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Old and New Dynamics:
What has Changed in Turkey-Israel Relations?
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Following the move of the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, and in protest against the killing of Palestinian demonstrators during confrontations with the IDF on the Gaza Strip border, Turkey recalled its ambassadors to Israel and the United States. Ankara also instructed Israel's ambassador to Turkey to leave the country temporarily. Israel reacted in kind, by demanding that the Turkish consul-general serving in Jerusalem (mainly in charge of relations with the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza) leave the country. Finally, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs requested that Israel's consul-general in Istanbul return to Israel for consultations.

Three times in the past decades, in 1956, 1980, and 2011, Turkey initiated a formal downgrading of relations with Israel. In the present interaction, diplomatic representation has not been formally downgraded, but the calling back of the Turkish ambassador to the US is an added dimension, marking the severity of the current crisis. Similarly, for decades, Turkey has shown sympathy for the Palestinian cause and criticized Israel when there were flare ups in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, since Recep Tayyip Erdogan's second term as Prime Minister in 2007, criticism of Israel's policies has become all the more prevalent. Most recently, Erdogan met with representatives of the small fringe anti-Zionist Ultra-Orthodox group, Neturei Krata on May 15, 2018 in London.

An evident recurring dynamic is Erdogan's use of the crisis with Israel to bolster his position, both inside Turkey and in the Muslim world. Turkey is approaching snap elections that will be held on June 24, 2018. A main concern in the ranks of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) is that the public support of the party has declined, largely because of a potentially looming economic crisis. Thus, Erdogan's call for a rally in Istanbul in support of the Palestinians on the first Friday of Ramadan, and the harsh rhetoric voiced against Israel in this rally can be seen as part of his presidential election campaign and the AKP campaign for the parliamentary elections. An additional nuance related to tensions and competition for influence inside the Sunni world is Erdogan's voiced frustration vis-à-vis other Muslim countries, and specifically the Arab states (i.e., Saudi Arabia and Egypt), for not raising enough outcry against Israel

following the Palestinian casualties in the skirmishes along the Israel-Gaza border. The opposition parties, for their part, aware of the sympathy among the Turkish public at large for the Palestinian cause and of Erdogan's political use of the tension with Israel, have also called for severe measures to be taken against Israel, such as withdrawing Turkish ambassador permanently, as means to challenge Erdogan himself and the AKP.

Calls in the Israeli political establishment and in the Israeli media to recognize the Armenian genocide, to support the Kurds (albeit those outside of Turkey, mainly in northern Iraq and northern Syria), and to boycott traveling to Turkey are also not new. What is rather novel this time is the emphasis on a clear "tit-for tat" approach toward Turkey – both in rhetoric and in actions - on the part of the Israeli government. The new approach, which conveys the message that "those who live in a glass house should not throw stones" was first voiced by Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in July 2017, and is meant to draw attention to Turkey's policies and actions against its own Kurdish population, as well as its conduct in northern Syria and in Cyprus.

During Operation Protective Edge (2014) in the Gaza Strip, Israel was not interested in Turkish mediation toward a ceasefire, while Turkey's humanitarian assistance to the Palestinians was welcomed – as long as it was coordinated with Israel. Against the background of the present tension between the two states, this Israeli differentiation between political and humanitarian intervention on the part of Turkey will likely not be sustained by Israel. According to media reports, Israel refused a Turkish request to landing a plane to evacuate wounded Palestinians. Similarly, Israel views with growing suspicion Hamas' operative structures hosted in Turkey; according to Jerusalem, some also have a military dimension to them.

While relations between Turkey and Israel feature some interdependence, in the sense that both states share interests that can be promoted through bilateral relations, these days only a few of their particular interests in fact converge. The proposed plan to build a natural gas pipeline from Israel to Turkey has so far not materialized. Reconstruction efforts in Gaza, which could have been a shared interest, are not moving forward effectively. In addition, as the threat posed by ISIS toward Turkey seems to be less than it was previously, and despite, according to Israel's Minister of Intelligence, the sharing of some ISIS-related intelligence with Turkey, this is not an issue that brings the countries closer, as did the threat emanating from Syria in the 1990s. In the current Syrian context, while the two states are not competing for influence, Turkey is mainly interested in northern Syria, while Israel is primarily interested in southern Syria. Israel also does not eye Turkish-Iranian cooperation favorably, be it in Syria or in Turkey's criticism of US President Trump's decision to withdraw from the nuclear deal with Iran.

The interdependence is most apparent in the economic realm. Recent media debates in Israel have emphasized the importance of El Al, Israel's national airline, flying over Turkish airspace. Another issue that has been mentioned is that a large amount of oil imports comes by tankers to Israel through the Turkish port of Ceyhan. Turkey, which enjoys a trade surplus, is interested in maintaining the level of exports to Israel (In 2017, of the \$4.3 billion mutual trade, \$2.9 were Turkish exports to Israel and \$1.4 exports from Israel to Turkey). Also, Turkish trucks arriving on ships docking in the Haifa port use Israeli highways to transport goods to Jordan and from there eastward. The Haifa-Jordan route has helped Turkey to overcome some of the lost transit routes in the Syrian civil war and the Turkish-Egyptian tensions. 2017 has also seen an increase of almost 30 percent over 2016 in the number of Israeli tourists visiting Turkey (380,000), and the Tel Aviv-Istanbul route is one of the more profitable Turkish Airlines routes. In 2015, Turkey's Directorate General for Religious Affairs (Diyanet) added al-Aqsa mosque to its religious umrah (pilgrimage) program and in 2017, 40,000 Turkish tourists visited Jerusalem.

The recurring and new dynamics playing out in the current crisis are first and foremost a clear sign that the relations themselves are at stake, not just the level of diplomatic representation. It can be argued that Israel has managed in many respects to compensate for the deteriorating relations with Turkey with its relations with various other actors - its blooming relations with the Republic of Cyprus and Greece, the quiet cooperation with Saudi Arabia and Egypt, and the growing military exports to India. Still, Ankara has proven itself to be a persistent rival that makes it harder for Israel in the international arena, for example in its initiative to convene two extraordinary meetings of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) on the issue of Jerusalem in the past six months. Critics of the normalization agreement between Israel and Turkey reached in June 2016 that settled the flotilla incident are correct to say that it does not meet both sides' expectations. However, they are less convincing in arguing that had the agreement not been signed, the situation between Israel and Turkey would have been better. In retrospect, the price Israel paid for the normalization agreement was limited – but so too were its short term benefits.