

## Turkey's Expanding Role in Gaza: What Is Israel Really Afraid Of?



The contours of an increasingly visible Turkish presence in the Palestinian file are sharpening moving beyond diplomatic and humanitarian support into active involvement in shaping the political and field landscape of the Gaza Strip, amidst rapid regional transformations that are redrawing balances of power after two years of war.

While Israel seeks to monopolize the “day after,” imposing a settlement that dismantles the resistance’s structure and re-engineers Gaza politically and securityly, it finds itself confronted by a robust Turkish comeback, driven by a close alliance with Washington so close, in fact, that Ankara coordinated directly with U.S. President Donald Trump, making it one of the key architects of the post-war phase.

This Turkish expansion, which began from a distance of support and shifted into mediation, taking ever-stronger shape in recent months, is provoking growing Israeli anxiety: Tel Aviv sees a dual threat.

On one hand, this gives the Hamas movement a legitimate political cover after

efforts to delegitimize it. On the other, it returns Ankara to the heart of the regional order as a power that cannot be bypassed in any settlement pertaining to Gaza or the broader regional files altogether.

A clearer presence and deeper engagement

The recent months have revealed a qualitative shift in Turkish involvement not limited to political or humanitarian backing but advancing to direct contact with the negotiation tracks, attempts to stabilise a cease-fire, and even participation in engineering the contours of the war's next phase.



In this context, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan played an active role in the negotiating process, specifically regarding the amendments the resistance requested to the “Witkoff Framework”, which later collapsed under U.S.–Israeli pressure but it marked the first substantive Turkish presence at the negotiation table concerning Gaza, after Israeli reluctance from the start of the war.

Subsequently, during the meeting of eight Arab and Muslim countries with President Trump in New York on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly, Ankara emerged as one of the most engaged mediation parties.

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who sat at the head of the meeting table, appeared confident of reaching a cease-fire agreement, saying after a bilateral meeting with Trump that “mechanisms have been agreed to achieve a lasting peace in the Gaza Strip and the rest of the Palestinian territories.”

According to diplomatic sources who spoke to “NoonPost”, Turkey’s channels of contact with Hamas leadership remained open around the clock to overcome any obstacles that might prevent reaching an agreement, while Turkey’s diplomats displayed clear eagerness to push the movement to accept the first phase of the deal which includes a prisoner-exchange deal ensuring a positive American response.

Turkish involvement became more evident during the Sharm-El-Sheikh talks, when an official Turkish delegation participated in the technical discussions on the first phase of the deal, in the presence of the foreign ministers of Egypt and Qatar, as well as U.S. envoys officially announcing Turkey’s entry into the international mediation team.

Thus, Turkey’s role transformed from political backer into a direct partner in cease-fire arrangements—a practical embodiment of Erdoğan’s remarks a year earlier, when he expressed his country’s readiness to assume greater responsibility in the peace process.

Yet this presence was hardly welcomed by Israel. Hebrew-language media reported widespread irritation over Ankara’s engagement, given the sharpness of Turkish positions since the “Al-Aqsa Flood” (i.e., the October-7 attack), starting from Erdoğan’s description of Benjamin-Netanyahu as “Hitler of our time”, to the economic boycott and the halt in trade relations with Israel.

Recently, some reports disclosed that Erdoğan threatened to withdraw from the Sharm-El-Sheikh summit if Netanyahu took part before his plane turned back after the latter announced his withdrawal citing respect for the Jewish-“Feast of the Throne”.

Israeli writer Lior-Ben-Ari summed up the Israeli position by saying: “Since the October-7 attack, Israel has tried every means to exclude Turkey from the negotiations, preferring to rely on Egypt and Qatar, but failed,” adding that “Turkey has become a player that cannot be bypassed, indeed the decisive force in passing the cease-fire agreement under direct pressure from Erdoğan himself.”

In practice, Israel realises that Turkish involvement in the Gaza file is no longer a political footnote; it has become a strategic datum that redraws regional balances and returns Ankara to the heart of the Palestinian cause.

This helps explain the intensifying Israeli unease about the Turkish role especially since Ankara operates on the basis of embracing the resistance and affirming its political legitimacy, not dismantling it or stripping it of legitimacy.

Turkey’s relationship with Hamas

Although Turkey has maintained strong political, economic and military ties with Israel over decades, and was the first Muslim-majority country to officially recognise Israel after its mid-20th-century founding, the positive tone of those early years did not last.

With Erdoğan's rise to power in 2002, that relationship began to show repeated cracks, coinciding with a growing Turkish openness to Hamas, which at that time was rising toward the forefront of the Palestinian political scene after its 2006 electoral victory.

Ankara's invitation to Hamas' then-political bureau chief Khaled Meshaal to visit Turkey despite Washington and the European Union designating the movement as a "terrorist organisation" signalled a strategic shift in Turkey's vision toward the Palestinian resistance, breaking the diplomatic isolation Israel had sought to impose on Hamas.

Tensions between Ankara and Tel Aviv escalated after the Davos incident in 2009, when Erdoğan angrily walked out of the World Economic Forum following a heated exchange with Israeli President Shimon Peres over the Gaza assault, declaring that he "would never return to Davos". He kept that promise.

Just one year later, the Turkish ship Mavi Marmara became the symbol of a major confrontation when Israeli forces raided the Turkish-flagged vessel that was en route to Gaza to break the blockade, killing ten Turkish activists in international waters. The incident marked the collapse of diplomatic relations between the two states and reinforced in Turkey's consciousness that the Palestinian cause had become one of national dignity.

Since then, Israel has never ceased expressing displeasure with the broad political space Ankara has granted to Hamas. In 2018 the Israeli domestic security service Shin Bet issued a report accusing Turkey of facilitating economic entities alleged to provide financial and logistical assistance to Hamas and allowing its leaders to attend arms exhibitions inside Turkey.

It also accused the movement of running money-laundering operations in Istanbul with tacit Turkish facilitation. More recently, in October 2024, Israel intelligence agency Shin Bet again accused Ankara, claiming that the August attack carried out by a Palestinian commando in Tel Aviv was planned under the supervision of "Hamas headquarters in Turkey".

Despite these campaigns, Turkey maintained a consistent stance toward Hamas even after the October 7 2023 assault and the unprecedented international campaign to demonise the movement.

Erdoğan strongly rejected the label of "terrorism" for Hamas, affirming it was "a

national liberation movement” akin to Turks when they sought independence after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, saying clearly: “It is wrong to blame Hamas alone; you cannot ignore Netanyahu’s actions.”

He also reportedly met several Hamas leaders in Istanbul, including Ismail Haniyeh, who was later assassinated in Tehran in July 2024 in a meeting that Israel considered a symbolic challenge to the political siege imposed on the movement.

Erdoğan’s repeated statements on international platforms most recently in a FOX News interview expressed a firm Turkish stance opposing the Israeli narrative.

He described what is happening in Gaza as “a genocide in the making,” assigning personal responsibility to Netanyahu, and announced that Turkey had transferred thousands of wounded Gazans for treatment inside its territory.

These direct positions, combined with the political embrace of Hamas’ leadership, made Ankara one of the few capitals that did not buckle under the wave of international pressure a situation Israel sees as a political threat to its strategy of isolating and demonising the Palestinian resistance.

The alliance of the two leaders that worries Tel Aviv

One of the most disconcerting developments for Tel Aviv at the current stage is the depth of the personal and political rapprochement between Erdoğan and Trump and the impact of that direct proximity on the Gaza war trajectory and Turkey’s future regional role.

For Israel, the issue is no longer only about its historically fraught relationship with Ankara; it has become a genuine fear that the special relationship between the two leaders could become a new channel of influence that reshapes Washington’s priorities in the Middle East at Israel’s expense.

According to a report published by the Hebrew website Walla, President Trump himself initiated Turkey’s inclusion in the negotiations that led to the cease-fire deal in Gaza, and considered it a central party that applied decisive pressure to make the deal succeed.

This became plainly evident during the Sharm El Sheikh summit when Erdoğan sat next to Trump, as well as Qatar’s Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el Sisi, to sign the agreement in a scene that Hebrew media viewed as the public sealing of a new Turkish role in Gaza.

It did not stop at the political level. Ankara declared its readiness to take part in the international task force charged with locating the bodies of Israeli hostages, where a senior Turkish official told the French news agency AFP that a team of 81 rescuers was awaiting the green light from Israel to enter the Strip.

Israeli observers believe that Trump, who prefers to manage the Middle East via “strong-leader relationships,” granted Erdoğan what he has sought for more than a decade: reinstatement as a key player in Gaza after the post-2010 isolation following the Mavi-Marmara crisis.

In this context, Israeli researcher Galia Lindenstrauss of the Institute for National Security Studies says that Ankara views its involvement in Gaza as “a historic opportunity to restore its regional standing after years of isolation,” and that it seeks thereby to reclaim its natural place in major Arab issues chief among them the Palestinian cause, which Turkey has invested in politically and diplomatically over two decades.

Researcher Rami Daniel considered Turkey's entry into the negotiation track “a decisive turning point,” pointing out that Ankara, despite its absence in the early mediation phase, insisted on being a decision-maker at the end, and succeeded thanks to Erdoğan's strong ties with Trump.

He adds that “Turkey has pumped large amounts of aid into Gaza in recent years, betting on Erdoğan's anti-Israel rhetoric to lead a bloc supportive of the Palestinians but this presence did not turn into actual influence until now, when Trump's plan opened the door for a clear political role inside the Strip.”

He regards that the Turkish president “found in the plan a golden opportunity to reposition himself regionally,” at a time when Israel is paying the price for this shift in the rules of the game.

Because Erdoğan, despite the rapprochement with Washington, did not change his stance on Hamas, but rather seeks to cement its political legitimacy a fact that makes advancing the second phase of the agreement even more complex for Israel.

The rapprochement between the two leaders did not only concern the Palestinian file: since the cooperation experience in Syria, and through to recent summits, Trump repeatedly praised Erdoğan's regional influence, saying during a joint press conference that “Erdoğan has vast influence in the Middle East, and cooperation with him will be pivotal to achieving stability,” adding: “We will work together to find sustainable solutions for peace.”

The “Times of Israel” newspaper, for its part, warned explicitly of “the growing Turkish presence in the arteries of the White House,” considering what is happening “a sign of the erosion of Israeli influence within the U.S. administration.”

The paper said that “Trump allowed Turkey to join the cease-fire mediators' club, but Ankara is using this window to breach Israel's regional backyard,”

pointing out that the image of Trump and Erdoğan in New York during the U.S. allies meeting “sums up the new scene”, where the two leaders sat side by side, ahead of everyone else.

According to the paper, Turkey's ambitions in Gaza extend beyond the political sphere to the geostrategic dimension seeking a foothold in the maritime port as part of its vision for Eastern Mediterranean control and encirclement of Cyprus and Greece.

The paper argues this Turkish deployment to south of Israel isn't too different from its presence in northern Syria, implying Israel is now encircled by Turkish influence on two fronts.

Moreover, Israeli analyses suggest the greatest fear lies in losing its monopoly on the channel of influence to the U.S. president. Turkey's extensive involvement in Gaza will make Ankara an important source of information and assessments for Trump about the Palestinian file, which may eventually translate into more balanced, or even contradictory, American positions vis-à-vis Israel's vision for Gaza and for the overall Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

A shift in the regional equation runs counter to Israeli desire

Despite “Israeli Prime Minister” Benjamin Netanyahu's belief that the wave of successive wars in the region from Gaza to Lebanon to Yemen to Iran has re-engineered the Middle East in a way that ensures Israel's dominance of the political and security equations in the region, the reality has begun to form in a completely opposite direction.

In contrast to Israel's growing exposure, new regional powers are emerging, repositioning themselves and asserting presence in sensitive files, chief among them Turkey, which is no longer just a temporary mediator or a marginal player—but a key actor shaping the contours of the new regional order.

This description was expressed by Udiad Eilam, the former head of the counter-terrorism unit at Mossad, when he said: “Turkey is no longer a temporary mediator but has become a leading player and one of the architects of the new system.”

While many Israeli analysts view Turkey's role in Gaza as a circumstantial crisis, major Israeli think-tanks warn that the matter runs far deeper it concerns a redistribution of power in the region and a decline in Israel's ability to control the shape of regional interactions.

Israeli concern is no longer confined to Gaza. According to researcher Galia Lindenstrauss, Turkey, which previously focused on northern Syria, now views the regional scene with a wider lens and treats Israel as a potential obstacle to

its influence, whether in Syria or the Eastern Mediterranean or Gaza.

Observers believe that the Turkish government is using the Gaza file to repair its image in the Arab and Muslim street and to boost its standing as a regional power capable of combining relations with Washington and defending central Arab causes.

Conversely, Israel sees that policy carrying two faces: one presents Turkey as a U.S. partner in “peace efforts,” the other keeps it as a fierce political adversary that attacks Israel in public rhetoric and continues to host Hamas politically and in the media.

Israeli scholars believe that Ankara will seek to embed its presence in the Gaza Strip via participation in monitoring teams or reconstruction projects, which will grant it long-term influence in the Strip that Israel cannot easily accept.

Lindenstrauss warned that “any field intersection between the Turkish and Israeli armies inside Gaza, no matter how limited, could turn into a widespread diplomatic crisis,” signalling the fragility of the new equation that Tel Aviv had not confronted before.

Israeli expert Nwa-Lazimi of the “Meisgav” Institute for National Security admitted that “involving Turkey in the Gaza agreement means recognising it as an influential Sunni power, and acknowledging that comprehensive regional arrangements especially on the Palestinian issue cannot be reached without Turkey’s participation.”

It is certain that Turkey’s expanding role in Gaza will create a dual strategic dilemma for Israel: on one side, Israel cannot act toward Turkey as it might toward Iran or its proxies, because Turkey is a NATO member and an official U.S. ally, which limits the options for direct hostile response.

On the other side, Turkey’s expanding role opens the door to new alliances that redefine the lines of influence in the region and weaken Israel’s ability to single-handedly manage Palestinian and regional files. The Israeli government recognises that this shift would not have occurred without Turkey’s repositioning in its regional relations especially after improved ties with Cairo and continued close partnership with Doha.

This opening has enabled Ankara to enter crucial regional files, especially Gaza, while at the same time assisting the Egyptian-led regional role that rejects Israel’s displacement plan and seeks to stabilise the equation of “war’s end without surrender of Palestinian rights.”

Thus, Israel faces a new, far more complex equation that undermines its ability to control Middle-East interactions and curtails the Zionist right-wing ambitions



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to impose its dominance over the region.

The balance of power no longer tilts in favor of Tel Aviv alone; regional actors are moving to shape new political paths that will be difficult to bypass and Turkey remains the most pivotal and influential actor in this emerging equation.

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