

In His Own Words: Erdogan on Israel, Hamas, and the Gaza Conflict

Policy #1475

February 11, 2009

On January 29, Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan walked out of a panel that included Israeli president Shimon Peres at the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos, Switzerland, further suggesting to skeptics that the Justice and Development Party (AKP) is turning its back on the West. Erdogan also chided Peres for "being old" and said to him, "You [using the second person plural pronoun in Turkish, referring to either Israelis or Jews, or both] know very well how to kill people." Is Erdogan's Davos outburst an isolated event, or is it representative of the AKP's attitude toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? The AKP has denied criticism that it is moving Turkey away from the country's traditional pro-Western stance or that it is abandoning Turkey's historic position as a friend of both Israelis and Palestinians. The following is a sampling of Erdogan's views on Israel, Hamas, and Gaza, providing background to the debate about the AKP's foreign policy:

On Israel • Israel has no place in UN <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/english/domestic/10792665.asp> Hurriyet, December 26, 2008 "How is such a country [Israel], which totally ignores and does not implement resolutions of the UN Security Council, allowed to enter through the gates of the UN [headquarters]?"

• "Allah will punish" Israel <https://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1230733177704&pagename=JPost%2FJPostArticle%2FShowFull> Jerusalem Post, January 5, 2009 "Sooner or later, Allah will punish those who transgress the rights of innocents" -- at the conclusion of Erdogan's tour of the region during the Gaza conflict, which included stops in Egypt, Syria (where he had contacts with Hamas), Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, but not Israel.

• Israel as oppressor and tyrant <https://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2009/01/04/haber.685EAF2DE0594BB685E9FEE84650BDFE.html> Sabah, January 4, 2009 "My dear brothers, do not forget that you cannot improve through oppression. Do not forget that if you oppress innocent people, you will eventually be paid back along the way. Right now, we are witnessing a human tragedy. But I am sure that Israel will suffer in the future because of the pain they are causing in Palestine. They can find some supporters to advocate their tyranny, but keep in mind that the righteous ones will win in the end. Israel will have to face the death of all those innocent children who died on the streets and of all those vulnerable mothers. Their tears will not go unnoticed."

https://www.worldbulletin.net/news_print.php?id=34375 World Bulletin, January 5, 2009 "Tears of children, defenseless women, and mothers will not be in vain. The tyrants will get drowned in those teardrops." • Israel bears historical responsibility for the Gaza operations <https://www.turkishweekly.net/news/63274/erdogan-humanity-is-dying-in-gaza-.html> The Journal of Turkish Weekly, January 13, 2009 Erdogan said that those who are silent about the attacks being staged in Gaza will bear historical responsibility regardless of why they are remaining silent. . . . Keeping silence and not taking any action is becoming a partner of the tragedy caused in Gaza. Israel and everyone silent are responsible for the deaths of innocent children in Gaza.

<https://www.turkishweekly.net/print.asp?type=1&id=62914> Radikal, January 7, 2009 "Israel makes calculations and thinks of the elections due in February. I am calling on [Israeli defense minister Ehud] Barak and [Israeli foreign minister Tzipi] Livni to leave aside elections. History will judge you for overshadowing humanity." • Gaza assault is "crime against humanity" <https://www.ihf.com/articles/ap/2008/12/28/europe/EU-Turkey-Israeli-Palestinians.php> International Herald Tribune, December 28, 2008 "To go and bomb these defenseless people, and to openly say that this operation will be a long-lasting one, that it will be this or that, to me, is a serious crime against humanity."

• "Two-thirds of Israel" is Palestinian <https://www.haberler.com/basbakan-erdogan-dan-israil-e-soru-yavrular-haber/> Son Dakika Haber, January 18, 2009 "The West did not react to developments in Gaza the way they did to the Georgian crisis. . . . There is a blunt truth here -- Israel is using disproportional and endless force. Is Gaza their country, their land? Then, I talk with the prime minister of Palestine. He tells me that two-thirds of Israel is theirs. If so, why don't you reconsider your attitude and actions?"

• Israelis (or Jews) "know very well how to kill" https://w9.gazetevatan.com/Davos_zirvesinde_kriz_/220749/1/Manset Vatan, January 29, 2009 "President Peres, I know you are older than I am, yet your voice is higher than mine. This is a sign of a guilty conscious. You [using the second person plural pronoun in Turkish, referring to either Israelis or Jews, or both] know very well how to kill. I also chide those who applaud this cruelty." -- speaking at a panel with Israeli President Shimon Peres at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

- "Israel has become a country of bandits" https://w9.gazetevatan.com/Davos_zirvesinde_kriz_/220749/1/Manset Vatan, January 29, 2009 "A Jew writing in the Guardian, Avi Shlaim, says the same. Israel has become a country of bandits." -- speaking at a panel with Israeli president Shimon Peres at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

On Gaza • Gaza is like a "concentration camp" <https://www.stargazete.com/index.php?metot=mobile&islem=detail&id=160271> Star, January 6, 2009 "The Palestinian issue is like a bleeding wound. Gaza has been under siege for the last two years. People living there have been trying to survive in the world's largest open-air prison. They are left to suffer in what can almost be called a concentration camp."

On Hamas • Hamas is not a terrorist group <https://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1059937.html> Haaretz, January 29, 2009 "President Obama must redefine terror and terrorist organizations in the Middle East, and based on this new definition, a new American policy must be deployed in the Middle East." -- addressing the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

- Hamas is a "reform party" <https://www.ntvmsnbc.com/news/473840.asp> NTVMSNBC, January 30, 2009 "Hamas is a type of a reform party. Who made them what they are today? It was those who did not give them their democratic rights as the elected party." -- speaking at a panel with Israeli President Shimon Peres at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

- Hamas "fully abided" by the ceasefire <https://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=JPost/JPArticle/ShowFull&cid=1232643740818> Jerusalem Post, January 27, 2009 "Hamas, without a doubt, erred by firing rockets at Israel, but we must consider that Hamas fully abided by the truce agreement with Israel for six months, even though Israel did not. . . . Israel didn't do anything to lift the blockade and open the crossings despite the agreement, and provoked Hamas and Gazans."

- Hamas should be offered a hand <https://www.presstv.ir/pop/print.aspx?id=82967> Press TV, January 19, 2009 "We should not be squeezing them [Hamas] into the corner after its war with Israel. . . . If we are to move toward democracy in that region, then we should respect the decision of the people who went to the ballot box." -- speaking at the European Policy Center in Brussels.

On where the AKP's heart is • "We are with the oppressed" <https://www.turkishweekly.net/print.asp?type=1&id=62914> Radikal, January 7, 2009 "You cannot use violence just because Hamas has made mistakes. We are beside the oppressed and we are talking as the grandchildren of the Ottomans who . . . [welcomed] you as guests in these lands."

On the Jewish role in the Israel-Hamas conflict in Gaza • Having suffered so much, Jews should know to value life <https://www.stargazete.com/index.php?metot=mobile&islem=detail&id=160271> Star, January 6, 2009 "I said that the attacks in Gaza would be a black stain in history. We cannot forget these recent attacks made by a people who have suffered so much throughout history. They should know the sacredness of human life above everyone else."

- Jewish-influenced media is misrepresenting facts <https://www.habervaktim.com/haberyazdir.php?id=51785> Haber Vaktim, January 13, 2009 "While attacks on Gaza continue, the media is misinforming the world about the developments. The media, especially the media under Jewish influence, is trying to make the death of all those innocent children look normal to the rest of the world. They constantly say that there has been a technical mistake. What kind of an excuse is that? They say that terrorists are hiding behind children. They must be joking!"

- Jews are violating the Old Testament https://w9.gazetevatan.com/Davos_zirvesinde_kriz_/220749/1/Manset Vatan, January 29, 2009 "It is written in the Old Testament that "Thou Shall Not Kill" but you are killing. Israel's barbarity is beyond cruelty." -- speaking at a panel with Israeli President Shimon Peres at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

This PolicyWatch was compiled by research assistants at The Washington Institute.