



Primer: Enhancing Better Equilibrium in the Middle East

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“The only thing that's worked are these powerful leadership regimes: either benevolent monarchies, the kind of a monarchical republic. Everything else, this Arab Spring, just faded away and evaporated. Countries that have put on this cloak of democracy, or that we've gone after for human rights, have failed”, US ambassador to Turkey Tom Barrack recently said at the [Antalya Forum](#), adding: “This part of the world respects only one thing: power. And if you don't reflect power, if you reflect weakness, you are on your heels. Syria is a great example of that. Why is Syria working? Because you have a powerful, strong, courageous leader that people may not have agreed with, whatever the points of views were in the past—but they see him leading someplace.” The whole speech is worth listening to in full, but the part that was most interesting is this. “If you wake up in Tel Aviv, you read the newspaper, and what do you see? You see a diagram in the paper of the Ottoman Empire 2.0. The Ottoman Empire is Vienna to the Maldives. Right, this is the view that Israel is presenting of what Türkiye should be. You wake up in Istanbul, and you read the paper, and it's the Greater Israel, Vienna to the Maldives.”

The bigger structural risk however, is that Israel and Turkey are both perhaps, determined to go to war. They are both in their formative regional hegemonic stages, and naturally a clash if not inevitable is still very likely, and one enjoys natural demographic advantage in the region and is slow and calculating, and the other is therefore more coercive and increasingly paranoid. It is inevitable, because that is what happens when you have two expansionist powers in one region, with no other threats nearby. The Iran war, therefore, is the reason that Turkey and Israel are the final two hegemonic aspirants in the Middle East, and the collapse of Iranian power is why Turkey and Israel will eventually collide.

Structure Determines Rivalry

The collapse of Nazi Germany resulted in the former wartime allies of USSR and USA to follow through towards a global rivalry between them. Something similar is happening in the middle east, with the collapse of the Shia Axis. A war with Iran significantly elevates Turkey's strategic importance in America, primarily because of geography and infrastructure, but also as evident from recent overtures, on technology. Turkey controls access points between Europe, the Middle

East, and the Black Sea, and hosts critical NATO assets such as Incirlik Air Base, and can mass produce cheap drones. In a conflict scenario Ankara is indispensable for logistics, intelligence, and containment of escalation. At the same time, Turkey has consistently opposed maximum-pressure strategies on Iran and resisted being drawn into a regional conflagration. Ankara's persistent hedging strategy between the US, NATO, EU and Russia has one single hinge point... a war with Israel, which will destabilize both EU and NATO permanently.

At the regional level, the relative weakening of Iran intersects with Turkey's longstanding competitive engagements across Syria, Iraq, and the South Caucasus, thereby creating openings for an expanded Turkish role. However, this opportunity structure is conditioned by the necessity of avoiding a scenario of Iranian state collapse, which could reproduce patterns of protracted instability previously observed in neighboring contexts. Taken together, these converging dynamics position Erdoğan to potentially emerge from the current crisis with enhanced geopolitical influence, contingent upon his capacity to manage the inherent tensions between opportunistic expansion and systemic risk. If Israel were to rhetorically or strategically recast Turkey as a primary regional adversary akin to Iran, it would present a profound dilemma for American strategic circles. Unlike Iran, Turkey is a NATO member with deep institutional, demographic, and logistical ties to Europe, making any equivalence fundamentally destabilizing to alliance structures.

A Fractured Demos

The problem for the US is also domestic, an effort that refuses any normalisation of relations in the Middle East. The executive branch, particularly the Pentagon and State Department, tends to emphasize Turkey's strategic importance and advocates engagement despite disagreements. In contrast, Congress, since at least the time of Barack Obama, has often taken a more punitive stance, reflecting both normative concerns such as human rights, and domestic lobby groups and political pressures.

Any direct confrontation between Turkey and Israel over Cyprus or Eastern Mediterranean energy disputes, with the United States attempting to avoid an explicit alignment with either party will be a final nail in the coffin of NATO, which, without American explicit support, is already a husk. Turkey's status as a treaty ally and Israel's unparalleled support in the US Congress would result in a situation similar to the Falklands crisis: a war between US allies Great Britain and Argentina. To avoid taking a side in that scenario would require active neutrality tilted toward conflict management. But the war would spread in Europe and Greece, and quite obviously across Syria and Cyprus. Ultimately, Washington's approach would reflect a hierarchy of interests: avoiding intra-alliance war, maintaining freedom of navigation and energy development, and preventing external actors such as Russia from exploiting divisions.

The structural reality however is that Turkey occupies a pivotal position in the American alliance

system, as a geographically pivotal power. In Europe, Turkey is closely tied to the politics of migration governance. As a principal transit corridor, Ankara retains considerable leverage over the regulation of migratory flows toward Europe. The prospect of renewed large-scale displacement, comparable to that associated with the Syrian conflict, has incentivized European actors such as Germany, to adopt a more pragmatic posture toward Turkey, even at the expense of normative concerns regarding democratic backsliding. Finally, Ankara has also identified the defense sector as a critical arena for strategic expansion. Additional factors such as Turkey's expanding military-industrial capabilities in the spheres of drones and technology, have further elevated Ankara's strategic value for European policymakers. Turkish policymakers increasingly frame these initiatives within a broader strategic vision of constructing a more autonomous regional security architecture not just to counterbalance Israel but also to further entrench itself in the logistical chain within NATO, absent America.

Historical Lessons for Hegemons

A common historiographical puzzle in international relations is the causal logic and timing of British entry into the Second World War. From a formal perspective, Britain's treaty commitments and strategic interests appeared stronger in earlier crises, such as the Second Schleswig War (1864) and World War I (1914), than in the case of Poland in 1939. Likewise, the dismantling of Czechoslovakia, a liberal democracy, might have seemed a more natural trigger for intervention than the invasion of a more reactionary Poland. Yet it was the German attack on Poland, rather than the earlier capitulation at Munich Agreement, that precipitated British war entry. Realist interpretations explain this apparent paradox by emphasizing the balance of power: once Poland fell, France remained the sole continental counterweight to Nazi Germany, making its defense strategically indispensable. This same logic of systemic balancing extended to the United States' eventual involvement.

As Hans Morgenthau wrote, and Secretary of War Henry Stimson argued during the Second World War, the survival of the British Empire became essential to hemispheric security, given the unacceptable prospect of German dominance extending across the Atlantic, from Greenland to Canada, when it was evident that London was the last entity standing against a consolidated hegemony in Europe. Put simply, both British and American interventions were less about legal commitments or ideological, religious, or linguistic affinities than about preventing the emergence of a hegemon capable of overturning the equilibrium.

Current Turkish-Israeli dynamics are increasingly similar. Statements by Israeli politicians such as Naftali Bennett and Yoav Gallant suggest that Israeli strategic thinking now situates Turkey alongside Iran as a potential long-term rival. Turkish military deployments in northern Syria, combined with its expanding political influence in the region, have also altered the regional balance for Israel. Simultaneously, emerging alignments among Greece, Israel, and Cyprus, illustrated by joint military coordination and naval signaling, indicate the crystallization of

balancing regional blocs.

In this scenario, the structural consequences of weakening Iran may prove more destabilizing than the status quo it replaces. Iran's demographic and sectarian limitations, particularly its reliance on Shiite networks in a predominantly Sunni region, constrain its hegemonic potential, yet its erosion could intensify competition between other regional powers, notably Israel and Turkey. In this sense, the current trajectory resembles earlier balance-of-power transitions: rather than resolving instability, the decline of one actor may inaugurate a new era of rivalry, where the best option for the United States would potentially be an active and preemptive proclamation of neutrality and push for diplomacy, similar to previous instances under George Washington, Ulysses Grant, and Theodore Roosevelt.