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## **Erdoğan Exploits the Temple Mount Crisis to Foment Anti-Zionism and Anti-Semitism**

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** Turkey continues to insert itself more and more into the ongoing clashes on the Temple Mount, almost as if it legally represents the Palestinians in the dispute. Turkey's anti-Israel agitation, which garners wide support among Palestinians in both Gaza and the PA, is hardly new. But its patronage of the Palestinians hides more than religious sentiment. Turkish anti-Zionism, which aligns directly with anti-Semitism, is being expressed once again through the current friction.

In May 2017, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan spoke at the opening ceremony of a two-day conference in Istanbul called "The International Forum on al-Quds Waqf." He condemned "Israeli crimes against the Palestinians" and called on Muslims to visit the al-Aqsa Mosque on the Temple Mount as frequently as possible. "As a Muslim community, we need to visit the al-Aqsa Mosque often," he said. "Each day that Jerusalem is under occupation is an insult to us."

On July 20, 2017, responding to increased security measures on the Temple Mount following the murders of two Israeli policemen there at the holy site, he said: "Any restriction on Muslims entering the al-Aqsa Mosque is unacceptable...The protection of the Islamic character and sanctity of al-Quds [Jerusalem] and al-Haram al-Sharif [the al-Aqsa Mosque complex] is important for the whole Muslim world...The Muslim world cannot remain silent."

In his capacity as term chairman of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Erdoğan condemned Israel's supposed prevention of Muslims' performing Friday prayers at the al-Aqsa Mosque. While extending condolences to those killed during the violent clashes in Jerusalem, he assailed the use of

“excessive force” by Israeli security forces against those who had gathered for Friday prayers.

“The OIC was founded in 1969 during an attack on al-Haram al-Sharif, and today the Islamic world stands with our Palestinian brothers with the same spirit of unity and solidarity,” Erdoğan claimed. He said efforts to remove “restrictions on access to the al-Aqsa Mosque” would continue in coordination with the Jerusalem Islamic Waqf, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, and Jordanian King Abdullah II, whom he phoned on July 24 to discuss the matter. At a press conference, the president’s spokesman İbrahim Kalın asserted, “al-Aqsa Mosque is not alone. It’s not for Israel. It belongs to the Palestinians and to all Muslims.”

Significantly, Erdoğan referred to the three Palestinians killed in clashes with the police over the Temple Mount security measures as “*Şehitler*,” or “*shahids*” (“martyrs”) – though ever since the establishment of modern Turkey, that term has been reserved for Turkish soldiers and policemen who fall in the line of duty. It thus carries a nationalistic-secular connotation. Furthermore, with regard to al-Aqsa, Erdoğan often uses the term “Muslims” instead of “Palestinians.” And at the AKP meeting on July 25, Erdoğan declared that Israel’s legal capital is Tel Aviv, not Jerusalem, which is sacred to three religions.

All these assertions, together with Erdoğan’s earlier call for Muslims to “take responsibility” for Jerusalem, endanger Israel’s legitimacy on the Temple Mount.

Erdoğan’s call to world Muslims to flock to Jerusalem, and his warning that “the Muslim world cannot remain silent”, were accompanied by vociferous protests at two Istanbul synagogues, Neve Şalom and Ahrida. (Though the protests almost took on the proportions of sieges, no damage was caused at either location.) On July 20, one of the protesters at Neve Şalom said, “If you obstruct our freedom of worship there [Jerusalem], we will obstruct your freedom of worship here.” Attacks on synagogues by Turkish Islamist-ultranationalists are unfortunately not a new phenomenon in Turkey, and include terror attacks at Neve Şalom in 1986 and 2003.

Moreover, during Israel’s military confrontations with the Palestinians since the rise of AKP, placards have been raised against Jews rather than against Israel. The Islamist newspaper *Yeni Akit*, which responded angrily to Ashkenazi synagogue officials in Istanbul who justified IDF operations in Gaza in 2014, called for an organized rally against synagogues. Following this call, social media networks announced an “egg protest.” On July 22, 2014, a group gathered in front of Ortaköy Synagogue carrying anti-Israel posters and threw eggs at the building.

The Turkish government occasionally condemns these incidents but does nothing to prevent them. Nor, ominously, does it distinguish between Israel and the Turkish Jewish community. Quite the reverse, in fact: in Turkish society, Jews and Israelis are essentially synonymous, as are anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism.

This way of thinking is substantially Erdoğan's doing. In a 2012 poll, 46% of Turks surveyed claimed that Erdoğan's anti-Israel statements had bolstered their own anti-Semitism. The president's half-hearted denunciation of synagogue attacks and seldom-expressed concern for Turkish Jews are mere lip service to an insincere attempt to draw a line between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism. When Israel is condemned as a terrorist state, Turkish Jews and Jews in general are labeled as Turkish targets.

Yet religion is not the Turkish government's only calculation in its agitation against Israel. Ankara has a great interest in creating pro-Turkish sentiment among Palestinians. Its objective is to oust Jordan from its position as patron of the Temple Mount and gain support on the Palestinian street at Jordan's expense. This would be in order to spread Muslim Brotherhood/Hamas ideology and strengthen Turkey's regional hegemony.

This objective is manifested by the organization of cultural and religious events, as well as the establishment and/or sponsoring of charity organizations, women's organizations, youth movements, and so on. These activities are orchestrated by the Turkish consulate in east Jerusalem and by Turkish organizations like TIKA (Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency), which started operating in east Jerusalem in 2005.

In this context, every security or military incident in which Israel is involved serves as another brick in the Turkish political and religious wall against the Jewish state. As threatening as Erdoğan's words are to the legitimacy of Israeli rule in Jerusalem, his vile anti-Israel/Jewish rhetoric further inflames Arabs and Muslims and strengthens anti-Semitism inside Turkey. For Erdoğan, so it seems, Israel is but a useful tool for promoting his ambitious neo-Ottoman vision.

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