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Britain, Turkey, and the EU in the Iran War and the New Fragmentation

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The Iran war of the United States and Israel opened the Pandora's box in global politics. It has done more than trigger another round of regional escalation. The new chapter of long-lasting tension has exposed how far the old assumptions of world order have already eroded. For decades, international politics was often narrated through the language of poles, blocs, and relatively stable alignments. That language now looks increasingly inadequate. The war has shown that the emerging system- since it cannot be named as an "order", is not being shaped by fixed camps acting in predictable ways, but by overlapping crises, selective partnerships, layered dependencies, and strategic ambiguity. What matters now is not simply who stands where, but how actors use uncertainty itself as a political resource and how they manage it. How do they use diplomatic flexibility, reputational positioning, domestic political signalling? Finally, and maybe most importantly, are they economically resilient?

The Iran war tests many actors and the global economy. Global financial volatility through oil prices, shipping exposure, insurance costs, and investor sentiment. Reuters reported on 11 March that the energy shock linked to the war was already reducing room for monetary easing across emerging markets, including Turkey, underlining that this is not merely a regional crisis but a system-level economic and geopolitical event. The conflict is forcing actors to think in several temporalities at once: what must be done immediately, what must be avoided because of historical memory, and what future strategic space must be protected before the next crisis arrives.

This is why the responses of the United Kingdom, Turkey, and the European Union to the latest Iran War deserve especially close attention. They represent three distinct but interconnected strategic forms in the emerging order. Turkey is critical not simply because it is a middle power with regional ambitions, but because it is geographically, politically, and socially exposed to the consequences of the conflict in ways few others are. It shares a 560-kilometre border with Iran, that was traced in 1639. Escalation is not a distant abstraction for Ankara but a matter of border management, refugee risk, energy exposure, and regional security spillover. Turkey is a predominantly Muslim country, and this war is interpreted not only through the language of strategy but also through broader civilisational, regional, and societal frames. The United Kingdom matters for very different reasons. It is an old great power now functioning under many of the constraints of a high-capacity middle power, yet it still occupies an exceptional position because of its historic and institutional closeness to the United States. That relationship is not symbolic. In the four quarters to the end of Q3 2025, total UK-US trade in goods and services reached £329.5 billion, with UK exports to the United States at £202.8 billion, underlining the structural depth of the relationship at precisely the time when Washington's regional decisions carry major strategic consequences for London. The European Union forms the third pillar of this comparison. Even with declining geopolitical coherence, it remains a major umbrella organisation with regulatory, diplomatic, and economic significance. Eurostat data show the EU population at roughly around 450 million in 2024, while the bloc accounted for roughly 14.8 percent of global GDP in 2023. That scale ensures that EU responses matter, even when they are slow, fragmented, or strategically inconsistent.

The EU and the UK's involvement in the Eastern Mediterranean which will undoubtedly be effected by how the Iran crisis unfolds, and Turkey's though position in that region for its ties with Cyprus and its dependency on external energy sources; Turkey and Great Britain being two outsiders of the EU yet major players in regional security issues tie in these different actors. These three cases also illuminate three different pathways through which contemporary actors respond to systemic crisis. Britain as the old Atlantic power trying to balance alliance depth with limited freedom of action. Turkey as the pragmatic regional middle power attempting to contain spillover while converting diplomacy into strategic relevance. At last, the European Union as the still-important but increasingly strained umbrella organisation seeking to preserve normative weight amid internal fragmentation. Examining these responses side by side is essential not only for understanding the Iran war, but for understanding the wider reorganisation of international politics now underway. For policymakers, the value is immediate since these cases reveal how different actors calculate risk, manage dependence, and preserve leverage under conditions of uncertainty. For analysts, the importance is equally clear: the Iran war is not just another regional conflict but a lens through which the grammar of the next world order is already becoming visible. What is at stake is not only the future of the Middle East, but the changing logic through which states, alliances, and institutions seek to remain relevant in a world that is no longer structured by the certainties of the old one.

Britain: Between Distance and Involvement

Britain's response to the Iran war has been defined by a posture that is at once cautious, calculated, and historically revealing. Prime Minister Keir Starmer has tried to hold together two positions that are not naturally easy to reconcile. First, a repeated insistence that Britain did not take part in the initial strikes on Iran and should not be drawn into an open-ended offensive war. Second, a willingness to provide limited but meaningful military, logistical, and basing support once the conflict began to spill across the region and threaten British personnel, assets, and partners. In his 1 March statement, Starmer [said](#) plainly that the United Kingdom was not involved in the strikes on Iran and that London still believed the best way forward for the region and for the world is a negotiated settlement. He nevertheless [authorised](#) U.S. use of British bases for a specific and limited defensive purpose against Iranian missile depots and launchers, framing the move as collective self-defence and in accordance with international law. Defence Secretary [John Healey](#) reinforced the same line by saying it was for Washington, not London, to set out the legal basis for the original U.S.-Israeli strikes. In other words, Britain has sought to keep legal and political distance from the war's opening act even while accepting a supporting role once the conflict widened. That distinction is central to the British position. London does not want ownership of the war, but it also does not want absence from it.

The legal caution is not incidental. It is rooted in one of the deepest strategic traumas of modern British foreign policy: Iraq War at the begging of the new millennium. Starmer has explicitly invoked [the mistakes of Iraq](#) when explaining why Britain will not simply follow Washington into another Middle Eastern war without a clear legal basis, a coherent political objective, and a thought-through endgame. Important to note that Starmer, himself a former lawyer, defended his stance partly by stressing that he would not repeat the logic of 2003, while

the [Hansard Society](#) has separately noted that the current debate is inseparable from the uncertain post-Iraq convention on parliamentary scrutiny and war powers. That matters because Britain's current posture is, in a longer historical sense, relatively new. For much of modern British history, from imperial expeditionary warfare to Suez and then on to Iraq and Afghanistan, London more often understood military action as a direct instrument of status, credibility, and global reach. The current pattern is indeed different. Britain is no longer acting like a power that assumes it can openly shape Middle Eastern order by force and then manage the consequences. Instead, it is acting like a state acutely aware of the domestic and constitutional costs of miscalculated intervention, and of the reputational damage that follows when legality and strategy come apart. That shift from imperial reflex to legalistic caution is one of the clearest signs that Britain's old mode of power projection has weakened.

That caution is reinforced by material reality. Britain still has major diplomatic, intelligence, financial, and military capabilities, but it is no longer the kind of power it once was. [In January 2026](#) that British growth and real incomes have been weak since the global financial crisis, and that Brexit and COVID struck an economy already suffering from poor productivity and underinvestment. [IMF](#) expectations of only 1.3% UK growth in 2026, roughly half Britain's average pace before the 2007–09 crisis. This matters strategically because Britain's diminished economic room for manoeuvre constrains its tolerance for major military adventures and makes it more dependent on partnerships to amplify its shrinking standalone capacity. In practical terms, that means Britain nearly always needs a political and strategic anchor when operating in a conflict of this scale, and that anchor remains the United States. The depth of that relationship is structural, not symbolic. [Official UK government figures](#) show total UK-U.S. trade in goods and services at £329.5 billion in the four quarters to the end of Q3 2025, with UK exports to the United States at £202.8 billion. Britain may be more cautious than Washington, but it cannot afford strategic estrangement from it. That is why Starmer has tried to draw a line between refusing automatic participation in offensive war and preserving the wider special relationship as a core pillar of British external power.

The pressure from Washington has made that balancing act harder. On 2 and 3 March that Donald [Trump publicly criticised Starmer](#) for initially blocking U.S. use of British bases for pre-emptive strikes and suggested that London's hesitation had damaged the U.S.-UK relationship. Starmer's response was revealing. He [defended](#) his decisions in terms of legality and national interest, not anti-Americanism, and insisted that Britain and the United States still shared intelligence and remained close partners. This is precisely the kind of intermediate tactic that defines the British approach: reassure domestic audiences that London has not surrendered decision-making autonomy, while simultaneously signalling to Washington that Britain is still operationally useful and strategically aligned. No British prime minister can ignore the domestic political toxicity of another Iraq-style entanglement, but no British prime minister can ignore the structural costs of antagonising the United States either. The result is a policy of calibrated ambiguity. Britain is neither fully in nor fully out. It is trying to satisfy its public, avoid a complete break with U.S. expectations, and preserve enough deniability that nobody can say London truly entered the war, even as British assets and bases help shape the battlespace around it.

That is why Britain's operational footprint matters so much. The country's rhetoric has been restrained, but its tactical presence has not been negligible. Important to note that [HMS Dragon](#) was sent to the eastern Mediterranean, that Britain deployed helicopters with counter-drone technology to Cyprus, that [RAF F-35B](#) jets destroyed Iranian-linked uncrewed systems over Jordanian airspace, and that a joint [UK-Qatar Typhoon](#) squadron shot down an Iranian attack drone directed at Qatar. Also, London later sent four additional [Typhoon jets to Qatar](#) and that British involvement in regional defensive operations included air-defence systems, radar, and other enabling capabilities. These moves make clear that Britain is not sitting on the sidelines. It is involved in what might be called controlled forward participation and therefore enough to protect bases, reassure allies, and preserve leverage in the conflict's wider strategic environment, but not enough to cross the threshold into undisguised co-belligerency. This approach also reflects Britain's military constraints. One should underline that [the armed forces are at their smallest since the Napoleonic era](#) and that years of defence cuts have increased doubts about military readiness. Precisely because Britain cannot now wage large expeditionary wars as easily as it once imagined it could, it is relying on selective, high-value deployments rather than open-ended force commitments.

Britain is doing this for at least three large strategic reasons, and all three would remain relevant regardless of how the war ends. The first is oil, Iraq, and the wider energy-security geography of the Gulf. BP's position is especially important here. In 2025 and again in 2026 that [BP's Kirkuk project in Iraq](#) could involve investment of up to \$25 billion over the life of the agreement, with the aim of lifting production capacity to 450,000 barrels per day within two to three years. That is not a marginal commercial interest; it is a long-term British stake in one of the most strategically sensitive hydrocarbon zones in the region. Britain also moved quickly once the conflict threatened maritime flows. [London](#) was working with allies to support commercial shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, while ministers were in contact with BP, Shell, and Lloyd's of London over war-risk insurance and broader energy disruption. This means Britain's position is not just about abstract alliance management. It is about protecting a wider British-linked ecosystem of energy firms, insurers, traders, and maritime actors whose interests are directly exposed to Gulf instability. Whether the war ends in de-escalation, prolonged attrition, or Iranian regime transformation, London has material reasons to ensure it remains present in the post-war energy conversation.

The second reason is gas and LNG, especially through Qatar. On paper, Britain is less directly dependent on Qatari gas than alarmist commentary sometimes suggests. Only about 1% of Britain's gas supply in 2025 came from [Qatar](#). But that number can obscure the real nature of British exposure. The issue is not just physical import dependence; it is systemic price dependence. Roughly 30% of Britain's electricity comes from gas-fired power and that more than 70% of British homes rely on gas for heating, which makes the UK highly vulnerable to international gas-price shocks even when direct [Qatari volumes are small](#). Due to these complicated issues, [UK wholesale gas prices](#) had surged by about 70% in a week as the war disrupted flows through Hormuz and Qatari production was hit. At the corporate level, the exposure is even clearer. Another issue is directly about Shell, the world's largest LNG trader, had declared force majeure on Qatari LNG cargoes after QatarEnergy's shutdown, and that

[Shell takes an estimated 6.8 mtpa from Qatar under long-term arrangements](#). Therefore Britain's LNG concern is not simply can the lights stay on this week? It is also can British-linked firms, British markets, and Britain's inflation-sensitive economy absorb a prolonged Gulf gas disruption? For a government already operating under growth constraints and inflation pressure, that is a strategic issue, not just an energy one.

The third reason is Gulf capital, political relationships, and Britain's long game in a potentially transformed Middle East. Qatar alone has invested more than [£40 billion](#) in the UK economy, according to the 2025 UK-Qatar Strategic Dialogue. A separate UK government release in October 2025 also highlighted [UK exports to Qatar of £4.4 billion](#) and a deepening defence relationship. With the UAE, [official UK data show](#) total trade of about £25.3 billion in the four quarters to the end of Q3 2025. With Saudi Arabia, HM Treasury reported that Rachel Reeves' 2025 Gulf visit unlocked more than [£6.4 billion](#) in two-way trade and investment deals. These figures matter because Britain's Gulf policy is no longer only about military basing or counterterrorism; it is now tightly connected to a growth strategy that depends on inward investment, financial ties, elite relationships, and long-horizon commercial access. That means London has reasons to hedge against every plausible outcome of the war. If the conflict freezes into a tense but durable standoff, Britain wants to remain useful to Gulf monarchies and to Washington. If Iran weakens but the regime survives, Britain wants to preserve channels into the wider regional settlement. If the Iranian regime is transformed or partially reordered, London wants to ensure it has not been excluded from the political and economic architecture that follows. In that sense, Britain's current stance is about much more than immediate caution. It is about ensuring relevance under every plausible end-state.

The broader significance is that Britain's approach reveals a form of statecraft that is both adaptive and historically unfamiliar. This is not the Britain of imperial overconfidence, nor even the Britain of Blair-era Atlantic activism. It is a Britain that still wants influence in the Eastern Mediterranean, still wants a role in Gulf security, still wants future energy relevance, and still refuses to turn its back on the United States — but that no longer believes these goals require, or can sustain, a straightforward rush into war. Instead, Britain is trying to stay legally outside the war while remaining tactically inside its strategic perimeter. That is why the policy looks contradictory only at first glance. It is coherent indeed and therefore London is preserving deniability without surrendering presence. It is reducing domestic political risk without giving up regional leverage. And it is making sure that whatever the outcome of the Iran war, regime survival, partial transformation, or a wider regional reordering, Britain will still be able to say that it never fully left the game.

The EU: Between Fragmentation and Dependence

The EU has been in a difficult place about its institutional role since the 2008 economic crisis. The following sovereign debt crisis of the 2010s, the Syrian Civil War and the migration scare, the Brexit, COVID-19 pandemic, and the ongoing democracy crises that started in young members like Hungary and Poland yet then spread to founding members have all tested the EU. Not only the institutional frame was tested with the voting and policy making structures

with the overstretched membership, but also the moral and normative foundations were shattered. Russia's war on Ukraine, on the other hand, reinforced the EU's normative stance-standing against the old aggressor despite few members' reluctance, only to be disrupted by Israel's attacks on Gaza. With the Israeli- American war on Iran, the EU once again sits with its moral imperatives, how to react to its aggressive ally, the U.S.'s, intervention to a country which is a system disruptor since 1979. So far, as of March 14th, The EU's stance towards the war is not very different from that of Britain, it does not want ownership, it cannot stay out of it.

Members of the European Union not only have divergent views about the Iran War but as the war prolongs views change as well. Spain is staunchly against the war, calling it [reckless and illegal](#) and its relations with the US strained after Madrid [refused](#) to allow U.S. aircraft to use jointly operated naval and air bases in southern Spain for an offensive against Tehran. Italian Prime Minister Meloni voiced criticism over the war under pressure from her opponents in the parliament, arguing that "[unilateral interventions outside the scope of international law are multiplying](#)." German Chancellor Merz recently changed course after his initial support for Trump during his visit to the White House, arguing that this might be an "[endless war](#)". France's stance was more pronounced in the early days, president [Macron](#) stating that "France was "neither informed [about] nor involved" in US and Israeli strikes against Iran. Yet after two Iranian drones hit a French naval base in the UAE, France took a decisive turn to support the US and the other European allies to "[enabling necessary and proportionate defensive action](#)."

The major European powers are thus repositioning themselves according to the developments on the ground and bracing for the long term impacts of this war. The fluctuation of oil prices and Qatar's going offline in LNG procurement puts the continent at unease. While direct trade between the two is small because of the sanctions, closing of the Hormuz Strait on which some European energy imports rely, has already affected the [prices](#), hiking up 20 percent, which brought about the change in tone of the European leaders. Depending on the length of the war, LNG supply risk, shipping chokepoints, and storage dynamics will affect the prices in Europe, and surely global oil prices' impact will be larger on economies.

The surge in oil prices and the risk of high volatility hits Europe on another level, especially at a time when the main threat to Russia not to prolong the war on Ukraine is sanctions and Trump is already talking about easing them. The main problem for Europe lies here, after 4 years of war with unprecedented European support for Ukraine, Russia is still unabated and the Russian threat is still present for other small want to be European countries such as Moldova and Georgia. Memories of the Soviet past are still vivid for countries like Romania as well.

On the other hand, the EU's operational stance in this war is determined when on March 2, [British military base of Akrotiri](#) on the divided island of Cyprus was hit by an Iranian drone. Italy, France, Spain and the Netherlands declared that they will send naval assets to (Southern) Cyprus to protect the airbase that sits on a [EU but non-NATO member](#) country. As the war

evolves, Eastern Mediterranean that has become strategically important for global energy in the last 15–20 years, especially because of new gas discoveries, competing pipeline projects, and its potential to bypass unstable Gulf routes, becomes more important. With the EU's vulnerability to energy shocks, how the EU deals with the regional actors, how members of the EU would position themselves on Eastern Med energy deals would become more important.

The broader significance of the EU actions lies in its alliance dynamics both internally and externally. In the absence of strong leadership or locomotive nations, such as at the times of Merkel, when domestic problems, both economic and ideological override liberal common sense that used to be the base of the European unity, and with an ally like the United States headed by Trump whose only predictable trait is unpredictability and whose entourage delights in helping the radical right-wing in Europe, the EU has a lot to lose.

Turkey: Between Border Pressures and Controlled Ambiguity

Turkey's position in the Iran war is fundamentally different from Britain's and the EU's because Turkey is not an external balancer looking into the region from a distance, instead, it is itself a regional state whose security, domestic politics, economy, and strategic environment are directly exposed to every shock produced by war. Geography alone explains much of this. As noted previously, Turkey shares a 560-kilometre border with Iran, a frontier that has remained largely [unchanged for centuries](#) and that turns any major Iranian crisis into an immediate Turkish problem rather than a distant strategic concern. This matters because for Ankara the costs of war are never limited to military calculations. Any prolonged conflict with Iran can [generate refugee pressure](#), border insecurity, disruption to trade and transit routes, pressure on energy prices, and a broader reconfiguration of regional balances that would spill directly into Turkish domestic politics. The war also comes at a moment when Turkey is still trying to manage a [fragile economic recovery](#) and a politically sensitive electoral horizon. Important to note that Turkey's next scheduled presidential and parliamentary elections are in 2028, while the opposition believes President Erdoğan may prefer an earlier vote in 2027 if he wants to preserve a viable path to another candidacy. Under those conditions, Ankara has no rational incentive a fresh external shock that could worsen inflation and undermine public confidence before the next electoral cycle. Turkey can neither absorb a major war easily nor explain such a war persuasively to a public that is already fatigued by economic strain and regional instability. That helps explain why Ankara's language has been so cautious, so insistent on diplomacy, and so clearly aimed at limiting escalation rather than taking ownership of it.

Domestic politics makes this caution even more understandable because this is not just any war from Ankara's perspective, it is a war in which Israel, led by Benjamin Netanyahu, plays the central offensive role. Ankara has a highly [confrontational rhetorical line against Netanyahu](#) and against Israel's regional conduct, especially since Gaza. President Erdoğan describing Netanyahu as sole responsible for earlier regional tensions and comparing him to [Hitler](#), while Turkey [partially](#) also cut trade with Israel in 2024 over Gaza then valued at about

\$7 billion a year. Also, Turkey and Israel had fallen to new lows during the Gaza war, with Israeli officials openly [rejecting](#) any Turkish military role in post-war arrangements.

[On 11 March](#) President Erdoğan had condemned the actions of the United States, Israel, and Iran in broad terms. Ankara's core interest was always to prevent the war from happening, precisely because almost every plausible scenario harmed Turkish interests. In late January, Foreign Minister [Hakan Fidan](#) had already warned that Israel still appeared to be seeking an opportunity to attack Iran and that such a move would further destabilise the region. In February he told the [Financial Times](#) that both Washington and Tehran appeared to be showing flexibility over a possible nuclear arrangement, signalling Ankara's hope that diplomacy could still avert a military rupture. After the war began, [on 3 March](#) that Fidan said Turkey was engaging with all sides and working with Oman to end the war and return to negotiations. Erdoğan himself then said [on 11 March](#) that Turkey had previously offered to mediate before the U.S.-Israeli strikes began. These details matter because they show that Turkish restraint is not passive. It is an active attempt to keep the crisis inside a diplomatic frame, even while Ankara strengthens its own security posture. It is also reasonable to read this as a whole-of-state effort rather than merely a foreign ministry line. Fidan has long embodied the fusion of intelligence and diplomacy in Turkish foreign policy, and Turkey's security bureaucracy under MIT chief İbrahim Kalın has equally strong reasons to avoid an uncontrolled Iranian collapse on Turkey's eastern flank. The point is not that Ankara believes diplomacy will fully succeed, but that diplomacy is the only position that allows Turkey simultaneously to calm domestic opinion, preserve regional legitimacy, and keep itself relevant to any eventual settlement.

At the same time, Turkey cannot simply stand outside the conflict because the war's regional effects may create exactly the political outcomes Ankara fears most. The Kurdish file is central here. It is well-known that [Turkey was closely monitoring](#) the activities of the Iranian Kurdish militant group [PJAK](#) after reports that it had discussed possible attacks inside Iran with the United States. Turkey's defence ministry warned that PJAK, which Ankara links to the PKK, posed risks not just to Iran but to wider regional peace, and stressed that all Turkish institutions were tracking the group's movements. Two days later [Reuters](#) further reported that Israeli actors were backing plans by Iranian Kurdish groups to seize border areas inside Iran. For Ankara, this is not a secondary issue. Kurdish military empowerment across borders has long been read through the lens of Turkey's own internal conflict with the PKK and its cross-border campaigns against Kurdish armed actors in Syria and Iraq. Ankara views Kurdish militancy in Syria as a direct national-security threat and links developments in Syria, Iraq, and now potentially Iran to the broader Kurdish question. That means a war that weakens Tehran but simultaneously opens space for Iranian Kurdish armed groups could destabilise Turkey's internal and regional balancing strategy. Ankara has no interest in either a total Iranian collapse or a Western or Israeli-backed Kurdish geopolitical opening on Iran's western flank. Put differently, Turkey may want an Iran that is weaker, more constrained, and less capable of challenging regional balances, but it does not want an Iran that fragments in ways that empower Kurdish militancy and invite a new, highly unstable security arc from northern Syria to western Iran.

This is why Turkey's military behaviour has been defensive, reactive, and still limited by its own structural constraints. On 4 March and again on 9 March Iranian ballistic missiles entered Turkish airspace, marking the first direct involvement of a NATO member in the conflict. They were intercepted by [NATO air-defence systems](#), underscoring how exposed Turkey had become to spillover of the war. NATO then raised its missile-defence posture across the alliance, while on [10 March a U.S. Patriot system was deployed to Malatya to reinforce air defence around the Kürecik radar base](#). On March 13th, a [third ballistic missile](#) that was fired from Iran towards Turkey was shot down by NATO air defences in the eastern Mediterranean. Turkey has been very measured and acts like the only grown-up in the crisis, protesting Tehran after every incident, while [saying](#) it does not want to be dragged into the war between Iran, Israel, and the U.S.

This measured and mature stance has another reason. Despite its large military and growing defence industry, Turkey still depends heavily on foreign air-defence systems and currently hosts only one additional Spanish Patriot battery under NATO arrangements. Turkey has formidable land forces, a mature drone sector, and significant regional reach, but it still lacks the kind of autonomous layered missile-defence shield that would make a direct confrontation with Iran strategically comfortable. This is crucial. Ankara cannot escalate against Iran without relying heavily on NATO capabilities, and that makes unilateral adventurism unattractive. Yet the same dependence also means Turkey cannot completely detach itself from the alliance response when Iranian missiles begin crossing into its airspace. This is the paradox of the Turkish position; militarily substantial, but not fully self-sufficient and regionally exposed.

Eastern Mediterranean dynamics deepen the dilemma further. As the war spread, Greece, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States all increased their [military presence around Cyprus](#), while Greece sent frigates, F-16s, and a Patriot system, and Britain reinforced Akrotiri after a drone strike. As an answer to all of these on 9 March that Turkey responded by deploying six [F-16 fighter jets](#) and air-defence systems to northern Cyprus, explicitly linking the move to the U.S.-Israeli war against Iran. For Ankara, this is not just about protecting Turkish Cypriots. It is also about preventing a broader Eastern Mediterranean security architecture from hardening in ways that leave Turkey strategically boxed in by Greece, Britain, and a wider Western military build-up on the island. At the same time, Turkey must watch the Gulf. Gulf Arab states, after absorbing Iranian strikes and economic damage, were reassessing their security arrangements and expressing anger at being dragged into a war they had neither wanted nor endorsed. The more Iran targets Gulf infrastructure, the more Gulf monarchies may move toward tighter quiet coordination with Israel and Western powers against shared threats. For Turkey, that risks producing a future regional order in which Israel deepens its strategic acceptance in the Gulf at precisely the moment Ankara hopes to preserve or expand its own regional relevance. That would make any post-war order more difficult for Turkey to shape.

All of this points to a core Turkish strategic preference which can be described rhetorically restrained, diplomatically engaged, militarily vigilant, and quietly aligned with an

outcome in which Iran is weakened but not broken. Ankara has a tough job. As the largest Muslim-majority country in NATO still publicly calling for de-escalation and negotiation, it must preserve diplomatic legitimacy and avoid appearing complicit in a war widely associated with Israeli escalation. Yet in strategic terms, Turkey has little interest in the survival of a fully intact and emboldened Iran, just as it has little interest in an Iranian collapse, territorial fragmentation, or a regime transformation on its border that tilts decisively toward Israel and an expanded anti-Iran regional bloc. What Ankara needs is a much narrower and far less attainable outcome: an Iran that is constrained, diminished, and more manageable, but still sufficiently intact to prevent systemic disorder on Turkey's eastern flank. This is what makes Turkey's position so difficult and so consequential. Ankara is not simply responding to a war; it is making choices that will shape the strategic environment in which it will have to operate long after the fighting stops. The decisions taken now will affect not only Turkey's immediate security posture, but also its leverage in the next regional order, its standing with Washington, its rivalry with Israel, its place in the Eastern Mediterranean, its Kurdish file, and its broader claim to regional relevance. This means that Turkey is not deciding only how to navigate today's crisis, but also it is deciding what kind of tomorrow it may still be able to influence.

Strategic Positioning in a War that No One Can Contain

The Iran war has already shown that the emerging international environment cannot be understood through the old language of fixed blocs, stable alignments, or orderly great-power management. What is taking shape instead is a far more fragmented and conflict-prone landscape in which actors are forced to operate across several crises at once, while managing economic shocks, alliance pressures, reputational risks, and domestic political constraints simultaneously. In that sense, the war is not just another Middle Eastern conflict. It is a systemic event that reveals how the next phase of world politics will likely be organised. It will not vertically through a clear hierarchy of poles, but horizontally through overlapping and intersecting theatres of competition, each feeding into the other. Energy insecurity, military escalation, alliance bargaining, regional rivalry, financial volatility, migration risk, and domestic political calculation are no longer separate dimensions of crisis. They now cut across each other in linear and non-linear ways, producing a much denser and more unstable strategic environment.

For Britain, Turkey, and the European Union, this means one basic truth; staying outside the war, whether directly or indirectly, is becoming extraordinarily difficult. None of these actors wants full ownership of the conflict. Yet none of them can remain untouched by it either. Britain cannot detach itself from a war that affects its American alliance, Gulf investments, energy-linked interests, and strategic role in the Eastern Mediterranean. The European Union cannot insulate itself from a conflict that strikes at energy markets, maritime security, alliance cohesion, and its already weakened internal strategic unity. Turkey, even more directly, cannot step away from a war unfolding on its borderland, one that threatens to reshape its Kurdish file, Eastern Mediterranean posture, economic stability, and broader regional standing. In different ways, all three actors are being pulled into the war's perimeter, even when they try to avoid being pulled into its centre. Furthermore, Even Turkey's most

careful strategy may not be enough, because the war's most consequential outcomes could unfold beyond Ankara's control. Turkey matters precisely because it is not just reacting to the conflict, but also it is trying to stop every possible endgame from damaging its strategic future, in a crisis where even prudent choices may still carry heavy costs.

This is precisely why the Iran war should be understood as a generator of wider strategic fragmentation. Its consequences will be simultaneously economic and geopolitical. Oil and gas shocks, shipping insecurity, insurance costs, inflationary pressure, and financial volatility will affect Britain, the EU, and Turkey in different ways, but none of them will escape the pressure. At the same time, the strategic effects will be equally profound. The war is accelerating the militarisation of the Eastern Mediterranean, deepening questions about transatlantic reliability, widening the space for Israel–Gulf coordination, and forcing regional and European actors alike to think more defensively, more transactionally, and with less certainty about the rules of the game. What emerges from this is not a new order in any coherent sense, but a harsher condition of strategic fragmentation in which relevance must be constantly defended and where even caution carries costs.

Ultimately, that is also the wider lesson of the war for Britain and the EU. The question is no longer who can shape the entire regional order by force or diplomacy alone. The question is who can remain relevant, limit damage, preserve leverage, and adapt to a world in which crises increasingly intersect rather than unfold one at a time. The Iran war shows that the coming period will be more conflictual, more layered, and more difficult to stabilise than the one that preceded it. It is a world of crossing pressures, partial alignments, and strategic ambiguity, where staying out is difficult, staying in is dangerous, and every actor must now calculate not only how to survive the present crisis, but how to avoid being diminished by the one that follows.



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