

Dozens of protesters demanding an end to Turkey's trade with Israel violently detained in Istanbul

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On Saturday, the police detained 43 people by beating and then handcuffing them during a march organized by the group “Thousand Youth for Palestine” on ?stiklal Street in the center of Istanbul. The march was protesting the genocide in Gaza and Turkey’s continued trade with Israel. A protest march was also organized in Konya with the slogans “Murderer Israel, Collaborator AKP”.

Members of the “Thousand Youth for Palestine” group had previously protested at election rallies for President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an’s ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) against the ongoing trade that feeds Israel’s war machine and were violently detained by police.

In a statement on X/Twitter, the group shared footage of the detention and mistreatment, saying the Turkish police were behaving like Israeli soldiers. “Our friends who were beaten and detained with handcuffing behind the back are still being tortured even though their hands are tied in the vehicle! Neither the corporations you protect nor the state violence that serves them can intimidate us. #StopTradewithIsrael”.

The demand for the suspension of trade with Israel has been persistently rejected and ignored by the government. In Turkey, where most of the population has anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist sentiments, the government’s continued diplomatic and economic ties with Israel in the midst of the genocide in Gaza has provoked outrage. This opposition was a factor in Erdogan’s AKP losing millions of votes in the March 31 elections.

The government’s first reaction after 7 October was one of caution and restraint. It called for a ceasefire by bringing the Israeli state and Hamas to the table as if they were equal actors. Turkey’s concern about the escalation of the war was that a regional war involving Iran would undermine its own interests.

The large-scale US military build-up in the Middle East

under the pretext of the war in Gaza was part of US imperialism’s preparations for war against Iran and its allies to secure its domination of the Middle East. Provocations for a war with Iran escalated last week when Israel attacked the Iranian embassy in Syria, which is Iranian territory under international law.

The *World Socialist Web Site* had previously analysed Turkey’s concerns about preparations for war against Iran as follows:

Turkey is home to a number of US and NATO bases, including Incirlik Air Base in Adana and the Kürecik Radar Base in Malatya. In the event of a war between the US and Iran, these bases could become flashpoints.

Turkey and Iran also share the Kurdish question. The Turkish bourgeoisie fears that a victory for Washington and Tel Aviv in a war in the Middle East could lead to the creation of a Kurdish state. During NATO’s regime-change war against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, Kurdish nationalists have become the main proxy force of Washington.

However, the genocidal scale of Israel’s attacks provoked an angry response from millions of people in Turkey and around the world. Almost three weeks after the attacks began, Erdogan began to condemn Israel in harsher terms, criticizing NATO allies and expressing support for Hamas.

However, it is becoming clear that Erdogan’s rhetorical response and the accompanying phony boycott campaign were not aimed at Israel but at suppressing public anger.

Even when Erdoğan condemned Israel, he was proclaiming his disagreement with the Netanyahu government, not with the state of Israel, the product of a 75-year Zionist project.

Journalist Metin Cihan's revelations about Turkey's ongoing trade with Israel during the genocide have confirmed the government's hypocrisy. Cihan used official statistics and maritime traffic websites, all of which are publicly available. Trade between Israel and Turkey reached \$2.5 billion during the five-month war against the Palestinians. According to the Turkish Statistical Institute, exports to Israel rose by 27 percent and imports from Israel by 18 percent in February.

Official documents show that critical supplies such as steel and oil that feed Tel Aviv's war machine come from Turkey. Israel imports 65 percent of its steel from Turkey. Vital Azerbaijani oil is shipped to Israel through Turkish ports. Cement, chemicals, even gunpowder, barbed wire and weapon parts are also being shipped through Turkish ports.

Buyers of many products were found to be suppliers working directly with the Israeli military. A significant number of Turkish exporters and logistics companies are owned by people close to the government. Even the shipping company owned by Erdoğan's son was found to have made shipments from Israel after October 7. Finally, it was revealed that state-owned mines were sending boron ore to Israel.

All this exposed Erdoğan as a pro-imperialist and pro-Zionist politician before this year's local elections, in which the AKP failed to win first place for the first time since 2002. In addition to the rising cost of living, the government's hypocritical position on the Israeli genocide in Gaza was a major reason for the significant defeat in the local elections.

The Islamist New Welfare Party (YRP) was the only party to capitalize on the anger over the Gaza genocide. Campaigning on demands of increasing workers' and pensioners' salaries and cutting trade with Israel, the YRP became the third-largest party, increasing its vote from 2.8 percent to 6.2 percent.

A few days before the elections, party leader Fatih Erbakan announced as conditions for supporting the AKP candidate in Istanbul, "If the government declares to end trade with Israel, to cut exports to Israel, to close the [NATO] Kürecik radar base in Malatya, which was established to protect Israel, and to raise pensions to 20,000 Turkish Liras, we are ready to withdraw our candidate for Istanbul today."

The YRP's criticism of the government is a hypocritical maneuver. In the 2023 presidential and parliamentary elections, the YRP supported the People's Alliance led by Erdoğan. Moreover, former Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan, whose legacy the YRP continues, established close ties with Israel during his time in office, reneging on all his previous promises.

What is the reason for the Erdoğan government's continued trade with Israel? Many commentators attribute it to the fact that the Turkish economy is in crisis and on the verge of collapse, with real inflation at 125 percent. But the real reason lies in the Turkish ruling class's close ties with imperialism.

The traditional policy, which Erdoğan has largely maintained since 2002, is one of maneuvering between the pro-Palestinian sentiments of the people and the pro-imperialist and pro-Zionist character of the ruling class. In Turkey, which was the first Muslim-majority country to recognize the creation of Israel in 1948, the ruling elite in the following decades rhetorically condemned Israel's crimes, but essentially acted in line with the destructive policies of the United States and Israel in the Middle East.

That is why both Erdoğan and the opposition Kemalist Republican People's Party (CHP) approved Sweden's NATO membership, while the Israeli genocide in Gaza continues with the support of the US-led NATO forces.

The Turkish ruling class and political establishment has revealed its complicity in the genocide against the Palestinians and in an imperialist war against Iran that could involve the whole Middle East.

The violent state terror against "Thousand Youth for Palestine" shows that the struggle against genocide and war cannot be carried forward by appealing to capitalist governments. As the Socialist Equality Group, the only left-wing political tendency to put the struggle against the genocide in Gaza at the center of its local election campaign, said in a statement, "The struggle against genocide and war must be waged by the international working class and directed against their cause, capitalism and imperialism."



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