



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on May 5, 2017

Russian No-fly Zone Plan for Syria Would Apply to U.S. Planes — But Only if We Send Them

Meeting in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan, on May 4, Russian, Iranian, and Turkish delegates agreed to a Russian plan establish “de-escalation zones” in Syria. The plan would bar military aircraft from all countries — including President Bashar Assad’s air force, Russian and Turkish planes, and also military aircraft from the U.S.-led coalition — from flying over the designated “safe” or “no-fly” zones in Syria.



Representatives of the rebel forces fighting against the Assad government also attended the meeting in Astana. The rebel opposition consists of multiple groups, but news reports did not identify which groups attended the meeting. Fox News reported that the proposal that Russia presented to the rebels in Astana delineates four zones in Syria where front lines between the government and rebels would be frozen and fighting halted, citing a statement made by the rebels. The four zones include areas in the provinces of Idlib and Homs, the eastern Ghouta suburbs outside Damascus, and an area in the south of the country.

Speaking from the Russian resort town of Sochi, Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed hope the Syrian government and rebels would adopt this latest proposal to “de-escalate” the conflict. Putin said Russian and Syrian government jets would halt flights over the specified zones if all sides respect the cease-fire.

The head of Russia’s delegation at the Astana talks, Alexander Lavrentyev, said the Syrian government would abide by the agreement, unless rebels inside the “de-escalation zones” stage attacks.

“As of the sixth of this month all military operations will be ceased,” Lavrentyev told journalists in Astana. “All Syrian flights over these areas will cease.”

Not all participants at the meeting were pleased, however. CBS News reported that as officials from Russia, Iran, and Turkey signed the agreement, some members of the Syrian opposition delegation shouted in protest and walked out of the conference room.

The rebel opposition protested Iran’s participation at the conference and its role as a guarantor of the agreement, accusing Iran of fueling the sectarian nature of the conflict that has been going on since 2011.

“Iran is a country that is killing the Syrian people and the killer cannot be the rescuer,” CBS News quoted Abu Osama Golani, a rebel commander who attended the Astana meeting.

As far as the U.S. reaction to the agreement, CBS News quoted U.S. State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert, who said on May 4, before Russia said that U.S.-led coalition flights would also be restricted under the deal, that the United States had “reason to be cautious” about the chances for success of the deal, but appreciates the efforts by Russia and Turkey to help reduce violence in Syria. Nauert added that the United States also has concerns, including about Iran’s “guarantor” role in the



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Kazakhstan deal.

"Iran's activities in Syria have only contributed to the violence, not stopped it, and Iran's unquestioning support for the Assad regime has perpetuated the misery of ordinary Syrians," she said.

The United States was represented at the talks in Astana though Nauert said the United States was neither a "direct participant" nor a party to the agreement.

CBS News reported that it was unclear whether U.S. officials were aware of the stipulation banning coalition flights in the "de-escalation zones" before the details were announced on May 5.

None of the reports related to the Russian proposal agreed to in Astana address a more significant matter, however. That is: Is it in the interests of the United States and the American people to become involved in yet another overseas military adventure? Furthermore, where is the constitutionally required authority to do so?

If we were not involved in the ongoing conflict in Syria, whether on the ground or in the air, it would make no difference to us if U.S. or U.S.-led aircraft were barred from certain zones.

The New American [reported back in 2013](#) that during a May 21, 2013 hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Rand Paul (R-Ky.) raised his voice to protest the actions of his fellow Senate colleagues, nearly all of whom voted to send arms to Syrian rebels. He told them: "This is an important moment. You will be funding, today, the allies of al Qaeda."

In an exclusive interview with *The New American*, Senator Paul pointed out the irony in the fact that the original Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF) enacted after September 11, 2001 called for finding and destroying al-Qaeda, while the legislation passed on May 21, 2013 by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee would arm known associates of that very organization. "These people [Syrian rebels] will say they love America knowing that that's how to get weapons. They lie to us and then shoot us in the back," Paul explained.

Despite Paul's efforts to keep the United States from running headlong into an armed conflict in Syria and his accurate depiction of the duplicity of those Syrian opposition forces waiting for the shipment of weapons from the United States, the Senate moved speedily toward awarding al-Qaeda with crates of technologically advanced U.S. weaponry.

Moving ahead several years, the United States is not only providing weapons to those Syrian rebels whose loyalties and objectives are highly questionable, we have followed up with boots on the ground in that beleaguered land.

This presence was highlighted in a statement from Senator John McCain's (R-Ariz.) spokeswoman, Julie Tarallo, whom we quoted in [our recent article](#) about McCain's secret trip to Syria to meet with members of the U.S. military and anti-Assad rebels. "Senator McCain traveled to northern Syria last week to visit U.S. forces deployed there and to discuss the counter-ISIL campaign and ongoing operations to retake Raqqa," Tarallo said, using the term for ISIS that began with the Obama administration.

McCain's office said his visit to Syria was an opportunity "to assess dynamic conditions on the ground" there and also praised President Trump for requesting a review of the U.S. strategy to defeat ISIS.

In that article, we noted that back in 2013 McCain had applauded the Obama administration for providing weapons to the Syrian rebels attempting to topple the regime of Bashar al-Assad, but he maintained that provided arms was not enough.



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An ABC News report in June 2013 reported:

Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) who has been vocal on the need for more U.S. action against the Assad regime, praised the finding by the government [regarding the alleged use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime] and pressed Obama to offer “lethal assistance” to rebel forces.

“But providing arms alone is not sufficient,” said McCain in a joint statement with Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) “That alone is not enough to change the military balance of power on the ground against Assad. The president must rally an international coalition to take military actions to degrade Assad’s ability to use air power and ballistic missiles and to move and resupply his forces around the battlefield by air. This can be done, as we have said many times, using stand-off weapons such as cruise missiles.”

During his presidential campaign, Donald Trump seemed to be more in alignment with the noninterventionist stance of Paul than the blatantly interventionist position of McCain, one of the Senate’s staunchest neoconservatives. Following a March 2016 meeting with the *Washington Post*, during which then-candidate Trump announced the members of his foreign policy team, the writers at the *Post* stated that Trump had outlined an “unabashedly non-interventionist approach to world affairs.”

That noninterventionism now seems to be quickly evaporating, as was made apparent by Trump’s decision to launch missiles against a Syrian base last month.

In an article by former Representative Ron Paul (R-Texas) posted by *The New American* on April 10, Paul observed: “Thursday’s U.S. missile attack on Syria must represent the quickest foreign policy U-turn in history.”

After exploring various motivations for the attack (e.g., “More likely the gas attack was a false flag by the rebels — or perhaps even by our CIA — as a last ditch effort to forestall a rebel defeat in the six-year war.”) Paul concluded:

Donald Trump’s attack on Syria was clearly illegal. However, Congress shows no interest in reining in this out-of-control president. We should fear any US escalation and must demand that our Representatives prohibit it. If there ever was a time to flood the Capitol Hill switchboard demanding an end to U.S. military action in Syria, it is now!

In an earlier [article posted on April 3](#), Paul wrote:

If the Trump Administration is serious about letting the people of Syria decide their fate he needs to take concrete steps. Rather than sending in more troops to fight an ISIS already on its last legs, he must bring U.S. troops home and prohibit the CIA from further destabilizing the country.

It would also be nice if Congress would wake up from its long slumber and start following the Constitution. The President (and his predecessors) have taken this country to war repeatedly without proper constitutionally required authority to do so. The president has reportedly decided not to even bother announcing where next he plans to send the troops. Congress can rein him in with very little effort by saying no money can be spent to deploy U.S. troops to areas where they may encounter hostilities unless a state of war is declared.

If the president and Congress would only follow Paul’s sage advice it would not matter one bit what sort of zones the Russians, Turks, and Iranians establish in Syria. Let them have at it — since our forces will be nowhere near Syria.

Photo: U.S. Air Force



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