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Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan addresses his supporters in Istanbul, Turkey June 24, 2018. (Photo by: KAYHAN OZER/PRESIDENTIAL PALACE/HANDOUT VIA REUTERS)

## Analysis: After Erdogan's victory, what should Israel do?

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Should Israel try to salvage what is salvageable in the relationship with Turkey or should it write Turkey off as a loss?

Gazans might have shot off fireworks in celebration, and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas may have put in a congratulatory call, but there was obviously no joy in Jerusalem on Tuesday at Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's victory – and that of his party – in [Sunday's election](#).

Erdogan, who supports Hamas and is vitriolic in his rhetoric against Israel, again plunged Israeli-Turkish ties to a low point just a month before the elections by “temporarily” expelling Israel's ambassador to Turkey, and recalling his own ambassador, following Israel's response to the riots along the security fence in Gaza.

Israel responded by “temporarily” expelling Turkey's consul-general in Jerusalem, who has responsibility for Turkey's relations with east Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza.

Turkey has poured massive amounts of money into Turkish-supported Islamic institutions and organizations in east Jerusalem, and has also used the consul general as the address to funnel aid into Gaza.

While there were some who attributed Erdogan's expelling of the Israeli ambassador to the election campaign, few in Jerusalem believe now that the campaign is over – and Erdogan has often used his anti-Israeli positions to boost his electoral prospects – the relationship between the two countries will improve in any significant manner.

There is a debate, however, about what Israel should do now.

Should Israel try to salvage what is salvageable in the relationship with Turkey, believing that economic, business and cultural ties between the countries are still important and worth fostering, out of the belief that Erdogan will not last forever? Or should it write Turkey off as a loss, not worth the effort and not as strategically important as it once was to Israel?

An early sign of which direction Israel is heading on this matter may come as early as Tuesday, when the Knesset might debate a resolution recognizing the Armenian genocide. This motion was on the agenda previously, but as of Monday evening it was not clear whether it will be brought up as originally anticipated.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu acceded to a recommendation from the Foreign Ministry earlier this month to postpone discussion of the bill until after the elections in Turkey so as not to help Erdogan at the polls.

A decision to further postpone movement on the bill could mean that Israel wants to see whether – now that the elections are over – Erdogan wants to return relations to where they were before he kicked out Israel's ambassador.

REGARDING HOW Israel should proceed now that Erdogan has won again, The Jerusalem Post spoke with two Israeli academics who follow Turkey closely, and who have opposing views of what Israel should do next regarding Turkey: Nimrod Goren, the head of Mitvim - the Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policies and a lecturer in Middle Eastern Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and Emmanuel Navon, a fellow at the Jerusalem Institute for Strategic Studies and a lecturer in international relations at Tel Aviv University and the Herzliya Interdisciplinary Center.

Goren said one thing Israel needs to internalize following the elections is that Jerusalem will have to deal with Erdogan for a number of more years – and the hope many harbored that the elections would bring about a change at the top in Turkey did not materialize.

As such, he said, “The goal should be to maintain a working relationship” with Erdogan and his government.

He said it is easy to “fortify oneself behind an aggressive position toward Erdogan – and he created the conditions for that – but the two countries have found a way to work together and advance economic interests in the past, and I think that is worth continuing to do.”

Goren said, at the end of the day, the relationship with Turkey is an important strategic relationship for Israel since it is a large Muslim country with which Israel has had relations since 1949. “There are not that many countries in the region with which Israel is able to work openly,” he said, adding that this is something worth keeping.

He said, however, Israel must be sober and realize that the obstacles in moving the ties forward with Turkey – Gaza, Jerusalem and the Palestinians – will not go away, and that every time there is a crisis with the Palestinians or an escalation in the violence, then Erdogan “will not act any differently than he has.”

AT THE same time, Goren said, Erdogan has been careful not to take the crisis in ties with Israel too far, and not supported a recent move in parliament to freeze economic ties with it. He also noted that even with the expulsion of the ambassador, there has been no formal Turkish declaration downgrading the relationship.

While the rhetoric is tough and has been so since 2008 and Operation Cast Lead in Gaza, there are significant economic ties between the countries that Goren said should be promoted.

The first thing we should do, Goren said, “is recognize that the ties with Turkey are worth preserving, and that with all the anger toward Erdogan, Turkey is still an important country with a government now that will be in power for years.” Israel, he said, should attempt to create other

channels of communication with Turkey to restore the situation at last back to it was before the Gaza riots and the expulsion of the ambassador and the consul general.

Navon, however, could not disagree more. He said that following the elections, Erdogan is going to continue to openly support Hamas and make “outrageous statements on Israel.”

“My take is that the relations with Israel will continue to deteriorate, and that Israel should really work on its relationship with Greece and Cyprus,” he said.

Asked what interest Erdogan had in a further deterioration of ties, Navon said: “He is an Islamist, his foreign policy is Islamist, he supports Iran, he supports Hamas, he has a deeply ingrained hatred for Israel and the Jews, and this works for him internationally because it turned him into the leader of the Muslim world.”

Navon recalled that soon after his election in 2002, Erdogan barred US troops from using bases in Turkey on the way to the invasion of Iraq, something that made him a hero in the Arab and Muslim world, and catapulted him to a leadership position. He has pursued similar policies ever since, Navon said.

“The more he is aggressive toward Israel, the more he is seen as the only leader in the Muslim world who speaks out and is willing to confront the US and Israel,” Navon said, something that adds to his stature in Arab and Muslim countries.

Rather than chasing Erdogan, Israel should make it clear that its natural gas will go through Cyprus and Greece, not via a pipeline through Turkey, Navon said. He also said Israel should also use its influence in Washington to push for Congress to recognize the Armenian genocide.

“One of the reasons Turkey got close to Israel in the 1990s was because they wanted to use the Israel lobby in the US to stop Congress from recognizing the Armenian genocide,” he said.

“Now we should use that card, and tell him that if he is going to burn his bridges with us, we should make him pay a price for this policies.”

Navon disagrees with those who say Israel should salvage what it can with Turkey.

“Israel is a very powerful country, with a strong economy,” he said. “It is a strong geopolitical player with strong ties with the US and elsewhere. We’re not in the 1960s anymore, and it’s about time we realized that.”

Asked whether Israel did not need Turkey, Navon replied simply: “For what?”



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