

Why do most Turks side with Erdoğan at Davos?

Friday 6 February 2009, by [Sahin Alpay](#)

The top news story last week in Turkey was surely about Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan walking off the panel on Gaza held at the World Economic Forum in Davos when he was prevented by the moderator from responding to Israeli President Shimon Peres, who with a raised voice and pointed finger railed at him for criticizing Israel's deadly offensive against the Palestinians.

There were widely divergent assessments of Erdoğan's performance at Davos among commentators in the Turkish media, some being highly critical of both his words and his walk-off. A national survey conducted by phone immediately after Erdoğan's return home from Davos found, however, that about four-fifths of those interviewed not only gave their support to Erdoğan's harsh criticism of Israel, but also approved of his walking off the panel.

I, too, belong to this broad majority of Turks. After watching the whole event live on television, I basically agreed with what Mr. Amr Moussa, the secretary-general of the Arab League and former foreign minister of Egypt, one of the other panelists, had to say about Erdoğan: "He said what he wanted to say and then he left. That's all. He was right. ... Israel doesn't listen."

I too think that Erdoğan was right, mainly for the following reasons: He was right, first of all, in what he said about Israeli aggression against the people of Gaza. Israel has committed crimes against humanity, killing innocent civilians and children, and disregarded United Nations Security Council's call for a cease-fire, while the rest of the world has done practically nothing but watch Israel kill and destroy. No other ally of Israel has so far dared to speak the ugly truth about Israel's militarist policies, which are not only a constant threat to peace in the region and the world, but which endanger the security of its own people. It was unacceptable that Mr. Peres, setting aside all diplomatic courtesy and with the usual Israeli arrogance, attempted to scold Turkey's prime minister over his criticism of Israel's policies. Peres' remarks deserved a full response from Erdoğan, but the moderator of the panel, Mr. David Ignatius of The Washington Post, impolitely and insistently hindered him. Mr. Ignatius' behavior was inexplicable and inexcusable. If I were Erdoğan, I too would have walked away.

Some of his domestic critics claim that Erdoğan's words and walk-off at Davos were wrong because it will encourage the Israel lobby in the United States to assume a hostile attitude towards Turkey. (I refuse to call this lobby the "Jewish lobby" as some people do, because I regard this as an affront to the Jews all over the world who are strongly opposed to Israel's policies of oppression and subjugation of the Palestinian people.) This lobby's efforts to suppress all criticism of Israel by accusing all who criticize Israel of anti-Semitism should not be tolerated, since it conflicts with the long-term interests of the people of Israel. The Israel lobby is discreetly threatening to give its support to the draft resolution in the US Congress to recognize the "Armenian genocide" unless Ankara discontinues its criticism of Israeli policies. Enough with this blackmailing! If the US is ready to adopt the resolution and alienate Turkey, it must be also prepared for the consequences.

" Hamas and DTP ?"

Some of the domestic critics of Erdoğan claim that his behavior at Davos is likely to damage the relations between Turkey and Israel. If the Israeli government does not regard Turkey as a valuable friend, does not appreciate Ankara's efforts to facilitate peace between Israel on the one side and the Palestinians and

Syria on the other, does not tolerate criticism from a close ally, why should Turkey care about relations with Israel?

I do side with Erdoğan at Davos. There are, however, many related issues on which I do not at all approve of him. First of all, I believe he needs to be consistent. Why doesn't he have anything to say about the injustices and atrocities committed against the people of Darfur in Sudan, when he rightly condemns the injustices and atrocities committed against the Palestinian people by Israel?

Why does he refuse even to shake hands with the democratically elected representatives of the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) in the Turkish Parliament, while he rightly calls on Israel to engage, rather than isolate Hamas, the democratically elected representatives of the Palestinian people? When he rightly accuses Israel of committing crimes against humanity and of disregarding UN Security Council decisions, is he prepared to face similar accusations that can be leveled against Turkish governments, too?

There is no doubt that the best support Turkey can give to the Palestinian people is to facilitate peace between Israel and Palestine. For this, yes it is absolutely necessary to secure the trust of the Palestinian people. It is, however, equally necessary not to lose the trust of the people of Israel, who surely have great respect for Turkey. It is necessary to convince the people of Israel that the criticism leveled against their government only aims to serve their long-term interests.

Sources

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