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Shifting Grounds in the Middle East and Turkiye's Role in the Region

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Under the constantly changing situation on the ground, it is an understatement to argue that the Middle East is faced with multiple risks. The situation in Gaza persists. France joined European countries such as Spain and Ireland to recognize Palestinian statehood in late June, and announced it will formally bring the issue to the United Nations in September¹. Yet, given the speed and multiple urgencies on the ground this summer, even September seems far. Syria is likely to be the main stage for the continuing debacle, as the latest violence in Suweida showed. Violence in the predominantly Druze city was the latest development signaling the hardship of keeping Syria intact. Previous signals included the church bombing in Damascus in June, coastal violence in Alawite areas in March, the fighting in Druze neighbourhoods such as Jaramana and Ashrafiyat Sahnaya in January and February².

Syria will be testing its Islamist limits because now that the competition is not between the incumbent and the Islamist, but a totally collapsed typical Arab single-party state and the unleashed popular sentiment which is increasingly brought into the political arena by different players in Syria. Reports of growing Iranian influence in Syria, Islamic State (IS) forces getting close to Damascus in addition to their presence in northeast Syria are ample.

The Syrian government finds itself in a position that it has little chance to establish a power monopoly over the country. Israel will not stop its strikes, Russia retains military footprints that exist in an uneasy equilibrium, especially with its fading power because of the war in Ukraine. Russia's activities in the Sahel region should also be monitored closely.

The Palestinian question, and how it is affected by all these risks after the war in Gaza and possible conflict involving West Bank, will be a liability for all Arab states before their peoples, and no longer

¹ "France to recognize Palestinian statehood as Europe hardens stance on Israel," <https://www.politico.eu/article/france-palestine-statehood-emmanuel-macron-middle-east-war-gaza/>.

² "Suweida shows the world what needs to change in Syria," <https://en.majalla.com/node/326544/opinion/suweida-shows-world-what-needs-change-syria>.

a rallying point for the rulers, as it has been until now. Jordan and later on Egypt will be affected most. Jordan-Saudi relations will also be important to watch, given how the sectarian relations play in the region.

The potential ramifications of instability in Syria and Palestine will significantly affect the region and Türkiye's role. Türkiye, as a careful balancer of moral imperatives and economic necessities, is a security actor in Syria and Iraq, diplomatic mediator in regional crises, economic partner for Gulf States, North Africa and post-conflict Syria. Meanwhile, with the Kurdish PKK, the internationally recognized terrorist organization dismantling in mid-June, Türkiye's hand seems to have strengthened vis-a-vis northern Syria and Iraq.

Still, in the midst of almost hourly developments in the region, Türkiye faces a uniquely complex calculus. Once aspiring to regional leadership through ideological and political affinity with like-minded regimes, Ankara has increasingly embraced a pragmatic, geoeconomic-focused approach. In recent years, this shift has signaled a more realist turn in its regional policy, aimed at expanding strategic relevance through diversified partnerships, defense industry cooperation, and large-scale economic integration initiatives³. The Gaza war—now a major geopolitical flashpoint—has not only disrupted Türkiye's delicate normalization efforts but also stalled broader regional reconciliation between Israel and the Arab states, exposed acute security vulnerabilities, and reignited ideological divisions. These developments are forcing Ankara to navigate a new and more constrained set of parameters in both regional and global power politics.

Türkiye's Regional Strategy and the Gaza War

Amid this turbulence, Türkiye's foreign policy straddles competing imperatives: balancing normative postures with realpolitik, managing entanglements in global rivalries, and reinstating its role in a region where competing visions of regional order remain deeply contested. The Hamas-led attack on Israel on October 7 and the subsequent war in Gaza marked a watershed moment for the Middle East's evolving regional order. For Türkiye, these developments did not merely represent a humanitarian crisis or a collapse of bilateral diplomacy with Israel; they disrupted a broader strategic recalibration Ankara had been carefully pursuing in response to shifting regional and global dynamics.

³ Hakan Fidan, "Turkish Foreign Policy at the Turn of the 'Century of Türkiye': Challenges, Vision, Objectives, and Transformation." *Insight Turkey* 25, no. 3 (2023): 11–26. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48744757>.

E. Fuat Keyman, "A New Turkish Foreign Policy: Towards Proactive 'Moral Realism'," *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Winter 2017), pp. 55-70;

Meliha Benli Altunışık, "The New Turn in Turkey's Foreign Policy in the Middle East: Regional and Domestic Insecurities," *Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)*, No. 17, (July 2020), pp. 1-22.

Prior to October 7, Türkiye's foreign policy was guided by a three-pronged strategy to secure its place in a transforming regional order. First, Ankara embraced the regional trend toward normalization. The broader Middle East was witnessing a thaw in long-standing rivalries, evidenced by the Saudi-Houthi dialogue⁴, the U.S.-brokered Abraham Accords between Arab states and Israel⁵, and the China-mediated rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran⁶. Within this shifting landscape, Türkiye pursued parallel normalization tracks—with Israel⁷, with regional rivals such as the UAE⁸, Egypt⁹, and Saudi Arabia¹⁰, and with its Western partners. These efforts aimed to maximize Türkiye's strategic flexibility, reduce tensions, expand trade and energy cooperation, and strengthen its position within a more cooperative and economically integrated regional framework.

Second, Türkiye sought to integrate itself into emerging visions of regional connectivity and economic order. The announcement of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) by the U.S. and its partners was perceived in Ankara as a direct bypassing of Türkiye in the new regional order¹¹. In response, Türkiye advanced its own alternative vision—promoting the Iraq-based Development Road initiative—as a competing corridor that would secure its geoeconomic relevance¹². This project, framed as a geoeconomic corridor linking the Gulf to Europe via Türkiye, marked a decisive shift from Ankara's earlier ideological order-building toward a more pragmatic focus on infrastructure, trade routes, and regional economic integration. As a third strategy, Türkiye was undertaking a strategic adaptation to intensifying global competition. Ankara sought to enhance its role in global supply chains, energy corridors, and multilateral platforms¹³. This geoeconomic turn was designed to increase

⁴ Saudi officials visit Yemen's capital for talks with Houthis, Gulf Today, 09 Apr 2023, <https://www.gulftoday.ae/News/2023/04/09/Saudi-officials-visit-Yemens-capital-for-talks-with-Houthis>.

⁵ The Abraham Accords Declaration, US Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/the-abraham-accords>.

⁶ Wang Yi: The Facilitation of the Reconciliation Between Saudi Arabia and Iran Sets a New Example of Political Settlement of Hotspot Issues, Ministry of Foreign Affairs The People's Republic of China January 09, 2024 https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/wjbzhd/202403/t20240319_11262331.html.

⁷ Kemal Kirişçi and Dan Arbell, "President Herzog's visit to Ankara: A first step in normalizing Turkey-Israel relations?", Brookings, March 7, 2022 <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/president-herzogs-visit-to-ankara-a-first-step-in-normalizing-turkey-israel-relations/>.

⁸ Turkey moves to normalize ties with Saudi Arabia, UAE, Amwaj Media, <https://amwaj.media/en/data/country/saudi-arabia/politics/accords-diplomacy/turkey-moves-to-normalize-ties-with-saudi-arabia-uae>.

⁹ Ali Bakir, "Egypt-Turkey normalization: Ankara's perspective", April 12, 2022, Atlantic Council, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/egypt-turkey-normalization-ankaras-perspective/>.

¹⁰ Sinem Cengiz, Time for Saudi Arabia and Turkey to reset the clock, The Arab News, 29 April 2022, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2073371/%7B%7B>.

¹¹ Ragıp Soylu, Turkey's Erdogan opposes India-Middle East transport project, Middle East Eye, 11 September 2023 <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/turkey-erdogan-opposes-india-middle-east-corridor>.

¹² Iraq, Türkiye, Qatar, UAE sign quadripartite agreement for Development Road project, Shafaq News, 22 April 2024, <https://shafaq.com/en/Iraq/Iraq-Turkiye-Qatar-UAE-sign-quadripartite-agreement-for-Development-Road-project>.

¹³ James M. Dorsey, Hedging bets: Turkey positions itself as supply chain alternative to China, Responsible Statescraft, 22 Jun, 2020, <https://responsiblestatescraft.org/2020/06/22/hedging-bets-turkey-positions-itself-as-supply-chain-alternative-to-china/>.

Türkiye's strategic autonomy and resilience in an era of multipolarity, while positioning itself as a key interlocutor between Western and non-Western blocs¹⁴. The overall aim was to maintain strategic relevance in a fragmented international system.

The Gaza war has upended this trajectory. Now, Türkiye faces three structural challenges: strategic distraction, policy limitations, and moral-strategic dissonance. The war has diverted Ankara's focus from long-term regional integration and normalization efforts toward the immediate management of crises and instability. Furthermore, the Assad regime's collapse further reinforced this dynamic by injecting profound uncertainty into Syria's future trajectory. The military escalation in Suweida and Israeli airstrikes on Syrian military targets, including Damascus military headquarters, as part of its declared objective to protect Druze civilians and establish demilitarised zones in Suweida, Daraa, and Quneitra became a flashpoint where Israel's objectives of promoting a decentralised Syria intersected with Turkish support for Syria's new leadership. All those developments have also exposed the limits of Türkiye's cooperation-based, geoeconomic-oriented approach—particularly in a context where hard power dynamics and regional rivalries are resurging¹⁵.

While Ankara remains committed to its broader foreign policy ambitions, it now confronts a more polarized and unpredictable regional landscape. The Gaza war has intensified the hegemonic rivalry between Israel and Iran, disrupted key diplomatic tracks, and revealed the fragility of emerging regional orders. In response, Türkiye is recalibrating its posture: deepening strategic partnerships with Gulf states, expanding defense diplomacy, and reaffirming its normative stance on Palestinian rights. Through these adjustments, Ankara aims to improve its regional relevance and retain a central role in shaping the contours of the post-crisis Middle East.

Gaza's Shockwaves and Turkish Foreign Policy: Disruption, Dilemmas and Dynamics

As the Gaza war reshapes regional fault lines, Ankara's strategic outlook is evolving across three interrelated dimensions: its impact on normalization processes, emerging security threats, and Türkiye's positioning within an increasingly bipolar and militarized regional order.

Sinan Tavşan, Turkey lauds improvement in relations with China after long stagnation, Nikkei Asia, 21 August 2024, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Turkey-lauds-improvement-in-relations-with-China-after-long-stagnation>.

Turkey wants to join the BRICS bloc of developing economies, official confirms, AP, September 3, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/turkey-brics-developing-economies-erdogan-foreign-policy-15a2428e73e804732085f78b9e5c3c50>.

¹⁴ "Türkiye can become a strong, prosperous, prestigious and effective country if it improves its relations with the East and the West simultaneously," Erdoğan said in Istanbul over the weekend. "Any method other than this will not benefit Türkiye but will harm it." <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/united-states-respects-turkish-plan-to-join-brics>.

¹⁵ Murat Yeşiltaş, Gazze ve Türkiye'nin Bölgesel Diplomasisi, Kriter May 2024 / 9: 90, <https://kriterdergi.com/dis-politika/gazze-ve-turkiyenin-bolgesel-diplomasisi>.

The first and most immediate impact of the war was the breakdown of the **Türkiye-Israel normalization process**. In response to Israel's military campaign in Gaza, Ankara's strong condemnation of Israel's military operations, its public characterization of the war as "genocide,"¹⁶ since late 2023, and the subsequent suspension of trade relations¹⁷ have effectively dismantled the fragile normalization process between the two countries¹⁸. This rupture has not only stalled the pragmatic rapprochement efforts of recent years—focused on energy cooperation and regional dialogue—but also underscored the fragility of transactional diplomacy in a volatile geopolitical climate. While full-scale diplomatic severance has not occurred, the prospects for short-term reconciliation remain slim, especially given the deepening humanitarian crisis and Ankara's emphasis on Palestinian rights.

At the same time, the war has elevated the strategic significance of **Türkiye's relationships with the Gulf states and former regional rivals**. The recalibration of ties with the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt has gained urgency, with cooperation now extending beyond trade and investment to encompass defense industry partnerships. For instance, Ankara has signed major defense cooperation agreements with both the UAE and Saudi Arabia, including the co-production and sale of Turkish Bayraktar TB2 drones and other military technologies¹⁹. In 2023, Saudi Arabia signed a contract with Turkish drone company Baykar, marking a significant milestone in bilateral defense ties²⁰. In March 2024, Türkiye and the GCC initiated negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement (FTA), aiming to liberalize trade in goods and services and facilitate investments²¹. This move signifies a concerted effort to institutionalize economic and diplomatic ties beyond individual bilateral relationships. In September 2024, Türkiye's Foreign Minister attended an Arab League ministerial meeting in Cairo for the first time in 13 years²².

¹⁶ Israel's 'occupier terrorism' in Gaza are crimes against humanity, constitute 'genocide,' says Turkish President Erdogan, Anadolu Agency, 22.11.2023 <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/israels-occupier-terrorism-in-gaza-are-crimes-against-humanity-constitute-genocide-says-turkish-president-erdogan/3061601>.

¹⁷ Türkiye seeks to force Israel into a ceasefire by halting trade—Erdogan, TRT World, <https://www.trtworld.com/turkiye/turkiye-suspends-trade-with-israel-amounting-to-dollar95b-erdogan-18016360>, Israel's open economy offset Turkish trade ban, central bank says, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israels-open-economy-offset-turkish-trade-ban-central-bank-says-2025-03-19/>.

¹⁸ Turkey severs all relations with Israel, says Erdogan, Middle East Eye, 13 November 2024, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/turkey-severs-all-relations-israel-says-erdogan>.

¹⁹ Burak Ege Bekdil, Turkey, UAE strengthen defense industry ties with dozens of deals, <https://www.defensenews.com/industry/2023/10/13/turkey-uae-strengthen-defense-industry-ties-with-dozens-of-deals/>; Orhan Coskun, Exclusive: Turkey sells battle-tested drones to UAE as regional rivals mend ties, 21 September 2022, Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/exclusive-turkey-sells-battle-tested-drones-uae-regional-rivals-mend-ties-2022-09-21/>; Pramod Kumar, Saudi Arabia in talks for \$6bn Turkish arms deal, AGBI, 28 January 2025 <https://www.agbi.com/economy/2025/01/saudi-arabia-in-talks-for-6bn-turkish-arms-deal/>.

²⁰ Saudi Arabia in pact with Turkey's Baykar Tech to localise drone manufacturing, 7 August 2023, <https://www.baykartech.com/en/press/saudi-arabia-in-pact-with-turkeys-baykar-tech-to-localise-drone-manufacturing/>.

²¹ Turkey and Gulf states to launch talks for free trade pact, Reuters, 21 March 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/turkey-gulf-states-launch-talks-free-trade-pact-2024-03-21/>.

²² Turkey heads to Arab League ministerial for first time in 13 years, source says, Reuters, 9 September 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/turkey-heads-arab-league-ministerial-first-time-13-years-source-says-2024-09-09/>.

For Ankara, strengthening these relationships is vital for maintaining regional relevance and mitigating the risk of strategic marginalization in an increasingly polarized environment.

Security Risks in the Region:

Beyond alliance realignments, the conflict has exposed a wide spectrum of emerging security threats that shape Türkiye's threat perceptions. These risks fall broadly into three categories: **conventional military escalation, asymmetric and hybrid warfare, and regional spillover.**

First, the growing use of advanced military technologies—including ballistic missiles, high-precision airpower, and real-time surveillance—has raised the prospect of broader interstate conflict spilling into multiple theaters. **Iran's development and testing of ballistic missiles**, such as the 2,000 km-range missile unveiled in May 2023, have raised concerns about the potential reach of such weapons into Turkish territory. In addition, the regional response has been indicating that conventional military escalation is on the rise. For instance, Riyadh has invested in enhancing its missile defense capabilities, procuring systems like the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) and Patriot missiles from the United States. Reports suggest that **Saudi Arabia has also explored developing its own missile capabilities, with assistance from countries like China.** UAE, on the other hand, has invested in Saab's GlobalEye system, receiving multiple units between 2020 and 2024. This system enhances the UAE's surveillance and early warning capabilities, crucial for detecting and responding to missile threats.

Second, the rise of asymmetric and hybrid warfare—especially by **Iranian-backed groups such as Hezbollah and the Houthis, as well as Israel's use of drones and cyber operations—further complicates Türkiye's defense calculus.** These tactics blur the lines of conventional warfare and highlight Ankara's need to improve in cyber defense and its exposure in contested regions such as northern Syria. While Türkiye has been investing its local capabilities to encounter these hybrid threats, there is a strong trend among the regional states to tilt towards joint ventures to speed up the process of their military readiness against the hybrid threats, especially coming from drones. In October 2024, Italy's Fincantieri signed a memorandum of understanding with Qatar's Barzan Holdings to jointly develop the Omega360 short-range radar program. This initiative supports Qatar's national anti-drone system, with operational units expected by late 2026²³. Notably, the Emirati defense conglomerate EDGE Group has collaborated with international partners to develop advanced counter-drone

²³ Italy's Fincantieri signs MoU with Qatar for radar program development, Reuters, 22 October 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/italys-fincantieri-signs-mou-with-qatar-radar-program-development-2024-10-22/>.

technologies. For instance, EDGE and Israel Aerospace Industries have agreed to co-develop anti-drone systems tailored for the region's specific security needs²⁴.

Third, while Iran remains weakened, it retains the capacity and resolve to retaliate asymmetrically across the region. **Iran's embedded networks in Syria and Iraq, coupled with expanding ties to armed non-state actors in the Red Sea corridor and beyond, give Tehran the tools to respond to perceived threats to its strategic posture.** Moreover, Tehran has signaled it could retaliate indirectly through its proxies in Lebanon, Gaza, or Yemen in response to regional pressures. This retaliatory posture—amplified by Iran's advances in missile and drone capabilities—raises the prospect that Türkiye could be entangled in broader confrontations unless it carefully navigates its regional alignments and manages its exposure to Iran's informal deterrence strategies.

These converging threats are also driving changes in regional defense postures that Ankara must factor into its long-term strategic calculus. Among them, **Israel's evolving doctrine—focused on long-term regional deterrence and military dominance—signals a shift toward more proactive and expansionist security policies.** This especially brings escalatory risks for Türkiye in Syria, following the Asad regime's fall and Israel's military operations in the country. Alongside the increasing conflict between Türkiye and Israel, Tel Aviv's military posture laid bare the disconnect between Türkiye's diplomatic ambitions and its constrained leverage in a crisis shaped by hard power realities. At the Gaza war's onset, Türkiye sought to leverage its ties with Hamas and fragile normalization with Israel to position itself as a critical mediator²⁵. Ankara aimed to broker short-term hostage releases and a ceasefire while advancing a long-term “guarantor” framework that would cement its role as a Palestinian advocate and regional powerbroker²⁶. The proposal collapsed, even immediate goals faltered: Ankara's influence over Hamas proved insufficient to secure concessions, while deepened mutual distrust between the two countries proved constrained.

Simultaneously, the Gulf states—particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE—are rapidly accelerating arms acquisitions, investing in missile defense systems, and building indigenous defense industries. While this trend opens opportunities for Turkish defense partnerships, it also introduces a competitive dynamic in the regional security economy.

²⁴ Emirati state weapons contractor invests in Israeli defense supplier, Reuters, 28 January 2028, <https://www.reuters.com/markets/deals/emirati-state-weapons-contractor-invests-israeli-defense-supplier-2025-01-28/>.

²⁵ Is Turkey uniquely positioned to mediate between Palestinians and Israel?, Al Jazeera, 22 October 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/22/is-turkey-uniquely-positioned-to-mediate-between-palestinians-and-israel/>.

²⁶ Türkiye proposes guarantor formula for Israeli-Palestinian issue: Turkish foreign minister, Anadolu Agency, 17.10.2023 <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkiye/turkiye-proposes-guarantor-formula-for-israeli-palestinian-issue-turkish-foreign-minister/3022412>.

On the top of all these, Tehran’s dual-track strategy—strengthening proxies while advancing its nuclear program—may eventually yield a de facto bipolar regional order. Such an outcome would marginalize middle powers like Türkiye unless Ankara recalibrates its defense and diplomatic posture to remain agile and influential.

New Frontiers: Türkiye’s Evolving Playbook

In response to shifting regional dynamics, **Türkiye is recalibrating its strategic posture across three fronts: deepening defense cooperation, expanding geoeconomic initiatives, and maintaining a mediating role in regional conflicts.** These efforts reflect Ankara’s bid to remain relevant in a fragmented regional order while balancing security imperatives with long-term economic interests.

One of the clearest indicators of this recalibration is Türkiye’s intensified defense cooperation with Gulf states. What began as a surge in arms exports has evolved into deeper partnerships encompassing joint production agreements, R&D collaboration, technology transfer, and strategic co-financing. Both the UAE and Saudi Arabia—pursuing strategic autonomy and localization in their defense industries—have come to view Türkiye as a partner offering cost-effective platforms, combat-tested systems, and political flexibility. These partnerships serve Ankara’s domestic and strategic objectives: boosting its defense sector, reinforcing bilateral ties, and embedding Türkiye within the long-term security architecture of the Gulf.

Simultaneously, Ankara is investing significant political and economic capital in Iraq, which has become a cornerstone of its broader geoeconomic strategy. President Erdoğan’s visits to Baghdad in 2023 and April 2024—culminating in 26 cooperation agreements—signaled renewed strategic emphasis on Iraq as a linchpin for counterterrorism collaboration, water diplomacy, and connectivity²⁷. Central to this engagement is the Development Road project: a \$17 billion corridor linking the Persian Gulf to Turkish ports and, by extension, to Europe. In contrast to the stalled India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)—which relied on Arab-Israeli normalization—the Development Road has gained traction as a viable and stabilizing alternative, allowing Ankara to assert itself as a logistical and political pivot between Asia and Europe. Furthermore, Türkiye’s engagement in Iraq—through the Development Road, counterterrorism cooperation, and hydro-diplomacy—illustrates a strategic fusion of security and economic interests aimed at anchoring Ankara’s influence in a fragmented region²⁸. By

²⁷ Türkiye, Iraq ink 26 agreements, MoUs during President Erdogan's visit to Baghdad, Anadolu Agency, 23 April 2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/turkiye-iraq-ink-26-agreements-mous-during-president-erdogans-visit-to-baghdad/3200218>.

²⁸ Meliha Altunışık, Derya Göçer, “Balancing Security and Diplomacy: Turkey’s Dual-Track Policy Towards Iraq”, Stimson, 25 April 2025 <https://www.stimson.org/2025/balancing-security-and-diplomacy-turkeys-dual-track-policy-towards-iraq/>.

merging security and economic agendas in Iraq, Ankara seeks to transform a historically volatile frontier into a corridor of strategic connectivity, while also counterbalancing Iranian influence and mediating between competing Iraqi factions.

Also, Türkiye has increasingly shown its interest in minilateralism in the region, forming flexible, issue-specific partnerships that align with its strategic interests. This approach may allow Ankara to navigate the complex geopolitical landscape by engaging in targeted collaborations without the constraints of broader multilateral frameworks. Anchored its interest, in March 2025, foreign ministers and senior officials from Türkiye, Jordan, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon convened in Amman for the “Syria and Neighbouring Countries Meeting.”²⁹ The summit focused on enhancing regional security cooperation, particularly in combating terrorism and organized crime. Participants emphasized the importance of a unified approach to counter the threats posed by extremist groups like ISIS, highlighting the necessity of collaborative efforts to ensure the security and sovereignty of Syria and its neighbors.

The Road Ahead: Between Opportunity and Uncertainty

Türkiye’s current regional posture reflects a tactical agility shaped by necessity, but its long-term efficacy depends on Ankara’s ability to institutionalize gains, avoid strategic contradictions, and navigate an increasingly multipolar and militarized regional order. Whether Türkiye can translate its current maneuverability into sustainable influence will hinge on its capacity to reconcile moral posturing with pragmatic engagement, economic ambition with geopolitical risk, and national priorities with regional responsibilities.

Much of Türkiye’s recent diplomatic momentum—particularly in its rapprochement with the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar—has been driven by pragmatic, leader-level bilateral agreements rather than embedded in multilateral or institutionalized frameworks. While these arrangements have delivered immediate gains in trade, defense, and investment cooperation, they remain inherently vulnerable to shifts in leadership preferences, evolving threat perceptions, or broader geopolitical realignments. The absence of institutional mechanisms to mediate divergences or sustain continuity in times of tension may limit their strategic depth. Türkiye’s exclusion from initiatives such as the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)—a multilateral infrastructure and trade framework backed by the U.S., India, the EU, and Gulf partners—highlights the limitations of a bilateral-centric approach when it comes to shaping emerging regional architecture. Without a more structured role in such platforms,

²⁹ Türkiye, Jordan, Syria, Iraq to discuss security cooperation in Amman: report, 8 March 2025, Turkish Minute https://www.turkishminute.com/2025/03/08/turkey-jordan-syria-iraq-to-discuss-security-cooperation-in-amman-report6/?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

Ankara risks marginalization in critical connectivity and energy configurations that are likely to define future regional order.

Furthermore, the concurrent pursuit of moral leadership, defense diplomacy, and economic integration may generate policy tensions. Türkiye's support for the Palestinian cause, for instance, coexists with its efforts to maintain or deepen relations with actors directly or indirectly involved in the Gaza conflict, including the United States and Gulf states. Similarly, balancing NATO obligations with strategic engagements in the Gulf, Central Asia, and with Russia and China introduces complexities that may strain coherence and credibility in Ankara's external posture.

In parallel, the possibility of a broader conflict involving Iran, Israel, and their regional proxies across multiple theaters—including Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and the Red Sea—poses tangible risks for Türkiye. Such scenarios could impact border security, energy transit routes, and Ankara's military presence in neighboring zones. Given the recent escalations between Israel and Türkiye in Syria, especially around the future of the country, the road ahead for Türkiye in Syria is increasingly complex, high-stakes, and multidimensional. While Ankara's overarching objective remains to prevent the emergence of hostile actors along its border, support a centralised Syria under the new leadership and mobilise regional and international rebuilding of the country, recent developments signal that Türkiye will have to adapt its Syria strategy to a far more competitive and congested security environment. Moreover, the accelerating militarization of the region, including concerns over nuclear proliferation, may limit the scope for cooperative security frameworks in which Türkiye has previously sought a role.

Türkiye's regional positioning is also shaped by how it is perceived by neighboring states. While some actors increasingly view Ankara as a pragmatic and capable partner—particularly in the defense and energy sectors—others remain cautious. Perceptions of Turkish ambition, shaped by its assertive role during the Arab uprisings and subsequent regional competition, continue to influence the terms of engagement, especially in contested arenas such as Iraq, Libya, and the Red Sea.

Finally, Türkiye's ambitious regional aspirations will remain closely tied to its internal resilience. Economic fragility, currency volatility, and persistent political polarization pose challenges to sustaining long-term strategic initiatives or projecting stability abroad.



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