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THE U.S.-TURKEY-ISRAEL TRIANGLE

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THE U.S.-TURKEY-ISRAEL TRIANGLE

The confrontation between Israel and Hamas during the summer of 2014 has pitted Turkey and Israel on opposite sides. Turkish efforts (together with Qatar) to mediate a cease fire on behalf of Hamas once again highlighted the close nature of the relationship between Turkey and Hamas and led Israel to opt for Egyptian mediation. The high civilian death toll in Gaza led to a harsh public reaction by the Turkish leadership against Israel and to violent demonstrations in front of Israel's Embassy in Ankara and Consulate General in Istanbul in the midst of the Turkish Presidential campaign.

Four years after the MV Mavi Marmara incident in May 31, 2010, Turkish-Israeli relations are in a state of semi-paralysis. More than a year has passed since Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu formally apologized to Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan for “operational errors...that led to the loss of life,” during the Marmara incident and, despite continuous discussions between Israeli and Turkish representatives, there is still no deal between the two countries on a compensation agreement that will set in motion a long-awaited normalization process between the two former partners turned rivals. President Barack Obama's personal intervention prompted a cautious apology that was neither given nor received with great enthusiasm. Netanyahu expressed regret while Erdoğan accepted Netanyahu's apology and confirmed his readiness to reestablish normal relations between the two countries. Reconciliation

seemed to finally be underway, yet Turkish domestic political considerations and Israeli hesitation and demand for Turkish assurances have put reconciliation efforts on hold, as the key actors seem to have come to terms with a limited relationship.

The March 2013 apology, grudging and hard-won, illustrates the extent to which the relationship between Israel and Turkey has shifted. As obstacles still remain on the way to a compensation agreement, more so after heightened bilateral tensions over the war between Israel and Hamas in the summer of 2014 what is clear at this stage is that U.S. involvement in the process is essential for it to succeed. What for many years was a diplomatic dance between like-minded partners has transformed into a political conflict between two estranged states that share significant economic and security interests, but do not trust one another. Washington's active involvement has shown itself to be effective, but at present there are far greater challenges for American foreign policy in the region, as well as Turkish and Israeli reluctance, intensified by the events of summer 2014. The question now is whether today's Turkish-Israeli relationship reflects a new “normal,” or whether the leaders of both states—and the U.S.—can muster the political will and focus to reconnect the triangle along more productive lines.

The challenges are significant. For decades, cooperation between Israel and Turkey hinged on the assumption that shared strategic interests would

trump—or at least keep at bay—conflicts that might arise from the religious or nationalist impulses of their respective societies. At first the rise of Islamist-oriented parties in Turkey did not undermine this assumption. The leaders of Israel and Turkey, and their military establishments in particular, strove to sustain long-standing security cooperation. This began to change as the Turkish Justice and Development Party (AKP) solidified its social base and isolated Turkey's once-powerful secular military.

Democratization in Turkey produced an agenda closely aligned with political Islam. Meanwhile, a fatigued and skeptical public in Israel, grown tired of the Oslo process and failure of the Camp David II talks, elected right-wing nationalist and right-centrist governments. This combination unfolded in parallel with rising tension vis-à-vis Hamas and conflicts along the Israel-Gaza border. Israel's December 2008 campaign in Gaza, "Operation Cast Lead," put Ankara in a difficult position. After thousands of Turks shouting *Allahu akbar* (God is great) besieged the Israeli consulate in Istanbul, Erdoğan reflected, some argue fueled, his countrymen's anger by storming out of the Davos Economic Forum. He left behind a stunned President Shimon Peres staring at the empty chair next to him.

The flotilla incident and raid on the Mavi Marmara marked a defining event in the deteriorating Turkish-Israeli relations, leading to the collapse of bilateral relations in nearly every sector. Turkey set out three conditions for the normalization of relations: an Israeli apology, compensation to the flotilla incident victims' families, and an end to the Gaza blockade. From Israel's perspective, agreeing to the removal of the Gaza blockade was unacceptable. However, negotiations seemed to hinge on an Israeli apology. In three years of international mediation, Prime Minister Erdoğan's anti-Israel rhetoric grew more aggressive, and Prime Minister Netanyahu resisted apologizing—a move which, in his view,

would weaken Israel's standing and security in the region.

By late 2012, a series of confidence-building measures—including resumption of military sales, approval to ship materials for the construction of the Turkish-Northern Gaza hospital project, and the opening of trade routes from Turkey to the Arab world through Israeli territory—came to naught. Indeed, these failed confidence building measures illustrate the extent to which restarting the relationship required continued U.S. chaperoning. The policy implications of this fact merit close attention. As we shall see, hopes for constituting the U.S.-Turkey-Israel triangle will require active and sustained leadership from the U.S. and its top decision makers, beginning with the president.

Such leadership will require identifying and carrying out elements of a trilateral agenda which could rebuild confidence and cooperation between Ankara and Jerusalem. Possible strategic, economic, and diplomatic inducements include promoting natural gas cooperation between the two countries and identifying common strategies for meeting new threats that have emerged in the wake of the Arab Spring and more specifically in dealing with the Syrian civil war and Iraq's deteriorating security and political instability

This paper suggests two closely intertwined conclusions: first, that good Turkish-Israeli relations are essential to the security and stability of the Middle East; and second, that U.S. leadership has come to play a central role in shaping—and often mediating—the Turkish-Israeli relationship. Indeed, while Israel and Turkey continue to face common strategic challenges and share mutual interests, the capacity to restart relations will partly depend on the readiness of U.S. leaders to help both Ankara and Jerusalem find a way back to sustained strategic cooperation. A United States willing to demonstrate leadership and apply leverage on both allies is vital for progress.

In many ways it may seem that events in the Middle East since mid-2013 have deemphasized the strategic centrality of the U.S.-Turkey-Israel triangle. Indeed, as President Obama's September 2013 UN General Assembly speech made clear, U.S. Middle East policy has refocused on two objectives: producing a final Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement and securing a comprehensive solution to Iran's nuclear program. Nevertheless, since the Israeli apology, several events and trends emerged in the region and on the international stage that were as unexpected as they were potentially momentous. These events not only affected the readiness of the United States to play a key role, but also influenced Turkish and Israeli calculations. These events include the partial thaw in U.S.-Iran relations in the aftermath of the Geneva interim agreement on Iran's Nuclear program signed between the P5+1 and Iran, the agreement to dismantle the Assad regime's chemical weapons program, the escalation of domestic turbulence in Turkey beginning in May 2013 over

the government's handling of Istanbul's Gezi Park riots, and later the judicial investigations into alleged corruption at the highest levels of the Turkish government.

It must be emphasized that none of these events suggest any diminishing in the importance of the Turkish-Israeli relationship to Middle East stability or the need for U.S. leadership on this issue. Taken together, recent events highlight the continuing challenge of restoring Turkish-Israeli relations in ways that will enhance the prospects for regional stability. With the recent collapse of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, the military confrontation between Israel and Hamas, and negotiations towards a final agreement between the P5+1 and Iran, repairing Turkish-Israeli relations may help advance U.S. strategy and goals on these issues. This will require fresh thinking from policy makers in Washington, Jerusalem and Ankara.

CHAPTER 1. A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: THE “EARLY YEARS” AND “GOLDEN YEARS”

INTRODUCTION

When examining the history of the relations between Turkey and Israel, it is important to note that relations between Ankara and Jerusalem developed gradually during the “early years” (1948-1992). Changes in the relationship during this period were mostly a result of developments in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The United States worked to enhance its ties separately with Turkey and Israel, but did not devote abundant time or resources to bringing the two countries closer together. Israel reached out to Turkey in an effort to break out of its regional isolation; Turkey’s approach to Israel was mostly driven by concerns that too close of a relationship with Israel would damage its relations with the Arab world, despite its clear interest in developing ties. Yet, as the Cold War came to an end and a Middle East peace process began to emerge, the stage was set for full-fledged diplomatic relations between the two countries.

What followed were the “golden years” (1992-2008), during which a strategic partnership was forged between Turkey and Israel. This new relationship stemmed mainly from changes in their respective domestic arenas, with an active Middle East peace process giving the relationship the necessary tailwind it needed to fully develop. The new relationship enjoyed the strong support and cooperation of the United States. It also had the support of the Turkish General Staff and the Israeli defense

establishment, both of which acted as chief proponents for enhanced collaboration. In many respects the Turkish military was the guarantor of continued close and stable relations with Israel; as long as it was able to maintain its control over the Turkish political system, relations flourished.

But at the dawn of the twenty-first century, a transformation had begun in Turkish society which would eventually prove detrimental to the Turkish-Israeli relationship. With the rise of political Islam, the secular Turkish military began to lose its grip on the domestic arena. Over the next several years, Turkey’s relationship with Israel became increasingly strained. The United States made some effort to slow this process of deterioration between its two allies, but was ultimately unable to stop it.

THE EARLY YEARS (1948-1992)

In 1947, Turkey voted against the UN Partition Plan for Palestine, but in 1949—just two years later—was the first predominantly Muslim country to recognize the State of Israel. During these early years, Turkey’s relationship with Israel was primarily built on Turkish concerns that pan-Arabism and Arab nationalism would enable the Soviet Union to gain a foothold in the Middle East. Israel did not consider Turkey to be within its scope of threat, which was initially limited to the Arab World.¹

¹ Zeev Maoz, *Defending the Holy Land: A Critical Analysis of Israel’s Security & Foreign Policy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2009), 13.

Although Turkey downgraded relations with Israel in the aftermath of the Suez War of 1956, it was Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion who two years later envisioned Turkey as part of a non-Arab “peripheral belt” (which included Iran and Ethiopia) in proximity to Israel. Ben-Gurion hoped that fostering ties with these countries would ease Israel’s isolation, enhance its legitimacy and security, and contribute to regional stability by forming a new balance of power. At first Turkey was not inclined to respond favorably to the Israeli offer, as it saw its membership in the Baghdad Pact—a cooperative defense arrangement among Turkey, Iraq, Great Britain, Pakistan, and Iran—as superseding any other suggested framework.² However, regional developments led Turkey to consider pursuing a different strategy towards Israel, including Iraq’s vote against Turkey in the UN over Cyprus in December 1957, the establishment of the United Arab Republic between Egypt and Syria in February 1958, and the fall of the monarchy of Iraq in July 1958.

A secret meeting was held in late August 1958 in Ankara between Israeli Prime Minister Ben-Gurion and Turkish Prime Minister Adnan Menderes which produced a set of top-secret understandings on cooperation in the diplomatic, economic, and military sectors. The so-called Peripheral Alliance remained in effect into the mid-1960s, and boiled down to a series of bilateral agreements between Israel and each of the three countries—Ethiopia, Iran, and Turkey. The agreement with Turkey included joint public relations campaigns aimed at both governments and public opinion; enhanced cooperation, trade, and assistance for industrial development in Turkey; exchange of intelligence and information,

joint planning for mutual aid in emergencies; and Turkish support (via the United States and NATO) in strengthening and assisting Israel’s military.³

Dating back to the 1950s, Turks began to perceive Jerusalem as an essential stop-over on the way to Washington. During those years, Turkish requests for loans were rejected by the United States due to Turkey’s reputation as an unreliable borrower. Israel intervened on Turkey’s behalf, and a loan of \$150 million was granted.⁴ Turkey believed in the power and influence of American Jewry over U.S. policy. Turkey attributed great importance to the Israel-U.S. government-American Jewry triangle, hoping it could be utilized to promote Turkish interests in the United States with assistance from the pro-Israel lobby.⁵

This relationship was one consideration among many in Turkey’s push for closer ties with Israel, and a pattern was established that would recur at different junctures in Turkish-Israeli relations: despite its clear interest in developing and maintaining closer ties with Israel, Turkey simultaneously tried to keep Israel at arm’s length because of Turkey’s desire to be on good terms with the Arab bloc. A phrase attributed to Ben-Gurion at the time summed up Turkey’s approach to Israel quite well: “Turkey treats us as its mistress. But we have already married and Turkey fails to accept this.”⁶

This pattern of ambivalence in Turkey’s policy towards Israel is evident in its approach to the early years of the Arab-Israeli conflict. During the major wars between Israel and its neighbors, Turkey remained militarily neutral and neither sent in

² “MILESTONES: 1953-1960: The Baghdad Pact (1955) and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO),” *U.S. Department of State Office of the Historian*.

³ Ofra Bengio, *The Turkish-Israeli Relationship: Changing Ties of Middle Eastern Outsiders* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 33-69.

⁴ Amikam Nachmani, “Turkey, Israel and American Hegemony,” in *U.S. Israel Relations in a New Era – Issues and Challenges after 9/11*, ed. Eytan Gilboa and Efraim Inbar. (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 216-31.

⁵ Bengio, 66.

⁶ Serkan Demirtaş, “Amid Sound and Fury, Turkey-Israel Alliance Endures,” *Hürriyet Daily News*, June 6, 2013. <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/english/domestic/10705597.asp>.

troops to support either side or severed relations with Israel after the wars in spite of Arab pressure; however, it did lean towards the Arabs in declaratory and practical ways. In the aftermath of the Suez war of 1956, Turkey downgraded its level of diplomatic representation in Tel Aviv. The Palestinian question, posed in the wake of the 1967 war, marked a shift in Turkish sympathies. Successive Turkish governments have had the task of balancing increasing domestic public sympathy for the plight of the Palestinians with the rewards of maintaining good relations with an influential nation closely allied with the United States. Turkey refused to grant landing and passage for U.S. planes carrying military supplies to Israel during the October 1973 war, so as not to upset the Arabs or the Soviet Union and in protest over the U.S. position on the question of Cyprus.

In the 1970s, Turkey experienced an acute economic crisis which coincided with the global oil crisis. Oil became the defining factor in Turkish-Arab relations, and played a central role in the downward trend in Turkish-Israeli relations during those years. This decline manifested in a number of very public decisions made by Turkey during this period, including Turkey's recognition of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as the sole representative of the Palestinian people (June 1975), its support of the UN General Assembly's Resolution 3379 – equating Zionism with racism (November 1975), and its decision to permit Yasir Arafat to open a PLO office in Ankara (1979).

But it was the Jerusalem Act, adopted by the Israeli Knesset in July 1980, which led to the most dramatic Turkish decision against Israel in the early years: the official downgrading of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The Jerusalem Act, which affirmed a united Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, was exploited by the new Turkish government in

order to gain financial assistance from Arab states. The new government had come to power in the aftermath of a military coup and was facing bankruptcy. Turkey's decision to downgrade diplomatic relations with Israel helped it secure the economic benefits it needed from the Arab nations to keep its economy afloat. On the day of the decision to downgrade relations with Israel, Turkish Foreign Minister İltis Türkmen returned from Saudi Arabia with a check in his hand for \$250 million.⁷

Israeli historian Ofra Bengio argues that in developing its relations with Israel, Turkey has consistently been guided by the premise that improved relations with the Jewish state would automatically lead to estrangement with the Arab nations. Therefore, there has been a need to either keep certain aspects of the relationship strictly secret or play a delicate balancing act between the two sides. However, Bengio notes that Israel, while important, was not the decisive factor in Turkish-Arab relations.⁸

The ambivalence in the Turkish position was further illustrated in December 1991, when six weeks after the successful Madrid Middle East Peace Conference, Turkey abstained from voting on UN Resolution 46/86 to repeal the earlier resolution equating Zionism with racism, yet decided that same month to reestablish full diplomatic relations with Israel. This was finally implemented in 1992, when ambassadors were appointed to embassies in Ankara and Tel Aviv.

THE GOLDEN YEARS (1992-2008)

Turkey commemorated the 500th anniversary of the flight of Spanish Jews to the Ottoman Empire in 1992, and Israeli president Chaim Herzog paid an unofficial visit to Turkey. Turkey's efforts are partially attributed to its desire to woo Jewish and pro-Israel lobbies in Washington. This was done in order to shield itself from continuous efforts by the Greek

⁷ Alon Liel, *Turkey: Military, Islam and Politics 1970-2000* (Tel Aviv: Hakibutz Hameuchad, 1999), 194. (Hebrew).

⁸ Bengio, 158.

and Armenian lobbies to promote resolutions in Congress to classify the mass killing of Armenians in April 1915 as a “genocide.”

The leap forward in the relationship began under President Turgut Özal as the Cold War was ending. Özal came to the conclusion that cooperation between the two strong and stable secular democracies in the region would benefit Turkey and give both countries the ability to rely on each other in cases of emergency. Turkey decided to upgrade its relations with Israel partly because it felt its NATO membership would not be sufficient to address emerging threats from Syria, Iran, and Iraq. Turkey also believed that the United States would not be effective in dealing with these threats.⁹ Potential cooperation between Turkey and Israel on defense was complemented by economic considerations and the prospects of enhanced trade between these two growing economies. In addition, the progress made in Middle East peace efforts during this period contributed to the forging of a strategic partnership that allowed Turkey to lift the veil of secrecy from its relationship with Israel.

In essence, the breakthrough in the 1990s occurred as a result of a convergence of interests between the two countries. Israel had always desired a close relationship with Turkey, seeing it as a way to break out of its regional isolation and to gain access to airspace for military-training exercises and new intelligence sources. For the secular Turkish defense establishment, which viewed Hafiz al-Asad’s Syria as Turkey’s primary threat in the region, strengthening ties with Israel would provide Turkey with an enhanced deterrence capability, military superiority over its rivals in the region, access to advanced military hardware, and the support of the pro-Israel lobby in the United States.¹⁰

A series of high-level visits between Turkish and Israeli leaders took place during this period. Israeli President Ezer Weizman visited Ankara in 1994, and Turkish Prime Minister Tansu Çiller arrived in Israel later that year. Turkish President Süleyman Demirel visited Jerusalem in 1996, a year which marked the formal upgrade of the bilateral relationship and the year in which the two countries signed a Military Training and Cooperation agreement and a Defense Industrial Cooperation agreement. Joint exercises and training between the two countries’ air and naval forces, often joined by their American counterparts, paved the way towards a dialogue between the land forces of Turkey and Israel. Cooperation in counterterrorism and intelligence sharing was another aspect of this multi-faceted new order, reportedly centered around annual meetings of the two countries’ intelligence officials and guidance from Israeli experts on how Turkey should handle the conflict with the Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK).¹¹

The Turkish military—most notably Deputy Chief of Staff General Çevik Bir—was the driving force behind these agreements on the Turkish side, leaving the Islamist political leadership in power no choice but to support the agreements.¹² Major General David Ivri, Director-General of the Israeli Ministry of Defense, was the main promoter of the agreements on the Israeli side. However, this goal was also strongly supported by Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and his successor Shimon Peres, after his assassination.

From 1996 to 1998, Turkey and Israel further solidified their strategic partnership, signing important bilateral agreements on economic, commercial, technological, and scientific cooperation, as well as an investment treaty, a treaty to prevent double

⁹ Nachmani, 219-20.

¹⁰ William M. Hale, *Turkey, the US and Iraq* (London: SAQI, 2007), 72.

¹¹ Bengio, 106.

¹² Ali Balcı and Tuncay Kardeş, *The Changing Dynamics of Turkey’s Relations with Israel: An Analysis of Secularization*. 2nd ed. Vol. 14 (Ankara: SETA Foundation, 2012), 99-120.

taxation, and an agreement on free trade. Turkey also opened up its airspace to Israeli fighter pilots for training exercises and began to accommodate hundreds of thousands of Israeli tourists each year, averaging about 235,000 Israelis annually between 1996 and 2000.¹³

These bilateral agreements were never declared to be part of a formal alliance, and it was constantly emphasized that they were not directed against a third party; nevertheless, these agreements were perceived in the Arab world as an attempt to oppress Arabs. Moreover, Turkey was once again seen as acting on behalf of Western interests in the region.¹⁴ At the same time, an Ankara on friendly terms with Israel presented a different picture to the world than a Turkey capable of adopting the anti-Zionist discourse of the Middle East. Ankara saw the Arab-Israeli conflict as dividing its own loyalties, and frequently offered to play the role of an honest broker. It also saw itself free from domestic constraints to criticize Israel's policy towards the Palestinians and the issue of Jewish settlements.

Washington encouraged this partnership between its two allies and was eager to play a bigger role in helping shape and strengthen the partnership. The Clinton administration capitalized on the developing relationship to transfer military aid to Turkey by convincing Congress that assistance to Turkey would also benefit Israel. In that period, highly sophisticated technologies were supplied to Turkey by Israel. Sales of Israeli weapons systems frequently included technology transfers to Turkish industries, which produced some of the components or assembled the final products.¹⁵ Israel also upgraded 104 of Turkey's American-made F-4 and F-5 Phantom fighter jets.¹⁶

Military cooperation was not a rare facet of the tripartite relations. Turkey's Chief of the General Staff Hüseyn Karadayı visited Israel in February 1997, a visit reciprocated in October 1997 by the Chief of Staff of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), Amnon Lipkin-Shahak. The two defense establishments also reportedly held a strategic dialogue focusing on common threats and operational plans for dealing with them. The Israeli navy trained at Turkish diving facilities; tripartite naval and air training exercises took place in the Mediterranean Sea and in Turkish and Israeli airspace (annual naval search and rescue exercises, known as "Reliant Mermaid," were held for the first time in the East Mediterranean in 1997). The United States also gave Turkey the green light to take military action against PKK targets in Northern Iraq, with Israel assisting the Turkish army with equipment and intelligence.¹⁷

Although senior U.S. officials supported the Turkey-Israel alliance, some argued there should be tighter American control over the relationship in order to not jeopardize other U.S. strategic and economic interests. For example, some members of the Clinton administration's Middle East Peace team were concerned about the potential negative effects a Turkish-Israeli alliance could have on the chances for a Syrian-Israeli peace deal, which they were working diligently to promote at the time.¹⁸

The American Jewish community was very active in promoting this trilateral collaboration. Turkey was viewed favorably by many American Jews, as its history was seen as a story of overall tolerance towards Jews: allowing Jews fleeing from Spain to seek refuge from persecution in the Ottoman Empire after 1492, permitting entry to European Jews during World War II, establishing close relations

¹³ "Turizm İstatistikleri, Giriş-Çıkış Yapan Ziyaretçiler." *Turkish Statistical Institute*.

¹⁴ Özlem Tür, *Turkey and Israel in the 2000's – From Cooperation to Conflict*. 3rd ed. Vol. 17. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 45-66.

¹⁵ Nachmani, 220.

¹⁶ Hale, 72.

¹⁷ Nachmani, 220.

¹⁸ Interview with a senior congressional staffer, February 26, 2013, Washington, DC.

with Israel, and having what one American Jewish leader described as a “sound policy” on anti-Semitism.¹⁹ Major Jewish organizations supported this close relationship and worked both to strengthen U.S.-Turkey relations and to encourage close Turkish-Israeli ties. In one example, Jewish organizations and lobbyists advised the Turkish government on ways to fight congressional attempts to pass an Armenian Genocide bill that would have included sanctions against Turkey. Major General David Ivri acknowledged that in the early 1990s, Israel approached various American Jewish groups and encouraged them to visit Turkey and familiarize themselves with the issues.²⁰ Some Jewish organizations were also motivated to respond to requests to assist Turkey in Washington, which came from individual leaders of the small Jewish community in Turkey, fearing for its safety and well-being.²¹

Successive Israeli governments in the 1990s and 2000s viewed Turkey as an honest broker in the Middle East peace process. Turkey joined the multilateral peace process (established to support the four bilateral tracks launched in the aftermath of the Madrid Peace Conference) focusing on regional issues, and guided a 1993 workshop of the Arms Control and Regional Security working group. In the post-Oslo era, Turkey was one of the financial donors to the Palestinian Authority as part of the international assistance effort. It also dispatched a Turkish contingent to be part of the international policing force in the City of Hebron (known as the Temporary International Presence in Hebron, or TIPH) in 1997. In the fall of 2000, Israel strongly supported the candidacy of former Turkish President Süleyman Demirel for membership in the Sharm al-Shaykh Fact-Finding Committee (also known as the Mitchell Committee), an internation-

al fact-finding mission led by U.S. Senator George Mitchell that was established to determine the causes for the outbreak of the Second Intifada.

SEEDS OF CRISIS

During this same period, Turkey’s relations with its other Middle Eastern neighbors began to turn from conflict to cautious rapprochement due to the capture of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan and the signing of the Adana Accords with Syria. The PKK issue had been resolved to a great extent, resulting in the disappearance of immediate threats and opening the door to normalization with the Middle East. In December 1999, the Helsinki European Council declared Turkey a candidate country for accession to the European Union (EU), prompting Turkey to embark on an ambitious reform program at home. This development, coupled with the de-secularization of foreign policy, put Turkey’s foreign policy on a new path that emphasized cooperation and the adoption of a more EU-style foreign policy orientation, which included a decreased role for the military in foreign policy. In Turkey’s new foreign policy paradigm, the Middle East held an important place. As a result, relations with the Arab countries and Iran took a new turn, and the seeds of future cooperation were sown. Nonetheless, Turkish decision makers were quick to emphasize that this new strategic relationship with the Arab countries and Iran would not come at Israel’s expense.²²

The collapse of the Camp David II talks, the failure of the Oslo process, and the outbreak of the Second Intifada in 2000 brought about political tensions which expressed themselves in numerous ways over the next decade. For instance, in 2002 Turkish Prime Minister Mustafa Bülent Ecevit

¹⁹ Interview with a senior American Jewish leader, February 15, 2013, Washington, DC.

²⁰ Bengio, 100.

²¹ Interviews with a leader of an American Jewish organization, February 15, 2013, Washington, DC, and a lobbyist who represented Turkish interests in the 1980s, January 4, 2013, Washington, DC.

²² Tür, 50.

accused Israel of committing genocide against the Palestinian people, and in 2004 Prime Minister Erdoğan called Israel a “terrorist state” for the killing of 50 Palestinians in Gaza. It seemed that as long as Israel continued to pursue policies in line with the peace process, the relationship with Israel was not questioned in Turkey; but as soon as the process was put on hold and conflict over the Palestinian issue resurfaced, relations between the two countries were negatively affected.

When the AKP won the November 2002 elections, it faced important foreign policy issues, including the impending U.S. invasion of Iraq, the Cyprus issue, its future relationship with the EU, the need to strengthen its partnership with Israel, and its desire to strengthen its relations with Iran and Syria. At first the AKP did not adopt an anti-Israel policy, as relations with Israel were not an issue in the election campaign. A meeting between AKP officials and a visiting Hamas delegation in Ankara in 2006 caused uproar in Israel, but did not sidetrack the relationship between the two countries. Turkish officials emphasized that their aim in associating with Hamas was to moderate the radical organization and assured Israel that strong messages to this effect were conveyed in meetings between the Turkish leadership and Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal.²³

An important milestone during this period was Prime Minister Erdoğan’s visit to Israel in May 2005, during which Erdoğan laid a wreath at the Yad Va’shem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem. This visit was followed in June 2006 by a visit from Turkey’s President Ahmet Necdet Sezer. Both Erdoğan and Sezer invited Israeli President Shimon Peres to address the Turkish Grand National Assembly in 2007. Between 2006 and 2008, Turkey

also played a behind-the-scenes role in trying to secure the release of IDF soldier Gilad Shalit from captivity in Gaza.²⁴

The 2003 Iraq War had serious implications for Turkish foreign policy, both in its relations with the United States and in its approach to Israel. With Saddam Hussein removed from the regional equation, one of the main forces that had brought Israel and Turkey closer in the 1990s was eliminated. The recalculated equation led Turkey to seek closer ties with Iran and Syria. The Turkish Parliament’s decision in early March 2003 not to allow the United States to launch a ground offensive into northern Iraq from Turkish soil caused tensions in the relations between Ankara and Washington, and raised questions about Turkey’s strategic partnership with the United States. However, this decision earned Turkey greater prestige in the Middle East.

As the Iraq War reached its final stages, news reports of close cooperation between Israel and the Kurds in northern Iraq surfaced. These included Israeli training of Kurdish militias and Israeli assistance in preparing the Kurds for independence. Israel categorically denied the reports, emphasizing that they viewed Turkey as an important asset, and reassuring the Turks that they would never sacrifice their relationship with them for the sake of the Kurds.²⁵

The tensions between Israel and Turkey during this period also strained the U.S.-Turkey relationship. This was due in large part to Israel’s supporters in the U.S. Congress frequently sounding off with harsh criticism of Turkey, and because of the increasingly cozy relationship that had developed between Turkey and Syria—a country the Bush administration had included in his “Axis of Evil.”²⁶

²³“Turkey’s Crises over Israel and Iran,” *International Crisis Group*, Vol. 208, September 8, 2010.

²⁴ Madeleine Albright, Stephen Hadley, and Steven Cook. *U.S.-Turkey Relations: A New Partnership*. Vol. 69 (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2012). Independent Task Force Report.

²⁵ Tür, 57-8.

²⁶ Hale, 135.

Although relations between Israel and Turkey in the twenty-first century lost some of their warmth, it was not until Israel launched the December 2008 Operation Cast Lead in Gaza, that the AKP discontinued the “business as usual” approach towards Israel in the military and economic sectors.

TURKISH-SPONSORED PROXIMITY TALKS BETWEEN ISRAEL AND SYRIA

Prior to Operation Cast Lead, Turkey facilitated and mediated several rounds of proximity peace talks between Israel and Syria in Ankara. Turkey actively played the role of intermediary, with Turkish diplomats shuttling back and forth, relaying messages, questions, and answers between the negotiating teams who would not meet in the same room. Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan acted as a broker, traveling back and forth between the delegations’ separate hotels at first, and later between rooms when the Syrian and Israeli delegations moved into the same hotel. Over time, the negotiating teams hammered out a detailed blueprint for Israel’s return of the Golan Heights, which were captured in June 1967, in return for Syria changing the nature of their alliance with Iran and their support for terrorist groups such as Hizballah and Hamas.²⁷

Prime Minister Olmert’s visit to Ankara on December 22, 2008, was the climax of a sixteen-year partnership between Israel and Turkey. Olmert had a decisive meeting with Erdoğan in Ankara. However, Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallem, who was to join the meeting in order to launch direct negotiations, did not show up.²⁸ The differences between the two sides were reportedly so narrow

that a historic breakthrough seemed in sight. Erdoğan was on the phone with President Asad and meeting face to face with Prime Minister Olmert. As Olmert was heading back to Israel, he indicated he would need a bit more time.²⁹ With elections in Israel approaching, it became clear that a decision on the continuation of the Turkish-sponsored proximity talks with Syria might have to wait for the next Israeli government. Olmert himself expressed support for the continuation of talks on the eve of his trip to Turkey in a speech at Tel Aviv University, stating that the talks could lead to direct negotiations between Israel and Syria and that “a peace treaty with Syria can be achieved.”³⁰ A few days after his return, Israel launched Operation Cast Lead in Gaza without giving Turkey advance notice. The operation postponed Syrian-Israeli talks indefinitely, and was viewed by Erdoğan as “an act of disrespect toward Turkey.”³¹ Erdoğan saw it as a personal insult, and went on to become the harshest critic of Israel’s military campaign.

CONCLUSION

Some recurring themes emerge when reviewing the “early years” (1948-1992) and the “golden years” (1992-2008) in Turkish-Israeli relations: two non-Arab states in a volatile region, each facing serious challenges, coming to terms with the complex regional dynamics, and choosing to maintain a close relationship with one another by identifying mutual strategic and economic opportunities and concerns. The two countries kept their relationship secretive in the early years, as manifested in the Peripheral Alliance of 1958. The relationship became increasingly visible during the golden years, culminating in the strategic partnership officially

²⁷ Deborah Amos, *Eclipse of the Sunnis: Power, Exile, and Upheaval in the Middle East* (New York: Public Affairs, 2010), 59-60.

²⁸ Itamar Rabinovich, *Israel’s View of the Syrian Crisis* (Washington, DC: Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, 2012, Vol. 22), 175.

²⁹ Amos, 60.

³⁰ “Olmert: Peace Treaty with Syria Possible.” *NBC News*, December 18, 2008. http://www.nbcnews.com/id/28297683/ns/world_news-mideast_n-africa/t/olmert-peace-treaty-syria-possible/.

³¹ Gönül Tol, “The ‘Turkish Model’ in the Middle East,” Middle East Institute, December 14, 2012.

launched in 1996. In both periods, relations were affected by outside pressures and obstacles, as well as domestic developments: the Arab-Israeli conflict and economic challenges in the early years, and the Middle East peace process and the domestic transformation in Turkey during the golden years. The United States played an important role in supporting its two allies in the early years and joining with its two allies to form a close tripartite cooperative defense arrangement in the golden years. Another common thread between the early years and golden years was the vital role that the defense establishments of Israel and Turkey played in shaping the relationship, both positive and negative. In the early years, cooperation between the two countries developed gradually out of a mutual recognition of

the benefits of military and defense cooperation. In the golden years, the Turkish military had become the guarantor of stable and close ties with Israel. Relations only declined when the Turkish military's status began to erode, leading to an eventual deterioration which the United States unsuccessfully tried to stop.

As long as Israel continued to pursue policies within the framework of the Middle East Peace process, the relationship between Turkey and Israel remained relatively stable. However, tensions arose when the peace process suffered setbacks, such as when talks with Syria broke down or when negotiations with the Palestinians were put on hold.

CHAPTER 2. THE RIFT: THE MAVI MARMARA INCIDENT AND THE SEVERING OF DIPLOMATIC TIES

Israeli commandos boarded the MV Mavi Marmara in the early morning hours of May 31, 2010. The vessel was one of six headed from Turkish ports to Gaza to breach the Israeli naval blockade. When activists resisted, using knives and metal bars, the commandos opened fire. Eight Turks and one Turkish-American were killed.

Relations between Israel and Turkey were already sorely strained, but bilateral relations mostly collapsed following the flotilla incident.

Turkey's ambassador to the UN condemned the raid as a "massacre" and an act of "piracy," and sought a Security Council resolution denouncing Israel's actions. While Turkey expected a U.S. condemnation similar to that issued by its European allies, the United States tried to calm both sides without denouncing the attack. Senior U.S. officials, among them Vice President Joseph Biden, spoke out in support of Israel's right to defend itself. They also worked to water down the language of the UN resolution. A lone voice criticizing the flotilla was the leader of one of Turkey's most influential Islamic movements, Fethullah Gülen, who stated that the organizers should have received Israeli consent before setting sail.³²

In the weeks after the Marmara incident, Israel established a military inquiry headed by retired Major General Giora Eiland, and a civil inquiry commission, headed by Supreme Court Justice Emeritus Jacob Turkel. At U.S. urging, the commission included two non-Israeli observers: British politician Lord David Trimble and Canadian retired Brigadier General Kenneth Watkin. Turkey established its own inquiry commission two months later, which included senior officials from the Prime Minister's office, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Maritime Secretariat.

As Turkey and Israel pursued their own domestic inquiries, both parties agreed to cooperate with a special UN commission established by Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon and headed by former New Zealand Prime Minister Geoffrey Palmer. The Palmer Commission's mandate was to identify the facts, circumstances, and context of the flotilla incident and recommend ways to avoid similar incidents in the future. The Commission did not act as a court and was not asked to adjudicate liability.³³

³² Joe Lauria, "Reclusive Turkish Imam Criticizes Gaza Flotilla," *Wall Street Journal*, June 4, 2010. <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052748704025304575284721280274694>.

³³ Geoffrey Palmer, Álvaro Uribe, Joseph Ciechanover, and Süleyman Sanberk. *Report of the Secretary-General's Panel of Inquiry on the May 31st 2010 Flotilla Incident* (New York: United Nations, September 2011), 3.

Behind closed doors there was an intensive U.S. effort to bring an end to the crisis. Between August 2010 and September 2011, continuous attempts were made to bridge the gap between the parties and pave the way to normalization. While discussions were taking place in New York, several rounds of talks were held in other U.S. and European venues between senior Turkish and Israeli officials.³⁴

Turkey presented the flotilla as a multi-faith humanitarian initiative organized by a coalition of NGO's from 37 countries. The six-ship convoy, sailing in international waters, was intended to raise awareness of the dismal conditions in Gaza and to deliver humanitarian aid.³⁵

The flotilla's primary organizer was the Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH), comprised primarily of Sunni Muslims closely tied to the AKP. Though IHH is a legal Turkish organization founded in response to the 1992 Balkan crisis, it has been accused of being a terrorist organization with links to al-Qa'ida. In early 2014 its offices were raided by Turkish police as part of a "crackdown on al-Qa'ida cells."³⁶ IHH adheres to a radical narrative of the Palestinian problem; in 2009 IHH gave \$20 million of its \$50 million aid dollars to Palestinians, and half of that to Gaza.³⁷ IHH continues to associate closely with the Turkish government, more recently in providing aid to Syria.³⁸ While the IHH partnered with several international NGO's, it was the driving force behind all stages of the flotilla.

All three inquiry reports—Turkish, Israeli, and Palmer—found that both countries knew of the

flotilla well in advance and attempted to resolve the problem through diplomatic means as early as March 2010. The Palmer Commission characterized these efforts as "intensive, at the highest level of governments ... [involving] a number of nations."³⁹ There were at least twelve diplomatic discussions focused on how to steer events in a way that neither lives nor international peace and security would be endangered.⁴⁰ Even after the flotilla set sail, U.S. officials believed that a clash could be avoided as both the Turks and Israelis were seeking a "face-saving way" to avoid a showdown.

When it became clear that efforts to prevent the flotilla's departure had failed, Israel tried to redirect the convoy either to the Port of Ashdod (in Israel) or the Port of Al-Arish (in Egypt), and then transfer the aid to Gaza by land.⁴¹

According to one senior U.S. official, Prime Minister Erdoğan was working along two separate and opposing tracks in the months leading up to the flotilla.⁴² Through the Foreign Ministry, Erdoğan engaged with the United States, Israel, and others in diplomatic efforts to divert the flotilla and avoid confrontation. At the same time, the prime minister's office was working in close coordination with the IHH to push the flotilla forward.

The Palmer Commission was indecisive on the Turkish government's level of active support for the flotilla. AKP officials made no attempt to deny close links with the IHH. The Palmer Report concluded that neither Turkey nor Israel intended the violent outcome that ultimately ensued.

³⁴ Interview with a former U.S. official, November 13, 2012, Washington, DC.

³⁵ *Report on Israeli Attack on the Humanitarian Aid Convoy to Gaza on 31 May, 2010* (Ankara: Turkish National Commission of Inquiry, 2011).

³⁶ "High-ranking al-Qa'ida members detained in major operation across Turkey," *Today's Zaman*, January 14, 2014. <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-336544-high-ranking-al-qaeda-members-detained-in-major-operation-across-turkey.html>.

³⁷ "Turkey's Crises over Israel and Iran." International Crisis Group, Europe Report, Vol. 208, September 8, 2010, 5.

³⁸ Justin Vela, "Turkey's Men in Syria," *Foreign Policy*, September 18, 2012. <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/09/18/turkeys_men_in_syria>.

³⁹ Palmer, Uribe, Ciechanover, and Sanberk, 49.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴¹ *The Public Commission to Examine the Maritime Incident of 31 May 2010* (Tel Aviv: Turkel Commission, 2011) 15, 115.

⁴² Interview with a former U.S. official, March 18, 2013, Washington, DC.

From the Israeli perspective, the flotilla appeared to be a Turkish attempt to break the naval blockade and weaken Israeli deterrence. Israel viewed penetration of the blockade as a dangerous precedent that would lead to further breaches of its security perimeter if successful.

The public opinion portion of this crisis should not be ignored. Polls in each country reflected deep anger and frustration at the other side. A vast majority of Turks believed that Israel's actions were illegal and ruthless, while Israelis overwhelmingly felt that the IDF acted in self-defense.

As the drafting of the Palmer Report entered its final stages, it was clear to decision makers in the United States, Turkey, and Israel that the Turkish reaction would be harsh if the commission's findings indicated that Israeli commandos acted in self-defense aboard the Marmara, and acknowledged the legality of the Gaza naval blockade.

SORRY SEEMS TO BE THE HARDEST WORD

Turkey set three conditions for normalizing relations with Israel: an Israeli apology, compensation for the victims' families, and an end to the Gaza naval blockade. Since Israel was not willing to discuss lifting the blockade, talks focused on the terms of an apology and a compensation agreement.

As official government-to-government dialogue was suspended, efforts were made by think tanks, NGOs, and academic institutions to maintain contact in track-two settings. The Obama administration exerted great effort to bring about a rapprochement at all

levels, including the president, vice president, and secretaries of state and defense.

Restoring dialogue between Ankara and Jerusalem was in America's interest, but it was pursued with greater vigor in the summer of 2011 as the U.S. administration was concerned with the Palestinian Authority's pursuit of an upgraded status at the UN. The feeling in Washington was that an Israeli apology would induce Turkey to fend off the Palestinian bid and defuse tensions at the UN.⁴³

According to sources, Israeli negotiator Joseph Ciechanover and Ambassador Süleyman Özdem Sanberk initialed a draft agreement on June 16, 2011, that was supported by Prime Minister Netanyahu's representative, Minister Yaalon.⁴⁴ The draft agreement is said to have included an Israeli apology for "operational mistakes" that may have occurred during the takeover of the flotilla vessels, Israeli compensation to the victims' families, restoration of full diplomatic relations between the two countries, and a guarantee by the Turkish government not to prosecute Israelis involved in the incident.⁴⁵

The debate inside the Israeli Cabinet on the draft agreement was conducted behind closed doors, and there is no public record of the deliberations. Several U.S. officials have indicated that at the bureaucratic level there was universal support for an apology, but the political leadership was split.⁴⁶ Defense Minister Barak and Deputy Prime Minister Meridor favored mending ties with Turkey. U.S. officials note that Netanyahu was inclined at a certain point to approve the "operational failures" formula, but apparently retracted due to pressure from Avigdor Lieberman, who opposed any agreement that

⁴³ Interview with former administration official, 22 January 22, 2013, Washington, DC.

⁴⁴ *Summary of an Israeli-Turkish Political Dialogue: Israel-Turkey Relations and the Middle East Paradigm Change* (Istanbul: Mitvim & GPoT Center, September 2012), 1-4.

⁴⁵ Nahum Barnea, "The Pride Parade," *Yedioth Ahronoth*, September 9, 2011. (Hebrew).

⁴⁶ Interview with a U.S. administration official, November 13, 2012, Washington, DC.

didn't also include a Turkish apology for supporting terrorist organizations such as IHH, Hamas, and Hizballah.⁴⁷ Lieberman later clarified that he would not stand in the way of normalizing relations with Turkey. Nonetheless, while Netanyahu publicly disassociated himself from Lieberman's comments, he was so concerned that Lieberman would contest him politically that he decided not to decide.

Two schools of thought emerged in Israel. The first, associated with Foreign Minister Lieberman and the right, argued that Turkey under the AKP had embarked on a path to hegemony in the Arab and Muslim world. In this school of thought, confrontation with Israel serves a strategic goal and relations will never return to what they used to be. An Israeli apology would be interpreted as a sign of weakness, would be a diplomatic coup for Erdoğan, and would deal a blow to national pride and IDF morale.⁴⁸ The second school of thought, identified with Defense Minister Ehud Barak, argued that the new regional landscape made it imperative to resume contact. In his view, among the four regional powers (Egypt, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Iran) Egypt is unstable, Saudi Arabia is focused inward and Iran is continuing with its radical policy, therefore, if Israel apologized for the Marmara incident, an incremental reconciliation process could pave the way for a Turkish role in the region that might serve rather than oppose Israeli interests.⁴⁹ Barak even proposed issuing the apology direct from the Defense Ministry, so it could be characterized as a military mishap and he himself could take the criticism from domestic opponents. Prime Minister Netanyahu reportedly considered the approach but

rejected it out of concern that Lieberman would dismantle the governing coalition.⁵⁰

The Cabinet debate did not receive considerable attention in the Israeli media, as the prevailing attitude among the Israeli public was that relations with Turkey were doomed and Erdoğan's continued Israel bashing made further deterioration inevitable.

On the eve of the release of the Palmer report, Ambassador Dennis Ross was dispatched to Israel. At the same time, Under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs William J. Burns, Assistant Secretary of State for Europe Philip Gordon, and Head of Middle East and North Africa at the National Security Council Steve Simon traveled to Ankara to join U.S. Ambassador Francis Ricciardone in working with the Turkish government.⁵¹

Despite considerable U.S. efforts, Israel backed away from the deal in August 2011.⁵² A senior administration official described the decision as "politics trumping strategy."⁵³

The Palmer Report was officially published in New York in early September 2011 and included an Appendix with separate brief statements by Mr. Ciechanover of Israel and Mr. Sanberk of Turkey. While Ciechanover announced that Israel would adopt the Report with reservations, Sanberk registered Turkey's disagreement on the question of naval blockades in general, the legality of the Gaza blockade in particular, and the alleged actions of the flotilla. He confirmed Turkey's rejection of and disassociation

⁴⁷ "Lieberman 'Won't Accept Turkish Lies,'" *Ynetnews*, December 26, 2010. <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4004688,00.html>.

⁴⁸ Interview with Avigdor Lieberman, *Yedioth Ahronoth: Musaf LeShabat*, April 19, 2013, 6.

⁴⁹ Interview with Ehud Barak, *Israel Radio, Reshet Bet*, October 7, 2011.

⁵⁰ Barak Ravid, "Netanyahu Rejected Barak's Offer to Take Brunt of Criticism for Gaza Flotilla Raid," *Haaretz*, February 24, 2013. <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/netanyahu-rejected-barak-s-offer-to-take-brunt-of-criticism-for-gaza-flotilla-raid.premium-1.505308>.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Barak Ravid, "Lieberman: Israel's Rejection of Apology to Turkey Came too Late," *Haaretz*, August 17, 2011. <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/lieberman-israel-s-rejection-of-apology-to-turkey-came-too-late-1.379178>.

⁵³ Interview with a former U.S. administration official, January 22, 2013, Washington, DC.

from the Report on those issues.⁵⁴ On September 3, 2011, Prime Minister Netanyahu's office issued a statement accepting the Report. The Prime Minister adopted a conciliatory tone in press interviews; while determined that Israel would not apologize, he expressed regret over the loss of life and highlighted the historic ties between the two peoples.⁵⁵

SEVERING OF TIES

Turkey responded by immediately expelling Israel's ambassador in Ankara and instructing the Turkish Ambassador in Tel Aviv to leave his post. Junior level diplomats with ranks of second secretary replaced the ambassadors.

For the next 12 months, diplomatic relations between the two former allies were practically non-ex-

istent—bilateral dialogue ceased and there was no contact at the senior level. What remained of Turkish-Israeli defense cooperation was put on hold and all military deals were frozen, including an \$800 million project to produce aircraft and radar systems, and a \$5 billion tank deal.⁵⁶ Turkey tried to block Israel in multinational institutions, opposed Israeli participation in the NATO-Mediterranean Dialogue, and opposed its proposed membership in the U.S.-Turkey led Global Counter-Terrorism Forum (GCTF). Finally, Turkey announced plans to maintain a military presence in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea to escort future flotillas and to challenge Israel's natural gas drilling. Erdoğan declared that Turkey would support lawsuits against Israeli soldiers. He then stated he would visit Gaza on a scheduled trip to Cairo, challenging the Gaza blockade.

⁵⁴ Palmer Report, 104-5.

⁵⁵ Herb Keinon, "PM Netanyahu's Rosh Hashana interview to 'Post,'" *Jerusalem Post*, September 28, 2011. <http://www.jpost.com/Features/Front-Lines/PM-Netanyahus-Rosh-Hashana-interview-to-Post#!>.

⁵⁶ Soner Çağaptay and Tyler Evans, "Turkey, Israel: Potential for a Fresh Start?," *CNN*, May 31, 2012. <http://globalpublicsquare.blogs.cnn.com/2012/05/31/turkey-israel-potential-for-a-fresh-start/>.

CHAPTER 3. KEY VARIABLES IN THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP

Any assessment of the deterioration of the Turkish-Israeli alliance and efforts to repair the damage of the Marmara incident must begin by examining the key drivers in the Turkish-Israeli relationship. This chapter looks at domestic and regional interests that inform geostrategic alliances in the region.

The way these factors played out both shaped the diplomatic rift and now represents interests and considerations for bolstering future cooperation. These brief synopses can demonstrate enduring trends in the Turkish-Israeli relationship amid rapidly changing regional politics. As non-Arab states, Turkey strives for recognition as a leader in the region, and Israel constantly questions its engagement in regional affairs.

At the outset, the two key factors with the most impact on the relationship were changes in the Turkish political landscape and developments in Israeli-Palestinian relations.

1. TURKEY UNDER THE AKP

The change in Turkey's stance toward Israel was foremost the result of the Islamic Justice and Development Party's (AKP) consolidated position in the Turkish government. Following the

AKP's victory in the November 2002 elections, there were no immediate changes, despite critical statements regarding Israel's handling of the Palestinian issue during the second Intifada. Over the next six years though, the Turkish political arena became engulfed in a clash between the new Islamist leadership and the military elite. As the military's position eroded, relations with Israel declined. Israel's policy toward Ankara was relatively passive during these changes, but the country was also moving in a more nationalist direction as the Israeli public elected right and later right-centrist governments. One reason for this shift was exhaustion and skepticism, stemming from the failure of the Oslo peace process and Camp David II talks.

Under the leadership of Abdullah Gül and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the AKP was eager to reintroduce religious themes and values into government.⁵⁷ However, they had learned from the Erbakan premiership that pushing for change too quickly could alienate the military. They understood that for an Islamist process to succeed, it was important to transform the system from within, gradually.⁵⁸ One of the AKP's main targets in this process was the secularist military elite, the main proponent of a strong alliance with Israel in the 1990s. Experts also note that the military had used Israel as a trump

⁵⁷ Reuel Marc Gerecht, *The Wave: Man, God and the Ballot Box in the Middle East* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution/Stanford University, 2011), 95.

⁵⁸ Interview with a former U.S. administration official, Mar.ch 15, 2013, Washington, DC.

card against Erbakan, which made Turkish-Israeli relations a contested issue in the domestic political arena. This made a strong impression on Gül and Erdoğan, two rising politicians during the February 1997 “soft coup” (when the Turkish military engineered the ouster of Erbakan’s Islamist Welfare Party).⁵⁹ The forging of the strategic partnership in the 1990’s must be seen in the context of domestic secularization, while the deterioration during the first decade of the twenty-first century cannot be detached from the de-secularization of Turkish society.⁶⁰ As Erdoğan emerged victorious from his clash with the military, many among the military elite were either forced to resign or jailed without trial on criminal charges. Relations with Israel were severely affected. It remains an open question whether the changed nature of Turkey’s relations with Israel was an aim of the AKP-led transformation or a by-product of the process.⁶¹ At present, as the recent Israel-Hamas conflict has demonstrated, reconciling between the AKP, the dominant manifestation of Turkish political Islam in the last decade, and the Jewish state, remains the biggest challenge to overcome, if relations are to improve.

2. THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

The collapse of Oslo, lack of progress, and at times vicious cycle of violence accompanying the Israeli-Palestinian peace process also contributed to the shift from a strategic partnership to increasingly antagonistic relations.

Turkish society is overwhelmingly supportive of the Palestinians, and Israel’s continued occupation of the West Bank and settlement policy strike a particularly sensitive nerve. While public opinion may be divided on the Syrian Civil War, the Turkish public is sharply critical of Israeli policy toward the West

Bank and Gaza. As Turkey became more democratic, these attitudes mattered more to elected officials. The strong ties between Turkey’s AKP government and Hamas are just one manifestation of Turkish popular support.

While it does seem that Prime Minister Erdoğan’s position on the Palestinian issue is genuine, it cannot be ignored that he scores easy points when he launches verbal attacks on Israel and demonstrates solidarity with the Palestinians. However, it is important to note that Erdoğan’s sympathy for the Palestinians did not carry over into relations with Israel until Operation Cast Lead in Gaza; indeed, he continued to strengthen defense and economic ties long after assuming office in 2003.

Israel launched Operation Cast Lead in December 2008, just days after Prime Ministers Olmert and Erdoğan met in Ankara to discuss Syria and other regional challenges. American, Turkish, and Israeli experts and journalists have adopted a simplistic narrative that Erdoğan’s reaction to the Gaza campaign stemmed from a sense of personal insult over not being notified of Israel’s plan to invade Gaza, but Erdoğan’s sense of prestige as a regional player cannot be overlooked. Syrian-Israeli proximity talks were a particular source of pride for Turkish statesmanship and diplomacy, and Operation Cast Lead put them on hold and also dealt a blow to Erdoğan’s prestige as a patron of Hamas.

January 2009 brought the clash that symbolized the beginning of the breakup. At the World Economic Forum in Davos, Erdoğan strongly criticized Israel’s Gaza operation, described Israeli President Shimon Peres as a man who “knew very well how to kill,” and then walked off the stage vowing never to return. Erdoğan’s popularity at home soared by 10 points

⁵⁹ Michael Reynolds, *Echoes of Empire: Turkey’s Crisis of Kemalism and the Search for an Alternative Foreign Policy*. Analysis Paper, Vol. 26. (Washington, DC: Saban Center for Middle East Policy and the Center on the United States and Europe, The Brookings Institution, 2012), 26.

⁶⁰ Balci and Kardaş, 106.

⁶¹ See Gerecht, 97, and Bernard Lewis, *The End of Modern History in the Middle East* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution, 2011), 16.

and he earned the attention of the Arab street as a champion of the Palestinian cause.⁶² With Foreign Minister Davutoğlu shuttling between Damascus and Cairo, Turkey positioned itself as a mediator on behalf of Hamas, and tried to broker a ceasefire deal in Gaza.⁶³

In spring 2009, Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoğlu cancelled a trip to Israel after being prevented from visiting Hamas officials in Gaza. In late summer 2009, Turkey retracted an invitation to Israel to participate in “Anatolian Eagle,” an annual United States-Turkey-Israel-NATO air force exercise. The United States said it would not participate if Israel did not take part, and the exercise was subsequently cancelled. “Anatolian Eagle” was designed to enhance long-range capability such as what may be required in a strike against Iran’s nuclear facilities. After “Anatolian Eagle,” no further joint air training took place and the Israeli Air Force was compelled to train in Greek and Italian airspace.⁶⁴ Turkey’s official explanation was that the event was postponed due to technical difficulties, but the political motivation soon became clear.⁶⁵ The cancellation signaled the military’s loss of initiative in relations with Israel, as well as the transformation of the civilian-military balance in favor of civilian political authority.⁶⁶

With stalled negotiations, continuing recriminations, and a hiatus in Turkish-Israeli diplomatic relations, Turkey’s ties to Hamas grew closer. The relationship came into full bloom during the Syria crisis, when the Hamas Political Bureau shut down

its Damascus office and Khaled Mashal left Syria in January 2012. Turkey’s role (alongside Egypt under Muslim Brotherhood control and Qatar) as a patron of Hamas was strengthened, and Erdoğan felt the time was ripe to visit Gaza. He announced his intention to visit the Gaza Strip at a date to be determined, adding that in the past he had also invited Mahmoud Abbas, Chairman of the Palestinian Authority, to join him. Abbas responded favorably, though the trip has not taken place due to Turkish domestic political turbulence, and remains a point of contention between Turkey and Israel.

Following weeks of continuing rocket fire from Gaza, Israel launched Operation Pillar of Defense on November 14, 2012 with the targeted killing of Ahmed Jabari, Hamas’ military wing commander. During the eight-day operation, the Israeli Air Force conducted strikes on more than 1500 rocket-launching sites in the Gaza Strip. For Turkey, the operation evoked memories of Operation Cast Lead. Prime Minister Erdoğan accused Israel of unnecessary aggression and of using the operation to steer the upcoming Israeli election. In a speech at Cairo University, Erdoğan warned that Israel would pay a price for killing innocent children in Gaza.⁶⁷

There was limited public criticism of the operation on the Israeli side, despite the fact that elections were in full swing. Still, Labor Party member MK Isaac Hertzog blamed Netanyahu for “not genuinely trying to solve the crisis with Turkey,” suggesting that the rift left Israel in a state of “strategic inferiority” that made it difficult to reach a ceasefire

⁶² Andrew Finkel, *Turkey: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 87, and International Crisis Group, 1.

⁶³ Nathalie Tocci and Joshua Walker, “The Sea Change in Turkey’s Middle Eastern Policy,” *OpenDemocracy*, March 16, 2010. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/opensecurity/nathalie-tocci-joshua-walker/sea-change-in-turkeys-middle-eastern-policy>.

⁶⁴ Jonathan Marcus, “Israel Woos Greece after Rift with Turkey,” *BBC*, October 16, 2010. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-11556442>. “Italian, Israel Air Force Conduct Joint Training Exercises in Sardinia, Southern Israel,” *Defense Update*, November 26, 2010. http://defense-update.com/20101126_iaf_in_sardinia.html#U_ZDsifjQeA.

⁶⁵ Ivan Watson “Turkey plays down tensions with Israel,” *CNN*, October 11, 2009. <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/europe/10/12/turkey.israel.tensions/>

⁶⁶ Balci and Kardaş, 114.

⁶⁷ “Israel will pay price for Gazans’ tears, Erdoğan says in Cairo,” *Today’s Zaman*, November 17, 2012. <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-298471-israel-will-pay-price-for-gazans-tears-erdogan-says-in-cairo.html>.

with Hamas.⁶⁸ While campaigning on behalf of her newly formed Ha'Tnua'a Party, former Opposition leader Tzipi Livni called Netanyahu's Turkey policy his government's biggest foreign policy blunder in four years.

Against this backdrop, Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan's willingness in November 2012 to allow the Turkish Head of Intelligence to meet his Israeli counterpart in Cairo, and Undersecretary of the Foreign Ministry Sinirlioglu to meet with Israeli senior envoy Ciechanover in Geneva, was unusual. Foreign Minister Davutoğlu explained in interviews that the meetings were aimed at finding a formula to end the Gaza crisis and that there would be no discussion of reconciliation as long as Israel refused to meet Turkey's three conditions.⁶⁹ Turkish press reports later confirmed that while discussion in Cairo focused on Gaza, Israel's envoy Ciechanover did introduce new ideas to address Turkey's three conditions.⁷⁰ Ciechanover reportedly told his Turkish interlocutor that Israel was willing to apologize for the Marmara incident and pay compensation to the victims' families, and in return expected Turkey to normalize relations with Israel and allow the return of the Israeli Ambassador to Ankara.⁷¹ Undersecretary Sinirlioglu reportedly stated that if Israel accepted Turkey's conditions, it would be seen by the government in Ankara as turning a new page and would be followed by the concrete steps Israel was asking for. He emphasized the third condition of lifting the Gaza naval blockade; Ciechanover did not rule that out, but noted that Israel would need "guarantees that the lifting of the blockade will not damage Israel's security."⁷²

Since the Israeli apology, plans made by Prime Minister Erdoğan to visit Gaza and the West Bank were put on the backburner, mostly due to Turkish domestic considerations as well as Turkish support of the U.S.-led peace effort to advance Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. As the "Kerry process" all but collapsed and an agreement was signed between Fatah and Hamas on the establishment of a new unity Palestinian government, Israel began a worldwide diplomatic campaign to limit international recognition of the new government, while Turkey rushed to recognize it. The summer 2014 confrontation between Israel and Hamas further exacerbated tensions between Turkey and Israel. Undoubtedly Turkey's support of Palestinian unity coupled with the continued close relations between the AKP government and Hamas, and the rhetoric coming from the Turkish leadership will likely have an adverse impact on efforts to improve the Turkish-Israeli relationship in the near future

Additional factors in the bilateral sphere affecting the relationship include:

3. PUBLIC OPINION

There is little doubt that Turkish attitudes toward Israel took a turn for the worse when the AKP came to power. While it is unclear exactly where to draw the line between AKP ideology and political maneuvering, a growing anti-Israel sentiment was evident as the Israeli-Palestinian peace process came to a halt and the Mavi Marmara incident occurred.

⁶⁸ Barak Ravid, "Gaza Crisis Highlights Netanyahu's Failure to Reconcile with Turkey," *Haaretz*, November 18, 2012. <http://www.haaretz.com/blogs/diplomania/gaza-crisis-highlights-netanyahu-s-failure-to-reconcile-with-turkey.premium-1.478860>.

⁶⁹ "Turkish FM confirms talks with Israel on Gaza, bilateral ties," *Today's Zaman*, November 25, 2012. <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-299227-turkish-fm-confirms-talks-with-israel-on-gaza-bilateral-ties.html>.

⁷⁰ Barak Ravid, "Turkey FM confirms resumption of reconciliation talks with Israel," *Haaretz*, November 25, 2012. <http://www.haaretz.com/blogs/diplomania/gaza-crisis-highlights-netanyahu-s-failure-to-reconcile-with-turkey.premium-1.478860>.

⁷¹ "Turkish FM confirms talks with Israel on Gaza, bilateral ties," *Today's Zaman*, November 25, 2012. <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-299227-turkish-fm-confirms-talks-with-israel-on-gaza-bilateral-ties.html>.

⁷² *Ibid.*

There are few public opinion polls to turn to, but a 2011 TESEV poll offers a glimpse at Turkish attitudes: 40 percent viewed Israel as hostile to Turkey, 10 percent viewed Israel as a threat (compared to 12 percent who viewed the United States as a threat), and 47 percent believed that strained relations with Israel harm Turkish interests.⁷³ The unanswered question is whether this poll reflects a nation divided on questions of policy, or a strong undercurrent of anti-Semitism, a phenomenon present since the early Republic.⁷⁴

As for Israel, the official government policy toward Turkey was one of containment. Israeli ministers kept quiet and barely reacted to Erdoğan's harsh rhetoric. Foreign Minister Lieberman was an exception; he clearly opposed any agreement that included an apology, and media reports suggested that he favored some form of retaliation, including embarrassing Turkey on Armenian, Kurdish, and Human Rights issues. Prime Minister Netanyahu categorically rejected any such action.

Israeli public opinion regarding Turkey has passed through several stages.⁷⁵ The initial phase was one of confusion, concern, and even fear—Erdoğan was portrayed as an irrational extremist who doesn't play by international rules. There was genuine concern about whether Turkey might be preparing hostile military activities against Israel. Early polls revealed a broad consensus against an Israeli apology, and there were public calls to boycott Turkish goods. A majority of Israelis felt deeply betrayed by the flotilla incident.

Over time a new discourse surfaced, criticizing the government's handling of the incident. While

perhaps not representative of mainstream opinion, critics included both traditional supporters and new voices—MK Livni, former MK Hanegbi, Governor of the Bank of Israel Stanley Fisher, and former Justice Minister Amnon Rubinstein. By August 2012, a public opinion poll conducted by the Rafi Smith Institute indicated that a majority of Israelis thought Israel should take action to improve relations with Turkey, including apologizing for operational mistakes on the Mavi Marmara. Those polled also believed that a rapprochement with Turkey would serve Israel's interests vis-à-vis Iran.⁷⁶

It must not be forgotten that the Turkey-Israel relationship deteriorated in part due to the personalities involved. As previously noted, Erdoğan's sense of personal insult over not being informed of Israel's plan to launch Operation Cast Lead helped shape both his and Davutoğlu's blunt rhetoric, which became the public face of Turkish policy. This naturally left many Israelis skeptical that Turkey under AKP rule would ever change or be a reliable ally. On the other side, Foreign Minister Lieberman's harsh stance, combined with Netanyahu's refusal to issue an apology for the Mavi Marmara incident (particularly when he issued an apology to Egypt following an August 2011 border incident) left many Turks puzzled about Israel's intentions. This was a political clash turned personal, and any perceived compromise or concession could put Erdoğan and Netanyahu at odds with their own constituencies.

In the aftermath of the Israeli apology, public opinion in each country remained mostly unfavorable towards the other country, but as illustrated in the Pew Global Attitudes Poll of Spring 2013, growing numbers in the Turkish and Israeli publics have

⁷³ Guenther Seufert, "Foreign Policy Perception in Turkey," TESEV, June 2011. http://www.tesev.org.tr/assets/publications/file/Comment%20on%20the%20Opinion%20Research,%20Foreign%20Policy%20Perceptions%20in%20Turkey_06.2011.pdf.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Nimrod Goren, "An Unfulfilled Opportunity for Reconciliation: Israel and Turkey during the Arab Spring," 2nd Ed, Vol. 4 (Ankara: SETA Foundation, 2012), 121-35.

⁷⁶ MITVIM Poll on Israel-Turkey Relations, conducted by the Rafi Smith Institute, August 23-6, 2012. <http://www.mitvim.org.il/israelis-sup-port-apology-to-turkey>.

moved from “very unfavorable” to “somewhat unfavorable” towards the other.⁷⁷ In the summer of 2014 anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic sentiments rose in Turkey as the confrontation between Israel and Hamas intensified, while in Israel public anti-Turkish sentiments peaked in response to Prime Minister Erdoğan’s comments characterizing Israel’s policy in Gaza as a “systematic genocide... surpassing Hitler’s barbarism.” Turkey’s attempts (jointly with Qatar) to broker a ceasefire were flatly rejected by the Israeli leadership and U.S. efforts to include Turkey in the discussions over a ceasefire were met by fierce public opposition and criticism. The revelation that a senior Hamas operative, that found refuge in Turkey in recent years, was behind the kidnapping and murder of three Israeli teenagers in the West Bank in June 2014, further aggravated Israeli public sentiments, as seen in a decision by a leading Israeli supermarket chain (“Rami Levy”) to halt the purchase of Turkish food products.

4. BILATERAL TRADE AND TOURISM

One stable element in Turkish-Israeli relations has been the two countries’ economic ties. While political and diplomatic ties came practically to a standstill, trade kept the relationship afloat.

Not only was there no freeze on bilateral trade, but trade between Turkey and Israel increased during the Global Financial Crisis, demonstrating stability, resilience, and steady growth for both economies. From approximately \$2.6 billion in overall bilateral trade during 2009, trade grew to \$3.3 billion in 2010 and to \$4.2 billion in 2011. This likely incentivized leaving commercial ties intact; as it was clearly serving Turkish economic interests, Erdoğan allowed Turkish business to continue trading with

Israel uninterrupted. Turkish exports—including machinery, minerals, and textiles—made up nearly 60 percent of the trade, while Israeli exports included base metals and machinery, chemicals, plastic and paper products.⁷⁸

After a drop in 2012 (to approx. \$3.9 billion) the volume of bilateral trade in 2013 for the first time crossed the \$5 billion dollar mark, as Turkey became one of Israel’s top 10 trading partners, and as Israel remains an important market for Turkish goods.⁷⁹ Growth in trade was steady during the first six months of 2014. However, commercial ties are private, not public. The statistics do not include defense-related trade, which had been nearly nonexistent until early 2013.

Israeli tourism to Turkey, an important dimension of the bilateral relationship in the “golden years” (with an annual average of 324,000 Israeli tourists between 2000-2006, reaching a peak of over half a million tourists each year in 2007-2008) plummeted in the aftermath of the Mavi Marmara incident (less than 100,000 tourists a year between 2010-2012) regained momentum in the aftermath of the Israeli apology with a renewed if somewhat restrained surge in the number of Israeli tourists, but is expected to drop dramatically after the Israeli government issued in July 2014 a travel warning to Turkey as a result of anti-Israeli violent demonstrations in Istanbul and Ankara.⁸⁰

5. NATURAL GAS DISCOVERIES IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

While Turkey tried to steer the developments of the Arab Spring towards a greater role, hoping to serve as a model for the new Arab regimes, Israel devoted

⁷⁷ Turkey-Israel Pew Global Attitudes Poll, Global Attitudes Project at Pew Research Center, Spring 2013, www.pewglobal.org.

⁷⁸ “Exports and Imports, by Commodities and Countries - Annual Data,” Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, www.cbs.gov.il.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Turkish Statistical Institute, www.turkstat.gov.tr, and “Turkey: Where Israeli and Iranian Tourists Meet,” *San Diego Jewish World*, 7 May 2014. <http://www.sdjewishworld.com/2014/05/07/turkey-israeli-iranian-tourists-meet/>.

its efforts to a rapprochement with Greece and to creating a framework for economic and energy cooperation with Cyprus. This added to the tension with Turkey.

Greece and Israel were eager to re-establish ties, which had been dormant for decades. In 2010, Greek Prime Minister Georgios Papandreou visited Jerusalem and signed a cooperation memorandum. Prime Minister Netanyahu visited Athens several months later. In 2011, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak and his Greek counterpart Panos Kefauz signed a security cooperation agreement which included joint training exercises and exchanges, including an annual U.S.-Greece-Israel naval exercise dubbed “Noble Dina.” Meanwhile, the Greek Parliament approved a \$155 million deal to purchase 400 Israeli bomb-precision upgrade kits. Closer ties were not limited to defense matters, and included scientific and cultural exchanges as well as enhanced trade and tourism. Prior to 2010, an average of 150,000 Israeli tourists visited Greece annually, while in 2012 their estimated number reached approximately 400,000. Ankara viewed these developments with great concern and criticism.⁸¹

Potential energy cooperation between Turkey and Israel was described in recent years by experts as a possible “game changer” in the Turkish-Israeli political context. At first, the discovery of very large gas fields in the Eastern Mediterranean aggravated the geopolitical dynamic, as the gas finds lie close to the Cypriot-Israeli maritime border. Reserves in Israel’s Leviathan gas field amount to 450-480 billion cubic meters (bcm) and in the Tamar gas field 254 bcm, thus allowing Israel to export gas. Israel and Cyprus were compelled to sign a maritime border agreement in December 2010 to delimit their

respective Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ), negotiate joint exploration in the cross-border area, and agree on the terms of participation of Israel’s Delek Energy (and its Texan partner Noble Energy) in exploring the Aphrodite gas field.

Turkey strongly contested these moves, claiming that gas exploration should take place within the framework of a comprehensive settlement, including Turkish Cypriot participation in decision making and revenue sharing. Tensions escalated when the Republic of Cyprus began exploratory drilling close to Israel’s Leviathan field. Turkey retaliated by signing a continental shelf delimitation agreement with the “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus,” engaging in gas exploration north, west, and east of the island, and threatening to scale up its military presence in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Although some Israeli politicians were tempted to describe these developments as a new Greek-Cypriot-Israeli axis and some Arab and Turkish media suggesting the aim was to counterbalance Turkey, Israeli officials rushed to tone down the idea of a geopolitical shift in which stronger ties with Greece and Cyprus come at the expense of Israel’s (deteriorating) relations with Turkey.⁸² Despite Israeli explanations and continuous efforts to resolve the crisis with Turkey, some experts remain doubtful as to the true nature of Israel’s new cooperation with Greece and Cyprus, arguing that a new balance of power was emerging. Indeed, an alignment between Turkey and the Arab world rivaling a Cypriot-Greek-Israeli axis supported by U.S. and European energy companies would add a troubling dimension to the fragile state of the Turkish-Israeli relationship.⁸³

⁸¹ Jean-Loup Samaan, “Israel-Turkey Strategic Ties Show Signs of Thaw,” *Al-Monitor*, March 20, 2013. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/03/israel-turkey-greece-relations-improve-gas-cooperation.html#>.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Daniela Huber and Nathalie Tocci, “Behind the Scenes of the Turkish-Israeli Breakthrough,” IAI Working Papers 13/15 (Rome: Istituto Affari Internazionali, April 2013), 6-7.

The United States and European Union have a growing stake in transforming gas into a force for unity in the Eastern Mediterranean. A Turkish-Cypriot-Israeli partnership over natural gas may be feasible only in the context of an agreement with Cyprus, which would include joint governance and revenue sharing between the two Cypriot communities, although Cypriot and Turkish officials are not ruling out creative ways for “circling the square” and reaching an accommodation to by-pass political hurdles.

The United States has a clear interest in solving the Cyprus issue and pressing for Turkey-Cyprus-Israel cooperation. The European Union has a stake in this triangular cooperation as well, as it will mean more energy security and diversification for Europe; it will also help the Cypriot economy, and will remove a thorn from its relations with Turkey.

Another regional consideration for gas cooperation is Egypt. A growing population has created an increased demand for natural gas which Egypt’s LNG plants have been unable to meet. These shortages are among Egyptian President al-Sisi’s greatest challenges at the beginning of his first term, as the transferring of natural gas from Israel’s Leviathan gas field to the two Egyptian LNG plants may prove to be a viable option, although very difficult politically. An Israeli diplomatic source noted, “Ultimately Egypt and Turkey need energy, and the fact that we have it is creating a regional convergence of interests,” yet Israelis may be over confident as to the likelihood that economic considerations will trump the complex political considerations and dynamics.⁸⁴ Notwithstanding, the partners in Israel’s Leviathan

field recently reached a preliminary agreement on a 30 billion dollar deal to supply gas (7 bcm of gas a year over 15 years) to British Gas in Egypt via a new undersea pipeline, in addition to signing a supply contract to sell gas to potash and bromine companies in Jordan while negotiating larger contracts to pipe gas from Leviathan to Jordan and the Palestinian Authority.⁸⁵

Turkey’s dependence on imported gas mainly from Russia, Iran and Azerbaijan led the Turkish energy sector to seek diversification of Turkey’s energy resources. Turkey’s placement in the “South Corridor” natural gas route and its agreement with the KRG to purchase natural gas and oil are steps in that direction. In this context as Turkey also has a keen interest in becoming an energy hub and a transit country for natural gas, a pipeline from Israel through Turkey to Europe may be the most economically viable export option for Israel. As such, discussions between Turkish and Israeli energy companies continue. A 25-year supply deal is envisioned, per a senior Turkish energy official.⁸⁶ This deal will require a normalization of relations and a reinstating of ambassadors, but will greatly boost economic ties between the two nations. According to an energy expert, “The Turks realize that if this gas project is implemented without their involvement, they will not be a game-player in East Med. Hence, the Turkish private sector could be encouraged to take the lead and politicians follow them at a later stage.”⁸⁷ A separate yet-to-be-built pipeline linking Europe with the Caspian through Turkey in 2019 could eventually also open up a new market for Israeli gas in Western Europe.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ John Reed, “Israel’s Leviathan partners target \$30bn supply deal with BG,” *Financial Times*, June 29, 2014. <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/7a51810a-ff6e-11e3-9a4a-00144feab7de.html#axzz3AwwKMFTH>.

⁸⁶ Oleg Vukmanovic and Ron Bousso, “Israel Gas Holds Promise of Better Ties With Neighbors,” *Reuters*, April 14, 2014. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/04/14/us-israel-egypt-gas-insight-idUSBREA3D07720140414>.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

6. REGIONAL POLITICS AND A CHANGING BALANCE OF POWER

The summer 2014 confrontation between Israel and Hamas has pitted Iran, Qatar and Turkey in support of Hamas and Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Israel in opposition to Hamas. Against this backdrop it is difficult to consider in the short term potential collaboration between Turkey and Israel on regional issues. Nevertheless it is important to consider a set of regional challenges, on which the two countries almost see eye to eye, that may provide the necessary glue for a future Israeli-Turkish normalization process. As Erdoğan consolidated his support, the Islamists under the AKP gained confidence, strengthened their grip on the domestic arena, and claimed the allegiance of a new military leadership. In 2004, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu articulated a new foreign policy doctrine known as “Strategic Depth” and “Zero Problems,” which emphasized Turkey’s desire for closer ties with Syria and Iran and a leadership role among Islamic movements, including Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, and the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC).⁸⁹ The new strategy signaled a strong departure from Kemalist doctrine and a sea change in Turkey’s Middle East policy.⁹⁰

Between 2002 and 2009, Turkey and Syria signed nearly 50 cooperation agreements and conducted their first-ever joint military exercises. In 2010 they signed a counter-terrorism agreement against the PKK and surpassed the \$3 billion mark in bilateral trade.⁹¹ Turkey also expanded economic ties with Iran and consistently sought to block or dilute

international sanctions. It further positioned itself as a mediator between the P5+1 and Iran over the nuclear issue.

During this time, Turkey’s relationship with the United States grew more complex. Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the United States looked to Turkey as a force for stability in Afghanistan, Iraq, Central Asia, and the Middle East.⁹² Early in his first term, President Obama saw Turkey as a regional linchpin and was viewed as taking “great pains to build a relationship of trust with Prime Minister Erdoğan.”⁹³ When Obama traveled to Istanbul for his first state visit in the region, it led to growing Turkish confidence and a realization that it no longer needed Israel or the American Jewish community to facilitate relations with the U.S. Administration.

With the rise of the AKP, Turkish exports to the Arab world grew to nearly 25 percent of total exports. This rapid growth of the Turkish economy reduced the weight of trade with Israel.⁹⁴ As Turkey’s AKP-led foreign policy shifted from NATO and the Mediterranean eastward and southward, relations with the Jewish state were bound to suffer.⁹⁵

7. THE ARAB SPRING

The fact that Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan was not invited to Egyptian President al-Sisi’s swearing in ceremony in Cairo in June 2014, demonstrates not only the level of Egyptian resentment towards Turkey’s prime minister but also is an indication to the failure of Erdoğan’s policy in the context of

⁸⁹ Soner Çağaptay, *The New Turkey and U.S. Policy*. Vol. 11 (Washington Institute Strategic Report, Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2013), 6.

⁹⁰ Reynolds, 2. Also, Tocci and Walker.

⁹¹ Hasan Korkut, “Turkish Foreign Policy toward the Arab Revolutions,” *Epiphany Journal of Trans-Disciplinary Studies*, Vol. 6. (Sarajevo: International University of Sarajevo, 2013), 163-7.

⁹² Albright, Hadley, and Cook, 3.

⁹³ Martin Indyk, Kenneth Lieberthal, and Michael O’Hanlon, *Bending History? Barack Obama’s Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2012), 184.

⁹⁴ Interview with a former senior U.S. official, March 18, 2013, Washington, DC.

⁹⁵ Oded Eran, “Quo Vadis, Turkey?” *Inside Turkey*, vol. 13, no.4 (Ankara: SETA Foundation, 2011), 31-8.

the Arab Spring. While the Arab Spring created a set of conditions that could be favorable to a renewed Turkish-Israeli dialogue, the two countries found themselves at first on opposite sides of the fence. After a few initial weeks of uncertainty, Turkey came out in support of the Arab revolts and also implicitly presented itself as a source of inspiration for pro-democracy, anti-authoritarian, popular movements. Turkey's decision to support the protesters and its desire to actively promote peaceful transformation was of great importance and might have favored some measure of accommodation with Israel. Most significantly, it led to the collapse of the Turkish-Syrian alliance and to closer coordination with the United States. For better or worse, it also allowed Turkey to position itself as a model of a moderate country in which Islam and democracy might prove fully compatible. When Prime Minister Erdoğan visited Tunisia and Egypt in 2011, he was mobbed by adoring crowds. This seemed a propitious springboard for deepening Turkey's influence across the Arab world.

For Israel, the Arab Spring brought fear of a rising tide of radicalism that could have dangerous repercussions on the conflict with Iran and the Palestinians.⁹⁶ Israeli officials tended to refer to an Arab tempest rather than a spring, yet Israel remained conspicuously silent about the revolutionary changes across its borders.⁹⁷

As the region grew more tumultuous, senior U.S. officials argued that Israel had two choices: it could hunker down, in which case its range of options would be further limited, or it could maximize its options in the region. They argued that if Israel solved its "Turkey problem," it might provide an incentive for other Arab and Muslim countries to

engage in a dialogue with Israel. Others saw resisting the deal as, more importantly than resolving the Marmara incident, setting a precedent for Israel's approach to addressing the challenges of the Arab Spring.

The Israelis were genuinely concerned that an apology would look weak and compromise Israeli security and deterrence. While some feared that concession on the Marmara incident would invite more challenges, others argued for issuing the apology and moving on. The two schools of thought regarding the Marmara incident paralleled Israel's position on the Arab Spring: one school held that since the outcome is unclear, Israel should hang tough," and the other that Israel should engage and seek to make deals.

A decade which started (in 2004) with Turkey's "zero problems with neighbors" policy is ending with growing Turkish regional isolation. Israel was experiencing a regional isolation of a different kind, more so in the aftermath of world wide recognition of the newly established Palestinian unity government, despite stern Israeli opposition. On the eve of Israel's Operation Protective Edge in Gaza some experts noted that this mutual sense of isolation may be an important element in pushing both countries towards reconciliation.⁹⁸

8. THE SYRIAN CRISIS

Experts agree that on Syria there is little disagreement between Turkey and Israel, and even modest coordination would serve common interests.⁹⁹

The intensification of Syria's civil war and Iran's declared support for the Assad regime was a slap in the

⁹⁶ Goren, 124-5.

⁹⁷ Byman, 123.

⁹⁸ Zvi Bar'el, "The Geopolitics of Not Getting an Invite to al-Sisi Inauguration," *Haaretz*, June 5, 2014. <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/.premium-1.597231>.

⁹⁹ Itamar Rabinovich, *Israel's View of the Syrian Crisis*. Vol. 22, (Washington, DC: Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, 2012), 12.

face to Foreign Minister Davutoğlu's "Zero Problems" philosophy, and posed a new threat to Turkish security. Since the start, Turkey has taken in more than one million Syrian refugees, while Erdoğan has been urging a more forceful response by the international community against the Asad regime and in support of the Syrian opposition. Turkey advocated a buffer zone to protect refugees inside Syria, but the United States rejected this as unworkable. In late 2012 Turkey deployed NATO-supplied Patriot missiles along the Turkish-Syrian border. This angered Iran, which was forced to redirect shipments of arms and personnel to Syria via Iraq rather than passing through Turkish air space.¹⁰⁰ As Turkey deepened its involvement in Syria, intelligence became crucial. Erdoğan realized that keeping Israel at arms-length could damage Turkish interests. The resumption of a dialogue between Ankara and Jerusalem could allow Turkey to benefit from Israeli intelligence, and once again play a more constructive role in Israeli-Palestinian context.

Turkey was at first indifferent about chemical weapons, but grew concerned that they might spill into Turkey or fall into the hands of the PKK. In early 2013, the Obama administration considered a meeting with Israel, Turkey, Jordan and others to discuss the issue.¹⁰¹ Reports of a multi-national task force emerged but were not confirmed. The reported sale of Israeli early warning equipment to Turkish AWACS intelligence aircraft can also be seen as part

of the change that was taking place in Turkey's foreign policy dynamic.¹⁰² Yaakov Amidror, National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister told IDF radio that "the possibility that Israel and Turkey will put together a joint military taskforce to prevent the spread of chemical weapons within Syria is one that cannot be ruled out."¹⁰³

On August 21, 2013, up to 1,729 Syrian citizens were killed in the Ghouta chemical attack,¹⁰⁴ launching a global debate about international military intervention against Asad's forces and the compulsion of previously set red lines. Video evidence quickly spread through social media outlets, bringing worldwide attention to the use of chemical weapons. Israel declared that it had proof chemical weapons had been used during this time, as well as a few days earlier.¹⁰⁵ UN investigators examined the sites of the alleged attack and concluded that sarin gas was used. The perpetrator of the attack was debated, with the Syrian government and the rebels blaming each other. The EU¹⁰⁶ and Arab League¹⁰⁷ blamed Asad's forces for the attack, while the Russian government claimed the rebels were carrying out a deception campaign aimed to align foreign countries with the opposition.¹⁰⁸ Turkey and Israel found themselves both in support of an American military strike against targets linked to the Asad regime and its chemical program, and were both greatly disappointed when President Obama reneged on his prior commitment and

¹⁰⁰ Louis Charbonneau, "Exclusive: Western report - Iran ships arms, personnel to Syria via Iraq," *Reuters*, September 19, 2012. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/09/19/us-syria-crisis-iran-iraq-idUSBRE88117B20120919>.

¹⁰¹ Interview with a senior U.S. administration official, January 22, 2013, Washington, DC.

¹⁰² Tocci.

¹⁰³ Mitch Ginsburg, "The Unmentioned Factor behind Turkey's Turn toward Israel," *The Times of Israel*, March 24, 2013. <http://www.timesofisrael.com/the-unmentioned-factor-behind-turkeys-turn-toward-israel/>.

¹⁰⁴ "Bodies Still Being Found after Alleged Syria Chemical Attack: Opposition," *The Daily Star*, August 22, 2013. <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2013/Aug-22/228268-bodies-still-being-found-after-alleged-syria-chemical-attack-opposition.ashx>.

¹⁰⁵ David E. Sanger and Jodi Rudoren, "Israel Says It Has Proof That Syria Has Used Chemical Weapons," *The New York Times*, April 23, 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/24/world/middleeast/israel-says-syria-has-used-chemical-weapons.html>.

¹⁰⁶ Justyna Pawlak and Arshad Mohammed, "EU Blames Asad for Attack, Urges Wait for U.N. Report," *Reuters*, September 7, 2013. <http://mobile.reuters.com/article/idUSBRE9860DZ20130907?irpc=932>.

¹⁰⁷ Lin Noueihed, "Arab League Blames Syria's Asad for Chemical Attack," *Reuters*, August 27, 2013. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/08/27/us-syria-crisis-league-idUSBRE97Q0NI20130827>.

¹⁰⁸ Vladimir V. Putin, "A Plea for Caution from Russia," *The New York Times*, September 11, 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/12/opinion/putin-plea-for-caution-from-russia-on-syria.html?pagewanted=all>.

decided not to opt for a military option. While it did not admit responsibility, in September 2013 the Syrian government admitted it had chemical weapons. It then declared its intention to join the Chemical Weapons Convention and destroy its stockpile.¹⁰⁹ The UN Security Council unanimously voted in favor of Resolution 2118, which calls for the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons.¹¹⁰ Turkey and Israel publicly moved to support the process of the dismantling of Syria's chemical weapons program, but remained doubtful and critical at times of U.S. policy vis-à-vis the Syrian crisis. On April 11, 2014 chemical weapons were believed to be used in Syria once again, this time in the form of Chlorine gas.¹¹¹ As the consequences of this attack remain to be seen, Prime Minister Netanyahu in an interview to the Bloomberg network acknowledged that the Obama administration's initiative (together with Russia) to dismantle Syria's chemical stockpiles is "one ray of light in a dark region."¹¹² Undoubtedly, the Syrian conundrum at present continues to be a great source of concern for both Turkey and Israel. As Turkey is dealing with 1.15 million Syrian refugees in its territory (at an estimated 3.5 billion dollar cost) and is contemplating ways of mounting more pressure on the Assad regime—such as blocking the flow of the Euphrates River to Syria—and as Israel ponders over effective methods of dealing with possible border unrest, this issue provides a platform for future dialogue, coordination and cooperation between the two countries, with Washington contributing its perspective.¹¹³

9. IRAQI INSTABILITY AND THE POSSIBILITY OF AN INDEPENDENT KURDISTAN

Policymakers in Washington, Ankara and Jerusalem, caught by surprise in the spring of 2014 from the rapidly deteriorating security situation and political instability in Iraq, became increasingly concerned as a result of the establishment of the Islamic State (IS) by the al-Qa'ida in Iraq offshoot group Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Turmoil in Iraq is viewed by all three as a destabilizing factor in an already volatile region. With political and economic interests in mind the governments of Israel and Turkey found themselves in June 2014 in support of the establishment of an independent Kurdish state in Northern Iraq. Prime Minister Erdoğan rushed to support Kurdish independence, seeking stability in Northern Iraq that will ensure the uninterrupted supply of energy to Turkey and also wishing to secure the Kurdish vote for his presidential bid in August 2014. Israel's President Peres and Prime Minister Netanyahu separately expressed public support in an independent Kurdistan, highlighting the traditionally close (for years "under the radar") ties between Israel and the Iraqi Kurds. Despite U.S. opposition to an independent Kurdistan, there were signs of increased American-Turkish cooperation during the summer of 2014 ahead of the US-led anti-ISIL coalition airstrikes against Islamic State targets in Iraq. Undoubtedly the issue of Iraq can be added to the items of an agenda for a future American-Turkish-Israeli dialogue.

¹⁰⁹ Thomas Grove, "Syria Will Sign Chemical Weapons Convention, Declare Arsenal, Foreign Ministry Says," *The Huffington Post*, ed. Steve Gutterman., September 10, 2013. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/09/10/syria-chemical-weapons-convention_n_3901417.html.

¹¹⁰ "UNSC Resolution 2118," *United Nations Security Council*, September 27, 2013.

¹¹¹ Bassem Mroue, "New Rebel, Government Claims of Poison Gas Attack Complicates Syria Civil War, Weapons Cleanup," *The Hamilton Spectator*, April 12, 2014. <http://www.thespec.com/news-story/4463388-new-rebel-government-claims-of-poison-gas-attack-complicate-syrian-civil-war-weapons-cleanup/>.

¹¹² Jeffrey Goldberg, "Netanyahu Says Obama Got Syria Right," *Bloomberg View*, May 22, 2014. <http://www.bloombergview.com/articles/2014-05-22/netanyahu-says-obama-got-syria-right>.

¹¹³ "Erdoğan holds UN responsible for Gaza attacks," *Today's Zaman*, July 16, 2014. http://www.todayszaman.com/diplomacy_erdogan-holds-un-responsible-for-gaza-attacks_353211.html.

10. IRAN

While Turkey has long upheld Iran's right to pursue a peaceful nuclear program, its view on the issue has shifted. In 2010, Turkey and Brazil brokered a fuel swap deal known as the Tehran Declaration. This agreement aimed to exchange a substantial portion of Iran's low-enriched uranium for foreign processed fuel rods, to be used for medical purposes in the Tehran Research Reactor. In June of the same year, Turkey cast a "no" vote on a new Iran sanctions resolution at the UN Security Council.

Turkey has since adopted and implemented economic sanctions on Iran and positioned itself closer to the P5+1 countries due to its own security concerns and pressure from the United States and NATO allies. While Turkey does not want Iran to have nuclear weapons,¹¹⁴ it is dependent on Iranian oil and natural gas. Prime Minister Erdoğan stated in a May 2013 address at the Brookings Institution that Turkey has reduced crude oil imports from Iran and may consider further cuts in the future.

There has been U.S. concern over another point of Turkish non-adherence to international Iran sanctions. Dubbed "gas for gold," Iran was receiving payments for natural gas sales in Turkish lira, and purchasing gold with it from Turkey's Halkbank.¹¹⁵ In May 2012, Turkey's trade with Iran reportedly rose 513 percent; in August 2012, nearly \$2 billion worth of gold was sent from Turkey to Dubai on behalf of Iranian buyers. In November 2012, a Turkish banking watchdog announced that Halkbank's Iran transactions conformed to regulations,

but according to the bank's website it still maintains an office in Tehran.¹¹⁶ Turkish ministers acknowledged the "gas for gold" trade but said it was carried out by the private sector and was not subject to U.S. sanctions.

Between 2011 and 2012, Turkey shifted from being a gold and precious metals importer to being a net exporter. Analysts explain that Iranian demand prompted both the high 2011 imports and the surge in exports in 2012 (gold rose to a total of \$6.5 billion in exports).¹¹⁷ By December, Iran was considering the creation of a joint barter company with Turkey to evade U.S. sanctions.¹¹⁸

Meanwhile, Turkey's state-owned Halkbank reportedly facilitated several important deals with Iran. The Wall Street Journal reported in February 2012 that it is one of the only Turkish banks still doing business with Iran, processing "payments from third parties for Iranian goods." Halkbank processed payments for Indian refineries unable to pay Iran for imported oil through their own banking system for fear of retribution from the United States.

In an April 2013 public letter to Secretary of State John Kerry and Secretary of the Treasury Jack Lew, 47 members of Congress noted concern that Halkbank was being used as a conduit to evade sanctions.¹¹⁹ Citing statements by Turkey's Economic Minister Zafer Çağlayan that "Turkish state-owned Halkbank will continue its existing transactions with Iran," they warned that Halkbank may be assisting Iran with its illicit nuclear program. The letter urged Kerry and Lew to consider Halkbank's actions as sanctionable activity beginning in July

¹¹⁴ International Crisis Group, 11-3.

¹¹⁵ Asli Kandemir, "Exclusive: Turkey to Iran gold trade wiped out by new US sanctions," *Reuters*, 15 Feb. 2013. <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2013/02/15/us-iran-turkey-sanctions-idUSBRE91E0IN20130215>.

¹¹⁶ Jonathan Schanzer, "Turkey's Terror Finance Problem," *Weekly Standard*, 7 Feb. 2013. http://www.weeklystandard.com/blogs/turkeys-terror-finance-problem_700428.html.

¹¹⁷ Kandemir.

¹¹⁸ Schanzer.

¹¹⁹ Congress of the United States, letter to Secretary of State John Kerry and Secretary of the Treasury Jack Lew, April 11, 2013. [https://jeffduncan.house.gov/sites/jeffduncan.house.gov/files/Turkey-Iran%20Letter%20\(April%2011%202013\).pdf](https://jeffduncan.house.gov/sites/jeffduncan.house.gov/files/Turkey-Iran%20Letter%20(April%2011%202013).pdf).

2013. In addition, the Turkish Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges (TOBB) reported that 28 Iranian-funded foreign companies were established in Turkey in January 2013—a 40 percent increase since 2010.

In early October 2013 another round of Turkish-Israeli verbal attacks and counter-attacks was sparked by a *Wall Street Journal* profile of the Turkish Head of Intelligence, Hakan Fidan, which included a quote from an anonymous Israeli official stating, “It is clear he (Fidan) is not an enemy of Iran.” Shortly after came the revelation by David Ignatius in the *Washington Post* that quoted reliable sources that pointed to Fidan as allegedly passing the names of 10 Iranians working for the Israeli Mossad on to the Iranian intelligence in early 2012. These ten people were later arrested by the Iranian authorities. Senior Turkish officials blamed Israel for leaking the story to Ignatius and the Turkish daily, *Hürriyet*, reported that Fidan was considering severing ties between Turkish and Israeli intelligence agencies. Reactions in Turkey and Israel to the Ignatius story were harsh and emotional. Turkish officials denied the report while Israeli officials refrained from any public comments. The Friday edition of *Yediot’s* front page headline read, “Turkish Betrayal,” and former Foreign Minister Lieberman voiced his opposition to the apology made in March; he expressed his opinion that it weakened Israel’s stance and image in the region, and he attacked Erdoğan for not being interested in a rapprochement.

On November 24, 2013, the P5+1 reached a breakthrough interim agreement in Geneva called the Joint Plan of Action.¹²⁰ This agreement placed short

term freezes at Iran’s major nuclear facilities and halted installation of new centrifuges in exchange for easing of economic sanctions.¹²¹ This deal was intended to set the foundation for the P5+1 to work on a long term agreement and was followed by several rounds of talks in Vienna beginning in February 2014.¹²² The interim agreement represented a thawing of the U.S.-Iran relationship as it was the first deal between the two countries in over three decades, since the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The change in U.S.-Iran relations also shifted the dynamics of the U.S.-Israel relations in dealing with the Iran nuclear issue.

In the aftermath of the Geneva interim deal on Iran’s nuclear program (November 2013), as signs of a thaw began to appear in relations of other western powers and Iran, Turkey conducted a reassessment of its Iran policy and reached the conclusion that after three years of great tension with Iran over the Syrian civil war, the time has come for a more nuanced policy: on one hand a continued critical approach towards Iran’s negative role in Syria, but on the other hand a renewed effort to reap the economic benefits from the reopening of the Iranian market, following the easing of international sanctions. Signaling this shift in policy, Prime Minister Erdoğan made an official visit to Tehran in January 2014, reciprocated by Iranian President Rouhani’s visit to Ankara in June 2014, in which the two leaders focused on promoting economic ties and signed a set of new bilateral economic agreements.

Following the Israeli apology in March 2013, some media reports indicated that Israel has requested that Turkey allow Israeli fighter jets to be stored in

¹²⁰ Anne Gearan and Joby Warrick, “World powers reach nuclear deal with Iran to freeze its nuclear program,” *The Washington Post*, November 24, 2013. http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/kerry-in-geneva-raising-hopes-for-historic-nuclear-deal-with-iran/2013/11/23/53e7bfe6-5430-11e3-9fe0-fd2ca728e67c_story.html.

¹²¹ Anne Gearan, “Iran nuclear deal takes big step forward,” *The Washington Post*, January 12, 2014. http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/iran-nuclear-deal-takes-big-step-forward/2014/01/12/710e3716-7bcd-11e3-97d3-b9925ce2c57b_story.html.

¹²² “Next Iran Nuclear Talks March 17: Ashton.” *Hürriyet Daily News*, February 20, 2014. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/next-iran-nuclear-talks-march-17-ashton.aspx?pageID=238&nID=62709&NewsCatID=359>.

Turkish air bases for potential future use in the event of an Israeli attack on Iranian nuclear facilities.¹²³ While these reports have not been confirmed and at present may seem outlandish, there's no doubt

that in the future, normalized relations with Turkey could enhance Israel's deterrence in many aspects, also vis-à-vis Iran.

¹²³ Chana Ya'ar, "Israel, Turkey Quietly Discuss Possible Strike on Iran?" *Arutz Sheva* 7, April 21, 2013. http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/167327#.U_tlqfldX3Q.

CHAPTER 4. LEADING TO AN APOLOGY: NEGOTIATIONS AND CONFIDENCE BUILDING MEASURES

In a 2011 keynote address to the Saban Forum, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta stated that he was deeply troubled by the direction of the Turkish-Israeli relationship and called upon Israel to “reach out and mend fences with those who share an interest in regional stability—countries like Turkey and Egypt, as well as Jordan.”¹²⁴ The next day, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton spoke in a closed session of the Saban Forum on U.S. efforts to mediate tensions between Turkey and Israel. She validated Ankara’s feeling of being shut out without warning when Israel launched Operation Cast Lead in Gaza, and suggested that an apology over the Marmara incident was reasonable.¹²⁵

CONFIDENCE BUILDING MEASURES

Short of an apology, or in lieu of one, Israel undertook a series of measures in late 2012 and 2013 to ease tensions with Turkey. These confidence building measures included:

RESUMPTION OF MILITARY SALES

After a two-and-a-half-year freeze, Israel supplied Turkey with advanced electronic warfare systems

in early 2013. This marked the first exchange of military equipment since the Mavi Marmara incident.¹²⁶ The systems significantly upgraded the early-warning capability of the Turkish Air Force. They were made by ELTA, a subsidiary of Israel Aerospace Industries, and ordered by Boeing, the American aircraft manufacturer. According to press reports, American administration officials and Boeing representatives pressured Israel to approve the deal.

FUNDING OF A TURKISH HOSPITAL IN GAZA

Israel’s Coordinator of Government Activities in the (occupied) Territories agreed to allow a Turkish delegation into Gaza to begin construction on the Turkish-Palestine Friendship Hospital. The project, funded by the Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency and carried out by the Norway-based Aker Construction Company, is the pinnacle of Turkish assistance to Gaza. Reports stated that Israel approved the shipping and storage of essential construction material through the Port of Ashdod.¹²⁷ While some Israelis saw the deal and the routing of materials through Ashdod as *de facto* recognition of the Gaza blockade, Turkish officials

¹²⁴ *U.S.-Israel Relations: Strategic Challenges in a New Middle East* (Washington, D.C.: Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, 2011).

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹²⁶ *Zaman*, 17 Feb. 2013; Anshel Pfeffer, “Israel supplies Turkey with military equipment for first time since Gaza flotilla,” *Haaretz*, February 18, 2013. <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/israel-supplies-turkey-with-military-equipment-for-first-time-since-gaza-flotilla-1.504299>.

¹²⁷ *Channel 10*, February 11, 2013.

viewed Israeli approval as a humanitarian gesture rather than a political move.¹²⁸

OPENING TRADE ROUTES THROUGH ISRAEL

Until mid-2012, trade from Europe and Turkey to Jordan and Iraq passed through the Syrian ports of Latakia and Tartus. As the Syrian civil war intensified, that trade had to be re-routed through safer channels. Alternative routes were explored, but deemed too long and costly. The Jordanians and Turks approached Israel's Ministry of Regional Cooperation to request use of a "trade/transportation corridor" through Israel. After careful deliberation, Israel authorized the entry of several Jordanian trucks, a number that has since grown.¹²⁹ The trucks enter Israel across the Sheik Hussein border and drive directly to Haifa, approximately 80 kilometers. They are then searched, screened, and escorted by Israeli police; the drivers' passports are not stamped, so they bear no sign of passing through Israel. Turkish trucks and drivers are used, and approximately 50 to 150 trucks arrive per ferry and continue on to Jordan. In 2012 there were a total of 6400 trucks, including Israeli trucks; in the first quarter of 2013 the number had already reached 2600. Trucks from Jordan to Turkey carry mostly agricultural produce, textiles, and light industry; from Turkey to Jordan trucks carry mostly raw materials, packing supplies, and dried food.¹³⁰

NEGOTIATING A GAS PIPELINE

In early 2013, the Zorlu Group, a Turkish conglomerate which owns a 25 percent stake in the Israeli Dorad Energy Company, began lobbying for an undersea pipeline from Israel's Leviathan field to Turkey's southern coast. The pipeline would connect from Turkey to a network of pipelines carrying natural gas to Europe.¹³¹ If approved, the proposed pipeline will be 600km (373 miles) long and cost an estimated \$2 billion.¹³² The pipeline has been under consideration for two years, but stalled due to the ongoing political impasse. In February 2013, Turkey was reluctant to move ahead. Turkish Deputy Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Murat Mercan, was quoted stating that Cypriot-Israeli cooperation would stand in the way of any proposed Turkish-Israeli gas pipeline.¹³³

It is not clear whether Israel or Turkey will approve the project, but it does offer a unique angle to view how regional developments are forcing Turkey and Israel to consider cooperation in strategic areas. An Israeli source told a leading Israeli financial newspaper, that "in principle, letters of intent could be signed tomorrow on gas sales to Turkey."¹³⁴ Both sides see clear economic advantage and the private sector is fully on board, yet everything hinges on what remains an intransigent situation between Erdoğan and Netanyahu.

¹²⁸ Serkan Demirtaş, "Israel permits materials from Turkey into Gaza," *Hürriyet Daily News*, February 11, 2013. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/israel-permits-materials-from-turkey-into-gaza.aspx?pageID=517&nID=40838&NewsCatID=352>.

¹²⁹ Daniel Schmil, "Beneath Syria's dark clouds of war, a silver lining: Israel a conduit for regional trade," *Haaretz*, April 25, 2013. <http://www.haaretz.com/business/economy-finance/beneath-syria-s-dark-clouds-of-war-a-silver-lining-israel-a-conduit-for-regional-trade-premium-1.517584>.

¹³⁰ John Reed, "Israel Promotes Trade Route between Turkey and Middle East," *Financial Times*, August 27, 2013. <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/11183018-0f22-11e3-ac66-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3B86xJDb7>.

¹³¹ Golan Hazani, "Next Target on Netanyahu's Sight: Gas Pipeline with Turkey," *Calcalist*, February 13, 2013.

¹³² "Israel Offers to Lay a Gas Pipeline to Turkey," *Hürriyet Daily News*, February 15, 2013. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/israel-offers-to-lay-a-gas-pipeline-to-turkey.aspx?pageID=238&nID=41157&NewsCatID=348>.

¹³³ Itai Trinick, "Turkey Warns against Israel-Cyprus Gas Deal," *Haaretz*, January 27, 2013. <http://www.haaretz.com/business/turkey-warns-against-israel-cyprus-gas-deal-premium-1.496633>.

¹³⁴ Semih İdiz, "More Than Meets the Eye in Turkish-Israeli Ties," *Al-Monitor Turkey Pulse*, February 22, 2013. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/ar/originals/2013/02/mavi-marmara-flotilla-turkey-israel-relations.html#>.

PROVOCATION AND APOLOGY

Despite deep economic interests, ongoing international mediation, and a series of Israeli confidence building measures, there seemed in 2012 to be no way past the crisis. With increasingly belligerent rhetoric coming from Erdoğan and Davutoğlu, Netanyahu was in no position to be contrite. In a sign of just how much the situation had deteriorated, Foreign Minister Davutoğlu lashed out at Israel in January 2013 when Air Force fighter jets struck military targets in Syria. Ridiculing Syrian President Asad for not retaliating, he declared that Turkey would not sit idly by as Israel attacked a Muslim country. He further suggested that Israel and the Asad regime had made a secret deal.¹³⁵ Israel reacted sharply, accusing Turkey of “brazen hypocrisy.” An editorial in the *Jerusalem Post* concluded that the “time has come to recognize that Turkey has changed radically—and for the worse.”¹³⁶

ERDOĞAN’S ZIONISM SLUR: A RED LINE AND A TURNING POINT

To make matters worse, Erdoğan compared Zionism to a “crime against humanity.” In a speech at a UN conference in Vienna, he said, “Just like Zionism, anti-Semitism, and fascism, it becomes unavoidable that Islamophobia must be regarded as a crime against humanity.”

Erdoğan’s comments instantly came under fire. Prime Minister Netanyahu issued a statement strongly condemning the Prime Minister’s remarks,

asserting that “this is a dark and mendacious saying the likes of which we thought have died away.”¹³⁷ UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon issued a statement condemning the remarks as unfortunate, hurtful, and divisive.

The U.S. was firm in its response, taking an uncharacteristically critical approach to Turkey. Secretary of State John Kerry told reporters in Ankara the next day, “Obviously, we not only disagree, we found it objectionable.” Kerry raised the matter directly with Erdoğan, and made it clear that Erdoğan’s comments had crossed a U.S. red line.¹³⁸

Turkey was unrepentant. Foreign Minister Davutoğlu insisted in a joint press conference with Secretary Kerry that Turkey is not hostile to the Jewish state, yet he blamed the dismal state of affairs between the two countries on Israel for its actions aboard the *Mavi Marmara* and its treatment of the Palestinians. Nonetheless, the harsh U.S. reaction registered. The Turkish state news agency *Anadolu*, which initially reported on Erdoğan’s remarks, issued a correction one hour later recanting the reference to Zionism. *Anadolu* said the correction was “made by the source” but gave no further explanation.¹³⁹

For the Obama administration, the episode became a leveraging point to lower Erdoğan’s price tag for a rapprochement with Israel. Senior U.S. officials pushed the Turkish Prime Minister to retract his remarks as a show of good will; at long last, a Turkish apology might pave the way for an Israeli apology.

¹³⁵ “Why Didn’t al-Asad Even Throw a Pebble at Israel: Turkish FM,” *Hürriyet Daily*, February 2, 2013. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/why-didnt-al-assad-even-throw-a-pebble-at-israel-turkish-fm.aspx?pageID=238&nid=40360>.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, February 22, 2013.

¹³⁷ Spokesman for the Office of the Israeli Prime Minister, February 28, 2013. <https://www.facebook.com/IsraeliPM/posts/606230289391720>.

¹³⁸ Anne Gearan, “Kerry Scolds Turkish Leader for Comment about Zionism,” *The Washington Post*, March 1, 2013. http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/kerry-scolds-turkish-leader-for-disparaging-zionism/2013/03/01/90c2c4fc-8284-11e2-b99e-6baf4ebe42df_story.html. See also Michael R. Gordon, “Kerry Criticizes Turkish Prime Minister over Zionism Remark,” *The New York Times*, March 1, 2013. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/02/world/europe/kerry-criticizes-turkish-prime-minister-over-zionism-remark.html?_r=0&gwh=CA493D879790AB3778C26A5C9E26720B&gwt=pay.

¹³⁹ Arshad Mohammed and Jonathan Burch, “Turkish PM’s Zionism comments ‘objectionable’: Kerry,” *Reuters*, March 1, 2013. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/03/01/us-usa-turkey-idUSBRE9200EB20130301>.

APOLOGY

Several important developments contributed to the rapprochement between Israel and Turkey. A “hands on” U.S. foreign policy approach made a critical difference at an opportune moment. In Israel, the establishment of a new coalition government allowed more room to maneuver. In Turkey, Erdoğan realized that in light of the Syrian civil war, his country could not afford to remain disconnected from Israel. The recent discovery of natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean and the prospects of laying a pipeline between Israel and Turkey may have also influenced both sides as they were contemplating the apology and its acceptance.

In the phone call on the tarmac, Prime Minister Netanyahu said he appreciated Erdoğan’s clarification of his remarks in Vienna and conveyed regret over the deterioration of relations.¹⁴⁰ Netanyahu expressed his commitment to overcoming differences in order to advance regional peace and stability. He clarified that the tragic results of the Mavi Marmara incident were unintended and that Israel expresses regret at the loss of human life and injury. Following an investigation of the incident which revealed a number of operational mistakes, the Prime Minister apologized to the Turkish people for errors that led to injury or loss of life and agreed to a compensation settlement. Prime Minister Netanyahu also noted that Israel had eased restrictions on the movement of civilians and the entry of civilian goods into the Palestinian territories, including Gaza, and that this would continue as long as calm prevailed.

Erdoğan stressed that he too would like to improve relations, and reportedly told Netanyahu that he

cherishes the long-standing ties between the Turkish and Jewish people.¹⁴¹

U.S. ENGAGEMENT

The importance of U.S. engagement cannot be overstated in achieving Israel’s apology and Turkey’s acceptance. First and foremost, it was a demonstration of a straightforward U.S. foreign policy—President Obama and Secretary Kerry identified a window of opportunity and engaged personally and directly. They applied necessary leverage, presented incentives to both sides, and paved the way for a deal that supports U.S. strategic interests at a time of increasing instability in the Middle East.

Among the inducements presented to Turkey to accept an apology, the U.S. gave Erdoğan a “green light” for a Washington visit, recognized Turkey’s desire to play a pivotal role in the region, and shaped the apology to include the operational mistakes and regret over loss of life. Secretary Kerry repeatedly stated that Turkey has a role to play in the Middle East Peace Process. The U.S. also initiated a discreet working meeting in London between representatives of the United States, Turkey, and Iraq.¹⁴² This meeting was later made public. Hours before the apology, the State Department issued a statement praising Erdoğan’s initiative in seeking a political solution to the Kurdish problem—Erdoğan’s call for dialogue resulted in a call by the leader of the PKK to stop its armed campaign.

Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoğlu confirmed that in the week prior to the apology he talked with Secretary Kerry six times over the wording of the apology and subsequent agreement.¹⁴³ He noted that during the preceding week, negotiations were

¹⁴⁰ “Barak Ravid, “Erdoğan, Netanyahu Reconciliation: Interests Triumph over Ego and Politics.” *Haaretz*, March 22, 2013. <http://www.haaretz.com/blogs/diplomania/erdogan-netanyahu-reconciliation-interests-triumph-over-ego-and-politics.premium-1.511425>.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² Interview with a British diplomat, March 28, 2013, Washington, DC.

¹⁴³ Interview on TRT, March 22, 2013.

conducted between Turkey and Israel through the offices of U.S. officials. It was agreed that Netanyahu would call in the presence of the U.S. President; the Turks gave a final approval on the morning of March 22, and the call from Netanyahu came through that afternoon.¹⁴⁴

In the aftermath of the apology, the United States at times continued to work behind the scenes as Turkish and Israeli representatives were meeting bilaterally to advance a compensation agreement. U.S. decision makers, preoccupied with far more burning issues, entrusted the parties with continuing the negotiations, refraining from too deep of an involvement. The Obama administration, frustrated with Erdoğan's handling of the Gezi protests, seemed to be giving the Turkish prime minister "a

cold shoulder." Obama and Erdoğan did speak on the phone in August 2013 focusing on the Syrian crisis, but the next phone conversation between them took place 8 months later in February 2014.¹⁴⁵ In that conversation, Obama raised the issue of the stalled negotiations with Israel and encouraged the Turkish prime minister to move forward. Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç's statement in March 2014,¹⁴⁶ and Prime Minister Erdoğan's comments (to Charlie Rose) in April 2014 indicated that Turkey has come to terms with signing an agreement.¹⁴⁷ To experts and observers of the Turkish-Israeli relationship, these developments suggested once again the importance of senior U.S. involvement/pressure to get Turkey to move forward, as it seems that the only leader Erdoğan seems to listen and respond to is the United States president.

¹⁴⁴ "With Israel's apology Turkey's demands have been met: Foreign Minister Davutoğlu," *Hürriyet Daily News*, March 22, 2013. <http://www.hurriyetaidailynews.com/with-israels-apology-turkeys-demands-have-been-met-foreign-minister-davutoglu.aspx?pageID=238&nID=43498&NewsCatID=352>.

¹⁴⁵ "Readout of President Obama's call to Prime Minister Erdogan," The White House, February 19, 2014. www.whitehouse.gov.

¹⁴⁶ "Israel and Turkey May Sign a Compensation Deal over Gaza Flotilla Death after March elections," *Russia Today*, March 25, 2014. <http://rt.com/news/flotilla-turkey-israel-compensation-185/>.

¹⁴⁷ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, interview by Charlie Rose, *Charlie Rose*, April 29, 2014. http://www.bloomberg.com/video/recep-tayyip-erdogan-charlie-rose-04-29-mHYP82ENRYWtZQU2n1f_Bg.html.

CHAPTER 5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND A U.S. ROLE

It was a U.S. achievement to bring Turkey and Israel back to the table. However, diplomatic relations have remained tied up in a stalled compensation agreement and the relationship is wary and cool. With the boiling over of the situation in Gaza in the summer of 2014 and its negative impact on the relationship, prospects for normalization have again faded. The animosity between the two governments and at the grassroots level is deep. It is difficult on both sides to look beyond the short term, but in focusing on the bigger regional picture in the medium to long term, the two countries stand to gain from restoring ties and the United States can assist. While Secretary Kerry stated clearly in April 2013 that “it is not for the U.S. to be setting conditions or terms,” U.S. involvement has proved crucial in leveraging the Turkish-Israeli relationship to put interests above politics and ideology. U.S. policy towards Turkey has been characterized by some experts as “stale,”¹⁴⁸ and clearly ties between Washington and Ankara are cooler in the aftermath of Erdoğan’s handling of the Gezi riots. But it seems that the only leader Erdoğan may listen to is President Obama. Therefore, despite the full plate on the Obama administration’s table it is essential that the United States remain engaged at the highest levels. Though bilateral relations are unlikely to return to the “golden age” of the Turkish-Israeli alliance, a strategic trilateral relationship can contribute to regional stability and advance

security and economic interests. In the aftermath of the war in Gaza the United States needs to step in and work vis-à-vis the parties. A set of policy recommendations is detailed below that can provide the United States with the necessary tools and leverage to move this process forward.

ENCOURAGING DIALOGUE AND REGIONAL COOPERATION

- **ISRAEL AND TURKEY SHOULD SIGN A COMPENSATION AGREEMENT**

At President Obama’s urging, the two sides were close in the spring of 2014 to signing a compensation agreement leading to the reinstatement of ambassadors in Ankara and Tel Aviv, and a resumption of state visits. An unexpected March 2014 announcement by Turkey’s Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç and an April 2014 Erdoğan interview to Charlie Rose, indicated that a compensation agreement was to be signed within weeks. Turkish domestic political considerations (AKP ahead of the March 2014 municipal elections and Erdoğan ahead of his bid for the presidency in August 2014) delayed the signing on the Turkish side while the Istanbul court ruling in late May 2014, issuing arrest warrants for four Israeli former generals for their alleged role in the Mavi Marmara incident caused yet another setback.

¹⁴⁸ Joshua Walker, “Ottoman Nostalgia: A proactive Turkey in the Middle East?” *War on the Rocks*, July 1, 2014. <http://warontherocks.com/2014/07/ottoman-nostalgia-a-proactive-turkey-in-the-middle-east/>.

- **GUIDELINES FOR COOPERATION SHOULD BE FORMALIZED IN A “CODE OF CONDUCT”**

The United States should help the parties develop a “Code of Conduct” to stipulate basic principles for future relations.¹⁴⁹ Such a document could include recognition of the two countries’ importance in the region, a commitment to resolve disputes in a peaceful manner, a commitment to normal bilateral relations despite ideological differences, a framework for dialogue, and a mechanism for resolving disputes.

- **CONVENE A TRILATERAL WORKING GROUP TO ADDRESS REGIONAL CONFLICTS**

Israel, Turkey, and the United States should establish a trilateral working group on the Middle East. Such a group could articulate an operative regional agenda on shared security threats and build momentum for high-level bilateral cooperation. There is ample precedent for this format, such as the U.S.-Japan-Australia Trilateral working group. Syria, Iran and Northern Iraq can be the first items on the agenda, but such a forum could address events in Egypt, Jordan, and other neighboring countries.

- **THE UNITED STATES SHOULD PRESS FOR ISRAELI PARTICIPATION IN THE NATO-MEDITERRANEAN DIALOGUE**

The United States and its allies should continue efforts to induce Turkey to accept Israel’s participation in NATO. Following pressure from NATO and calls by Secretary General Rasmussen for more cooperation with Israel, Turkey lifted its veto on Israeli participation. Nonetheless, it continues to

block joint military maneuvers.¹⁵⁰ In April 2013, Turkey prevented a meeting of NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue in which Israel is a member. Other members include Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria and Mauritania.¹⁵¹ Israeli Deputy National Security Advisor, Eran Lerman said, “Turkey was undermining Israeli participation in NATO” and should be told it is hurting the alliance.¹⁵² Israeli National Security Adviser Yaakov Amidror stated that “as Syria disintegrates, and as Islamist elements seize control of key territories, it is in Israel’s advantage to ensure that Turkey not exercise its veto against Israeli cooperation with NATO.” He went on to express the hope that as soon as the relationship with Turkey is restored, it will lose its desire to harm Israel’s ties with NATO.”¹⁵³

- **OFFER INCENTIVES AND REGIONAL FORUMS FOR ECONOMIC COOPERATION**

Working through each country’s Chamber of Commerce and with the private sector, the United States could help to advance joint initiatives in business, hi-tech, and energy. Cooperative projects which bring together U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Israel’s Agency for International Development Cooperation (MASHAV), and the Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA) to assist outside parties could also help in strengthening the trilateral relationship.

- **ENCOURAGE ACADEMIC, CULTURAL, AND SCIENTIFIC EXCHANGE**

The United States should encourage academic, cultural, and scientific exchanges between the two

¹⁴⁹ Such a document might be similar in structure to the 1972 “Basic Principles of U.S.-Soviet Relations,” in Dore Gold, “A Code of Conduct for the Middle East,” *Israel Hayom*, January 18, 2013. http://www.israelhayom.com/site/newsletter_opinion.php?id=3259.

¹⁵⁰ “Turkey to resume NATO cooperation with Israel,” *YNet News*, December 23, 2012. <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4323558,00.html>.

¹⁵¹ Burak Ege Bekdil, “Turkey blocks NATO meeting with Israel,” *Defense News*, April 15, 2013. <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20130415/DEFREG/304150019/Turkey-Blocks-NATO-Meeting-Israel>.

¹⁵² Herb Keinon, “Jlem official: Turkey hurting NATO by undermining Israel,” *The Jerusalem Post*, February 11, 2013. <http://www.jpost.com/Diplomacy-and-Politics/Turkey-hurting-NATO-by-undermining-Israel-ries>.

¹⁵³ Mitch Ginsburg, “The unmentioned factor behind Turkey’s turn toward Israel,” *Times of Israel*, March 24, 2013. <http://www.timesofisrael.com/the-unmentioned-factor-behind-turkeys-turn-toward-israel/>.

countries. Both Turkey and Israel have reputable university systems, with multiple universities ranked in the top 25 percent of the University Ranking by Academic Performance's (URAP) annual "World Ranking of 2,000 Higher Education Institutions."¹⁵⁴ By building upon academic, cultural, and scientific relationships, opportunities exist to shift social norms and repair private citizen relationships. The possibility also exists that these exchanges could lead to Track Two initiatives which could pave the way to place interests above politics or ideology.

- **PROMOTING A JOINT DEFENSE AGENDA OVER THE MEDIUM TERM**

Contingent upon reestablishing political relations, the goal of restarting defense relations between Turkey and Israel should be on the U.S. agenda. In the meantime, the United States should encourage incremental steps by both parties to identify areas of cooperation in counter-terrorism and cyber-terrorism. At a later stage there may be possibilities for joint consultation on defense matters, or opportunities to unfreeze defense contracts and re-establish joint programs.

- **TURKISH INVOLVEMENT IN ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN RELATIONS**

With the collapse of Secretary Kerry's efforts, the establishment of an interim technocratic Palestinian unity government, and the crisis in Gaza, chances for resuming Israeli-Palestinian negotiations are dim. Since 2009, Turkey's role in this context was viewed by Israel as negative, as Prime Minister Erdoğan's public diplomacy has been geared toward

support for Hamas and the Palestinians in Gaza. Experts note that Turkey wants to be seen as alleviating Palestinians' suffering, not necessarily mediating between the parties.¹⁵⁵ A high-profile visit to Gaza has also been in Erdoğan's travel plans since the Marmara incident, but was placed on the backburner due to Turkish domestic turmoil and Kerry's efforts to advance Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. Secretary Kerry noted publicly that Turkey can and should play a role in the peace process. In his April 7, 2013 visit to Istanbul, Kerry told reporters "Turkey can be a key, ... [and] can have a profound impact by being a partner in this process,"¹⁵⁶ but in the absence of a process it is not clear whether Turkey is able or interested in moderating Hamas and clearly at present Israel does not trust Turkey and believes it cannot play a constructive role in this context. Arguably, Turkey would be more inclined to play a constructive role if it is directly engaged in the process. Moreover, Turkish-Israeli relations have always been closely linked to the Palestinian issue.

- **ISRAEL SHOULD CONSIDER EASING RESTRICTIONS ON THE TRANSFER OF GOODS INTO GAZA**

While Turkey at first seemed to back off its condition of lifting the Gaza blockade, Erdoğan has since made it clear that ending the Israeli naval blockade remains a condition of normalization. Interestingly, only 28.5 percent of the Turkish public agreed that bilateral relations should be conditioned on the lifting of the Gaza blockade according to a Turkish public opinion survey conducted by the Centre for Economic and Foreign Policy Studies (EDAM) between March 1 and April 9, 2013.¹⁵⁷ According to the Turkish MFA website, Israel pledged to ease

¹⁵⁴ "10 Turkish Universities Rank among Top 500." *Hürriyet Daily News*, July 15, 2012. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/10-turkish-universities-rank-among-top-500-.aspx?pageID=238&nid=25586&NewsCatID=341>.

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Michael Kopolow, May 14, 2013, Washington, DC.

¹⁵⁶ "Turkey can be key to Middle East peace process: US top diplomat," *Hürriyet*, April 7, 2013. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-can-be-key-to-middle-east-peace-process-us-top-diplomat.aspx?pageID=238&nid=44402>.

¹⁵⁷ "Poll of Turks: Only 28.5% require Israel to lift embargo on Gaza to mend relations with Turkey," *Before It's News*, May 3, 2013. <http://beforeitsnews.com/middle-east/2013/05/poll-of-turks-only-28-5-require-israel-to-lift-embargo-on-gaza-to-mend-relations-with-turkey-2451174.html>.

restrictions on the entry of civilian goods into the Palestinian territories (including Gaza), and this will continue so long as calm prevails. In the medium term Israel could ease restrictions on the movement of goods in and out of Gaza, and work with Turkey as indicated to improve the humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territories.¹⁵⁸ In the aftermath of the Gaza crisis, it does not seem probable that Israel will speedily move to ease restrictions, but allowing the transfer of Turkish humanitarian assistance to Gaza through Israel can be a step in the right direction.

- **OFFER A QUID PRO QUO FOR “DELIVERING” HAMAS**

Turkey may be willing to compromise on its demand for Israel to lift the Gaza blockade in return for a clear role as intermediary and a signal to deliver Hamas to the negotiating table. The conditions set by the International Quartet for Hamas to join negotiations are to 1) renounce terrorism; 2) recognize Israel; and 3) abide by all prior agreements signed by Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

However, there are serious doubts about Turkey’s ability to deliver Hamas to the negotiating table. Since Mashaal’s first visit to Turkey in February 2006, changes in the Hamas position have been minor. Yet, Erdoğan remains a strong backer of Mashaal, nonetheless, allowing normalization to proceed without lifting the Gaza blockade (and allowing Turkey to advocate for Hamas) may be a reasonable diplomatic compromise for Turkey and Israel.

ENCOURAGING ENERGY COOPERATION

Natural gas discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean have introduced a new variable in the Middle

East that may again alter the dynamics in the rapidly changing and volatile region.

Israel is poised to become an important gas exporter. While the country decided to allocate 40 percent of future production to exports, and signed agreements to export natural gas to Jordan and the Palestinian Authority, as well as a letter of intent to supply natural gas to Egypt, the main export destinations are yet to be determined. Experts note that Israel is likely to diversify its export market and maintain critical infrastructure inside its borders, including liquefaction plants. Though Israel has several options, the most economical and logistically viable would be to export natural gas to Turkey via the Cyprus EEZ.¹⁵⁹

Turkey is interested in becoming an energy hub and natural gas transit country. If it is to reduce energy imports from Russia and Iran, it can negotiate to import natural gas through the Trans-Caspian pipeline, the Al-Tamini pipeline in Northern Iraq (KRG), or a Cyprus-Israel undersea pipeline.

To make the Cyprus-Israel option work, it is essential to solve or bypass the current political problems. The United States has a clear geostrategic interest in making this happen. The recent visit of Vice President Joe Biden to the island of Cyprus and the growing U.S. efforts to reach a settlement between the two communities of the island indicate the importance the U.S. attaches to the region. The United States has equities at stake. Likewise, two major NATO allies are affected by Mediterranean gas discoveries, Turkey and Greece. To secure a deal, there must be a common dialogue between Turkey, Israel, and the two Cypriot communities. Greece must also be kept in the loop. Only the United States can bring these actors together in a common forum. Track Two initiatives and involvement by

¹⁵⁸ “Turkey’s Relations with the State of Palestine,” Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, www.mfa.gov.tr.

¹⁵⁹ David Wurmser, *The Geopolitics of Israel’s Offshore Gas Reserves* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 2013). Also Huber and Tocci.

United States think tanks may pave the way for identifying a convergence of interests and practical strategies benefiting all parties.

- **DEVELOP REGIONAL ENERGY COOPERATION AGREEMENTS**

Directly or indirectly, natural gas agreements will affect Israel, Cyprus, Turkey, Greece, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, Iraq, and the Palestinian Authority.

The United States should consider a visionary plan to guide regional cooperation. Taking a long-term geostrategic approach can ease tension, encourage cooperation, and eventually bolster stability. Developing regional cooperation regimes has been a building block of American foreign policy since the end of World War II. Numerous examples exist, such as customs unions, common markets, FTA's, and QIZ's. What all these agreements have in common is a framework for conflict resolution through shared economic interests. Many doubt the feasibility of such an approach in the Eastern Mediterranean, due to the complex political dynamics and relations in this region, but a serious discussion should take place.

- **DEVELOP A REGIONAL ENERGY PLAN MODELED AFTER THE EISENHOWER WATER PLAN**

In this regard, an ambitious plan can be considered. One of the transformative ideas of the Eisenhower administration was the Jordan Valley Unified Water Plan, commonly referred to as the Johnston Plan. Though rejected by the Arab League, the Johnston plan of the 1950's spurred smaller initiatives, including the building of Israel's national water carrier and the Jordanian water administration. A U.S.-led energy initiative like the Johnston plan could serve several policy objectives, such as managing the natural gas issue and bringing greater stability to a volatile region. The U.S. is currently focusing on the economic gains of newfound energy in the region through American energy companies such as Noble Energy. However, the opportunity exists to pursue strategic action as well, rather than be driven by economic benefits only. Since the United States is the only state that can bring all the actors to the negotiating table, it should be proactive in pursuing this action by using gas as a diplomatic tool. This plan could also address challenges such as the Cyprus problem, the decline of the Eurozone, and the flagging Greek and Cypriot economies.

CONCLUSION

This paper suggests two closely related conclusions: Good Turkish-Israeli relations are essential to the security and stability of the Middle East, and U.S. leadership needs to play a key role in shaping the Turkish-Israeli relationship.

Israel's apology to Turkey over the May 2010 Mavi Marmara incident following a three-year hiatus in diplomatic relations highlights the complex and fluid nature of Turkish-Israeli relations and the central role of the United States in this situation, as do the heightened tensions between the two countries in the summer of 2014 over the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza. The willingness of the two parties to restart relations will be tested by several factors that may serve as either points of agreement or new sources of friction.

The main impediments to normalization are the wide gap between the two countries over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as well as the Turkish domestic political arena which since 2008 adopted a tough approach towards Israel as manifested in public statements that anti-Semitic in nature. As long as the AKP dominates the Turkish domestic arena, it will be difficult to achieve full rapprochement. Changes in Israeli policies and attitudes on the Palestinian issue may contribute to a more

positive environment, but close cooperation is unlikely while the AKP remains in power. The trajectory of bilateral relations will depend heavily on progress in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

Yet these problems do not mean that no progress is possible. Indeed, while Israel and Turkey continue to face common strategic challenges and share mutual interests, easily identifiable by both countries, such as the Syrian crisis or possible energy cooperation, the capacity to restart relations will partly depend on the readiness of U.S. leaders to help both Ankara and Jerusalem find a way back to sustained strategic cooperation. The deep animosity between Erdoğan and Netanyahu requires a third party facilitator to help the parties move from politically- or ideologically-based positions to interest-based ones. The United States is the ideal actor for this role because of its historic relationship with both parties.

As the regional agenda continues to evolve, Turkey and Israel will need to communicate. A reported visit to Ankara in June 2013 by the chief of Israel's Mossad to discuss Syria was a step in that direction.¹⁶⁰ The developments in Iraq add another important dimension to future consultations between the two countries.

¹⁶⁰ "Israel's Mossad chief meets head of Turkish intelligence," *Hürriyet*, June 12, 2013. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/israels-mossad-chief-meets-head-of-turkish-intelligence.aspx?pageID=238&nID=48656&NewsCatID=341>.

When the dust settles over the events of summer 2014, the United States needs to begin talking separately to both parties in order to rebuild mutual trust—an element severely damaged and absent since 2009. Furthermore the United States should try and develop a modest joint agenda for possible discussions and cooperation, perhaps beginning with the establishment of a triangular dialogue mechanism in which the United States is the convener and the agenda setter.

Events since 2011 have affected the region in unpredictable ways and highlight the continuing challenges of restoring Turkey and Israel's relationship. Each of these events has the potential to influence relationships with key actors for the United States. However, regional stability is in the best interest of the United States, and none of these events should diminish the importance of the Turkish-Israeli

relationship to achieving this goal. Erdoğan stated that as long as he's in power, there is no chance "to have any positive engagement" with Israel, dismissing prospects of normalizing relations any time soon.¹⁶¹ This of course further complicates the already complex situation, therefore normalization of the relationship will require in the future fresh thinking from policy makers in Washington, Tel Aviv, and Ankara.

If the United States does not rise to the challenge, Turkey and Israel relations will continue to suffer, eventually harming U.S. strategic regional interests. If the United States does decide to deal with this issue we can expect a beginning of modest cooperation between the two countries. Realistic progress can be achieved but we should not expect any return to the "golden era" before Erdoğan took power in Turkey.

¹⁶¹ Tulin Daloglu, "Turkey reacts to Israel ground operation in Gaza," *Al Monitor*, July 20, 2014. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/ru/originals/2014/07/daloglu-turkey-israel-gaza-operation-consulate-protests-akp.html#>.

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