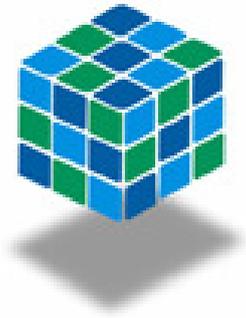


הפורום למזרח תיכון חכם
منتدى الشرق الأوسط الحكيم
Smart Middle East



Where Is Israel's Gratitude to the Kurdish People?

Just as we preserved our friendship with Turkey while they continued supporting our adversaries, so, too, will the Turks learn to live with Israeli friendship on one hand, and our support for Kurdish rights on the other.

Eli Avidar (translated from the Hebrew by Marty Roberts Grogin)

For a long time I have warned that we must cease typical Israeli "black and white" conduct, which causes damage to us and prevents us from advancing vital interests in the international arena and in our relationship with the Palestinians and the Arab world in general. The story of our relationship with the Kurdish people and our conduct with Turkey concerning them is no different.

Some 130 thousand members of the Kurdish community live in the State of Israel, and their stories indicate that they lived in peace and with regard among their Muslim neighbors. The very fact that they preserved their Jewishness in areas remote from other Jewish centers proves that the Jews of Kurdistan achieved respect and appreciation. You can see that concentrations of Jews living in similar isolation disappeared over the years. Not so in Kurdistan.

Most of the Israeli public does not even know that the Jewish people from Kurdistan happened to arrive there in the wake of the Assyrian royal exile. The first stage of the exile was undertaken by Shalmaneser V in 733 BC, and it was completed by his successor, Sargon II in 722 BC. The two Kings deported Jews living in the Kingdom of Northern Israel and east of the Jordan River. The aliyah (immigration) of Kurdish Jews to Israel began before the establishment of the State, with the majority of the community immigrating after the establishment of Israel, during 1950-1954, under the orders of the rabbis and community leaders. Their emigration to Israel was not due to riots or pogroms of the Muslim population amongst which the Jews lived, but because of deep love for Israel, which prompted them to follow the community leaders and leave their region.

We have a moral and a historic debt to the Kurdish people in all the geographic regions in which they live, especially the Kurdish community in Iraq. Following the riots, pogroms and the harsh conditions that Iraqi Jews were exposed to, since the founding of the State of Israel and even before, it was the Kurdish people who helped Jewish families escape from Iraq to Turkey, and from there to reach the Land of Israel. I am personally familiar with one incident, the case of the victim murdered by the government, the late Fouad Gabai z"l, who was hanged in the central square of Baghdad on 27 January 1969 along with eight others also killed by the government. His widow and four children were arrested and placed in a detention camp. They were later smuggled to Israel by the Barzani family, one of two main Kurdish families in Iraq.

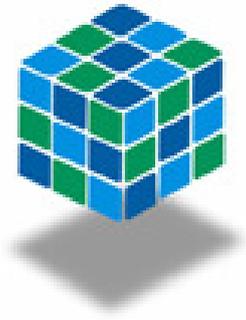
How are the Kurds different from the Eastern Europeans?

For many years the Kurds have suffered under the strong arm of the Iraqi regime,

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their only sin being their desire for independence - and the the Sunni world was silent. The Kurdish people have always been amongst the adopted sons of Sunni Islam and the Middle East in general. The change of government in Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein led to a Sunni-Shiite civil war. In 2007, in a live broadcast on Qatar's satellite channel, the world's most extreme Sunni preacher, Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who kept silent when members of the Kurdish community in Iraq were slaughtered during the of reign Saddam Hussein, called to the Kurdish leadership not to forget that they are Sunni, and to help their fellow Sunnis against the Shiites. The Kurdish leadership in Iraq did not buy this and did not assist. They suffered too many years for a call like this to bring them to action.

Over the years, members of the Kurdish community in Israel have shared the pain of the Kurdish people suffering in Iraq and Turkey. I have learned from their stories; community leaders returning deeply moved after travelling to Turkey, making sure to reach areas under the control of Turkish Kurds in order to connect with their heritage and to talk to the people, .

Over the years of tight relations with Turkey, the anger of the Kurdish resistance has been directed against against Israel more than once. The best example of this took place on 17 February 1999, when, following the announcement by the Turkish court of the verdict of Kurdish leader Ocalan, a furious mob of Kurds took over our consulate in Berlin for a few hours.

The Jewish people, who know how to be grateful to every citizen of Poland, Russia or Germany who saved Jews, also needs to know how to be grateful to an entire people with whom we lived in peace, appreciation and understanding for thousands of years.

With regard to Turkish anger over such a move, one has to say that, just as Turkey could always maintain good relations with Israel while sometimes supporting elements opposing Israel, (the ultimate being the flotilla to Gaza last week...and it's not only the Prime Ministers from the Islamist parties, such as Erdogan, Erbakan or Abdullah Gul, but the same is true during the periods of secular Prime Ministers such as Demiral Ecevit and Yilmaz) so too, Turkey needs to understand that our good relations with her do not to cause us to ignore our moral obligation to the Kurdish people, which the international community in their self-righteousness have forgotten about and left outside of the global agenda. The Kurdish people deserve what any other people deserves.

We must stop thinking in black and white. We need to adopt a world view and a multi-disciplinary policy within which resides the peaceful coexistence of good relations with Turkey alongside gratitude to the Kurdish people. We are not talking about a revolutionary policy here. Look around us. All of the Middle Eastern countries and many countries in the world operate within such policies, which, according to my rationale, are much more effective and ethical.