

In Turkey, Antisemitism Right and Left

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Last year, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan called for the creation of an “Army of Islam” to attack Israel from all sides, in order to destroy it.

That was shocking, but not surprising, for Erdogan has long been outspoken in his hostility to the Jewish state. Before Erdogan, relations between Turkey and Israel had long been close. Trade and tourism between the two countries boomed. Turkey was the favored destination of Israeli tourists. Israeli technicians were modernizing Turkish combat jets. Israeli pilots practiced maneuvers in Turkish airspace. There were also plans for high-tech cooperation and water sharing.

This ended when Recep Tayyip Erdogan was elected president in 2003. He began to speak about Israel as an “oppressor” of the “Palestinians” and of the need for Turkey to express its

solidarity with fellow Muslims. When Israel went to war in Gaza to stop rocket fire on its southern villages in 2009, Erdogan angrily denounced Israel for defending itself.

Relations deteriorated much more rapidly because of the Mavi Marmara episode. A flotilla of six ships attempted to break the Israeli blockade of Gaza in 2010. Israeli ships tried to stop them. Five of the six ships offered only passive resistance. Those on board the sixth, Turks on a Turkish ship, the Mavi Marmara, put up a fight against Israeli commandos trying to board, and nine armed Turks were killed, with a tenth severely wounded. This caused a furor in Turkey; Erdogan was enraged. Normal diplomatic relations with Israel were frozen – and would remain that way until 2015, when Prime Minister Netanyahu apologized for the Mavi Marmara deaths and agreed to pay \$20 million in compensation. Turkey was in 2015 greatly interested in receiving natural gas – from Israel, so as to break its dependence on supplies from Russia, and that might also help explain its very brief, and very slight, warming toward the Jewish state.

But despite that short period of a scarcely discernible rapprochement, Erdogan soon reverted to type, again constantly denouncing Israel, taking the side of the “Palestinians.” This past March, an article appear in *Yeni Safak*, a newspaper that is regarded as Erdogan’s mouthpiece, under the title “What if an Army of Islam was Formed Against Israel?” The piece openly called on the 57 member states of the OIC to form a joint “Army of Islam” – presumably under Turkish direction – to simultaneously attack Israel from the east, west, north, and south, in order to destroy it.

So that is where relations stand between President Erdogan and Israel – they could hardly be worse.

Then last summer we discovered, to our chagrin, that Erdogan has been echoed in his hysterical anti-Israel views not only by a leading figure in his ruling AKP party, but [also by a](#)

[leading figure in the opposition](#), an opposition that many in the West surely assumed was, in contradistinction to Erdogan, sensible, liberal, secular, and above all, rational. How wrong they were.

Turkish Opposition Figure Criticizes ‘Jewish’ Award, After Founder of Ruling Party Claims ‘Jewish Bankers’ Control US Economy

A founding member of Turkey’s ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) accused Zionist Jews on Tuesday of secretly controlling the US economy, days before a leading opposition figure criticized the AKP for accepting a prize from a Jewish-American group.

In a tweet shared by more than 900 people, Burhan Kuzu alleged that a dozen “Zionist banking families of Jewish descent, whose numbers do not exceed 300,” oversee the printing of US dollars.

Here we go again, with the antisemitic trope of the “Jewish bankers.” Burhan Kuzu needs to be reminded that the “printing of US dollars” is not done by “Zionist banking families,” but by the United States Department of Engraving and Printing, which has been engaged in that task since long before the appearance of “Zionism” or of “Zionist banking families.” It would be fascinating to know exactly how Mr. Kuzu counted up those twelve – count them, twelve – Jewish banking families “whose numbers do not exceed 300.”

After claiming that Presidents Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy “were killed by the Zionists” for trying to wrest control of the economy back from “Jewish bankers,” he [Burhan Kuzu] called on President Donald Trump to follow in their footsteps. “But he can’t do it, because they will assassinate him,” Kuzu said. “Try it Trump, and see what happens!”

Again, just to refresh Mr. Kuzu's curious memory: there were no "Zionists" around (and very few "Jewish bankers") in 1865 to kill Abraham Lincoln, nor any reason for them to have wished to do so. Lincoln was, in fact, the first president to have extensive social contact with Jews in the United States, as we shall see tomorrow.

Abraham Jonas of Springfield, Illinois, whose sons fought on both sides during the Civil War, was himself an active Republican who helped place Lincoln's name in nomination in 1860. Samuel G. Alschuler, a Bavarian Jewish immigrant and photographer, took numerous photographic portraits of Lincoln from his days as a young, rising politician to the president's funeral procession as it worked its way through Chicago en route to his final resting place in Springfield. As president, Lincoln was regularly attended to by a Jewish foot doctor, Issachar Zacharie, who was a favorite of the whole Lincoln family. Burhan Kuzu apparently knows nothing of the philosemitism Lincoln repeatedly displayed.

As for President Kennedy, there have been whole bookshelves dedicated to Lee Harvey Oswald, but though many wild charges have been made about him, no one has yet declared that that homegrown Marxist was a tool of the "Zionists" until Burhan Kuzu came along. Kennedy himself was keenly aware of his own father's antisemitism, and as president was pro-Israel in both his sentiments and his policies. No "Zionist" would have wanted him killed. And has Kuzu forgotten who killed JFK's brother Robert in 1968, the brother who, had he lived, might well have become President himself? It was Sirhan Sirhan, a "Palestinian" from Jordan, who calmly explained that he had killed Robert Kennedy for supporting Israel during the Six-Day War. Kuzu could benefit from a little more study of our presidential history. However, antisemitism is by its very nature unhinged from reality; the truth seldom has any effect on those suffering from that mental pathology. So perhaps no amount of study will change Burhan Kuzu's imperfect grasp of

reality.

The lira recently plummeted in value after Trump imposed steel and aluminum tariffs on Turkey, amidst a diplomatic row over Ankara's ongoing detention of a American evangelical pastor, which also saw Washington sanction two of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's cabinet members. Turkey – whose economy was already on the brink before the spat – has retaliated by doubling tariffs on certain US imports.

I'm surprised that no one in Turkey has yet claimed that Pastor Branson is really a Zionist agent, with the perfect cover – pretending to be a pastor these past 26 years, spreading the gospel in Turkey, while actually an agent of Mossad – and clever enough to have arranged for his own arrest and imprisonment, so as to worsen Turkish-American ties. Anything is possible when those diabolically clever "Zionists" are involved. Burhan Kuzu, take note!

And then there is the head of the Turkish opposition (CHP), another unhinged carrier of antisemitism:

In a separate Twitter thread on Thursday, Muharrem Ince – who served as the presidential candidate for Turkey's main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) in the June 24 [2018] elections – criticized the AKP's recent statements about the US, claiming his own party has been on the vanguard of the fight against "imperialism."

He accused Erdogan's party of "protecting the outpost of imperialism with every policy" since 1950, and "surrendering the state to the Fetö terrorist organization" led by Turkish preacher Fethullah Gülen, who Ankara blames for a failed 2016 coup.

What does Ince mean by an "outpost of imperialism"? This is a reference to Israel, as the ally of the United States and

therefore an “outpost” of American imperialism. Why did Ince mention the date “1950”? It was on January 7, 1950 that the first Turkish diplomatic representation in Israel, a legation, was formally inaugurated.

So Erdogan, who has called for an Army of Islam to destroy Israel, is here being denounced by the leader of the opposition CHP as having all along been “protecting” the very outpost of imperialist America – Israel – that he has been endlessly attacking. What’s next in the wild imagination of Muharrem Ince? Does he think Erdogan is actually a Zionist double agent, only pretending to be hostile to Israel while, all along, he’s been “protecting” it?

Just as ludicrous, **Muharrem Ince accuses Erdogan of “surrendering the state” to the followers of the Turkish preacher Fethullah Gulen.** But Erdogan described the 2016 coup as being planned and led from Pennsylvania by Gulen. It was Erdogan who detained more than 100,000 people and arrested 47,500 of them, accusing them of being followers of Gulen. These included thousands of high-ranking officers, judges, lawyers, journalists, media personalities, and writers. All of them were charged with being part of a coup supposedly organized by Fethullah Gulen; it is Erdogan who keeps demanding that the Americans extradite Gulen from Pennsylvania to Turkey. Yet here we have the leader of the opposition charging Erdogan, who has for two years been whipping up anti-Gulen sentiment, of “surrendering the state” to none other than his worst enemy, Fethullah Gulen. The sheer craziness of Turkish political life is clearly not confined either to Erdogan or to the AKP.

“You are the partners to the Greater Middle East Project for the last 16 years,” Ince added. “You are those who are worthy of the Jewish Courage Prize with the services you have done and deserve this award.”

Many commentators have taken this as a negative reference to

the “Courage to Care Award” that Erdogan accepted in 2005 from the US-based Anti-Defamation League, which was dedicated to the people of Turkey for their efforts to save Jews during the Holocaust.

Erdogan was not, pace Muharrem Ince, awarded the Courage to Care award; he only accepted it on behalf of its intended recipients, “the people of Turkey for their efforts to save Jews during the Holocaust.”

Erdogan also accepted a “Profile of Courage” award from the American Jewish Congress in 2004 for his commitment to protecting Turkish Jews and supporting Middle East peace efforts. He agreed to an AJC request to return the award in 2014, following criticism of his “dangerous rhetoric” during that summer’s war between Israel and the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas.

Ishak Ibrahimzadeh, president of the Jewish community of Turkey, denounced Ince’s language on Thursday, asking in a tweet, “Mr. Muharrem, what’s the problem with the ‘Jewish’ award?”

“In an environment where the word ‘Jewish’ has become a symbol of hatred and alienation,” he said, “we expect you to remove this tweet that lacks awareness!”

Ince’s comments are not the first to raise concerns about antisemitism in the Turkish left. In November, Ozgur Özel – a CHP parliamentary group leader – claimed that then-Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım would fail to discuss a US clampdown on Turkish visas during a visit to Washington, and would instead “seek support from the Jewish lobby.”

In Erdogan’s earliest days in power, having gone from being Mayor of Istanbul to Prime Minister, when it wasn’t clear how anti-Israel and how antisemitic Erdogan would turn out to be,

the American Jewish Congress gave him its **“Profile of Courage” award for his “commitment to protecting Jewish Turkish Jews”** (which, rhetorically, he did), and his “supporting Middle East peace efforts,” which would, beginning in 2009, turn out to mean supporting the “Palestinians” to the hilt and denouncing Israelis for their attempts to defend their country from Hamas rockets. When that award was given to him in 2004, it still looked as if Erdogan might continue to treat Israel, if not any longer as an ally, at least not as the enemy it subsequently became for him. Indeed, in 2005 he paid a visit to Israel.

Muharrem Ince thinks it shameful that Erdogan should ever have accepted any awards from any Jewish group. For him, that implies a sinister connection – no need to spell it out – to the “Zionists.” Erdogan was given, and accepted, exactly one award for himself (the other he accepted on behalf of the “people of Turkey”), and when asked by the American Jewish Congress to return that award in 2014 because of his strong criticism of Israel that year, he eagerly complied, taking the occasion to lash out at Israel yet again. But apparently that cuts no ice with Ince. Not even the fact that Erdogan has been described as possibly “the most antisemitic leader now in office” saves him, in Ince’s view, from being too close to the Zionists.

Erdogan’s incessant over-the-top comments about Israel are noteworthy. With his offer to create an “Army of Islam” to destroy the Jewish state, he can hardly be outdone in antisemitic malevolence. But he is not, alas, a lonely figure on the Turkish political landscape. He has plenty of company. There is Burhan Kuzu of the AKP, who knows “Jewish bankers” – a dozen families – control everything in the United States, and have done so since at least 1865, when the Zionists killed Abraham Lincoln. Jeff Bezos, Warren Buffett, Bill Gates, the Koch brothers – please take note. There is Muharrem Ince, the opposition leader who hopes to outdo Erdogan in antisemitism,

by accusing him of being too closely linked to the Jews. Pay no attention to how Erdogan has been lambasting Israel for the past 13 years, says Ince, but just remember that in 2004 he accepted an award for speaking in friendly fashion about Turkish Jewry. Erdogan, for shame!

There must be some sane people in Turkish politics, not unhinged by antisemitism. If you hear of them, please let me know. I'll be glad to post both their names and examples of their sanity. For me, it would be a Turkish delight.

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