How the Emerging Balkan-Israeli Strategic Alliance could Alter Energy Security in the Eastern Mediterranean Basin

SIGURD NEUBAUER*
Editor at Bulletin News LLC, US

Abstract: This paper seeks to analyze Israel's emerging strategic alliance with the Balkan countries, not only as an “alternative” to Turkey, but rather expose how interest-driven policies are rapidly shaping deepening political, military & intelligence cooperation with Cyprus, Greece, Romania and Bulgaria. At the backdrop of Israel's quest to form alternative alliances with non-Middle Eastern states close to its geographical vicinity, is its apparent interests in exporting newly discovered energy riches to European markets. Aside from commercial aspects driving Israel's relations with Greece and Cyprus, it remains unclear how viable a Balkan-Israel alliance can be without some sort of Turkish-Israeli rapprochement.

Keywords: Israel-Turkey relations, Balkans, energy, security dynamics

Introduction

Following what has widely been described as the collapse of the Turkish-Israeli strategic partnership over Ankara's support for the 2010 Gaza-bound “Freedom Flotilla,” the Jewish state began forming alternative alliances with several countries in the Balkans. In particular, ties with Bulgaria and Greece have blossomed over mutual concern over an increasingly assertive Turkey, while Israel has also significantly increased bilateral defense and intelligence cooperation with Cyprus, Romania, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia and Croatia as part of a wider effort to deter international jihad and terrorist networks from establishing a foothold in the Balkans.

The emerging strategic alliance with the Balkans states, under Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman's stewardship, is also a paradigm shift from Israel's traditional foreign policy as the current government remains “skeptical” of whether the Jewish state “will ever” be fully integrated into the broader Middle East. That skepticism, Israeli polls suggest, have also resonated with the public at large, as Israelis gradually are shifting towards the political right.

From the “Oslo accords” of the 1990s and onwards, every successive Israeli government sought to reach a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace treaty through a permanent settlement with the Palestinians. However, following the second Palestinian intifada, the withdrawal...