

TURKEY'S CRISES OVER ISRAEL AND IRAN

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TURKEY'S CRISES OVER ISRAEL AND IRAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Damage to Turkey's relations with Israel and suspicions in Western capitals about its relationship with Iran have dealt setbacks to Ankara's "zero-problem" foreign policy. At the same time, there have been many misconceptions about Turkey's new engagement in the Middle East, which aims to build regional peace and prosperity. From a Turkish perspective, Israel and Iran issues have separate dynamics and involve more collaboration and shared goals with Western partners than is usually acknowledged. Ankara's share of the blame for the falling out with Western friends and Israel has been exaggerated, but there are problems in the government's formulation and presentation of its foreign policy. These include short-sightedness, heated rhetoric, over-reach and distraction from Turkey's core conflict-resolution challenges in its immediate neighbourhood, including a Cyprus settlement, normalisation with Armenia, resolution of new Kurdish tensions and commitment to EU convergence.

Turkey-Israel relations are at a nadir after Israeli commandos killed eight Turks and a U.S. citizen of Turkish descent on 31 May 2010, as they seized a ship that Ankara had discouraged from sailing but said it ultimately could not stop from trying to break the blockade on Gaza. The U.S. and EU member states should back UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's four-person, UN-led panel of enquiry into the tragic incident. Israel should work to normalise its important relationship with Turkey, including, if its soldiers are found to have used excessive force or committed crimes, by prosecuting suspects, and finding ways to give Turkey satisfaction in the matter. For its part, Turkey should use the current enquiries to satisfy Israeli and international opinion about the Turkish activists' intentions and play its part to improve relations with Israel by moving away from maximalist demands and confrontational rhetoric. Previously good ties gave Turkey a unique status as a potentially effective mediator in the Middle East, including in Arab-Israeli peace talks, but frayed relations with Israel and the U.S. need to be set right if this potential is to be realised.

Turkey is also being criticised for its attempts to mediate with Iran over its nuclear program, especially after voting against additional sanctions on 9 June at the UN Security Council. But Turkey's "no" was not to reining in any Ira-

nian nuclear military ambitions. Ankara argues that it (and Brazil) believed it had U.S. encouragement to negotiate the swap of a substantial amount of Iran's low-enriched uranium stockpile, as set out in the 17 May Tehran Agreement. It voted as it did in the Security Council, it says, to protect its negotiating leverage and to retain the Tehran Agreement as a possible way forward.

The U.S. and EU states should put aside simplistic clichés about Turkey "turning East", "joining an Islamist bloc" or "turning its back on the West". Turkey's new foreign engagement has been first and foremost economic, with Christian and Muslim countries in Eurasia, the Balkans, Africa and the Middle East alike. The bulk of its trade and investment, its social, popular and educational connections, and the source of its intellectual and economic innovation all remain inextricably linked to EU states and the U.S.

Turkey also shares most of its Western partners' goals in the Middle East, such as no nuclear weapons proliferation in the region, including Iran; a just solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that respects the full rights of both parties; and the elimination of al-Qaeda. It should find more ways to speak out for these common objectives. At the same time, its Western partners should recognise that due to geography and history, Turkey will reasonably pursue them at times with its own tactics and methodology.

Ankara can achieve more through a good working relationship with the EU and the U.S. than if it tries to forge ahead alone. The government and public opinion should avoid presuming, as they sometimes seem tempted, that the U.S. needs Turkey more than it needs Israel, or that personal relations with President Obama will substitute for policy substance. Even though Turkey is clearly becoming a stronger international player, cooperation with Washington and EU convergence are keys to its regional prominence and have contributed to its economic growth, boom in trade with neighbours and improved respect for human rights, as well as Istanbul's growing reputation as a glamorous regional hub. Turkish leaders should also tone down populist or militant rhetoric, since it undermines allies' trust, and resume more quiet dialogue with Israel to regain its unique ability to speak with confidence to all parties in its region.

Turkey has changed greatly over the past two decades, becoming richer and more self-confident, no longer dependent on Washington or Brussels alone. While Ankara should not exaggerate its own importance or capacities, its Western partners should recognise its genuine significance in its region and beyond and spend more time talking to it quietly, constructively and at high-levels. To this end, Washington and Ankara in particular might usefully consider establishing new mechanisms for regular dialogue and better coordination on the full range of their shared foreign policy interests, including in the Middle East. Moreover, while Turkey remains committed to its EU path, France and Germany must keep its membership perspectives credible, if all are to take maximum advantage of their shared Middle East goals. These commonalities remain a strong basis for cooperating to increase stability and diminish conflicts in the region.

Istanbul/Brussels, 8 September 2010

TURKEY'S CRISES OVER ISRAEL AND IRAN

I. INTRODUCTION

Turkey's engagement in the Middle East is greater than at any time since the modern republic was founded in 1923 in the core provinces of the Ottoman Empire, the former regional power from the Balkans to the Persian Gulf. As Crisis Group outlined in an earlier report,¹ both regional states and powers further afield have mostly assessed this Turkish outreach positively. The European Union's 2009 Progress Report called Turkey's new Middle Eastern engagement "constructive". President Obama chose Turkey as his first Muslim country to visit, in April 2009, speaking of shared goals in the Middle East and describing the two nations as being in a "model partnership".²

As much as a deliberate new policy, Turkey's rising profile is the natural consequence of social, political and economic advances over the past decade in this country of 73 million people. Accepted by the European Union (EU) as a candidate for membership in 1999, it began negotiations to join in 2005. This came after a coalition government (1999-2002) pushed through a wave of reforms to meet EU criteria, which was then consolidated under the AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, Justice and Development Party) government elected in 2002, the first stable majority government since the 1980s. Turkey's EU path has been hampered by the sceptical attitudes of France and Germany, as well as the unresolved Cyprus dispute, but Ankara remains committed to meeting the conditions for membership and generally allies itself to EU member states' foreign policy positions.

The Turkish economy averaged annual 7 per cent growth in 2002-2007, inflation fell from the three-digit highs of the 1990s to 9.5 per cent in 2009, foreign investment increased by a factor of more than fifteen to nearly \$20 bil-

lion annually, and exports quadrupled to \$132 billion. Despite suffering its share of the global contraction of 2008/2009,³ the economy is recovering relatively well.

At the same time, successive Turkish governments developed a new diplomatic outreach to neighbours. AKP turned this into what it calls a "zero-problem" foreign policy, ending decades of a hard-line approach on Cyprus and supporting the ill-fated Annan Plan; seeking normalisation with Armenia; facilitating peace talks between Israel and Syria; and improving Turkey's relations with the Kurds of northern Iraq. The most eye-catching element of this foreign policy from a Turkish perspective has been the Middle East, but that is only one of many sets of relationships on the move, including notable outreach to Russia, the Balkans and Africa.

In the Middle East itself, reactions have focused variously on the prosperity, legitimacy and acceptance by the West achieved by successive Turkish governments; Turkey's new and outspoken criticism of any perceived Israeli government oppression of Palestinians, a hugely popular stand in most regional states' public opinion; and appreciation of Turkey's new regional policy of socio-economic integration, which imitates the conflict-resolution philosophy of the early EU, including freer trade and travel, integration of economies and infrastructure and regular meetings of groups of cabinet ministers. As a commentator in Jordan put it:

Everyone seems to admire Turkey ... unlike the Iranian model, the Turkish model that is based on "soft power" enjoys international credibility and respect Turkey has proven that between a fatalist silence and surrender to the U.S. and Israeli diktats, and waging comprehensive wars and uncalculated adventures, there is a broad spectrum of options We should be inspired by the lesson of the "civil and democratic Islam" that they embody. We should impart a dose of Turkish "rationalism, pragmatism, and modernity" to our resistance discourse.⁴

¹ See Crisis Group Europe Report N°203, *Turkey and the Middle East: Ambitions and Constraints*, 7 April 2010.

² "Turkey and the United States can build a model partnership in which a predominantly Christian nation, a predominantly Muslim nation – a Western nation and a nation that straddles two continents – can create a modern international community that is respectful, that is secure, that is prosperous". Barack Obama, press conference, Ankara, 6 April 2009. See www.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/04/06/obama.turkey/index.html.

³ In 2009, Turkish government statistics show the economy contracted 5.6 per cent, exports fell off a third to \$102 billion and investment more than halved to \$7.7 billion.

⁴ Urayb al-Rintawi, "Many Lessons", *al-Dustour* (Jordan), 10 June 2010.

Events since April 2010, particularly crises over policy towards Israel and Iran, have, however, highlighted an argument in both Middle East and Western capitals about whether Turkey has made a decisive turn to the East or is basing its foreign policy on an "Islamist" ideology. This report explores the proposition that Turkish policy under AKP, even in these crises, is still much more about the emergence of Turkey as an increasingly self-confident, heavy-hitting and all-round regional player, welcomed by some and the cause of wariness in others, but with values and goals that are generally favourable to its Western partners.⁵

II. TURKEY AND ISRAEL: LOST AT SEA

After an enthusiastic business, tourism and military partnership in the 1990s, Turkey and Israel have entered unexplored and difficult new territory.⁶ The *Mavi Marmara* flotilla's attempt to break the blockade of Gaza and the Israeli raid on its lead ship on 31 May 2010 were only the most egregious shocks to a relationship which had been deteriorating since early 2009. Turks perceive the problem as the robust refusal of Israel's government to relinquish territory and make peace with the Palestinians; for Israelis, the issue is the increasing tendency of the AKP government to side diplomatically and ideologically with their enemies. In the background are very different assessments of the Middle East's future and which country will influence it most.

A. ISRAEL AND THE AKP

Many AKP leaders, including Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, came of age among a group of Islamist politicians who voiced intense hostility to Israel. But Erdoğan and his followers split with this highly conservative group, now collected around the still-influential Saadet (Happiness) Party, to create their own party in 2001. AKP won parliamentary elections in 2002 on a pledge to improve governance and fight corruption, rather than by highlighting religious identity. Relations with Israel were not an issue in any recent election. AKP's 47 per cent showing in its 2007 victory was due to relatively good governance that brought new prosperity, the domestic struggle for an EU-oriented democracy and rejection of military domination of Turkish politics.

For sure, voters knew that Erdoğan could be angry at and highly critical of Israel and that his outbursts were used for domestic and other political purposes.⁷ Under any Turkish government, Ankara's relationship with Israel is indexed to popular perceptions of Israeli treatment of Pal-

⁵ "Turkey's government created more leeway for its response to [long-standing] challenges, ie, it did not more or less instinctively tend to follow the 'Western' line but, instead, sought to maximize the national interest by primarily looking at developments with a genuine Turkish view". Heinz Kramer, "AKP's 'new' foreign policy between vision and pragmatism", *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik*, June 2010, p. 34.

⁶ Turkey was one of the first states to recognise Israel in 1949, while Israel long courted Turkey as a major non-Arab Middle Eastern state with which it could do business. Although Turkey first sent diplomats to Israel in 1952, an ambassador was only appointed in 1992, after the start of the Madrid and Oslo Arab-Israeli talks; the golden era in bilateral ties coincided with the peace optimism of the 1990s. Conversely, severe crises followed the June 1967 Six-Day War, Israel's declaration of Jerusalem as its undivided capital in 1980 and full reoccupation of West Bank towns in 2002. See Crisis Group Report, *Turkey and the Middle East*, op. cit.

⁷ In at least one instance, "the harsh tone of Erdoğan's accusation was mostly used for Turkish domestic political consumption". Alexander Murinson, *Turkey's Entente with Israel and Azerbaijan: State Identity and Security in the Middle East and Caucasus* (Abingdon, 2010), p. 137.

estinians.⁸ At the same time, in Erdoğan's first term he and his fellow leaders visited Israel;⁹ companies close to AKP did good business there; and more official agreements were signed than by any previous Turkish government.¹⁰ Under AKP, Turkish diplomats instigated secret contacts to promote peace between Israel and Syria, holding five rounds of proximity talks in 2008. At the high point, Erdoğan entertained Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to a five-hour dinner in Ankara.¹¹

Israel has long been critical of AKP contacts with Hamas, but Turkish officials insist that they aim to moderate a group legitimately elected by Palestinians in 2006 and do not associate with its goals and methods.¹² While Hamas leader Khaled Mashal made one trip to Turkey in 2006, Palestinian Authority chief Mahmoud Abbas has visited seven times since his election as president in 2005. An Arab diplomat said that AKP leaders personally "like Hamas. One of the causes of the current situation is this extra feeling towards Hamas. But they want Hamas to be a good boy, they want Hamas to react to the demands of the international community".¹³ A European diplomat said of Erdoğan's support for the movement:

You can see it as an attachment to Islam or as an attachment to the underdog. Ultimately Erdoğan is emotionally attached to the Palestinian cause and genuinely believes that Hamas must be involved. And I don't think anyone working on Middle East peace thinks [peace] can happen without Hamas.¹⁴

⁸ "With Arab countries Turkey has interests, with the Palestinians, commitment. The Turks feel committed towards the Palestinian cause, maybe more than the Palestinians themselves ... I was there with thousands of people watching the *Mavi Marmara* sail from Istanbul, and many people were weeping. It's a feeling from the heart". Crisis Group interview, Arab ambassador, Ankara, July 2010.

⁹ During his 2005 visit, Erdoğan paid his respects at the Yad Vashem Holocaust museum in Jerusalem, although he offended some Israelis by declining to cover his head.

¹⁰ Crisis Group interview, Turkish official in the region, June 2010.

¹¹ See Crisis Group Middle East Reports N°92, *Reshuffling the Cards (I): Syria's Evolving Strategy*, 14 December 2009; and N°93, *Reshuffling the Cards (II): Syria's New Hand*, 16 December 2009.

¹² "To the extent we have influence over Hamas, we use it for positive purposes. When Khaled Mashal came to Ankara, we told him, 'now you've won an election, make the best of it, integrate; you're not just a resistance group any more; work within the system'. Hamas was ready for this but then came the [Western] policies of isolation [against Hamas] and the whole thing failed We encourage them to recognise their differences with Fatah and reach some sort of national unity. As a matter of fact, President Abbas requested our help and involvement in this regard, and we responded favourably". Crisis Group telephone interview, senior AKP official, July 2010.

¹³ Crisis Group interview, Ankara, July 2010.

¹⁴ Crisis Group interview, European diplomat, Ankara, July 2010.

In fact, Israel-Turkey relations only began to deteriorate two years after Hamas won the 2006 Palestinian elections. AKP felt deeply betrayed when Israel launched its devastating "Cast Lead" assault on Hamas-led Gaza in December-January 2009 – just days after the Erdoğan-Olmert dinner, during which the Turks say the matter was not raised. For most Israelis, and some U.S. officials, the big change came into view three weeks later, when Erdoğan harshly criticised Israeli President Shimon Peres over Gaza at the World Economic Forum in Davos.

Relations spiralled downwards. A Turkish TV series dramatised scenes of alleged Israeli military atrocities, and Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon summoned the Turkish ambassador to deliver a protest, seated him on a sofa that was lower than his own chair – a calculated insult that he pointed out to an Israeli TV crew. Israel apologised, but Turkish public opinion's anti-Israel bias increased.

Some Israelis also felt threatened by AKP's broader Middle East policy of engagement with governments and movements they perceive as hostile – Iran, Syria, Sudan and Lebanon's Hizbollah, as well as Hamas.¹⁵ Turkish officials argued that this engagement was in the service of stability, integration and future prosperity of a region traumatised by decades of divisions, wars and coups. Israelis pointed to the disconnect however, between a Turkish government urging Israel to engage Hamas while refusing to talk to its own legal Kurdish nationalist party. An Israeli researcher noted the contradiction of defending human rights in Israel/Palestine and ignoring them in Iran and Sudan:

Turkey moves between imperial logic, whose purpose is to position Turkey as a hegemonic actor on the regional level, and an important player on the international one, and universal logic that is based on morality and justice The impossible mathematical equation of "zero problems" can be understood in this context; however it mostly reflects naiveté and lack of experience A foreign policy that is based on ideals, ethics and morality must be consistent in order for it to be considered genuine.¹⁶

¹⁵ "The 'zero-problem' foreign policy was going in a positive way; there was a lot that contributed to the security of the state of Israel, the mediation [with Syria] was constructive ... but there is a growing component of Islamism in Turkish foreign policy". Crisis Group interview, diplomat familiar with Israeli policy in the region, July 2010. "Ankara, under the baton of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has joined forces with many of the radical elements in the Muslim world". Boaz Bismuth, "Turkey's Revenge", *Israel Hayom*, 10 June 2010.

¹⁶ Anat Lapidot-Firilla, "Turkey: from state to faith-based NGO", *In Depth*, July 2010.

These conflicting viewpoints, together with poor communications, made for an incendiary mix. In the year after "Cast Lead", just one Turkish parliamentarian, Suat Kınıklıoğlu (AKP), visited the Jewish state.¹⁷ When a feisty, Islamist Turkish non-government organisation decided to supply real clout to the unofficial international effort to break Gaza's blockade, the scene was set for a major crisis.

B. THE MAVI MARMARA AFFAIR

The *Mavi Marmara* (Blue Marmara) was the biggest vessel of a six-ship international flotilla that set out in late May 2010 to make a deliberately attention-grabbing effort to reach Gaza's 1.5 million Palestinians with direct aid. The number of vessels, and the size of the lead ship with more than 600 people, distinguished this from previous attempts to break the blockade Israel imposed on Gaza in June 2007.¹⁸

On 31 May, Israeli forces intercepted the flotilla in international waters, seizing all the ships and killing eight Turks and one U.S. citizen of Turkish descent aboard the *Mavi Marmara*. The Turkish and Israeli governments, as well as their friends, are judging the future of the important bilateral relationship on the basis of perceptions of what the flotilla's organisers planned and the reason for the sudden escalation of violence. Without attempting to give a comprehensive overview, much less prejudge the findings of a formal investigation, it is possible to explain the intensity of the Ankara government's engagement in and reaction to the crisis by describing the Turkish view of some of the events and their background.

1. The IHH

The previously little known yet relatively wealthy Turkish NGO that owns the *Mavi Marmara*, the Humanitarian Relief Foundation, known by its Turkish acronym IHH (İnsan Hak, Hürriyetler ve İnsani Yardım Vakfı, the Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief) organised the flotilla with six international NGOs, including the Free Gaza Movement and groups from Sweden and Greece.

Immediately after the bloodshed, Israel accused IHH of being a terrorist organisation with links to al-Qaeda.¹⁹ The source most often cited is a report published in 2006 in Denmark.²⁰ However, the U.S. says it has no evidence of an al-Qaeda association.²¹ A Turkish official said, "there are no links between IHH and terrorist groups. They have sympathies. That's all".²² Israel put IHH on its terrorist watchlist only in June 2010.²³ Germany shortly thereafter shut down a humanitarian aid group working in its Turkish community and sharing IHH's initials on the grounds it sent money to Hamas and "fights against Israel's right to exist";²⁴ IHH Turkey says the two groups had no organisational connection.

A legal Turkish public organisation that has worked in 120 countries, IHH was founded in response to the Balkans crises in 1992 and formally incorporated in 1995. At its modern headquarters in a neatly-kept Istanbul neighbourhood, it displays a wall of appreciative citations from around the world and a 2007 Turkish parliament prize for outstanding public service. Its slogan is "Doing Good Opens Every Door", and its mission statement is universal.²⁵

¹⁹ For instance, "Israeli Ambassador to Denmark Arthur Avnon said on Monday that his country only attacked the Gaza-bound aid flotilla earlier in the day after receiving reports that it had links to al-Qaeda. 'The people on board were not so innocent ... and I cannot imagine that another country would have reacted differently', the ambassador added". Agence France-Presse, 31 May 2010.

²⁰ The report's allegation is based on a French anti-terror magistrate's allegation of telephone calls in the 1990s between IHH and an al-Qaeda safe-house in Italy. See Evan F. Kohlmann, "The Role of Islamic Charities in International Recruitment and Financing", Danish Institute of International Studies, 2006. For a sceptical discussion of this and other allegations of IHH links to Islamist terrorism, including the same French magistrate's allegation of IHH involvement in the 2000 Los Angeles Airport bomb plot, see Martha B. Cohen, "'Terror smear' against IHH springs from a familiar source", Mondoweiss, 4 June 2010.

²¹ "We know that IHH representatives have met with senior Hamas officials in Turkey, Syria and Gaza over the past three years. That is obviously of great concern to us. That said, the IHH ... has not been designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation by the United States. [As concerns any ties to al-Qaeda,] we cannot validate that". Philip J. Crowley, State Department press briefing, Washington, 2 June 2010.

²² Crisis Group interview, Ankara, July 2010.

²³ *Haaretz*, 17 June 2010.

²⁴ "Germany bans IHH for Hamas links", *Jerusalem Post*, 12 July 2010.

²⁵ "Working since 1992, without regard to region, religion, language, race or sect, to send humanitarian aid and to prevent the contravention of basic rights and freedoms of all people who have fallen on hard times, been struck by disaster, been oppressed, or left hungry and without shelter; those who have, through war or natural disaster, been afflicted, wounded or injured; or those who are without house and home". Publicity

¹⁷ "What the current Israel government does not seem to get is that this action has crossed a critical threshold in the Turks' perceptions vis-à-vis Israel, regardless of political persuasion". Suat Kınıklıoğlu, "This Israeli government has gone too far", *International Herald Tribune*, 2 June 2010.

¹⁸ Passengers included 400 Turks and 200 other individuals with more than 30 nationalities.

Rooted in Turkey's Muslim religious-conservative constituency, IHH's support for Palestinians has a pro-Hamas bias²⁶ and a radical narrative about the Palestinian problem.²⁷ IHH Chairman Bülent Yıldırım punctuated a fiery January 2009 speech in Gaza with Islamist slogans, praise for Hamas and a reference to "the Jews", not the Israelis.²⁸ IHH gave \$20 million of its \$50 million aid total in 2009 to Palestinians,²⁹ half of which went to Gaza³⁰ and says that Turks should support Palestinians out of Islamic solidarity.³¹ There is a general Muslim emphasis to all its activities, including donating mosques and religiously-oriented schools in Africa, animals for Muslim religious sacrifices in Mongolia and aid and food to the poor during Ramadan generally. Proselytism, however, is not a stated aim.

pamphlet, İnsani Yardım Vakfı (IHH), Istanbul, 2010. See also www.ihh.org.tr.

²⁶ IHH representatives regularly meet Hamas officials. In a history of the Palestinian question in its pamphlet, *Filistin* (Palestine), printed to raise money for the *Mavi Marmara*-led flotilla, IHH mentioned only Hamas and ignored the Palestine Liberation Organisation, Fatah and the Palestinian Authority.

²⁷ "The basic problem for the massacres and other infringements of rights committed in Palestine is Zionism Zionism is a racist movement that sees the Jewish race as superior and which doesn't see other races as being human Zionism ... wants to conquer all lands from the Nile to the Euphrates It is a state that must make war to survive ... for this reason we can comfortably say that the Israeli occupation state is a terrorist organisation that has become a state for an Israeli, killing is a pleasure [IHH followed this comment with a list of 22 well-known "massacres" in which Israeli forces killed large numbers of Palestinians, Syrians, Libyans, Lebanese and others]". "Filistin", İnsani Yardım Vakfı (IHH), Istanbul, 2010.

²⁸ "I wish we could take you to Istanbul and that we could be under the bombs here for you. What can the enemy do? I have paradise in my heart ... dying is martyrdom. God is Great", www.youtube.com/watch?v=tLNWwSDjFzs.

²⁹ Crisis Group interview, Ahmet Emin Dağ, IHH Middle East coordinator, Istanbul, 14 June 2010.

³⁰ The rest of IHH's aid to Palestinians went to the West Bank and assistance programmes for camp districts housing Palestinian refugees and their descendants in Lebanon and Syria. IHH also assists refugees in camps in Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Philippines, Bangladesh and Sudan.

³¹ "The Palestinian cause is not just for Palestinians but has a special and priority place for the Islamic world ... it is necessary to support the Palestinian cause with consciousness of the brotherhood of faith Palestine belongs to all of us, and we are all Palestinians The Palestinian people is not just fighting a Zionist occupation but also modern imperialism. To neglect this cause means to neglect the future of all Muslim peoples". "Filistin", op. cit.

IHH says it is independent from Turkish political parties,³² although its rhetoric and network suggest closeness to the Saadet Party.³³ In addition, it has publicly claimed to carry messages from the AKP leadership to Hamas.³⁴ Prime Minister Erdoğan has long supported IHH's central aim to end the Gaza blockade. Several AKP deputies joined in a controversial January 2009 land convoy to bring aid to Gaza through Egypt,³⁵ and several officials of the party sit on its board or are otherwise close to it.³⁶

Israel alleges that IHH put at least 40 activists on board the *Mavi Marmara*,³⁷ about one in ten of the Turkish passengers. An IHH official said the organisation chose most Turkish passengers from NGOs by lottery among volunteers from each of Turkey's 81 provinces. He added, "if they [the Israelis] knew we were terrorists, why didn't they ask for the Turkish government to arrest us?"³⁸ In fact, Israel at least twice communicated concerns about a possible confrontation, but the government did not stop the ship from sailing (see below).³⁹

2. A tragedy of errors

After the flotilla and Israel's interception of it became an international scandal, much focus was put on who to blame: the Turkish government, which did not stop the *Mavi Marmara* from sailing despite Israel's known vow to maintain the blockade; the Israeli government, Egypt and its Western partners, which had openly or tacitly col-

³² "We have nothing to do with any [Turkish] political party. All parties have their own aid group, but we are unique in not being close to any one party. We have a conservative base, of course. Saadet's people are very sympathetic to Palestine. But it's not a command-and-control relationship. We're also close to MHP [Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, Nationalist Action Party] and AKP". Crisis Group interview, Ahmet Emin Dağ, IHH Middle East coordinator, Istanbul, 14 June 2010.

³³ Yavuz Baydar, "Diversions, splits, disagreements", *Today's Zaman*, 7 June 2010. Crisis Group interviews, Turkish official and AKP parliamentarian, Ankara, July 2010.

³⁴ www.youtube.com/watch?v=tLNWwSDjFzs. For a detailed discussion of AKP links to IHH, see Michael Weiss, "Ankara's Proxy", *Standpoint*, July/August 2010.

³⁵ This effort resulted in a grave crisis of confidence with Egypt and angry scenes at the Egypt-Gaza border crossing during which one Egyptian soldier was killed.

³⁶ Dan Bilefsky and Sebnem Arzu, "Sponsor of flotilla tied to elite of Turkey", *The New York Times*, 16 July 2010.

³⁷ www.idf.org.il. In another statement, an Israeli official suggested the figure was 65. *The New York Times*, 13 July 2010.

³⁸ Crisis Group interview, Ahmet Emin Dağ, IHH Middle East coordinator, Istanbul, 14 June 2010.

³⁹ "[Israel] warned the Turkish government that [Israel was] worried, it's a provocation. The Turkish foreign ministry tried to persuade them not to sail but they failed. They should have stopped them from sailing". Crisis Group interview, diplomat familiar with Israeli policy in the region, July 2010.

laborated in the blockade; the IHH, for an apparent readiness to mix humanitarian aid with physical resistance; or the Israeli military, whose planning appeared inadequate and whose commandos quickly resorted to deadly force. From the Turkish perspective there is no doubt that the blame belongs on the Israeli side, though Ankara acknowledges that it encouraged IHH not to sail for Gaza.

IHH had noted that Israel had previously allowed some international aid ships to proceed to Gaza, while others had been taken to Ashdod without violence. The NGO's intentions were clear; one of its officials said, "we had three aims: to get aid [directly] to Gaza; to open an aid corridor of one boat per month, maybe from Cyprus or Turkey; and to reveal the inhuman side of the Israeli blockade. The first didn't work. But the other aims did have success".⁴⁰

The Turkish government says that maritime authorities tried to stop the *Mavi Marmara* from sailing when safety equipment did not match Turkish flag regulations, but could not when IHH re-registered the vessel⁴¹ under the flag of the Comoros Islands in the Indian Ocean.⁴² It did ensure that parliamentarians and officials, some of whom had initially been enthusiastic,⁴³ did not board.⁴⁴ Senior government officials say they communicated extensively with IHH before the *Mavi Marmara* left port.⁴⁵ Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu called IHH leader Bülent Yıldırım to try to persuade him not to go directly to Gaza.⁴⁶ IHH said the government told it not to undertake the voyage because another crisis was emerging over Turkey's opposition to sanctions on Iran,⁴⁷ and that the day it sailed, it promised Turkish authorities that if there was a confrontation, it would re-route to the Egyptian port of al-

Arish.⁴⁸ Turkish officials said their Israeli counterparts assured them, including on the ministerial level, that in that case the convoy would not be harmed.⁴⁹ When matters turned out otherwise, the Turkish officials who had been part of the negotiations claimed they felt personally betrayed by the Israelis.⁵⁰

The Turkish government says it checked what went on board the ships that sailed from Turkey⁵¹ and that the loads went through standard control procedures,⁵² though their destination port was obviously false.⁵³ Passengers were rigorously searched,⁵⁴ even those who joined from Cyprus.⁵⁵ All had to sign a document pledging non-violence, and attempts were made to exclude people with radical views,⁵⁶ even if clearly some did board.⁵⁷

⁴⁰ Crisis Group interview, Ahmet Emin Dağ, IHH Middle East coordinator, Istanbul, 14 June 2010.

⁴¹ Crisis Group email communication, Turkish official, September 2010.

⁴² *Today's Zaman*, 6 June 2010.

⁴³ Crisis Group interview, Murat Mercan, chairman of the Turkish parliament Foreign Affairs Commission, 19 February 2009.

⁴⁴ "We have no direct link to the government. It gave us no political support [to organise the flotilla]. That's why no party sent its deputies". Crisis Group interview, Ahmet Emin Dağ, IHH Middle East coordinator, Istanbul, 14 June 2010.

⁴⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Turkish official and Western diplomat, Turkey, July 2010. According to the official, at the end of April, Israel offered to allow the goods through Ashdod; the Turkish government supported this solution and informed IHH, which responded that the convoy refused this option. Turkish officials then "insisted and tried to convince them until the last day", but to no avail.

⁴⁶ "Davutoğlu said: 'Don't do it. There is danger'. [Yıldırım] said: 'We're a peaceful group, an NGO, nothing will happen to us'". Crisis Group interview, Turkish official, Ankara, July 2010.

⁴⁷ Crisis Group interview, Ahmet Emin Dağ, IHH Middle East coordinator, Istanbul, 14 June 2010.

⁴⁸ Crisis Group interview, Turkish official, Ankara, July 2010.

⁴⁹ Crisis Group interview, Turkish officials, Ankara, July 2010.

⁵⁰ "They didn't inform us. They gave all the wrong signals. They deliberately misled us. [If they had been honest,] this would never have taken place". Crisis Group telephone interview, Turkish official, 2 June 2010.

⁵¹ "If the Israelis had wanted, they could have been there during the loading of the ships. But they didn't ask for anything. I suppose that's because it would have been as if they were giving permission for the ships to sail". Crisis Group telephone interview, Turkish official, 2 June 2010.

⁵² Apart from the *Mavi Marmara* cruise liner, one ship from Istanbul carried big generator sets, five of which were to power drinking water pumps, medical supplies and food. Another, from the Turkish port of Iskenderun, carried 2,000 tons of iron and 5,000 tons of cement. In all, more than 10,000 tons of goods were sent from Turkey. Crisis Group interview, Ahmet Emin Dağ, IHH Middle East coordinator, Istanbul, 14 June 2010.

⁵³ The stated destination in the paperwork was another Mediterranean port. Crisis Group interview, Turkish official, July 2010.

⁵⁴ "We x-rayed everyone's suitcase. Going onto the *Mavi Marmara* was like going onto a plane at an airport. We didn't want any criticism". Crisis Group interview, Ahmet Emin Dağ, IHH Middle East coordinator, Istanbul, 14 June 2010.

⁵⁵ As he boarded from Cyprus, Canadian passenger Kevin Neish had his penknife tossed into the sea after his bags were searched by those on board the ship. Interview with *Counterpunch*, 16 June 2010.

⁵⁶ Crisis Group telephone interview, Iara Lee, film-maker, activist and member of Crisis Group's Presidential Council, 16 July 2010. See Tobias Buck, "Israeli soldiers accused of aid flotilla theft", *Financial Times*, 19 August 2010; also Richard Lightbown, "The Israeli Raid of the Freedom Flotilla, 31 May 2010: A review of media sources", www.tadamon.ca.

⁵⁷ "Between 5,000 and 6,000 people had applied for the flotilla, and radical extremists were not accepted. However there were radical elements on board. A group of militants was filmed by Al Jazeera chanting an intifada battle cry, 'Remember Khaibar, Khaibar, oh Jews! Muhammad's army is returning'; recalling a victorious battle fought by the Prophet's army against the Jews [in 7th century Medina]". Lightbown, "The Israeli Raid", op. cit.

The broad outline of what followed is not disputed. The *Mavi Marmara*, with five smaller cargo ships and boats, was in international waters more than 130km from the Israeli coast in the early hours of 31 May, when the Israeli navy demanded that all change course for the Israeli port of Ashdod; the convoy refused, with most ships declaring they were heading for Gaza; at 4:30am the flotilla was surrounded by navy fast boats and helicopters; Israel quickly seized control of the five smaller vessels, mainly carrying only crews; activists physically opposed the boarding of the *Mavi Marmara*, however, during which Israeli fire killed nine and wounded about 50.⁵⁸ Seven Israeli commandos were injured – beaten, stabbed and in one instance wounded by a bullet.⁵⁹

Israel said IHH planned the violence.⁶⁰ A summary of Major General (res.) Giora Eiland's report into the military's conduct concluded that it was an intelligence mistake to have underestimated the intensity of any confrontation.⁶¹ The Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center (ITIC), an Israeli think-tank close to the defence establishment, said that IHH officials ordered activists to repel any boarders with chairs and clubs, though this was apparently well after it became clear that a night-time Israeli attack was imminent.⁶² Prime Minister Netanyahu told the Turkel Commission, set up by Israel to examine the legality of the Gaza blockade and the Israeli seizure of the flotilla: "Our soldiers faced a very real danger to their lives from brutal attacks with clubs, metal rods and knives and

... from live weapons. IDF soldiers acted in self-defence". The chief of general staff, Lieutenant-General Gabi Ashkenazi, told that commission the second soldier who rappelled onto the *Mavi Marmara*'s deck was immediately shot and that "the soldiers legitimately opened fire and shot those who they needed to shoot and not those who they didn't need to shoot".⁶³

Though the activists did not adhere to their non-violence pledge, an IHH official who was on board the *Mavi Marmara* said the lack of medical preparations showed that bloodshed was unplanned and that the use of hand weapons was a reaction to nearly an hour of intimidation by Israeli fast boats, the rotor noise of low-flying helicopters and the sound of shots and explosions in the night.⁶⁴ IHH sent a party to the top deck, most wearing bulky orange flotation-jackets, to prevent a boarding. Describing this defensive instinct, a Turkish commentator said, "they were crazy Turks. That's what they do".⁶⁵ Another with close knowledge of those on board claimed: "The mentality on the ship was one in which people were defending their wives and children from outside attack".⁶⁶

Critical to any subsequent investigation will be the question of live fire. Israel said the first shot was fired by someone on the *Mavi Marmara*; according to Major General (res.) Eiland, it was the shot that hit the second Israeli down the rope from the first helicopter in the stomach.⁶⁷ IHH and Turkish officials said there were no firearms on board and that guns seized from commandos were thrown into the sea.⁶⁸

⁵⁸ Turkish autopsies reported recovering 30 bullets from the bodies of the dead and that "most were shot dead at close range, multiple times". "Blatant violation of international law by Israel: the attack on the freedom flotilla facts", Turkish foreign ministry, June 2010.

⁵⁹ IDF website account of the Eiland enquiry report, <http://idfspokesperson.com>, 12 July 2010.

⁶⁰ The Israeli foreign ministry released a video of IHH Chairman Bülent Yıldırım addressing a crowded meeting on the *Mavi Marmara* hours before the attack and saying "we follow in the footsteps of the martyrs if you [Israel] send commandos ... we will throw them into the sea". *Jerusalem Post*, 18 June 2010.

⁶¹ "Not all possible intelligence gathering methods were fully implemented ... the anticipated level of violence used against the forces was underestimated". <http://idfspokesperson.com>, 12 July 2010. A Pacific region diplomat put it this way: "The reason they didn't know that there were terrorists on board was that they weren't terrorists They were certainly Turkish thugs. But I can also see why they had a go at those Israeli commandos". Crisis Group interview, Ankara, July 2010.

⁶² According to Israel's ITIC, IHH's advance preparation mainly featured 100 bullet-proof jackets and 200 gas masks. Weapons like kitchen knives, fire axes and iron bars appear to have been spontaneously collected. The only exception to this appears to have been a "large number of slingshots", or handheld catapults, including one with the word "Hizbollah" written on it. Intelligence Terrorism and Information Center (ITIC), 22 June 2010.

⁶³ "Ashkenazi: IDF actions in flotilla raid were proportional", *Jerusalem Post*, 11 August 2010.

⁶⁴ "All we had were painkillers and seasickness pills. Nothing for operations. The doctors were arguing and abandoning the badly injured for whom they could do nothing. If we had known there'd be anything like this, we'd have had an operations room". Crisis Group interview, Ahmet Emin Dağ, IHH Middle East coordinator, Istanbul, 14 June 2010.

⁶⁵ Crisis Group interview, Ankara, July 2010.

⁶⁶ Crisis Group interview, June 2010.

⁶⁷ See <http://idfspokesperson.com>, 12 July 2010.

⁶⁸ Crisis Group interview, Turkish official, Ankara, July 2010. According to IHH, from the moment Israeli inflatable fast boats attacked, "they also started to fire on the ship. The highest frequency sound was the most intermittent. The second heard sound was full and loud noise that resembled a gas [percussion] bomb. The third sound was the constant sound of machine gun fire ... before descending on deck [from helicopters], the soldiers fired both plastic and real bullets". "Palestine our route, humanitarian aid our load, flotilla campaign summary report", www.freegaza.org.

C. A BITTER AFTERMATH

The Turkish government appears not to have foreseen any violence, and the Israeli government seems not to have foreseen the consequences of using it. On the Turkish side, the prime minister, foreign minister and chief of general staff were all outside the country.⁶⁹ Indeed, Foreign Minister Davutoğlu was due to meet that day with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu in Canada in the presence of the U.S. secretary of state. A Western diplomat closely involved in trying to calm emotions in the aftermath said, "nobody had thought anything through".⁷⁰

The reaction in Turkey was furious.⁷¹ Angry crowds gathered in cities to chant Islamist slogans.⁷² Public opinion blamed the Israeli government for the high death toll. Popular disgust⁷³ was further fuelled by stories of Israeli abuse, beatings and degrading treatment of passengers prior to their return to Turkey. Activists also accused Israelis of destroying their private property, cameras and computers, taking their cash and using confiscated cell-phones and credit cards.⁷⁴

Demonstrations prevented the Israeli ambassador from leaving his Ankara residence for most of a week. Turkey recalled its ambassador to Israel, cancelled joint military exercises with Israel,⁷⁵ scaled back previously extensive intelligence cooperation⁷⁶ and banned Israeli military flights over its airspace.

After U.S. President Obama's personal intervention won the release of all flotilla passengers jailed by Israel,⁷⁷ Turkey set its demands for a resolution of the dispute: an Israeli apology, compensation for the victims, return of the ships and an international investigation. Israel publicly blamed the incident on IHH,⁷⁸ further angering Turkey;⁷⁹ in private, Israeli officials also put blame on the Turkish government.⁸⁰ Israel initially warned its citizens against travelling to Turkey, dealing a blow to the country's tourism sector.⁸¹ Business ties, however, were less affected.

After a debate that reflected worldwide shock and condemnation,⁸² the Security Council agreed to a Presidential

⁶⁹ "Both sides were shocked. I don't think the government of Turkey wanted any of this. They may have wanted to be more confrontational, to change policy on Gaza. They were trying hard behind the scenes. It was meant in the spirit of constructive criticism". Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, Ankara, July 2010.

⁷⁰ Crisis Group interview, Turkey, July 2010.

⁷¹ "This is tantamount to banditry and piracy. It is murder conducted by a State. It has no excuses, no justification whatsoever ... Israel has blood on its hands This is a black day in the history of humanity, where the distance between terrorists and States has been blurred". Ahmet Davutoğlu, statement to UN Security Council, 31 May 2010. "It is the first time in the history of the Turkish Republic that Turkish civilians are killed by a foreign army. This is huge". Crisis Group telephone interview, Turkish diplomat, 15 June 2010.

⁷² Nevertheless, demonstrations were relatively restrained compared to those witnessed during Israel's 'Cast Lead' assault on Gaza in early 2009, doubtless because IHH is closer to the Saadet Party than AKP, which compete for different wings of the religious vote in Turkey.

⁷³ An early poll found that 60.7 per cent of Turks thought Erdoğan was not being tough enough on Israel. Illustrating the self-referential nature of many Turks' world view, 45.2 per cent of respondents thought that Israel's aim in launching the attack was to "damage Erdoğan's domestic and foreign policy" and only 33.3 per cent that it was to maintain the Gaza blockade. Metropoll's survey of 1,000 Turks on 3 June 2010. See www.metropoll.com.tr.

⁷⁴ Richard Lightbown, "The Israeli Raid", op. cit. The Israeli military has charged one lieutenant with stealing and selling at least four computers. *Jerusalem Post*, 3 September 2010. "They kept my laptops and sent back the bags. They took my cameras and sent back the cables". Crisis Group interview, İara Lee,

activist, film-maker and member of Crisis Group's Presidential Council, 16 July 2010.

⁷⁵ At least three military exercises have been cancelled, all in Israel: the "Pigeon of Peace" land forces exercise between Israel, Jordan and Turkey in late June; the "Reliant Mermaid" naval and sea rescue exercise between Israel, the U.S. and Turkey in August; and "Natural Disaster Preparedness Operation" between Israel, Turkey and Jordanian special forces in June/July.

⁷⁶ Crisis Group interview, Turkish diplomat in the region, 15 June 2010.

⁷⁷ Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, Turkey, July 2010.

⁷⁸ Israel says that there is no humanitarian crisis in Gaza, that any food that Gaza needs can be transferred through Israeli-controlled checkpoints and that the *Mavi Marmara* aid flotilla had rejected offers to transfer the goods to Gaza via the Israeli port of Ashdod. It said IHH "are not peace activists; they are not messengers of goodwill. They cynically use the guise of humanitarian aid to send a message of hate and to implement violence". Daniel Carmon, Israeli Ambassador to the UN, statement to the Security Council, 31 May 2010.

⁷⁹ "[I am] saddened to see a State stoop so low as to lie and struggle to create pretexts that would legitimise their illegal actions". Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, statement to UN Security Council, 31 May 2010.

⁸⁰ "The Israelis thought they had a deal with the Turks that there would be no resistance". Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, Ankara, July 2010.

⁸¹ Turkish tourism ministry statistics showed that only 2,608 Israeli citizens visited Turkey in June 2010, compared to 27,289 in June 2009. *Hürriyet Daily News*, 6 August 2010.

⁸² "Israel's deadly raid ... has sparked global condemnation ... Israel is finding little sympathy outside its borders". Voice of America, 2 June 2010. "There has been near-universal condemnation of Israel's actions. Nicaragua broke off relations with Israel, while Ecuador and South Africa recalled their ambassadors, and many other governments called in Israeli ambassadors to protest". Carol Migdalovitz, "Israel's Blockade of

Statement that “condemns those acts” which resulted in loss of life.⁸³ As part of his good offices, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon suggested a five-person international enquiry under his aegis, which Israel initially rejected. The UN Human Rights Council appointed a three-person fact-finding panel, which is to report in September.⁸⁴ Israel experienced an unprecedented wave of criticism from European parliaments, politicians and civil society organisations.⁸⁵ The U.S. said it would watch the conduct and outcome of the various investigations, including Israel’s own, before drawing any conclusions.⁸⁶ The EU’s Foreign Affairs Council called on 14 June for a “full and impartial investigation”, as did UN groups representing the 118 countries of the Non-Aligned Movement and the 57 members of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference.

There was much Israeli domestic debate as well, including three enquiries: a military one under Major General (res.) Eiland; a civilian commission under retired Supreme Court Justice Jakob Turkel – which includes two non-voting international observers – to look into the legality of Israel’s action on the high seas;⁸⁷ and an enquiry by the ombudsman. According to a summary released by the military, the Eiland report found mistakes but no failures and praised the navy commandos’ performance.⁸⁸ The

Turkish government, IHH and Turkish public opinion initially rejected the suitability of Israel’s self-generated investigations.⁸⁹

On 2 August, however, Israel accepted a revised proposal by Ban Ki-moon for a four-person international panel of enquiry under former New Zealand Prime Minister Geoffrey Palmer and including Turkish and Israeli representatives.⁹⁰ This panel, based at UN headquarters in New York, is to make a first report on 15 September. Its mandate is narrow, mainly to review and clarify national reports, not to determine individual or criminal responsibility.⁹¹ Israel says it will allow the panel access to the materials gathered by its own military and legal investigations but not to interview any military personnel.

The Turkish government has promised full cooperation, but insists that regardless of an international investigation, bilateral relations cannot return to the status quo ante until Israel formally apologises.⁹² The prime minister’s office formed a National Commission of Enquiry with members from several ministries, which relayed an official Turkish account to the UN commission on 1 September.⁹³ A public prosecutor is pursuing an investigation into the Turkish nationals’ deaths, which may ask for

Gaza, the *Mavi Marmara* Incident, and Its Aftermath”, Congressional Research Service, Washington, 23 June 2010.

⁸³ www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2010/sc9940.doc.htm. The statement was issued after several hours of deliberations and fell short of assigning blame for the violence.

⁸⁴ The UN Human Rights Council has appointed Judge Karl T. Hudson-Phillips (Trinidad and Tobago), Sir Desmond de Silva (UK) and Mary Shanthi Dairiam (Malaysia) to investigate and report back in September on “violations of international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law, resulting from the Israeli attacks on the flotilla of ships carrying humanitarian assistance”. See www2.ohchr.org, 23 July 2010.

⁸⁵ On 17 June, the European Parliament called for “a prompt, international and impartial inquiry into this attack ...”, European Parliament resolution Pz-TA-Prov (2010) 0235. “Israel’s actions, tactical bluster devoid of strategic sense, have left it far more isolated than before. I hear more hostility to Israel around the world than at any time I can recall”. Roger Cohen, *The New York Times*, 9 July 2010.

⁸⁶ “We will not prejudice the process or its outcome and will await the conduct and findings of the investigation before drawing further conclusions”. Robert Gibbs, White House spokesman, 13 June 2010.

⁸⁷ Also on the commission are Amos Horev, a former university president, and Shabtai Rosen, a former professor of international law. The two foreign observers are David Trimble, a former Northern Ireland politician, and Ken Watkin, a former head of the Canadian military judiciary.

⁸⁸ See <http://idfspokesperson.com>, 12 July 2010. “IDF Probe of Gaza flotilla carefully avoiding placing real blame”, *Haaretz*, 13 July 2010; and “To Eiland, mistakes are not necessarily failures”, *Jerusalem Post*, 13 July 2010.

⁸⁹ “Israel does not have the authority to assign a national commission to investigate a crime perpetrated in international waters. An inquiry to be conducted by such a commission cannot be impartial, fair, transparent and credible”. Turkish foreign ministry statement, 14 June 2010. IHH dismissed the Eiland report as “trying to cover up [the] Israeli commandos massacre”, www.ihh.org.tr. “The Turkel Commission looks like a staged ‘mise en scène’ to prove the rightfulness of the infallible Israeli army, but it is also revealing the internal contradictions of the Israeli administration”. Kerim Balci, *Today’s Zaman*, 12 August 2010.

⁹⁰ Palmer will be chairperson and former Columbian President Alvaro Uribe the vice chair. The Israeli and Turkish representatives are retired foreign ministry chiefs Joseph Ciechanover and Özdem Sanberk respectively.

⁹¹ The UN panel “will receive and review reports of national investigations into the incident and request such clarifications and information as it may require from relevant national authorities”, discharging their mandate “in the light of the Security Council presidential statement”. It is, however, “not designed to determine individual criminal responsibility, but to examine and identify the facts, circumstances and the context of the incident, as well as to recommend ways of avoiding future incidents”. UN press statement, 10 August 2010.

⁹² Crisis Group interview, senior foreign ministry official, Ankara, July 2010.

⁹³ The dossiers sent to the UN included interviews with witnesses and officials as well as a report of the inspection conducted of the *Mavi Marmara* and the two other ships in the convoy which sailed from Turkish ports. Crisis Group telephone interview, Turkish official, September 2010.

Israel's cooperation. AKP voted down two opposition motions for a parliamentary investigation.⁹⁴

III. TURKEY AND IRAN: AGE-OLD SPARRING PARTNERS

Turkey's relationship with the Islamic Republic has swung in and out of harmony with those of its Western partners.⁹⁵ In the past year, however, criticism of its actions has reached new levels due to the speed with which AKP leaders congratulated President Ahmedinejad on his controversial re-election in June 2009; Turkey's signature in May 2010, along with Brazil, of an agreement committing Iran to ship out low-enriched uranium in return for research reactor fuel rods for medical purposes; and finally, its 9 June 2010 vote in the Security Council against additional sanctions on Iran.

This criticism came over the same time period in which Turkey's relations with Israel spiralled downwards, and feeling grew in the West that it might be turning its back on its traditional allies and partners. Some critics believe that Turkey's Iran and Israel policies are linked to an alleged radicalisation of Prime Minister Erdoğan in the past two years.⁹⁶ Others believe its relations with those two countries are independent of each other.

A. NO ALLIANCE

Critics fear that Turkey is forging an alliance with Iran, or at least joining with it in an Islamist bloc (see below).⁹⁷ History, however, suggests that political alliances between Turkey and Iran are a considerable rarity.⁹⁸ AKP leaders' statements of friendship for Iran or their actions in support of a diplomatic settlement of its nuclear ambitions do not signal an intention to ally with Iran. Neither has Iran

⁹⁵ See Crisis Group Report, *Turkey and the Middle East*, op. cit., pp. 16-18.

⁹⁶ Turkey "strengthened its identification and cooperation with Iran just days before the flotilla". Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, testimony to the Turkel Commission, 9 August 2010.

⁹⁷ The most extreme see Turkey as liable to emerge as an Islamist U.S. enemy in the region: "If matters continue as they are, both in Turkey and Iran, then one plausible outcome might eventually be that Turkey and Iran switch places. Iran, after its Islamist experience, may rejoin the community of nations, while Turkey may turn toward Islamism and become a driving anti-Western force throughout the Islamic world". Harold Rhode, "Between Atatürk's Secularism and Fundamentalist Islam", Jerusalem Issue Briefs, 9 May 2010.

⁹⁸ The only real example is a brief, unsuccessful Turkish attempt in the 1950s to bring Iran and other Middle East states under the anti-Soviet banner of the Baghdad Pact, an effort which was backed by the West. See Hugh Pope, "Iran and Turan: the Age-Old Antagonists of Eurasia", in *Sons of the Conquerors: The Rise of the Turkic World* (New York, 2005), pp. 188-194.

⁹⁴ "There are lots of dark areas in this matter", Kemal Kılıçda-roğlu, CHP leader (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, Republican People's Party), *Habertürk*, 4 July 2010.

shown any interest in an alliance,⁹⁹ although Iranian officials say AKP's role underlines the "peaceful purposes of" Tehran's nuclear program.¹⁰⁰ Such an alignment would fly in the face of centuries of Turkish and Iranian diplomatic tradition and regional rivalry. Ironically, this competition is a reason why both have seized on the Palestinian cause.¹⁰¹ In a wide-ranging account of how Ankara and Tehran compete in style and substance, a Lebanese analyst wrote:

The Turkish "offensive" is yielding better results so far. Despite the fiery tones that dominate the discourse of Turkish leaders these days, this "offensive" relies on diplomacy, international relations, economic roles, political and religious moderation, control of emotions, courting European slogans about human rights The Iranians hope to achieve this by sponsoring violent fronts The current heated arena of competition is Gaza. Tehran provides the jihadist movements with missiles, financing and training. It urges continued military confrontations, despite their feeble effect. Ankara, on the other hand, sends aid and provides political support. It tries to lift the siege and transport Hamas into the political arena.¹⁰²

There are areas of policy overlap, of course. Turkey's commercial and political interests in Iran are far more extensive than those of the U.S. or European powers. Turkish and Iranian societies are diverse but have many common points, and their leaders have occasionally influenced each other.¹⁰³ During the short-lived (1996-1997)

Refah Party (Welfare Party) government, which included many now at the top of AKP, Turkey inaugurated work on a gas pipeline from Iran that now supplies one fifth of its needs.¹⁰⁴

But Turkey and Iran also spar. Turkey has been irked by Iran's alleged past attempts at Islamist subversion and its cancellation of business deals.¹⁰⁵ The governments apparently now collaborate against Turkish Kurd PKK insurgents,¹⁰⁶ but in the past, the PKK seemed to enjoy Iran's support. The two are wary rivals in Iraq,¹⁰⁷ partly because Turkey is predominantly Sunni Muslim and Iran Shia,¹⁰⁸ and partly because Turkey wants to contain any rise in Iranian influence in that important neighbouring country.¹⁰⁹

B. IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAM AND TURKEY

Turkey shares its U.S. and European partners' goal of ensuring that Iran does not acquire a nuclear weapon.¹¹⁰ On

phen Kinzer, *Reset: Iran, Turkey, and America's Future* (New York, 2010). The Islamic Revolution in 1979 had an energising impact on Turkey's Islamist fringe, including some of the predecessors of today's AKP.

¹⁰⁴ Arguably, AKP's split with the Refah Party in 2001 was in part over the simplistic assumptions of Muslim solidarity behind some of Prime Minister Erbakan's Middle East policies. At one point, Libyan leader Muammar Ghaddafi treated the visiting Erbakan to a lecture on Kurdish rights on a live television show from his desert tent, a humiliation for a Turkish leader.

¹⁰⁵ For Turkish comments on Iranian activities in Turkey in the 1980s and 1990s and details of the 2004-2005 cancellation of Turkish airport management and mobile phone contracts partially due to Turkey's Israel connections, see Crisis Group Report, *Turkey and the Middle East*, op. cit.

¹⁰⁶ The Turkish Kurd insurgent Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) has an affiliated group known as the Party for Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK) active in Iran's Kurdish community. The two countries signed a memorandum on security cooperation in February 2008. In recent years, Turkish air attacks on PKK and PJAK bases in northern Iraq have at times been accompanied by Iranian shelling.

¹⁰⁷ "In Iraq, they hate each other". Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, Turkey, July 2010.

¹⁰⁸ Crisis Group interview, Turkish official, Ankara, July 2010.

¹⁰⁹ "There is not much love between Sunni Turks and Shia Persians in popular culture. The same goes for politics. The Justice and Development Party (AKP), deep down, is a Sunni party that shares the concerns of fellow Sunnis in the Middle East about the rise of a Shia crescent". Ömer Taşpınar, "The anatomy of Turkey's Iran policy", *Today's Zaman*, 2 August 2010.

¹¹⁰ "We have the same target, we have the same aims. It's just our approach that is different. If the Americans had waited for just another month to try out the Tehran Agreement, and if it hadn't worked, we'd have voted with them on sanctions too". Crisis Group interview, AKP official, Turkey, July 2010. "We don't want a nuclear Iran, Iran destabilising the region or a de-

⁹⁹ "We [too] are trying to remain a great power in the Middle East. We do not compete, we cooperate. [When it comes to relations with Hamas and Hizbollah] we do not tell them what to do and what not to do, we say to them, you do your things and we do our things". Crisis Group interview, Iranian official, Ankara, July 2010. Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's journalist grandson, Farid al-Din Hadad Adel, in February 2010 was quoted as saying any Western strike against Iran would see Turkey fight against Iran: "Turkey is the only option for the advancement of the West's ambitions". Cited in Meir Javedanfar, "Iran's Next Rival: Turkey", *The Diplomat*, 18 June 2010.

¹⁰⁰ "AKP leaders know that Iran's nuclear programs are for peaceful purposes and that is why they are involved in this issue. The Iranian government, on the other side, welcomed their role in this regard". Crisis Group email communication, Iranian official, August 2010.

¹⁰¹ "Turkey and Iran ... are competing with each other in consolidating their legitimacy and expanding their circle of regional and international influence by supporting the forgotten Arab cause [Palestine] and confronting Israeli ghoulishness and arrogance". Abdelbari Atwan, *al-Quds al-Arabi* (UK, pan-Arab), 9 June 2010.

¹⁰² Hassan Haidar, *Al-Hayat* (UK, pan-Arab), London, 10 June 2010.

¹⁰³ For an account of Turkish republican founder Kemal Atatürk's secularising influence over Iran's Reza Shah, see Ste-

this, Western diplomats in Ankara do not doubt its sincerity. In private, Turkish officials suspect that Iran does aspire to have a nuclear bomb¹¹¹ but that it cannot achieve this in less than two years.¹¹² Ankara argues different tactics are required, however.¹¹³ A senior AKP official put it this way:

The main difference is that the Americans think the Iranians will change their behaviour under pressure. We think it should be through persuasion. If they feel they will lose something big by developing the bomb, they will decide against it.¹¹⁴

Ankara believes that sanctions will be bad for business but also will entrench Iran's hardline regime; that any military attack on Iranian nuclear installations could at most only delay the acquisition of a weapon; and that the threat of either tougher sanctions or military action merely reinforces the regime's resolve. Furthermore, absent a clear and present nuclear threat from Iran, Turkey worries that a further destabilisation of the Middle East would, like earlier regional crises, carry high costs for its economy. Finally, some Turks are proud of their activist diplomatic approach with Brazil, which they consider shows that emerging powers can affect the global management of nuclear issues.¹¹⁵

stable Iran", Crisis Group interviews, Turkish officials, Ankara, July 2010. Turkish policy further calls for a nuclear-free Middle East.

¹¹¹ According to *Forbes* magazine 26 March 2010, "Gül says he has no doubts that Iran wants the nuclear bomb: 'This is an Iranian aspiration dating back to the previous regime, the days of the Shah'. For Iran's current regime, says Gül, 'I do believe it is their final aspiration to have a nuclear weapon in the end,' as a matter of 'national pride'. He says Turkey is against an Iranian bomb. He believes it would trigger a nuclear arms race in the Middle East: 'A major competition will start in the region'". On 27 March 2010, Gül issued a statement that he had never been interviewed by the U.S. magazine, apparently to show that the conversation was not meant for publication.

¹¹² Crisis Group telephone interview, senior AKP official, July 2010.

¹¹³ Crisis Group interview, Turkish official, Ankara, July 2010.

¹¹⁴ Crisis Group telephone interview, July 2010. "Does Turkey share our objectives? Yes. We're just talking about [different] tactics. But sometimes [the Turkish position] seems to be only about tactics. Of course, what happens in the region does affect them more than it affects us, but all they've got is a mitigation strategy, the short-term national interest. This is not just about Iran, it's about a completely different geopolitical environment. Turkey should be playing the long game". Crisis Group interview, European diplomat, Ankara, July 2010.

¹¹⁵ "Turkey's demands that Israel join a nuclear-free Middle East, its implicit attacks on the failure of the existing nuclear accords to achieve disarmament or to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and its cooperation with an emerging power like Brazil all appear to signal a fundamental shift in the way policy

The policy of engagement with Iran¹¹⁶ includes passing messages between Tehran and Washington, mostly as observations and advice. This has real value, as Turkish leaders have long had the rare advantage of access to the highest officials on both sides. Turkish officials say they do not pull punches in private conversations with the Iranians, and some U.S. counterparts do not doubt this.¹¹⁷ Significantly, since Turks and Iranians do not need visas to visit each other's country, their business people, intellectuals and elites are also familiar with each other.

According to Ankara, Turkey volunteered in 2009 to help secure a plan by the International Atomic Energy Authority (IAEA) to persuade Iran to swap a substantial portion of its low-enriched uranium for foreign-processed fuel rods, to be used in the Tehran Research Reactor for medical purposes. In November 2009, the then-IAEA secretary general, Mohammed ElBaradei, and Ankara agreed that the uranium could be deposited in Turkey, an option which Iran signalled it might be interested in.¹¹⁸ Initially promising negotiations led by the Vienna Group (the U.S., Russia, France and the IAEA) stalled over the timing, synchronisation and location of the swap.¹¹⁹ The idea that Turkey and Brazil should revive the initiative was first seriously discussed at the April 2010 Nuclear Security Summit in New York,¹²⁰ according to some at a trilateral meeting between U.S. President Obama, Brazilian President Lula da Silva and Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan.¹²¹

Obama then sent similar letters to his Turkish and Brazilian counterparts outlining what he would consider acceptable. The letter to Turkey, dated 20 April, underlined that the Iranians should send 1,200kg, in one shipment, to a third country such as Turkey and that it would take longer than ten months to exchange or convert them into fuel rods. It also talked about the need for Iran to cooperate with the IAEA and to be more forthcoming about its

is formulated". İlter Turan, "Turkey's Iran policy: moving away from tradition?", German Marshall Fund of the United States, 25 June 2010.

¹¹⁶ For details, see Crisis Group Report, *Turkey and the Middle East*, op. cit., pp. 16-18.

¹¹⁷ The U.S. "knows [from intelligence] that the Iranians can become very angry with the Turks". Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, Turkey, July 2010.

¹¹⁸ "Iran signals will accept Turkish role for uranium", *Hurriyet Daily News*, 10 November 2009.

¹¹⁹ Crisis Group interview, Turkish official, Ankara, July 2010. The earlier deal broke down when Iran rejected a proposal by the P5+1 (the U.S., Russia, China, Britain and France plus Germany) to transfer the enriched uranium out of the country in one shipment.

¹²⁰ Crisis Group interviews, Turkish and Western officials, Ankara, July 2010.

¹²¹ Crisis Group interview, Turkish official, New York, June 2010.

nuclear program. The Turks saw the letter as a green light to pursue the swap proposal, despite other, less enthusiastic, U.S. messages.¹²²

Before the Tehran Agreement was announced on 17 May 2010, a stressful final seventeen- to eighteen-hour negotiation was conducted with the Iranians. The Brazilian foreign minister threatened to leave in frustration if Iran did not meet certain conditions and the Turkish prime minister delayed leaving for Tehran to join the group for hours until sure the Iranians agreed to strict timetables.¹²³ In the agreement, Iran promised to send the 1,200kg of low-enriched uranium to Turkey in one shipment, if the Vienna Group would send fuel rods for the research reactor within a year. The Turks thought they had secured what the Vienna Group had tried and failed to do in 2009.

This is the first time that Iran has committed itself in writing [to any compromise in the nuclear standoff]. For the first time something workable was achieved, which met 80 per cent of our concerns and those of our Western friends. This is a confidence-building measure. Other issues will be addressed in due course. Confidence has to be built up.¹²⁴

But when Washington heard the news, the U.S. administration was displeased. "There had been selective listening on both sides", a Western diplomat explained. "The Turks thought the [enriched uranium swap proposals] were the key And a real problem was Davutoğlu telling the Iranians that 'this deal will mean there's no need for sanctions'. This was not part of the Obama letter".¹²⁵ As the Iranians likely well knew, China and Russia had just been persuaded to back a resolution for expanded sanctions on Tehran in the Security Council.¹²⁶

Turkey's achievement (and Brazil's) had turned into a liability for both itself and its U.S. and European Security Council partners, at least in the short term. Ankara could

not abandon the Tehran Agreement without being perceived as foolish and unreliable, yet its Western allies on the Council wanted it to support the sanctions package.¹²⁷ With Iran making clear that anything less would rule out further discussion of the Tehran Agreement, Turkey joined Brazil in voting "no" on the Security Council resolution.¹²⁸ It subsequently committed to apply the UN sanctions but not the additional ones the U.S. and EU adopted unilaterally.

The 9 June Security Council vote put the differing Turkish and U.S. approaches on public display.¹²⁹ Turkey said its vote was a vote for diplomacy, against sanctions and to mitigate Iranian reactions.¹³⁰ U.S. officials publicly criticised the Tehran Agreement, pointing out that the amount of enriched uranium Iran would retain was far greater than would have been the case had the 2009 negotiation succeeded, thus reducing the deal's confidence-building impact, and that Iran remained unwilling to cease uranium enrichment. The Turks felt betrayed: "We were part of the team, but they started to play against us; it was not fair ... nobody would have blamed France or Spain for having an Islamic policy if they had done this".¹³¹

Turkey and Brazil, non-permanent members of the Security Council, were frustrated about the way negotiations over the draft resolution on additional sanctions that started around March 2010 were conducted mainly by the U.S., Russia and China.¹³² Among Security Council diplomats, Turkey's resistance to U.S. pressure to vote for sanctions was also seen as a possible reaction to U.S. insistence on a weak Security Council response to the Gaza flotilla events that did not condemn Israel directly for killing nine persons.¹³³

After the initial shocked exchanges, tensions appear to have decreased.¹³⁴ It is not clear if there are any winners

¹²² Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, Ankara, July 2010. U.S. officials say the letter was followed by numerous phone conversations between officials making clear that the kind of deal ultimately embodied in the Tehran agreement was unacceptable. Crisis Group interviews, U.S. officials, Washington, June and July 2010.

¹²³ Crisis Group interviews, Turkish officials, June and July 2010.

¹²⁴ Crisis Group interview, senior AKP official, Istanbul, June 2010.

¹²⁵ Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, Ankara, July 2010.

¹²⁶ Some in Turkey argue that it is possible China and Russia, as well as the U.S., acted to make sure that non-permanent Security Council members like Turkey and Brazil would not be seen to be seizing the diplomatic initiative from the hands of the established powers. Crisis Group interview, Turkish official, Ankara, July 2010.

¹²⁷ U.S. diplomats' instructions were to push only for a positive vote, not an abstention, until at least the day of the vote. Crisis Group interviews, Western diplomats, Ankara, July 2010.

¹²⁸ "Anything else would have meant contradicting ourselves". Crisis Group interview, Turkish official, Ankara, July 2010.

¹²⁹ For the official Turkish version of events, arguing that there had been "seamless consultation", see "Iran's nuclear programme: the Turkish perspective", foreign ministry, June 2010.

¹³⁰ The vote "does not mean unconditional support to Iran's nuclear program. It is to give diplomacy a chance. Iranians have been advised that we do not want Iran to develop nuclear weapons the experience in Iraq advises us to be cautious about over-reliance on the sanctions tool". Crisis Group email communication, Turkish official, August 2010.

¹³¹ Crisis Group interview, Turkish official, Ankara, July 2010.

¹³² "We were not consulted [as much as we would have liked]". Crisis Group interview, Turkish official, Ankara, July 2010.

¹³³ Crisis Group interviews, UN Security Council diplomats, New York, June 2010.

¹³⁴ For the U.S., "the differences over Iran are less long term than the problem with Turkey-Israel". Crisis Group interview, West-

from the Tehran Agreement. Iran may have created some confusion among those seeking to impose limits on its nuclear program,¹³⁵ but it also came under additional sanctions despite having made a concession. The Turks say they were aware from the beginning that the deal they were negotiating was no substitute for an eventual overall settlement and express pride that they were able to achieve what they did: as one official put it, “the Americans didn’t believe we would be able to do it”.¹³⁶ But this has been at the cost of substantially irritating its U.S. ally.

There is scepticism in the EU about any real Turkish mediation role,¹³⁷ but UK Prime Minister David Cameron said Turkey was the European country with “the greatest chance of persuading Iran”.¹³⁸ U.S. diplomats believe the Tehran Agreement might be used to start discussions.¹³⁹ Elements of it, and the Turkish role, could still be revived. After signing the document, Iran forwarded it to the Vienna Group within a week. The Group responded just before the UN sanctions vote, outlining nine areas in which it fell short of expectations.¹⁴⁰ Iranian officials have left the door open for more talks, however, and underline that they wish Turkey and Brazil to remain part of the proc-

ess.¹⁴¹ A letter to the Vienna Group one day after a 25 July meeting in Istanbul between the foreign ministers of Iran, Turkey and Brazil indicated that, for these parties at least, the talks remain a basis for discussions on confidence-building measures.¹⁴²

Turkey stresses that it foresees only a facilitation role in support of the two main tracks (the five permanent members of the Security Council plus Germany, the P5+1, and the Vienna Group). It points to the Iranian foreign minister’s statement after the 25 July meeting that he might meet in late September with EU High Representative Catherine Ashton, perhaps also in Istanbul, and that if the Tehran Agreement swap goes forward, Iran would have no need for uranium enrichment activity.¹⁴³ Others fear that an opportunity has been lost:

What happened, happened. There’s no dramatic issue coming up soon. It looks like the next few months will be ordinary on the Iran nuclear file. And in spite of our vote, and despite the ambiguous position of the U.S. and the Europeans, we are being asked to keep the Iranians at the negotiating table. That means that we are still trying to get the Tehran declaration to work. And it looks like the Americans are saying, “it’s fine, but it’s just not enough”.¹⁴⁴

ern diplomat, Ankara, July 2010. “We can completely understand [the Turkish ‘no’ vote]. They had to support their diplomatic effort”. Crisis Group interview, European diplomat, July 2010. That said, anger in Washington has not wholly abated. An official said, “there is anger, especially about [the] Iran vote, which is one of the president’s foreign policy priorities and in which he personally tried very hard to get Turkey to abstain. This has led to a debate within the administration over whether we should still work closely with them to try to steer them in a more productive direction or whether we need to be tough to send them a clear message about our displeasure”. Crisis Group interview, Washington, June 2010.

¹³⁵ “With their timing, the Iranians played everyone like a fiddle”. Crisis Group interview, European diplomat, July 2010.

¹³⁶ Crisis Group interview, Ankara, July 2010. A Western diplomat privately agreed: “We just didn’t think they’d be able to get a deal out of the Iranians”. Crisis Group interview, Turkey, July 2010.

¹³⁷ “When we saw Turkish fingerprints all over the Tehran Agreement, Turkey doing this, deciding that, people distanced themselves from Turkey. It was too much”. Crisis Group interview, European diplomat, Turkey, July 2010.

¹³⁸ “Which European country could have the greatest chance of persuading Iran to change course on its nuclear policy? ... Turkey”, David Cameron’s speech in Ankara, 26 July 2010.

¹³⁹ Crisis Group interviews, Ankara, July 2010.

¹⁴⁰ Objections included continued Iranian uranium enrichment at higher levels; Iran’s refusal to meet for talks with the P5+1 (the permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany); the absence of a certain date by which the fuel would leave Iran; Iranian control in effect over its enriched fuel in Turkey; and that Iran now has much more enriched fuel than it had in 2009, devaluing the gesture implicit in the swap of 1,200kg.

¹⁴¹ “Vienna Group agrees to inclusion of Turkey, Brazil in nuclear talks”, *Tehran Times*, 13 July 2010.

¹⁴² “We would only be glad to be the address for any diplomatic solution”. Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Today’s Zaman*, 26 July 2010.

¹⁴³ Crisis Group email communication, Turkish official, August 2010.

¹⁴⁴ Crisis Group telephone interview, senior AKP official, July 2010.

IV. CALMING THE DEBATE

While Turkey casts its policies on Israel and Iran in the framework of Western goals, miscommunication with its traditional allies about its engagement in Middle Eastern disputes has contributed to a perception that it is turning its back on the West. In the Israeli case, Turkish involvement risks making it into a party to the dispute. Yet, an ability to talk with all parties is essential if Ankara wants to be a mediator contributing to regional peace and security. In some ways, Turkey has also overextended itself.¹⁴⁵

Turkey would do well to devote most of its conflict-resolving energy to disputes in which it is a principal player. Much of its recent increased international credibility has been built on determined efforts to end such old disputes. But the attempt to solve the Cyprus problem since 2004 is floundering, gravely undermining Turkey's EU convergence, which in turn is damaging a critical dynamic fuelling the democratisation and prosperity that underpin its success over the past decade.¹⁴⁶ Turkey's promising initiative to normalise relations with Armenia has stalled. The "Democratic Initiative" to head off support among its ethnic Kurdish community for the PKK insurgency in Turkey is also stuck, a situation that could lead to new strains in another AKP success story, improved relations with the Kurds of northern Iraq, where the PKK has its main bases in remote mountains.

If Turkey's "zero-problem" vision has encountered difficulties, it is partly because the neighbouring states with which it is seeking "zero problems" have not changed their approach.¹⁴⁷ It is also true that the EU and U.S. share

the blame for "doing much to estrange Turkey's public and new political elite alike".¹⁴⁸ But Ankara clearly must work hard to recover its earlier credibility, in particular with Israel. Lost in the bitter aftermath of the *Mavi Mar-mara* incident is the positive image Ankara enjoyed there, which was pivotal to its 2008 facilitation of Syria proximity talks.

Turkey also needs to do more to defuse Washington's criticism of its policies, often based as they are on a misperception of Ankara's intentions and goals. Collaboration with the U.S. remains vital for Turkey, especially in the Middle East. This is so whether it be for intelligence sharing in the fight with PKK insurgents; to ensure smooth U.S. troop withdrawals from Iraq and Afghanistan; cooperation against al-Qaeda factions like the ones that bombed Istanbul in 2003; or indeed to help reach a real Arab-Israeli settlement.

At the same time, Turkey's key interest still lies in a solid relationship with EU states.¹⁴⁹ Foreign policy successes and engagement could do much to overcome European hesitations about its eventual place in the EU.¹⁵⁰ EU states supply three quarters of its recent foreign investment boom – much of which is based on the fact that no country engaged in formal negotiations to join the EU has ever failed to complete the process – and take more than half of its exports. Europe is home to some 2.7 million Turks¹⁵¹ and supplies 56 per cent of Turkey's tourists.¹⁵²

The Middle East offers good opportunities for commercial expansion, and building stability there would be of real benefit to Turkey as a whole, but it still takes less than one quarter of the country's exports, is only responsible for about ten per cent of its tourism and is home to just

¹⁴⁵ "Our diplomats cannot even find the time to take a breath. These situations that create contradictory and difficult processes from time to time are actually due to this hyperactivity", *Akşam*, 15 July 2010.

¹⁴⁶ "Rather than being blinded by ambitions of grandeur, Turkey must thus realise that its value-added in the neighbourhood largely hinges on its ongoing domestic transformation, which in turn is highly dependent on the EU accession process". Ahmet Evin, Kemal Kirişçi, Ronald Linden, Thomas Straubhaar, Nathalie Tocci, Juliette Tolay, Joshua Walker, "Getting to zero: Turkey, its neighbours, and the West", Transatlantic Academy, June 2010. "Turkey's EU membership will have a particularly positive impact on us. Turkey's relations with the near region are not an alternative to but are supportive of its relations with the EU". Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, interview, *Today's Zaman*, 17 July 2010.

¹⁴⁷ "It used always to be 'Turkey demands'. Now it's 'Turkey would like to make a deal'. The problem is that the neighbourhood hasn't changed; they are surrounded by people who are still in the 'demand' school – the Greeks, Greek Cypriots, Armenians, Azerbaijanis, countries with [myths, inflated egos] or powerful lobbies in Washington. They sit there and say, 'you

Turks are the bad Muslim half-men". Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, Turkey, July 2010.

¹⁴⁸ Heinz Kramer, "AKP's 'new' foreign policy between vision and pragmatism", *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik*, June 2010, p. 33.

¹⁴⁹ See Crisis Group Europe Reports N°184, *Turkey and Europe: The Way Ahead*, 17 August 2007; and N°197, *Turkey and Europe: The Decisive Year Ahead*, 15 December 2008.

¹⁵⁰ "Turkey has become the object of renewed interest and a more respectful curiosity Turkey now benefits from a real capital of intellectual sympathy among French opinion leaders, and the discussion now focuses more on substance". Dorothée Schmid, "Les elites Françaises et la Turquie: une relation dans l'attente", Centre for Economic and Foreign Policy Studies (EDAM), June 2010.

¹⁵¹ Figure from 2008, representing 80.9 per cent of Turks living or working abroad. See "Getting to zero", op. cit., p. 10.

¹⁵² Provisional figures for 2009. Turkish culture and tourism ministry.

110,000 Turks.¹⁵³ The broadening of regional trade, infrastructure integration and political links¹⁵⁴ is a natural consequence of Turkey's opening up, three decades ago, to international trade, as well as to the end of the Cold War, which had cut it off from most of its neighbours. The policy did not originate with AKP, and it cannot be "Islamist" given that beneficiaries include Russia, Greece, Georgia and Serbia.¹⁵⁵

A. REBUILDING TURKEY-ISRAEL TIES

A month after the *Mavi Mamara* disaster, Foreign Minister Davutoğlu talked in Brussels with the Israeli industry, trade and labour minister, Binyamin Ben-Eliezer.¹⁵⁶ Turkish officials hoped that the 30 June meeting would help break the ice but said Israel still needed to do what any "friendly country" would: apologise and compensate the victims. Without this, they said, there would be no normalisation of relations, diplomatic ties would be reduced and the past climate of cooperation would not be restored.¹⁵⁷

At one point, Davutoğlu appeared to be threatening to cut relations altogether, though officials say this was not the case.¹⁵⁸ Turkey has achieved Israel's acceptance of a panel of enquiry sponsored by the UN Secretary-General, but it claims that the UN process will only freeze the status quo. Even diplomats sympathetic to Turkey say AKP leaders are erring in setting demands that Israel is unlikely to agree to. Israel believes that "the Turks have gone so high on

the ladder, [Israel] can't supply any instruments to get [them] down. No Israeli government will be in a position to satisfy their requests".¹⁵⁹ Turkish commentators have reflected a feeling that Turkey has boxed itself in.¹⁶⁰

Several aspects of bilateral relations have escaped grave damage. Israeli charter tours to Turkey initially dried up, but reservations on Turkish Airlines' 25 weekly Istanbul-Tel Aviv flights only fell 10 per cent.¹⁶¹ Businesspeople on both sides have tried to retain existing contracts,¹⁶² and trade continued to rise in the month after the *Mavi Marmara* raid.¹⁶³ While Turkey cancelled joint military exercises, it continued to receive deliveries of unmanned Israeli surveillance/attack drones. Israeli technicians who help Turkey fly the drones on missions against the PKK insurgents left briefly for security reasons, but by early-July had returned to south-eastern Turkey.¹⁶⁴ Israel kept all its diplomats in Ankara and in mid-July lifted a warning to its citizens against travel to the country.¹⁶⁵ A Turkish tug-boat was allowed to tow the *Mavi Marmara* home from Ashdod harbour on 5 August.

Turkey's management of the *Mavi Marmara* crisis has worked best when it has remained within an international consensus: U.S. pressure for the release of the passengers seized by Israel, new international pressure to ease the Gaza blockade and the cumulative pressure that brought the UN Secretary-General's panel of enquiry. Turkey has to be wary of overplaying its hand, in effect asking Washington and Brussels to choose between Turkey and Israel, as it seemed to risk in suggesting that the U.S. needs Turkey more than it needs Israel, or that the EU needs Turkey more than vice versa.¹⁶⁶ A Western diplomat in Turkey asserted that:

¹⁵³ Figure from 2008, representing 3.2 per cent of Turks living or working abroad, a big contraction from the Middle East's 8.5 per cent share in 1985. See *ibid*.

¹⁵⁴ Turkey, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan signed an agreement on a joint Cooperation Council to implement bilateral agreements concluded over the past two years on free trade and visa-free travel and to "develop a long-term strategic partnership". The quadripartite mechanism will be open to other countries of the region. Agence France-Presse, 11 June 2010.

¹⁵⁵ See Crisis Group Report, *Turkey and the Middle East*, op. cit.

¹⁵⁶ Leaks in Israel made it clear the Israeli foreign ministry had not been advised, undermining the initiative. Crisis Group interview, diplomat familiar with Israeli policy in the region, July 2010.

¹⁵⁷ If Israel "does not want an international commission, then it has to acknowledge this crime, apologise and pay compensation Turkey-Israel relations will never be on normal footing until we have an answer". Interview with Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Newsweek*, 9 July 2010. "This is not a choice between Turkey and Israel. It is a choice between right and wrong, between legal and illegal". Suat Kınıklıoğlu, AKP member of parliament, *International Herald Tribune*, 2 June 2010.

¹⁵⁸ A Turkish official said quotations about cutting relations in the *Hurriyet Daily News* (4 July 2010) and other newspapers were a misrepresentation of a statement that "irrevocable damage" would be done to the Turkey-Israeli relationship. Crisis Group interview, Ankara, July 2010.

¹⁵⁹ Crisis Group interview, diplomat familiar with Israeli policy in the region, July 2010.

¹⁶⁰ "What is Ankara doing? It rightfully wants to make Israel pay the price. But it has set this price so high that this message is called 'I do not want to come to terms with you'". Mehmet Ali Birand, *Posta*, 8 July 2010.

¹⁶¹ *Financial Times*, 28 June 2010.

¹⁶² For instance, an Israeli supermarkets association rejected an attempt to boycott Turkish goods. See also "Turks in Tel Aviv show business binds Israel, Turkey", *Bloomberg/Today's Zaman*, 15 July 2010.

¹⁶³ Turkish exports to Israel rose 42 per cent in the first half of 2010. Crisis Group interview, diplomat familiar with Israeli policy in the region, July 2010.

¹⁶⁴ Crisis Group interview, diplomat familiar with Israeli policy in the region, July 2010.

¹⁶⁵ An Israeli newspaper pointed out the original warning was based on fear rather than intelligence and that no threatening cycle of anti-Israel demonstrations developed in Turkey. *Yedioth Ahrenoth*, 21 July 2010.

¹⁶⁶ "Everyone in [our capital] was happy after Davutoğlu gave a speech; there was a kind buzz; he had the entire hall mesmer-

Erdoğan's children are in the U.S. all the time. But he has the street fighter attitude [and] an Islamist background which assumes everything the U.S. does is bad. Increasingly, he doesn't care. He thinks the U.S. needs Turkey more than Turkey needs the U.S. Somehow the Turks believe that Obama – with his African heritage and middle name of Hussein – actually thinks like they do, that he's on their side, even though nothing has been said.¹⁶⁷

AKP officials' belief in President Obama's pro-Turkish inclination¹⁶⁸ was reinforced by his critical role in sorting out the *Mavi Marmara* raid's aftermath.¹⁶⁹ Erdoğan claimed: "Obama has made statements which basically mean ... that we are justified and that he shares our views".¹⁷⁰ But if AKP leaders were in any doubt about political balances in Washington, some three quarters of the members of Congress signed letters on 21 June and 29 June highly critical of IHH and unquestioningly supportive of Israeli actions.¹⁷¹ The 87 senators recommended that IHH be investigated to see if it should be on the U.S. list of terrorist organisations.

The international investigation has won a little time for rebuilding Turkey-Israeli ties, and there remains a strong U.S. desire to assist.¹⁷² While Israel will need to explain

and make amends if it is found to have used excessive force, Turkey will have to accept its share of criticism if, as Western diplomats suggest it may, the investigation finds impropriety in the triangle of links between AKP leaders, IHH and Hamas.¹⁷³

To help the way forward, all sides could also agree to improve the situation in Gaza by further normalising its relations to the outside world.¹⁷⁴ Israel took a step on 20 June, introducing a "negative list" of banned goods to replace the more restrictive "positive list" of allowed goods and increasing the number of trucks permitted to enter. But far more is needed, in particular allowing exports from Gaza, movement of peoples and greater access to goods necessary for reconstruction. New debates in Western capitals and Israel's relative easing of Gaza restrictions indicate that the *Mavi Marmara* has catalysed change with respect to the blockade, which Turkey has said is its goal.¹⁷⁵ But it would be counterproductive for Turkish politicians to take more than private credit for this.

Negative rhetoric should be toned down. Israeli characterisations of AKP leaders as "Islamist" distort both their own understanding of the situation¹⁷⁶ and undermine Turkish trust. Turkish leaders should be aware that populist rhetoric against Israel shakes trust of Ankara in Western capitals.¹⁷⁷ Particularly unhelpful have been conspiracy hints from Erdoğan and other prominent AKP figures that Israel was linked to recent PKK attacks on Turkish soldiers.¹⁷⁸ The PKK denies this,¹⁷⁹ and, as noted above,

rised, the reaction was very positive. But after the *Mavi Marmara* affair, I received messages from our political directors, saying, this is not the even-handed approach that Turkey claims. Turkey needs to live up to it ... even though Israel is mainly to blame. The picture that presents itself is an AKP government bent on confrontation with Israel". Crisis Group interview, European diplomat, Ankara, July 2010.

¹⁶⁷ Crisis Group interview, July 2010.

¹⁶⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Istanbul, June 2010.

¹⁶⁹ Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, Turkey, July 2010.

¹⁷⁰ Press statement in Serbia referring to late June meeting with Obama in Toronto, *Today's Zaman*, 13 July 2010.

¹⁷¹ www.aipac.org. The letters were not supported by all Jewish-American groups. "J Street – the pro-Israel, pro-peace lobby – is not supporting sign-on letters to the President now circulating in the House regarding the Gaza flotilla. As is far too often the case, these letters have been drafted primarily for domestic political consumption rather than to advance the U.S. interest in peace and security in the Middle East". The J Street letter did not mention Turkey, but rather tried to draw attention to the humanitarian problems of Gaza. Circulated by J Street President Jeremy Ben-Ami to members of Congress, 15 June 2010.

¹⁷² "The Turks can't look the Israelis in the eye. It doesn't feel the same. They are [America's] two closest allies in the Middle East, and [the U.S. feels] a responsibility to prevent ... a fundamental break". Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, Ankara, July 2010. According to Assistant U.S. Secretary of State Philip Gordon, "any step away from what had been a really flourishing security, diplomatic, tourism and economic relationship is a setback and is unfortunate". *Today's Zaman*, 1 July 2010.

¹⁷³ Western diplomats say they are aware of much information about links between AKP leaders and IHH but have not discussed it publicly in order not to embarrass Ankara. Crisis Group interviews, Ankara, July 2010.

¹⁷⁴ "Turkey's underlying goal is Gaza. This could be a way to declare a success". Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, Ankara, July 2010.

¹⁷⁵ A former U.S. official remarked: "In a way, we owe Turkey a debt of gratitude. The Obama administration knew that the blockade was damaging its reputation in Muslim eyes, yet could or would do nothing about it. The flotilla incident helped trigger long overdue steps that serve U.S. interests in the region". Crisis Group interview, Washington, July 2010.

¹⁷⁶ "Structural changes resulting from the end of the Cold War, Europe's continuing rebuff of Turkey, and the economic opportunities to the country's south, east, and north have driven [Foreign Minister] Davutoğlu's thinking, not the Quran". Steven A. Cook, "How do you say 'frenemy' in Turkish?", *Foreign Policy*, 1 June 2010.

¹⁷⁷ "The Turks are going too far. They aren't giving the Western alliance what it needs to work for it. Turkey shouldn't push Israel into a corner, and it shouldn't cut off its nose to spite its face". Crisis Group interview, European diplomat, Ankara, July 2010.

¹⁷⁸ Prime Minister Erdoğan said, "my people know well the forces for which the PKK act as subcontractors", *Posta*, 20 June 2010; Foreign Minister Davutoğlu declined to directly respond to a

Israel supplies the drones that are critical to Turkey's anti-insurgent campaign. The AKP may be making the linkage to win votes, but that would be a questionable strategy.¹⁸⁰

B. FOCUSING ON THE REAL TURKEY

Commentators over the past eighteen months have increasingly accused Turkey of making a fundamental change of direction, away from the West and towards Islamism.¹⁸¹ Some of the criticism, as from this former member of President George W. Bush's Department of Defense, is scathing:

It isn't Ottoman Islam that these Islamist Turks seek to revive. Their Islam is more in tune with the fanatically anti-Western principles of Saudi Wahhabi Islam The present Turkish government is methodically taking over every aspect of society, including every branch of government, businesses, schools and newspapers ... I've been visiting Turkey regularly since 1968. People were always prepared to talk about politics – but no longer. Today, the Turks are obviously afraid of something.¹⁸²

As the Israeli and Iranian events unfolded, the accusations entered the popular press. A commentator in the UK's conservative *Daily Telegraph* sweepingly declared that "a country that was once the sick man of Europe has become the angry man of the East. The fear now is that it may become another Pakistan, and the frustrations of millions of frustrated secular Muslims may lead them down the path of Islamist radicalisation".¹⁸³ A writer in

question on allegations of a PKK-Israel connection but said, "the PKK may have been used in the Middle East up until now; the same forces that want to prevent the establishment of peace in the Middle East may want to make use of the PKK again". *Star*, 21 June 2010.

¹⁷⁹ Murat Yetkin, "PKK: No connection between Israel and [PKK attacks on a naval base in] Iskenderun", *Radikal*, 15 June 2010.

¹⁸⁰ Erdoğan's rhetoric during Israel's "Cast Lead" assault on Gaza pleased crowds in Turkey and the Middle East, but if it was aimed at increasing his party's vote share in the March 2009 municipal elections, it did not succeed: AKP's vote dropped to 39 per cent from 47 per cent in parliamentary elections two years before.

¹⁸¹ "For even if the increasingly Islamist state remains a NATO partner, at best, it seems Turkey will be an unreliable partner. Since the 1930s, the country has been a model of modernization and moderation in the Middle East. But absent a remarkable turnaround, it would appear that the West is losing Turkey". David Schenker, "A NATO without Turkey", *Wall Street Journal*, 5 November 2009.

¹⁸² Rhode, op. cit.

¹⁸³ Con Coughlin, "Turkey's role in the Gaza flotilla affair should worry us all in the West", *Daily Telegraph*, 4 June 2010.

Canada's *Globe and Mail* saw Turkey turning its back on the West,¹⁸⁴ and another in *Forward* described the emergence of a fellow-traveller with eastern hard-liners.¹⁸⁵ A headline in *The New York Times* set a new tone: "Turkey goes from pliable ally to thorn for U.S.",¹⁸⁶ and a leading columnist in the paper made alarmist suggestions of Turkey joining a radical front against Israel.¹⁸⁷ An article in the *The Washington Times* even characterised Turkey's actions in Cyprus – divided politically since 1963 and militarily since 1974 – as worse than Israel's in Gaza.¹⁸⁸

Criticism has begun to spread from Prime Minister Erdoğan to Foreign Minister Davutoğlu.¹⁸⁹ While Erdoğan has been seen as overplaying his hand,¹⁹⁰ Davutoğlu, a charismatic academic, long kept a positive profile for many Western diplomats and is credited with changing Turkey's default stance of victimhood to one of conflict-

¹⁸⁴ "The latest events around Gaza have highlighted the growing alienation of Turkey from the West. Until recently, Turkey was the only solid Muslim ally of Israel but also of the Western world. But now, it is moving towards a more radical version of Islamism". Lysiane Gagnon, "Turkey looks East of the Mediterranean", *Globe and Mail*, 11 June 2010.

¹⁸⁵ "Without a doubt, the botched raid on the *Mavi Marmara* is a diplomatic catastrophe for Israel ... [but in Turkey] is a regime whose public rhetoric increasingly resembles that of the most hardline Arab states". Michael Rubin, "Erdoğan's Turkey is not a friend", *Forward*, 11 June 2010.

¹⁸⁶ The 8 June 2010 article quoted Council on Foreign Relations expert Steven A. Cook as saying that Turkey was perceived as "running around the region doing things that are at cross-purposes to what the big powers in the region want ... the question being asked is 'How do we keep the Turks in their lane?'".

¹⁸⁷ "[I] find Turkey's Islamist government seemingly focused not on joining the European Union but the Arab League – no, scratch that, on joining the Hamas-Hizbollah-Iran resistance front against Israel I exaggerate, but not that much". Thomas Friedman, "Letter from Istanbul", *The New York Times*, 15 June 2010.

¹⁸⁸ For Daniel Pipes, Turkish army-occupied northern Cyprus "shares features with Syria and resembles an 'open-air jail' more than Gaza does". "Turkey in Cyprus vs. Israel in Gaza", *The Washington Times*, 19 July 2010. A pro-Greek U.S. politician said Turkey did not share NATO "values", but that all would be well if it withdrew troops from Cyprus. Rep. John Sarbanes, "Can America rely on Turkey?", *Huffington Post.com*, 20 July 2010.

¹⁸⁹ "The conservative think-tanks that shape so much of the foreign policy discourse in America have decided that Erdoğan is an Islamist – a wholly pejorative term. He is not, of course. He is a religious nationalist, in the way so many members of the [U.S.] Republican Party are religious nationalists". Michael Goldfarb, *Global Post*, 1 June 2010.

¹⁹⁰ "Erdoğan can hardly contain his ambition to make Turkey a dominant regional actor and a global player". Morton Abramowitz and Henri J. Barkey, "The Turkish-American split", *The National Interest*, 17 June 2010. Abramowitz, a former U.S. ambassador to Turkey, is a member of the Crisis Group Board.

resolving engagement.¹⁹¹ Diplomats noted that Davutoğlu privately distanced himself from responsibility for Erdoğan's more controversial moves.¹⁹² But just as Erdoğan's populist rhetoric creates tension with Western partners, there is now also unease about the extent that a grandiose vision of the Ottoman past figures in Davutoğlu's world view.¹⁹³

This is affecting relations with Washington. A June 2010 meeting between Davutoğlu and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton reportedly went badly, as U.S. officials bristled at what one described as the minister's excessive attacks on Israel.¹⁹⁴ A Western official noted that once troops are pulled out of Iraq and Afghanistan, Turkey's use as a transit country will be of less importance.¹⁹⁵ In a rare rebuke, the top U.S. diplomat for European affairs, Assistant Secretary of State Philip Gordon, co-author of an earlier book that both set out common U.S. and Turkish interests and worried about a "fading partnership",¹⁹⁶ questioned Turkey's basic orientation.¹⁹⁷ A U.S. expert on

Turkey said that the time has come to admit that in the Middle East the U.S. and Turkey are not part of a "strategic alliance" but "fast becoming competitors".¹⁹⁸

A former U.S. ambassador to Turkey described the alliance as sound but cautioned that Washington should adapt to Turkey's new assertiveness.¹⁹⁹ Other commentators noted that Ankara's partnership with Russia, looser ties with the EU and strong economic growth mean that "whatever America's importance to Turkey, the dependency of the past is over", and the relationship may well move into new territory that will be more "transactional"²⁰⁰ or "à la carte".²⁰¹ One writer pointed out the West's underestimation of emotional components in Turkish policy making.²⁰² Such an ad hoc policy framework will certainly make things more difficult as the EU and Turkey, as an accession country, try to harmonise their foreign policy positions,²⁰³ and Ankara behaves not so much neo-Otto-

¹⁹¹ "He's a good person, has a strong moral character ... he has energised the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs; it has become less bureaucratic. They are working on at least eighteen different projects. They are making history, accomplishing things. It changes Turkey's view of itself and its role in the world. They feel strong and confident that their star is rising [even if] there'll be plenty of non-successes, if not failure". Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, Ankara, July 2010.

¹⁹² Crisis Group interview, European diplomats, Istanbul, July 2010.

¹⁹³ "Things haven't been going well recently. This Ottomanism, they say it isn't a basis of policy, but it is the basis of their comfort zone. Davutoğlu speaks of it being a sphere of influence. He talks differently to different audiences". Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, Turkey, July 2010.

¹⁹⁴ Crisis Group interview, U.S. official, Washington, June 2010. A Turkish official said, "we have a different view of the encounter. We didn't lecture anybody. If there was any discomfort at was said, why wasn't it raised in the meeting?" Crisis Group telephone interview, September 2010.

¹⁹⁵ Noting that Turkish rhetoric on Gaza goes farther than any Arab country, a Western diplomat said, "maybe [the U.S.] will have to reconsider if this goes on. The rhetoric is going [too far]. If they are going to flip into an Islamic Republic of Turkey, [the U.S.] doesn't have to have it. Turkey is useful, gives air transit rights and so on, but thanks to Iran, [the U.S.] now has bases all over the Middle East. And in 2011, [the U.S.] may be substantially out of Iraq and Afghanistan. There's nothing indispensable about Turkey". Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, Turkey, July 2010.

¹⁹⁶ Philip H. Gordon and Ömer Taşpınar, *Winning Turkey: How America, Europe and Turkey can Revive a Fading Partnership* (Washington, 2008).

¹⁹⁷ "We think Turkey remains committed to NATO, Europe and the United States, but that needs to be demonstrated. There are people asking questions about it in a way that is new, and that in itself is a bad thing that makes it harder for the United States

to support some of the things that Turkey would like to see us support". Associated Press, 26 June 2010.

¹⁹⁸ "In the abstract, Washington and Ankara do share the same goals: peace between Israel and the Palestinians; a stable, unified Iraq; an Iran without nuclear weapons; stability in Afghanistan; and a Western-oriented Syria. When you get down to details, however, Washington and Ankara are on the opposite ends of virtually all these issues ..." Cook, "How do you say 'freemasonry' in Turkish?", op. cit.

¹⁹⁹ "Life has changed with a more vibrant, dynamic and self-confident Turkey. It remains an ally but our relations are far more ramified, more complex, and recently more difficult." Morton Abramowitz and Henri Barkey, "Turkey's other war", *Real Clear World*, 15 July 2010.

²⁰⁰ "Turkey is a growing power and possesses assets we do not have. Where we can get their help we should elicit it. Where we differ we can acknowledge their interests. Retaliation is no answer to differences over key issues ... However, we should by no means jump through hoops for Ankara or incur costs we do not have to. Turkey cannot simply be surprised when we criticise its behavior". Morton Abramowitz and Henri J. Barkey, "The Turkish-American split", op. cit. See also Ömer Taşpınar, *Today's Zaman*, 14 June 2010.

²⁰¹ "The new Turkish-Western relationship will be a la carte, and driven by convergent national interests rather than amorphous notions of geopolitics and identity. It could still be a rough ride". Ian O. Lesser, "Rethinking Turkish-Western relations: a journey without maps", German Marshall Fund of the United States, 30 June 2010.

²⁰² "Many in the West have interpreted the Turkish position as evidence that the place is under the control of Islamic crypto-fundamentalists. This is certainly part of the picture [but overlooks] something both more subtle and more obvious: emotions are running the show". Claire Belinski, "Smile and smile: Turkey's feel-good foreign policy", *World Affairs*, July/August 2010.

²⁰³ "In the field of foreign and international policy, the EU strives at establishing an 'ever-closer union' [which] at first glance, seems hardly compatible with the new Turkish foreign policy one could, however, argue with some plausibility that the EU in its actual shape will never be able to reach that goal [in

man as “neo-Non-Aligned”.²⁰⁴ A long-time Turkey watcher concluded that two of the main motivations changing the country have nothing to do with Islam, Israel or Iran: a healthy commercial drive to profit more from regional trade and “an over-inflated sense of its importance on the world stage ... an unhealthy dose of hubris”.²⁰⁵

Despite new frictions, Turkey, the U.S. and the EU share many policy objectives in the Middle East. In a conscious effort to build stability and prosperity, Ankara is working hard to integrate its neighbours in a zone of visa-free travel, free trade, compatible infrastructure and regular cabinet-level dialogue.²⁰⁶ Other shared goals include peace between Israel and the Palestinians; a stable, unified Iraq; an Iran without nuclear weapons; stability in Afghanistan; the extirpation of al-Qaeda; and a Western-oriented Syria. There is disagreement on how to characterise the differences. Some are uneasy over Turkish rhetoric, priorities, tactics or even a growing struggle for power with Western partners. Others actively approve of Turkey's different approach on issues that may be taboo to Western governments for domestic political reasons, like seeking to include Hamas in peace talks, reaching out to Iran or speaking out against the Israeli blockade of Gaza.²⁰⁷

Washington and Brussels have traded barbs about who is to blame for friction between Turkey and the West – with U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates blaming some EU states' undermining of Turkey's EU negotiations²⁰⁸ and European Commission President Manuel Barroso pointing out that the trouble began with the U.S. invasion of

Iraq.²⁰⁹ Both have plausible cases. Just as important, however, is that as a rising power, Turkey simply sees the Middle East differently. It is a rival of Iran's and shares many Western goals. But it is critical alike of EU passivity and U.S. actions that it believes contribute to conflict in the region for which Turkey pays the price.

Since Turkey is becoming more active in a region where the U.S. has so many interests and since more than half of U.S. material and many troops for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan transit the country or its airspace, any administration should do the maximum to engage and inform Ankara's policy.²¹⁰ The democratic legitimacy of the Turkish government makes it a more credible partner than less democratic U.S. allies in the region.²¹¹ But 70 per cent of Turks polled admit to having a negative opinion of the U.S.²¹² Prime Minister Erdoğan could show leadership by doing more to keep his supporters aware of the U.S.'s importance to Turkey, the commonalities of their values and their greater ability to influence the region when working in tandem. Washington, meanwhile, should consider putting in place a mechanism for sustained high-level dialogue and improved coordination with Ankara on the full range of shared foreign policy interests, including in the Middle East.

At the same time, the EU should find ways to shape its “High-Level Political Dialogue” with Turkey in the spirit demonstrated at the July 2010 meeting in Istanbul of High Representative Catherine Ashton and Enlargement Commissioner Stefan Füle with the Turkish foreign policy leadership.²¹³ After all, Turkey initiated the regional

which case Turkey's foreign policy] would not run into many difficulties in order to remain compatible with the EU approach”. Heinz Kramer, “AKP's ‘new’ foreign policy”, op. cit.

²⁰⁴ “Today's Turkey brings a lot more foreign policy capacity to the table, but it may not be an easy fit with Europe's interest in forging common strategies on key issues, including on Iran and Russia”. Ian O. Lesser, “Turkey, Brazil, and Iran: a glimpse of the future”, German Marshall Fund of the United States, 20 May 2010.

²⁰⁵ Henri Barkey, “Don't blame Europe for Turkey's moves away from the West”, Los Angeles Times, 20 July 2010.

²⁰⁶ See Crisis Group Report, *Turkey and the Middle East*, op. cit.

²⁰⁷ “Turkey is now an autonomous regional power that acts according to its own national interest and foreign policy objectives, which often align with EU and U.S. goals, but occasionally differ ... Turkey's ties to Syria and Hamas could complement U.S. mediation efforts in the Arab-Israeli conflict ... Turkey's ‘tough love’ toward Israel, if proportional (ie, not excessive) and consistent (ie, toward all parties based on similar criteria), would mark a potentially constructive contrast to U.S. and EU policies in the Middle East”. “Getting to zero”, op. cit.

²⁰⁸ “If there is anything to the notion that Turkey is, if you will, moving eastward, it is, in my view, in no small part because it was pushed, and pushed by some in Europe refusing to give Turkey the kind of organic link to the West that Turkey sought”. Statement, 9 June 2010.

²⁰⁹ Interview with *The New York Times*, 21 June 2010.

²¹⁰ “If we are willing to listen and approach Turkey with [a] certain degree of flexibility ... I think there's a good chance of building a relationship that could yield unexpected benefits for many years. That sort of nuance hasn't been exactly our forte, however, so I'm not especially optimistic”. Stephen Walt, *Foreign Policy*, 17 May 2010.

²¹¹ “Encouraging Ankara's newfound assertiveness and diplomatic initiatives, rather than demonising it for tactical differences, will ensure that Turkey remains a constructive transatlantic partner and committed U.S. ally in the long run”. Joshua Walker, “Turkey: still America's best ally in the Middle East?”, *Foreign Policy*, 25 June 2010. “For many Americans, and for some Europeans ... the Turkey of their imagination was one forever in their debt and forever grateful for any seat at the Western table. The irony, of course, is that the new, assertive, Turkey has more to offer the West than its pliant predecessor”. Philip Stephens, “The West must offer Turkey a proper seat at the table”, *Financial Times*, 18 June 2010.

²¹² BBC World Service Poll, April 2010, at www.bbc.co.uk/turkce/haberler/2010/04/100419_us_views.shtml.

²¹³ “Turkish involvement [with neighbouring states] is anything but in conflict with Western interests. Quite the contrary. But the West (and Europe in particular) will finally have to take Turkey seriously as a partner – and stop viewing it as a Western

activism that turned into the “zero-problem” foreign policy a decade ago as a way to convince sceptical Europeans that it would be a valuable partner and EU member, not as a reason to be seen as beyond the pale.²¹⁴

C. AKP LOSES LIBERAL SUPPORT

The direction taken by Prime Minister Erdoğan and Foreign Minister Davutoğlu is also causing some concerns at home. Most telling is a change in the position of the liberal intellectuals and media commentators, whose support had been an important legitimising factor for AKP policy. In the words of a leading AKP parliamentarian and thinker, “we’ve lost them”.²¹⁵

The liberals are only one part of the debate in Turkey. Ideological opponents of AKP, mainly in the secularist camp, remain as convinced as U.S. neo-conservatives and right-wing Israelis that the party’s aim is to join Turkey to a notional Islamic *umma* (universal community of Muslims).²¹⁶ And on the other side, Islamist commentators cheer anything that they think will quicken a triumph of their values.²¹⁷

The liberal intellectuals in the middle are important, however, often commanding a significant swing vote in elections. Their shift away from AKP is not just about foreign policy: after eight years in power, Prime Minister Erdoğan has triggered opposition from intellectuals and others with belittling remarks about commentators, punitive tax fines on the main Turkish media group, his ultra-sensitivity to caricatures and his litigiousness about any hint of corruption. Nobody denies what an AKP official called the “Erdoğan impact”:

client state”. Former German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, *The Guardian*, 1 July 2010. “What are we to make of the fact that countries the United States wishes would play a larger role in the world are now doing so, but in a way that frustrates American goals? ... Diplomacy surrounding global issues will be a lot more complicated It may be that the only chance to get Brazil [or Turkey] to act more like a global citizen is to treat it like one”. James Traub, *Foreign Policy*, 25 May 2010.

²¹⁴ Crisis Group interview, Turkish official, Ankara, July 2010.

²¹⁵ Crisis Group interview, Istanbul, June 2010.

²¹⁶ “Although AKP Prime Minister Erdoğan denies it, everyone knows that party will try to join the world of Islamists while moving away from the West ... the only means to prevent possible defeat in the coming elections is to move much closer to Islamism both at home and abroad”. *Cumhuriyet*, 14 June 2010.

²¹⁷ “Ankara has a new route to escape the yoke of Washington and become independent. Gaining its independent strategic identity does not mean that Turkey is shifting towards the East. It means becoming itself. Turkey making peace with its geography, becoming a regional power, establishing a state policy acting on national interests and stopping the U.S.-Israel tandem is discomfiting the [U.S.] cowboy inside us”. Taner Korkmaz, *Yeni Şafak*, 15 June 2010.

[Erdoğan] is not a diplomat but a political leader, passionately believes in such values as justice, trust, honesty and sincerity. None of these core values have a proper place in the current nomenclature of political science and/or international relations. They are the “subjective” and sentimental elements of global politics. This much of Erdoğan’s political leadership can be analysed along subjective tendencies.²¹⁸

But mainstream commentators are also increasingly opposed to the prime minister’s rhetoric that makes Turkey look unreliable or in the same camp as anti-Western hardliners.²¹⁹ There are accusations of hypocrisy in Erdoğan’s and other AKP leaders’ approaches towards human rights, in which massive criticism of Israel is matched by silence on violations in Sudan, Gaza or Iran. Criticism targets the government’s apparent strong support for Hamas²²⁰ and partial defence of Sudan’s leadership, accused of crimes against humanity in Darfur, on the grounds that Muslims cannot commit genocide;²²¹ Erdoğan’s embrace of Iran’s President Ahmedinejad as a “friend” about whom talk of nuclear ambitions was “just gossip”;²²² his repeated charge that Israel is responsible for “state terrorism” or speeches about “a perception in the world that the Nazi swastika hangs by the Zionist star”;²²³ and outbursts like one in which he off-handedly threatened to expel tens of thousands of Armenian guest workers.²²⁴

Leading liberal commentators wish the prime minister would preserve Turkey’s neutrality,²²⁵ rather than damage

²¹⁸ Ibrahim Kalın, “The complexities of the new Turkey”, *Today’s Zaman*, 29 July 2010.

²¹⁹ “If PM Erdoğan did not have a habit of letting pressure from the streets govern his foreign policy, the situation would be different today. People would not be confused by discussions about a shift in Turkey’s foreign policy”. Ferai Tınç, *Hürriyet*, 18 June 2010.

²²⁰ “We cannot receive such broad support if we start discussing whether Hamas is a terrorist organisation or not. Hamas is an organisation that is quite controversial, even in the Arab world”. Taha Akyol, *Milliyet*, 8 June 2010. “Tell me why we have to support Hamas more than Iran? Is it because of our statesmen’s inexperience?” Ertuğrul Özkök, *Hürriyet*, 8 June 2010. “For a country suffering from terrorism ... [taking Hamas’s side] is a dangerous illogicality”. Rıza Türmen, *Milliyet*, 11 June 2010.

²²¹ “It is absolutely impossible for someone who is part of our civilisation, someone who has given himself over to our religion of Islam, to commit genocide”. Speech to AKP officials, *Radikal*, 9 November 2009. See also Crisis Group Report, *Turkey and the Middle East*, op. cit., p. 8.

²²² Agence France-Presse, 16 March 2010.

²²³ Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, speech in Konya, 4 June 2010.

²²⁴ Interview, BBC, 17 March 2010.

²²⁵ “For Turkey, what is more important than the debate about a shift in foreign policy is not to get involved in the conflicts and

ties with the West,²²⁶ and not demean those who urge him to fix perceptions of Turkey.²²⁷ One is particularly uneasy that Turkey was taking an expensive risk in publicly underwriting Iran's nuclear innocence.²²⁸ Others believe Erdoğan has escalated his rhetoric in order to recover the national-conservative vote in the May 2011 parliamentary elections.²²⁹ Some go as far as the secularists in expressing fear that, in the long term, he plans to reshape Turkey's national ideology along nationalist-religious lines, worrying that:

The AKP's foreign policies are weakening Turkey's EU perspective and at the same time transforming Turkey's political culture from one based on Western democratic values into one based on an Islamic/conservative approach. The opposite is also true: The AKP is exploiting Islamic policies to transform Turkey.²³⁰

The new liberal criticism of AKP includes admonishments from the moderate wing of its own religious-conservative constituency. The leader of one of the most influential Muslim movements in Turkey, Fethullah Gülen, warned from his U.S. base that the *Mavi Marmara* flotilla's failure to deliver the aid in agreement with Israel "is a sign of defying authority, and will not lead to fruitful matters".²³¹ One of the most influential AKP ministers, Bülent Arınç, echoed this sentiment in a speech to a large pro-Gülen audience, whose loud applause reflected discomfort with the confrontational Islamist approach of IHH.²³²

crises that are taking place nearby". Sami Kohen, *Milliyet*, 18 June 2010.

²²⁶ "Turkey's axis has not shifted, but there is a certain need to adjust the balance in our foreign policy. Turkey has to send new signals that it will not break with the West, and those narrow minds in Europe must also start thinking more reasonably". Taha Akyol, *Milliyet*, 11 June 2010.

²²⁷ "Rather than accusing those who note a shift in the country's foreign policy of being spies, members of the government should question what they have done to create such a perception". Mehmet Yılmaz, *Hürriyet*, 16 June 2010.

²²⁸ Rıza Türmen, *Milliyet*, 14 June 2010.

²²⁹ "The AKP, too, has decided to jump on the bandwagon of nationalist frustration with the West. After all, this is the most powerful societal undercurrent in Turkey, and ... Erdoğan needs to win elections". Ömer Taşpınar, *Today's Zaman*, 14 June 2010.

²³⁰ Kadri Gürsel, *Milliyet*, 14 June 2010.

²³¹ Joe Lauria, "Reclusive Turkish Imam criticizes Gaza flotilla", *The Wall Street Journal*, 4 June 2010.

²³² Fethullah Gülen has lived on a 25-acre estate in Pennsylvania's Pocono Mountains since 1999, at first for health reasons and later because he was charged in Turkey with an attempt to create an Islamic state, a charge since dropped. Arınç suggested that Turkey should never be seen as initiating any hostile action: "We may be oppressed, but we must never be the oppressor". *Milliyet*, 5 June 2010.

AKP's loss of foreign policy traction was highlighted during interventions in a parliamentary debate on a new law governing the foreign ministry, which stretched out over several days.²³³ Foreign Minister Davutoğlu was forced to interject that "zero problems" was an aspiration that reflected his idealistic approach, not an expectation that all Turkey's foreign difficulties would be solved soon, and that "you have to dream to make something happen". The leader of the opposition later retorted that "you've drowned in your strategic depth. We now have an image of a Turkey isolated in its foreign policy".²³⁴

While the AKP government received accolades in 2008 for organising proximity talks between Syria and Israel, many commentators have seized on evidence that Ankara may no longer be able to play this role. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, one of Turkey's closest friends in the Middle East, hinted that damaged relations with Israel might make it hard for Ankara to mediate, although he later said his comments had been misrepresented.²³⁵ An eloquent Turkish defender of the basic liberalism of AKP policy, commentator Şahin Alpay, views the deterioration of ties with Israel as a major failure.²³⁶ Diplomatic journalist Semih İdiz noted:

Arab [regimes' and intellectuals'] interest in Turkey would decline if Ankara were to lose its "Western orientation" in general, and sever its ties with the EU in particular what is liked about Turkey is the West-

²³³ Critics from left and right included deputies condemning what they saw as Turkey "up to its neck in the filth of the Middle East", or a sell-out compromise on Cyprus and sarcastically mocking, "you say our policies are aligned with those of the U.S. – but what about U.S. policy on Israel? The PKK? Iran?"

²³⁴ *Milliyet*, 7 July 2010.

²³⁵ "If the relationship between Turkey and Israel is not renewed, it will be very difficult for Turkey to play a role in negotiations". Press statement in Spain, 5 July 2010. However, in a statement to Turkish reporters especially invited to "correct the mistake of the Turkish press", President Assad sought to stress the "trust between the Syrian and Turkish governments", and added that "in that statement he said that there was nobody that could take Turkey's place in mediation between Syria and Israel". Ceyda Karan, "We have been unable to find a mediator better than Turkey", *Radikal*, 17 July 2010.

²³⁶ Listing improvements on Cyprus, Armenia, Iraqi Kurdistan and elsewhere, Şahin Alpay said, "The AKP leadership may be devoutly Muslim, but objectively evaluated, the policies they have pursued are not inspired by Islamist or nationalist, but basically liberal ideas The AKP government has been mostly, if not entirely, successful in its policies. The Republic of Turkey today is a far more democratic, prosperous and respected country The single most important failure of AKP government in foreign policy is surely the deteriorating relations with Israel since the Israeli assault on Gaza". Şahin Alpay, "Liberal principles inspire Turkish foreign policy", *Today's Zaman*, 21 June 2010.

ern image it projects, an image which is lacking in the Middle East ... a Turkey that has severed ties with Israel and turned this country into a demonised adversary will diminish Ankara's role in the Middle East, where there is the need for new players who have contacts with both Israel and the other countries in the region.²³⁷

While until recently neighbours' interest in the "zero-problem" foreign policy burnished Ankara's regional attraction, AKP's struggles with its Israel and Iran policies have clearly lost it an important margin of trust and influence in the U.S., Europe and Israel. Turkish-U.S. relations especially are unlikely to improve if Ankara's rhetoric vis-à-vis Israel remains acrimonious. AKP would, therefore, be well-advised to go back to the proven formula of its first period in office: the EU track of reform, steady hard work to normalise relations with Armenia and Cyprus and on other core Turkish foreign relations problems; persuasion of allies to its points of view on Israel and Iran; and, when the opportunity arises, continuation of its visionary conflict mediation, expansion of trade, integration with the region and engagement with all parties in conflict.

V. CONCLUSION

The evidence currently available is that Turkey is only partly to blame for what has gone wrong with its "zero-problem" foreign policy; when it has erred, it has been mostly due to haste, poor communication, lack of planning and fiery speeches. Turkey still shares goals with its many Western partners, including finding a way to avoid Iran acquiring nuclear weapons and relieving the suffering in Gaza. However, it is much closer to Middle Eastern events and has far greater security and economic exposure to the region than those partners, so it has different tactics, including a policy of engagement with Iran and Hamas. Public opinion is more emotional, too, putting additional pressure on political leaders.

That said, the *Mavi Marmara* affair showed the difficulties Turkey faces when it loses its reputation for neutrality in Middle East disputes, even if it is arguably the injured party. The bruising experience in negotiations over Iran's nuclear program illustrates the problems faced by a middle-ranking power in a process dominated by permanent members of the Security Council. Nevertheless, Ankara should do, and be encouraged to do, what it can when it sees an opportunity to work in close cooperation with other mediators, as it has sought to with respect to Iran and in its important work facilitating Israeli-Syrian proximity talks, or as it might do in mediating between Fatah and Hamas. To the extent possible, it should avoid becoming a party itself to regional disputes. In particular, Turkey and Israel need to find their way back to a working relationship. This is important to Ankara both to smooth its U.S. relationship and to revive its earlier mediation role, and to Israel to win back what was formerly a rare, major Muslim partner in the region. An international perception of open hostility to Israel would rob Turkey of its hard-won image as an effective player that can help bring stability to the region.

At the same time, Western partners should be fairer in approaching Turkey and not use one-sided presentations of its policy on Iran or Israel to decide whether or not it is "Western" and "European". They should support Turkey's convergence with the EU, its real efforts to build bridges to Iran and the UN investigation into the *Mavi Marmara* incident. For their part, AKP leaders have a point when they complain that Germany since 2005 and France since 2007 are betraying EU states' long-standing promise of Turkey's eventual EU membership. But angry rhetoric is not the answer. Instead, they should sustain steady work to persuade Turkish and European public opinion alike of the undoubted benefits of a partnership that is still bearing fruit.

²³⁷ Semih İdiz, "What drives Arab interest in Turkey?", *Hürriyet Daily News*, 28 June 2010.

APPENDIX A

MAP OF THE MIDDLE EAST REGION



Map No. 4102 Rev. 3 UNITED NATIONS
August 2004

Department of Peacekeeping Operations
Cartographic Section

APPENDIX B

ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 130 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a twelve-page monthly bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in all the most significant situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports and briefing papers are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on the website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policy-makers around the world. Crisis Group is co-chaired by the former European Commissioner for External Relations Christopher Patten and former U.S. Ambassador Thomas Pickering. Its President and Chief Executive since July 2009 has been Louise Arbour, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and Chief Prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda.

Crisis Group's international headquarters are in Brussels, with major advocacy offices in Washington DC (where it is based as a legal entity) and New York, a smaller one in London and liaison presences in Moscow and Beijing. The organisation currently operates nine regional offices (in Bishkek, Bogotá, Dakar, Islamabad, Istanbul, Jakarta, Nairobi, Pristina and Tbilisi) and has local field representation in fourteen additional locations (Baku, Bangkok, Beirut, Bujumbura, Damascus, Dili, Jerusalem, Kabul, Kathmandu, Kinshasa, Port-au-Prince, Pretoria, Sarajevo and Seoul). Crisis Group currently covers some 60 areas of actual or potential conflict across four continents. In Africa, this includes Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe; in Asia, Afghanistan, Bangladesh,

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