

Russian Security Council Slams U.S. Refusal for Joint Syria Bombing

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Syrians gather around damages after a bombing attack at a bus station, in the coastal town of Tartus, Syria, May 23, 2016.

The deputy head of Russia's National Security Council, Yevgeny Lukyanov, accused the United States of operating with double standards in Syria after Washington denied reports that it agreed with Moscow to begin joint bombing of the al-Nusra extremist group, an affiliate of terror network al-Qaida in Syria.

“There are shades of national interests everywhere,” Lukyanov said. “So, this means they can understand something differently. [Here] they believe that there are ‘good terrorists’ and ‘bad terrorists,’” he said, echoing a common Russian refrain on U.S. policy in the region.

The two sides have reportedly agreed on which groups operating in the Syrian civil war are fair targets, but the issue of al-Nusra continues to divide the rhetoric between Moscow and Washington.

Lukyanov declined to comment on the possibility of unilateral Russian action against al-Nusra if Washington does not come around to the offer. Joint action was proposed openly by Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu at a meeting televised on May 20.

According to Shoigu, the combined operation would have begun five days later. State Department spokesman John Kirby denied on May 20 that any agreement had been reached.

“There is no agreement for joint air strikes with the Russians in Syria,” Kirby said. However, the two sides are evaluating “proposals for a sustainable mechanism to better monitor and enforce the cessation of hostilities,” Kirby added.

A Pentagon spokesman, Navy Capt. Jeff Davis, said that no formal proposal had been received, but that cooperation remains limited to airspace safety in the crowded skies over Syria.

Russia entered the fray at the end of September. Though it claims to be attacking the Islamic State and other terror groups, such as al-Nusra, officials and observers in the West have accused Moscow of flying mainly in support of Syrian President Bashar Assad.

In this role, Russian air strikes have appeared to fall predominantly in areas controlled by what the United States and its allies classify as the moderate elements of Syria’s fractious opposition forces.

Al-Nusra and the Islamic State are terrorist organizations banned in Russia.

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