

Turkey, Israel and the Emerging Architecture of Confrontation: An Indicator-Based Security Science Analysis

Prof. Dr. Darko Trifunovic

(RIEAS Director of International Relations, Director and Founder, Institute for National and International Security (INIS) and Editor -in-Chief, Security Science Journal)

Copyright: @ 2026 Research Institute for European and American Studies (www.rieas.gr)

Publication date: 30 August 2026

Note: The article reflects the opinion of the author and not necessarily the views of the Research Institute for European and American Studies

The possibility of a future military confrontation between Turkey and Israel should no longer be examined exclusively through the prism of inflammatory political rhetoric. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's increasingly hostile discourse toward Israel is important, but rhetoric alone does not constitute evidence of an intention to wage war. A serious security assessment requires something different: identifying and interpreting political, military, geographical, ideological, economic, and alliance-related indicators that, when examined together, may reveal the gradual creation of conditions under which confrontation becomes possible.

This analysis therefore applies an **indicator-based methodological approach grounded in Security Science (SS)**. Its purpose is not to claim that Turkey has already made a political or military decision to attack Israel. No publicly available evidence currently justifies such a definitive conclusion. Instead, the analysis examines observable indicators of changes in the security environment, capabilities, strategic positioning and geopolitical relationships to assess a more relevant early-warning question: **Is Turkey gradually acquiring the strategic position, regional influence, military capabilities and geopolitical architecture that could provide Ankara with the option of confronting Israel in the future?**

One ideological dimension of this problem lies in Dabiq's symbolism. Precision is essential here. The apocalyptic significance of Dabiq does not originate in the Qur'an but in Islamic hadith tradition. ISIS transformed the small Syrian town into one of the central symbols of its propaganda, presenting it as a location associated with an eventual great confrontation between Muslim and non-Muslim forces. ISIS even named its English-language propaganda magazine

Dabiq. When Turkish-backed Syrian forces captured the town from ISIS in October 2016, its military importance was relatively limited, but its ideological significance was enormous.

Dabiq should therefore not be presented as evidence that Erdoğan himself is planning an eschatological war. Instead, it should be understood as part of a broader ideological environment in which religious symbolism, historical memory, and contemporary geopolitics can interact. In Security Science, ideological narratives become particularly relevant when they overlap with political objectives, military capabilities, and changes in the security environment.

The much more important development today is **Syria**.

Following the collapse of Bashar al-Assad's regime, Turkey acquired an opportunity to achieve something Ankara had pursued for years: profound political, economic, and security influence over Syria. This fundamentally changes the Turkish-Israeli strategic equation. Israel is no longer evaluating only traditional threats associated with Iran, Hezbollah and remnants of the former Syrian military infrastructure. It must increasingly consider what a permanent or semi-permanent Turkish security presence inside Syria could mean for Israel's northern strategic environment.

Recent developments surrounding Syrian military facilities demonstrate the seriousness of this problem. Israeli concerns regarding potential Turkish deployments, military infrastructure, drones, air-defense capabilities and military cooperation with Damascus have created circumstances in which Turkish and Israeli security interests increasingly occupy the same geographical space. Washington's efforts to establish mechanisms intended to prevent accidental escalation between Turkey, Israel and Syria are themselves an important early-warning indicator. Great powers do not normally establish military deconfliction mechanisms unless they perceive a realistic possibility that forces or strategic interests could collide.

This brings the analysis toward **southern Syria and the Golan Heights**. Turkey does not need to deploy troops directly opposite Israeli positions on the Golan for the strategic balance to change. The critical variable is strategic depth. If Turkish advisers, intelligence structures, drones, electronic-warfare capabilities, air-defense systems, or access to Syrian military installations gradually move southward, Israel could eventually face a completely different military geography.

The appearance of a major Turkish military power in the Syrian security equation would represent a structural transformation, regardless of whether Ankara initially described such deployments as training, stabilization, or defense cooperation. From an early-warning perspective, the critical indicators would therefore be not only declared Turkish intentions but the geographical movement of military capabilities, logistical infrastructure, command structures and intelligence assets.

The second geographical dimension is the **Eastern Mediterranean**. Turkey's policy toward Northern Cyprus, its maritime arrangements with Libya and its broader maritime strategy cannot automatically be interpreted as preparation for conflict with Israel. Nevertheless, these policies collectively demonstrate Ankara's determination to create strategic depth extending from

Anatolia across the Eastern Mediterranean toward North Africa. Energy resources, maritime boundaries, naval mobility, and future energy corridors make this region increasingly important. Geographically, Turkey's position, Northern Cyprus, its relationship with Libya, its influence in Syria, and its growing naval capabilities create interconnected zones of Turkish influence across much of the Eastern Mediterranean. At the same time, Israel has developed important strategic and energy relationships with Greece and Cyprus.

What may appear to be separate disputes can therefore increasingly be understood as components of a larger geopolitical competition over the future security, energy and strategic architecture of the Eastern Mediterranean.

Gaza represents another crucial dimension of Erdoğan's geopolitical strategy. Turkey has tried to position itself as one of the strongest political defenders of the Palestinian cause, an important interlocutor with Palestinian political actors, a diplomatic participant in negotiations, and a potential stakeholder in the post-war regional order. Gaza gives Erdoğan something strategically valuable: an issue that can connect Turkish foreign policy with public opinion across much of the Muslim world. This matters because competition with Israel is not exclusively military. It is also a competition for political legitimacy, influence and regional leadership. By placing the Palestinian issue near the center of Turkish regional diplomacy, Erdoğan can present Turkey as a power capable of articulating positions that some Arab governments, because of their relations with Washington or Israel, may be reluctant to express as forcefully. Gaza consequently provides Ankara with political leverage extending far beyond Palestinian territory.

The Intelligence Dimension: Turkey, MIT and Hamas

An additional indicator that deserves particular attention is the **intelligence dimension of Turkey's involvement in the Palestinian issue**. Ankara's role cannot be assessed exclusively through Erdoğan's political rhetoric, diplomatic initiatives or humanitarian engagement with Gaza. Turkey also maintains direct channels of communication with Hamas at the highest political and intelligence levels. The involvement of the Turkish National Intelligence Organization (MIT), including contacts between its leadership and senior Hamas representatives, demonstrates that Ankara possesses something strategically more significant than political sympathy: **access**. Such access should not be interpreted as evidence that Turkey controls Hamas or directs its military activities. No publicly available evidence currently justifies such a conclusion. Turkey itself presents these contacts primarily within the framework of mediation, ceasefire negotiations and efforts to achieve a political settlement in Gaza.

Nevertheless, from an indicator-based Security Science perspective, the existence of sustained intelligence-level communication with a major non-state actor involved in direct armed confrontation with Israel constitutes an important strategic capability. Intelligence access gives Turkey the potential to understand internal calculations, communicate proposals, influence negotiations, and potentially shape the behavior of actors that Israel regards as direct security

threats. This gives Ankara an additional instrument of regional influence that operates below conventional military power. This indicator would become more significant if the relationship shifted from **communication and mediation toward operational assistance**. Evidence of intelligence sharing related to Israeli military activity, military training, weapons transfers, targeting assistance, command-and-control support or coordinated operational planning would represent a qualitatively different level of involvement. No such conclusion should presently be drawn without credible evidence. The critical early-warning distinction is therefore between **access, influence and operational support**. Turkey clearly possesses access and seeks influence. Whether this relationship ever develops toward operational security cooperation represents an indicator that should be monitored carefully. In this sense, Gaza is not only a humanitarian, diplomatic and ideological component of Turkish regional policy. It also provides Ankara with an important **intelligence and non-state actor dimension** in its increasingly complex relationship with Israel.

A further element is **Turkey's complex relationship with Russia**. Ankara and Moscow offer an unusual example of two states that can simultaneously cooperate and compete across multiple theatres. They have stood on opposing sides in Syria and Libya, competed for influence in the Black Sea and the Caucasus, and disagreed over Ukraine, while maintaining substantial economic, energy and diplomatic relations. This relationship reveals an important characteristic of Erdoğan's foreign policy: **strategic flexibility**. Turkey does not necessarily divide the international system into permanent allies and permanent enemies. Ankara has demonstrated an ability to compartmentalize competition, cooperation, and economic interests. This experience may shape how Turkey manages its increasingly adversarial relationship with Israel. Erdoğan may seek to increase pressure and strategic capabilities while remaining below the threshold of direct war for as long as this serves Turkish interests.

Turkey's evolving relations with **Pakistan and Saudi Arabia** should also be considered within this framework. Growing political, security, and defense cooperation among these states does not constitute evidence of an anti-Israeli military alliance, and it would be analytically irresponsible to describe it as such without evidence. Nevertheless, it is part of a broader process through which Turkey is expanding defense-industrial, military, and political relationships across the Muslim world. Pakistan brings nuclear status and considerable military capabilities. Saudi Arabia brings extraordinary financial resources and influence in the Arab and Islamic worlds. Turkey brings NATO experience, a large conventional military, significant geographic positioning, and an increasingly sophisticated domestic defense industry.

The strategic significance lies less in what these states have formally promised one another today than in the possibilities that increasingly institutionalized cooperation could create tomorrow.

The **Balkans** constitute another layer of Turkey's wider geopolitical architecture. Ankara maintains substantial political, economic, cultural, and military relationships across Southeastern Europe, particularly with Albania, Kosovo, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, while also maintaining important relations with other regional governments. Separately, Albania, Croatia, and Kosovo have developed their own trilateral defense cooperation. These processes should not be artificially merged into a fictitious Turkish-controlled Balkan military alliance. No publicly

available evidence supports such a conclusion. Nevertheless, from a strategic-influence perspective, Turkey has established a network of relationships extending from Anatolia deep into Southeastern Europe. The importance of this network is not that Balkan states would necessarily participate in a Turkish-Israeli confrontation. Rather, it demonstrates the geographical breadth of Ankara's increasingly multidirectional foreign and security policy and its ambition to remain an influential actor simultaneously in Europe, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, the Caucasus and the wider Islamic world.

Perhaps the most underestimated variable, however, lies **inside Turkey itself**. Turkey faces substantial economic pressures and deep political polarization. Inflation, currency pressures, living costs and broader economic uncertainty directly affect ordinary Turkish citizens. At the same time, Erdoğan faces significant political opposition and an increasingly contested domestic environment. This introduces a classical security concern: the potential **externalization of internal political and economic pressure**. There is no evidence that Erdoğan has decided to initiate a war to preserve political power, and such a claim should not be made without evidence. Nevertheless, history provides numerous examples of governments that, confronted by economic difficulties, declining public confidence, or political polarization, have increasingly relied on nationalism, external threats, and foreign-policy crises to consolidate domestic support. For this reason, one of the most important indicators to monitor is the relationship between deteriorating domestic conditions and Erdoğan's foreign-policy rhetoric. If worsening economic or political pressures are repeatedly followed by stronger nationalist, religious, or anti-Israeli mobilization, this correlation would deserve serious analytical attention.

From Political Adversary to Perceived Security Threat

Perhaps one of the most important indicators in this assessment is the potential transformation of **Israel's position within Turkey's threat perception**. There is a fundamental difference between describing another state as a political adversary, condemning its military operations or accusing its government of violations of international law, and beginning to characterize that state as a **threat to national security**.

Recent Turkish rhetoric deserves particular attention because Erdoğan has increasingly connected Israeli military activities in Syria and Lebanon with Turkey's own security environment. Such statements may represent more than another escalation in diplomatic language. They could indicate the beginning of a conceptual transition in which Israel is no longer perceived exclusively through the Palestinian question or broader Middle Eastern politics, but increasingly through the framework of **Turkish national security**.

From an indicator-based Security Science perspective, this distinction is critical. Political hostility does not necessarily lead to military confrontation. States can maintain deeply antagonistic political relationships for decades without preparing for war. A transformation in officially perceived security endangerment, however, can have substantially different

consequences because it may eventually influence national-security strategy, intelligence priorities, military doctrine, defense procurement, operational planning and force deployment.

The critical question is therefore whether this rhetorical transformation remains political or becomes **institutionalized within the Turkish security system**. If references to Israel as a threat to Turkey begin appearing systematically in official national-security documents, military assessments, intelligence priorities, defense planning or statements by senior military and security officials, this would represent a significantly stronger indicator than Erdoğan's rhetoric alone.

An even more important threshold would be reached if such a change in threat perception were accompanied by corresponding changes in capabilities and geographical positioning: Turkish military infrastructure in Syria; movement of air-defense or electronic-warfare systems toward southern Syria; expanded intelligence collection directed against Israel; increased naval deployments in the Eastern Mediterranean; or operational coordination with regional actors hostile to Israel.

At that point, several previously separate indicators would begin to converge:

political hostility → threat perception → securitization → institutional adaptation → military capability → operational positioning.

This sequence represents one of the clearest early-warning pathways identified in this Analytical Review. The decisive question is therefore not simply whether Erdoğan's rhetoric toward Israel is becoming more aggressive, but whether **the Turkish state itself is gradually redefining Israel from a political adversary into a national-security threat**.

Within the framework of Security Science, such a transformation would represent a qualitative change in the **security problem**, particularly if changing threat perception began to influence institutional behavior, military doctrine, and the range of responses the Turkish state considers legitimate.

Another crucial indicator is Turkey's rapidly developing **defense-industrial capability**. Turkey has invested heavily in unmanned systems, missiles, naval platforms, electronic warfare, air defense, and indigenous combat-aircraft programs. These capabilities significantly increase Ankara's strategic autonomy. A state with domestic production capacity for critical weapons systems has far greater freedom of action during a prolonged international crisis than one that depends primarily on foreign suppliers.

Turkey's growing military-industrial complex therefore represents an important structural variable in any long-term assessment of Turkish regional power. **Capabilities, however, do not imply intent**. Turkey's military modernization serves numerous objectives unrelated to Israel. The key early-warning question is whether military capabilities begin to converge with changing threat perceptions, geographical positioning, political narratives, and strategic behavior.

Iran must also be incorporated into this equation. Turkey and Iran are simultaneously competitors and partners whose interests overlap across Syria, Iraq, the Caucasus and Central Asia. A significant weakening of Iranian regional influence could create a geopolitical vacuum that Turkey might attempt to fill. This creates a potentially paradoxical development: Iran's weakening, traditionally regarded as beneficial to Israeli security, could eventually facilitate the emergence of another powerful regional competitor with substantially greater conventional military capabilities, economic potential, geographical depth, and NATO military experience.

Turkey should therefore be increasingly considered an independent center **of regional power**.

For decades, strategic competition in the Middle East was frequently conceptualized around Israel, Iran and the Arab states. Turkey increasingly represents a **fourth center of power with its own geopolitical ambitions, seeking influence across the Balkans, Black Sea, Caucasus, Syria, Iraq, Eastern Mediterranean, Libya, the Gulf region**, and the wider Islamic world.

The emerging competition may consequently involve something considerably larger than the bilateral relationship between Erdoğan and the Israeli leadership. The fundamental question may increasingly become:

Who will shape the emerging regional order?

Israel and Turkey possess characteristics that make their potential rivalry particularly consequential. Both have sophisticated armed forces, powerful intelligence services, advanced defense industries and extensive regional networks. Turkey is a NATO member with a population exceeding 80 million, substantial territory and considerable strategic depth. Israel possesses significant technological advantages, highly developed intelligence capabilities, close strategic relations with the United States and a widely assumed nuclear deterrent.

A direct military confrontation between them would therefore differ fundamentally from most recent Middle Eastern conflicts. Yet the most dangerous scenario may not begin with a deliberate Turkish decision to initiate war. It may begin with **miscalculation**.

Consider a scenario in which Israel attacks a Syrian military installation where Turkish personnel are present. Turkish soldiers are killed. Ankara retaliates against the platform or military asset responsible for the attack. Israel responds against Turkish military infrastructure. Turkey activates additional assets in Syria and the Eastern Mediterranean. Political leaders on both sides then confront domestic public opinion, national prestige, and military pressures that make immediate de-escalation increasingly difficult.

Under such circumstances, the distinction between strategic competition and direct military confrontation could disappear rapidly.

This scenario illustrates why Security Science should focus on **indicators rather than deterministic predictions**. Among the most important are the geographical movement of

Turkish military assets inside Syria, particularly toward southern Syria; permanent Turkish access to Syrian airbases; deployment of Turkish air-defence, drone and electronic-warfare systems; increased Turkish-Syrian intelligence integration; changes in Israeli targeting patterns against facilities associated with Turkey; expansion of Turkish naval activity in the Eastern Mediterranean; further institutionalization of Turkey's defence relationships with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia; developments surrounding Gaza; Ankara's relationships with Russia and Iran; continued expansion of Turkey's military-industrial capabilities; and the relationship between domestic political-economic pressures and increasingly confrontational foreign-policy narratives.

Within this broader set of indicators, a particularly important warning signal would be the **formal institutionalization of Israel as a threat to Turkish national security**, especially if accompanied by corresponding changes in military doctrine, operational planning, intelligence priorities and force deployment.

None of these indicators independently proves that Turkey is preparing to attack Israel. **Their significance lies in their potential convergence.**

Their convergence would be far more significant. This distinction is central to the methodology applied here. Individual developments may have entirely rational explanations unrelated to war preparation. Military modernization can serve deterrence. Cooperation with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia can serve broader strategic objectives. Turkish involvement in Gaza can be diplomatic. The relationship with Libya can be maritime and economic. Influence in Syria can be motivated by Kurdish security concerns. Relations with Russia can be transactional. Nationalist rhetoric can serve domestic politics. But when several independent indicators begin moving simultaneously in the same strategic direction, their cumulative significance changes. That is precisely where an **indicator-based Security Science assessment** becomes useful.

Dabiq consequently belongs at the beginning of this analysis as a warning about the power of historical and religious narratives, but it should not determine its conclusion. Prophecy does not predict modern conflicts. They are anticipated through observable changes in capabilities, military geography, logistics, alliances, threat perceptions, political narratives, and strategic behavior. The greatest analytical mistake would therefore be to claim with certainty that Erdoğan will attack Israel. The second major mistake would be to dismiss the possibility simply because such an attack appears irrational today. Security analysis exists precisely in the space between those two errors. Turkey is constructing an increasingly autonomous geopolitical position stretching across several strategic regions.

Syria provides Ankara with unprecedented influence immediately adjacent to Israel's northern security environment. Gaza provides political leverage and legitimacy across significant parts of the Muslim world. The Eastern Mediterranean provides strategic geography. Northern Cyprus and Libya extend Turkey's maritime reach. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia potentially broaden its security network. The Balkans provide another dimension of political and strategic influence. Russia demonstrates Ankara's capacity for transactional great-power balancing. Turkey's defense

industry provides increasing strategic and military autonomy. Iran's changing regional position may create additional geopolitical space. Domestic political and economic pressures, meanwhile, could strengthen incentives for nationalist mobilization and a more confrontational foreign policy.

Individually, these developments have different explanations.

Together, they constitute a pattern that deserves serious attention.

The fundamental early-warning question is therefore no longer simply:

Will Turkey attack Israel?

A more sophisticated Security Science question is:

Is Turkey gradually constructing the geopolitical architecture, strategic depth, military capabilities, regional partnerships and domestic political narrative that could make a future confrontation with Israel possible?

At present, publicly available evidence does not allow us to conclude that Erdoğan or the Turkish state has decided on war. But the accumulation and potential convergence of indicators suggest something sufficiently important for Israel, NATO and the wider international security community to examine carefully:

Turkey may be acquiring the option.

And in strategic and security analysis, creating an option can precede the political decision to use it by years. The Syrian Proxy Hypothesis and the Greece–Cyprus–Israel Strategic Triangle

An additional indicator deserves particular attention: the possibility that Turkey may seek to confront or strategically pressure Israel not through a direct Turkish military attack, but indirectly through the emerging security architecture of the new Syrian state. This possibility should be described as the **Syrian Proxy Hypothesis**. At present, there is insufficient publicly available evidence to conclude that the government of President Ahmed al-Sharaa is acting as a Turkish proxy against Israel. Indeed, Damascus has publicly stated that it seeks a security arrangement with Israel and wishes to avoid confrontation. Nevertheless, the growing asymmetry between Turkish and Syrian power, Turkey's political influence over the post-Assad authorities, military training of Syrian personnel, defense cooperation, and Turkish involvement in rebuilding Syrian security institutions create conditions that require careful monitoring.

The distinction is fundamental. A proxy relationship does not necessarily require formal subordination or direct operational control. From a Security Science perspective, the relevant question is whether a stronger state can progressively shape a weaker partner's military capabilities, threat perceptions, strategic priorities, and operational environment in ways that serve the stronger state's geopolitical objectives. This is where the evolution of the relationship between Ankara and Damascus becomes particularly important. Turkey has supported the new Syrian authorities politically and economically while expanding cooperation in defense, security, training, energy, and reconstruction. Turkish officers have participated in military cooperation and training activities, while Syrian personnel have received training connected with Turkey. This creates a potential mechanism through which Ankara could influence the development of

the post-Assad Syrian armed forces without necessarily deploying large Turkish combat formations close to Israel. Such a scenario would provide Turkey with significant strategic advantages.

Ankara could increase pressure on Israel while remaining formally below the threshold of direct Turkish-Israeli war. Syrian military forces would remain Syrian forces; Syrian bases would formally remain under Syrian sovereignty; and disputes concerning the Golan Heights would continue to be presented as Syrian national-security issues rather than Turkish territorial ambitions. This would create a form of **strategic deniability**. The most important indicator would therefore not necessarily be the appearance of Turkish troops on the Golan Heights. It would be the emergence of Syrian military capabilities whose effectiveness increasingly depends upon Turkish training, intelligence, command-and-control assistance, drones, electronic warfare, air defense, logistics, or weapons systems. If these capabilities were progressively moved toward southern Syria, the significance would increase considerably.

Israel appears already to recognize this possibility as a security concern. The Israeli strike against Abu al-Duhur airbase in August 2026 is particularly significant because Israel stated that its objective was to prevent a Turkish military deployment. Syria and Turkey denied that a permanent Turkish base was being established. At the same time, Syrian officials confirmed that Turkish officers had visited the facility in the context of military training and cooperation. This incident demonstrates an important change in Israeli threat perception. Israel is no longer concerned exclusively with Iranian military entrenchment inside Syria.

Turkish military influence inside Syria itself is becoming part of Israeli security calculations.

This creates the possibility of a profound transformation of the regional security architecture. For decades, Israel's northern strategic problem was primarily associated with Syria, Hezbollah and Iran. If Iranian influence declines while Turkish influence simultaneously expands, Israel could eventually confront a different type of strategic challenge: not an Iranian-controlled network of non-state actors, but a neighboring Syrian state whose military capabilities are increasingly rebuilt, trained or supported by Turkey. This would represent a fundamentally different security problem.

Greece and Cyprus: The Counterbalancing Architecture

This is precisely why **Greece and the Republic of Cyprus must be incorporated much more prominently into the analysis.**

The emerging Greece–Cyprus–Israel relationship is no longer simply an energy partnership. It increasingly possesses an explicit security and military dimension. In 2026, Greece, Cyprus and Israel adopted a Joint Action Plan, while Greece and Israel separately adopted a Military Cooperation Program involving joint operational activities, Special Operations Forces training, staff-level cooperation and consultations. This represents an important counterbalancing

development in the Eastern Mediterranean. From Ankara's perspective, Turkey faces an increasingly interconnected strategic environment extending from Greece through Cyprus to Israel. From the Israeli perspective, Greece and Cyprus provide geographical, political and military depth west of Israel at precisely the moment when Turkish influence is expanding to Israel's north through Syria. The geographical pattern is therefore particularly significant. To Israel's north, Turkish influence is expanding through Syria. To Israel's northwest, Turkey maintains overwhelming influence over Northern Cyprus. Farther west, Ankara has established a maritime and strategic relationship with Libya. Against this emerging Turkish geographical architecture, another axis is simultaneously consolidating:

Israel–Cyprus–Greece.

This should not automatically be described as an anti-Turkish military alliance. Nevertheless, its strategic logic increasingly centers on shared security concerns in the Eastern Mediterranean. Greece and Israel are expanding military cooperation, while Israel has become an increasingly important supplier of advanced military technology to Greece. The strengthening of Greek-Israeli defense cooperation is therefore another indicator that the regional system itself may already be responding to Turkey's growing power. Cyprus occupies an especially sensitive position within this architecture. The island lies geographically between Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and the wider Eastern Mediterranean. Its continuing division means that any serious deterioration in Turkish-Israeli relations would inevitably increase the strategic importance of Cyprus. This produces two competing geographical structures.

One can be conceptualized as:

Turkey – Northern Cyprus – Syria – Libya

while the other increasingly takes the form of:

Greece – Republic of Cyprus – Israel.

These are not formal opposing military blocs, but from a geopolitical perspective they represent increasingly visible patterns of strategic alignment.

The Wider Regional Environment

Egypt must also be considered. Cairo has profound interests in the Eastern Mediterranean, Libya, Gaza and maritime energy routes. Egypt's relations with Turkey have improved considerably after years of confrontation. Still, Cairo simultaneously has a peace treaty with Israel and important strategic interests that do not necessarily coincide with Ankara's ambitions.

Jordan represents another critical state. Any military escalation involving southern Syria and the Golan Heights would directly affect Jordanian security. Amman therefore constitutes an important geographical barrier against uncontrolled regional expansion of the conflict.

Saudi Arabia is even more complex. Riyadh may cooperate more closely with Ankara on defense and security while maintaining its own strategic relationship with Washington and its own calculations regarding Israel, Iran, and regional stability. Saudi-Turkish cooperation consequently cannot automatically be interpreted as participation in an anti-Israeli bloc.

The same analytical caution must apply to Pakistan. What is emerging, therefore, is not necessarily a rigid alliance system comparable to twentieth-century military blocs. It is better understood as a **fluid network of overlapping security relationships** in which states cooperate in some areas while competing in others.

The Most Dangerous Scenario: War Through Syria

This brings us to a scenario that deserves serious early-warning consideration.

Turkey may have little strategic interest in initiating a direct conventional attack against Israel from Turkish territory. Such an action would create enormous military, diplomatic and NATO-related consequences. An indirect confrontation through Syria would be fundamentally different. If the Syrian armed forces are progressively rebuilt with Turkish assistance; if Turkish military advisers become embedded within Syrian structures; if Turkish intelligence increasingly contributes to Syrian situational awareness; if Turkish drones, electronic-warfare systems, air-defence systems or other capabilities are transferred to Syria; and if some of these capabilities subsequently move toward southern Syria, Ankara could acquire substantial strategic leverage over Israel without formally entering into war.

A future Syrian-Israeli military confrontation could therefore become the mechanism through which a broader Turkish-Israeli confrontation is indirectly expressed. This possibility should not be confused with evidence that such a plan currently exists. An important counter-indicator is that the al-Sharaa government has publicly pursued negotiations over a security arrangement with Israel and has stated that it seeks to avoid confrontation. This contradicts any simplistic conclusion that Damascus is already functioning as an instrument for a Turkish attack against Israel. But because Security Science analysis relies on indicators rather than assumptions, it must monitor this counter-indicator alongside the others. The central question becomes whether Syrian strategic autonomy increases or decreases over time. If Damascus maintains independent relations with Washington, Europe, Arab states and even Israel while limiting Turkish military influence, the proxy hypothesis becomes weaker. If, however, Syrian defense structures become increasingly dependent upon Turkish training, weapons, intelligence, logistics and operational support—particularly while Syrian-Israeli relations deteriorate—the hypothesis becomes substantially stronger.

The **location** of Turkish-supported capabilities would matter.

Training Syrian soldiers in northern Syria is one indicator. Establishing Turkish-supported military infrastructure in central Syria matters more. Deploying Turkish-origin air-defense, drone, intelligence, or electronic-warfare capabilities in southern Syria would represent an entirely different level of warning. Moving such capabilities into operational proximity to the Golan Heights would constitute a potentially critical threshold. This is where Greece and Cyprus become inseparable from the Syrian dimension. If Israel increasingly perceives Turkish influence in Syria as a direct security threat, Jerusalem has strong incentives to deepen military, intelligence and technological cooperation with Athens and Nicosia. Turkey, in turn, may interpret that cooperation as strategic containment.

A classic **security dilemma** could therefore emerge. Every Turkish move in Syria could stimulate stronger Israeli cooperation with Greece and Cyprus. Every new Israeli-Greek-Cypriot military arrangement could subsequently be interpreted in Ankara as justification for expanding Turkish military capabilities in Syria, Northern Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean.

The result could be a self-reinforcing cycle in which one side's defensive measures are interpreted as the other's offensive preparations. For an indicator-based Security Science assessment, this means that Turkey can no longer be analyzed exclusively through Turkish-Israeli bilateral relations. The relevant strategic system is becoming considerably larger:

Turkey – Syria – Northern Cyprus – Libya – the Eastern Mediterranean – Israel – the Republic of Cyprus – Greece, with Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Iran, Russia, and the United States acting as additional balancing or influencing powers. Within this system, Syria is potentially the most important variable because it is the only space where Turkish strategic influence and Israeli military power are already approaching direct physical contact.

This leads to an additional early-warning question that should be added to the overall assessment:

Is Turkey seeking direct military confrontation with Israel, or is Ankara constructing a security environment in which a future Syrian-Israeli confrontation could allow Turkey to pressure Israel indirectly while remaining formally outside the initial conflict?

There is currently insufficient evidence to answer that question affirmatively.

But there is now sufficient evidence to justify asking it. That distinction is precisely what indicator-based Security Science analysis is intended to identify.

The NATO–Kosovo Variable: A Turkish–Israeli Confrontation and the Strategic Consequences for Serbia

A further dimension of this analysis concerns NATO itself and, consequently, the future security equation surrounding Kosovo. This question becomes particularly important if the Syrian Proxy Hypothesis develops beyond political influence and Turkey-supported Syrian structures become involved in a direct military confrontation with Israel.

NATO should not presently be described as disintegrating. Indeed, at the July 2026 Ankara Summit, the Alliance formally reaffirmed its “ironclad commitment” to collective defense and Article 5, while European Allies and Canada have substantially increased defense expenditure. Nevertheless, beneath this institutional continuity lies a significant strategic transformation, driven in large part by President Donald Trump's approach to the Alliance.

Trump has repeatedly demanded that European members assume a much greater share of their own defense burden. His administration describes the emerging model as “NATO 3.0”: an Alliance in which European states assume primary responsibility for conventional defense. At the same time, American resources are increasingly available for homeland defense and other strategic priorities. The United States has also returned its troop presence in Europe toward pre-2022 levels and is reviewing its European force posture.

This does not mean that Trump has abandoned NATO. In fact, he joined the other Allied leaders in reaffirming Article 5 in Ankara in July 2026. It does mean, however, that the traditional assumption of almost automatic American leadership of every European security crisis can no longer be taken for granted in precisely the same way as during previous decades.

For an indicator-based Security Science assessment, the relevant concept is therefore not NATO collapse but **NATO strategic stress**.

A direct or indirect Turkish-Israeli confrontation could intensify that stress dramatically.

The most sensitive scenario would arise if forces of the new Syrian government, increasingly trained, equipped, advised, or otherwise supported by Turkey, entered into sustained military confrontation with Israel. The current analysis already identifies precisely this possibility as the Syrian Proxy Hypothesis. It emphasizes that publicly available evidence is insufficient to conclude that Damascus is presently acting as Ankara's proxy against Israel. Nevertheless, the recent Israeli strike against Abu al-Duhur demonstrates that Israeli decision-makers are already concerned about expanding Turkish military influence inside Syria.

If this evolved into an actual confrontation, Washington would face an extraordinary dilemma: **Turkey is a NATO Ally, while Israel is one of America's closest strategic partners.**

Here the legal and institutional distinction is critical. NATO's Article 5 does not provide Turkey with an automatic mechanism for obtaining Alliance participation in a Turkish-initiated military confrontation outside the circumstances covered by the Washington Treaty. NATO formally defines itself as a defensive alliance. A Turkish decision to support Syrian offensive military action against Israel would therefore be fundamentally different from Turkey being attacked on its own territory in circumstances triggering collective-defense consultations.

At the same time, the strategic relationship between Washington and Jerusalem is exceptionally deep. U.S. law explicitly defines preservation of Israel's security and its qualitative military edge as American policy.

It would therefore be reasonable for an early-warning analysis to assess that **if Washington concluded that Turkey was deliberately enabling or directing a Syrian attack against Israel, the United States would be far more likely to support Israel politically, militarily or logistically than to treat Turkish participation as protected Allied collective defense.** This remains a scenario-based assessment rather than an established future policy decision, but the structural foundations of the U.S.–Israel relationship make it a highly relevant possibility.

Such a development could produce one of the most serious internal political crises in NATO's history: the United States supporting Israel while another NATO member, Turkey, supported forces fighting Israel.

The consequences would extend far beyond Syria.

They could reach the **Balkans and Kosovo**.

Turkey is not a peripheral actor in Kosovo's security environment. Ankara maintains close political and military relations with Pristina and Albania and possesses substantial influence throughout parts of the Western Balkans. Existing analysis already identifies Albania and Kosovo among the principal areas of Turkish political, military, and cultural engagement in Southeastern Europe.

The crucial question for Serbia would therefore not be whether Turkey had become militarily preoccupied with Israel. The relevant question would be whether a Turkish-Israeli confrontation had produced a sufficiently severe **fracture inside NATO's political decision-making system to alter KFOR's credibility, cohesion, or operational posture**.

This distinction is fundamental.

As long as NATO remains politically cohesive and KFOR retains credible operational capabilities, a unilateral Serbian military attempt to change the situation on the ground would carry an extremely high risk of confrontation with international forces and broader escalation.

A fundamentally different strategic environment could emerge only if several independent indicators converged simultaneously.

The first would be a severe political rupture between Washington and Ankara over Israel.

The second would be a sustained Turkish or Turkish-supported Syrian military confrontation with Israel.

The third would be a corresponding crisis within NATO decision-making concerning Turkey's actions.

The fourth would be a significant change in American military posture toward the Balkans.

The fifth—and most important for Serbia—would be an observable weakening, restructuring, or loss of political cohesion within KFOR.

Only the convergence of such developments would justify reassessing whether the Kosovo security architecture established after 1999 was undergoing a structural transformation.

Even then, Serbia would face another paradox.

A weakening of NATO cohesion would not necessarily weaken Turkey's position in Kosovo. It could produce precisely the opposite result.

If Ankara concluded that its relationship with Washington and some European NATO members was becoming strategically unreliable, Turkey might attempt to strengthen bilateral military relationships with Albania and Kosovo independently of NATO. The result could be the emergence of a more autonomous **Turkey–Albania–Kosovo security relationship**, particularly if the existing Albania–Croatia–Kosovo defence cooperation continued developing simultaneously.

Kosovo could therefore become not an opportunity created by Turkish weakness, but another theatre of strategic competition generated by Turkish-Western divergence.

This possibility is especially important because Turkey's regional strategy increasingly operates through overlapping relationships rather than formal alliances. Ankara can remain a NATO member, cooperate with Russia, develop defense relationships with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, exercise influence in Syria, maintain its position in Northern Cyprus, cooperate with Libya, and expand its relationships in the Western Balkans. The existing analysis identifies precisely this multidirectional character of Turkish strategy.

Kosovo should consequently be added to the broader geographical model already identified in this study.

The emerging Turkish strategic architecture could potentially be conceptualized through several interconnected directions:

Turkey – Syria – Southern Syria – Israeli security perimeter

Turkey – Northern Cyprus – Eastern Mediterranean – Libya

Turkey – Albania – Kosovo – Western Balkans

Against this, a different network is becoming increasingly visible:

Israel – Republic of Cyprus – Greece – United States, accompanied by other states whose interests may increasingly conflict with unchecked Turkish regional expansion.

The significance of Greece becomes particularly important here. Greece simultaneously belongs to NATO, maintains an increasingly sophisticated defence relationship with Israel and possesses direct strategic competition with Turkey in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean. A serious Turkish-Israeli crisis would therefore place Athens in an unusually important geopolitical position.

This could transform what is currently a predominantly regional Turkish-Israeli rivalry into a much broader strategic realignment extending from the Middle East through the Eastern Mediterranean into Southeastern Europe.

For Serbia, the correct early-warning question is therefore not:

Could a Turkish attack on Israel allow Serbia to retake Kosovo militarily?

That formulation assumes an automatic causal relationship that does not exist.

A methodologically stronger Security Science question would be:

Could a Turkish-Israeli confrontation generate such a profound crisis of NATO political cohesion that the security architecture surrounding Kosovo would itself begin to change?

The answer is that such a scenario is theoretically possible, but only under considerably more extreme circumstances than a Turkish-Israeli confrontation alone.

The decisive indicators would be changes in American policy toward Turkey; the American military and political commitment to Israel; NATO deliberations concerning Turkish conduct; Greece's positioning; changes in KFOR command, composition and force levels; Turkish military assistance to Kosovo and Albania; changes in American force posture in the Balkans; and any transition from NATO-based security arrangements toward competing bilateral security relationships.

President Trump's policy adds another element of uncertainty because Washington is explicitly demanding that Europeans assume substantially greater responsibility for their own defense. At the same time, however, the 2026 NATO Summit demonstrated that this pressure has so far produced higher European defense spending and a renewed formal commitment to Article 5 rather than NATO's collapse.

The correct assessment is therefore that **NATO is transforming and under strategic stress, not that it has ceased to function.**

But because the Alliance is changing, a direct confrontation between two states of extraordinary importance to Washington—NATO member Turkey and strategic partner Israel—could test NATO's internal political cohesion in ways the Alliance has never experienced.

Kosovo would then become one of several secondary theatres where the consequences of that larger geopolitical rupture might become visible.

For Serbia, this would require extraordinary strategic restraint and continuous reassessment rather than an automatic military response. The decisive moment would not be the outbreak of a Turkish-Israeli confrontation itself.

It would be the point at which multiple indicators demonstrated that the **existing Euro-Atlantic security architecture in the Western Balkans was undergoing structural change.**

Only then would the Kosovo security equation itself need to be fundamentally reassessed.

From the perspective of indicator-based Security Science, this represents an additional critical threshold:

Turkey–Israel confrontation → U.S.–Turkey strategic rupture → NATO internal stress → possible transformation of KFOR and Balkan security arrangements → new Kosovo security equation.

This sequence is not a prediction.

It is an **early-warning scenario whose individual indicators can be observed, measured, and reassessed as the security environment evolves.**

Predictions and Early-Warning Outlook

Based on the convergence of indicators examined in this Analytical Review, several developments can reasonably be anticipated if the current strategic trajectories continue. These predictions should not be understood as deterministic forecasts. They are indicator-based projections within the methodological framework of Security Science and must therefore be continuously reassessed against changes in the security environment.

The first prediction is that **Turkey and Israel are likely to shift from political antagonism toward a more structural, long-term strategic rivalry.** The central issue will increasingly extend beyond Gaza. Syria, the Eastern Mediterranean, Cyprus, energy corridors, regional military partnerships and competing concepts of regional leadership are creating multiple points at which Turkish and Israeli interests can collide. The most important indicator will be whether Israel becomes institutionalized within Turkish national-security thinking as a security threat rather than remaining primarily a political adversary. This assessment already identifies the early stages of such a possible transition.

The second prediction is that **Syria will become the principal geographical arena in which Turkish and Israeli strategic interests approach one another most dangerously.** A direct Turkish attack on Israel remains considerably less likely than indirect confrontation generated by competing military interests inside Syria. Turkey's growing influence over Syrian defense and security institutions, combined with Israeli determination to prevent potentially hostile military capabilities from approaching its northern security perimeter, creates conditions for recurring crises.

The third prediction is therefore that **the probability of an unintended Turkish-Israeli military incident will increase if Turkish-supported military capabilities expand toward central and particularly southern Syria.** The critical threshold would not necessarily be deploying Turkish combat formations to the Golan Heights. It could instead be reached through Turkish-supported Syrian air-defense systems, drones, intelligence capabilities, electronic

warfare, command-and-control structures or other military assets operating increasingly close to Israel.

The fourth prediction concerns the **Syrian Proxy Hypothesis**. In the short term, the available indicators do not justify defining the government in Damascus as a Turkish proxy against Israel. Damascus continues to demonstrate an interest in avoiding direct confrontation, which remains an important counter-indicator. However, if Syrian military structures become progressively dependent upon Turkish training, intelligence, weapons, logistics and operational support, while Syrian-Israeli relations simultaneously deteriorate, Syria could gradually acquire the characteristics of an **indirect strategic instrument through which Ankara can exert pressure on Israel without formally entering the initial confrontation**. The decisive variable will therefore be the future degree of Syrian strategic autonomy. This follows directly from the proxy indicators already identified in the review.

The fifth prediction is that **Israel will continue strengthening its strategic relationship with Greece and the Republic of Cyprus** if it increasingly perceives Turkish regional expansion as a security problem. What is currently defense cooperation could gradually develop into a more sophisticated architecture of military exercises, intelligence exchange, technological cooperation, procurement and contingency coordination. This would reinforce the emerging geographical counterbalance already identified in this review between **Turkey–Northern Cyprus–Syria–Libya** and **Greece–Republic of Cyprus–Israel**.

The sixth prediction is that this process could generate an increasingly dangerous **security dilemma in the Eastern Mediterranean**. Israel, Greece and Cyprus could interpret measures Ankara describes as defensive as preparations for strategic expansion. Israel, Greece, and Cyprus's responses could then be interpreted by Ankara as containment. The result could become a self-reinforcing process in which each side uses the other's actions to justify additional military capabilities and strategic positioning.

The seventh prediction concerns **Gaza and Hamas**. Turkey is likely to continue using its political and intelligence access to Palestinian actors as an instrument of regional influence. At present, the critical distinction remains between access, influence, and operational support. Turkey's intelligence-level contacts provide Ankara with political and diplomatic leverage, but this assessment currently provides insufficient evidence to conclude they constitute operational military support. A transition from mediation and access toward intelligence sharing, training, weapons transfers, targeting assistance, or command-and-control support would therefore represent a major escalation indicator.

The eighth prediction is that **Turkey will continue attempting to maximize strategic autonomy rather than choosing exclusively between East and West**. Ankara is likely to remain formally embedded in NATO while preserving transactional relations with Russia, expanding defense relationships with Muslim powers, strengthening its defense industry, and pursuing independent policies in Syria, Libya, the Caucasus, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the

Balkans. This multidirectional strategy will increasingly complicate traditional classifications of Turkey as simply a Western or Middle Eastern power.

The ninth prediction concerns Turkey's **domestic political and economic environment**. If economic pressure, political polarization and challenges to Erdoğan's domestic position intensify, nationalist and security-oriented foreign-policy narratives are likely to become increasingly useful instruments of political mobilization. This does not mean that domestic problems will cause Turkey to initiate a war. The relevant early-warning indicator will instead be whether worsening domestic conditions repeatedly correlate with the intensification of anti-Israeli rhetoric and the presentation of external actors as threats to Turkish national security. The review already identifies this relationship as an indicator requiring particular attention.

The tenth prediction is that **a serious Turkish-Israeli military confrontation would place the United States in an exceptionally difficult but ultimately asymmetrical strategic position**. If Washington concluded that Turkey had deliberately enabled, supported, or directed offensive Syrian military action against Israel, this assessment considers American political, logistical, and potentially military support for Israel substantially more likely than American treatment of Turkish involvement as an Allied collective-defense matter. Such a development could generate one of the most serious political crises NATO has faced, particularly because Turkey would remain formally inside the Alliance while confronting one of Washington's closest strategic partners. This remains a scenario-based projection rather than a prediction of a specific American decision.

The eleventh prediction is therefore that **the most important secondary consequence of a Turkish-Israeli confrontation may be increased NATO strategic stress rather than immediate NATO collapse**. President Trump's pressure for greater European responsibility already contributes to the Alliance's transformation. A simultaneous U.S.–Turkey strategic rupture over Israel could expose disagreements concerning Turkey's role, American commitments, European security responsibilities, and the future political cohesion of NATO.

The twelfth prediction concerns the **Western Balkans**. If relations between Ankara and Washington deteriorate substantially, Turkey may attempt to compensate by strengthening bilateral security relationships in regions where it already possesses considerable influence. Albania and Kosovo would be particularly important in such a scenario. This could strengthen rather than weaken the Turkey–Albania–Kosovo security relationship, especially if existing regional defense arrangements continue to develop.

For Serbia, this produces an important and perhaps counterintuitive prediction: **a Turkish-Israeli confrontation would not automatically create a strategic opportunity concerning Kosovo**. In its initial stages, it could instead increase uncertainty and potentially stimulate greater Turkish bilateral engagement with Pristina and Tirana.

A fundamentally different Kosovo security equation could emerge only if the Turkish-Israeli confrontation generated a much larger chain reaction: a serious U.S.–Turkey rupture, sustained

NATO political stress, changes in American military posture toward Europe and the Balkans, and ultimately an observable weakening, restructuring, or transformation of KFOR. The relevant causal pathway therefore remains:

Turkey–Israel confrontation → U.S.–Turkey strategic rupture → NATO strategic stress → possible transformation of KFOR and Balkan security arrangements → new Kosovo security equation.

The thirteenth and most important prediction is consequently that **the greatest danger does not lie in any single indicator identified in this Analytical Review, but in their convergence.**

Turkey's influence in Syria alone does not indicate preparation for war. Its relationship with Hamas does not indicate preparation for war. Its military modernization does not indicate preparation for war. Its relationships with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia do not indicate preparation for war. Its activities in the Eastern Mediterranean do not indicate preparation for war. Its domestic political pressures do not indicate preparation for war. Nor does Erdoğan's increasingly confrontational rhetoric, by itself, demonstrate a decision for military confrontation.

The assessment changes if several of these indicators begin moving simultaneously in the same direction.

The most serious warning condition would therefore emerge if **Israel becomes formally institutionalized as a Turkish national-security threat; Turkish-supported military capabilities move toward southern Syria; Syrian strategic autonomy decreases; Turkish intelligence and operational integration with regional actors opposing Israel increases; Turkish naval and military positioning in the Eastern Mediterranean expands; Israeli-Greek-Cypriot military integration accelerates; U.S.–Turkey relations deteriorate; and mechanisms of diplomatic and military deconfliction simultaneously weaken or disappear.**

Such convergence would represent a qualitative transition from geopolitical rivalry toward a significantly elevated risk of military confrontation.

The central prediction of this Analytical Review can therefore be expressed in one sentence:

Turkey is unlikely to seek a direct conventional war with Israel as its preferred strategic option; however, if current indicators continue to converge, Ankara may increasingly construct the political, military, and geographical conditions through which Israel can be pressured indirectly, particularly through Syria, while simultaneously building the strategic capacity required for a broader confrontation should deterrence and deconfliction fail.

The decisive question for future assessments should consequently not be simply whether Turkey intends to attack Israel. It should be:

Are the indicators moving toward convergence—or away from it?

The answer will determine whether the emerging architecture described in this Analytical Review remains a system of competitive deterrence or evolves into an architecture of confrontation.

Analytical Note

*This article represents an **indicator-based analytical assessment conducted within the methodological framework of Security Science (SS)**. It does not claim access to classified intelligence and does not assert that the Turkish political or military leadership has decided to initiate an armed confrontation with Israel. The assessment is based on identifying, comparing, and interpreting observable political, geopolitical, military, economic, ideological, and security indicators and their potential convergence. Its purpose is not to predict an inevitable conflict, but to identify changes in the security environment, emerging patterns and possible trajectories that may provide **early warning of an increased risk of future confrontation**.*