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LIVE



BREAKING



At least 22 killed in Israeli bombardment of house in Gaza's Khan Younis

Sweden

Turkey expresses outrage after far-right politician burns a Quran during an Islamophobic protest in front of its embassy in Stockholm.



21 Jan 2023



Turkey denounced Sweden after protests in front of its embassy in Stockholm including the burning of a Quran by far-right supporters and a separate demonstration by Kurdish activists.

Ankara said on Saturday it was cancelling a visit by Sweden's defence minister

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The Quran burning was carried out by Rasmus Paludan, leader of Danish far-right political party Hard Line. In April last year, Paludan's announcement of a Quran burning "tour" during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan [sparked riots](#) across Sweden.

Surrounded by police, Paludan set fire to the holy book with a lighter following a long diatribe of almost an hour, in which he attacked Islam and immigration in Sweden. About 100 people gathered nearby for a peaceful counterdemonstration.

"If you don't think there should be freedom of expression, you have to live somewhere else," he said.

The Turkish foreign ministry responded immediately in a statement.

"We condemn in the strongest possible terms the vile attack on our holy book... Permitting this anti-Islam act, which targets Muslims and insults our sacred values, under the guise of freedom of expression is completely unacceptable," the ministry said.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu vented fury at Swedish authori-

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Several Arab countries – including Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Kuwait – also denounced the Quran-burning.

“Saudi Arabia calls for spreading the values of dialogue, tolerance, and coexistence, and rejects hatred and extremism,” the Saudi foreign ministry said in a statement.

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A small group gathered outside the Swedish embassy in Ankara to protest the Quran-burning. A protest was also scheduled to take place in Istanbul on Saturday evening.

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Parties in Sweden election 'completely even' as far right surges



'Clear crime of hatred'

Swedish Foreign Minister Tobias Billstrom called the Islamophobic provocations "appalling".

"Sweden has a far-reaching freedom of expression, but it does not imply that the Swedish Government, or myself, support the opinions expressed," Billstrom said on Twitter.

A separate protest took place in the city supporting Kurds and against Sweden's bid to join NATO. A group of pro-Turkish demonstrators also held a rally outside the embassy. All three events had police permits.

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Turkey earlier was angered by Sweden's green light for the protest in front of its embassy amid ongoing tensions following Ankara's objections to Sweden's bid to [join the NATO military alliance](#).

Turkish Defence Minister Hulusi Akar denounced Sweden's government for failing to take measures against "disgusting" anti-Turkish protests on its soil. Akar said the scheduled January 27 visit by his Swedish counterpart Pål Jonson no longer held "any importance or point".

Turkish presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin condemned the demonstration as a "clear crime of hatred".

"Allowing this action despite all our warnings is encouraging hate crimes and Islamophobia," he tweeted. "The attack on sacred values is not freedom but modern barbarism."

Billström told TT news agency on Friday that Sweden respects freedom of speech.

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'Extremists and loonies'

Carl Bildt, a former prime minister of Sweden, told Al Jazeera there was still progress being made on the issue of Turkey's approval for Sweden's ascension into NATO despite the tensions.

"There are extremists and loonies running around trying to sabotage the whole process. They should not be given [importance] if the authorities in Ankara are truly interested in coming to an agreement," Bildt said.

Turkey summoned the Swedish ambassador on Friday to condemn the protests, saying rallies by pro-Kurdish groups linked to the PKK would be a violation of the joint memorandum signed between Turkey, Sweden and Finland that prevented a Turkish veto for the Nordic countries' NATO accession in June.

Sweden and neighbouring Finland [dropped decades of military non-alignment](#) last year when they applied to join the Western defence alliance in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Turkey has so far refused to approve their bids, which need sign-off by all member states, and tied its favourable vote to Swedish steps to extradite people it accuses of terrorism or of having played a part in the 2016 coup attempt against President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Turkey argues that Sweden is not doing enough to crack down on Kurdish groups that Ankara views as "terrorists".

Sweden's ambassador to Turkey was summoned last week after a video posted

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