

# Putin's Comment About Helping the Syrian Free Army

by [Anna Borshchevskaya \(/experts/anna-borshchevskaya\)](/experts/anna-borshchevskaya)

Jan 31, 2016

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Anna Borshchevskaya \(/experts/anna-borshchevskaya\)](/experts/anna-borshchevskaya)

Anna Borshchevskaya is a senior fellow at The Washington Institute, focusing on Russia's policy toward the Middle East.



## Articles & Testimony

**O**n 11 December 2015 Russian President Vladimir Putin addressed the Russian Defense Ministry's expanded board meetings, where he said, for the first time according to Western press reports, that Russia is helping the Free Syrian Army -- an opponent of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Russia has supported Assad unequivocally since the beginning of the Syrian uprising in March 2011. The accompanying excerpt from Kremlin.ru, the Kremlin's official web-site, quoted a seemingly contradictory statement by Putin, in that he appears to be saying that Russia is supporting both governmental and opposition efforts: "I will especially emphasize that the work of our aviation group promotes joint efforts of both government forces and the Free Syrian Army.... In addition, we support them from the air, as well as the Syrian army, assisting them with arms, munitions and materiel." It was impossible to independently verify the validity of Putin's statement, according to the Washington's Post, and no further information is available at the time of this writing.

The same day Dmitry Peskov, Putin's press secretary, clarified Putin's comment about the Free Syrian Army, as per the accompanying excerpts from RBC.ru. Russia is not supplying weapons to the Free Syrian Army, he said, but rather support is about "military-technical cooperation" and special supply of what he called "special property... carried out in accordance with international law." He also urged not to "nitpick on the language," which appeared to be a reference to Putin's language.

Meanwhile, numerous reports have indicated consistently since Putin's Syria intervention on 30 September that, despite his official calls to fight terrorism, the vast majority of Russia's air strikes have not been directed at the Islamic State, but at armed opposition against Assad, which included those supported by the West. Indeed, the Kremlin defines "terrorist" as any armed opposition against Assad. Representatives of the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) -- the main Western-backed opposition group and one which coordinates with the Free Syrian Army -- had refused to attend two rounds of Syrian peace talks Moscow hosted in February and April 2015 because, in their view, these talks only included members of the Syrian opposition who supported Assad. Furthermore, many observers noted that civilian casualties and the flow of refugees from Syria have only increased since Russia's intervention in Syria.

*Anna Borshchevskaya is the Ira Weiner Fellow at The Washington Institute. This item was originally published in the [January 2016 edition \(http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/OEWatch/201601/FMSO's%20OE%20Watch-](http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/OEWatch/201601/FMSO's%20OE%20Watch-)*

---

## RECOMMENDED

---



### ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

#### [How to Make Russia Pay in Ukraine: Study Syria](#)

Feb 15, 2022

◆  
Anna Borshchetskaya

([/policy-analysis/how-make-russia-pay-ukraine-study-syria](#))



### BRIEF ANALYSIS

#### [Bennett's Bahrain Visit Further Invigorates Israel-Gulf Diplomacy](#)

Feb 14, 2022

◆  
Simon Henderson

([/policy-analysis/bennetts-bahrain-visit-further-invigorates-israel-gulf-diplomacy](#))



### BRIEF ANALYSIS

#### [Libya's Renewed Legitimacy Crisis](#)

Feb 14, 2022

◆  
Ben Fishman

([/policy-analysis/libyas-renewed-legitimacy-crisis](#))

## TOPICS

[Military & Security \(/policy-analysis/military-security\)](#)

## REGIONS & COUNTRIES

[Syria \(/policy-analysis/syria\)](#)