

Fidan reads the postwar moment: Is Türkiye trying to overturn the normalization equation?



Last week, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan sat down with a correspondent for Nikkei Asia, assessing a regional moment weighed down by the aftermath of a broad war that shook the Middle East and pushed the region to the brink of rethinking its security, alliances and the very meaning of stability.

The fire that erupted between the United States and Israel on one side and Iran on the other left behind an uneasy truce, a closed Strait of Hormuz, turbulent oil markets, and capitals calculating the cost of sliding into a broader confrontation that neither the region nor the global economy can bear.

Amid this tense scene, Ankara moved as one of the few capitals capable of speaking to opposing sides at the same time, opening its channels with Tehran and Washington, coordinating with Qatar and Pakistan, and seeking to turn the moment of escalation into a broader political opportunity in search of a new security architecture stretching from the Gulf to Iran, Pakistan and Türkiye. Fidan, who came to diplomacy from a deep intelligence background, was reading reality as a test of the region's entire structure, and of Türkiye's ability to produce security arrangements that do not remain hostage to periodic explosions.

In that interview, Fidan presented a vision for a regional security platform that would include Türkiye, Pakistan, the Gulf states and Iran, and would in principle

open the door to Israeli participation. But that door was not left open without a political price. The Turkish foreign minister tied any potential Israeli accession to a clear recognition of a Palestinian state on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

With that formulation, Ankara shifted the discussion from the question of normalization with “Israel” to the question of the political legitimacy of that normalization, and from a logic of integrating “Israel” into the region through security and economic interests to a logic that ties regional security to a settlement whose core is the Palestinian issue.

While the Abraham Accords since 2020 have been built on engineering a normalization track that separates relations with “Israel” from the obligations of the Palestinian cause, Fidan’s remarks came to reorder the equation from the ground up: no stable regional security while the Palestinian wound remains open, and no full recognition of Israel within the region’s system without a corresponding recognition of the Palestinians’ right to an independent state.

From this perspective, the Turkish proposal appeared to be an attempt to shift the center of gravity in the debate and return Palestine from the margins of regional deals to the heart of any future vision for security and peace.

So does Fidan’s position reflect a fixed principle in Turkish policy toward Palestine, or does it represent a negotiating card Ankara is using to strengthen its position in the postwar phase? And does Türkiye actually have the capacity to impose an equation different from the Abraham Accords, amid its dispute with Israel, the Gulf’s differing calculations, and the overlapping mediation tracks between Washington and Tehran?

Then there is the question of the limits of Turkish ambition in building a new regional security order, if the very parties expected to make up that order are themselves governed by a long history of suspicion, conflict and clashing interests.

These questions open the door to a broader reading of the moment Fidan is trying to seize. The war on Iran, and before it the war on Gaza, exposed the fragility of the existing regional order and showed that normalization detached from the Palestinian issue can produce formal relations, but cannot produce popular legitimacy or long-term stability.

From this angle, the Turkish statement appears to be an entry point into a broader struggle over how security in the Middle East is defined: Is security built by integrating Israel as it is into the region’s system, or by addressing the political root that has made its regional presence a constant source of tension?

The normalization equation

Türkiye is not starting here from an entirely new idea. Linking normalization to a Palestinian solution has been present in the official Arab position since the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, but the importance of the proposal Hakan Fidan is putting forward lies in moving this condition from the realm of political principle to the heart of the region's proposed security architecture. At its core, the issue is not a rejection of normalization in principle, but a redefinition of its terms, its function and the place of the Palestinian issue within it.

The Abraham Accords were built on an equation that granted Israel the gains of normalization directly, including diplomatic recognition, economic openness and security cooperation, without any tangible Palestinian return. In that sense, normalization was separated from the path to a solution, and the Palestinian issue was turned into a deferred file, or into a vague future horizon incapable of obstructing Israel's regional integration. The Turkish proposal, by contrast, seeks to reverse that order.

Fidan is not merely calling for confidence-building steps or limited negotiating progress; he is making the establishment of a fully sovereign Palestinian state on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, a prior condition for any broad regional integration of Israel.



Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu during the Abraham Accords signing

ceremony in the South Lawn of the White House, Sept. 15, 2020. (Yuri Gripas / Abaca / Bloomberg)

Here the fundamental difference between the logic of the Abraham Accords and the logic of the Turkish approach becomes clear. The former gave Israel normalization first and left the Palestinian solution to an open and faltering negotiating track. The latter makes the Palestinian solution the gateway to normalization, turning regional integration from a free reward into a political price tied to clear recognition of Palestinian rights.

The Turkish proposal does not stop at adjusting the terms of normalization. It expands toward a broader vision of a regional security architecture that would include Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the Gulf states and Pakistan, and perhaps Iran later when conditions allow. It is an attempt to draw a new map of power based on broader regional balances: Türkiye with its military and diplomatic weight, Saudi Arabia and Egypt with their Arab heft, Pakistan with its Islamic strategic depth, and Iran with the potential of its inclusion to ease regional polarization.

But is Fidan proposing an equation that can actually be implemented, or is he raising a negotiating ceiling he already knows the current Israeli government will reject? The Turkish condition puts Israel before a choice: recognize a Palestinian state and gain broad regional normalization, or settle for limited bilateral relations with some capitals in a regional environment made more tense by the Gaza war.

Yet this approach carries its own risk. If Israel rejects the condition a strong possibility given the current balance of Israeli politics Türkiye could find itself outside the existing normalization tracks, while the Abraham Accords have already shown that some Arab states are prepared to move ahead with normalization without a Palestinian solution. Ankara's wager therefore remains tied to its assessment that the Gaza war has returned the Palestinian issue to the center of the regional equation, and that any new security order in the region will remain fragile unless it begins with this very knot.

Principle or negotiating card?

Between moral discourse and strategic calculations, the Turkish approach moves from a position that is difficult to reduce to a single category. Ankara does not treat the condition of a Palestinian state as a political slogan, nor does it present it outside the logic of interests and regional repositioning. The equation therefore appears more complex: a stance grounded in a clear reservoir of principle in support of the Palestinian cause, but managed with the tools of realpolitik, where principles become pressure cards and the moral and political cost of the war on

Gaza becomes an element in reshaping regional balances.

Ankara has grounds to rely on when it presents its position as a principled commitment. Since the Gaza war, Türkiye has escalated its political rhetoric against Israel, recalled its ambassador from Tel Aviv, and suspended its trade relations with it in May 2024, despite the direct economic cost to a trade relationship that had reached high levels in previous years.

The Turkish leadership, from President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, has also continued to stress that sustainable peace in the region runs through a two-state solution and the establishment of a fully sovereign Palestinian state on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. In this sense, the Palestinian condition appears to be part of a broader Turkish narrative that sees bypassing the Palestinian issue as one of the reasons for the region's explosion, and that any new security arrangement will remain fragile as long as this knot is deferred.

Yet the principled character of the position does not erase its pragmatic dimension. Even as Türkiye raises its political ceiling in confronting Israel, it has maintained a margin for diplomatic and security maneuver. Relations have not reached a complete rupture, and back channels have remained usable, especially on files touching direct security such as Syria and avoiding miscalculated friction. Fidan's own statements also leave the door to "normal life" open if Israel stops killing Palestinians and lifts restrictions on the entry of food, water and medicine into Gaza.

That means Ankara is not framing its position as a final break, but as a conditional equation that includes ending the war, easing the humanitarian catastrophe, and returning to a political track that restores the Palestinian issue to centrality.



File photo of US President Donald Trump and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan during a multilateral meeting on the sidelines of the 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York City, United States, Sept. 23, 2025. (Reuters / Al Drago)

It is precisely here that the Turkish approach appears both simple and complex at once. Once principle enters the realm of foreign policy, it does not remain abstract moral discourse; it becomes a tool of pressure, bargaining and influence-building. Fidan understands that the strength of a position is measured not only by its moral clarity, but by its ability to produce political effect.

Ankara therefore appears to be trying to turn broad popular sympathy for Palestine and regional anger over the war on Gaza into diplomatic capital that raises the cost of ignoring it in any subsequent arrangements concerning Gaza, the Gulf or regional security.

This dimension becomes even more important in Türkiye's reading of decision-making inside "Israel". Fidan believes Benjamin Netanyahu always needs an external enemy to justify his regional policies and domestic calculations a reading that treats Israeli behavior as part of a political structure built on escalation and the perpetuation of threat.

From this perspective, Ankara is not content with condemning "Israel" morally; it

is trying to contain its political logic by proposing a regional alternative that says security is achieved not by widening the circle of confrontation, but by removing the deeper cause of tension: the absence of a just solution to the Palestinian issue.

But this combination of principle and interest carries its own risks. The more the Turkish position appears reversible under certain political conditions, the more vulnerable it becomes to doubts about its moral credibility, especially among Arab and Muslim audiences who see the stance on Gaza as a test that leaves no room for maneuver. Conversely, if “Israel” reads this position as more of a negotiating card than a fixed commitment, it may seek to bypass it through alternative tracks with other states, or treat it as temporary pressure that can be contained over time.

How did the war on Iran affect Turkish security thinking?

The war on Iran pushed Ankara to reexamine many of its security assumptions. Türkiye, which had grown accustomed to managing competition with Tehran within controlled limits, found itself facing a broader and more dangerous possibility: an open regional war on its eastern and southern borders that could reshape the balance of power in the region.

Hence Türkiye’s cautious and calculated behavior: clear condemnation of the strikes targeting Iran and warnings against violating its sovereignty, while at the same time rejecting Iranian attacks on Gulf states or any escalation that could drag the region into a full-scale confrontation.

This balance reflected Türkiye’s awareness that every extreme outcome of the war carries a direct danger for Ankara. A collapsed Iran would mean a vast security vacuum along Türkiye’s long border, the possibility of massive refugee waves, and the rise of armed chaos in a space where ethnicities, sects, smuggling networks and transnational organizations overlap.

An Iran that emerges victorious or empowered could return to a policy of influence through proxies in neighboring states, reviving areas of friction Ankara has tried to contain in recent years.

As for an “Israel” emerging from the war with broader regional superiority, that represents a different kind of danger in Turkish calculations: a power more emboldened in its military movement in Syria, Iraq and the eastern Mediterranean, and more capable of filling the vacuums that Iranian weakness or retreat might leave behind.

In this sense, Türkiye found itself facing a three-sided dilemma that offered no comfortable option. Neither Iran’s collapse serves its security, nor does an

empowered Iran reassure it, nor is absolute Israeli superiority compatible with its interests. Ankara therefore preferred to manage the crisis through diplomatic containment rather than engage in the logic of military responses.

In its view, the war threatens not Iran alone, but also confronts Türkiye with intertwined possibilities affecting border security, energy stability, Kurdish balances, the future of Syria and Iraq, and Ankara's place in any coming regional order.

This caution appeared even more clearly in the files most sensitive to Turkish national security, foremost among them the Kurdish issue. Ankara fears that Iran's weakness or preoccupation with war could activate armed Kurdish groups inside Iranian territory, or lead some international powers to try to use them as a pressure card against Tehran. For Türkiye, any movement on this file does not remain within Iran's borders; it can directly rebound on its internal track with the Kurdistan Workers' Party and on its border security in Iraq and Syria.

That is why Ankara has treated the possibility of arming Iranian Kurds as an extremely sensitive red line, not as a card that can be used against a regional rival.



Debris from a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) air defense system that intercepted a missile launched from Iran is seen in the Dortyol district of Hatay

province in southern Türkiye, March 4, 2026. (IHA Agency)

The Azerbaijani file is no less sensitive in Turkish calculations. The presence of a large Azerbaijani bloc inside Iran, alongside the national and cultural ties between Türkiye and Azerbaijan, makes any internal Iranian unrest liable to turn into a highly complex regional issue. Supporting Iranian Azerbaijanis may seem tempting to some nationalist impulses, but it also carries the risk of dragging Türkiye into a prolonged internal Iranian conflict and opening an ethnic front whose course and cost cannot be controlled.

Ankara therefore appeared keen to keep this file outside the logic of mobilization and to prevent it from becoming an entry point for dismantling Iran or igniting its eastern borders.

Economically as well, the war gave Ankara another reason for concern. Türkiye is highly sensitive to energy disruptions and depends heavily on oil and gas imports, while any tension in the Gulf or the Strait of Hormuz is quickly reflected in energy prices, inflation and the exchange rate. Ankara therefore does not view the war as a distant crisis confined to the Iranian sphere, but as a direct pressure factor on an economy already suffering from high prices and energy costs.

The longer the confrontation lasts, the greater the risk that its effects will spill into Turkish markets, whether through rising oil and gas prices or through disruptions to trade routes and capital flows.

All of this explains why Turkish mediation shifted from the category of diplomatic initiative to that of security necessity. Ankara is acting from the conviction that the continuation of the war will narrow its strategic margin and raise the cost of every option before it. Hakan Fidan therefore intensified his contacts and tours among the capitals concerned, while Türkiye sought to encourage channels of dialogue between Washington and Tehran, push Gulf states toward restraint, and work with regional parties such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Pakistan to build a path linking de-escalation to broader arrangements in Gaza, the Gulf and the region.

Yet Ankara is operating in a crisis that exceeds its unilateral ability to control. It is trying to prevent the worst scenarios more than it is creating the ideal scenario it wants. The war on Iran thus appears as a revealing moment in Turkish security thinking, pushing Ankara to see regional security as an interconnected system in which Gaza cannot be separated from the Gulf, Syria from Iran, or competition with Israel from the future of the regional balance.

From here, the Iran file connects directly to the Turkish proposal for a new security order. If mediation succeeds in lowering tensions between Washington and Tehran, Ankara may find an opportunity to push broader arrangements that

redefine regional security on the basis of balance rather than hegemony, and settlement rather than the management of open-ended crises.

But if the war ends with Iran weakened and fragmented, or with “Israel” more dominant and more assertive, Türkiye will find itself in a harsher regional environment that pushes it toward greater military and diplomatic fortification, and perhaps toward deeper revisions in its conception of deterrence and national security.

Limits of ambition

Türkiye’s ability to turn this vision into reality remains contingent on whether it possesses the tools to build a new regional security order, rather than merely offering an accurate reading of a moment that is still larger than its ability to control. The proposal Hakan Fidan is advancing rests on a clear awareness of postwar shifts, but it is moving within a regional environment crowded with competing powers, each with its own calculations, fears and limits on its willingness to engage in a security architecture led by Türkiye or shaped with Turkish participation.

The most sensitive obstacle begins with Israel itself. Since the Gaza war, Turkish-Israeli relations have entered one of their most tense phases. At the same time, Israeli circles view Türkiye’s rise as a new strategic challenge, especially in Syria, the eastern Mediterranean and the regional space where Iranian influence has receded. In that sense, “Israel” to which the Turkish proposal offers security integration conditioned on recognition of a Palestinian state sees Türkiye itself as a rival power seeking to fill sensitive regional vacuums.

Fidan is aware of this dilemma when he describes Israeli behavior as driven by a search for more land, not security alone. This diagnosis confronts the Turkish initiative with a question: Is it possible to build a regional security framework with a party that sees military and political expansion as a means of protecting itself and strengthening its position?

Türkiye is trying to turn security into the outcome of a just political settlement, while the current Israeli government treats security as an extension of military superiority and freedom of action in Gaza, the West Bank, Syria and Lebanon.

The disagreement between the two sides therefore concerns the meaning of security itself, and whether it is built through settlement or through force.

The difficulty of Turkish ambition is compounded by Gulf and Arab calculations. Saudi Arabia coordinates with Ankara on several files, from Gaza to Syria and mediation with Iran, but it remains keen to preserve its position as the central Arab power in any coming regional arrangement. The UAE, one of the pillars of

the Abraham Accords, may view with caution any attempt to relink normalization to a strict Palestinian condition, because that would put the path it chose on the defensive.

As for Egypt, despite its overlap with Türkiye in supporting a solution to the Palestinian issue and managing the Gaza file, it watches Turkish regional ambition with a historical sensitivity tied to its traditional place in the Arab order.



Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan takes part in the extraordinary session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, March 5, 2024, in Jeddah.

These calculations do not prevent coordination, but they make building a shared security platform a complicated matter. The states expected to engage in this vision do not start from a single view of threats. The Gulf balances between Iran, “Israel” and US guarantees; Egypt places the security of Gaza, Sinai and the Red Sea at the top of its priorities; Saudi Arabia seeks to shape arrangements that preserve its regional leadership; and Türkiye is looking for a position that secures its interests in Syria, Iraq, the eastern Mediterranean and the Caucasus.

The Turkish proposal therefore needs, alongside moral consensus on Palestine, a practical convergence of interests among states that view the region from different angles.

The American obstacle adds another layer of constraints. Washington may benefit from Turkish mediation on some files, especially when Ankara is able to communicate with parties the United States has no direct channel to, but it does not appear ready to grant Türkiye full freedom to redefine the rules of regional security.

The US vision still sees the Abraham Accords as a model that can be expanded, while Fidan is trying to reinsert the Palestinian issue into the heart of any normalization or security architecture.

The possible inclusion of Iran in any future regional platform, even after de-escalation, also raises clear sensitivities in Washington, which wants to contain Tehran, not integrate it into arrangements that would grant it broader regional legitimacy.

Above all this, Türkiye runs up against the limits of its position as a rising middle power. It has broad influence, a flexible network of relations and the ability to move between opposing camps, but it does not alone possess the capacity to impose major settlements. Ankara can open channels, offer formulas, bring parties together and lower the cost of dialogue, but it needs the acceptance of major and regional powers for its vision to become an actual system.

That is the difference between being a state that cannot be bypassed in any settlement and being the state capable of imposing the shape of that settlement.

Still, this does not diminish the importance of what Türkiye is trying to do. The value of Fidan's proposal lies not only in its immediate applicability, but in the fact that it places the Palestinian issue back inside the regional security equation after years of attempts to separate normalization from it. From this angle, Ankara appears to be trying to change the language of the debate before changing the balance of politics.

Here the limits of Turkish ambition and its value appear at the same time. Ankara understands that today's "Israel" will not easily accept the condition of a Palestinian state, that some Arab capitals do not want to return to a strict linkage between normalization and a solution, and that Washington prefers expanding the Abraham Accords to rebuilding them from the ground up.

Yet it is putting its equation forward anyway, because it understands that moments after major wars are not decided only by what is immediately achievable, but also by the visions placed on the table awaiting a shift in the balance of power.

Fidan's proposal therefore appears closer to an attempt to establish a long-term equation than to an initiative awaiting quick results. Türkiye does not hold all the

keys to the region, but it is trying to ensure that its coming arrangements are not shaped without it.

Between the ambition of building a new security order and a regional reality that resists discipline within a single system, Ankara's ability to maneuver, to be patient and to choose the right moment will remain the decisive factor.

The open question is whether a region exhausted by wars, incomplete normalization and fragile balances will grant this equation enough time to mature, or whether a new crisis will overtake it and return everyone to the logic of managing fires rather than building security.

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