

A tale of two cities: Istanbul vs. Jerusalem (II)

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The first part of this mini series visited Jerusalem in June 1967. (Available at www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=a-tale-of-two-cities-istanbul-v.-jerusalem-i--2011-06-02.) This sequel takes the mini series to Istanbul in June 2011, aboard the Mavi Marmara.

The organizers of the Gaza flotilla, a Turkish Islamist charity with dubious United Nation recognition, the İHH, have pledged to send a second flotilla later this month after the first one faced a deadly Israeli commando attack last year. Although the opening, and brief closure, of the Rafah crossing into Gaza has apparently made any aid flotilla meaningless, İHH's president, Bülent Yıldırım, said the new mission is not aid but "justice." But which justice?

The day after the Israeli raid that killed nine people aboard the Mavi Marmara, Mr Yıldırım explained his understanding of justice: "Last night everything in the world changed, and everything is progressing toward Islam. Anyone who does not stand alongside Palestine, his throne will be toppled."

And in response to U.N., American and Israeli calls, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu said governments cannot stop their citizens launching another flotilla to Gaza, and Ankara would not prevent private challenges to an illegal blockade.

Wisdom would ask Mr Davutoğlu to perhaps encourage the İHH to send a flotilla to Latakia to break the blockade on protestors and stop the Syrian police killing them. The Syrian death count is already over 1,000, or 111 times bigger than the death toll on the Mavi Marmara, excluding over 10,000 missing or detained for torture and future death.

Alternatively, if the foreign minister is so keen on the idea of freedom flotillas against illegal blockades, he can think of Varosha in Cyprus, which has remained a ghost town after the Turkish army fenced it off in 1974. But Mr Davutoğlu has other, preferred, responsibilities.

For example, the foreign minister often talks about his dream to "pray at the al-Aqsa Mosque in Palestinian [Muslim] Jerusalem." He does not hide his ambition to see Jerusalem as the capital of a free Palestinian state. One wonders, though, if he would have kept his sympathetic smile if a foreign minister spoke of his dream to visit Diyarbakır as the capital of Kurdistan. I think we can guess. But he is not the only Islamist who habitually boasts multiple standards of indecent choice, all for the advance of political Islam.

Last week, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan addressed a local crowd in Diyarbakır, saying that: "We are the grandchildren of Saladin Ayyubi's army [soldiers] that conquered Jerusalem." So, says the prime minister, the ancient capital of Judaism had been conquered by Muslims.

But, then, why would something taken by force from someone else belong to its occupier? Why is Jerusalem Palestinian if it had been conquered from its ancient possessors? And why should we be proud to be the grandchildren of someone whose army conquered other people's territories?

A few days earlier, Mr Erdoğan, this time in Trabzon, reminded his party's supporters that on May 29

"We proudly celebrated the 558th anniversary of the conquest of Istanbul." And, he said, without the conquest of Trabzon, the conquest of Anatolia would have been incomplete.

It is not a coincidence that Fatih (conqueror) is a very common male name in Turkish. The Turks are proud to be the evlad-i fatihan (the descendants of conquerors). They are too happy to be living in the territories that once belonged to other nations. But all that is understandable since they are not the only nation which does so, with or without the others naming their children "conqueror." All the same, there is a problem with the Turkish/Islamist case.

If we are talking about universal justice and legality, why are the conquests of Istanbul, Trabzon and Anatolia by the Turks, and of Jerusalem by Ayyubi good; but the repatriation of Jerusalem to Israel by re-conquest bad? Especially when the re-conquest was the result of self-defense in the face of eight enemy armies who attack to annihilate a legitimate state.

More questions. If Jerusalem should be the capital of "free Palestine," why should Istanbul not become the capital of "freer Greece?" Why is Nicosia a divided capital? What were the Turks doing at the gates of Vienna in 1683? Was Süleyman the Magnificent's army there to distribute humanitarian aid to the Viennese, like the İHH claims its Gaza mission is?

Forty-four years ago, the Arabs dreamed of "having lunch in Tel Aviv." The dream cost them a major humiliation and Jerusalem, and the Middle East, peace. Today, the Turkish leaders dream of praying in the "Palestinian capital" Jerusalem while denying the Orthodox Patriarch of Istanbul his ecumenical designation. Luckily, the Turks, unlike Arabs, are the grandchildren of conquerors.

Keeping the ancient capital of Orthodoxy as the biggest Turkish city is fine. But please, Mssrs Erdoğan and Davutoğlu, at least try not to make too much noise in commemorating the day when we took it by force from another nation. And remember, gentlemen, claiming that Istanbul is a Turkish city by origin and Jerusalem is Palestinian sounds like too-dark black humor.

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