

Article 5 or 'Oh my gosh'? What will US do after Turkish troops die in Syrian strike

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Turkey has reached out to NATO and the US following the deaths of its troops in Syria's Idlib province, fueling speculation that it might invoke Article 5 and get the alliance involved in a shooting war with Damascus – and Russia.

“An attack on Turkey is an attack on NATO. We expect that certain steps will be taken to [create] a no-fly zone [in Idlib],” spokesman for the ruling AKP party, Omer Celik, told reporters in Ankara early on Friday.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan called an emergency meeting of security officials on Thursday evening, after an airstrike – attributed to the Syrian government – in Idlib killed at least 33 Turkish soldiers, and wounded an unknown additional number.

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Phones were also ringing at NATO headquarters, the White House and the Pentagon, as Turkish media reported contacts with alliance Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, US National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien and Defense Secretary Mark Esper.

Esper and his Turkish counterpart Hulusi Akar were *“exploring ways the United States can work together with Turkey and the international community???”*, Pentagon press secretary Alyssa Farah said on Thursday, giving no further details.

"We stand by our NATO ally Turkey and continue to call for an immediate end to this despicable offensive by the Assad regime, Russia, and Iranian-backed forces," the US State Department said in a statement.

"Oh my gosh," was the [response](#) of US envoy to NATO Kay Bailey Hutchinson when journalists told her about the airstrike on Thursday. *"This is a new development. This is a big development,"* she said, adding that *"of course, everything is on the table."*

Her comments led to speculation that NATO might be considering invoking Article 5, the provision of its charter that says an attack on one member is an attack on them all.

The trouble with Article 5 is that it doesn't cover actions of alliance members in foreign territory – which Idlib demonstrably is.

"Nothing has been really brought up for a decision in NATO," Hutchinson said, however. She also quickly shifted to expressing hope that Ankara now understands the US and NATO are its true and real allies – not Russia, with whom Erdogan has been increasingly cooperating in recent years.

Meanwhile, NATO's Stoltenberg *"condemned the continued indiscriminate airstrikes by the Syrian regime and its backer Russia in Idlib province,"* the alliance's press service said. He also called on Moscow and Damascus to *"stop their offensive, to respect international law and to back UN efforts for a peaceful solution"* in Syria and urged *"all parties to de-escalate this dangerous situation."*

Hawkish US senators such as Marco Rubio (R-Florida) and Lindsey Graham (R-South Carolina) have already called for intervention. Graham released a statement on Thursday evening – Washington time – calling for the US to lead the way in establishing a no-fly zone over Syria.

"The world is sitting on its hands and watching the destruction of Idlib by Assad, Iran, and the Russians," Graham said. *"I am confident if the world, led by the United States, pushed back against Iran, Russia, and Assad that they would stand down, paving the way for political negotiations to end this war in Syria."*

Rubio repeated his endorsement of the Washington Post's editorial call for US intervention in Syria from the day before, also blaming Moscow and Damascus while declaring that *"Erdogan is on the right side here."*

Rubio and Graham have been advocating US intervention in Syria for years, however – while President Donald Trump has sought to withdraw from the country after the demise of Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIS).

Trump has yet to comment on the situation in Turkey. His most recent tweet was on Thursday morning, announcing a campaign rally in South Carolina.
