



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

Turkey – an ally that refuses to commit



Turkey occupies a specific and difficult-to-sustain position in this war. As a NATO member, it participates in the collective defence system that directly tracks and intercepts Iranian missiles.

At the same time, it refuses to take part in **military operations** against Iran and maintains regular political contact with Tehran.

This is not neutrality but a deliberate postponement of a decision in a situation where any clear alignment would have direct consequences.

Turkey hosts key elements of the NATO system on its territory. The Incirlik base, near Adana, houses the American B61 nuclear weapon, part of a wider deterrent system.

In Malatya is the **Kürecik radar**, included in the NATO anti-missile defence European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA). That radar monitors launches from the direction of Iran and provides early information about threats to Europe.

If that system were hit or disabled, NATO would lose some of its ability to detect and intercept ballistic missiles in time. That is why Kürecik is not only a Turkish facility but also part of the wider security structure of the alliance.

Turkey has a 534-kilometre-long land border with Iran. This means that any incident along that line immediately becomes a security issue for Ankara.

Not invoking Article 4 or 5

In the first weeks of the war, three Iranian missiles entered Turkish airspace. NATO systems, including Patriot batteries, deployed in Turkey shot down all three Iranian missiles.

The key is what did not follow. Turkey has not invoked Article 4 of the North Atlantic Treaty, which provides for consultations in the event of a threat, nor has it raised the issue of **Article 5**, which implies collective defence.

This was a political decision. Ankara has avoided formally treating the incidents as an attack, because that would automatically push NATO into further steps it does not wish to take.

Limiting Turkey's role in the war

That policy was evident even before the start of the war. **Foreign Minister** Hakan Fidan tried to arrange talks between the United States and Iran in Istanbul.

Iran declined and selected Oman as a mediator, stipulating that they could only discuss the nuclear programme.

After the conflict began, Fidan publicly stated that Tehran felt they had been attacked while still in negotiations with Washington. He did not defend Iran but showed how the other side interprets the situation.

Ankara decided that its airspace and military bases would not be used for attacks on Iran

This is important because it explains why Ankara still maintains direct contact with Tehran and why it avoids moves that would close that channel.

During the same period, Ankara decided that its airspace and military bases would not be used for attacks on Iran. In practice, this meant that **Incirlik** was not involved in the operations.

In this way, Turkey limited its role in the war and avoided being directly associated with the American strikes.

No military response

Meanwhile, the situation on the ground was tense. The first **missile** intercepted in the

direction of Hatay allowed for various interpretations, ranging from a mistake to a deliberate test of the system.

After the second **incident** over Gaziantep, such ambiguity no longer existed. The third case, near **Incirlik**, was the most sensitive, as it occurred in an area of key military infrastructure.

The response was cautious but tangible. The United States reduced its presence in Adana and temporarily closed the consulate. NATO further strengthened the anti-missile protection of the Kürecik radar. However, Turkey did not alter its fundamental policy.

Turkey seeks to maintain communication with both sides, without assuming the role of mediator or becoming directly involved in the conflict

These incidents cannot be viewed in isolation. During the same period, Iran targeted or damaged radar systems in several Gulf countries. This indicates a pattern – early warning systems are becoming direct targets.

Kürecik should also be considered within this context. It is not only a Turkish facility but part of the NATO network that monitors launches from Iran. **Tehran** views it as a legitimate target for this reason.

Despite this, Ankara did not change its approach. It did not sever contact with Iran or resort to a military response. All reactions remained at the political level.

In doing so, Turkey seeks to maintain communication with both sides, without assuming the role of mediator or becoming directly involved in the conflict.

Balancing relationships

This policy is most evident in the **Strait of Hormuz**. While passage for most Western

ships is restricted, **Turkish vessels** are permitted to pass. This is the result of a direct agreement with Iran.

Turkish ships sail under clear markings that do not classify them as enemies. Iran treats them differently from American, Israeli, or European vessels. This demonstrates that communication between Ankara and Tehran continues uninterrupted.

For Turkey, this is a practical matter – trade and energy must continue. For NATO, it is a political issue.

Ankara is developing military and security cooperation with the Gulf states, which are under Iranian attack

An ally with a special transit regime through a zone controlled by Iran is clearly pursuing a policy not fully aligned with the others.

Turkey does not have complete freedom of choice. Some gas still comes from Iran. The border is long and unstable, and the Kurdish question remains unresolved.

Any expansion of the conflict towards Iraq or Iran could directly affect security in the south of the country.

At the same time, Ankara is developing military and security cooperation with the Gulf states, which are under Iranian attack. This means it maintains relationships with both sides, even though these relationships are in opposition. This is not a consistent policy, but an attempt to reduce risk in several directions.

Choosing between Iran and NATO

Such an approach is only viable for a limited period. If there were civilian casualties on Turkish territory or a direct hit on facilities such as the Kürecik radar, the political space for restraint would vanish.

At that point, a response would no longer be optional but would become an obligation under NATO.



If the conflict continues or intensifies, the space for balancing will disappear. Then Ankara will have to make the decision it has so far postponed

This is why Ankara's current strategy is primarily time limited. It relies on the assumption that the conflict will not escalate to a level that directly threatens Turkish territory or key allied assets. This is an assessment, not a guarantee.

Meanwhile, Turkey remains the only actor in this conflict that simultaneously maintains an operational link with Tehran, controls critical NATO infrastructure, and avoids military alignment.

This combination gives Turkey influence that exceeds its formal role in the alliance but also exposes it to pressures that will increase over time.

If the conflict continues or intensifies, the space for balancing will disappear. Then Ankara will have to make the decision it has so far postponed.

At that point, there will be no further room for balancing. It will have to make a clear choice, both regarding Iran and NATO.