

Erdogan vows to defend Jerusalem from Israeli 'invaders'

Turkish leader says will fight against 'those who perform state terror on Palestinians,' a week after Hebrew media report suggesting possible reconciliation between the two nations

By **TOI STAFF**

24 September 2018, 2:57 pm



Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, as he shakes hands with Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani prior to their talks at the Presidential Palace in Ankara, Turkey, on August 15, 2018. (Presidential Press Service via AP, Pool)

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Sunday that he will defend Jerusalem from Israeli "invaders" and against those who carry out "state terror" against the Palestinians.

In a speech to the TURKEN foundation in New York, the Turkish leader also said he would continue his diplomatic battle with Israel and the US over the future of the Israeli capital, according to the Anadolu news agency.

"We will not abandon Jerusalem, our first qiblah [Islamic direction of prayer], to invaders and those who perform state terror on Palestinians," he said.

Erdogan, who is in the US for the United Nations General Assembly, added that Turkey will continue its struggle against "the US and Israeli governments' breaches of the holy city at the 'highest-level' in diplomacy," the agency quoted him as saying.



A view of the Western Wall and the Dome of the Rock, some of the holiest sites for Jews and Muslims, is seen in Jerusalem's Old City, Wednesday, December 6, 2017 (AP Photo/Oded Balilty)

According to a Hebrew media report last week, [Israel and Turkey are holding back channel talks](#) in a bid to restore the all-but-severed diplomatic relations between the two nations.

After the violent protests on the Gaza border in May in which over 60 Palestinians, most of them members of Hamas and other terror groups, were killed, Turkish leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan placed the blame for the deaths squarely on Israel, calling it a “terrorist state” that commits “genocide.” Turkey recalled its ambassador and expelled Israel’s ambassador, Eitan Na’eh, and consul in Istanbul.

Israel responded at the time by expelling Turkey’s consul-general in Jerusalem and summoning the country’s deputy ambassador in Tel Aviv for a dressing down.

According to the report in the daily Yedioth Ahronoth, if the latest talks bear fruit, both governments expect to return their respective ambassadors after the Jewish holiday season, or roughly in early October, some five months after the spat — the latest in a series of diplomatic crisis spanning years.

Two private jets, one Israeli and one Turkish, left their respective countries for Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates on Sunday morning, flying via Amman, the report said. The flights are believed to be connected to the ongoing talks, but neither government has confirmed their purpose.

Turkey already returned its economic attache to Israel in recent weeks.

While Ankara under the leadership of Islamist President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has positioned itself as a supporter of Hamas and other staunchly anti-Israel forces since coming to power in 2003, the two nations now find themselves sharing vital interests on several fronts, especially Syria.

As the Syrian civil war grinds to an end, Sunni Turkey is fearful of Shiite Iran’s domination of its southern neighbor, a concern shared by Israel.



Palestinian protesters gather during a demonstration along the Israeli border fence east of Gaza City on September 21, 2018 as smoke plumes billow from burning tires in the background. (AFP/Said Khatib)

Observers have noted in recent weeks that Turkey, usually the first in line to lambaste Israel, has remained silent over purported Israeli airstrikes against Hezbollah and Iranian weapons shipments and military installations in Syria.

Turkey also faces an economic crisis and a collapsing currency amid a diplomatic falling out and trade dispute with the United States over Ankara's detention of an American pastor in the country on espionage charges.

Even at the height of the latest diplomatic crisis in May, Israeli officials took pains to clarify that relations were not beyond repair.

"Turkey is an important state in the region, and even though its leader made very grave remarks against Israel's leadership and its actions, I think we repaid him in a similar vein," Deputy Foreign Minister Tzipi Hotovely said at the time. "We said that a dictator like him who spills blood and behaves in such a cruel manner cannot lecture us."

Israeli officials responded to Erdogan's accusations at the time in kind, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu saying Erdogan "well understands terrorism and slaughter" and should not preach to Israel about military ethics.

According to AP figures, more than 130 Gazans have been killed by Israeli fire since the start of the clashes. Hamas, an Islamist terror group that seized control of Gaza in 2007 and seeks to destroy Israel, has acknowledged that dozens of the Palestinian fatalities were its members.

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