Israel vs. Turkey? Or America's Shadow Play in Eurasia?

by Tina Antonis

As U.S. allies recalibrate their priorities, Israel's spotlight shifts subtly from Iran to Turkey—a development flagged by Trita Parsi as the next act in a deepening regional drama. But Washington isn't just watching from the wings. From backchannel nods to revived funding for the PKK/YPG-led SDF—mere months after the YPG's disarmament fanfare. Optics that feel oddly familiar to anyone who's studied stay-behind theater. U.S. foreign policy continues to speak louder than press briefings. *Counterterrorism? Hardly.* It's *The Grand Chessboard*, redux—and Russia and China are already on stage.

As U.S. think tanks continue to frame Eurasia as a chessboard and maritime chokepoints as levers of control, the logic of encirclement persists. As argued in *Board Games and Bottlenecks*, this isn't about defense—it's about dominance. From the Bosporus to the Strait of Malacca, the strategy is less about stability than about bottlenecking rivals into submission. Turkey, like Russia and China, isn't just reacting to threats—it's responding to a map already drawn in Washington.

Whether it's Mackinder's Heartland, Spykman's Rimland, or Greater Kurdistan, the maps were drawn long before the headlines. One encircles. The other carves. Both serve the same end: *leverage disguised as liberation.*

Turkey sits astride a geographic and strategic fault line. The Bosporus cleaves its European flank (East Thrace) from the vast Anatolian landmass, anchoring it firmly in Eurasia. But this is more than a continental junction—it's a geostrategic hinge, a role Zbigniew Brzezinski underscored in *The Grand Chessboard*, where he identified Turkey as a pivotal state whose orientation could tip the balance of power across the region. Nicholas Spykman's Rimland theory cast these coastal corridors as the key to global control. And by that logic, Turkey isn't just on the periphery—it's the pressure point. A buffer, a chokepoint, and a stage where sea power and land power lock eyes.

Control the chokepoints, control the game. U.S. policy papers have long emphasized the need to dominate maritime bottlenecks to contain China's rise. From the Strait of Malacca to the First Island Chain, the logic is clear: restrict access, restrict power. The Turkish Straits—linking the Black Sea to the Mediterranean—are no exception. In fact, they're central. The Bosporus isn't just a continental divide; it's a pressure valve for Russian naval movement and a potential fulcrum in Eurasian power projection. That makes Turkey not just a hinge state, but a gatekeeper. And Washington knows it.

Turkey has been treading the middle line between Washington and its invented foes, Russia and China for a long time. The so-called 'Neo-Ottoman revival' is less a Turkish doctrine than a

Western projection—an ideological scarecrow used to justify regime change narratives and delegitimize Ankara's strategic autonomy.

For those sympathetic to Moscow's geopolitical concerns, the idea of a "security zone" in Donbass is seen as a rational response to NATO encroachment. But when Ankara seeks similar depth along its southern flank—amid real cross-border insurgent threats—the same logic is rebranded as expansionism. The framing isn't about principle; it's about power alignment. Security zones aren't inherently controversial—they're only "illegitimate" when claimed by the wrong side. That's not analysis. That's alignment masquerading as objectivity.

Strategic Buffers, Selective Frames

The U.S. continues to back the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)—a coalition dominated by the YPG, which Turkey sees as indistinguishable from the PKK. Despite the PKK's recent disarmament announcement, Washington has resuscitated funding and military coordination with the SDF—a coalition whose very name was crafted to obscure its PKK lineage. This comes even as the U.S. consolidates its military presence to a single base in Hasakah, signaling a shift from occupation to strategic entrenchment.

Yet when Turkey seeks a buffer zone in northern Syria—citing cross-border insurgent threats—it's cast as revanchist or neo-Ottoman. The same logic that justifies U.S. support for Kurdish forces in the name of "counterterrorism" is denied to Ankara, a NATO ally, in the name of "regional stability."
Security zones are legitimate when they serve U.S. interests. Illegitimate when they don't. That's not strategy—it's narrative engineering.

New Front, Old Logic

A parallel dynamic is now unfolding across Iran's western frontier, where Iranian Kurdish groups have intensified their fight against Tehran. The timing—and the renewed Western attention—tracks neatly with the same proxy logic shaping northern Syria. The actors differ, but the utility is familiar: pressure Iran from its periphery while signaling to Turkey that the Kurdish question remains a lever, not a liability. The escalation doesn't introduce a new doctrine; it extends an existing one. A corridor of pressure running from Qandil to Hasakah to the Turkish borderlands, framed as liberation when convenient and destabilization when Ankara responds.

The Think Tank-Media Feedback Loop

This asymmetry doesn't emerge in a vacuum—it's cultivated through a dense ecosystem of think tanks, media outlets, and advocacy groups, many of them funded by the very defense contractors who profit from perpetual instability. These institutions don't just shape public opinion—they engineer the terms of debate before it ever reaches Congress or cable news. Organizations like the Middle East Forum have actively lobbied for expanded U.S. support to the SDF, even as they push for sanctions against Turkey. Meanwhile, reports from

defense-funded think tanks like the Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS) and the Brookings Institute frame American engagement with Kurdish forces as a moral imperative, while casting Turkey's counter-moves as authoritarian overreach. It's a framing sleight of hand: one actor is seen as stabilizing, the other destabilizing—even when both are pursuing analogous strategic objectives.

This isn't just bias—it's narrative infrastructure underwritten by the Military Industrial Complex. By laundering policy preferences through white papers and op-eds, the think tank-media circuit defines what qualifies as "defensive," what gets labeled "aggression," and who is permitted to redraw borders under the pretext of security. Legibility becomes a function of alignment: if you serve Washington's map, you're called a partner. If you resist it, you're a problem.

The logic doesn't just repeat—it *metastasizes*. Today's proxy alignments and partition logics aren't deviations from NATO's Cold War playbook; they're refinements. Yesterday's anti-communist shock troops have become today's counterterror allies. And the same backchannels once used to suppress dissent now fund it—under new flags, with friendlier press coverage.

Strategy of Tension: Then and Now

While rarely acknowledged, the operational logic behind NATO's Cold War stay-behinds finds an eerie parallel in how Kurdish militias are used today. That doctrine was pioneered in Turkey—where CIA-trained Colonel Alparslan Türkeş helped orchestrate the 1960 coup, then pivoted to politics, founding the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and its paramilitary youth wing, the Grey Wolves. Backed by NATO's Special Warfare Department, the Wolves assassinated leftists and incited ethnic violence in the name of national security—a trajectory meticulously documented in Daniele Ganser's *NATO's Secret Armies*. It was less a defense of democracy than a blueprint for proxy containment, with fascist credentials laundered through anti-communist doctrine.

That legacy didn't end with the Cold War. The Wolves' networks persist, their operational DNA echoing in newer theaters like Ukraine, where pan-Turkic solidarity has become the banner under which old loyalties find new battlegrounds. Their reemergence signals not extinction, but adaptation—a testament to how Cold War instruments morph into post-Cold War proxies. And the logic lives on: U.S. support for PKK-linked Kurdish militias in Syria functions in eerily similar ways—manufacturing fragmentation, pressuring Turkey from within its periphery, and cloaking quasi-state formations in the language of liberation. Call it "soft power," but there's nothing gentle about a partition that rides in on combat gear and lands with congressional funding.

Greater Kurdistan's Favorite Director of National Intelligence

And no, don't count on Tulsi Gabbard to shut the door on Greater Kurdistan. In 2019, as Trump was weighing a withdrawal of U.S. troops from Syria during his first term, Gabbard brought Ilham Ahmed—the then-head of the Syrian Democratic Council, political wing of the

U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces in Rojava—as her guest to Trump's second State of the Union. The message was clear: autonomy should have air support. Ahmed currently serves as Co-Chair of the Foreign Affairs Department of Rojava, formally known as the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria. That same year, Gabbard denounced Erdoğan as a "radical Islamist megalomaniac who wants to establish a caliphate with himself as the Caliph"—a flourish that echoed the very Western propaganda she claimed to resist. And when Gabbard was tapped as Trump's Director of National Intelligence in late 2024, Ahmed publicly welcomed the appointment, citing her commitment to Kurdish autonomy and protection. The insurgent became the institution—and the institution applauded. She later supported Trump's air campaign against Yemen, even calling on other countries to join in, despite once denouncing the Saudi-led war there as "genocidal." And while she once echoed the intelligence community's assessment that Iran wasn't building a nuclear weapon, she later reversed course—dismissing those earlier conclusions as "fake news" just in time to justify the bombing of Iranian nuclear facilities.

That's not dissent. That's a PsyOp in insurgent clothing.

"Continuity of Agenda"

This isn't a rupture. It's what Brian Berletic calls a "continuity of agenda."
From the Grey Wolves to the PKK/YPG/SDF,
From Brzezinski's chessboard to Greater Kurdistan—
The names change,
The map remains.
Partition the periphery.
Encircle Eurasia.
Contain China.

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More sources to look into:

Baiting Turkey: Israel's Strategy in Syria

Former Israeli PM Naftali Bennett says 'Turkey is the new Iran' - YouTube

MEMO - OPINION ...Turkey as Israel's "next Iran"? A strategic rivalry reconsidered

FDD - Beware Turkey's ambitions in the post-Iran power vacuum

SourceWatch FDD

BBC - Briefing: Turkish media see Ankara as Israel's 'next' target after Iran weakened

i24 - Former Israeli PM Bennett warns Turkey poses a new threat

Al Jazeera - Turkish 'threat' talked up in Israel as Netanyahu focuses on new alliances

Türkiye's New Security Architecture: Continuity, Fragility, and Transformation

Ankara Institute

How Likely Is It That The US Will Contain Turkiye After It's Done With Iran?

WSJ: An Urgent Need to Contain Turkey