CANDIDLY SPEAKING: TURKEY’S ERDOGAN-
AN AUTOCRATIC ISLAMIST BIGOT
Isi Leibler
Jerusalem Post, Oct. 28, 2013

After over 50 years of Israeli-Turkish intelligence cooperation, the Turkish disclosure to Iran of the identities of Mossad operatives – apparently subsequently executed – illustrates the depths to which Israel-Turkey relations have descended under Islamist autocrat Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Erdogan seeks to conceal his true intentions and convey the illusion that he is himself a role model for an enlightened Islam which blends with democracy.
Nothing could be further from the truth. Erdogan is a fanatical Islamist and a vile bigot wholavishes praise on the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas and Hezbollah and whose behavior is more reminiscent of an Ottoman sultan than a democratically elected leader. Erdogan has employed Islamist demagoguery to win three elections and has exploited his power and position to intimidate the media and destroy the opposition. He has purged the army of its secular officers through primitive show trials and brutally repressed freedom of speech. Today, there are more imprisoned journalists in Turkey than in Communist China and perhaps any other country in the world…

Since his demagogic outburst against President Shimon Peres in Davos live on TV in January 2009, followed by his dramatic storming out of the meeting, Erdogan’s attitude toward Israel has dramatically deteriorated. He shamelessly allies himself with the genocidal Hamas and refers to Israel as a “terrorist state” which “massacres children” and “knows well how to kill.” Only a few weeks ago, Erdogan hosted Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal in Turkey for the third time in 12 months. Clearly, he reached the conclusion that as a major global Israel-basher he reaps dividends among the Arab masses and furthers his dream of becoming head of a new Ottoman Sunni empire.

Erdogan’s anti-Zionism is a natural extension of his anti-Semitism. As far back as 1974, he directed and played a leading role in a play entitled Maskomya, based on the evil global influence of Jews, Communists and Freemasons. As mayor of Istanbul in 1998, he stated, “Today the image of the Jews is no different from that of the Nazis.” In 2006 he endorsed the popular virulent anti-Semitic film Valley of the Wolves about an American Jew who trades in body parts. He blamed the Gezi Park environmental protest on the “interest rate lobby,” the “dual loyalists” and the “rootless cosmopolitans,” clear references to The Protocols of the Elders of Zion. His deputy explicitly attributed the blame for the riots on the Jewish Diaspora. Erdogan has made outrageous statements in international circles. At a UN conference in Vienna in February, Erdogan stated, “Just like Zionism and fascism, Islamophobia must be regarded as a crime against humanity.”

Only a few weeks ago he blamed Israel for the upheavals in Egypt, stating, “What is said about Egypt? That democracy is not about the box. Who was behind this? Israel is. We have evidence in our hands.” When subsequently pressed to substantiate this xenophobic outburst, all he could do was to quote the French Jewish philosopher Bernard Henri Levy (not an Israeli) who had made negative references to the Muslim Brotherhood in 2001. One of Erdogan’s favorite remarks is “There is no Islamic terror.” He also publicly undermines American efforts to boycott Iran and continues to provide Tehran with reliable trade outlets. Nonetheless, the US still considers Turkey a principal ally with which it shares “bonds of trust.”…

The surreal nature of Turkish influence is best exemplified by the ongoing story of the Mavi Marmara flotillas that sought to break Israel’s weapons embargo on Gaza in May 2010. Following the international incident, Erdogan demanded that Israel issue an unequivocal apology for the death of nine Turkish protesters associated with al-Qaida who were aboard the boat. When Israel acted in accordance with the ruling of an independent UN inquiry that found that it need not apologize for the loss of lives, Erdogan recalled his ambassador, orchestrated show trials against IDF personnel, and sought to exclude Israel from global organizations, including NATO – this, from a leader who has never acknowledged his country’s massacre of 1.5 million Armenians in World War I.

Following his visit to Israel in March 2013, President Barack Obama allegedly pressed Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu to apologize and pay compensation to the Turkish terrorists’ families. Despite bitter condemnation in Israel, Netanyahu complied in order to restore relations with Turkey so that Israel and Turkey could cooperate on issues emerging in Syria. Erdogan agreed to cooperate with Israel at all levels. But, unsurprisingly, the Turkish prime minister has failed to adhere to his commitment. Immediately after Israeli issued its apology, Erdogan announced his intention to visit Gaza, and demanded Israel lift its maritime blockade against Hamas. Six months later, Erdogan still has not restored diplomatic relations nor suspended the show trials of senior Israeli officials. The Greek ambassador to Israel informed The Jerusalem
Post that Turkey was still continuing to block Israel’s participation in NATO. This month, President Abdullah Gul stated that Israel had extended its apology “too late.”

In light of this, it is disappointing that Obama continues to praise Erdogan as a “moderate Islamist” who “has shown great leadership,” ignoring the fact that he has effectively violated all the undertakings brokered by him in relation to Israel and continues to actively undermine efforts to impose sanctions on Iran. Not to mention that only a few weeks ago Erdogan announced a “strategic partnership” with China. The reality is that while the inveterate anti-Semite Erdogan has his way, he will veto any efforts to improve relationships with Israel, despite the major strategic and economic benefits that would accrue to both countries. Thus, even if the US clings to the fantasy that Turkey represents a moderate, democratically influenced form of Islam, we should not delude ourselves. Erdogan is running an anti-Semitic, anti-Israeli regime that supports Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood. As long as he remains in power, Israel-Turkish relations will remain cold at best.

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ERDOGAN TAKING TURKEY BACK 1000 YEARS WITH ‘REFORMS’
Amir Taheri
New York Post, Oct. 4, 2013

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyib Erdogan this week [Sept. 30, 2013] 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.

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**IS IRAQ’S PRESENT AFGHANISTAN’S FUTURE**

Max Boot

*Commentary*, Oct. 29, 2013

Back in 2011, President Obama tried briefly and not very hard to attain a Status of Forces Agreement that would have allowed U.S. forces to remain in Iraq past 2011. That effort failed, as we know, with disastrous consequences—the civil war that was all but extinguished by the surge in 2007-2008 has reignited with a vengeance as al-Qaeda in Iraq has come roaring back from the grave. As the *Washington Post* notes, recent violence in Iraq “has virtually erased the security gains made in the past five years. More than 5,300 Iraqis have been killed this year.”

There are many reasons why the U.S.-Iraq accord failed to be completed. One of the less noticed but more important was Obama’s unwillingness to send more than a few thousand U.S. troops to Iraq in spite of U.S. commanders’ recommendations that he send at least 15,000 to 20,000. Many Iraqi politicians figured that a commitment of fewer than 5,000 U.S. troops would be mainly symbolic and ineffectual and would not be worth the resulting political controversy.

Is history repeating itself in Afghanistan? It’s too soon to say, but there is cause for concern when one reads articles like this one in the New York Times today reporting that “NATO has endorsed an enduring presence of 8,000 to 12,000 troops, with two-thirds expected to be American.” That translates into 5,300 to 8,000 U.S. troops, considerably below the 13,600 that Gen. Jim Mattis, former commander of Central Command, estimated to be necessary—and that itself was a low-ball estimate in the judgment of many military experts.

At some point there is a real risk of Afghan politicos, like their Iraqi counterparts, deciding there is no point in having their sovereignty violated and being exposed to anti-American criticism in return for a token force that can accomplish little. If that were to happen, the future of Afghanistan isn’t hard to imagine. Just look at Iraq today—only Afghanistan will probably be worse off because it faces a more malignant insurgency with more entrenched cross-border bases and its government and security forces are weaker than their Iraqi counterparts.

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**WHY U.S. TROOPS WANT TO STAY IN AFGHANISTAN**
U.S. and Afghan politicians are in the middle of a heated debate over whether a small American and NATO force will remain in Afghanistan at the end of next year. But what’s a political and strategic question at the negotiating table is an emotional question at bases around Afghanistan, where soldiers watch the discussions with one eye on their sacrifices over the past 12 years and the other on the American withdrawal from Vietnam four decades ago. In short, they don’t want to go home without the win.

After repeated combat tours, an untold number of divorces and nearly 2,300 U.S. dead, American servicemen want their losses in Afghanistan to have been worth it. For many of them, that means keeping a residual force here to help the Afghans fend off a resurgent Taliban. The sense is especially sharp among elite special-operations troops. They were the first U.S. forces on the ground in Afghanistan in 2001, fighting alongside Northern Alliance rebels to oust the Taliban regime that had sheltered Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda. And they are the ones likely to form the backbone of any force the U.S. would leave in place to buttress the Afghan military and government after the bulk of coalition forces withdraw by the end of next year. “There’s some ownership of this,” says Maj. Gen. Austin Scott Miller, who has spent three years in Afghanistan since 2001 and now commands allied special-operating forces there. “There are people who have been here since the beginning.”

The U.S. military would like to keep close to 9,000 American troops in Afghanistan after 2014, with a smaller contribution from allied nations, according to a senior Obama administration official. That force would likely be heavy with Army Green Berets, Marine Corps special-operations troops, Navy SEALs and other specialized units, which work closely with select Afghan forces. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Afghan President Hamid Karzai made progress this month in hammering out an accord that would allow a continued American and NATO military presence beyond 2014. But the deal is still hung up on several points, including the touchy question of whether U.S. troops would be subject to Afghan law. Mr. Karzai has said that he won’t approve immunity for foreign troops unless it is approved by a gathering of traditional Afghan leaders, or Loya Jirga. A similar immunity dispute sank U.S. efforts to leave a rump force in Iraq in 2011. “We’d like to stay in the long term, and our [Afghan National Security Force] partners have indicated they want us to stay,” says Gen. Miller. “The relationships between us run deep after 12 years.”

The ignominious U.S. exit from Vietnam—helicopters lifting the last Americans and desperate Vietnamese from a Saigon rooftop—isn’t far from the minds of U.S. troops as American participation winds down in Afghanistan. A more personal fear, perhaps, is becoming like the Vietnam veterans of popular imagination, bitter over losing their friends and their youth in a failed effort to prevent a Communist takeover of the country’s south…

It isn’t that U.S. commanders express pessimism about the outcome in Afghanistan; Gen. Miller and Col. Roberson say that Afghan troops are better able than ever before to take on the insurgents. Nationwide, they often operate virtually independent of coalition support, although Afghan military casualties are soaring as a result. Still, there’s pervasive sense among elite U.S. troops that the end of next year is too early to go home. In Helmand’s Kajaki district, where the U.S. built a hydroelectric dam 60 years ago, one Marine staff sergeant reflected recently on his third Afghan tour in four years. He missed his daughter’s birth two months ago; he was on emergency leave, rushing home from the battlefield, when his wife went into labor. He has lost two very close friends in Afghanistan. He escorted one friend’s body home. Despite the heavy price—or perhaps because of it—he says: “I think we need to have the conviction as special-operating forces to finish this fight…”
In the headquarters building at a major base, Lt. Col. Joe McGraw, commander of 2nd Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group, often finds himself walking a hallway lined with the photos of young Marines, soldiers, sailors and airmen killed in Helmand province over the past 12 years. “You walk down that hallway and realize it’s not dozens—it’s hundreds and hundreds,” he says. The price paid in “blood and flesh” makes it hard for Lt. Col. McGraw to swallow the idea of leaving too early. “Nobody comes over here looking to lose,” he says.

Still, the elite troops recognize that the very concept of victory is elusive in Afghanistan, where religion, politics, corruption and crime mix together to muddy the definition of friend and foe. No matter how long U.S. forces stay, they say, there is unlikely to be a final battle or surrender. One Marine major—who has missed half of the Christmases in his son’s seven years—says, “For something like this, winning and losing is too black and white.” Afghanistan, he predicts, will long have pockets of violence. But, he says, however the next few years play out, the war has already achieved its major goal. “I don’t think there’s an al Qaeda-type element who will ever come back into power and threaten my country and my family,” says the major. “That’s victory to me.”

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**ON TOPIC**

**Thorn in the Side: Why is Turkey Sheltering a Dangerous Hamas Operative?:** Jonathan Schanzer, *Foreign Policy*, Sep. 17, 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.

**Turkey Goes From Honest Broker to Iranian Ally:** Mahir Zeynalov, *Al-Arabiya*, Oct. 27, 2013—A few years ago, Turkey was the only country that could talk to everyone in a Middle East where distrust among nations is a prevailing mentality. Mishandling crises in most states hit by the mass uprising, Ankara was left alone. Officials in Ankara preferred to describe its international standing “precious loneliness.”

**The Taliban’s New Tactic to Dera il Afghanistan’s Elections:** Najib Sharifi, *Foreign Policy*, Oct. 29, 2013— The assassination of Amanullah Aman, the Chief Election Officer of Afghanistan's Kunduz province, in September should be taken seriously, as it could mark the beginning of a devastating terror campaign targeting election workers that could potentially paralyze next April's presidential elections.

**Afghan Elections: the Warlords are Back:** Ron Moreau & Sami Yousafzai, *The Daily Beast*, Oct. 16, 2013— As the country gears up for presidential elections, several prominent warlords have already thrown their hat in the ring—including Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, the onetime mentor of Osama bin Laden and one of the country’s most powerful anti-Taliban voices. Ron Moreau and Sami Yousafzai report on the rogue’s gallery of candidates.