

DISCUSSION PAPER



Anatolian Resolve: Türkiye, U.S., and Israel in the Shifting Middle East Landscape

Çağdaş Yüksel

TRT WORLD
research
centre

Anatolian Resolve: Türkiye, U.S., and Israel in the Shifting Middle East Landscape

Çağdaş Yüksel

© TRT TRAINING AND RESEARCH DEPARTMENT

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

WRITTEN BY

Çağdaş Yüksel

PUBLISHER

TRT TRAINING AND RESEARCH DEPARTMENT

December 2024

TRT TRAINING AND RESEARCH DEPARTMENT

AHMET ADNAN SAYGUN STREET NO:83 34347

ULUS, BEŞİKTAŞ

İSTANBUL / TÜRKİYE

TRT WORLD LONDON

PORTLAND HOUSE

4 GREAT PORTLAND STREET NO:4

LONDON / UNITED KINGDOM

TRT WORLD WASHINGTON D.C.

1819 L STREET NW SUITE 700 20036

WASHINGTON DC

researchcentre.trtworld.com

The opinions expressed in this discussion paper represent the views of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the TRT World Research Centre.

Introduction

The geopolitical strategies of global powers have long shaped the dynamics of the Middle East. Ideological, religious, and strategic objectives have moulded the plans of the United States and Israel for the region. Due to its geopolitical significance and historical ties, Türkiye has sought to navigate a delicate balance within these power dynamics. The U.S.-Türkiye-Israel triangle has become a critical axis of tension, particularly as Türkiye pursues independent policies and alliances continue to shift. Historically, Washington has tried to shape its relations with Ankara through demands that serve its interests and efforts to control the Turkish establishment. At this juncture, Israel's aggressive and uncontrollable actions in the region raise numerous questions about the future.

This uncertainty is compounded by the results of the U.S. presidential election held on November 5, 2024. Accordingly, Donald J. Trump will return to the Oval Office after four years. The Republican Party's control of both the Senate and the House of Representatives will position Trump to act with greater freedom during his new term (The New York Times, 2024). This development is interpreted as a sign of potentially significant changes in U.S. domestic and foreign policies.

During his presidency from 2016 to 2020, Trump adopted a strategy centred on the "America First" slogan, focusing on economic pressure and diplomatic agreements rather than military interventions. His objectives in the Middle East included

- Increasing pressure on Iran,
- Leading normalisation efforts between Israel and Gulf countries, and
- Limiting direct U.S. involvement in the region.

This approach was highlighted by supportive policies toward Israel, including recognising Jerusalem as Israel's capital and accepting the Golan Heights as Israeli territory (Morsy, 2024). Signals that similar support for Israel will continue in Trump's new term were evident even before the election.

The 2024 U.S. elections have not only been marked by unprecedented events such as criminal trials, assassination attempts, and withdrawals from candidacies but also by unusual alliances. The interest of neoconservatives, typically associated with Republicans, in Kamala Harris and the competition between the two main candidates over their support for Israel offer clues about how U.S. domestic and foreign policies may take shape in the coming years (Yüksel, 2024).

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's visit to the U.S. in July, his address to Congress, and his private meeting with former President Donald Trump reflect Israel's efforts to strengthen its relations with the U.S. Following the presidential election, Netanyahu reportedly spoke with Trump three times in one week, emphasising the goal of "further strengthening the alliance" between the two countries. This suggests the U.S. may adopt a more active strategy toward the Middle East in the coming period (Ravid, 2024).

Alongside Netanyahu's close ties with Trump, the interest of neoconservatives in Democrats has fuelled speculation about a comprehensive U.S. deep state agenda for the Middle East. Notably, influential figures in U.S. Middle East policymaking, such as Brett McGurk and Amos Hochstein, have maintained roles across multiple administrations—from George W. Bush to Biden—highlighting the U.S.'s enduring strategy of reshaping the region to establish new realities and expand its sphere of influence (Sofuoglu, 2024).

The U.S. modern global landscape is shaped by three primary factors: "competition with Russia, strategic rivalry with China, and ongoing challenges in the Middle East." These factors will continue to define U.S. foreign policy in the coming years. Since its annexation of Crimea in 2014, intervention in Syria, and the subsequent war in Ukraine, Russia has repositioned itself as a geopolitical rival to the U.S. in both Europe and the Middle East. As Russia loses power and energy influence in Ukraine and Europe's dependence on U.S. alliances increases, the U.S. may expand its military presence in Eastern Europe and the Middle East to counter Russian influence.

Through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China has strengthened its economic presence in the Middle East via infrastructure investments and trade agreements. By prioritising economic influence over military intervention, China threatens U.S. hegemony in strategically critical regions like the Persian Gulf.

During the Cold War, U.S. military doctrine focused on the ability to fight two major wars simultaneously. Given the complex nature of today's Russian and Chinese militaries, managing two wars simultaneously presents financial and logistical challenges for the U.S. Within this context, U.S.

strategic thinking increasingly aligns with Israel's interests in the region. Against this backdrop, U.S. and Israeli plans for the Middle East appear to converge. The U.S. may maintain a more active presence in the region, not only to provide Israel with greater freedom but also to contain Russian and Chinese influence. Efforts to encircle China will require more than just Indo-Pacific initiatives, making it necessary to evaluate the U.S.'s Greater Middle East Project alongside Israel's Greater Israel Project to understand regional developments.

In this historical framework, developments in the region carry significant risks for regional actors like Türkiye. The long-term regional plans of the U.S. and Israel suggest developments that could directly impact Türkiye's interests and security. In this context, it is critical for Türkiye to reassess its role within regional dynamics and formulate strategic actions in response to U.S. Middle East policy.

This discussion paper examines the historical trajectory and current tensions among these actors, beginning with the Cold War period. By focusing on the post-Cold War rise of neoconservatives, the long-term geopolitical goals of the U.S. and Israel, and the recent frictions involving Türkiye, it analyses the threats to Türkiye's national security.



(Amos Ben-Gershom (GPO) / Handout - Anadolu Agency)

Grand Plans: The Geopolitical Goals of the U.S. and Israel in the Middle East

Understanding the religious and ideological influences on modern U.S. foreign policy is key when examining the relationship between the Greater Middle East Project (GMEP) and the Greater Israel Project. At the start of the 21st century, the neoconservatives, or “Neocons,” who shaped U.S. foreign policy, had significant influence with the support of Jewish-Christian alliances, particularly Evangelical groups (Fischer & Maimon, 2009).

The Neocon movement rose to prominence, especially in the post-Cold War era, influencing U.S. strategic objectives. Originating in the 1960s with contributions from some academics and journalists, this movement became ideologically solidified, noted for its hardline stance against communism during the Cold War. Neocons believed the U.S. could sustain its global hegemony through interventionism under the guise of “democracy” and “freedom.” They aimed to demonstrate power in strategically important regions like the Middle East, not only for security but also to spread democracy and liberal values, which they saw as America’s “sacred mission.” (Mohamad, 2024).

In the United States, Evangelical groups support Jews based on the Old Testament and apocalyptic prophecies, viewing Israel’s existence as a divine necessity. Following the establishment of the Israeli state in 1948, Evangelicals openly expressed their support for Jews with the belief that Israel’s dominance in the Middle East was essential for the conditions leading to the second coming of Christ and the final battle known as “Armageddon.” (Altun, 2021).

This alliance deeply influenced U.S. policies in the Middle East, ensuring robust military and diplomatic support for Israel. The theological rationale shared by Neocons and Evangelicals underpins the “Greater Israel” project, which aims to expand Israel’s geographical borders.

The concept of Greater Israel is rooted in the biblical myth of the Promised Land, spanning from the Nile to the Euphrates. This concept signifies Israel’s territorial expansion and regional hegemony in the modern political context. Theodor Herzl, the founder of modern Zionism, advocated for establishing a Jewish state, outlined in his 1896 work “Der Judenstaat” (The Jewish State). His ideas formed the foundation of the Zionist movement, culminating in the founding of the State of Israel in 1948. The Greater Israel Plan is important in Israel’s regional strategies and security policies. Since its inception, Israel’s expansionist policies

and efforts to increase its regional influence have been evident (Zilbersheid, 2004). The 1967 Six-Day War resulted in Israel occupying the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan Heights, and the Sinai Peninsula, seen as part of the Greater Israel Plan, shaping its security policies.

U.S. support for Israel is crucial for the implementation of the Greater Israel Plan. During the Trump administration, the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital and the acceptance of Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights were steps supporting Israel’s expansionist policies. This support continues to be evident in the recent conflict in Gaza that began on October 7.

From a material perspective, setting aside the theological basis, the Greater Middle East Project (GMEP) was officially presented as a strategy to promote political, economic, and social reforms in the Middle East and North Africa. Initially articulated by President George W. Bush in 2004, this project aimed to encourage democracy, human rights, free market economy, and regional security. The core objective of the GMEP was to bring profound changes to the “troubled” areas in the Middle East, ensuring these changes aligned with Western security and interests.

However, the underlying goals of this project included securing access to regional energy resources and increasing American influence in the area. The most distinct feature of the GMEP was its interventionist strategy to transform the political structures of the region while solidifying U.S. geopolitical hegemony. This strategy also aimed to ensure Israel’s security, as American intervention in the Middle East, directly or indirectly, strengthened Israel’s position in the region.

In this context, the Neocon ideology sought to legitimise U.S. interests in the region under the noble goal of “exporting democracy.” Historically, the claim of bringing democracy has often been used as a tool for implementing the geopolitical strategies of great powers. The post-9/11 period exemplified this strategy most clearly, with U.S. interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq under the guise of “democracy,” though both countries failed to achieve stability.

Focusing on Trump’s first term to shed light on future scenarios, his Middle East policy centred on a pragmatic approach defined by the “America First” slogan, aiming to reduce costs and minimise direct military interventions.

This approach focused on protecting U.S. strategic interests in the region through economic pressure, diplomatic alliances, and manipulation of regional power balances rather than military force. Trump's administration pursued a policy against Iran, deepening strategic alliances with Saudi Arabia and Israel, aiming to isolate Iran and limit its regional influence.

The normalisation of diplomatic relations between Israel and several Gulf and African countries (UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco) through the "Abraham Accords" exemplified this policy (U.S. Department of State, 2010). These accords served the GMEP's narrative of "peace and stability" while securing a more stable status for Israel in the region. Economically and security-wise, Israel was positioned as a stronger actor. Trump's "Deal of the Century" peace plan prioritised Israeli interests and further marginalised Palestine, igniting more discussions on the "Greater Israel" project.

Though Trump's approach during his presidency aimed to reduce the U.S. military presence in the region, it continued to align with the fundamental goal of the GMEP: maintaining U.S. influence in the Middle East. Trump openly supported this project, advocating for U.S. withdrawal from the Middle East, yet strategies such as strengthening Israel, isolating Iran, and encouraging Arab states to ally with Israel can be seen as a continuation of the GMEP.

In other words, during Trump's tenure, actions taken allowed Israel to expand its regional influence, normalise relations with Arab countries, and marginalise Palestine. Therefore, the steps taken during Trump's administration reflected strategic goals aligned with the "Greater Israel" project. Hence, it can be argued that some elements of the GMEP overlapped with Trump-era policies, laying the groundwork for the Greater Israel Project.

It is quite clear that Trump, set to return to the White House on January 20, will follow a similar policy in his new term. By accusing Democrats, who are partners in the genocide against Palestinians starting on October 7, of supporting Hamas and arguing for greater support for Israel, Trump has already declared that he will provide unlimited credit to Israel in his new term.

The continuation of Israeli presence in the region and the presence of direct or indirect U.S. elements are both necessary and inevitable for a pragmatist president like Trump. This pragmatic approach is also driven by the need to counter China's regional presence. In this sense, politically, the U.S. and Israel's plans appear aligned, setting aside the religious and ideological dimensions. The U.S. must be in the Middle East to counter China, while Israel needs the U.S. for the Greater Israel plan. Considering China-Israel trade agreements, there seems to be no alternative to the U.S. presence in the region.

American-Turkish Relations during the Cold War Era

During the Cold War, U.S.-Türkiye relations were shaped by a complex interplay of cooperation and tension. While the U.S. sought to maintain strategic control due to Türkiye's critical geopolitical position, it also had to contend with Türkiye's aspirations for sovereignty and self-determination. Türkiye's role during the Cold War was crucial as it acted as a buffer state against Soviet expansion, bridging the divide between East and West. This strategic importance made Türkiye an indispensable ally of the U.S., especially within the context of NATO.

A key aspect of the U.S.'s efforts to maintain influence over Türkiye during this period was the establishment of covert operations under NATO's "Counter-Guerrilla" force, which were linked to the broader Gladio network. This structure, dubbed "Counter-Guerrilla" in Türkiye, was an extension of NATO's secret defence program, Gladio. Initially created to organise guerrilla warfare against a potential Soviet

invasion, this apparatus soon evolved into a tool for combating communism within Türkiye (Hansen, 2006).

For instance, the transformation of the Tactical Mobilisation Group into the Special Warfare Department in 1967 and the escalation of right-left conflicts leading up to the 1980 military coup underscore this structure's impact and its significant role in Turkish domestic politics. An example of this influence can be seen in the matching serial numbers of weapons used by right- and left-wing groups before the coup, suggesting an active role of the deep state in orchestrating these conflicts (Birand, 1992).

Although the Counter-Guerrilla's primary objective was to establish a secret resistance force against a potential Soviet invasion, it gradually became a domestic policy tool to suppress communist movements in Türkiye. Both Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit of the 37th government and

Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel of the 39th government acknowledged the existence of this organisation, which, during the 1970s, operated directly under U.S. and NATO influence within the Turkish military. By infiltrating both right- and left-wing groups, it exacerbated political conflicts and created an atmosphere resembling a civil war. This turbulent period included activities by the Counter-Guerrilla that paved the way for the 1980 military coup, accelerating the process (Birand, 1992).

However, the Turkish establishment did not remain passive. While leveraging its geostrategic importance to secure military and economic aid, Ankara also resisted certain aspects of U.S. hegemony. The Cyprus Crisis of the 1960s vividly illustrated this dynamic. When Türkiye prepared to intervene militarily in Cyprus to protect Turkish Cypriots from ethnic violence, it faced strong opposition from the U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson. The latter's 1964 letter warned Türkiye against unilateral action, emphasising that NATO support would not be available if the Soviet Union retaliated. Ankara perceived this intervention as a betrayal, prompting a re-evaluation of Türkiye's reliance on U.S. support (Çelik, 2021).

Following the Turkish military intervention in Cyprus in 1974, the U.S. government demanded Türkiye to withdraw its troops from Northern Cyprus. Ankara refused, continued

its Cyprus operations, and declared the mutual defence agreements with the U.S. invalid, suspending activities at all U.S. bases in Türkiye except for İncirlik (Çelik, 2021).

This embargo compelled Türkiye to reassess its dependence on U.S. arms, leading to the establishment of a domestic defence industry. Prominent Turkish defence firms such as ASELSAN and ROKETSAN were founded with this vision. The embargo was eventually lifted in September 1978 following a decision by the U.S. Congress. According to Çelik (2021), besides the Greek lobby, the Jewish lobby emerged as a significant ethnic group supporting the embargo decision in the U.S. Congress.

Despite these tensions, Türkiye's pragmatic approach enabled it to maintain alignment with the West while pursuing independent policies. Remaining a loyal NATO member, Türkiye also sought rapprochement with the Soviet Union during periods of détente to diversify its strategic options. This dual policy reflected Ankara's sophisticated understanding of leveraging its position as a cornerstone in the East-West divide to secure concessions and preserve a degree of autonomy.

In the post-Cold War era, the strategic calculus of U.S.-Türkiye relations shifted, but the lessons of this period continued to shape the bilateral dynamics.

The End of the Cold War and the Neo-Cons' Role

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 brought significant changes to the geopolitical landscape, profoundly affecting the dynamics of U.S.-Türkiye relations. With the disappearance of the Soviet threat, the United States redefined its strategic priorities, while Türkiye sought to recalibrate its national security and foreign policy goals.

First, the absence of the Soviet threat created a vacuum in defining America's role on the global stage. This void provided a foundation for neoconservatives to argue that the United States, as the sole superpower, should be responsible for maintaining global order. According to them, the U.S. should actively promote democratic values and free-market economies, often through military interventions and regime-change policies.

During the 1990s, neoconservatives gained increasing influence in American foreign policy. The Gulf War following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait became a prominent

example of their interventionist approach. In this period, neoconservatives strongly advocated for protecting U.S. interests in the Middle East and promoting democracy and human rights against authoritarian regimes in the region. Furthermore, U.S. support for Israel became a cornerstone of neoconservative policy.

The Gulf War also brought significant strategic and security developments for Türkiye. The emergence of a power vacuum in Northern Iraq altered regional dynamics. The rise of Barzani and Talabani's dominance in the area, coupled with the lack of control over the 36th parallel, enabled the PKK terrorist organisation to establish training camps in Northern Iraq. The PKK used these camps to enhance its organisation, secure weapons, and escalate attacks on Türkiye (Turkmen, 2021).

The U.S. policy of containment through Operation Provide Comfort aimed to limit threats from Iraq and Iran. However, the operation faced criticism for indirectly supporting the



(Abaca Press - Anadolu Agency)

PKK and Kurdish entities in Northern Iraq. Within Turkish politics, particularly after Operation Provide Comfort was established in Türkiye, there was growing sentiment that these operations laid the groundwork for a Kurdish state, as evidenced by the increase in regional terrorist activities (Sen, 2006).

The capture of PKK terrorist leader Abdullah Öcalan marked a turning point in Türkiye's fight against the PKK and served as a critical moment in U.S.-Türkiye relations. On February 15, 1999, Turkish security forces captured Öcalan in Kenya through an operation supported by U.S. intelligence (Sen, 2006).

While Öcalan's capture deepened bilateral cooperation, it also highlighted tensions stemming from differing policies. Notably, the U.S.'s relations with Kurdish groups and Türkiye's perception of these ties created long-term strategic challenges that persist today.

Following the September 11, 2001, attacks, the George W. Bush administration fully embraced neoconservative doctrine. The administration's worldview prioritised pre-emptive actions against perceived threats, particularly in the Middle East, which it regarded as a source of terrorism and instability. This shift materialised with the 2003 invasion of Iraq, justified by the alleged presence of weapons of mass destruction and the aim of spreading democracy in the region.

The Iraq War became a major turning point in U.S.-Türkiye relations, exposing deep strategic and ideological differences. In March 2003, the Turkish parliament rejected a motion allowing U.S. forces to use Turkish territory for

the Iraq invasion. This decision strained bilateral ties and reshaped regional power balances long navigated by both countries. For Türkiye, the weakening of Iraq complicated its strategic calculations by removing a key counterbalance to Iranian influence. Additionally, the emergence of a semi-autonomous Kurdish region in Northern Iraq directly challenged Türkiye's territorial integrity and national security. The resulting instability in Iraq created a power vacuum that groups like Kurdish militias and the PKK exploited, validating Türkiye's concerns (Hale, 2009).

The war also strengthened U.S.-Israel cooperation, as neoconservative policymakers viewed Israel as a cornerstone of American strategy in the Middle East. However, this alignment further alienated Türkiye and perceived U.S. indifference to Turkish concerns, which fuelled anti-American sentiment within Turkish politics and society.

Despite these challenges, Türkiye supported U.S.-led operations in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan by deploying troops and granting base access. It played a significant role in containing Iraq after the Gulf War, becoming one of the first countries to enforce U.N. sanctions. During this time, increasing economic and military ties with Israel received U.S. backing, and the three nations conducted joint military exercises in the Mediterranean. Meanwhile, the U.S. acknowledged Türkiye's sensitivities on issues such as EU membership, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, Cyprus, and the Armenian question. However, following the Iraq War, Türkiye began asserting greater autonomy in its foreign policy, distancing itself from U.S.-led initiatives and prioritising its regional interests.

Frictions Between Türkiye and the U.S./ Israel in the Past Decades

Over the past decades, bilateral relations were marked by several ups and downs. While Türkiye remains a key NATO ally, increasing frustration with some policies has led Ankara to reshape its foreign policy toward a more independent stance and explore alternative alliances.

The struggle to gain full control over the deep state in Türkiye was a pivotal one. During the military coup of September 12, 1980, the junta not only targeted leftist groups but also cracked down on right-wing and nationalist factions that considered themselves protectors of the regime. This dynamic suggests that, during the Cold War, the Turkish deep state was not entirely under U.S. control. Instead, the establishment leveraged the counter-guerrilla apparatus to align with its own objectives. Furthermore, the diminishing threat of Soviet expansion and the imposition of the U.S. embargo in 1975 prompted key players within the system to reevaluate the global order, political alignments, and security policies. In this context, the shifting world order pushed Washington to either reconfigure its influence over the deep state in Türkiye or establish an alternative structure capable of aligning with its strategic goals.

Starting from the 1990s, FETO began to gain strength, establishing influence in areas such as education and media and systematically infiltrating Türkiye's state apparatus. During the February 28 Process, characterised by regime fears and debates, as well as the victimisation of religious citizens, FETO presented itself as a compatible structure with the system, gaining power across all state organs. Especially during its peak control of the judiciary and police force, FETO launched fabricated legal cases against influential bureaucrats, soldiers, politicians, businessmen, and religious leaders outside its organisation, imprisoning many innocent people. Among the most prominent cases inflated with false confidential documents, testimonies, and manipulated recordings were the Ergenekon, Balyoz, Fenerbahçe Match-Fixing, Military Espionage, and the December 17-25 indictments (Uzun, et al., 2017).

One of FETO's most notorious operations involved breaching the "cosmic room," where strategic documents of the Turkish military were stored, leaking state secrets. Additionally, FETO-affiliated members embedded in the judiciary attempted to portray Türkiye's National Intelligence Organisation (MIT) as collaborating with the PKK/KCK terrorist organisation. On February 7, 2012, they

summoned MIT Undersecretary Hakan Fidan and other officials for questioning. On the day of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's surgery, Fidan informed Erdoğan and refused to comply. During these legal proceedings, it was revealed that FETO had wiretapped MIT (Paksoy, 2020).

For decades, FETO exploited structural gaps and weaknesses in state governance to carve out a wide operational space. It operated with extraordinary secrecy, adapted to the prevailing circumstances, and expanded its influence by forging relationships with both national and international power centres. By 2014, FETO had significantly strengthened its network within the state, establishing dominance in critical institutions, particularly the judiciary and law enforcement. The organisation actively sought to weaken Türkiye's military and economic power and undermine independent production and defence initiatives.

When the government started operations against FETO, weakening its influence, the organisation attempted a military coup on July 15, 2016. However, President Erdoğan's calls for citizens to take to the streets, combined with interventions by patriotic elements within the military and police forces, thwarted the coup attempt.

In this context, the failed coup of July 15, 2016, became a critical turning point in U.S.-Türkiye relations over the past decade. Türkiye repeatedly demanded the extradition of FETO leader Fethullah Gülen, who resides in Pennsylvania, but Washington declined this request, citing legal technicalities and evidentiary insufficiencies. From Ankara's perspective, the U.S.'s inaction signalled tacit approval of the coup, further eroding the already fragile trust between the two nations. The blatant U.S. support for FETO, a parallel state structure that directly threatens Türkiye's sovereignty, still represents a stain in the bilateral relations.

Another fault line in U.S.-Türkiye relations was the Syrian Civil War. Despite their mutual opposition to the Assad regime, the two countries sharply diverged in their tactical approaches. The U.S.'s military and logistical support for the PYD/YPG, the Syrian branch of the PKK, which Türkiye classifies as a terrorist organisation, deepened tensions (Stein & Foley, 2019). Washington viewed the YPG as a reliable ground force against ISIS, prioritising short-term

strategic goals over long-term alliance management. Türkiye, however, perceived this support as an existential threat, potentially bolstering Kurdish separatism within its borders. This divergence led to Turkish military operations such as Operation Euphrates Shield, Olive Branch, and Peace Spring, aimed at dismantling the PYD/YPG's territorial gains in northern Syria. U.S. support for the PYD/YPG also exposed fundamental contradictions within NATO solidarity, with Washington framing its actions as counterterrorism while Ankara regarded them as an affront to its sovereignty.

Compounding these geopolitical disputes were economic tensions. The Trump administration imposed tariffs on Turkish steel and aluminium in 2018 in response to the

detention of an American pastor. Another significant development in bilateral relations was Türkiye's acquisition of the S-400 air defence system from Russia in 2019, which triggered sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA). Notably, in 2013, Türkiye had sought to procure Patriot missiles from its NATO ally, the U.S., to meet its air and missile defence needs, but Congress rejected the request, signalling Washington's disregard for Türkiye's security concerns.

These developments unfolded against the backdrop of shifting regional dynamics as Türkiye sought to assert itself as a pivotal power in the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean.



(Fatih Kurt - Anadolu Agency)

Current Situation

The fall of the Assad regime and the opposition's control over key cities, including Damascus, is generally seen positively by Türkiye's establishment even though concerns remain.

It is an undeniable fact that the policies of the United States and Israel often conflict with Türkiye's strategic objectives. This discord is most evident in the support given to Kurdish groups like the PYD/YPG. Since 2014, the U.S. has been providing military and logistical support to the PYD and its armed wing, the YPG, under the umbrella of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). A fragmented Syria and a potential Kurdish autonomous region coincide with Israel's long-standing goal of weakening a unified Syrian state that could be antagonistic to Israel. Reports of Israeli intelligence cooperation and political support for Kurdish independence movements further validate these concerns.

In November 2023, it was reported in the media that the United States would provide short and medium-range air defence systems to the terrorist organisation PKK/PYD. The same reports mentioned that around 80 PKK members were undergoing training. In July 2024, the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) delivered short-range air defence systems known as AVENGER to the PKK/PYD. Previously, in October 2023, the Pentagon announced that an armed Turkish drone had been shot down by US F-16 fighter jets in Syrian airspace (Aslan, 2024).

In November 2024, in a provocative statement, Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar described the Kurds in the

region as victims of Türkiye and sent incitements messages of political independence. Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Tzipi Hotovely stated, "We are helping the Kurds (PKK/PYD) in different ways in the areas where Türkiye is conducting operations in Syria." (TRT Haber, 2024).

As Syria undergoes rapid transformation, marked by the fall of the Assad regime and the opposition's control over key cities, including Damascus, these developments signal a positive trajectory for Türkiye, which has long supported opposition forces. However, significant challenges persist, particularly in the form of a scenario in which YPG/PYD-controlled areas evolving into a statelet with backing from Israel.

President Erdogan [tweeted](#) about this, warning that "Türkiye will not allow any move that would endanger our national security and interests. It would be best for our entire region if all responsible actors and all international organisations support the preservation of Syria's territorial integrity."

The establishment of an Israeli-backed Kurdish state in the region represents a worst-case scenario for Türkiye. Ankara views a Kurdish state as an existential threat that could encourage separatist sentiments among its own Kurdish population. Such a state would create constant friction along Türkiye's southern borders and weaken its national security and regional influence. While this scenario aligns with the designs of the Greater Israel project and the Neocons, Türkiye will do everything to make it fail.

Conclusion

The shifting geopolitical dynamics of the Middle East underscore the complex interconnections between global power strategies, regional ambitions, and national security priorities. The historical and ideological underpinnings of U.S. and Israeli policies continue to present significant challenges for Türkiye, particularly amid developments in Syria and the broader region. To navigate these complexities effectively, Türkiye must adopt a holistic strategy that balances strategic alliances with independent policymaking, safeguards its territorial integrity, and addresses regional threats with precision.

The convergence of U.S. objectives, Israel's regional aspirations, and Türkiye's security concerns highlights the urgent need for comprehensive and adaptive approaches. Türkiye's response to these challenges will be pivotal in defining its role as a stabilising force within an increasingly volatile regional landscape. The prospect of a Kurdish statelet backed by external powers further emphasises the necessity of Türkiye's proactive measures. This includes maintaining a robust military, aligning actions with national interests free of ideological biases, countering provocations, fostering a societal ethos that values ethnic diversity, and staying vigilant against subversion and imperial designs.

References

Altun Altun. (2021). Neo-con evangelistler ve ABD'nin İsrail politikasına etkisi. *Diyalektolog - Uluslararası Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*

Aslan, M. (2024, July 30). Abd'Den terör örgütü PKK/pyd'ye son iltimas: Avenger Teslimatı. Anadolu Ajansı. <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/analiz/abdden-teror-orgutu-pkk-py-dye-son-iltimas-avenger-teslimati/3289140>

Daily Sabah. (2020, July 2). *Sivas massacre remembered in muted ceremony in central Türkiye*. <https://www.daily-sabah.com/Türkiye/sivas-massacre-remembered-in-muted-ceremony-in-central-Türkiye/news>

Gür, A. (2023). FETÖ ve Aum Shinrikyo Örneğinde İlimli Dini Hareketten Terör Örgütüne Dönüşüm: Sistematik Bir Değerlendirme. *Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 20(2), 604-614. <https://doi.org/10.33437/ksusbd.1298010>

Hale, W. (2009). Türkiye and the Middle East in the 'new era'. *Insight Türkiye*, 143-159.

Hansen, P. H. (2006). NATO's Secret Armies: Operation Gladio and Terrorism in Western Europe. *The Journal of Intelligence History*, 5(1), 110-113.

Fischer, S., & Maimon, D. (2024). AMERICAN EVANGELICALS, JEWS, AND ISRAEL.

Mohamad, H. (2009). Protestant Evangelicals and U.S. Policy Towards Israel (pp. 224-245). Jefferson, NC: McFarland Press.

Morsy, A. (2024, November 8). *Trump's return and implications for the Middle East*. Middle East Council on Global Affairs. https://mecouncil.org/blog_posts/trumps-return-and-implications-for-the-middle-east/

Paksoy, M. (2020, June 21). Fetö'nün Hükümeti Yıkma Yönelik ilk kalkışması: 7 şubat 2012 MİT kumpası. Anadolu Ajansı. <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/Türkiye/fetonun-hukume-ti-yikmaya-yonelik-ilk-kalkismasi-7-subat-2012-mit-kumpasi/1884609#>

Ravid, B. (2024, November 10). Netanyahu says he spoke three times with Trump in recent days. <https://www.axios.com/2024/11/10/netanyahu-trump-three-calls-gaza>

Şen, F. (2006). *Soğuk savaş sonrası Türk-Amerikan ilişkileri (1989-2001)* (Master's thesis, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü).

Sofuoglu, M. (2024, October 7). *McGurk and Hochstein: The American diplomats creating chaos in Middle East*. TRT World - Breaking News, Live Coverage, Opinions and Videos. <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/mc-gurk-and-hochstein-the-american-diplomats-creating-chaos-in-middle-east-18217037>

Stein, A., & Foley, M. (2019, October 18). The YPG-PKK connection. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menaso-urce/the-ypg-pkk-connection/>

The New York Times. (2024, November 5). *Presidential election results*. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/11/05/us/elections/results-president.html>

TRTHaber.(2024,November16).YouTube. <https://youtu.be/IBTiGpKwn88?si=ILMPTGkfEwDGel3O>

Türkmen, M. (2021). 1 Mart Tezkeresi Bağlamında Türkiye'nin Irak Politikası. *Bölgesel Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 5(1), 185-212.

U.S. Department of State. (2010, September 15). <https://www.state.gov/the-abraham-accords/>

Uzun, C. D., Akgün, M. H., & Yücel, H. (2017). İddianamele-rde 15 Temmuz darbe girişimi ve FETÖ. SETA.

Yerlikaya, A. (2024, August 14). İçişleri Bakanı Ali Yerlikaya: "Göçü Kaynağında Durdurduk" . T.C. İçişleri Bakanlığı Göç İdaresi Başkanlığı. <https://www.goc.gov.tr/icisleri-bakani-ali-yerlikaya-gocu-kaynagin-da-durdurduk#:~:text=T%C3%BCrkiye'de%2520yasa-l%2520ka%C4%B1C5%9F%2520hakk%C4%B1.mily-on%2520437%2520bin%2520325%2520yabanc%C4%B1>

Yüksel, Ç. (2024b, October 30). *Neocon support for Harris: A troubling sign for things to come?*. TRT World Research Centre. <https://researchcentre.trtworld.com/featured/analysis/neocon-support-for-harris-a-troubling-sign-for-things-to-come/>

Zilbersheid, Uri. "The Utopia of Theodor Herzl." *Israel Studies* 9.3 (2004): 80-114.

TRTWORLD
re|search
centre

TRT WORLD
research
centre