

How the Geopolitical Shifts Set up Turkey-Iran Rivalry in Iraq and Syria?



September 2023

Author: Berk Özmeral

About the Center

Raman is a research and consultancy center that studies and analyzes political developments and phenomena in the Middle East. Raman relies on state-of-the-art research methods and tools in preparing its research papers that build up a solid knowledge base and contribute constructively to understanding key issues while solving local and regional problems. Our research principles stem from the need to understand local and regional disputes and offer perspectives that promote stability and progress. Raman also prioritizes contributing to the general knowledge base as the main goal for the center's research agenda.

Address: Istanbul / Türkiye

Email: info@ramancenter.org

Contents

Abstract	3
Introduction.....	3
Conflict and Power	4
The Waning U.S Influence and Historical Power Reignition in the Middle East.....	5
Economic Rivalries in the New Middle East.....	6
Syrian Conflict and the Iranian-Turkish Relations	7
The Strategic Balance of Power in Post-War Northern Syria.....	9
Iranian Strategic and Economic Goals in Syria	12
Limitations of Iranian Investment and Strategy in Syria	16
Turkish-Iranian Competition in Syria and Potential for Renewed Rivalry	17
Russian Presence in Syria as a Containment Mechanism for Turkish-Iranian Rivalry	18
Turkish and Iranian Rivalry in Iraq	21
Regional Energy Dominance Between Türkiye and Iran in Iraq.....	22
The Politics of Energy Rivalry in Iraq	24
Turkish-Iranian Rivalry in the Nineveh Governorate	26
Conclusion	30
About the Author	31
Bibliography	32

Abstract

This paper analyzes how Türkiye and Iran are in a nascent geopolitical power struggle for control and influence in the Middle East. The first part of this paper aims to explain the context for this rivalry and analyze how the United States deprioritizes its presence in the Middle East, creating a power vacuum for this rivalry to emerge. The following sections analyze Türkiye and Iran's increased presence in Syria and Iraq and demonstrate how Türkiye and Iran are in a power struggle for resources and political influence in Syria and Iraq.

Introduction

Türkiye and Iran are regional powers that have historically competed for military and cultural dominance during their respective empire eras. When the empires of the Turkish Ottoman and various Persian dynasties eventually lost their status as great powers while still comparatively more industrialized and developed than many of their regional counterparts, the newly established Turkish and Iranian states were forced to accept the new geopolitical realities of the 20th century that the western European powers, and subsequently the United States and the Soviet Union, would have a significant influence on the geopolitical developments in the Middle East. While neither Türkiye nor Iran were colonial subjects, their political decisions were heavily influenced by the various powers on the world stage. Türkiye joined the American-led anti-Soviet bloc due to the threat of Soviet encroachment into Turkish territory, and American and British interests largely influenced Iran's internal politics in the 1950s. While Türkiye and Iran were both influenced by the politics of greater powers during the Cold War, both maintained a strong sense of national identity and self-determination which resulted in policies and actions that were outside the Cold War framework, such as Türkiye's military intervention in Cyprus and Iran's Islamic revolution in 1979.

Both Iran and Türkiye's inclinations towards independent-minded policies during the Cold War set the stage for a future power rivalry between the two countries. While Türkiye and Iran had their foreign policy disagreements during the 20th and early 21st centuries, they were prevented from spilling over into larger regional rivalries partly due to convergence on various other issues that outnumbered the two countries' disagreements.

Given this convergence in various issues, it was in the two countries' mutual interest to pursue a more amicable relationship. The height of this convergence era was between 2010 and 2020, when both countries were vehemently opposed to an emerging Saudi Arabia-UAE-Egypt power faction in the Middle East that was strongly backed by the US under the Trump administration. Ankara and Tehran thought they were excluded from this emerging bloc and engaged in closer political relations. The two countries also found common ground in opposing the Kurdistan Region of Iraq's independence referendum, organized in 2017. Türkiye's strained relationship with Israel during that period also contributed to the Turkish-Iranian relationship. As of 2023, many factors that Türkiye and Iran found common ground on are no longer relevant geopolitically. As a result, the two countries find themselves more at odds on policy issues. In addition to the lack of common foreign policy interests between the two countries, the declining position of the United States in the region also exacerbates regional tensions between Türkiye and Iran.

Conflict and Power

Genuine power rivalries between different states or empires can only occur in the absence of an objectively stronger power in the region. This is because all nations have competing and conflicting interests, and the most powerful one naturally imposes its interests, which directly or indirectly subdue the interests and ambitions of lesser powers. While historical rivalries and local issues in the Middle East never went away in the 20th century, the interests of the two world superpowers of the era,

the United States and the Soviet Union, heavily influenced the course of events in the region. Even conflicts that reflected local issues, such as the Iran-Iraq war, had their outcomes heavily influenced by the United States, which used the regional conflict for its national security interest of weakening the newly established Islamic Republic of Iran. Under a global political system with the United States as the single global superpower and the US dollar as the world reserve currency, the United States was increasingly in a position to influence the Middle East, which preserved a balance of regional power to ensure that no power could upset this stability and that if any regional actors had power ambitions that conflicted with these interests, such as Saddam Hussein in Kuwait, there would be severe consequences.

The Waning U.S Influence and Historical Power Reignition in the Middle East

While the United States remains the most powerful actor on the world stage, militarily and economically, its interest in leading post-World War II globalization has dramatically declined. This is due to conscious political goals in the United States, such as a desire to prioritize onshoring and domestic manufacturing, as well as geopolitical changes, such as the rise of multipolarity. While not overtaking the United States in power or global reserve currency status, countries such as China, India, and Russia have all decided to pursue policies and actions on the global level that challenge US hegemony on the world stage.

Examples of this include the open negotiations with China and various Middle Eastern countries to conduct trade in a currency other than US dollars, the relative skepticism of countries outside the US-led NATO bloc to further escalate the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, and the Taliban's resurgence in Afghanistan after the United States' withdrawal in 2021. As the United States slowly but gradually withdraws from the world stage for a more domestic and regional focus, a natural consequence will be the re-emergence of rivalries for regional power and an absent great power

without the ability or interest to influence or subdue these rivalries. One of the nascent power struggles for the region that will escalate in the 2020s is the one between Türkiye and Iran. This rivalry has begun in places like Syria, Iraq, and Azerbaijan. This paper analyzes how Türkiye and Iran attempt to project their influence in these respective countries and how Iran is actively trying to counter growing Turkish influence by supporting Kurdish and sectarian Sunni and Shia groups. This paper also aims to analyze how Türkiye is working to disrupt Iranian networks of influence in countries such as Syria and Iraq.

Economic Rivalries in the New Middle East

Türkiye and Iran are both in a position to try to take advantage of Syria's situation that is emerging from war and an Assad regime rehabilitated at the regional level to project economic influence for monetary and political gain. As the United States takes a less involved role on the regional level in the Middle East, localization and a reorientation of supply chains and investment to more local and regional scales would be the consequence that will likely follow. This deglobalization phenomenon will mainly affect the Middle East, which the United States has been trying to shift away from since the era of Obama. The US foreign policy establishment's increasing focus on shifting national security policy attention towards China, the move towards domestic oil and natural gas in the United States, and the search for alternative energy sources have all made engagement in the Middle East increasingly a lower priority for the United States.

In this new economic era, Türkiye and Iran are both in a position to compete for economic dominance. This sphere of influence for Türkiye will include an industrial zone stretching from northern Aleppo to across the border through Gaziantep, a southern city of Türkiye. As for Iran, this sphere of influence will include the eastern part of Syria surrounding Deir Ezzor and the Iraqi border. The emerging economic spheres of influence for Türkiye and Iran are also intertwined with a larger security presence

to protect commercial interests, as evidenced by the presence of Turkish Armed Forces in northern Syria and Iranian-backed militia groups in eastern Syria.

Syrian Conflict and the Iranian-Turkish Relations

Before the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War, one of the significant foreign policy goals that the former Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu crafted for his country was “zero problems with neighbors,” which sought to enhance relations and cooperation with countries in the Middle East, a major departure from Türkiye’s 20th-century tradition of Eurocentric foreign policy. Syria was one of the main target countries for this zero-problems approach, resulting in an explosion in enhanced economic integration, agreements, and investment between the two countries. This included lifting visa restrictions, heavy investment from Turkish industrialists in the northern Aleppo region of Syria, and the total valuation of Turkish exports to Syria reaching \$1.4 billion in 2009. In 2010, a proposed free trade zone between Türkiye, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan was seriously considered. (Asbarez 2010).

The visa-free travel and blossoming political relations between Türkiye and Syria ended in 2011 as the Turkish government took the side of the opposition groups and shut off all relations with the government of Bashar al-Assad after it had become clear to Ankara that the Assad regime was adamant to crush any sort of democratic reform demand despite Türkiye’s efforts in convincing the regime to do otherwise in the beginning of the Syrian conflict. The brutal crackdown of the Assad regime on peaceful protesters forced Türkiye to withdraw its support from Assad and ally with the opposition.

The Turkish policy towards actively supporting the opposition parties also represented the beginning of a divergence in foreign policy alignment with Iran, as the latter immediately began sending IRGC

personnel to provide logistical support and advisory services to Syrian security forces in the early days of the conflict. (The Guardian 2011).

Iran, since the onset of the Syrian Crisis, saw the fall of the Assad regime as an existential threat. Thus, to keep the Assad regime in power and ensure the land corridor stretching from Iraq to Lebanon, namely due to its geopolitical calculation with regard to the so-called axis of resistance, it supported the Syrian regime through the IRGC and allied local and foreign militias. In this vein, and parallel to the divergent path and policies, Türkiye and Iran had an uneasy relationship in Syria. As a matter of fact, Türkiye even targeted Iranian allied militias twice during its military incursion into Syria due to this divergence.

Despite this reality, Türkiye, Russia, and Iran initiated the Astana process in an attempt to manage their divergences in Syria. The initiation of the Astana process proved very fruitful, especially for Russia, while the Syrian opposition further slid towards irrelevance with the process. Iran and Russia also saw the process as a viable alternative to the UN-backed Geneva process. In a nutshell, the Syrian conflict has become an area of rivalry between Ankara and Tehran.

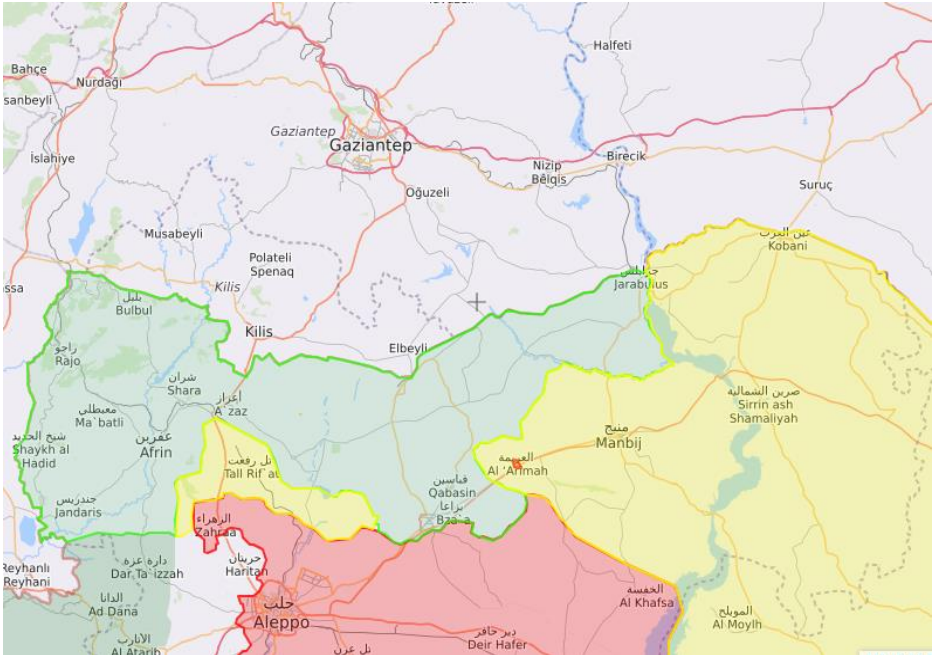
As of July 2023, while no official reconciliation has been made between Türkiye and the Syrian regime, the reality that Bashar al-Assad seems to be staying in power has caused a shift in foreign policy calculations for the Turkish government and a normalization of relations between Ankara and Damascus or at least a détente between the two sides may become a stronger reality in the upcoming period. Even if Türkiye normalizes relations with Syria, Iran-Türkiye relations will risk further tension as both countries will use post-war Syria for their own geopolitical and economic advantages.

The Strategic Balance of Power in Post-War Northern Syria

While the Syrian civil war ended the booming peacetime trade relations between Türkiye and Syria and Bashar al-Assad remains in power in spite of Türkiye becoming one of the primary backers of armed Syrian opposition groups, the current situation in Syria has created opportunities for a new Türkiye`s approach in Syria. A new development is a reorientation of the northern Aleppo province to act as an industrial periphery further economically integrated into Türkiye`s city of Gaziantep and the surrounding area, similar to how many industrial areas of northern Mexico are almost fully economically integrated into the United States economy.

Even in the event of normalization with the government of Bashar al Assad, the geographic proximity of the Aleppo province to the Turkish border, the Syrian government`s recovering wartime economy, and the likely desire of both countries to return to close economic relations during the years prior to the start of the Syrian Civil War will ensure that northern Aleppo remains in the Turkish sphere of economic influence.

The reintegration of the Syrian sections of the Aleppo province into the Turkish economy has been enabled by the strategic advancement of Turkish forces into the area. As shown in the map below, the light green section of the map represents areas of Syria's northern Aleppo province that are under Turkish control, much of which was taken in various Turkish military operations between 2016 and 2019, which first removed ISIS fighters and subsequently removed PYD forces and allied groups from the area.



(Important note: While day-to-day government services are administered by an umbrella of local actors known as the Syrian Interim Government in the Syrian-opposition-controlled area, the Turkish military maintains a permanent presence there, and the Turkish Lira is widely used as a currency.)

The economic integration between Gaziantep and the various cities of northern Aleppo heavily increased in 2017 after Türkiye began to achieve territorial gains in the area, and Turkish exports to Syria reached close to 1.4 billion dollars, nearing a return in export value to its 2010 peacetime levels of 1.85 billion (Tastekin 2018). The vast majority of these exports went to cities in the Turkish-controlled parts of Syria, and many of the Syrian businessmen based in Türkiye maintained local connections to the

area. The local Gaziantep Chamber of Commerce (GTO), which has registered over 2,000 Syrian-owned businesses, has heavily driven this integration between Turkish and Syrian markets. (Building Markets 2020) These efforts include establishing a Syria Desk within the chamber to focus on Turkish-Syrian business relations and organizing visits to northern Syrian cities such as Jarablus to establish networks between Turkish and Syrian businessmen. The efforts at economic integration have advanced, and there are currently several industrial zones in the northern Aleppo province in areas such as Al-Bab, Jarablus, Azaz, Al-Rai, and Marea. The industrial zones are heavily connected to the Turkish economy, with many Syrian factory owners sourcing their materials from across the Turkish border and Türkiye acting as one of the few export destinations.

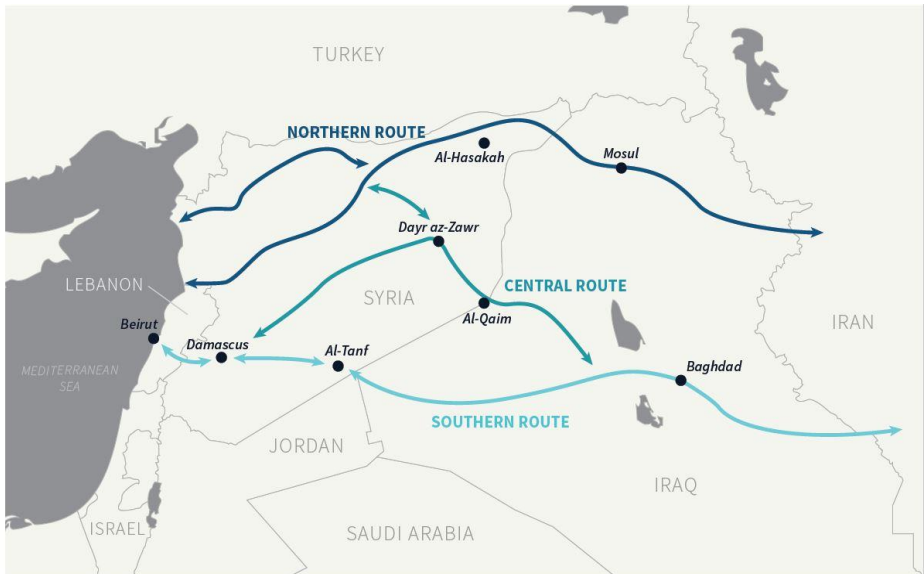
The Turkish military presence in northern Aleppo, the economic integration between northern Aleppo cities and Türkiye, and friendly local rulers all help to serve one of Türkiye's crucial strategic interests of eliminating any chance of the PYD from gaining control of that area in the future. In addition to neutralizing the PYD presence in northern Syria, a permanent Turkish political, economic, and military presence allows Türkiye to be a power broker in the complex security situation in Syria, especially in the remaining opposition-controlled Idlib province. Türkiye's role as an enforcer in the area was previously demonstrated when Turkish troops intervened to halt the advancement of Hayat Tahrir Al Sham fighters in the Afrin area and end infighting between various Syrian National Army factions. Türkiye will likely use its increasing role in the area to attempt to leverage its power as an equal with Russia in helping to install a permanent security settlement between the government of Bashar al-Assad and the remaining rebel factions controlling Idlib.

Iranian Strategic and Economic Goals in Syria

Iranian political and military support for the Assad government in the conflict inevitably coincided with economic investment in Syria. The extent of Iranian investment in Syria before and during the war has been extensively documented, which includes a proposal in 2010 to create a joint Iranian-Syrian bank with a capital of USD 30 million (GONN 2010), a USD 3.6 billion line of oil credit in 2013 (Al-Khalidi 2013), 2016 agreement between Iran and Syria to operate a telecommunications company backed by the IRGC (Hamidi 2019), the construction of an oil refinery in Homs. (Gnana 2017), extending multiple lines of credit to Iran worth at least 1 billion (Westall and Al-Khalidi 2015), and constructing a power plant in Latakia (Taghreeb News 2021). As the conflict in Syria has de-escalated, Iran can use the foothold it gained during the war to expand its industrial presence in Syria, and Syria can become a primary market for its sanctioned economy. One of the major Iranian companies taking part in Syrian reconstruction is an energy and construction company known as the Mapna Group, which is currently working on reconstructing the power grid in Aleppo for an estimated cost of 411 million euros. (Temizer 2018)

Besides actively investing in infrastructure, Iran invests heavily in the Syrian housing market. According to a statement from the Syrian Housing Minister in August 2018, Iranian companies had agreed to construct 30,000 residences in the Syrian provinces of Aleppo, Damascus, and Homs. Iranian businessmen have also registered their companies in Syria, which goes hand in hand with an increased number of Iranian individuals moving to Syria (ATHR Press 2022). In addition to generating a return on investment to make up for the billions of dollars spent on fighting in the conflict, Iran also hopes to use its economic control over Syria to fulfill its broader geo-political ambitions. Iran has tried to invest in Syria's agricultural goods, which has flooded the market with Iranian olive oils, poultry and various agricultural goods. Besides using Iranian businessmen to partner in Syria, Iran has also used militias

close to the Iraqi border to transport agricultural goods into Syria. The primary geo-political objective in this is the so-called Shia Crescent, which aims to create a continuous route going from Iran through Iraq and ending in the Mediterranean port cities of western Syria. As the below map shows, there are multiple paths for this land bridge.



Source: Institute for Strategic and International Studies

As shown in the map, Iran has deployed multiple routes to access the Mediterranean. The eastern Syrian city of Deir Ezzor and the surrounding Deir Ezzor province is a vital strategic point for Iranian ambitions in the region. The proximity to the Iraqi border, where Iran already has extensive influence through proxy militias and allied political parties, makes the Deir Ezzor province a strategic gateway for continued Iranian transit routes to enter Syria via Iraq. Highway-1, which runs through Deir Ezzor, acts as one of the key transportation routes for Iran to continue to conduct its activities in the Land Bridge going from Iran to Syria. Given that Iran also has influence in other Syrian cities such as

Damascus and Homs, securing the eastern part of Syria so that there can be a continuous and secure route from Iraq to these cities is extremely strategic. Due to these strategic and geographic realities, Iran will heavily invest in the development of this area to fortify its influence. Iran has used its network of militias and allies with local tribes in the area, such as the Baghara tribe, to construct and invest in numerous infrastructure and real estate ventures in the Deir Ezzor province, particularly in the Abu-Kamel border city. Buying up real estate to house the militia population and investing in public infrastructure to gain the trust and loyalty of the local population served to establish a permanent Iranian presence in the Deir Ezzor province.

In addition to coming passing via Deir Ezzor, the Northern Route, which would come through al-Hasakah via Mosul, Iraq, is the one that would most likely conflict with Turkish interests as this area is not too far from the Turkish-controlled areas of the neighboring Aleppo province. The Nineveh province of Iraq, which borders Hasakah, has an extensive Iranian militia presence which will be further discussed in the paper's Iraq section. The presence of the Iran-aligned figures in the Hasakah province is crucial as it provides a continuous path and natural flow for Iran to maintain its influence from across the Iraqi border.

One of the potential uses of this area is the construction of a natural gas or oil pipeline to the Mediterranean that would pass through the Hasakah province and allow Iran to export to Europe via Syrian port cities such as Baniyas or Latakia. While such ambitions to supply gas to Europe are a major challenge for Iran due to sanctions, Iran has never completely ruled it out, especially in 2022, after the Russian invasion of Ukraine disrupted the natural gas supply flow to Europe. Such a plan would conflict with Türkiye's, which has ambitions to act as a transit energy hub to transport Azerbaijani natural gas to Europe. In such a scenario of conflicting interests between two powers in close geographical proximity, this would inevitably lead to aligning with the enemy of the rival power to gain a

competitive advantage, which in the case of Türkiye and Iran means the latter aligning with PYD in the area.

To secure its interests in the area and contain Turkish influence, one likely scenario for Iran will be deepening its relations with the PYD forces in northern Syria. While the PYD is associated with solid backing and support from the United States, changing geo-political realities such as a drawn-down American presence in the region means that the PYD will be open to other alliances, including Iran, to contain Turkish influence. Indeed, Iran and the PKK/PYD had long maintained converging interests in preventing Türkiye from increasing its presence in Syria. (Wahab 2017) As Türkiye has gained further inroads into Syria since Operation Peace Spring, the PYD-Iranian converging interests have solidified, and during the summer of 2022, reports circulated that Iranian-backed groups had helped fund SDF training courses in preparation for an additional Turkish military advance into northern Syria. (Hardan, Al-Monitor 2022)

The growing presence of Iranian militias in northern Syria, especially the Kurdish-majority province of Hasakah to the east of the Turkish-controlled areas, represents a potential for growing power struggles with Türkiye. While the United States and the PYD retain the most influence in the Hasakah province, Iran has steadily tried to increase its influence in the province; the IRGC militias and its allied groups have taken control of various strategic points of al-Hasakah province, including the Qamishli airport, which had been under IRGC control until a Russian-Turkish memorandum of understanding removed Iranian control of the airport in 2019 after the Operation Peace Spring and put the airport under supervision of Russian forces (Hassan and al-Ahmed 2022).

Iran, which was vehemently opposed to Türkiye's Operation Peace Spring and viewed it as a threat to its regional ambitions, has subsequently tried to regain its influence in the area amidst various challenges. The current presence of US troops in the Hasakah province, local resistance to the growing Iranian presence in the area, and logistical

limitations of Iranian capabilities to sustain its military presence are challenges that Iran will face in growing its presence. Despite these challenges, Iran has steadily grown its presence in 2022, with local sources confirming that militia networks and weapons shipments to the area have significantly increased, especially after Russian forces that were previously policing areas of rural Qamishli withdrew due to the situation in Ukraine. Iran has stealthily tried to increase its influence in the Hasakah province through its influence over the Syrian Arab Army's 54th Regiment, which is part of the Iranian-allied 4th Division. Iran has recently been working on expanding the 54th regiment's presence in Hasakah. It has engaged in a construction project to increase the number of housing units and military facilities for fighters in the province. (Mohammed and al-Ahmed 2022). Whether or not Iranian relations with Kurdish groups in the Hasakah province will continue to grow will also heavily depend on to what extent the United States military decides to remain in Syria in the coming decade.

Limitations of Iranian Investment and Strategy in Syria

While Iran has invested heavily in Syria and maintains an extensive militia network to enforce its interests in Syria, there are severe limits to Iranian ambitions. Although Russia and Iran were on the same side during the conflict to keep Bashar al-Assad in power, Russia strongly opposed Iranian expansion in Syria. It has actively sided with military units and local Syrian actors who oppose Iranian advancement in Syria. Russia also maintains control of a significant amount of Syrian air space. It has a military presence in the country that makes it extremely difficult for Iran to become over-ambitious in its territorial designs in Syria. Israel's concerns that Iran is using its eastern Syrian base to transport weapons to Hezbollah in Lebanon are also a severe limitation for Iranian expansion. Israel has bombed and will continue to bomb any Iranian infrastructure in Syria that it suspects of storing weapons. Aside from the opposition of other actors, Iran is also severely limited by certain aspects of its strategy. While buying up land and spending on infrastructure

establishes influence in the area, Iran has engaged in very little investment in potential profit-generating enterprises that could offset the extensive costs of the money that Iran spent to maintain its presence in Syria. Economic reports indicate that recuperating the USD 30 billion spent financing its intervention in Syria will be a long and challenging task. While Iran has signed many investments Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) in Syria, many of these MoUs have not gone beyond the initial signing. According to an anonymous Syrian businessman, Iran has not been able to get any investment interest in its proposed telecommunications projects. (Solomon and Bozorgmehr 2018).

While Iran has many economic ambitions in Syria, many fear that Iran would use its economic influence in Syria for greater control over the country. Thus, many Syrian government officials and businesspeople are looking to countries like China and Russia for reconstruction investment projects. The current Iranian challenges in investing in Syria are seen in recent figures provided by the Deputy Chairman of the Iranian Chamber of Commerce. Iranian products only comprise 3% of Syria's total imports, compared to 30% from Türkiye (Sinaee 2021).

Turkish-Iranian Competition in Syria and Potential for Renewed Rivalry

As Türkiye and Iran both have their strategic ambitions in Syria, there is the inevitable question of whether or not there will be a tacit acknowledgment and unspoken memorandum of understanding of the other side's sphere of influence or if there will be active attempts to reduce the other side's influence in Syria. While Türkiye and Iran's engagement in a direct conventional military conflict in Syria is low, Türkiye has engaged in armed clashes with Iranian-backed proxy groups in Idlib and Afrin. The expansion of Iranian-backed militia groups into

the PYD-controlled Hasakah province represents a potential security concern for Türkiye, increasing the chance of Turkish military operations to contain any advancement further west. Additionally, the extent of Russian continued influence in Syria will be a critical factor in determining the course of the Iranian-Turkish rivalry and whether or not it can be contained.

Russian Presence in Syria as a Containment Mechanism for Turkish-Iranian Rivalry

As mentioned in the introduction, power vacuums and the lack of a superior player to enforce their influence will open the way for a more intense and concentrated power struggle. While the primary power vacuum in the coming decades in the Middle East will be the one left by the United States, there is also the issue of how Russian influence, particularly in Syria, will influence the outcomes of the Türkiye-Iran rivalry. Due to historical ties to the Assad government and its aerial intervention in Syria in 2015, Russia ultimately influences the course of events in Syria. Israeli airstrikes on suspected IRGC weapons depots usually occur in Russian-controlled airspace that the latter tacitly permits, and Turkish military incursions into Syria are usually communicated with Russia beforehand (Mathews 2021) (Sahinkaya 2022).

While Russia does not control everything in Syria, as evidenced by the presence of various other powers, it does ultimately have a significant amount of control over the course of events in Syria to maintain some semblance of equilibrium. Whether or not Russia can maintain this into the 2020s is currently an unforeseen factor. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine and its effect on Russia's geopolitical standing on the world stage will also indirectly influence its degree of control over Syria. During the early stages of the war in Ukraine, as Russia redeployed large numbers of its Syrian-based soldiers to fight in Ukraine, Iran actively used this as an opportunity to increase its influence in areas that Russia significantly curtailed (Nofal 2022).

While it is still too early to tell what the ramifications for Russia will be in the aftermath of the Ukraine conflict, any outcome that results in a Russian loss will carry over to increasing difficulty for Russia to maintain its position in Syria. In such a scenario, Turkish-Iranian power conflicts would likely increase. One such reason is that Russia, while having a diminished role in Syria, wouldn't be gone from the country entirely and would likely want to maintain its weakened but remaining influence in Syria. Indeed, Russia wishes to cement its military and political gains in Syria via a stable post-conflict settlement, which includes the normalization of Turkish-Syrian relations. While a normalized Turkish-Syrian relationship benefits Russia, Iran would not benefit to the extent Russia benefits.

As mentioned, Russia and Iran have had rivalry and disagreements in Syria, specifically regarding the security apparatus. The Russian goal of the Syrian military was to train and integrate regime units into a more organized and disciplined front and to prevent Iranian-backed militias from forming a parallel military within Syria.

This goal of integration and restructuring of the Syrian Arab Army was attempted by creating a unit known as the 5th Corps. (Lukyanov 2017) Even though Iran's military strategy in Syria focused heavily on establishing parallel militia networks, it maintained influence over some divisions of the Syrian Arab Army, most notably the 4th division, which often had its soldiers fighting alongside militia members (Alghadawi 2021). Russia, having been aware of the pro-Iran stance of the 4th Division, has tried to limit the deployment of 4th Division troops in regime-controlled areas of Syria (Al-Madoon 2019).

Given all of the time, money, and resources Russia has spent in restructuring the Syrian Arab Army as a way to prevent the dominance of Iranian militia networks, it will likely wish to continue such a policy, but if the prolonged conflict in Ukraine strains its ability to do so, it will not be able to achieve such a feat alone, which is where Türkiye comes in. Russia is likely aware of the reality that it will be tied down militarily

in Ukraine longer than expected and, as a result, is now making permanent plans to shift its focus away from Syria. Sources close to both Turkish and Syrian government officials have confirmed that Russia is actively trying to finalize the ongoing rapprochement between Türkiye and Syria, which Türkiye hopes will allow it to send its Syrian refugees back and engage with the Assad regime in countering the PYD in Syria. While no final political agreement between the two countries is in place, the foreign ministers of the two sides have met under Russian supervision. One of the main Russian strategic objectives of this rapprochement would be for Türkiye to help fill the security void in various parts of Syria created by Russian redeployment to Ukraine, where Türkiye would actively try to contain Iranian militia advancement in Syria (The Arab Weekly 2021).

While it is unclear what a reconciled Erdogan-Assad relationship would entail, Bashar al-Assad, has largely supported the Russian policy in Syria, and although his government maintains a positive diplomatic relationship with Iran out of necessity, the Syrian government is also concerned that Iran has worn out its welcome in Syria, especially as the military conflict has largely subsided while Iran still maintains its militia presence all over the country. This would further fuel the Turkish-Iranian rivalry, as any Turkish stance in Syria would largely align with Russia.

Russia has more influence on the Syrian political situation than Iran or Türkiye. However, the ongoing conflict in Ukraine has caused a priority shift in Russian foreign policy that both Türkiye and Iran are exploiting. While a void left by Russia presents an opportunity for Iranian-backed groups to expand their presence further, Israeli airstrikes and the remaining US military presence in al-Hasakah present limitations for Iranian expansion. As a result of these multiple factors and limitations, the most likely scenario is occasional Iranian provocations followed by de-escalation to avoid a large-scale conflict.

Turkish and Iranian Rivalry in Iraq

While many aspects of the Turkish-Iranian rivalry in Syria are still playing out as a permanent political settlement is yet to emerge, the rivalry between the two countries has become pronounced in neighboring Iraq due to natural resource and sectarian issues. Iraq, specifically the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and the Nineveh province areas, are zones where there will be power struggles between Türkiye and Iran for energy control, economic influence, and political power.

For a long time, Iraq has appeared as a primary area of geopolitical rivalry and a sphere of possible escalation between Ankara and Tehran. Due to Türkiye's growing military presence in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, thanks to Ankara's cross-border military operations against the PKK, Iran-allied militias are increasingly uncomfortable. This even led the Iran-allied militias to strike Türkiye's military base in Bashiqa, Mosul. And this kind of attack took place more than once. On top of this, the PKK-affiliated Sinjar Resistance Units (YBŞ) has been cooperating with the Hashd al-Shaabi for a long while. Due to the increasing PKK presence here, Türkiye conducted drone strikes in Sinjar, culminating in Tehran-backed Hasd al Shaabi leaders' threats against Türkiye. In the 1990s, Türkiye's military operations in the KRI were not paving the way for a permanent Turkish presence in the area.

Nevertheless, this situation does not seem to continue in the KRI anymore. Türkiye's military presence becomes permanent, which drives a wedge between Türkiye, Iran, and allied militias. Moreover, Türkiye tried to increase its political influence in Iraq during the government formation process in Baghdad by supporting the KDP and Sunni Arab politicians. This reality also raised eyebrows in Iran.

Regional Energy Dominance Between Türkiye and Iran in Iraq

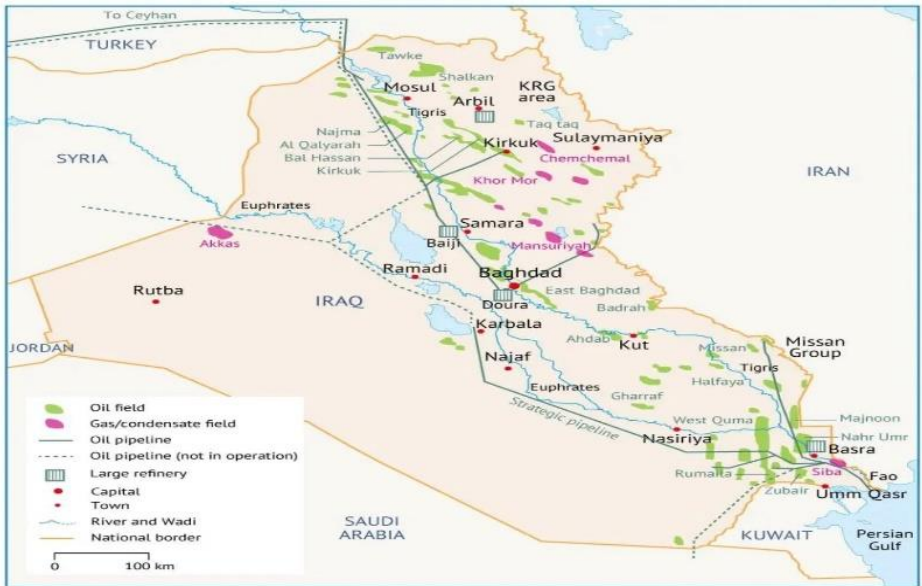
Aside from the political and economic rivalry for influence in post-war Syria, Türkiye and Iran are also at the beginning of a rivalry for regional energy dominance. The KRI's natural gas issue further complicated Turkish-Iranian bilateral ties. The KRI is one of the primary places in the Middle East where this rivalry occurs. While the Middle East is traditionally known for petroleum, natural gas is also an abundant resource and the continued rising global demand, as well as the need for European markets to look for alternative natural gas supply routes in light of the current Ukraine War, has motivated various Middle Eastern countries, including Türkiye and Iran, to invest in natural gas production aggressively. According to recent estimates, Iraq, particularly the northern part of the country, which is governed by the Kurdistan Regional Government, has the potential to increase its natural gas production output to 40 billion cubic meters per year by the mid-2030s.

Private sector Turkish firms, such as Cengiz Energy and Turkish government officials, have signalled their intention to import natural gas to Türkiye for domestic consumption and potential transit point before exporting to Europe. In February 2020, Cengiz Energy applied for permits with KRG regulatory authorities to access natural gas fields, allowing the company to import natural gas to Türkiye eventually. (Haber Turk 2021) Turkish president Erdogan has also publicly stated his ambition to have Türkiye import natural gas from the KRI, and 2022 media reports indicated that Erdogan and KRG prime minister Masrour Barzani were prepared to sign (Dri 2022) a pipeline deal.

Iran, which has large amounts of its natural gas reserves and currently exports its gas to Türkiye and Iraq, is wary of any potential energy deals between Türkiye and the KRI that would undercut Iran's share in the regional energy market. Iranian concerns about being shut out of the natural gas market are heightened because a 25-year natural gas pipeline contract signed between Türkiye and Iran expires in 2026. Observers are

pointing to the possibility that Türkiye will not renew the deal and instead opt to get its gas from KRI or use Türkiye as a possible transit point to sell gas to Europe. (Shafan 2022) Türkiye is the biggest buyer of Iranian natural gas, and Tehran is the second biggest exporter of gas to Türkiye after Moscow.

Nevertheless, Iranian gas is expensive, and Türkiye wants to diversify its sources. What is more, Türkiye wants to become a transit hub in exporting the KRI’s gas as well as Azerbaijani gas to Europe at a time when Europe wants to decrease its dependency on Russian gas due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which started in February 2022. This situation concerns Tehran.



(Major oil and gas fields and associated infrastructure in Iraq. [Source: IEA](#))

The Politics of Energy Rivalry in Iraq

As Türkiye and Iran are likely to experience a heightened natural gas rivalry in Iraq in the coming years, one of the ways this rivalry will manifest politically is through each party supporting different political factions in the KRI. Currently, this is playing out through Türkiye supporting the Barzani-led Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Iran supporting its rival, the Talabani-led Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), which is in control of most of the KRI's natural gas-rich areas. Given that both the Barzani and Talabani clans are potent actors in the KRI's politics whose influence in the area goes back decades, Türkiye and Iran aligning with them will serve energy and geopolitical interests in both Iraq and the broader Middle East.

Examples of the Türkiye-KRG alliance include Türkiye taking the KRG's side in past disputes with the Baghdad government over oil payment distribution and the KRG's attempts to crack down on the PKK's presence on KRI soil. Barzani has also been vehemently opposed to the expansion of Iranian influence in Iraq and has feared that Iranian-backed militias will strengthen their influence and power close to the KRI. This has increasingly happened after the militia groups took over the land in the area that ISIS formerly invaded. The KDP's opposition to Iranian expansion led to an unsuccessful electoral coalition with the influential Iraqi Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, an opponent of Iranian presence in Iraq despite similar hardline religious Shia views.

On the other hand, the PUK has gradually adopted a much more pro-Iranian stance, especially after the PUK and the various Iranian-backed militias had a mutual interest in fighting ISIS. Iranian support for the PUK goes back to at least the 1980s when the IRGC supplied PUK-aligned Peshmerga forces with arms and training for guerilla warfare operations against the regime of Saddam Hussein. (Entessar 2009) For at least three decades, IRGC members-built networks and lasting contacts with PUK-aligned officials and Peshmerga fighters. One of the most

prominent individuals is an Iranian official named Mohammad Hajji Ali Eghbali, commonly known as Agha Eghbali (Institute for International and Strategic Studies 2019). While he is officially called an “Iranian representative”, PUK officials confirmed that Agha Eghbali is an IRGC commander who has trained Peshmerga forces since the 1980s. The long-lasting ties that Agha Eghbali and other IRGC officials formed with PUK-allied Peshmerga units allowed for close coordination with these forces in the fight against ISIS and a path to further cement Iranian-backed militia control in the KRI.

Türkiye backing the KDP and Iran backing the PUK increases the likelihood that both countries will try to use them to limit any potential expansion of their rival. For Türkiye, this includes increasing Turkish intelligence presence in the area to gather information on and conduct operations against the PKK activity and using its friendly relations with Barzani to gain favorable business contracts with cronies.

For Iran, this would likely entail using its vast network to limit any potential expansion of Turkish interests that conflict with Iranian ones, particularly Türkiye’s desire to cultivate energy dominance. A real-time example of this occurred in March 2022, when the IRGC fired missiles at the villa of a businessman in Erbil named Baz Karim Barzanji, who was the owner of a company called KAR Group, which allegedly had plans to work with Türkiye to transport natural gas from the KRI to Europe via Türkiye.

Additionally, the dispute over wealth management between the KRG and Baghdad dates back to 2014 when the Iraqi Ministry of Oil filed a complaint with the arbitral tribunal of the International Chamber of Commerce in Paris to object to Erbil exporting oil without the approval of the ministry through the Iraqi-Turkish oil pipeline. This issue was a significant focus of the dispute between the two parties.

The sides that were close to Iran inside Iraq worked to exploit this file to weaken the position of the KRI and tried to undermine it economically by draining the financial resources of the Kurdistan Regional Government. As a result of these attempts, the arbitral tribunal of the International Chamber of Commerce in Paris issued, on March 25, 2023, a decision against the KRG's interests. Türkiye allowed the KRI to export oil through the Iraqi oil pipeline that connects Iraq to the port of Ceyhan on the Mediterranean Sea, and the decision led to stopping the process of exporting oil from the KRI to Türkiye, which led to billions of dollars in damage for the KRI.

Turkish-Iranian Rivalry in the Nineveh Governorate

The Nineveh governorate of western Iraq represents another strategic zone that will likely further intensify Turkish-Iranian rivalry. From the resource perspective, Mosul and the surrounding Nineveh Governorate are extremely rich in oil, which Türkiye and Iran will have ambitions to secure as part of their respective natural resource and energy market dominance strategies. In addition to the resources, the area has solid geo-strategic significance for Türkiye and Iran. This area is vital for Türkiye because the governorate, especially the areas around Sinjar, have become strongholds for PKK fighters, given that the Nineveh province of Iraq shares a border with the PYD-dominant Al-Hasakah province in Syria. Türkiye's primary concern is any potential cross-border flow of money and weapons between the two groups. In addition to the resource and national security issues for Türkiye, Mosul and various areas of the Nineveh governorate also have strong historical and cultural ties to Türkiye.

Due to these factors, Türkiye naturally had ambitions to regain a prominent role in Mosul once the opportunity presented itself. After the Iraq War, in addition to the extensive economic investment in Mosul,

Türkiye established connections with local influential political leaders, most notably Atheel Al-Nujaifi, the former governor of the Nineveh province who is a descendant of a prominent and historical land-owning family that was on good terms with the Ottoman authorities when they ruled over Mosul. (Barchard 2015) In addition to his ancestral ties that made him naturally predisposed to be friendly to Türkiye, Al-Nujaifi is also highly wary of the central government authority in Baghdad and wishes to further decentralize power among the Iraqi provinces, a policy that would ultimately benefit Türkiye, which has a history of tension with the Iraqi government and has a recent history of pursuing policies aiming for closer collaboration with the KRG, often cutting Baghdad out altogether (Stein 2016).

Türkiye's influence in Mosul and the Nineveh province was heavily challenged after the rise and defeat of ISIS in the area due to the changing political structure and the new military actors. After ISIS had taken over the city of Mosul in the summer of 2014, Iran, through its various militia units already heavily present in Iraq, was one of the many actors that fought ISIS in the area. The desertion of the Iraqi armed forces after ISIS's capture of Mosul allowed a security vacuum to form, which the PMU, a loose umbrella of Shia militias with ultimate backing and control from Iran, filled in the area. Given the strategic location of Mosul as a logistical hub along Iran's northern route into Syria, Iranian-backed groups have stayed in the area post-ISIS and pose a challenge to any Turkish ambitions to regain economic and political influence in the area. On the political front, Türkiye's position in Nineveh has also significantly been challenged by the resignation of al-Nujaifi from power.

In addition to a permanent Shia militia presence in the Nineveh governorate, Türkiye has had to contend with another security challenge: the increased presence of PKK and aligned groups in the area, most notably Sinjar. The PKK's increased presence in Sinjar was cemented

after it fought against ISIS during the latter's mass atrocities against the Yazidi community in Sinjar. While efforts in evacuating Yazidis from Sinjar were aided by American and NATO airpower, Iranian militias actively increased their contacts with the PKK in the Sinjar area. In addition to tacit acceptance of the other's presence in the area, the PMU also integrated some PKK-linked local fighters into its ranks, most notably the 80th brigade. This PMU-PKK alliance was further demonstrated in the spring of 2022 during Türkiye's Operation Claw-Lock, which targeted PKK fighters in the Nineveh governorate area, in which Turkish military units also came under attack from Iranian-backed militia units (Knights and Hamdi 2022). As recently as February 2023, Iran escalated its actions against Turkish presence in Nineveh when an Iranian-backed militia group fired at least eight rockets at the Turkish Zilkan military base. (Salar 2023)

While Iran has dramatically increased its presence in the Nineveh governorate and enjoys an alliance with the PKK that allows it to help contain Turkish influence, Iranian dominance in the area is also challenged by some factors. The current governor of the Nineveh governorate, Najim Al-Jabouri, while he has no close relationship with Türkiye like al-Nujaifi, has a career in the Iraqi military and previously worked closely with the United States military in Iraq. Al-Jabouri has recently replaced the previous pro-Iranian governor of Nineveh province, who served as governor between al-Jabouri and al-Nujaifi. As governor, al-Jabouri has been working to crack down on militia presence in Mosul and the surrounding areas of the Nineveh governorate. While he is not close to Türkiye, he has demonstrated an indifferent attitude towards Türkiye, targeting PKK hideouts in the area (Ali 2021).

In addition to the presence of the new governor, militia morale and organizational problems also represent a challenge to continued Iranian militia dominance in the Nineveh governorate. The 2020 targeted airstrike from the United States that killed General Qasem Soleimani, one

of the foremost strategists behind Iranian ambitions in Mosul, has created a leadership vacuum that makes the current militia structure in Iraq vulnerable to power struggles, splintering, or absorption. Given both Turkish and Iranian limitations in Nineveh, the two sides will likely be locked into a stalemate for dominance. Changes to this forced stalemate could turn in Türkiye's or Iran's favor, depending on the changes in the Iraqi political situation.

Currently, there are political factors that could increase Iran's influence in the Nineveh province. The new prime minister of Iraq, Mohammad Shia al-Sudani, is from the political pro-Iran coalition and previously served in the government of the Nouri al-Maliki, which was also extremely close to Iran. In addition, al-Sudani's cabinet also consists of former PMU members, including a former spokesperson for the Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq militia. Such a government could reverse any plans to crack down on militia presence in the Nineveh governorate and reestablish Iranian dominance.

The Nineveh Governorate is another area of economic rivalry between Türkiye and Iran due to its natural resource and geostrategic location. For Iran, the proximity of Nineveh to Syria is economically significant because it acts as a route for IRGC-affiliated merchants and traders to access Syria. While ongoing sanctions make the matter difficult for Iran, Nineveh is also economically important because any potential pipeline to the Mediterranean coast of Syria would likely pass through Nineveh. Türkiye is also heavily invested in this region economically.

Moreover, the Turkmen file is one of the most critical files that aroused Turkish interest inside Iraq, where the Turkish side always stresses the importance of ensuring the rights of the Turkmen and not excluding them from the political process. Yet, the Turkish policies towards the Turkmen did not lead to gaining their support. On the contrary, the Shiite Turkmen tended to work per Iranian policies inside Iraq, as a result of preferring the ideological side over the ethnic side, and Iran succeeded in convincing the Shiite Turkmen that it was capable of protecting them and

being the guarantor of their rights inside Iraq as a result of its active role and a significant influence on Baghdad's policies.

The Turkish-Iranian competition is not limited to the issue of winning over the Turkmen but rather affects many other files, such as the presence and influence within the strategic city of Kirkuk, which Iran succeeded in fully acquiring after the repercussions of the 2017 referendum and the KRI's loss of control over the disputed areas, including Kirkuk. Türkiye was relatively relieved due to the KRI's loss and Erbil's ensuing weakening. Nevertheless, the Turkish interests in Iraq were also negatively affected by the expansion of Iranian influence.

Conclusion

While Türkiye and Iran maintain an official diplomatic relationship and exhibit strong economic relations with each other, the changing geopolitical situation of the Middle East is creating a new regional order in which Türkiye and Iran both wish to be significant powers. As Türkiye and Iran wish to increase their agency in the region, an inevitable rivalry is forming, specifically in Syria and Iraq, as Türkiye and Iran wish to exert political and economic influence. Nevertheless, despite the geopolitical rivalry between the two sides, Ankara and Tehran are highly likely to follow a balanced approach toward each other. It is also very likely that they would push for continuity in compartmentalizing various files in their relationship. Thus, while a conventional war between the two countries is improbable, skirmishes via proxy groups and aggressive competition for resource control are likely ways for this rivalry to play out.

That being said, both Ankara and Tehran are pushing the limits of the distinctive compartmentalization feature in their relationship. The factors that once tied the two sides together evaporate, and the disagreement areas rise. The geographic areas of rivalry enlarge. And on top of this,

the trade volume between Türkiye and Ankara decreases. As a result, a more overt geopolitical rivalry is likely to play out between the two powers, especially in Syria and Iraq, in the incoming period.

About the Author

Berk Ozmeral holds a BA in International Affairs from George Washington University and an MA degree in International Security from the University of Denver.

Bibliography

- Alghadawi, Abdullah. 2021. *Middle East Institute* . September 24 .
<https://www.mei.edu/publications/fourth-division-syrias-parallel-army> .
- Ali, Sura. 2021. *Rudaw*. January 27 .
<https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/270120211> .
- Al-Madoon . 2019. *The Syrian Observer* . July 29.
<https://syrianobserver.com/news/51975/russian-tries-to-pull-fourth-division-away-from-irans-hands.html> .
- Asbarez. 2010. *Asbarez*. November 8 . <https://asbarez.com/Türkiye-posturing-to-create-middle-east-free-trade-zone/> .
2022. *ATHR Press* . August 15.
<https://syrianobserver.com/news/78110/more-foreign-investments-to-syria-establishment-of-iranian-lebanese-companies.html> .
- Barchard, David. 2015. *Middle East Eye*. December 14.
- Building Markets. 2020 . *Turkish-Syrian Business Partnerships, Part II*.
 New York : Building Markets .
https://buildingmarkets.org/sites/default/files/pdm_reports/turkish_syrian_business_partnerships_part2.pdf .
- Dri, Karwan Faidhi. 2022. *Rudaw*. February 4.
<https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/040220221> .
- Entessar, Nader. 2009. *Middle East Institute*. January 29.
<https://www.mei.edu/publications/kurdish-factor-iran-iraq-relations> .
- Gnana, Jennifer. 2017. September 28. <https://www.meed.com/iran-build-refinery-syria> .
- Haber Turk . 2021. February 21. <https://www.haberturk.com/kuzey-iraktan-inci-ile-gaz-ithalati-2590708-ekonomi> .
- Hamidi, Ibrahim. 2019. *Asharq Awasat* . September 6 .
<https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/1889836/irgc-affiliated-company-operate-mobile-service-network-syria> .

- Hardan, Mohammed. 2022. *Al-Monitor* . June 17 . <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/06/kurdish-syrian-iranian-forces-coordinate-ahead-turkish-operation>.
- . 2022. *Al-Monitor*. June 17. <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/06/kurdish-syrian-iranian-forces-coordinate-ahead-turkish-operation>.
- Hassan, Mohammed, and Samer al-Ahmed. 2022. *Middle East Institute* . March 24. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/irans-growing-presence-syrias-al-hasakah-poses-direct-threat-us-forces> .
- Institute for International and Strategic Studies. 2019. *Iran's Network of Influence in the Middle East* . Washington : Institute for International and Strategic Studies.
- Knights, Michael, and Malik Hamdi. 2022. *Washington Institute for Near East Policy* . July 22. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/claiming-without-claiming-iraqi-militia-responses-turkish-attacks>.
- Lukyanov, Grigory. 2017. *Russian International Affairs Council* . June 16. <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/the-fifth-assault-corps-back-to-order-in-syria/> .
- Mathews, Sean. 2021. *Middle East Eye* . December 31 . <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/syria-russia-tolerates-israel-air-raids-little-appetite-restrain-iran> .
- Mohammed, Hasan, and Samer al-Ahmed. 2022. *Middle East Institute* . March 24. <https://www.mei.edu/blog/alwjwd-alayrany-fy-alhskt-alswryt-dwr-mtnamy-wmsdr-thdyd-mbashr-llqwat-alamrykyt>.
- Nofal, Walid Al. 2022. *Syria Direct* . May 4 . <https://syriadirect.org/amid-war-in-ukraine-russia-withdraws-and-iran-expands-in-syria/> .
- Sahinkaya, Ezel. 2022. September 26. <https://www.voanews.com/a/Türkiye-signals-possible-rapprochement-with-syria-/6763615.html> .
- Shivan Ibrahim. 2022. *Syria TV*. March 30. <https://bit.ly/45wP4Q4>

- Sinaee, Maryam. 2021. *Iran International*. April 12 .
<https://www.iranintl.com/en/20211204048763>.
- Solomon, Erika, and Najmeh Bozorgmehr. 2018. *Financial Times*. February 13. <https://www.ft.com/content/f5129c30-0d7f-11e8-8eb7-42f857ea9f09>.
- Stein, Aaron. 2016. *Atlantic Council*. October 12.
<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/behind-erdogan-s-dismissive-statements-to-iraq-s-prime-minister/>.
- Taghreeb News. 2021. *Taghreeb News Agency* . August 9 .
<https://www.taghribnews.com/en/news/514557/iran-constructs-power-plants-in-syria>.
- Tastekin, Fehim. 2018. *Al-Monitor*. June 7. <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2018/06/Türkiye-syria-exports-revived-under-shadow-of-war.html> .
- Temizer, Murat. 2018. *Anadolu Agency* . October 3.
<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/energy/coal/iran-signs-deal-to-build-540-mw-power-plant-in-syria/21831>.
- The Arab Weekly. 2021. *The Arab Weekly* . April 12.
<https://www.thearabweekly.com/preoccupied-ukraine-war-moscow-nudges-Türkiye-syria-improve-ties>.
- Wahab, Bilal. 2017. *Washington Institute for Near East Policy* . February 6. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/irans-warming-relations-pkk-could-destabilize-krg>.
- Westall, Sylvia, and Suleiman Al-Khalidi. 2015. *Reuters* . July 8 .
<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-iran/syria-ratifies-fresh-1-billion-credit-line-from-iran-idUSKCN0PI1RD20150708>.

RAMAN

FOR RESEARCH AND CONSULTANCY

رامان للبحوث والاستشارات



RAMAN CENTER

info@ramancenter.org