



TURKEY'S SUPPORT FOR HAMAS: A BRIDGE TOO FAR?

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INTRODUCTION

Turkey has long aspired to serve as a bridge between civilisations: between East and West, between Europe and Asia, between Islam and Christianity. Turkey's geographic location, its democracy, its previously secular and now purportedly moderate-Islamic outlook, its close ties with the West—including its membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation—are factors that make this seem viable. Turkey's bid to join the European Union (EU) reflects this desire while U.S. President Obama, during his visit to Turkey in 2009 spoke of a “model partnership”¹, a sentiment that has since been echoed consistently by former

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¹ Press Release, Office of the Press Sec'y, the White House, Joint Press Availability with President Obama and President Gul of Turk. (6 Apr. 2009), [https:// www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/joint-press-availability-with-president-obama-and-president-gul-turkey](https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/joint-press-availability-with-president-obama-and-president-gul-turkey).

Turkish Prime Minister and ideologue Ahmet Davutoğlu².

For Turkey to fulfil this bridging role effectively, it needs good relationships on both sides of the Bosphorus. This may require a delicate balancing act, but the potential to benefit from both worlds would seem to justify the effort.

The Justice and Development Party (AKP), since coming to power in 2002, has added a major agenda item to the Turkish vision—the desire to bolster Turkey’s leadership role in the Islamic world. Needless to say, this aspiration does not always square easily with Turkey’s bridging role.

To a large extent, Turkey has arguably succeeded in “having its cake and eating it too”. It has pursued its cause on the Islamic front while retaining most of its friends. However, its leadership of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu has consistently and increasingly put its relationship with the West and others under strain. Such is the case regarding Turkey’s support for Hamas—the violent, Islamist, rejectionist Palestinian faction that controls the Gaza Strip—an adversary of both Israel and the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority (PA) and an outlawed terrorist organisation in the U.S., the EU, and other countries.

This article examines the history and nature of Turkey’s ties with Hamas, the former’s motivations for pursuing the relationship and the implications for Turkey’s relations with other actors as well as for the Israeli-Palestinian “Peace Process”. What emerges clearly from the analysis is that Turkey’s current conduct *vis-à-vis* Hamas is incompatible with the constructive international bridging role to which Turkey aspires. In conclusion, the article looks at considerations which might persuade Turkey to change course in this regard.

² See Press Release, Republic of Turk. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Minister Davutoğlu, “The model partnership between Turkey and the U.S. will continue forever,” http://www.mfa.gov.tr/foreign-minister-davutoglu-the-model-partnership-between-turkey-and-the-u_s_-will-continue-forever.en.mfa (last visited 16 May 2016).

I. HOW THE TURKEY-HAMAS RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPED

Before the AKP came to power in Turkey in 2002, there was no Turkish relationship to speak of with Hamas. In 2006, Turkey hosted its first Hamas conference and such events took place with increasing frequency in successive years³. The Gaza conflict of 2008-2009 brought about a downturn in the hitherto flourishing relations between Turkey and Israel with Erdoğan accusing the Israelis of atrocities in the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip⁴. This was compounded by the “*Mavi Marmara* Affair” in May 2010. The *Mavi Marmara* was a cruise ship sent by IHH⁵, a prominent NGO with close ties to Turkey’s ruling AKP party, to spearhead a protest flotilla aimed at breaking the Israeli naval blockade of the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip. Israeli naval commandos boarding the vessel were attacked by some of the protesters. The bloody clash that ensued claimed the lives of nine Turkish nationals⁶. Diplomatic relations between Turkey and Israel have been poor ever since, despite several brief attempts at reconciliation⁷. In parallel, the ties between Turkey and Hamas have become steadily stronger.

Hamas has been bolstered by a series of high-profile meetings that have taken place between Turkish and Hamas leaders since 2012.

³ Soner Cagaptay, *The AKP’s Hamas Policy: Transformation of Turk Foreign Policy and the Turk View of the West*, THE FAO JOURNAL (2010) <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/opeds/4b7c32f9b0278.pdf>.

⁴ See Katrin Bennhold, *Leaders of Turkey and Israel Clash at Davos Panel*, N.Y. TIMES (29 Jan. 2009), <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/30/world/europe/30clash.html>.

⁵ The IHH is an abbreviation for *İnsan Hak ve Hürriyetleri ve İnsani Yardım Vakfı*, meaning Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief in English.

⁶ Yaakov Katz, *Nine Dead in Vicious Conflict Aboard ‘Mavi Marmara’*, JERUSALEM POST (01 June 2010), <http://www.jpost.com/Israel/Nine-dead-in-Vicious-conflict-aboard-Mavi-Marmara>; see Robert Weston Ash, *The Mavi Marmara Trial: Politicising the Turkish Justice System*, 1 J. CTR. FOR STUDY OF L. & PUB. POL’Y at Oxford 49 (2015), for a more detailed account and legal analysis of the incident and its aftermath, including the show trial conducted by Turkish Authorities.

⁷ See Jay Alan Sekulow, *Turkey-Israel Relations*, 1 J. CTR. FOR STUDY OF L. & PUB. POL’Y at Oxford 1 (2015), for background on Turkish-Israeli relations.

For example, in January 2012, the leader of Hamas in Gaza, Ismail Haniyeh, visited Turkey where he met Turkish Premier Erdoğan at his Istanbul residence. He was also cheered by the Turkish Parliament⁸. In April 2012, both Erdoğan and Davutoğlu met with Hamas off-shore leader Khaled Mashaal in Qatar. This came on the heels of a visit by Mashaal to Ankara in March 2012⁹. Then in July 2012, Mashaal met again with Erdoğan in Ankara¹⁰. He was there once more in September 2012 and attended the Congress of the ruling AKP party with Erdoğan¹¹. After the hostilities of November 2012¹², Davutoğlu joined a delegation of Arab ministers for a highly publicised visit to Gaza¹³.

In June 2013, both Mashaal and Haniyeh travelled to Ankara where they met with Erdoğan and Davutoğlu¹⁴. Mashaal met with Erdoğan once again in Ankara in October of that year¹⁵. During the Gaza–Israel conflict in July–August 2014, Davutoğlu met with

⁸ *Gaza's Hamas PM Warmly Welcomed in Turkish Parliament*, DAILY STAR (03 Jan. 2012), <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2012/Jan-03/158702-gazas-hamas-pm-warmly-welcomed-in-turkish-parliament.ashx>.

⁹ *Turkish FM Talks Palestine with Hamas Chief*, DAILY NEWS (23 Apr. 2012), <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-fm-talks-palestine-with-hamas-chief.aspx?pageID=238&nID=19042&NewsCatID=338>; *Hamas Leader Meets with Erdoğan in Surprise Visit*, CIHAN (16 Mar. 2012), <https://www.cihan.com.tr/en/hamas-leader-meets-erdogan-in-surprise-visit-hd-video-647915.htm>.

¹⁰ *Erdoğan Holds Surprise Talks with Hamas Leader*, TODAY'S ZAMAN (25 July 2012), http://www.todayszaman.com/diplomacy_erdogan-holds-surprise-talks-with-hamas-leader_287633.html. NOTE: The Erdoğan government has recently closed down the *Today's Zaman* news outlet. Accordingly, until the Erdoğan government reverses its decision, access to *Today's Zaman* articles is unavailable.

¹¹ Elinor Levy, *Mashaal: Resistance is Only Path Towards State*, YNET NEWS (30 Sept. 2012), <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4287181,00.html>.

¹² Dubbed “*Operation Pillar of Defence*” by Israel.

¹³ Press Release, Republic of Turk. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Minister Davutoğlu “Your Pain is Our Pain and Your Future is Our Future”, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/foreign-minister-davutoglu-your-pain-is-our-pain-and-your-future-is-our-future.en.mfa> (last visited 16 May 2016).

¹⁴ *Hamas Leaders Meet with Erdoğan in Ankara*, TODAY'S ZAMAN (18 June 2013), http://www.todayszaman.com/latest-news_hamas-leaders-meet-with-erdogan-in-ankara_318567.html.

¹⁵ *Turkey's Erdoğan Meets Hamas Leader Mashaal*, TODAY'S ZAMAN (8 Oct. 2013), http://www.todayszaman.com/latest-news_turkeys-erdogan-meets-hamas-leader-meshaal_328470.html.

Mashaal in Qatar¹⁶. Mashaal visited Turkey in December 2014 and had a highly publicised meeting which can aptly be described as a “lovefest”. In what can only be interpreted as a sign of growing intimacy, Mashaal was taken by Prime Minister Davutoğlu to a gathering of the AKP party in his home town of Konya. In addition to a display of hand-holding and mass adulation by the party faithful, Mashaal received a private audience lasting no less than four-and-a-half hours with the Turkish Prime Minister¹⁷. The most recent publicised high-level meeting took place between Erdoğan and Mashaal in Istanbul in December 2015¹⁸.

The meetings mentioned above are those which the parties saw fit to publicise. Needless to say, lower-profile and lower-level contacts have been taking place continuously¹⁹.

Erdoğan has famously stated that he does not view Hamas as a terrorist organisation. In a 2011 interview on a U.S. television channel, Erdoğan said:

Let me give you a very clear message. I don't see Hamas as a terror organisation. Hamas is a political party. And it is an organisation. It is a resistance movement trying to protect its country under occupation. So we should not mix terrorist organisations with such an organisation²⁰.

In a speech given in January 2015, in Germany, Davutoğlu reiterated his government's position that “Hamas is not a terrorist organisation

¹⁶ *Israel Is Disingenuous about Peace: Turkish FM*, ANADOLU AGENCY (26 July 2014), <http://www.aa.com.tr/en/politics/365086--Israel-is-disingenuous-about-peace-Turkish-FM>.

¹⁷ Burak Bekdil, *Davutoğlu and Mashaal: A Marriage Made in Heaven*, GATESTONE INST. (01 Jan. 2015), <http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/4997/davutoglu-mashaal>.

¹⁸ *Erdoğan Meets Hamas Leader Meshaal in Istanbul*, HURRIYET DAILY NEWS (20 Dec. 2015), <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/Default.aspx?PageID=238&NID=92747&NewsCatID=352>.

¹⁹ This was confirmed to the writer by an opposition member of the Turkish parliament.

²⁰ Tovah Lazaroff, *Erdoğan: Hamas is Not a Terrorist Organization*, JERUSALEM POST (13 May 2011), <http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Erdoğan-Hamas-is-not-a-terrorist-organization>.

and has not carried out any terrorist acts”²¹.

In December 2011, a Palestinian website posted the news that Erdoğan had directed Turkey’s finance ministry to donate \$300 million to the Hamas government in Gaza²². Turkey also pledged \$200 million for reconstruction in Gaza after the conflict in 2014²³ although a World Bank report from May 2015 showed that Turkey had so far failed to meet this pledge²⁴. Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesman, Tanju Bilgic subsequently insisted that the aid was still on track and confirmed that Turkish aid to Gaza over the previous 10 years had reached \$369 million²⁵. According to Israeli sources, Turkey has been giving financial support to Hamas to the tune of \$250 million per year. This money has been reportedly channelled mostly through private sources with the full coordination of Erdoğan and his aides, mostly to Hamas in the West Bank²⁶. Also, the powerful Turkish NGO, IHH is known to be part of Hamas’ fundraising network²⁷.

Reports from early 2016 show Hamas in a financial crisis which has forced it to cut back on salaries, including even in its military wing, the Al-Kassam Brigades. The crisis has been attributed to Egypt’s destruction of smuggling tunnels running between Gaza and its terri-

²¹ Bekdil, *supra* note 17.

²² Saed Bannoura, *Turkey to Grant Hamas \$300 Million*, IMEMC (03 Dec. 2011), <http://www.imemc.org/article/62607>.

²³ *Turkey Pledges \$200 Million for Gaza’s Reconstruction*, TODAY’S ZAMAN (13 Oct. 2014), http://www.todayzaman.com/anasayfa_turkey-pledges-200-million-for-gazas-reconstruction_361515.html.

²⁴ Deniz Arslan, *World Bank Report: Turkey Fails to Honour Pledge to Gaza*, TODAY’S ZAMAN (24 May 2015), http://www.todayzaman.com/anasayfa_world-bank-report-turkey-fails-to-honor-pledge-to-gaza_381631.html.

²⁵ *Turkey Says Keeping Promise on Aid to Gaza*, ANADOLU AGENCY (27 May 2015), <http://www.aa.com.tr/en/news/517739--turkey-says-keeping-promise-on-aid-to-gaza>.

²⁶ *Turkey Replaces Iran as Primary Funding Source for Hamas*, WORLD TRIBUNE (22 Dec. 2013), <http://www.worldtribune.com/2013/12/22/turkey-replaces-iran-as-primary-funding-source-for-hamas>.

²⁷ *The Union of Good – Analysis and Mapping of Terror Funds Network*, ISRAELI SEC. AGENCY, <http://www.shabak.gov.il/English/EnTerrorData/Reviews/Pages/coalition.en.aspx> (last visited 16 May 2016).

tory as well as a lack of foreign financial support²⁸. The situation with respect to donations from Turkey is unknown.

In early 2015, Turkey was reportedly prepared to host the offices of Khaled Mashaal, who, according to various sources, was asked by Qatar to relocate from his headquarters in Doha due to pressure from the U.S. and others. Publicly, Hamas has denied the existence of any moves to expel Mashaal from Qatar²⁹.

II. TURKEY BECOMES AN OPERATIONAL BASE FOR HAMAS

Over and above the political and financial support for Hamas from the Turkish government, Turkey has in recent years become a base for Hamas terror-related activity. Reportedly set up in 2011, after Hamas was expelled from Damascus, the so-called “West Bank and Jerusalem Headquarters” of the organisation is located in Istanbul.

The kingpin of Hamas’ Turkish operation has been Saleh al-Arouri, the founder of Hamas’ armed wing in the West Bank, deported from the West Bank in 2010 after lengthy prison terms. Arouri is believed to have directed and financed Hamas operatives in the West Bank to carry out kidnappings, car bombings and roadside attacks. In August 2014, Arouri publicly claimed responsibility on behalf of Hamas for the abduction and murder of three Israeli teenagers in June of that year³⁰. He has also been alleged to be plotting kidnappings of Israelis abroad. In early 2015, the Israeli secret service (*Shin Bet*) confirmed the arrest

²⁸ Kifa Ziboun, *Hamas’ Financial Crisis Affects its Military Wing for the First Time*, ASHARQ AL-AWSAT (15 Mar. 2016), <http://english.aawsat.com/2016/03/article55348538/hamas-financial-crisis-affects-its-military-wing-for-the-first-time>.

²⁹ *Report: Hamas’ Mashaal Expelled from Qatar, Heading for Turkey*, TODAY’S ZAMAN (06 Jan. 2015), http://www.todayzaman.com/anasayfa_report-hamas-mashaal-expelled-from-qatar-heading-for-turkey_369063.html.

³⁰ Saleh al-Arouri, *Hamas Leadership Acknowledges Responsibility for Kidnapping Three Israeli Teens*, THE MIDDLE EAST MEDIA RESEARCH INST. (20 Aug. 2014), <http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/4437.htm>.

of a terror network in the West Bank which had been planning mass casualty attacks on a Jerusalem Soccer stadium and the City's light rail system. This network had been built and funded by the then Turkey-based Arouri. Arouri is also suspected of involvement in a Hamas ring which conspired to overthrow the Fatah-led government of Mahmoud Abbas in the West Bank in the summer of 2014. The ring, comprising over 90 operatives, was exposed by the Shin Bet. In July 2015, Palestinian Authority security forces claimed to have arrested some 250 Hamas operatives who had been planning to kidnap Israelis, fire at vehicles on main routes in the West Bank and launch attacks on IDF checkpoints. The object was to provoke an Israeli reaction which would lead to a deterioration of ties between Israel and the PA. The Hamas cells also planned to assassinate senior PA security officials. Again, Arouri was fingered as being behind the plot³¹.

Hamas in Turkey is also known to be actively recruiting operatives from among Gaza and West Bank residents and Israeli Arabs who are studying in Turkey, Jordan, Syria and other Arab countries. Such recruiting efforts are reportedly under way as far afield as Malaysia³². The students are said to undergo initial screening in Jordan and Turkey and are then sent to the headquarters in Istanbul, where they receive security clearances and training in light weapons, bomb-making and covert operations, which takes place just outside the city—all with the knowledge of Turkish intelligence officials. The recruits, allegedly hundreds every year, are then sent for additional training in Syria and from there, to the West Bank to engage in terror operations.

The Istanbul Headquarters receives ongoing reports from the West Bank from intelligence-gathering agents working in the field, and is be-

³¹ Avi Issacharoff, *Hamas Plot to Attack Israel, PA in West Bank Foiled by Mass Arrests*, TIMES OF ISRAEL (19 July 2015), <http://www.timesofisrael.com/hamas-plot-to-attack-israel-pa-in-west-bank-foiled-by-mass-arrests/>.

³² *Hamas Activity in Malaysia*, THE MEIR AMIT INTELLIGENCE AND TERRORISM INFO. CTR. (06 May 2015), http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/Data/articles/Art_20805/E_085_15_936313463.pdf.

lieved to have been behind several of the violent incidents taking place in Jerusalem since the last quarter of 2014. Moreover, many of the illicit arms in the hands of West Bank Hamas members were purchased and shipped by Hamas' Turkish operation³³.

Arouri has been known to have several dozen operatives assisting him. These include Imad alAlami, Hamas' erstwhile representative in Iran, and around 20 deportees from the 2011 Shalit Deal, among them Zaher Jabarin and Jihad Yarmur, who were involved in the murder of IDF soldier Nachshon Wachsmann in 1994³⁴.

There is a further dimension to Hamas in Turkey which aggravates an already grave situation: There are indications that Arouri has been operating as a law unto himself and has not always coordinated with the Hamas top leadership. Thus for example, Arouri is understood to have initiated the 2014 kidnapping of three Israeli teens without the knowledge of Mashaal or Hamas in Gaza. True to form, the organisation closed ranks after the fact and voiced its support for Arouri's action, but it appears that the branch of Hamas hosted by Turkey is in fact more extreme and even less pragmatic than the Hamas mainstream³⁵.

Turkey is apparently also home to Hamas financial operatives Bakri Hanifa and Maher Ubeid. The former was said to be heavily involved in an ongoing operation to move "tens of millions of dollars" from Qatar to Turkey which are then sent on to Hamas' political and military wings. The latter was believed to be engaged in the transfer of funds from Turkish official sources to Hamas in Gaza via Turkish money changers³⁶.

³³ Alex Fishman, *Forced from Damascus, Hamas Establishing Itself in Turkey*, YNET NEWS (25 Feb. 2015), <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4630331,00.html>.

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ Shlomi Eldar, *Turkey's Hamas 'Bureau'*, AL-MONITOR (01 Dec. 2014), <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/12/saleh-al-arouri-khaled-meshaal-hamas-leadership-turkey-gaza.html#>.

³⁶ Jonathan Schanzer & David Andrew Weinberg, *The Turkey-Hamas Nexus*,

Reports from August 2015 indicate that Arouri was asked to leave the country by the Turkish government. At the time of writing, Arouri is understood to have relocated to Qatar. A Hamas source has said that Arouri left voluntarily so as not to embarrass Turkey which was under significant pressure from the U.S. and Israel. The source maintained that Turkey had not placed restrictions on Hamas activities or its officials living in that country and that Arouri had not been banned from entering Turkey³⁷. Press reports confirm that despite the departure of Arouri, Erdoğan has clarified that he has no intention of closing Hamas offices in Turkey or of ceasing Turkey's financial and moral support for Hamas³⁸. In addition, there are reports claiming that since relocating, Arouri has been shuttling freely between Qatar and Turkey³⁹.

The continued presence of Hamas operations in Turkey has been a key sticking-point in reconciliation efforts between Israel and Turkey. Interestingly, some commentators say the shutting-down of Hamas in Turkey would also serve the interests of the mainstream Hamas leadership due to the rogue nature of the Turkish operation⁴⁰.

III. TURKEY'S MOTIVATIONS FOR ITS TIES WITH HAMAS

Analysts of Turkish foreign policy routinely point to Ahmet Davu-

THE NAT'L INTEREST (16 Jan. 2015), <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/the-turkey-hamas-nexus-12044>.

³⁷ Herb Keinon & Khaled Abu Toameh, *Hamas Activity in Turkey an Obstacle to Ankara – Jerusalem Reconciliation*, JERUSALEM POST (21 Dec. 2015), <http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Politics-And-Diplomacy/Hamas-activity-in-Turkey-an-obstacle-to-Ankara-Jerusalem-reconciliation-438011>.

³⁸ Smadar Perry & Itamar Eichner, *Hamas Leader Expelled from Turkey*, YNET NEWS (22 Dec. 2015), <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4742831,00.html>.

³⁹ Aaron Klein, *Exiled Hamas Terror Kingpin Back in NATO-Member Turkey*, BREITBART (06 Jan. 2016), <http://www.breitbart.com/middle-east/2016/01/06/exiled-hamas-terror-kingpin-back-in-nato-member-turkey/>.

⁴⁰ Alex MacDonald, *What does the Turkey-Israel Détente Mean for Hamas?* MIDDLE EAST EYE (23 Dec. 2015), <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/what-does-turkey-israel-detente-mean-hamas-1595659569>.

tođlu's book "Strategic Depth" for an explanation of what Turkey under the AKP is trying to achieve. Essentially, the book sets out a vision of "neo-Ottomanism" which is the idea that Turkey should re-establish itself as the leader and epicentre of the Islamic world in much the same way as the Ottoman Empire fulfilled this role for about five centuries. To this end, Turkey has set about a process of Islamisation of its foreign policy which runs counter to Turkish policies of previous decades which were more in line with a Western approach⁴¹.

Initially, upon coming to power in 2002, the AKP had a declared policy of "zero problems with neighbors". However, with the advent of the inaptly named "Arab Spring", Turkey saw an opportunity to advance its agenda and support the creation of like-minded regimes. Accordingly, Turkey saw the Muslim Brotherhood as a kindred spirit and was one of the chief supporters of the Morsi government in Egypt, while it lasted. Despite the overthrow of the Brotherhood in Egypt, Turkey remains a die-hard supporter of the movement and is, to date, the only country in the region which has not recognised the regime of Abdel Fatah el-Sisi in Egypt⁴².

It is possible to explain Turkey's affinity for Hamas as a natural extension of the former's support of the Muslim Brotherhood. Hamas is recognised as having a deep connection with the Brotherhood. It has even been asserted that "Hamas *is* the Muslim Brotherhood"⁴³.

In addition to the ideological kinship, it has also been suggested that Turkey has several political motivations for its attitude to Hamas.

One of these is the desire to position Turkey as an independent

⁴¹ Amanda Paul, *The Folly of Turkey's Ideological Foreign Policy*, TODAY'S ZAMAN (06 Jan. 2015), http://www.todayszaman.com/columnist/amanda-paul/the-folly-of-turkeys-ideological-foreign-policy_369047.html.

⁴² *Id.*

⁴³ See, e.g., Andrew C. McCarthy, *Hamas Is the Muslim Brotherhood*, NAT'L REVIEW (29 Jan. 2011), <http://www.nationalreview.com/corner/258381/hamas-muslim-brotherhood-andrew-c-mccarthy>.

thought-leader, with its own defiantly-held opinions, unsusceptible to pressure from Washington or other sources, even at the cost of international isolation. In this respect, Erdoğan has been said to be an admirer of Russia's Vladimir Putin and can perhaps be seen as trying to emulate the latter's seeming nonchalance towards international opinion⁴⁴. Erdoğan's chief policy adviser, Ibrahim Kalin, has branded Turkey's situation as "precious loneliness," arguing that it stems from "Turkey's principled and ethical stance" on international issues⁴⁵. Certainly, in the Muslim world, which Turkey aspires to lead, an outspokenly militant stance on the Palestinian issue is generally considered a political asset, if not a necessity.

Another possibility is that Turkey identifies Iran as its main competitor for the Muslim world's top-spot and attaches importance to preventing the latter from establishing too big a footprint on the Palestinian issue—the one cause that unites Muslims everywhere. The significance of this rivalry has increased since the two countries have become embroiled on opposite sides of Syria's protracted civil war. Turkey may be taking advantage of the fallout between Hamas and Tehran over the former's opposition to Syria's Assad, while mindful that Hamas could well end up in Iranian arms again after possibly losing Doha. The London-based newspaper *Al-Hayat* reported that shortly after the July-August 2014 hostilities between Israel and Gaza, Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal met in Turkey with the commander of the Quds Force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, Qassem Soleimani. According to the report, after the meeting, a Hamas delegation travelled to Iran to discuss the resumption of financial and military aid from Tehran⁴⁶.

⁴⁴ Semi Idiz, *Some See Snubs, Erdoğan Sees Envy*, AL-MONITOR (17 Feb. 2015), <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/02/turkey-international-isolation-erdogan.html#ixzz3SHB3j4Wt>. Whether the crisis in Turkey-Russia relations following the November 2015 downing of a Russian jet by Turkey has affected Erdoğan's opinion of Mr Putin, is open to speculation.

⁴⁵ *Id.*

⁴⁶ Elior Levy, *Hamas and Iran Said to be Renewing Ties*, YNET NEWS (17 Feb. 2015), <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4627643,00.html>.

Press reports from April 2015 claimed that Iran's financial and military aid to Hamas had indeed been resumed;⁴⁷ yet, a senior Hamas official complained in January 2016 that Hamas had not received financial aid from Iran since 2009⁴⁸. Given that Iran has been emboldened and strengthened economically by the deal it signed with the P5+1 in July 2015, it can be anticipated that Iran will seek to further consolidate its influence in the Palestinian arena. Since Iran has reportedly severed its ties with the Palestinian Islamic Jihad organisation, the second largest militant faction in Gaza after Hamas, it seems natural that Iran will try to get Hamas, the heavier hitter, on board again. In a meeting reportedly held in March 2016 between Hamas leaders and senior Iranian officials, the Iranians explained the drop in aid as a result of economic difficulties and insisted that their support for the Palestinian cause was as strong as ever⁴⁹. One can surmise that Turkey is watching these developments closely.

Iran is not Turkey's only competitor for influence in the Palestinian sphere. Qatar, with its vast disposable income, continues to host the Hamas Headquarters (albeit somewhat reluctantly) and remains notably active in initiatives relating to Gaza⁵⁰.

⁴⁷ Con Coughlin, *Iran Rekindles Relations with Hamas*, WALL ST. J. (21 Apr. 2015), <http://www.wsj.com/articles/iran-rekindles-relations-with-hamas-1429658562>; Con Coughlin, *Iran 'is Intensifying Efforts to Support Hamas in Gaza'*, THE TELEGRAPH (04 Apr. 2015), <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/11515603/Iran-is-intensifying-efforts-to-support-Hamas-in-Gaza.html>; see also *Israel: Iran Steps up Arms Shipments to Hezbollah, Hamas*, TIMES OF ISRAEL (13 Apr. 2015), <http://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-iran-steps-up-arms-shipments-to-hezbollah-hamas/>.

⁴⁸ Maayan Groisman, *Report: Senior Hamas Official Blames Iranian "Liars" for Deserting Hamas*, JERUSALEM POST (31 Jan. 2016), <http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Report-Senior-Hamas-official-blames-Iranian-liars-for-deserting-Hamas-443356>.

⁴⁹ Maayan Groisman, *Commander of Elite Iranian Quds Force Meets Secretly with Hamas Delegation*, JERUSALEM POST (17 Mar. 2016), <http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Commander-of-elite-Iranian-Quds-Force-meets-secretly-with-Hamas-delegation-448286>.

⁵⁰ Avi Issacharoff, *Turkey Joins Qatari Bid to Broker Israel-Hamas Deal*, TIMES OF ISRAEL (28 Apr. 2015), <http://www.timesofisrael.com/qatar-turkey-try-to-broker-israel-hamas-ceasefire/>.

Another regional power looking to fortify its position and influence, particularly in light of the Iran–P5+1 deal, is Saudi Arabia. This country, noticeably anxious about a stronger Iran, has also reached out to Hamas. A high-level Hamas delegation headed by Khaled Mashaal, visited Riyadh in July 2015 to meet with King Salman, Crown Prince Muhammad bin Nayef, and other Saudi officials. Significantly, Arouri was included in the Hamas delegation along with Mashaal's deputy, Moussa Abu Marzouk. This was the first such meeting in over three years⁵¹. The Hamas publication *al-Resalah* explained that the Saudi King had requested that Hamas and Fatah empower him to replace Egypt as mediator in the reconciliation efforts between the two groups. Mashaal, the report said, came to Riyadh carrying a written “letter of empowerment” for Salman. However, Iran's *Fars* news outlet, voicing Iranian displeasure at the visit, reported that the Saudi king had asked Mashaal to send hundreds of trained Hamas gunmen to Yemen to fight alongside the Saudi army against the Houthi separatists, who are backed by Iran⁵². Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri denied the *Fars* report as “pure lies”⁵³.

A Turkish commentator has suggested that Hamas would prefer an Arab country as its base, because, among other things, it isn't keen on the idea of Turks leading Arabs⁵⁴. In this respect, Turkey and Iran are in the same boat, while Saudi Arabia has the edge. Turkey therefore may be tempted to be as accommodating as possible towards Hamas, even to the extent of allowing it to operate a terror base in Turkey, in order to get ahead of the pack on the Palestinian front.

Domestic political considerations may also be behind Turkey's

⁵¹ Elhanan Miller, *In Hamas' Embrace of Sunni Saudi Arabia a Slap to Iran*, TIMES OF ISRAEL (21 July 2015), <http://www.timesofisrael.com/in-hamass-embrace-of-sunni-saudi-arabia-a-slap-to-iran/>.

⁵² *Id.*

⁵³ *Id.*

⁵⁴ *Suspicious of Turkey Hamas Alliance Stoke Fears in Israel*, FOX NEWS (04 Mar. 2015), <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2015/03/04/turkey-red-carpet-for-hamas-stokes-fears-in-israel/>.

support for Hamas. Sympathy for the Palestinians is shared across the entire political spectrum in Turkey and championing the “Palestinian cause” has traditionally played well at the polls while religiously conservative voters, who constitute the AKP’s power base, feel empathy with Islamic Arab actors⁵⁵. Even Turkey’s main opposition party, the Kemalist CHP (Republican People’s Party), has shown a willingness to engage with Hamas. In January 2012, party chairman Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu held a meeting with Ismail Haniyeh at the party headquarters in Ankara⁵⁶. With that, a CHP member of the Turkish parliament told this writer he doubted whether the average Turkish voter would be happy about Turkey hosting an operational base of a foreign terrorist organisation. This is borne out by polls showing that some 80% of Turks disapprove of Hamas and a majority oppose violence against civilians⁵⁷. Indeed, an opposition party member of the National assembly did ask, after Arouri appeared to take responsibility for the kidnapping and murder of three Israeli teenagers in July 2014, whether it was true that the person responsible was resident in Turkey⁵⁸. However, by and large, the issue has not been the subject of public discussion in Turkey.

After the first round of voting in the Turkish general election in June 2015, it appeared that the ruling AKP party might be forced to make political concessions having failed to achieve a majority of seats in the National Assembly. The AKP gained only 258 seats out of 550,

⁵⁵ Gallia Lindenstrauss & Süfyan Kadir Kıvam, *Turkish-Hamas Relations: Between Strategic Calculations and Ideological Affinity*, 17 STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT 1, 10–11 (2014); see also Bekdil, *supra* note 17.

⁵⁶ *Turkish CHP Leader Meets Hamas Leader in Ankara*, WORLD BULLETIN (03 Jan. 2012), <http://www.worldbulletin.net/haber/83809/turkish-chp-leader-meets-hamas-leader-haniyeh-in-ankara>.

⁵⁷ Jacob Poushter, *The Turkish People Don’t Look Favorably Upon the U.S., or Any Other Country, Really*, PEW RESEARCH CENTER (31 Oct. 2014), <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/10/31/the-turkish-people-dont-look-favorably-upon-the-u-s-or-any-other-country-really/>.

⁵⁸ *Loğoğlu Asks if Hamas Leader Accused of Kidnappings Lives in Turkey*, TODAY’S ZAMAN (09 July 2014), http://www.todayszaman.com/diplomacy_logoglu-asks-if-hamas-leader-accused-of-kidnappings-lives-in-turkey_352583.html.

which led to coalition talks with the other political parties⁵⁹. All the potential coalition partners (the CHP with 132 seats, the left-wing pro-Kurdish HDP with 80 seats and the right-wing Nationalist MHP also with 80 seats) had criticised Erdoğan's hostile attitude towards Israel, arguing that Turkey should be standing together with Israel against Iran⁶⁰. Thus, for a while it seemed possible that the AKP could shift its stance on Israel and Hamas. Indeed, it appears that Saleh Al-Arouri received his marching orders during this period. In November 2015, however, a second round of voting was held which gave the AKP a clear majority.

Since his election victory, Erdoğan and his AKP have moved to restrict opposition voices, including those which have criticised his policies towards Israel and Hamas. A major development was the forcible closure in March 2016, of the daily newspaper *Zaman* which was aligned with Turkish opposition cleric in exile, Fethulla Gülen. Gülen was a vocal critic of the Turkish-led Gaza Flotilla which had resulted in the *Mavi Marmara* incident⁶¹.

Given the AKP's post-election position, one can assume that any previous domestic electoral considerations militating against Turkey's support of Hamas no longer carry much weight.

Some observers explain Turkey's deepening of relations with Hamas and the corresponding downturn in relations with Israel as connected to advancements in the peace process between Turkey

⁵⁹ Raziye Akkoc, *Turkey PM Ends First Round of Coalition Talks with Only One Choice of Partner*, THE TELEGRAPH (15 July 2015), <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/turkey/11742251/Turkey-PM-ends-first-round-of-coalition-talks-with-only-one-choice-of-partner.html>.

⁶⁰ *Erdogan's Loss Could Result in Better Turkey-Israel Ties*, I24 NEWS (08 June 2015), <http://www.i24news.tv/en/news/international/middle-east/74117-150608-erdo-gan-s-loss-could-result-in-better-turkey-israel-ties>; Tova Dvorin, *Turkish Elections: What's Next for Israel?*, ISRAEL NAT'L NEWS (07 June 2015), http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/196380#.VbzoN_mqqko.

⁶¹ Joe Lauria, *Reclusive Turkish Imam Criticizes Gaza Flotilla*, WALL ST. J. (04 June 2010), <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748704025304575284721280274694>.

and the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK). The AKP with its Islamic religious orientation would always have felt a natural affinity with Hamas. However, as long as Turkey was employing harsh measures in response to the violence of the PKK, it found itself relatively isolated and was happy to have that isolation relieved by a warming of ties with Israel which was enabled by the Oslo Process. Since the 2013 official ceasefire purporting to end its conflict with the PKK, so the argument goes, AKP-ruled Turkey is simply following its natural inclination of sympathy towards Hamas and hostility towards Israel⁶². If this analysis is correct, then circumstances may once again be ripe for a warming of Turkey-Israel relations.

The end of July 2015 saw a sudden deterioration in the Turkey-PKK relationship. On July 25th, Turkey launched bombing raids on PKK positions in Northern Iraq as well as a domestic crackdown against the group involving hundreds of arrests. This was in response to an attack on Turkish troops in South East Turkey. Subsequently the PKK has said on its website: "The truce has no meaning anymore after these intense air strikes by the occupant Turkish army"⁶³.

Turkey is also facing an additional terror threat in the form of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) which is suspected of carrying out a suicide bombing in the border town of Suruc on July 20th which killed 32. Turkey responded to the attack by bombing ISIS targets in Syria as well as rounding up local suspects. Interestingly, Turkey had previously been roundly criticised both at home and abroad for not acting against ISIS and has even stood accused by some of covertly supporting ISIS in its confrontations with Kurdish forces.

The latter half of 2015 and the first quarter of 2016 saw a massive

⁶² Barçin Yinanç, *Turkey's Talk with the PKK Justifies its Ties to Hamas*, HURRIYET DAILY NEWS (02 Apr. 2013), <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkeys-talk-with-the-pkk-justifies-its-ties-to-hamas.aspx?pageID=449&nID=44061&News-CatID=412>.

⁶³ *Turkey Extends Airstrikes to Kurdish Targets*, SKY NEWS (26 July 2015), <http://news.sky.com/story/1525357/turkey-extends-airstrikes-to-kurdish-targets>.

upsurge in terror attacks on Turkish soil. Among these, the bombing outside the Ankara Central Railway Station in September 2015 which caused 103 fatalities in addition to some 400 injured was the deadliest terror attack in modern Turkish history. The Kurdish TAK group claimed responsibility for two further mass-casualty terrorist attacks in Ankara in February and March 2016 while ISIS perpetrated attacks in Istanbul in January and March 2016.

It should be noted that Turkey has already sought Western support in its fight against ISIS and Kurdish nationalist terrorism. It is also possible that the recent spike in terror threats to Turkey has, at least in part, motivated it to seek an improvement in relations with Israel, which may in turn affect its relationship with Hamas.

There are also official explanations for Turkey's ongoing support of Hamas. As Prime Minister Davutoğlu said shortly after the terror attacks in Paris in early 2015:

Turkey is friends with Palestine and we have a strong mutual relationship with its leaders" ... "Hamas has not launched any terror attack and they even condemned the recent attacks in Paris. If their land was not conquered there would be no need for the existence of Hamas and that is the reason why we do not see them as a terrorist movement⁶⁴.

Turkey has also made much of Hamas' electoral successes in the Palestinian parliamentary elections of 2006. In an interview to the Washington Post in January 2009, Erdoğan stated:

Hamas entered the elections as a political party. If the whole world had given them the chance of becoming a political player, maybe they would not be in a situation like this after the elections that they won. The world has not respected the

⁶⁴ *Turkey Defends Ties with Hamas*, RUDAW (13 Jan. 2015), <http://rudaw.net/english/middleeast/turkey/13012015>.

political will of the Palestinian people⁶⁵.

Ibrahim Kalin, Advisor to the Turkish Premier, has explained the Turkish Policy vis-à-vis the Israeli–Palestinian issue as follows: “Turkey will continue to actively work for a two-state solution based on 1967 borders. For that to be achieved it will first push for Palestinian reunification and then for talks to resume for a solution”⁶⁶.

This statement is in line with the official Turkish policy as stated on its Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ website:

Turkey supports a negotiated settlement to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict on the basis of the UN Security Council Resolutions 242, 338, 1397 and 1515, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map that would ensure two states living side by side within secure and recognised borders.

Turkey is concerned with the ongoing division in Palestine since June 2007. Turkey encourages for national reconciliation and also calls on the international community for taking a constructive attitude that would focus on a national agreement rather than separation and isolation⁶⁷.

Indeed, Turkey appears to have been active in pushing for reconciliation between the Palestinian factions and has justified its contacts with Hamas, in part, as being directed towards this end. Foreign Minister Mevlüt Cavuşoğlu has claimed for Turkey a pivotal role in establishing the Palestinian national unity government:

⁶⁵ Lally Weymouth, *Palestine Today is an Open-Air Prison*, WASH. POST (31 Jan. 2009), <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/01/30/AR2009013002809.html?sid=ST2009020200054>.

⁶⁶ Yinanç, *supra* note 62.

⁶⁷ *Turkey’s Political Relations with the State of Palestine*, REPUBLIC OF TURK. MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-political-relations-with-the-palestinian-national-authority.en.mfa (last visited 16 May 2016).

Since this government will be an important signal for the independent state of Palestine, Israel doesn't accept it. . . . Is there anyone else who objects to unity in Palestine? If so, they may criticise our work with Hamas and Al Fatah, yet everyone who wants unity in Palestine shouldn't object to our relations with Hamas in this matter⁶⁸.

Turkey is also claiming to have had a "moderating" effect on Hamas, with Foreign Minister Cavuşoğlu asserting that Hamas is now "mainstream":

Everyone sees how Hamas' attitude in the past was and how different it is now. Turkey is the strongest contributor for this change. We have even convinced Hamas to recognise Israel as an independent state when there is resolution. . . . Turkey wants peace in the Middle East and connects everyone who wants to contribute. We try to convince each side. Our connection with Hamas in fact is important for peace and dialogue. Even though everyone accepts this, we don't understand why they don't want Hamas leader[s] to come [to] Turkey⁶⁹.

Although Turkish leaders have not been hesitant to defend their support for Hamas on ideological grounds, there are also practical considerations involved if Turkey is to have any impact on the *cause célèbre* of the Gaza Strip. Activism with regard to the plight of the people of Gaza is a *sine qua non* for a country striving to lead the Muslim world. Since Hamas are the *de facto* rulers of Gaza, it follows that any action to ameliorate conditions in Gaza must, of necessity, go through Hamas. A notable Turkish project which commenced long before the warming of ties with Hamas has been the Ankara Forum, a forum for cooperation between Turkey, Israel and the Palestinian Authority whose

⁶⁸ *Turkey Says Had Convinced Hamas to Recognise Israel*, WORLD BULLETIN (12 Jan. 2015), <http://www.worldbulletin.net/haber/152783/turkey-says-had-convinced-hama-s-to-recognise-israel>.

⁶⁹ *Id.*

flagship project was to reconstruct and rehabilitate the Erez Industrial Area in the Northern Gaza Strip after the Israeli disengagement from Gaza in 2005. Any leeway on this project would necessitate the cooperation of Hamas. So far, due to a lack of progress in Gaza, the focus of the forum moved to Jenin in the West Bank. Also, the Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA) has been active in various projects in the Palestinian-controlled territories.

As mentioned above, Turkey also pledged large sums for reconstruction in Gaza after the 2014 conflict, although some reports claim that Turkey has been slow to meet its commitments. In April 2015, Mehmet Gormez, Turkey's President of Religious Affairs, visited Gaza and pledged to finance the rebuilding of 19 mosques destroyed during the conflict. During the visit, the Hamas leader in Gaza, Ismail Haniyeh, praised Turkey for its "reliable and sacred bond"⁷⁰.

IV. IMPLICATIONS FOR TURKISH-ISRAELI RELATIONS

Israel-Turkey relations are characterised by a glaring paradox. On the one hand, trade relations between the two countries have been booming at record levels. By way of illustration, for the first third of 2014, the Israeli Ministry of Economy stated that exports to Turkey were running ahead of 2013's record level, with the figure climbing nearly 25% to \$949.2 million in the first four months of the year. Imports from Turkey grew to \$956 million, a 21% increase from the same time in 2013⁷¹. Incredibly, Turkey's national flag carrier Turkish Airlines has more flights into and out of Tel Aviv than any other foreign airline⁷². By contrast, on the diplomatic front, relations between

⁷⁰ Tzvi Ben-Gedalyahu, *Turkey to Help Hamas Rebuild 19 Destroyed 'Missile Mosques'*, THE JEWISH PRESS (18 May 2015), <http://www.jewishpress.com/news/breaking-news/turkey-to-help-hamas-rebuild-19-destroyed-mosques-missile-sites/2015/05/18/>.

⁷¹ Ora Coren, *Israeli Trade with Turkey on Track to Reach Record*, HAARETZ (04 July 2014), <http://www.haaretz.com/business/.premium-1.603035>.

⁷² Danny Sadeh, *Turkish Airlines Remains Most Active Foreign Airline in Israel*, YNET NEWS (12 Jan. 2015), <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4613890>,

Turkey and Israel have arguably never been worse. While there has been much bad blood over the *Mavi Marmara* Affair and Israel's military operations in Gaza as well as Erdoğan's unbridled anti-Israel and anti-Semitic ranting⁷³, never before has Israel directly accused Turkey of material support for Hamas terror attacks. Israel's former Defence Minister, Moshe Ya'alon, complained to the U.S. Secretary of Defense that Turkey is "playing a cynical game" and that "Hamas now has two command centres, one in Gaza and one in Turkey"⁷⁴.

Further, Israel's Strategic Affairs Minister, Yuval Steinitz, has stated that Israel expects the U.S. and NATO to pressure Turkey to dismantle Hamas infrastructure in Turkey. For its part, Turkey has rejected the Israeli allegations. Turkish officials have said: "Turkey has dialogue with Hamas but will absolutely not allow a terror organisation

00.html.

⁷³ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, President of Turkey, Speech Made Prior to his Election as President of Turkey (03 Aug. 2014), http://www.memritv.org/clip_transcript/en/4484.htm. Erdoğan stated,

[j]ust like Hitler tried to create a pure Aryan race in Germany, the State of Israel is pursuing the same goals right now. . . . This is really amazing. They kill the women so that they will not be able to give birth to Palestinian babies. They kill the babies so that they will not be able to grow up to be men. They kill the men so that they will not be able to defend their homeland. They are even afraid of babies in cribs. They are even afraid of children playing in parks or on beaches. They are even afraid of the wounded or the wheelchair-ridden in hospitals. Rest assured that the more they kill, the more they will be afraid. The more they shed blood, the more they will drown in the blood that they shed. No cruelty lasts forever. The day is sure to come when they will be held accountable for their atrocities. We impatiently await this day of reckoning. We believe, from the bottom of our hearts, that laws will be implemented and that justice will prevail. We know that these baby killers – this Israel – will sooner or later be held accountable for all their deeds in accordance with the law.

Id.

⁷⁴ Ricky Ben-David, *Ya'alon: Hamas Has Two Command Centres – in Gaza and Turkey*, TIMES OF ISRAEL (22 Oct. 2014), <http://www.timesofisrael.com/yaalon-hamas-has-command-centers-in-gaza-turkey/>.

to operate on Turkish soil"⁷⁵. Of course, such a response rings hollow when taken in the context of Turkey's stated position that Hamas is not a terror organisation⁷⁶.

The current state of Turkey–Israel relations stands in stark contrast to the situation prior to 2009. Until then, since the early 1990s and including the initial years of the AKP's ascendancy, the relationship had been exceptionally warm—encompassing even extensive military cooperation. At present, neither country has an ambassador in the other, military cooperation is non-existent, and, incredibly, a Turkish opinion poll released in May 2015 found that 42.6% of respondents view Israel as the number one threat to Turkey⁷⁷. Notwithstanding, both sides have consistently expressed an interest in rapprochement, each blaming the other for the impasse.

In a sign that a change in Turkey's attitude to Israel might be pending, a mere two weeks after the June 2015 elections, a low-key meeting took place in Rome between Feridun Sinirlioğlu, Director General of the Turkish Foreign Ministry, and his Israeli counterpart, Dore Gold⁷⁸. Soon afterwards, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Cavuşoğlu confirmed that reconciliation talks were underway. However, according to Cavuşoğlu, "The ball is in the court of the other side on our two demands"⁷⁹.

The first demand in question is compensation to the families of the casualties of the *Mavi Marmara* incident. All indications are that

⁷⁵ Itamar Eichner, *Turkey Denies Harboring Hamas Terror Command*, YNET NEWS (28 Nov. 2014), <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4597286,00.html>.

⁷⁶ Bekdil, *supra* note 17; Lazarof, *supra* note 20.

⁷⁷ *Survey: Israel and US Biggest Threats for Turkey*, TODAY'S ZAMAN (27 May 2015), http://www.todayozaman.com/diplomacy_survey-israel-and-us-biggest-threats-for-turkey_381906.html.

⁷⁸ *Foreign Ministry Chief Meets Turkish Counterpart in Sign of Thaw*, TIMES OF ISRAEL (22 June 2015), <http://www.timesofisrael.com/foreign-ministry-chief-meets-turkish-counterpart-in-sign-of-thaw/>.

⁷⁹ *Turkey Confirms Reconciliation Talks with Israel*, TIMES OF ISRAEL (24 June 2015), <http://www.timesofisrael.com/turkey-confirms-reconciliation-talks-with-israel/>.

the parties are close to agreement on this issue. The other demand is much more problematic and appears to flow directly from the Turkey– Hamas relationship, namely the lifting of the Israeli blockade on the Gaza Strip.

In December 2015, Turkey and Israel renewed talks on restoring diplomatic ties. A second round of talks was reportedly commenced in Geneva in February 2016. Subsequently, and particularly in the wake of the 2015-2016 terror attacks in Turkey, statements by the leaders of both countries have reflected a mutual willingness to improve relations⁸⁰. For example, after the March 2016 Ankara bombing, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu condemned the attack and expressed Israel’s “solidarity with the Turkish people in the war against terrorism and calls on the international community to unite in the fight against terror”⁸¹.

In a gesture mirroring Netanyahu’s, subsequent to the March 2016 terror attack in Istanbul in which three Israelis were killed, Erdoğan sent a message to Israeli President Reuven Rivlin in which he conveyed his “deepest condolences to the people of Israel and to the families of Israeli citizens who lost their lives in this treacherous attack”⁸². A further gesture which did not go unnoticed in Israel was the prompt sacking of an AKP official who on Twitter wished death on the Israelis hurt in the attack⁸³. In addition, a statement by the Director-General of Israel’s Foreign Ministry praised the Turkish government for its cooperation in the aftermath of the attack and asserted that “Turkey and Israel

⁸⁰ *Netanyahu Condemns Attack on Ankara, Calls for International Unity in War on Terror*, JERUSALEM POST (13 Mar. 2015), <http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Politics-And-Diplomacy/Netanyahu-condemns-Ankara-attack-calls-for-international-unity-in-war-on-terror-447802>.

⁸¹ *Id.*

⁸² *Erdogan Sends Condolences to Rivlin over Istanbul Blast Victims*, TIMES OF ISRAEL (20 Mar. 2016), <http://www.timesofisrael.com/erodgan-sends-condolences-to-rivlin-over-istanbul-blast-victims/>.

⁸³ *Turkish Official Fired after Wishing Death on Israelis Hurt in Bombing*, TIMES OF ISRAEL (19 Mar. 2016), <http://www.timesofisrael.com/turkish-official-fired-after-wishing-death-on-israelis-hurt-in-bombing/>.

stand united in the front against terror and in dealing with the shared regional challenges”⁸⁴.

In spite of these overtures, scepticism still abounds. The following comments made in March 2016 by the Israel Defence Forces Deputy Chief of Staff, Major-General Yair Golan, are probably reflective of the thinking in the Israeli establishment: “As long as Turkey is ruled by a party with a strong Islamist orientation—basically the Muslim Brotherhood—and by a ruler as contrarian as Erdoğan; as long as this is the situation, we can expect problems and we can expect challenges”⁸⁵.

Indeed, major obstacles still remain in the path of a full rapprochement: Israel is unlikely to relinquish its demand that Turkey shut down all Hamas terror activity on its soil; and as long as Hamas controls Gaza and shows no sign of renouncing its terror campaign against Israel, it is highly unlikely that Israel will agree to a lifting of the blockade. This is because such a move would enable a massive influx of arms into Gaza by sea. Israel is likely to insist that all imports to Gaza pass through an Israeli inspection process. Whether a formula can be found that satisfies all parties remains to be seen. One idea that has been proposed in talks involving Turkey and Qatar has been a floating port on which international inspections would take place, but no progress has been reported on this initiative. It is also anticipated that Egypt would balk at any move which would give Turkey a foothold in Gaza and thereby bolster the presence of the Muslim Brotherhood and its supporters in the region.

Israel is reportedly also demanding that any reconciliation agreement with Turkey include Hamas’ return of the bodies of two Israeli soldiers who fell in 2014 *Operation Protective Edge*.

Clearly, therefore, the prospects for Turkish-Israeli reconciliation

⁸⁴ *Id.*

⁸⁵ Judah Ari Gross, *Top Israeli General: ‘Expect problems’ So Long as Erdogan in Power*, *TIMES OF ISRAEL* (18 Mar. 2016), <http://www.timesofisrael.com/top-israeli-general-expect-problems-so-long-as-erdogan-in-power/>.

are closely bound to the Turkey-Hamas relationship. Hence, it should come as no surprise that Turkey is coordinating its stance towards Israel with the leaders of Hamas. Davutoğlu even went so far as to profess publicly that Turkey's "sole goal" in the rapprochement process with Israel was to "bring solutions to the problems of our Palestinian brothers"⁸⁶.

V. IMPLICATIONS FOR TURKISH-PALESTINIAN RELATIONS

Although Hamas was nominally a partner in forming the "Palestinian Unity Government" in June 2014, the relationship between Hamas and Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah faction is so fractious that, at time of writing, it appears that the "Unity Government" led by Prime Minister Rami Hamdalla is that in name only, if it exists at all⁸⁷. Protests of Palestinian unity are unconvincing at the best of times, but particularly so since successive Hamas plots to destabilise and overthrow the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority in the West Bank were exposed in August 2014 and July 2015, respectively⁸⁸. It is also instructive to read what Mahmoud Abbas had to say about Hamas in an interview given on November 30, 2014, to the Egyptian daily *Akhbar Al-Yawm*, wherein he slammed Hamas' conduct which sparked and prolonged the Gaza war of July-August 2014. At one point he stated: "I want to say here that no one lies more than them [Hamas] and the MB [Muslim

⁸⁶ Dalit Halevy, *Hamas Says Turkey Consulted with it on Israel Talks*, ISRAEL NAT'L NEWS (23 Dec. 2015), <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/205494#.Vzt0PvkrKUK>; see also Ari Yashar, *Turkish PM: Israel Deal only Meant "to Help Gaza"*, ISRAEL NAT'L NEWS, (22 Dec. 2015), http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/205330#.Vzt0n_krKUK.

⁸⁷ Khaled Abu Toameh, *Hamas Threatens to Exit National Unity Government with PA*, JERUSALEM POST (13 Jan. 2015), <http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Hamas-threatens-to-exit-national-unity-government-with-PA-387543>; see also *Palestinian Unity Government Resigns*, AL JAZEERA (17 June 2015), <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/06/palestinian-unity-government-resigns-150617125314649.html>.

⁸⁸ See *supra* Section II.

Brotherhood]"⁸⁹. In December 2014, the Turkish newspaper *Zaman* reported that Abbas had warned Turkey about its ties with Hamas in a July 2014 visit to Istanbul⁹⁰.

Palestinian Authority officials are reportedly also peeved at being left out of the loop in indirect talks between Hamas and Israel during 2015, mediated by Turkey, Qatar and the EU⁹¹.

Regarding the discussions on Gaza in the context of the Turkish–Israeli negotiations, Fatah Central Committee member Azzam al-Ahmad has clarified the PA's position: "The mediations from outside the framework of the PA are unacceptable, since they consecrate division. Turkey or any other country is not entitled to negotiate with Israel on any part of our country. The legitimate Palestinian leadership did not ask Turkey to intervene and negotiate on our behalf"⁹². Hamas, in turn, has branded the PA position as "unpatriotic"⁹³.

Given the tensions between the PA leadership and Hamas, it follows that Turkey–PA relations are not well served by Turkey's supporting and harbouring Hamas. This is indubitably compounded by the fact that the plot to overthrow the PA in the West Bank was directed by Hamas headquarters in Turkey.

VI. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ISRAELI–PALESTINIAN PEACE PROCESS

Hamas is arguably the single biggest impediment to progress in the

⁸⁹ *Abbas in Interview*, THE MIDDLE EAST MEDIA RESEARCH INSTITUTE (05 Dec. 2014), <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/8323.htm>.

⁹⁰ Deniz Arslan, *Abbas Asked Erdoğan to Mend Ties with Egypt*, TODAY'S ZAMAN (14 Dec. 2014), http://www.todayzaman.com/anasayfa_abbas-asked-erdogan-to-mend-ties-with-egypt_366915.html.

⁹¹ *Palestinian Unity Government Resigns*, *supra* note 87.

⁹² Ahmad Melhem, *Will Israel, Turkey decide the fate of Gaza?*, AL MONITOR (15 Mar. 2016), <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/03/israel-turkey-negotiations-floating-harbor-gaza.html#>.

⁹³ *Id.*

stalled Israeli-Palestinian peace process. While its counterpart Fatah has stated its belief in a negotiated two-state solution to the conflict, Hamas remains fixated on its goal of destroying the State of Israel by violent means⁹⁴. Hamas is a powerful actor on the Palestinian scene; and just as the Gaza Strip fell to a violent Hamas overthrow of the PA, there is a very real danger that the same fate could befall the West Bank. The reality is that even if Israel and the PA could succeed in working out a peace agreement, any arrangement for ceding territory to the PA could be exploited by Hamas to turn the West Bank into an additional platform from which to attack Israel. Thus, there are only two possible ways forward: either Hamas is dismantled or weakened to a degree that it is no longer relevant, or Hamas “changes its spots”.

While many would view the latter option as a practical impossibility owing to Hamas’ extremist, religious-based ideology, Turkey has defended its engagement with Hamas by professing to be pushing this option. However, despite Turkey’s claims to have “moderated” Hamas, the organisation has shown no outward sign whatsoever of flexibility. On the contrary, all indications are that Hamas is digging-in (quite literally), having already commenced the rebuilding of its terror tunnel network and other military capabilities⁹⁵, as well as intensifying its terror operations in Jerusalem and the West Bank. Press reports from April 2015 describe efforts by Turkey and Qatar to broker a long-term cease-fire deal between Israel and Hamas; yet, all indications are that Hamas only wants an easing of restrictions to buy time to enable the organisation to reconstruct and regroup militarily⁹⁶. Furthermore, even if one were to accept the Turkish argument that its relationship with Hamas can somehow contribute to the peace process, this would at most justify Turkey’s maintaining a dialogue with Hamas. There can be no justification whatsoever for Turkey providing material support and harbouring

⁹⁴ Hamas Covenant 1988, 18 Aug. 1988, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hamas.asp.

⁹⁵ Elior Levy, *Hamas Reconstructing Terror Tunnels Using Israeli Material*, YNET NEWS (19 Dec. 2014), <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4605504,00.html>.

⁹⁶ Issacharoff, *supra* note 50.

a base for Hamas terrorist activity, as has been exposed. As described above, this terror activity has not only been directed at Israel but also towards undermining the Palestinian factions who espouse non-violent compromise. This is seriously undercutting chances for intra-Palestinian unity, which Turkey itself has espoused as a *sine qua non* for peace.

In the final analysis, therefore, Turkey's current conduct vis-à-vis Hamas can only be seen as detrimental to the peace process.

VII. IMPLICATIONS FOR TURKEY'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE WEST

U.S. President Obama, on a visit to Turkey soon after taking office in 2009, had the following to say about the U.S.–Turkey relationship:

This is a country that has been often said lies at the cross-roads between East and West. It's a country that possesses an extraordinarily rich heritage but also represents a blend of those ancient traditions with a modern nation state that respects democracy, respects rule of law, and is striving toward a modern economy.

I think that where there's the most promise of building stronger U.S.–Turkish relations is in the recognition that Turkey and the United States can build a model partnership in which a predominantly Christian nation, a predominantly Muslim nation—a Western nation and a nation that straddles two continents—that we can create a modern international community that is respectful, that is secure, that is prosperous, that there are not tensions—inevitable tensions between cultures—which I think is extraordinarily important⁹⁷.

Obama's sentiments were echoed by Ahmet Davutoğlu, then the Turkish Foreign Minister⁹⁸.

⁹⁷ Office of the Press Sec'y, *supra* note 1.

⁹⁸ Republic of Turk. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *supra* note 2.

Over and above its “model partnership” with the U.S., Turkey also has close ties with the European Union—having applied for membership in that organisation. Turkey is also a long-standing member of NATO (since 1952).

The upgrade of Turkey’s relationship with Hamas, in particular the support and hospitality provided to Hamas terror operations, flies in the face of policies held by the U.S. and EU⁹⁹, where Hamas is designated as a terrorist organisation. It does not bode well for the “model partnership” vision or for Turkey’s European aspirations.

Upon learning of Khaled Mashaal’s December 2014 visit to Turkey, U.S. State Department Spokesperson, Jen Psaki, articulated the U.S. position as follows:

Our position on Hamas has not changed. Hamas is a designated foreign terrorist organisation that continues to engage in terrorist activity and demonstrated its intentions during the summer’s conflict in—with Israel. . . .

We continue to raise our concerns about the relationship between Hamas and Turkey with senior Turkish officials, including after learning of Mashaal’s recent visit there. And we have urged the government of Turkey to press Hamas to reduce tensions and prevent violence¹⁰⁰.

In a daily press briefing given during the 2014 Gaza-Israel hostilities, Deputy Spokesperson Marie Harf, who was asked why Secretary of State Kerry was frequently holding talks with Davutoğlu despite his

⁹⁹ Hamas was recently removed from the EU’s terror organisations’ list by the EU Court due to what EU officials have described as a “technicality”. However, the EU still holds the position that Hamas is a terrorist organisation and has appealed the decision. *EU Keeps Hamas on Terror List Despite Court Ruling*, YNET NEWS (27 Mar. 2015), <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4641700,00.html>.

¹⁰⁰ US ‘Concerned’ over Hamas-Turkey Relations, HURRIYET DAILY NEWS (9 Jan. 2015), <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/us-concerned-over-hamas-turkey-relations.aspx?PageID=238&NID=76702&NewsCatID=510>.

and Erdoğan's offensive comments about Israel, had this to say:

Because the Turks have a role to play. We've said these comments make it harder for them to play a role, but they do have a role to play and they have a relationship with Hamas. I mean, they can have conversations that we can't. So obviously the Turkish Foreign Minister is a key player in the region and has some leverage he can bring to bear on the situation. Those two things aren't mutually exclusive¹⁰¹.

Israel has appealed to NATO to take action against Turkey. Official communiqués sent from Jerusalem to NATO Headquarters in Brussels have said it was inconceivable that a member of the alliance would maintain ties with a terrorist organisation¹⁰².

Mashaal's December 2014 visit also provoked a response from the senior German parliamentarian, Volker Beck, who criticised the German government for failing to rebuke Turkey over the visit. The German Foreign Ministry clarified that "Hamas is in the eyes of the Federal Government and the European Union a terrorist organisation" and stated that the Federal Government had expressed "surprise" about the presence of Mashaal in Turkey¹⁰³.

Following the July 2015 suicide bombing in Suruc and the subsequent attacks on Turkish soldiers, Turkey requested an emergency

¹⁰¹ Sevil Erkus, *Turkish FM to Meet Hamas Leader in Bid to Secure Week-Long Humanitarian Cease-Fire*, HURRIYET DAILY NEWS (25 July 2014), <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-fm-to-meet-hamas-leader-in-bid-to-secure-week-long-humanitarian-cess-fire.aspx?pageID=549&nID=69602&NewsCatID=510>.

¹⁰² Shlomo Cesana, *Israel Livid Over New Hamas Headquarters in Turkey*, ISRAEL HAYOM NEWSLETTER (26 Nov. 2014), http://www.israelhayom.com/site/newsletter_article.php?id=21733.

¹⁰³ Benjamin Weinthal, *Top German MP: Merkel Should Condemn Turkey for Hosting Hamas Official*, JERUSALEM POST (31 Dec. 2014), <http://www.jpost.com/International/Top-German-MP-Merkel-should-condemn-Turkey-for-hosting-Hamas-official-386205>.

meeting of NATO to obtain support for its actions against ISIS and the PKK. In that meeting, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg expressed NATO's solidarity with Turkey. These developments have also triggered discussions between the U.S. and Turkey about military cooperation against ISIS. Notably, Turkey has agreed to allow the U.S. military to make use of the Inçirlik air base for its strikes against ISIS¹⁰⁴. Also, the U.S. has expressed solidarity with Turkey in light of subsequent terror attacks¹⁰⁵.

As of yet, neither the U.S. nor any of the EU states have commented publicly on the disclosures about the Hamas operational headquarters in Turkey. Also, the matter has received no significant mainstream press coverage outside of Israel. It is worthy of note, however, that in September 2015, the U.S. Treasury Department placed Saleh Al-Arouri on its Counter-Terrorism Designations List¹⁰⁶.

It is not publicly known whether these issues have been raised with Turkey through discreet channels, although according to press reports from June 2015, Turkish intelligence reportedly requested Arouri to cut back on his anti-Israel activity, apparently due to concerns about U.S. disapproval¹⁰⁷. Indeed, Arouri's eventual departure from Turkey has been attributed to U.S. and Israeli pressure being brought to bear on Turkey¹⁰⁸.

¹⁰⁴ 'NATO Allies Stand in Solidarity with Turkey', WORLD BULLETIN (28 July 2015), <http://www.worldbulletin.net/politics/162510/nato-allies-stand-in-solidarity-with-turkey>.

¹⁰⁵ *US Deplores 'Vicious Terrorist Attack' in Istanbul*, TIMES OF ISRAEL (19 Mar. 2016), <http://www.timesofisrael.com/us-deplores-vicious-terrorist-attack-in-istanbul/>.

¹⁰⁶ U.S. DEP'T OF THE TREASURY, OFFICE OF FOREIGN ASSETS CONTROL, *Counter Terrorism Designations*, <https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/OFAC-Enforcement/Pages/20150910.aspx> (last visited 16 May 2016).

¹⁰⁷ Amos Harel, *Turkey Sends Message to Local Hamas Operatives to Cut Back on Anti-Israel Terror*, HAARETZ (10 June 2015), <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/.premium-1.660431>.

¹⁰⁸ Klein, *supra* note 39.

CONCLUSION

Turkey's courtship with Hamas has for some time troubled Israel, the PA, the U.S., the EU, and others in the international community. Moreover, the situation has worsened dramatically since Turkey allowed Hamas to establish and operate a base on its soil. Yet, instead of being roundly condemned or sanctioned for its conduct, Turkey has, for the most part, received mixed messages from the international community.

The U.S. in particular has sought to exploit the Turkey-Hamas relationship on occasions when it wanted an interlocutor with Hamas. Thus, from time to time, the U.S. has urged Turkey to exert pressure on Hamas while at the same time condemning the existence of the relationship. One may criticise the U.S. position which essentially legitimises Turkey's defence of the relationship. Any possible advantage to having Turkey as an interlocutor is surely outweighed by the active terrorist threat posed by Hamas operations in Istanbul. Accordingly, one would expect more robust objections to Turkey's conduct.

A positive development has been the pressure reportedly brought to bear by the U.S. and Israel on Turkey to curb the activities of Saleh al-Arouri. Indeed, Arouri's departure from Turkey was an important step, yet the remainder of Hamas' Turkish infrastructure remains intact with Arouri allegedly still calling the shots and even visiting from time to time from his new base in Qatar.

What incentives, if any, exist for Turkey to pull back its support for Hamas? One might expect that developments in late July 2015 which saw Turkey approaching NATO and the U.S. for backing in its campaign against ISIS might provide some leverage with which to pressure Turkey to rein in Hamas activity on its soil.

However, another development in the region has, meanwhile, strengthened Turkey's hand and its ability to resist NATO and EU

pressure, namely the European migration crisis. Turkey is seen as the key to solving the crisis, and this has had the effect of muting international criticism of Turkish behaviour on other issues¹⁰⁹.

At the time of writing, it appears that the strongest incentive for Turkey to curb Hamas activity on its soil is the former's desire to normalise relations with Israel. Analysts have pointed to a variety of factors that have rekindled Turkey's interest in rapprochement with Israel since late 2015. One has been the crisis with Russia after the Turkish downing of a Russian jet in November 2015. Russia is a key supplier of natural gas, and Turkey is urgently seeking alternative sources for this crucial commodity to reduce its dependency on Russia¹¹⁰. Nearby Israel with its recently discovered natural gas reserves is an obvious option.

Others point to Turkey's political isolation, not only as a result of the crisis with Russia, but also due to disagreements with the U.S. over the latter's support for the Kurds. Turkey is also estranged from much of the Arab world as a result of its fall-out with Egypt over the former's continued backing of the Muslim Brotherhood and needless to say, it is at odds with Iran over the civil war in Syria. In such a situation, Turkey needs whatever friends it can get¹¹¹.

Another factor, according to Turkish defence sources, is a Turkish desire to acquire Israeli military hardware, in particular advanced UAV's and fighter jet systems. Turkey may also be interested in benefiting from Israel's counter-terrorism experience in a period when Turkey

¹⁰⁹ Mark Mardell, *Turkey Has European Union over a Barrel*, BBC NEWS (17 Mar. 2016), <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35819675>.

¹¹⁰ Mehmet Cetingulec, *Will Russia's Economic Restrictions on Turkey Backfire?*, AL MONITOR (13 Dec. 2015), <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/12/turkey-russia-steep-costs-of-downing-of-russian-jet.html#>.

¹¹¹ Eyal Zisser, *Terror; Refugees, Diplomatic Fallout*, ISRAEL HAYOM NEWSLETTER (16 Mar. 2016), http://www.israelhayom.com/site/newsletter_opinion.php?id=15519; Yossi Melman, *Analysis: A Weakened Turkey Seeks Israel's Help to Break Growing Isolation*, JERUSALEM POST (01 Mar. 2016), <http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Politics-And-Diplomacy/Analysis-A-weakened-Turkey-seeks-Israel's-help-to-break-growing-isolation-446549>.

is once again facing serious terror threats from Kurdish militant factions as well as from ISIS¹¹².

There are also those—Arab sceptics in particular—who attribute Turkey's latest overtures to Israel to Turkey's neo-Ottoman agenda whereby Turkey aspires to expand its influence into areas ruled by the former Ottoman Empire. They see Turkey as standing to gain a highly influential foothold in the Palestinian arena if the negotiations with Israel result in a lifting of the Gaza blockade, thereby positioning Turkey as a key presence in the Gaza Strip¹¹³. This theory gels with official Turkish protestations that helping the Palestinians is the “sole” objective of the reconciliation attempt.

In return for some or all of the above benefits, Turkey may well be prepared to deny Hamas an operational base in Turkey. This would not necessarily entail a souring of relations between Turkey and Hamas. In fact, as already mentioned, it may suit the mainstream leadership of Hamas in Gaza and Doha who view Hamas in Turkey as a rogue operation¹¹⁴.

The question now to be asked is whether Israel is interested enough in a reconciliation with Turkey. The answer is probably in the affirmative, but not at any cost. The Israelis have experienced Erdoğan's fickleness and will be sceptical about Turkey's motives and reliability. Moreover, the closing of Hamas' terror base in Turkey is more likely to be demanded as a precondition for negotiations rather than as a *quid pro quo*.

¹¹² Ari Yashar, *Turkey Wants Normalization to Buy Israeli Weapons*, ISRAEL NATIONAL NEWS (24 Dec. 2015), <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/205437#.VvaqSf97IU>.

¹¹³ Lee Gancman, *Hamas Denies Rumours of Turkish Designs on Gaza*, TIMES OF ISRAEL (29 Dec. 2015), <http://www.timesofisrael.com/hamas-denies-rumors-of-turkish-designs-on-gaza/>.

¹¹⁴ MacDonald, *supra* note 40.

The analysis in this article suggests that Turkey's current policy towards Hamas is of no benefit to anyone other than to Saleh Al-Arouri's rogue faction of Hamas. Hence, regardless of whether international pressure is brought to bear, it is unclear why Turkey would wish to persist with its current course. Certainly, if Turkey wants to fulfil the international bridging role that has been a cornerstone of its foreign policy, it must acknowledge that allowing Hamas to operate a terror base on its soil is "a bridge too far".