

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

Gulriz Ergoz

10.04.2025



Gulriz Ergoz

Israel and Turkiye in Syria: No clash, just a division of spoils

Despite public posturing, Israel and Turkiye are not adversaries in Syria but cooperative actors carving up the country along lines drawn by US-led regional designs.



Photo Credit: The Cradle

Two US-aligned states, led by populist strongmen who convert foreign policy into a domestic spectacle. Two allies of Washington, performing antagonism while quietly advancing a shared project in Syria.

Can Turkiye and Israel, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, ever truly confront one another in Syria? Or are they simply playing assigned roles in a theater whose script was written elsewhere?

Turkiye's 'Middle East Duty'

“Turkiye has a duty in the Middle East. What is that duty? We are one of the co-chairs of the Greater Middle East and North Africa Project. And we are carrying out this duty.”

So said Erdogan in the mid-2000s, repeatedly confirming Turkiye’s role as a co-chair of the [Greater Middle East Project](#) – Washington’s strategic initiative to re-engineer the region under US–Israeli tutelage.

After the Justice and Development Party's (AKP) 2002 victory, Erdogan stood in the White House and declared strategic alignment with the US “not only on Iraq but on many other issues.” By 2005, former US president George W. Bush was openly thanking him for his “strong support” for the project, and Erdogan said, “Our contacts with relevant countries, including Syria, continue.”

Despite public spats with Israel – like Erdogan’s famous [“One Minute” confrontation](#) with then-Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres at Davos in 2009 – his provocations have consistently played to domestic audiences, while leaving Ankara's structural alliance with Tel Aviv untouched.

From Davos to Damascus

Since then, West Asia has burned: Iraq all but collapsed, Gaza obliterated, Syria torn apart, and Lebanon’s Hezbollah severely weakened. Amid the foreign-designed chaos, Turkiye carved out territory in northern Syria, justifying its incursions through claims of fighting the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), and cultivated Islamist proxies like former Al-Qaeda affiliate Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) – which is now in power in Damascus. On 8 December 2024, when HTS [toppled](#) the Syrian government, Erdogan celebrated the “victory.” But what followed was neither peace nor resistance to Israel. Instead, the occupation military moved aggressively into southern Syria, crossing the UN buffer zone in the Golan Heights, dismantling what remained of Syria’s defenses, annexing territory around the key border governorates of Quneitra and Deraa, and declaring its [occupation of Mount Hermon](#) permanent.

Tel Aviv is now at the gates of Damascus. Its soldiers killed civilians protesting the occupation, while Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu postured as protector of the Druze resisting HTS advances, warning: “We will not allow forces from the HTS organization or the new Syrian army to enter the area south of Damascus.” Meanwhile, HTS leader-turned-President of Syria, [Ahmad al-Sharaa](#) – whose family is from the Golan and who is beholden to Ankara – has made no mention of resisting Israeli encroachment.

Quiet coordination over the Syrian Kurds

Even when it comes to the US-sponsored Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which Ankara claims are a PKK cutout, there is quiet coordination.

While Israeli officials have openly backed Syrian Kurdish autonomy, the SDF's foreign envoy Ilham Ahmed was speaking to Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar in February, declaring to [The Jerusalem Post](#):

“The crisis of the Middle East requires that everyone understand that without Israel and Jewish people playing a role, a democratic solution for the region will not happen.”

In March, as HTS-led security forces [massacred Alawites](#) across newly-captured territory, Sharaa and SDF commander Mazlum Abdi signed a surprise agreement. Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan responded obliquely, “Our suggestion to the new administration is to grant the rights of Syrian Kurds, which is extremely important for our president.”

In effect, a de facto [understanding](#) is emerging in Syria: Turkiye holds the north, HTS operates from Idlib to Damascus, the SDF secures the east, and Israel claims the south. [Syria's fragmentation](#) is no accident – it is the outcome of overlapping imperial projects.

Shared interests, separate zones

According to Syrian journalist Hosni Mahalli, a third player sits behind this arrangement:

“Behind both the Druze and the Kurds in Syria, alongside Israel, is the United Arab Emirates.”

Political analyst Emir Ashnas puts it more bluntly, telling *The Cradle*, “Turkiye’s political-economic integration with the west cannot be expected to allow it to engage in a military conflict with Israel other than rhetoric.” Turkiye, in his view, is too indebted and too exposed to risk genuine confrontation in Syria.

This analysis gained further weight in February, when Erdogan [received](#) Sharaa in Ankara. Reports emerged that Turkiye sought to train Syria’s new army and gain access to key airbases in Homs province – including Palmyra and T4, near Israeli-controlled zones.

On 2 April, Israel responded with airstrikes on those very sites. Turkiye’s state-run [Anadolu Agency](#) even filmed the aftermath, as if to confirm the message had been received.

Red lines and silent messages

Israeli media sources described the strikes as “a clear message to Erdogan.” The next day, Saar accused Turkiye of seeking a Syrian “protectorate.” Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz even [addressed](#) Sharaa using his Al-Qaeda-phase nom de guerre: “I warn the Syrian leader, Abu Mohammad al-Julani: If you allow hostile forces to enter Syria and endanger Israel’s security interests, you will pay a heavy price.”

On 4 April, following a NATO summit, Fidan tried to [downplay](#) tensions in an interview with *Reuters*:

“We don't want to see any confrontation with Israel in Syria because Syria belongs to Syrians. If the Syrian government wants to reach an agreement with Israel, that is their business.”

Political analyst Ashnas believes tensions were bound to emerge between the two most significant foreign players in the dismantling of Syria and the sidelining of Iran:

“It was inevitable that tensions would arise between these two countries, which had the greatest share in the elimination of the Syrian state and the expulsion of Iran and its allies from Syria. However, there are differences and contradictions between the interests of these two countries in terms of sharing Syria's territory and sovereignty.”

Ashnas adds:

“Ultimately, Israel is extremely pleased that the Assad regime, an integral part of the Axis of Resistance, has been toppled and the Syrian army has been eliminated. Syria is in its weakest position and is a playdough that Israel can shape as it wishes. Israel should be grateful to Turkiye for its cooperation and ‘indispensable’ role in bringing Syria to this state. But Israel also desires that Syria's territories close to the Israel and south Lebanon front, remain under Israeli control as a security zone.”

Federalism, fragmentation, and the realignment

So why is Tel Aviv now goading Ankara? Turkiye’s push to build a new Syrian army contradicts Israel’s desire to keep Syria militarily weak. The airstrikes were Tel Aviv’s way of drawing a line. And Turkiye, for now, appears to have accepted the terms.

Meanwhile, the US continues its air assault on Yemen, and with Netanyahu’s White House visit on 8 April, US President Donald Trump offered his own take.

Trump [spoke](#) of his “great relations” with Erdogan, whom he described as “a tough guy, and he's very smart, and he did something that nobody was able to do.”

Reminding Netanyahu of his leverage, Trump said: “Any problem that you have with Turkey, I think I can solve. I mean, as long as you're reasonable, you have to be reasonable. We have to be reasonable.”

Trump has tested this leverage before. In 2018, when he demanded the release of detained American pastor Andrew Brunson, Turkiye’s economy buckled under sanctions, and the pastor was freed. In 2019, [Trump wrote to Erdogan](#) as the latter launched another Syrian operation: “Don’t be a tough guy. Don’t be a fool.”

No fight, just theater

“There is no fight,” Mahalli argues. “There is a sharing of roles. This is a big theatre.” If it were not, Saar would not be in Abu Dhabi meeting Emirati President Mohammed bin Zayed, and Kurdish leader Nechirvan Barzani would not be en route to the Antalya Diplomacy Forum via the UAE. “Marketing him at the forum? They gave that job to Erdogan,” he concludes.

Ashnas notes that Turkiye’s latest outreach to the Kurds – driven by its Syria strategy – does not clash with Israel’s vision. In fact, the absence of any military clashes in the past week suggests a quiet pact with the SDF is already in effect.

Ankara, now signaling support for a federal model in Syria, just as it did in Iraq, appears to have accepted the limits imposed by Israeli strikes. It will settle for influence without an army – just as it did in Lebanon. And in doing so, it remains squarely within the strategic orbit shaped by Washington – and enforced by Tel Aviv.

APR 9, 2025