

Turkey, Israel and the Dangerous Vacuum in Post-Assad Syria

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The [strikes at Abu al-Duhur](#) matter less for what happened than for what they revealed. Strip away the incident report and what is left is familiar rhetoric. Two regional powers reading the same accounting and drawing opposite lessons from it.

The fall of Assad did not [create](#) a vacuum so much as reveal one that existed for years, hidden by a regime too weak to project power but too entrenched to remove. Turkey and Israel are now the two actors with both the capability and the appetite to fill the power void, and they are filling it from opposite directions with opposite security theories. Ankara's theory is based upon proximity, allowing for influence over Damascus, embedding [advisers](#), directing infrastructure [investment](#), and producing a [client](#) government that owes its stability partly to Turkish backing. Israel's theory is based upon distance, leaving an emptied [buffer](#) zone, allowing minimal contention, and the right to [strike](#) anything that threatens these. Both theories will [collide](#) somewhere in Idlib or Hama. Abu al-Duhur is just where the collision appeared.

When Intent Becomes the Threat

What is more interesting than the Abu al-Duhur strike itself is how each side communicates about it afterward because the language reveals what each government fears. Turkish officials [denied](#) the specific claim of a permanent base, while Syrian officials said they had [assured](#) Israel that no Turkish presence was planned. Both statements can be true and still miss the point because the Israeli [concern](#) (a radar, an air-defense node, or a rotational advisory presence) does not require anything as formal as a "base" to change the operating environment. In short, Israel does not need Turkey to build a garrison to lose strategic value. They only need Turkish sensors to be present in their airspace to reduce Israeli air maneuver. This presents a much lower bar than the word "base" implies, which is why the denials satisfied no one.

When Strategic Ambiguity Becomes a Trigger

The question of whether Turkey was building a pincer is also interesting. The public evidence that Turkey posed a [deliberate](#) two-front strategy against Israel is thin and treating this as evidence of one risks manufacturing a conspiracy out of two states pursuing separate, self-interested expansions that happen to be converging. The more useful approach is to question what happens structurally once any two states with unresolved historical friction start [operating](#) in the same 200-mile strip of contested territory without a shared rulebook. That is a problem independent of intent. Even if Ankara is not trying to encircle Israel and Israel is not seeking a war with a NATO-adjacent power, the lack of agreed rules leaves each side to interpret future moves through worst-case assumptions. That is what almost happened here. Turkish forces are watching unannounced Israeli jets approach their border and had to decide in real time whether they were witnessing an isolated strike or the opening move of something larger, with no immediate channel to ask.

This interpretation is the part that gets lost when the coverage [focuses](#) on “was this an imminent threat?” Whether or not the Abu al-Duhur strikes specifically mattered is only a part of what happened. The mechanism by which it almost escalated one side into acting unilaterally and the other side was [forced to guess](#) at intent is likely to recur as long as Turkey keeps deepening its role in Syria and Israel reserves the right to strike in the region, all without an agreed set of boundaries. The airbase is almost incidental. The pattern is the story.

Managing a Rivalry That Won't Disappear

The outcome desired is not necessarily a settlement of who is “right” about Syria, as both Ankara and Jerusalem are not going to agree on what kind of country a post-Assad Syria should become, and there is no likely version where their interests fully align. Instead, what is achievable and worth pursuing is a much narrower path. They should seek a [standing arrangement](#) or a formal conflict-avoidance mechanism where neither side is forced to act on assumptions when it has no knowledge of the other's intentions. That means real advanced notice or advanced provisions before strikes near the Turkish frontier, instead of an after-the-fact explanation. This means Turkey must be willing to declare, rather than deny, the scope of its military footprint in Syria so that ambiguity stops creating unintended outcomes. It means Damascus, the government with the least power and the most to lose from being squeezed between two much larger militaries, has some voice in such an arrangement that it is not reduced to a battleground that occurs to its detriment.

Conclusion

An arrangement as described herein does not resolve the underlying rivalry. Turkey will [keep building](#) influence in Syria because that is what a rising regional power with a long land border does. Israel will [retain](#) the right to strike because that has [provided](#) security since 1973 and they have no intention to abandon it. However, managed rivalry through a known channel provides a fundamentally different kind of danger than rivalry managed through guesswork under time pressure. The best and most realistic outcome here is not peace between Ankara and Jerusalem. Instead, it is peace by ensuring the next Abu al-Duhur results in a diplomatic phone call instead of deployed border unit deciding if it is watching the start of a war in real time and must react.

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