

# Erdogan drives toward armed clash with Israel. Oil and gas at stake

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Tayyip Erdogan wants war with Israel

Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan this week coolly moved his country step by provocative step towards an armed clash with Israel – not just over the Palestinian issue, but because he covets the gas and oil resources of the eastern Mediterranean opposite Israel's shores.

Thursday night, Sept. 8, he announced that Turkish warships will escort any Turkish aid vessels for Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. In his remarks to Al Jazeera television, the Turkish prime minister also said he had taken steps "to stop Israel from unilaterally exploiting natural resources from the eastern Mediterranean."

He did not say what steps he had taken. However, for some time now, he has moved mountains to isolate Israel by drawing a double diplomatic noose around it.

If Turkish ships breach the Israeli naval blockade of Gaza, which a UN report last week pronounced legitimate under international law, Erdogan will become the first Muslim leader to embark on military action in the Palestinian cause. The Arab nations which fought Israel time after time in the past will be made to look ineffectual and the Turkish leader the regional big shot. Even Iran would be put in the shade for never daring to provoke Israel the way Turkey has.

The Turkish prime minister clings to the belief that the foremost Arab powers, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, which have been watching his maneuvers with deep suspicion, will have no choice but to play ball with him now that he has confronted Israel. The first crack in the Arab ice came about Thursday, Sept. 8, in the form of Egyptian consent to join the Turkish Navy in sea maneuvers in the eastern Mediterranean.

Erdogan plans to send his warships into this water for two missions:

1. To split the Israel's small Navy into two heads – one for sustaining the blockade against Gaza and one for safeguarding the gas and oil rigs opposite its shores.
2. To scare Israel into the full or partial stoppage of its offshore oil and gas operations, thereby robbing it of energy power status and substantial economic gains. Erdogan is determined never to let Israel overshadow Turkey in the regional stakes and will put a stop to the Jewish state's progress – even if military aggression is called for.

debkaf's military sources report that the Turkish prime minister is resolved to corner Israel into an inescapable military confrontation. It might not happen at once or even within a week, but it will happen a lot sooner than many Israeli politicians and military chiefs imagine because he is using Israel as his ticket to regional prestige.

Erdogan is driven to assert Turkey's importance additionally by the way he was shouldered aside in Libya. Ankara invested heavily in its support for the Libyan rebels. But when British, French, Jordanian and Qatari special forces stormed Tripoli on Aug. 21 and overthrew the Qaddafi regime, Turkey was left behind and forgotten in the heat of the action.

From Ankara, the Turkish leader watches the sharing out of Libyan oil as the spoils of war among the Western powers and Qatar as an outsider.

Since he can't pluck up courage to intervene in Syria, he has plumped for seizing eastern Mediterranean natural resources to elevate Turkey's standing. Not only will he snatch the treasure out of Israel's hands but no less

important, he will challenge his country's traditional rival Greece whose military ties with Israel are growing stronger.

As for Washington, Erdogan is counting on President Barack Obama's backing in a military clash with Israel. Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Ehud Barak are less confident of US support. This gives Turkey an edge in a conflict – the cost of the passive military policy pursued consistently by Israeli leaders in the face of security threats.

The Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas will also suffer if Turkey and Israel come to blows by being overshadowed.