

Israel-Hamas war

Israel's 'trolling' foreign minister confronts the world

Foreign minister Katz has shunned diplomatic protocol to lampoon critics with cartoonish social media posts



Foreign minister Israel Katz has used social media to troll both enemies and allies of the Jewish state © FT montage/Eyal Warshavsky

James Shotter in Jerusalem, **Barney Jopson** in Madrid and **Jude Webber** in Dublin 16 HOURS AGO

Angry at Spain's decision to recognise Palestine, Israel's top diplomat responded with a trademark move: social media crafted to cause supreme offence.

Shunning tried-and-tested methods of diplomacy, Israel Katz published a video splicing images of Hamas's October 7 attack with stock footage of a couple dancing flamenco. The foreign minister's message to Spain's leadership: "Hamas thanks you for your service."

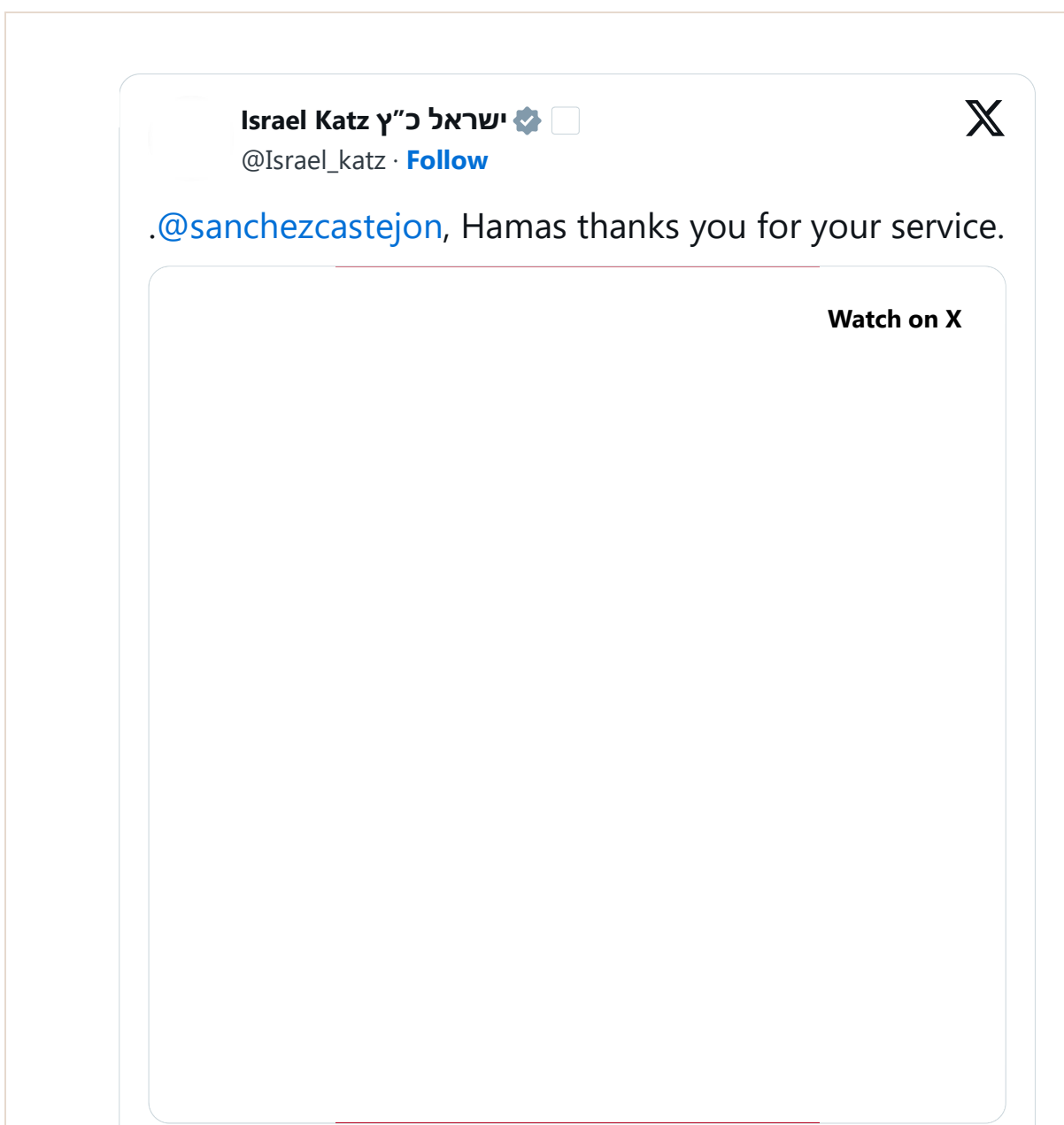
It was not a one-off. Alongside conventionally bland diplomatic fare, such as publicising meetings with officials or rallying support for Israel's Eurovision candidate, Katz's account on X has often used cartoonish posts to attack and lampoon Israel's critics.

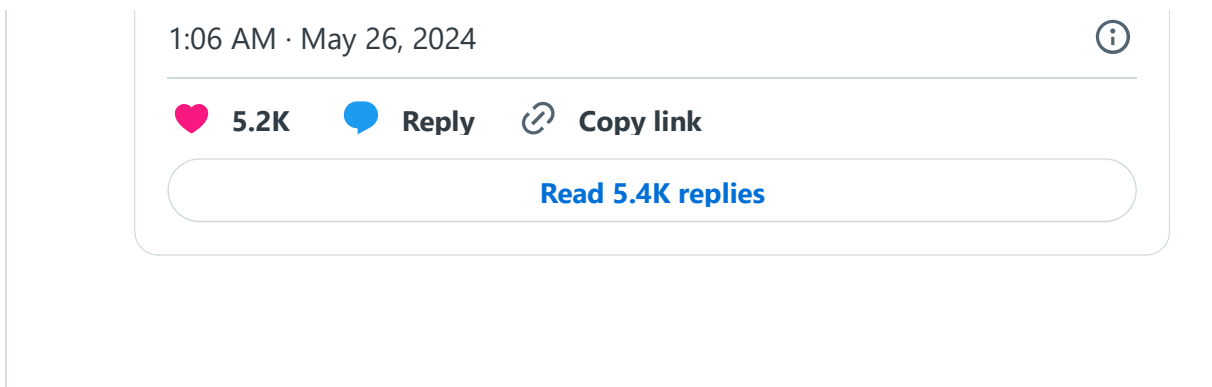
Truculence is a feature of modern diplomacy well beyond [Israel](#). China's "wolf warrior" envoys rammed home Beijing's message for years — while Donald Trump's White House mastered the art of insulting enemies and allies alike. But Katz's brazen attitude also reflects a bigger shift in Israeli diplomacy under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has pushed an unapologetically no-holds-barred approach to dealing with Israel's critics.

The Spanish video this weekend was accompanied by similar broadsides at Norway and Ireland for their simultaneous recognition of Palestine. The Irish video spliced the October 7 footage with the feet of someone Irish dancing and the same Hamas-thanks-you message.

And as Israel and Turkey engaged barbs in April over the [war in Gaza](#), Katz's account posted an unflattering Photoshopped image of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan sprawled on a bed, dreaming of himself in the regalia of an Ottoman sultan.

"Erdoğan dreams of re-establishing the Ottoman Empire . . . The man of the Muslim Brotherhood [Erdoğan] dreams of destroying Israel, conquering Jerusalem and leading the Muslim world," ran the text accompanying the image, before suggesting the Turkish premier would be better off just watching glorified Ottoman dramas on television.





Among the diplomatic corps in Israel, the posts from Katz's account have been met with a mixture of bafflement and eye-rolling. "I don't think any other foreign minister is doing what he's doing," said one diplomat.

"It's just weird," said another. "I think he thinks it works . . . But it's not effective. People see it as aggressive and offensive, not as an effective means of communication."

The social media posts have also drawn angry reactions from national capitals. Ireland's finance minister Michael McGrath called the Irish video "particularly distasteful", while Spain's foreign minister called the Spanish video "scandalous and abominable".

The Spanish video also drew criticism from Zeina Sabbah, one of the two flamenco dancers, who — in a remarkable twist — is of Palestinian descent.

"I'd like somebody to help me complain about it, because what they're doing is laughing. Laughing about Spain, laughing about what's going on, laughing about the support Palestine has received," she told the Financial Times.

Officials have also taken umbrage at Katz's penchant for making traditionally private parts of diplomacy public. In response to the recognition of Palestine by Spain, Norway and Ireland, the countries' ambassadors were summoned to the foreign ministry to watch a video of Hamas's October 7 attack in front of members of the media. Katz also published a letter prohibiting the Spanish consulate in Jerusalem from providing services to Palestinians in the occupied West Bank.

Irish foreign minister Micheál Martin slammed the fact that his country's ambassador was reprimanded in front of the media as "totally unacceptable".



Sarımsaklı ve Karadimadamları Sarıca'da. Müslüman Kardeşler in adını
 @RTErdogan, İsrail'i çökertmeyi, Kudüs'ü fethetmeyi ve Müslüman
 Show more



A post on X by Israel Katz making fun of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

Katz's spokesperson declined to comment. A person familiar with the approach said it was effective and a reflection of the fact that traditional tools were not enough in a time of war. "We need to shock the world. This is not a usual time," the person said.

Diplomats and analysts said the undiplomatic approach was partly a reflection of the status of Israel's foreign ministry. Katz is not a member of Israel's five-man war cabinet, and the ministry has generally been at arms length from the centre of power in Netanyahu's governments.

"It's a means for him to make noise and be seen," said the second diplomat, who noted the foreign ministry's general lack of prominence.

Although Katz's posts attacking Israel's critics in countries such as Spain and Turkey have often been posted in both Hebrew and the language of his target, they were also designed to have a domestic impact, analysts said.

Louis Fishman, an associate professor at Brooklyn College in New York who specialises in Turkish and Israeli affairs, said the brazen approach could potentially help Katz in a post-Netanyahu era, or within government. Targets such as Erdoğan, who regularly launches diatribes at Netanyahu's government, are themselves deeply unpopular in Israel.

"It's a free-for-all," said Fishman, who described Katz as "the minister in charge of trolling Turkey".

Nimrod Goren, senior fellow for Israeli affairs at the Middle East Institute in Washington, said Katz's posts also reflect a broader anger in Israel at the international community's stance towards the country and the sense that "no matter what Israel does, the international community will oppose it".

But on the other hand he noted that Israel's successful operation to repel Iran's missile salvo last month relied on allies. "For Israel to achieve its national security requirements, it cannot work alone and it has to be part of a community," he said. "So going back to this approach of 'we will attack anyone who is critical' . . . doesn't work in the current reality."

Additional reporting by Ayla Jean Yackley in Istanbul and Carmen Muela in Madrid

[Copyright](#) The Financial Times Limited 2024. All rights reserved.
