

# Türkiye's actions destabilize the Middle East

written by Noa Lazimi | 03.06.2024

Since October 7, Türkiye has been hardening its stance towards Israel in a manner uncharacteristic of the behavior exhibited by the Turkish administration in previous crises with Israel. More specifically, Türkiye's decision to sever trade relations with Israel as an act of solidarity with Hamas reflects a troubling shift from its typical hostile rhetoric to inflicting actual economic damage. Although Türkiye later retracted from its sweeping boycott, this move marks a significant escalation in Erdoğan's anti-Israel stance.

In the wider context, Türkiye's growing presence in the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean poses significant challenges for Israel and its Western allies. Erdoğan's Türkiye leads a radical Islamist line and undertakes actions that undermine the existing regional order while harming crucial Israeli interests.

First and foremost, Türkiye's support of Hamas, its attempts to force Israel to comply with its demands on the humanitarian aid issue, as well as other initiatives aimed at gaining a foothold in post-war Gaza, act as a considerable obstacle to achieving one of Israel's main war objectives: the defeat of Hamas.

Moreover, despite the heavy consequences suffered by Ankara after sending the Turkish aid flotilla to Gaza in 2010, Türkiye has been preparing to launch a second Marmara under the supervision of the IHH, which was designated as a terrorist organization by Israel in 2008. This initiative is currently delayed after the Republic of Guinea-Bissau requested the removal of its flag from two of the ships, however, the organizers vow to overcome the obstacles and end the siege on Gaza.

These steps, along with the unprecedented announcement of cutting all economic ties with Jerusalem, position Türkiye as a hostile nation willing to deteriorate its relationship with Israel, with whom it previously maintained reasonable relations despite tensions over the Palestinian issue, even at the cost of severe damage to its already struggling economy.

Israel should also be concerned about Türkiye's involvement in East Jerusalem,

manifesting in the agitation of the local Muslim population against Israel while weakening Jordan's role in administering the Muslim holy sites. Under the guise of tourism and religious activity, Türkiye strives to gain a foothold in the mosques on the Temple Mount and plays an active role in incitement and provocation against non-Muslim visitors. It is not unreasonable to assume that the stabbing incident of an Israeli Border Police officer by a Turkish tourist in Jerusalem about a month ago is a result of this incitement.

Ankara's efforts in recent years to thwart cooperation between Israel, Greece, and Cyprus in the gas sector, alongside demonstrating military presence in Libya and other places, further illustrate that Ankara has become a factor that undermines regional stability while infringing on the sovereignty of its neighbors.

The escalation in Türkiye's attitude towards Israel is particularly concerning given that, unlike in the past, Türkiye is now willing to abandon pragmatism and realpolitik in favor of ideological considerations and domestic public opinion, a trend that, if continues, could turn Ankara from a mere rival into an active enemy. If the Biden administration doesn't exert significant pressure to curb Türkiye's dangerous foreign policy, this threat is only likely to grow in the foreseeable future.

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