

## Is Turkey's exclusion from NATO in Israel's interests?

ARVAK Center comment, 06.08.2024<sup>1</sup>

On 29.07.2024, Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz called “*to immediately expel Turkey from NATO*”. He stressed that President Erdogan had turned his country into a “*part of the Iranian axis of evil*”. Katz also reminded that Turkey favorably receives members of HAMAS on its territory, against which Israel is currently waging war.

The Israeli minister made his statements in response to Erdogan’s threats to bring the Turkish army into the Jewish state. The day before, I. Katz on his X page compared the Turkish leader to Saddam Hussein: “*Threatening to attack Israel, Erdogan is following the Saddam Hussein's footsteps. Let's just remind him what happened there [Iraq], and how it all ended*”.

Judging by the information from Israel, Katz’s statement about Turkey’s exclusion from the North Atlantic Alliance should not be considered a purely rhetorical appeal. According to *The Times of Israel*, the Jewish state’s MFA issued a corresponding statement: “*In light of the Turkish President’s threats to invade Israel and his dangerous rhetoric, Israel Katz has instructed diplomats <...> to urgently engage with all NATO members, calling for Turkey’s condemnation and demanding its exclusion from the Alliance*”.

Two days after Israel Katz's resonant words, the head of Turkey’s Foreign Ministry Hakan Fidan made a statement in response: “*Nothing will come of this. Turkey's membership in NATO cannot be questioned in such an equation. Moreover, Turkey is not the only country whose opinion on the Palestinian issue does not coincide with the West’s. There are other countries as well, holding a position against Israel, but the tone of their voices may be different. In the context of recognizing the Palestine State, Spain, Ireland, and Norway have officially expressed their position*”.

First, it should be noted that H. Fidan was somewhat late with the response to his colleague, meaning that Turkish diplomacy has found itself in a difficult situation. R. Erdogan's threat to invade Israel is unprecedented even against the backdrop of the personal insults aimed at Prime Minister Netanyahu, which have become quite usual. Such a rhetoric is especially provocative considering the unpredictable situation in the Middle East and the existential challenges posed to Israel.

On the other hand, however, Fidan obviously could not structure his answer in such a way that it would look like “repentance” for the Turkish leader's words, which the latter certainly would not like. So, the Turkish Foreign Minister chose to divert the debate from the essence of the issue in his answer. Undoubtedly, he is right saying that many members of the North Atlantic Alliance support the “*Palestinian independence*” and criticize Tel Aviv for its specific actions in Gaza. However, this does not mean that they can be supporters of the idea of Turkish invasion of Israel, which is NATO’s main ally in the Greater Middle East. In his response, the head of the Turkish MFA changed the background of the political and diplomatic squabble, leaving out of the brackets of his judgments the very origins of the

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<sup>1</sup> The original (in Rus.) was posted on our website on 04.08.2024.

scandal. As for the Israeli threats to initiate the process of Turkey's exclusion from NATO, here too can be seen the signs of eccentricity and staging of radical actions. Undoubtedly, Tel Aviv will include into its agenda of relations with NATO member states the issues of discussing and condemning Turkey's "*inappropriate behavior*". But, at the same time, the chosen method of countering Turkish *démarches* does not envisage real steps to "squeeze" Ankara out of the North Atlantic bloc.

Firstly, Israel is not a member of NATO and therefore does not have legal instruments to even bring such an issue up for discussion by the military-political structure.

Secondly, one of the fundamental provisions of the NATO Charter, i.e. the principle of "*consensus decisions*", currently excludes the possibility of revising Turkey's status, since a significant and even the large part out of the 32 members do not accept such an initiative.

Thirdly, Turkey is considered one of the North Atlantic bloc old-timers and due to several weighty factors it plays an important role in there. Hypothetically, exclusion of even such "insignificant" countries as Estonia or Albania from NATO is associated with a lot of legal and technical issues and is fraught with irreversible consequences for the future of the military-political bloc. Turkey's withdrawal from the Alliance being the second NATO country after the United States in terms of the number of armed forces, would question its further existence as such.

Fourthly, it should not be unequivocally stated that the exclusion of Turkey from NATO is in the national interests of Israel itself. As long as Turkey is a member of the North Atlantic bloc, it is more or less controllable, regardless of the personal ambitions and characteristics of its leader. Outside the bloc, not being burdened by its obligations, it can, albeit in the short term (due to the economic situation), become a significant military-political entity in Western Asia, confronting Israel as a new enemy. Now, it is the most unacceptable scenario for the Jewish state.

And finally, fifthly, Turkey, together with Azerbaijan, is a stable supplier of Israel with raw materials and strategic products, which now has an existential significance for Tel Aviv, weighing much more than Erdogan's aggressive rhetoric, which, in essence, bears no practical threats behind it.

Consequently, one should not expect that Tel Aviv takes effective steps aimed at actual dismantling the West's Middle East policy by excluding Turkey from NATO. Perhaps the rhetoric will continue to consistently escalate, and Israel will not abandon demonstrative gestures in this direction, but all this will not lead to a "point of no return" and the final unbalancing of the relations that Ankara and Tel Aviv have been building for decades.