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Harsh Words From Turkey About Israel, and From Iran About United States

By NEIL MacFARQUHAR, 22 September 2011



Damon Winter/The New York Times

The floor of the General Assembly was largely empty on Thursday when President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran offered his annual list of denunciations.

UNITED NATIONS — Evidently heedless of American attempts to engineer a thaw in Turkish-Israeli relations, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey used his appearance before the annual General Assembly on Thursday to enumerate a long list of grievances with Israel, a former regional ally.

Mr. Erdogan was the second major Middle Eastern leader addressing the General Assembly, with the widespread focus on the region's most intractable problem, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, due to culminate Friday with speeches by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel and President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority.

Representatives of the so-called quartet — the United States, the United Nations, the European Union and Russia — were still trying late Thursday to reach an agreement on a statement about moving peace negotiations forward, intended to counterbalance the controversial proposal for United Nations membership that Mr. Abbas has vowed to present. The future of the Quartet could be at risk, some diplomats suggested, with the Americans and the Europeans, close to an agreement, ready to abandon the other two members and issue a statement by themselves. It could go down to the very moment after the Netanyahu and Abbas speeches, the diplomats said.

At the General Assembly, a couple of hours before Mr. Erdogan spoke, Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, delivered one of his characteristic anti-Western broadsides, embroidered with tinges of religious mysticism. He blamed the United States, Israel and Europe for the global recession and a list of other ills. He also suggested that the American military's killing of Osama bin Laden last May and the disposal of his body at sea were part of a dark conspiracy to conceal the real perpetrators of the Sept. 11 attacks.

Mr. Ahmadinejad's remarks provoked what has become a ritual large-scale walkout of delegations, led by the United States.

Mr. Erdogan, describing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a "bleeding wound" that the international community can no longer accept, accused Israel of thwarting all attempts to solve the problem. From [nuclear weapons](#) to control of the occupied territories to humanitarian aid, Mr. Erdogan said, Israel has contradicted the wishes and norms of the rest of the world.

"If you want to send a box of tomatoes to [Palestine](#), this is subject to approval from Israel, and I don't think that is humanitarian," Mr. Erdogan said, suggesting that the new spirit of change in the Middle East meant Israel could no longer continue to foster strife.

The Turkish leader repeated a drumbeat of accusations against the Israelis that he has leveled for months, and there was no immediate reaction from Israel.

The tension is rooted in differences over the Gaza Strip, particularly a [May 2010 raid by the Israeli military](#) on a Turkish-organized flotilla trying to run the Gaza blockade, which left eight Turks and a Turkish-American dead. Turkey rejected a [United Nations report](#) that found the blockade legal but said Israel had used excessive force.

Mr. Erdogan's veiled threats to take action against joint efforts by Israel and Cyprus over gas exploration in the eastern Mediterranean did elicit a response from Demetris Christofias, the president of Cyprus, divided into hostile Turkish and Greek halves. He called Turkish naval maneuvers in the area "provocative and a real danger for further complications in the region."

Mr. Ahmadinejad, appearing before the General Assembly for the seventh year in a row, said poverty, homelessness and denial of basic rights were traceable to "greed for materialism in the United States and Europe."

Iran has been estranged from the United States since the Islamic Revolution more than 30 years ago, and Mr. Ahmadinejad's speech has become something of a signature event at the annual session. There were no surprises in either his criticisms or his singular interpretation of world events.

As he has done in previous speeches, Mr. Ahmadinejad raised questions about the Holocaust, blaming the West for using it as an excuse for unwavering support for Israel and for the oppression of the Palestinian people. "They threaten anyone who questions the Holocaust and Sept. 11 with sanctions and military action?" he said.

By the time he got to that line in his 30-minute speech, the low-level American and European diplomats who had been there were no longer around.

The United States delegation was the first to leave when Mr. Ahmadinejad referred to the Sept. 11 attacks as "mysterious" and suggested that the decision to kill Bin Laden, instead of bringing him to trial, was intended to bury the truth of who sent the planes to attack New York and Washington. "Is there any classified material secret that must remain a secret?" he said.

After the Europeans walked out, the hall, not terribly full in the first place, was mostly empty. Oddly, King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa of Bahrain, whose government has repeatedly blamed Iran rather than domestic ills for inflaming the Shiite population there, stuck around.

The United States quickly condemned the speech, as did many other Western governments and nongovernmental organizations. "Mr. Ahmadinejad had a chance to address his own people's aspirations for freedom and dignity, but instead he again turned to abhorrent anti-Semitic slurs and despicable conspiracy theories," said Mark Kornblau, the spokesman for the United States Mission to the United Nations.

The Iranian leader, whose previous visits to New York have been contentious, generated less interest this year. Though he did inspire protests outside the United Nations and his Midtown Manhattan hotel, his power clashes at home with Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, have cast some doubt over the extent of his authority.

That doubt, in turn, has made him personally a less threatening figure, despite significant international concerns about important issues like the possibility that Iran is developing nuclear weapons.

