



## **Rising tensions could hurt anti-ISIS coalition-building**

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The downing of a Russian jet by a Turkish fighter yesterday sent ripples through what was already a complex and precarious situation in the wake of last week's ISIS terror attacks in Paris.

Russian President Vladimir Putin called it a "stab in the back" and vowed revenge, casting serious doubt over the possibility he'll join NATO's battle against terrorists.

But striking back at Turkey is a move Putin can hardly afford, one analyst said.

"Russia has no interest in escalating this," said Emma Ashford, visiting research fellow at the Cato Institute in Washington.

The jet attack — which left one Russian pilot dead, another missing, and caused a Russian Marine to be killed in a failed rescue mission — blew apart any hope of an alliance.

Turkish officials said the plane ignored warnings after entering Turkish air space. But Putin reacted by spitting fire, saying the move was a "slap in the face" by Turkey, and promising swift retaliation. "Our slap will be hard," Putin said.

But experts said such retribution would only backfire on Putin, who at this point needs the cooperation of members of the NATO alliance against ISIS more than they need him.

President Obama himself made that clear yesterday.

"We've got a coalition of 65 countries who have been active in pushing back against ISIL for quite some time," Obama said at a joint press conference with French President Francois Hollande. "Russia right now is a coalition of two, Iran and Russia, supporting Assad."

Obama also made it clear that he was clearly on Turkey's side, saying "Turkey, like every country, has a right to defend its territory and its airspace."

There may still be a diplomatic option open to Putin, should he choose to pursue it, that could let him save face as well as appease NATO members — furthering his effort to get relief from sanctions the countries imposed on Russia after it annexed Crimea from Ukraine.

“The smartest thing he could do is try to peel off Turkey from the rest of the coalition with this,” said Jeremy Shapiro, foreign policy fellow at the Brookings Institution, noting that other NATO allies may already be miffed at Turkey for taking the drastic step of shooting down a jet just seconds after it entered Turkish airspace, then opening fire on its parachuting pilots.

But Shapiro said, “It’s a fool’s game to predict what Vladimir Putin will do.”

Hollande is set to head to Russia next to meet with Putin in hopes of salvaging some hope of building an alliance against ISIS.