



# Turkish Foreign Policy and the Iran War: Adapting to a New Regional Environment

*Edited Volume*

Editor:

**Ioannis N. GRIGORIADIS**, *Head, Turkey Programme, ELIAMEP*



June 2026  
Working Paper #139/2026

ELIAMEP | Working Paper # 139/2026

# Turkish Foreign Policy and the Iran War: Adapting to a New Regional Environment

Copyright © 2026 | All Rights Reserved

HELLENIC FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN & FOREIGN POLICY (ELIAMEP)

Vas. Sofias Ave. 49, Athens 106 76, Greece

Tel.: +30 210 7257 110 | [www.eliamep.gr](http://www.eliamep.gr) | [eliamep@eliamep.gr](mailto:eliamep@eliamep.gr)

*ELIAMEP offers a forum for debate on international and European issues. Its non-partisan character supports the right to free and well documented discourse. ELIAMEP publications aim to contribute to scholarly knowledge and to provide policy relevant analyses. As such, they solely represent the views of the author(s) and not necessarily those of the Foundation.*

**Cover photo:** Strait of Hormuz, Flickr

**Contributors** (in alphabetical order):

### **Sinem Akgül Açıkmeşe**

*Sinem Akgül Açıkmeşe is a Professor of International Relations and a former Jean Monnet Chair at Kadir Has University (KHAS) in Istanbul, Turkey. Her research focuses on Security Studies, Transatlantic Relations and NATO, EU foreign and neighbourhood policies from a security perspective, European integration, enlargement, and Turkey-EU relations.*

### **Umut Can Adisönmez**

*Umut Can Adisönmez is Assistant Professor at the Department of Political Science and International Relations, Izmir University of Economics. Adisönmez's research interests include emotions in international relations, political psychology, and Middle East politics. His works have been published in leading journals in the field, such as Political Psychology, Middle East Critique, and Critical Studies on Security.*

### **Başar Baysal**

*Başar Baysal is an Associate Professor of International Relations at the Institute of Area Studies, Social Sciences University of Ankara. He holds a PhD from Bilkent University. His research spans critical security studies, securitization theory, defence studies, peace and conflict processes, and the climate–security nexus, with fieldwork on the Colombian peace process and policy work on Turkey's defence posture.*

### **Esra Dilek**

*Esra Dilek is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Political Science and International Relations at Kadir Has University in Istanbul, Turkey. She was previously a Mercator-IPC Fellow at the Sabancı University Istanbul Policy Center and a Fulbright postdoctoral researcher at George Mason University in Virginia, USA. Her research centres on peace negotiation processes, second track diplomacy, and foreign policy research.*

### **Cihan Dizdaroğlu**

*Cihan Dizdaroğlu is Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science and International Relations at Başkent University and Managing Editor of Uluslararası İlişkiler (International Relations) journal. His research interests include Turkish foreign policy, Turkish-Greek relations, the Cyprus problem, and critical peace and security studies. He is the author of Turkish-Greek Relations: Foreign Policy in a Securitisation Framework (Edinburgh University Press, 2023).*

### **Nora Fisher-Onar**

*Nora Fisher-Onar is Associate Professor and Chair of Global Studies at the University of San Francisco. She is the author of Contesting Pluralism(s): Islamism, Liberalism and Nationalism in Turkey and Beyond (Cambridge UP, 2025) and lead editor of Istanbul: Living with Difference in a Global City (w/ Fuat Keyman and Susan C. Pearce, Rutgers UP, 2018). An IR analyst whose work is inspired by Turkey and its neighbourhood(s), interests include foreign policy analysis, global IR, and the role of history/memory and religion in shaping world politics. She has served as guest editor of special issues of International Affairs (2026), the Journal of Common Market Studies (JCMS 2025), and Global Studies Quarterly (GSQ 2022). She also contributes policy analysis to platforms like Foreign Affairs, the Washington Post, and OpenDemocracy.*

**Ioannis N. Grigoriadis**

*Ioannis N. Grigoriadis is Associate Professor and Jean Monnet Chair at the Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Bilkent University. He is also Senior Fellow and Head of the Program on Turkey at the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP). His research interests include energy, comparative, European, Middle Eastern and Turkish politics and history.*

**B. Toygar Halistoprak**

*B. Toygar Halistoprak is an assistant professor of Political Science and International Relations at Antalya Bilim University. He received his Ph.D. in International Relations from Bilkent University. His research focuses on Foreign Policy Analysis, Peace and Security Studies and Turkish foreign policy. His current research agenda examines comparative foreign policy behavior, with particular emphasis on political speeches, leadership rhetoric, and the relationship between political culture and foreign policy roles.*

**Alpaslan Özerdem**

*Alpaslan Özerdem is Dean of the Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter School for Peace and Conflict Resolution at George Mason University. His research interests include peacebuilding, post-conflict reconstruction, mediation, Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR), humanitarian crises, and the political economy of conflict and recovery. He has conducted extensive field research in conflict-affected societies, including Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Nepal, the Philippines, Somalia, Sri Lanka, and Syria. His recent work focuses on middle-power diplomacy, peace processes, peace technologies, and the changing nature of conflict and global governance in a fragmented international order.*

**Ahmet Erdi Öztürk**

*Ahmet Erdi Öztürk is Reader in Politics and International Relations at London Metropolitan University and non-resident fellow at ELIAMEP. He is author, co-author or editor of 12 books, over 50 peer-reviewed articles and 25 book chapters. His awards include ISA Emerging Scholar honours (2023-2024), CEFTUS Academic of the Year 2024 and London Metropolitan (2020) and Coventry University's (2023) Rising Star Awards.*

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	
Ioannis N. Grigoriadis.....	6
<b>From the Abraham Accords to a Turkish-led Quartet: Towards a New Order in the Middle East?</b>	
Umut Can Adısönmez .....	7
<b>Beyond Sectarian Rivalry: Why the Iran War Pushes Turkey toward Gulf Recalibration and Muslim-World Balancing</b>	
Ahmet Erdi Öztürk .....	8
<b>Turkey and Russia Amidst the Iran War: Strategic Autonomy under Pressure</b>	
Esra Dilek .....	10
<b>Turkey's Policy Making in North Africa and Eastern Mediterranean in the Shadow of the Iran War</b>	
B. Toygar Haliştoprak.....	11
<b>The Iran War and the Limits of European Security: Turkey, Cyprus, and the Architecture of Paralysis</b>	
Cihan Dizdarođlu.....	13
<b>Turkey's Energy Policy Challenges in Light of the US-Israeli War on Iran</b>	
Ioannis N. Grigoriadis.....	15
<b>Turkey's Defense Capacity and Industry Amid the Iran War</b>	
Başar Baysal.....	16
<b>As US Iran policy evolves, Turkey needs a Neo-Ottoman balancing act</b>	
Nora Fisher-Onar .....	18
<b>Mediation in a Fragmented Order: Turkey's Strategic Window in the Iran War</b>	
Alpaslan Özerdem.....	20
<b>Inside the Alliance, Outside the Iran War: Turkey's NATO Comeback</b>	
Sinem Akgül Açıkmeye.....	22

## Introduction

### ***Ioannis N. Grigoriadis***

Since the advent of the second Trump administration in the United States there has been a growing global discussion about the “decline of the liberal international order,” the “end of US hegemony,” as well as mounting concerns about global peace and security. This discussion has often been linked with Russia’s attack on Ukraine and the aftermath of the 7 October 2023 Gaza attacks and Israel’s attempts to reshape the strategic map of the Middle East, but goes deeper into the structural transformations affecting the international order for more than a decade. The US-Israeli war on Iran has further increased the stakes and raised concerns about the destabilization of the Middle East, the global energy markets and raised once again the question of nuclear proliferation. Under these circumstances the role of middle powers emerges as a key question, as they face the consequences of the declining international order; hence, they may have to undertake a larger international role and fill the gap that the United States and international organisations may leave.

Turkey is one of these middle powers whose foreign policy has had to undergo a sharp adaptation in the new regional and global settings. Its proximity to all three recent major conflicts, in Ukraine, Gaza and Iran, has highlighted how strongly challenged Turkey’s economic and security interests have been. This publication brings together the views of ten experts on Turkish foreign policy who evaluate the effect of the recent international developments on the regional and sectoral scope of Turkish foreign policy. Some papers focus on the regional dimensions of Turkish foreign policy. Turkey’s relations with Iran, Russia, the Gulf states, the MENA region, the Eastern Mediterranean are explored. The remaining ones explore sectoral dimensions of Turkish foreign policy, i.e. the effects of the Iran war on Turkey’s energy policy, defence industry, strategy and mediation capabilities. This collection of short essays were first presented and discussed in two roundtables organized by Turkey’s International Relations Council (*Uluslararası İlişkiler Konseyi-UİK*) and convened by Prof. Sinem Açıkmeşe at the 67<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention of the International Studies Association (ISA) that took place in Columbus OH from 22 to 25 March 2026.

## From the Abraham Accords to a Turkish-led Quartet: Towards a New Order in the Middle East?

**Umut Can Adısönmez**

- *A new diplomatic quartet (Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Egypt) is emerging to fill the regional vacuum left by the Abraham Accords' collapse and the US-Israel-Iran conflict.*
- *Turkey should seize this moment through calibrated diplomacy, reinforcing its NATO and mediator credentials while proactively engaging Kurdish groups regionally to balance Israeli influence and hedge against instability from a potential Iranian collapse.*

In the wake of recent hostilities involving the US, Israel, and Iran, the strategic scenery of the Middle East has undergone a significant transformation. Failing to achieve his stated objectives regarding Iran, Israeli PM Netanyahu faces harsh criticism both at home and abroad. This situation is directly relevant to Turkey, with which Israel is already in contestation at three fronts: the design of a post-Assad Syria, gas exploration projects in the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Gaza Peace Plan. Equally important is Turkey's emerging position as a potential architect of a new regional order.

The Abraham Accords, which aimed to normalize Israel's relations with its Arab neighbours, were already in limbo following the October 7 attacks. The recent exchange of strikes with Iran has further suspended the promising environment it created. Against this perceived vacuum, a diplomatic quartet of Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Egypt has been formed, positioning itself as the primary platform for regional negotiation and stability to counterbalance Israeli and Iranian influence. This group is composed of some of the world's most influential Muslim-majority states with significant military and economic capacity. Notably, Israeli elites –amidst their eroding international image– have begun to portray Turkey as the “next Iran” and the leader of “radical Sunni axis,” framing it as an existential threat. Their response appears designed to diminish the new bloc's leverage.

In this moment of transition, Netanyahu is seeking to establish a counter-alliance to curb Turkey's increasing regional influence. He aspires to bolster ties with Greece and Cyprus as well as India to pressure Pakistan. This signals that Israel's alliance options are shrinking, as moral support for the country has become a politically toxic card in Western capitals. This is also underscored by recent polls showing that, for the first time, more US citizens sympathise with Palestine than with Israel.

Given this context, first, Ankara must pursue a prudent foreign policy in the Aristotelian sense, acting with caution and careful judgment. Turkey has long sought to carve out a secure and influential role in a shifting world order. It is therefore vital for Turkey to avoid unnecessary regional risks and instead highlight its capabilities as a reliable NATO member and an experienced international mediator.

Second, while Turkey views Iran as a major rival, it also fears the consequences of its potential collapse. It is cautious about a possible US-Israeli-Kurdish ground operation in Iran. This, however, presents a strategic –and historical– opportunity for Ankara, especially given its recent peace talks with the PKK. Turkey should proactively engage in the regional restructuring by coordinating with various Kurdish groups in the region. This would align with its claim to be a regional order-setter, and also balance Israel's hegemonic ambitions, including its potential to weaponise Kurdish militias against Turkey in the future. It would also provide Turkey a strategic buffer against the multiple spillover effects of a potential Iranian regime collapse. This proactive diplomacy is achievable in the current geopolitical climate, where old codes of conduct are being fundamentally challenged.

## Beyond Sectarian Rivalry: Why the Iran War Pushes Turkey toward Gulf Recalibration and Muslim-World Balancing

**Ahmet Erdi Öztürk**

- *The Iran war forces Turkey into a delicate balancing act: Ankara distrusts and competes with Tehran, but cannot openly align itself against a Muslim-majority country without damaging Erdoğan's domestic narrative of Turkey as a voice of the wider Muslim world. This is why Turkey has condemned the attacks on Iran while keeping diplomatic channels open with Washington, Tehran and Gulf capitals.*
- *The crisis also pushes Turkey toward deeper Gulf recalibration. Stable ties with Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are essential for energy security, investment confidence and economic resilience, especially as rising oil prices worsen Turkey's energy bill and inflation outlook. Turkey's opportunity lies in layered balancing: opposing war, avoiding sectarian language, preserving Gulf partnerships and positioning itself as a future energy and logistics hub.*

The ongoing Iran war has exposed a core constraint in Turkish foreign policy in many ways. Ankara must react to a serious regional security crisis without appearing to align itself against a Muslim-majority, but a constitutionally secular country. This is not only merely a tactical issue, but also it reflects the deeper logic of Turkey's current regional posture under the Erdoğan government. Ankara may distrust Iran, compete with it, and seek to limit its regional leverage, yet it cannot easily frame itself, either domestically or internationally, as part of a broader anti-Muslim alignment. President Erdoğan has publicly condemned the attacks on Iran as a violation of international law, while Turkish officials have simultaneously maintained diplomatic channels with Washington, Tehran, and key Gulf capitals. Therefore, Ankara has been playing a multi-sided diplomatic game for the Muslim world and Gulf countries.

First, this restraint is rooted in domestic politics. The Erdoğan government would struggle to convince its own base that Turkey should visibly align against a Muslim-majority country, even where rivalry with Iran is real. After years of casting Turkey as a civilisational power and a legitimate voice of the wider Muslim world, Ankara cannot easily normalise a discourse of open confrontation with Muslims. Turkey may oppose Iran's policies, but it cannot politically afford to present conflict with Muslims as natural or acceptable. Secondly and quite related with this issue, secondly, this is precisely why Turkey's improved relations with the Gulf and the broader Muslim world matter so much. Since the post-2020 normalisation wave, Ankara has rebuilt relations with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar through trade, investment, and diplomatic repair. That recovery now constrains Turkey in a productive way which having spent recent years repairing its standing across the Muslim world, it can no longer place symbolic distance between itself and that wider political space without incurring reputational and diplomatic costs. This is especially true in the case of Qatar, which occupies a unique place in Turkish regional thinking. Qatar is not only a close political partner; it is also a critical economic and strategic interlocutor at a moment when Turkey's own economy remains fragile and acutely exposed to external shocks.

Therefore, third; the economic dimension is central. Turkey's vulnerability to rising energy prices has become clearer during the war. For instance, every 1 dollar increase in oil prices adds roughly 400 million dollars to Turkey's energy bill, while [S&P has raised its 2026](#) inflation forecast for Turkey largely because of the conflict's energy fallout. Turkey's oil and gas import dependence therefore gives Ankara a strong incentive to preserve stable ties with Gulf states, not only for diplomatic reasons but because the Gulf remains indispensable to capital flows, trade, investment confidence, and energy coordination.

Additionally, yet the war may also generate selective opportunities for Turkey. If postwar reconstruction of regional energy routes accelerates, Ankara could position itself as a more important transit, storage, refining, and logistical hub linking the Gulf, Iraq, the Eastern Mediterranean, and Europe. In this regard, Turkish efforts to diversify supply, explore new upstream partnerships, and reconnect Syrian and Iraqi flows to existing

**Turkish Foreign Policy and the Iran War: Adapting to a New Regional Environment**

infrastructure. Those opportunities, however, are not automatic. Turkey can only benefit if it keeps its relations with Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and other regional actors sufficiently strong to be trusted as a stable economic and geopolitical partner.

The necessary policy adjustment, then, is not strategic distance but layered balancing. Turkey should deepen differentiated engagement with the Gulf, maintain a principled anti-war discourse legible to wider Muslim publics, and avoid any language suggesting sectarian confrontation. Its long-term advantage lies in being neither Iran's partner nor the Muslim world's estranged outlier, but a state able to preserve Gulf ties, protect its fragile economy, and convert regional disruption into carefully managed diplomatic and energy leverage.

## Turkey and Russia Amidst the Iran War: Strategic Autonomy under Pressure

**Esra Dilek**

- *The Iran war is turning Turkey's Russia policy from a strategic choice into constant risk management — driven by energy dependence, sanctions pressure, and shrinking diplomatic space.*
- *Mediation is Ankara's most viable response: keeping channels open with Moscow protects strategic autonomy while raising Turkey's value to Western and regional partners.*

The ongoing Iran war has put Turkey's policy of strategic autonomy under significant pressure. In Turkish official discourse, strategic autonomy means preserving room for maneuver in a multipolar system rather than aligning fully with any single power bloc. Foreign Minister [Hakan Fidan stated](#) in 2025 that Turkey was pursuing policies designed to protect its strategic autonomy in such an environment. In practice, this has meant remaining in NATO, supporting Ukraine's sovereignty, keeping dialogue open with Russia, and resisting full alignment with Western sanctions policy. The Iran war makes that balancing act harder.

The first reason is energy vulnerability, which directly strengthens Russia's importance for Turkey. Turkish officials have said that supply security remains under control, but they also describe the regional situation as volatile. Energy Minister [Alparslan Bayraktar noted](#) that every \$1 increase in oil prices adds roughly \$400 million to Turkey's energy bill, while also emphasizing the continued importance of TurkStream. Since the end of Russian gas transit through Ukraine, TurkStream has become even more central as a route for Russian gas to Europe. This creates a paradox for Turkish strategic autonomy: the Iran war increases the value of relations with Russia precisely when Ankara would prefer to reduce dependency.

Second, the war narrows Turkey's diplomatic space between the United States and Russia. Ankara wants to remain useful to Washington while avoiding full participation in U.S.-led coercive approaches in the region. At the same time, it needs continued cooperation with Moscow on energy and Black Sea stability. Turkey has tried to keep diplomacy alive around the Strait of Hormuz and maintain contact with multiple actors, including the United States and Iran. This is a classic strategic autonomy posture, but the war raises the cost of sustaining it because regional politics are becoming more polarized.

Third, the war heightens sanctions and compliance pressures, which affect Turkey's ties with Russia. The European Commission's [2025 Turkey Report](#) notes that Turkey maintained very low alignment with EU foreign policy positions and did not align with EU sanctions on Russia, although it did cooperate in curbing sanctions circumvention. As Russia and Iran become more closely linked in Western threat perceptions, Turkey's room for economic flexibility with Moscow may shrink further. That means strategic autonomy is becoming less a matter of free choice and more a matter of constant risk management.

The implication is that Turkey should recalibrate strategic autonomy, using mediation as a main tool. In the context of the Iran war, mediation allows Turkey to preserve dialogue with both Russia and the United States without fully aligning with either side. This is especially important in Turkey's relationship with Moscow: by maintaining open channels and presenting itself as a facilitator rather than a partisan actor, Ankara can manage tensions with Russia while also increasing its diplomatic value to Western and regional partners. Mediation therefore serves not only as a peace-oriented policy, but also as a way for Turkey to protect its strategic autonomy.

## Turkey's Policy Making in North Africa and Eastern Mediterranean in the Shadow of the Iran War

### ***B. Toygar Halistoprak***

- *Turkey's growing tendency toward securitized policy making in North Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean risks narrowing its strategic flexibility at a moment when regional instability is simultaneously creating new diplomatic and economic opportunities.*
- *Turkey can strengthen its regional influence more effectively through institutional statecraft, inclusive energy diplomacy, and connectivity-oriented partnerships.*

The war on Iran has introduced a new layer of instability into an already volatile regional order in Turkey's near neighborhood. The consequences, however, are not limited to Turkey's eastern borders. Across the Eastern Mediterranean and North Africa, Turkey faces a shifting strategic environment, one in which the temptation to respond with aggravated securitization is understandable but potentially counterproductive as well.

Turkey's near neighborhood is undergoing a process of intense resecuritization. Developments in the Eastern Mediterranean are likely to be interpreted through a risk-sensitive and survival-oriented framework rather than a cooperative and integrative one. This is not solely due to the inherent securitized nature of these issues; it also stems from series of decisions through which Turkey positioned itself vis-à-vis certain relevant actors over the past decade. As a result of this, approaching regional issues through a securitized discourse has come to be seen as a rational policy choice. Yet if this becomes a normalized pathway in the policy making towards the region, it also carries the risk of becoming a factor narrowing Turkey's strategic options when flexibility is most needed. The Iran war does not only reshape threat perceptions; it also reshapes the opportunity structure as well. Turkey's policy choices in the coming months can determine whether it emerges as a more capable regional actor offering integrative solutions to regional challenges, or as one that competes with others in ways narrowly commensurate with its material capabilities.

In this context, three policy pathways are worth closer consideration:

#### ***From Security Dominance to Institutional Statecraft in Libya***

Turkey's engagement in Libya has long been shaped by an uneasy mix of security concerns and economic interests. The current securitized policy making environment intensifies the pressure to prioritize the former at the expense of the latter. Resisting this pull is difficult. A predominantly security-driven posture in Libya is increasingly costly and may yield less returns. At the same time, regional actors such as Egypt, the UAE, and European stakeholders are recalibrating their own strategies in response to broader instability. Actors in the region risk being isolated economically if they remain locked in a securitized mode. What is needed instead is a shift toward institutional and economic statecraft, namely supporting governance structures, expanding trade and reconstruction ties, and embedding oneself in multilateral, not unilateral, stabilization efforts. Military engagement have opened the door for Turkey; it is now diplomacy, institutions and pursuing commercial opportunities that must secure a lasting and constructive presence in Libya as a relevant actor.

#### ***Rethinking the Cyprus Question Through an Energy Lens***

The war is also implicitly reshaping Eastern Mediterranean energy geopolitics. Cyprus has invested heavily in energy cooperation with Israel, building a framework of joint exploration, pipeline ambitions and these also tend to extend to security ties. Yet this architecture now rests on increasingly fragile foundations. As pressures on Israel intensify, the assumptions underpinning the Cyprus-Israel cooperation axis become more uncertain. What once appeared as a coherent trilateral alignment with Greece is now exposed as strategically fragile, especially when Mitsotakis faces critique at home for policy preferences favoring Israel. This creates a

**Turkish Foreign Policy and the Iran War: Adapting to a New Regional Environment**

rare opening for Turkey. Rather than approaching the Cyprus issue through a zero-sum rationale, Turkey could leverage this moment to advocate for a more inclusive regional energy architecture. The vulnerabilities created by exclusionary energy arrangements are no longer solely a Turkish critique, they are becoming increasingly visible to European and regional actors as well. This is something that Turkish foreign policy makers can build on to pursue opportunities.

***From Competitor to Connector***

Across both North Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean, the broader strategic rationale converges on a single point: Turkey must pivot from competitive posturing toward connectivity leadership. The evolving energy landscape that is also shaped partially by disruptions linked to the Iran war enhances the importance of alternative routes, diversified suppliers and reliable transit actors. Turkey possesses key advantages in this regard: geographic centrality, growing infrastructure capacity and a network of diplomatic relationships spanning multiple blocs. The challenge is not capability, but strategic orientation. A connector role requires selective de-escalation, pragmatism in engagement with existing regional status quos and a willingness to compartmentalize political disputes where necessary, even in a manner to reconsider previously taken positions.

The temptation toward over-securitization is real and politically convenient as its domestic political payoff is sometimes high. Yet Turkey that prioritizes threat perceptions over strategic imagination risks ending up with more hard power but fewer partners. In an increasingly fragmented regional order, influence will depend not only on coercive capacity alone but also on the ability to build flexible, multi-layered partnerships.

## The Iran War and the Limits of European Security: Turkey, Cyprus, and the Architecture of Paralysis

**Cihan Dizdaroğlu**

- *The Iranian conflict has revealed Cyprus to be an active security theatre. This demonstrates that the deployment of individual member states — indicative of the structural fragility of EU defence cooperation — is not a viable alternative to a political solution, and could exacerbate the division of the island rather than resolving it.*
- *Turkey's structural exclusion from the EU's defence architecture, formalised by the double veto, has evolved from a manageable diplomatic impasse into a tangible security liability. This requires a dedicated cooperation mechanism that is independent of unresolved political disputes.*

The conflict over Iran and its repercussions has caused serious turbulence in the region itself and beyond, sending shockwaves through the foreign and security policy calculations of both Turkey and the EU. This piece focuses on two particularly important and interrelated fault lines where these calculations collide: the Cyprus problem and the structural problems in EU-Turkey defence cooperation. Understanding how these fault lines interact is essential for any serious rethinking of regional security — not just for Ankara, but for Brussels as well.

Cyprus has been at the heart of international politics for decades, as a “protracted” or “comfortable” conflict that has remained stable without resolution. Numerous diplomatic efforts have been made to solve the problem, but they have stalled, resulting in the status quo of managed ambiguity persisting. The conflict over Iran is now shattering this comfortable inertia.

The drone attack on the British Akrotiri base at the early days of the war made it clear that Cyprus is no longer a spectator to regional conflicts. The Eastern Mediterranean, which has long been the subject of disputes over energy and maritime jurisdiction, has become a live security theatre. Although the military deployments by European member states such as France, Italy, Spain, Greece and the Netherlands in the south and around the island, and Turkey's response in the north, were intended to provide security, they created dangerous dynamics. The existence of overlapping forces operating within the same area without unified command, clear coordination or agreed rules of engagement is not a strength, but it is a liability.

It is challenging to convert strategic focus during a crisis into long-term leverage. The presence of individual members strengthens the strategic confidence of the Greek Cypriot side without advancing a settlement. Increased external interest is not a substitute for a political solution. On the contrary, it risks deepening dependency on outside actors and further entrenching the division. Therefore, those involved must prioritize diplomatic efforts to find a comprehensive settlement, in order to achieve a more sustainable outcome for the island's future.

The fact that the member states responded with individual troop deployments rather than collectively shows that they prioritize their own interests over an integrated European defence mechanism. Although French President Emmanuel Macron declared that [“when Cyprus is attacked, it is Europe that is attacked”](#), what arrived in Cyprus or the region was not Europe, but a coalition of individual states.

This fragmentation is not incidental — it is structural. As there is no collective EU defence mechanism that includes Turkey, a non-EU NATO member, each member state fills the vacuum on its own terms. In this sense, the individual deployments in the south of the island and the eastern Mediterranean are both a symptom of and a consequence of Turkey being excluded from the EU's defence architecture.

This is precisely why Turkey's structural position in European security cannot be treated as a separate question from what happened in Cyprus. Turkey has always been a paradox: as a NATO member but not an

**Turkish Foreign Policy and the Iran War: Adapting to a New Regional Environment**

EU member, it has been indispensable to the EU's security and defence architecture. However, the double veto of Turkey and Cyprus has prevented any formal cooperation between the two frameworks.

The result is a security architecture built around a political impasse: two actors that need each other, kept structurally apart by disputes. The most recent crisis has once more demonstrated that both Turkey and the EU need each other, and that the current architecture, premised on keeping them apart, poses a security risk. What is needed is a mechanism that integrates non-EU NATO members, Turkey above all, into collective European defence responses, separating the security cooperation question from the unresolved political disputes that have paralyzed it for decades.

The double veto may have been sustainable when tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean could be managed from a distance. However, it is no longer viable when missiles are being intercepted over allied territory. The question is no longer whether the regional security architecture needs to change. The question is whether Turkey and its European partners will work together to shape that change, or continue to exacerbate each other's problems.

## Turkey's Energy Policy Challenges in Light of the US-Israeli War on Iran

**Ioannis N. Grigoriadis**

- *Rising energy prices as a result of the war and the concomitant destabilization of the energy markets deal a heavy blow against the efforts of the Turkish government to bring budget deficit and inflation under control.*
- *As the government is trying to suppress or coopt political opposition, an improvement of the economic situation could facilitate yet another electoral victory in the upcoming presidential elections.*
- *At a time the Turkish government has declared its intention to diversify its foreign and security policy, establishing an energy policy depending on the United States could be seen as a blow against Turkey's declared ambitions for strategic autonomy.*

While the US-Israeli war on Iran has impacted Turkey in many profound ways, energy policy is probably the most evident of them. Iran is Turkey's third largest exporter of natural gas through a pipeline whose construction had tested both Turkey's commitment to the Western alliance and Iran's ability to reach the Western energy markets despite mounting international obstacles and the UN embargo. The interruption of the operation of the pipeline exporting Iranian natural gas to Turkey may have been an inevitable consequence of Iran's attempts to secure its own domestic supplies but it has profoundly affected Turkey's own energy security. The unprecedented destabilization of energy markets is bound to hit the economies of countries heavily dependent on energy imports and vulnerable to supply shocks. Rising energy prices as a result of the war and the concomitant destabilization of the energy markets deal a heavy blow against the efforts of the Turkish government to bring budget deficit and inflation under control. After several years of domestic devaluation efforts, the inflation rates became tamed; this partial success is now facing severe risks. Being a country heavily dependent on energy imports, Turkey has limited options. A sharp increase in energy prices could derail this process, especially if the price disruptions linked to it do not prove to be short-lived and the cost of keeping the exchange rate of the Turkish lira against the Euro and the US dollar may prove prohibitively high. The domestic political consequences of this are a major concern for the Turkish government. As the government is trying to suppress or coopt political opposition, an improvement of the economic situation could facilitate yet another electoral victory in the upcoming presidential elections.

Moreover, Turkey's declared quest for strategic autonomy can also come under considerable pressure as a result of the US-Israeli war on Iran. The Turkish government is likely to be invited again to join the Trump administration plans for the export of US liquefied natural gas (LNG) to Europe as a substitute for Russian, Iranian natural gas. Turkey's endorsement and participation in these projects was one of the key requests of President Donald Trump during his latest meeting with President Erdogan in the White House. Against US expectations, President Erdogan avoided a commitment. Giving up the Iranian and Russian natural gas and joining the list of European countries willing to buy US LNG is not an easy decision for Turkey, and this is not only due to the price difference between the US LNG and Iranian and Russian natural gas. At a time the Turkish government has declared its intention to diversify its foreign and security policy, establishing an energy policy depending on the United States could be seen as a blow against Turkey's declared ambitions for strategic autonomy. Turkey's energy policy will be profoundly affected by the outcome of the Iran war. Neither an Iranian victory nor a devastating Iranian defeat would serve Turkey's regional energy interests, while continuing uncertainty is likely to shrink the government's leverage against the domestic public opinion and the Trump administration.

## Turkey's Defense Capacity and Industry Amid the Iran War

### *Başar Baysal*

- *The Iran war is the first major operational test confirming that Turkey's defence indigenization has translated into geopolitical manoeuvring space, not just industrial output — enabling Ankara to close airspace, condemn strikes, and mediate while preserving alliance ties.*
- *Two concrete windows have opened for Turkey: (i) mass-producible loitering munitions, where the next competitive frontier in unmanned systems lies, and (ii) co-production partnerships with Gulf states seeking defence diversification — both calling for strategic independence in critical domains.*

The ongoing Iran war has served as both a stress test and a mirror for Turkey's defense posture. What the conflict has revealed is not simply a set of concerns, but a broader confirmation that Turkey's decade-long investment in defense autonomy has created genuine room for independent foreign policy maneuver. Ankara closed its airspace to US forces, condemned the strikes as violations of international law, pursued mediation, and maintained economic ties with multiple parties while avoiding a rupture with its Western allies. This balancing act would have been considerably harder, arguably impossible, for a fully defense-dependent actor. Turkey has progressively reduced its defense dependency, and the Iran war is the first major test that demonstrates this was not merely an economic calculation but a geopolitical one.

That said, the conflict has also illuminated where critical dependencies persist. The interception of ballistic missiles over Turkish airspace by NATO systems underscored that indigenization is still incomplete in the most demanding capability categories, as Turkey's own layered air defense architecture remains in development. Yet this is not a uniquely Turkish problem. The Iran war has exposed universal gaps across even well-equipped militaries: ballistic missile defense, air superiority sustainment, and credible ballistic and supersonic strike capabilities have all emerged as areas where demand far outpaces available supply. For Turkey, the implication is not to retreat from indigenization but to be more deliberate about sequencing it. These high-end capability domains, precisely because they are difficult, expensive, and strategically decisive, represent the areas where reducing dependency carries the greatest operational and political return.

Two concrete opportunity windows have opened as a result of this conflict, and both deserve serious attention. The first concerns munitions, air defense systems, and unmanned capabilities. The Iran war has demonstrated that even well-resourced militaries exhaust their stocks of air defense interceptors and precision-guided munitions at a pace that peacetime planning consistently underestimates. Alongside this, the conflict has underscored the asymmetric battlefield effectiveness of loitering munitions: low-cost, expendable systems that in several engagements proved more operationally relevant than larger, more sophisticated platforms. This has direct implications for Turkey. Turkish firms have established real competence in UAV development. But the Iran war signals that the next competitive frontier is no longer the medium/high-altitude surveillance and strike drone, but the mass-producible loitering munition. Turkey has the industrial base and the combat experience to move decisively in this direction. Doing so would reinforce rather than abandon its existing lead, adapting it to where demand is now heading.

The second window concerns the Gulf. The security uncertainty in the region has accelerated what was already a growing appetite for defense diversification among Gulf states. Turkey's export figures to this region were rising before the war; the structural conditions now favor a further shift. Crucially, the opportunity lies not only in direct exports but also in co-production arrangements, a model already emerging in Saudi Arabia through UAV assembly lines, which create more durable partnerships and reduce the political fragility of purely transactional arms deals. Gulf states are not passive buyers; they want industrial partnerships, technology transfer, and some degree of local ownership. Turkey's willingness to engage on these terms is a comparative advantage that this moment rewards.

The overarching policy implication is straightforward, even if its execution is demanding. The Iran war does

**Turkish Foreign Policy and the Iran War: Adapting to a New Regional Environment**

not make the case for full autarky. No middle power achieves that, and complete self-sufficiency is neither fully feasible nor necessarily desirable as a policy goal. What it does make the case for is strategic independence in critical domains: engines, air defense systems, ballistic and supersonic strike capabilities, and advanced electronics. The distinction matters because it focuses scarce resources where dependency carries the highest political cost, rather than dispersing them across every capability category in pursuit of a self-sufficiency that remains out of reach. Turkey is closer to that position than it was a decade ago. Whether it consolidates that progress will depend on the choices made in the window that this war has opened.

## As US Iran policy evolves, Turkey needs a Neo-Ottoman balancing act

**Nora Fisher-Onar**

- *With the U.S. war on Iran yielding few fruits and multiple complications, Turkey should proceed cautiously and pragmatically, recalling the late Ottoman strategy of balancing whilst engaging multiple, great power stakeholders.*
- *Guiding principles for strategic patience include: cooperation to stabilize, restraint to avoid entanglement, and dialogue to outlast shifting great-power rivalries.*

Conflict over Iran—the current ceasefire notwithstanding—has redrawn the strategic map of the Middle East from the Persian Gulf to the Eastern Mediterranean. For Ankara, the war poses an acute test of statecraft: how to safeguard its interests in a volatile region complicated by Washington's unpredictable decision-making. The United States' erratic conduct has left allies and adversaries alike improvising amid uncertainty. For Turkey, the prudent response lies in drawing on its older diplomatic inheritance—the late Ottoman art of balancing through flexible alignment rather than existential commitment.

Washington's management of the Iran war exposes the limitations of hard power. Policy has alternated between impulsive escalation and mixed signals from the White House and Pentagon. Over reliance on coercive tools is untethered from coherent short-, medium-, or long-term objectives. The administration's notion of "maximum pressure" has yielded diminishing returns both abroad and at home.

US domestic politics are amplifying this incoherence. With November's midterm elections approaching, the White House has framed Republican victory as vital to the president's personal and political survival. Yet despite pledges to avoid "endless wars," the administration entered a conflict for which it neither built public support nor defined achievable ends. Predictably, economic drag, allied hesitation, and public skepticism now constrain Washington's freedom of action. Under these mounting pressures, recalibration of policy is becoming a political necessity.

Shifts in U.S. posture will complicate Ankara's calculus within an already fraught strategic geography. To the north, Turkey manages the impacts of Russian revisionism and Ukrainian resistance. To the south and east, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and smaller Gulf states are recalibrating, as is an increasingly assertive but also isolated Israel. Yet multi-vector volatility is not unfamiliar terrain. Ottoman diplomacy was long defined by survival within overlapping and often contradictory spheres of power.

Since the seventeenth century, when imperial expansion hit the walls of Vienna, the Porte shifted from conquest to maintenance of its vast domains, then to managing decline without collapse. It did so by maintaining parallel relationships with rival empires—British, French, and Russian—while leveraging localized and regional ties to extract concessions and avoid dependence on any single actor. This flexible pragmatism allowed the empire to outlive, if only briefly, the Russian dynasty that had once dismissed it as the "sick man of Europe."

Only when that balancing instinct was abandoned—under the Young Turk Triumvirate's geopolitical embrace of Germany, and ideological swing towards pan-Turkism—did the imperial system implode. The early Turkish Republic absorbed this lesson. Atatürk's maxim of "peace at home, peace in the world" expressed not withdrawal but strategic discipline: preserving sovereignty through the stability in a fragmented order.

A century later, in a context of renewed regional conflagration and global multipolarity, that principle endures. Ankara must recall its balancing reflex—neither isolating, nor aligning fully with partners whose own vision(s) will likely shift. As Washington confronts the limits of coercion and turns to alternatives, Turkey could reassert itself as a broker, offering cooperation where it promotes stability, restraint where it prevents

**Turkish Foreign Policy and the Iran War: Adapting to a New Regional Environment**

entanglement, and dialogue wherever possible. In our age of recklessness, Turkey's wisest path remains an old one: balance, flexibility, and patience to outlast the storm.

# Mediation in a Fragmented Order: Turkey's Strategic Window in the Iran War

## *Alpaslan Özerdem*

- *The Iran war highlights how mediation in today's fragmented international order increasingly depends on "functional mediators" like Türkiye that possess access, credibility, and flexibility across competing geopolitical blocs.*
- *Türkiye's strategic value lies not only in facilitating communication during conflict, but also in contributing to post-war regional integration and designing long-term frameworks for sustainable de-escalation and interdependence.*

In the midst of an active war, when missiles are still being exchanged, and escalation risks remain high, it may appear premature, even naïve, to think about mediation. Yet experience suggests the opposite. All wars come to an end. What matters most is not only how they end, but who is positioned to shape what comes next.

The ongoing Iran war is unfolding within an increasingly fragmented international order. Great power competition has eroded the coherence of traditional diplomatic mechanisms, while multilateral institutions struggle to act decisively. In such an environment, mediation is no longer the exclusive domain of major powers or formal institutions. Instead, it is increasingly shaped by what may be called "functional mediators": states that possess access, credibility, and flexibility across competing blocs.

This is where Turkey's strategic relevance becomes particularly visible.

Turkey occupies a rare position. It maintains working relations with Western allies, regional actors, and, critically, channels of communication with Iran. At the same time, its recent diplomatic practice, from the Black Sea Grain Initiative to various regional de-escalation efforts, demonstrates a capacity to act pragmatically rather than ideologically. In a fractured system, this kind of positionality matters more than formal authority.

However, mediation in this context cannot be understood as a single intervention or a one-off diplomatic event. It is better conceived as a layered process with three distinct but interconnected roles.

First, communication facilitation. In highly polarized conflicts, the immediate need is often not agreement, but contact. Turkey's ability to maintain open channels with multiple sides can help prevent miscalculation and create the minimum conditions for de-escalation.

Second, process design. Even if a ceasefire becomes possible, the absence of a credible negotiation framework can quickly lead to renewed instability. Here, Turkey's experience in structured dialogue initiatives positions it to contribute not just as a host, but as a co-designer of negotiation processes.

Third, and perhaps most critically, post-war regional integration. The Iran war, like many conflicts in the Middle East, is not only about security but also about the absence of interdependence. Durable peace will depend less on formal agreements and more on whether regional actors can build economic, political, and institutional linkages that make renewed conflict less viable. Turkey's economic networks, logistical connectivity, and regional engagement could play a meaningful role in shaping such an environment.

Yet this opportunity is not without constraints. Turkey's credibility as a mediator depends on maintaining a careful balance, avoiding over-alignment with any one actor while preserving trust across competing sides. Moreover, mediation requires not only access but also sustained diplomatic investment, institutional capacity, and strategic patience.

**Turkish Foreign Policy and the Iran War: Adapting to a New Regional Environment**

The Iran war does not automatically create a mediation role for Turkey. But it does open a strategic window, one that must be pursued in concert with other middle powers, great powers, and international organizations. In a world where traditional diplomatic hierarchies are weakening, acting as a flexible, credible, and process-oriented mediator within this broader coalition may prove to be one of the most valuable forms of influence, grounded in responsibility to the international community as much as national interest.

The question, therefore, is not whether mediation is possible in the midst of war, but whether actors like Turkey are prepared to work collectively to shape the conditions of peace before the war ends.

## Inside the Alliance, Outside the Iran War: Turkey's NATO Comeback

### *Sinem Akgül Açıkmeşe*

- *The Iran war has revalidated NATO's indispensability for Turkish security in operational, not merely declaratory terms, while simultaneously exposing the strategic costs of Ankara's episodic tensions with the Alliance.*
- *The conflict has revealed a mutual dependence. Turkey needs NATO to defend its territory, and NATO needs Turkey to manage its southeastern flank. The 2026 NATO summit in Ankara is the moment to convert this reality into deeper institutional commitment.*

The ongoing Iran war has confronted Turkish foreign policy with its most consequential security dilemma since Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Turkey has tried, with considerable discipline, to stay out of the Iran war. Ankara has avoided siding with Washington, refused to provide its airspace or facilities for its strikes against Iran, and consistently called for a negotiated solution. The war, however, has not extended the same courtesy to Turkey. NATO air defense assets have so far intercepted four Iranian ballistic missiles over Turkish airspace. The effectiveness of the responses by NATO delivered a powerful operational demonstration of what collective defense means in practice. As with Russia's war against Ukraine, the Iran war has silenced, at least temporarily, those who questioned NATO's strategic relevance in a post-Cold War world. Turkey understands that as a member of NATO with an Article 5 commitment, its deterrence is far stronger than anything it could achieve alone. For Ankara, the conflict has yet again validated NATO's indispensability.

That indispensability was not reaffirmed in summit communiqués or strategic documents, but in real time, over southern Turkish airspace. On four separate occasions between March 4 and April 4, ballistic missiles fired from Iran entered Turkish airspace, each incident formally confirmed by [Turkey's Ministry of National Defense](#). NATO's response operated through an integrated defense chain stretching from Kürecik to Ramstein. The [AN/TPY-2 radar at Kürecik in Malatya](#), alongside other Allied sensors, detected incoming missiles shortly after launch, calculated their speed and trajectory, and transmitted that data within minutes to NATO's command network at Ramstein Air Base in Germany, which cued interceptors across the Alliance. The missiles were also neutralized by NATO air and missile defense assets deployed in the Eastern Mediterranean. NATO also moved swiftly to reinforce Turkey's defensive posture on the ground: [a Patriot battery system](#) was deployed near the Kürecik radar site in Malatya, and as Turkey's Ministry of National Defense declared, [a second Patriot system](#) assigned by Allied Air Command in Ramstein is being deployed in Adana alongside the Spanish Patriot battery already stationed there, bringing the total number of active NATO Patriot systems on Turkish soil to three.

The operational record above speaks for itself: missiles from Iran were stopped by Allied assets. For a country that has spent years cultivating strategic autonomy, the Iran war has delivered an unambiguous reminder that autonomy and strategic vulnerability are not mutually exclusive, and that the Alliance remains Turkey's most reliable security insurance policy.

However, the same conflict that has reaffirmed NATO's value has also exposed the strategic costs of Turkey's episodic tensions within the Alliance. [Turkey's 2019 acquisition of the Russian S-400 missile defense system](#) which triggered U.S. sanctions and resulted in its exclusion from the F-35 program has left a tangible air defense gap that became acutely visible when Iranian missiles began entering Turkish airspace. It was NATO interceptors, not Turkish weapons, that brought down the four missiles. The contradiction is difficult to overlook: a country that invested heavily in an autonomous defense posture found itself, at the moment of greatest exposure, mainly reliant on the collective architecture it had simultaneously challenged. Choosing a Russian missile defense system over NATO-compatible alternatives proved to be a strategic liability precisely when the threat materialized. Iran war has made this liability visible in a way that any diplomatic language alone could not.

**Turkish Foreign Policy and the Iran War: Adapting to a New Regional Environment**

On the other hand, the Iran war has equally demonstrated why NATO cannot afford to treat Turkey as a peripheral or problematic ally. The Alliance's ability to defend its southeastern flank has rested, in concrete operational terms, on what Turkey brings to the table. Even though Kürecik is neither the only nor the closest radar to Iran, it is strategically positioned to offer among the earliest tracking of missiles launched from Iran's western regions, feeding data into a defense chain that no single European alternative can replicate. Incirlik, hosting Allied personnel has served as the logistical and operational backbone of NATO's reinforced posture. Taken together, these two installations illustrate a broader truth: Turkey's geographic position, its control of the Turkish Straits under the Montreux Convention, and its status as one of the largest armies of NATO make it a front-line ally whose value becomes most visible precisely when the Alliance is under pressure. Beyond hardware and geography, [Turkey's absorbing four missile incidents without invoking Article 4 or Article 5](#), while keeping diplomatic channels with Tehran open has itself served Alliance interests by preventing a regional war from escalating into a broader NATO confrontation. That restraint should not be mistaken for passivity, it is a form of Alliance management that deserves formal recognition. Thus, the Iran war has not merely revealed Turkey's dependence on NATO, it has also equally revealed Turkey's relevance for NATO.

The Iran war has handed both Turkey and NATO a strategic opportunity they should not waste. The missiles that entered Turkish airspace did not draw Ankara into the Iran war. They may, however, have set the stage for its most consequential NATO comeback yet. For Ankara, the priority should be to resolve the S-400 dispute and re-engage with NATO's defense procurement framework. For NATO, the lesson is institutional: the Alliance needs a clearer framework for sub-threshold threats such as the repeated missile incidents which demand more than silence. The 2026 NATO summit in Ankara may offer such a rare platform to set the southern flank agenda from the chair rather than negotiating from the margins.