

A COLLISION COURSE IN SYRIA: WILL TÜRKİYE AND ISRAEL TIP THE REGIONAL SCALES?

April 4th, 2025



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A Collision Course in Syria: Will Türkiye and Israel Tip the Regional Scales?

In Syria's fractured landscape, the influence of external powers has become the norm rather than an exception. Among the significant players today are Türkiye and Israel, whose intersecting policies could spark tensions with far-reaching consequences.

While their friction has simmered quietly over Gaza, recent developments raise fears that the unspoken could soon become unavoidable, direct confrontation.

Beyond the specter of conflict, Türkiye has the potential to emerge not as a combatant but as a stabilizing force capable of ensuring security and fostering a sustainable solution to the Syrian crisis. To achieve this, it is essential to prioritize de-escalation, de-confliction, and dialogue between the two countries.

Israel's Strategy: From Defense Toward Dominance

Israel's involvement in Syria began with clear security objectives: curbing Iran's growing influence and preventing Hezbollah from acquiring advanced weaponry. These goals were logical from their point of view in the chaotic early years of Syria's civil war, with Israel primarily focusing on precision strikes against military installations. As the situation evolved, so did Israel's approach.

Today, Israel's strategy in Syria seems more expansive. Last Wednesday, Israeli forces struck multiple locations across Syria, including military sites in Damascus, Hama, and the T4 airbase, which is reportedly being considered to host a Turkish military presence. The strikes allegedly resulted in significant damage to military infrastructure and civilian casualties, with the Syrian government accusing Israel of fuelling instability. These operations, among around 800 since the fall of the Assad regime, reflect Israel's proactive attempts to pre-emptively address perceived threats, including the potential for Turkish military installations near its areas of interest. They also indicate an intent to not only defend national borders but also to influence the rules of engagement in the surrounding region.

Israel's actions in Syria cannot be separated from its broader policies affecting Gaza, the West Bank, Yemen, and Lebanon. Military campaigns and atrocities in Gaza, settlement expansions in the West Bank, and periodic clashes with Hezbollah all contribute to a larger mosaic, one of

assertiveness, dominance, and strategic recalibration. These actions may offer short-term security and satisfy the egos of far-right figures in Israel, but their ripple effects often deepen divisions, exacerbate grievances, and leave Israel with more conflicts than resolutions to manage.

Türkiye's Footsteps in Syria

In contrast, Türkiye's engagement in Syria has evolved from a reactionary security measure to a comprehensive strategy aimed at shaping the country's political and security architecture. Initially driven by the necessity to counter the PKK-linked Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), Ankara's policy has since broadened to include securing strategic zones, maintaining leverage in diplomatic negotiations, and ensuring a long-term presence in key areas.

The purported establishment of Turkish military bases, including the strategically vital T4 airbase, further highlights Ankara's strategy to consolidate its footprint in northern and central Syria. However, these ambitions have inevitably drawn Türkiye into Israel's redefined sphere of concern. With both parties now operating in overlapping regions, the likelihood of friction has surged dramatically.

Yet, rather than presenting a direct threat to Israel, Türkiye's military presence could act as a crucial stabilizing factor, mitigating the influence of Iran-backed militias and preventing Syria from turning into a battleground for external proxy wars.

Where Interests Collide and Align

The risk of confrontation arises from more than just overlapping operational zones. Türkiye and Israel's priorities in Syria are fundamentally misaligned. For Israel, the existential threat continues to be Iran and its proxies, as well as the Sharaa government's potential destabilizing actions or inactions. Meanwhile, Türkiye is focused on the PKK terrorism and expanding its territorial influence. This divergence creates a volatile mix, as both powers pursue their objectives with little consideration for each other's agenda.

Despite their divergent priorities, Israel needs to realize that it shares common concerns with Türkiye in Syria. Both sides seek to prevent Iran from establishing a permanent foothold, maintain a balance of power that avoids full regime resurgence, and counter extremist groups that threaten regional stability. However, the risk of confrontation arises from a lack of coordination and the potential for miscalculation.

The Looming Role of Malign Forces

As if the stakes weren't high enough, opportunistic actors like Iranian proxies and DAESH stand ready to exploit any chaos that may arise. Iranian-backed militias, skilled at filling power vacuums, could deepen their foothold in Syria if Türkiye and Israel were to clash. Meanwhile, DAESH, though weakened, remains a lurking threat, capable of resurging amidst turmoil. For Syrians, these forces represent yet another layer of suffering, a grim reminder that friction between nations often opens doors for the worst aspects of humanity to thrive.

Beyond Borders: Regional Ramifications

The potential for confrontation between Türkiye and Israel extends well beyond Syria's borders. A clash would send shockwaves throughout the Middle East, destabilizing fragile alliances and threatening global interests. The United States, a key ally of both nations, would face immense pressure to mediate. At the same time, Russia's balancing act between its ties with Türkiye and its role in Syria would become even more precarious. With Türkiye as a member, NATO would be drawn into the crisis, further complicating the international response.

For Syrians, who have already faced extensive difficulties over the years, further conflict would be highly detrimental. Civilians caught between external powers, internal factions, and militias would bear significant consequences, highlighting that geopolitical conflicts invariably have human costs.

A Shared Responsibility

The potential for Israeli-Turkish conflict in Syria encapsulates the broader challenges of the Middle East, a region where ambition clashes with humanity. The stakes are enormous, but the potential suffering of Syrians is even greater. As history has shown time and again, unchecked rivalry only deepens wounds.

Ultimately, such a confrontation benefits no one—not Israel, not Türkiye, and certainly not the United States, which has a vested interest in maintaining stability. Pragmatic diplomacy and shared responsibility are crucial to guiding the region away from yet another disaster.