ERDOGAN, SUPPORTING HAMAS, BLOCKING ISRAEL, PUSHING “REFORMS”, IS “TAking TURKEY BACK 1,000 YEARS”
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Isranet Daily Briefing, October 8, 2013

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Lost in the Pipeline: Tracking Jihadists from Turkey to Syria: Idris Emen, Al-Monitor, Oct. 1, 2013—Amid already controversial allegations that Turkey is aiding armed groups in the Syrian civil war, it has emerged that young men between 18 and 30 are being recruited to fight in Syria, mainly from the province of Adiyaman, but also from Bingol, Batman, Urfa, Diyarbakir and Bitlis.

Despite Apology, Turkey Blocking Israel-NATO Cooperation: Herb Keinon, Jerusalem Post, Sept. 12, 2013—Nearly six months after Israel's apology to Turkey for the Mavi Marmara incident, Ankara continues to completely block any NATO cooperation with Israel, Greece's Ambassador Spiros Lampridis told The Jerusalem Post on Wednesday.

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Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyib Erdogan this week unveiled his long-promised “reform package” to “chart the path of the nation” for the next 10 years — that is, through 2023, 100 years after the founding of Turkey as a republic. Which is ironic, since Erdogan seems bent on abolishing that republic in all but name. His plan to amend the Constitution to replace the long-tested parliamentary system with a presidential one (with himself as president and commander-in-chief) is only part of it. He’d also undo the key achievement of Kemal Ataturk, the founder of modern Turkey.

In the 1920s, Ataturk created the Turkish nation from the debris of the Ottoman Empire. Ataturk and the military and intellectual elite around him replaced Islam as the chief bond between the land’s many ethnic communities with Turkish nationhood. Over the past 90 years, this project has not had 100 percent success. Nevertheless, it managed to create a strong sense of bonding among a majority of the citizens. Now Erdogan is out to undermine that in two ways.

First, his package encourages many Turks to redefine their identities as minorities. For example, he has discovered the Lezgin minority and promises to allow its members to school their children in “their own language.” Almost 20 percent of Turkey’s population may be of Lezgin and other Caucasian origin (among them the Charkess, Karachai, Udmurt and Dagestanis). Yet almost all of those have long forgotten their origins and melted in the larger pot of Turkish identity. What is the point of encouraging the re-emergence of minority identities?

Meanwhile, Erdogan is offering little to minorities that have managed to retain their identity over the past nine decades. Chief among these are the Kurds, 15 percent of the population. Erdogan’s Justice and Development Party, the AKP, partly owes its successive election victories to the Kurds. Without the Kurdish vote, AKP could not have collected more than 40 percent of the votes. Yet his package offers Kurds very little.

They would be allowed to use their language, but not to write it in their own alphabet. Nor could they use “w” and other letters that don’t exist in the Turkish-Latin alphabet but are frequent in Kurdish. Kurdish leaders tell me that the package grants no more than 5 percent of what they had demanded in long negotiations with Erdogan.

Another real minority that gets little are the Alevites, who practice a moderate
version of Islam and have acted as a chief support for secularism in Turkey. While Erdogan uses the resources of the state to support Sunni Islam, Alevites can’t even get building permits to construct their own places of prayer. Armenians, too, get nothing — not even a promise of an impartial inquest into allegations of genocide against them in 1915.

The second leg of Erdogan’s strategy is to re-energize his Islamist base. Hundreds of associations controlled by the Muslim Brotherhood are to take over state-owned mosques, religious sites and endowment properties — thus offering AKP a vast power base across Turkey. Indirectly, Erdogan is telling Turks to stop seeing themselves as citizens of a secular state and, instead, as minorities living in a state dominated by the Sunni Muslim majority. Call it neo-Ottomanism.

Erdogan is using “Manzikert” as a slogan to sell his package. Yet this refers to a battle between the Seljuk Sultan Alp Arsalan and the Byzantine Emperor Romanos in 1071, the first great victory of Muslim armies against Christians in Asia Minor. It happened centuries before the Ottoman Turks arrived in the region. Invoking the battle as a victory of Islam against “the Infidel,” Erdogan supposedly has an eye on the battle’s thousandth anniversary. Does he mean to take Turkey back 1,000 years? The Ottoman system divided the sultan’s subjects according to religious faith into dozens of “mullahs,” each allowed to enforce its own laws in personal and private domains while paying a poll tax.

It’s doubtful most Turks share Erdogan’s dream of recreating a mythical Islamic state with himself as caliph, albeit under the title of president. His effort to redefine Turkey’s republican and secular identity may wind up revitalizing it.

WHY IS TURKEY SHELTERING A HAMAS OPERATIVE?
Jonathan Schanzer
Real Clear World, Sept. 18, 2013

Turkey is a member of NATO and an aspiring member of the European Union — but it has one alliance that sets it apart from its Western counterparts: It’s an important base of operations for at least one high-ranking member of the Palestinian militant group Hamas.

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has made no secret of his desire to transform Hamas into an accepted member of the international community. In 2011, he told a U.S. audience that the Palestinian party was not a terrorist group,
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and he has repeatedly vowed to visit the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip. Ankara has also provided Hamas with significant financial support — as much as $300 million, according to some estimates.

In his attempts to strengthen Hamas, Erdogan has also allowed his country’s ties with Israel to suffer. The Turkish leader famously stormed offstage during a contentious 2009 panel with Israeli President Shimon Peres, in protest of Israel’s isolation of Gaza. Relations between Ankara and Jerusalem plummeted further the following year, after Turkey’s largest NGO dispatched a flotilla that tried to break Israel’s blockade of Gaza, leading to clashes between Israeli commandos and [armed] activists that left nine Turks dead.

More recently, however, the two countries have take steps to bury the hatchet. This year, U.S. President Barack Obama facilitated a phone call between Erdogan and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, which began a process that resulted in Israel issuing an apology for the incident and agreeing to pay reparations to the victims’ families. Mutual interests in Turkey — namely the ouster of Syria’s Bashar al-Assad — have provided additional hope for rapprochement. However, Erdogan’s support for Hamas could become a serious stumbling block for a further warming of ties with Israel. The Turkish premier’s ties with Hamas remain as strong as ever — in fact, they appear to have deepened.

Turkey currently serves as the home for Hamas operative Saleh al-Arouri, whom the Palestinian movement’s website identifies as the founder of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, Hamas’s armed wing, in the West Bank. One senior Israeli intelligence official described him to me as “one of the most important leaders of Hamas … involved in a lot of things including finance and logistics.”...

Arouri was originally recruited by Hamas while studying at Hebron University, and he has served as a high-ranking military leader for the movement since the early 1990s, according to U.S. court documents. After serving several stretches of jail time, Israel released him in March 2010, possibly as part of an effort to secure the release of captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. After Arouri’s release, he served as a political official in Hamas’s headquarters in Damascus, where he reportedly played a role in negotiating the Shalit deal, which brokered the soldier’s freedom for more than 1,000 Palestinians in Israeli custody.

When Hamas parted ways with Syria over the Assad regime’s massacres in the country’s ongoing civil war, Arouri left Damascus and is believed to have started operating out of Turkey last year. He has not been shy about his presence there: In March 2012, for example, he was part of a Hamas delegation that took part in talks with Turkish officials, including Erdogan. In October 2012, he traveled from Turkey to Gaza to attend the visit of Qatar’s emir to the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip.

But diplomacy appears to be only one part of Arouri’s job. He is also allegedly involved in Hamas’s illicit financial networks. In April 2013, Israeli security services announced the arrest of two Palestinians for smuggling money from Jordan to Hamas operatives in the West Bank. During the interrogation, according to the Shin Bet, Israel’s internal security service, one smuggler admitted that he was moving the money upon the orders of Arouri.

Presumably, those orders were issued from Turkey. The veteran Israeli analyst of Palestinian affairs, Ehud Ya’ari, recently noted that Turkey is allowing Arouri to direct efforts to rebuild Hamas’s terrorism
 infrastructure in the West Bank. If Arouri really has, as Yaari writes, “taken sole control of the movement’s activities in the West Bank,” Turkey appears to have in effect taken over from Damascus and become Hamas’s West Bank headquarters.

Given the strategic importance of Turkey to the United States, particularly in light of Turkey’s role in helping to support the Syrian opposition, officials in Washington have demurred on confronting Ankara. Obama, who has maintained cordial ties with Erdogan, has given no indication that Turkey’s relationship with Hamas is a problem for Washington. The only notable exception was a bipartisan congressional letter in May that expressed “concerns about Turkey’s relationship with Hamas.”

But a recent uptick in Hamas terrorism out of the West Bank may change Washington’s calculus. Israel’s Shin Bet recently foiled a Hamas plot to establish a terrorist cell in the West Bank city of Hebron. Meanwhile, there have been seven attempted attacks out of the West Bank so far this year, compared with six all last year.

If Arouri is behind the funding, recruiting, or planning of any of these Hamas operations in the West Bank, it will have grave consequences for Turkey. To the letter of the law, Turkey could meet criteria as a state sponsor of terrorism. Strange friends for a nation that views itself part of the Western alliance.

Jonathan Schanzer, a former terrorism finance analyst at the U.S. Treasury Department, is vice president for research at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.

LOST IN THE PIPELINE: TRACKING JIHADISTS FROM TURKEY TO SYRIA
Idris Emen
Al-Monitor, Oct. 1, 2013

Amid already controversial allegations that Turkey is aiding armed groups in the Syrian civil war, it has emerged that young men between 18 and 30 are being recruited to fight in Syria, mainly from the province of Adiyaman, but also from Bingol, Batman, Urfa, Diyarbakir and Bitlis. Al-Qaeda, Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham, as well as pro-Assad groups, have established a presence in Adiyaman city, recruiting young men for jihad or in return for money and taking them to Syria via Kilis, Hatay and Sanliurfa in 15-strong groups.

About 200 people are said to have gone to Syria from Adiyaman alone. Relatives are touring camps in various regions in Syria to find their sons. Gang leaders ask for ransom or threaten to kill the recruits when families want to take their sons back. Yet, some have been able to bring their sons home. At the end of a lengthy investigation, we managed to find four families whose sons went to Syria. Our first interview was with M.D., the father of twin brothers O.D. and M.G.D., who left
Here is what M.D. said: “Last year, when my sons were preparing for the university exam, they used to go out at night on the pretext of studying. Their behavior began to change in time. They first grew beards and then began telling their sisters to cover their heads. When we discussed the Syrian civil war, they would get angry with me and say: ‘There are things you do not understand. You do not understand Islam. This is jihad and everybody must fight in jihad.’ One day I followed them and saw them going to the home of a fellow in the neighbourhood who goes by the nickname ‘the Haji Butcher.’ When they came back, I asked them why they went there. They said they were meeting with a group of five to six people, called Rejd-i Cuma [Friday rejection], to talk about religion and watch videos concerning Muslims. I cautioned them to not go there again. The boys kept performing prayer, but they never went to the mosque. They did not perform the Friday prayer, for instance. They rejected it. Those men tricked my sons by making them watch videos with violent content.”

M.D. recounted how he traveled to Aleppo in Syria and went from camp to camp until he tracked his sons down in a villa. “One day my sons telephoned to say they were in Syria, fighting. They said they were there for jihad and told me not to go after them. I went to the police to explain the situation, but they told me my sons were legally adults and did nothing. I went to Aleppo with a guide and toured six camps in four days. There were young men from Adiyaman, Bitlis and Bingol in the camps. I found both my sons in a camp in Aleppo. When I told the gang leader that I had come to take them back, he replied: ‘The boys are fighting for jihad here. Are you an infidel, since you are trying to stop them from jihad? If you show up again here, we’ll shoot and bury you on the spot.’ When I said I wanted to see the boys, he told me they would receive a 45-day training and once it was over, they could go to Adiyaman to see their family if they wished. I couldn’t bring my sons back,” M.D. said.

M.T.A. is another father whose son went to Syria. He said his son, 23-year-old Y.A., left home two months ago for Istanbul to work, taking 500 Turkish lira [$250] with him. “I was told that after he went to Istanbul, my son returned to Adiyaman and stayed here two days and then went to Syria, joining the Ahrar al-Sham organization. Once I learned that, I went to Kilis with a guide. I paid the guide to go to Syria and bring my son back. When the guide returned, he told me that my son had joined Ahrar al-Sham and had gone to fight after completing training. The organization changed my son’s name to Abu Musa. I don’t know whether he is dead or alive. My only wish is that they bring my son home as soon as possible,” M.T.A. said, appealing for help from the authorities.
F.B., for his part, was able to bring his son back. The 25-year-old A.B., married with two children, went to Syria via Hatay two months ago and joined a pro-Assad group. F.B. had to bargain for his son’s life and pay a ransom. Here is his account of what happened: “A month before Eid el-Fitr, my son suddenly vanished. I learned he went to Aleppo via Hatay. I decided to go to Syria to bring him back. I crossed to Syria from Kilis and paid 150 Turkish lira [$75] to someone to take me to the camps. In Aleppo, I learned that my son was in a camp called Abu Dijla. They let me see a commander there. I told him I had come to take my son home. The commander said my son had gone to fight and he knew nothing about him. I reacted defiantly and his men pointed their guns at me. At that moment, I fainted. When I came round, I saw my son walking toward me in a group of 50 men. They carried weapons and were clad in Arab robes. I passed out again at the sight. When I came back to my senses, they let me see another commander, who asked for a donation. I had only 200 Turkish lira [$100] left. They took the money and let my son go. As we were leaving the camp, I noticed that two boys, aged about 18, were looking at us. My son said they were also from Adiyaman. My son had been told he would be fighting against Assad, but that camp belonged to pro-Assad forces. I brought my son back at the risk of my life.”

The people of Adiyaman are uneasy about young men going to Syria. “We hear that some types are paying money to the youth as they organize them to go to Syria. This is scaring us all,” a shopkeeper said. Rumors in Adiyaman suggest even the existence of a gang taking young men to Syria. Yet, the governor’s office and police headquarters in Adiyaman refused to comment on our questions about the issue.

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DESPITE APOLOGY, TURKEY BLOCKING ISRAEL-NATO COOPERATION

Herb Keinon

Jerusalem Post, Sept. 12, 2013

Nearly six months after Israel’s apology to Turkey for the Mavi Marmara incident, Ankara continues to completely block any NATO cooperation with Israel, Greece’s Ambassador Spiros Lampridis told The Jerusalem Post on Wednesday [Sept. 11] Following the Mavi Marmara incident in 2010, NATO member Turkey adamantly opposed Israeli involvement - “even the most innocent” - in any NATO programs, he said. These programs included joint exercises, intelligence exchanges, and research and technological development programs.
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“We were hoping that after the arrangement between [Prime Minister Binyamin] Netanyahu and [Prime Minister Tayyip Recep] Erdogan in the spring, Turkey would pull back a little and allow some of the programs,” he said. “But there is nothing.” By not allowing Israel’s participation in NATO programs, he added, Turkey was blocking participation with other Mediterranean countries, because Israel and other nations in the region - Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, Mauritania and Algeria - took part in NATO projects as a bloc. “We can’t cooperate with any of them, because the programs are all blocked, nothing can go through,” he said.

Lampridis said he was surprised by the continued Turkish opposition, especially since practical cooperation between Turkey and Israel was taking place on a daily basis, “like where Turkey has an advantage, of course, and Israel is demonstrating goodwill.” For example, since Turkish goods can no longer be transported overland through Syria to the Persian Gulf, every week hundreds of Turkish trucks arrive via ferry to the Haifa Port where they then proceed across the country to the Jordan border crossings, carrying millions of dollars worth of goods to Jordan and onward to the Gulf.

“If Israel behaved in the same negative way that Turkey was behaving, it could have said ‘no’ to Turkey, told them, ‘This is your problem. I don’t need these trucks blocking my highways.’ But Israel is cooperating, and Turkey is deriving great benefit from this.” One Foreign Ministry source confirmed this arrangement, stressing that it came at the initiative of the private business sector in Turkey, which is very keen on maintaining close ties with Israel. Erdogan’s government was not involved in setting up the program.

The Greek ambassador also took Erdogan to task for blaming Jews and Israel for the unrest over the summer in Turkey and for the overthrow of Egyptian president Mohamed Morsi. “You just don’t say such things,” he said. Asked if he thought Erdogan was an anti-Semite, he replied, “Even if he is, is it the position a prime minister takes? He can do it privately if he wants. You don’t do it openly and expose a whole country - a country that has never been anti-Semitic in the past, to tell the truth, especially under the Ottoman Empire, when it was a haven for Jews. Other countries were not, Turkey was. What’s wrong with the guy? It really beats me.” He also said that he believed Erdogan’s policies and comments on Israel were directed toward the Muslim world, believing they would make him a leader there. But, he said, a series of missteps in the Arab world, first and foremost with Egypt, had weakened Turkey’s position there as well.

Regarding the situation in Syria, Lampridis made it clear his country was opposed to US military action at this time. “The best approach is to seek a solution that would be constructive and diminish the possibility of things going wrong in the region,” he said. “We have enough violence in the region. If there are more violent actions, nobody knows where they will lead.” Lampridis said the peaceful removal of the chemical weapons stockpiles from Syria - as the Russians have proposed - would “obviously” be beneficial to Israel, because if there were violence “you don’t know what spillover there could be.”
The envoy said there was hope that the Russian proposal could lead to a positive momentum and to a “greater resolution” of the Syrian civil war. “What alternative do we have?” he asked. “We can let them kill each other for the next God knows how many years, and then expect spillover in Lebanon, Israel - God forbid - Jordan and the entire region. The region is unstable enough as it is, unfortunately.” While Assad is “bad enough,” he said that his possible replacements - be they from the Nusra Front or other al-Qaida factions - “could be much worse.”

While Lampridis said he was not overly confident that the Russian proposal would ignite a whole new dynamic, “we don’t have many options. “We are hearing another one from President Obama [the military option],” he said. “But he doesn’t have a clear okay from Congress; he does not have too many allies in the international community, and he does not have the majority of the public. We don’t have really too many alternatives. We always think that the peaceful alternative, if it works, is the best policy.”

On Topic

Has Turkey Become the ‘Pakistan of the Middle East’?: Kadri Gursel, Al-Monitor, Sept. 23, 2013—Turkish territory in the border region that arches from Hatay to Gaziantep is on the way to becoming the “Peshawar of the Middle East,” that is, a region where the state has no control over the border and outlawed forces move as they like.

The Real Beneficiaries of Erdogan’s Democracy: Semih Idiz, Al-Monitor-Turkey Pulse, Oct. 3 2013—Some view it as a “silent revolution” while others say “the mountain gave birth to a molehill.” There are also those calling it “treacherous” because it whittles away at core values for Turkish nationalists.

Turkish Military Linked to Christian Murders: Barbara G. Baker, World Watch Monitor, Sept. 26, 2013—Nearly six years into the court trial over the murder of three Christians in southeastern Turkey, documents have emerged confirming that secret military units were involved in those assassinations and others.

Turkey Protests New Police Aggression: Veli Sirin, Gatestone Institute, Sept. 19, 2013—A deep split in Turkish society is visible: Both secular Turks and religious Muslim AKP voters see their lifestyles threatened and their freedoms stolen. More elections will not conceal the dissatisfaction of the Turkish populace.

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