



MEI MEDIA WATCH

(A Survey of Editorials)

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Israel-Turkey tensions

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[Ever since nine Turkish citizens were killed in the clash abroad *MV Mavi Marmara* on 31 May, the Israeli-Turkish relations have been under pressure. There were speculations of an impending rupture. Various media both within and outside the Middle East have commented on the growing tensions between the two countries. **Editor, MEI Media Watch.**]

THE JERUSALEM POST
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Editorial, 1 June 2010, Tuesday

1. A turning point for Turkey

Future of relations with close ME ally uncertain.

Relations between Israel and Turkey are at a new low and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan is doing a great deal to exacerbate the situation. In a speech to his country's parliament Tuesday (1 June 2010), Erdogan called the *Mavi Marmara* conflict at sea a 'bloody massacre' and warned, 'Today is a turning point in history. Nothing will be the same again.'

So far, the Turkish premier has refrained from breaking off diplomatic ties with Israel. But with four Turkish citizens among those killed on the Turkish ship that was part of the 'Peace Flotilla'

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to Gaza, the future of relations with Turkey, once Israel's closest friend in the Middle East, is uncertain.

The deterioration of Turkey's relations with Israel dates back to its decision to support Hamas's violent takeover of Gaza in 2007. But it is part of a broader trend in which Erdogan has been gradually steering his country away from a secular-based democracy toward radical Islam. Though it is a member of NATO, Turkey, with the strong-willed Islamist Erdogan at the helm, appears to be moving out of the orbit of western democracies and into a deepening alliance with a newly forming axis of power composed of countries such as Russia, Iran, and Brazil.

Erdogan has led Turkish opposition to US-supported sanctions against Iran's nuclear ambitions, attempting instead, together with Hugo Chavez, to put together an alternative deal that would allow Iran to continue to enrich uranium. His country has officially hosted Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as well as Sudan's President Omer Hassan al-Bashir, a man charged with war crimes and genocide.

Relations with the US have worsened since the House Foreign Affairs Committee of the US Congress voted in March (2010) to brand as genocide the 1915 slaughter of around 1.5 million Armenians by Ottoman Turks.

Israel, which in the past had put its lobbying power on Capitol Hill to work for Turkey, did not rush to help this time. Turkey could have prevented the vote if it had moved forward on negotiations with Armenia, which got off to a good start but stalled when Turkey insisted on tying normalization to a withdrawal of Armenian troops from the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh. Turkey thus missed an opportunity to reach an agreement on the Armenian massacre through dialogue.

As evidence of Turkey's increasing religious fundamentalism, Efraim Inbar, the director of Bar-Ilan University's BESA Center for Strategic Studies, quoting businessmen friends, notes that sipping a glass of *raki* (the Turkish equivalent of arak or ouzo) in public nowadays can hurt one's chances of receiving a government contract. Pressure is growing to conform to Muslim mores.

The situation has not always been so bleak. Erdogan's party, which won the 2002 national elections – the last held – with 35 percent of the vote, started off its term positively. In December 2002, Yoav Biran, then the acting director-general of the Foreign Ministry, made a well-publicized visit. In January 2003, two Turkish frigates participated in a joint US-Turkey-Israel search-and-rescue exercise in the eastern Mediterranean. There was considerable additional military cooperation.

And although there was a 46 per cent fall in the number of Israelis visiting Turkey in 2009 to 300,000, in previous years the two countries had maintained a vibrant exchange of tourists.

The ascension to power of the AKP was widely perceived not so much as the Turkish public's turn to radical Islam as a rejection of the nepotism, corruption and overly zealous secularism of the previous political leaderships.

While members of Istanbul's Jewish community are currently reluctant to be interviewed for fear they might be singled out by extremists, one Turkish Jew who spoke off the record felt that the masses of demonstrators holding Hezbollah flags in front of the Israeli Embassy did not represent the vast majority of Turks. Channel 2's Middle East news analyst Ehud Ya'ari has pointed out that many talkbacks on Turkish Internet news sites have been pro-Israel.

With elections slated for November 2011, Erdogan was right when he said that his country is at a turning point in history. Turkey's leadership has a choice. It can continue on its present path. Or, however improbably and belatedly, it can yet change direction.

If it chose to, Turkey could have a highly constructive role in forging a better Middle East. As a successful Islamic democracy aligned with the West, it could be a powerful force for regional peace and a uniquely valuable partner for the US. In the process, it would be improving its own global stature while helping to stabilize the world's most volatile region.

Source: <http://www.jpost.com/Home/Article.aspx?id=177170>



Editorial, 4 June 2010, Friday

2. Turkey's Fury

Turkey is understandably furious about Israel's disastrous attack on the Turkish-flagged aid ship that tried to run the Gaza blockade. Eight Turks and a Turkish-American died. Turkey's demands for the release of detained activists (all are now free) and for an international investigation (Israel is balking) are reasonable.

But Turkish officials have let their anger and rhetoric go way too far. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey has called for Israel to be punished for state terrorism. President Abdullah Gul said, 'Turkey will never forgive this attack.' Turkey, Israel and their shared ally, the United States, need to work to cool things down. Turkey was the first Muslim nation to recognize Israel, and both countries have benefited from the relationship. Bilateral trade reached \$2.5 billion in 2009. As a moderate, secular democracy and NATO member, Turkey has a strong interest in a stable Middle East.

Things have deteriorated sharply since early 2009 when Mr. Erdogan publicly confronted the Israeli president, Shimon Peres, on the subject of Gaza. His new even fiercer denunciations are playing well at home and in the wider Muslim world. But Mr. Erdogan may find it hard to walk things back when he needs to — and he will.

The Palestinians can certainly use articulate defenders. And Israel deserves to be criticized for the flotilla disaster. But gratuitously stoking anti-Israeli sentiment is irresponsible and dangerous. Mr. Erdogan is to be applauded for his attempts to broker secret negotiations between Israel's previous government and Syria. His more recent effort, with Brazil, to cut a nuclear deal with Iran was disturbingly naïve. Turkey needs to keep working diplomatically to end the blockade. Israel has now indicated a willingness to modify the siege; it needs to end it altogether. If Turkey is truly committed to the rights of the Palestinians, it should be pressing other Muslim countries to seriously encourage an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal — the best way to up the pressure on Israel.

Israel also has a strong interest in repairing relations with Turkey. That is yet another reason why it should support a credible, independent international investigation. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu still doesn't get this. Washington needs to help him understand all that is at stake.

Source: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/05/opinion/05sat2.html?ref=editorials>



Dubai, Editorial, 5 June 2010, Saturday

3. Flotilla and Turkish-Israeli ties

Storming of the flotilla bound for Gaza has come at a visible cost. Turkish-Israeli relations are on the rocks. If anger and resentment prevailing in Ankara are to be believed, their bilateral relations are bound to nosedive.

Tel Aviv's trigger-happy tendency has pushed one of the major Islamic countries to recast its ties with the Jewish state. At the same time, it has proved beyond doubt that not only does Israel disregard public opinion; it also scales very low its relationship with the Muslim world. Had this not been the case, it would not have attacked the vessels carrying peace activists and aid for the besieged residents of Gaza. By compelling Ankara to think otherwise, Israel has sabotaged its reconciliation prospects with the world at large.

The Turkish ship, Marmara, which was the target of the Israeli commando raid on the high seas that left nine people dead and scores injured, is now the subject of international wrath. For the pundits of international law and inter-state relations, it is tantamount to an act of war against Turkey. The fact that it was attacked in the international waters and held in arrest since then — as a thriller from a Hollywood film — are enough to provoke large scale ramifications. Turkey is exceptional by virtue of the fact that it had the courage to strike a balance in its foreign relations by reaching out to the West and Israel —and, at the same time, boast itself as the centre of Muslim civilisation. Israel should have opened up to the Muslim and Arab world by valuing its ties with Ankara. But the manner in which Tel Aviv snubs the Muslim countries that have recognised the Jewish state out of real politik largesse is quite despicable. This will neither help

the Zionist entity further its international image nor address the imbroglio of security and peaceful coexistence in the region.

As things stand today, a rupture is round the corner. The two countries that had staged regular joint military training exercises and had an open line of communication over a host of bilateral affairs will miss the fraternity. Moreover, it comes as a blow to the efforts of modernity that Ankara had been carefully treading in its endeavour to make the country a hub and an inevitable link between the East and the West. It will come as an opportunity to radical elements who will try to cash in on this incident by evoking historic and religious disenchantment. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan was correct when he said that Israel's mindless jingoism will lead to losing its best friend in the region. As a measure of damage control, Israel will be better advised to lift the siege on Gaza, allow aid ships to sail into the enclave and order an inquiry into its naval misadventure. The Flotilla flop is Tel Aviv's diplomatic and humanitarian fiasco. It has only added to its chronology of defiance and disregard for civilised norms of interstate relations. Dumping Turkey would not be as easy as dispensing with the Goldstone findings. The flotilla will come to haunt it, come what may.

Source:

http://www.khaleejtimes.com/displayarticle.asp?xfile=data/editorial/2010/June/editorial_June9.xml§ion=editorial&col=



Dubai, Editorial, 7 June 2010, Monday

4. Erdogan to test rough seas

Flotilla's showdown seems to be graduating. If reports are to be believed, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan wants to give it a try by boarding a vessel to Gaza. This, of course, will come with a cost and a consequence. Israel, which is determined to block the adventure, will definitely be cast in a bad light, leading to more pressure from the international community.

Whether this serves the Gazans' purpose or it will be an episode of brinkmanship and sabre rattling, has to be seen. This high-profile endeavour of breaking the siege is bound to highlight the need and necessity of resolving the Palestinian imbroglio. With Iran and several other Arab and Muslim countries extending their support to this mission on high seas, a new wave of confrontation will be the order of the day. This the volatile region cannot withstand. It's time for Israel to take a break from defiance and do away with the solitary confinement of the dispossessed nation in all humility.

Though Tel Aviv has shrugged off such a venture as 'unrealistic scenario', Ankara is seriously considering giving it a shot. Such a vibe has already unnerved Washington, which has asked Erdogan to delay the plan in order to look into the matter. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, in the same vein, had also talked of sending aid flotillas towards the marooned

enclave. The messy waters of the region seem to be gradually heating up with warfare and diplomacy, this time with a trend that is unique and innovative in essence. Is it déjà vu from the gun-diplomacy missions of colonial centuries? The only difference is that this time around people struggling to do away with the yoke of repression are testing the rough waters by keeping their fingers crossed.

Erdogan's leadership is aboveboard. He has emerged as the lone spokesperson for the Palestinian cause, and has time and again exhibited the courage to take on the Zionist state. This he did in Davos and again in New York, during the Nuclear Proliferation Review conference, wherein he castigated the double standards of the West, and questioned the rationale for allowing Tel Aviv to go scot-free with nuclear weapons. Turkish-Israeli ties are already on the rocks since its vessel Marmara came under attack, killing and injuring scores of peace activists on board. Ankara has said that it is reviewing its relations with the Jewish state, and it could lead to cessation of future joint military exercises. The unending siege of Gaza at the hands of Israel is more than a diplomatic row. It is a humanitarian issue, and a matter of life and death for more than a million people with no access to basic civic amenities. Erdogan by considering sailing into the occupied waters has made a powerful point. This needs to be supplemented with remedial measures for alleviating the sufferings of the Palestinians. There is no point in snubbing Turkey or lecturing it to mind its own business.

Source:

http://www.khaleejtimes.com/displayarticle.asp?xfile=data/editorial/2010/June/editorial_June13.xml§ion=editorial&col=

gulfnews.com

Dubai, Editorial, 18 June 2010, Friday

5. Erdogan is challenging Israeli egotism

The Turkish PM is emerging as an effective statesman and deserves Arab support

Turkey has downgraded its diplomatic relations with Israel and suspended its military cooperation, as part of its reaction to the Israeli attack on the Freedom Flotilla. Turkey's actions have forced a real shift in the Middle East, as Israel's position as the leading military power in the region is being challenged. Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government is seeking to shatter Israel's assumption that it is able to use force unilaterally whenever it wants to, and this laudable aim needs clear and committed Arab support.

For decades, Israel has acted with impunity. It maintained its occupation of Palestinian lands, it started a nuclear weapons programme outside UN or any other supervision, it launched innumerable attacks on Palestinians, it invaded Lebanon and other Arab states several times, all without any serious international retribution. Israel has managed to persuade the United States and others that what is good for Israel's security is good for their security.

But Turkey's reaction to the assault on the Freedom Flotilla, and the killing of unarmed peace activists, is drawing a line through the assumption that different rules apply to Israel. Turkey's actions are stiffening Arab resolve to stand up to Israel, and show the world that Israel's actions are illegal and wrong, and are also a cause of regional instability.

Over the years, Erdogan has been building a powerful position in the Middle East, and his tough response to Israel is putting Turkey into the forefront of anti-Israeli activity, attracting strong support from the Arab states. This also has the effect of displacing Iran's Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as the regional hegemony. Ahmadinejad has enjoyed his position as the leading anti-western voice of the Middle East, but his main focus has been domestic, concentrating on developing Iran's nuclear programme. Erdogan is a far more effective voice, who deserves Arab support.

Source: <http://gulfnews.com/opinions/editorials/erdogan-is-challenging-israeli-egotism-1.642567>



Cairo, Editorial, 1-7 July 2010

6. Turkey's Western gaze

Over the past 10 years, Turkey has emerged as a major player in Middle East politics, immersing itself in many of the region's most thorny issues. Turkey was never altogether absent from the regional scene. But until recently, the heir to the Ottoman Empire looked westward for both inspiration and guidance. A member of NATO and a candidate for EU membership, Turkey forged particularly close ties with Israel. This was the course Turkey's secular elite had pursued since Kemal Ataturk.

For years, in fact, Turkey's relations with its Arab neighbours were strained. At one point, Turkey even threatened to attack Syria. Meanwhile, military cooperation with Israel flourished. Turkey held joint manoeuvres and conducted military research with the Israelis. Some of the naval and aerial bases that Turkey and Israel manned jointly may even have been used in attacks against Gaza. And it was not all about the military. Trade between Turkey and Israel grew steadily over the years.

It is not that Turkey needed Israel for defence reasons. The two countries don't really have a common enemy. With the exception of the Iskenderun area, which has been excised from the Arab world, there is no marked hostility between the Arabs and the Turks. Some tensions exist, such as those related to the presence of members of the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) in Syria. But since Arab and Turkish nationalists traded accusations following the Turkish revolution of 1908, things have been mostly calm on the Arab-Turkish front.

As Israel's ally, Turkey became a source of concern for the Arabs. The alliance was viewed by many as being in bad taste, though Turkey must have had reasons to seek closer ties with Israel. To put it mildly, Turkey's alliance with Israel was frowned upon in the Arab world.

Now, 'the times are changing.' Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan is positioning himself as a major Israel basher in the region, and in doing so is acquiring undeniable popularity among the discontented Arab masses. With the Arab world caught up in the middle of what seems like a political vacuum, a little posturing can go a long way.

Not so long ago, Jacques Chirac wooed the region with his sweet talk. Then came Saddam Hussein with his thundering bluster, Hassan Nasrallah with his defiant moments, and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad with his devil-may-care politics. All captured the attention of the impressionable Arab masses, and all had their day under the sun.

This is not to say that a real change is not underway in Turkey. Since the Islamists came to power, new policies have been introduced, the military has been kept at bay, and Western demands for better human and personal rights have been somewhat addressed. The Islamists proved themselves to be adept politicians, and they have so far managed to avoid a head-on collision with the Kurdish insurgency. They even won over some Kurdish hardliners.

Turkey has been heartbroken by the EU, at whose doors it has been standing in line for years, waiting for its turn while others -- who came much later -- were whisked inside. Resentful, certainly the Turks are. But this is not the real reason why they are getting involved, after decades of absence, in Arab affairs.

The Islamist elite see a point in edging close to the Arabs. But this doesn't mean that Turkey is going to forget its Western and European affiliations. The Turks are going to seek a middle-of-the-road path, keeping one eye on the Arab world and another on Europe.

Europe may not necessarily be averse to this attitude. Traditionally, Europe saw Turkey as a bridge between West and East. Therefore, Turkey is unlikely to turn its back on the West or on Israel. The Turks are only trying to collect a few more bargaining chips. If influential in the East, the Turks hope to become more appreciated in the West.

Erdogan is not about to hop into a plane and land in Gaza. He is not about to sever ties with Israel. He will threaten and foam at the mouth, but this is all lip service, quite expected from the leader of a country whose citizens Israel has killed in cold blood. Erdogan is saying all the right things, but what he intends to do may be something altogether different.

Turkey likes its newfound popularity in the Islamic world, and it knows that along with popularity come trade benefits and political clout. But Ankara is not about to ditch its old dream of being accepted by the Europeans. The Turks have not given up on Washington and Brussels.

Source: <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2010/1005/ed.htm>



Dubai, Editorial, 3 July 2010, Saturday

7. Turkish-Israeli thaw

Turkish-Israeli détente seems to be in the making. After hitting a new low in bilateral relations, both the countries have at least psychologically agreed to do some fence mending.

This is a welcome development. If the somewhat discreet meeting held at an anonymous place between the trade minister of Israel and Turkish foreign minister is any indication, rapprochement seems to be round the corner. Israel's raid on Turkish aid flotilla to the besieged Gaza enclave had pushed them on the brink of war with Ankara threatening to limit economic and defence ties with the Jewish state. The realisation on their part to give peace a chance without resorting to brinkmanship is a good omen, and can lead to addressing the Middle East imbroglio in a better manner.

Yet it is quite difficult to predict what would be the impact of these talks. The attack on Turkish vessel *Manana*, which led to the killing of nine peace activists, has opened a Pandora box of sorts. With Ankara taking it as an act of war, and subsequently refusing to allow Israeli military aircraft to fly over its airspace, things have hit a new abyss. Thus it would be futile to believe that a discreet session of dialogue and that too on an unofficial level, can lead to any amount of damage control. Until and unless Tel Aviv comes up with an official apology, offers to compensate for the loss and holds a credible inquiry into its navy's misadventure, sentiments will continue to simmer. How comprehensively Turkey's Ahmet Davutoglu and Israel's Benjamin Ben Eliezer have been able to chalk out the roadmap for normalcy is anybody's guess. That this meeting took place without being in the knowledge of Israeli Foreign Office and its hawkish minister Avigdor Lieberman raises questions of propriety, and inadvertently hints at discord at the highest policy-making level. Lieberman has expressed his displeasure over the meeting in no unequivocal terms; with rumours making the rounds that he could even contemplate pulling out of the fragile coalition. Though Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had given nod to this unusual meeting, it remains to be seen what impact it will have on the larger canvas of creating a conducive environment for peace talks in the volatile region.

Turkey is no ordinary country, and its wisdom to have diplomatic relations with Israel should not be underestimated. Thus any misadventure on Tel Aviv's behalf to play the Turkish card to serve its petty political considerations will be ill advised. Strengthening ties with Ankara will help it make inroads into the Muslim world, and come as a great diplomatic and psychological strength in attaining the objective of a two-state solution in the Middle East. With discreet talks over, it's time that real and meaningful cooperation saw the light of the day.

Source:

http://www.khaleejtimes.com/displayarticle.asp?xfile=data/editorial/2010/July/editorial_July4.xml§ion=editorial&col=



Editorial, 4 July 2010, Sunday

8. Turkey is slipping away

Turkey now has denied routine use of its airspace to the Israeli Air Force, a long-standing courtesy. This latest 'salami tactic' ought to awaken Turkey's NATO allies to the fact that Prime Minister Recep Erdogan is creating an outright Islamist state.

The Ankara government says it is retaliating for the Israeli attack on the Gaza 'peace flotilla' aid convoy in May (2010).

Turkey says it will still give permission for Israeli flights case by case. Israel shouldn't count on it. The first flight denied specific permission to fly over Turkey was to have carried Israeli officers to visit Nazi death camps in Poland.

Erdogan's government has launched a massive prosecution of alleged participants in an improbable military coup plot, has given madrassas (Islamic school) diplomas the status of high school diplomas and has vastly increased government control of the judiciary. It has seized opposition newspapers. It plans to help Iran get partially enriched nuclear fuel for a research reactor, and it is cozying up to Syria.

In fact, it helped an ally of the Hamas terror group organize the Gaza flotilla.

These are not the acts of a friend. The United States should have an evacuation plan ready for the 1,500 U.S. military personnel at Incirlik Air Base, and prepare other arrangements for the fighter, bomber, transport, reconnaissance and tanker squadrons that use the base. Some day it also may be necessary to expel Turkey from NATO.

Source:

http://bostonherald.com/news/opinion/editorials/view/20100704turkey_is_slipping_away/



Jeddah, Editorial, 5 July 2010, Monday

9. Turkish-Israeli ties

Turkey has thrown down a major diplomatic gauntlet to Israel.

Unless the Netanyahu government apologizes for the murder of nine Turks on board the Mavi Marmara lead ship of the Freedom Flotilla, and agrees to an international inquiry into the piracy, it will break off diplomatic relations.

If Turkey contemplates such an extremely serious step it only demonstrates the Turkish government's continuing anger at the slaughter of its nationals and Israel's failure to address the issue properly. Ankara's fury was no doubt stoked by the Israeli leak that Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu had secretly met with an Israeli Cabinet minister in Zurich. Turkey was clearly trying to persuade their erstwhile allies to adopt a more moderate and cooperative attitude in the face of world outrage at the commando attack on the Gaza-bound aid convoy.

It may have dawned on the Turks that quiet diplomacy simply does not work with Israelis, especially when they have an administration hell-bent on avoiding any sort of concession to anyone. Coming on the eve of this week's meeting between the Israeli premier and President Barack Obama, the Turkish ultimatum is likely to add to the pressure on Netanyahu. The more radical members of his right-wing coalition government may be realizing that Israel is increasingly driving itself into isolation. If the Turkish demands are not met, it will lose one of its two allies in the Middle East and the situation may lead to the breaking of diplomatic links.

In the meantime, the talk in Washington is moving toward the unthinkable. Serious people are now asking if America's unstinting support for Israel is really worth the high price, not just in cash to support the country but also in terms of the widespread deleterious consequences for US foreign policy, especially in the Muslim world. It still remains highly unlikely that the Obama administration will have the strength, let alone the will to reverse over 60 years of slavish policy toward Israel. The US Zionist lobby is already buzzing menacingly and if it swarms it will create considerable political dangers for the president.

Nevertheless, Netanyahu's refusal to do more than slow illegal settlement activity in the occupied territories, not least in East Jerusalem, coupled with the continuing Gaza blockade and the murderous piracy against aid vessels trying to bring succour to Palestinians trapped in Gaza, is placing considerable strain on his relations with the US. His visit to the White House is likely to be a repeat of the disastrous encounter in March unless he is prepared to make guaranteed concessions. The president must not allow him to hide behind vague promises, perhaps built up around Monday's Jerusalem meeting between Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad and Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak.

Israeli arrogance has alienated Turkey, embarrassed Egypt and infuriated Washington. If this is calculated behaviour then it is highly sinister. Any Israeli government, Likud or Labour, may have its way in its confrontation with a US administration, whether Republican or Democrat. At least that has been the experience so far. But Israel sometimes forgets that other governments have no such constraints or inhibitions when it comes to defending their interests or honour.

Source: <http://arabnews.com/opinion/editorial/article79395.ece>



Dubai, Editorial, 6 July 2010, Monday

10. End of Turkey-Israel honeymoon

Turkey was the first Muslim country to recognise Israel, as early as 1949--a year after it was founded. It was perhaps only understandable given Turkey's historical role in sheltering hundreds of thousands of Jews, running from persecution in Christian Europe.

This 'special relationship' between Israel and Turkey, moulded by Kemal Ataturk in accordance with his secular, European view of the world, has continued for over six decades.

The two countries have not only enjoyed close economic and cultural relations but also share strong military ties. The Israelis have regularly used Turkish military bases and facilities, not to mention the billions of dollars of arms and ammunition the Turkish army buys from the Jewish state at a premium. In fact, it's the powerful army that sees itself as the guardian of Ataturk's vision of pro-West Turkey that is responsible for continuing this unusual alliance despite Israel's appalling crimes and atrocities against the Palestinian people for decades.

Lately though, the times they are a-changing. Under the charismatic leadership of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey is increasingly asserting itself and speaking out against the continuing oppression and injustice in the Middle East without worrying about its close ties with the United States or its EU prospects.

Many suggest that the outrageous Israeli attack on the Turkish aid flotilla for Gaza killing nine Turkish peace activists last month (June 2010) was a stern warning to Turkey to not involve itself in the Middle East and stop talking about the Palestinian persecution. However, if Israel thought it could get away with murder, as it always has over the past 62 years, it was clearly mistaken. The Turkish leadership, civil society and the media responded to the attack with the vehemence and swiftness it really deserved.

Prime Minister Erdogan immediately recalled Ankara's ambassador to Israel and demanded an unconditional apology from Israel, an international investigation into the attack on the aid flotilla in international waters and compensation to the families of victims.

Now after patiently waiting for Israeli response for weeks, Turkey has hardened its stance threatening to snap diplomatic ties with the Jewish state, if it does not comply with its demand for apology/compensation/probe. While Israel has put up a brave face saying it has nothing to apologise for, the development comes as a huge blow to the country. It stands to lose its only friend and ally in a region where it already finds itself hopelessly isolated and shunned thanks to its unjust, racist policies and continuing persecution of Palestinian people.

Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, the soft spoken architect of new Turkey's look-east policy, has warned that a break could only be averted if Israel either apologised or accepted the outcome of an international probe into the attack.

If the Israelis remain characteristically defiant encouraging Turkey to snap all ties with Israel, it would be a huge diplomatic disaster and strategic loss for Israel.

On the other hand, by dumping Israel Turkey stands to lose virtually nothing. In fact, freed from the yoke of Israeli 'friendship', Turkey would emerge stronger and more in harmony with its Arab and Muslim allies.

Source:

http://www.khaleejtimes.com/displayarticle.asp?xfile=data/editorial/2010/July/editorial_July11.xml§ion=editorial&col=



Cairo, Editorial, 8-14 July 2010

11. The Turkish stake

Turkey has taken tough measures to answer Israel's attack on the aid flotilla, measures that some say will bring all strategic cooperation between the two countries to a halt. One such measure was to ban Israeli fighter planes from using Turkish airspace. The measures were greeted with joy in the Arab world and especially among the Palestinians. Political analysts voiced hope that Turkey was finally allying itself with the Arabs and distancing itself from Israel after years of the reverse.

But a few facts seem to have escaped the attention of the Arab media, and some of these facts suggest that Turkey's estrangement from Israel is not as complete or final as it seems.

For example, a Turkish delegation arrived in Israel to follow up the delivery of Israeli drones, or pilotless planes, to Ankara. As far as we know, Israel's modernisation of Turkish tanks is still proceeding unheeded. The Arab media doesn't seem interested in reporting such things, except on the inside pages and in small print. But every sign that Turkey is edging away from Israel gets full coverage. This is what many in the media think is the big story.

The Arab media has also taken little interest in the surprise meeting between Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu and Israeli Industry Ministry Binyamin Ben-Eliezer held recently in

Brussels. The meeting was kept a secret on Turkey's request, but the Israeli media leaked the news. It took more than 42 hours for the Turkish media to report the meeting, which Erdogan's government was hoping to keep from the public eye, perhaps because it brings into question the seriousness of its retaliatory stance against Israel. It is meetings such as this that suggest that the estrangement with Israel is not as final as some people think. Ankara used Gaza to woo the Arabs, but so far it hasn't burned its bridges with Israel. The jury is still out.

After the secret meeting in Brussels some interesting developments took place. One was that the Turkish Workers Party (PKK) suddenly escalated its action against the Turkish army. Another was that the US let Turkey understand that it must stop its retaliatory measures against Israel.

A few days ago, a Turkish delegation visited Washington to explain their country's position on the Iranian question. Turkey, as you know, had voted against a recent UN Security Council resolution concerning Iran. The delegation was allowed only to meet junior White House officials.

About a month ago, Turkey hosted a conference on regional security. The participants had to wait for 21 hours for the American delegation to arrive, and in the end some of the Americans didn't show up at all.

During the recent G20 meeting, Erdogan asked for a meeting with Barack Obama, but the Americans took their own sweet time in answering him. The meeting was held at last, but Obama showed up late and reporters were kept away.

Right after the Erdogan-Obama encounter, Turkey said that it would comply with the UN Security Council resolution concerning Iran, but added that it doesn't want the sanctions to be stiffened further. One can only guess that the Americans made it clear to Erdogan that Turkey cannot have its cake and eat it too.

Ankara may have wanted to meet secretly with the Israelis ahead of Benjamin Netanyahu's visit with Obama in Washington. No doubt the Turks wanted to alleviate some of the Israelis' complaints before the latter start voicing their grievances to a sympathetic US audience. As it turned out, all the Turks have asked for is an apology and compensation. They said nothing about Gaza and the siege. The whole thing about Gaza is mere posturing, one is led to conclude.

Initially, Israel offered an apology and compensation. But the offer was withdrawn when a row developed between Netanyahu and his foreign minister, Avigdor Lieberman. The latter was livid that a member of his government was meeting the Turks behind his back. Should more hostility develop between Ankara and Tel Aviv, it would be over the question of the apology and compensation, not Gaza and its beleaguered inhabitants.

Most likely it was Israeli official sources that leaked the news to the media, just to let the world know that Turkey was prone to reversing its policy. As for the escalation by the PKK, this too may not have been a coincidence. If Turkey is to defeat the PKK, it will need to pursue its purchase of drones from Israel.

For now, Turkey wants its exchanges with Israel to remain hushed, but the Israelis are spilling the beans. They have just disclosed that another meeting with Turkish officials is set to take place, time and venue so far undisclosed.

Ankara is torn between hitting hard and going easy. Most likely, it will posture some more, if only to keep the momentum of popularity it has generated on the Arab scene. The Arab media will lap it all up, the fact as well as the fiction. But politics is about interests, not emotion. Gaza is just a bargaining chip, a handle on Arab hearts and minds, and a means of getting something out of America and Europe. It is but a stake on the gaming table of international interests.

Source: <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2010/1006/ed.htm>



Editorial, 9 July 2010, Friday

12. After the Flotilla

Nearly six weeks later, Turkey and Israel are still stoking anger over the disastrous Israeli attack on a Gaza-bound aid ship. Their posturing and threats are playing into the hands of extremists. Both countries need to find ways to cool things down.

Turkey is furious about the death of eight Turks and one Turkish-American in the raid. Israel claims that its soldiers acted in self-defence and that the flotilla was organized by radical activists, supported by Turkey, who were bent on provoking an incident. Israel's government has opened its own review, with outside observers, but has resisted calls for an international investigation — the only chance of getting Turkey to answer questions.

Since the raid, Turkey has recalled its ambassador from Jerusalem, halted military exercises with Israel and banned Israeli military planes from its airspace. It is now threatening to sever all diplomatic ties if Israel does not apologize, compensate the victims' families and accept an international investigation.

Israel has withdrawn its defence advisers from Turkey, warned Israelis against visiting their once solid Muslim ally and impounded the seized ships. It is refusing to pay compensation or apologize.

Some members of Congress are adding to the tensions with anti-Turkey rants and threats to punish the Turkish government. 'There will be a cost if Turkey stays on its present heading,' said Representative Mike Pence, a Republican of Indiana.

Israel, Turkey and the United States all have a lot to lose if this continues. Turkey was the first Muslim nation to recognize Israel. Bilateral trade reached \$2.5 billion in 2009. As a secular, thriving, free-market democracy and NATO member, Turkey has a strong interest in a stable Middle East — and in strong ties to the West.

The Obama administration has been trying to help. When President Obama met with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey in Canada in late June, he urged him to cool the anti-Israel rhetoric. We hope he sent the same message when he met with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel this week. Washington also helped set up a secret meeting between Turkish and Israeli officials last week in Zurich.

Mr. Obama and his aides will have to keep pressing. Eight days after that meeting, the Turkish foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, said that if Israel did not quickly make amends, Turkey would ‘take any option’ (he did not elaborate) to protect the rights of its citizens. Two days after the meeting, Prime Minister Netanyahu told a TV interviewer that Israelis ‘regret the loss of life’ but the country cannot apologize ‘because its soldiers had to defend themselves to avoid being lynched by a crowd.’

We still believe that an impartial, international investigation is the best chance of finding out what really happened. The United States should press Israel to accept an international investigation — and press Turkey to fully participate as well. Mr. Obama should also let members of Congress know that fanning these flames is not in this country’s strategic interest or Israel’s.

Source: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/10/opinion/10sat2.html?ref=editorials>



Cairo, Editorial, 10-16 June 2010

13. Wake-up call

The Obama administration has sorely let down the people in the Arab and Muslim worlds and freedom loving people everywhere. The most glaring example is the disgraceful and coward indecisiveness it showed over Israel's act of terrorism in the Mediterranean.

The hero of the moment is the gallant Turkish leadership which stood up to the Goliath and took a principled position at considerable risk to its long-term relations with Washington and Tel Aviv. By demanding a forceful UN resolution condemning the act of piracy and state terrorism of the Israelis, it has become by default the leading light of those who seek peace and justice around the world. It should be commended.

The Organisation of Islamic Conference took its cue from Turkey, calling on all Muslim nations to reassess their relations with Israel in light of its atrocious actions. The Egyptian government

for one has decided to end the siege of Gaza by opening indefinitely the Rafah border crossing, which is now the only available gateway to the world for Gazans. By taking this principled stand despite US and Israeli disapproval, the Egyptian government must also be commended.

The US veto of Turkey's call for an international investigation of the events surrounding the murders and hijacking of the Freedom Flotilla is shameful and reveals Washington's inability to discipline its wayward Frankenstein, despite the fact that one of those who died was an American citizen.

A sad irony is that a flotilla member that arrived late and was also seized by the Israelis but without any deaths is named after the American martyr Rachel Corrie, who was brutally run over by an American-made bulldozer clearing Palestinian land to accommodate illegal Israeli settlers. Her parents are to this day seeking retribution with no US government support, alas to no avail.

But this is not the only failure that Obama has chalked up in his year and a half in office. His surge in Afghanistan is an even more damning outrage, the war now in its 104th month, the longest war in US history, with deaths increasing at a horrifying rate, destroying the fabric of a once proud nation.

Where are the promises that Obama made in Cairo last year? Is he really this powerless or is he duplicitous? Whatever the answer, the Arab and Muslims worlds need to acknowledge that we are ultimately responsible for finding answers to the crises that are piling up around us.

The divisions between secular nationalists and religious, as exemplified among the Palestinians by Fatah and Hamas, must be overcome. We can take our cue from the Turks, who have combined a national pride and a firm faith in a popular way forward for the nation as a whole. The 'American Way' has lost its sheen for us, with its chauvinistic navel gazing and the rule of Wall Street. The way ahead is clear for those with a moral compass and a brave heart.

A new balance of forces is arising in the East, with Israel facing greater and greater isolation as it pursues its racist expansionist schemes and warmongering. Principled unity in the Arab and Muslim world will bring the Zionists to their senses and to the negotiating table. It is now up to Obama to push its offspring towards accommodation.

Source: <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2010/1002/ed.htm>

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