islamic State and Western-backed opposition groups.</b></p>

New Baghdad Intelligence Centre	-	The Defense Ministry on Wednesday said that <b>air strikes would be coordinated with Syria, Iraq and Iran via a recently established intelligence center in Baghdad.</b>
Religious War	-	A spokesman for the Moscow Patriarchate, Vsevolod Chaplin, was quoted by the Interfax-Religion news service as <b>calling the flight (sic) against Islamic extremism "a holy war."</b>
Crimea	Critics say that the Kremlin is using the Syrian crisis <b>to escape international isolation after its annexation of the Crimean Peninsula</b> in March 2014, and to divert attention at home from the conflict in eastern Ukraine.	The last time the Federation Council authorized Putin to use force abroad was in March 2014, just before <b>Russia's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine.</b>
Putin Talks to UN	It also raises the stakes over competing visions for Syria outlined this week at the United Nations, where <b>Putin insisted that Syria's embattled government is the key to stability after four years of bloodshed</b> and Obama warned that the "status quo" cannot stand.	In his address to the UN, <b>Putin proposed the creation of a broad international coalition to fight the Islamic State in Syria.</b>
Putin and Obama Meeting	In Washington, the dramatic escalation of Russia's military involvement was <b>viewed as an affront just two days after President Obama and Russian President Vladimir Putin sat down to discuss</b> means for negotiating the	Later, <b>Putin met with U.S. President Barack Obama behind closed doors</b> to discuss Syria, among other things.

	deep differences in their countries' approaches to the conflict in Syria.	
Soviet Union-Afghanistan 1979 War	-	<p>The announcement that the Russian air force would begin air operations in Syria sparked a stream of comments on social media comparing it to <b>the Soviet Union's 1979 decision to send troops to Afghanistan to support a struggling socialist regime there.</b></p> <p>The <b>Afghan war, which lasted more than nine years, saw around 15,000 Soviet troops die, and prompted the rise of virulent and violent Islamist extremism in the region.</b></p>
Russian Ground Forces in Syria	Sergei Ivanov, the Kremlin chief of staff, said that the resolution was strictly limited to the use of Russian aviation in Syria and that <b>ground troops would not be sent into battle.</b>	<p>However, there is already some indication that <b>Russian forces are on the ground fighting for Assad's survival.</b> Videos appeared online earlier this month reporting to show <b>Russian equipment operated by Russian soldiers engaging in combat in Syria.</b></p>
Vietnam War	-	<p>However, Yuval Weber, an assistant professor of international relations at Moscow's Higher School of Economics told The Moscow Times on Wednesday that by declaring limited involvement in Assad's war, <b>Russia was repeating U.S. mistakes early in the Vietnam war.</b></p>

Ukraine War	Critics say that the Kremlin is using the Syrian crisis to escape international isolation after its annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in March 2014, and to <b>divert attention at home from the conflict in eastern Ukraine.</b>	Though Russia's move might simply be a bid to save an embattled ally, it might also be a bid to reverse <b>Moscow's status as a global pariah after its actions in Ukraine.</b>
US Bombing in Syria	Accusing Russia of "pouring gasoline on the fire," Defense Secretary Ashton B. Carter vowed that <b>U.S. pilots would continue their year-long bombing campaign against the Islamic State in Syria</b> , despite Moscow's warning to keep American planes away from its operations.	-
US Military Strategy in Syria	<p>The introduction of Russian air power — which took place with scant notice to the U.S. government — <b>threatens to upend U.S. strategy in Syria at a time when U.S. military officials say they are beginning to discern hints of progress against the Islamic State</b>, a heavily armed al-Qaeda offshoot that is also known as ISIS and ISIL.</p> <p><b>The CIA has trained thousands of fighters at secret bases in Jordan</b> in an effort to bolster moderate factions against the Assad government.</p>	"The larger strategic issue is whether [this] is an attempt to create issue linkage with Ukraine: genuinely help the <b>U.S.-led coalition in the Middle East</b> to gain concessions in Europe," he said.
Ongoing US-Russia Military Talks	U.S. officials were particularly irked that they didn't get much warning of the strikes, <b>even as they make plans to resume military talks with Russia</b>	-

	<b>about Syria as early as next week.</b> Discussions have been halted since last year over Russia's support for separatists in Ukraine.	
Asylum Seekers	Assad's forces are blamed for fueling the war that has forced more than 4 million people to flee the country, many of whom are joining a <b>wave of asylum seekers and migrants flooding Europe.</b>	-