



Potential Impacts on Türkiye in the Event of a Possible U.S. Intervention in Iran

A Comprehensive Policy Framework for Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid Organizations

The recent history of the Middle East demonstrates that every major military escalation in the region is rarely confined to the battlefield; it produces political, economic, and humanitarian consequences that reverberate across neighboring states. Iran is one of the region's pivotal countries due to its geopolitical position, population size, and energy resources. For this reason, a potential large-scale U.S. military intervention in Iran would not only affect Iran, but would also directly impact neighboring countries.

In this context, Türkiye's position is of particular importance. Türkiye is a direct neighbor of Iran, a strategic gateway to Europe, a NATO member, and a country that has hosted millions of refugees over the last three decades. Any instability or war in Iran could generate the most acute effects in Türkiye in areas such as migration movements, border security, energy supply, social cohesion, and broader security dynamics.

This paper aims to provide a preventive analysis and strategic framework for human rights organizations, humanitarian aid agencies,

international donors, and policymakers in anticipation of a potential crisis scenario.

Geographic and Demographic Context

Türkiye and Iran share an approximately 500-kilometer land border. A significant portion of this border runs through the mountainous and rugged terrain of Eastern Anatolia. While physical barriers and security measures exist, historical experience indicates that during periods of crisis, natural obstacles alone do not fully prevent large-scale displacement.

Iran's population is estimated at 85–90 million. If only 1% of this population were to flee due to a sudden security threat, 800,000 to 900,000 people could move toward neighboring countries. If this figure were to rise to 3%, the displacement could exceed 2.5 million. Although these numbers are theoretical, comparable proportions have been observed in the crises in Syria and Iraq.

Why Türkiye May Be a More Likely Destination?

For people departing from Iran's western provinces, Türkiye may be attractive for several reasons:

Perceived state capacity and stability: Compared to many countries in the region, Türkiye is often viewed as having stronger institutional capacity.

Economic diversification: A broad economy spanning industry, services, trade, and tourism.

Health and education infrastructure: Relatively developed public services.

Access to Europe: Türkiye's land and maritime connections to Europe.

These factors may lead migration pressure to concentrate toward Türkiye, particularly if instability becomes prolonged.

Historical Experiences and Key Lessons

▪ Syrian Crisis

After 2011, Türkiye registered more than 3.6 million Syrians. Initially, a camp-based model was used; over time, however, the overwhelming majority settled in urban areas.

Lesson: Camps are a temporary solution; in the long run, urban integration becomes unavoidable.

▪ Iraq War

After 2003, limited migration movements occurred from Northern Iraq, but the crisis remained geographically confined.

Lesson: If a conflict remains limited, border management can be an effective tool.

▪ Afghanistan–Origin Migration

Prolonged uncertainty produced continuous and fluctuating mobility rather than a single large-scale wave.

Lesson: Protracted crises tend to create sustained migration flows rather than one-time surges.

Economic Impacts and the Energy Dimension

Türkiye meets part of its natural gas needs from Iran. In the event of conflict:

- Energy supply disruptions may occur.
- Electricity generation costs may increase.
- The industrial sector may be adversely affected.
- Inflationary pressures may intensify.

A USD 20–30 increase per barrel in global oil prices would place direct pressure on Türkiye as an energy importer. Rising living costs would disproportionately affect low-income groups and could heighten social tensions.

Pressure on Local Governments

In the event of a large-scale influx:

- Shelter capacity may become insufficient.
- Public hospitals may face increased congestion.
- Schools may experience capacity constraints.
- Municipal budgets may come under severe strain.
- Rents and basic consumer prices may rise.
- If international support is delayed, the risk of social tension between host communities and new arrivals may increase.

Security, Intelligence, and Hybrid Threats

Large humanitarian crises carry not only social but also security risks, including:

- The possibility of infiltration by armed groups,
- An increase in smuggling activities,
- Attacks on critical infrastructure,
- Disinformation campaigns.

Intelligence and Espionage Risks

Mass movements create a complex operational environment for intelligence services. It becomes more difficult to distinguish genuine security threats within large crowds. In a hybrid-warfare context, risks may include:

- Intelligence collection targeting energy facilities or military infrastructure,
- Attempts to trigger internal political polarization,
- Efforts to spread fear and distrust through social media.

A core principle here is to maintain a balanced approach between security measures and human rights. Collective suspicion, discriminatory practices, or arbitrary procedures can undermine social peace in the long term.

Secondary Movement to Europe and Central Asia

If migration pressure increases:

- Congestion may rise at the Greek and Bulgarian borders.
- Dangerous crossings via the Aegean Sea may increase.
- Diplomatic negotiations with the European Union may become more complex.
- Alternative routes through Central Asia may re-emerge.

This would position Türkiye not only as a destination country, but also as a transit corridor.

Scenario Analysis

▪ Best-Case Scenario

- The intervention is short and limited.
- Iran's state structure does not collapse.
- Migration remains below 1%.
- International financial support is mobilized rapidly.

Outcome: Türkiye can keep the process under control with manageable pressure.

▪ Mid-Level Scenario

- The conflict lasts for months.
- 1–1.5 million people move toward Türkiye.
- Partial disruption occurs in energy supply.

Outcome: Economic and social pressure increases, but the system does not collapse.

▪ Worst-Case Scenario

- Prolonged war and internal instability.
- More than 2 million displaced persons moving toward Türkiye.
- Energy crisis and high inflation.
- Increased security and intelligence risks.

Outcome: Serious strain on local governments, social cohesion, and border security; relations with Europe may become tense.

Recommendations for Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid Organizations

- Establish emergency funding mechanisms in advance.
- Deploy mobile health units in border regions.
- Develop modular temporary shelter solutions.
- Set up specialized protection mechanisms for women and children.
- Implement digital, transparent registration systems.
- Develop strategies to counter disinformation.

- Strengthen social cohesion programs with host communities.
- Reinforce international burden-sharing mechanisms.

Conclusion

A possible U.S. military intervention in Iran could generate multi-dimensional consequences for Türkiye. Geographic proximity, perceived stability, and access to Europe could place Türkiye at the center of potential displacement. Historical precedents and existing indicators suggest that even in the best-case scenario, Türkiye would face significant administrative and economic pressure.

Therefore, preventive planning, international cooperation, and a rights-based approach are the key foundations for reducing the impact of a potential crisis.

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*Whoever
saves a life,
it will be as if they
saved all of humanity.*

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