Our Minarets are Lances
Turkey turns its gaze from Europe and towards its Ottoman past

By Jürgen Bühler

The ramifications of the recent Gaza flotilla incident are still unfolding. Yet it is already clear that Turkey’s government, in backing the flotilla organizers and lashing out at Israel’s interception of the hostile fleet, is steering that nation away from its alignment with Europe and the West back into the Islamic fold.

This historic shift was foreseen by some long before the Gaza aid flotilla set sail from Istanbul. Germans in particular have been sensitive to signs of change due to their country’s long and unique relationship with Turkey going back to the Ottoman era and Germany’s alliance with Turkey in World War One.

In 2002, the German political analyst and writer Peter Scholl-Latour projected in his book “Allah’s Shadow over Atatürk” that secular Turkey might soon become a relic of the past. Fervent Islamic faith, he observed, was no longer the religion of a small, backwards-looking fringe group, but represented a burgeoning political movement. Today, it indeed has become mainstream in Turkish society, and the turn Eastward has been especially evident since Recep Tayyip Erdogan rose to power five years ago in the AKP faction which has governed Turkey for eight years now.

A decade ago, Erdogan first became popular nationwide while serving as mayor of Istanbul. He was sentenced to a 10-month prison term by the Kemalist generals because he had quoted from a Turkish poet during a campaign speech: “Our minarets are our lances, our cupolas are our helmets, our mosques are our barracks, our faithful are our army.” Western journalists criticized the verdict as arbitrary despotism. But the generals saw the secular character of their country threatened.

When Kemal Atatürk founded modern Turkey in 1923, he established a secular state inspired by the Swiss constitution. Islamic clergymen were not allowed to advance in the army, which safeguarded the secular nature of the state. In some ways, Muslim Turks living in Germany could express their faith even more freely than their compatriots back home.
The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem

The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem was founded in 1980 as an act of comfort and solidarity with Israel and the Jewish people in their claim to Jerusalem.

Today, the Christian Embassy stands at the forefront of a growing mainstream movement of Christians worldwide who share a love and concern for Israel and an understanding of the biblical significance of the modern ingathering of Jews to the land of their forefathers.

From our headquarters in Jerusalem and through our branches and representatives in over 80 nations, we seek to challenge the Church to take up its scriptural responsibilities towards the Jewish people, to remind Israel of the wonderful promises made to her in the Bible, and to be a source of practical assistance to all the people of the Land of Israel.

The ICEJ's United States Branch is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization with offices in Washington, D.C. and in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. We are a non-denominational faith ministry supported by the voluntary contributions of our members and friends.

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Recent events off the shores of Gaza have again brought into focus issues surrounding the existence of Israel. Of supreme importance is Israel’s right to defend herself against relentless attack by Hamas and others. The world increasingly seems to be denying Israel this right.

In the wider Church, there is general disinterest as well as a small minority which persists in opposing Israel and supporting the Palestinians, even the terror militia Hamas.

For true Christians, the issue is the Bible and not political agendas. We need to ask the question: “What does the Bible have to say about Israel?” We should, as Christians, regulate our actions in that light. Here are a few guidelines:

1. The Word of God clearly promises the Land of Canaan to the Jewish people as an everlasting possession (Genesis 17:7-8).

2. This promise is reiterated again and again (for example, Psalm 105:7-10) and even in the New Testament (Hebrews 6:13-20). In this latter reference, the promises of God to Abraham are held up before doubting New Testament believers as proof of God’s faithfulness. In short, it says God does not lie when He makes a promise. He is trustworthy and will keep every promise He has ever made.

3. Israel’s possession of the Land of Canaan is everlasting, but her domicile upon the land is regulated by her obedience to the God that called her. The Lord God of Israel demands that a holy people live in a holy land (Ezekiel 36:24-28).

4. History affirms God’s faithfulness in sending Israel into exile because of rebellion against Him and yet always restoring her to the Land (Jeremiah 25:4-11).

5. The Prophet Isaiah states that in Israel’s long history there will be two exiles and two returns to the Land of Canaan (Isaiah 11:11).

6. The latter and final return will be punctuated by conflict and blessing. That is, Jerusalem will become a source of great contention and wars will be fought over it, but Israel will not be exiled again (Zechariah 12:1-3; Amos 9:14-15).

7. Issues of justice and righteousness are important to God (Micah 6:8) and He will deal with all the people in the region in this regard. In this connection, He alone knows the truth about these matters (Isaiah 55:8-9).

8. Jesus clearly spoke of a Jewish return to Jerusalem after a long exile in the Gentile nations, assuring this would be a sign of the consummation of the age (Luke 21:24).

9. The entire Bible envisions a Jewish return to Zion accompanied with great blessing for the world (Isaiah 2:1-3; Zechariah 14:16-21; Isaiah 66:12-13).

Given all of the above, we affirm that Israel’s modern-day restoration is indeed an act of God and that Christians are obligated to bless what God Himself is blessing. This support of Israel has to be regulated by all parts of the Bible, which in turn requires that we do not attempt to “play God” by thinking and acting as if we have the full picture as to the restoration process unfolding before us.

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13:9-10 that now we know in part but then, “when the perfect age has come,” we shall know all things. Until that perfect age dawns, we will bless Israel and pray for her, and we will stand beside her because we have a debt to pay to her (Romans 15:27); not only because salvation is of the Jews (John 4:22), but because of the centuries of awful Christian anti-Semitism.
Aliyah to Israel has been notably on the rise of late, spurred in part by the global economic downturn, which Israel has been remarkably weathering, as well as by an upsurge in anti-Semitism due to the IDF’s efforts to isolate Hamas in Gaza. The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem continues to assist thousands of Jews in making the journey home from many diverse places, and ICEJ delegations were on hand to help greet several groups of new arrivals at two “Aliyah Fairs” in Jerusalem this summer.

Some 600 new immigrants were hosted recently at a welcoming ceremony on the Hebrew University campus in the latest “Aliyah on a Red Carpet” event sponsored by the Jewish Agency in partnership with the ICEJ. Exhausted but very excited to finally be in Israel, the newcomers from 24 countries, including Ethiopia, Russia, Italy, France, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Ukraine and Georgia, received their Israeli ID cards and were provided with practical tips on how to get settled in their new surroundings. This included advice on obtaining medical insurance, and opening bank and cell phone accounts.

An ICEJ team also attended a similar Jewish Agency welcoming ceremony for some 170 Jews from Latin America and Spain this summer. In each case, the Christian Embassy had donated funds to help sponsor the Aliyah Fairs and to pay for the initial overnight stays of hundreds of newcomers in Jerusalem hotels.

Howard Flower, director of the ICEJ’s aliyah operations, explained that such welcoming events are of immense benefit to these olim. “After their difficult flights, it’s great that they receive such a warm introduction to their new life in Israel,” said Flower.

Flower believes that “all the world shakings are helping to bring the Jews home, according to Ezekiel 36. Life for Jews is turning especially difficult in Europe and South America right now. We are responding with increased help in certain areas where there is much need.”

For example, he noted that the ICEJ recently sponsored a flight and extra baggage allowance for a new Jewish immigrant from a city in Sweden where a bomb was recently detonated in front of a synagogue.

The new immigrants were very appreciative of the welcome and the knowledge they receive at the aliyah fairs, and are also grateful for the help from Christian supporters of Israel.

World Shakings Increase Aliyah
ICEJ sponsors ‘Welcome Fairs’ for Jewish immigrants from across the world

By Taylor Innes
“Many of my friends who made aliya told me that the hardest part is that you come to Israel and you do not know the language or anything,” said Joseph, 22, from Colombia. “But you have to take care of many details and so this Aliyah Fair today, it means just one day of taking care of basic needs and then you can start enjoying Israel.”

“Today is a dream come true to finally be home in Israel. And to hear about Christian support is a surprise. I did not know about that. This makes me feel very good!” said Aaron from Mexico.

“Christian support for aliya is so crucial,” insisted Offer Dahan, coordinator for the Red Carpet events. “Personally, I see the ICEJ as a very strong partner which is active all around the world. Jews in other countries who see your activities are encouraged so much by them that they take the first step and decide to make aliya and it’s wonderful.”

“When I made aliya, the ICEJ gave us pillows and things for my house and I still have it from eight years ago. And now my granddaughter arrived today and is joining me in Israel and I am here to welcome her,” said Gladys, originally from Argentina.

Natan Sharansky, Chairman of the Jewish Agency, recalled that “Christian support was extremely important during the time of the worldwide struggle to bring down the Iron Curtain of Soviet communism. And Christian support has been very important in the miracle of aliya of bringing Jews home by ships and airplanes. The Christian Embassy has been participating in this effort and we appreciate it very much!”

Over the past 20 years, the ICEJ has assisted more than 106,000 Jewish immigrants in making aliya to Israel. Please join us in supporting these efforts to bring the Jewish people home according to the promises of God. Learn more at: www.icejusa.org/aliyah.

Taylor Innes is originally from the US and serves as part of the ICEJ media team in Jerusalem.

Painful Journey; Bright Future
ICEJ Project Update

Making aliya has been fraught with difficulties for Ethiopian Jews, many of whom fled their famine ravaged homeland in the early 1980s by trekking across Africa’s Nubian Desert on foot. It was a journey that saw only 2 out of 3 make it to Israel alive. For those that survived new challenges awaited them in Israel as they struggled to adapt to the culture, lifestyle and advanced technology of a First World nation.

This year ICEJ AID has been focusing on the needs of this unique community: increasing educational opportunities for young Ethiopians on one hand while assisting the older generations deal with the painful memories of their journey nearly 30 years ago.

Today some 70% of Ethiopian Jews live below the poverty line. To break the employment barrier, however, this community needs help bridging the education gap. That’s why the ICEJ has been partnering with the Ruppin Academic Center near Netanya in its efforts to enable more second-generation immigrants to gain higher education qualifications.

We’ve also been supporting a successful after-school program in Bet Shemesh that provides a safe place for at-risk Ethiopian teens to get help with behavioral and educational problems and complete their High School education. So far not one of those in the program has dropped out of school!

In addition ICEJ AID is continuing to support the Israel Center for the Treatment of Psychotrauma at Herzog Hospital as it seeks to assist an older generation come to terms with the trauma of their historic, yet painful desert journey.

With our help, the center is providing one-on-one counseling and group therapy to enable these precious survivors finally to tell their story and begin to address the high rate of suicide and depression prevalent in their community.

None of this would be possible without the ongoing prayers and financial sacrifice of Christians around the world. Thank you for your faithful support!

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www.icejusa.org/aid
Recently, the Obama administration led an effort in the UN Security Council to pass a fourth round of international sanctions against Iran over its renegade nuclear program. This was followed by the US Congress and European Union adopting even tougher unilateral measures targeting the clerical regime in Tehran.

Not long afterwards, reports emerged that the new sanctions were already having an impact on Iran’s banking and energy sectors. But surprisingly, US officials were just as quick to admit that sanctions alone will not be sufficient enough to stop Iran from pursuing nuclear weapons. In addition, State Department officials insisted Iran can no longer be trusted on its nuclear intentions, meaning further diplomacy could be pointless.

These developments have left Israeli officials and strategic analysts pondering several burning questions.

First, if sanctions alone will not do the job, what else can be done in tandem with the economic squeeze on Tehran? Is the US headed towards Cold War-era notions of containment? And is it safe for Jerusalem to assume along with Washington that the Ayatollahs will never actually use the Bomb?

Dr. Chuck Freilich, a former Israeli deputy national security adviser, recently outlined for ICEJ News the six options he sees for trying to halt the Iranian nuclear drive. One option is the current strategy, which he claims is not working, and second is crippling sanctions. A third option is regime change, but that moment may have passed last year, Freilich assessed. A fourth option is a naval blockade meant to bring Iran to its knees. The remaining alternatives are the military option, and then there’s deterrence and containment.

“My own personal assumption is that the US is heading for containment, which may be fine for the US,” Freilich maintained.
“But the question is whether Israel can live with that?”

An American decision to resort to containment would rest upon the premise that the clerics in Tehran would never actually press the nuclear trigger. At a recent conference on the Iranian nuclear threat at Tel Aviv University, those Israeli security experts present who went on record all concluded that the Ayatollahs were not insane enough to ever push the button leading to their own self-destruction.

“I definitely do not share the fear that Iran would actually use nuclear arms,” averred Dr. Emily Landau. “I think Israel has a strong nuclear deterrent and Iran knows it. I don’t think it’s in their interests to challenge Israel in that way.”

Freilich explained that in the Israeli national security establishment, there are two broad schools of thought on this question. “One says an Iranian nuclear capability is absolutely existential, that Israel cannot live with it,” he said. “The second says Iranian nukes are a dire threat, a severe threat, but it’s not an existential one.”

“My personal opinion is that the Iranians are extremists, but I don’t think they’re irrational,” Freilich maintained. “But I can be wrong here, and when you’re talking national existence, there’s no margin for error.”

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu recently gave his own view on the containment question in an interview with Fox News Sunday. It would be “a mistake,” insisted Netanyahu. “We’ve had effective nuclear peace for more than half a century because everybody understood the rules. I don’t think you can rely on Iran... There is an irrationality here. And there’s madness. And we should not allow irrational regimes like Iran to have nuclear weapons. It’s the ultimate terrorist threat today.”

David Parsons is ICEJ Media Director and Contributing Christian Editor of The Jerusalem Post Christian Edition in which this article was first published. Aaron Hecht is part of the ICEJ News team in Jerusalem.

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Given this commitment to secularism and democracy, Turkey was a solid member of NATO and a promising aspirant to membership in the European Union. It had tried earnestly to secure its place within the European Union, mainly by adopting strict new economic guidelines demanded by Brussels. Yet as its application for EU membership was prolonged, Turkey began heading in the opposite direction, back towards its Islamic past, which included a 400-year era of Ottoman Turk dominance over the Arab/Muslim heartland.

Eurocrats turned a blind eye to this development, hoping the fruits of growing prosperity would make the Islamic yearnings dissipate. But by the time of the IDF incursion into Gaza in January 2009, Erdogan was more outraged at Israel than most Arab leaders, accusing Israeli President Shimon Peres in person of knowing “how to kill.”

In 2008, Erdogan had also stunned the German government during a state visit to Berlin. Addressing a crowd of some 20,000 Turks living in Germany, France and Belgium, some of them for three generations, he insisted, “Assimilation is a crime against humanity.” He challenged his compatriots to adhere to their Turkish and Islamic heritage. His German host, Chancellor Angela Merkel, was not pleased.

Recently, Erdogan’s colleague and foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, declared that Turkey is no longer content with its role as a bridge-builder between the Christian West and the Islamic East. Turkey, he demanded, needs to become again the center of gravity of the region. This harkened back to the nearly five centuries when the “High Porte” in Istanbul controlled a territory reaching from the Balkans down through most of the Middle East and as far as Morocco. The Ottoman Empire was not only a political entity, but its Caliphate served as the highest spiritual authority for most of the Islamic world.

Is Turkey intent on returning to those glorious Ottoman days? After the Gaza flotilla clash, it is clear that Israel and the West are confronting not just Iran but a resurgent Turkey. This represents a unique challenge to Europe, due to Turkey’s proximity and its economic integration with the EU. A leading German commentator also recently suggested that the millions of Turks living in Germany and Holland may one day prove to be a “fifth column” of a very ambitious Turkey.

Dr. Jürgen Bühler serves as ICEJ International Director in Jerusalem