

Israel lobby's worldview is closer to Bush than Obama

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Certainly, much of it has to do with perceptions and denial. Just as the majority of Greeks still do not seem to understand the true meaning and impact of the economic crisis, the majority of the Israeli people show the same pattern.

They are unable to grasp the fact that the current Gaza blockade has become unsustainable and that their government's systematically invasive policies of dealing with the Palestinian issue are undermining the West's vital interests in the region.

Societies take their own time to change their minds. Let us leave them alone for more reflection and turn to the ongoing blame game and propaganda activities at the diplomatic level. As predicted, the ball is in Washington's court. With the dust settling after the violence at sea, the frustration is now turning against the Turkish government, apparently in an effort to force the Obama administration to make a choice between Israel and Turkey for their strategic cooperation in the region. Some voices from Europe — although tiny — blame Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Ahmet Davutoğlu for their fiery rhetoric and choices of phrasing such as, "It is our Sept. 11" and " Hamas is not a terrorist organization."

Reports and private discussions we have had with sources all indicate that the anti-Turkish mood in the US capital is gaining strength. Nobody should deny that the powerful Israeli lobby — despite visible splits because of the Gaza incident — is doing its best to persuade the Obama administration not to change its Gaza policies, to continue its full support of the Israeli government and "make the Turkish government pay" for what it believes is a criminal act.

The vitriolic mood was also clearly reflected by The Washington Post in an editorial dated June 5 (although it was nuanced by a more "friendly" editorial three days later asking Israel to soften its Gaza policies).

As these attempts to exert influence in the White House go on, nuances should be enriched to understand the full picture, to understand what really is taking place.

Sizeable EU States awkwardly alienated Turkey

Some Europeans have expressed concern about the Turkish government's actions in the past week. Turkey was an easy tool in the Cold War. It no longer is a passive actor. Currently the 16th largest economy in the world, and aspiring to be among the top 10 in five or 10 years, it is keen on translating its economic power to political might on the world stage. Any country of such size would refuse to be treated like an infant. If there is any party to blame for refusing to predict or see this fact, it is the several sizeable EU member states who have alienated Turkey, since 2005, on its path to full EU membership. The more Turks felt frustrated, the more they sought to expand the impact of their economic success story to the East. Their policy remains unchanged: the deeper and wider the economic interdependence is, the more stability, security and democracy in the region. While this is happening — with Syria and Iraq, for example — the EU is just watching. As Turkey seeks to expand its presence (economically and culturally), Israel stands out more and more as an old-fashioned power which is becoming a security risk due to its unwillingness to seek peace.

One can project many negative reflections and labels onto Erdoğan and feel some satisfaction, but even

his staunchest adversaries acknowledge one element of his character (which stems from the poor neighborhood he comes from): He deeply despises dishonesty and cheating and hardly ever forgets. What lies beneath his anger with Israel dates back to the Gaza invasion by Israel a couple of years ago. A week or so before the incident, he had hosted then-Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, and talked at length with him about ways of building peace. He called Syrian President Bashar al-Assad during the meeting. And soon after Olmert returned to Israel, Erdoğan was given the news that the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) had launched an attack into Gaza. He felt cheated and publicly projected his fury in Davos to President Shimon Peres.

Now the two adversaries, having declared a sort of cold war on each other, stand eye to eye. My colleague Cengiz Çandar writes (in Radikal) that one of the governments has to go in order to break the stalemate. But this does not have to happen. The Israeli government — whose policies clearly undermine American efforts to gain ground in the Middle East — can think deeper and help the US to take on a more constructive role.

And a final point for Americans to reflect upon: For decades, those who fought for freedom and human rights in Turkey (leftists, liberals, moderate Muslims, Kurds, etc.) felt, over and over, let down by the US because its choices at the end of the day helped the suppressors to keep their power. President Barack Obama came to power as a reaction to global wrongs and human rights abuses. The Israeli lobby might think of Turkey as a liability. What Turkey stands for and what it says needs a deeper understanding.

Sources

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