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Erdogan's Dhimmi Problem

By EMMANUEL NAVON
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It is precisely because the Obama administration has opted for appeasement that Israel must show steadfastness in its refusal to capitulate to Turkey's demands. But more than that, Israel should go on the offensive by exposing Erdogan's ongoing hypocrisy to the world.

According to Shariah (Islamic law), non-Muslims (such as Christians and Jews) are mostly free to practice their religion in private but are discriminated and treated as second-class citizens, or *dhimmi*s. As the Quran clearly states, non-Muslims must "feel themselves subdued" (Sura 9:20). When the Jews regained their independence in 1948, they not only rebelled against "dhimmitude," they also regained a land once ruled by Islam - like the Spaniards after the Reconquista. To Muslims, this was -and still is- a double offence.

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Turkey's Islamist Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has taken it upon himself to show Israel as being a "*dhimmi* state." Edorgan was raised as a Sufi Muslim and was imprisoned in 1998 for singing out loud that "the mosques are our barracks, the domes our helmets, the minarets our bayonets and the faithful our soldiers."

While mainstream Western media are at pains to describe Turkey's Islamist AKP Party as "moderate," Erdogan himself declared on Kanal D TV in August 2007 that describing Islam as moderate "is offensive and an insult to our religion." And Erdogan himself openly embraces the presidents of Iran and Sudan.

Sudan's president is accused of genocide by the International Criminal Court, Turkey has been asked time and time again to apologize for the Armenian genocide, and all the while Erdogan continues to hold fast onto the notion that "no Muslim can perpetuate genocide."

Erdogan comes from an anti-Jewish tradition. His political mentor Necmettin Erbakan was an anti-Semite. As soon as he was elected to office in 2003, Erdogan adopted a hostile policy toward Israel as exemplified by the following: In March 2004, Erdogan called Israel a "terrorist state" following the elimination of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin. In February 2006, he received Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal in Ankara. In January 2009, he publicly humiliated Shimon Peres at the Davos conference. In October 2009, the Turkish state television started airing fiction series showing Israeli soldiers intentionally murdering Palestinian children. In November 2009, Erdogan declared that he'd rather meet Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir than Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu. In March 2010, Erdogan claimed that the Temple Mount, Hebron and Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem were never Jewish sites.

While Erdogan's hatred of Israel is authentic, his public outbursts at Israel are opportunistic. Those outbursts are the easiest way for him to be acclaimed as a hero by Islamists both in Turkey and around the world. The Israeli government made the right decision by refusing to behave as a *dhimmi* state. The attitude of the Obama administration, by contrast, is irresponsible and scandalous. Instead of making Erdogan pay the price for his foreign policy choices, the Obama administration has been hopelessly trying to appease him.

Erdogan is ultimately responsible for the death of his fellow citizens aboard the *Mavi Marmara*. He is the one who sent out the jihadist organization Insani Yardim Vakfi (or IHH) to militarize Gaza and arm Hamas. Yet nevertheless, US President Barack Obama called Erdogan after the *Marmara* affair to express "his deep condolences for the loss of life and injuries resulting from the Israeli military operation."

The Palmer Report recently released by the UN (not usually known for its pro-Israel bias) states unambiguously that Israel's naval blockade of Gaza was legal, that Turkey should have done more to stop the flotilla, and that Israeli soldiers were brutally attacked and had to use force in self-defense. And yet, instead of scolding Turkey for its troublemaking, the Obama administration is still insisting upon Israel to apologize.

Rather than stopping Erdogan from destabilizing the Middle East with his irresponsible policies and preventing him from further bullying Israel, the Obama administration has adopted an appeasing stance, which in turn is encouraging Erdogan who is now threatening to go to war in order to lift the siege of Gaza.

It is precisely because the Obama administration has opted for appeasement that Israel must show steadfastness. As Winston Churchill has said, an appeaser is someone who feeds the crocodile hoping he will be eaten last. Israel cannot afford to play that game.

But steadfastness is not enough. Israel should go on the offensive by exposing Erdogan's hypocrisy to the world.

And achieving this isn't rocket science: At the same he was scolding Bashar al-Assad for shooting at Syrian demonstrators last month, Erdogan himself had ordered air strikes in Kurdistan which killed over 100 Kurds. In a similar display of hypocrisy, Erdogan continues to call on Israel to accept the establishment of a Palestinian state while he remains adamant in his refusal to allow an independent Kurdish state to emerge.

While he urges Israel to negotiate with the terrorist organization Hamas, Erdogan refuses to listen to his own advice and begin talks with Greek Cypriots after a 37-year Turkish occupation of Cyprus. Erdogan recently declared that his country "considers it a disgrace to sit down at the negotiating table with [the Greek Cypriots] at the United Nations." And in 2006, after obtaining Syria's capitulation to Turkey's occupation and annexation of the Alexandretta Province, Erdogan offered Israel to broker a peace deal with Syria based on Israeli - not Syrian - capitulation over the Golan.

While Erdogan must be made to understand that Jews are no longer *dhimmi*s, we Israelis have to realize that the end of "dhimmitude" does not only mean the end of humiliation. It also provides the ability - and perhaps even the duty - to make our enemies get a taste of their own medicine.

The writer is an International Relations Lecturer at Tel Aviv University and the founding partner of the Navon-Levy Group Ltd., an international business consultancy. He is also the author of numerous books on Israel's foreign policy, including most recently, From Israel, With Hope: Why and How Israel will Continue to Thrive.

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