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Given the current strength of the ties, it is of great importance when looking at the relationship between Israel and Turkey, that one does not lose sense of the historical context of this relationship. One must be aware that in this context what we are looking at is a continuing story and not a new and hereto unknown "alliance". Already in 1949, the government of the young Republic of Turkey demonstrated significant political bravery and recognized the new Jewish state, in line with the decision of the United Nations in November 1947. This at a time when other states, Middle Eastern as well as others, failed to accept the validity of the UN decision and the political reality that was accomplished then with the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.

Since that time, what we have witnessed is an up and down relationship, dictated for the most part by Turkey's interests and its relationship with the Arab and the Muslim states. It would be fair to say that the Israeli willingness to forge closer ties with the Turkish Republic remained throughout all of the last 50 years.

To demonstrate the historical nature of the ties, let me remind you that in 1957 there was an attempt at creating a quadrilateral cooperation pact between the four non-Arab states in the region Ethiopia, Iran, Israel and Turkey. Then Prime Minister of Israel David Ben Gurion displayed a keen sense of the delicate nature of such an agreement vis-à-vis the other states of the region, particularly for Turkey. Thus, maximum discretion was exercised surrounding the visit of Ben Gurion in Ankara at that time. Remembering us all of certain chapters in the history of the relations between Israel and Turkey might help us in maintaining the current chapter in its proper perspective, more rational and with less emotion and rhetoric that characterizes politics in our Middle East.

Today we are witness to strong criticism aimed at Turkey from some of its neighbors, as well as internally, who feel that Turkey is showing an unbalanced hand when furthering its ties with Israel, to their detriment. It is wise that the record be straight when addressing such criticism.

The relations between Turkey and its Arab neighbors have deep historical roots, some predating the establishment of the State of Israel, and not connected to the development of ties between the two countries. Part of these "historical roots" include major points of contention and sometimes friction, totally unrelated to Israel:

1. Water: By virtue of its geographic location upstream of two major water arteries to Iraq and Syria, the Tigris and the Euphrates, the utilization of water by Turkey has always been a delicate issue in its relationship with these two downstream neighbors.
2. Territory: The 1939 treaty, which gave Turkish sovereignty to the region of Hatay, has never been recognized by the government of Syria. Indeed, very recently there have been statements by top Syrian officials implying that the Syrian claim and ultimate goal regarding Alexandretta (Hatay) is not different from the way they see the Golan Heights.
3. Terror: The Arab support for anti-Turkish terror organizations continues to this very day (as recent events demonstrate) to be a major point of friction.
4. Fundamentalism: Certain neighboring states, with differing intensities and using different actions, have shown their support for the cause of fundamentalist movements in Turkey, who aim at undermining the secular nature of the state established by Atatürk in 1923.
5. Secularism and democracy: These two ideals which lie at the foundation of the modern Turkish Republic, are viewed as a negative model and a threat to the nature of the regimes found in the Arab states. As such, they view with great suspicion the democratic process in Turkey and are weary that this may encourage democratic movements in their own country.
6. NATO and the West: Turkey's historical strategic decision to "turn West" and attempts to achieve recognition as a member of the Western world places it at odds with its neighbors. Turkey's membership in NATO serves to further this bone of contention.

Thus, the evidence indicates that there are sufficient items of contention on the Arab-Turkish agenda which predate and are totally unrelated to the current climate of Turkish-Israeli ties.

Furthermore, as the historical record serves to remind us, when there were extended periods of "cooling off" in Turkish-Israeli relations, such as in the early 1980's, we failed to see concurrent improvement in Turkish-Arab ties.

Today Turkey has full diplomatic relations with all Arab countries. Israel sees this purely as a normal, natural and even positive fact. Israel does not raise this issue and does not seek any change in Turkish relations, even with the most extreme "Pariah States".

In summary, "it takes two to tango". Turkey's attempts to deepen its political and economic ties with the Arab world are well documented, yet these states have traditionally failed to respond to Turkey's advances.

In this respect, it is needless to elaborate on the fact that in one of the most crucial moments of truth for Turkey, not one single Arab state has been ready to recognize the state that was declared in the Northern part of Cyprus in 1983.

Finally, Turkey, by virtue of its ties with both the Arab world and Israel and the West, has a unique role to play in bringing more stability to the entire region. If allowed to fill this role, Turkey will be a major leader in furthering stability and enhancing the dialogue between Israel and the Arab and Muslim world.

This would be a "crowning legacy", appropriate for these two relatively young states, whose people are blessed with a most glorious joint history, and are celebrating, together, milestone anniversaries this year Turkey its 75th and Israel its 50th.