

Obama's Grand Bargain? Israel Apologizes to Turkey, Promises Mavi Marmara Compensation

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In a remarkable about-face after three years of adamant refusal, Bibi Netanyahu has [apologized to Turkey's premier](#) for Israel's 2010 massacre on the Mavi Marmara. He's also promised financial compensation to the families of the nine Turkish citizens murdered during the attack. Reports also indicate an Israeli agreement to ease the Gaza blockade, though the provisions are uncertain.

This is such a strange and sudden development that it begs speculation about what caused it. First, earlier refusals were grounded in Avigdor Lieberman's rejection of an apology. Given that Lieberman immediately attacked the apology, it seems he hasn't changed his mind. Contrition lies with Bibi. Given that Pres. Obama left Israel today one can't deny the critical role that he played in brokering the deal.

But given that Obama had tried and failed before, something more must've been offered to Bibi. This is where I fear what transpired during this visit. What could Obama offer Bibi that would move the latter from rejection to acceptance of a development that surely rankles the pride the any red-blooded Israeli nationalist.

Here is a perfect example of a tone-deaf Israeli journalist attempting to spin Netanyahu's cave and turn it into a purely politically expedient act:

After three years in which relations between the two countries fell victim to internal politics and ego games disguised as national pride, unrest in Syria, Iran's nuclear program and some U.S. pressure pushed the Israeli and Turkish PMs to make up.

A country which has still not given up on the disappearance and likely death of airman Ran Arad decades ago in Lebanon, and which obsessed for the five years of Gilad Shalit imprisonment, doesn't have the right to minimize Turkish bitterness over the cold-blooded murder of nine of its citizens. Anyone who can write what Barak Ravid wrote shows he has absolutely no understanding of the interests of Israel's interlocutor, Turkey. It's really a shameful admission of journalistic ignorance.

Ravid dropped another howler into his piece in which he actually stated that Turkey's leader would welcome a U.S. attack on Iran. Considering that the two nations, until the Syrian civil war, were allies, makes Ravid's claim close to delusional. Alas, this sort of wishful thinking is all too common among Israeli journalists and military strategists.

However, on the off-chance that this reconciliation between Israel and Turkey came with Erdogan's acquiescence to an attack on Iran, then I'd take back everything I wrote in the paragraph above. I find it impossible to believe that Erdogan would agree to such an attack on a former ally.

Given that Iran was at the top of the mutual Israeli-U.S. agenda on this trip. And given that Bibi didn't object when Obama told the world that Iran was at least a year away from the nuclear threshold, despite the fact that Bibi placed that date right around now when he broached the subject in his fall UN speech; this leads to the sneaking suspicion that there was a Grand Bargain made that involved an [American commitment to attack Iran](#) with or without Israel in the coming year.

A deep irony in this development is that the Israeli apology involves its acceptance of the fact that its actions were egregious, unwarranted and illegal. No nation apologizes and pays money when it has done nothing wrong. Thus three years of Israeli whitewashes, fake reports, and lobbying in the international community for exoneration have ended in Israeli capitulation. There will be those who argue that despite its apology, Israel has admitted nothing. To which I respond, whether Israel admits it violated international law or not everyone will know as a result of this that it did precisely what it has denied for three years. It murdered nine Turks with no justifiable reason for doing so.

The rapprochement may also have involved developments in Syria. It's possible that Obama is preparing to intervene in the civil war there and wants two critical frontline states sharing borders with Syria to be on the same page with him. Israel has in the past few days floated the dubious claims that Assad used chemical weapons. If this claim were accepted, it would pressure the U.S. into acting much more forcefully. Obama may be trying to get out in front of such pressures.

Though I'm concerned about what form western intervention in Syrian affairs might take, I'm marginally more concerned about how an attack on Iran might play out. In terms of regional stability, a military overthrow of Assad (*à la* Hussein) would be less destabilizing than a U.S.-Israeli attack against Iran. Though it must be said that depending on the response, each development might be equally toxic. If Obama is contemplating either eventuality he's playing with fire. This fire could burn just as destructively as it did for George Bush when he invaded Iraq.

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