

IN PLACE OF A THOUSAND WORDS



Getting ready for Afghan winter

An Afghan woman waits for transportation after getting a bag containing winter items distributed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Kabul, Afghanistan yesterday. Since the temperature gets worse throughout the country, the UNHCR is delivering supplies to Afghan refugees and internally displaced families. (AP photo / Musadeq SADEQ)

Nightmares from my father and reading history wrong



Generation, the generation of Americans who grew up during the deprivation of the Great Depression, and then went on to fight World War II. Those who survived, went on to build and rebuild U.S. industries, and created the Baby Boomers, that is us, whose social values did not quite match that generation's social values.

What were the lessons learned on a real, down-to-earth human scale?

As it turns out, the results were unexpected... or were they?

Seeking some acquired wisdom, I listened to some nightmares from my journalist father, Bernard Redmont who reached the venerable age of 90 in 2008, after a life of reporting around the world for CBS and many other media titles...

Again, it seems we didn't quite read or reread history correctly nor learn our lessons: Listen to him in his "DREAMS FROM YOUR FATHER:"

"I have a dream. It recurs. Sometimes in the guise of a nightmare.

Dreams of my encounters with wars. And hopes, or reveries, of peace.

On the eve of the new year 2009, I dreamed again of Roi and Namur, the coral islands where I was almost killed.

War veterans often make pilgrimages to the scenes of their battles with life and death, like those you've seen on TV, on the beaches of Normandy in World War II. My own visions become a "virtual" pilgrimage, in memories and dreams, because I can't actually go to Roi and Namur, in Kwajalein Atoll, the Marshall Islands, in the south central Pacific, 2,100 miles southwest of Hawaii.

I told most of the story of Operation Flintlock in my book, "Risks Worth Taking." That was where, from Jan. 31 to Feb. 12, 1944, as a "gung ho" marine, I earned my Purple Heart and many weeks of restful recuperation in hospitals.

But what of now? In my dreams, and on the Internet, I, and you, can go on a "virtual battlefield tour" of the two northern islets of the world's largest coral atoll.

We thought we were liberating that first of the Japanese-held territories in the war, looking forward to peace and no more wars.

Today, Roi and Namur stand nominally as part of the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

They are, nevertheless, the multi-billion dollar lethal scene of the Ronald Reagan Ballistic Missile Defense Test Site, run by the Pentagon.

Here, where 3,500 bunkered and entrenched Japanese soldiers fought us, and barely 51 of them survived, and where thousands of American Marines became casualties too, it is not quite peaceful.

You can take a "virtual battlefield tour" on the Internet, but you won't see the missile sites or naval port, or hear the deafening blasts, or the constant drone of American military planes arriving and departing from the once Japanese, now Dyess US airfield which we captured.

You will see the Japanese concrete pillboxes and bunkers, some four feet thick, still standing despite their "pulverization" by cannon and naval gunfire. You can't actually visit all this now, without special military clearance, or see the former Japanese submarine base.

But you can see the torpedo bunker, still standing, where our fellow marines dropped in a satchel charge of demolition explosives, and 20 of them died from the blow back blast. You can also see an undemolished Japanese five-inch gun on a concrete emplacement, and a plaque commemorating the Japanese dead, some scattered American graves and a brass plate labeling the place a "National Historic Site."

For those cleared to visit, the authorities offer beautiful palm trees, a small golf course, a scuba diving club and trips to wrecks of Japanese warships, planes and even a heavy cruiser.

So ends the spiel of your "virtual tour guide."

Alas, wars rage all over our world. Yes, we yearn for peace on earth, good will to all."

Dennis Redmont, an executive at the Council for United States and Italy, is an American journalist and consultant, who divides his time between Rome and Istanbul.

And Turkey wonders why it is not being embraced by the EU

SHOSHANA NICOLE BEKERMAN

The current "peace journey" undertaken by Prime Minister Erdoğan in response to the Israeli defensive actions against Hamas in the Gaza Strip should serve as a lesson to the Turkish government, Parliament and Turkish citizens as to why Turkey is not being openly embraced by the European Union, or EU, and why there is so much apprehension about Turkey joining as a full partner to the EU.

Since the beginning of the Israeli action in the Gaza Strip, which is defined by the EU president as well as all major international law experts in the West as a justifiable defensive response to Hamas rocket fire on Israel, Erdoğan has taken a totally one sided position in favor of the terrorist organization Hamas. In fact, immediately upon assuming its two-year mandate on the UN Security Council this week, the prime minister failed his first test in international diplomacy even while seeking to become a global player. Erdoğan is quoted as saying to CNN Turk that "We could bring the conditions of Hamas for a ceasefire to the attention of the UN. Hamas officials have full confidence in Turkey," In fact, all along while trying to assume the role of a mediator, Erdoğan acts more like a spokesman and supporter of Hamas which is defined by all the civilized world as a terrorist group. In his "peace journey" Erdoğan made a point of visiting only Arab nations and skipping Israel which he claimed showed him "disrespect" for embarking on the attack against Hamas. While the Egyptian, Saudi and even Palestinian leadership in the West Bank accused Hamas of bringing this on themselves by not renewing the cease fire and continuing rocket attacks against Israel, Erdoğan was speaking and acting more like the hard line extremist Islamists of Syria and Iran. His tone set the stage for the mass demonstrations against Israel and the growing animosity against a historic friend of Turkey as never before. The fact is that Erdoğan chooses not take into consideration or mention the following facts:

1) Hamas has fired over six thousand rockets into Israel since its disengagement from Gaza in 2005

2) Contrary to the well oiled propaganda of the radical Islamists, Hamas never kept the cease fire fully during the six months of the hudna - but allowed lesser amounts of rockets to be fired from Gaza into the town of Shderot throughout the period (which forced Israel to shut the border crossings in response)

3) The day before the Israeli action began Hamas fired eighty rockets into Israeli cities

4) Instead of directing its resources and funds into building up the Gaza Strip after the disengagement and bringing prosperity to the population, Hamas chose to pour funds into building a radical military regime which terrorizes its own people and brutally executes their own brethren Fatah who oppose them.

The Israeli government has responded to Prime Minister Erdoğan's diatribes through the normal diplomatic channels. However, it is not the Israelis who should be most concerned over the Turkish prime minister's behavior, actions and words during this crisis. It is mainly the Turkish people who should be concerned. It seems that not for the first time since his election as head of the AKP, Erdoğan has let down his guard and removed his mask to reveal the true radical Islamic ideology which guides him. This is the same leader who said while he was Mayor of Istanbul at the opening ceremony of the Welfare Party Ümraniye District Organization: "It is not possible to be a secular and a Muslim at the same time. They are continuously saying, "Secularism is in danger." It will be, if this nation demands it. You can not prevent it. The Islamic nation is waiting for the rise of the Muslim Turkish nation. We will. This rebellion will start."

It is true that the thousands who protested in Istanbul and Diyarbakır against Israel's actions in Gaza share Erdoğan's radical views. Nevertheless, a great majority of the Turkish population as well as Turkish leaders have always been a friend to Israel. The Turkish people and the Jewish people share a common history and culture since the days that the Prophet Abraham acknowledged monotheism and refused to worship idols in the Turkish city of Harran. The Prophet Abraham went from Harran to the Land of Israel through Syria. Later in life, it was to Harran that Abraham sent his loyal servant Eliezer to find a wife for his son Isaac - because this was the city of his ancestors and they were known to be good people with morals like his own. It was to Harran that Isaac's son, Jacob went to find a wife for himself and it was there that his descendants (who were to be the Jewish tribes) were born. The

Ottoman Sultans who gave refuge to the Jewish refugees from the Inquisition in Spain continued this tradition of friendship and brotherhood with the Jews. The Jewish legend notes that Turkey was rewarded for this by the Almighty Allah with the four hundred years of Ottoman Rule in the Middle East and Europe. Turkish Righteous of the Gentiles saved Jewish refugees from the Nazis during World War II. The previous Turkish secular governments sponsored draft resolutions at the UN condemning anti-Semitism at a time when Arab countries refused to include the term in the anti racism resolutions.

Prime Minister Erdoğan, who refuses to have anything to do with the Israelis after they showed him "disrespect", entrusted President Gül to make contact with the Israeli President Shimon Peres to arrange for humanitarian aid to be sent to Gaza from Turkey. Israel agreed without hesitation. In fact, Israel has sent many truckloads of humanitarian aid of its own into Gaza since the fighting started. This has been documented. In addition, despite the fact that the Hamas terrorists use innocent women, men and children and human shields and choose to locate their firing ranges against Israel inside populated areas, the Israeli army takes great pains to avoid civilian casualties. It is the only army in the world which warns the civilians ahead of time of an incoming bomb so that they may flee to safety. The EU leaders and others in the West wonder whether Erdoğan would act the same way had it been Turkey which was forced to respond to hostile bombardment with 6,000 rockets into cities in Turkey striking at homes, schools and kindergartens as do Hamas against Israeli cities without any forewarning or notice. We know from the history of Turkish action against the Kurds that Turkey does not pay as much attention to try to spare civilian lives as does Israel. This fact is also not revealed to the Turkish people. The Turkish history of human rights can not serve as a role model and even as it tries to improve its record, Erdoğan's one sided concern for Palestinian human rights while showing disdain for the human rights of the citizens of Israel only reinforces the apprehension of the EU countries as to the true colors of the Turkish government. As noted by the renowned expert on international law, Professor Rene Beres: "It is easy to feel sorry for the Palestinians in Gaza. Televised and print images of their apparently unrelieved misery suggest Israeli cruelty in the creation of shortages and in the use of armed force. Exactly the opposite is true. The moment that flagrantly illegal Hamas rocket attacks upon Israeli noncombatants cease, no harms of any kind will be imposed by Israel. Hamas commits other egregious violations of international law. It is always a codified war crime to use civilians as 'human shields.' This cowardly act even has a precise legal name - 'perfidy.' By systematically placing their most impoverished women and children in harm's way - especially in those areas from which they launch terrorist rockets into Israel - Palestinian terrorist leaders deliberately create Palestinian casualties. As Beres puts it very precisely: "International law is not a suicide pact. Rather, it offers an authoritative body of rules and procedures that permits states to express their inherent right of self-defense. When terrorist organizations celebrate the explosive 'martyrdom' of Palestinian children, and when Palestinian leaders unashamedly seek religious redemption through the mass-murder of Jewish children, the terrorists have no legal right to demand sanctuary. Anywhere."

If Erdoğan truly wanted to succeed in his efforts to be a global player and to mediate peace in the Middle East instead of displaying his overt sympathy for the radical Islamic leaders of Hamas, he would act within the Turkish sponsored framework of the Alliance of Civilizations to bring about the implementation of the U.N. resolutions on "Dialogue Among Civilizations" and creating a "culture of peace" as exemplified by the Biblical stories of the Patriarchs in Harran. The King of Saudi Arabia has already accepted this initiative as I will be pleased to elaborate in detail to the Turkish leaders who wish to really embark on a "journey of peace". The Prophet Abraham was the father of monotheism for all three Abrahamic faiths - Islam, Judaism and Christianity. If Erdoğan wants to succeed in his peace efforts he should begin in Harran and from there he could continue to Syria and on to Israel "in the footsteps of the Prophet Abraham". No other path will lead him to his destination in the Middle East or the EU successfully.

Shoshana Nicole Bekerman is founder and director of the Global Ethics Resource Center/Ethics Initiatives Consortium, president of SMB Global Strategy Consultants and a former press liaison officer of the Turkish Embassy in Tel Aviv. She can be contacted at globalethicsrc@yahoo.com) Editor's note: The definition noted by Bekerman of the EU's Czech Presidency describing Israel's Gaza offensive as "defensive," was made and then later rescinded and attributed to a spokesman's error

Our policy on letters to the editor, corrections and amplifications

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STOP! BACK TO THE (OTHER) FRONT!