

Mideast Conflict Could Escalate Into Regional War

Turkey recently intercepted an Armenian plane, saying it was carrying Russian weapons bound for Syria.

Fighting between rebels and the Syrian government spilled over the border into Turkey, and Turkish troops retaliated.

These are just two recent examples of an escalating conflict in the **Middle East** that could soon erupt into a regional war.

Turkey is a NATO member, and is now escalating its efforts to remove Bashar al Assad from power in Syria. Turkey has warned that its troops could storm Damascus within three hours.

Samuel Tadros, with the Hudson Institute, said he believes the Turks are hungry for action.

“It’s a golden opportunity for Turkey to play a role in the region, to become the hero of the Sunni cause of allying itself with this Sunni majority that will be fighting for the future of Syria,” Tadros said.

That could advance efforts to reestablish a Sunni Muslim caliphate throughout the **Middle East**.

But Turkey is not the only neighboring country feeling the effects of war. Syria has also attacked rebel positions across the border in both Jordan and Lebanon.

The Lebanese are concerned that what happens in Syria might not necessarily stay in Syria. They worry the conflict could spill over the border into Lebanon, and once again Lebanon would be embroiled in civil war.

“The sectarian nature of the conflict in Syria has naturally had a spillover effect on Lebanese politics,” Tadros

confirmed.

Shia Muslim leader Hassan Nasrallah is allied with the Syrian and Iranian regimes. His Hezbollah movement controls the Lebanese government.

The militia is well armed, even though a United Nations resolution required the group to lay down its weapons after the 2006 war with Israel.

Most Lebanese Sunni Muslims oppose the Assad regime and Hezbollah.

“When we say return to civil war, it means that there are armed militias on the other side. There aren’t,” Middle East analyst Walid Phares told CBN News. “So, if anything, it would be a return to Hezbollah killing other Lebanese, and the question is who is going to be protecting them?”

Phares said the Lebanese Army is unlikely to protect Sunni Muslims and Christians from Hezbollah because it is under the influence of Nasrallah.

Tadros said Sunni Muslims are beginning to arm themselves in Syria, and they may do the same in Lebanon.

He suggested many Lebanese Sunnis would like to even the score with Hezbollah over the group’s involvement in the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, and its strong-arm tactics of governing.

“In a sense, Hezbollah’s violent take-over of the streets in Beirut is a lesson that is not forgotten by anyone,” Tadros said.

The two regional powers backing opposite sides in the Syrian war—Turkey and Iran—have expressed initial support for a ceasefire.