

# HAMAS AND TURKEY: PARTNERS IN TERROR

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## TURKEY'S HISTORY OF HAMAS SUPPORT

BY JONATHAN SCHANZER

Thousands of people rallied at Istanbul's iconic Galata Bridge on New Year's Day 2025 in support of the Palestinian cause and to protest Israel. Bilal Erdogan, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's son, was among its speakers. Bilal spoke of the "martyrs" of Palestine, including Yahya Sinwar, the architect of the October 7, 2023, slaughter of 1,200 Israelis. This is, by now, barely newsworthy given Ankara's long track record of pro-Hamas rhetoric. But the son of Turkey's strongman leader caught the attention of international observers when he stated, "we are here for ... Al-Aqsa Mosque, for Jerusalem."<sup>1</sup>

A quarter century ago, such a rally would be unimaginable. Turkey viewed itself as a pillar of stability. It was largely democratic and sought to tie its future to Europe and the United States. Turkey and Israel cooperated to defeat terror groups. Much has since changed.

Turkey's antipathy toward Israel and its affinity for Hamas is now so well established that diplomats accept it as fact. The open romance between the NATO member and the terror group began in 2006 when Erdogan stunned the West by inviting top Hamas leaders to visit Ankara just weeks after he privately assured world leaders that he would not do so until Hamas, fresh from its win in the Palestinian Authority elections, accepted the terms of the Oslo Accords. Three years later, Erdogan clashed with Israeli President Shimon Peres at the World Economic Forum in Davos. After berating the Nobel laureate as a murderer due to Israel's counter-terror operations, Erdogan returned to Turkey in the predawn hours to a "spontaneous" outburst of support. There was little spontaneous about it. The day before Erdogan's Davos eruption, the Istanbul subway announced it would remain open through the night the following day. Thousands of Palestinian flags suddenly materialized well after shops closed. When Erdogan's plane landed, thousands of Turks waving Palestinian flags greeted him, chanting, "Turkey is proud of you."<sup>2</sup>

The following year, Erdogan's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) sponsored a flotilla to break the blockade of the Gaza Strip. Israel imposed the blockade to prevent Hamas from importing weaponry after the terror

1. "Massive pro-Palestine rally brings together thousands in Istanbul," *Daily Sabah* (Turkey), January 1, 2025. (<https://www.dailysabah.com/turkiye/massive-pro-palestine-rally-brings-together-thousands-in-istanbul/news>)

2. "Recep Erdogan storms out of Davos after clash with Israeli president over Gaza," *Associated Press*, January 30, 2009. (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jan/30/turkish-prime-minister-gaza-davos>)

group seized the entire Mediterranean coastal enclave by force.<sup>3</sup> To organize the flotilla, the Turkish government partnered with Turkey's Humanitarian Relief Foundation (*Insani Yardım Vakfı*, IHH), a group banned in Israel and viewed by U.S. intelligence with suspicion due to its ties to Hamas, al-Qaeda, and other extremists.<sup>4</sup> While Israel successfully intercepted several ships from the flotilla, when commandos attempted to board the *Mavi Marmara*, Turks attacked the Israelis. In the ensuing clashes, ten Turks, one a dual American citizen, died.<sup>5</sup>

By 2011, Palestinian sources reported that Erdogan promised \$300 million to Hamas.<sup>6</sup> While never confirmed, this dollar amount would cover nearly half of Hamas's budget at the time, making Turkey perhaps Hamas's primary benefactor. As Syria — for decades a safe haven for Hamas — descended into civil war, top Hamas leaders not only migrated to Qatar, but some also began to operate from Turkey.<sup>7</sup> Erdogan welcomed them. "I don't see Hamas as a terror organization," he stated. "Hamas is a political party."<sup>8</sup>

The Obama administration did not just ignore Turkey's support for Hamas; it embraced Turkey's ties to the terrorist group. The U.S. president spoke to the Turkish strongman more than nearly every other world leader as Muslim Brotherhood factions rose up and challenged the Middle East's traditional regimes.<sup>9</sup> Obama sought to steer the "Arab Spring" to a soft landing, and he believed that Turkey, as an "Islamic democracy," could assist. It was a failed experiment, but it would take years for Obama to acknowledge this failure.

But the United States was not entirely to blame for the normalization of Turkey's Islamist and pro-Hamas leanings. In the U.S.-backed hostage diplomacy deal that saw the release of more than 1,000 Hamas operatives in exchange for kidnapped Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, Israel released dozens of Hamas operatives to Turkey who then openly began to operate a headquarters.

By 2012, it was clear that Hamas was merely a symptom of the Erdogan government's terrorism support. The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) threatened to add Turkey to its blacklist that, at the time, only included Iran and North Korea.<sup>10</sup> A multinational FATF team first notified Ankara about its deficiencies in 2007, finding that Turkey had neither adequately criminalized terrorism finance in the country nor had it done enough to establish infrastructure to identify and freeze terrorist assets.<sup>11</sup> This came amidst reports that Turkey was helping Iran illegally evade sanctions in a "gas-for-gold scheme." A whopping \$20 billion in frozen Iranian funds held in

3. Dan Bilefsky and Sebnem Arsu, "Sponsor of Flotilla Tied to Elite of Turkey," *The New York Times*, July 15, 2010. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/16/world/middleeast/16turkey.html>); Conal Urquart, Ian Black and Mark Tran, "Hamas takes control of Gaza," *The Guardian* (UK), June 15, 2007. (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/jun/15/israel4>)

4. Jonathan Schanzer, "The Terror Finance Flotilla," *The Weekly Standard*, May 31, 2010. (<https://schanzer.pundicity.com/7539/the-terror-finance-flotilla>)

5. "American, 19, Among Gaza Flotilla Dead," *ABC News*, June 3, 2010. (<https://abcnews.go.com/WN/Media/american-killed-gaza-aid-flotilla/story?id=10814848>)

6. Saed Bannoura, "Turkey To Grant Hamas \$300 Million," *IMEMC News* (Palestinian Authority), December 3, 2011. (<https://imemc.org/article/62607>)

7. Yaakov Katz, "Shin Bet: Hamas operating in Turkey, China," *The Jerusalem Post* (Israel), September 8, 2011. (<https://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Shin-Bet-Hamas-operating-in-Turkey-China>)

8. "Turkey's Erdogan: Hamas Is a Political Party, Not a Terrorist Group," *Haaretz* (Israel), May 12, 2011. (<https://www.haaretz.com/2011-05-12/ty-article/turkeys-erdogan-hamas-is-a-political-party-not-a-terrorist-group/0000017f-e968-dc91-a17f-fded5adc0000>)

9. Paul Richter, "Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan poses challenge for Obama," *The Los Angeles Times*, October 10, 2011. (<https://www.latimes.com/world/la-xpm-2011-oct-10-la-fg-us-turkey-20111011-story.html>)

10. "Panel approves bill for prevention of terrorism financing," *Hürriyet Daily News* (Turkey), January 27, 2013. (<https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/panel-approves-bill-for-prevention-of-terrorism-financing-39865>)

11. "Mutual Evaluations," *The Financial Action Task Force*, accessed March 21, 2025. (<https://www.fatf-gafi.org/en/topics/mutual-evaluations.html>)

escrow in Turkey was illegally sent onward to Iran, either directly or by way of the United Arab Emirates. Turkey did this at the height of the U.S.-led sanctions regime designed to curb Iran's nuclear ambitions.<sup>12</sup>

In 2013, Obama brokered a phone call between Erdogan and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to repair ties between Ankara and Jerusalem. Israel ultimately apologized for the Mavi Marmara incident, but Erdogan continued to meet openly with and support senior Hamas officials.<sup>13</sup>

Erdogan's bad faith ultimately contributed to more war. In 2014, Turkey-based Hamas operative Saleh al-Arouri in the West Bank prompted Israel's 50-day "Operation Protective Edge" counter-terror campaign. Arouri planned, financed, and ordered the kidnapping and killing of three Israeli teens.<sup>14</sup> Rather than punish Turkey, then Secretary of State John Kerry leaned on Ankara and Hamas-patron Qatar to broker a ceasefire.<sup>15</sup> Erdogan repaid the favor by likening Israel's operation against Hamas to the "barbarism" of Hitler.<sup>16</sup>

Israel was not the only victim of Turkey's Hamas support. In the waning days of Operation Protective Edge, Israel's Shin Bet security service thwarted a Hamas-led coup plot in the West Bank to topple Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas. The Shin Bet arrested more than 90 Hamas operatives, confiscated weapons, and seized \$170,000 in cash. Here, too, the Turkey-based Arouri was central to the plot.<sup>17</sup> Arouri was not alone; at least nine other senior Hamas leaders called Turkey home.<sup>18</sup>

Turkey's terror embrace expanded beyond the Palestinian cause. By 2014, Turkey selectively loosened enforcement at its Syrian and Iraqi borders to enable Islamic State fighters to transit. Ankara also helped the violent jihadi group raise money and run businesses to fund its caliphate. Illicit oil sales and the trade of stolen antiquities were among the businesses that Turkey supported.<sup>19</sup>

Among Western diplomats, however, there was wishful thinking that these problems were temporary. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Çavuşoglu played on this naivete, telling the media that Turkey was one or two meetings away from normalizing ties with Israel. Dangling the possibility of better ties led many in Washington and Jerusalem to put off more robust actions to counter Turkey's turn toward terror.

Meanwhile, Turkish entities were working with Hamas to expand terror even further. In 2017, the Shin Bet announced the arrest of Muhammad Murtaja, the Gaza coordinator of the state-funded Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency. He allegedly attempted to travel to Turkey to divert funds to Hamas. Israeli officials

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12. Jonathan Schanzer and Rachel Ziemba, "The Anatomy of Turkey's "Gas-For Gold" Scheme with Iran," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, March 13, 2014. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2014/03/13/the-anatomy-of-turkeys-gas-for-gold-scheme-with-iran>)

13. Herb Keinon, "Netanyahu apologizes to Turkey over Gaza flotilla," *The Jerusalem Post*, March 22, 2013. (<https://www.jpost.com/international/obama-netanyahu-erdogan-speak-by-phone-307423>); Jonathan Schanzer, "Hamas Leader Meets Turkey's Prime Minister in Ankara," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, October 8, 2013. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2013/10/08/hamas-leader-meets-turkeys-prime-minister-in-ankara>)

14. Orlando Crowcroft, "Hamas official: we were behind the kidnapping of three Israeli teenagers," *The Guardian* (UK), August 21, 2014. (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/21/hamas-kidnapping-three-israeli-teenagers-saleh-al-arouri-qassam-brigades>)

15. Michael R. Gordon, "To Talk With Hamas, U.S. Needs Help From a Testy Trio of Nations," *The New York Times*, July 21, 2014. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/22/us/politics/to-talk-with-hamas-us-needs-help-from-a-testy-trio-of-nations.html>)

16. Onur Ant, "Turkey's Erdogan Compares Israel Gaza Offensive to Hitler," *Bloomberg*, July 20, 2014. (<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-07-20/turkey-s-erdogan-compares-israel-gaza-offensive-to-hitler>)

17. Jonathan Schanzer and Michael Argosh, "Lying Down With Dogs," *Foreign Policy*, August 20, 2014. (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2014/08/20/lying-down-with-dogs>)

18. Ibid.

19. Jonathan Schanzer and Merve Tahiroglu, "Bordering on Terrorism," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, November 19, 2014. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2014/11/19/bordering-on-terrorism>)

further said he passed intelligence to Hamas, including information about Israeli military sites.<sup>20</sup> The Shin Bet also announced, despite Hamas denials, that Hamas was working with the IHH to access advanced satellite mapping programs to improve the accuracy of Hamas rockets.<sup>21</sup>

Erdogan's attitude toward Israel in many ways made Israel the canary in the coal mine. Erdogan has been willing to act in other ways to undermine the West. In 2019, for example, the Turkish government acquired the Russian S-400 air defense system, triggering a crisis within NATO.<sup>22</sup> The United States ultimately deprived Turkey of its ability to acquire F-35 fighter jets for this transgression. Ankara is trying to reverse this policy by way of a charm offensive in Washington.

The 2021 war between Israel and Hamas further ratcheted up tensions between Turkey and Israel. Erdogan called Israel a "terror state" and implored the United Nations to step in on behalf of Hamas.<sup>23</sup> This was, of course, a prelude to the war that Hamas launched in 2023. In September 2023, just weeks before the October 7 assault, Israeli customs authorities seized 16 tons of explosive material sent from Turkey to Gaza, hidden behind construction supplies.<sup>24</sup> Other similar shipments may have gotten through.

After Hamas slaughtered 1,200 Israelis and abducted another 254 individuals, Erdogan threw the Turkish government's support behind the Palestinian group. In December 2023, as the war in Gaza escalated, Israeli authorities again seized illicit goods from a Turkish ship at the port of Ashdod. Inspectors found weapons and components hidden inside an industrial weaving machine destined for the West Bank.<sup>25</sup> Nearly one year into the war, Erdogan called for an Islamic coalition against Israel.<sup>26</sup> It was a call for a religious war — a jihad.

In March 2024, the Shin Bet thwarted a terrorist plot inside Israel planned by Hamas operatives in Turkey.<sup>27</sup> The Israeli security service arrested Hamas operative Anas Shurman in Nablus and charged him in the bomb plot.<sup>28</sup> At his interrogation, Shurman admitted that Turkey-based Hamas operative Imad Abid recruited him in December 2023.<sup>29</sup>

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20. Jonathan Schanzer, "Turkish Organizations Under Fire for Alleged Hamas Support," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, March 22, 2017. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2017/03/22/turkish-organizations-under-fire-for-alleged-hamas-support>)

21. "Israel Tries To Block All Aid To Gaza," *Humanitarian Relief Foundation* (IHH), March 21, 2017. (<https://ihh.org.tr/en/news/israeli-gazze-ye-tum-yardimlari-kesmeye-calisiyor>)

22. Jonathan Schanzer, "Trump gave Erdogan everything he wanted," *New York Post*, October 23, 2019. (<https://nypost.com/2019/10/23/trump-gave-erdogan-everything-he-wanted/>)

23. "Turkey's Erdogan says U.N. must act to halt Gaza conflict," *Reuters*, May 14, 2021. (<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/turkeys-erdogan-says-un-must-act-halt-gaza-conflict-2021-05-14>)

24. "Explosive materials found inside containers bound for Gaza," *i24 News* (Israel), September 14, 2023. (<https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/middle-east/palestinian-territories/1694677181-revealed-explosive-materials-found-inside-containers-bound-for-gaza>)

25. "Israeli Authorities Foil Weapons Shipment from Turkey to West Bank," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, December 22, 2023. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2023/12/22/israeli-authorities-foil-weapons-shipment-from-turkey-to-west-bank>)

26. "Turkey's Erdogan calls for Islamic alliance against Israel," *Reuters*, September 7, 2024. (<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/turkeys-erdogan-calls-islamic-alliance-against-israel-2024-09-07>)

27. Emanuel Fabian, "Shin Bet says it foiled Hamas suicide bombing plot directed from Turkey," *The Times of Israel* (Israel), June 3, 2024. ([https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog\\_entry/shin-bet-says-it-foiled-hamas-suicide-bombing-plot-directed-from-turkey](https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/shin-bet-says-it-foiled-hamas-suicide-bombing-plot-directed-from-turkey))

28. "Shin Bet foils Hamas suicide bombing plot directed from Turkey," *Jewish News Syndicate*, June 3, 2024. (<https://www.jns.org/shin-bet-foils-hamas-suicide-bombing-plot-directed-from-turkey>)

29. "Shin Bet thwarts Turkey-based Hamas cell terror attack in Israel," *The Jerusalem Post* (Israel), June 3, 2024. (<https://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/article-804818>)

Months before he was killed in the heart of Tehran in July 2024, Hamas political chief Ismail Haniyeh was hosted by Erdogan in Istanbul, where the two allegedly discussed the possibility of relocating Hamas's political headquarters from Qatar to Turkey.<sup>30</sup>

For Erdogan, there is no turning back. He has invested more than 15 years to legitimize, fund, and support the Palestinian terrorist organization. He transformed Turkey into a global financial hub for Hamas.<sup>31</sup> While the U.S. Department of the Treasury has added new Turkish individuals and entities to its terrorism list due to their financial ties to Hamas, these designations are only a drop in the bucket.

With the Trump administration prepared to shatter norms, there are ample opportunities to target Hamas financial assets in Turkey, regardless of what Turkish diplomats might plead. However, a full paradigm shift is needed. Only by calibrating U.S. policy toward the reality of Turkey today, rather than the wishful thinking of what Turkey could be under better leadership, will Washington be able to push Turkey to quit its support for Hamas and bring Ankara back into the Western fold.

## RECEP TAYYIP ERDOGAN'S POLITICAL CALCULUS

BY SINAN CIDI

In the days that followed the October 7, 2023, massacre of over 1,200 Israeli civilians, Turkish Erdogan remained silent, refusing to condemn the attacks.<sup>32</sup> The Turkish Foreign Ministry's response was both weak and fell short of a condemnation.<sup>33</sup> By October 23, however, Erdogan could not contain his pro-Hamas and anti-Israeli sentiments. "Hamas is not a terrorist organization ... [but rather] a liberation group, '*mujahideen*' waging a battle to protect its lands and people" Erdogan declared.<sup>34</sup>

No other member of NATO, or country in the West, has characterized Hamas in such a way. When Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi perished in a helicopter crash, Turkey flew its flags at half-mast in the capital city of Ankara, the only NATO member to do so, for the man nicknamed "the butcher of Tehran."<sup>35</sup> Three months later, Erdogan declared another day of mourning for Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, whom he called a "fallen martyr."<sup>36</sup> When a Turkish citizen rebuked the day of mourning, Erdogan ordered her arrested.<sup>37</sup>

What motivates Erdogan to embrace Hamas? It is not complicated. Erdogan may be an ideologue, but he is also a politician; he wants to win elections.

30. "Hamas Chief Meets Turkish President, Considers Move From Qatar to Turkey," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, April 22, 2024. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2024/04/22/hamas-chief-meets-turkish-president-considers-move-from-qatar-to-turkey>)

31. Jo Becker and Justin Scheck, "Israel Found the Hamas Money Machine Years Ago. Nobody Turned It Off," *The New York Times*, December 16, 2023. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/16/world/europe/israel-hamas-money-finance-turkey-intelligence-attacks.html>)

32. The author would like to thank FDD intern Sophia Epley for her contributions.

33. Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Press Release, "Press Release Regarding the Latest Developments in the Context of Israel-Palestine," October 7, 2023. ([https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no\\_-247\\_-\\_israil-filistin-baglaminda-yasanan-son-gelismeler-hk.en.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-247_-_israil-filistin-baglaminda-yasanan-son-gelismeler-hk.en.mfa))

34. Tuvan Gumrukcu and Huseyin Hayatsever, "Turkey's Erdogan says Hamas is not terrorist organisation, cancels trip to Israel," *Reuters*, October 25, 2023. (<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/turkeys-erdogan-says-hamas-is-not-terrorist-organisation-2023-10-25>)

35. Reuters, "Video: Turkish flags at half-mast as country observes day of national mourning for Iran's Raisi," May 21, 2024. (<https://reuters.screenocean.com/record/1947764>)

36. "Turkey Holds 'Day of Mourning' to Commemorate Assassinated Hamas Leader," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, August 2, 2024. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2024/08/02/turkey-holds-day-of-mourning-to-commemorate-assassinated-hamas-leader>)

37. Arzu Geybullayeva, "In Turkey, a street interview lands a citizen in jail," *Global Voices Advox*, August 15, 2024. (<https://advox.globalvoices.org/2024/08/15/in-turkey-a-street-interview-lands-a-citizen-in-jail>)

Erdogan may have the presidency wrapped up until at least 2028, but his AKP Party must still compete in local elections. The right to control the country's local governments is the lifeblood of any political party in Turkey. Ruling major cities, especially Istanbul and Ankara, provides AKP elites control over lucrative public construction projects and permits, as well as welfare services, winter fuel, hardship income, and daycare.

In recent years, however, Erdogan has found it difficult to attract voters to the AKP due to growing dissatisfaction with his economic stewardship.<sup>38</sup> Seven years ago, one dollar bought just over four Turkish lira. As of April 2025, one dollar purchases about 38 Turkish lira. The unofficial inflation rate is 81 percent, with falling consumer incomes and stagnant wages constantly depreciating the lira against the U.S. dollar.<sup>39</sup>

The Hamas-Israel war allowed Erdogan to change the subject.<sup>40</sup> Erdogan has won the hearts and minds of voters by spewing anti-Zionism imbued with the most virulent antisemitic conspiracy theories, mixed with a healthy dose of anti-Westernism. Erdogan has used pro-Hamas public rallies as the bread and butter of the AKP's electioneering drive.<sup>41</sup> Erdogan delivers polemical speeches calling Israel a "terror state" and comparing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to "Adolf Hitler."<sup>42</sup> At some rallies, individuals donned the fatigues of Hamas fighters, carrying mock-up Hamas rockets and grenade launchers.<sup>43</sup>

Some of the Turkish government's anti-Israel activity has been less coordinated. An angry mob of protestors surrounded the Israeli Consulate in Istanbul on October 9, 2023, shooting fireworks at the building with little interference by Turkish law enforcement officials. Huda-Par — a radical Islamist party and partner in Erdogan's governing coalition — held a celebratory rally outside the Israeli Consulate in Istanbul, chanting "Israel be damned!"<sup>44</sup> A day later in Istanbul, IHH held a rally in Istanbul in which supporters vowed to kill U.S. troops deployed in the region and denounced the United States as the "Great Satan" for its support of Israel.<sup>45</sup> The AKP hung a giant banner from a historic tower, glorifying the Izz ad-Din Al-Qassam Brigades, the self-described military wing of Hamas, in the center of Istanbul.<sup>46</sup>

Some of the activity was even more dangerous. On October 17, a Turkish mob charged the perimeter of a sensitive NATO radar installation located in Kurecik, demanding that U.S. forces leave Turkey immediately.<sup>47</sup> IHH leader Fehmi Bulent Yildirim embraced that demand. He urged Turks on November 1 to "march to Incirlik base from

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38. Sinan Ciddi, "Local Elections Will Soon Decide Turkey's Future," *Foreign Policy*, March 13, 2024. (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/03/13/turkey-erdogan-elections-istanbul-ankara-local-akp>)

39. "Consumer Price Index (E-CPI) February 2025," *ENA Research Group*, February 2025. (<https://enagrup.org/?hl=en>)

40. Sinan Ciddi, "Erdogan's love for Hamas threatens Israel," *Washington Examiner*, October 12, 2023. (<https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/2579748/erdogans-love-for-hamas-threatens-israel>)

41. Ece Goksedef, "What is behind Turkey's staunch support for Hamas in Gaza?" *BBC (UK)*, January 2, 2024. (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-67861266>)

42. Nadav Gavrielov and Safak Timur, "Erdogan Compares Netanyahu to Hitler," *The New York Times*, December 27, 2023. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/27/world/middleeast/erdogan-turkey-netanyahu-hitler.html>)

43. "HÜDA-PAR mitinginde skandal görüntü! Yapicioglu yanindaki isim dikkat çekti [Scandalous Image at HUDA-PAR Rally! The Name Next to Yapicioglu Drew Attention]," *Sözcü (Turkey)*, November 13, 2023. (<https://www.sozcu.com.tr/huda-par-mitinginde-skandal-goruntu-yapicioglu-yanindaki-isim-dikkat-cekti-wp7860473>)

44. Arti TV, "HÜDA PAR'dan kefenli eylem: Filistin'e destek çağrısı! [Shrouded Protest From HUDA PAR: Call for Support for Palestine!]" *YouTube*, October 9, 2023. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gYf7t0rnIc0>)

45. Ilke News Agency, "Beyazıt'tan on binler 'Aksa Tufanı'na selam durdu [Tens of Thousands Saluted the 'Aqsa Flood' From Beyazıt]," *YouTube*, October 13, 2023. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o-JTshz05IY>)

46. Boris Zilberman, X, November 9, 2023. (<https://x.com/rolltidebmz/status/1722690777543782660>)

47. ENSONHABER, "Malatya'da protestocular Amerika Kürecik üssü önünde toplandı [Protesters gathered in front of the American Kürecik base in Malatya]," *Daily Motion*, March 2023. (<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x8owr2c>)

every part of Turkey, from every district and neighborhood,” a dangerous prospect given that the United States reportedly stores nuclear warheads at the base.<sup>48</sup>

Erdogan even prioritized championing Hamas over celebrating Turkey’s most important national holiday commemorating the founding of the Turkish Republic. In 2023, Erdogan canceled the reception at his palace in Ankara to celebrate Turkey’s centenary, citing Israel’s military campaign against Hamas.<sup>49</sup> Ilber Ortayli, a well-known historian, was among those to express disappointment in Erdogan, remarking “We are in the 100th year of our Republic ... No republic has celebrated its 100th anniversary like this.”<sup>50</sup>

Erdogan’s policies have not fully matched his pro-terror virtue signaling, however. In late 2023, Erdogan began calling for a boycott of Israeli goods in addition to international brands that he identified as supporting Jerusalem: Starbucks, McDonald’s, and Burger King, to name a few.<sup>51</sup> Yet the volume of trade between Turkey and Israel was more than \$5 billion in 2023, with a 30 percent increase in the last quarter of 2023 compared to 2022.<sup>52</sup> Ankara attempted to blame this on existing contracts between Turkish manufacturers and Israeli buyers. Digging deeper, however, journalists discovered that elites close to the AKP were profiting from Israel trade: Erdogan’s eldest son, Ahmet Burak Erdogan, as well as Erkan Yildirim — the son of former Prime Minister Binali Yildirim, are beneficiaries of business ties with Israel.<sup>53</sup>

Opposition parties, including Islamists in the New Welfare Party (*Yeniden Refah Partisi*), condemned such hypocrisy. Election results show that Erdogan lost 7 percent of the conservative vote to the New Welfare Party.<sup>54</sup> To win back favor, Ankara announced new trade restrictions on 54 categories of strategic exports to Israel, including concrete, steel, aluminum, and explosives, on April 9, 2024.<sup>55</sup> The government announced a total suspension of trade with the Jewish state on May 2, 2024.<sup>56</sup>

48. John Vandiver, “Turkish activist urges large protest around air base to decry US stance on Gaza,” *Stars and Stripes*, November 1, 2023. ([https://www.stripes.com/branches/air\\_force/2023-11-01/incirlik-protests-turkey-israel-eucom-11902466.html](https://www.stripes.com/branches/air_force/2023-11-01/incirlik-protests-turkey-israel-eucom-11902466.html)); Steven Pifer, “It’s time to get US nukes out of Turkey,” *Brookings Institution*, November 5, 2019. (<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/its-time-to-get-us-nukes-out-of-turkey/>)

49. “Turkish president cancels Republic Day reception, prepares to head to site of mine disaster,” *Hürriyet Daily News* (Turkey), October 29, 2014. (<https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-president-cancels-republic-day-reception-prepares-to-head-to-site-of-mine-disaster-73603>)

50. Hamdi Firat Buyuk, “Turkey’s Erdogan to Hold Mass Rally to Support Palestinians,” *Balkan Insight* (Serbia), October 27, 2023. (<https://balkaninsight.com/2023/10/27/turkeys-erdogan-to-hold-mass-rally-to-support-palestinians>)

51. Sinan Ciddi, “Erdogan’s Hypocrisy Has No Boundaries!” *Townhall*, December 14, 2023. (<https://townhall.com/columnists/sinan-ciddi/2023/12/14/erdogans-hypocrisy-has-no-boundaries-n2632436>)

52. Benny Avni, “Will Washington Freeze Out Ankara Following Outrage Involving an Israeli Soccer Star?” *The New York Sun*, January 15, 2024. (<https://www.nysun.com/article/will-washington-freeze-out-ankara-following-outrage-involving-an-israeli-soccer-star>)

53. Barış Demir, “Turkish President Erdogan’s links to ongoing trade with Israel exposed,” *World Socialist Web Site*, December 8, 2023. (<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2023/12/08/mkxv-d08.html>), “The Türkiye-Israel Trade Boom: Talk is Cheap, but Money Talks,” *The Cradle*, March 14, 2024. (<https://thecradle.co/articles/the-turkiye-israel-trade-boom-talk-is-cheap-but-money-talks>)

54. Steven A. Cook, “Post-Erdogan Turkey Is Finally Here,” *Foreign Policy*, April 4, 2024. (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/04/04/turkey-local-elections-erdogan-akp-imamoglu>)

55. “Turkey Initiates Trade War With Israel,” *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, April 11, 2024. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2024/04/11/turkey-initiates-trade-war-with-israel>)

56. Sinan Ciddi and Tyler Stapleton, “Turkey’s Suspension of Trade With Israel Cuts off Its Nose to Spite Its Face,” *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, May 5, 2024. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2024/05/05/turkeys-suspension-of-trade-with-israel-cuts-off-its-nose-to-spite-its-face>)

Turkey still, however, facilitates the sale of goods to Israel by way of third countries such as Slovenia and Greece.<sup>57</sup> As of May 2024, Turkey still transshipped Azerbaijani oil via Turkish tankers to Israel. In other words, Erdogan's economic rhetoric appears to be more bark than bite.

Erdogan may want to project himself as the protector of Palestinian Muslims, but he does not want this to affect his country's bottom line. Perhaps this provides an opening to coerce Erdogan to back away from the terrorism support that has brought Turkey and the United States to the brink of a full rupture.

## THE WEB OF HAMAS OPERATIVES AND BUSINESSES IN TURKEY

BY MELISSA SACKS

After his almost two-decade open dalliance with Hamas, Erdogan may believe that the West cannot do anything to stop his support for one of the Middle East's deadliest and most destabilizing terror groups. He is wrong. The presence of multiple Hamas terror leaders in Turkey opens the door for numerous sanctions.

Former Hamas West Bank leader and deputy chief of Hamas's Political Bureau Saleh al-Arouri helped lay the foundation for the Hamas base in Turkey following the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011. The U.S. Treasury sanctioned Arouri in 2015.<sup>58</sup> Turkey then deported the Hamas leader, but he did not stay outside Turkey for long.<sup>59</sup> In 2018, the State Department added Arouri to its "Rewards for Justice" program, issuing a bounty for information leading to his arrest.<sup>60</sup> Undeterred, Arouri was one of the masterminds of the October 7 terror attacks. That morning, he was in Istanbul "prostrating in gratitude."<sup>61</sup> An Israeli airstrike killed Arouri in Lebanon on January 2, 2024, but the network he established inside Turkey remains.<sup>62</sup>

Today, the commander of the Hamas financial office inside Turkey is Zaher Jabarin. Released in the 2011 prisoner swap only to become Arouri's right-hand man, Jabarin manages Hamas's financial ties with Iran and other countries. Jabarin manages a network in Turkey that allows Hamas to raise, invest, and launder money prior to transferring it to Gaza and the West Bank.<sup>63</sup> He holds stakes in several companies, including some traded on the Turkish stock exchange, such as Redin Exchange. Jabarin also served as the primary point of contact between Hamas and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Quds Force.<sup>64</sup> In 2019, the U.S. Treasury designated Jabarin, creating a precedent that the United States could apply to other Turkey-based terrorists.

57. "Israel seeks to import goods from Turkiye through a third country," *Middle East Monitor* (UK), May 13, 2024. (<https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20240513-israel-seeks-to-import-goods-from-turkiye-through-a-third-country>); Sharon Wrobel, "Turkey's trade ban: Importers seek indirect routes to bring goods to Israel," *The Times of Israel* (Israel), May 6, 2024. (<https://www.timesofisrael.com/turkeys-trade-ban-importers-seek-indirect-routes-to-bring-goods-to-israel>)

58. U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control, Press Release, "Specially Designated Nationals List Update," September 10, 2015. (<https://ofac.treasury.gov/recent-actions/20150910>)

59. Smadar Perry and Itamar Eichner, "Hamas leader expelled from Turkey," *Ynet* (Israel), December 22, 2015. (<https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4742831,00.html>)

60. Ibid.

61. Gianluca Pacchiani, "Report: Hamas chiefs were asked to leave Turkey after October 7 attacks," *The Times of Israel* (Israel), October 23, 2023. (<https://www.timesofisrael.com/report-hamas-chiefs-were-asked-to-leave-turkey-after-october-7-attacks>)

62. Raffi Berg and Graeme Baker, "Hamas deputy leader Saleh al-Arouri killed in Beirut blast," *BBC* (UK), January 3, 2024. (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67866346>)

63. U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, "Treasury Targets Wide Range of Terrorists and Their Supporters Using Enhanced Counterterrorism Sanctions Authorities," September 10, 2019. (<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm772>)

64. Ibid.

Occasional action against Hamas leaders will likely not be enough, simply because so many Turks and Hamas operatives are involved in terror finance and supply. According to a Kuwaiti newspaper, Hamas operative Bakri Hanifa has moved “tens of millions of dollars” from Qatar to Turkey and then onward to Hamas’s political and military wings.<sup>65</sup> Maher Ubeid, another key financier, reportedly received funds from Turkish official sources and transferred them to Hamas in Gaza via Turkish money changers.<sup>66</sup>

By 2019, the four children of an American and his Israeli wife Hamas killed in 2015 filed suit against Turkey’s Kuveyt Turk Bank in a New York court, alleging that the bank helps Hamas finance its terrorism. The complaint came two weeks after the U.S. Treasury sanctioned 11 Turkey-linked entities and individuals for supporting Hamas and other jihadist outfits and months after Treasury sanctioned six individuals and a Turkish money exchange for their role in bankrolling the Islamic State.<sup>67</sup>

Treasury sanctions in recent years offer a glimpse of the Hamas financial operations in Turkey. Jihad Yaghmour is one key figure to emerge. Originally from eastern Jerusalem, Israel arrested Yaghmour in 1994 for the abduction and murder of an Israeli soldier but subsequently released him to Turkey as part of the Shalit prisoner exchange.<sup>68</sup> Over the last decade, Yaghmour has become crucial to Hamas operations in the West Bank. He coordinated this through a nongovernmental organization (NGO) named KUTAD, or “Association of Jerusalem and Our History,” which maintains offices in Istanbul and Ankara. In 2015, Hamas reportedly appointed Yaghmour to be the official representative of Hamas in Turkey and the primary liaison between Hamas and the Turkish National Intelligence Organization.<sup>69</sup> Yaghmour has also used the organization to host high-profile Hamas leaders to speak at public events in Turkey, including Haniyeh and Nesim Yassin, the nephew of Hamas founder Sheikh Ahmed Yassin.<sup>70</sup> Zaher Albaik (a.k.a. Zaher Elbek) helps Yaghmour run KUTAD’s Ankara office.<sup>71</sup> Albaik and KUTAD have met with current and former members of the Turkish government to further their cause.<sup>72</sup> In December 2023, the U.S. Treasury, in coordination with the United Kingdom, sanctioned Yaghmour and seven other Hamas operatives for representing Hamas interests abroad and for managing its finances.<sup>73</sup>

Kuwaiti-born Amer al-Shawa is a board member of several Turkey-based companies that provide financing for Hamas, including Trend GYO, Uzmanlar Company, and Advancity Company. In October 2023, the U.S. Treasury designated al-Shawa as one of nine key managers of Hamas investments.<sup>74</sup> In January 2024, the U.S. Department of

65. Jonathan Schanzer and David Andrew Weinberg, “The Turkey-Hamas Nexus,” *The National Interest*, January 16, 2015. (<https://nationalinterest.org/feature/the-turkey-hamas-nexus-12044>)

66. Ibid.

67. Jonathan Schanzer and Aykan Erdemir, “Turkey is now a haven for terrorists and an enabler of terrorism,” *New York Post*, September 23, 2019. (<https://nypost.com/2019/09/23/turkey-is-now-a-haven-for-terrorists-and-an-enabler-of-terrorism>)

68. Elior Levi, “האסים’ ששוחררו בעסקת שלית” [The ‘Aces’ Who Were Released in the Shalit Deal], *Ynet* (Israel), September 28, 2021. (<https://www.ynet.co.il/news/article/s1d9ygtqk>)

69. Nadav Shragai, “Hamas’ Istanbul Headquarters Has Directed Hundreds of Terror Attacks Against Israelis and Laundered Millions of Dollars,” *Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs*, December 30, 2021. (<https://jcpa.org/article/hamas-istanbul-headquarters-has-directed-hundreds-of-terror-attacks-against-israelis-and-laundered-millions-of-dollars>)

70. @Kutadankara, *Instagram*, April 19, 2022. (<https://www.instagram.com/p/CciooPmDaOC>)

71. Gazzeli Gazeteci Elbek, “İşgalciler HAMAS’ı yok edemedi edemez [Gaza Journalist Elbek: Occupiers Could Not Destroy HAMAS],” *Ilke News Agency* (Turkey), March 21, 2025. (<https://ilkha.com/roportaj/gazzeli-gazeteci-elbek-iscalciler-hamasi-yok-edemedi-edemez-365433>)

72. @zaher\_albaik, *Instagram*, January 10, 2023. (<https://www.instagram.com/p/CnOj86Qt00l>)

73. U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, “U.S. And UK Target Additional Hamas Finance Officials and Representatives,” December 13, 2023. (<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy1981>)

74. U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, “Following Terrorist Attack on Israel, Treasury Sanctions Hamas Operatives and Financial Facilitators,” October 18, 2023. (<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy1816>)

State, through its Rewards for Justice Program, offered a reward of up to \$10 million for information on five Hamas financial facilitators, including Al Shawa.<sup>75</sup>

Designated by the U.S. Treasury in November 2024 for his role as a Hamas financier in Turkey, Musa Daud Muhammad Akari has helped facilitate flows of funds from Turkey to Hamas since at least 2011.<sup>76</sup> In 1992, Akari was part of a Hamas terrorist squad that kidnapped and murdered Israeli Border Police officer Nissim Toledano.<sup>77</sup> Sentenced to three consecutive life sentences for his role in the attack, Israel freed him as part of the Shalit prisoner exchange and deported him to Turkey. Several days after the October 7 attack, Akari was part of a Hamas delegation that met with Turkish politicians to recount the situation in the Gaza Strip and “the Zionist savagery.” He urged the parliament to condemn Israel at a hearing just five days after the attack.<sup>78</sup> Akari has been pictured in the past with Hamas leaders Khaled Meshal and Ahmed Jabari.<sup>79</sup>

Yaghmour and Akari’s close Hamas associate, Mahmoud Muhammad Ahmad Attoun (Abu al-Ezz), also roams freely. Attoun was also involved in the operation to kill Toledano. He too was deported to Turkey in 2011 with his associates. His brother, Ahmad Attoun, is a Hamas operative and a former member of the Palestinian Legislative Council. In April 2023, the U.S. Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) sanctioned Ahmad Attoun for his Hamas affiliation.<sup>80</sup> Unlike his brother and despite being an active member of Hamas in Turkey, the United States has yet to designate Mahmoud Attoun.

Hasan Turan, head of the Turkish parliament’s Turkey-Palestine Parliamentary Friendship Group, is another figure that has not been targeted by Treasury. Turan has organized high-level meetings between senior Hamas leaders and Turkish political elites. In 2019, Turan, along with Yaghmour, hosted a delegation that included Taher al-Nunu, a senior advisor to Haniyeh.<sup>81</sup> On October 12, 2023, five days after the Hamas attack on Israel, Turan hosted Bassem Naim at the Turkish National Assembly. Naim was the “health minister” for the Hamas-run Gaza Health Ministry that allowed Hamas to run military operations out of hospitals across the Gaza Strip.<sup>82</sup>

Turan is also the vice president of the League of Parliamentarians for al-Quds and Palestine.<sup>83</sup> In November 2023, the League hosted Hamas leader Ahmed Bahr at an event titled “Ways to Protect Al-Aqsa Mosque from Israeli

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75. U.S. Department of State, Rewards for Justice, “Amer Kamal Sharif Alshawa,” accessed March 21, 2025. (<https://rewardsforjustice.net/rewards/amer-kamal-sharif-alshawa>)

76. U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, “Treasury Targets Key Hamas Leaders and Financiers,” November 19, 2024. (<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy2720>)

77. Elior Levy, “Terrorist known Hamas member, brother of terrorist freed in Shalit deal,” *Ynet* (Israel), November 5, 2014. (<https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4588477,00.html>)

78. “حزب الهدى يلتقي مع وفد فلسطيني في البرلمان التركي [Al-Huda Party Meets With a Palestinian Delegation in the Turkish Parliament],” Ilke News Agency (Turkey), October 12, 2023. ([https://ilkha.com/arabi/world/355905/حزب\\_الهدى\\_يلتقي\\_مع\\_وفد\\_فلسطيني\\_في\\_البرلمان\\_التركي](https://ilkha.com/arabi/world/355905/حزب_الهدى_يلتقي_مع_وفد_فلسطيني_في_البرلمان_التركي))

79. Elior Levy, “Hamas vows to abduct more soldiers,” *Ynet* (Israel), October 22, 2011. (<https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4137544,00.html>)

80. U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control, “Non-SDN Palestinian Legislative Council List,” November 14, 2023, page 2. (<https://ofac.treasury.gov/media/10411/download?inline>)

81. “Turkey as a Terrorism-Sponsoring State,” *The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center*, December 24, 2019. ([https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/app/uploads/2019/12/E\\_278\\_19.pdf](https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/app/uploads/2019/12/E_278_19.pdf))

82. @hasanturantr, X, October 12, 2023. (<https://x.com/hasanturantr/status/1712432430336929943?s=20>); Nidal Al-Mughrabi and Trevor Hunnicutt, “U.S. backs claim Hamas uses Gaza hospitals as military cover amid hopes for hostages’ release,” *Reuters*, November 14, 2023. (<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/biden-says-gaza-hospitals-must-be-protected-2023-11-14>)

83. “Vice President of the League, Hasan Turan: The Aggression on Gaza is a Stain on History,” *Parliamentarians for al-Quds & Palestine*, March 21, 2025. (<https://www.lp4q.org/en/news/25452/vice-president-of-the-league,-hasan-turan:-the-aggression-on-gaza-is-a-stain-on-history.html>)

Aggression.”<sup>84</sup> After the Hamas assault on October 7, League director Mohammad Makram Balawi spoke at a rally in India with Khaled Meshal.<sup>85</sup>

On November 8, 2023, members of the League held a meeting with speaker of the Turkish Parliament and AKP member Numan Kurtulmus, a close Erdogan lieutenant. The group also held discussions with Huda-Par, the Iran-backed party that is part of Erdogan’s electoral alliance.<sup>86</sup> In January 2024, League leader Hamid al-Ahmar spoke at the “International Conference in Support of Gaza” in Istanbul featuring Haniyeh and several Turkish parliamentarians.<sup>87</sup> In October 2024, OFAC sanctioned League leader al-Ahmar for being a key member of Hamas’s once secret investment portfolio but has yet to sanction the League itself.<sup>88</sup>

Turkish-based NGO *Filistin Dayanışma Derneği* (The Turkish Society for Solidarity with Palestine, or FIDDER) also has troubling ties to Hamas. The group’s website acknowledges it exists to “build cultural and social bridges between the Turkish people and Palestine.”<sup>89</sup> FIDDER and some of its partner organizations are part of the Union of NGOs of the Islamic World, founded in Istanbul in 2005 to coordinate Islamist NGOs on a more global level.<sup>90</sup> Under the leadership of Mohammed Mushanish, FIDDER has hosted senior Hamas members on delegations, both in Turkey and abroad.<sup>91</sup>

Turkey-based NGO *Khair Ummah* is another organization with direct ties to Hamas. Headquartered in Istanbul and licensed under Turkey’s Charitable Societies Law, Khair Ummah maintains offices in southern Turkey, Syria, and the Gaza Strip. In 2021, Khair Ummah received \$110,000 from Igatha 48 Association (“AID 48”), the fundraising arm of the Islamic Movement in Israel, an organization with ties to Hamas. Israeli authorities highlighted Khair Ummah’s alleged ties to terror by filing an indictment against Rami Habiballah, an Arab from northern Israel who sent money to the group. The association also received the money via Abdel Jaber Shelbi, who manages Khair Ummah in Turkey.<sup>92</sup>

Hamas’s Berlin representative, Majed al-Zeer, is linked to Khair Ummah events in Turkey.<sup>93</sup> In December 2023, German authorities accused al-Zeer of being one of Hamas’s key liaisons in Europe and planning attacks on Jewish

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84. The League of Parliamentarians for al-Quds and Palestine, *Facebook*, April 10, 2023. (<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=590350653125273&set=pb.100064510313545.-2207520000&type=3>)

85. Shaju Philip, “Former Hamas chief Khaled Mashal virtually addresses pro-Palestine rally in Kerala, BJP demands strong action against organisers,” *The Indian Express* (India), October 30, 2023. (<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/former-hamas-chief-virtually-addresses-pro-palestine-rally-in-kerala-9004497>)

86. “Turkish MP Zekeriya Yapicioglu: Zionism Has No Bounds in Brutality and Is a Threat to the Entire World,” *Parliamentarians for al-Quds & Palestine*, January 17, 2024. (<https://www.lp4q.org/en/news/24486/turkish-mp-zekeriya-yap%C4%B1c%C4%B1o%C4%9Flu:-zionism-has-no-bounds-in-brutality-and-is-a-threat-to-the-entire-world.html>)

87. Ohad Merlin, “Conference in Istanbul features Hamas, PIJ leaders, antisemitic authors, Neturei Karta,” *The Jerusalem Post* (Israel), February 19, 2024. (<https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/article-787781>)

88. U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, “Treasury Targets Significant International Hamas Fundraising Network,” October 7, 2024. (<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy2632>)

89. “رادي ف – FIDDER,” *FIDDER*, accessed March 21, 2025. (<https://fidder.org.tr/رادي-ف-ن-ع>)

90. “Turkey, the Global Muslim Brotherhood, and the Gaza Flotilla,” *Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs*, November 30, 2011. (<https://jcfa.org/article/turkey-the-global-muslim-brotherhood-and-the-gaza-flotilla>)

91. Fidder - Filistin Dayanışma Derneği, *Facebook*, March 6, 2015. (<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1073996112626894&set=pcb.1073996135960225>); Fidder - Filistin Dayanışma Derneği, *Facebook*, March 26, 2014. (<https://www.facebook.com/fidder14/photos/pb.100064599285542.-2207520000/882238328469341/?type=3>); Mohammed Mushanish, *Facebook*, November 2, 2020. (<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=3736113983137105&set=pb.100002156192208.-2207520000&type=3>)

92. “Org. associated with Israeli Islamist party transfers money to Hamas-linked group,” *Maariv Online* (Israel), February 12, 2024. (<https://www.jpost.com/israel-hamas-war/article-786575>)

93. Majed Alzeer, *Facebook*, May 17, 2015. (Screenshot in possession of authors. The original post, since deleted, was available at: (<https://www.facebook.com/search/posts/?q=%D8%AE%D9%8A%D8%B1%20%D8%A3%D9%85%D8%A9%20>))

and Israeli targets.<sup>94</sup> On October 7, 2024, the U.S. Treasury designated al-Zeer as a Specially Designated National for his role as a Europe-based Hamas fundraiser.<sup>95</sup>

On several occasions, Khir Ummah has also worked collaboratively with IHH. Khir Ummah also cooperates with Al-Wafaa Campaign, a Dutch organization whose founder, Amin Abou Rashed, is in a Dutch prison for funding Hamas.<sup>96</sup> Al Wafaa's member organizations are part of the Union of Good, a global coalition of entities fundraising for Hamas.<sup>97</sup> The U.S. Treasury sanctioned the Union in 2008, but the European Union has not followed suit.

Businesses based in Turkey, such as Trend GYO, are also important nodes in the Hamas financing network. Designated in May 2022 as part of Hamas's investment portfolio, Trend GYO is a key component of Hamas's global asset holdings which had previously been estimated to be worth over \$500 million.<sup>98</sup> According to the U.S. Treasury, "as of 2018, Hamas elements held about 75 percent of issued capital at Turkey-based company Trend GYO. Additionally, Hamas planned to privately issue more than \$15 million of Trend GYO's shares to senior officials in the investment portfolio."<sup>99</sup>

In November 2023, just one month following Hamas's October 7, 2023, attack on Israel, Brian Nelson, undersecretary of the U.S. Treasury Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence warned that the United States is "profoundly concerned with Hamas's ability to continue to fundraise or find financial support for its operations for potential future terrorist attacks here in Türkiye."<sup>100</sup> Since then, the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control has released several tranches of sanctions designations targeting Hamas financial networks and operatives in Turkey.<sup>101</sup>

That is the good news. The bad news is that Turkey has not wavered in its support for Hamas. If the United States seeks to change Ankara's calculus, more pressure is necessary. Targeting Hamas operatives and businesses may not be enough. Indeed, it may be time to impose sanctions on Turkish nationals, businesses, and even officials involved in supporting one of the world's most dangerous terrorist organizations.

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94. Padraic Flanagan, "British pro-Palestinian activist who has appeared in Parliament at events with Jeremy Corbyn is accused by German authorities of being Hamas's key liaison in Europe," *Daily Mail* (UK), December 24, 2023. (<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12898103/British-pro-Palestinian-activist-accused-German-authorities-Hamass-key-liaison-Europe.html>); Rasmus Buchsteiner, Tobias Großkemper, Hubert Gude, Wolf Wiedmann-Schmidt, Roman Lehberger, and Sven Röbel, "Arrests Suggest Terrorist Organization Is Operating in Europe," *Der Spiegel* (Germany), December 15, 2023. (<https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/hamas-in-germany-arrests-suggest-terrorist-organization-is-operating-in-europe-a-ba8a9a89-b5bc-49a1-9247-3cbac9519a58>)

95. U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, "Treasury Targets Significant International Hamas Fundraising Network," October 7, 2024. (<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy2632>)

96. "Rotterdam suspect linked to foundation accused of raising millions for Hamas," *NL Times* (The Netherlands), December 15, 2023. (<https://nltimes.nl/2023/12/15/rotterdam-suspect-linked-foundation-accused-raising-millions-hamas>)

97. Al-Wafaa Campaign, "Donate to the campaign," accessed March 21, 2025. (<https://web.archive.org/web/20140409010423/http://www.europal.org/ar/donation>)

98. U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, "Treasury Targets Additional Sources of Support and Financing to Hamas," October 27, 2023. (<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy1845>)

99. U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, "Treasury Targets Covert Hamas Investment Network and Finance Official," May 24, 2022. (<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0798>)

100. Adam Samson and Ayla Jean Yackley, "US 'profoundly' worried over Turkey's financial links to Hamas," *Financial Times* (UK), November 30, 2023. (<https://www.ft.com/content/d2483bf8-fce6-4bf6-b5db-7e30f1d922ce>)

101. U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, "U.S. And UK Target Additional Hamas Finance Officials and Representatives," December 13, 2023. (<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy1981>); U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, "U.S., UK, and Australia Target Additional Hamas Financial Networks and Facilitators of Virtual Currency Transfers," January 22, 2024. (<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy2036>)

## TURKEY'S TRAIL OF TERROR AND AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

BY MICHAEL RUBIN

In 1979, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini led the Islamic Revolution that swept away Iran's shah and replaced the Iranian monarchy with a clerical rule. Overnight, Iran transformed from a pillar of American partnership in the region to an adversary and terror sponsor. The change was undeniable, even to Iran's most ardent supporters.

Prior to his ascent to power, Khomeini denied any ambition to rule Iran. He spoke of bringing democracy and renounced interest in ruling Iran. "I don't want to have the power of government in my hand; I am not interested in personal power," he told one gullible journalist.<sup>102</sup>

There is an irony today that while policymakers recognized the obvious regarding Iran's transformation, too many remain in denial about Turkey's equally momentous shift.

The pragmatism that Western officials ascribed to Recep Tayyip Erdogan was always a ruse that Erdogan embraced to allay concerns while he consolidated power. It worked. And not just with the Obama administration. Daniel Fried, George W. Bush's assistant secretary of state for European affairs, described Erdogan's AKP Party as "a kind of Muslim version of a Christian Democratic party," while Bush's secretary of state, Colin Powell, praised Turkey as a "Muslim democracy."<sup>103</sup> Erdogan played to Western naivete as he consolidated control. The Turkish leader's authoritarian tendencies were on full display after the March 2025 arrest of Turkish opposition figure Ekrem Imamoglu on spurious charges. Erdogan's subsequent crackdown on protestors only exacerbated Western concerns that Turkey's window to join the club of liberal democracies has all but closed.

In hindsight, Ankara's European Union accession process had less to do with a desire to join Europe than with serving as a mechanism to consolidate Erdogan's autocracy. Indeed, Erdogan was only too happy to accede to European demands that he unravel any internal military role in Turkish society. In theory, this was good for democracy given the military's role in toppling previous regimes. In 1960 and 1980, the Turkish Army interceded to end governments that violated the constitution or failed to maintain law and order. In 1971 and 1997, the threat of intervention was enough to force governments to resign. But the European Union unraveled the military's role to protect the constitution before establishing a check on Erdogan's power. In retrospect, this may have been the final nail in the coffin for Turkey's democracy.

Erdogan's first step in consolidating his dictatorship was to hijack the technocratic bodies. His first move was to replace every member of the Savings Deposit Insurance Fund (TMSF) with veterans of Islamist finance. The TMSF is analogous to the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation in the United States, but it also has a broader purview and is more powerful. Erdogan weaponized it to audit banks and corporations affiliated with his competitors and often saddled them with ruinous fines. He soon moved the TMSF under the purview of the prime minister's office and, when he assumed the presidency, it accompanied him.

Erdogan also created a new Revenue Administration (GIB) that, in practice, imposed punishing tax assessments not only on political rivals but also on anyone who donated to them. In one famous case, a news report about a

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<sup>102</sup>. "ویژه پژوهش در تاریخ تمدن فرهنگ ایران و زبان و ادبیات فارسی" [Special Research on the History of Iranian Civilization, Culture, and Persian Language and Literature], *Iran Shenasi*, Ed. Jalal Matini, Winter 2003. (<https://fis-iran.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/2003-VOL-14-NO-4.pdf>)

<sup>103</sup>. Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs Daniel Fried, "Putting Transatlantic Power to Work for Freedom," *U.S. Department of State*, December 14, 2005. (<https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/58229.htm>)

Turkish-German charity transferring money illegally to Islamists in Turkey infuriated Erdogan. Tax authorities punished the Dogan Group, the newspaper's owner, with a spurious \$600 million tax lien. When Dogan paid the penalty and the newspaper continued to report critically on the Turkish strongman's governance, authorities slapped Dogan with a \$2.5 billion fine.<sup>104</sup> Ultimately, Dogan offloaded his media holdings to pro-Erdogan interests.

This was the rule rather than the exception: The Erdogan government confiscated the high-circulation independent daily *Sabah*, for example, and transferred its control to his son-in-law after forcing all other potential bidders to back out of the auction for *Sabah* and its assets.<sup>105</sup> By gaining full control over not only newspapers but television and radio as well, Erdogan was able to shape a media narrative that only reinforced his efforts to consolidate domestic power. The fawning coverage of Erdogan's endless incitement against Israel and promotion of terror groups like Hamas has further fundamentally changed Turkey's public opinion on foreign affairs.

None of this should have surprised. Erdogan's Islamist ideology was always there for those who cared to see. While mayor of Istanbul, Erdogan said "Thank God almighty, I am a servant of Shari'a [Islamic law]." He later described himself as "the Imam of Istanbul."<sup>106</sup> But his jihadi leanings were not the only ideological red flag. The Turkish strongman famously likened democracy to a streetcar. "Democracy is like a tram ride: when you reach your stop, you get off."<sup>107</sup> As Erdogan consolidated control, he shed any pretense of moderation.

As this FDD research memo makes clear, Turkey today qualifies as a state sponsor of terrorism. Across administrations and political parties, two faults undermine U.S. policy. The first is a tendency to ignore ideology. Erdogan has a core set of beliefs. It is a mistake to confuse tactical moderation with sincere conversion. Second, U.S. officials consistently calibrate American policy to wishful thinking about what they hoped Turkey is or believed it once was rather than what it is now.

A corollary error is to believe that Turkey can return to the status quo ante. More than 35 million Turkish children have matriculated through the education system since Erdogan came to power; Turkish media have incited tens of millions more. Erdogan has staffed the civil service with men in his image. He has also used coup plots, real and imagined, to replace the leadership of the Turkish General Staff. Even if Erdogan dies tomorrow, it will take decades to wash Erdoganism out of the system. And that assumes that his successors and the political opposition do not look at his populist formulas as keys to their own future success.

The Islamic Republic of Iran deserved its terror designation. It cheerleads Hamas, funds it, trains its leaders and smuggles weaponry to it. Turkey now does the same. And just as Iran supports other terrorist groups around the Middle East, so does Turkey.

The Islamic Republic does not limit its terror sponsorship to Hamas; it supports Hezbollah, the Houthis, and Kashmiri terrorist groups based in Pakistan that target India. There is overwhelming evidence that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Quds Force also supported the al-Qaeda-led insurgency in Iraq.<sup>108</sup>

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104. Sebnem Arsu and Sabrina Tavernise, "Turkish Media Group Is Fined \$2.5 Billion," *The New York Times*, September 9, 2009. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/10/world/europe/10istanbul.html>)

105. "Turkish media company sale raises eyebrows," *Hürriyet Daily News* (Turkey), April 23, 2008. (<https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/turkish-media-company-sale-raises-eyebrows-8769903>)

106. "Does Prime Minister Erdogan Accept Turkish Secularism?" *Middle East Quarterly*, Spring 2007, pages 89-90. (<https://www.meforum.org/middle-east-quarterly/does-prime-minister-erdogan-accept-turkish-secularism>)

107. Nilgun Cerrahoglu, *Milliyet* (Turkey), July 14, 1996, page 20. (<https://gazetearsivi.milliyet.com.tr/liste?tarih=1996.07.14>)

108. Estate of Robert P. Hartwick, v. the Islamic Republic of Iran, No. 1:18-cv-01612-CKK, D.D.C. 2018). (<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5894b0fa725e25cd299eed06/t/5c4241d76d2a73d0704ddc5b/1547846108112/Hartwick+v+Iran+et+al+Second+Amended+Complaint.pdf>)

Likewise, there is ample evidence that Turkey does not limit its terror sponsorship to Hamas. In 2015, the center-left daily *Cumhuriyet* published photos of Turkey's National Intelligence Organization (MIT) transferring weaponry to an al-Qaeda affiliate on the Syrian border. Turkey's reaction was not to investigate its intelligence operatives but rather to launch a legal case against *Cumhuriyet's* editor-in-chief, Can Dunder. He later survived an assassination attempt. Today, the Turkish-backed Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) rules large swaths of Syria, and it remains to be seen whether this group engages in aggression against its neighbors after consolidating power.

The Islamic State, meanwhile, found safe haven in Turkey at the height of its caliphate. Syrian Kurdish forces who were defending Kobane, a city that abuts the Turkish border, have videos of Islamic State fighters enjoying free passage into Turkey and then firing on the Kurdish defenders from Turkish territory. On February 28, 2025, Lebanese authorities announced they intercepted \$2.5 million carried by a Turkish man arriving at Beirut's international airport.<sup>109</sup> The intent was to distribute those funds to the Iran-backed Hezbollah in Lebanon.

There should be no free pass for NATO members to engage in terror. Nor is it undiplomatic to sanction allies if their behavior merits it. Designating Turkey a state sponsor could certainly have downsides. There are elements of the Turkish-U.S. relationship that still benefit Washington and the West. But there are limits to how long Washington can turn a blind eye to Ankara's longstanding support to jihadi terror groups.

Terrorism sanctions against Turkey would infuse credibility into the State Department's terror designation process by demonstrating that objective factors trump subjective ones. Just as designations regarding money laundering led Cyprus and Armenia to work with Washington to reform and reverse the designation, so too should the goal of any Turkey terror designation be to provide a roadmap for Turkish officials, under Erdogan or any future administration, to understand what they must do should they wish for Turkey to rejoin the U.S.-led alliance.

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<sup>109</sup>. "Lebanon seizes \$2.5 million bound for Hezbollah, sources say," *Reuters*, February 28, 2025. (<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/lebanon-seizes-25-million-bound-hezbollah-sources-say-2025-02-28>)

## Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD)

FDD is a Washington, DC-based nonpartisan research institute focusing on national security and foreign policy.

### FDD's Turkey Program

Since the rise to power of the Islamist-rooted Justice and Development Party (AKP) and Recep Tayyip Erdogan's subsequent consolidation of one-man rule, Turkey has transformed from a trusted NATO ally with a commitment to secular governance and rule of law to a far more difficult actor. FDD's Turkey Program seeks to inform policymakers and the public about the AKP's dangerous and anti-American policies that threaten Turkish and Western security.

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