

Sinking Turkey-Israel relations

By ANAT LAPIDOT-FIRILLA
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Turkish involvement in Gaza flotilla was intended to prove that Turkey, under the AKP, has become the leader of the Sunni Muslim world.

Turkey's attitude toward Israel over the past two years has been fairly consistent. It is a proactive approach that falls perfectly with the general shift in foreign policy paradigms and, no less important, with its domestic agenda. These two spheres are connected in more than one way. Israelis as well as other western observers, who wonder as to the reasons for the ongoing Turkish campaign against Israel and its legitimacy in the international arena shouldn't see this policy within the narrow boundaries of the return of Islam or the revival of neo-Ottoman imperial dreams.

The Justice and Development Party, AKP, is trying to preserve its position in the domestic Turkish political scene through foreign policy gains, an area that falls beyond the supervision and control of Kemalist security and constitutional institutions.

An analysis of the viewpoints in the party and of its foreign policy architects, regarding Turkey's position on the international scene reflect the basic claims that are commonplace today in the Muslim world regarding the discrimination against Muslims on the international scene and the diagnosis that this discrimination is being carried out under the guise of "Western universalism" through international institutions.

Furthermore, such claims fit the global discourse of many non-Muslim countries such as Venezuela or Brazil. The recent Turkish-Brazilian-Iranian agreement is a reflection of this common agenda of countries with global and regional aspiration.

Indeed, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the AKP leadership have brought to the sociopolitical center stage the discussion on Islamic civilization and the links between ethics and morality, on the one hand, and identity and politics on the other, both on the national and the international arenas.

THE CAMPAIGN against Israel serves the AKP, which controls state institutions, in a variety of pragmatic additional goals:

First, the bolstering of AKP's position among party supporters by emphasizing the support of the defense establishment and the Kemalist bureaucracy to immoral Israel and the lack of interest in the fate of their Muslim brethren in Palestine. This linkage between Kemalism and the army, on the one hand, and of Zionism and Israel on the other, strengthens the party's claims against the absolute control that Kemalism had imposed on the public sphere. They stress that the Kemalist elite imposed order on the basis of functionalism, without any attention to ethical and moral considerations, which in the case of foreign policy has dragged Turkey into the immoral cooperation with Israel. Similar criticism is being directed at the problematic nature of Western capitalism, which is described as heavy-

handed and inhumane, when compared with the alternative offered by the Islamic-Turkish model that comprises networks of small urban businesses that are friendly to free market dynamics.

Second, posing relations with Israel as morally questionable also serves to place Turkey as a leading country in the Muslim world, empowering its efforts to pressure, psychologically, the US and the European Union to accept its claims of regional and international importance.

In view of the general concerns in the West regarding Islamic terrorism and a confrontation with the Muslim world, the AKP insists that the Western world must change and make room in the international arena for Muslim democracies, with Turkey first in line.

Third, the way Israel is viewed is based on a belief that the Ottoman Muslim world, represented by the successor state, Turkey, is superior to the West and international political institutions in its ability to change and reflect the recognition and respect that the Muslim world deserves. According to this line of thought, the correct approach would be to grant the true representative of the Muslim world – Turkey – a representative position in the international arena and in its global institutions. In parallel, these institutions should lower the importance of Israel, cease offering it protection, and embark on the recognition of Islamic organizations, like Hamas, as legitimate. Israel, on the other hand, so it is argued is a threat to world peace, both because of its actions, but also because of what it symbolizes.

THE TURKISH authorities' deep involvement in organizing the Gaza aid flotilla serves the aim of further delegitimize Israel and to internationalize the Israeli-Palestinian problem. The goal of this campaign was to establish Israel's image as barbaric and uncivilized, and to question its basis of its historical existence. It was also aimed at the Arab regimes who did not rush to the Palestinians' defense, describing them as dictatorial and lacking in moral legitimacy. But mainly, it intended to establish that Turkey, under the leadership of the AKP, has become the leader of the Sunni Muslim world, a regional superpower and the key to world peace and political stability.

The Israeli response to this campaign proved Turkish tactics to be effective. Thus, it is likely that Turkish pressure on Israel will grow and the deterioration of the relationship between the two states, that only a few years ago were strategic partners, will continue accordingly.

The writer is a senior research fellow and the academic director of the Mediterranean Unit at The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute. She is also a faculty member of the Department of International Relations at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.