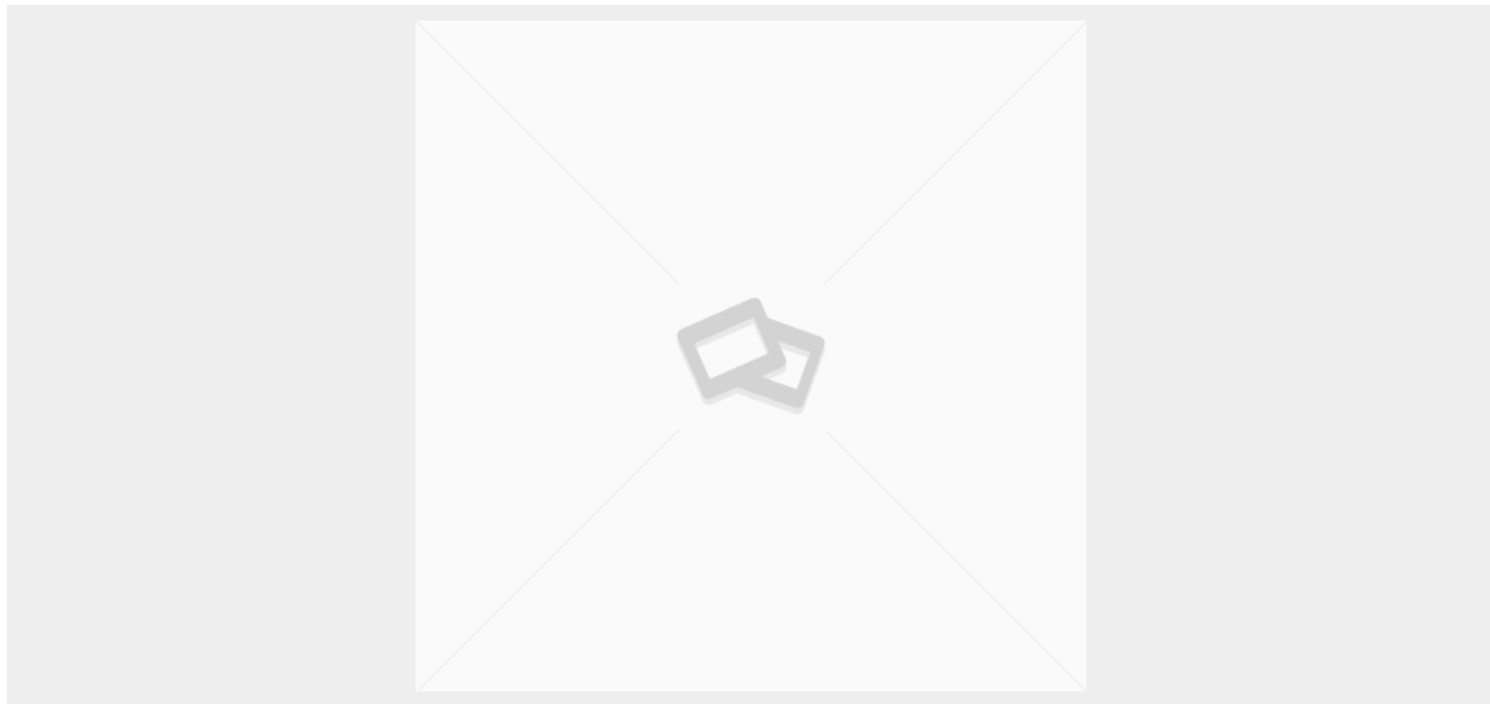


ANGERED BY TURKISH CRITICISM OVER GAZA, ISRAEL MAY RECOGNIZE THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

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By Harut Sassounian, Publisher, The California Courier, 13 January 2009

Enraged by the abrasive tone of Turkey's condemnation of Israel's attack on Gaza, Israeli officials and Turkish analysts are now raising the possibility that Tel Aviv may retaliate either by recognizing the Armenian Genocide or refusing to help Turkey to lobby against a congressional resolution on the genocide.

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Enraged by the abrasive tone of Turkey's condemnation of Israel's attack on Gaza, Israeli officials and Turkish analysts are now raising the possibility that Tel Aviv may retaliate either by recognizing the Armenian Genocide or refusing to help Turkey to lobby against a congressional resolution on the genocide.

This unexpected turn of events was in response to Turkish Prime Minister Recep Erdogan's continued harsh criticisms, accusing Israel of "perpetrating inhuman actions which would bring it to self-destruction. Allah will sooner or later punish those who transgress the rights of innocents." Erdogan qualified Israel's attack on Gaza as "savagery" and a "crime against humanity." He also refused to take calls from Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and rejected a request by Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni to visit Ankara.

Israel initially downplayed the hostile comments emanating from Turkey. The Jerusalem-based DEBKAFfile reported that "a deep crisis in Turkish-Israel relations appears to be the first strategic casualty of Israel's offensive to suppress Hamas' rocket campaign." An Israeli Foreign Ministry official told Turkey's ambassador to Israel that such harsh words were "unacceptable" among friendly nations. Another Israeli official added: "It would be necessary to evaluate the damage to the relationship that these comments have caused."

In a January 5 editorial, the Jerusalem Post escalated the level of Israeli displeasure by questioning Turkey's credibility on passing judgment on other countries: "On balance, we're not convinced that Turkey has earned the right to lecture Israelis about human rights. While world attention focuses on Gaza, Turkish jets have bombed Kurdish positions in northern Iraq. Over the years, tens of thousands of people have been killed as the radical PKK pursues its campaign for autonomy from Turkey. Kurdish civilians in Iraq complain regularly that Ankara's air force has struck civilian areas where there is no PKK activity. The next Israeli government should weigh whether Israel can accept as a mediator a country that speaks, albeit elliptically, of our destruction. Meanwhile, if Turkey persists in its one-sided, anti-Israel rhetoric, the Foreign Ministry might consider recalling our ambassador in Ankara for consultations."

Finally, Israel's Deputy Foreign Minister, Majalli Whbee angrily lashed back at the Prime Minister of Turkey. Several Turkish media outlets quoted Whbee as stating: "Erdogan says that genocide is

taking place in Gaza. We will then recognize the Armenian related events as genocide." Whbee, a member of the Israeli Knesset and a close confidante of Prime Minister Olmert, issued the following warning to Turkey: "We, as Israel, hope that Prime Minister Erdogan's statements will not damage our relations. But, if Turkey does not behave fairly, this will have its consequences."

While it is unlikely that Israel would reverse its long-standing refusal to acknowledge the Armenian Genocide, it may decide not to accommodate future Turkish requests to have American Jewish organizations to lobby against a congressional resolution on the Armenian Genocide.

Commentator Yigal Schleifer explained in his EurasiaNet article that Erdogan may "find himself walking a tightrope when it comes to distancing Turkey from Israel. Ankara has long depended on Israel to act as a conduit to Washington and to American Jewish organizations who have frequently acted as a kind of surrogate lobby for Turkey in Washington. In the past, Jewish organizations have been instrumental in helping Turkey block efforts to introduce resolutions in Congress recognizing the Armenian genocide of 1915. 'There is real anger with Erdogan on Capitol Hill and among people who follow Turkey in Washington,' says a Washington-based consultant who closely monitors Turkish affairs. 'Nobody is threatening anything right now, or knows if there are going to be repercussions, but this is going to have an effect.' Adds the consultant: 'There is a sense that Erdogan has used up a lot of good will.'"

The Turkish newspaper, Hurriyet, in a January 9 editorial, tried to downplay the consequences of the Turkish anger at Israel, by stating that the latter hopes "the Jewish lobby in the United States...will ensure, through its clout on issues such as preventing Armenian genocide bills, that Turkey falls in line.... It is suggested that if Turkey does not fall in line, that same lobby will punish her by refusing to help on this score, or even by ensuring that such bills pass."

Turkish columnist Barcin Yinanc described in Hurriyet the absurd situation Turkish leaders will find themselves in a couple of months: "When April comes, I can imagine the government instructing its Ambassador to Israel to mobilize the Israeli government to stop the Armenian initiatives in the U.S. Congress. I can hear some Israelis telling the Turkish Ambassador to go talk to Hamas to lobby the Congress. Erdogan's harsh statements against Israel have certainly not gone unnoticed in Israel.... I am sure the Israeli government as well as the Jewish lobby in America will not forget these statements."

Turkish leaders may wish to remember that the last time they irritated a prominent Jewish-American congressman, he retaliated by supporting congressional action on the Armenian Genocide. Cong. Tom Lantos, a Holocaust survivor and a staunch opponent of the recognition of the Armenian Genocide, surprised everyone in 2005 when he voted in favor of a congressional resolution on the Armenian Genocide in the House International Relations Committee. Lantos disclosed that he was backing the Armenian resolution in order to teach the Turks a lesson for not supporting the U.S. on

the eve of the Iraqi War.

In the coming days, Turkey's relations with Israel may further deteriorate as Turkish politicians, journalists, and leaders of non-governmental organizations urge Erdogan to go beyond mere words and expel Israel's Ambassador from Ankara, recall Turkey's Ambassador from Tel Aviv, cancel all military and economic agreements with Israel, and ban overflights by Israeli pilots in Turkish airspace. Erdogan may resort to such punitive actions in order to appease widespread anti-Israel anger by large segments of the Turkish public prior to local elections which are critical for his ruling political party.

