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Amid booming trade ties, Erdogan warns of Israeli attack on Turkiye

The Turkish president's belligerent words may irk Tel Aviv, but actions speak louder than words, and Ankara's exports to Israel are growing exponentially.

On 1 October, during the opening of the third legislative year of the Grand National Assembly of Turkiye (TBMM), Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan delivered a speech [expressing](#) serious concerns about Israel:

I openly say that the Israeli leadership, acting with the delirium of the promised land and with purely religious fanaticism, will set its sights on our homeland after Palestine and Lebanon ... Just as Hitler, who saw himself in a giant mirror, was stopped, Netanyahu will be stopped in the same way.

Erdogan's escalating rhetoric towards Israel

Those remarks have further escalated tensions in Turkish-Israeli relations and increased public resentment against Israel in Turkiye. Given the military strategies, geopolitical realities, and current political dynamics in the region, is there a possibility of an Israeli military attack on Turkiye? Do Tel Aviv and Ankara genuinely perceive each other as military threats? Or is this mere jingoistic rhetoric to cater to domestic constituents?

A week later, the TBMM held a [closed session](#) to discuss Israeli attacks and developments in the region, during which Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan and Defense Minister Yasar Guler briefed assembly members. Closed sessions in the TBMM are special meetings where confidential matters such as national security, foreign relations, state secrets, and extraordinary circumstances are discussed.

These sessions are not open to the press, their minutes are kept confidential for 10 years, and participants are prohibited from disclosing any details of the high-level discussions.

Following the meeting, however, Republican People's Party (CHP) leader Ozgur Ozel weighed in on the latest murmurings that Israel has set its military sights on Turkiye:

When we made our own assessments, we knew that Israel's attack on Turkiye was something that would not be possible based on reason, logic, Israeli power, Turkish power, and the duties of international organizations.

If the Erdogan government genuinely believes that Israel poses an imminent threat to Turkiye, there are concrete steps it could take. Most notably, as a member of NATO, Turkiye could invoke [Article 4](#) of the NATO Treaty, which states:

The Parties shall consult together whenever, in the opinion of any of them, the territorial integrity, political independence, or security of any of the Parties is threatened.

But Ankara has not called for such a consultation over the perceived Israeli threat.

Pipeline politics

Azerbaijan maintains very close political and military ties with Israel. Simultaneously, Turkiye and Azerbaijan describe their [relationship](#) as “two states, one nation.” The [Shusha Declaration](#), signed on 15 June 2021, elevated the bilateral relationship to an alliance level, including commitments to support each other if their independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, or national security is threatened. This implies mutual military assistance, if necessary.

Therefore, if Turkiye genuinely anticipates a military threat from Israel, it could, by the Shusha Declaration, request Baku to review its relations with Tel Aviv and provide diplomatic support. Yet, again, no such request has been made.

Israel receives approximately 40 percent of its oil through the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline, a [critical energy route](#) running from the Caspian Sea through Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkiye to the Turkish port of Ceyhan and onward via tankers to Israeli ports.

The pipeline primarily transports oil from Azerbaijan's Azeri–Chirag–Deepwater Gunashli (ACG) field and condensate from the Shah Deniz field. British Petroleum (BP) operates the ACG field on behalf of the Azerbaijan International Operating Company (AIOC), a consortium of international oil companies.

Another consortium, including BP, SOCAR, MOL, Equinor, TPAO, Eni, TotalEnergies, ITOCHU, INPEX, ExxonMobil, and ONGC Videsh, operates the BTC pipeline and markets

the oil globally. As of 10 May, BP announced this consortium's involvement in the pipeline's management.

Currently, the pipeline is a crucial route connecting the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean, capable of transporting 1.2 million barrels per day (bpd).

According to data from the [State Statistical Committee of Azerbaijan](#), the volume of oil transported through the BTC pipeline increased by 1.6 percent in 2023, reaching 30.2 million tons loaded onto 313 tankers at Ceyhan. Given the significant share of Kazakh and Azerbaijani oil in Israel's crude oil supply, the BTC pipeline is pivotal in facilitating this energy trade.

Legal constraints are surmountable

Despite Israel's dependence on oil from the port of Ceyhan, Turkiye ostensibly lacks the authority to halt the oil flow except under force majeure conditions, according to agreements signed with the BP-led consortium. The Host Government Agreement (HGA) and the Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) that underpin the BTC Pipeline Project legally bind Ankara to ensure uninterrupted oil flow.

These agreements contain provisions that commit signatory states, including Turkiye, to obligations beyond typical international treaty law. Specifically, they make signatory states unconditionally liable for any construction or oil transport delays, irrespective of the cause. This grants the international consortium a privileged legal position over nation-states and requires its members to relinquish some sovereign powers, such as legislation and adjudication rights.

Therefore, even if Turkiye wanted to suspend oil flow to Israel for political reasons, the strict liability clauses and other provisions in the BTC agreements would likely pose a legal obstacle.

However, as [The Cradle](#) noted in June, while extracting itself from the consortium is nearly impossible, one potential "out" for Turkiye could be citing Israel's violation of International Court of Justice (ICJ) and International Criminal Court (ICC) rulings. This would provide Turkiye with legal grounds to renegotiate the agreements. Despite this possible legal pathway, no such request for renegotiation has been made.

Turkish trade with Israel via Palestine

Despite Turkiye's official claims to have ceased all trade with Israel, it appears that Turkish companies are circumventing this ban by [channeling exports through Palestine](#). Data from the Turkish Exporters Assembly (TIM) illustrates a significant surge in Turkish exports to the occupied Palestinian territories, where Israel exercises total control over the transit of goods.

According to recent data, Turkish steel exports to Palestine, which amounted to \$156,000 in 2023, increased by an extraordinary 43,500 percent, reaching \$68 million this year. Similarly, Turkish cable exports to Palestine were just \$1,366 in 2023, but in August 2024 alone, these exports rose dramatically by 128,000 percent to \$1.75 million.

Reports suggest that these exports, officially destined for occupied Palestinian territories, are actually reaching Israel – and specifically the Israeli army. The Pamukkale Cable Company in Denizli is [reportedly](#) a top supplier of cables to the Israeli military.

Political posturing vs practical relations

These developments raise questions about Turkiye’s narrative of Israel as a national security threat. Despite aggressive rhetoric from the Erdogan government, Israeli President Isaac Herzog told the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations during his speech that Israel has [no hostile intentions](#) towards Turkiye, reaffirming that there have never been plans against it:

On the contrary, we have great respect to the people of Turkey, and they have great respect for the people of Israel. We have longstanding relations between the peoples, and the peoples will prevail over all voices that are adverse to friendship and coexistence.

This suggests that both states, in practice, do not view each other as existential threats despite political posturing to the contrary.

In short, the tense political rhetoric between Turkiye and Israel does not imply that the two countries perceive each other as military threats. Economic ties, geopolitical realities, and international agreements serve as significant binding factors in their bilateral relations.

Erdogan’s statements can be considered as messages intended for his increasingly anti-Israel domestic constituents. It remains uncertain, however, how this discourse will affect Turkiye–Israel relations in the long term and shape regional dynamics.

So far, Turkish exports to the occupation state continue to flow and have even vastly increased since Israel launched its brutal military assaults on Gaza over a year ago. Maintaining the complex relationship between the two countries appears to be a priority for both capitals but will be managed quietly, out of the Turkish public’s disapproving view.

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