

TURKEY'S MEDIATION: CRITICAL REFLECTIONS FROM THE FIELD

Ahmet Davutoğlu

Dr. Davutoğlu is the foreign minister of Turkey.

In today's world there are serious problems in the regional and global systems. The end of the Cold War did not help much in regard to developing mechanisms to resolve those problems. The post-Cold War era continued to present big challenges, and the emergence of new issues complicated the deep problems in international politics. Ethnic, sectarian and religious clashes and geopolitical conflicts, as well as frozen conflicts, throughout the world are in need of effective mediation. In the changing security environment, in addition to bilateral disputes and state security, the security of individuals as well as crises sparked by nonstate threats further complicate this grim picture. In this period, in addition to the global economic crisis, the broader Middle East is experiencing a political earthquake creating new challenges that are domestic rather than interstate. The need for mediation is obvious in this new era. In the last three decades, Turkey's position has been based on the use of diplomacy in an efficient way to help resolve disputes and conflicts.

Turkey works to develop effective dispute resolution instruments for various conflicts. It is located right at the center of all the political conflicts of the surrounding regions, and is affected directly or indirectly, historically or culturally, by

the myriad crises taking place throughout a wide area. When there was a crisis in Bosnia, all those who were suffering tried to escape to Turkey. When there was a crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh, we felt its bitter consequences before anyone else — and a substantial number of refugees escaping from Syria turn to Turkey as a humanitarian safe haven. In times of crisis — as in Tunisia, in Egypt or in Libya last year — Turkey is always among the countries that try to make a significant contribution to its resolution. This is a challenge for Turkey.

In our endeavor to develop effective mechanisms for mediation, we are particularly pleased to see that we share this vision with several like-minded states. Many countries are joined together around a common vision based on mutual understanding, trust, confidence building and the use of diplomacy to resolve disputes. It was this common vision that led to the formation of the Friends of Mediation, launched under the UN framework in a partnership between Turkey and Finland, bringing together states, international organizations and NGOs.

The Friends of Mediation platform with Finland was the most meaningful initiative for us with regard to this challenge. The idea is to have a global platform to contribute positively to the resolution

of crises. In many ways, it parallels the Alliance of Civilizations project, which was initiated with Spain. The Alliance of Civilizations aimed to ease tensions and create a new platform to counteract those who want to create tensions along cultural and civilizational fault lines. Within the framework of this initiative, Turkey hosted the Istanbul Conference on Mediation on February 24-25, 2012, bringing together representatives of NGOs (nongovernmental organizations), experts and officials from a variety of countries. Turkey will continue to promote this platform in order to contribute to greater international convergence on this issue.

Mediation is a long and challenging process. The mediator needs to operate with the utmost care and patience within a well-prepared and comprehensive framework. Based on Turkey's experience, a successful mediation effort has four dimensions: psychological, intellectual, ethical and methodological.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSION

One may divide negotiations into three phases: overcoming psychological barriers, compromising on technical differences, and mustering political will. Psychological considerations play a significant role, perhaps as important as the substantive aspects of the crisis at hand. At the very least, without mutual trust or appropriate psychological preparation, you cannot achieve success. Technical details of negotiations come next, and the rest is about having the right political will to solve the issue.

Empathy

A mediator, whether an individual or an institution, must *empathize*: try to understand, and put himself or herself in the shoes of the other. If a mediator cannot

achieve empathy, he cannot understand the psychological dynamics of a dispute. Likewise, those whom we want to bring together should see the mediator as one of them.

Let me explain my argument by referring to an individual experience. In 2005, before the elections in Iraq, Sunni resistance groups were refusing to participate in the elections. At the time, as the chief adviser to Prime Minister Erdogan, I engaged in discreet, confidential diplomacy to bring all the primary resistance leaders to Turkey in order to persuade them to participate in the elections as political parties. For three months we negotiated, day and night. As these groups were also fighting against each other, they had difficulties in coordinating their positions.

After two or three months, in the last meeting, I said I wanted to listen to all of them. They criticized each other for four or five hours. In the last hour, I took the floor and, without saying anything about the dispute among them, I described to them the Baghdad of the tenth century, when it was the center of civilization: how people lived, the intellectual vivacity, the order, Harun Rashid and all the great leaders. Then I described another Baghdad, which was destroyed by Mongols in the thirteenth century. Finally, I described the choice before them: "Either you will reestablish Baghdad as a center of civilization or you will be part of the destruction of Baghdad, as the Mongols were." It took an hour to relate all these details. One of the leaders, the oldest one, in his seventies, from the Ubeydiye tribe, stood up and said, "Look, my sons" — the others were much younger — "we have to listen to this brother, because he speaks like a Baghdadi." He doesn't speak like someone from the outside.

After that hour, we reached an agreement; these groups came together and

formed what we call *tavafuk*, and they participated in the elections. The important thing is this: If we are mediating between Iraqi people, we should be speaking like Baghdadis. We have to speak like Damascenes if the issue is Syria, or like someone from Sarajevo if the issue is related to the Balkans. This is the most important aspect, if we are to convince others.

Belief in a Solution

Another psychological necessity is to believe in a solution. For a mediator to solve the crisis, self-confidence is a must.

Indeed, if the mediator does not believe that the problem can be solved, he cannot convince oth-

The mediator himself should believe that the problem can and will be solved. If we do not believe that, we cannot convince the conflicting parties that there is the possibility of a solution.

ers. I know various mediators, even today, who make so many excuses during the mediation process for why the problem is not solvable. The mediator himself should believe that the problem can and will be solved. If we do not believe that, we cannot convince the conflicting parties that there is the possibility of a solution.

My colleague Celso Amorim, the former Brazilian foreign minister, worked very closely with me to persuade Iran to sign on a deal. When we were en route to Tehran in the early stages of this process, a journalist had asked me, "How come you are so confident that you can solve this issue, or that you can help at least, when until now there has been no agreement?" This was seven or eight months before the Tehran agreement, during our first trip to Tehran. I told her, "If I do not believe in a solution, I cannot persuade others to solve the problem."

Advance Preparation

Both sides must be prepared psychologically before bringing them together. Usually, people want to embark on the negotiation process right away, thinking that the mediation starts when all the concerned parties come together. It does not happen like this in the actual situation. The process starts before; and if in the early phases you do not prepare them psychologically, the chances of finding a solution will be slim.

When we launched indirect talks between Israel and Syria, they were an-

nounced in May 2008. The actual process, however, had started three years before that,

when Prime Minister Erdoğan spoke with Bashar al-Assad and Ehud Olmert, at the same time. During the two-to three-year interim period, we tried to lay the groundwork and prepare both sides psychologically for a solution. In the case of the Tehran deal, again, my colleague Celso Amorim and I worked patiently for five to six months separately and made gradual progress. A mediator should be patient, making sure, before the final stage, that all sides are ready to discuss and negotiate.

THE INTELLECTUAL DIMENSION

The second aspect of mediation is the intellectual dimension. I do not refer just to an academic framework. What I mean is having thorough knowledge about the issue in question. The mediator must know the details as much as possible, even better than the conflicting parties.

Studying the Details

Naturally, knowing all aspects of the subject requires the mediator to prepare in advance. Before starting the indirect talks between Syria and Israel, I read all the memoirs of participants in the Middle East negotiations of the 1990s. I examined all the actors and personalities, collected all the books on the topic and read all the related documents. For example, one of my conclusions regarding the failure of the Syrian-Israeli talks in the 1990s concerned secrecy. Before starting the indirect negotiations, I placed one condition on both sides: there would be no sharing of information with the press because, in the 1990s, a leak to the press at the most critical stage had led to the collapse of the process. I can tell you that I admired both teams in 2008. We conducted five rounds of talks, and there was no leakage, partly because I had said if there were, we would quit the negotiation process.

Having a Vision

Another aspect of the intellectual dimension is that mediators must have a vision. The success of a mediation process depends on the extent to which a mediator can conceptualize, not only the solution, but also the new *status quo* that he is trying to establish after the solution. Equally important is the need for the mediator to be clear about this vision in his interaction with the parties, as if he is one of them.

In the case of the Israeli-Syrian indirect talks, for instance, I spoke to both sides. To the Israeli side I said, "If this peace is achieved, one day an Israeli can drive his car through Damascus to Istanbul to Europe without any barrier." And to the Syrians, I said, "One day you can go from Damascus to Jerusalem to pray in Masjid Al-Aqsa without any barrier." Here

is an example of sharing a vision of what the positive consequences of a negotiation process could be. The same goes for our experience in the Balkans. When we established the Bosnia-Herzegovina-Serbia-Turkey trilateral dialogue mechanism last year, we had 10 meetings; and we had great success in resolving almost all of the pending issues between Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, largely owing to the fact that we shared a common vision for the Balkans.

Understanding Contexts

Another very important point related to the intellectual dimension is for the negotiator to *understand and analyze the international context* of the process. No crisis takes place in a vacuum; all the international crises that we are seeking to address have happened in a global context. For example, before the war in Iraq, our analyses told us that a conflict among the neighbors of Iraq would create a disaster before or after the war. Then we decided to form the Iraqi Neighboring Platform, composed of all the neighbors of Iraq. The members of the platform had 12 meetings before and after the war and tried to create at least a minimum consensus in order to have a positive impact on Iraq and its neighbors. We did so because my analysis of the Bosnia-Herzegovina crisis in the 1990s led me to the conclusion that not only the domestic problems, but also the negative influence of neighbors, were responsible for the continuation of the conflict for several years and the failure of negotiation attempts. International actors seeking to mediate have to contain neighbors in order to control a crisis. Thus, understanding regional and international contexts is as important as the substance of the issue itself.

THE ETHICAL DIMENSION

Thirdly, there is the ethical dimension of the negotiation process. Anyone who rises to the challenge of mediation should act ethically and have personal integrity. The relevant question to ask is, "What are the main ethical values relevant to the negotiation process?" In the first place, the mediator should adopt a value-oriented approach.

The mediator should be the defender of shared values rather than a particular interest. He should not be seen as being affiliated with

a specific interest. When both sides feel that you are sharing their values, they are ready to accept mediation from your end. Shared cultural and historical values are very important ethical factors.

For example, Turkey was very successful in bringing about concrete outcomes through another trilateral platform, the Afghanistan-Pakistan-Turkey Trilateral Process. Beginning with the Ankara Declaration after trilateral meetings in April 2007, we had several meetings as part of this process. It has been the most meaningful platform for easing the tension between the two neighbors and for discussing, developing, implementing and overseeing various cooperation projects. In every meeting, we have referred to the same values and to Turkey's cultural ties with both countries. These are not directly related to any specific interest, but facilitate Turkey's access to both countries.

Sincerity and Honesty

Similarly, it is important for a negotia-

tor to have sincerity and honesty, especially when carrying messages between parties. The Israeli-Syrian talks have failed because of the Gaza War, but both Israeli and Syrian teams, throughout three years of preparation and then six months of indirect negotiations, always admired the honesty of the Turkish side in carrying messages. We neither exaggerated the

I hope that one day all the documents in Tehran and Moscow and other places will be transparent [not just the WikiLeaks documents], so that all these parties might see that Turkey has used only one language to all the parties in all the negotiations. We are not afraid.

messages in a positive sense, nor did we add any negative input to the messages themselves. You have to carry the messages

from one side to the other in an honest and sincere way.

During one notorious crisis, a mediator shared two different documents with the two sides. It created a huge breach in mutual trust, which created problems for the resolution of the crisis. The mediator has to share the same documents and speak the same language with both sides.

It was interesting when the WikiLeaks documents were released on the Internet. That day I was in Washington for bilateral talks. It was Sunday, and there were several references to Turkey in those documents. The next day Secretary Clinton and I held a press conference on bilateral issues, but it was the first appearance by the secretary of state in public after the WikiLeaks documents were released. Therefore, the press were very critical. Afterward, in another press conference somebody asked me what I thought regarding these WikiLeaks documents, which contained so many references to Turkey. I said I did not feel anything, because I hoped that one day all the docu-

ments in Tehran and Moscow and other places will be transparent, so that all these parties might see that Turkey has used only one language to all the parties in all the negotiations. We are not afraid. We have used the same language consistently.

When the Iraqi diplomatic archives were made public after the war, Kurdish friends said, "It was shocking for us that all the parties used different language to us and to Saddam. Only Turkey used the same language to us and Saddam in the same way." Such honesty and sincerity is very important. There should not be duplicitous language, but sometimes mediators are tempted by their desire for success. Many mediators want to have the Nobel Prize, and this is indeed a good objective. However, this temptation for success sometimes may lead a mediator to try to satisfy one side by changing the context a little bit. He/she may wish to convince one side in this way and try to convince the other side by presenting a slightly different picture, hoping that one day these innocent lies will bring them together. But such lies eventually will destroy the parties' trust in the mediator. In short, sincerity and honesty are important ethical values that should be preserved by mediators.

Neutrality

Another ethical quality which we should all defend is *neutrality*. Here, some conceptual clarity is needed; neutrality and objectivity are two different things. All mediators should be neutral, but in order to be objective, sometimes you have to say to parties on one side that they are right or wrong. Neutrality means not favoring one side; objectivity means being on the side of truth.

The P5+1 Iran talks were held last year in Turkey. During the initial din-

ner, since we were the host country, we were not planning to talk on the subject. I decided to make some jokes. In Turkish popular culture, we have Nasreddin Hodja, a well-known scholar and judge. One day a case was brought to him. He listened to one side and said, "You are right." Then he listened to the second side and said, "You are right, too." His wife was watching him, and she said, "How come, Hodja, they have conflicting views and you said 'right' to both of them." He turned his face to his wife and said, "You are right, too."

If you listen to all the parties to a conflict, of course, they will try to convince you of the merit of their case. Neutrality means listening in a neutral way. Objectivity means, after listening, telling one party, "You are wrong," and the other, "You are right." But you need to do so in the absence of the other side, not in front of them, in order to bring them closer.

The absence of neutrality unfortunately affected the 2004 Cyprus negotiations negatively. We missed a great opportunity because the concerned parties did not say to one side in an objective way that they were wrong. Consequently, the Greek Cypriot side rejected the plan. Neutrality and objectivity should go hand in hand.

THE METHODOLOGICAL DIMENSION

Finally, there is the methodological dimension. Mediation is, in most cases, a long-lasting process and should be handled with the utmost care, sensitivity and precise planning. Besides psychological, intellectual and ethical considerations, a mediator should have a precise plan for the timing of the mediation and for controlling the interactions of conflicting sides among themselves and with outside actors in a wider context. In addition, mediators

should also be able to draw the boundaries of the mediation process and determine the scope and content of the negotiations.

Correct Timing

The most important aspect of the methodological dimension is to pursue correct timing, the essential part of any mediation.

Let us have a closer look at the 2004 Cyprus negotiations to gain some insight from the ground. At a time when no hope for a solution was on the horizon, Turkey took an initiative in January 2004. The timing was fortuitous: on May 1, 2004, Cyprus would become a member of the EU. We wanted to complete the negotiations within those four months, which was a great incentive for both sides. We indeed achieved a comprehensive settlement, but that settlement was eventually rejected by one party. Still, this example is illustrative of the value of correct timing. Similarly, our 2005 initiative in Iraq was also undertaken with advantageous timing for the purpose of political reconciliation. Even our effort in Syrian-Israeli indirect talks had correct timing, because it was the last year in office for both Ehud Olmert and President Bush. We wanted to achieve a successful settlement for all the parties before the end of that year.

An Inclusive Approach

It is essential to have an *inclusive approach* to various stakeholders in a conflict process in order to bring together all the concerned parties. Turkey's trilateral dialogue involving Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina are examples of this inclusive attitude. It brings all parties together to address the problems in a comprehensive manner.

Concentration of Talks

Yet another methodological principle is *the concentration of talks*. Today, one of the reasons for the failure in the P5+1 Iran talks is the infrequency of the meetings. There was only one meeting last year. It is better to conduct concentrated negotiations as regularly as possible. In our last meeting in Tehran, Celso Amorim and I negotiated patiently for 17 hours non-stop, in the end reaching a solution. If we had said, "stop here, let's continue after one week," we would have had difficulty reaching a solution.

Control of Outside Factors

The last methodological principle is to *control and contain all outside factors*. In today's world, the interdependent nature of the disputes places the burden on the shoulders of the mediator for controlling outside factors in the wider context of the mediation attempts. The perfect situation for dealing with the problems in a defined framework is not likely to occur in the majority of mediation processes. There will always be unexpected outside factors affecting the process. The mediator should be ready to face this challenge and prepare for controlling and containing these factors. For instance, in the case of the Gaza War, where we negotiated a ceasefire, we had to control all other parameters in order to reach a ceasefire. The challenge was not only to persuade Hamas to agree to a ceasefire, but to have conflicting parties, regional and international actors take responsible positions in not provoking the situation. The nature of the Palestinian problem requires handling the outside factors and connected issues with the utmost care in order to make progress. The mediator needs to have all the actors included in the process, while simultaneously being

able to control outside influences.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

In short, mediation is a one of the main instruments of peace and happiness for humanity. Obviously, there remain many challenges to the realization of effective mediation in world politics. Turkey has reoriented its foreign policy by means of an active, multidimensional and visionary framework. Mediation is an integral part of this policy. Turkey's unique access to both the global north and south makes it a suitable mediator over a wide geographical range. Turkey's cultural-civilizational background and long experience with Western political and security structures creates an advantage in the field. There is also strong political will and consider-

able societal support behind Turkey's engagement in finding solutions to chronic problems, in particular to those in Turkey's neighboring regions. Turkey has assumed for itself a central role in regional and international politics, and mediation is a necessary tool for contributing to peace and stability at various levels. Turkey's dynamic civil society is also active in conflict zones through humanitarian assistance, further supporting the dynamism of Turkey's mediation efforts. For its part, Turkey is working hard to ensure that the Friends of Mediation and other platforms can create a new international intellectual atmosphere where states and NGOs can work for peace and stability in regions over the entire globe.