



NDC Research Report

Research Division

NATO Defense College

06/16 – June 2016

Turkish-Israeli Rapprochement with NATO

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On 4 May 2016, the news on NATO's official website read that, along with Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain and Jordan, the North Atlantic Council "has agreed to accept the request that an official Israeli Mission be established at NATO headquarters." The news continued by adding that Israel had been a very active partner of the Alliance as a member of NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue, established in December 1994.²

The short statement may look insignificant to some, as it is a routine step for partners to have representation within NATO, but in reality it is the tip of an iceberg of often emotional and sensitive developments involving Eastern Mediterranean affairs.

As early as October 2007, Israel's then Vice Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni said that Israel was committed to the NATO Mediterranean Dialogue and that it was time to upgrade and formalize relations between Israel and NATO, broaden the scope of cooperation, and promote joint activity.³

Israel applied to NATO to open an office at its Headquarters back in September 2011, but then the Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu declared that his country had blocked the attempt by the threat of a veto. The issue was never put on the agenda of the North Atlantic Council.⁴

The timing of the application was ill-chosen, when tensions between Jerusalem and Ankara were still very high because of the *Mavi Marmara* incident the previous year. Turkey initially also vetoed Israel's participation in various NATO meetings and exercises, but later in 2012 relaxed its position, allowing limited presence in selected events. Nevertheless, cooperation between NATO and Israel did continue, particularly in areas of counter-terrorism. Turkey and Israel used to be close allies in the

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² NATO agrees Israel Mission to NATO, 4/5/2016, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_130509.htm

³ Livni address at Israel NATO Symposium, 22 October 2007, <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/PressRoom/2007/Pages/Address%20by%20FM%20Livni%20to%20the%20NATO-Israel%20Symposium%20Herzliya%2022-Oct-2007.aspx>

⁴ Turkiye'den Israil'e NATO Vetosu, 19/09/2011, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/turkiyeden-israile-nato-vetosu-18769091>

Middle East and it is very important to remember this when considering more recent developments.

After five years of objections, Turkey finally agreed to lift its veto on Israeli representation in NATO. By moderately optimistic standards, this could be the beginning of a new set of relations and a new balance of power in that region. For NATO, it will make business in the area easier, establishing cooperation to increase the Alliance's potential for better access to a partner's activities and understanding of the region.

The Israeli perspective

On 4 May 2016, at his weekly cabinet meeting, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that Israel would "accept an invitation from NATO to open a permanent office at its Brussels headquarters," a slight variation to NATO's version of the development, but of note was that he saw the move as a significant upgrade for Israel's ties to NATO. Netanyahu said that Israeli diplomatic efforts had paid off after many years and that the move would enhance Israel's security, and was important to its standing in the world. He claimed that countries worldwide wanted to cooperate with Israel because of its determined struggle against terrorism, its technological expertise and intelligence network.⁵

Israel is not new to NATO partnerships and has excellent relations with most of NATO's nations and armed forces. The only exception was Turkey, with which relations have followed a rollercoaster ride, due to major disagreement on the Palestinian issue, but also due to the strong personalities of the leaders in both countries, who are fervent about their views and opinions of each other.

However, on almost all occasions, and with the encouragement of mutually friendly third parties, reason has prevailed and the two countries have turned back from the brink of confrontation to more normal relations.

The Turkish Perspective

The Turkish response to the development was muted. No official announcement was made by government, but unofficial statements acknowledged the decision as part of confidence building measures for normalization.⁶ Only some extremist religious groups and the Felicity Party, which is not represented in parliament, reacted negatively, and blamed the government for paving the way to "Israel's membership of NATO."⁷ Party President Mustafa Kamalak warned that Turks and Jews would fight against Muslims.⁸

5 Herb Keinon, Israel to open permanent office at NATO HQ, five years after Turkey blocked move, Jerusalem Post, 4 May 2016, <http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Israel-to-open-permanent-office-at-NATO-HQ-five-years-after-Turkey-blocked-move-453049>

6 Muyesser Yildiz, 9 May 2016, <http://odatv.com/israilin-natoda-ne-isi-var-0905161200.html>

7 Milli Gazete, 4 May 2016.

8 Abdullah Ozbay, Mustafa Kamalak: Türk askeri ile İsrail bir olup Müslümanlara karşı savaşıacak, Milli Gazete, 7 May 2016, <http://>

The History of Turkish-Jewish Relations

It is important to understand that historically Turks and Jews had close relations as early as the founding of the Ottoman Empire. Aside from the Krymchak – the Turkic speaking Crimean Jews,⁹ who still survive today in Lithuania,¹⁰ – the territory of the Empire hosted Jewish communities from Jerusalem to Bursa, where the Etz ha-Hayyim Synagogue has been in use since 1324.¹¹

From the start of the 14th century, Jews fleeing oppression from Hungary, France, and Sicily began to settle in the Ottoman Empire. In 1453, Sultan Mehmet II actively encouraged Jews to settle in Ottoman territory. After he conquered Constantinople, he issued a proclamation to all Jews stating, “*Who among you that is with me, may his God be with him, let him ascend to Istanbul, the site of my imperial throne. Let him dwell in the best of the land, each beneath his vine and beneath his fig tree, with silver and with gold, with wealth and with cattle. Let him dwell in the land, trade in it, and take possession of it.*”¹² Jews soon made up 10% of Istanbul’s population.

During the Spanish Inquisition, Ottoman Sultan Bayezid II sent an armada to save the Sephardic Jews of Spain, as well as those from Portugal, southern Italy and Sicily. In 1492 he granted them permission to seek refuge in the Ottoman Empire. Eventually, more than 100,000 Jews settled in Istanbul, Thessaloniki, the Western cities of Anatolia and other cities of the Balkans.¹³

The Jews brought many skills in enterprise and trade and became an integral part of society. Jews were preferred over the distrusted Orthodox subjects of conquered lands and enjoyed more privileges than the local populations of the Balkans, practically until the decline and final collapse of the Empire. Neither did they have any problem with the establishment of the Republic of Turkey.

Turkey remained mostly neutral during World War II but, thanks to the efforts of some diplomats and some special deals, it succeeded in saving some 35,000 Jews from the Holocaust. With the establishment of Israel, about 60% of Turkish Jews chose to move to Israel on a voluntary basis, while still maintaining ties with Turkey. Today, Turkish Jews number around 77,000 in Israel.

Turkey became the first Muslim majority country to recognize Israel, in March 1949. Military, strategic, economic and diplomatic cooperation between the two countries blossomed, the Israeli Air Force was allowed to exercise in Turkish airspace and Israeli companies were involved in modernizing Turkish combat jets and tanks. Major projects for selling Turkish water to Israel, notably “the Peace Water Pipeline” of 1986 through offshore pipelines and high-tech cooperation, came onto the agenda several times, but most failed to be implemented for one reason or another.¹⁴

tr.abna24.com/service/important/archive/2016/05/08/752986/story.html

9 Orientation-Krymchaks – Countries and Their Cultures, www.everyculture.com/Russia-Eurasia-China/Krymchaks-Orientation.html

10 The Karaims <https://www.eki.ee/books/redbook/karaims.shtml>

11 Etz ha-Hayyim Synagogue http://digital.cjh.org/R/P1UXPG3HB4QSQ4PXP2AGIE7EALQB96RN7JDJ7QJYR2ISA-HA7S9-00361?func=search-simple-go&local_base=GEN01&find_code=WSU&request=Synagogue%20architecture%20--%20Turkey%20--%20Bursa

12 Ottoman Empire: A Safe Haven for Jewish Refugees, 11 June 2014, <http://www.jerusalemonline.com/israel-history/ottoman-empire-a-safe-haven-for-jewish-refugees-5797>

13 Jewish History: Medieval Jews Fleeing Persecution Take Refuge in Ottoman Turkish Empire 26 February 2013. <http://unitedwithisrael.org/jewish-history-jewish-people-find-refuge-in-ottoman-turkish-empire/>

14 Dursun Yildiz International Water Transfer Projects of Turkey 2 June 2014 <http://www.hidropolitikakademi.org/en/international-water-transfer-projects-of-turkey.html>

Relations were still trouble-free during the first years of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) majority, with Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as Turkish Prime Minister between 2002 and 2008. In fact, trade, military cooperation, and tourism flourished even further. The Islamist Al-Qaida terrorist attacks in 2003 against two Jewish Synagogues in Istanbul, which killed 24 people and injured 300, united the two peoples even more in their condemnation of all kinds of terrorism.¹⁵

Just after that incident, PM Erdoğan was awarded the Medal of Courage by the American Jewish Committee (AJC) during his visit to the United States in January 2004.¹⁶ Erdoğan went on to pay an official visit to Israel in 2005 and offered to serve as a peace mediator between Israel and Syria, as well as between Israel and Palestine.¹⁷

In early 2006, relations with Turkey were termed as “perfect” by the Israeli Foreign Ministry, as a joint Israeli-Palestinian industrial park was being developed under Turkish sponsorship. In November 2007 Israeli President Shimon Peres and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas addressed the Turkish Parliament a day apart. Syria’s Foreign Ministry said that Turkey was also serving as a “channel of communication” between Syria and Israel.¹⁸

Difficult Times

Relations took a downturn during the second term of the AKP and the ascent of Benjamin Netanyahu to Prime Minister of Israel, particularly with the 2008–2009 Gaza War, when the Turkish government strongly criticized Israel over heavy civilian suffering and the Israeli government accused Turkey of supporting Hamas.

At the World Economic Forum conference in Davos, Switzerland in January 2009, Prime Minister Erdoğan strongly criticized Israel’s conduct in Gaza and for causing civilian casualties during the raids.¹⁹

On 5 March 2009, the Israeli daily newspaper Haaretz reported that secret talks were being held to get Israeli-Turkish relations back on track, but without success. On 11 October 2009, Turkey barred Israel from the Anatolian Eagle military exercise and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu objected to Turkish mediation, accusing Turkey of “not being an honest broker” between Israel and Syria.²⁰

After Hamas leader Khaled Mashal paid a visit to Turkey in March 2010, Israel accused Turkey of

15 Haaretz 16 November 2013, <http://www.haaretz.com/attacks-on-istanbul-synagogues-kill-24-1.105755>

16 Erdoğan honored with medal of courage by AJC, 28 January 2004, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/erdogan-honored-with-medal-of-courage-by-ajc.aspx?pageID=438&n=erdogan-honored-with-medal-of-courage-by-ajc-2004-01-28>

17 Greg Myre, 02 May 2005 Turkish Leader Visits Israel, Restoring Friendly Ties http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/02/world/middleeast/turkish-leader-visits-israel-restoring-friendly-ties.html?_r=0

18 Article Id: WHEBN0008277622 http://www.gutenberg.us/articles/Israeli-Turkish_relations#cite_note-52

19 Human Security in Turkey: Challenges for the 21st Century, Alpaslan Özerdem, Füsun Özerdem - 2013 - History, Bennhold, K. (2009) ‘Leaders of *Turkey* and Israel clash at Davos panel’, Çağ aptay, S. (2010) ‘The AKP’s Hamas policy I: how *Turkey* turned,’ Publishers Ltd. Today’s Zaman (2012) ‘*Hamas leader* meets with Erdoğan in surprise visit’, <https://books.google.it/books?isbn=1136658106>

20 Israeli-Turkish Relations - Diplomatic and Political Relations, http://www.liquisearch.com/israeli-turkish_relations/diplomatic_and_political_relations

cooperating with Hamas terrorists and with Iran, alleging that Hamas had established a command post in Turkey and used it to oversee operations in the Middle East.²¹

Relations dipped further when Israeli troops killed nine Turkish unarmed civilian activists and wounded many more on 31 May 2010, during the raid on the ship Mavi Marmara, which was part of the “Gaza Freedom Flotilla,” a convoy of six ships carrying activists from 37 nations, along with food and aid for Gaza with a view to breaking the Israeli embargo. Mavi Marmara was flying a Turkish flag and the raid took place in international waters of the Mediterranean. Very strong mutual accusations raised tensions further and Prime Minister Erdoğan described the raid as “Israeli state terrorism.”²²

Turkey demanded an apology, compensation and that the embargo on Gaza be lifted. The respective ambassadors were withdrawn, trade became static, and tourism dwindled. In September 2011, military agreements were suspended and 16 defence contracts worth about 10 billion dollars were frozen.

Hillary Clinton wrote, in her memoir “Hard Choices,” that then Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoglu had told her that Turkey had come to the brink of declaring war on Israel “after [a] ‘9/11’-scale attack.”²³

In March 2013, Israel officially apologized for the Gaza Flotilla killings, and promised to resolve the compensation issue, but refused to take a step back in its Gaza policies.

In December 2015, due to the need for cooperation against the problems of the region, but also for economic and political benefits on both sides, Turkey and Israel began secret talks to restore diplomatic relations.²⁴

The Elements That Brought the Two Countries Back to the Negotiating Table

On the Turkish side, the main motivation is that the Government needs allies for political, security and economic reasons.

Turkey is not content with how the Syrian crisis evolved and at home is facing both ISIS and PKK terrorism. The Turkey-supported Free Syrian Army is on the losing side, and ISIS is lobbing missiles at Kilis, a town located only a few kilometres from the Syrian border. PKK terrorists are finding refuge and supplies in Syria and Iraq, and they disrupt life in south-east Turkey, while PKK’s kin PYD in Syria is recognized by the United States and other allies as a friendly force fighting ISIS.

21 Jonah Ari Gross, Ya’alon: Turkey reset impossible while it hosts Hamas, 11 February 2016, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/yaalon-turkey-reset-impossible-while-it-hosts-hamas/>

22 Israeli attack on Gaza flotilla sparks international outrage, World news ... 31 May 2010 <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/may/31/israeli-attacks-gaza-flotilla-activists>

23 Haaretz, 12 June 2014, Hillary Clinton: Turkish FM Considered War on Israel After ‘9/11’-scale Attack. Fatal raid on Gaza-bound flotilla in 2010 drove Davutoglu to extremes, the former secretary of state’s memoir asserts, <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.598477>

24 Secret talks hint at Israeli-Turkish thaw. After years of tensions, envoys agree on a number of reconciliatory steps, including the return of ambassadors and payment of compensations by Israel, Itamar Eichner, 17 December 2015, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4740891,00.html>

Over 2.7 million Syrian refugees have found refuge in the country and many terrorist elements hide among them.

The confrontation with Russia over the shooting-down of a Russian plane in Turkish airspace has not been resolved. Russia has deployed S-300 and S-400 missiles to Syria and has hinted that any Turkish plane crossing the border will be shot down, thus undermining the Turkish fight against ISIS.²⁵

Furthermore, Turkey is heavily dependent on Russian gas (55% of all imports) and, faced by ever-growing demand, is desperate to diversify suppliers, and Israeli gas is a welcome new energy source in the region. Although still a remote possibility, an Egyptian-Israeli-Cypriot-Greek gas pipeline, bypassing Turkey, would also be strategically objectionable for Turkey's leadership. Turkey has been following the Israeli, Cyprus and Greek discussions on energy cooperation closely and will not wish to be left out. Trade, tourism and technological cooperation are only a few of the numerous other benefits.²⁶

Due to the crises in Iraq and Syria, and now problems with Egypt, Turkey needs land/sea access for exports to the Gulf countries and Israel offers an alternative. Israel can offer weapons and UAVs to Turkey which can be used against the new challenge of urban terrorism. Friendship with Israel will also win friends in Washington D.C.

So, in Turkish President Recep T. Erdoğan's words, "Israel is in need of a country like Turkey in the region. We have to admit that we also need Israel."²⁷ This should not come as a surprise.

On the Israeli side, the Syrian regime-Iran-Hezbollah triangle and ISIS presence in the region are too close for comfort. Given the threats of Hezbollah and ISIS, Israel is determined to hold on to the Golan Heights and needs allies in the region. Turkish influence over Hamas may help.

To counter the Shia threat from Iran, the Syrian regime, Hezbollah and potential Iraqi extremists, Israel needs to find new partners in its foreign policy. Columnist Ben Caspit from Al-Monitor claims that "promoting the emerging Israeli-Sunni understandings are becoming a strategic cornerstone in Israel's national security," and the Turkish contribution to a new image of Israel among the Sunni front cannot be overlooked.²⁸

Israel would therefore benefit from restoring ties with one of its few Middle Eastern partners, particularly to balance Iran's grip over the Syrian regime and its vast influence in Lebanon. Friendship with Turkey will also allow easier access to cooperation with NATO for enhanced security options.

25 Alix Culbertson and Tom Batchelor, 25 November 2015, <http://www.express.co.uk/news/world/621613/Turkey-shoots-jet-airspace>

26 Charles Ellinas, 28 February 2016, <http://in-cyprus.com/israel-turkey-rapprochement/>

27 Dunya Bulteni, 02 January 2016, www.dunyabulteni.net/.../erdogan-turkiye-ile-israilin-birbirine-ihiti

28 Ben Caspit, Is Israel forming an alliance with Egypt and Saudi Arabia?, 13 April 2016, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/04/israel-al-sisi-egypt-saudi-arabia-islands-transfer-alliance.html>

The Economy

Since 2012, Israel has been trying to develop the Leviathan gas field and export its new-found gas; Turkey is the geographically closest and most viable customer, requiring less investment in pipelines.²⁹

A deal with Turkey would create interdependence and anchor the two countries as allies, and the first steps can already be noted. The Israeli company Edeltech and the Turkish Zorlu Holding have signed a \$1.3 billion deal with Leviathan partners to build two new power plants in Israel.³⁰

In an interview, the Israeli Minister of Energy Yuval Steinitz said that the two countries are very close to signing an agreement and resuming diplomatic relations, adding that up to 90% of the gaps have been bridged. He added that “Turkey needs Israeli gas and Israel needs the Turkish market.”³¹

Ankara would be consuming half of Leviathan’s estimated 29bn m³ reserves from 2020, via a proposed pipeline to Turkey. As a second phase, the gas could be shipped to Europe via Turkey.³²

Furthermore, the Turkish energy company Turcas is setting up a buyers’ consortium to ship Israeli gas to Europe via Turkey when the gas reaches Turkey in the next four to five years.³³

According to Israel’s Consul General in Istanbul, the highest-ranking Israeli diplomat in Turkey, the signature of a Normalization Agreement is very close. In an interview, he reiterated the determination of his government to move ahead and that it was only a matter of some weeks or months at most. Once the agreement is signed, Israel will pay some \$20 million as compensation to the families of the victims of the Gaza Flotilla incident and would allow Turkey to send humanitarian assistance to Gaza via Ashdod Port, on the condition that Turkey use the Palestinian Authority and not Hamas as its official counterpart.³⁴

Consequences for Third Parties

In the region Russia, Egypt, Iran and perhaps Cyprus would be the countries most interested in renewed Turkish-Israeli friendship.

Russian views

Relations between Ankara and Moscow are at an all time low. Putin would not be very happy if Turkey

29 Ben Caspit, Why Israel needs Putin more than it needs Erdoğan, 07 March 2016, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/03/vladimir-putin-erdogan-netanyahu-syria-missiles-security.html>

30 Natural Gas Europe, 03 May 2016, <http://www.naturalgaseurope.com/zorlu-eyes-jv-in-israeli-gas-consortium-29344>

31 David Wainer, 05 May 2016, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-05-05/israel-near-domestic-gas-solution-turkish-deal-steinitz-says>

32 Natural Gas Europe, 10 May 2016, <http://www.naturalgaseurope.com/turkey-and-israel-close-to-sign-energy-agreement-for-natural-gas-29476>

33 Merve Erdil, Dev Sirketler Israil Gazi icin el ele Verdi, Turkish daily Hurriyet, 5 April 2016, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/dev-sirketler-israil-gazi-icin-el-ele-verdi-40082084>

34 Verda Ozer, Turkish daily Milli Gazete, 11 May 2016 http://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/Israil_Baskonsolusu_Cohen_Turkiye_ile_birlikte_Suriyeye_operasyon_yapabiliriz/407518

assured Israel of its friendship at this point, and he has some cards up his sleeve. Israel feels like it is walking on egg shells in its rapport with Russia as the latter provides Iran and the Syrian regime with arms, which have occasionally landed in the hands of Hezbollah, such as SA-22 missiles. Russia can also limit the Israeli air force's freedom of action by enabling Syria with better weapon systems. The Israeli message to Putin is that there must be no "Syrian arrangement" that strengthens Iran and Hezbollah. "Shiite terror endangers the world, including Russia, no less than Sunni jihad does."³⁵

On the other hand, Russia has no special liking of Hezbollah and will tread carefully with regard to Iran. While maintaining Iran as a client, Russia would not like to see another dominant power in the Middle East.³⁶

For the Russians, Israeli exports of natural gas to Turkey would also not be good news, as, currently, Russia is the main supplier for Turkey and this gives Moscow some leverage over relations with Ankara. Russia would prefer for Israeli gas not to compete with Gazprom, not only with regard to sales to Europe but more critically for those to Turkey.

In fact, Russian President Putin has been attempting to involve Gazprom in developing the Leviathan field. On 19 October 2015, Putin and Netanyahu agreed to the participation of Gazprom in developing the Leviathan gas reserves.³⁷

Cyprus

A gas deal between Israel and Turkey would require an offshore pipeline through Cyprus' EEZ and the incentives may help hasten a political settlement to the Cyprus problem. It should, therefore, be an inducement to promoting such a solution proactively.

However, currently, Cyprus, Israel and Greece have agreed to the establishment of a gas pipeline from the Aphrodite, Leviathan and Tamar gas fields to a liquefied natural gas plant in the Vasilikos power station by 2019. How the two initiatives will develop is unclear.

Turkish Cypriots would also not like to miss the opportunity of getting their share of gas dollars. The leader of the Turkish Cypriots (from the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, as recognized by Turkey) President Mustafa Akinci said Cypriot and Israeli gas could flow into Turkish and European markets through a pipeline linking a reunified island with Turkey, about 70 kilometres away. A planned Turkey-Cyprus electricity cable link would further boost energy ties. "This will not only be an energy corridor, but a corridor for peace also," Akinci said.³⁸

35 Ben Caspit, Can Israel influence the 'day after' in Syria? Al-Monitor, 16 March 2016, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/03/syria-russia-vladimir-putin-pullout-army-idf-golan.html>

36 Charles Ellinas, Israel-Turkey Rapprochement, 28 February 2016, <http://in-cyprus.com/israel-turkey-rapprochement/>

37 Charles Ellinas, in-cyprus, 28 February 2016, <http://www.phileleftherosgroup.com/>

38 Associated Press, 5 April 2016, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/some-see-gas-as-boon-to-israel-turkey-cyprus-cooperation/>

Egypt

Michael Kaplan from the International Business Times reports that the Egyptians do not want to see the Turks in the Gaza Strip, and are strongly opposed to a rapprochement between Jerusalem and Ankara.³⁹ Relations between Turkish President Erdoğan and Egyptian President Al-Sisi are at an all-time low over different perspectives of the Muslim Brotherhood era. The rivalry between the two Sunni countries over leadership in the region has a long history, and Israel's rapprochement with Turkey can change the game for Egypt. On the other hand, Israeli-Egyptian relations are normalized and, this time, Israel can help bridge the gap between Ankara and Cairo.

Iran

The Islamic Republic has so far played its cards very well in Iraq and Syria, establishing its influence with both regimes. With its nuclear deal the country is now coming out of decades of embargo and is proving to be attractive to Western companies and investment. Turkish-Israeli rapprochement will influence Iran in political, military, and economic terms. Iran's gas exports to Turkey provide an important export income for that country, and rivalry will hurt its price bargaining opportunities. Furthermore, a wider Sunni-Israel relationship is something Tehran will not appreciate. The Iranian regime will, most likely, tread carefully in order to avoid Western reactions, but how it will use proxies is to be followed closely.

NATO and the Repercussions

As expressed in the Wales Summit Declaration of 2014, the growing instability in NATO's southern neighbourhood from the Middle East to North Africa is defined as one of the two immediate challenges to member states, along with the threats to Eastern Europe. NATO's leadership is becoming more and more concerned about the challenge posed by the terrorist organization ISIL, as well as by violent extremism and sectarianism across the Middle East and North Africa. ISIL's advances in Iraq and the Levant risk exporting terrorism to NATO and Europe.⁴⁰

At a Security and Counter Terror Conference in London on 19 – 20 April 2016, NATO's Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Emerging Security Challenges Dr Jamie Shea said there is 'justified concern' that Islamic State militants are actively working to obtain nuclear, radiological and biological materials to carry out attacks in Europe. It is also feared that ISIS has obtained a stockpile of Iraqi short range missiles.⁴¹

39 Michael Kaplan, With Turkey-Israel Reconciliation Looming, Egypt Fears Turkish Influence In Gaza Strip, 9 January 2016, <http://www.ibtimes.com/turkey-israel-reconciliation-looming-egypt-fears-turkish-influence-gaza-strip-2257299>

40 NATO Deputy Secretary General Alexander Vershbow at the conference on NATO-Israel cooperation, La Hulpe, Belgium, 17 November 2014, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_114789.htm?selectedLocale=en

41 Rosie Perper, NATO Security Chiefs Warn of ISIS Plan for Nuclear Attack on Europe, 21 April 2016, <http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/NATO-security-chiefs-warn-of-ISIS-plan-for-nuclear-attack-on-Europe-451923>

To better deal with the magnitude of these problems and their spill-over potential to its member states, NATO is transforming Operation Active Endeavour in the Mediterranean into a broader security operation, which can deal with counter-terrorism, help deal with the migrant crisis, and ensure freedom of navigation. NATO will increase its military presence in the eastern part of the Alliance, and at the Warsaw Summit in July 2016 will announce the final decisions about the scale and the scope of this presence.⁴²

The basic rationale for NATO's engagement with Israel is grounded in sharing the same concerns over the region's explosive security environment, as a source of radicalism, fanaticism, and terrorism. Developing closer cooperation with like-minded nations is an integral part of tackling such challenges.

Among all these countries, Israel occupies a special place as one of the most active participants in the Mediterranean Dialogue process and the first to conclude an Individual Cooperation Programme with NATO in 2008.

One priority area of the Cooperation Programme is the fight against terrorism, and the sharing of experience and intelligence. Others include armaments cooperation, defence research and technology, airspace management and logistics cooperation. Another promising area for closer cooperation is in training and education.⁴³

Israel's official representation in NATO and regular attendance at consultations on security issues is one positive development; but the more important point is settling the differences between members/partners and other consensual governments of the Middle East and the establishment of a wider and abler coalition.

Conclusions

What you have, what you need and what you can do in the absence of what: this is inventory control. Both Turkey and Israel need the same thing: security. They know that they cannot achieve it without cooperation.

One hundred years after Sykes-Picot the Middle East is in chaos. Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Libya have collapsed. The future of Lebanon is unclear. Jordan is gasping under an immense wave of refugees. Egypt is trying to normalize its domestic situation, but most of the ills of that society are still a threat to stability, and the Sinai peninsula is a war zone. ISIL is a menace to all mankind, threatening Turkey from the South and Israel from the North, and a large coalition is running operations to neutralize it.

Iran is fighting a proxy war in Yemen and Syria against the Sunni world. Yet, it is emerging from its "terrorist state" status and even becoming a Western "ally" in its campaign against ISIS. Both Turkey

42 NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at joint press point with incoming SACEUR General Curtis Scaparrotti, 04/05/2016, http://nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_130535.htm?selectedLocale=en

43 NATO Deputy Secretary General Bisogniero opening speech at NATO Public Diplomacy Symposium in Herzliya-Israel, 22 October 2007, http://nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_7936.htm?selectedLocale=en

and Israel are following events to see how relations between Washington and Tehran will develop. In Iraq and Syria Sunni-Shia animosities are rekindled; ex-Libyan weapons are in the hands of radical/terrorist groups, and Europe is facing the biggest refugee crisis of the century. Low oil prices are hurting the Gulf monarchies, while their defence expenses are sky-rocketing. Russia has a naval base and a brand new airbase in Syria and S-400 missiles are there to stay.

In such a dire environment, NATO and the West in general need friends and better cooperation between friends. Turkish-Israeli rapprochement is one modest piece of good news from the region.

And it is not only Turkey and Israel who are part of this equation. In a region divided into two fronts along Shia-Sunni lines, it is imperative for both countries to develop closer ties with the members of the front. That brings Egypt and Saudi Arabia into the epicentre of a potential coalition and also leads to better cooperation with NATO.

Lately, Turkey has been acting in unison with Qatar and Saudi Arabia and, although not said out loud, Israel and Saudi Arabia are also closing gaps, since both see Iran as their main rival.

An Israel-Egypt-Saudi Arabia trio will be more complete with Turkey, which shares many of the same concerns. It is not wrong to predict that the ice between Turkey and Egypt could melt over the next few months.

The economic incentives are also obvious. A common pipeline bringing gas from Egypt's Zohr, Israel's Leviathan and Tamar, and Cyprus' Aphrodite fields to Turkey, and through Turkey to Europe, would help any politician win public support in the region.

Overall, part of the Middle East appears to be putting its act together to deal with immediate threats in the region, and NATO nations will willingly support and benefit from such local solutions to local problems.



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