Turkey’s Gaza plan could corner Israel on two fronts

written by Prof. Kobi Michael | 11.11.2025

Let’s start with a fact many likely missed: Ankara announced that it is recruiting 2,000 Turkish soldiers and training them as a Turkish brigade that will join the International Stabilization Force, slated to deploy in the Gaza Strip as part of US President Donald Trump’s Gaza plan. This step dovetails with another Turkish move revealed a few days ago, the issuance of 37 arrest warrants against senior Israeli officials, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, on allegations of war crimes and genocide.

These developments come as Ankara invests heavily in increasing Turkish visibility in Gaza via Turkish and Palestinian aid organizations. Turkish posters and flags are flying across the Strip, including on bulldozers clearing debris and searching for deceased hostages.

Trump has enlisted Turkey, alongside Qatar, as a lead partner in his initiative and views Ankara as the most effective lever over the Hamas terrorist organization. Erdogan has thrown himself into the task. He credits Turkey with persuading Hamas to accept, and begin implementing, the plan’s first phase, and he wants what he considers proper payment for that achievement: a deeper Turkish presence, involvement and influence in Gaza.

Turkey’s interest, and Hamas’s

For Erdogan, that payoff serves two strategic aims. First, to elevate Turkey’s status as a leading regional power that is actively shaping Middle Eastern geopolitics. Second, to hem in Israel, erode its regional standing and blunt its ability to advance Israeli priorities over Turkish ones. A clear example is the Israel–Greece–Cyprus strategic alliance, which Turkey see as threatening key Turkish interests in the eastern Mediterranean.

Ankara regards Israel as its most challenging regional competitor, chiefly in military terms but also in technology, and economically through the potential opened by expanding the Abraham Accords, including IMEC, the India–Middle East–Europe Corridor linking India and East Asia through Saudi Arabia and

Jordan to Israel and on to Europe. Diplomatically, Israel's widening ties in the region and its special relationship with the US also come into play.

Backing Hamas and political Islam is one of Turkey's levers for asserting leadership of Sunni Islam in the Middle East. That logic drives Ankara's Hamas policy and its insistence that Hamas retain its standing as a relevant and influential political actor, not only in Gaza but in Palestinian politics more broadly. A significant Turkish presence in Gaza would allow Ankara to safeguard Hamas's vital interests, which by definition are also vital Turkish interests.

A winning combination

Influence in Gaza, coupled with Erdogan's closeness to Trump and the favor the US president shows the Turkish leader, creates what Ankara sees as a winning combination. Erdogan believes, and hopes, that this mix will enable Turkey to force a broad military presence in Gaza as a central pillar of the ISF. A Turkish military footprint in the Strip, reinforced by the growing dominance of Turkish civilian aid groups, could, in Erdogan's view, narrow Israel's room to maneuver and its operational freedom in Gaza, and thus its ability to act consistently, deeply and effectively against Hamas's reconstruction efforts.

Israel's understandable caution about harming Turks, together with Erdogan's sway over Trump to restrain Israel, gives the Turkish Armed Forces a chance to clamp Israel in a pincer, via Gaza in the south and Syria in the north. That is how the Turkish president could carve out and stabilize a strategic comfort zone that works to Israel's detriment.

Given these moves, and in light of Erdogan's hostility toward Israel and his open antisemitism, Israel would do well to keep firmly opposing any Turkish military presence in Gaza. It should act creatively and in close coordination with Washington, working with the Egypt–Saudi Arabia–UAE axis to minimize Turkey's role in the Gaza Strip.

At the same time, Israel should push to prioritize deeper involvement, military presence and influence by that counter-axis, which also sees Turkey and its maneuvers as a threat and a challenge. Above all, Israel needs to internalize the implications: if Erdogan succeeds in executing his broader strategy, Israel could find itself in a Turkish stranglehold, where Ankara sets the rules.

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