

Erdogan; The New Hero of the Muslim World

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Global Research, June 08, 2010

8 June 2010

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#), [Law and Justice](#)

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The Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has stirred up international appreciation after he courageously blasted the Tel Aviv leaders for the bloody massacre of the peace activists aboard the Freedom Flotilla convoy of humanitarian aids which was heading towards the besieged Gaza strip to break the three-year-long blockade of the war-stricken enclave.

The beleaguered Gaza strip has been grappling with deteriorating economic and social situation over the past three years and needs urgent humanitarian aids to be disentangled from the growing crisis it's facing. More than 80% of the Gaza strip's 1.5m population lives under poverty threshold. The unemployment rate of the enclave hit 41.3% in 2008. According to the United Nations' World Food Program (WFP), some 70 percent of Gaza's population is food insecure and the vast majority is dependant on assistance from the United Nations to cover its basic needs.

According to the World Health Organization, 98 percent of industrial operations in Gaza have been shut down and there are acute shortages of fuel, cash, cooking gas and other basic supplies due to Israel's blockade of the enclave since 2007.

Israel's military operation in Gaza in the late 2008 and early 2009 led to the destruction of more than 7,500 Palestinian homes and displacement of some 3,500 families; however, Tel Aviv's prevention of the entry of infrastructural and building materials have impeded the reconstruction of the ruined homes and those 3,500 families are still living without any shelter and protection.

According to the Gaza-based freelance journalist and photographer Sameh Habeeb, the Israeli forces launched a massive attack on Gaza's infrastructures in June 2006 after an Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit, was incarcerated by Hamas. Shalit is the only Israeli prisoner being kept in the jails of Palestinian authorities while the Israeli regime is keeping 7,383 Palestinian prisoners, 340 of whom are Children.

Habeeb reported that the key bridge linking the southern and northern areas of Gaza was totally devastated during the Israeli assault. The sole power plant of the Gaza strip was also destroyed after the Israeli military raided the city with heavy F16 squadrons. The only key motorway of Gaza, Salah El-Din was another vital construction in Gaza which the Israeli forces destroyed altogether. Although the Japanese government had proposed a plan to reconstruct the motorway, Israel never allowed this.

So far, all the international efforts to reconstruct Gaza and renovate its dilapidated

infrastructures have been hindered by Tel Aviv. The majority of Gazans are deprived of sanitation, electricity, proper education, pure water and sufficient foodstuff.

Turkish Prime Minister had previously complained that Israel did not allow the entry of construction materials in the Gaza strip to accelerate the renovation process.

"This construction is still not allowed [by Israel]. Turkey is not allowed to build schools, houses, hospitals. The Israelis allow food and medicine to pass, but not the rest," he had told the Philadelphia Inquirer in a 2009 interview.

As a harbinger of political transformations and ideological revolution in Turkey, the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan who rose to power by the virtue of AK Party's Muslim backgrounds has set off serious efforts over the past years to champion the cause of Palestinian people. He has become an outspoken critic of the Israeli regime and lambasted Tel Aviv on various occasions. In 2009, he inspired widespread global admirations after he walked out of a televised debate with the Israeli President on the sidelines of the 2009 World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. In a reference to the tragic massacre of the Palestinian citizens in the Gaza war, Erdogan told the Israeli President that he is "killing people" and then stormed out of the debate in presence of the UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, blaming the debate moderator's refusal to allow him reply the fallacious statements made by Shimon Peres.

Canceling his visit to the Latin America in the wake of recent incidents in the Gaza strip, Erdogan stated before the Turkey's parliament that Israel should be severely punished for its vicious massacre of the peace activists in the international waters: "The bloody massacre of Israel, committed against ships bringing humanitarian aid to Gaza, is a massacre deserving every kind of curse and condemnation."

Trying to appeal to the Jewish minority of Turkey, Erdogan implied that his country's response to such violent acts would be hard-hitting and decisive: "Turkey's friendship is valuable; on the other hand, its enmity is violent. No one should test Turkey's patience. The Turkish nation has always been in a historical friendship and collaboration with Jewish people. Here Jewish people understands who is the true culprit of these events."

However, Erdogan's message to Israel was unambiguous and clear: "A bloody regime, now in power in "Israel", must be surely punished. Even pirates and bandits do not touch unarmed people, children, elders, and they did it. And these people try without shame to justify themselves."

Turkey which has cancelled its recent joint military exercise with Israel is the only Muslim state which maintains full diplomatic ties with Tel Aviv. The parliamentarians of the country have called on the government to take practical steps to narrow its ties with the Zionist regime and, the government equally seems to be inclined to the restriction of ties; however, it seems that tourism and financial transaction with Israel which benefit Turkey monetarily are the only reasons which impede the way of Ankara's detachment from Tel Aviv.

According to the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Israeli citizens comprise more than 2.1% of the 20 million tourists who visit the country annually.

However, Mr. Erdogan who has determinedly warned Israel that it might lose one of its most important friends in the Middle East is gaining a growing popularity in the Muslim world due

to his recent categorical statements about the Israeli regime. Reuters published a report on June 2, titled "Israel tension boosts Turkey's popularity with Arabs" in which the rising esteem of Turkish Prime Minister has been discussed. The report reads: "Already popular for championing the Palestinian cause, Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan has further enhanced his status through calls for the Jewish state to be punished for the sea raid. The U.N. Security Council has condemned the deaths."

Anyway, it seems that Israel, as a globally hated regime, brings popularity and reputation to whoever contests its unilateral, hypocritical and atrocious policies and actions.

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