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## Israel is a victim of Turkey's transformation

**Even if Israel satisfies Ankara's demand for an apology and compensation over the Gaza flotilla raid, we will still be facing problematic Turkish policy.**

By Michael Herzog

Let's not fool ourselves. The Turkish firefighting planes did not douse the flames that continue to scorch Turkish-Israeli relations. Even if a formula is found that would satisfy Turkey's demand for both an apology from Israel and compensation for casualties of the Gaza flotilla incident, we will still be facing Turkish policy that is fundamentally problematic.

Turkey today is not the same Turkey we once knew. The country has experienced a major internal change, reflected in its foreign policy: From being a state loyal to NATO and a close friend of Israel's, Turkey has transformed into a country that follows an independent policy line - to the point of defying Western interests, flirting with radical forces and displaying hostility toward Israel.

The character of the leadership of the Justice and Development Party, which has ruled Turkey since 2002, provide the primary explanations for this transformation. These are leaders that possess a "soft" Islamic cultural worldview that departs from the secular Kemalist heritage, and that cultivate a sense of Islamic solidarity on the international stage.

Using this commitment to Islamic solidarity as a foundation, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu has developed a policy doctrine motivated by economic aspirations and a political desire to make Turkey a dominant force in its historic region of influence (a kind of neo-Ottoman doctrine ); the policy has adopted "no problems with our neighbors" as its slogan.

This orientation provided the background by which Turkey took such steps as moving closer to Syria and Iran, voting in the UN Security Council against slapping Iran with sanctions, opposing charges against the president of Sudan for murders in Darfur (as Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan declared, "It's not possible for those who belong to the Muslim faith to carry out genocide" ), as well as its opposition (which was lifted in the end ) to the appointment of Denmark's former prime minister, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, as NATO secretary-general because of his "soft" response to caricatures of the prophet Muhammad published by a Danish newspaper.

Israel has been a natural victim of this Turkish transformation. Fires engulfed relations between the two countries following Israel's Operation Cast Lead, as a result of widespread pro-Palestinian sentiment in Turkey; and the fires continue to burn thanks to the stalled peace process. Israel is not devoid of errors, but the Gaza flotilla incident was a result of a crisis in relations, not its cause.

All that remains today is a shadow of the two nations' much-celebrated security cooperation. Turkey now predicates its participation in NATO's missile defense programs upon Israel's not receiving relevant information; and in Turkey's policy pronouncements, Israeli policy is characterized as a source of regional instability that threatens Turkish interests. Erdogan has frequently attacked Israel and its prime minister; and it now appears that he will assent to Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas' request to promote, alongside European countries, the recognition of a Palestinian state.

Possibly, Turkey exploited the opportunity to make a humanitarian gesture - toward the Israeli people, not the Israeli government - owing to the price it is paying in its relations with the United States as a result of its anti-Israel turn. But when Israel considers making a goodwill gesture, it should take the strategic picture into account and ask itself where things might potentially end up. Would such a gesture lead only to a cosmetic change that would serve Erdogan's interests in the international and domestic arenas, ahead of Turkish elections in June 2011? Or would it lead to actual reconciliation that would culminate in cooperation?

Turkey is a big, important country and it would be wrong for Israel to give up on relations with it. But while offering its hand, Israel should make clear that Turkey cannot grab the stick at both ends, adopting an anti-Israel position while also claiming it is revising policies and steering an oscillating course between Israel and its neighbors.

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