

A CUFİ PRIMER: Timeline of the Deteriorating Relationship between U.S., Israel, and Turkey

Background

From 1945, when Turkey entered World War II aligned with the Allies, relations between the U.S. and the Republic of Turkey were friendly. In 1947, due to difficulties in Greece repressing a communist rebellion and the Soviet Union's demands for military bases in the Turkish Straits, the U.S. declared the Truman Doctrine. In that document, the U.S. delineated its intentions to ensure Greece and Turkey's security which resulted in significant military and economic support from the U.S. to both countries.



In 1949, Turkey was the first Muslim-majority country to recognize the State of Israel, formalizing a relationship between the two nations. For several decades, Turkey and Israel maintained close cooperation and created plans for continued partnership in technology and water-sharing.

Strained Relations Begin



While relations between the U.S., Turkey, and Israel were favorable in the past, they began to deteriorate in 2003 after the election of the AKP (Justice Party) in Turkey which made Recep Tayyip Erdoğan the Prime Minister (and later President). When the U.S. prepared to invade Iraq to overthrow Saddam Hussein's government, Turkey refused to allow U.S. forces to cross its territory into northern Iraq. Meanwhile, Erdoğan's anti-Israel views were revealed with the rise of Hamas in Gaza as Erdoğan began to criticize Israel's defensive actions. When Israel assassinated infamous Hamas terrorist and spiritual leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin in 2004, Turkey began to describe

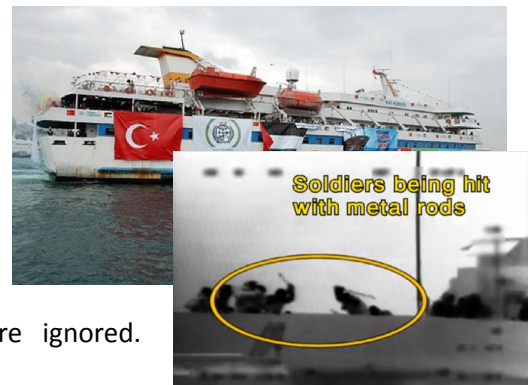
Israeli policy in the Gaza Strip as "state-sponsored terrorism."

Although Turkey under Erdoğan initially strove to keep up diplomatic relations with Israel, by 2009 Turkey openly and vociferously condemned Israel's conduct in Gaza during Operation Cast Lead, and Erdoğan even made an impassioned speech against Israel at the World Economic Forum conference in Switzerland. In the years following, this pattern of thinly veiled hatred for the Jewish state would persist.



The Gaza Flotilla Incident: Turkey Cuts Ties with Israel

In May 2010, IDF naval forces began an interception of six ships from the Turkish IHH. IHH claimed to be a purely humanitarian organization, but were tied to Hamas. Their flotilla was attempting to break Israel's naval blockade of the Gaza Strip. Members of the IHH likened the mission to an Islamic conquest and expressed plans to reach Gaza, intending to breach the blockade which Israel instated to prevent Hamas' smuggling of weapons and harming of Israeli civilians, or die trying. The ships were given numerous warnings to redirect their course to Ashdod so they could be inspected before their goods were transferred to Gaza, but these warnings were ignored.





Eventually, Israeli naval commandos boarded all six ships. Violence broke out on one ship, the Mavi Marmara, when flotilla participants attacked IDF personnel with knives, clubs, and live fire. As a result of the confrontation, eight Turkish citizens and one Turkish-American with dual citizenship were killed and others were wounded. Ten IDF soldiers were beaten and wounded, one seriously.

Prime Minister Erdogan declared that the raid was “state terrorism,” recalling Turkey’s ambassador from Israel and demanding an apology from the Jewish state.

Investigations revealed that 50 of the Mavi Marmara’s passengers had connections to global Islamic terrorist organizations, and photos of the cache of weapons on the Mavi Marmara were published online. The same year, a UN report said that Israel’s blockade of Gaza was legal according to international law. In response, Turkey expelled Israel’s ambassador, downgraded diplomatic ties with the Jewish state and suspended military co-operation. Israeli officials stated that they hoped to restore ties but said that they would not apologize for the Mavi Marmara incident.



Turkey - Israel Reconciliation

It was not until three years later, in March 2013, that Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu apologized to Prime Minister Erdogan over the phone for the Gaza flotilla incident, after U.S. pressure on both sides. An official statement by the Israeli government said that Prime Minister Netanyahu expressed regret over the deterioration in relations between their countries, describing the incident as unintentional and regretful. Prime Minister Erdogan later issued a statement in which he accepted the apology on behalf of the Turkish people. In June 2016, Israel and Turkey announced plans for reconciliation after their six-year rift, and both countries appointed ambassadors to each other’s countries.



Despite the declared intention to reconcile, relations between Turkey and Israel have only continued to deteriorate. Turkey, under President Erdogan, has continued to falsely accuse Israel of terrorism and crimes against humanity. In 2018, Turkey expelled the Israeli ambassador and withdrew its ambassador in Tel Aviv for consultations in protest of the conflicts on the Gaza border. In response, Israel expelled Turkey’s consul in Jerusalem. Recently, Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Erdogan have engaged in verbal confrontations over Twitter.



A Failed Coup



Despite Turkey's membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), relations between the U.S. and Turkey have become increasingly strained in recent years. In July 2016, a coup d'état was attempted in Turkey's Islamist government. Although the coup failed, an extensive purging of Turkish civil service personnel and thorough investigation ensued. The coup leaders were accused of being linked to a Turkish businessman and cleric living in Pennsylvania, Fethullah Gulen, the leader of the Gulen movement which is designated a terrorist organization by Turkey.

Turkey demanded that the United States extradite Gulen, but President Obama said that the cleric would only be extradited as a result of "a legal process," and if the extradition request was found to be justified according to the relevant laws and treaties. In response, Turkish Labor Minister Suleiman Soylu claimed that America was behind the coup, and President Erdogan accused the United States of protecting Gulen. However, both German and British investigations found no definitive evidence that Gulen masterminded the failed coup.



Turkey Courting Terrorists

In 2017, then U.S. national security adviser General H.R. McMaster said that Turkey had joined Qatar as a prime source of funding for terrorist groups (specifically those connected to al-Qaeda) that contributes to the spread of the extremist ideology of Islamism. Erdogan, who met with Hamas chief Khaled Mashal in Istanbul in 2015, has said that he does not deem Hamas a terrorist organization. Instead, he considers it to be "one of the resistance movements working to liberate the occupied territories of the Palestinians." Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu recently criticized the United States for designating Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps a terrorist organization.



Turkey Courting Russia

As the ties between Turkey, the U.S. and Israel became even more strained, Turkey and Russia strengthened their relationship. In September 2017, Turkey, a NATO member, signed a controversial deal with Russia to arm its forces with Russian S-400 anti-aircraft missiles, a move that poses a variety of problems, both practical and political. At the same time, Turkey was in the process of purchasing the most advanced warplane in the U.S. arsenal, the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter.



Throughout 2018, under the Trump administration, Turkey's relations with the U.S. became less and less friendly, partly due to Turkey's opposition to the relocation of the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem and partly due to the unlawful 24-month imprisonment of an American pastor, Andrew Brunson, by the Erdogan regime. For months, the Trump administration called on Turkey to release Brunson, even imposing punitive tariffs and sanctions against Turkey, but Prime Minister Erdogan's response was that Turkey would now be forced to look for new friends and allies.

Presently, the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act, which is expected to pass later this year, would ban any sale of F-35's to Turkey unless Ankara cancels their order of the Russian missile defense system. In spite of repeated U.S. warnings, on May 22nd, 2019, Turkey's defense minister said its military personnel are receiving training to operate the S-400 missile defense system. In June, the Pentagon announced that Turkey would face "devastating consequences," including removal from the Lockheed Martin (LMT) F-35 program, by July 31st if Ankara will not backtrack from the Russian S-400 missile deal.



At present, relations between the U.S., Turkey, and Israel are more strained than ever. Unless Turkey reverses its anti-democratic, anti-western, and pro-terrorist stance, relations between the three countries will continue to deteriorate.