



Erdogan's security people confront UN guards

JONATHAN M. KATZ, *Hurriyet Daily News* , Tuesday, 27 September 2011



United Nations: This much is agreed: Last Friday at the United Nations, as all eyes were on the Palestinian president's speech asking for statehood recognition, U.N. guards and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's security detail were in the hallway in a shoving match.

It is still not clear exactly what turned an apparent disagreement over security rules into a physical confrontation. Cell phones and hallway conversations at the U.N. headquarters in New York were still buzzing about the incident on Monday, three days later, but officials on all sides shied away from reporters when asked for details.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan speaks at the 66th session of the United Nations General Assembly at U.N. headquarters. AP Photo.

When asked about the fight at his daily noon briefing, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon spokesman Martin Nesirky referred to "unfortunate misunderstandings." He added that "necessary action has been taken to prevent such misunderstandings and that the issue had been "satisfactorily resolved." He wouldn't respond to reports that Ban apologized to Erdogan, but he did confirm that the two met. U.N. security officers referred all questions back to Nesirky's office.

Back at their offices across First Avenue, the Turkish delegation also declined to discuss the fight. Press official Yesim Sertkan said her office was waiting for a reply from the delegation's own ambassador.

That leaves just glimpses of the altercation, its build-up and fallout from various diplomats and officials around the opening session of the U.N. General Assembly, all of

whom spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the matter is diplomatically sensitive.

Several officials said that Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan was late for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' speech and that his guards were trying to rush him through a cordoned-off exit. (An account in the foreign policy blog Turtle Bay said the door did not actually lead into the General Assembly hall.) The ensuing fight was described as heated and "serious," with pushing and shoving lasting for several minutes and even spilling down the stairs onto another floor.

One U.N. guard was reportedly hospitalized afterward with bruised ribs.

The tumult caused a security alert that led to diplomats outside the General Assembly hall being ordered out of U.N. headquarters to wait in a steady rainstorm until the situation was under control.

The sources say that initially as many as nine U.N. security guards were suspended but after a protest, they were called back to work and placed on administrative duty, out of uniform and off the beat as the matter is investigated. It was not immediately known if the Turkish security guards have been similarly reassigned or punished.

One diplomat said he witnessed Turkish security officials being involved in another incident during a high-level meeting at the U.N. on Libya last Monday. The diplomat said a Turkish security member went under the rope in a cordoned-off corridor as U.S. President Barack Obama was about to arrive and was confronted by U.N. security guards. There was some pushing and shoving until Turkey's U.N. ambassador stepped in and calmed the situation, the diplomat said.