

False Foes and Fruitful Friction: U.S.-Turkish Military, Defence, and Intelligence Relations during the Erdogan Decade*

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Introduction: 'Korea, 1951'

Before leaving for Turkey on a year-long teaching fellowship in August 2014 I received an email from my grandfather wishing me safe travels among other formalities. In the post-script, however, he succinctly captured the essence of U.S.-Turkey relations over the past 60 years: 'Korea 1951, Turkish infantry battalion was attached to our 2nd Indianhead division through UN. I directed artillery and called for air strikes for their infantry patrols seeking out Chinese forces.' Throughout the modern era the United States and Turkey have indeed maintained a robust strategic partnership on the military, intelligence, and defence fronts. From serving as a buffer state between the Soviet Union and Europe during the Cold War to deploying soldiers in Afghanistan to help the U.S. combat Al-Qaeda, Ankara was a firm ally of Washington during the latter part of the 20th century and beyond.

Recently these long-standing ties have appeared to fray –some would argue unravel– since the rise of Turkey's AKP (Justice and Development Party) just over a decade ago. After being elected in 2002, AKP leader and former Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan disregarded numerous American directives regarding Ankara's stances on three key issues in the Middle East: The 2003 Iraq War, the sanction regiment against Iran's nuclear weapons program, and ties with Israel. Worried pundits and congress members in Washington responded by placing the U.S.-Turkey strategic partnership on trial. An influential 2008 Brookings Institute report, entitled 'Winning

Turkey', suggested that these rifts signified an emerging crisis between the U.S. and Turkey.¹ Ultimately the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee convened in 2010 to evaluate the troubled alliance. Speaking in front of the 2010 committee, Congressman Connie Mack proclaimed 'the relationship with Turkey is hanging by a thread.'² For many on Capitol Hill, the verdict was already clear – Turkey had been lost.

My paper examines and assesses the validity of concerns over divergences in vital U.S.-Turkish military, defence, and intelligence relations from 2003 up until this past year. It explores the nature and extent of the partnership's decline and whether any discovered decline was overstated in American foreign policy discourse. Another central purpose is to investigate if the commonly perceived distance between Ankara and Washington might have provided political cover or diplomatic gains for either nation. In sum, this paper aims to produce a more nuanced and complete understanding of a complex new era in U.S. engagement with Turkey.

I contend that significant gaps generally did not separate U.S. and Turkish chief objectives in the Middle East. These included furthering mutual national security goals such as preventing Iran from nuclearising its weapons arsenal; toppling Saddam Hussein; and cooperating with Israel to thwart Iran aggression. This is not to deny changes in the character of the U.S.-Turkish relationship. Turkey certainly assumed a variety

* I would like to acknowledge my former professor at Emory University, Dr. Kenneth Stein, for the general feedback as well as technical support he provided me during this project.

¹ Philip H. Gordon and Ömer Taspınar, *Winning Turkey: How America, Europe, and Turkey Can Revive a Fading Partnership* (Washington DC: Brookings Publ., 2008).

² U.S. House Hearing 111th Congress, *Turkey's New Foreign Policy Direction: Implications for U.S.-Turkish Relations* (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2010).

of tactics that conflicted with U.S. ones. However, Erdogan usually limited Turkish defiance to public speeches, symbolic gestures, and populist ramblings against Netanyahu. Turkey's vociferous criticism of the U.S and Israel did not drastically disrupt the strategic partnership. On the contrary, outwardly distancing itself from the Bush and Obama administrations bolstered Turkey's chances for helping the U.S. achieve long-term objectives in the region: facilitating negotiations with both Iran and the Palestinians as well as supporting democratic movements via Erdogan's leadership during the Arab Spring. Full and overt compliance would have diminished Turkey's political capital among the many regional actors who distrust the U.S. and its presumed allies. Thus surface friction over tactics and verbal skirmishes between Washington and Ankara rarely jeopardised primary American objectives and, in fact, better positioned Turkey to be a powerful enabler of U.S. policies in the Middle East.

Turkey's Allegiance on Trial: The Charges

Mounting concerns over Turkey's handling of Iraq, Iran, and Israel served as the driving impetuses behind a 2010 U.S Committee on Foreign Relations hearing to analyze Ankara's consternating behaviour. Chairman Howard Berman (D-CA) identified three main reasons for reassessing the alliance. The first was Erdogan's scathing criticism of Israel, compounded by his alleged termination of military cooperation with Jerusalem after the Flotilla Incident in 2010. The second concern was Turkey's warming economic and public connections with Iran despite U.S-led sanctions levelled against the regime. Finally there was the Turkish parliament's refusal of Washington's request for the US Fourth Infantry Division to stage an attack from Turkish territory at the 2003 Iraq War's onset.³

Yet none of these instances really pointed to diplomatic disaster. It was and remains incredibly unlikely for Turkey to ever consider such a drastic move as withdrawing its membership from NATO or removing U.S. personnel from Incirlik Air Base in Adana.

³ Hearing, *Turkey's New Foreign Policy*.

How to explain Turkey's intermittent recalcitrance then? One alternative theory raised by a perceptive senator –which this paper further investigates– was that Turkey took 'independent positions regarding the Palestinians and Iran, however objectionable to us, while otherwise remaining committed to the Western alliance.'

The Cooperation amidst the Controversy in Iraq

Washington's inflated expectations for Turkey's role in the 2003 Iraq War obscured Ankara's significant contributions. Widely considered a flashpoint in the history of U.S.-Turkish diplomacy, Turkish parliament's rejection of a 2003 U.S. plan to invade northern Iraq via Turkey marred their image as a 'shining crown jewel' among many notables in the American foreign policy community.⁴ Immediately following the vote in Turkish parliament Paul Wolfowitz, former U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense, labeled the decision a 'big, big mistake.'⁵ Congressman John Costa echoed Wolfowitz's discontent during the 2010 special hearing and blamed Turkey's lack of 'willingness to allow us to participate on the northern border of Iraq' for fragmenting U.S.-Turkish unity. Other top analysts also saw the tabled invasion plan as a catastrophe with long-term diplomatic fallout.⁶ A 2007 Brookings Institute report's grim conclusion stated that the split over Iraq precipitated the end of the period in which the U.S and Turkey could always 'count on the other in the name of common strategic interest.'⁷

Admittedly, such scepticism seemed justified given the historical context of Turkey's foreign policy being tailored to suit Washington's preferences. For instance, Turkey fully supported the last American-led attack on Iraqi forces in 1991 even when it inflicted heavy economy costs upon Turkey.⁸ The removal of hundreds of thousands Kurds during this conflict added more fuel to the conflict with

⁴ William Hale, *Turkey, the US and Iraq* (London: Saqi, 2007), p. 91.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁷ Gordon & Taspinar, *Winning Turkey*, p. 37.

⁸ Hale, *Turkey*, p. 59.

the P.K.K and raised new security problems in Southeast Turkey. Ankara's mere consideration to again serve as a launch pad for an even more ambitious aim of overthrowing Saddam warranted greater recognition itself.

This begs the question: In actuality, how far did Turkey distance itself from American military and intelligence postures in Iraq in 2003? Both the initial parliamentary vote on participation in the war –which failed only narrowly– and Ankara's quick response to pass a new resolution suggested a bona fide willingness to support the American campaign. Although the 1 March 2003 resolution to deploy U.S. troops into Iraq from Southeast Turkey did not pass, the majority of parliament members actually voted in favor of the American invasion. The 'yes' votes outnumbered the 'no' ones by a margin of 14, but the Turkish bylaws required three more 'yes' votes for the motion to carry.⁹ In fact, The AKP leadership expected the resolution to pass; 'the outcome was a brutal shock.'¹⁰ Turkish parliament officials scrambled after the vote to reassure Washington of Ankara's allegiance. If anything, the vote's failure was a result of poor canvassing and bureaucratic in-fighting rather than the product of a risky political gambit by Erdogan to undermine U.S. policy.¹¹

More telling was Turkey's decision to carry through on its promise to support the U.S. and provide significant operational assistance to American forces throughout the war. After the first vote failed to pass, another resolution prevailed a mere three weeks later and American bombers were promptly granted permission to use Turkish air space. Later in 2003 Turkish parliament re-affirmed its commitment to advancing U.S. war efforts by signing off on an agreement giving American

planes total access to Incirlik air base for one year, 'as well as the ports of Mersin and Iskenderun, for support of coalition operations' and renewed this contract again in early 2005.¹² Through the early stages of the Iraq War, Turkey not only served as a critical transit point for provisions for American troops in Iraq but also combated Iraqi insurgency and used its own personnel to help stabilise Northern Iraq.¹³ By February 2005 a couple of analysts were able to look past the initial Iraq plan gaffe and wrote that Turkey was playing 'a positive role in Iraq's future, and that the gap between Turkish and US policies was a relatively narrow one.'¹⁴

When placed against a global backdrop Turkey's moderate to high levels of compliance should have been praised rather than condemned by American officials. The United Nations condemned the invasion and traditional U.S supporters –such as France, Germany, and Canada– loudly opposed unilateral action by the U.S. In total, 54 countries formally protested the American incursion. Nevertheless, Turkey backed the Iraq War with both promises and deeds. As a result of this decision to align with the U.S., Turkey would lose face in the international politics arena. Amidst promising EU accession talks, for instance, Turkey squandered an opportunity to show solidarity with Germany and France by backing the U.S. offensive.

Blame for the plan's failure to pass should not have been solely attributed to Turkey's deficient allegiance, as many in Washington had, but to the Bush administration's deficient patience regarding the 2003 Iraqi offensive. Conceivably, if Washington adopted a slower and more thoughtful diplomatic approach, Turkish apprehensions could have been properly assuaged and the vote could have passed by a larger margin. It was not Turkey's commitment to the U.S. that faltered during 2003, but rather the lack of appreciation for Turkey's major operational contributions and shared vision toward the future of Iraq. This example proves particularly instructive today as State

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

¹⁰ Henri J. Barkey, Scott B. Lasensky & Phebe Marr, *Iraq, Its Neighbors, and the United States: Competition, Crisis, and the Reordering of Power* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2011), p. 50.

¹¹ Michael Rubin, 'A Comedy of Errors: American-Turkish Diplomacy and the Iraq War', *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Spring 2005, online at <http://www.meforum.org/701/a-comedy-of-errors-american-turkish-diplomacy> (last accessed 30 October 2015).

¹² Hale, *Turkey*, p. 125.

¹³ Hearing, *Turkey's New Foreign Policy*.

¹⁴ Hale, *Turkey*, p. 123.

Department officials again press Turkey to take a greater role in fight against ISIS without a clear plan for the fighting's aftermath or how to safeguard Turkey from the fall-out.

Divisions over Iran

Another area of concern for American analysts was improving Tehran-Ankara relations between 2003 and 2013. The pinnacle of Iranian-Turkish economic partnership roughly coincided with the peak of U.S.-Iranian tensions over Tehran's nuclear program. Turkey's trade with Iran skyrocketed from approximately \$1 billion when Erdoğan first took office in 2003 to over \$20 billion a decade later.¹⁵ Iran meanwhile evoked new ire from the U.S. due to the unveiling of Terhan's efforts to nuclearise. Named as part of 'Axis of Evil,' by President Bush in 2003, Iran remained a principal adversary of the U.S. through 2013. One of the reasons provoking U.S. animosity was the discovery of undeclared nuclear facilities in Iran in 2002. A major way the U.S. sought to combat Iran's nuclear weapon ambitions was by invoking economic sanctions against the Islamic Republic. Given this zero-sum logic, members of U.S. Congress that the strengthening of Turkish-Iranian economic ties from 2003-2013 meant the weakening of the bonds between Turkey and the U.S.

Mutual Fears, Goals

But like the U.S., Turkey did not want to see the emergence of an Iran with atomic weapons. Though their two economies were tightly linked, Ankara and Tehran were nonetheless rivals. Erdoğan opposed the emergence of a nuclear Iran since a more powerful Tehran would have threatened Turkey's objectives, ranked in ascending order of importance, for a neo-Ottoman Middle East, regional stability, and the survival of the Turkish state.

'Whatever we lost between 1911 and 1923, whatever lands we withdrew from, from 2011 to 2023, we shall once again meet our brothers

¹⁵ Rubin, 'Iran-Turkey Trade Jumps Again', *American Enterprise Institute*, 5 March 2013, online at <https://www.aei.org/publication/iran-turkey-trade-jumps-again/print> (last accessed 30 October 2015).

in those lands,' then Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu announced in a 2012 press conference.¹⁶ The AKP's mantra to reestablish Turkish hegemony and pride in the region was repeated throughout out his time in command. Armed with a bomb, however, a nuclear Iran would foil Erdoğan's designs for a Turkish-centric Middle East. Besides the ideological differences separating the Shia Islamic Republic and Sunni Turkey, the two nations split over how to shape the destinies of Egypt and Syria.¹⁷ A more powerful Iran could have leveraged its new weapons to gain more influence in Egypt and Syria, derailing Turkish aspirations for obtaining more regional clout. Turkish fear of conceding regional hegemony to Iran discouraged it from providing any direct and substantive support for Iran's attempts to obtain nuclear bomb.

Iran's success might have also destabilised the Middle East by initiating a dangerous arms race, further discrediting theories that Ankara was in favor of a Tehran possessing WMDs. In December 2011, Saudi Arabia's chief intelligence officer, Turki al-Faisal, stated that his country, a powerful regional rival led by Sunni Arabs, might develop their own nuclear weapons program if Iran had acquired the bomb.¹⁸ Similar attitudes were held by then-president of Egypt, Hosni Murabak. In a cable leaked while Murabak was attending a 2008 international conference, the leader said that 'Egypt might be forced to begin its own nuclear weapons program if Iran succeeds in

¹⁶ Haber Turk Correspondent, 'Kaybettüğimiz Topraklarda Buluşacağız', *Haber Turk*, 21 January 2012, online at <http://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/708252-kaybettugimiz-topraklarda-bulusacagiz> (last accessed 30 October 2015).

¹⁷ Burak Bekdil, 'Is the Turco-Iranian Friendship Real?: Turkey at the Crossroads', *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 21, Nr. 2 (Spring 2014), online at <http://www.meforum.org/3768/turkey-iran-friendship> (last accessed 30 October 2015).

¹⁸ The Associated Press, 'Prince Hints Saudi Arabia May Join Nuclear Arms Race', *The New York Times*, 6 December 2011, online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/07/world/middleeast/saudi-arabia-may-see-nuclear-weapons-prince-says.html> (last accessed 30 October 2015).

those efforts.¹⁹ A potential nuclear weapons domino effect brought about by Iran's creation of atomic weapons would surround Turkey with multiple nations capable of posing an existential threat to the Turkish Republic.²⁰ With a history of playing off one another's unruly Kurdish populations, moreover, a nuclearised Iran could have also provided the PKK and other anti-Turkish militants with more sophisticated, longer-range, and more accurate conventional weaponry to use for harm and leverage against Turkey. The potential fallout of a nuclear Iran would be unacceptable for Turkey.

Above all, a Tehran wielding atomic weapons would have posed an immediate mortal threat to Turkey considering Iran's previous attempts to coerce Turkey. On multiple previous occasions Iran warned it would launch military assaults against Turkey. In 2011 a senior military commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guard announced that Tehran would have targeted NATO's missile defense shield in Turkey in retaliation of any U.S. or Israel assault on the Islamic Republic.²¹ Iran also threatened to strike back if U.S. or any of its allies intervened in the Syrian War. Given that Turkey was increasingly depicted by Iran as a proxy for carrying out Western designs in the Middle East, a retaliation might have indeed involved Ankara due to its geographic proximity and close ties to Washington. One of the Revolutionary Guards' most influential newspapers, *Sobhe-Sadegh*, corroborated this assessment and declared in 2012 'that Iran's relationship is so important that it would choose Assad's Syria over Turkey.'²² Although

Turkey's official stance on the Iranian nuclear program was not as stringent as the U.S. would have liked, the Turkish political and military elite were highly concerned about a potentially nuclear armed Iran and the direct and existential danger it posed to Turkey.

More importantly, did the concrete actions of Turkey indicate that minimising the Iranian threat was Turkey's true priority? I would answer this contested question in the affirmative due to Turkey's serious military and intelligence responses to the Iranian nuclear threat. Most notably, Turkey's agreement to deploy and then take further steps to defend a NATO radar system evinced Turkey's commitment to neutralising the Iranian nuclear threat. The early warning radar system activated in 2012 in the eastern Anatolian could provide information to U.S. ships in the Mediterranean in the event of an Iranian ballistic missile being launched against a NATO partner or U.S. ally.²³ Turkey further countenanced its pro-American orientation by hosting a micro-missile defense set-up in southeastern Turkey. The system, owned by NATO and deployed presumably to protect Turkey from the threat of Syrian chemical-biological attack, was made up of six Patriot anti-missile batteries. Not only could the Patriot umbrella safeguard Turks from border clashes, as it was depicted, but the missiles could be used to protect the aforementioned U.S.-owned, NATO-assigned radar deployed in south Turkey from an Iranian strike. Thus, the anti-missile protection raised over the NATO radar in Kurecik represented U.S.-Turkish solidarity over what both saw as an essential strategic aim: checking the influence of Iran's military threat.

Nonetheless, Turkey's doubts about carrying through with the radar deployment suggested deeper cracks were extant between the U.S. and Turkey. Turkey initially hesitated since many in Ankara feared the system singled out Iran.²⁴

¹⁹ The Associated Press, 'Egypt Considering Nuclear Arms if Iran Gets Them', *Fox News*, 2 December 2010, online at <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2010/12/02/egypt-considering-nuclear-weapons-iran> (last accessed 30 October 2015).

²⁰ F. Stephen Larrabee and Alireza Nader, *Turkish-Iranian Relations in a Changing Middle East* (Santa Monica, CA etc: RAND Corporation, 2013,) p. 11.

²¹ The Associated Press, 'Iran to Hit Turkey if Nuclear Program Targeted by Israel, U.S., General Says', *Haaretz*, 26 November 2011, online at <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/iran-to-hit-turkey-if-nuclear-program-targeted-by-israel-u-s-general-says-1.397862> (last accessed 30 October 2015).

²² Larrabee & Nader, *Turkish-Iranian Relations*, p. 24.

²³ Serkan Demirtaş, 'NATO Radar System in Turkey up, Running', *Hürriyet Daily News*, (undated; 2012), online at <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/nato-radar-system-in-turkey-up-running.aspx?pageID=238&nID=11474&NewsCatID=338> (last accessed 30 October 2015).

²⁴ Zeynel Lüle, 'İşte NATO'nun Füze Planı', *Hürriyet Daily News*, 10 October 2010, online at

President Abudllah Gul himself voiced his reluctance to bless NATO's plans to install the radar since its 'mentioning one country, Iran... is wrong and will not happen. A particular country will not be targeted.... We will definitely not accept that.'²⁵ A Foreign Affairs article criticised this hesitation, claiming that Turkey 'dragged its heels on hosting NATO X-Band radar installations on its territory, which are aimed at protecting NATO states from Iranian ballistic missiles.'²⁶

Understated in this analysis is the fact that Turkey firmly aligned itself with the West at the end of the debate. Turkey's delay over deploying the radar bears many similarities –and lessons– to Turkey's hesitancy to accept the U.S. plan to invade Iraq in 2003. In both cases, Turkey was rushed to accept a risky operation. And in both cases, Turkey was unfairly criticised for carefully weighing and assessing its options. The impatience and criticism of the U.S. stemmed from its weak grasp of the potential consequences facing Turkey. Simply put, there was no diplomatic touch; still, Turkey answered faithfully to the U.S command and deployed the equipment.

Not only did analysts overlook the ultimate acquiescence of Turkey, they did not seek to understand why Turkey might delay the deployment. Fielding harsh criticism from Iran throughout the process, including threats to bomb the Turkey-based radar system at certain points, Turkey acted resilient in order to assuage the fears and animosity of Iran. To that end, Turkey deliberately stated the radar would not be used to single out one nation. Though the radar was of course designed to protect

against Iran, Turkey wanted to save face by ostensibly advocating for Tehran. Moreover, accepting the U.S. demand with alacrity would give off the notion that Turkey was still the puppet it was for the U.S. during the Cold War. Putting up more than a half-hearted fight against the U.S. helped disabuse the idea of Turkey being a 51st state and portrayed Turkish foreign policy to be more independent, as Erdogan desired and the U.S. would be wise to wish for as well. By the end of 2012 both radar and missiles protecting the system were up and running effectively. For all the noise and uproar Turkey gave off about cooperating with the U.S. on vital security issues, Washington appeared as a friendly target on Ankara's radar.

Israel

A similar dynamic can be used to explain Turkey's simultaneous criticism of Israel with its cooperation in military and intelligence areas between 2003 and 2013, as well as American analysts' negative interpretations of this complex situation. Erdogan condemned Israel over its relations with Palestine between 2003 and 2013. He blasted Israel's air raids over Gaza and poor treatment of Palestinians during the second Intifada. At one point Erdogan labelled Israel a terrorist state and warned that 'sooner or later, Israel will answer for the innocent blood it has shed so far.'²⁷

The U.S. was and should have been concerned about the verbal onslaught being waged against one of its closest allies. The opening statement from the chairman of the 2010 US SPFC addressed this point: 'The intensity of Prime Minister Erdogan's anger at Israel became clear for all to see at Davos in February 2009. Since that time Turkey's growing closeness with Iran has added, for many of us, a new dimension of outrage and concern.'²⁸ The indignation towards Turkey's anti-Israel statements grew as the hearing progressed. One senator pointedly concluded that Erdogan had 'turned his back

<http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/iste-nato-nun-fuze-plan-16046631> (last accessed 30 October 2015).

²⁵ Damien McElroy, 'Turkey objects to Nato missile shield targeting Iran', *The Telegraph*, 18 October 2010, online at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/turkey/8071659/Turkey-objects-to-Nato-missile-shield-targeting-Iran.html> (last accessed 30 October 2015).

²⁶ Michael J. Koplou, 'False Friends: Why the United States is Getting Tough with Turkey', *Foreign Affairs*, 20 February 2014, online at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2014-02-20/false-friends> (last accessed 30 October 2015).

²⁷ Elad Benari, 'U.S. Criticises Erdogan After his Latest Anti-Israel Remarks', *Arutz Sheva*, 21 November 2012, online at <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/162337#.VIY4alcVfu4> (last accessed 30 October 2015).

²⁸ Larrabbe & Nader, *Turkish-Iranian Relations*, p. 6.

on one of our Nation's most trusted allies.²⁹

Erdogan was, however, working behind the scenes with Israel to coordinate their military and defense troops from the day he assumed office. Between 2003 and 2013 Turkey, the U.S, and Israel organised multi-lateral naval and ground military exercises. The sale of high-tech arms from Israel to Turkey also boomed throughout Erdogan's tenure as prime minister.³⁰ Moreover, it is notable that Turkey risked its own security to safeguard Israeli from Iranian missile attacks by deploying the aforementioned controversial NATO radar unit in 2012 in southeastern Turkey. Yes, Ankara recalled high-level political figureheads from Israel and vilified them in the press. Nonetheless, Turkey and Ankara cooperated to protect one another's pressing and often mutually shared security concerns.

The 2010 Flotilla controversy supposedly redressed this special relationship and eliminated military cooperation between Israel and Turkey and, by extension, damaged the partnership between Turkey and the U.S. Turkish hostility to Israel came to a head in May 2010 when the *Mavi Marmara* boat, sailing under a Turkish flag, tried to slip pass the Israeli blockade of Gaza under the pretence of delivering food, water, and other humanitarian aid to the Palestinians. And 'When Israeli troops boarding the ship were met with violence, Ankara downgraded its diplomatic relations with Israel and cancelled all military cooperation with Jerusalem.'³¹ The Flotilla incident, in particular, stood out to congress for the casualties inflicted and Turkey's severe response. As a result, one senator asked congress to meditate on whether Turkey in fact 'had our interest in mind, and whether or not they can continue to be thought of as truly reliable allies' in the Middle East.³²

But Turkey continued to prove its trustworthiness by covertly cooperating with Israel in vital defence and intelligence areas.

²⁹ Hearing, *Turkey's New Foreign Policy*.

³⁰ *Ibid*.

³¹ Ilias Kouskouvelis, 'The Problem with Turkey's "Zero Problems": Turkey, Past and Future', *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 20, Nr. 1 (Winter 2013), pp. 47-56.

³² Hearing, *Turkey's New Foreign Policy*.

Subsequent news reports in Israel contradicted the information that was being dispersed about the halting of military cooperation between the two nations. Officially, Turkey announced the expulsion of the Israeli ambassador over Israel's refusal to apologise for the 2010 Gaza-bound aid flotilla, also indicating that Ankara would sever its substantial military links with Jerusalem. However, speaking to Israel Radio, Amos Gilad, then-director of policy and political-military affairs at the Israel Defense Ministry, said military relations between Israel and Turkey were still operational, adding that 'Israel's military attaché was continuing his work.'³³ The senior Israeli defence official discredited Turkey's declarations of total freeze as well as discounted rumours about a potential war breaking out over the incident. And while Erdogan demanded Israeli issue a formal apology before diplomatic ties were normalised, Turkey continued to work together with Israel on defence projects. In 2012, Erdogan allowed his foreign ministry's director general to meet with Israeli Senior Envoy Ciechanover in Geneva 2012 at the same time Erdoğan was spewing out harsh rhetoric against Israel during the initial phases of Operation Pillar of Defense.³⁴ Despite all the uproar and noise generated, Turkey's tacit collaboration with Israel endured, though not at the extent it previously was.

Friction's Fruits

Even if the hardliners had got their way, the consequences for Turkey announcing a shift back to Israel and warmly embracing the American line could have been unfortunate for the U.S. For one, it might have damaged the prospects of Turkey serving as a key interlocutor between U.S. and the many Islamic peoples and organisations in the Middle East.

³³ Haaretz Correspondent, 'Top Israel Defense Official: Military Ties With Turkey Still in Effect', *Haaretz*, 6 September 2011, online at <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/top-israel-defense-official-military-ties-with-turkey-still-in-effect-1.382850> (last accessed 30 October 2015).

³⁴ Dan Arbell, 'The Beginning of a Turkish-Israeli Rapprochement?', *Brookings Blog*, 3 December 2012, online at <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/up-front/posts/2012/12/03-turkey-israel-arbell> (last accessed 30 October 2015).

Turkey's connections to group such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Iran, and Palestinians were more jeopardised when the U.S appeared to be controlling Turkey or Turkey appeared to be protecting Israel. For example, Turkey was one of the few countries very closely strategically aligned with the U.S. but also trusted enough by Palestinians to help mediate the Israel-Palestinian conflicts—due in part to the overt distance between U.S. and Israel created by the verbal skirmishes launched by Erdogan.³⁵ If Turkey were and is to have any future as a meaningful intermediary between the U.S. and a Islamic Middle East that is deeply mistrustful of America, Turkey's perceived neutrality as well as its underlying commitment to the U.S. policy goals are both paramount.

Amidst the most comprehensive and fiercest movements toward democracy in the Islamic Middle East, many nations overthrowing autocrats still disapproved of American and its allies during the Arab Spring. According to Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project Polls, the percentage of Egyptians who viewed American favourably fell from 27% in 2009 to 19% in 2012 during the height of the movement. Similar declines occurred across a number of Muslim-majority countries in the region.³⁶ Turkey's distance from the Oval Office is one the variable that should not be ignored when considering why Ankara, and not Washington, became an inspirational model for Tunisia and Egypt. Nearly 1 million Muslim brotherhood supporters rallied around and greeted Erdogan as a role model and hero when he landed in Cairo after Murabark fell. And Erdogan didn't call for the establishing of an Islamic republic when he arrived. Instead Erdogan recommend Arab nations adopt secular and democratic constitutions. If the U.S.

wishes for democracy to grow in the Islamic Middle East via the Turkish Model, Washington simply cannot be seen as too closely influencing of or cordial with Ankara.

Final Thoughts

This paper suggests a number of related conclusions: In the areas of military, defence, and intelligence, Turkey has almost always been with the U.S. during the 21st century. The paper also reveals that clashes over soft issues did not always mean cooperation was dwindling over hard issues like security cooperation. Finally, this study indicates that the rifts in public diplomacy might have actually opened the way for Turkey to play a more productive and positive role in the Middle East than it otherwise could have. In the future, calls to punish Turkey with actions such as removing American personnel from airbases in Adana should not be quickly heeded. At the same time Obama should not be too eager to pick up the phone to organise press conferences aim toward revamping Turkey-U.S. public relations. Given these findings, U.S. policy makers might be best served to simply let the relationship's new negative reputation stick with the public while continuing to work closely with Turkey behind the scenes to coordinate and implement regional strategies.

³⁵ Serkan Demirtaş, 'Kerry to Ask Ankara to Join Middle East Peace', *Hürriyet Daily News*, 6 April 2013, online at <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/kerry-to-ask-ankara-to-join-middle-east-peace.aspx?pageID=238&nID=44364&NewsCatID=338> (last accessed 30 October 2015).

³⁶ Pew Research Center Report, 'Global Opinion of Obama Slips, International Policies Faulted: Drone Strikes Widely Opposed', *Pew Research Center*, 13 June 2012, online at <http://www.pewglobal.org/2012/06/13/global-opinion-of-obama-slips-international-policies-faulted> (last accessed 30 October 2015).