

# Why are Turkey and Israel Reconciling?

by Jerry Gordon (September 2016)



Israeli and Turkish Flags, Tel Aviv, June 26, 2016

Turkey's reopening of diplomatic relations with Israel after a break off of six years culminated in conclusion of a reconciliation deal with Erdogan's Turkey on June 26, 2016. The deal was affirmed by the Ankara Parliament on August 19<sup>th</sup>. You may recall that famous phone call in March 2013 "suggested" by President Obama to Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu during a visit to Jerusalem that some attest may have triggered the final phase of the pact discussions. The deal involves renewal of diplomatic relations and mutual indemnifications for deaths and injuries arising from an attack on board a Turkish ferry, the *Mavi Marmara* during a Free Gaza Flotilla in Israeli Waters on May 31, 2010.

It also involves arrangements to meet Erdogan's objectives in providing infrastructure rehabilitation and humanitarian aid to Hamas in Gaza, obviating reliance on Egypt which had shut down Gaza's smuggling tunnels. However, Erdogan refused Israel's request to shut down Hamas in Ankara. He kept Hamas political chief Khaled Meshaal in Turkey and Hamas leaders in Gaza informed about the progress in negotiations. Erdogan was endeavoring to lift Israeli restrictions

and permit Turkish infrastructure construction projects in power and health facilities in Gaza. Prior to Turkey approving the deal, Israel agreed to shipments of humanitarian goods to ports under its control and inspection before entering Hamas-controlled Gaza.

There are compelling economic and security reasons for reconciliation between Turkey and Israel. One is significant tourism and economic trade between the two Mediterranean countries. Another is the attraction to Ankara of Israel's development of major gas fields offshore in its Exclusive Economic Zone. That requires investments in pipelines for transporting it to both Turkey, for its internal needs, and prime markets in the EU. Erdogan had just concluded a deal with Russian President Putin in Moscow that would complete the so-called Turkish Stream pipeline. Israel's gas would offer significant economic benefits to Turkey which, in turn, might invest in the submarine pipeline connecting Israel's offshore gas fields to the Turkish Stream, estimated at \$4 billion.

There is another factor. The ancient canard about "keeping my enemies closer." Erdogan has been a major supporter of Muslim Brotherhood affiliate Hamas in Gaza. He struck a compromise deal on a security issue raised by Israel as a condition of a possible energy deal. That resulted in facilitating the transfer of a major Hamas military leader from Turkey to Qatar. The weekend following the Turkish Parliament's approval of the reconciliation pact, there was a rocket launched from Gaza that exploded in the southern Israeli town of Sderot adjacent to Gaza. Israel undertook massive retaliation that Turkey formally objected to, while Israel condemned Ankara's criticism as an invasion of its sovereign right of self defense.

Curiously, following the July 15<sup>th</sup> coup, Israel has been conspicuously absent from any of the accusations of alleged complicity in the coup. Perhaps, this was because the reconciliation deal was awaiting approval by Ankara's Parliament. Given Erdogan's incursion into neighboring Syria on August 24, 2016 which threatens the Syrian Kurds, the question arises as to whether that might ultimately lead to the reconciliation deal unraveling. Ankara knows that Israel's Prime Minister Netanyahu has publicly supported Kurdish independence in the region. There is a history of periodic covert Israeli support to the Kurds over the past half century, especially in Iraq. Some in Israel have raised the matter of whether Netanyahu faces a choice between the Turks versus the Kurds

given the latter's own significant energy resources. One example has been the shipment of smuggled oil to Israel from the oil fields of the Kurdish Regional Government in Iraq – some of which may have been transshipped via vessels owned in part by the Erdogan family's business interests.



"Countries have interests, not friends"

This writer had an *Israel News Talk Radio (INTR)* interview on August 16, 2016, "[The US-Turkish Connections](#)." The matter arose of Prime Minister Netanyahu concluding an economic/diplomatic deal with Erdogan in late June. It concerned the proposed payment of \$20 million for compensation to eight Turkish nationals and one Turkish American. They were killed during an Israeli Naval Sayeret (Commando) boarding of the Turkish ferry, the *Mavi Mamara*, in late May 2010 when the Free Gaza Flotilla tried to run the blockade. Erdogan has continued to provide a safe haven for Hamas military and political wing leaders in Turkey. Further, Turkey is making regular shipments of food and civilian materials to Gaza via the Israeli port of Ashdod where the cargoes undergo inspection prior to being sent to Gaza.

In reply to "Beyond the Matrix" hosts Rod Bryant and Ira Michaelson, I mentioned

the famous quote of US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles during the Eisenhower era who remarked, "[The United States of America does not have friends; it has interests.](#)" We speculated that the six-year dispute ripened because these two wary parties saw economic and geo-political advantages to burying the hatchet. Erdogan wanted to gain a piece of the cheaper Israeli offshore gas for internal use, making Turkey less dependent on Russian supplies that constitute over 50% of the country's needs. Then there is the prospect of relying on Israeli gas for his pipeline deal to the lucrative EU market. In response, we mentioned the triple alliance that Netanyahu had crafted with an economic deal for exploitation of the offshore gas fields with Greece and the Republic of Cyprus, which includes an alternative LNG facility and possible EU financed submarine pipeline.

A *Reuters* story concerning the Israeli reparations deal approval by the Erdogan AKP controlled Ankara Parliament, "[Israel to pay Turkey \\$20 million in compensation after six-year rift](#)" noted the attraction of Israel's offshore gas development:

Israel had already offered its apologies for the raid. Both countries are to appoint ambassadors and Turkey is to pass legislation indemnifying Israeli soldiers as part of an agreement partly driven by the prospect of lucrative Mediterranean gas deals.

In addition to the compelling energy attraction to Turkey there is the matter of Israel's significant bi-lateral trade under a Free Trade agreement concluded in the 1990's and continued by Erdogan.

The Ankara parliament's approval of the reconciliation agreement and renewal of diplomatic relations with Israel is unlikely to come apart soon. It's all about trade between these two countries. When the deal was concluded on June 26, 2016, The Turkish *Daily Hurriyet* [noted](#):

The only route big enough for Israel's gas exportation was a country like Turkey, which was capable of providing infrastructure and further exportation to the West, Shai Cohen, the consul-general of [Israel](#) in Istanbul, recently told Anadolu Agency.

Pipeline infrastructure, the development of gas fields and a pipeline to southern Turkey would cost about \$4 billion alone,



not counting further expenses which would be accrued afterwards, Cohen explained.

The bilateral trade volume between the two countries is currently at around \$4 billion. Turkey's exports to [Israel](#) rose by 13 percent to around \$2.7 billion from 2011 to 2015, according to official Turkish statistics. Over the same period, Turkish imports from [Israel](#) dropped from around \$2 billion to \$1.6 billion. The bilateral trade volume and tourism numbers will likely soar in short order, according to businesspeople from both sides.

To paraphrase Secretary of State Dulles' comment, countries have interests, not friends.

The deal, as we noted earlier was approved on August 19, 2016 by the Ankara Parliament. Less than 72 hours later, it was tested by rockets launched from Gaza.



Hamas Political Leader Khaled Meshaal and President Erdogan of Turkey in Ankara

Turkey Found to be Supporting Hamas and Muslim Brotherhood

During the INTR interview we stressed that perhaps Israel believes that it might be able to control Turkish funding of Hamas and that Israeli representatives in Ankara could monitor Hamas senior operatives there.

Those comments were buttressed by a *Newsweek* story about a 'leaked' German

Intelligence report accusing Erdogan of bankrolling Hamas and other Muslim Brotherhood groups in the Middle East, "[Leaked German Report Calls Turkey 'Platform' For Hamas, Muslim Brotherhood, Syrian Rebel Groups.](#)" The *Newsweek* article noted:

The leaked German report alleges that the government of Turkish President Erdogan supports Palestinian militant group Hamas, Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood and "groups in the armed Islamist opposition in Syria," all of which follow Sunni Islam, the same strand as the majority of Muslim Turks.

It continued to say that "as a result of Ankara's domestic and foreign policy that has been Islamized step-by-step above all since 2011, Turkey has developed into the central platform of action for Islamist groups in the Middle East region."



Hamas Military leader, Salah al-Aroui

### Turkey Expels US Sanctioned Hamas Military Leader as Condition of Deal

During the reconciliation negotiations, we noted that Israel demanded closure of the Hamas Ankara office, but that Erdogan rebuffed that effort. Instead, Israel extracted a condition that Turkey would prevent possible terror attacks. Israeli justification for acceptance of that compromise was Turkey's "arrangement" in December 2015 to send to Qatar Salah al-Aroui, founder of the Hamas Military Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades. Israel [wanted](#) him expelled as a condition of

continuing negotiations for a gas pipeline. Arouri allegedly “volunteered” to leave in an agreement between Hamas Political leader Khaled Meshaal and then Turkish Foreign Minister Davatoglu. Al-Arouri had been [jailed](#) by Israel for 15 years prior to being released to Syria in 2012 where he joined Hamas. When the Hamas office was closed he made his way to Turkey. From Turkey Al-Arouri organized the abduction and murder of three Jewish Yeshiva youths, Eyal Yifrah, Gilad Sha’ar, and Naftali Frenkel, one of them a dual US Israel citizen, hitchhiking near Hebron in June 2014. They were picked up by Hamas operatives posing as Chassidic Jews. Hamas used the IDF killing of its operatives involved in the abduction and murder of the three Yeshiva students as a pretext for unleashing the 50 day war in Gaza. The two Hamas operatives, Marwan Kawasmeh and Amir Abu Eishawere were [tracked down](#) by Israel Border Police and Shin Bet security and killed in a shootout near Hebron in September 2015. The US Treasury [sanctioned](#) al-Arouri and a Saudi-based Hamas finance group. *Naharnet.com* [noted](#):

financier Maher Salah; Abu-Ubaidi Kari Hafiz Al-Adha, a Saudi citizen and “senior Hamas financial officer”; and al-Agfa’s company Masyaf International Holding Group for sanctions.

It said Arouri has since 2013 “overseen the distribution of Hamas finances” and worked closely with Salah. Now that al-Arouri is in Qatar, doubtless he is continuing to conspire with new funding sources for Hamas.

During the reconciliation negotiations between Israel and Turkey, the matter was raised about a possible Palestinian prisoner exchange for the bodies of four IDF soldiers killed in Gaza during the 2014 Operation Protective Edge.



Israeli Police Officer Shows Gaza Rocket that Exploded in Sderot, Israel, August 21, 2016

## Turkey and Israel Exchange Condemnations over IDF Retaliation to a Gaza Rocket Attack

Contretemps flared up between Israel and Turkey on August 22, 2016 following a weekend rocket attack launched by Hamas from Gaza that fell on the Southern Israeli town of Sderot. Israel launched an immediate overwhelming response by air and tank attacks against dozens of targets in the Hamas-controlled territory. [AFP reported](#) the Turkish foreign ministry statement condemning the reprisal attacks by Israel:

We strongly condemn these disproportionate attacks. These attacks, which caused injury to innocent Palestinian civilians, are unacceptable whatever prompted them. The normalization of our country's relations with Israel does not mean we will stay silent in the face of such attacks against the Palestinian people.

Israel's foreign ministry replied in like manner:

The normalization of our relations with Turkey does not mean that we will remain silent in the face of its baseless condemnations. Israel will continue to defend its civilians from all rocket fire on our territory, in accordance with international law and our conscience. Turkey should think



twice before criticizing the military actions of others.

Notwithstanding the abrupt diplomatic exchange, the reconciliation deal held.



Does Israel Face a Choice between Turkey and the Kurds?

Dr. Reuven Berko in an *Israel Hayom* commentary, August 25, 2016, "[Erdogan recalculates his Route](#)," said this about Erdogan threading the proverbial Gordian Knot between the Russian deal and reconciliation with Israel:

The need for Russian cooperation and gas explains the reconciliation between Erdogan and Russian President Vladimir Putin; and it also led, despite support for Hamas, to the renewal of relations with Israel – as a gas supplier, an economic actor and a broker to the Russians and the West.

Just before the Ankara Parliament approval of the reconciliation with Israel Dr. Norman Bailey published commentary on August 17th "[Israel's Kurdish conundrum](#)," in *Globes Israel Business*. His tag line was "Israel may soon be forced to choose between the Turks and the Kurds." Bailey is a former Reagan-era National Security Council member and Haifa University professor.

In our *IsraelNewsTalkRadio* interview, we talked about Turkey's avid interest in

Israeli offshore gas to supplant Russian gas for transmission to the EU via the Turkish Stream gas pipeline. What Dr. Bailey brings up is what we focused on – the alternative of the LNG and Eastern Med pipeline with Israel's partners in the triple alliance, Cyprus and Greece.

Bailey contends that Erdogan's rush to embrace Putin in Moscow may diminish the value to Israel of Turkish pipelines for gas transmission. Russian gas may have been the quid pro quo for providing financing to complete it under prior agreements.

Thus Bailey thinks that the reconciliation might be in jeopardy and that Kurdistan in Syria linked to Iraqi Southern Kurdistan transmitting oil via an existing pipeline to the Mediterranean Coast might be the better option. Given Erdogan's objective in his incursion into Syria, the Kurds might be denied a link up to that pipeline.

As Dr. Bailey points out in his *Globes* comment Israel has already announced its support for an independent Kurdistan in the region. He defines the choices that Israel faces. Whether to stick with the Turkish deal, affirmed in August by the Ankara Parliament, or cultivate what he considers the more reliable Kurdish alternative given the turmoil in Turkey perpetrated by Erdogan. He concludes:

Would that be a bad thing? A formal or informal alliance with Syrian/Iraqi Kurdistan, providing cover in the north in case of hostile activity on the Israeli borders is arguably more important than a fragile normalization with Turkey, which is any case the unpredictable Erdogan regime could end anytime for reasons of its own.

We asked a knowledgeable observer of whether Dr. Norman Bailey's conundrum about Israel having to make the choice between the Turks and Kurds, we were advised to note that Erdogan has studiously avoided including Israel in the blame game rotation for the coup. Despite the contretemps exchanged over the massive retaliation by Israel against Hamas in Gaza for the rocket attack on Sderot, it didn't stop the mechanics of reconciliation.

Does that mean that Netanyahu has abandoned the Kurds after promoting their Independence? My knowledgeable source said, "Don't count on it."

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