

Erdogan says Israel has 'set its sights' on Turkish territory

Turkish president says Hamas is the first line of defence against eventual military expansion by Israel into Anatolia



Erdogan has been a vocal critic of Israel since the start of the war last year (AFP)

By Ragip Soylu in Ankara

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Hamas is defending [Turkish](#) lands against [Israel](#), President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said in televised remarks on Wednesday.

Addressing the Turkish parliament in Ankara, Erdogan said Israel would eventually "set its sights" on them if it was "not stopped".

"Israel is not only attacking Palestinians in Gaza; [it is] attacking us. Hamas is the forward line defense of Anatolia in Gaza," he said.

The statement came as bilateral relations hit a new low after Ankara completely [halted trade](#) with Israel earlier this month, demanding unhindered flow of humanitarian aid into [Gaza Strip](#) and a ceasefire.

"Israel will answer for the 35,000 Palestinians they murdered and the 85,000 people they injured. We will be on their backs," Erdogan said.

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"No one should expect us to soften our words. They are as spoiled as they are barbaric. They killed people with the deadliest weapons, hunger and thirst. They took people out of their homes and directed them to supposedly safe areas. They massacred civilians in safe areas."

Erdogan in April likened Hamas to the Turkish revolutionary forces which helped expel foreign armies from Anatolia in the 1920's.

Even though both countries normalised previously rocky relations and exchanged ambassadors last year, the 7 October Hamas-led attack on Israel led to a rift that undermined the detente.

Turkey initially kept its criticism towards Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government muted, and also condemned Hamas' attacks on civilians.

However, the government's posture changed over time as suffering in the Gaza Strip mounted. Turkey first recalled its ambassador for consultations in November.

Since suffering significant losses in Turkey's local elections in March, the Turkish government has intensified its criticism of Israel and taken a series of steps against Netanyahu's government.

Turkey also [announced](#) earlier this month that it would join South Africa's genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice.

Despite this, Israeli sources told Middle East Eye on Monday that Israel had begun to send back its diplomats to Turkey earlier in May, half a year after it withdrew them over security concerns.

"As the Israeli departure was due to [security reasons](#), Israel is trying to gradually send back its diplomats," an Israeli source told MEE.

A Turkish official confirmed that Israeli diplomats have been returning to their posts.

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