

“Mask Diplomacy” Might Not be Enough to Save Turkey from Financial Crisis

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Turkey seems to be getting inspiration from China by engaging in “mask diplomacy” and is helping many coronavirus affected countries. Even though Turkey is being devastated by the pandemic with over 100,000 cases and 2,200 succumbing to the infection, it has taken the opportunity to try and create good will after it tarnished its reputation when it attempted to asymmetrically invade Greece with illegal immigrants in February and March.

Turkish coronavirus aid is reaching all corners of the globe from the Americas to Africa, from Europe to East Asia. However, one of the most surprising locations for Turkish aid is Israel. The Israeli government has been extremely quiet about this fact, especially since Israeli **Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu** was happy enough to thank China and the United States for their aid.

For years Turkish **President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan** has been vocally defending the Palestinian cause, so-much-so that he openly announces his friendship with the Hamas terrorist organization that has controlled Gaza since 2007. Hamas has been the justification used by Israel to impose its inhumane blockade on the tiny territory wedged between Israel and Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula. Israel has endlessly accused Erdoğan of being allied to terrorists. But despite the frosty words, this has not stopped the thriving economic relations between the two countries that accounted [for nearly \\$6 billion](#) in trade in 2019.

An interesting factor in Turkey’s “mask diplomacy” with Israel is that masks extended to the Palestinians were only bound for the West Bank and not to Erdoğan’s allies in Gaza. This demonstrates that perhaps Erdoğan has given up provoking Israel as Tel Aviv recognizes the Fatah government in West Bank but not Hamas in Gaza. It now appears that Erdoğan no longer wants to take on the mantle as the “Champion” of the Palestinian cause after the majority of the Arab world abandoned Palestine to focus on initially Iran, but shifting more towards resisting Turkey’s expansionist ideology in the Arab world.

As Erdoğan strongly supports the Muslim Brotherhood that aims to depose Arab authoritarian monarchs from power, such as those in the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, it has created a split in the Muslim World, putting the Palestinian cause on the sidelines. However, the Muslim Brotherhood does not only take aim at Arab monarchies’, with the exception of Qatar who also fund the organization, but also secular government’s like those in Egypt.

With the Muslim world in disarray, Israel is no longer seen as the enemy, or at least a

priority. Israel will take the Turkish-offered aid without hesitation and remember that Turkey was the first Muslim country to recognize the Jewish State and that Erdoğan will not always be in power. For Erdoğan though, it is critical that he gets the Israelis back on his side since the Palestinians are of little strategic value and there is no more prestige behind “championing” the Palestinian cause.

At the same time a trilateral relationship between Israel, Cyprus and Greece is emerging in the military and energy sectors. As Turkey becomes increasingly isolated in the region with few friends, having strengthened relations with Israel again means a potential rupture in Tel Aviv’s relations with Greece and Cyprus. The coronavirus pandemic is serving as another front in geopolitical games, and although China is leading the pack in this, Turkey does come in at a distant second place.

As energy prices are tumbling, the construction of the East Med pipeline between Israel, Cyprus and Greece appears to be threatened which would be to Turkey’s advantage. This pipeline will reshape the power structures of the Eastern Mediterranean and make it difficult for Turkey to legitimize its illegitimate claims over Greek and Cypriot maritime space in defiance of the United Nations Charter Law of the Sea.

Although Turkey will be hoping for the collapse of the ambitious pipeline and to strengthen relations with Israel through “mask diplomacy,” Erdoğan must survive the economic and social repercussions of his domestic coronavirus policy. While most of the world was preparing to deal with the pandemic, [pro-Erdoğan television stations](#) were having discussions whether Turkish genetics could protect the people from coronavirus. Authorities in Turkey were also [arresting journalists](#) and [social media users](#) who contended that the true case and death toll from coronavirus in the country were purposefully underreported.

With Turkey being economically devastated by not only the coronavirus, but by years of corruption and nepotism, the country has now run out of foreign reserves and the Turkish lira is plummeting. The question then becomes whether Turkey can maintain a highly militarized and aggressive foreign policy, and whether “mask diplomacy” will be enough to bring some respite from financial hardship. Israel will remember Erdoğan is volatile and can very well easily turn against them again despite flourishing trade relations, and Europe has not forgotten how only some weeks ago Turkey attempted to flood the continent with illegal immigrants. “Mask diplomacy” might not be enough to save Erdoğan from his all his past aggressions, nepotism and financially irresponsibility.

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