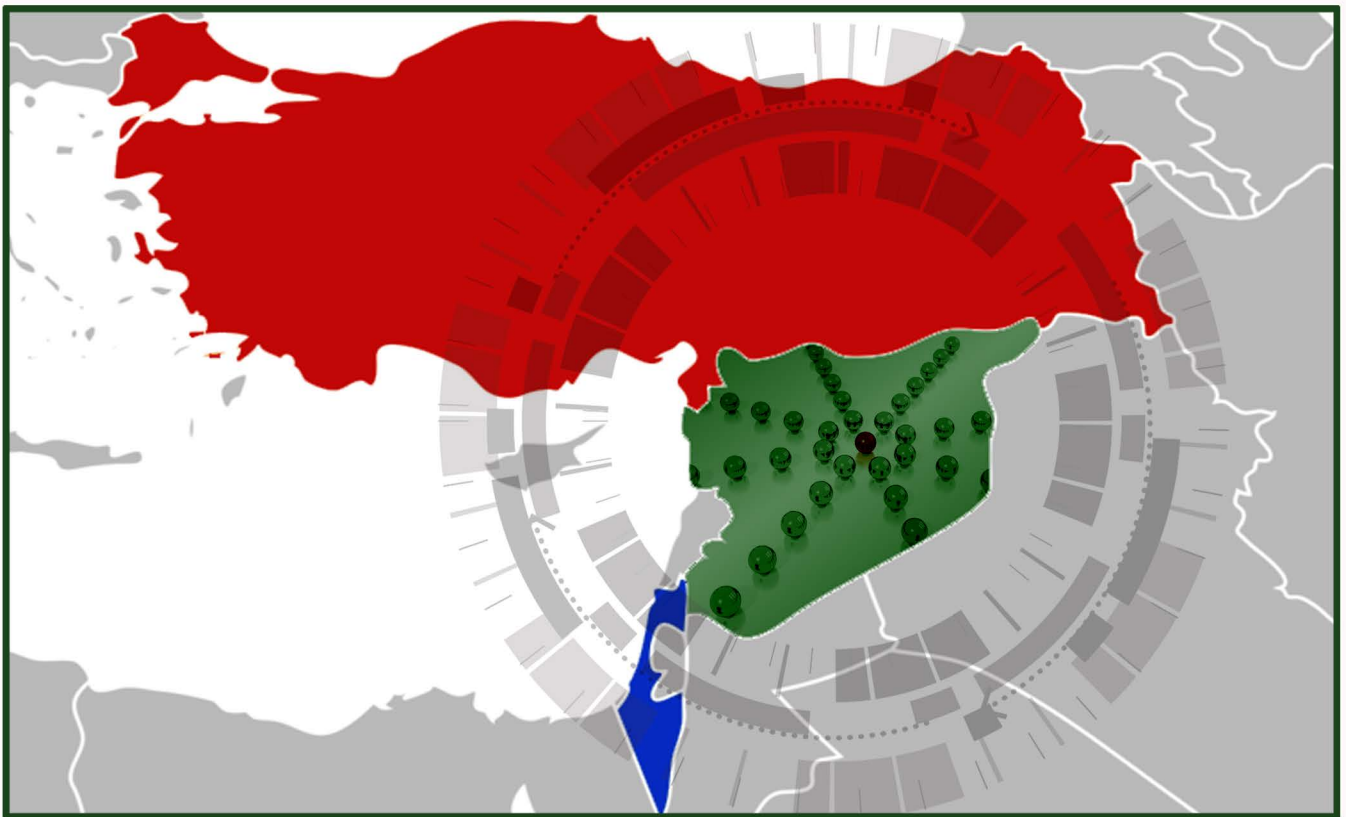




Academic Paper

# Assessments of Israel-Türkiye

## Flashpoints in Syria



**Ibrahim Khaled 'Abdul Karim**

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**Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies & Consultations**

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## Assessments of Israel-Türkiye Flashpoints in Syria

Ibrahim Khaled ‘Abdul Karim<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

Since the onset of the new era in Syria, 8/12/2024, both Israel and Türkiye have maintained an active presence on the Syrian stage, whether through their respective positions on this shift or through direct and potential friction between them.

Developments in Syria have deepened Israeli concerns over Türkiye’s current regional posture, especially amid rising tensions between the two sides following the outbreak of the war in Gaza Strip (GS). These shifts have set the two countries on a path of multifaceted confrontation. This reflects a distinctive regional case within the broader framework of international competition over spheres of influence and strategic interests. Accordingly, this study examines Israeli media and research-based assessments that shed light on the contours of the emerging confrontation between Israel and Türkiye in Syria, and probes its nature—one shaped in practice by the bilateral relationship between the two states. This relationship has fluctuated in recent years between two clearly defined poles: overt hostility (since the GS war) and a state of near-normal relations tinged with persistent tensions (prior to the war).



Accordingly, this study offers a documented and analytical overview of the key flashpoints between Türkiye and Israel in the Syrian arena. These include: Türkiye’s military support to Syria; Israel’s expansionist activities and overreach in Syria amid efforts at de-escalation; the role of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and Kurdish factions as a zone of contention between the two countries; the demarcation of maritime borders between Türkiye and Syria and its regional and international repercussions; the proposed gas pipeline from Qatar to Türkiye (and subsequently to Europe); and Iraq’s “Development Road” project, which seeks to integrate Syria into Türkiye’s logistical corridors—both projects posing significant challenges.



## First: Turkish Military Support for Syria

Although the details of military cooperation between Türkiye and the new Syrian regime remain largely unclear, media outlets have circulated reports pointing to strategic initiatives—chief among them, efforts to rebuild the Syrian army. These developments have attracted the attention of Israeli circles, especially in light of *alleged* “special reports” suggesting that Türkiye intends to support this process. The reports also point to emerging defense and security cooperation, as well as the potential contribution of the Turkish defense industry to strengthening Syria’s military and security capabilities.



In an article by Zvi Bar’el, Arab affairs analyst for *Haaretz*, it was reported that Türkiye does not intend to limit itself to political support for the new regime in Syria. Turkish Defense Minister Yaşar Güler said his country “is ready to provide the necessary support if the new administration requests it.” He didn't elaborate, but a source in the Turkish opposition told *Haaretz* that Ankara could become a significant arms supplier to Syria. He added that Türkiye could send instructors to train the new army, draw up a defense outline suitable for Syria, and provide loans to finance all this. The article emphasizes, however, that “Turkey isn’t a charitable organization. Ankara is expected to demand a military alliance with Damascus that would ensure Turkey’s influence in all Syria’s military and political endeavors, even allowing it to keep forces in the areas it has occupied.”<sup>2</sup>

On 24/12/2024, the Turkish newspaper *Türkiye* reported that the most ambitious plan between the two countries envisions the formation of a new Syrian army comprising 300 thousand soldiers, fully supported by Türkiye. The plan includes the establishment of five military camps across various regions in Syria. The initial core force will consist of 50 thousand troops from the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) and another 40 thousand fighters from Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). While the Turkish newspaper *Yeni Şafak* reported that Türkiye is planning to establish military air bases in Damascus and Homs, as well as naval bases in Tartus and Latakia.<sup>3</sup>



In a similar vein, information and analyses have emerged indicating that military cooperation between Türkiye and Syria will inevitably affect Israel. Since the very beginning of the new phase in Syria, Israel has escalated its military strikes against Syrian military sites, on land, in the air, and at sea, as well as against related military-industrial and scientific facilities, nearly destroying them entirely. Among the various forecasts, Dr. Carmit Valensi, a senior researcher at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) at Tel Aviv University, head of the Northern Arena Program, and an



expert in contemporary Middle Eastern affairs, strategic studies, military doctrines, and terrorism, highlighted the possibility that Türkiye's "military presence in Syria may expand over time (even if defined as 'advisors'), which would restrict Israel's ability to operate there and could lead to friction" with the Israeli army.<sup>4</sup>

The visit of Syrian President Ahmad al-Sharaa to Türkiye on 4/2/2025, sparked meaningful "military signals" that the Israelis picked up on to monitor the military cooperation between Türkiye and Syria.



These signals garnered wide media and academic attention, centered on an unannounced joint defense pact between the two countries, as reported by international news agencies. According to disclosed details, the pact includes Türkiye's intention to "establish new air bases in Syria, use Syrian airspace for military purposes, and take a lead role in training troops in Syria's new army." Security sources said "the possible airbase locations were the Palmyra military airport and the Syrian army's T4 base, both in the province of Homs" in central Syria. These facilities, the sources noted, would allow Türkiye to "defend Syria's air space in case of any future attacks." A report by Israel's Channel N12, on 5/2/2025, anticipated that Israel would assess the security ramifications of these developments in Syria.<sup>5</sup>

President al-Sharaa's visit offered Israeli media an opportunity to highlight its security implications, generating sensational headlines about a looming Turkish threat, particularly in light of reports suggesting that the Turkish Air Force may be deployed in Syria in the future. In this context, *Maariv* published a report titled: "The [Turkish] Air Force on the Border: Israel Doesn't Want to Leave Syria—Now Erdoğan's Response Has Arrived."<sup>6</sup>

Following the visit, multiple reports surfaced about understandings between Türkiye and the new Syrian government to establish Turkish military bases in Syria. Among the reported details was that Türkiye "plans to deploy surveillance and armed drones" at the T4 airbase in the Homs region. It also "aims to establish a layered air defence system in and around the base, which would have short-, medium- and long-range air defence capabilities against a variety of threats, from jets to drones to missiles." It was reported also that "Ankara is considering the temporary deployment of S-400 air defence systems to T4 or Palmyra to secure the airspace during reconstruction efforts."<sup>7</sup>

Researchers Tal Beer and Boaz Shapira from the Israeli Alma Research and Education Center revealed that Türkiye "has transported troops and military equipment to the Minaq military airport in northern Syria, now operating in Turkish-Syrian





collaboration. The airport is located approximately 35 km north of Aleppo and about 13 km south of the Turkish border.” Türkiye “has recently renovated and expanded the base, installing radars, air defense systems, and additional equipment to help Syria monitor and control its airspace.” Beerli and Shapira warned that “A scenario in which Turkish Air Force jets operate in Syrian airspace against Israeli Air Force jets is a possible one.”<sup>8</sup>

In this context, Oded Ailam, former head of the Counterterrorism Division in the Mossad and a researcher at the Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs (JCFA), warned in an article published in *Israel Hayom* that the most alarming scenario is the establishment of a permanent Turkish F-16 squadron on Syrian soil, which could lead to a direct aerial clash—particularly if an air defense system is activated against an Israeli aircraft, even by mistake. Ailam quoted a senior security official as saying: It wouldn’t take much, any minor error could trigger a new northern front. Israel’s greatest concern at the moment is the possibility that Türkiye might deploy HISAR air defense systems, or even S-400 missiles, in Syria. If that happens, any Israeli action would likely be met with a response, and a confrontation would become a question of when, not if.<sup>9</sup>



**Oded Ailam**

In a follow-up report, the Turkish newspaper *Sözcü*, 25/4/2025 stated that Türkiye is planning to transfer to Syria missiles it had purchased from Russia for \$2.5 billion. The move, among other objectives, is intended to prompt the lifting of US sanctions imposed on Türkiye as a result of the missile deal with Russia. However, the matter remains unresolved, as US warnings have surfaced that transferring the missiles to Syria “would not be sufficient to lift [Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act] CAATSA sanctions.” It would compromise Israel’s “qualitative military edge” in the region and “threaten US–Türkiye relations.”<sup>10</sup>

In response, Türkiye’s military operations in Syria triggered swift Israeli reactions, reflecting Israel’s view that its security extends beyond its geographic borders. Unlike typical state behavior and established international norms, Israel treats certain areas outside its territory as falling within its sphere of influence.

According to Ron Ben-Yishai, military analyst for *Yedioth Ahronoth*, Türkiye’s “intention to introduce air defense systems and radar to central Syrian airports poses a direct threat to Israel’s freedom of action in Syria. This freedom of action is vital not only to counter direct threats from Syria but also to maintain flight routes to destinations near and far in the Middle East, such as Iran.” He adds, “A Turkish military presence in southern and eastern Syria, including the Syrian Golan, could also create a situation where, under the protection of Turkish forces, jihadists who have become al-Sharaa’s ‘security forces’ move further south—rapidly creating a scenario similar to that of .. the Lebanese border, where a hostile terrorist army is positioned



within striking distance of Israeli communities in the Golan Heights and northern Israel.” A Kurdish media outlet has even reported that Turkish intelligence has established a new jihadist group operating in Dar‘a and Jasim in southern Syria, with the explicit aim of fighting Israel. To preempt such a development, Ben-Yishai explains, when Turkish security elements intended to move into the T4 Airbase—located over 100 kilometers from Israel’s border—“the Israeli Air Force carried out a series of bombings that completely destroyed the T-4 airport and its contents, preventing its use for a long time. While Turkey can rebuild these airports, the destruction was primarily intended to signal to Ankara that Israel would not allow such actions.”<sup>11</sup>

Among the reported details highlighting Israel’s resolve to confront Türkiye’s activities in Syria is that, following visits by Turkish officials to at least two airbases, possibly in preparation for troop deployment under a planned mutual defense agreement, Israel carried out airstrikes on these sites, despite the potential for a military confrontation with Türkiye.<sup>12</sup>



A military official stated that the recent strikes on the Palmyra and T4 airfields were intended to block the Turkish Air Force from establishing a presence there. The Israeli Air Force has carried out extensive operations to render both Syrian airfields completely inoperable. The strikes targeted and destroyed runways, control towers, fuel depots, warehouses, parking aprons, radar systems and more.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, it is virtually certain that the existing or potential military ties between Türkiye and Syria are viewed by Israel as a serious threat, leaving Israel determined not to tolerate or ignore them.

## **Second: Israel’s Escalation and Overreach in Syria.. and De-escalation Efforts**

Israel took advantage of the political transition in Syria to occupy the summit of Mount Hermon (Jabal al-Shaykh), the buffer zone in the Golan, and an adjacent strip of territory. It also secured surveillance capabilities over additional areas extending east and south toward the countryside of Damascus, Dar‘a and Suwayda, under the pretext of protecting its borders and settlers from potential security threats.



Numerous Israeli reports and analyses have addressed this new expansion and its potential implications. For example, Alon Ben-David, a military correspondent and commentator for *Maariv* and Channel 13, claims that “Israel’s entry into the buffer zone in the Golan, and beyond, was a necessary defensive move... Beyond the deployment of forces, Israel is seeking to initiate dialogue with nearby Sunni and Druze villagers, who do not necessarily align themselves with the approach of Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the new dominant force in Damascus.”<sup>14</sup>

Eitan Lasri, an expert in geopolitical governance, a former advisor to the Prime Minister, CEO of Etgar, and a business figure active in countries across the region, advocated for the necessity of maintaining “a ‘holding zone’ 15 km inside Syrian territory, where the IDF will retain a presence to ensure that loyalists of the new regime cannot fire missiles toward the Golan Heights. In addition, a “zone of influence” 60 km inside Syria will be established, in which Israel will maintain intelligence control to ensure that no threat develops there against it.”<sup>15</sup>



**Eitan Lasri**

Nonetheless, the Israelis did not dismiss the possibility of Türkiye rejecting and resisting their eastward expansion. More significantly, Major General (ret.) Yaakov Amidror (former head of Israel’s National Security Council and currently affiliated with the Jewish Institute for National Security of America, JINSA) raised the prospect of Turkish-backed groups reaching the Golan, thereby heightening friction and tension between Israel and Türkiye; a staunch adversary of Israel that has yet to engage in direct confrontation. For this reason, the Israeli military is working to destroy the advanced weaponry formerly held by the Syrian army, to prevent it from falling into the hands of the new regime.<sup>16</sup>

Zvi Bar’el predicted that “The Turkish-Syrian relationship’s evolution could significantly impact Israel’s operations in Syria. Beyond leading international efforts to remove IDF forces from the buffer zone, Turkey may determine Israel’s aerial operational freedom in Syria.” He added, “With Syrian and Russian air forces absent, Turkey may become the de facto controller of Syrian airspace and, in partnership with the Syrian government, could end Israel’s operational freedom.”<sup>17</sup>

Udi Etzion, a commentator for the Hebrew website *Walla!*, considered the threat made by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, in which he said he might invade Israel, was unusual: “Just as we entered Karabakh and Libya, we may do the same with Israel. Etzion added, “There’s no reason we can’t—we just need to be strong,” he declared. This was not the first threat by the Islamist-nationalist leader against Israel, but it was the clearest and most severe to date.”<sup>18</sup>



**Recep Tayyip  
Erdoğan**

David Ben Basat, CEO of Radio 100FM and Chairman of the Israeli Radio Communications Association, linked the statement to recent developments in Syria. He argued that “The dramatic fall of the Assad regime and the victory of the Syrian rebels—some of whom were significantly supported by Türkiye and operated under its guidance—should raise

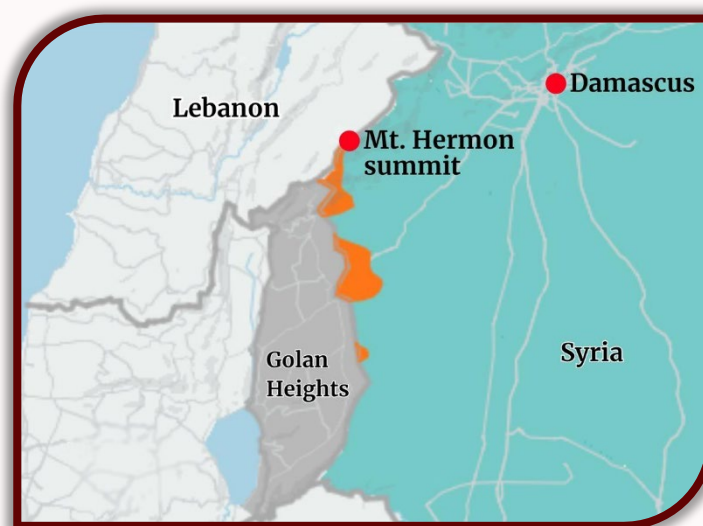




a red flag among decision-makers in Israel—and not only there. In his great arrogance, Erdoğan expresses what seems to be nothing less than a threat to Israel, and in his imagination—within his version of the Middle East—he already sees his feet wading in the waters of the Sea of Galilee [Lake Tiberias].”<sup>19</sup>

Israeli circles closely monitored another statement by President Erdoğan, in which he called for “an immediate halt to Israeli military activity in the Syrian Golan Heights,” and advocated for “international intervention against Israeli military actions,” urging “Western nations to ‘halt the invasion of Syrian territory.’ He also announced his intent to cooperate with Syria on defense matters.” Erdoğan warned that if Israel does not cease its operations in Syria, “the consequences will be negative.” In response, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a strongly worded statement, declaring: “Israel completely rejects the Turkish president’s statement. The aggressive imperialist actor in Syria (just as in northern Cyprus, Libya, and other parts of the Middle East) is Türkiye itself. The Turkish president would do well to refrain from unnecessary threats. The State of Israel will continue to act to defend its borders against any threat.”<sup>20</sup>

Amid escalating tensions between the two sides and a series of increasingly hardline statements from President Erdoğan, Israel Hayom reported that he said, “Those seeking to exploit Syria’s instability by inflaming ethnic and religious affiliations must know they will not achieve their goals. We will not allow Syria to be divided according to the maps they draw.” Citing a Kurdish media outlet, the report added that Türkiye is intensifying efforts to secure a security foothold in various parts of Syria. Turkish intelligence has established a new jihadist group operating in Dar’a and Jasim in southern Syria, with the explicit aim of fighting Israel. The report added, “To preempt such moves, Israel has taken control of Mount Hermon and the buffer zone in the Syrian Golan and publicly demanded the demilitarization of southern Syria.”<sup>21</sup>



According to Eitan Lasri, “President Erdoğan’s call for Israel to withdraw from Syria is problematic, given that Türkiye controls three regions in Syria that it occupied and continues to support rebel groups currently fighting the Kurds, whom it views as a security threat.” He added that in response to Erdoğan’s remarks, senior Israeli officials stated, “Türkiye is not our enemy, but it is a rival, and tensions may arise. Still, no one wishes to see a military confrontation. There is communication through security



channels, we are in dialogue with Türkiye, and in any case, we would not want to see military forces near Israel's border.”<sup>22</sup>

Israel's repeated references to Türkiye's occupation of Syrian territory, alongside its rejection of Turkish criticism regarding Israel's own, similar occupation, suggest that Israel views Türkiye's actions as setting a precedent. In essence, what is permissible for Türkiye should also be permissible for Israel. This kind of “communal logic” is evident in Israel's statements and actions aimed at expanding and deepening its presence in the disengagement zone and beyond. Notably, Israel has consistently emphasized its commitment to what it terms a “security zone,” a broad area in which no Syrian forces are to be present. The notion of “protecting the Druze”

population in this area has also been repeatedly invoked. Defense Minister Israel Katz said during a visit to the Syrian side of Mount Hermon on 28/1/2025 that “The IDF will remain at the summit of the Hermon and the security zone indefinitely to ensure the security of the communities of the Golan Heights and the north, and all the residents of Israel,” adding “We will not allow hostile forces to establish themselves in the security zone in southern Syria... we will act against any threat.” Katz said Israel will make contact with “friendly populations” in the southern Syria area, “with an emphasis on the large Druze community which has historic and close family relations with our Druze brothers in Israel.”<sup>23</sup>



**Israel Katz**

At a military graduation ceremony, on 23/2/2025, Netanyahu said, “We will not allow forces of the HTS or the new Syrian army to enter the territory south of Damascus. We demand full demilitarization of southern Syria,” adding, “we will not tolerate any threat to the Druze sect in southern Syria.”<sup>24</sup>

Katz echoed Netanyahu's remarks, reiterating that the Israeli army “will not allow hostile forces to establish a presence in the security zone from here to Damascus, and we will act against any threat.” Katz also highlighted Israel's commitment to strengthening ties with friendly populations in the region, particularly the Druze, whom he called “brothers in arms.”<sup>25</sup> In the period that followed, Israeli statements, positions, and military interventions persisted under the banner of protecting Syria's Druze, reflecting Israel's broader ambitions and its pursuit of strategic objectives at both the domestic and regional levels.



**Benjamin  
Netanyahu**

According to an Israeli report, the promise to protect the Druze in Syria is part of a broader Israeli geostrategic initiative to establish the “Saladin Corridor,” a route described as a passageway for minority freedom that would link the Kurds and Druze to Israel.<sup>26</sup>

Roni Shaked, a researcher and the Coordinator of the Middle East Unit at the Harry S. Truman Research Institute at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, considered that the Defense Minister's statement served as a signal to the President of Türkiye, who is



demanding that Israel withdraw from Syrian territories it took control of following the collapse of Assad's regime.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, Israel has escalated its threats against Syria. While it previously referred only vaguely to preventing the presence of any forces or “subversive elements” near the areas it controls, it now explicitly insists on barring the current Syrian army from operating in the Syrian territory it has designated as part of its security sphere. This undoubtedly constitutes a provocation, a challenge and an attempt to entangle the new Syrian regime militarily under conditions it does not currently consider favorable. This Israeli posture also targets Erdoğan's administration, as it has become common for Türkiye to denounce Israel's latest violations due to its alliance with the new Syrian regime. In fact, responding to this development, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, in a joint press conference with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov in Ankara, 24/2/2025, condemned Israel's expansionism toward Jordan, Syria and Lebanon, noting this policy “destabilizes the region, opens it to all sorts of risks, including terrorism.” Its policies are aimed at imposing regional dominance through military escalation and reflect strategies intended to enforce a new status quo in the region.” Fidan urged the international community to “apply pressure on Netanyahu's government before it's too late.”<sup>28</sup> In a *Financial Times* interview, 6/3/2025, Minister Fidan described Israel's “ongoing attacks on the land and new troop movements are a clear provocation,” adding that “Israel sees every Arab and Muslim country as a threat, and it's extremely dangerous. The strategy of keeping all its border states weak is untenable.”<sup>29</sup>



**Hakan Fidan**

Despite ongoing Israeli provocations, Türkiye opted to leave space for political efforts. On 9/4/2025, Fidan stated, “As Türkiye, we have no intention of entering into conflict in Syria – not with Israel or any other country,” adding, “As we have consistently stated, Israel's ongoing operations serve neither Syria's security nor Israel's. In the long run, they will only fuel greater instability and insecurity across the Middle East. Therefore, as Türkiye, we must act proactively – through diplomacy and other measures – to contain this crisis before it escalates further.”<sup>30</sup>

Israel, for its part, has maintained a hardline stance against the growing military cooperation between Syria and Türkiye. Defense Minister Katz warned Syrian leader al-Sharaa, “If you allow forces hostile to Israel to enter Syria and threaten Israeli security interests, you will pay a very heavy price.” To clarify that the message was not solely directed at Syria's current ruler, Katz added, “The Air Force's activities yesterday at the T-4 airport in Hama and the Damascus area are a clear message and warning for the future. We will not allow harm to Israel's security.”<sup>31</sup>

These instances reflect the ongoing confrontation between Israel and Türkiye over the Syrian file, during a tense phase marked by Israeli airstrikes targeting Syrian military sites, aimed at preventing the regime and Türkiye from restoring or utilizing them. The situation now calls for a solution that puts an end to this cycle of escalation and counter-escalation, with a priority on de-escalating tensions in Syria.



To address this issue, Israel involved several parties closely connected to both Türkiye and Israel. One revealed move was Netanyahu's dispatch of his military secretary, Major General Roman Gofman, in early March for a series of high-level security and diplomatic meetings aimed at strengthening coordination between Israel and Russia while safeguarding Israeli security interests. During these meetings, Israel requested, among other things, to neutralize Türkiye's influence, which has been exploiting the vacuum left in Syria following the collapse of the former regime.<sup>32</sup>

Netanyahu also requested, during his talks with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in Budapest, 4/4/2025, that he mediate with Türkiye to halt its entrenchment in Syria, given Orbán's good relations with President Erdoğan.<sup>33</sup>



**Viktor Orbán**

Ariel Kahana, a political commentator and White House correspondent for *Israel Hayom*, revealed that Israel had approached the US with a request to convey calming messages to Türkiye, urging it not to establish three new military bases across Syria and to prevent the formation of anti-Israel militant structures in the country. At the same time, Israel's National Security Council asked its counterpart in Washington to convey calming messages to Ankara.<sup>34</sup>

Then attention shifted to how to activate US mediation between Türkiye and Israel, in order to move beyond the stagnation that had marked the second Trump administration, namely, the absence of “a coherent approach to Syria, with disagreements between the Pentagon and the State Department, and Trump himself avoiding direct engagement.”<sup>35</sup>

For this reason, Netanyahu used his meeting with President Trump in Washington, 7/4/2025, to emphasize that Israel does not “want to see Syria being used by anyone, including Turkey, as a base for attacking Israel.” The conversation centered on how to prevent a confrontation. Trump, for his part, chose to praise Erdoğan, stating, “Any problem that you have with Turkey, I think I can solve. I mean, as long as you're reasonable. You have to be reasonable. We have to be reasonable.”<sup>36</sup> And so, the matter remained unresolved at the time.

It was noted that, alongside this diplomatic activity, Israel was eager for Azerbaijan, which maintains good relations with both Israel and Türkiye, to resume its role as mediator. Azerbaijan had previously succeeded in facilitating the first reconciliation between Türkiye and Israel in 2016, playing a key role in bridging their positions.<sup>37</sup> On 19/2/2025, Hikmet Hacıyev, Assistant to the President of Azerbaijan and Head of the Foreign Policy Department of the Presidential Administration, visited Israel and met with Netanyahu, before traveling to Ankara a few days later. According to Azerbaijani media, his mission was to convey messages aimed at de-escalation between the two countries. There is a prevailing belief in Azerbaijan that, despite Erdoğan's longstanding hostile rhetoric and his support for Hamas, Israel has no reason to fear him.<sup>38</sup>





Communications between the parties led to military and security delegations from Türkiye and Israel meeting in the Azerbaijani capital, Baku, 9/4/2025, to discuss establishing a military mechanism aimed at avoiding friction between the two sides in Syria. This mechanism would mirror the previous arrangement between the Israeli army and Russian forces, involving a direct communication channel between the two militaries to enable prior coordination and prevent field confrontations. Under this model, the two sides would communicate before launching operations in sensitive areas, following the same coordination framework previously implemented with Russia.<sup>39</sup>

According to reports, the talks in Azerbaijan were technical in nature, with each side outlining its interests and red lines concerning the Syrian landscape. They attempted to draft a plan to prevent clashes and to establish a stable mechanism for avoiding friction stemming from their conflicting interests. Türkiye seeks to ensure the stability of the new Syrian regime and to preserve Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, while Israel aims to prevent Syria from acquiring significant military capabilities and to block any threatening Turkish military presence in the country.

On 12/4/2025, Turkish Deputy Foreign Minister Nuh Yilmaz addressed at the 4th Antalya Diplomacy Forum, the Türkiye-Israel contacts in Baku clarifying, "It was not a meeting that took place between diplomats. This is a mechanism aimed at preventing conflict," adding, "When you use airspace, you need to be in communication with other actors using that airspace. We've done this before — with Russia in Syrian airspace... This doesn't mean it was a political or diplomatic meeting."<sup>40</sup>

According to published reports, sources in the Turkish Ministry of Defense stressed that Ankara informed the Israeli delegation that in line with the demands of the new Syrian government, Türkiye is providing support to enhance its defensive capabilities and combat all terrorist organizations, especially the "Islamic State." The sources added that "Türkiye is evaluating the establishment of a training base in Syria, with the aim of supporting the territorial integrity, stability, and security of Syria and cleansing it of terrorism." Türkiye "has the intention, capacity, and vision to achieve this, with all activities conducted and to be conducted for this purpose taking place within the framework of the agreement between the two countries, according to international law, without targeting a third state." Israel, meanwhile, pursues a confrontational foreign policy and targets Türkiye with unfair accusations. The same sources reported that "the Israeli delegation made it unequivocally clear that any change in the deployment of foreign forces in Syria, particularly the establishment of Turkish bases in the Palmyra area, is a redline and will be considered a serious breach." Israel has previously conveyed that preventing such a threat is the responsibility of the government in Damascus.<sup>41</sup> The security establishment clarified that it has two red lines concerning Syria, which were conveyed during the talks with Türkiye. The first concerns the removal of all weaponry from the area in southern Syria bordering Israel, up to a depth of 80 kilometers from the border. The second concerns the freedom of the Israeli Air Force to operate in the skies of Syria and





Lebanon. On this matter, Israel made clear that it will not permit the introduction of radar or other systems into Syrian territory that could limit the operations of the air force, and that it is acting to prevent the entrenchment of any foreign military presence in Syria.<sup>42</sup>

Regarding Türkiye, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan clarified on 9/4/2025, “While we are conducting certain operations in Syria, there needs to be a deconfliction mechanism at a certain point with Israel, which flies aircraft in that region, just like we do with the Americans and the Russians.” “It is unacceptable for Israel to try and provoke in Syria by using its expansionist ambitions in the region.” Fidan also criticized Israel’s destruction of Syria’s military infrastructure following the departure of the ousted Assad regime, saying Tel Aviv has developed a strategy to leave the new Syrian administration and armed forces with “nothing,” and it is advancing it step by step. “We do not openly attack any country that does not attack us. (But) if an area of instability emerges in a neighboring country that could also harm us, we cannot remain a bystander,” he stressed, adding in such a case, Türkiye takes steps, primarily diplomatic ones.<sup>43</sup>

Based on what has been published about the talks in Azerbaijan, it can be concluded that the two sides did not reach any understandings. However, driven by their shared desire to overcome obstacles, they agreed to hold another round of talks.<sup>44</sup> Field developments continued despite both sides expressing a desire to avoid escalation, as tensions between them persisted. A Turkish report stated that on 2/5/2025, Israeli warplanes struck targets in the Damascus area, including bases belonging to the Sultan Murad and Suleiman Shah brigades, both backed by Türkiye. In response, Turkish fighter jets conducted reconnaissance missions in the same airspace as Israeli aircraft. A radio exchange took place between the two parties, and both sides refrained from direct confrontation.<sup>45</sup>

In this context, an Israeli report on 5/5/2025 revealed a meeting between representatives of the Israeli security establishment and Turkish officials to establish a coordination mechanism for the two armies’ operations in Syria.<sup>46</sup> A new round of talks between Israel and Türkiye on Syria was held in Azerbaijan during the second week of May 2025. An Israeli report quoted Israeli officials confirming that Israel is working to prevent the Turks from deeply entrenching their presence in Syria. Therefore, it set two conditions for any agreement: no military force exists near its border with Syria that could threaten its security; and second, confirming that Syria is free of strategic weapons that could directly endanger Israel.<sup>47</sup>

At the same time as this round, a report on Israel’s N12 channel, 15/5/2025, alleged that Israel is holding secret talks with the new Syrian regime, mediated by the United Arab Emirates. One of the key meetings reportedly took place in Azerbaijan between Major General Oded Basyuk, head of Operations Directorate in the Israeli army, and Syrian representatives.<sup>48</sup> However, no official Syrian statement has confirmed these claims.



**Oded Basyuk**



In a later development, on 21/5/2025, Israeli newspapers reported that Israel and Türkiye, following talks in Baku, had reached a “framework agreement to prevent military clashes between their forces in Syria,” and that the two sides had established a “hotline” for security coordination. According to the sources cited, Israel did not object in principle to the deployment of Turkish forces in Syria, including armored units and infantry, provided that no air defense systems or radars capable of detecting Israeli aerial movements were installed. The discussions reportedly focused on the so-called “Palmyra Line,” north of which Israel may allow the deployment of Turkish forces.<sup>49</sup> Israel “clarified its principled position on the importance it places on maintaining southern Syria as a demilitarized zone.”<sup>50</sup>

At this stage, tensions in the current hotspot, driven by the clash between Türkiye’s military operations in Syria and Israel’s response, appear to have cooled somewhat, at least in theory. This raises the possibility that Israel may scale back its deep incursions into Syrian territory. However, a practical assessment requires monitoring the implementation of the agreement reached between the two sides, the outcomes of future coordination meetings, and the results of security contacts and meetings between Syrian and Israeli officials, as reported by multiple independent sources.

### **Third: The SDF and Kurdish Forces in the Conflict Between Türkiye and Israel**

Amid ongoing tensions between Türkiye and Israel, the autonomous administration of northern and eastern Syria, led by SDF—a coalition dominated by Kurds and headed by Mazloum Abdi—has emerged as a key issue. Established in late 2015, the SDF includes a diverse mix of ethnic and religious groups, including Arabs, Assyrians, Turkmen, Armenians and Circassians. Its political wing is known as the Democratic Syria Council (DSC). This administration controls roughly a quarter of Syria’s territory, encompassing the governorates of Raqqqa, Hasakah, and Deir ez-Zor. It receives support from the US and Western countries under the justification of combating ISIS and other terrorist groups. However, the SDF simultaneously fights against Syrian forces backed by Türkiye and has also engaged in conflict with Assad’s regime forces.<sup>51</sup>



Türkiye firmly opposes the presence of SDF forces along its border and classifies them as a terrorist organization. In turn, the SDF refuses to disband or disarm, insisting on preserving the Autonomous Administration and securing self-governance within Syria, not full independence, under a democratic, pluralistic, federal parliamentary system. This would allow for decentralization, local rule, and independent security forces, an arrangement the new regime in Damascus rejects.

To shed light on some aspects of this issue, numerous reports have documented ongoing ties between the SDF and Israel, extending to the present day. Following the



fall of the Assad regime, Ariel Kahana, political commentator and White House correspondent for Israel Hayom, revealed that Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar held an extensive phone discussion with Ilham Ahmad, the SDF's foreign minister. Senior SDF officials reportedly appealed to Israel for urgent support, citing fears over the future of their autonomous rule.<sup>52</sup>

Galia Lindenstrauss, a senior research fellow at INSS at Tel Aviv University and editor of *Strategic Assessment* journal, specializing in contemporary Turkish foreign policy, believes that Israel's recent public support for the Kurds in Syria, especially Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar's remarks about ties with them, appears intended to pressure the US to avoid withdrawing from northeastern Syria.<sup>53</sup>

Among the reports discussing the presence of Syrian Kurds and the SDF within the opposing interests of Türkiye and Israel, an Israeli news report noted that President Erdoğan has escalated his rhetoric against Kurdish forces in northern Syria, seizing the new circumstances to deliver a major blow, despite appeals from the US and Western powers.<sup>54</sup>

After highlighting Israel's long-standing support for the Kurds in the region and its clear interest in maintaining the US military presence that protects the Kurds in Syria, Michael Harari, a fellow at the Israeli Mitvim Institute for Regional Foreign Policies and former ambassador to Cyprus, warned that "any Israeli policy perceived as overly aligned with the Kurdish side will likely provoke strong and confrontational Turkish responses toward Israel."<sup>55</sup>



In this context, Alon Ben-David emphasized that "the point of friction that should concern Israel is the Kurds in northeastern Syria (SDF), supported by the US, who have managed to maintain autonomy for most of the civil war years. If Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan carries out his threats and launches a scorched-earth campaign against them, it will place him on a collision course with the US and could ignite conflicts in other parts of Syria."<sup>56</sup> The author did not specify these parts. Efrat Aviv affirmed that "Turkey wants to eradicate all Kurdish activity in Syrian territory, especially along its border. But, as noted above, the Kurds are a partner Israel relies on. These are obviously conflicting interests."<sup>57</sup>

Following these reports, developments emerged that attracted Israel's attention. On 10/3/2025, an agreement was signed between Ahmad al-Sharaa and Mazloum Abdi, which included, among other points, the integration of the SDF into state institutions, a firm rejection of division, and a deadline to implement the agreement by the end of 2025. Limited practical steps indicated the SDF's partial commitment to the agreement, amid ongoing disagreements over the constitutional declaration and al-Sharaa's new government. Tensions sharply escalated after the Kurdish Unity and Position

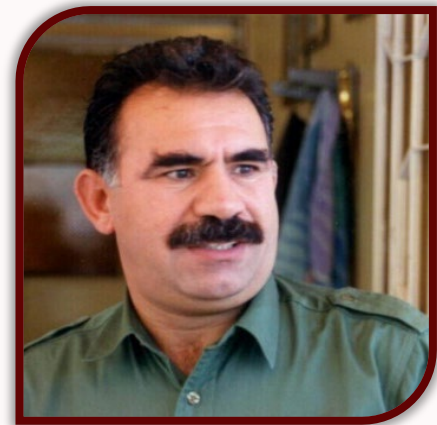


Conference, on 26/4/2025, the Syrian president's response, and the ensuing military clashes.

Regarding the fallout, unlike the favorable reception from Türkiye and the US administration of the agreement,<sup>58</sup> Israel expressed what it described as disappointment in its fraternal ties with the Kurds. The agreement “marks a clear indication of Israel's strategic failure in understanding how to effectively pursue its objectives in Syria,” as “Israel had hoped the Kurds would resist integration into al-Sharaa's regime.”<sup>59</sup>

Although Kurdish officials in Syria sought to reassure Israel, according to Roy Kays, a Kan 11 correspondent, that “the agreement aims to regulate their status within the new Syrian state and is not directed against Israel,”<sup>60</sup> the agreement was nonetheless perceived as a move to unify Syria and reject any attempts to divide it. This was, among other things, a clear message to Israel.<sup>61</sup>

In another Kurdish matter, while Türkiye expressed satisfaction with the historic announcement by Abdullah Öcalan, leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), imprisoned on an island off Istanbul (1/3/2025), “in which he called on the organization to lay down its arms and disband,” Israel viewed it “may be the impetus of a dramatic change in the balance of power in Syria and impact Turkey's regional status, as well as promoting the withdrawal of American forces from Syrian territory, challenging the continued Israeli presence in areas of southern Syria.” Israeli relief was also evident in Mazloun Abdi's statement denying “any connection between Öcalan's announcement and the PKK's decision and the conduct of his forces, and that the PKK's decision does not bind him.”<sup>62</sup>



**Abdullah Öcalan**

To date, the Kurdish issue in Syria remains a source of tension between Türkiye and Israel, with no signs that Israel will halt its interventions aimed at limiting the SDF's responses to the commitments under the agreement with the Damascus government, which Türkiye backs. Furthermore, apart from media reports, there is no clear indication of Israel's position on the PKK's move to dissolve itself.





#### Fourth: Maritime Border Delimitation Between Türkiye and Syria

There are emerging expectations of an agreement to delimit the maritime border between Türkiye and Syria, similar to the maritime deal Türkiye signed with Libya, which received UN approval and significantly altered the balance of power in the Eastern Mediterranean. According to Bloomberg, the “Turkish Minister of Transport claims Türkiye intends to begin negotiations with Syria to establish maritime boundaries in the Mediterranean Sea—an agreement that, according to him, would allow ‘both countries to expand their areas of influence in the search for energy.’ The minister also added that Türkiye is interested in cooperating with Syria on infrastructure projects, including ports.” Lieutenant Colonel (res.) Amit Yagur, the former deputy head of the Palestinian arena in the Planning Directorate of the Israeli military and the former head of the Northern Arena in the Naval Intelligence Division, commented that if an agreement between Türkiye and Syria were to take shape, it would merge their maritime zones, allowing for the joint exploration and exploitation of offshore oil and gas resources, and the establishment of a shared maritime security zone, particularly to secure the Gulf of Iskenderun from threats. Such a development would diminish the influence of Greece and Greek Cypriots, restrict the movement of Western naval forces in the Eastern Mediterranean, and undermine Israel’s maritime activities.<sup>63</sup>



Israeli Energy Minister Eli Cohen visited Greece, where he met with his Greek counterpart, Theodoros Skylakakis, to sign an agreement expanding cooperation in the energy sector, particularly regarding natural gas. Cohen emphasized, “The agreement to expand cooperation with Greece is of strategic importance for both countries. We agreed to accelerate the implementation of the undersea electricity cable that will connect Israel to the European power grid, and we discussed advancing a corridor for goods and energy infrastructure that will link Asia to Europe via the Gulf states, Israel, and Greece. These partnerships will diversify Europe’s energy sources, contribute to stability and prosperity in the Middle East, enhance our energy security, establish Israel as a bridge between East and West, and strengthen our position as a regional energy power.” In a related development, security cooperation between Israel and Greece has intensified. Greek Defense Minister Nikos Dendias announced a comprehensive partnership with Israel to establish a nationwide air defense system, further escalating tensions between Greece and Türkiye. Hay Eytan Cohen Yanarocak, an expert in international relations at the Moshe Dayan



**Eli Cohen**



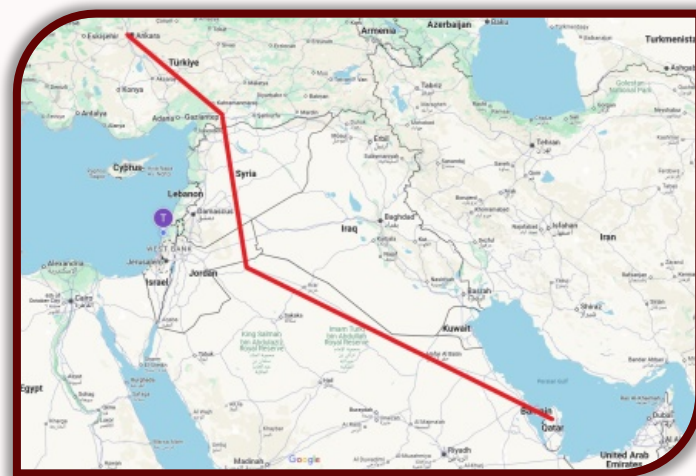


Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies at Tel Aviv University, noted that Türkiye perceives the strengthening ties between the countries as a direct challenge to itself: “Türkiye sees both Greece and Israel as a shared threat.” Israel uses this cooperation to consolidate its position as a regional power.<sup>64</sup>

According to Ron Ben-Yishai Turkey has “ambitions to control not only the gas fields of the Mediterranean but also to prevent Mediterranean states from trading and transporting gas to Europe. The economic friction over control of gas exploration zones around Cyprus and Turkey’s attempt to block the construction of an underwater gas pipeline in the Mediterranean—meant to transport gas from Egypt, Israel, and Cyprus to Europe—are central points of contention between Israel and Turkey.”<sup>65</sup>

### **Fifth: The Qatar–Türkiye Gas Pipeline Project**

Two days after the fall of the Assad regime, Turkish Minister of Energy and Natural Resources Alparslan Bayraktar was asked about a possible revival of the natural gas pipeline project, which could connect European countries and Türkiye to Qatar through Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Syria. Bayraktar said the realization of the pipeline could be possible “if Syria achieves its (territorial) integrity and stability.” He added, “If so, that line must be safe. We hope it will be so. If so, there are many projects to produce.”<sup>66</sup>

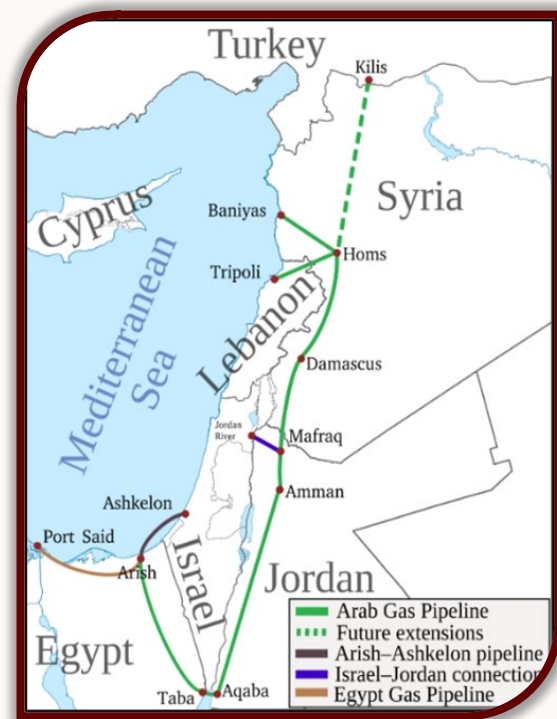


A previously postponed project, shelved since the war in Syria began in 2011, is now being reconsidered. It is expected to generate hundreds of billions of dollars, particularly for Türkiye and Qatar, at a time when most EU countries have sharply reduced their gas imports from Russia and halted them entirely following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. According to an Israeli report, Qatar holds a quarter of the world’s largest proven gas reserves and is rapidly working to increase its exports to Europe, as European countries aim to eliminate fossil fuel use, oil and natural gas, by 2050. From an Israeli standpoint, if implemented, this project would pose a challenge to Israel, as it would diminish its strategic appeal as a transit route for energy and goods from the Gulf and the East to Europe.<sup>67</sup>



The Middle East is undergoing a significant geopolitical shift: Türkiye is deepening its foothold in Syria through extensive infrastructure projects and far-reaching economic initiatives, warns Hay Eytan Cohen Yanarocak. This new reality in the Middle East requires Israel to prepare for proximity to a regional power that may appear distant on paper but is, in practice, already present. This evolving dynamic could dramatically alter the regional balance of power and calls for renewed strategic thinking.<sup>68</sup>

Elai Rettig, a professor specialized in energy geopolitics in the Department of Political Studies and a senior research fellow at the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies at Bar-Ilan University, noted that the collapse of the Assad regime has revived several important energy plans aimed at connecting the regional countries that were neglected due to the war in Syria. Currently, Turkish interest has returned to advancing this joint plan because it serves “several important Turkish interests. It would allow Turkey to strengthen its position as the main transit country for non-Russian gas to Europe; provide Turkey with an additional source of cheap gas to serve southeastern Turkey, which suffers from winter power outages due to unreliable supply from Iran and Iraq; and strengthen Turkish and Qatari ties with the new regime in Syria.” For Israel, Rettig adds, “the energy connection created between Turkey and Qatar through Syria could undermine some of its own ambitions to become part of an economic corridor between Europe and the Arab Gulf States, also known as the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMEC).” Rettig notes that “Turkey has been reexamining the possibility of connecting to the Arab Gas Pipeline through its mostly neglected section in Syria. The Arab Gas Pipeline, inaugurated in 2003, was initially designed to allow Egypt to export natural gas northward to Jordan and Syria. Plans to extend the pipeline further to Turkey were signed in 2006 and 2008 but abandoned in 2009, primarily due to financial disputes and the fact that Egypt was running out of gas to export. Today, the pipeline mainly serves Israel, as it transits Israeli gas to Jordan and southward to Egypt while the Syrian section remains unused.”<sup>69</sup>



Commenting on Erdoğan’s plans to revive Türkiye’s ambition of becoming a key gas hub for Europe, particularly after Germany signed an agreement to import liquefied gas from Qatar, Eitan Lasri warned that this could raise tensions along the border with Israel, which had already suspended negotiations over a pipeline to Türkiye due to international pressure. This development could destabilize the entire region and potentially escalate into a direct Türkiye-Israel confrontation.<sup>70</sup>

A key dimension of the anticipated conflict is Israel’s push to establish a broad security zone and assert its control over southern Syria, along with its plan to create the



“Saladin Corridor.” As previously noted, this corridor would obstruct the planned gas pipeline route from Qatar to Türkiye.

### **Sixth: The Development Road Project and the Integration of Syria into Türkiye’s Logistical Corridors**

In addition to previous plans and projects that Israel views as detrimental to its interests, the editor-in-chief of the Turkish newspaper Yeni Şafak, İbrahim Karagül, has predicted that the “Development Road” project between Türkiye and Iraq may be extended to include Syria as part of the southern corridor. This would link the Gulf states with Türkiye, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. The project goes beyond pipelines, laying the groundwork for comprehensive regional economic integration, a strategic shift in the regional balance of power. It is arguably the most significant investment in regional partnership since the Hijaz Railway. However, achieving this vision requires a key prerequisite: clearing eastern Euphrates of Kurdish factions and neutralizing Kurdish opposition in northern Iraq. Meanwhile, Israel is actively seeking to derail this integration by promoting what it terms the “Kurdish issue” as a means to serve its own strategic goals. Israel clearly recognizes that such regional cooperation would substantially reduce its influence and leverage in the region and is therefore making concerted efforts to prevent its advancement.<sup>71</sup>



Aligned with this scenario, an Israeli report emphasized Turkish Vice President Cevdet Yılmaz’s assertion of Syria’s strategic role as a transit and trade corridor. Syria is set to be integrated into Türkiye’s logistical routes, including the planned development corridor with Iraq and the proposed corridor linking Türkiye and Azerbaijan via Armenia. Furthermore, the anticipated signing of an exclusive maritime agreement between Türkiye and Syria, previously mentioned, has provoked protests from Greek Cyprus and the European Union. This development shifts the balance of power in the Eastern Mediterranean in favor of Türkiye, with implicit implications for Israel.<sup>72</sup>



A close examination of the six flashpoints between Israel and Türkiye on the Syrian front reveals that they cannot be separated from the tense strategic environment emerging in the area and its surroundings. An environment that Israeli circles have closely analyzed, articulating their perspective and proposed courses of action.



## Conclusion

The assessments regarding the Türkiye–Israel confrontation in the Syrian arena draw on concepts and strategic benchmarks shaped by power dynamics. These dynamics stem from conflicting spheres of influence and divergent political, security and economic interests. They are understood as facts and perceptions linked to each side’s national security.

As for forecasts, weighing the characteristics of the six flashpoints of between Türkiye and Israel, outlined earlier, suggests that three are likely to remain relatively tense in the current phase:

- ▶ 1. Turkish-Syrian military cooperation, driven by several factors, including the success of Türkiye’s military experience in Azerbaijan.
- ▶ 2. Türkiye’s insistence on Israel’s withdrawal from areas it has recently expanded into, and on halting its broader military operations in Syria.
- ▶ 3. Türkiye’s continued threats of military action regarding the SDF. So far, no resolution has emerged for Türkiye’s disputes with Israel and the US over this issue.

Given the orientations of the new government in Syria and the developments that have accumulated, it is expected that this administration will continue to prioritize alignment with the Turkish position, particularly in securing conditions that help reduce the impact of Israeli interventions. The Syrian leadership is likely to benefit from Türkiye’s support, while at the same time seeking to distance itself from conflicts it neither desires nor is equipped to handle, now and in the foreseeable future. The supportive Arab environment surrounding Syria will undoubtedly provide important leverage to help it manage the burdens of the transitional period and beyond, while also easing the harsh costs and consequences of the emerging polarization between Türkiye and Israel.





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