

# Turkey and Israel Need "Earthquake Diplomacy"

by [Soner Cagaptay \(/experts/soner-cagaptay/\)](/experts/soner-cagaptay/), [Amos Yadlin \(/experts/amos-yadlin/\)](/experts/amos-yadlin/)

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Soner Cagaptay \(/experts/soner-cagaptay/\)](/experts/soner-cagaptay/)

Soner Cagaptay is the Beyer Family fellow and director of the Turkish Research Program at The Washington Institute.

[Amos Yadlin \(/experts/amos-yadlin/\)](/experts/amos-yadlin/)

Amos Yadlin served for five years as the head of Israeli military intelligence and, from 2011-2012, was Kay fellow on Israeli national security at The Washington Institute. Over his distinguished career, General Yadlin spent more than forty years in uniform, including service as defense attache in



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**Although Turkey and Israel are not yet ready to become friends, they do not need each other as enemies: talking to one another would serve them both well.**

**W**hen a massive earthquake hit Turkey in 1999, it set the stage for Greece and Turkey to improve their downward-spiraling ties. This process, later dubbed "earthquake diplomacy," ushered in a lasting, positive era in Turkish-Greek ties.

The recent quake in Turkey might just serve a similar purpose, launching Turkish-Israeli "earthquake diplomacy." According to media reports, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called his Turkish counterpart for the first time in almost a year to offer his condolences and Ankara responded positively to the Israeli offer of assistance.

The Israelis and Turks should use this opportunity to rebuild their relationship. However, unlike previous Turkish-Israeli relations, which were founded upon the age-old warmth between Turks and Jews, this new relationship should be based upon hard security interests and not just sympathies, and this might be better for both sides.

Both Turkey and Israel would benefit from increased communication. Each faces a new and challenging regional landscape. Consequently, both countries would be well served to focus on pressing security issues, rather than devoting precious resources to confronting one other. In other words, whereas Turkey and Israel allied in the past because they needed the other's friendship, they must now ally because they do not need the other's enmity.

Israel's current security environment is a prime example of why it should not wish to add another state -- especially one as powerful as Turkey -- to its "watch list." Iran poses the most serious challenge to Israel by marching toward a

nuclear weapons program. What's more, Iran can mobilize Hezbollah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and other radical terror groups to target Israel and the peace process with the Palestinians. Israel also faces new security challenges, such as the Arab Spring's historic transformation of its neighbors. Not only has Egypt become a bigger concern for Israel than in the past, but Israel must also devote resources to watching Syria if and when President Bashar al-Assad falls.

Turkey also stands to benefit from improved relations with Israel. Until recently, Ankara's policy of "zero problems with neighbors" yielded positive results in the Middle East: Turkey's relations with Iran improved; and Ankara and Syria became close allies. Turkey also pacified the terror attacks of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), and even mediated peace between Israel and Syria.

Now, Turkey's problems with its neighbors have resurfaced. Ankara's opposition to the Assad regime's crackdown on demonstrators has earned Damascus' hostility once again, and has placed it on a collision course with Tehran, which defends Assad's crackdown. Turkish-Iranian competition, which began with Tehran and Ankara's support of opposing factions in Iraqi elections, will be further exacerbated if Syria descends into even greater chaos. Unfortunate signs are emerging that Iran may even resort to its past policy of using the PKK against Turkey.

Given the Middle East's new environment, just as Israeli policymakers should seek to recreate the Turkish-Israeli relationship to avoid further security problems, Ankara would therefore be well served to do the same.

Fortunately, a solid foundation for renewed relations already exists: despite their political differences, trade between the two countries is booming, having risen by over 30 percent in 2011, and there are reports of back track diplomacy already happening.

In crafting new policy, both countries ought to look to the future and the new strategic environment, rather than the recent past -- however painful that may be. While Turkey and Israel are not yet ready to become friends, they do not need each other as enemies: talking to one another would serve them both well.

*Amos Yadlin is the Kay fellow on Israeli national security at The Washington Institute. Soner Cagaptay is director of the Institute's Turkish Research Program. ❖*

*Hurriyet Daily News*

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