

Iran and Turkey in Syria: A Comparative Analysis of Foreign Policy, 2010–2025

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Abstract

This article analyzes the roles of Iran and Turkey in the Syrian civil conflict, emphasizing their historical ties to Damascus and conflicting strategies post-2011. Iran views Syria as crucial for its "axis of resistance," providing considerable military and financial support, while Turkey's approach has evolved from initially backing the opposition to focusing on limiting Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) influence through controlled military engagements. The study applies neoclassical realism to explore how each nation's domestic dynamics and security concerns shaped their foreign policies. It also covers significant events leading to the Assad regime's decline in December 2024 and the onset of a Turkish-mediated PKK disarmament

initiative in 2025, which prompted Turkey to reassess its relationship with Kurdish groups. The narrative integrates historical analysis with statistical data on refugee movements, civilian casualties, and military actions, supported by comparative tables and graphics, illustrating the complex interplay between Iran and Turkey's decisions and the evolving power dynamics in the Middle East.

Keywords: Iran–Turkey relations, Syrian conflict, foreign policy strategies, Kurdish question, regional security, proxy dynamics, Middle East geopolitics, neoclassical realism

* Introduction

The Syrian conflict did not initially commence as a war. It commenced in 2011 similarly to the majority of the Arab uprisings — as a

demonstration initiative. Syrians protested against Bashar al-Assad's regime; the regime responded with violence; and a nonviolent movement rapidly devolved into a conflict that neither faction could decisively prevail in. What ensued was not a change but an intensification, and in a matter of years, the conflict evolved into one of the most convoluted wars of the century — featuring a fluctuating array of local militias, regional benefactors, and external forces, each possessing its own interpretation of triumph. When the Assad regime ultimately fell in December 2024, over fifty percent of Syria's pre-war populace had been uprooted, and the nation's political destiny had largely shifted to external entities that had influenced its conflict for thirteen years (UNHCR, 2025a).

Two external actors, Iran and Turkey, belong to a unique category. Both are regional powers, not of Arab descent, situated adjacent to Syria. Both possess the military and economic capacity to maintain an extended intervention. Both characterise that intervention, in public discourse, as a national security issue rather than as an act of opportunism. There the similarity concludes. Iran intervened to sustain Assad's regime, as Syria served as the

vital link in its "axis of resistance" and the conduit connecting Tehran to Hezbollah in Lebanon (Wastnidge, 2024). Turkey intervened to assist in his removal, anticipating that a more amicable regime in Damascus would align with Ankara's regional objectives — subsequently dedicating the majority of the ensuing decade to addressing the repercussions of an unsuccessful wager, refocusing its military endeavours on a more limited aim: preventing a self-governing Kurdish authority from solidifying along its southern frontier (Kardaş, 2025).

That divergence extends beyond merely selecting different allies. It embodies two distinct theories regarding the ideal configuration of regional order. For Iran, Syria was significant due to its position at the crossroads of ideology and essential strategic requirements — providing access to the Mediterranean, a terrestrial pathway to Hezbollah, and a frontline defence against Israel (Wastnidge, 2024). For Turkey, Syria held significance due to a domestic issue: it became intertwined with the Kurdish question, a matter that has influenced Turkish politics for four decades and consistently overshadowed other aspects of Ankara's agenda regarding Syria.

What caused two neighbours, experiencing the same deteriorating situation, to become so distant? Responses that reveal broader insights into the operational dynamics of contemporary Middle Eastern powers — characterised not by rigid alliances, but by adaptive strategies under duress. Its significance extends far beyond the confines of Syria. The manner in which Ankara and Tehran have addressed the Kurds in Syria has consistently acted as a precursor and experimental arena for their treatment of Kurdish movements within their own borders in Iraqi Kurdistan and the broader Kurdish political sphere.

A brief note on methodology prior to continuation. This is a qualitative, comparative case analysis based on secondary sources, including think-tank evaluations, peer-reviewed research, and humanitarian information from UN agencies and their partners. The military and financial expenditures of Iran in Syria are intentionally unclear; therefore, when sources vary considerably, this document presents a range instead of creating misleading accuracy, and considers all figures as approximations unless specified otherwise. It does not purport to provide a conclusive account of the total expenditures or casualties of

either state — both are still genuinely debated in scholarly discourse — but it consolidates the most reliable publicly accessible estimates, incorporating several new peer-reviewed sources not included in the initial draft, to support a comparative analysis of strategy and outcomes.

The document advances through eight additional stages. It delineates the historical underpinnings of Syria's affiliations with Iran and Turkey; constructs a theoretical framework based on neoclassical realism; contrasts the proclaimed and actual interests of both nations; outlines the significant phases of their engagement from 2011 to 2025; identifies instances of policy divergence and, less frequently, convergence; offers a statistical examination of the conflict's humanitarian and financial aspects — augmented here with new data on civilian casualties, Turkish defence expenditures, and labour market impacts related to refugees, in addition to a comparative summary table and a chart detailing regional refugee movements; and evaluates the implications of these findings for regional stability post-Assad.

*** The Historical Background of Syria's Relations with Iran and Turkey**

*** Syria–Iran Relations**

A collaboration designed for longevity. Iran and Syria have maintained one of the most enduring bilateral partnerships in contemporary Middle Eastern history since the 1979 Iranian Revolution (Goodarzi, 2006). The alliance was notably established during a time of conflict: Hafez al-Assad supported the nascent Islamic Republic against Iraq amid the Iran–Iraq War, a decision that rendered Syria nearly isolated within the Arab community. The collective confrontation with a mutual adversary endowed the alliance with a profundity that its ideological discord ought to have obstructed — a Ba'athist, ostensibly secular Syrian regime, and a revolutionary Shia theocracy in Tehran.

The "Coalition of Defiance. Iran and Syria have consistently characterised their alliance as the foundation of a broader coalition aimed at opposing American and Israeli influence in the region (Wastnidge, 2024). The coalition known as the Axis of Resistance comprises Hezbollah in Lebanon and, to a lesser extent, various Palestinian factions. It functions less as a

conventional treaty alliance and more as an ideological and logistical framework, unified by a common interpretation of the threat landscape, economic interdependence, and synchronised military strategies orchestrated by the IRGC's Quds Force (American Enterprise Institute [AEI], 2024). Via that network, Iran broadened its ideological influence and enhanced its ability to exert indirect pressure on Israel, utilising Syrian territory as both a staging area and a transit route.

Consistency throughout leadership changes. The coalition endured a significant shift in leadership on both fronts while maintaining its foundational rationale. The demise of Hafez al-Assad in 2000 and the subsequent rise of Bashar momentarily concerned Tehran, due to the younger Assad's initial engagement with economic liberalisation and tentative overtures toward the West. That concern was fleeting. By the mid-2000s, the situation had unequivocally tilted in favour of Iran: Assad's administration became increasingly isolated following the 2005 assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri — an event largely ascribed to Syrian and Hezbollah participation — which drew Damascus nearer to Tehran while

Western and Gulf nations sought to diplomatically isolate Syria. The trend of external isolation intensifying rather than diminishing the Iran–Syria relationship would manifest on a much grander scale post-2011, as sanctions transformed Iranian financial assistance from a mere alternative into a vital necessity.

Spatial dynamics and tactical extension. Syria provided Iran with a strategic position on the eastern Mediterranean, which is crucial for any Iranian aspirations extending beyond the Gulf. It served as the primary channel for Iranian weapon deliveries to Hezbollah, ensuring that Tehran's most proficient non-state ally remained equipped and prepared for combat. Experts from the American Enterprise Institute (2024) characterise this as Iran's "forward defence" strategy — the belief that deterrence is most effectively pursued away from Iranian territory, with Syria acting as the outer boundary of that defensive zone. The alliance not only equipped Hezbollah with weaponry but also entangled Iran in the political dynamics of Israeli security and Lebanese administration, granting Tehran a degree of influence that surpasses what its military capabilities would typically warrant.

*** Syria–Turkey Relations**

A disquieting tranquillity, and the crisis of 1998. Throughout the latter part of the twentieth century, the relationship between Syria and Turkey was characterised by correctness rather than warmth, as the two nations engaged in trade and sporadic security cooperation, lacking substantial trust. In 1998, a sudden and significant shift occurred when Turkey concentrated troops along the Syrian frontier and issued threats of military intervention due to Damascus's sheltering of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan. Syria's choice to expel him alleviated the crisis and resulted in the Adana Agreement, fostering a decade of authentically improved relations — culminating, by the 2000s, in an exceptionally close personal connection between President Bashar al-Assad and then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

The hiatus following 2011. The Syrian insurrection halted that course. As Assad's regime responded to demonstrations with deadly violence, Erdoğan's initial hope for reform in Damascus transformed into overt antagonism. Turkey provided refuge to opposition leaders, equipped and instructed rebel groups, and openly demanded Assad's resignation (Carnegie Endowment

for International Peace, 2021). This was not solely an issue of principle. It also demonstrated a calculation — held by many in the region and the West during 2011 and 2012 — that Assad's demise was both unavoidable and imminent, and that prompt backing for the opposition would secure Turkish leverage over subsequent developments (Kardaş, 2025). That computation proved to be significantly erroneous, and Ankara devoted a considerable portion of the subsequent decade addressing the repercussions.

The connection worsened as Turkey's internal concerns regarding Kurdish independence clashed with the evolving battlefronts. The ascendance of the YPG as the preeminent ground force opposing the Islamic State, along with its integration into the American-supported SDF, transformed northern Syria into a pivotal arena for Turkish strategy, prompting a series of cross-border military actions that persisted for years beyond the anti-Assad insurgency (Foundation for Defence of Democracies [FDD], 2025).

Wider influences completed the remainder. The competition for dominance in a disintegrating Middle East, the precarious situation of Kurdish populations near the Turkish-Syrian border, and Russia's

rise as a pivotal military force post-2015 have further altered this environment, entrenching both Iranian and Turkish strategies in a broader structural rivalry that remains beyond the complete control of either nation (Center for Strategic and International Studies [CSIS], 2021).

*** The Ideological and Sectarian Dimension of the Iran–Syria Relationship**

Apart from its strategic significance, the Iran–Syria partnership has consistently possessed an ideological dimension that distinguishes it from a mere transactional association. The Ba'athist elite of Syria, which is officially secular and predominantly composed of the Alawite minority, discovered in revolutionary Iran a collaborator ready to prioritise mutual opposition to Western and Israeli influence over sectarian distinctions. This perspective allowed Tehran to portray its backing of Damascus as involvement in a larger anti-imperial initiative rather than sectarian bias, a narrative that has surprisingly endured despite the significant material expenses of the alliance since 2011 (Goodarzi, 2006; Wastnidge, 2024). Contemporary research has emphasised this narrative from two noteworthy perspectives. Booyesen (2021)

contends that Iran's internal narrative regarding its involvement in Syria predominantly utilises the rhetoric of martyrdom, portraying the fatalities of IRGC members and allied militia as a foundation of religious and political legitimacy that enabled Tehran to maintain public backing for an expensive, remote conflict — a dynamic that the foundational literature on Iranian strategy in Syria often minimises. Cohen (2022) elaborates on a systematic demographic manipulation in regions vacated by their native inhabitants, especially near Damascus and the route to the Lebanese border, where displaced Sunni individuals were frequently substituted by Shia settlers affiliated with Iranian-aligned militias — a phenomenon Cohen refers to as "Shi'ization" instead of simple battlefield consolidation. Simultaneously, the sectarian nature of Iran's wartime mobilization—enlisting Shia militia combatants chiefly from Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan to engage in a predominantly Sunni nation—significantly complicated Tehran's anti-imperial rhetoric, exacerbating tensions that Iranian officials have intermittently sought to minimise publicly while effecting minimal change in reality.

*** The Economic Foundation of the Syria–Turkey Relationship**

Before 2011, the relationship between Syria and Turkey was primarily based on economic ties, which are often overlooked in narratives centred on security competition. Bilateral commerce expanded swiftly during the 2000s, visa restrictions were eliminated, and both nations collaborated on infrastructure projects — elements of what Turkish authorities termed a "zero problems with neighbours" strategy, aimed at transforming Ankara into a regional center for trade and diplomacy instead of a military stronghold. That relationship did not endure beyond 2011. After Turkey imposed sanctions on Damascus and redirected its trade, the collapse was genuine yet secondary — a byproduct of Ankara's choice to support the opposition — which subsequently influenced how Turkish officials assessed the advantages of re-establishing economic relations with Syria's transitional government post-December 2024.

*** Theoretical Framework: Explaining Divergence through Neoclassical Realism**

Comparing Iranian and Turkish strategies in Syria necessitates a framework that accommodates both the structural

challenges encountered by each state and the divergent decisions they opted for in reaction. Neoclassical realism accomplishes that task. Gideon Rose (1998) asserted unequivocally that "a foreign policy theory predicated exclusively on systemic factors is often misleading," as the power distribution within the international system limits state actions without determining them — this void is addressed by domestic elements like elite perceptions, regime ideologies, and a state's ability to mobilise resources.

Implement that perspective to Iran and Turkey in Syria, and the conundrum begins to clarify. Two regional powers encountered almost identical systemic motivations — a disintegrating Syrian state, an opportunity for influence, and the danger of a competitor occupying the void first — yet ultimately adopted markedly divergent strategies. For Iran, the critical intervening factor was ideological: the Islamic Republic's foundational pledge to resist Israeli and American dominance conferred upon Syria a significance that surpassed conventional power-political assessments, and the IRGC's institutional independence enabled Tehran to establish militia networks with a level of ideological

consistency that a solely interest-driven framework would not anticipate (Lobell et al., 2009; Project on Middle East Political Science [POMEPS], 2019). For Turkey, the pivotal factor was rooted domestically: years of strife with the PKK had fostered an almost complete intolerance within the Turkish security apparatus for any unification of Kurdish land, and this threshold of tolerance, rather than any overarching regional strategy, influenced Ankara's policy in Syria, even after it initially aimed to depose Assad, once Kurdish factions started to seize substantial Syrian territory (Kardaş, 2025).

This framework also performs valuable functions in establishing boundaries for the comparison. Neoclassical realism perceives foreign policy as the outcome of both external frameworks and internal dynamics, warning against interpreting Iranian and Turkish actions merely as a dichotomy between a "revisionist" nation and a "status quo" one. Both nations aimed to dismantle the pre-2011 regional framework; however, the nature of their revisionist approaches—ideological proliferation for Iran and border regulation alongside Kurdish suppression for Turkey—originates from distinctly divergent domestic

systems. The subsequent sections utilise this framework implicitly to structure the comparison of objectives, stages, and areas of divergence.

Two alternative frameworks warrant a cursory examination and a swift rejection. A purely structural, neorealist perspective would anticipate analogous actions from Iran and Turkey when confronted with identical systemic indicators — a disintegrating Syrian state and the potential emergence of a competitor. It fails to elucidate why Turkey initially sought regime change while Iran aimed for regime preservation, as both decisions are justifiable within a limited balance-of-power framework. A constructivist perspective, focused on identity and normative allegiance, encapsulates a significant portion of Iran's ideological self-perception but encounters difficulties with the persistent pragmatic shifts exhibited by both nations — Turkey's transition from overt antagonism to measured engagement with Damascus post-2022, or Iran's readiness to concede a reduced military presence in Syria following the arrival of Russian air capabilities in 2015 (CSIS, 2021). Neoclassical realism's focus on the interplay between systemic opportunities and domestic mediation

elucidates both the general parallels in the revisionist tendencies of the two states and the stark contrasts in the manifestation of that revisionism in practice.

*** National and Regional Interests**

*** Iran's Aims in Syria**

Iran's engagement in Syria was based on a series of interconnected objectives: -

- 1- Maintaining the Assad regime as the cornerstone of Iranian dominance in the Levant, as its downfall would disrupt the geographical cohesion of the broader Axis of Resistance.
- 2- Mitigating the proliferation of Sunni jihadist factions, particularly the Islamic State, which Tehran perceived as both an ideological and an urgent security menace.
- 3- Maintaining the logistical and military route to Hezbollah, reliant on uninterrupted passage through Syrian territory (Atlantic Council, 2020).
- 4- Sustaining influence over Israel via a proactive military deployment in proximity to the Golan Heights.
- 5- Safeguarding the substantial financial investment Iran has established in Syria — assessed by multiple sources to range from 30 to 50 billion US dollars in credit lines, oil dealings, and military expenditures from 2011 to 2020, with certain projections for the entire duration significantly exceeding that

figure (Atlantic Council, 2020; IranWire, 2022; The New Arab, 2025).

These objectives mutually strengthened each other, imparting a distinctive character to Iranian engagement. The necessity to counter Sunni extremism, for example, provided a defensive rationale for Iran's militia mobilisation that appealed to segments of the Syrian populace apprehensive about Iranian hegemony — the prospect of territorial control by the Islamic State or a comparable entity appeared significantly more dire to many Syrians. Simultaneously, the Hezbollah corridor dictated particular geographic imperatives for Iranian military strategy, prompting Tehran to concentrate on fortifying the Damascus-Homs-Qusayr corridor adjacent to the Lebanese border, despite the availability of more accessible territorial acquisitions elsewhere. Collectively, these intersecting objectives elucidate a recurring theme in this paper: Iran, in contrast to Turkey, never genuinely considered a negotiated transition from Assad. Any successor regime, regardless of its formation, was improbable to maintain the unique blend of ideological congruence, territorial influence, and militia framework that rendered Syria vital

to Tehran's regional strategy.

*** Turkey's Aims in Syria**

Turkey's aims evolved significantly throughout the examined timeframe — to the extent that "objectives" seems almost too neat a term — yet they can be encapsulated as follows: -

1- In the initial stages of the conflict, the objective was to supplant Assad's regime with a government more favourable to Ankara's regional aspirations and ideologically congruent with the opposition factions associated with the Muslim Brotherhood that Turkey endorsed.

2- Averting the establishment of an autonomous or federal Kurdish governance in northern Syria, which Ankara has persistently regarded as an existential peril due to the SDF's affiliations with the PKK (Alma Research and Education Center, 2025).

3- Overseeing the substantial humanitarian challenge posed by Syrian displacement: at its zenith, Turkey accommodated over 3.7 million registered Syrian refugees, the most extensive refugee demographic housed by any nation globally (UNHCR, 2025b).

4- Creating a buffer zone along its southern frontier via direct military intervention — Operations Euphrates Shield (2016), Olive Branch (2018),

and Peace Spring (2019) (FDD, 2025).

5- Recently, it has established itself as the foremost external supporter of Syria's post-Assad transitional administration, utilising the 2025 PKK disarmament initiative as a means to advocate for the dissolution of the SDF's autonomous command framework (Baker Institute for Public Policy, 2025).

Similar to Iran, these objectives did not consistently align, and this discord elucidates much of what appeared, at different times, as inconsistency in Turkish policy. The objective of ousting Assad often conflicted with the aim of limiting Kurdish independence, as numerous militant factions crucial to the anti-Assad campaign were initially hesitant to focus on the YPG, which was simultaneously engaged in combat against both the Islamic State and Assad's supporters. Turkey's humanitarian responsibilities exacerbated the situation. The accommodation of millions of refugees exerted significant domestic pressure for a diplomatic resolution that would facilitate mass repatriation, despite Ankara's military actions in Kurdish-controlled regions continually producing new displacements that countered this objective. This does

not constitute incoherence. The typical friction arises when a state aims for multiple, only partially compatible objectives amidst genuine uncertainty — a friction that neoclassical realism, emphasising domestic mediating elements, adeptly elucidates.

Table 1 delineates these objectives in parallel, aligning each state's articulated goals with the primary policy mechanisms employed to achieve them.

Table 1 Comparative Strategic Objectives of Iran and Turkey in Syria, 2011–2025

Dimension	Iran	Turkey
Primary Objective	Preserve the Assad government as the anchor of the Axis of Resistance	Initially regime change; later, containment of Kurdish (YPG/SDF) territorial control
Principal Instrument	IRGC Quds Force advisors; transnational Shia militias (Hezbollah, Iraqi and Afghan units)	Conventional Turkish Armed Forces; Syrian National Army-aligned factions
Key Motivations	Ideological solidarity; land corridor to Hezbollah; forward defence against Israel	Kurdish/PKK containment; border security; refugee management; regional influence
Financial Exposure	Estimated US\$30–50 billion in credit, oil, and military costs (2011–2020)	Refugee hosting costs; cross-border operations; administration of controlled zones
Legal/Diplomatic Basis	Invitation from the recognised Assad government (pre-Dec. 2024)	Article 51 self-defence claims; post-2024 cooperation with transitional government
Post-2024 Position	Loss of principal ally; severed land corridor to Hezbollah; contested financial claims	Leading external patron of the transitional government; leverage over SDF integration

*** The Wider Cast of External Actors**

The aims of Iran and Turkey in Syria cannot be comprehended independently from the wider array of external players whose interests have intersected with, limited, and at times supported their endeavours. The Gulf nations, especially Saudi Arabia and Qatar, vied with Turkey for dominance over the Syrian opposition during the initial phases of the conflict, financing and equipping competing groups that splintered the anti-Assad alliance Turkey aimed to spearhead. Russia's intervention in 2015 altered Iran's stance, offering aerial assistance that alleviated Tehran's military strain while concurrently subordinating Iranian goals to a Russian-dominated command framework that occasionally conflicted with Iran's own inclinations, especially regarding the tempo and objectives of military actions. The United States found itself in a notably uncomfortable stance concerning both nations: its alliance with the SDF exerted direct strain on fundamental Turkish security interests, notwithstanding the formal NATO affiliation, while U.S. sanctions on Iran's financial infrastructure progressively diminished Tehran's capacity to

uphold its commitments in Syria during the latter stages of the conflict. The European Union primarily focused on humanitarian assistance and diplomatic efforts regarding refugees in collaboration with Turkey, particularly through the 2016 EU-Turkey migration pact, while failing to establish a self-sufficient military or political strategy to influence on-the-ground results.

*** Key Phases of Involvement, 2011–2025**

Iranian and Turkish engagement in Syria can be categorised into seven distinct stages, each characterised by a change in the power dynamics on the ground and a subsequent response from the external supporters of both nations.

Phase One: Commencement and Preliminary Assistance (2011–2012). Iran promptly acted to bolster Assad's administration by dispatching IRGC advisors and providing financial support to assist Damascus in coping with declining oil revenues and the initial surge of defections from the Syrian military (Milani, 2013). Turkey utilised the same timeframe to disengage from Damascus, accommodating the political leadership of the Free Syrian Army and urging its Western and Gulf partners to provide armaments to the opposition.

What is notable in this initial phase is the divergent interpretations of the uprising by each government. Iranian authorities, leveraging their revolutionary background, initially characterised the Syrian demonstrations as a result of external meddling and conspiracy — an interpretation that legitimised their early, unconditional backing of Assad's repression instead of advocating for reform. Turkish authorities initially employed discreet diplomacy, as then-Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu undertook multiple visits to Damascus during the spring and summer of 2011, attempting, yet failing, to convince Assad to implement substantial political reforms before the opportunity for a negotiated transition diminished. The failure of that initiative — coupled with Ankara's subsequent realisation that Assad lacked a true commitment to reform — signified the conclusive termination of the "zero problems with neighbours" phase in Turkish foreign policy and paved the way for the more aggressive stance that ensued.

Phase Two: Equipping and Mobilisation of Militias (2012–2013). As the conflict intensified, Iran transcended its advisory capacity, assisting in the organization

and financing of the National Defence Forces — a coalition of pro-government militias — and enabling the deployment of Hezbollah combatants to safeguard critical areas near the Lebanese frontier (Wastnidge, 2024). Turkey enhanced logistical assistance for opposition factions functioning from its land, although direct military engagement by Turkey had not commenced.

Phase Three: The Ascendancy of the Islamic State and Turkey's Strategic Realignment (2014–2015). The territorial growth of the Islamic State in 2014 altered the strategic landscape for both nations. Iran regarded the group as the tangible manifestation of a Sunni extremist menace it had long foreseen, and intensified its collaboration with Iraqi and Syrian militias to mitigate it. Turkey's initial indecision regarding the group attracted ongoing global reproach, yet the more significant transformation for Ankara was the YPG's rise as the most competent local ally in the U.S.-led coalition against the Islamic State — a situation Turkey observed with increasing concern (FDD, 2025).

Phase Four: Russian Involvement and the Astana Initiative (2015–2017). Russia's direct military involvement in September 2015 altered the course of the conflict,

providing aerial support that significantly benefited Assad and alleviated pressure on Iran, despite complicating on-ground coordination between Tehran and Moscow (CSIS, 2021). The initiation of the Astana process in 2017, which united Russia, Iran, and Turkey as co-guarantors of specified "de-escalation zones," represented a significant yet tenuous compromise between Ankara and Tehran, enabling Turkey to commence direct military actions against Kurdish-controlled areas while implicitly endorsing ongoing Russian and Iranian support for Assad in other regions of the nation.

The practical implementation of the Astana framework exposes the constraints of Iranian-Turkish collaboration, even during its peak. Four zones for de-escalation were created, encompassing Idlib, sections of Homs and Hama, Eastern Ghouta, and the southern regions of Daraa and Quneitra, with each guarantor ostensibly tasked with overseeing adherence in specified locales. In reality, the configuration functioned asymmetrically: from 2018 to 2019, Syrian government troops, supported by Russian aerial capabilities and Iranian-affiliated militias, methodically reclaimed three out of four zones, whereas Turkey's role as a guarantor in Idlib diminished,

ultimately failing to avert a renewed government assault that displaced hundreds of thousands of additional civilians toward the Turkish frontier (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2023). This trend — Astana presenting a diplomatic facade of collaboration while the fundamental military equilibrium increasingly favoured Assad and his Iranian and Russian supporters — is why the framework appears more as a tool for regulating competition among external benefactors than as a sincere attempt at a negotiated political resolution.

Phase Five: Turkish Transnational Military Actions and Territorial Integration (2016–2020). From 2016 to 2020, Turkey executed three significant cross-border operations — Euphrates Shield, Olive Branch, and Peace Spring — thereby creating regions of direct Turkish authority or influence throughout a considerable expanse of northern Syria and displacing SDF forces from locations such as Afrin and the Tel Abyad-Ras al-Ain corridor (FDD, 2025). Iran, during the same timeframe, entrenched itself more deeply in central and eastern Syria — a fortification that would subsequently render Tehran's presence there exceedingly difficult to dislodge.

In addition to the observable military manoeuvres, both nations equally committed resources to more subtle methods of consolidation. Following the stabilisation of the front by Russian air support post-2015, Iran consolidated its militia networks into more resilient institutional frameworks — assimilating IRGC-affiliated units into the Syrian army's command structure and securing enduring basing rights, property, and economic interests, particularly along the route linking Damascus to the Lebanese border, designed explicitly to endure beyond any prospective political resolution. Following Operation Euphrates Shield, Turkey commenced the administrative integration of its controlled territory: implementing the Turkish lira as a supplementary currency, expanding Turkish mobile networks, and aligning local educational institutions with the Turkish curriculum — actions that Turkish officials termed stabilisation and reconstruction, while detractors labelled them as the foundation for a persistent, albeit unofficial, territorial presence.

Phase Six: The Dismantling of the Regime and Its Consequences (2024–2025). The most pivotal moment of the entire era occurred in December 2024, when a swift offensive

orchestrated by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham surged through Aleppo, Hama, Homs, and ultimately Damascus, concluding fifty-four years of Assad family governance in mere days. For Iran, the downfall represented a clear strategic setback: the departure of its primary Levantine ally disrupted the terrestrial connection to Hezbollah, dismantled a decade of proactive defence strategies, and raised significant concerns regarding the recuperation of billions in Iranian claims against Damascus. For Turkey, the identical downfall presented a considerable, albeit intricate, opportunity: Ankara became a prominent external supporter of Syria's transitional administration, while concurrently urging the new regime in Damascus to hasten the integration or disbandment of the SDF. The aforementioned pressure coincided with a significant event — the 2025 declaration of the PKK's disbandment, subsequent to renewed communication between the Turkish administration and incarcerated PKK chief Abdullah Öcalan — thereby presenting, for the first time in ten years, a viable avenue for addressing the Kurdish issue that had profoundly influenced Turkey's policy in Syria (Baker Institute for Public Policy, 2025; Atlantic Council, 2025).

Stage Seven: Unification and Conflict in Post-Assad Syria (2025). By 2025, the initial hope regarding Syria's political transition had transformed into a more chaotic and frequently disputed situation. The provisional administration led by President Ahmad al-Sharaa endeavoured to mediate between rival foreign benefactors — embracing Turkish security collaboration and reconstruction support while prudently interacting with Gulf nations keen to mitigate excessive Turkish dominance. The March 2025 accord between the SDF and the Syrian national army to consolidate forces and transfer authority over border crossings and oil installations to Damascus by the end of the year represented a genuine, albeit incomplete, advancement toward territorial reunification; nonetheless, execution was inconsistent, and intermittent confrontations between the SDF and Turkish-supported Syrian National Army factions persisted post-agreement (Congressional Research Service, 2025; Baker Institute for Public Policy, 2025). In 2025, Iran primarily assessed its setbacks, with indications that Tehran was investigating maritime and Iraqi land pathways to maintain its link to Hezbollah, following the loss of the

Syrian corridor it had depended on for more than ten years (RFE/RL, 2025).

*** Points of Divergence and Convergence**

Discrepancy in strategic reasoning. The fundamental distinction between Iranian and Turkish policy lies in the objectives each nation sought to achieve. Iran's participation was primarily conservative — an endeavour to maintain a long-standing ally and the surrounding regional framework. Turkey's engagement initially had a revisionist agenda, seeking to completely overthrow the Syrian government, but later evolved into a strategy focused on territorial governance: establishing a lasting Turkish security presence and a barrier against Kurdish unification along its frontier (Kardaş, 2025).

Discrepancy in tools. Iran's primary instrument was the mobilisation of ideologically compatible militias and the Quds Force of the IRGC, functioning predominantly beyond the norms of inter-state military interactions. Turkey predominantly depended on its traditional military forces, augmented by Syrian opposition factions supported by Turkey, resulting in more conspicuous and geographically limited interventions

by Ankara (FDD, 2025).

Disparity in assertions of legitimacy. A relatively overlooked yet significantly crucial distinction pertains to the manner in which each state has rationalised its involvement in Syria to both domestic and global audiences. Iran perpetually characterised its engagement as a reaction to an official appeal from a legitimate sovereign authority, grounding its legitimacy in the legal continuity of Assad's solicitation for Iranian military assistance — a rationale that disintegrated completely with the regime in December 2024, thereby leaving Tehran devoid of any analogous legal foundation for its continued presence in the nation. In contrast, Turkey has based its military operations on a combination of Article 51 self-defence assertions related to PKK incursions and, more recently, direct solicitations and collaboration agreements with Syria's transitional administration — providing Ankara with a more flexible, albeit still disputed, legal and diplomatic foundation amidst significant political upheaval.

Discrepancy in interactions with indigenous communities. Iran's engagement, facilitated by Shia militia networks, has generated significant demographic and

sectarian tensions in regions of Syria previously devoid of Shia influence — tensions that Cohen's (2022) analysis of intentional demographic alteration in the Damascus corridor elucidates with greater specificity than is typically found in the wider literature. Turkey's involvement in northern Syria has entailed direct administrative participation — offering services, currency, and education in regions it governs — a situation that detractors label as de facto occupation while proponents refer to it as stabilisation (Alma Research and Education Center, 2025).

Nexus of alignment. Notwithstanding these disparities, Iranian and Turkish policies converged at various pivotal instances. Both nations acted as joint guarantors of the Astana process with Russia, agreeing on a common structure for overseeing, if not settling, the conflict while simultaneously supporting rival factions in combat. Both nations have persistently resisted formal Kurdish self-governance in Syria, albeit for divergent reasons: Turkey due to its immediate apprehension regarding the PKK, and Iran due to fears that Kurdish autonomy might disrupt the broader regional equilibrium and invigorate Kurdish movements in

Iraq and within its own territory. This mutual disdain has, at different times, created an unrecognised yet tangible convergence of interests between Tehran and Ankara, despite their rivalry for dominance in Syria's future reconstruction and political resolution.

Rivalry regarding restoration. An additional, and progressively significant, aspect of divergence pertains to the conflicting aspirations of the two states regarding Syria's future reconstruction. Prior to the collapse of Assad's administration, Iranian companies pursued enduring reconstruction agreements and concessions, especially in sectors such as telecommunications, agriculture, mining, and phosphate extraction, partly as an unofficial method to mitigate Tehran's substantial financial liabilities (The New Arab, 2025). The transitional government's explicit inclination toward Turkish- and Gulf-sponsored reconstruction, rather than allowing any ongoing Iranian economic involvement, amplifies the war's political ramifications into the economic domain: Iran's military setback has been exacerbated by its almost complete marginalisation from the reconstruction economy that could have mitigated some of its losses. In contrast, Turkey

commenced 2025 in a significantly more advantageous position to transform its wartime investments into economic benefits, as its construction and infrastructure companies — some of the most globally engaged in the industry — are ideally situated to spearhead the reconstruction of Syrian cities following over ten years of conflict.

Exhibited prudence regarding Israel. Both nations have exhibited a measure of mutual restraint concerning direct conflict with Israel over Syrian land, despite their otherwise divergent stances. Iran's proactive defence strategy in Syria aimed to dissuade rather than incite direct military engagement from Israel, and Tehran typically refrained from escalating tensions despite numerous Israeli assaults on Iranian and Hezbollah-affiliated locations in Syria post-2013. Turkey, despite its proximity to Western nations, has largely refrained from direct engagement with Israeli activities in southern Syria, indicating a tacit, mutual interest among various regional players in preventing the Syrian conflict from escalating into a wider interstate war.

*** Statistical Overview: The Human and Financial Dimensions of the Conflict**

Assessing the comparative

influence of Iranian and Turkish participation in Syria is challenging for two reasons: the intentional lack of transparency regarding Iranian military and financial expenditures, and the fluctuating nature of displacement data in the rapidly evolving post-Assad landscape of Syria. Nonetheless, the existing evidence substantiates a fairly robust empirical framework across four facets: financial risk, displacement of refugees, the human toll of the conflict in terms of lives lost, and the tempo of military activities.

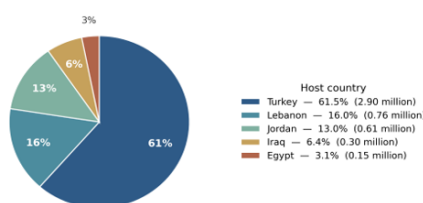
Financial vulnerability. Estimates of Iran's overall expenditure in backing the Assad regime are between 30 billion and over 50 billion US dollars from 2011 to 2020, sourced from oil and fuel credit lines (estimated at 2 to 3 billion dollars annually), direct monetary transfers, and the expenses associated with maintaining militia forces (Atlantic Council, 2020; IranWire, 2022). A disclosed Iranian governmental document referenced by regional media estimated Tehran's total demands from Damascus — encompassing both military and non-military aspects — at approximately 50 billion dollars, a liability that Syria's newly established transitional authorities are allegedly contesting. Turkey's financial obligations have

diverged significantly, focusing on humanitarian and administrative aspects rather than solely military: expenses related to accommodating Syrian refugees, constructing border security systems, managing Turkish-administered regions in northern Syria, and financing three substantial cross-border military operations. This obligation is reflected in the nation's overall defence expenditures as well. Turkey's total military spending is projected to be approximately US\$25 billion in 2024, reflecting a 12 percent increase from the previous year, which positions it seventeenth in the world, as per the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's 2025 evaluation of global military expenditures (SIPRI, 2025; Turkish Minute, 2025a). That statistic encompasses the entire defence budget instead of solely the expenses related to Syria; however, the increasing trend from 2016 to 2024 aligns closely with the periods of significant Turkish military engagement in northern Syria, spanning from Euphrates Shield to the stabilisation mission post-2024.

Displacement of refugees. Turkey has persistently accommodated the most substantial Syrian refugee demographic globally, reaching approximately 3.7

million registered refugees in 2021 before experiencing a gradual decrease (UNHCR, 2025b). As of the conclusion of 2024, Turkey accommodated an estimated 2.9 million registered Syrian refugees, constituting approximately 61 percent of the regional aggregate, while Lebanon hosted around 755,000 (16 percent), Jordan about 611,000 (13 percent), Iraq nearly 304,000 (6 percent), and Egypt close to 148,000 (3 percent) (UNHCR, 2025b). Figure 1 illustrates the regional distribution, clearly demonstrating the unequal burden of Syrian displacement on one particular host nation. After the downfall of the Assad administration in December 2024, Turkish authorities indicated that over 450,000 Syrians had repatriated by mid-2025, contributing to a larger regional return initiative that the UNHCR estimated might encompass up to 1.5 million individuals by the conclusion of 2025 (Turkish Minute, 2025b).

Figure 1
Registered Syrian Refugees by Host Country, End-2024



Source: UNHCR (2025b). Figures reflect registered Syrian refugees as of end-2024; totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

The influx of refugees was not merely a humanitarian figure for

Ankara; it represented an economic challenge, and a contentious issue as well. Esen and Oğuş Binatlı (2017) conducted a peer-reviewed regional labour market study across twenty-six Turkish provinces from 2004 to 2016, revealing that regions with significant Syrian refugee populations experienced notable rises in local unemployment and reductions in both formal and informal employment — a discovery that elucidates why refugee policy emerged as a persistent domestic political concern in Turkey prior to the 2024 regime collapse, which provided Ankara the opportunity to promote extensive repatriations.

The toll on humanity, measured in lives lost. A comprehensive statistical analysis of this conflict must address its fundamental cost: the tally of individuals who perished. The UN Human Rights Office (2022) employed a blend of documented case files and statistical estimation methodologies — specifically multiple systems estimation and data imputation — to ascertain that a minimum of 306,887 civilians perished in Syria from March 2011 to March 2021, with a 95 percent confidence interval suggesting the actual number lies between 281,443 and 337,971. Out of the total, 143,350

fatalities were meticulously recorded and confirmed, whereas the rest were extrapolated from insufficient documentation — a methodological decision the report's authors explicitly justified as more truthful than disregarding the unrecorded deceased or estimating a singular exact figure (UN Human Rights Office, 2022). Importantly, that statistic pertains solely to civilian fatalities over a single decade, omitting combatants from all factions and the significantly greater number of Syrians who perished due to the indirect consequences of warfare — deprivation of healthcare, nutrition, and potable water — indicating that the actual human cost of the entire 2011–2025 conflict is, without doubt, considerably greater than any singular figure presented in this document can justifiably assert.

Speed of military manoeuvres. Turkey's direct military engagement in Syria has focused on three distinct operations — Euphrates Shield (2016), Olive Branch (2018), and Peace Spring (2019) — each targeting specific territories controlled by the SDF or the Islamic State along the border. In contrast, Iran's involvement has been more persistent and widespread, maintained through rotating IRGC advisory missions and allied militias

instead of sporadic conventional operations (FDD, 2025). Table 2 delineates this comparative chronology.

Table 2 Comparative Timeline of Iranian and Turkish Military Involvement in Syria, 2011–2025

Period	Iranian Actions	Turkish Actions
2011–2012	IRGC advisory deployment; financial support to offset lost oil revenue	Diplomatic pressure for reform; hosting of opposition political leadership
2012–2013	Organisation of the National Defence Forces; Hezbollah deployment near the Lebanese border	Logistical and material support for armed opposition factions
2014–2015	Expanded coordination against the Islamic State alongside Iraqi militias	Ambivalence toward ISIS criticised internationally; alarm at YPG-led SDF formation
2015–2017	Ground support to the Russian-led offensive; entrenchment in central and eastern Syria	Co-guarantor of the Astana de-escalation framework alongside Russia and Iran
2016	Continued militia consolidation	Operation Euphrates Shield launched against ISIS and YPG-held territory
2018	Continued advisory and militia presence	Operation Olive Branch; capture of Afrin from the YPG
2019	Continued advisory and militia presence	Operation Peace Spring; Tel Abyad–Ras al-Ain corridor secured
Dec. 2024	Loss of the Assad government; collapse of the forward-defence posture	Positioning as a principal patron of the transitional government
2025	Search for alternative routes to Hezbollah; pursuit of financial claims against Damascus	SDF integration agreement; PKK disarmament process; continued reconstruction diplomacy

Table 3 Selected Human and Financial Cost Indicators of the Syrian Conflict

Indicator	Estimate	Source
Civilian deaths, March 2011–March 2021	306,887 (95% CI: 281,443–337,971)	UN Human Rights Office (2022)
Documented (individually verified) deaths within that total	143,350	UN Human Rights Office (2022)
Iran's financial exposure, 2011–2020	US\$30–50 billion	Atlantic Council (2020); IranWire (2022)
Iran's total claims against Damascus (leaked estimate)	~US\$50 billion	The New Arab (2025)
Turkey's total military expenditure, 2024	US\$25 billion (+12% year-on-year)	SIPRI (2025); Turkish Minute (2025a)
Peak registered Syrian refugees hosted by Turkey	3.7 million (2021)	UNHCR (2025b)
Syrian refugee returns reported by Turkey, by mid-2025	450,000+	Turkish Minute (2025b)

Examining the statistics collectively. Collectively, these statistics indicate a fundamental imbalance in the nature, if not the total extent, of Iranian and Turkish engagement in Syria. Iran's vulnerabilities have primarily been financial and military, distributed across a somewhat unclear array of expenditures, the complete scope of which may remain unknown without independent audits of IRGC-associated spending. Turkey's vulnerability has been significantly more apparent and acutely experienced by its citizens: accommodating millions of refugees in urban areas has led to persistent social and political pressure — a

pressure that the labor-market analysis by Esen and Oğuş Binatlı (2017) quantifies rather than simply claims — evident in the continuous domestic discourse regarding the expenses and administration of the refugee demographic, even as this same demographic has afforded Ankara substantial influence in its discussions with the European Union concerning migration policy. The increase in refugee repatriations since 2024 — exceeding 450,000 by mid-2025, as reported by Turkish authorities — demonstrates the interconnectedness of Iran's and Turkey's circumstances in Syria: the regime's downfall that undermined Iran's strategic standing also alleviated, to a certain extent, the demographic and economic strains that had burdened Turkish policy for over ten years (Turkish Minute, 2025b). Beneath the strategic accounts of both states lies the significantly larger and messier statistic from Table 3: over 300,000 verified civilian fatalities within a single decade of a conflict that, by 2025, had persisted for fourteen years — a stark reminder that the terminology of "financial exposure" prevalent in foreign-policy discourse, including much of this document, can reduce a humanitarian disaster to mere numerical analysis if the

fundamental toll in human lives is not explicitly articulated.

*** Strategic Implications for the Middle East**

Iranian and Turkish engagement in Syria has altered the regional equilibrium of power significantly beyond Syria's frontiers. Numerous analysts perceive the downfall of the Assad regime in December 2024 as the most consequential strategic defeat for the Axis of Resistance since its inception — disrupting the terrestrial corridor to Hezbollah and compelling Tehran to consider more expensive, less dependable maritime or Iraqi options to sustain its Lebanese ally. The loss has a domestic political aspect as well: after investing tens of billions of dollars in a partner government that disintegrated in mere days, Iran's leadership now confronts intensified domestic examination regarding the efficiency of its regional strategy, especially in light of ongoing economic pressure from sanctions (IranWire, 2022).

For Turkey, this identical downfall has presented a legitimate, albeit still ambiguous, chance to recalibrate the parameters of its regional engagement. As the primary external supporter of Syria's transitional administration, Ankara currently wields considerable power

over reconstruction, security sector reform, and the conditions for the integration of Kurdish forces into a cohesive Syrian state. The simultaneous declaration of PKK disarmament in 2025 indicates that Turkey might be nearing a significant juncture in a conflict that has influenced its internal and external policies for forty years — yet the sustainability of this process is still in question, and confrontations between the SDF and Turkish-affiliated groups have persisted despite the preliminary 2025 accords.

The juxtaposition of Iran and Turkey exemplifies a wider transformation in Middle Eastern geopolitics: regional authorities are progressively advancing their agendas via proxy engagement, constrained military involvement, and informal multilateral frameworks such as Astana, instead of relying on conventional alliances or direct inter-state conflict. This has tangible repercussions for smaller and non-state entities caught amid conflicting regional interests — including the Kurds of Syria, whose political destiny hinges on negotiations where Kurdish representatives have, at best, held a subordinate position. The Syrian situation serves as a warning for Iraqi Kurdistan and the wider Kurdish political landscape regarding

the rapid changes in external support and the vulnerability of sub-state political initiatives to the strategic adjustments of more dominant regional actors.

Consequences for Iraq. The course of Syria significantly influences Iraq, whose political framework has historically been moulded by the competition between Iran and, to a lesser degree, Turkey. Iran's challenges in Syria have reignited discussions among Iraqi politicians regarding the sustainability of Tehran's influence in the region, especially among factions traditionally associated with the Iranian-supported Popular Mobilisation Forces, which bear significant similarities to the militia frameworks Iran established in Syria. Turkey has consistently augmented its economic and occasionally military footprint in northern Iraq, explicitly rationalised on counter-PKK grounds that closely align with Ankara's declared justification for its intervention in Syria. Syria's situation provides a valuable, albeit flawed, framework for understanding the potential development of Iranian-Turkish competition in Iraq and the wider Iraqi Kurdistan area — particularly if the 2025 PKK disarmament initiative succeeds and transforms Turkish-Kurdish

dynamics throughout the region.

Consequences for Russia and the broader international framework. The occurrences of December 2024 prompted significant enquiries regarding the dependability of Russian security assurances throughout the Middle East. Moscow's failure, or reluctance, to take decisive action to avert Assad's downfall — markedly different from its assertive intervention in 2015 — is primarily ascribed to Russia's military overextension post-Ukraine invasion, leading to a wider regional reevaluation of the value of Russian support. This reevaluation has highlighted the significant roles of Iranian and Turkish influence in shaping Syria's future, as neither Washington nor Moscow seems capable of regaining the pivotal external positions they held in previous stages of the conflict.

Consequences for the Gulf nations. The Gulf monarchies, with Saudi Arabia at the forefront, have adjusted their regional stance due to Iran's waning influence and Turkey's ascendance. Riyadh's prudent re-engagement with Damascus's interim administration signifies a wider Saudi aim: to avert any singular external benefactor — Iran prior to 2024, Turkey presently — from achieving unchallenged dominance over Syria's

political and economic direction. The outcome is a more authentically multipolar landscape of external engagement in Syria than at nearly any time throughout Assad's governance, with Gulf, Turkish, and Western entities now vying for sway over reconstruction financing and political structure instead of merely responding to Iranian and Russian supremacy. The unresolved issue is whether this increasingly competitive external environment will bolster Syrian sovereignty by hindering the dominance of a single patron, or if it will merely extend the externally induced fragmentation that has characterised the conflict since its inception.

*** Conclusion**

The participation of Iran and Turkey in the Syrian conflict from 2010 to 2025 exemplifies two divergent approaches to regional power dynamics, influenced more by internal political frameworks, ideological allegiance, and threat assessment than by mere resource availability. Iran's dedication to maintaining the Assad regime demonstrated a profound ideological and strategic investment in the Axis of Resistance, upheld for more than ten years at significant financial expense, only to disintegrate within days in December 2024. Turkey's

convoluted trajectory — transitioning from supporting regime change to a prolonged offensive against Kurdish territorial unification, and ultimately assuming a pivotal role in Syria's post-Assad evolution — exemplifies the enduring influence of the Kurdish issue on Turkish security considerations, a dynamic that the 2025 PKK disarmament initiative may be beginning to tackle.

Neither path simplifies into a narrative of national interest optimisation. Both are more comprehensively interpreted, via the neoclassical realist perspective utilised in this paper, as the outcome of systemic opportunities interacting with unique domestic political factors. The downfall of the Assad regime marks the pivotal moment of this era, transforming ten years of relatively stable, albeit expensive, involvement into a dynamic and unresolved struggle for Syria's political destiny. The potential for Iran to establish a significant presence in a post-Assad Syria, along with the possibility that Turkey's existing influence will lead to a sustainable solution for the Kurdish issue that has heavily influenced its regional strategy, are unresolved matters that are expected to shape Middle Eastern geopolitics throughout the decade. Considering

the rapid developments since December 2024, it is crucial to maintain vigilant observation of policy changes in Tehran and Ankara, particularly regarding their implications for Syrian Kurdish political entities, to comprehend the forthcoming stage of Middle Eastern realignment.

Constraints and avenues for subsequent investigation. This research's dependence on secondary, predominantly open-access resources indicates that its conclusions ought to be regarded as tentative in various aspects. Accurate statistics regarding Iranian spending are still debated, and the rapidly evolving circumstances in post-Assad Syria indicate that information on displacement, repatriation, and reconstruction will continue to change following the conclusion of this document. The civilian casualty statistics included in this update, for example, extend only until March 2021 — the latest timeframe for which a comprehensive UN statistical assessment is available — and almost undoubtedly underestimate the total fatalities throughout the entire 2011–2025 timeframe, as no similarly thorough tally has been conducted for the concluding years of the conflict. Future research would gain from a more detailed analysis of sub-

national disparities in regions of Syria influenced by Turkey and former Iranian presence, a methodical assessment of the actual implementation of the 2025 SDF integration agreement, a comprehensive casualty estimate once post-2021 data of equivalent rigour is accessible, and a comparative application of the neoclassical realist framework utilised here to Iranian and Turkish actions in Iraq, Lebanon, and the South Caucasus, where analogous tensions between ideological allegiance and domestic threat perception could reveal broader patterns of regional engagement that transcend the Syrian context.

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