



By: TA | AP Insight

Turkey believes Iran is open to back-channel diplomacy



Turkey's powerful foreign minister said Saturday that there is no serious initiative to resume negotiations between the United States and Iran but that he believes Iran is open to back-channel talks.

The comments by Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan to The Associated Press in an exclusive interview came as Ankara is striving to stay out of the widening **war in the Middle East**.

Ankara, which has good relations with both Washington and Tehran, had attempted to mediate a solution between them before the U.S. and Israel attacked Iran two weeks ago, triggering the war.

"The conditions are not very much conducive" to diplomacy now, Fidan said. The Iranians "feel betrayed" because for a second time they were attacked while in active negotiations with the U.S. over their nuclear program, he said, but added, "I think they are open to any sensible back-channel diplomacy."

Fidan, 57, served as Turkey's intelligence chief for more than a decade before being appointed foreign minister in 2023.

Key role in formulating Turkey's Middle East policy

In that role, he played a key part in shaping **Turkey's policy** in the Middle East, particularly toward Syria, Iraq and Iran. He is considered to be one of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's most trusted advisers and one of the potential candidates to succeed him.

Turkey has maintained a neutral position in the war, criticizing both the U.S and Israeli strikes against Iran and Tehran's retaliatory actions against Gulf states that host U.S. bases.

Fidan said he has been attempting to persuade the Iranians to halt those attacks.

Turkey's top priority is to remain outside of the conflict

Fidan said Turkey's top priority is to remain outside of the conflict, even after three missiles believed to come from Iran were **intercepted over Turkey by NATO** defenses.

Turkey is a NATO member and an air base in southern Turkey is used by NATO forces, including U.S. troops.

Iranian officials have insisted that they did not fire at Turkey, although the available data shows that the missiles came from Iran, the Turkish foreign minister said.

He ruled out a military response at this stage, saying that NATO's defenses were effective and that Ankara's "primary objective" is to stay out of the conflict.

"I know that we are being provoked and we will be provoked, but this is our objective," he said. "We want to stay out of this war."

Fidan, who has regular contact with Iranian officials, said he does not know the severity of the wounds suffered by Iran's new Supreme Leader Ayatollah **Mojtaba Khamenei** in a strike earlier in the war, but that "what we know is that he is alive and functioning."

Khamenei was appointed to replace his father, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who was killed Feb. 28 during the war's opening salvo.

Fidan said "the process of electing a new leader and the medical conditions of the new leader, it created a gap" in Iran's power structure and "I think that gap has been filled by the high command of the Revolutionary Guards," referring to the paramilitary force reporting to the Supreme Leader.

A failed peace initiative

Before the conflict, Turkey tried to avert a war by offering to host talks in Istanbul that would have brought U.S., Iran and other regional countries together.

Iran later opted for talks mediated by Oman, without the participation of regional actors

and focusing solely on its nuclear program – talks that ultimately failed.

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Fidan said that Iran had refused to discuss its missile program and the proxy armed groups it backs in the region, including the Lebanese Hezbollah and a group of Iraqi militias – both of which have now waded into the regional war.

Turkey had proposed that “the Americans and the Iranians can discuss fully the nuclear issue and we as regional countries can come together to discuss the other two with Iran” as part of an initiative to build trust within the region.

Tensions with Israel

Turkey and Israel have tense relations, with Erdogan becoming one of the most vocal critics of Israel’s actions in Gaza.

Turkey has cut trade ties with Israel and frequently accuses Israel of committing genocide. Israel in turn accuses Turkey of supporting Hamas, the Palestinian militant group that launched the deadly Oct. 7, 2023 attack in southern Israel.

Since Israel launched its strikes on Iran, some have gone as far as to suggest that Turkey could be the next target. Fidan dismissed that possibility, while acknowledging that the war in Iran gave Turkey an increased incentive to step up its own production of weapons and air defenses.

As long as Netanyahu is there, Israel will always identify somebody as an enemy - Hakan Fidan

“As long as Netanyahu is there, (Israel) will always identify somebody as an enemy,” he said. “Because they need it to advance their own agenda. If not Turkey, they would name some other country in the region.”

He criticized Israel’s role elsewhere in the region, including in Syria, where both countries have strategic interests.

Turkey has been a strong backer of the current government in Damascus led by interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa, the former leader of an Islamist rebel group.

Israel regards al-Sharaa’s government with suspicion and, since it took power in December 2024, Israeli forces have seized control of a swathe of land in southern Syria and launched airstrikes on Syrian military facilities, wiping out much of the country’s arsenal.

Israel has said its presence in Syria is meant to secure its border from another Oct. 7-style attack.

“They are after not security, they are after more land,” Fidan said. “So as long as they don’t give up this idea, there will always be a war in the Middle East.”

An ongoing role in Gaza

Turkey has also sought to play an active role in postwar Gaza. It has joined U.S. President Donald Trump’s Board of Peace – boycotted by many other countries that see it as an attempt to supplant the United Nations and criticize the lack of a role for Palestinians – and has offered to supply troops for an international stabilization force in the battered enclave.



We are not under the illusion that the Board of Peace will address all the existing issues - Hakan Fidan

Fidan said it was important for Turkey to join the Board of Peace, as an “opportunity” to stop the war, although “we are not under the illusion that the Board of Peace will address all the existing issues.”

Fidan said Turkey has not received a request to contribute troops to the stabilization force, which he attributed to the Israeli opposition, but added, “I think the Americans are quietly trying to settle the issue with the Israelis to allow Turkey to participate.”

Fidan said however, that Turkey’s priority was the establishment of an administration committee for Gaza, which is to be made up of 15 politically independent Palestinian administrators.

“We expect them to go into Gaza and start their work,” he said. “This has not started yet, so we need to start from somewhere.”