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## Erdogan Ruptures Turkish-Israel Relations

DEBKAFfile Special Report

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A deep crisis in Turkish-Israel relations appears to be the first strategic casualty of Israel's offensive to suppress Hamas' rocket campaign. **DEBKAFfile's** Ankara sources report that Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan is seriously planning to freeze the long-standing military ties between the US's foremost defense allies in the Middle East and call off forthcoming joint maneuvers. If his hostility toward Israel persists, it will have far-reaching fallout for American Middle East policies and Israel's defense position in the region.

And there is no sign of him relenting; just the reverse.

Monday, Jan. 5, Erdogan outdid himself in vituperation when he accused Israel of "perpetrating inhuman actions which would bring it to self-destruction. Allah will sooner or later punish those who transgress the rights of innocents," he said.

This level of abuse is rarely heard even from Israel's worst enemies.

Washington has been trying to hold together the framework of Turkish-Israeli military ties, which for years provided for frequent reciprocal visits by Israeli and Turkish fighter aircraft and warships to each other's bases and the use of facilities as between friends.

A freeze on these relations would cause serious harm in another sphere: the intelligence-sharing which substantially benefits the campaigns against terrorists fought by the US, Turkey and Israel.

It has not been lost on Washington and Jerusalem that the Turkish prime minister is working closely with French president Nicolas Sarkozy and the Emir of Qatar Sheikh Khalifa al Thani, both of whom have chosen to distance themselves from US policy positions in the Middle East and walk alone - at times with radical elements.

For six months, Erdogan willingly hosted in Ankara indirect Israel-Syrian talks that were initiated by Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert. They finally reached an impasse.

On Dec. 22, Olmert flew to the Turkish capital to persuade him to announce the opening of direct talks. Erdogan refused but, during their conversation, he asked Olmert how Israel proposed to handle the escalating Hamas missile onslaught from Gaza. Four days earlier, Hamas had formally terminated its ceasefire understanding with Israel. This was heralded by a 21-missile barrage on Dec. 17.

The Israeli leader calmed his Turkish host, assuring him that he was not planning a major military assault in Gaza and would silence the hawks at home.

Two days after his Ankara trip, Hamas pummeled southern Israel with 60 missile and mortar rounds in a widening perimeter. The next day, Dec. 25, a Lebanese farmer discovered 8 brand-new Iranian-made rockets with factory markings primed to fire at the northern Israeli town of Nahariya.

The hawks were now joined by most of the country in clamoring for action to put a stop to Hamas' crippling aggression. Olmert, defense minister Ehud Barak and foreign minister Tzipi Livni and the chief of staff resolved Friday, Dec. 26 to go to war against Hamas, starting the next day.

The four kept the secret to themselves. Hamas was therefore taken by surprise. But Erdogan was bitterly offended, claiming that Olmert had deliberately misled him when they met on Dec. 22, and accusing him of disrespect for Turkey and a stab in the back to himself.

The Turkish leader then forced deputy chairman of the Turkish-Israeli Inter-parliamentary Friendship group, Egemen Bagis, to resign as a mark of protest against Israeli air strikes in Gaza.

Next, he announced he was embarking on a truce mission around Arab capitals and deliberately left Jerusalem off his schedule. The tour ended in Riyadh without any results. From that moment on, he began taking the lead of the anti-Israel Arab front taking shape.

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