

The Turkish aspect of the Arab-Israeli reconciliation

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On January 19, 2025, a six-week ceasefire agreement between Israel and the Palestinian “radical group” Hamas came into effect in the Gaza Strip, aiming to end the 15-month-long war. This marks the first phase of the “*peace deal*”, which includes a ceasefire and the exchange of hostages and prisoners. The details of the 2nd and 3rd phases of the agreement, including the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Gaza Strip, will be discussed in negotiations starting on the 16th day of the ceasefire. However, as Israeli Prime Minister B. Netanyahu pointed out, if the negotiations on the 2nd phase fail, Tel Aviv has already reached an agreement with the USA to continue the war until the complete destruction of Hamas ly².

The mediators of the ceasefire were the United States, Egypt, and Qatar³, who successfully balanced the demands and conditions of the parties so that none of them felt defeated. Although the ceasefire situation remains fragile, it has the potential to become a precursor to a period of *détente* and peace. According to the international media, the news was received with great enthusiasm both in Gaza and in Israel, whose society is tired of the losses and inconveniences of war.

The ceasefire in Gaza is also valuable for Israel as it allows for the easing of tensions in the north of the country and the resolution of Lebanese-Israeli disagreements. On January 15, 2025, U.S. special envoy Amos Hochstein, after meeting with Lebanese parliament speaker Nabih Berri in Beirut, stated that no more time could be wasted, and no side could justify further delay: “*We must take advantage of this window for diplomatic actions and solutions*”. According to Hochstein, the Gaza agreement “*will also help diplomatic settlement here in Lebanon and prevent the start of a larger war*”⁴. Nabih Berri, considered one of the most “pro-Hezbollah” politicians in the Lebanese government, agreed with the American envoy on the urgent need for a Hezbollah-Israeli ceasefire.

Thus, alongside the peace negotiations on the Palestinian issue, preparations are underway to resolve the situation on the Lebanese-Israeli border. The United States is probing the ground for initiating negotiations between Tel Aviv, Beirut, and Hezbollah, which continues to fight against the IDF in southern Lebanon.

A rather unique situation is emerging. At first glance, the fall of the “Assad regime” has made it easier for Tel Aviv to fulfill its promise of the “*complete destruction of Hamas and Hezbollah terrorist groups*”. Iran was forced to evacuate its units and instructors from Syria. Its logistical chains that ensuring communication and arms supplies to allied forces in Lebanon were disrupted. Iran’s support for Hamas significantly decreased since the summer

¹ The original (in Rus.) was posted on our website on 27.01.2025.

² “The delayed ceasefire in the Gaza Strip has come into effect”. DW (in Rus.), 19.01.2025, <https://www.dw.com/ru/v-sektore-gaza-s-zaderzkoj-vstupilo-v-silu-peremirie/a-71340865> (download date: 20.01.2025)

³ “Israel and Hamas agreed on a deal regarding Gaza”. Interfax (in Rus.), 15.01.2025, <https://www.interfax.ru/world/1002926> (дата обращения: 20.01.2025).

⁴ “Negotiations for a ceasefire in Gaza. Hamas did not show up, mediators hope to avoid a large-scale war”. BBC NEWS (in Rus.), 15.01.2025, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/articles/c17gq7lk1kno> (download date: 20.01.2025).

of 2024, when the group's then-leader, Ismail Haniyeh, was assassinated in Tehran. In turn, the new Syrian authorities, led by al-Julani, have repeatedly stated that they have no claims against Israel and do not intend to jeopardize relations with it⁵. Such statements continue to be made even after Israel has carried out massive bombings of Syrian bases and arsenals, and its ground forces have significantly penetrated into the Syrian territory. Tel Aviv's hands are almost completely untied to, as Netanyahu promised, "*once and for all deal with the terrorists*" of Hamas and Hezbollah, who are weakened and deprived of a strong centralized leadership. Additionally, the newly inaugurated U.S. president D. Trump has repeatedly promised Israel assistance for a radical solution to the "*terrorist problem*".

And yet, despite all its advantages, B. Netanyahu, contrary to previous plans, abandoned the war "until the end", which inevitably resulted in image and political losses for him. After it became known about Tel Aviv's intentions to strike a deal with Hamas, several far-right ministers from Netanyahu's cabinet resigned, which, according to Western media, "*significantly weakened the prime minister's position*"⁶. Consequently, the motives behind the aforementioned "controversial" decision of the Israeli prime minister must have been very weighty.

It is known that Netanyahu was under immense socio-political pressure when, for more than a year, he refused to make any contact with Hamas, contrary to the demands of the relatives of the Israeli hostages. He also resisted international pressure that accused the Israeli leadership of adopting Nazi methods of exterminating the civilian population of the "*enemy side*" and violating all humanitarian norms. Netanyahu faced friction on all these issues both with the Israeli public, as well as with relatively moderate circles in the Israeli political establishment, and with part of the officer corps of the country's armed forces, including the command. Yet he continued to adhere strictly to maximalist positions on the forceful resolution of the Palestinian and Lebanese issues, initially excluding any compromises. However, now, under the conditions of the undisputed superiority of the Israeli army and with the unconditional support from the US in the person of D. Trump, Netanyahu nevertheless decided to compromise with forces he considered untouchable. He is not troubled by the resulting split in the ruling coalition in the Knesset due to his change of position, which could lead to a political crisis and a collapse of power in the country⁷.

International media are still weakly covering the possible reasons and motives that prompted the Israeli leadership to change its approach to the Palestinian problem. Mainly, assumptions are made about the "*fatigue of Israeli society and the army*" and the "*heavy financial and economic burden*" that the Jewish state is experiencing under the conditions of a war "*on two fronts*". However, little, if anything, is said about the possible geopolitical background of the issue at all. Meanwhile, there are grounds to think that the change in the Tel Aviv's official position is due to the events in Syria, specifically Turkey's role in them and

⁵ "Al-Julani refused to consider Israel an enemy". Islam News (in Rus.), 15.12.2024, <https://islamnews.ru/2024/12/15/al-dzhulani-otkazalsya-schitat-izrail-vragom/> (download date: 21.01.2025).

⁶ "How the first day of the fragile ceasefire between Israel and Hamas went". BBC NEWS (in Rus.), 20.01.2025, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/articles/cgkjmle8eozo/> (download date: 21.01.2025).

⁷ "Why a deal with Hamas could cost Netanyahu his premiership". RBK (in Rus.), 17.01.2025, <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/17/01/2025/678a5fd29a79475b25aecfaa/> (download date: 20.01.2025).

its regional plans. From this perspective, the fact that J. Biden's proposal to make a deal with Hamas was received by the Israeli government on May 31, 2024, is interesting. According to Turkish sources, Ankara began secret preparations for organizing a march of its HTS and SNA-controlled forces in Syria to Aleppo, and then to Damascus.

The attack on the regime of B. Assad was not spontaneous, and it was known both to Americans and Israelis. Turkey was preparing to expel Russia and Iran from Syria, presenting all interested parties, including the US and Israel, with the fact of a radical change in the balance of power in the region. The attack by pro-Turkish Syrian militants was successful, and the Turkish plan worked faster than planned in Ankara, as the Turkish media reported itself. The central power in Syria ended up in the hands of Turkey-supported radical forces, which are more complicated and unpredictable for Israel than the Assad regime, with which Tel Aviv had established a hidden but fairly intensive dialogue over the last few years.

According to the Israeli media, Bashar-al-Assad has maintained contacts with the Israeli leadership since early 2021, despite the fact that the IDF constantly carried out attacks on the Syrian border and deep into the Arab Republic⁸. Apparently, Israel was satisfied with this format of relations with B. Assad, in which the Iranian factor in Syria was contained by the Jewish state not only by force but also by the Syrian leader's own intentions of himself to balance between Tehran and Tel Aviv.

As Turkey begins to assume Iran's role in Syria, Israel, whose relations with Turkey have become highly strained, must reevaluate its assessments and perspectives on the geopolitical configuration of the region. The Shiite "*Axis of resistance*" in the Middle East has been destroyed, but this does not give Israel time to breathe, which this time found itself facing the threat of "*neo-Ottoman revisionism*". In the days of the fall of the "Assad regime", the world media reported that Israeli tanks were 20 km from Damascus. In Israel itself, the Syrian events and the situation in this country preferred to be viewed from another angle: Turkish artillery is stationed about 80 km from Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. These realities, against the background of the scandalous statements by R. Erdogan and other radical representatives of the Turkish establishment, form a picture for B. Netanyahu that contradicts the ideas of Israelis about their security and main enemies in the region.

Turkey has changed the reality in the Middle East, forcing Tel Aviv to reconsider its defense doctrine and geopolitical priorities. According to *The Jerusalem Post*, this conclusion was reached after months of work by a specially established Israeli government commission responsible for "*the development of the armed forces*", led by Yaakov Nagel, a retired IDF brigadier general, former national security advisor to the Israeli prime minister, and head of the Israeli National Security Council. In early January 2025, the commission presented a report to the government, deeming the conflict of interests between Israel and Turkey in the Middle East inevitable, and a war between the two countries highly likely⁹. According to Israeli media, after the Commission's report, Netanyahu stated that Turkey had

⁸ "Israeli media: Syria is holding secret talks with Israel mediated by Russia". KATEHON (in Rus.), 18.06.2021, <https://katehon.com/ru/news/izraillskie-smi-siriya-vedet-taynye-peregovory-s-izrailem-pri-posrednichestve-rossii/> (download date: 20.01.2025).

⁹ "Israel should prepare for an armed conflict with Turkey". BFM.RU (in Rus.), 04.05.2024, <https://www.bfm.ru/news/565355/> (download date: 21.01.2025).

become the main threat to Israel in the region, an unprecedented case in the history of the Jewish state, which has had allied relations with the Turkish Republic since its founding. The statement is even more resonant because, in the context of threat forecasting, the Israeli leadership did not mention the Islamic Republic of Iran as an existential enemy for the first time¹⁰. The emphasis and tone of Netanyahu's statement indicate that the Israeli prime minister has not only taken note of Nagel's report but is ready to base the country's new defense doctrine on it.

Based on its focus (*"Development of the Armed Forces"*), Nagel's commission presented recommendations for increasing the country's defense capabilities to address the tasks of containing Turkey. In particular, it proposed increasing Israel's military budget by 15 billion shekels (about \$3.5 billion) annually and purchasing new volumes of weapons for the army, mainly missiles, UAVs, air defense systems, and electronic warfare systems of both domestic and foreign production. The commission did not provide any political recommendations. At least, there is no public information about this. However, it should be assumed that the development of political and economic measures to contain Turkey, was carried out in parallel with the work of Nagel's commission, by the Jewish state's intelligence services and diplomatic structures. The set of plans and actions in this area is quite extensive, and the deal with the ceasefire in Gaza and, presumably, subsequently in Lebanon, should be considered a central measure. First and foremost, peace in Gaza will primarily allow Israel to free up military resources that have been dislocated there and redeploy them to the Syrian frontier, which currently poses the greatest threat in the context of a hypothetical confrontation with Turkey and its proxies. It also contributes to easing tensions in relations with the Arab world, primarily with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, whose support is extremely important for Tel Aviv, given the Saudis' complex relations with Turkey due to the latter's ambitions for the Islamic heritage of the caliphate. At the same time, Tel Aviv needs to deprive Ankara of the lever of political pressure on Israel in the form of the Palestinian issue, as it is precisely the factor of this bloody conflict that has allowed Turkey to radicalize its rhetoric against the *"Zionist regime"* and direct the factor of Islam against it.

Given all the above circumstances, it becomes clear why Netanyahu stopped *"halfway"* in the matter of destroying Hamas, as characterized by the head of the far-right Israeli party *"Otzma Yehudit"* Itamar Ben-Gvir, who resigned his ministerial powers and collapsed the coalition with Netanyahu's *Likud* party. After the Syrian events, peace with the hated Hamas has become a very valuable political asset for Tel Aviv, outweighing the dreams of the far-right radicals of the Jewish state and their strong influence in the country. Peace in Gaza and the Palestinian Authority on the West Bank of the Jordan River is primarily a blow to Turkish interests, and Netanyahu took this step even under the threat of losing the traditional support of the ultra-right circles that ensured his last election victory. All described is also relevant in the case of the Lebanese problem, negotiations on the resolution of which, according to some reports, Israel is intensively conducting with Beirut and representatives of Hezbollah with the mediation of the United States. Tel Aviv does not need

¹⁰ "Israel is calculating the possibility of war with Turkey". "Nezavisimaya Gazeta", 08.01.2025, https://www.ng.ru/world/2025-01-08/1_9166_israel.html (download date: 22.01.2025).

a Lebanese campaign now, especially since the elimination of the hierarchical top of the Shiite group already allows Netanyahu's government to reasonably present the operation in Lebanon as *“successful and achieving its goal”*. Moreover, after the overthrow of Assad's power, the Shiite movement no longer poses an existential threat to the Jewish state, as the land connection with Iran and the channels for delivering weapons from the IRI have been almost completely neutralized. Hypothetically, otherwise, if Israel continues the dismantling of Hezbollah, then Turkey will be the only force capable of taking on the role of the organization's curator, its main sponsor, and arms supplier.

Additionally, as one of the necessary measures for the comprehensive containment of Turkey, Israel is considering joint support with the United States for the Kurdish movement in Syria and Iraq, which the ARVAK Center has repeatedly mentioned in [previous publications](#). The Kurdish issue is a well-known “Achilles' heel” of Turkey, which Tel Aviv cannot afford to neglect in the current situation. Especially considering that Kurds, with certain external support, can complicate Turkey's breakthrough to the energy resources of the Persian Gulf. In the context of the confrontation between Turkey and Israel, the economic factor can play a decisive role in ensuring the growth of the combat potential and self-sufficiency of both sides. In this context, Israel's actions are also evident.

Notably, economically, both countries were interdependent until the last moment, and despite the increasing tension between them, trade relations have been maintained. Moreover, the trade and economic cooperation between Turkey and Israel grew in parallel with the radicalization of their political positions towards each other. Israel's operation in Gaza contributed to the fact that Turkey's steel exports to Israel increased to 300% of pre-war levels, and exports of petroleum products and consumer goods more than doubled. This occurred even after the Turkish leadership officially announced the complete severance of trade relations with Israel on May 2, 2024¹¹. Reports of Turkey's shadow trade with Israel were persistently denied until, finally, in Turkey itself, there was talk of the government's *“unlawful lies”*, which, as it turned out, only increased the volume of trade and economic deals with the Jewish state. The last person to openly declare this and provide evidence was Turkish MP Omer Faruk Gergerlioglu. He confirmed the existence of a scheme for the illegal delivery of oil and other goods to Israel by sea, documented as destined for Italy, Greece, and other Mediterranean countries. Facing a severe financial and economic crisis, Ankara did not reject the opportunity to receive money from shadow cooperation with the *“enemy regime”*, which, due to the *de facto* blockade of the route through the Red Sea by the Houthis, was forced to ensure its supply of strategic raw materials and goods through Turkey's capabilities.

Nevertheless, it is evident that in the face of growing confrontation it was deemed necessary in Israel, to free Tel Aviv from its dependence on Turkish trade and supplies. In this context, one of the main achievements of the ceasefire in Gaza was the announcement by the Houthis of lifting the blockade in the Aden Strait of the Red Sea and the free passage of

¹¹ “Turkey ends trade with Israel”, Euronews (in Rus.), 04.05.2024, <https://ru.euronews.com/2024/05/04/turkey-israel-trade-ban/> (download date: 22.01.2025).

ships following from the Indian Ocean to Israeli ports and back¹². Based on this, it can be assumed that if the ceasefire regime in Gaza is maintained, which the Houthis set as the main condition for maintaining unhindered navigation in the Red Sea, Tel Aviv will implement a strategic reorganization of its trade logistics and change its suppliers of raw materials. This primarily involves the complete abandonment of Turkish steel and construction materials, as well as Azerbaijani oil if Baku, in line with Ankara, prefers to spoil its relations with Tel Aviv. Thus, on the eve of an escalation with Turkey, Israel will not only acquire the existentially necessary independence from Turkish supplies but will also deal a severe blow to the already unstable positions of the Turkish economy. This is a bad prospect for Ankara, which, despite the discontent of wide sections of the public, allowed Turkish companies to cooperate with Israel through shadowy methods and thereby stay afloat. In the event of an actual and complete severance of trade and economic relations with the Jewish state, a significant segment of the Turkish business community will increase the pressure on the authorities in Ankara. For example, Turkish construction companies are already very dissatisfied with R. Erdogan's policies, as they have been deprived of the opportunity to participate in the reconstruction of destroyed Gaza due to Ankara's anti-Israeli rhetoric and actions.

Thus, it can be concluded that the recent processes surrounding the situation in Gaza far exceed the scope of the Palestinian-Israeli issue. They involve global changes in the Middle East, where new interests, a new balance of power, and new geopolitical rivalries are forming, with a high likelihood of transitioning to a "hot phase". Israel and Turkey are still moving towards a collision, and the reality suggests that if both sides maintain a policy of maximalism, a conflict in one form or another will become inevitable.

¹² "Houthis stopped attacking commercial vessels after the Gaza ceasefire". Kommersant (in Rus.), 20.01.2025, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/7444385/> (download date: 21.01.2025).