

Timeline of Turkish-Israeli Relations, 1949–2006

1949

March 28: Turkey is among the first countries to recognize the state of Israel.

1958

August 29: Israeli prime minister David Ben-Gurion and Turkish prime minister Adnan Menderes meet secretly to form the basis for their nations' partnership, agreeing upon the "peripheral pact." This pact would involve joint public-relations campaigns to influence the citizens in each nation, an exchange of intelligence information, and support of each other's military advancements.

1967

June: Turkey joins the community of Arab nations in condemning Israeli gains in the Six-Day War and calling for Israel's withdrawal from the lands it occupied after the war. Turkey abstains, however, from signing on to a clause referring to Israel as an "aggressor state."

1969

September 25: Turkey opposes the conclusion of the Organization of the Islamic Conference meeting held in Rabat, Morocco, which calls for a break in diplomatic relations with Israel.

1979

October: Yasser Arafat travels to Ankara to open a Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) office.

1980

December 3: Turkey announces its plan to downgrade diplomatic relations with Israel to a symbolic level—with duties performed by a "second secretary"—citing Israel's continued "unconciliatory" policy on Middle East problems. The Turkish foreign ministry spokesman, Oktay Iscen, says that Israel was notified of the decision on November 26, and stresses that the "second secretary" representation will commence on a "reciprocal" basis.

1985

- Israel appoints Yehuda Millo, a diplomat with minister-counselor rank, as charge d'affaires to Turkey.

1986

September: Turkey appoints Ekrem Guvendiren, a diplomat with ambassadorial rank, as its "second secretary" in Tel Aviv. Guvendiren takes up the appointment on September 5.

September 6: Two men described as Arabs enter the Neve Shalom synagogue in Istanbul during Sabbath prayers and fire submachine guns and detonate grenades, killing at least twenty-one of the thirty worshippers.

- Turk Hava Yollari (Turkish Airlines) begins direct flights between Israel and Turkey.

1987

September: The Turkish and Israeli foreign ministers meet at the UN General Assembly.

December: The first Palestinian intifada begins. Turkey makes several statements “denouncing Israeli oppression and supporting the Palestinians’ right to self-determination.”

1988

November: Turkey recognizes the existence of a Palestinian state, becoming the first nation with diplomatic relations with Israel to do so. When Israel issues a protest to the Turkish representative in Ankara, Turkey refrains from granting full diplomatic status to the PLO representative.

1989

- Moris Amitay, a former member of the pro-Israel lobby in the United States, is hired to support Turkey in lobbying the U.S. Senate to defeat a draft resolution denouncing the alleged massacre of Armenians by the Turks during World War II.

1990

- Estimates for yearlong trade volume between the two countries run from \$100 to \$150 million. (Israeli exports to Turkey account for about 70 percent of this figure.)

1991

December: Both nations restore full ambassadorial relations.

1992

April: The two nations’ defense ministries sign a document on principles for cooperation.

May: Turkey takes part in the Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) meetings for the Middle East as an extraregional partner, Israel as a full participant.

June: “Normalization” with Israel proceeds forward after Turkish tourism minister Abdulkadir Ates signs a treaty facilitating tourism between the two countries.

July: Israeli president Chaim Herzog visits Istanbul.

October: Bilgin Unan, the Turkish foreign ministry’s deputy undersecretary, visits Israel.

- Turkish and world Jewry commemorate the 500th anniversary of the official welcome extended to the Jews by the Ottoman Empire.

1993

March: The Turkish-Israeli Business Council is established.

April: Israeli foreign minister Shimon Peres visits Turkey for the funeral of Turkish president Turgut Ozal.

November: The two nations sign a memorandum of understanding creating joint committees of senior officials to handle regional threats such as terrorism and fundamentalism. The countries agree to cooperate in gathering intelligence on Syria, Iran, and Iraq and to meet regularly to share assessments pertaining to terrorism and military capabilities in these three countries.

November 13–15: Turkish foreign minister Hikmet Cetin visits Israel, the first visit ever by a Turkish foreign minister. He takes part in the signing of two documents that set a mutual framework on tourism, economic cooperation, and educational exchange.

1994

January: Israeli president Ezer Weizman visits Turkey, the first official visit ever by an Israeli head of state. He takes part in the signing of a cultural agreement and a memorandum of understanding aimed at fostering cooperation in the fields of art, culture, education, science, and sports.

April: Israeli foreign minister Shimon Peres visits Turkey, where he signs an environmental-protection agreement between the two countries.

May 31: A Security and Secrecy Agreement is signed, guaranteeing secrecy in the exchange and sharing of information between the two nations.

Summer: The two nations exchange military attachés.

September: Negotiations begin on a Turkish-Israeli free trade agreement.

October: Israeli director of security Asaf Haffetz visits Turkey.

October: The April 1992 protocol on defense cooperation is embellished and solidified. Specific areas for military cooperation are delineated.

November 3–5: Turkish prime minister Tansu Ciller visits Israel, the first official visit by a Turkish prime minister, and pushes for a free trade agreement between the two countries. Ciller compares Ben-Gurion to Kemal Ataturk, the father of modern Turkey.

November: The two nations' police forces reach an agreement on cooperation over the exchange of information.

December 10: Turkish prime minister Ciller attends the Nobel Prize ceremony for Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres, and Yasser Arafat and holds talks with each leader.

- Yearlong trade volume between the two countries comes to approximately \$300 million, with about 200,000 Israelis flocking to Turkish beaches and casinos.

1995

May: Israel's deputy foreign minister, Yossi Beilin, visits Turkey.

September 18: Leaders of both countries sign a memorandum of understanding for the training of pilots in each other's airspace.

November: Israeli naval commander Adm. Ami Ayalon visits Turkey.

November 6: Turkish prime minister Tansu Ciller attends Yitzhak Rabin's funeral.

November 21: Israel fully supports Turkey's planned customs union with the European Union, believing that the deal will prevent Islamic fundamentalism from flourishing in Turkey. To make this stance clear, Israeli ambassador Zvi Elpeleg announces that Israel's acting prime minister, Shimon Peres, has sent letters to several EU leaders and parliamentarians expressing support for Turkey's customs union.

December 24: The Islamist Refah (Welfare) Party, led by Necmettin Erbakan, who campaigned on a platform promise of cutting ties with Israel, wins a plurality of votes.

1996

January: Turkish undersecretary of the foreign ministry Onur Oymen visits Israel.

February: The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) advise and equip the Turkish security forces at the borders with Iraq, Syria, and Iran.

February 23: The two nations sign a five-year agreement—renewable annually thereafter—on military training cooperation. The agreement involves exchange of military experience, visits between the armed forces of the two countries, joint training as well as separate exercises in each other's territory, and attendance of observers from each country.

March: Turkish president Suleyman Demirel visits Israel, the first trip to Israel by a sitting Turkish president, and numerous economic agreements are signed.

March 14: A Turkish-Israeli free trade agreement is signed.

April: Israeli F-16s train in Turkish airspace, a routine that is scheduled to continue for one week, and four times annually.

April: Turkey publicly announces its new military cooperation agreement with Israel. The Israeli Air Force conducts its first joint air exercise with the Turkish Air Force.

June: Israeli president Ezer Weizman visits Turkey.

June: Twelve Turkish planes train in Israel, a routine that is scheduled to continue for one week, and four times annually.

June 8: During a summit of Syrian, Egyptian, and Saudi leaders in Damascus, participants urge Turkey to reconsider its February 23 accord with Israel in order to maintain "relations of good neighborliness" in the region.

August: Turkey and Israel engage in joint production of \$150 million Popeye I air-to-ground missiles.

August 28: An agreement on military-industrial cooperation is signed.

December 8: Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan signs a \$632.5 million contract with Israel Aircraft Industries (IAI) for the upgrade of fifty-four Turkish F-4 Phantoms. This is IAI's largest deal to date.

- An Israeli submarine crew trains in Turkey.
- A forum is established for the biannual convening of Turkish and Israeli leaders for strategic evaluations.

1997

February 1: A rally to protest Israel's presence in East Jerusalem is held in Sincan, a small town near Ankara. The rally is organized by the town's mayor, who is later arrested.

February 24–28: Turkish chief of staff Gen. Ismail Hakkı Karadayi visits Israel.

April: The Turkish-Israeli free trade agreement is ratified by both countries.

April–May: Turkish defense minister Turhan Tayan visits Israel.

April 8–9: Israeli foreign minister David Levy visits Ankara and meets with General Karadayi.

May: The free trade agreement goes into effect.

May 4–6: Turkish chief of staff Cevik Bir visits Israel.

May 19: Turkey and Israel engage in joint production of Popeye II missiles, a project estimated at \$100 million.

June: A five-vessel Turkish naval battle group visits the Israeli port of Haifa after the Sea Wolf-97 exercises.

October: Israeli chief of staff Gen. Amnon Lipkin-Shahak visits Turkey.

December: Israeli defense minister Yitzhak Mordechai visits Turkey.

1998

January: In a \$75 million contract, Israel upgrades forty-eight Turkish F-5s. Later in the month, Turkey purchases from Israel large fuel tanks for its F-16 fleet along with high-tech military equipment, while Israel purchases fifty armored vehicles from Turkey.

January 8: Operation Reliant Mermaid, a joint U.S., Turkish, and Israeli search-and-rescue exercise, is held for the first time.

February 3–7: Gen. Huseyin Kivrikoglu, commander of Turkish land forces, visits Israel.

March 24: Israel and Turkey sign a trade protocol in Ankara.

May 28: Israeli defense minister Yitzhak Mordechai meets in Tel Aviv with Turkish chief of staff Gen. Cevik Bir.

July: Turkey increases its number of military attachés in Tel Aviv from one to three.

September: Turkish prime minister Mesut Yilmaz visits Israel.

October: Israeli president Ezer Weizman visits Turkey for the second time.

December: Turkey's chief of the air force, Gen. Ilhan Kilic, visits Israel.

1999

July: Turkish president Suleyman Demirel visits Israel.

August: After Turkey suffers a major earthquake, Israel helps in recovery efforts.

September: Israeli president Ezer Weizman visits Turkey for his third time as president.

October–November: Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak visits Turkey.

December: Reliant Mermaid 1999 is conducted off the western Mediterranean coast of Turkey.

2000

January: Turkey and Israel sign an agreement that allows Israel to purchase 50 million cubic meters of Turkish water.

February: The two nations' Joint Economic Commission signs a protocol allocating six agriculture irrigation projects, totaling \$600 million, to the GAP region, which consists of eight provinces in Anatolia, Turkey.

June: The first memorandum of understanding for promoting scientific cooperation between Israel and Turkey is signed in Ankara by representatives of the Israeli Ministry of Science, Culture, and Sport and the Turkish Council for Scientific and Technological Research (TUBITAK). This agreement is renewable every two years.

September: Outgoing Turkish president Suleyman Demirel is asked to participate in the Mitchell Commission, which has been set up to investigate the outbreak of the second Palestinian intifada.

2001

January 17: Reliant Mermaid III is held.

April: Turkey and Israel carry out joint maneuvers from the Marmaris Aksaz Deniz naval base in Turkey.

June: The Turkish, Israeli, and U.S. air forces hold joint exercises, referred to as “Anatolian Eagle,” over Konya, Turkey.

July: Israeli defense minister Binyamin Ben Eliezer visits Ankara.

November: Turkish prime minister Bulent Ecevit publicly scolds Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon during a joint press conference in Ankara, rejecting Sharon’s claims that Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat “supports terror.”

December 3–7: Reliant Mermaid IV is held.

2002

March: Israel commits to buy water from Turkey.

March 29: Turkey signs a secret agreement with Israel Military Industries, valued at \$668 million, to upgrade 170 M-60A1 Turkish tanks.

April: An agreement for cooperation is signed between the Turkish Sciences Academy (TUBA) and the Israeli Academy of Sciences and Humanities.

April: Turkish prime minister Bulent Ecevit sparks a public outcry in Israel when he says Sharon’s policy toward the Palestinians is tantamount to “genocide.”

July: Israel is awarded a \$110 million contract to install electronic-warfare systems on Turkish helicopters.

August 6: Turkey and Israel sign an agreement valued at \$800 million to \$1 billion to import water from Turkey’s Manavgat River.

November: The AK Party is elected in Turkey, upsetting the balance in Turkish-Israeli-Palestinian relations. Under the AKP government, Turkey expresses broader support for the Palestinians, and Hamas in particular.

December: Lt. Gen. Moshe Yaalon, Israel Defense Forces chief of staff, visits Turkey.

December: Reliant Mermaid V commences.

2003

January 9: Israeli president Moshe Katsav writes a letter of condolence to Turkish president Ahmet Necdet Sezer after an airline crash near Diyarbakir takes many Turkish lives.

April 14: Israeli foreign minister Silvan Shalom is received in Ankara by both the Turkish president and prime minister.

May: Israeli defense minister Shaul Mofaz visits Turkey.

July 8–9: Israeli president Moshe Katsav visits Ankara.

August 12: When the UN General Assembly votes on a resolution condemning Israel's fence separating Israel and the Palestinian territories, Turkey joins other Muslim nations in criticizing Israel.

November: Israeli foreign minister Silvan Shalom visits Istanbul following a string of bombings that targeted Jewish synagogues, the British consulate, and an HSBC building.

December: Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan visits the chief rabbi of the Turkish Jewish community, Isak Haleva. This marks the first such visit in Turkish history.

- Israel buys \$1 billion in Turkish goods over the course of the year. In addition, more than 320,000 Israeli tourists visit Turkey, with the November 15 synagogue bombings in Istanbul occurring too late in the year to affect the annual figure. In Gezbe, east of Istanbul, a high-tech industry park opens that is 48 percent Israeli-owned.

2004

March 4: Israel signs the Manavgat water agreement with Turkey, in which Israel will import 50 million cubic meters of water per year for 20 years. The deal is completed piecemeal and under significant pressure from Turkey, which allegedly threatened to call off joint military and development projects should Israel abandon the agreement.

March 24: Following Israel's assassination of Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan denounces the killing as a "terrorist act."

March 24: Khaled Mashaal, chairman of Hamas's political office, urges Turkey to offer financial, political, and diplomatic support to the Palestinians.

May 20: Turkish prime minister Erdogan describes the Israeli policy in the Gaza Strip as "state-sponsored terrorism" and criticizes Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon for his Palestinian policy, causing concern in both Israel and the United States.

May 24: The Zorlu Group, a Turkish company, signs an \$800 million contract with Israel to build and manage three energy plants.

July 14: Israeli minister of industry and trade Ehud Olmert visits Turkey and meets with President Ahmet Necdet Sezer, along with Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul, Economic Minister Ali Babacan, Communications Minister Binali Yildirim, and Energy Minister Hilmi Guler. The central reason for Olmert's visit is the Turkey-Israel Joint Economic Council meeting over which he is to preside.

September 6–7: Turkish foreign minister Gul hosts a dinner in honor of Palestinian prime minister Ahmed Qurei's first visit to the country. Prime Minister Erdogan receives the Palestinian leader the next day.

November 25: Israeli foreign ministry director-general Ron Prosor and Turkish foreign ministry officials, including Prosor's counterpart, Ali Tuycan, hold talks in Ankara on bilateral ties and regional matters, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict after the recent death of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. This meeting is part of regular consultations between the two countries.

2005

April: Turkey buys three unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) systems from Israel Aircraft Industries (IAI) and the Israeli company Elbit Systems at a cost of \$183 million. Under the deal, Turkey will acquire ten ground stations, each with three or four UAVs. All three arms of the Turkish military will use the new technology.

May 1–2: Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan visits Jerusalem. During the visit, he invites Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon to Ankara, tours the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial, and confirms the development of seventeen new joint Turkish-Israeli military projects.

September: Turkey brokers the first public, official talks between Israel and Pakistan.

December: Turkish Air Force commander Faruk Comert visits Israel in an “unpublicized” three-day trip. Commander Comert is accompanied by a five-person staff and meets with his Israeli counterpart, Air Marshal Eliezer Shekedi.

December–January: Commander of the Turkish Naval Forces, Adm. Yener Karahanoglu, travels to Israel.

December 22: Israeli chief of staff Dan Halutz visits Ankara, meeting with his Turkish counterpart, the chief of general staff, Gen. Hilmi Ozkok. They discuss common concerns such as Islamist terrorism and Iran’s suspicious nuclear activities. During these talks, Turkey and Israel agree to continue joint military exercises (the Reliant Mermaid maneuvers) and to use intelligence satellites more effectively to monitor Islamist terrorist activities in the region. The IDF also agrees to supply Turkey with high-tech surveillance equipment in order to more effectively cover Turkey’s problematic border with Iraq, which is being infiltrated by separatist Kurdish operatives aiming to carry out attacks.

- Over the course of the year, Turkey is Israel’s biggest trade partner in the region, importing \$900 million in Israeli goods and exporting \$1.2 billion in goods to Israel.

2006

January 27: A day after Hamas’s victory in the Palestinian legislative elections, Turkish prime minister Tayyip Recep Erdogan maintains that the international community must respect the decision of the Palestinian people.

February 14: Turkish foreign minister Abdullah Gul calls on Hamas to “act in a democratic way.”

February 16: Turkish officials meet with a Hamas leader at AKP headquarters.

March: Turkey’s military and procurement authorities scrap two defense deals with Israel, one for a high-value strategic reconnaissance program and the second for antiradar drones. Analysts claim to see no political motive behind either move.

March: Turkey’s undersecretary of the foreign ministry, Ali Tuygan, travels to Israel for political consultations, and meets with Dov Weisglass, chief advisor to the prime minister; Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni; and Foreign Ministry Undersecretary Ron Prosor.

April 31: During the first day of a two-day visit to Israel and the Palestinian territories, Turkish foreign minister Abdullah Gul signs a deal with Palestinian officials for reopening an industrial zone in the Gaza Strip. He is accompanied by his Palestinian counterpart, Naser al-Qidwa. Gul signs a similar agreement on the same day with Israeli officials in Jerusalem.

May: The Federation of Israeli Chambers of Commerce signs an economic cooperation agreement with the Turkish Chambers of the Aegean Region to forge bilateral trade relations. This agreement is made during “Agritech 2006,” after the visit of Nedim Kalpaklioglu, deputy chairman of the Aegean Region Chamber of Industry (EBSO) Executive Board to Israel. Turkey and Israel also negotiate the construction of a multimillion-dollar energy and water project that will transport water, electricity, natural gas, and oil by pipelines to Israel and thereafter to points in the Far East.

May 28: Israeli foreign minister Tzipi Livni arrives in Turkey for the first high-level contact between the two countries since Ankara infuriated Israel by hosting a Hamas delegation.

June 6–9: Turkish president Ahmet Necdet Sezer visits Israel and meets with Israeli president Moshe Katsav, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Foreign Minister Livni, and Benjamin Netanyahu, among others. He also meets with Palestinian premier Mahmoud Abbas, of Fatah.

June 10: The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemns Israel for the death of a Palestinian family on a Gaza beach, and expresses concerns about escalating tension in the Middle East.

June 26: Israeli foreign minister Livni phones Turkish counterpart Gul to seek support for the rescuing of an Israeli soldier abducted by Palestinian militants. Gul calls Palestinian prime minister Ismail Haniyeh after the conversation with Livni.

June 29: A day after Israeli troops move into Gaza in an attempt to gain the release of the abducted soldier, the Turkish Foreign Ministry issues a statement calling on Palestinians and Israelis to take steps to avoid a “deep crisis” in the Middle East.

June 30: In Turkey, thousands of angry protesters burn Israeli flags and chant pro-Hamas slogans. Included among these protesters are those who have congregated in the square near the Beyazit Mosque.

July 3: Turkish prime minister Erdogan sends his chief foreign policy advisor, Ahmet Davutoglu, to Damascus in what Turkish foreign minister Gul calls a bid to convince Syrian president Bashar al-Asad to defuse the mounting crisis between Israel and the Palestinians. The visit has been encouraged by the United States and Israel.

July 8: The Turkish Foreign Ministry releases two statements calling for an end to the violence. The first statement expresses concern over the escalation in tensions; the second urges Israel and the Palestinians to act responsibly.

July 9: On a Sunday, approximately 50,000 Turks gather in Abide-i-Hurriyet Square in the Sisli district of Istanbul to protest the Israeli offensive in the Gaza Strip. Foreign Minister Gul, in a meeting with journalists while en route to Tehran, calls the slaying of Palestinians a “horrible act.” Gul also makes clear Turkey’s opposition to unilateral steps by the Israelis, asserting that negotiations and dialogue are necessary for a final-status solution.

July 16: Prime Minister Erdogan sends the following message to G8 leaders: Stop Israel or Turkey will suspend its role in the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative (BMENAI).

July 17: Tens of thousands of Turks gather in Diyarbakır to condemn Israeli operations in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories.

July 18: The Turkish Foreign Ministry reports that Turkey is sending thirty-five trucks carrying 630 tons of flour to aid the Palestinians.

July 26: Turkish activists, party officials, and citizen groups gather in large numbers outside the Israeli embassy in Ankara to protest Israeli military actions in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories.

July 28: At Istanbul’s Taksim Gezi Park, Turks stage a three-day sit-in to protest Israeli aggression in the Middle East. The sit-in ends with a public rally, in which about 3,000 protestors gather under a banner demanding that Israel stop its attacks, followed by a march to the Dolmabahce Palace. The protests are organized by Turkey’s Revolutionary Workers Unions Confederation (DISK).

July 31: Israel and Turkey sign an agreement that is expected to boost Israeli food and agricultural exports to Turkey by roughly \$20 million yearly. The deal builds on a pact from 1998—which eased trade restrictions—by removing tariffs on quotas of Israeli dried vegetables, coffee, spices, hatchery eggs, and other products entering Turkey. It also lifts tariffs on quotas of Turkish dried fruits, nuts, jams, beer, and arak entering Israel. These changes are expected to take effect within three months, following approval by both countries.

July 31: In Ankara, negative reactions to Israeli retaliatory strikes in the Palestinian territories and Lebanon intensify. Activists from the Hak-Is labor union lay a wreath in front of the Israeli embassy

in condemnation, while representatives of the Rights and Freedom Front march and burn the Israeli flag in front of AKP headquarters.

August 1–2: In the Turkish parliamentary group that supports friendship with Israel, 26 of 263 members resign their posts. The head of the group—Vahit Kirisci, the AKP deputy for Adana—states that dissolution is not the group’s first alternative, and that it will instead call on Israel to halt its attacks and work for peace.

This timeline was prepared by Turkish Research Program interns Brock Dahl and Danielle Slutzky.