

**Speech of Hon. Steve Cohen of Tennessee
In the House of Representatives
Tuesday, May 6, 2008**

Mr. COHEN. Madam Speaker, as the State of Israel commemorates its 60th anniversary, I take this opportunity to recognize the longstanding friendship between the State of Israel and the Republic of Turkey.

Turkey was the first country with a predominantly Muslim population to step forward and recognize the Jewish State in 1949. Moreover, for three decades the Republic of Turkey remained the only Muslim country to have full diplomatic representation in Israel. This historical fact alone speaks well for the solid, special, and valuable relationship between Turkey and Israel. It is no wonder this relationship stands on its uniquely own merits--unmatched in the entire Middle East. Historical facts and recollections in the collective memories of both Turkish and Israeli peoples testify this sense of togetherness, standing shoulder to shoulder in testing times.

In recent years, more than 60 agreements have been enacted between the State of Israel and the Republic of Turkey in the economic and military fields. These have not only bolstered the bilateral relationship between the United States and these two close friends and allies, but have also created a legal framework that serves to institutionalize the bonds we have collectively developed. Since Turkey and Israel are the only two countries in the region that have embraced the principles of democracy and liberal market economy, it is easier to develop both the content and the depth of the bilateral relations in a multitude of different fronts.

Also, through a large volume of tourism and cultural sharing, countless citizens of Turkey and Israel, not just the two governments, have developed strong bonds of benevolence, a sense of togetherness, collaboration, and mutual respect.

At a time when dialogue between the parties to the Arab-Israeli conflict is needed, Turkey is once again in the unique position of maintaining positive relations with all the parties to the conflict. This is undoubtedly an asset for the region, and a great contribution to the security of Israel. The Israeli President Shimon Peres and President of the Palestinian Authority Mahmoud Abbas have addressed the Turkish Parliament last year in November and praised Turkey as an important ally in the peace process. President Peres's speech was the first to a parliament by an Israeli head of state anywhere in a predominantly Muslim country.

We also remember too well through what is known as The Ankara Forum, that Turkey has recently sustained Israeli and Palestinian joint efforts to provide support for economic development in the West Bank. Recent reports indicate that Turkey, investing on this ground of mutually earned respect, trust and confidence and taking steps at the request of both parties, has now embarked on facilitating dialogue between Syria and Israel.

Most members of the international community share the goal of a peaceful and prosperous Middle East. The security of all the countries in the region, including Israel, is dependent on this. Turkey believes that dialogue and cooperation are essential tools in working to make this dream a reality, and it is well equipped to chart its course for the benefit of Israel and her Arab neighbors, all for a peaceful and prosperous neighborhood. On this note, the 60th anniversary of the State of Israel, I commend and encourage the strong relationship between our two allies, Turkey and Israel, which in fact stands stronger and more robust by each day offering hope for peace in the future.