



Washington

Selected News on Turkey

July 2010

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Turkey Reiterates Demands to Israel Following Secret Talks

Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu has made clear that Israel has only two options in preventing a complete break-off in bilateral ties with Turkey following the Mavi Marmara incident on May 31. One remains offering an official apology to Turkey and the other is consenting to an international investigation into the raid. "The recovery of relations is not possible as long as Israel doesn't apologize. They listened to our demands and said they would convey them to [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu," Davutoğlu said late on Saturday, referring to his secret meeting with Israeli Industry, Trade, and Labor Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer which took place in Brussels last Wednesday.

"We haven't set a deadline for the response. We're waiting. If [Israel] will not apologize, then it should accept an international commission and accede to its findings... There are three options ahead: it will either apologize or it will consent to a study by an international commission or the relations will break off," he explained. "We have been following the studies of the fact-finding mission at [the] UN; we will set a calendar accordingly," said Davutoğlu, referring to the fact that the UN Human Rights Council, on June 18, decided to send a fact-finding mission "to investigate violations of international law resulting from Israeli attacks on the flotilla of ships carrying humanitarian assistance." The Turkish Foreign Minister continued, "[The] Americans are trying to give the commission established by Israel a chance. We are objecting principally." When reminded of efforts by the US to contribute to the mending of bilateral relations between Israel and Turkey, Davutoğlu said: "We want to give a chance to those parties who attach importance to the recovery of relations. The meeting between Obama and Netanyahu on July 7 will be important regarding the process."

While welcoming the meeting between Davutoğlu and Ben-Eliezer, the US State Department stated last Wednesday that US officials have spoken with each country about their relationship, without elaborating on American involvement. The talks in Brussels came just days before Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visits Washington for a meeting with US President Barack Obama. As of Friday, Netanyahu said Israel could not apologize for the raid, but stressed that he wanted to avoid further harm in relations with Ankara. "Israel cannot apologize that its soldiers were forced to defend themselves against a mob that almost butchered them; they defended themselves from a lynch. We regret the loss of life," explained Netanyahu. US State Department spokesman Philip J. Crowley said on Thursday that he anticipated Netanyahu would give Obama "a report on

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the early stages of the Israeli investigation into the flotilla tragedy" and that the two would discuss "recent progress" on the Gaza Strip. /Today's Zaman/

Clinton Urges Turkey to Revive Stalled Armenian Rapprochement Process

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on Sunday praised the Armenian government for its willingness to move toward normalization with Turkey and suggested that the ball was in Turkey's court to revitalize the rapprochement process while urging Ankara to overcome its reluctance to reopen the border between the two countries, closed in 1993 due to the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute. Yet Ankara took exception, arguing that the process was largely stalled due to the domestic policy concerns of the Armenian administration. Turkish officials also reiterated that a partial normalization in the Caucasus is not sustainable if the parties don't work for complete normalization.

Clinton's remarks came on a weekend visit to Armenia, on a regional tour including Azerbaijan, and she delivered identical messages in both countries: Washington will do its part to help end the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute between the two countries, violence serves no one, and a resolution would bring prosperity and stability to the Caucasus. "We urge Turkey to take the steps that it promised to take and that both sides continue to try to find the opportunity to open the door to reconciliation and normalization," Clinton told reporters in Yerevan after talks with Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan. When asked about Clinton's remarks, Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesman Burak Ozugergin responded: "Partial solutions to regional problems will bring neither peace, stability nor a sustainable resolution in the long-term." /Turkish Press Review/

Iran Says Nuclear Talks to Resume with Turkey, Brazil

Iran stated on Tuesday it would soon resume nuclear talks with Turkey and Brazil -- a tentative first step back to international negotiations after Tehran was hit with a new wave of sanctions over its disputed nuclear program. Iran has belittled the U.N., U.S. and European sanctions and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said on Monday he would return to long-frozen talks with world powers on certain conditions only, and not before the end of August. His foreign minister said talks would start before then with the two countries with which Iran agreed a nuclear fuel swap deal in May and which voted against the U.N. sanctions. "There were some contacts with the foreign ministers of the three countries [Iran, Turkey, and Brazil]," Manouchehr Mottaki told a news conference. "A joint meeting is on the agenda and we will announce it in the coming one or two days."

Iran has held no substantive talks with world powers since the deal in principle on the fuel swap struck with Russia, France, and the United States in October. The pact would have seen Iran sending 1.2 tons of low-enriched uranium (LEU) -- about 70 percent of its stockpile at the time -- abroad in exchange for specially processed fuel rods needed to keep the Tehran medical research reactor running. Iran agreed in talks in May with Brazil and Turkey to part with 1.2 tons of LEU, but by then Iran's LEU reserve had doubled in size, devaluing the swap's terms in Western eyes since it would no longer divest Iran of enough LEU to prevent its use for an atomic bomb, if refined to high purity.

Ahmadinejad has called on the major powers to "clarify" three things before talks could resume: their attitude to Israel's alleged nuclear arsenal, their stance on commitments to

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the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and whether they come to the table as Iran's friend or its enemy. World powers were likely to dismiss such conditions as irrelevant to the main issue: Iran's refusal to negotiate limits and transparency with respect to its nuclear activity. "Somehow implying there's a linkage between the Iranian issue and the Israeli issue ... will certainly not make life easier," said a Western diplomat versed in the Iran issue. "Saying that as a punishment that they only want talks in the third week of August -- this is posturing which we shouldn't take too seriously ... We need to wait for Iran's official response on the [swap] plan and the offer of talks from the EU." /Sabah/

Obama Nominates Ricciardone as New Envoy to Turkey

US President Barack Obama has nominated Francis J. Ricciardone as the country's new ambassador to Turkey, the White House announced on Thursday. Ricciardone will assume his post, to be vacated by outgoing Ambassador James Jeffrey, after his nomination is confirmed by the US Senate. Jeffrey, the US ambassador in Ankara since December 2008, was recently nominated as the new US envoy to Iraq and is expected to leave Ankara in the next few weeks. He will replace Christopher Hill, who began serving as ambassador in Baghdad in April 2009.

Ricciardone has served as deputy ambassador and chargé d'affaires at the US Embassy in Afghanistan since 2009. According to a White House biography, he also served as ambassador to Egypt until 2008 and earlier as ambassador to the Philippines and Palau. But Ricciardone is no stranger to Turkey. He began his career in Ankara and Adana and served twice again in Turkey: as political advisor to the US and Turkish commanders of Operation Provide Comfort at İncirlik Air Base and as deputy chief of mission in Ankara. He led the transition to an organization of the US Embassy in Baghdad in 2004, and the Department of State's task force in response to the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. He served as former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's special representative for the transition of Iraq from 1999-2001. /Today's Zaman/

Mullen Says Sustaining Turkey-US Ties Critical

Stressing that Turkey has been "a critical ally" of the United States for a long time, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has stated that sustaining this relationship in the long term is also "critical," although the relationship has recently been going through a bumpy process. "And the other hugely important relationship in that part of the world, which has certainly been very visible lately, is Turkey," US Navy Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, said on Monday at the Aspen Institute's Aspen Security Forum in Colorado.

Mullen was actually responding to a question on US-Israeli relations when he raised the issue of Turkey-US relations on his own initiative. "They're a critical ally. They've been a critical ally for a long time. They're a member of NATO. And so -- and I have a very strong relationship with my counterpart [Turkish Chief of General Staff Gen. İlker Basbuğ], very strong relationship throughout the military with Turkey -- all of our services do. And this is a bumpy time, and we just need to make, from my perspective, sustaining that in the long run is really critical. ... Relationships go through ups and downs, but the overall long-term importance of those two relationships, from my perspective, are [sic] critical," Mullen stated.

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Following these comments, Mullen was asked whether he believed that "Turkey feels rejected by Europe and is moving back toward the Muslim world" and whether he believed that Turkey is "on a brief dalliance and will be back in NATO as a full partner." Mullen responded, "I don't know. That's up to, obviously, Prime Minister Erdoğan and the political leadership, and quite frankly, the people of Turkey to, in a sense, both develop and execute. I just want to -- we've had a very strong relationship for a long, long time. And I think whatever the breaches are, we need to work our way through that and sustain that relationship. They're a member of a critical alliance for us, with NATO. And they also reside, physically, in a very, very important part, strategically. So I actually -- exactly where they're going, it's a little bit difficult for me to figure out," Mullen responded. /Today's Zaman/

EU Opens New Accession Chapter with Turkey

Amid growing concerns about the direction of stalled European Union accession negotiations with Turkey, Spain, a staunch supporter of Turkey's bid to join the bloc, was able to deliver the opening of one chapter Wednesday, the last day of its six-month rotating EU presidency before handing the reins to Belgium. Top officials and bureaucrats from the EU and Turkey met in Brussels at an intergovernmental conference marking the opening of the EU chapter on food safety and veterinary standards. The critical move comes at a time when Turkey's ties with the West are being questioned and follows accusations from the US that the EU is pushing Turkey away. The opening of one more chapter in the negotiations process signals two things: that the EU wants to firmly anchor Turkey to the bloc and that the Turkish side is still willing to continue on the EU path.

"Turkey has completed all the technical criteria and Parliament has passed all the necessary laws," said Turkey's top EU talks negotiator Egemen Bagis en route to Brussels yesterday. "It was about time we heard positive news from the EU side." It took three years for the EU to open the chapter on food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary policy after the screening process was completed in 2007. Agriculture and Rural Affairs Mehmet Eker, who accompanied Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu along with Bagis to the ceremony in Brussels, explained that Turkey had taken speedy steps to harmonize Turkish agricultural legislation with that of the EU. Parliament passed the Food Safety Law earlier this month after long debate. Bagis also strongly criticized some EU member states for proposing resolution of the Cyprus problem as a requirement for opening new chapters. "Why wasn't this issue an obstacle for Greece or the UK, as both countries have troops on the island as guarantor states?" he asked. "How did the Greek Cypriots join the EU after they rejected the 2004 UN-sponsored plan which was accepted by the Turks in the north?" /Turkish Press Review/

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Top Court Annuls Parts of Constitutional Reform Package

Turkey's top court Wednesday annulled parts of a government-sponsored package of constitutional changes curbing the powers of the judiciary. The government criticized the court for exceeding its authority with the verdict, but said the amendments were still a major reform despite the changes and would go to a referendum on September 12 as planned. The opposition said Thursday that the adjustments made in the ruling did not go far enough and has vowed to campaign against the reforms in the referendum.

In its verdict, the court rejected a demand to scrap the whole of the amendment package, but annulled parts of amendments dealing with the court itself and a key judicial body that appoints judges and prosecutors, the court's president, Hasim Kılıç, told reporters in Ankara. The ruling gives top courts a wider choice in determining candidates to sit on the Constitutional Court and restricts the pool of those eligible to serve on the Supreme Board of Prosecutors and Judges, or HSYK, a body that has often clashed with the AKP, Kılıç said.

While Kılıç stated the amendments untouched by the court would go to a referendum, Justice Minister Sadullah Ergin said the articles changed by the court would also be put to the vote in September in their edited form. The AKP says the changes to the Constitution, the legacy of the military rule of the 1980's, will improve democratic standards and boost Ankara's bid to join the European Union. The main opposition Republican People's Party, or CHP, charges that the AKP designed the package to tighten its grip on power by extending government control over key judicial bodies and undermining the system of checks and balances. The country's top judges have also objected to the changes, which they say encroach on the independence of the judiciary and violate the separation of powers.

The constitutional amendment package limits the jurisdiction of military courts and allows civilian courts to try military personnel in peace time for coup attempts and offenses related to national security and organized crime. Another measure paves the way for the military chief and his top four aides to be tried at the Supreme Court. The amendments also allow for the trial of the leaders of the 1980 coup, give civil servants the right to collective bargaining, but not the right to strike, and expand women's and children's rights. /Hurriyet/

Obama Urges EU to Accept Turkey as Member

US President Barack Obama Thursday made a cautious appeal to the European Union to accept Turkey as a member, warning that Turkey could end up seeking alliances outside the West if the EU keeps it dangling over its bid for membership. "Although we are not EU members, we have said as a matter of opinion that we think it would be wise for the EU to accept Turkey," Obama said in an interview with Italian daily Corriere della Sera. Obama stated he did not believe the slow pace of EU accession or backtracking in the membership process is the "sole contributor or even a predominant contributor in some of the changed orientation that we've seen in Turkey... But it is inevitably destined to play a role in how the Turkish people see Europe. If they do not feel themselves part of the European family, it is natural that they should end up looking elsewhere for alliances and affiliations." He added that some of the change "has to do with their [Turkish]

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democracy operating and reflecting changing attitudes within Turkey."

Separately, Obama repeated the US unease over Turkey vote against new UN sanctions on Iran, saying Turkey's "attempt to deal with Iran on the nuclear issue" was "unfortunate." But he added: "I think some of that was also guided by the fact that they have a long border with Iran, and they don't want any kind of conflict in that region. Some of it has to do with them flexing their muscles. I think the most important thing we can do with Turkey is to continue to engage, continue to hold out the advantages for them of integration with the West, while still respecting their own unique qualities and not acting fearful about the fact that they are Muslim." /Turkish Press Review/

Report Faults Israeli Military over Flotilla Raid

A military probe has found Israel's armed forces to have committed serious errors in preparing and carrying out the deadly boarding of a Gaza-bound aid ship in May. The 150-page Eiland Commission report presented to Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Gaby Ashkenazi on Sunday said mistakes were committed at all levels of command, from top officers to commandos, the daily Yediot Aharonot reported. The investigators said the navy failed to sufficiently consider the possibility the troops could encounter violent resistance during the May 31 operation, but also praised the commandos involved and found the use of force had been the only way to stop the flotilla.

The findings, to be formally released on Monday, said the clashes occurred partly because the navy had failed to deploy enough forces on the deck of the Mavi Marmara. They also said the military failed to coordinate sufficiently with intelligence agencies in preparing for the raid, and that some of the information used was faulty. The military probe is separate from the Tirkel Commission, which is looking into the legality of the raid and of Israel's four-year-old blockade of the Gaza Strip.

Israeli Defense officials said Israel's first internal report on the deadly raid on a Gaza-bound flotilla is expected to criticize the planning and intelligence gathering that preceded the operation, not the commandos who conducted it. The report was not expected to recommend dismissals, but some senior officers could be ousted or demoted in the ensuing shake-ups, stated the officials, who were familiar with the report but spoke on condition of anonymity ahead of its formal release. /Hurriyet/

Israeli and Turkish Generals Still Talking Amid Row

Israel's military chief said on Tuesday he had been in contact with his Turkish counterpart in an effort to maintain relations in the midst of a diplomatic row over the deadly Israeli raid on a Gaza aid ship. Turkey responded to Israel's killing of nine Turkish activists on board the ship on May 31 by withdrawing its ambassador, suspending joint defense exercises and closing Turkish airspace to Israeli military planes.

Briefing Israeli lawmakers behind closed doors, Lieutenant-General Gabi Ashkenazi said he had been "personally in touch" with the Turkish chief of staff since the high seas interception, which Israel defended as part of its blockade on Hamas-ruled Gaza. Ashkenazi said he thought there was a limit to Turkey's change of political direction because as a NATO member it was dependent on Western military hardware, according

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to a parliamentary official who briefed reporters. On a military level, Ashkenazi thought Israeli-Turkish ties could be maintained as before. "Relations are important, and we must maintain them during turbulent times," the commander said. "Contact with the military is continuing despite the fact that some exercises have been canceled," he added. "I gained the impression that on the military level there is no problem and nothing to prevent continued meetings."

Turkey's powerful military has long been the guardian of the secular constitution, leading to tension with the Islamist-rooted government of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. "I do not know where Erdogan's path is leading them," Ashkenazi said. Israel is a major defense exporter to Turkey, with annual sales of around \$2.5 billion, an Israeli defense official reported. In a \$180-million deal, Turkey ordered 10 surveillance drones from Israel. Six were delivered before the ship crisis, the official said, with the rest to follow "in coming weeks." As a security precaution, Israel withdrew its defense advisers from Turkey last month, relocating the training of Turkish drone operators to Israeli bases. The official said he believed the advisers would return to Turkey soon. /Sabah/

NATO Chief Slams EU over "Unfair" Treatment of Turkey

NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen criticized the European Union Wednesday for what he called its "unfair" treatment of Turkey. Writing in Danish center-left daily Politiken, Rasmussen advised the EU to "take a series of pragmatic steps to improve relations with Turkey, entirely outside the negotiations" between Ankara and Brussels over Turkey's EU membership. In particular, the former Danish prime minister urged the EU to give Turkey more of a role in decision-making for military missions it is involved in, and come to an agreement on Turkey's request to join the European Defense Agency. Rasmussen said it was "unfair" to exclude Turkey from the military research and development body, pointing out how Norway is involved even though, like Turkey, it is a member of NATO but not the EU. "This is not reasonable," he said, appealing to the EU to "send out a clear message" to Turkey regarding its role in the West. Maintaining a close partnership with Turkey is important, Rasmussen said, "not only as a valued NATO ally, but also with the EU." /Turkish Press Review/

US to Investigate Turkish Aid Foundation

The United States is investigating whether to add the Turkish Humanitarian Relief Foundation, or İHH, to its official list of terrorist organizations, a State Department spokesman has said. Acting deputy spokesman Mark C. Toner told reporters at a daily press briefing Wednesday that the inquiry began after a bipartisan group of 87 senators called on U.S. President Barack Obama to consider putting the İHH on the list of foreign terrorist organizations. The senators' letter to the president came shortly after Israeli commandos raided an İHH aid ship bound for Gaza, killing eight Turks and one American citizen of Turkish descent. In response to a question from a reporter about whether the Department of State's investigation was ongoing, Toner downplayed the inquiry. "I believe we're looking at the İHH, but it's a long process to designate something - an organization - a foreign terrorist organization and there's nothing to announce on that," Toner said. /Hurriyet/

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EU Foreign Policy Chief Holds Talks in Turkey

The EU's foreign affairs chief Catherine Ashton held talks in Istanbul last week on Turkey's bid to join the bloc and cooperation on terror, the first such meeting at a ministerial level since the enactment of the Lisbon Treaty in December 2009. 'The main objective of the meeting is to reaffirm the EU's commitment to Turkey and explore ways for the EU and Turkey to enhance cooperation in the region,' the EU statement on the event declared.

Speaking at a press conference on Tuesday, Enlargement Commissioner Stephan Füle said the meeting was about the synergy between Turkey and the EU regarding the country's accession process. It was also a chance to discuss foreign policy matters on both regional and global levels. "Today's issue is not about how to follow but how to lead," Füle explained, adding that there were two important messages the EU wants to give to Turkey. First, he said, was that the union was determined in its commitment to Turkey's full membership. "There should be a zero-doubt policy in this respect." The second important message was that the EU once more confirmed that Turkey's political reforms, and especially the constitutional reform package that will be subject to a referendum on Sept. 12, have met European standards and that they had to continue progressing further.

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, also in attendance, said there were three main topics of discussion: strengthening Turkey-EU political dialogue; harmonizing foreign policy in both regional and global issues; and, most importantly, increasing common efforts to speed up Turkey's accession process. "The constitutional reform is welcomed by our EU counterparts," stated Davutoğlu, adding that during the meeting the high-level EU representatives encouraged Turkey's ongoing political reforms as well as the democratization process that the country has been going through. He also said Turkey and the EU share a common vision on both regional and global developments. Turkey's chief negotiator for EU talks, Egemen Bağış, also participated in the meeting.

Another important issue on the agenda of Tuesday's EU-Turkey ministerial meeting was the fight against terrorism. "We have to strengthen cooperation and improve coordination of our efforts," Ashton said, expressing strong condemnation on behalf of the EU for recent attacks that have taken many lives among the military and civilians. "There is no justification of such acts," she said, adding that the EU lends all its sympathy and solidarity to families who have lost loved ones, to the Turkish government and all the Turkish people. Ashton also stated the PKK is a terrorist group that uses the

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EU as a base for its actions as well, and that cooperation between Turkey and the EU would be further extended and institutionalized very soon. "The EU counterterrorism representative visited Ankara to find practical ways in which we can collaborate," she highlighted, adding that the meeting had been very fruitful and that it would be followed with real action. /Hurriyet/

Clinton, Davutoglu Discuss Cooperation on Iranian Nuclear Issue, PKK Terrorism

Early last week, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu had a phone talk during which they discussed issues such as Iran, Israel, the Caucasus and the Balkans. During a daily press briefing at the US State Department, Assistant Secretary Philip Crowley replied to a question on Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu's statement denying an agreement between the U.S. and Turkey to leave Turkey out of the negotiation process on Iran's nuclear program, and expressing that the country would continue to be involved in the process. "I do not see those as necessarily being mutually exclusive. In other words, Turkey and Iran are neighbors. One would expect that Turkey and Iran will continue to have diplomatic contacts. It is within their rights, and obviously, what happens in Iran has a profound and direct influence on Turkey," Crowley said. Commenting on the content of the recent telephone conversation between U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Davutoglu, Crowley explained, "What the Secretary said to the foreign minister in their call earlier this week was that at this stage, the primary focus should be on Iran engaging constructively [with] the IAEA and the P-5+1... And we believe that there was a mutual understanding about the importance of getting Iran to engage the IAEA and the P-5+1 at this stage of the game," Crowley added.

Crowley also said Clinton reiterated that Washington will continue to assist Turkey's fight against the terrorist PKK, calling the terrorist group the enemy of both Turkey and the US. During the call Clinton had repeated the US commitment to help Turkey in the fight against the PKK, which the US has long recognized as a terrorist group. He explained Clinton told Davutoglu that the PKK remains a threat to Turkey, Iraq, and the US, and endangers regional stability. During their conversation, Clinton and Davutoglu also discussed strained relations between Turkey and Israel due to the Israeli raid on a Gaza-bound aid flotilla. While Davutoglu reaffirmed the importance Turkey places on establishing an international commission to probe the attack, Clinton encouraged Turkey to continue what she called important dialogue with Israel, saying that this carries vital importance for the future of the region. /Anadolu Ajansi, Turkish Press Review/

Assad Reaffirms Turkey's Role as Mediator with Israel

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has insisted that Turkey is his country's best hope for a mediator in possible peace talks with Israel, even after Ankara's ties with the Israeli state have suffered following the Mavi Marmara incident in May. "The interceding role in indirect talks [with Israel] belongs to Turkey. Other countries can play only a supportive role, not an alternative one," Assad told a group of Turkish journalists in an interview in Damascus. "We are fully confident that Turkey will successfully fulfill this role. If we had found a more successful negotiator, we would have gone to them," he added.

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In the interview, the Syrian president called the Israeli raid an "act of terror" and backed Turkey's demands for an apology, compensation for families of the victims and establishment of an international investigation. On the topic of peace efforts, Assad suggested that resumption of talks with Turkish mediation could be difficult if Turkey's demands are not met. "Turkey has made a few attempts lately to resume its role [as mediator], but now blood has been shed," Assad said, "Turkey cannot give up on the blood of its nationals for the sake of mediation. Otherwise, it might lose its weight and credibility." When asked whether the Israeli fulfillment of Turkish demands was a Syrian condition for the resumption of talks, he said it was a condition for Turkey, not for Syria.

The Syrian president also denied a report in the Turkish media that he had asked a Western leader to assume the role of mediator, underlining that he also explains how vital Turkey's role is in peace efforts in each and every one of these meetings. Earlier this month, Assad was quoted as saying that the crisis between Israel and Turkey could affect the stability of the Middle East and undermine Ankara's role in the region's peace process. "If the relationship between Turkey and Israel is not renewed, it will be very difficult for Turkey to play a role in negotiations [to revive the Middle East peace process]," he said during a visit to Spain. Assad backed Turkey's EU membership bid as well, and said Turkey's recent increase in ties with its neighbors in the Middle East would be a supplement, not an alternative, to its relations with the EU. /Today's Zaman/

Turkey Ready to Open Armenia Border for NATO Exercise

Though normalization efforts between estranged neighbors Turkey and Armenia have stalled, Turkey will be among the NATO and partner countries taking part in an exercise to be held in Armenia by NATO's Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Center (EADRCC). Foreign Ministry officials based in Ankara confirmed a media report on Wednesday that Turkey will participate in a disaster response exercise called "Armenia 2010." The exercise, organized by the EADRCC as a consequence management field exercise, will take place between Sept. 11 and 17 in Armenia. For the exercise, the border between Turkey and Armenia may be opened "temporarily," Turkish diplomatic sources stated. "During technical discussions at NATO headquarters in Brussels a while ago, when such a possibility was raised by NATO officials, the Turkish side responded favorably."

Yet whether the border is physically suitable for the conduct of the exercise is still in question. Nonetheless, whatever the scenario is and however the border will be used, for instance for the crossing of trucks loaded with humanitarian aid, the border will be closed again upon the end of the exercises, the same diplomatic sources highlighted. /Today's Zaman/

EP Report Stresses Importance of Turkey's Economy for the EU

A new European Parliament report highlights Turkey's economic importance for the European Union. The first-ever report on Turkish-EU trade ties by the EP's International Trade Commission, approved by the commission yesterday, matters because it urges that Turkish-EU relations be seen from an economic perspective rather than through political disputes, stressing Turkey's economic indispensability for the EU. The report, which is set to come to the EP floor in September, warns that the Customs Union

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between the EU and Turkey, which is improving its trade ties with more and more countries throughout the world, could suffer for political reasons. It also criticizes the visa restrictions the EU imposes on Turkey, saying that they are depressing trade.

Stating that Turkey has the world's 17th largest economy and the sixth largest in Europe, the reports asks the EU's executive organ, the European Commission, to examine why trade between Turkey and the EU is in decline. "Though the EU remains the largest trade partner of Turkey, in recent years Russia, China, the US and Iran took their places among Turkey's main trade partners while Turkey's trade volume with the EU has decreased," the report says. It also stresses Turkey's importance for the EU's energy supply, as a country located at the crossroads of energy supply lines. /Turkish Press Review/

Turkish Minister Eyes Increased Trade with US

Turkey is trying to build a new trade mechanism with the United States and would like to undersign a "new-generation contract" to improve trade volume, State Minister Zafer Çağlayan told reporters Sunday during a visit to Chicago. Turkey wants U.S. companies to produce goods in Turkey and sell them in the U.S. market. "We want U.S. companies to get to know the Turkish market better," Çağlayan said. "We met with some big companies from Indiana. They want to cooperate with Turkey in energy efficiency ... as well as in the poultry, furniture and timber businesses. They want to come to Turkey." The U.S. companies want to cooperate with Turkey to open up to the Middle East, Africa, Caucasus, and Europe, the minister added.

Turkey will soon open new commercial attachés in Houston and Miami. Turkey already has commercial attachés in Washington, D.C., New York, Chicago and Los Angeles. The U.S is the world's third highest exporter of goods behind China and Germany and is the leader in terms of service exports, Çağlayan explained, adding that Turkey also attached a great importance to the export of services. In addition, he highlighted the fact that the U.S. imports \$67 billion of textiles every year, \$27 billion of which comes from China. Turkey's textile exports to the U.S., meanwhile, total only \$270 million. "We want to sign a new-generation agreement with the U.S." /Hurriyet/

Turkish Diplomat Appointed to Top NATO Position

Diplomat Huseyin Dirioz, a former foreign policy adviser to President Abdullah Gul, has been designated NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen's new deputy secretary general and will act as chief adviser on political-military policy and planning issues, including logistics, missile defense, terrorism, WMD issues, nuclear policy, and defense aspects of cooperation with partners and international organizations. He will be responsible for the development and delivery of NATO's defense policy and for planning mechanisms to support national and collective defense and force planning. Dirioz will have an important role in the political motivation of the new strategic concept expected to be adopted at the fall NATO summit in Portugal. Dirioz will be responsible to the North Atlantic Council as long as he assumes this position. He earlier served as the Foreign Ministry spokesperson and ambassador to Jordan.

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Following Dirioz's recent appointment Turkey is planning to pursue a more dynamic diplomacy in both NATO and the international arena. Accordingly, Turkey will work to make sure that fight against the terrorist PKK remains an important concern for the security alliance, urging member countries to act in concert with Turkey in fighting the group. Dirioz's appointment to the key NATO post is also expected to weaken claims by Athens that Turkey violates Greek airspace because Turkey notifies NATO about all its training flights over the Aegean Sea. Among other items that Turkey plans to bring to the NATO agenda are the Cyprus issue and the appointment of a special envoy to the Middle East. In this way, Turkey wants to gain NATO's support for its diplomatic efforts in the international arena. /Turkish Press Review/

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Turkey Discusses Nuclear Swap Deal with Brazil, Iran

Upon the request of his Brazilian and Iranian counterparts, Turkish Foreign Affairs Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu met with his fellow foreign ministers in Istanbul Sunday. After the meeting with Brazil's Foreign Affairs Minister Celso Amorim and Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Manouchehr Mottaki, Davutoğlu announced that using the Tehran Declaration as a base and keeping all diplomatic channels open, Iran is expected to send a letter in response to technical questions posed by the Vienna Group and the International Atomic Energy Agency. A decision was also reached for Iran to meet with the P5+1 and EU High Representative of Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton in the second week of September, following the month of Ramadan.

Remarking that the Sunday Meeting marked the first time all three parties had reconvened following the May 18th signing of the Tehran Declaration, Davutoğlu stated; "The primary purpose of the Tehran Agreement was to pave the way for [diplomacy]. The agreement is not a declaration designed to solve the issue, it is instead intended to establish a strong foundation. It still constitutes as being an appropriate foundation from which to provide positive contributions." Noting that Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Mottaki would be answering questions posed by the Vienna Group in a letter, Davutoğlu stated; "We hope that this process which will be initiated by this letter, will contribute to strengthening diplomatic channels." Emphasizing that they have not seen the letter's content, Davutoğlu stated; "There is a general consensus on using Istanbul as a meeting place. We are very pleased to have Istanbul be selected as a location to reach any sort of diplomatic solution and we are willing to do all of the preparations necessary." /Sabah/

Davutoglu Holds Surprise Damascus Talks with Iraqi Leaders

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Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu appeared optimistic after a series of surprise talks with Iraqi leaders and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus, saying there were "positive developments" regarding Iraq's troubled government formation process. Davutoğlu paid a previously unannounced visit to the Syrian capital on Monday for what turned out to be a hectic round of talks with Assad, Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri, Palestinian Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal and, most surprisingly, two Iraqi political leaders: former Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, whose al-Iraqiya coalition won the country's latest election with a narrow margin of two seats, and Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr. "I had talks with Iraqi leaders, all of which went very well," Davutoğlu told reporters before wrapping up his less-than-24-hour visit to the Syrian capital. "I had very extensive meetings with Allawi and al-Sadr. There are positive developments." Turkey says it maintains dialogue with all Iraqi groups but says the new Iraqi government should be broad-based.

Davutoğlu met Allawi at the Turkish Embassy in Damascus and Sadr at a hotel. Sadr praised Turkey's Middle East policies, saying they aim to promote interests of the Iraqi people and the region, and added that he was pleased that Davutoğlu had requested to meet him. Davutoğlu also commended Sadr, saying he and his family have made big contributions to Iraq. "We appreciate your efforts for the unity of Iraq and its future and we see Iraq's fate as our own," Davutoğlu told Sadr, according to sources close to the meeting.

Davutoğlu's talks also focused on a crisis in Turkey's ties with Israel and efforts to unite rival Palestinian factions Hamas and Fatah. Sources close to Monday's meetings said the talks with Mashaal, who lives in exile in Syria, reviewed efforts for reconciliation between the Palestinian groups and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The foreign minister also had both three-way and separate talks with Assad and Hariri, discussing plans to create a free-trade zone among Turkey, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan on the basis of an agreement in June. Foreign ministers of the four countries agreed during talks in İstanbul that the free-trade zone will be based on "existing bilateral agreements and practices on free trade and visa exemption" between the parties and will be open to the participation of other countries as well.

In talks with Assad, Davutoğlu also discussed tensions between Turkey and Israel. Both agreed that an international commission should be created to investigate the Israeli flotilla raid. On Iraq, Davutoğlu and Assad agreed that a government that would unite Iraqis and bring stability to the country must be established as soon as possible. They also rejected foreign intervention, saying solutions to the problems of the region should come from within the region, not outside. /Today's Zaman/

Israel to Release Mavi Marmara and Two Other Turkish Ships

The Israeli government has decided to release three Turkish ships it seized after a deadly raid on a Gaza-bound aid flotilla on May 31. Following the raid, the Turkish ships were seized and taken to Israeli ports. An official from the Israel Foreign Affairs Ministry verified the report. "All related state offices approved the decision. The decision to release the ships was made to improve relations and restore trust between the two countries," he said.

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Talks to return the Mavi Marmara and two other Turkish-owned ships from the flotilla had been held up by Israel's demand the owners undertake not to sail against the blockade, which it says prevents arms smuggling to Gaza's Islamist Hamas rulers. "A decision was made yesterday to allow the ships to leave without further conditions. Turkey has been informed. They will leave soon," an Israeli official said. The Turkish embassy was handling discussions on how to retrieve the ships from Haifa and Ashdod ports, another Israeli official said, but the embassy had no immediate comment.

The return of the ships was one of steps the U.N. Security Council had asked Israel to take a day after the raid. "This was something Israel had to do anyway. There were certain steps Israel needed to take, and this was one of them," Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu was quoted as saying in Vietnam by state-run Anatolian news agency. "We hope the other necessary steps will be taken," he said. Earlier this week, the Israeli government lifted a travel warning it had issued earlier for Israeli citizens traveling to Turkey as a gesture aimed at normalizing relations between the countries. /Hurriyet, Sabah/

Trade Aspect of US-Turkey "Model Partnership" Taking Shape

Turkey and the US yesterday took the first tangible step in line with the "model partnership" notion introduced by US President Barack Obama to redefine America's relations with Turkey. A project outlined in the Framework for Economic and Commercial Strategic Cooperation, signed by Obama and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan last December to launch a new engagement between Turkey and the US on economic and trade issues, officially started Wednesday with the establishment of a new Turkish-US Business Council, to be co-chaired by US Trade Representative Ron Kirk, Commerce Secretary Gary Locke, Turkish Deputy Prime Minister for the Economy Ali Babacan, and State Minister for Foreign Trade Zafer Caglayan, as part of Caglayan's trade talks in the US.

Aiming to further develop trade ties between the two countries, the new council will play an active role in determining general strategies for improving trade ties between the two countries in addition to its sector-based activities. It will work at both the federal and US state level to bring bilateral trade to a desired level. The new council will organize promotional activities to create awareness about Turkey across the US while facilitating direct contacts between business organizations from both sides. Agreements similar to the recently signed memorandum of understanding with Illinois will be inked with other US states. Ten businesspeople from the US and 12 from Turkey will have seats on the new council, which is set to hold its first meeting in September. The new council is expected to emerge as a permanent cooperation platform for Turkey and the US.

Proceeding from Chicago, Caglayan yesterday visited the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, Port of Los Angeles, and local Turkish-US Chamber of Commerce office. Speaking to reporters afterwards, Caglayan said that he and Babacan were tasked by Erdogan to form the trade aspect of the model partnership between Turkey and the US, starting by identifying hurdles to developing trade ties with the US. Stating that Turkey hopes to become one of the world's 10 largest economies by 2023, the centenary of the republic, with a foreign trade volume of \$1 trillion, Caglayan expressed belief that his visit would help promote Turkey to US business circles. /Turkish Press Review/

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Turkey Steps Up Reconstruction Assistance to Afghanistan

Turkey yesterday launched its second reconstruction team in Afghanistan, a sign of Ankara's continued commitment to assist Afghan authorities with reconstruction efforts and to help enhance development and stability in the war-torn country. The official opening of the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in the northern province of Jowzjan came a day after a major international conference in Kabul endorsed plans for Afghan forces to be in charge of security by 2014. "This is a very good beginning between friends. The Turkish-Afghan friendship has deep historical roots, and it will always endure," Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said during the opening ceremony in Sheberghan, Jowzjan's capital. "Serving Afghanistan is no different than serving Turkey," Davutoglu added, adding that his own family's roots lie in Greater Khorasan, a historic region that covered parts of modern-day Iran, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

Turkey, a key contributor to international efforts to help reconstruction in Afghanistan following a nine-year war with the Taliban and other insurgent groups, has opened 34 schools and a hospital in northern Afghanistan, Davutoglu also said, pledging that these efforts will continue. The Turkish PRT in Jowzjan will assist Afghan authorities' efforts in the development and training of Afghan personnel, including security personnel, to improve their capacity to deal with day-to-day challenges. The Jowzjan PRT is built on the same model used in Turkey's existing PRT in the province of Wardak. That PRT, led by a civilian and protected by military forces, has been functioning since 2006. More than 30 PRTs function across Afghanistan. /Turkish Press Review/

Turkish Cypriot President Urges Deal by End of 2010

Marking the 36th anniversary of Turkey's intervention in Cyprus, Turkish Cypriot President Dervis Eroğlu called for a peace deal on the divided island by the year's end Tuesday, warning that failure could wipe out the last chance of a settlement with the Greek Cypriots. The island's rival communities have been locked in U.N.-sponsored peace talks since September 2008, but there is little sign of tangible progress in overcoming the divisive consequences of the Turkish intervention 36 years ago. "Our neighbors in the south are holding elections next year, that is why drawing out the negotiations will eliminate the chance for an agreement, or at least shelve the matter for a very long time," said Eroğlu. "The end of this year is a turning point. If we, the leaders, act responsibly, it should be possible to reach a settlement by the end of the year," he told a ceremony in Nicosia to mark the 36th anniversary of the Turkish intervention.

Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Cemil Çiçek accused Greek Cypriots of lacking the necessary political will to find a settlement and warned that the division would deepen if the two sides failed to reach a settlement in time. "This is not a process that can go on forever. If the Greek Cypriots and their supporters cannot reach a solution by the end of the year, everyone will continue to follow their own paths," he said.

The reunification of Cyprus would allow Ankara to overcome a major stumbling block in its lagging negotiations to join the European Union. Turkey is obliged to open its ports to Greek Cyprus - an EU member it does not recognize - under a trade pact with the EU, but refuses to do so until the 27-nation bloc fulfills its pledge to ease Turkish Cyprus'

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international isolation. The row has led to the EU freezing talks in eight of the 35 policy chapters that a candidate country must successfully negotiate prior to membership. Cyprus has been divided since Turkey intervened in the north of the island on July 20, 1974, to protect Turkish Cypriots after a Greek Cypriot coup engineered by the junta then ruling Athens aimed at uniting the island with Greece. /Hurriyet/

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