

Israel mustn't remain silent in face of Turkey's support of Hamas

written by Noa Lazimi | 16.01.2024

Israel can no longer remain silent in the face of Turkey's extensive support of Hamas and its central role in building the organization's financial empire.

With the help of its closest ally, Israel must clarify to Turkey that continuing to sponsor Hamas will have severe consequences for their relationship.

Three weeks after Hamas's massacre in southern Israel, during a pro-Palestinian mass rally held in Istanbul, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan declared that Hamas is not a terrorist organization and accused Israel of committing war crimes in Gaza.

In another speech in Ankara in December 2023, Erdogan went so far as to compare Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to Hitler in reference to the IDF attacks in the Gaza Strip.

Such rhetoric is not uncommon when it comes to the president of Turkey and aligns with previous antisemitic statements by Erdogan or his affiliates.

However, Erdogan's hostility toward Israel is not confined to mere rhetoric. For over a decade, Turkey has been assisting Hamas in various ways: politically, economically, and militarily, enabling it to grow exponentially and afflict catastrophic suffering on innocent Israelis.

Turkey a safe haven for Hamas

It is no secret that Turkey provides a safe haven for Hamas leadership. Ankara regularly hosts top Hamas figures, and Erdogan himself has openly met with the movement's senior officials, including the chairman of the political bureau, Ismail Haniyeh, and the former head, Khaled Mashaal.

Ankara is also the driving force behind Hamas's global financing apparatus. An investigation by The Wall Street Journal reveals Turkey's primary role in constructing the financial network of Hamas, led by the organization's financial chief, Zaher Jabarin.

According to the WSJ report, from his office in Istanbul, Jabarin oversees Hamas' comprehensive fundraising system, which involves transferring funds from Iran to the Gaza Strip, managing a portfolio of companies that provide Hamas with annual income, among which are several Turkish firms, and managing a network of private donors.

Strong evidence supports the claim

DESPITE ITS denial, there is strong evidence to support the claim that Turkey assists Hamas militarily as well. In 2018, Israel arrested Kamil Takli, a Turkish law professor who was revealed to be a Hamas financier.

In his interrogation, Takli confirmed that Hamas operated in Turkey and that it received military aid from Ankara through a private military contractor close to Erdogan. Furthermore, in July 2023, Israel intercepted 16 tons of explosive material on its way from Turkey to Gaza to be used for rocket production.

The damage caused to Israel by containing Turkey's extreme Islamist approach seems to outweigh the benefits of cooperation with Ankara. Thus, despite the desire to maintain close trade relations, it is time for Israel to make it clear that if Turkey continues to support Hamas, it will pay a heavy price.

The Israeli government should reject any future initiatives to normalize relations with Turkey until Hamas is defined by the Turkish government as a terror organization and Turkey fully complies with American sanctions on its funding. Israel should also freeze any potential cooperation with Turkey in the gas and energy sectors until Turkey responds to these demands.

In accordance with this hardline approach, Israel must engage the United States in its efforts, imploring Washington to exert pressure on Turkey. This pressure should include an American demand that Turkey take legal action against entities on Turkish territory that fund US-designated terror organizations.

The US should also condition any future arms deal with Turkey on the latter, cutting off all ties with Hamas and enforcing American sanctions in full.

If Turkey continues to back Hamas, the US should amend the Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act to facilitate the filing of lawsuits by victims of terrorism. This has been proposed in relation to Qatar and can be applied to any other state that

provides material or other forms of assistance to terrorist organizations, Turkey included.

These measures would send a clear message to Turkey that it must cease backing Hamas or suffer the consequences.

Published in The Jerusalem Post, January 16, 2024.