

Turkey's regime seeks to isolate Israel using 'reconciliation' propaganda



Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan delivers a speech during a protest against the recent killings of Palestinian protesters on the Gaza-Israel border and the US embassy move to Jerusalem, in Istanbul, Turkey May 18, 2018 — (photo credit: REUTERS/MURAD SEZER)

After a year of invasions, attacks, aggression, ethnic-cleansing, using Syrian refugees as mercenaries, buying Russian defense technology and working with Iran to oppose the US role in Syria, Turkey's regime is trying to change its tune to sabotage Israel's growing friendship with Greece and the UAE.

Ankara has worked closely with western lobbyists and experts who it has cultivated over the years to push this narrative. It is a sophisticated attempt aimed at trying to convince Israel's government that Ankara wants a new leaf in relations, but Ankara refuses to change and merely wants to muddy the waters between Israel and Jerusalem's partners in the region.

The push began at *Israel HaYom*, a newspaper Ankara assumes is read by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and which it thinks is a line directly into Israel's right-leaning ruling politicians. Turkey watched closely the US election, afraid of president-elect Joe Biden after having poured support towards the Trump administrations.

Between December 5 and 6 articles appeared in Hebrew and then English suggesting that Turkey wanted reconciliation with Israel after a decade in which Ankara's increasingly anti-Israel regime had hosted Hamas and compared Israel to the Nazis. The "reconciliation" would involve Turkey getting everything it wanted and ruining Israel's relations with Greece and Cyprus.

Israel had signed a gas pipeline deal with Greece and Cyprus this year and Turkey

wants to sabotage that. So “reconciliation” would mean Israel losing allies and Turkey hosting Hamas terrorists and calling Israel a nazi country. Turkey would get everything. Israel: Nothing.

Turkey also pushed this story via *Al-Monitor*, with an article claiming shared interests on Iran and in the Caucasus push Israel and Turkey closer. In fact Turkey often welcomes Iran regime figures and with Iran it supports Hamas and vows to “liberate” Jerusalem. There is no evidence Israel and Turkey have any shared interests on Iran. But the article claimed “secret contacts between Turkey and Israel.”

There was. No evidence of these supposedly “secret” contacts except Turkey purposely leaking this to make it seem Israel was ready to do Ankara’s bidding. This is the same Turkish regime that said “Jerusalem is ours” and frequently bashes Israel. The regime has never said anything positive about Israel in the last decade. An article on November 30 at *Al-Monitor* also suggested a “secret channel.” If it’s secret why is Turkey talking so much about it to journalists?

Nevertheless, the willing lobbyists who work on Ankara’s behalf pushed this narrative, complete with maps made in Turkey printed in Israeli media and think tanks. The maps showed Turkey controlling waters off Cyprus and even maybe carving away part of Israel’s Exclusive Economic Zone. This would be “reconciliation” by way of surrendering Israel’s decades of work on gas development at sea and Israel’s work with Cyprus, Greece, and Egypt. Israel’s work with Greece is also linked to the new peace with the UAE because the UAE and Greece are increasing cooperation.

Turkey’s regime led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan has roots in the Muslim Brotherhood and is the main opponent of Egypt’s current leadership. Turkey even threatened to break relations with the UAE for normalizing ties with Israel. Ankara has worked to isolate Israel and stop normalization, threatening countries that work with Israel. This is part of Turkey’s “reconciliation.”

Ankara also pretended it was willing to “mend fences” by appointing a new envoy who is known for anti-Israel and anti-Zionist views. Reports last week said Turkey had appointed Ufuk Ulutas as a new envoy. Ulutas wrote in 2013 that Zionism as a “culturally/religiously racist” ideology and that it has “separatist content as well as expansionist policies, the plan committed many massacres, displacing millions

of people. It physically and mentally tortured locals.” This is Turkey’s attempt to “mend fences” with Israel, by sending an envoy who accused Israel of “displacing millions” and has called Zionism “racist.”

It was Turkey that withdrew its ambassador from Israel several times over the past decade. Turkey’s regime helped support the Mavi Marmara that tried to break the blockade on Gaza in 2010. Ankara then ordered Israel to apologize for stopping the ship in a raid that led to ten deaths after Israeli soldiers were attacked.

Turkey was the main opponent of US President Donald Trump moving the US embassy to Jerusalem. Erdogan compared Israel to Nazi Germany at the UN in September 2019. Turkey gave Hamas leaders, including numerous wanted terrorists, a red carpet twice this year, leading to the US State Department condemning Ankara.

Reports in the UK suggest that Hamas plans terror attacks from Turkey and has done cyber attacks and that the Mossad concluded Turkey is a rising threat, according to the Times of London. In addition Turkey harassed an Israeli ship off Cyprus last year and the IDF has said Turkey’s threats could be a challenge, according to an annual report reported in January.

Ankara has made no moves to condemn Hamas terrorism or apologize for comparing Israel to the Nazis. While the UAE is celebrating Hanukkah and welcoming Jews, Turkey is increasingly antisemitic and extremely anti-Israel. Nevertheless the narrative from Ankara continues.

While Turkey is the largest jailor of journalists and all media in Turkey is pro-government, there are no articles in Turkey supporting Israel, but foreign newspapers are being fed information from Ankara about the “reconciliation.” Turkey even pushed an article at the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, arguing that Israel should ignore Cyprus water rights and gas claims and create a direct maritime jurisdiction with Turkey. This would give Turkey everything and Israel nothing and violate agreements with Cyprus and international law.

Turkey did this before in the spring, trying to slow down Israel’s energy ties with Egypt, Greece and Cyprus and France. Turkey claims that the US has obstructed its “geostrategic destiny,” according to an article at the Hoover Institution. The

destiny appears to be one that includes occupying Syria, ethnically-cleansing Kurds and supporting attacks on Armenians, as well as hosting Hamas and fueling extremism from the Middle East to Europe.

The story of the “secret” push to mend-fences with Israel is all about Turkey trying to use media and its long propaganda arm abroad to harm ties between Israel, Greece, Cyprus and the UAE, making it appear Israel is conducting “secret” talks behind the backs of its friends. Turkey leaked this entirely to harm Israel’s relations and even sent maps to Israeli media to use, maps that ignore Cyprus and violate agreements Israel has.

Israel’s friends and partners in Cyprus, Greece, Egypt and the UAE are the opposite of Ankara’s regime. They don’t host Hamas and call Israel a Nazi country, they don’t bash Israel and they don’t appoint envoys known for claiming Zionism is racist. Ankara is one of the most hostile countries in the world to Israel outside of Iran. No other countries in the world besides Ankara and Iran give Hamas a red carpet and Turkey’s current leadership gives Hamas even more respect than Iran does, treating it with the respect of a foreign country.

Ankara has a long history of mobilizing media abroad through contacts to push its narratives, usually to get everything it wants and giving nothing in return. For instance Ankara speaks to friends and lobbyists in Washington to claim that it was “confronting Iran and Russia,” when in fact Ankara was working with Iran and Russia against US interests in Syria and buying Russia’s S-400s.

Now Turkey has pivoted to try to pretend it wants to compartmentalize certain issues with Israel, such as trade and maritime ties, as part of pretending the last year of chaos and extremism Ankara unleashed is behind it. Ankara wants more than anything to play the “good cop” for the new Biden administration, much as it worked to get support from Trump for invasions of Syria, Libya, and threats against Greece and Armenia.

But reality shows what is actually happening in Ankara. The regime is increasingly a far-right openly racist regime against Armenians and Kurds, and Jews are often objects of hatred for the Turkish-backed extremists that it has unleashed in Syria and other countries. If Turkey wanted reconciliation it wouldn’t use it to sabotage Israel’s alliances and isolate Israel and its own media, which is entirely pro-government, would support Israel.

Instead Turkey bashes Israel at home and tars Israel as a “Nazi” country. That is not how reconciliation works. The leaked stories about “secret” talks are designed only to muddle Israel’s relationships with other states in the region as part of an Ankara regime project which it openly says is designed to “liberate” Jerusalem from the “Zionists,” an ideology of religious extremism Ankara shares with Iran’s regime.

While countries like the UAE are welcoming Israelis and Jews and talking about tolerance, Ankara’s government jails dissidents and lashes out at minorities, spreading hatred and intolerance. In that toxic mix, there is no reality of mending fences, only a new anti-Israel envoy and an extremist authoritarian government in Ankara that wants Israel isolated so it can manipulate the incoming Biden administration. When Turkey apologizes for comparing Israel to the Nazis, then that might be evidence that it has changed. Ankara’s current regime will never do that.

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