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Hamas denounces Kerry's call on Erdogan to delay Gaza visit



The Hamas rulers of Gaza on Sunday slammed U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry for urging the Turkish prime minister to delay a visit to the Palestinian territory. Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri accused Kerry and Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas -- who met in Istanbul earlier in the day -- of "collusion in a bid to maintain the [Israeli] blockade on Gaza." Kerry met separately in Istanbul with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Abbas, and told reporters he had asked Erdogan to wait for the "right conditions" before going ahead with a planned visit next month to Gaza. "We have expressed to the prime minister that it would be better to delay [the visit to Gaza]," Kerry told reporters.

Kerry has visited the region several times in recent weeks, holding talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. Erdogan had been expected to visit Gaza this month but postponed his trip at the request of the United States. He will travel to Washington to meet President Barack Obama on May 16. "I think the prime minister listened very graciously to that and he has been very thoughtful and sensitive about it and if needs be we certainly could have further conversations about it when he comes to Washington," Kerry added. Hamas's refusal to recognize the Jewish state and past vows to destroy it are a key reason behind an Israeli blockade of the coastal territory since Hamas seized it from the more moderate pro-Western Fatah movement in 2007. Europe and the United States have long demanded Hamas drop violence and recognize Israel as a condition for any dialogue.