

Triple Standards: Kurds and Israelis vs. Arabs, Iranians, and Turks

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Brief Analysis

For decades, Kurds have been accused of support for Israel and opposition to the Palestinian cause. But besides the ethnic dispute, the real issue between Kurds and Arabs is that one side wants to drag the other into participating in its wars. At the same time, Turkish and Iranian media have tried to justify crimes against Kurds in Syria, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran. Turkey deals profitably with Israel to the extent that trade between the two nations reached \$4 billion in 2017 even though Ankara insists in its media that it is fighting Israel.

Kurds are not Arabs, and they should not be forced to declare enemies of the Arabs as their own enemies. Why should the Kurds necessarily be against Israel because of its occupation of Palestine or the Golan Heights, while the same principle does not apply Turkey for example? Turkey is a state occupying Kurdish land, yet Kurds never demand Arabs or Syria or Iraq to be hostile towards Turks or expel Turkish ambassadors from Damascus or Baghdad.

The majority of Arabs and Syrians who oppose the regime of Bashar al-Assad view Israel alone as an occupying state, while Turkey occupies large areas of historic Syria, including the Sanjak of Alexandretta, Jarabulus, al-Bab, and Afrin. This does not even include the Ottoman occupation of Arab countries that lasted four centuries. Perhaps the clearest justification for the double standard is that Turkey is a Muslim country.

Whoever declares himself in solidarity with the Palestinians against Israel, must also show solidarity with the Kurds against Turkey and other countries occupying their territory. Otherwise, we are in the grips of a double standard in how we treat the legitimacy of human rights, freedoms, and beliefs.

How can you ask someone to be against Israel for Israel's crimes against your people and land, but show unwavering support for another country that has committed the most heinous crimes against Kurds in recent history? The majority of Arab elites are consistently hostile to Israel, yet roll out the red carpet for Turkey no matter the occasion.

It is noteworthy that manifestations of the Arab-Israeli conflict have begun to fade at the official level in the Arab world. As a case in point, there are now Israeli embassies and consulates in a number of Arab capitals, including

Cairo, and Amman, Nevertheless, some Arab media and elites do not hesitate to describe a potential Kurdish state as “second Israel,” despite the vast geographical distance between Israel and the Kurdish areas of Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Turkey, or the fact that there are no apparent official or diplomatic relations between the two countries.

What is puzzling about some Arabs depicting Kurds this way is the lack of any clear reason or evidence for this accusation. Kurds have lived in their own historic land since the Sykes-Picot agreement in 1916, which divided their country between four states. For instance, the Turkish-Syrian border fence in Kobani leaves members of the same Kurdish family separated on either side. The same situation also exists in Iraq and Iran, where Kurds face constant oppression even though they are linked by family ties across borders.

In light of these constant racist accusations against Kurds and their struggle – which is one of the most complicated in the Middle East – we must remember that while Israel has never been on the Kurds’ side, it does not actively combat them directly, as the other four countries do. These countries wage war on the Kurds either militarily, as happened in Afrin recently, or morally by banning their language and culture, as is the case in Syria. Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that many left-wing Kurdish fighters have fought against Israel in Palestine and southern Lebanon with Palestinian military groups, mostly in the form of Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) fighters during the 1980s.

It is important to go back to the early stages of the Arab-Israeli conflict during the wars between the two sides in Palestine, the Golan Heights, Lebanon, Sinai, and Jordan, and all of the massacres, destruction, and displacement carried out by Israel in this period. However, Palestinian residents of these countries and regions were not without identification papers. They were able to move around and travel with temporary or permanent documents issued by the authorities in their country or the countries they fled to (Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, etc.). Israel even granted citizenship to the majority of them as well. Even some Palestinian elites today carry Israeli passports, including some who run Arab institutions that supported the Arab Spring or sponsor Political Islam, in either its moderate or radical strains. In addition, during their conflict with the Arabs, the Israeli authorities have not prevented Palestinians from speaking their native language of Arabic. This is in sharp contrast to the bitter experience Kurds have had while still remaining on their own land.

The Arab-Israeli conflict – which now only appears in the form of a media war waged in some Arab press outlets and social media sites – was being fought against what Arab leaders and their media described as “the racist occupier Israel.” At the same time, however, a similar system in Syria and Iraq has deprived Kurds of basic civil rights, including banning their native Kurdish language. Many lived without any identification papers and the Syrian authorities did not even recognize their existence, even though they were living on their historic land. The racist practices of the Syrian state forced some Kurds who had Syrian passports to register as Syrian Arabs on some documents required by the state and on their birth certificates.

There is also the Arabization of the names of Kurdish cities, villages, and towns in Syria and Iraq. The Syrian and Iraqi regimes have changed the demographics of Kurdish areas by resettling Arab families there in both northern Syria and Iraq. As a result, the current conflict in the disputed areas between Erbil and Baghdad likely will not stop any time soon.

The bloody massacres carried out by Israel against Arabs in occupied Palestine, the Golan Heights, Lebanon, Sinai, and Jordan in all of their cruelty and oppression still do not compare to Saddam Hussein’s 1988 massacre of Kurds, where over 5,000 Kurds were killed by chemical weapons in less than half an hour in the Iraqi Kurdish village of Halabja.

Turkish crimes against the Kurds cannot be ignored either. In an attempt to belittle Kurds, Turkey says that “Kurdish” means “the sound of our soldiers’ feet on the snow.” The insult does not stop there, as Turkish authorities

have continued their war against Kurdish territories through their planned and organized attack on the city of Afrin since the beginning of this year, where with the help of some Syrian Arab opposition fighters it successfully occupied the city and expelled its inhabitants. Hundreds of civilians are killed by fighter jets without any clear Arab stance condemning these crimes or demanding that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan stop the killing and withdraw from the semi-autonomous region within the Syrian border.

The tyranny and occupation of these three regimes and their racist practices against Kurds are no different in Iran, which executes Kurds nearly every day just for demanding the right to live in their own land.

In summary, there is no comparison between what the Kurds have suffered and the Palestinians' experience in Israel or in the diaspora during the Arab-Israeli conflict. Accordingly, most Arabs are not justified in their hostility to Kurds and have no right to ask them to show an absolute and blind hostility to Israel as a condition for Arabs to show solidarity with them. This is especially true as Arab regimes are standing by silently during the Turkish occupation happening today. No Arabs have spoken out against the Turkish forces that are slaughtering and displacing the peaceful people of Afrin under the pretext of driving out "terrorism." Solidarity here is entirely one-sided: it is an expectation imposed only on the Kurds and is not reciprocated by the Arabs.

To solve these problems that are an obstacle to the coexistence of all the countries that oppress the Kurds, I believe that the Arab elite must not impose conditions on them or try to make their decisions for them. The same applies to the Kurds when supporting the Arab cause – they must not dictate conditions to the other side. On the other hand, if the current silence about the injustice and abuses against the Kurds in Syria, Iraq, Turkey, and Iran continues, then it is only natural that the Kurds should wish for Israel to be their occupier, instead of Arabs, Iranians, or Turks! ❖

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