

Turkey: US missile attack an important step against Syria's war crimes, no-fly zone needed

Hurriyet Daily News, 07.04.2017



The U.S. air strike on a Syrian air base early is a “positive response against the al-Assad regime’s war crimes,” Turkish Presidential spokesperson brahim Kalin has stated, calling for a no-fly zone in Syria.

“What happened in Idlib proved again the bloody al-Assad regime shows complete disregard for the prospect of a political transition and efforts to enforce the ceasefire,” said Kalin, adding that Turkey condemns the chemical attack in Idlib.”The destruction of the airbase marks an important step to ensure both chemical and conventional attacks against the civilian population do not go unpunished,” he added.

Kalin also stressed the need to “enforce a no-fly zone and create safe zones in Syria without further delay,” in order to “prevent similar massacres” from happening again. “Moving forward, it is important for the international community to act in unison to end the humanitarian crisis in Syria,” he stated.

In a separate written statement, the Turkish Foreign Ministry also welcomed the U.S. airstrike. “We welcome the operation very positively ... Steps to be taken to ensure that similar offenses do not go unpunished and to guarantee accountability will have the full support of Turkey,” read the statement.

Turkey will continue to work with the international community in order to “prevent the regime from terrorist and collective punishment against its population and to advance a process that will open the way for a political solution in Syria,” said the ministry.

Turkey hopes Russia won't veto UN bid on Syrian gas attack

Hurriyet Daily News, 05.04.2017



Turkey has expressed hopes that Russia will not use its right to veto on a potential resolution at the United Nations Security Council following a deadly gas attack, allegedly conducted by the Syrian army, around Idlib that killed around 100 civilians.

“I hope the Russians won't veto decisions taken by the U.N. Security Council,” Deputy Prime Minister and government spokesman Numan Kurtulmu told a TV channel in the Black Sea province of Ordu. He added that he hoped the Security Council would take effective action this time.

Following France's action, the U.N. Security Council decided to meet for an extraordinary session to discuss the chemical gas attack that occurred in the northern city of Idlib that killed more than 100 civilians, including dozens of children. Russia, one of five permanent members of the Security Council, has previously blocked numerous resolutions against the Syrian government.

Kurtulmu called the attack a “grave crime against humanity,” because it targeted civilians, including children, women, the elderly and the wounded at a medical clinic. In a written statement, the Turkish Foreign Ministry said Turkey condemned the attack perpetrated by the Syria.

“The imagery and information received from Khan Sheikhun points to the continuous use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime, in clear violation of U.N. Security Council Resolutions 2118 and 2209.

We expect the international community to react to these attacks while we anticipate relevant international organizations, in particular the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, to immediately investigate these attacks, which have been repeated time and again,” it read.

The statement invited all the relevant parties who have influence on the Syrian government to fulfill their responsibilities in order to immediately stop such attacks which exclusively target civilians and constitute grave violations of the cease-fire regime.

President Erdoğan: Next phase of Euphrates Shield operation to include Iraq

Reuters, 05.04.2017



The next stages of the recently concluded Euphrates Shield Operation will be broader, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said April 5, suggesting that Turkey would move on areas in Iraq.

Speaking in a joint interview with NTV and Star, Erdoğan described the Euphrates Shield Operation as the first stage of Turkey's counter-terrorism road map, saying expanded stages would follow. A future operation will have "not [only] a Syrian dimension, [but] also an Iraqi dimension. There are the Tal Afar and Sinjar situations [in Iraq]. We also have kin in Mosul," he said, referring to Turkmens.

Launched in August 2016 and carried out with Free Syrian Army support, the Euphrates Shield aimed to improve security, support coalition forces and eliminate the terror threat along the Turkish border. It ended on March 29 after Turkey lost around 70 soldiers.

Erdoğan said the situation was worse in Iraq's Sinjar region, saying the city is about to become the "second Kandil" for the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), referring to its headquarters in Iraq's Kandil Mountains. "There are around 2,500 PKK terrorists attempting to create this second Kandil," Erdoğan said.

The PKK has had a presence in the region in the northeastern mountainous outskirts of the Nineveh province since arriving to aid local Yazidi populations after the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) invaded in August 2014 and Peshmerga forces under the control of Iraqi Kurdish leader Massoud Barzani retreated.

Turkey has previously expressed concerns about the PKK's presence in Sinjar and said it would take measures, including deploying troops, to prevent it from securing a base in the region. The president also warned that the mostly Shiite al-Hashd al-Shaabi groups in Iraq were acting as an invasion and occupation movement in Iraq. "When we look at it all, there is a support for Iranian and Persian nationalism based on sects in Iraq. They disseminate it with sectarianism and spread it on the basis of Persian nationalism," he said.

Turkey won't break with West, says Turkish deputy PM

Hurriyet Daily News, 05.04.2017



Turkey will not break with the West, Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Mehmet İmrek said, adding that Ankara wanted to enhance relations between the two parties.

“Turkey will not break up with the West. On the contrary, we want to enhance relations with the West,” İmrek said during an address at the opening ceremony of the 20th Eurasian Economic Summit organized by the Marmara Group Foundation in Istanbul. Stating that Turkey had taken drastic measures since the failed coup attempt in July 2016, İmrek said the measures would not be the new norms and that Ankara had only been forced to fight threats.

“We will not apply isolationist measures,” he said. İmrek said he believed Turkey would return to posting stronger growth in the near future. Turkey accuses U.S.-based Islamic preacher Fethullah Gülen and his followers of organizing and conducting the coup attempt.

After the failed attempt, the government launched a crackdown on the followers of the Gülenist movement, which it accuses of infiltrating state institutions like the judiciary and army and trying to topple the government.

Stating that the state of emergency was a temporary measure, İmrek said Turkey was not only dealing with the Gülenist movement, but also the threats that have spilt over into the country due to the six-year-old war in Syria and terrorism, whether from the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) or the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

İmrek said that even though there had been anger, resentment and frustration in Turkey-EU relations, as well as harsh rhetoric, he continued to believe that Turkey and the EU needed each other. “We are committed to delivering reforms within the EU context,” the deputy PM said, adding that this would serve the Turkish people. “We are not going to give up on that.”

Commenting on the rise of populism, Islamophobia and the far-right in Europe, İmrek said the EU needed to deal with the issues, as the topics affected its relations with other countries, especially Turkey.

“We do not want Turkey to be used for domestic football at a time where there are many elections [in Europe],” İmrek said in reference to souring relations between Turkey and some EU countries, namely the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland. “That is why we are pushing for an upgrade to the Turkey-European Union customs union” to include agriculture, services and public procurement, he said. Calling on European leaders, İmrek said he recommended that they “stop talking or shouting at Turkey” but rather “talked with Turkey.” The best solution is dialogue, he added.

US fires missiles at Syrian airbase after 'chemical attack'

Reuters, 07.04.2017



The US fired dozens of cruise missiles at a Syrian airbase on April 7 from which it said a deadly chemical weapons attack was launched this week, an escalation of the U.S. military role in Syria that swiftly drew sharp criticism from Russia.

Two U.S. warships fired 59 cruise missiles from the eastern Mediterranean Sea at the Syrian airbase controlled by forces of President al-Assad in response to a poison gas attack, U.S. officials said. Facing his biggest foreign policy crisis since his inauguration, President Trump took the toughest direct U.S. action yet in Syria's six-year-old civil war, raising the risk of confrontation with Russia and Iran.

Russian President Vladimir Putin believes that the missile strikes on a Syrian air base broke international law and have seriously hurt U.S.-Russia relations, news agencies cited the Kremlin as saying.

The Russian leader regarded the U.S. action as "aggression against a sovereign nation" on a "made-up pretext" and as a cynical attempt to distract the world from civilian deaths in Iraq, Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov was cited as saying.

S. officials said they informed Russian forces ahead of the missile attacks and that they took pains to avoid hitting Russian troops at the base, saying there were no strikes on sections of the base where Russians were present. But they said the administration did not seek Moscow's approval.

"Years of previous attempts at changing Assad's behavior have all failed and failed very dramatically," Trump said as he announced the attack from his Florida resort, Mar-a-Lago, where he was meeting Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Trump ordered the strikes a day after he blamed Assad for this week's chemical attack, which killed at least 70 people, many of them children, in the Syrian town of Khan Sheikhoun. The Syrian government has denied it was behind the attack.

The Tomahawk missiles were launched from the USS Porter and USS Ross around 8:40 p.m. EDT (0040 GMT on Friday), striking multiple targets - including the airstrip, aircraft and fuel stations - on the Shayrat Air Base, which the Pentagon says was used to store chemical weapons.

"Initial indications are that this strike has severely damaged or destroyed Syrian aircraft and support infrastructure and equipment at Shayrat Airfield, reducing the Syrian government's ability to deliver chemical weapons," said Pentagon spokesman Captain Jeff Davis.



At least four Syrian soldiers, including a senior officer, were killed in the attack, which almost completely destroyed the base, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. The U.S. cruise missile attack was a “one-off,” a U.S. defense official told Reuters, meaning it was expected to be a single strike with no current plans for escalation.

The attacks spurred a flight to safety in global financial markets, sending yields on safe-haven U.S. Treasury securities to their lowest since November. Stocks weakened in Asia and U.S. equity index futures slid, indicating Wall Street would open lower on Friday. Prices for oil and gold both rose, and the dollar slipped against the Japanese yen.

Syrian state TV said that “American aggression” had targeted a Syrian military base with “a number of missiles and cited a Syrian military source as saying the strike had “led to losses.” Trump sought to cast the attack, which took place as he and Xi were wrapping up a dinner of Dover sole and dry-aged New York strip steak, as an effort to deter Syria from using chemical weapons in the future.

“Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad launched a horrible chemical weapons attack on innocent civilians,” he said later. “Tonight I ordered a targeted military strike on the airfield in Syria from where the chemical attack was launched.”

“It is in this vital national security interest of the United States to prevent and deter the spread and use of deadly chemical weapons,” Trump added. Trump aides described his action as a measured and targeted response and suggested the wider U.S. strategy, which has been to avoid getting dragged into the civil war, would not change.

“We feel the strike itself was proportionate,” U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson told reporters. “This clearly indicates the president is willing to take decisive action when called for,” he added. “I would not in any way attempt to extrapolate that to a change in our policy or our posture relative to our military activities in Syria today. There has been no change in that status.”

According to a U.S. defense official, Trump first asked about possible military action on Wednesday, after U.S. intelligence agencies confirmed that Syrian aircraft based at the al Shayrat airbase had dropped Sarin gas on civilians.

Planning began on Wednesday and accelerated at the Pentagon, the State Department and the White House on Thursday, helped by the fact that the Defense Department had numerous off-the-shelf plans, including for cruise missile strikes on Syrian airfields.

“It was a matter of dusting those off and adapting them for the current target set and timing,” the official told Reuters, speaking on condition of anonymity. The relatively quick response to the chemical attack came as Trump faced a growing list of global problems, from North Korea and China to Iran and Islamic State, and may have been intended to send a message to friends and foes alike of his resolve to use military force if deemed necessary.

“One question is whether Russia will respond in any meaningful way,” said a senior U.S. official involved in planning the raid. “If they do, they will be further complicit in the actions of the Syrian regime.” Russia has air and ground forces in Syria after intervening there on Assad’s side in 2015 and turning the tide against mostly Sunni Muslim rebel groups.

Trump has so far focused his Syria policy almost exclusively on defeating Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) militants in northern Syria, where U.S. special forces support Arab and Kurdish armed groups.

Iran, which also backs Assad, denounced the attack. "Iran ... condemns use of chemical weapons ... but at the same time believes it is dangerous, destructive and violation of international laws to use it as an excuse to take unilateral actions," Students News Agency ISNA quoted Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qasemi as saying.

Israel welcomed the move. "In both word and action, President Trump sent a strong and clear message today that the use and spread of chemical weapons will not be tolerated," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said in a statement.

U.S. lawmakers had a mixed reaction, with some criticizing Trump's decision to use force without getting their approval. "Congress will work with the president, but his failure to seek congressional approval is unlawful," said Senator Tim Kaine, the 2016 Democratic vice presidential candidate.

The U.N. Security Council was expected to hold closed-door consultations on Friday about the U.S. strike on Syria following a request by Bolivia, an elected member of the council, a senior Security Council diplomat said.

Ankara launches new national energy policy

Hurriyet Daily News, 06.04.2017



Supply security, the prioritization of national resources and a predictable market will be the centerpieces of Turkey's new national energy strategy, Energy Minister Berat Albayrak said at a press meeting on April 6.

He vowed that Turkey would focus its energy diversification efforts on local resources as part of a detailed plan that includes ambitious targets to decrease the country's dependence on foreign resources in energy and boost Turkey's capabilities in energy production and electricity infrastructure.

Turkey will conduct seismic studies for oil and gas drilling activities, he said, noting that exploration would occur in two areas in the Black Sea and two in the Mediterranean. "We will open two wells for each in these seas with a drilling ship on an annual basis.

We plan to buy this ship over the year. This will be a first for Turkey," he said. Albayrak also said Turkey would produce a complete geophysical map of its territory to acquire a full picture of its natural resources. "We aim to complete the map by 2018," he said.



“We will invest heavily in local coal reserves as the latest findings regarding Turkey’s coal reserves have showed that Turkey’s reserves are better than had previously been suggested,” he said, adding that the latest green technologies would be used in the field of electricity production from coal reserves.

Improving Turkey’s indigenous energy production and R&D capacity is crucial for the new plan, said Albayrak, noting that the strategy would blaze a trail in nuclear and renewable energy. “One of my personal ambitions was to create a national solar energy tender, and we did this. Our next step is to set up a national wind tender,” he said, adding that discussions have been held with significant global wind energy companies to obtain their input in order to revise strategies before holding the wind tender before the end of summer.

The Turkish-Korean Kalyon-Hanwha consortium won a tender bid on March 20 for the construction of Turkey’s biggest solar power plant, which will be built in the Central Anatolian province of Konya’s Karapınar district for \$1.3 billion.

Turkey plans to supply most of its energy needs from domestic resources and held its first auction for renewable energy resources for 1,000 megawatts of installed capacity along with a production factory for photovoltaic equipment.

The tender requested that locally produced equipment be used and stipulated that local engineers should constitute 80 percent of the personnel on the project. Turkey has already begun its strategy to boost the country’s domestic energy resources, including coal and renewables, and capacities from these are set to further grow in the share of the country’s total energy mix.

According to the ministry’s 2015-2019 Strategic Plan, the country is aiming for 32,000 megawatts of production capacity in hydro power, 10,000 megawatts in wind, 3,000 megawatts in solar, 1,000 megawatts in geothermal and 700 megawatts in biomass.

The government also plans to make investments of around 30 billion Turkish Liras to improve electricity transmission and distribution infrastructure in the next five years. More than half of the figure is expected to come from the private sector.

Albayrak also said the country’s oil storage capacity would be increased to 5 million tons in the near future. The country’s aim is to increase its gas storage capacity to 20 percent of the country’s entire consumption.

Brexit: Theresa May and Donald Tusk agree to 'lower tensions' over Gibraltar

Independent, 06.04.2017



Theresa May and Donald Tusk have agreed to try and “lower tensions” over Gibraltar in Brexit talks following the recent furore over the issue.

The Prime Minister made clear however that there would be “no negotiation on the sovereignty” of the British territory without the consent of its population. The two leaders met to discuss pending Brexit negotiations amid concerns that Gibraltar could become a flash-point in an already difficult situation. Their meeting at Downing Street comes after former Tory leader Michael Howard suggested the UK would go to war over Gibraltar in the same way it had over the Falklands.

Sources at both No 10 and in Brussels said two hours of talks between Ms May and European Council President Mr Tusk on Thursday were friendly. On Gibraltar, an EU source added: “They agreed to stay in regular contact throughout the Brexit process to keep a constructive approach and seek to lower tensions that may arise, also when talks on some issues like Gibraltar inevitably will become difficult.”

A Downing Street official went on: “The PM also made clear that on the subject of Gibraltar, the UK’s position had not changed, the UK would seek the best possible deal for Gibraltar as the UK exits the EU and there would be no negotiation on the sovereignty of Gibraltar without the consent of its people.”

The issue of Gibraltar arose after Mr Tusk’s draft negotiating guidelines for the EU effectively said Spain would be given a veto over any deal that would affect the status of Gibraltar, a territory it has desired to take back from the UK for many years.

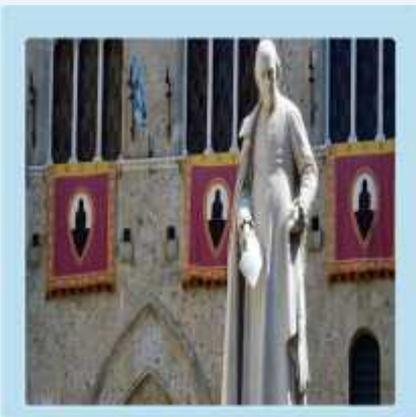
Tensions became further strained following Lord Howard’s unexpected intervention, in which he said: “Thirty-five years ago this week, another woman prime minister sent a taskforce halfway across the world to defend the freedom of another small group of British people against another Spanish-speaking country, and I’m absolutely certain that our current Prime Minister will show the same resolve in standing by the people of Gibraltar.”

While later ruling out any sort of military action over Gibraltar, Ms May still refused to condemn Lord Howard’s comments. At their meeting on Thursday Ms May and Mr Tusk talked further over the draft guidelines set out after the UK triggered Article 50, which will now be cemented into a Brexit negotiating mandate for Michel Barnier at a meeting of the European Council on 29 April. The Number 10 official added: “The PM reiterated the UK’s desire to ensure a deep and special partnership with the European Union following its exit, and noted the constructive approach set out by the Council in its draft guidelines published last week.”

The European Parliament became the first EU institution to formalise its guidelines for Brexit talks on Wednesday, in which it said guaranteeing the rights EU and British citizens living abroad should be a priority.

EU sees no future for Assad in Syria, say foreign ministers

Hurriyet Daily News, 03.04.2017



President Bashar al-Assad has no future in post-conflict Syria but his fate is ultimately up to the Syrian people, European Union foreign ministers said April 3 in response to an apparent shift in U.S. policy.

The US and the EU have consistently demanded al-Assad stand down in any peace deal. But last week Washington signaled it would no longer focus on Assad's ouster as it concentrates on the wider fight against terror groups such as the ISIL. Asked what this meant for EU policy, bloc foreign affairs chief Federica Mogherini said she believed it "would be impossible" to return to the status quo in Syria.

After nearly seven years of war, "it seems completely unrealistic to believe that the future of Syria will be exactly the same as it used to be in the past," Mogherini said as she arrived for an EU foreign ministers meeting in Luxembourg.

"But this is for the Syrians to decide, that is clear ... any solution that can be acceptable by all Syrians, we will support it." The foreign ministers later endorsed a statement which noted: "The EU recalls that there can be no lasting peace in Syria under the current regime."

It said some 13.5 million Syrians were now in need of humanitarian assistance inside Syria while another five million had sought refuge in neighbors, such as Turkey and other regional countries. Mogherini on April 4 co-hosts with the United Nations a two-day conference on Syria's future in Brussels focused on the disastrous humanitarian situation in the country after a war which has claimed more than 320,000 lives.

Mogherini stressed that this was part of efforts to prepare properly for the end of the war while U.N.-sponsored peace talks in Geneva continued to search for a peace settlement and Russia and Turkey brokered talks between Damascus and the rebels on a cease-fire.

German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel said he believed the changed United States position was certainly "more realistic," as to insist that al-Assad must step down from the start would only result in deadlock. "But there is one thing which cannot happen - that a dictator who committed horrible crimes in the region remains untouched," Gabriel said. The U.N. peace talks should continue with the aim of producing a "new constitution, elections and a new and democratic government," he said.

“This cannot be abandoned or subordinated to the conflict against Islamic State [ISIL],” he added. French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault for his part said there had to be a genuine political transition to a new Syria.

“France does not believe for an instant that this new Syria can be led by Assad,” he said. Meanwhile, more than \$260 million was pledged in humanitarian aid for Syria following a meeting in Doha on April 2 involving the U.N. and 25 non-governmental organizations from across the region.

Qatari state media said the total number of pledges stood at \$262 million and were made by participants at the meeting which comes ahead of the EU conference in Belgium. Ahmed bin Mohammed Al-Muraikhi, the U.N. Secretary General’s Humanitarian envoy, told the Doha meeting that Syria faces a huge humanitarian crisis which requires up to \$8 billion in aid for the current year.

He added that more than 13 million Syrians need humanitarian assistance, according to the Qatar News Agency. Among the organizations at the conference was the Qatar Red Crescent, several from the Gulf Cooperation Council and charities from Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. This week’s Brussels conference is expected to bring together representatives from more than 70 countries and international organizations.

Trump drops Steve Bannon from National Security Council

Hurriyet Daily News, 06.04.2017



U.S. President Donald Trump removed his chief strategist Steve Bannon from the National Security Council on April 5, reversing his controversial decision early this year to give a political adviser an unprecedented role in security discussions.

Trump’s overhaul of the NSC, confirmed by White House, also elevated General Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Dan Coats, the director of National Intelligence who heads all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies. The official said the change moves the NSC “back to its core function of what it’s supposed to do,” Reuters reported.

It also appears to mark a victory for national security adviser H.R. McMaster, who had told some national security experts he felt he was in a “battle to the death” with Bannon and others on the White House staff.

U.S. Vice President Mike Pence said Bannon would continue to play an important role in policy and played down the shake-up as routine. “This is just a natural evolution to ensure the National Security Council is organized in a way that best serves the president in resolving and making those difficult decisions,” Pence said on Fox News.

Bannon said in a statement he had succeeded in returning the NSC back to its traditional role of coordinating foreign policy rather than running it. He cited former President Barack Obama's national security adviser, Susan Rice, for why he advocated a change. "Susan Rice operationalized the NSC during the last administration so I was put on NSC to ensure it was 'de-operationalized.' General McMaster has NSC back to its proper function," he said.

Trump's White House team has grappled with infighting and intrigue that has hobbled his young presidency. In recent days, several other senior U.S. foreign policy and national security officials have said the mechanisms for shaping the Trump administration's response to pressing challenges such as Syria, North Korea and Iran still were not in place.

Critics of Bannon's role on the NSC said it gave too much weight in decision-making to someone who lacked foreign policy expertise. Bannon, who was chief executive of Trump's presidential campaign in the months leading to his election in November, in some respects represents Trump's "America First" nationalistic voice, helping fuel his anti-Washington fervor and pushing for the president to part ways at times with mainstream Republicans. Before joining the Trump administration, Bannon headed Breitbart News, a right-wing website.

Trump turns on Assad, strikes air base with flurry of cruise missiles

Foreign Policy, 06.04.2017



President Donald Trump ordered a missile strike on a Syrian airbase late Thursday in reprisal for a deadly chemical weapons attack this week by the regime of Syrian strongman Bashar al-Assad, a stark reversal from the president's formerly stand-off approach to the six-year old civil war.

Two U.S. Navy warships launched over 50 Tomahawk cruise missiles at Al-Shayrat air base in Homs. Tuesday's sarin gas attack was launched from there. One official told FP the base was struck in multiple locations, and American military officials warned the Russian government of the impending attack, giving them time to move assets and troops.

There is no indication if the Russians informed their Syrian allies of the attack, what targets were hit, or the number of potential casualties on the ground. The missiles strike followed two days of intense diplomatic activity at the United Nations, as the U.S., Britain and France sought support for a U.N. Security Council draft resolution demanding Syria hand over intelligence on its air operations, including any flight plans produced on the day of the chemical attack. The draft resolution also demanded the names of all commanders of Syria's helicopter squads, and obliged Syria to arrange meetings with senior Syrian military officers within five days.



Russia dismissed the proposal as unnecessary, noting that the U.N. and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons already had the authority to investigate the attack, which it claimed was caused when Syria bombed a terrorist warehouse that contained chemical agents.

On Thursday, presented its own competing resolution that urge the international inspectors to visit the site of the attack, but which also would have placed fresh constraints on them. For instance, the Russian plan would have granted authority to the Security Council's 15 members, including Russia, to vet any of the investigators.

The council's 10 non-permanent members, meanwhile, tried to break the impasse, circulating their own compromise resolution that would have condemned the use of chemical weapons, and called on Syria to cooperate with any investigation by international chemical weapons experts. But the draft would stripped out some of the toughest U.S.-backed provisions placing new reporting obligations on Damascus.

The council met behind closed doors Thursday evening to determine if there were grounds for agreement, but Nikki Haley, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, and a senior Russian diplomat, Vladimir Safronkov, quickly squared off in a "heated and acrimonious" dispute over their widely divergent approaches. Finally, a British diplomat, Stephen Hickey, tweeted from inside the chamber that the "UN Security Council will no longer vote on the [UN Security Council resolution] on #Syria this evening."

The strike increases overnight the U.S. involvement in the civil war in Syria, and could put hundreds of U.S. soldiers in northern Syria at risk, as they train and equip Syrian Arab and Kurdish fighters preparing to assault the Islamic State capital of Raqqa.

But it's not clear exactly what the administration seeks to achieve in Syria — just a week ago, it signalled a willingness to let Assad continue in power — or why a limited strike on a single airfield would somehow change the calculus of the Syrian leader, who has deployed every weapon in his arsenal to crush the uprising that began in 2011.

The legal authority for the strikes is also unclear. The 2001 Authorization for the Use of Military Force, under which the United States conducts counterterror strikes in the region, applies to terrorist groups, not states.

The administration could point to legal justifications drafted during the Obama administration for the 2011 intervention in Libya, which allows for unilateral, punitive strikes on humanitarian grounds. But some lawmakers — citing Trump's own long-held positions — said that Congress must authorize deeper U.S. involvement against the Syrian regime.

President Trump said Thursday evening in a televised address that the strike on the airbase was in the "vital national security interest of the U.S. to prevent and deter the spread and use of deadly chemical weapons."

Speaking with reporters at the Pentagon, spokesman Capt. Jeff Davis said that "initial indications are that this strike has severely damaged or destroyed Syrian aircraft" and equipment, while "trying minimize risk to Russian or Syrian personnel located at the airfield."



Tuesday's attack in Idlib was at least the fourth time that Syria has used chemical weapons since the beginning of the civil war, and Trump vociferously opposed any U.S. action against Assad before he was president. In addition to proposing budget cuts for U.N. programs that monitor chemical weapons programs like Syria's, the Trump administration has also banned Syrian civilians fleeing Assad's violence from entering the United States.

Trump authorized the strike after being briefed on the target by Defense Secretary Jim Mattis earlier in the day. The cruise missile strike was on the more limited end of the range of options that secretary Mattis presented the president, a military official said. Trump is in the middle of a two-day summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping at his Palm Beach, Fla., resort.

Russia's deputy U.N. envoy, Vladimir Safronkov, warned Washington Thursday not to strike Syrian government targets. "We have to think about negative consequences, and all the responsibility if military action occurred will be on shoulders of those who initiated such doubtful and tragic enterprise," Safronkov told reporters.

In a joint statement, senators John McCain (R.-Ariz.) and Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) said the operation "sent an important message the United States will no longer stand idly by as Assad, aided and abetted by Putin's Russia, slaughters innocent Syrians with chemical weapons and barrel bombs."

U.S. Senator Ben Cardin (D-Md.), Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, said the strikes "send a clear signal that the United States will stand up for internationally accepted norms and rules against the use of chemical weapons." He added, however, "any longer-term or larger military operation in Syria by the Trump Administration will need to be done in consultation with the Congress."



Announcements & Reports

Europe in a new world order

Source : Bruegel
Weblink : <http://bruegel.org/2017/02/europe-in-a-new-world-order/>

Maintaining Arctic Cooperation with Russia

Source : Rand
Weblink : http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1731.html

The unprecedented expansion of the global middle class

Source : Brookings
Weblink : <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-unprecedented-expansion-of-the-global-middle-class-2/>

Upcoming Events

Competitive Gains in the Economic and Monetary Union

Date : 25 April 2017
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/534-competitive-gains-in-the-economic-and-monetary-union/>

The Future of Capitalist Democracy: UK-Japan Perspectives

Date : 25 April 2017
Place : London - UK
Website : <http://www.chathamhouse.org/event/future-capitalist-democracy-uk-japan-perspectives>

13th Asia Europe Economic Forum (AEEF)

Date : 26 April 2017
Place : Beijing - China
Website : <http://bruegel.org/events/13th-asia-europe-economic-forum/>

Emerging Markets and Europe: Time for Different Relationships?

Date : 27 April 2017
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/524-emerging-markets-and-europe-time-for-different-relationships/>



What future for Europe's Social Models?

Date : 27 April 2017
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/526-what-future-for-europes-social-models/>

Challenges for Growth in Europe

Date : 27 April 2017
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/521-challenges-for-growth-in-europe/>

Global Governance of Public Goods: Asian and European Perspectives

Date : 28 April 2017
Place : Paris - France
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/529-global-governance-of-public-goods-asian-and-european-perspectives/>

The Future of the Welfare State

Date : 28 April 2017
Place : Berlin - Germany
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/541-the-future-of-the-welfare-state/>

Vision Europe Summit 2016

Date : 28 April 2017
Place : Lisbon - Portugal
Website : <http://bruegel.org/events/vision-europe-summit-2016/>