Turkey, Israel Must Find Renewed Ties

T urkey's demand that Israel halt its blockade of the Gaza Strip deflated Israel's bid to normalize ties between the two Middle East powers. For Israel to lift the sea blockade as long as Hamas, a terrorist organization, rules Gaza would be extremely dangerous.

Hope bubbled up on March 22 when, at President Obama's urging, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu partially apologized in a phone conversation to Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan for "operational errors" committed by Israel during the ill-fated May 2010 raid on the Mavi Marmara ship, part of a Turkish-flagged aid flotilla, as it sought to break a maritime blockade of Gaza. Netanyahu agreed to compensate families of nine Turkish Humanitarian Relief Foundation members killed in the violence when Israeli naval commandos boarded the ship. And he conceded to allowing more humanitarian goods into Gaza.

Diplomacy between Israel and Turkey, two historic allies, essentially stopped in the aftermath of the bloody sea incident.

Israel issued a statement saying Netanyahu's apology would restore normalization between Jerusalem and Ankara, including the exchange of ambassadors.

Israel's overtures seeking diplomatic renewal with Turkey are significant in a region where Jewish-Islamic tension runs high. The good times that Turkey and Israel shared in the 1990s degenerated as a result of:

• Erdogan's rise to power in 2003 and the brutality he wrought against the minority Kurds;

• America's prolonged war in Iraq and its potential impact on Turkey;

• The Israeli army's reported "disproportionate" force against Palestinians in the 2008-09 Gaza war. On March 24, Erdogan, apparently feeling heat from Turkish hardliner criticism of Israel's newfound PR success, wavered. He declared that Netanyahu also would have to end the Gaza embargo — a certain nonstarter in negotiations involving Israel. Only a complete cessation of missiles fired from Gaza on southern Israel would bring relaxed sea passage into Gaza, insisted Israel in a bold statement issued the same day. Three days earlier, on the second day of Obama's visit to the region, at least four rockets were fired from Gaza at southern Israel. That marked the second such attack since an Egyptian-brokered truce ended Israel's Pillar of Defense operation in Gaza last November.

Netanyahu's seeming epiphany in apologizing has roots in the threat posed by Syria as its civil war escalates. In a March 23 Facebook post, the prime minister wrote: "It's important that Turkey and Israel, which both share a border with Syria, are able to communicate with each other, and this is no less relevant to other regional challenges."

Consider the compelling economic incentive of Israel possibly exporting billions of dollars to Turkey and beyond as a byproduct of improved relations, reported the Wall Street Journal.

"Turkey, a nation of 76 million, including 26,000 Jews, is a good counter to Iran for dominance in the region and also a somewhat demo-

Turkey’s Recep Tayyip Erdogan

Anti-Zionism Is Anti-Semitism

Why we need to have the conversation.

Brenda Rosenberg with Samia Bahsoun

D uring the past 12 years of interfaith efforts, I've had numerous conversations with Christians, Muslims, Arabs and African Americans that anti-Zionism is anti-Semitism. Some were open to understanding my point of view, some were polite, but unshakable in their belief: "We have nothing against Jews; Zionists and Zionism are the problem. Zionism is a crime against humanity" or "Zionism is racism." Some were almost violent.

I feared for my safety when a woman at a church in Birmingham stood up and said, "Choose! Choose! You must be willing to collaborate with people from the opposite side of conflict and take joint ownership in transforming conflict, Samia and I committed to facing challenges together and seeking solutions together.

Use the tension surrounding conflict as an opportunity to deepen understanding and engage the other. Samia shared her thoughts on Zionism — "Zionism is a terrorist Jewish expansionist movement that justifies taking Palestinian land and is the cause of the Arab-Israeli conflict."

Samia, who lost her grandmother and great-aunt to Israeli raids on southern Lebanon in 1982 and suffered losses in the 2006 war, is convinced that Israeli attacks on Lebanon are part of the Zionist ambition to expand Israel's borders under the disguise of self-defense and national security. She believes that Zionism is racism because it calls for a Jewish state, denying peace — so different from mine. It was
equally challenging for Samia to hear how I see my Jewish identity as inseparable from my Zionist identity. Zionism is part of my core identity — my historical connection to the Land of Israel — the connector to all Jewish people, an expression of Jewish values, the importance of life, oneness and justice, a statement Samia had never heard before.

Samia heard my fears that Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran want to annihilate all Jews. She learned when I hear anti-Zionist slurs, I feel they are not just rejecting my identity as a Jew, but the collective bond I feel with all Jews, and that I feel anti-Zionist remarks are an attempt to delegitimize our right as Jews for self-determination, as well as negating our legitimate right to co-existence as Jews in our historical birthplace and homeland, Israel.

Our next hurdle was to role play the other. It was tough to express words that were not “our” truth. We were fearless and committed to deepening our understanding. Reversing roles, I experienced Samia’s anger, and Samia experienced my fear.

Through the process of being the other, we both felt truly heard. The process stretched our boundaries; we experienced a powerful shift in perceptions. Paradoxically, we acknowledged each other’s narrative without giving up our own beliefs. We were ready for the third step of the Tectonic process.

The third step is to “lead consciously through the lens of evolution and not through the lens of survival.” We were willing to let go of the footprint of the past and walk where there are no footprints, holding each other accountable and standing with each other in both communities, especially during times of crisis.

When Samia and I make a presentation, I speak about Arab and Islamophobia and Samia speaks about anti-Semitism and explains why Jews feel anti-Zionism is anti-Semitism. Paired and committed, we step together into the fault line, probe below the surface, examine the tension and use it to connect our communities.

The government should keep its hands off Social Security.
Reductions in Social Security are needed to tackle the deficit.