

US seeks to align Turkey and Israel in preparation for war against Iran

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Turkey and the government of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan emerged as a major topic during US President Donald Trump's meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the White House on Monday.

The meeting came after the risk of direct armed confrontation between Turkey and Israel reached a new dimension, with the recent Israeli attacks on military installations and air bases in Syria. Trump's willingness to mediate between these two Middle East allies in the meeting with Netanyahu underlined the reality of the risk of conflict.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the ongoing US-Israeli ethnic cleansing in Gaza. However, the genocide against the Palestinians is an integral part of the preparations for a wider war against Iran and its allies, and Turkey is playing an important role in these plans. The Trump administration does not want Turkey and Israel to confront each other, but to help the US in its aggression against Iran.

Trump warned that unless Iran accepts his terms, "there will be bombing ... the likes of which they have never seen before" and has launched near-daily airstrikes on Yemen since last month.

The tensions between the Erdoğan and Netanyahu regimes stem from the growing regional rivalry between the two countries, which has been deepened by the US-led imperialist war of to redivide the Middle East.

While Erdoğan has rhetorically criticised the Netanyahu regime's genocidal war against the Palestinians and expressed support for Hamas, he has never stopped fueling Israel's war machine. The flow of oil from Azerbaijan, which remains a major oil supplier and ally of Tel Aviv, passes through Turkey to Israel. Turkey is home to numerous US-NATO bases, while the Kürecik radar base in the east of the country is said to provide the US and Israel with intelligence against Iran and its allies.

That's why, speaking to *Telegraph*'s the Iranian government official warned last week: "When the time comes, it won't matter whether you're an American, British, or Turkish soldier—you will be targeted if your base is used by Americans."

At the joint press conference, Netanyahu said: "We also discussed the situation in Syria. We have had neighborly relations with Turkey that have deteriorated, and we don't want to see Syria being used by anyone, including Turkey, as a base for attack in Israel." He added: "Turkey is a country that has a great relationship with the United States. The President has a relationship with the leader of Turkey. We discussed how we can avoid this conflict in a variety of ways."

Trump said: "I happen to like him [Erdoğan], and he likes me and I know the press will get very angry ... and we've never had a problem ... He's a tough guy. He's very smart ... He has done what nobody's been able to do in two thousand years. He has taken over Syria." (This stupid remark only underscores Trump's ignorance, since Syria was part of the Ottoman Empire, i.e., Turkey, from 1516 to 1918, and was previously ruled from Baghdad and Cairo. It only became an independent state in the 20th century.)

Trump also turned to Netanyahu, saying: "Any problem that you have with Turkey, I think I can solve. I mean, as long as you're reasonable."

While Israel slaughters civilians in Gaza, including women, children and the elderly, attacks clearly identified aid workers and journalists, and uses starvation as an instrument of war, the US continues to arm and finance Israel to continue such "reasonable" actions. Trump himself has openly declared his support for the ethnic cleansing of Gaza and his desire to "take over" the territory.

The same critical questions were raised at the Senate hearing on April 1 of Tom Barrack, the nominee for US

ambassador to Turkey. Like Trump's statements, Barrack's answers reveal that Washington sees Turkey as a critical ally in its plans for full sovereignty in the Middle East, including preparations for war against Iran.

Barrack is a billionaire crony of Trump's, founder of several private equity firms specializing in real estate and property development, with extensive interests in the Middle East, mainly in the Persian Gulf sheikdoms. He has done numerous business deals with the Trump family, and at one point, as a creditor owed \$70 million by Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, helped him to avoid bankruptcy after a phone call from Trump.

While Barrack called Turkey "a valued NATO partner" at the "strategic crossroads of Europe, Asia and the Middle East" in his opening remarks, senators from both parties criticised Ankara for its military presence in Syria, its ongoing relationship with Hamas, its attitude towards the Israeli government and its purchase of the Russian S-400 air defence system.

On these issues of tension between the US and Turkish governments, Barrack refrained from directly criticising the Erdoğan government. However, he emphasised that cooperation between the two countries would depend on Turkey's alignment with US strategic priorities.

Barrack said Turkey has made positive contributions to NATO, including military bases in Incirlik and Izmir, providing UCAVs to Ukraine, and mediating the Black Sea grain corridor deal with Russia. On the other hand, he acknowledged the existence of tensions between NATO and Turkey and stressed the need for a "firm and structured process" in US-Turkey relations. He warned diplomatic efforts must focus on consistent messaging and the elimination of "interferences over time."

Florida Senator Rick Scott asked Barrack if it was possible to bring Turkey back into alignment as a "great NATO ally." Barrack replied in the affirmative, likening himself to "a small hammer" committed to chipping away at obstacles.

The main focus of the hearing was on how Turkey can align itself more closely with the interests of US imperialism in the Middle East. "Turkey is an important partner in President Trump's maximum pressure campaign to counter Iranian influence in the Middle East," Barrack said, and added: "What we all agree on is that the ouster of the Assad regime in Syria provides an opportunity for Israel, for America, for Turkey to get rid of the Shia crescent and to eliminate ISIS. But the scale of the problems we face is enormous."

The problems, which Barrack describes as "enormous,"

are mainly how to reconcile the growing rivalry between the Israeli and Turkish ruling classes in the wake of the ongoing genocide in Gaza and the regime change in Syria within the framework of US regional interests.

In the hearing, Senator Ted Cruz, a Republican from the state of Texas, condemned Turkey's support for International Criminal Court (ICC) actions against Israeli officials, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Following this, Barrack advised Erdoğan: "Don't get on a collision course with President Trump. That would not be a wise direction."

Democratic Senator Jacky Rosen of Nevada demanded that Turkey stop offering sanctuary to Hamas and improve relations with Israel.

If the US fails to fully align Turkey with its goals in the Middle East, the interests of American imperialism, not Trump's fond feelings for Erdoğan, will be decisive. Trump imposed significant sanctions on Turkey during his first term. In 2019, he responded to Russia's delivery of S-400 systems to Ankara by excluding Turkey from the production process of F-35 fighter jets.

In 2018, Trump doubled US tariffs on Turkish steel and aluminum, to 50 percent and 20 percent, respectively, a move that shook the Turkish economy. At the time, the pretext for the tariffs was the detention of evangelical American preacher Andrew Brunson. In the face of the sanctions, the Erdoğan government was forced to release Brunson within a few months.

In fact, during his joint press conference with Netanyahu, Trump referred to this incident while talking about his ability to solve problems between Turkey and Israel. "As you remember, we got our minister back from Turkey. You remember that? And this was a big deal at the time and we got him back," saying he did not fail to strongarm his "friend" Erdogan.



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