

# 'Too risky' for Iran to hit Turkey over US assets: analysts

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● **Attacking a NATO member could also trigger the military alliance's collective defence mechanisms**

AFP | Istanbul, Turkey

Under relentless Israeli-US attack, Iran has bombarded US assets in the Gulf, but so far has not touched Turkey which would be a "high-cost strategic gamble" that could go disastrously wrong, analysts said.

Iran had long warned that if Washington attacked, it would target its regional assets -- which in principle should include NATO-member Turkey where US troops are stationed at several bases.

Since the conflict began early on Saturday, Iran has fired missiles and drones across the Middle East, striking Israel, and at Iraq, Jordan and all six Gulf states in a bid to strike at US assets.

But not Turkey, despite the presence of several highly sensitive sites hosting an unspecified number of US troops.

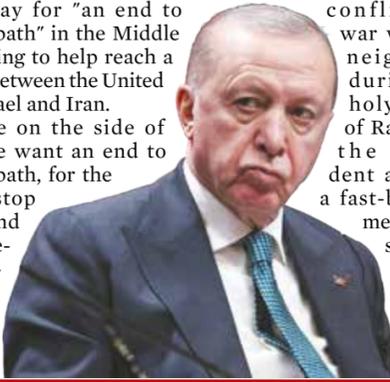
One is Incirlik, a key NATO air base used for decades by US troops near the southern city of Adana, another is Kurecik, a base in central Turkey which has a NATO early-warning radar system that can detect Iranian missile launches.

## Erdogan calls for end to Iran war 'bloodbath'

AFP | Istanbul, Turkey

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan called on Monday for "an end to the bloodbath" in the Middle East, vowing to help reach a ceasefire between the United States, Israel and Iran.

"We are on the side of peace. We want an end to the bloodbath, for the tears to stop flowing and that our region finally reach the lasting peace



it has cried out for for years," Erdogan told members of his AKP party in Ankara.

"We want neither conflict nor war with our neighbours during this holy month of Ramadan," the president added at a fast-breaking meal for observant Muslims.

Erdogan, who

maintains good relations with President Donald Trump despite frequently criticising American ally Israel, nonetheless insisted that the US-Israeli strikes on Saturday, which sparked the war and triggered retaliation from Tehran, were "illegal".

"We will intensify our contacts at all levels until a ceasefire is concluded and tranquility is restored to our region," he said, adding that he was "grieving at the sight of the suffering of the civilians and innocent children" in Iran hit by the conflict.

Erdogan, a key regional play-

er, had previously expressed his sadness at the death of Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who was killed in Saturday's strikes along with much of the Islamic republic's leadership.

Turkey, a majority Sunni-Muslim nation which is a member of NATO, shares a 500-kilometre (315-mile) border with Iran.

While Iran has retaliated by aiming drones and missiles at Israel, Iraq, Jordan and the Gulf states in the hope of striking US bases and assets, Turkey has so far been spared Tehran's wrath.

"Iran continues to value Turkey's potential role in de-escalation and diplomatic mediation. Targeting Turkey would undermine that channel at a moment when dialogue remains crucial," he told AFP.

Important neighbour Turkey had furiously worked diplomatic back-channels to head off the military confrontation, but since Saturday has sought to maintain a neutral stance.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Saturday he was "deeply disturbed" by the attacks while also denouncing Iran's retaliatory strikes, vowing to step up diplomatic efforts to bring the sides back to the negotiating table.

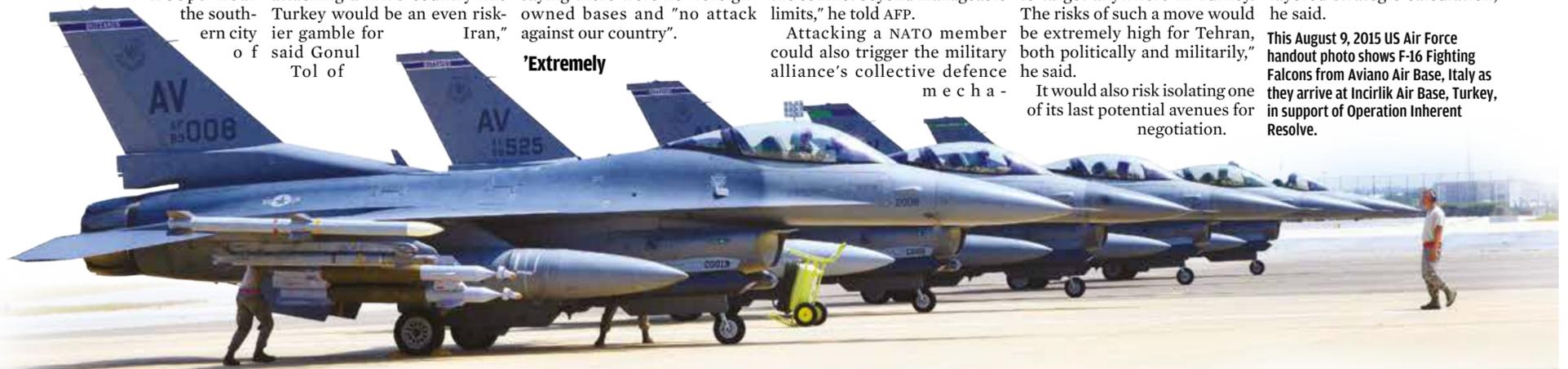
For Tehran, Ankara remained "a critical diplomatic actor" who could play a key in back-channel diplomacy, Keskin said.

"An attack on Turkey would narrow Iran's diplomatic manoeuvring space and cut off a crisis-management route it may later need."

It also risked pushing Ankara into "an opposing camp" which could play out badly for Tehran given Turkey's geostrategic location, he said.

"Iran's choice not to attack Turkey is not a matter of goodwill but the outcome of a highly layered strategic calculation," he said.

This August 9, 2015 US Air Force handout photo shows F-16 Fighting Falcons from Aviano Air Base, Italy as they arrive at Incirlik Air Base, Turkey, in support of Operation Inherent Resolve.



the Washington-based Middle East Institute.

The bases are a deeply sensitive issue for Turkey with police on Saturday arresting three journalists for "national security offences" over footage filmed near Incirlik shortly after the Iran strikes began.

On Monday, Ankara roundly denied unsubstantiated online rumours alleging "a US military base in Turkey has been hit", saying there were no "foreign owned bases and "no attack against our country".

'Extremely

high risk'

Unlike its strikes on the Gulf countries, an attack on Turkey would not be a low-risk "messaging operation" but "a high-cost strategic gamble for Iran," said Arif Keskin, an Iranian expert at Ankara University.

"A direct military move against Turkey would risk triggering a symmetrical response from Ankara. This could push the conflict beyond manageable limits," he told AFP.

Attacking a NATO member could also trigger the military alliance's collective defence mechanisms,

which would "raise the strategic cost dramatically," he said.

Serhan Afacan, director of the Ankara-based Centre for Iranian Studies (IRAM), said Iran appeared to have banked on the fact none of the Gulf states would retaliate -- which wouldn't be the case with Turkey.

"Iran has neither the strategic incentive nor the intention to target anywhere in Turkey. The risks of such a move would be extremely high for Tehran, both politically and militarily," he said.

It would also risk isolating one of its last potential avenues for negotiation.

## UK PM defends Iran strikes stance after Trump criticism

AFP | London, United Kingdom

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer defended yesterday his decision to keep Britain out of the United States and Israel's initial strikes against Iran following criticism from President Donald Trump.

Trump told Britain's Daily Telegraph he was "very disappointed" with Starmer's initial refusal to let Washington use British military bases in the US-Israeli war against Iran, launched on Saturday.

"President Trump has expressed his disagreement with our decision not to get involved in the initial strikes, but it is my duty to judge what is in Britain's national interest," Starmer told parliament.

"That is what I have done and I stand by it," he added.

After initially refusing to have



any role in the strikes, Starmer on Sunday announced that he had agreed to a US request to use British military bases for a "specific and limited defensive purpose".

His Downing Street office said the prime minister took the decision after Iran fired missiles over the weekend that put British interests and people "at risk".

"We all remember the mistakes of Iraq, and we have learnt those lessons. Any UK actions must always have a lawful basis and a viable thought-through plan," he told lawmakers.

The prime minister also said that British military bases in Cyprus "are not being used by US bombers" during the US-Israeli war with Iran.

Britain's Akrotiri air force base on Cyprus came under attack by an unmanned Iranian drone that hit the base's runway.

Starmer said the strike "was not in response to any decision that we have taken," adding that the British government believed the drone "was launched prior to our announcement".

Iran's approach is becoming "more reckless and more dangerous", Starmer said.

"They are working ruthlessly and deliberately through a plan to strike, not only military targets, but also economic targets in the region, with no regard for civilian casualties. That is the situation we face today and to which we must respond."