

AN ANALYSIS OF TURKIYE'S RESPONSE TO THE GAZA CRISIS

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(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)



Turkiye has been actively pursuing peace in the Middle East and in the post-October 7 period. With escalating tensions in the region due to Israel's barbaric assault against innocent Palestinians in Gaza, Turkiye's role has been further highlighted. Ankara has persistently pushed for a ceasefire and an immediate end to Israeli aggression. Ankara's response has been both active and steadfast, reflected also in the provision of humanitarian aid at a large scale via Egypt. Ankara's close links with Hamas and Fatah also enable it to play a role in pushing for an end to the crisis. Hamas had also stated that it would like Turkiye to be one of the guarantor states.¹

On a global level, Turkiye has been actively engaged in bilateral negotiations -- with the Turkish leadership having repeated conversations with counterparts from Russia, Greece, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Algeria as well as from Palestine and Israel. Multilateral forums are no exception and Ankara has taken a clear stance there as well. At international summit meetings, like the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), among others, Turkiye has raised this issue and has also had deep engagement with officials at the United Nations. The lack of unity within the Muslim world has been decried by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan as a major reason for the absence of a comprehensive response. It may be noted that

¹ Muhittin Ataman, Diplomatic push for peace: Türkiye's efforts in Gaza, Daily Sabah, May 8, 2024, <https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/columns/diplomatic-push-for-peace-turkiyes-efforts-in-gaza>

Turkiye has become the second country to join South Africa's genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

Earlier, Turkiye's role was significant in the formation of a joint diplomatic initiative representing the OIC and the Arab League during a combined summit meeting of the two organizations in November 2023. The Foreign Ministers of Turkiye, Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Egypt, Jordan, Qatar, Indonesia and Nigeria were chosen as members of this mission. The members of this contact group have undertaken visits to the capitals of key regional states as well as global powers with the aim of persuading these countries to exert pressure on Israel to stop its military onslaught and establish peace.² These initiatives reflect the strong will of Turkiye, taking a lead role in the efforts for peace.

On June 11, 2024, Turkiye welcomed the adoption of a ceasefire resolution to end violence in Gaza at the UN. Turkiye has also raised the Palestinian issue at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Foreign Ministers meeting held in Prague in May 2024.³ Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan stressed the need for a 'principled stance' regarding the illegal occupation of Palestinian territories. He also appreciated the recognition of Palestine by European nations, including Slovenia, Ireland, Norway and Spain.

Turkiye's recent move to cut economic ties with Israel in the wake of the worsening humanitarian crisis in Gaza reflects Ankara's sharpening stance towards Israeli actions.⁴ It has also stated that it will continue trade only if the condition of uninterrupted flow of aid to the Palestinians is allowed.⁵ The deepening tensions between Turkiye and Israel are not a new phenomenon, and relations between Ankara and Tel Aviv have witnessed several lows in the past few decades. A showdown between the then Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and the Israeli President at a Davos Summit in the year 2009 over Israel's aggression against Gaza is a prominent case in point. Similarly, the 2010 Flotilla Raid by Israel, a vessel carrying aid for Palestinians, was ruthlessly attacked by the Israeli navy and resulted in deterioration of bilateral relations. However, despite these lows, trade between the two countries continued at that point in time.

The cut in economic ties is a reflection of the seriousness of Ankara's stance. Time will tell if Turkiye is successful in persuading other countries to follow suit. This development is worth noting since

² Ibid.

³ Merve Berker and Busranur Koca, Turkiye almost only country drawing attention to Gaza conflict: Turkish foreign minister, Anatolian Agency, June 1, 2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkiye/turkiye-almost-only-country-drawing-attention-to-gaza-conflict-turkish-foreign-minister/3236939>

⁴ Ezgi Akin , Rina Bassist, Turkey cuts all trade with Israel as ties fray, Al Monitor, May 2, 2024, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2024/05/turkey-cuts-all-trade-israel-ties-fray>

⁵ Giorgio Cafiero, Erdogan v. Netanyahu: Where does this go?, Responsible Statecraft, May 6, 2024, <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/israel-trade-turkey-gaza/>

Turkiye-Israel bilateral trade stood at \$7 billion in the year 2023.⁶ The cut in trade ties will certainly affect the Turkish economy, and can also hurt the Israeli economy in several ways. Israel can potentially be more deeply affected if Turkiye proceeds further to stop Azerbaijan from exporting oil to Israel, since the oil goes through the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline. It cannot yet be ascertained whether Turkiye will take this step; however, if it does, it will have further significant impact.

The killing of the Hamas leader, Ismael Haniyeh, in Tehran could push Ankara and Tel Aviv further apart. Haniyeh had also been invited to address the Turkish parliament by President Erdogan. A Turkish delegation attended the late Hamas leader's funeral in Qatar. Moreover, in a recent development, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas addressed the Turkish parliament on August 15, 2024, vowing to visit Gaza, which received a resounding welcome from the members. During his meeting with President Abbas, President Erdogan reiterated Turkiye's resolve to support the Palestinian cause.⁷

In sum, Ankara's actions in pressing for a ceasefire, delivery of humanitarian aid, raising the issue at all possible international forums, joining the legal battle at ICJ, and the recent cut in trade ties, illustrate Turkiye's firm and steadfast commitment to the cause of Palestine and a steadily hardening stance towards Israel. Turkiye is likely to remain in the vanguard of efforts to bring relief to the beleaguered Palestinians and push for a just solution to this most intractable issue of the past century.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Turkey to continue pressuring Israel, Erdogan tells Abbas, The New Arab, August 15, 2024, <https://www.newarab.com/news/turkey-continue-pressuring-israel-erdogan-tells-abbas>