

# Formula for Stability: Turkey Plus Israel

by Çevik Bir and Martin Sherman

**T**he 1990s loom like the lost decade in the Middle East. The carefully-constructed house of cards known as the Arab-Israeli “peace process” lies in a heap. Saddam Husayn still menaces his neighbors and the region. And the prime export of the region, aside from oil, is fundamentalist-fueled terror, whose recent performance in Manhattan wrenched the city’s tallest buildings from its skyline. In the balance sheet of stability, the 1990s left the Middle East in the red. But at the top of the plus column is one indisputable achievement: the Israeli-Turkish relationship.

As U.S. policymakers scan the ruins for bits of scaffolding with which to reconstruct a semblance of order, they should consider the Israeli-Turkish relationship. The ties between these two countries—democratic, pro-Western, non-Arab—could provide the Middle East with stabilizing ballast, which is now a vital interest of the West. Yet theirs is a peculiar relationship with a complex history. Its potential may be very great indeed, but realizing it requires that the partnership be promoted and managed with utmost care.

Here, then, is a short prospectus on the past, present, and future of the Turkish-Israeli relationship, by a coauthor who was one of its Turkish architects, and another coauthor, one of its Israeli proponents.

## IN THE BEGINNING

The first thing that must be understood about the relationship between Turkey and Israel is that, for a very long time, Israel was eager to develop it, and Turkey was reticent. Israel

played the suitor to a reluctant Turkey.

In 1949, Turkey was the first majority Muslim nation in the world to recognize Israel, and for three decades, remained the only such country to do so. The establishment of formal ties with Israel sent a strong message about Turkey’s international orientation and its desire to align itself with the West. Diplomatic missions were opened in 1950 at the legation level. But until the 1990s, relations were symbolic more than substantive. For the first forty years, Turkey withstood constant Arab diplomatic and economic pressure to cut diplomatic ties with Israel. But those ties did not develop any momentum.

This was not for any lack of effort on Israel’s part. During Israel’s first years of independence,

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*That Turkish look: David Ben-Gurion (left), first prime minister of Israel, and Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, second president of Israel, as law students in Istanbul, 1912.*

David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, worked assiduously to forge a close bond with Turkey. Ben-Gurion (who as a young man studied law in Ottoman Istanbul) was keenly aware of the benefits inherent in Turkey's impressive geophysical, material, and human resources. Relations with Ankara were also in accord with what was then a central pillar of Israel's foreign policy: the "periphery states" doctrine. Israel sought to offset the diplomatic and economic isolation imposed by its near Arab neighbors by "leapfrogging" over the ring of hostility and forging ties with more remote, non-Arab neighbors.

In particular, Israeli diplomacy invested immense effort in promoting ties with Iran, Ethiopia, and Turkey. Of the three, Turkey proved to be the most important. For several decades, Iran was of comparable significance—until the Islamic revolution. It then became a major source of threat to Israel. Israel also strengthened its ties to Ethiopia, situated as it was on the Red Sea. But the country was gradually devastated by civil war and famine, and the secession of Eritrea undermined its strategic importance. By contrast, Turkey has remained relatively stable, pro-Western, and prosperous over the entire span of Israel's existence. From the very outset, Israel hoped that ties with Turkey—a Western-aligned, Muslim-populated state—would dilute the religious element of the Arab-Israeli conflict and

might even evolve into a strategic relationship, reinforcing Israel's ties to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Europe.

Turkey, in contrast, showed little interest in any strategic relationship with Israel. Throughout the Cold War period, Ankara preferred to seek allies in the West rather than in the Middle East, opting for a policy of non-engagement in the region. Even in the 1970s, when several of Turkey's Middle Eastern neighbors started to acquire weapons of mass destruction and ballistic delivery systems, Ankara pointedly turned its back on the region. By Turkey's exclusive reliance on NATO, it ran

a considerable risk, since the purpose of the alliance was to counter the Warsaw Pact. Was NATO obliged to come to Turkey's defense if it were attacked from the Middle East? On paper—Article 5 of the 1949 Washington Treaty—the answer seemed to be "no."<sup>1</sup>

The end of the Cold War finally brought Turkey to reevaluate its ties with Israel.<sup>2</sup> With the disintegration of the Warsaw Pact, NATO's future became unclear. The eastward expansion of the European Union (EU), the surfeit of EU-based security and defense schemes, the moves to set up a European rapid reaction force, all created uncertainty for Ankara. Turkey, located on the edge of the NATO alliance and outside the EU, had good reason to wonder whether its established strategic security doctrines were still valid, and whether it still had a place under any "collective umbrella."<sup>3</sup>

1 Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Turkey and Israel Strategize," *Middle East Quarterly*, Winter 2001, pp. 62. According to Article 5, NATO members "agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America [authors' emphasis] shall be considered an attack against them all."

2 Meltem Müftüleri Baç, "Turkey and Israel: An Evolving Partnership," Ariel Center for Policy Research, Policy Paper no. 47, 1998, synopsis, at <http://www.acpr.org.il/publications/policy-papers/pp047-xs.html>.

3 Kibaroglu, "Turkey and Israel Strategize," p. 63.

At the same time, potential threats to Turkey originating in the Middle East began to grow at an alarming pace. At various times, Syria, Iraq, and Iran have had accelerated programs for chemical and biological weapons, as well as long-range delivery systems. And at various times, Turkey has faced threats from terrorist groups that received aid from one or more of these three states. Although the problem has abated since the 1999 arrest and imprisonment of the Partiya Karkaren Kurdistan (PKK) head, Abdullah Öcalan, it has not been totally eradicated. Moreover, the danger of radical Islam, fueled by state-sponsored material aid, operational assistance, and spiritual guidance, continues to menace the secular, Western-oriented fabric of the Turkish state.

Two other trends combined in the 1990s to nudge Israel and Turkey together: the failure of democratization in Arab countries and European unification.

Turkey and Israel are countries with a pronounced pro-Western, secular-democratic preference—a fact that makes them outsiders to the Arab Middle East. A leading analyst has remarked that Turkey and Israel “share ‘a common sense of otherness’ from the non-democratic and Arab regimes that dominate their region.”<sup>4</sup> This sense of “otherness” deepened in the 1990s when the Arab Middle East failed to undergo the democratizing transition experienced by the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

During the same decade, the accelerated movement toward European unification intensified Turkey and Israel’s sense of marginality. Both countries aspired to membership in the European club. But both countries, systematically assailed by adversarial human rights and political lobbies in European capitals, could not count on a European consensus in favor of their inclusion. As the train of European unification accelerated, both Turkey and Israel felt dangerously



*Discreet contacts: Israeli prime minister Levi Eshkol (left) and Turkish prime minister İsmet İnönü meet in Paris, 1964.*

isolated and marginalized—and the partnership between them became a convenient fallback.

However, the liaison between Ankara and Jerusalem would not have gone far had it only been a club for the isolated. Each side had very tangible needs that could be fulfilled by the other. For Turkey, Israel represented a much-needed source of technologically advanced military equipment, which other Western sources denied it. For Israel, with its narrow territorial dimensions, Turkey offered geostrategic depth.

In sum, the 1990s provided ample incentive for Israel and Turkey to forge a new relationship. They did not miss the opportunity.

## THE WARMING

The shift in Israeli-Turkish ties began in 1991 in the wake of the Madrid peace conference, when Turkey moved to upgrade relations

4 Daniel Pipes, “A New Axis: The Emerging Turkish-Israeli Entente,” *The National Interest*, Winter, 1997-98, at <http://www.danielpipes.org/articles/1997winter.shtml>.

to full ambassadorial status. But the real breakthrough occurred in November 1993, when Turkish foreign minister Hikmet Çetin visited Israel. During the visit, he signed a memorandum on mutual understanding and guidelines on cooperation with his Israeli counterpart.<sup>5</sup> Upon his return, Çetin announced that Turkish-Israeli relations would be advanced further in all areas, adding that the two states would cooperate “in restructuring the Middle East.”<sup>6</sup>

**For a very long time, Israel played the suitor to a reluctant Turkey.**

More high-level contacts followed in the ensuing years including visits by the Turkish prime minister, Tansu Çiller, in 1994 and by President Süleyman Demirel in 1996. Israel’s foreign minister, Shimon Peres, and Israeli presi-

dent, Ezer Weizmann, reciprocated these visits.

Until early 1996, Ankara seemed to favor economic, technical, and cultural ties with Israel rather than military cooperation.<sup>7</sup> But in 1996, the two countries signed a far-reaching military coordination agreement. The accord provided, among other things, for Israeli air force planes to utilize Turkish air space for training purposes. In August of the same year, the two governments concluded an additional agreement for the exchange of technical knowledge and expertise, paving the way for Israeli upgrading of over fifty Turkish air force F-4 Phantoms.

The 1996 accords were followed by a flurry of mutual visits and declarations as to the far-reaching importance each country attached to the relationship. The Turkish army’s chief of

staff, Ismail Hakki Karadayi, visited Israel in early 1997. This was followed by a visit by Israel’s foreign minister, David Levy, to Ankara. Then Turkey’s defense minister, Turhan Tayan, paid a visit to Israel, as did Çevik Bir (co-author of this piece) in early May 1997. In October of the same year, Israel’s chief of staff, Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, visited Turkey. In each case, these visitors brought sizeable entourages in tow, so that by the latter part of 1997 significant numbers of commanding officers from both militaries had met each other.<sup>8</sup>

Political pronouncements from the highest echelons openly stressed the strategic importance of the relationship. For example, in August 1997, Prime Minister Mesut Yılmaz stated that Turkish-Israeli cooperation “is necessary to the balance of power” in the region.<sup>9</sup> In 1998, Israel’s prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, likewise argued that the relationship would “induce stability where instability prevails.”<sup>10</sup> Yitzhak Mordechai, then Israel’s defense minister, portrayed the significance of the ties in the following terms: “When we lock hands, we form a powerful fist ... our relationship is a strategic one.”<sup>11</sup>

Bilateral trade has also been an important factor in the bond between the two nations. Virtually negligible a decade ago, Israeli-Turkish trade increased steadily through the 1990s, reaching almost a billion dollars in 1999. Israel is today Turkey’s chief Middle Eastern export market. The volume of civilian exchanges (tourist, academic, professional, sporting, and cultural) has also expanded dramatically, and Turkey became Israel’s most popular tourist destination by the mid-1990s.

The new ties weathered several difficult tests, the most severe of which was the rise to power of Necmettin Erbakan, head of the anti-Israel and Islamist Welfare Party, in 1996. From his first days in office, Erbakan embarked on an

5 Ayşegül Sever, “Turkey and the Syrian-Israeli Peace Talks in the 1990s,” *Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA)*, Sept. 2001, at <http://www.biu.ac.il/SOC/besa/meria/journal/2001/issue3/jv5n3a7.html>.

6 Efraim Inbar, “Regional Implications of the Israeli-Turkish Strategic Partnership,” *MERIA*, June 2001, at <http://www.biu.ac.il/SOC/besa/meria/journal/2001/issue2/jv5n2a5.html>.

7 Sever, “Turkey and the Syrian-Israeli Peace Talks.”

8 Pipes, “A New Axis.”

9 Inbar, “Regional Implications.”

10 *Ibid.*

11 *Ibid.*

Islamic agenda, on both the domestic and foreign policy fronts. This included a drive for the Islamicization of the educational system, a promise to bring Turkey closer to the Arab world, and a vision of the creation of a “NATO-like” alliance of Islamic states. Erbakan’s anti-Israel rhetoric was rife with traditional anti-Jewish motifs and myths. For him, Israel was a “timeless enemy” and “a cancer in the heart of the Arab and Muslim world.” He accused Israel of seeking to undermine the Islamic faith, warned of the specter of a “greater Israel” stretching from the Nile to the Euphrates, and alleged that a “Zionist conspiracy” was to blame for Turkey’s economic difficulties.<sup>12</sup> Before his election, Erbakan pledged to freeze Ankara’s relations with Israel and to annul the bilateral agreements between the two countries. Some analysts thought Erbakan’s election would constitute a fatal blow to the relationship.

It didn’t. Under the provisions of Turkey’s constitutional system, the military is charged with protecting the secular republican legacy of Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey. The army made it clear to Erbakan that it would not sit idly by and watch Turkey turn toward Islam or allow Israeli-Turkish military relations to be jeopardized. In a reaffirmation of secularist supremacy, the secretary general of the powerful National Security Council (MGK)—a body made up of both military and political leaders—declared that Turkey’s secular society and educational system formed basic tenets of the country’s national security. Erbakan was kept in check. Turkey and Israel concluded their most



*In the open: Israeli president Ezer Weizman (right), accompanied by Turkish president Süleyman Demirel (left), reviews the Turkish honor guard on Weizman’s visit to Turkey, January 24, 1994.*

important military cooperation agreements during Erbakan’s tenure, which ended in June 1997, when the Islamist prime minister tendered his resignation under pressure from the MGK.

Another test arose from the vehemence of the criticism leveled by those who saw themselves as adversaries (or potential adversaries) of Turkey or Israel (or both). For example, Vice-President ‘Abd al-Halim Khaddam of Syria, the country perhaps most affected by the Israeli-Turkish partnership, warned that it was “the greatest threat to the Arabs since 1948,” and that U.S.-Turkish-Israeli ties were “the most dangerous alliance ... witnessed since the Second World War.”<sup>13</sup> The Iraqi foreign minister Muhammad Sa’id as-Sahaf termed the joint naval maneuvers in January 1998 “a provocative act.”<sup>14</sup> Iranian president Muhammad Khatami also declared that the Turkish-Israeli entente “provokes the feelings of the Islamic world.”<sup>15</sup> Egypt, although constrained by its reliance on the United States, also criticized the Israeli-

12 Pipes, “A New Axis”; Alan M. Schneider, “Turkey and Israel: Shared Enemies, Shared Interests,” *The Jerusalem Journal*, at <http://www.bnabrith.org/worldcenter/jerjournal/jerjournal15.html>.

13 *Ha’aretz*, Apr. 30, 1996, and June 3, 1997.

14 Quoted in Inbar, “Regional Implications.”

15 Quoted in *ibid*.



*Cerebral politicians: Turkish prime minister Bülent Ecevit (right) and Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak in Ankara, August 28, 2000.*

Turkish partnership. Presidential advisor Usama al-Baz warned that military cooperation between Ankara and Jerusalem “would lead to instability and possibly war in the Middle East,” and that it “threatens the interests of the Arab states.”<sup>16</sup> Egypt’s hostility towards the agreement has since abated somewhat, but Cairo still views the Ankara-Jerusalem entente as a formidable obstacle to its aspirations for regional leadership.

Most of the criticism, especially from Arab quarters, was intended to persuade Turkey to back out of the relationship. It, too, failed.

Since September 2000, the Turkish-Israeli relationship has faced another test. The war of attrition between Israel and the Palestinians has reverberated through much of the Muslim world, including Turkey. Turkish voices have been raised in criticism of Israeli policies.<sup>17</sup> Once again, speculation swirled about the possibility that agreements might be suspended or cancelled. Yet, once again they have stood firm.

Certainly, the events of the past two years

have dispelled some of the hyperbole surrounding Israeli-Turkish ties. But the partnership did not arise from the Israeli-Palestinian “peace process,” and the demise of the process has not stopped cooperation. In fact, the criticism of Israel provided an opportunity for many in Turkey to reaffirm the crucial importance of the Israeli-Turkish relationship to Ankara’s own national interests.

As a result of the developments of the 1990s, Israeli-Turkish relations were transformed. The old pattern of Israeli eagerness and Turkish reticence was replaced by a more mature pattern of two partners bound by mutual interests, working as equals in expanding areas of cooperation. But the relationship still has much unrealized potential, nowhere more so than on the strategic level. Just what has the partnership achieved so far in strategic terms? In what directions should it develop?

## STRATEGIC CONTENT

The word “strategic” is easy to invoke, and it has been coupled with Israel and Turkey time and again. According to one well-known expert, “the emergence of close Israeli-Turkish relations is one of the most significant strategic developments in the post-Cold War Middle East,”<sup>18</sup> A leading journalist has expressed the view that the “alliance has altered the strategic power balance in the oil-rich Mideast.”<sup>19</sup> Another analyst has declared that “the new relationship which has developed [between Israel and Turkey] is perhaps the most significant development in Israeli foreign policy since the Israeli-Egyptian rap-

16 Quoted in *ibid*.

17 British Broadcasting Corporation, at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/world/europe/newsid\\_1911000/1911609.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/world/europe/newsid_1911000/1911609.stm).

18 Alan Makovsky, quoted in “Special Policy Forum Report, The Turkish-Israeli-Syrian Triangle” *Peacewatch*, no. 249, Mar. 15, 2000, at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/watch/Peacewatch/peacewatch2000/249.htm>.

19 Sami Kohen, quoted in Pipes, “A New Axis.”

prochement.”<sup>20</sup> Still another has dubbed it the Middle East’s “most important military relationship.”<sup>21</sup> Before accepting any of these characterizations, it is important to define what the relationship is, and what it is not.

Insofar as there is no formal commitment between the two countries to mutual defense or military cooperation in defined future scenarios, the entente between Ankara and Jerusalem is clearly not a military alliance in the traditional sense. Neither state expects the other to wage its wars, and both are wary of embroilment in crises that do not impinge directly on their own vital national interests. Israel and Turkey do not have a defined *casus foederis*, specifying the situation(s) that will activate military action by one on behalf of the other.

Nevertheless, their relationship can still be considered a strategic partnership, for it is rooted in a fundamental convergence of views on a wide range of issues, both regional and global in nature. While leaders of both countries are at pains to stress that the relationship is not specifically directed against any third party, Israel and Turkey do share concerns about Syria, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the danger of Islamic radicalism, potential threats from Iran or Iraq, and the geopolitical destiny of Central Asia.

The strategic partnership between Turkey and Israel is not a classic balance of power play. The two countries are jointly stronger militarily than any regional rival or potentially rival regional alliance. It is rather a relationship between two “status quo powers,” pooling resources to ward off common threats and concerned mainly with preventing forcible disruptions of the pre-



*Continuing dialogue: Turkish president Ahmet Necdet Sezer (center) receives Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon (left) at Çankaya Palace, Ankara, August 8, 2001. On far right: Turkish foreign minister Ismail Cem.*

vailing geopolitical conditions in the region. Neither Israel nor Turkey has any active territorial claims beyond their existing frontiers or any aspirations to topple incumbent regional regimes. But they both face “revisionist” adversaries such as Syria, Iraq, and Iran, which do harbor territorial ambitions or aspire either to control or replace regimes in the region not to their liking. (Indeed, the recent security coordination agreement signed between Damascus and Ankara in June 2002, has changed little in the basic geopolitical parameters that prompted the Israeli-Turkish relationship. Syrian-Turkish tensions over water and the Syrian claim to Hatay continue to simmer beneath the surface.)<sup>22</sup>

Although the strategic side of the partnership lacks structural formality, the present level of military cooperation—including joint exercises, staff-to-staff coordination, intelligence sharing, and mutual visits—has created an infrastructure for possible joint action in the fu-

20 Efraim Inbar, “The Israeli-Turkish Connection,” Massachusetts Institute of Technology Security Studies Program Seminar Series, Spring 1999, Feb. 3, 1999, at <http://web.mit.edu/ssp/spring99/inbar.html>.

21 Sabri Sayari, quoted in Pipes, “A New Axis.”

22 *The Syria Report*, at <http://www.syria-report.com/Features6.htm>.

ture. This, together with the fact that both countries sometimes publicize their high-level strategic dialogue, has enhanced their respective potential for deterrence and coercive diplomacy. In a region where international relations are conducted predominantly as power politics, and where military prowess is perceived as the principal component of national power, informal alliances are often as important as formal, explicit coalitions. And since

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most of the other Middle Eastern states have become obsessed with the military component in Israeli-Turkish ties, both countries have already reaped strategic dividends simply because potential adversaries perceive them as allies.

The strategic benefits that both countries have derived so far from their relationship can be

grouped under the following rubrics:

*Enhanced deterrence.* Israeli-Turkish military cooperation has undoubtedly enhanced the deterrence postures of both parties and so reduced the chances of violence being instigated against either one of them. States considering the use of force against either Turkey or Israel must take into consideration their combined might. The relationship raises the potential stakes for any would-be adversary. Even though the precise parameters of Israeli-Turkish mutual obligation are uncertain, that very uncertainty is an asset to both countries in deterring challengers.

*Enhanced coercive diplomacy.* Coercive diplomacy draws on many of the same elements as deterrence, but instead of dissuading an adversary from undertaking an undesired action, it compels an adversary to undertake a desired action.

Turkey's coercive diplomacy has already benefited from the liaison with Israel. In 1998, Damascus bowed to Turkish pressure to expel PKK head Abdullah Öcalan and terminate support for his organization, whose terrorist activities had cost the lives of tens of thousands of

Turkish citizens. There is general consensus among the proponents of Israeli-Turkish ties that Syrian compliance with Ankara's demands was prompted in no small measure by the perception among Syrian leaders that they might have to deal with a combined Turkish-Israeli threat. Indeed, this view is even held by opponents of the relationship. Thus, according to Nabil Kaylani, a vehement Arab critic of the Israeli-Turkish entente: “Turkey would not have confronted Syria so aggressively had it not been for its alliance with Israel.”<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the recently signed security coordination pact between Syria and Turkey is viewed by some as an additional benefit that devolved to Ankara as a result of the Turkish-Israeli détente, which compelled Damascus to resign itself to the new realities of the Middle East power equation and to curb or at least suspend its animosity toward Turkey. The fact that the Syrians did not attempt to convince Turkey to cut ties with Israel lends support to this view.<sup>24</sup>

*Enhanced standing in Washington.* Cooperation between Turkey and Israel creates a synergy that increases their importance to the United States. This is especially true following the events of September 11, 2001, which starkly underlined the fact that the Israeli-Turkish entente demarcates the fringes of a region fiercely inimical to U.S. interests. Together both countries constitute a formidable force for stability that compliments U.S. interests.

Daniel Pipes has made the following commentary on the U.S. interest in a flourishing Israeli-Turkish partnership:

The Turkish-Israeli partnership offers many advantages to the United States. Most ambi-

23 Nabil Kaylani, “Israeli-Turkish Alliance May Prove to Be New Destabilizing Factor in Middle East,” *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, Jan/Feb 1999, pp. 47, 94.

24 The security coordination agreement signed between Syrian and Turkey in June 2002 did not involve any demands from Damascus for Ankara to forsake its ties with Israel. According to Turkish officials, this indicates that Syria “accepts the reality [of Turkish-Israeli relations] in the Middle East with sober realization.” *Ha'aretz*, July 3, 2002.



tiously, it could provide the nucleus of an American-oriented regional partnership made up of democratic allies—as opposed to the authoritarian rulers upon which Washington has relied for five decades. Eisenhower’s Baghdad pact, Nixon’s “twin pillars,” and Reagan’s “strategic consensus” depended mostly on dubious monarchs (Iraq’s weak Hashemites, Iran’s bombastic shah, the egregious Saudis) and ugly authoritarians (such as the Mubarak regime in Egypt, today). But the Turkish-Israeli alignment creates, for the first time, the possibility of developing an alliance of pro-American democracies, such as exists in Europe. If cultivated carefully, [others] might join in. . . . The final result could be that most elusive of all goals: a more peaceable Middle East.<sup>25</sup>

At various crucial points, the Turkish-Israeli relationship has received the blessing and encouragement of the United States. Perhaps its most tangible manifestation is a lenient attitude towards defense-related technology transfers to and between the two parties, in order to ensure their undisputed military supremacy in their volatile environment.

## NEXT PHASE

The dramatic events of September 11 constitute a watershed for the international system, irrefutably demonstrating the severity of the threat of international terrorism and radical Islamism to liberal democracies. Concepts such as “democratic peace” and “zero tolerance of terror,” which had been mere slogans, have now been infused with new meaning. The rallying of democracies that face similar military and terrorist threats will define the world order in the coming phase.

The Middle East is fast on its way to becoming the principle generator of these threats. This opens new vistas for the Israeli-Turkish relationship, as a counterweight to the menace

of radical forces. The entente began in a convergence of the interests of two countries. It could well develop as the pillar of a wider security architecture for the Middle East, encouraged by the United States and Europe, with the objective of keeping theocratic extremism and martial despotism in check.

There are four major messages that the entente should convey to the region and beyond:

- It is aimed at providing increased security and stability in the Middle East and beyond.

- It demonstrates the merits (both in moral and political terms) of democratic regimes and the benefits inherent in the effective consolidation of cooperation between them.

- It is not motivated by any aggressive designs and is not directed against third parties.

- It is open to other like-minded regional actors, thanks to its informal structure and non-aggressive objectives.

The ultimate direction of this relationship may reside in the ease of its interaction with the network of interlinking ties being forged under the rubric of “the war on terror,” the purpose of which is nothing less than remaking the Middle East.

This is precisely where the Israeli-Turkish partnership goes beyond its value to both states and serves as a beacon of optimism to a benighted region. As Efraim Inbar, a leading authority on this relationship, observes:

The success of their societies in achieving far more freedom and prosperity than any other country in the Middle East is a constant reminder that democracy is not a feature found exclusively in western Europe and North America. This fuels the hope that such an experience can be emulated by their neighbors.<sup>26</sup>

**Both countries have already reaped strategic dividends simply because adversaries perceive them as allies.**

25 Pipes, “A New Axis.”

26 Inbar, “Regional Implications.”

Whether the hope is realistic remains to be seen. In the meantime, the Turkish-Israeli relationship deserves to be nurtured and rewarded by all those whose interests lay in a stable and democratic Middle East. And Israel and Turkey must regard their entente as open-ended, wel-

coming to all those who would share its premises. In a Middle East where the forces of disorder weave ever more intricate networks, the champions of stability can't afford to do less.



## Palestinian Pokémon

BALATA REFUGEE CAMP, West Bank—Fourteen-year-old Salih Attiti has replaced his once-precious Pokémon cards with a less innocent craze that has swept up children in this violence-torn camp.

On a plastic coffee table in his cinder-block home, Salih proudly displays part of his growing collection of necklaces with pictures of “martyrs” of the Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation.

“I used to have plenty of Pokémon—my school bag was half full of them,” Salih said. “I threw them all away. They’re not important now. The pictures of martyrs are important. They’re our idols.”

It’s difficult to find a child in this teeming camp of 20,000 people who isn’t wearing at least one necklace with a picture of a *shahid*, or “martyr”—mostly militant gunmen killed or suicide bombers blown up during the 20-month-old uprising.

The children use them the way they once used cards of Pokémon or sports heroes. They spend their meager allowances to collect and trade them, constantly hunting for prized *shahid* pictures that excite like a vintage baseball card.

“These children are convinced that martyrdom is a holy thing, something worthy of the ultimate respect,” said Munir Jabal, head of a Balata teachers association. “They worship these pictures. I think it will lead them in the future to go out and do the same thing.”

In Balata, a stronghold of the Fatah-linked Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, the most recent hot item is a pendant of Jihad Attiti, the 18-year-old who became the camp’s first suicide bomber two weeks ago by blowing himself up and killing two Israelis—an 18-month-old baby and her grandmother—in a Tel Aviv suburb.

Plastic medallions manufactured in Nablus are the top end of the necklace craze and sell for about \$3.30. Other merchants have jumped on the craze with a cheaper alternative to the medallions. They mass-produce passport-size photos of the militants and slip them into transparent pendants. Those sell for just 65 cents.

At Balata, the craze is a by-product of a community that has seen some of the worst fighting in the uprising. It’s the kind of environment that has forced teachers to grudgingly allow students to wear their “martyrs” necklaces in class. When a teacher recently insisted a student remove his necklace during gym class, the boy’s father showed up the next day and “wanted to fight us,” said the school’s principal.

*Toronto Star*, June 17, 2002