

TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS ISRAEL: THE IMPLICATIONS OF  
TURKEY'S RELATIONS WITH THE WEST

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Approval of the Graduate School of Social Sciences

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS ISRAEL: THE IMPLICATIONS OF TURKEY'S RELATIONS WITH THE WEST**

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This thesis aims to analyze the Turkish foreign policy towards the State of Israel in a historical perspective and to examine how the foreign policy perceptions of the AKP Government having Islamic roots that came to power in 2002 affected this policy. The thesis argues that, historically, the Western connection of the Turkish Republic has determined the Turkish foreign policy towards Israel and the foreign policy perceptions of the AKP Government strengthened this connection rather than weakening it. It is argued that, the fundamental reason underlying this situation is the efforts of the AKP Government to use its compromising foreign policy as a leverage against the constitutional legitimacy question it faced in domestic politics. As a result, during the AKP era, it is concluded that, Turkish foreign policy towards Israel has not undergone fundamental changes at least as long as the domestic legitimacy question exists.

Keywords: Turkish foreign policy, Turkish-Israeli relations, Justice and Development Party, strategic depth doctrine.

## ÖZ

### TÜRKİYE'NİN İSRAİL'E YÖNELİK DIŞ POLİTİKASI: BATI İLE OLAN İLİŞKİLERİN ETKİSİ

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Bu tez tarihsel bir pespektif içerisinde İsrail Devleti'ne yönelik Türk dış politikasını analiz etmeyi ve 2002 yılında Türkiye'de iktidara gelen siyasal İslamcı bir parti olan AKP'nin dış politika anlayışının bu politikayı nasıl etkilediğini araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Tez tarihsel olarak Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin Batı bağlantısının İsrail'e yönelik dış politikasını belirlediğini, AKP iktidarının benimsediği dış politika anlayışının Türkiye'nin Batı bağlantısını zayıflatmadığını, aksine güçlendirdiğini, bunun temel sebebinin ise AKP iktidarının dış politikadaki uzlaşmacı tutumunu iç politikada karşı karşıya bulunduğu anayasal meşruiyet krizi ile baş etmede bir kaldıraç olarak kullanmaya çalışması olduğunu savunmaktadır. Bu nedenle, AKP döneminde, en azından iç politikadaki meşruiyet krizi var olduğu sürece, İsrail'e yönelik Türk dış politikasında esaslı sapmalar olmadığı sonucuna varılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türk dış politikası, Türkiye-İsrail ilişkileri, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, stratejik derinlik doktrini.

To my parents, wife and sister.  
For their trust, support and encouragement.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Historical approach to Turkish foreign policy towards Israel is worth analyzing from various perspectives. Historically, Turkish foreign policy has been dependent on the structure of the international system and the Western connection of Turkish Republic. The impact of this connection on Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East region, and Israel in particular, is evident. Turkish policy makers composed their foreign policy behaviour towards this region according to the developments within the Cold War and the perceived role of Turkey within a bipolar international system. Within a Cold War context, the fundamental determinant of Turkish foreign policy behaviour towards the Middle East and Israel has been evidently the Western connection of Turkey. Turkey placed itself in the Western bloc within a bipolar international structure and composed its foreign policy through the lens of the Cold War mentality. The implications of this mentality have been various, sometimes advantageous, sometimes disadvantageous.

The magnitude of Turkey's dedication to its Western connection, however, varied from time to time. While it was at its peak in the 1950s, Turkey lost its enthusiasm towards the Western alliance especially after the second half of the 1960s. Turkey's recognition of Israel in 1949, the initiation of the early relations and the forging an alignment regarding the military and the intelligence issues in the 1950s could be explained by the efforts of Turkish foreign policy makers to harmonize Turkey's foreign policy with that of its Western allies. Similarly, the falling-off Turkey's enthusiasm towards the Western alliance ushered in a cooling in Turkish-Israeli relations after the second half of the 1960s. Relations with the Arab countries, on the other hand, had its honeymoon period during this certain time frame yet without much success for Turkey's fundamental foreign policy

issues. In sum, Turkey's participation in the Western bloc and its efforts to harmonize its foreign policy with that of its Western allies have been the determinants of Turkish foreign policy behaviour towards Israel throughout the Cold War period.

As for Israel, on the other hand, Israel's view of Turkey was conditioned by the fact that Ankara had for years been the only Muslim country to have recognized Israel both *de facto* and *de jure*. Relations with Turkey have been, thus, of crucial strategic, political, and diplomatic importance. In other words, Turkey was a strategic asset, a pivotal country for Israel in the years of its total isolation in the region.

After the Soviet bloc had collapsed the member states of each bloc found themselves in a position that can be described as international turmoil, so they had to pursue dynamic and multi-dimensional policies rather than Cold War's static inter-block ones. In this context, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War increased the concerns of the Turkish political elite that Turkey's geopolitical and geostrategic importance for the West would decline in the post-Cold War era. Thus, Turkish governments sought to pursue proactive policies towards the Middle East in order to consolidate their prominence for the West in the region and Turkey's efforts to prove its gravity for the security of Western bloc mounted. These efforts required a more orchestrated foreign policy with Turkey's Western allies which re-strengthened Turkey's Western connection. The rise in Turkey's enthusiasm regarding its Western connection had its impact on Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East region, in particular Israel during the 1990s as well. Turkey has calculated the political consequences and the positive effects of establishing better relations with Israel and assessed these relations as a contributing factor to the consolidation of its role in the Western bloc.

Similar perceptions about post-Cold War era worried the Israelis as well. The Soviet support for the Arab countries was over therefore the

Americans could suppose that they no longer needed Israel to realize their projects and protect their interests in the Middle East. Thus, Israeli policy makers sought new, friendly non-Arab states to develop close relations. While Israel had pursued expansionist policies during to Cold War era in order to secure its borders, in this new era they tried to integrate themselves into the region via friendly policies.<sup>1</sup>

Due to these common perceptions regarding the structure of the international system and the perceived threats from certain Middle Eastern countries, in the 1990s, relations between Turkey and Israel greatly expanded and reached an unprecedented degree of closeness. The Turkey-Israel strategic partnership<sup>2</sup> has become an important element in the politics of the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean areas, and this rapprochement had great effects on the regional politics. This increasingly deep and open relationship between the two countries worried some of their neighbors in the region.

Turkey had already been in a long lasting and low-profile relationship with Israel since the foundation of the Jewish State in 1948, and this relationship gained a more apparent and permanent character during 1990s. However, the new close cooperation between Ankara and Tel Aviv began at the end of 1991, when Turkey decided to upgrade its diplomatic relations with Israel to ambassadorial level. Since then, the two states have exchanged many high level state visits and bilateral trade has grown significantly. The commercial and economic benefit was an important cause for better relations. In addition, the volume of civilian exchanges (tourist, academic, professional, sporting and

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<sup>1</sup>Ahmet Davutođlu, *Stratejik Derinlik; Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu*, Küre Publishing, İstanbul, 2001, p.383. Israel occupied West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan Heights and Sina during the Cold War era.

<sup>2</sup>The relationship between Turkey and Israel is named differently by the scholars. Efraim Inbar and Süha Bölükbaşı call it as "strategic partnership", Meliha Altunışık, Türel Yılmaz and Gencer Özcan as "rapprochement", Ofra Bengio as "alignment", Robert Olson as "alliance", F. Stephen Larrabee and Ian O. Lesser as "strategic relations", Mesut Özcan as "strategic cooperation", Gregory A. Burris as "unique entente", Amikam Nachmani as "special relationship".

cultural) increased dramatically. The two states have also signed a series of military agreements that led to cooperation in many areas. There has been also a growing interaction between their respective defence industries. This cooperation in the national security sphere lent the relationship a strategic aspect. Since the relationship between Turkey and Israel in the 1990s reflects a convergence of views on a wide range of global and regional issues, it deserves to be called as strategic partnership. However, the partnership between two capitals is clearly not a military alliance in the traditional sense; the two countries have not defined a *casus foederis*, the situation that will activate military action on behalf of the other.

The Arab reaction against the close relations between Israel and Turkey was shaped, first of all, by the historical perceptions of the Arabs regarding the Turks. The Arab world's view of Turkish Republic was shaped by the Ottoman legacy and by concerns that Turkey may one day again threaten their territory and people. Suspicions were increased to a great extent by Turkey's recognition of Israel in 1949, which was perceived as a stab in the back, because it undermined Arab attempts to isolate Israel and deprive it from any legitimacy. The assumption of the Arabs was that the Arab states could exploit their numerical superiority to pressure Turkey to break its relations with the State of Israel. The oil weapon, Islamic solidarity, the Palestinian issue, and the Cyprus cause of Turkey have been among the levers used by the Arab countries.

In November 2002, however, an Islamist rooted political party, Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in Turkey. Many of the leaders of the new party began their political careers in the pro-Islamist Welfare Party, which was closed down by the Turkish courts due to the violation of the principle of the separation of religion and state. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has professed to have modified his Islamist views and insists that the AKP is a center-right political party

whose traditional Islamic religious values make it no less democratic and secular than the Christian Democratic parties in Germany and other Western European democracies. Nevertheless, there has been a change in Turkish foreign policy with AKP Government, in particular towards the Middle East. It is argued by the AKP policymakers that Turkey should not only adopt a foreign policy approach which depends only on its strategic importance but also an approach relying upon historical and geographical depth of Turkey. The general framework of this new policy mindset is called "the strategic depth doctrine" that is eponymous with the title of Ahmet Davutoğlu's book. The main thesis of this doctrine is that strategic depth is predicated on geographical depth and historical depth. Consequently, Turkey, as a result of its historical legacy of the Ottoman Empire, possesses great geographical depth.

Much of the serious and scholarly contributions to the study of Turkish-Israeli relations have tended to focus more on the rapprochement between the two countries during the 1990s. There is much to learn from these studies concerning the mentioned rapprochement and its underlying dynamics. Yet, at the same time, there is a need to re-evaluate the Turkish-Israeli relations and the Turkish foreign policy towards Israel in a broader historical perspective starting from the early relations during 1940s and ending up with the soonest developments taking place in the 2000s.

A quick glance at the experience of Turkish foreign policy towards Israel within the historical perspective reveals that it had many ups and downs and it has been vulnerable to several internal and international effects which are discussed in this thesis. The basic argument of this thesis is that; *Turkish foreign policy towards Israel has mostly been affected by Turkey's Western commitment and by the structure of the international system which had its own effect on this commitment.* The secondary argument of this thesis is that; *there has been a change in*

*Turkish foreign policy mindset towards a more compromising attitude with Justice and Development Party (AKP) Government that came to power in 2002 which is formulated in the strategic depth concept. The dynamics under which this change took place and how these dynamics had their effect on Turkish-Israeli relations are dealt in this study.*

The shift in Turkish foreign policy perceptions, however, had little effect on Turkish-Israeli relations since its Western commitment has not changed due to several reasons the most important of which has been the domestic legitimacy question<sup>3</sup> of the AKP Government. Since AKP Government has a domestic legitimacy question they need to seek legitimacy in their foreign relations. Thus, while AKP Government has a political Islamic background, the Western commitment of Turkish foreign policy continues. The third argument of this thesis is that; *The different foreign policy perception of AKP Government from its predecessors which is mostly compromising ushered in the continuation of Turkish-Israeli relations since such a foreign policy perception has been used as a leverage against the domestic question of legitimacy.* As far as the relations with the United States concerned, according to Fuller, for many people in the AKP, maintaining closer relations with the United States is an insurance bill in the domestic politics especially against the military.<sup>4</sup> For them, the military in Turkey would act against the AKP Government more easily if Washington gave up supporting the government.

Putting forward the above-mentioned arguments, this thesis is based on the following structure. First of all, in the first second the early relations between the two countries and the recognition of Israel by Turkey will be briefly discussed, and later the progress in the relations

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<sup>3</sup>The political Islamic parties in general and the AKP Government in particular, are accused of being illegitimate since their political project is said to be out of the founding constitutional principles which are unquestionable according to the Constitution.

<sup>4</sup>Graham E. Fuller, *Yükselen Bölgesel Aktör: Yeni Türkiye Cumhuriyeti*, Timaş Publishing, İstanbul 2008, p.295.



with its ups and downs during the Cold War era has been analyzed. In the third chapter, the thesis has been concerned with the relations during the post-Cold War and post-Gulf War era. While doing this, the internal policy developments of each state will be discussed when necessary. The focus will be on the foreign policy perceptions of the two countries and the regional and global circumstances that enabled them to cooperate and establish a strategic partnership. In the fourth chapter the focus will be on the new policy mindset of the AKP Government and the changing character of Turkish foreign policy behaviour. In this regard, special importance will be put on the "*strategic depth doctrine*" that has been devised by Ahmet Davutoğlu, who is the chief foreign policy adviser to the Prime Minister, and its impacts on the Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East region and Israel in particular. How the domestic question of legitimacy of the AKP Government ushered in a compromising foreign policy behaviour in its international relations has also been discussed in the fourth chapter of the thesis.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **COLD WAR YEARS**

#### **2.1 General**

In order to assess thoroughly the fundamentals of Turkish foreign policy towards the Arab Middle East and Israel after the Second World War, one should first of all take into consideration the structure of the international system and its impact on the regional developments within that certain time period. Naturally, both the bipolar structure of the international system and the Cold War concept that emerged from this structure after the War affected the foreign policy behaviour of Turkish Republic towards the region. The impact of the Cold War on the region further limited the capabilities of Turkish foreign policy and determined its preferences.

The structure of the international system has dramatically changed after the Second World War as far as the economic, political and the military conditions concerned. Politically, the foundation of the United Nations in 1945 within a realistic perspective is noteworthy. As far as the military issues concerned, the separately clustered countries around the United States (US) and the Soviet Union –North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Warsaw Pact- led the bipolar structure of international system in world politics. Finally, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank emerged as a result of Bretton Woods system together with the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) to take up the function of organizing the international economy under close scrutiny of big capitalist powers and liberalization of international trade. Within this context, the room for manoeuvre of the member states of the two blocs in foreign policy

making has been limited to a great extent. In particular, Turkish foreign policy makers assessed their policy perceptions towards the region and Turkey's relations with the countries in the region through the eyes of the NATO alliance.

Within the Cold War perceptions, the reflection of the global polarization had its effects on the Middle East region as well. As far as the region is concerned, in certain time periods, countries such as Egypt, Iraq, Algeria and Syria approached the Soviet camp. Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Gulf Countries, Iran (until 1979) and Turkey, on the other hand, acted together with the US and the NATO camp. As a consequence, the Middle East region has become a chessboard of Cold War in which the superpowers struggled, directly or indirectly, for having certain areas of economic, cultural and political influence. In this context, as a regional power, Turkey found its room for manoeuvre limited by the global and the regional politics.

Given this international system, Turkey's foreign and security policies heavily depended on the developments taking place in the West and on the relations between the two blocs.<sup>5</sup> The fact that the Western powers declared the initiation of the Cold War in 1947 and set their relations according to the rules of the new international system provided Turkey, who saw the Soviet Union as a threat since 1945 and seeking for immediate economic and military aid from the West, with the opportunity of determining its foreign policy completely within the NATO perceptions. Turkey, as a result, adopted a foreign policy which focused on its strategic importance and on the fact that the security of Turkey was indispensable for the security of the Western bloc. Naturally, this type of foreign policy perception had its effect on Turkey's foreign policy towards the Middle East and Turkey assessed the regional developments through the lens of its Western allies and

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<sup>5</sup>Kemal Kirişçi, "Türkiye ve Müslüman Ortadoğu", in *Türkiye'nin Yeni Dünyası; Türk Dış Politikasının Değişen Dinamikleri*, Alan Makovsky and Sabri Sayarı (eds), Alfa Publishing, İstanbul, 2002, p.53.

the Cold War mentality. Turkey adopted the Cold War mentality so harshly and severely that it even ignored the struggle of the colonized people of the Third World for independence who claimed their right of self-determination after the Second World War. More specifically, after Turkey's participation in NATO in 1952, its room for manoeuvre in foreign policy has been limited to a great extent and Turkey composed its policy towards the region within the context of bloc politics. Turkey has been pro-Western when dealing with the crises and conflicts taking place within the Middle East region during 1950s and did not evaluate thoroughly the fundamental reasons lying under the certain crises or conflicts such as Suez War, Middle East crises in which Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and Jordan participated, Iraqi Revolution in 1958, Algerian War of Independence, and Arab-Israeli conflict.<sup>6</sup> According to Hale, during the 1950s and early 1960s, Turkey's commitment to and engagement with the Western alliance was at its height.<sup>7</sup>

## **2.2 Relations Until 1964**

### **2.2.1 Turkey's Participation in the Western Bloc**

As mentioned above, Turkey left her impartial policy after the Second World War and joined Western bloc after the war. This strategic decision was mainly due to its perceptions of threat from the Soviet Union. The milestone of this policy-shift has been the welcoming of Truman Doctrine in 1947. Since the foundation of the Republic, and until the declaration of Truman Doctrine, Turkish governments had been able to pursue impartial and neutral policies in their international relations. Turkey, however, by welcoming the Doctrine, curtailed its room for manoeuvre among the blocs and after that point, closer relations with Western bloc and the degree of the threat posed by the

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<sup>6</sup>Ramazan Gözen, *Amerikan Kışkırcısında Dış Politika: Körfez Savaşı, Turgut Özal ve Sonrası*, Liberte Publishing, Ankara, 2000, p.8.

<sup>7</sup>William Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy: 1774-2000*, Frank Cass, 2002, p.121.

Soviet Union has gone hand in hand.<sup>8</sup> Sever clearly puts that, after the Second World War the very first reason that led Turkey towards the West was the claims of the Soviet Union over Turkey.<sup>9</sup>

Infact, the perceptions of the United States about the threat posed by the Soviet Union coincided with that of Turkish ones. In a meeting in White House held by the Secretary of State George Marshall and his deputy Dean Acheson together with the head of Foreign Relations Committee Arthur Vandenberg, Secretary Marshall stated that;

*Problem in Turkey is quite different. The Soviets, by maintaining a mental war which leads Turkey not disarming its army, have been exerting pressure on Turkish economy that Turkey can not resist for a long time. The country needs two things: financial assistance which would increase the economic productivity, and military assistance which would provide the same military power with fewer soldiers. Taking into consideration of the current situation of the Great Britain, it is clear that only the United States can provide this assistance. Our military authorities unanimously think that the maintainance of the political unity of Turkey is indispensable for the independence of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East region.*<sup>10</sup>

The shared views of the parties led first the Truman Doctrine declared by the United States, and then the welcoming of the Doctrine by Turkey. Upon the declaration of the Doctrine, participating in all Western-oriented political, military and economic organizations became the fundamental objective of Turkish foreign policy.<sup>11</sup> Turkey's formal entrance to the Western camp was realized by its acceptance to the Council of Europe in 1949 and later to NATO in 1952. As mentioned, the main rationale of this preference is related to Turkish concerns about Soviet attitudes towards Turkey. Upon the expiration of the "Turkish-Soviet Treaty of Neutrality and Non-Agression" Stalin put

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<sup>8</sup>Ayşegül Sever, *Soğuk Savaş Kuşatmasında Türkiye, Batı ve Ortadoğu 1945-1958*, Boyut Publishing, İstanbul, 1997, p.51.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid*, p.51.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid*, p.48.

<sup>11</sup>Hüseyin Bağcı, *Türk Dış Politikasında 1950'li Yıllar*, METU Press, Ankara, 2001, p.8.

forward a set of demands including joint control over the Turkish Straits and re-adjustments in the Turkish-Soviet border which was established by the treaty in 1921. Hence, as Kirişçi points out, the main logic behind Turkey's preference to join the Western alliance was to counterbalance the Soviet threat.<sup>12</sup>

In sum, throughout the 1950s and the first half of the 1960s, Turkish foreign policy was shaped mainly by security concerns and by Turkey's Western-oriented foreign policy perceptions. With the Cold War declared and Turkey found its place within the Western bloc, Ankara composed its foreign policy within the framework of NATO and pursued a foreign policy that put forward Turkey's strategic importance regarding the security of Western bloc.<sup>13</sup>

Willingly or not willingly, Turkey had to harmonize its foreign policy with that of NATO's throughout the 1950s and the first half of the 1960s. Although Turkey had certain foreign policy perceptions separate from NATO alliance, when these perceptions contradicted with that of NATO's, Turkey preferred an orchestrated way of action with the alliance since the internal harmony of the alliance for Turkey took priority over the national perceptions in foreign policy, especially during the initial years of membership in NATO. An early meaningful example of this preference has been witnessed when Turkey acted together with its NATO ally France against Algeria with whom Turkey had cultural and historical ties. This perception obviously made itself clear in Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East as well; Turkey assessed the political developments taking place in the region through the lens of the Cold War mentality and Western point of view.<sup>14</sup> As far as the Middle

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<sup>12</sup>Kemal Kirişçi, "The End of Cold War and Changes in Turkish Foreign Policy Behaviour", *Foreign Policy*, 17 No:3-4 (1993), p.5-6.

<sup>13</sup>Melek Fırat, Ömer Kürkçüoğlu, "1945-1960: Orta Doğu'yla İlişkiler", in Baskın Oran (ed.) *Türk Dış Politikası, Volume I*, İletişim Publishing, Ankara, 2001, p.615.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.* p.615.

East region concerned, Turkish foreign policy acted in harmony with NATO when composing its policy towards the region such as participating in western-oriented pacts, adopting Eisenhower Doctrine, and developing relations with Israel.<sup>15</sup> Gözen points out that because of this harmonization of Turkish foreign policy towards the region with that of NATO's, Turkey came out to be a "Cold War warrior" especially until the second half of the 1960s.<sup>16</sup>

### 2.2.2 Recognition of Israel and the Early Relations

Turkey's early relations with Israel, thus, were too shaped by security concerns and by the Western influence. Turkey, together with the Arab states, voted against the UN Partition Plan on 29 November 1947, while the US, France and the USSR voted for the plan and UK abstained.<sup>17</sup>

The reason why Turkey voted for the UN Partition Plan with the Arab states in November 1947 can be explained not with an Islamic affiliation, but with Turkey's concerns about the Soviet-oriented nature of the founders of Israel.<sup>18</sup> According to Yazar, the one and only reasonable factor underlying Turkey's decision was the security concern regarding the territorial integrity and political stability of Turkey.<sup>19</sup> For him, Turkey knew that after the partition, the region will be exposed to a Palestine-centered communist threat and instability and this would lead to Soviet penetration into the Arab states which meant a

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<sup>15</sup>İlter Turan, Dilek Barlas, "Batı İttifakına Üye Olmanın Türk Dış Politikasına Etkileri", in Faruk Sönmezoğlu (ed.), *Türk Dış Politikasının Analizi*, Der Publishing, 2004, p.157. For further information about Turkish attitude towards Algeria during its struggle for independence see Onur Öymen, *Silahsız Savaş: Bir Mücadele Sanatı Olarak Diplomasi*, Remzi Publishing, 2003, pp.119-126.

<sup>16</sup>Ramazan Gözen, *Amerikan Kışkırcısında Dış Politika...*, p.5.

<sup>17</sup>Erhan Yazar, *Tarihsel Dönüşüm: Filistin Sorunu Temelinde Türk Dış Politikası ve İsrail Devletini Tanıma Süreci*, Siyasal Publishing, Ankara, 2006, p.203.

<sup>18</sup>Gencer Özcan, "Türkiye İsrail İlişkileri", in Faruk Sönmezoğlu (ed.) *Türk Dış Politikasının Analizi*, Der Publishing, İstanbul, 2003, p.330.

<sup>19</sup>Erhan Yazar, *Tarihsel Dönüşüm...*, p.206.

vulnerability of Turkey from its southern border as well.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, as Aras puts that, "the negative vote in 1947 was not motivated by popular inspirations or Islamic affiliations but rather due to fear of the creation of a communist regime in Israel."<sup>21</sup> Infact, Turkey was vitally interested in maintaining the British presence in the Middle East and feared that the Jewish state could create a Soviet bridgehead in the region.<sup>22</sup> In particular, the kibbutz-type organizations founded by the Jewish immigrants especially immigrating to Palestine from the Soviet Union led Turkish policy makers have doubts concerning the communist orientation of the newly born State of Israel. Furthermore, the Soviet Union was one of the most supportive countries of the foundation of the State of Israel and of the Jewish terrorist organizations who played great role in the foundation of Israel.<sup>23</sup>

Although Turkey opposed the Partition Plan, Ankara preserved neutrality policy during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and did not give permission to its citizens who wanted to fight for each party's side. Despite the official neutrality, the public opinion and the mass media supported the Arab side during the war.<sup>24</sup> During the war, Turkey, who was unable to contribute to the prevention of the war, avoided to be considered as acting together with one of the belligerent states, thus, with respect to recognition, Turkey did not mention any statement for, or against the recognition of Israel. Rather, Turkey pursued a wait-and-see policy. For Turkish policymakers, the result of the war, although the State of Israel had already been declared, would determine the

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<sup>20</sup>*Ibid*, p.207.

<sup>21</sup>Bülent Aras, *Palestinian-Israeli Peace Process and Turkey*, Nova Science, New York , 1998, p.115.

<sup>22</sup>Amikam Nachmani, *Israel, Turkey and Greece: Uneasy Relations in the East Mediterranean*, Frank Cass, London, 1987, p.44.

<sup>23</sup>These organizations used Czech-made armaments especially after 1946.

<sup>24</sup>Recep Öztürk, *Batı Faktörünün Etkisinde Türkiye İsrail İlişkilerinin Politikası*, Odak Publishing, Ankara, 2004, p.129. and Avner Levi, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nde Yahudiler*, İletişim Publishing, İstanbul, 1998, p.156.



final solution of the problem. Despite all the expectations of the Arabs, Turkey did not give support to the Arabs. Infact, Turkey realized the fragmented structure of the Arab states and foresaw the result of the war, more or less. Turkey, therefore, did not want to be linked with the war process in spite of all the pshylogical pressure it was prone to. Although, Turkey stated its goodwill for the Arabs it also resisted to the arms demands of the Arabs after the breakup of the war.<sup>25</sup>

Soon after the war, however, relations between Israel and Turkey started to develop, since Israel turned out to be a pro-Western state immediately after the war. The fact that the Western states started to establish close relations with Israel contributed to this policy shift in Turkey. In this period, for the Turkish military-bureaucratic elites, the closer relations with a pro-Western Israel meant closer relations with the West itself, thus, Israel was seen as valuable.<sup>26</sup> It was, indeed inevitable for Turkey to act in harmony with the US in foreign policy making since the fundamentals of economic and military dependency on Western bloc were established with the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan.

Turkey voted along with the West in the establishment of a Reconciliation Commission on Palestine in December 1948, and even participated in that commission. The other members of the Commission were the US and France and it was supposed that the US would be pro-Israel, France would be neutral and Turkey would be pro-Arab. Turkey, however, had been far from being pro-Arab during both the initial phase and the subsequent studies of the Commission. As aforementioned, the priorities of Turkish foreign policy shifted towards a more pro-Western stance after the declaration of Truman Doctrine

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<sup>25</sup>Erhan Yazar, *Tarihsel Dönüşüm...*, p.217-218.

<sup>26</sup>Özlem Tür, "Türkiye ve Filistin 1908-1948: Milliyetçilik, Ulusal Çıkar ve Batılılaşma", *SBF Dergisi*, Ankara, January-March 2007, No:62/1, p.248.

and introduction of the Marshall Plan.<sup>27</sup> As a result, Turkey, for the first time, acted against the Arabs in regard to the Question of Palestine, since the Arabs voted against the establishment of the Commission in the UN.<sup>28</sup> According to Kürkçüoğlu, Turkey, by participating in the Commission together with the two Western countries, US and France, to which the Arab states had opposition, turned out to be within a line parallel with the Western camp, while positioning itself far from the Arabic Middle East.<sup>29</sup> Such a decision, in fact, undoubtedly converged with the pragmatism in Turkish foreign policy since the regional and global security of Turkey had not been assured yet at that time.<sup>30</sup>

As had been before the war, the fundamental concern of Turkey, after the war, had been the Soviet activities which would have led to the regionalization of the conflict and communist penetration into the region. Turkey had channelled all its energy and efforts into thwarting the possibility of being surrounded by communism. That is, it was not only the Arab-Israeli war or the historical Question of Palestine that affected Turkey's perceptions about the declaration of state of Israel. Rather, both the structure of the government of Israel and the communist threat that was trying to infiltrate into the Arab countries which were located in the southern defence line of Turkey, were the concerning issues.<sup>31</sup>

The Turkish member of the Reconciliation Commission Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın reported to President İsmet İnönü that there was no need to worry about the Soviet influence on Israel thus Turkey should

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<sup>27</sup>Çağrı Erhan, Ömer Kürkçüoğlu, "Filistin Sorunu", in Baskın Oran (ed.) *Türk Dış Politikası, Volume I...*, p.640.

<sup>28</sup>Erhan Yarar, *Tarihsel Dönüşüm...*, p.221.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid*, p.221.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid*, p.221.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid*. p.223.

immediately recognize Israel.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, US President Truman's personal interest in Israel's existence and prosperity lifted the concerns of Turkey about Israel's Soviet orientation.<sup>33</sup> These issues led Turkey's policy towards Israel to a milestone, and eventually Turkey recognized Israel *de facto* on March 24, 1949.

While assessing the underlying factor that contributed to the *de facto* recognition of Israel by Turkey, one should take into consideration the structure of the international system, the impact of this structure on the Middle East region and on the foreign policy perceptions of Turkey after the Second World War. As mentioned above, the structure of international political, economic and cultural system that emerged after the Second World War is explanatory when evaluating the recognition of Israel by Turkey at the expense of worsening relations with the Arab countries. That is, Turkey's preference of Israel can not be understood without taking into consideration its preference of Western bloc in a broader sense. Turkey expected the positive effect of developing relations with a country like Israel which the Western countries supported its foundation and recognition in the region on its relations with these Western countries.

Bağcı supports this point of view and stresses that:

*The concrete impact of the Truman Doctrine, which was the immediate reflection of the international bipolar system on the region, on Turkish foreign policy was the changing attitudes of Turkey towards the Question of Palestine. Turkey had supported the Arab thesis until the declaration of the Doctrine, however, as the US aid started, the political stance of Turkey shifted partly because of the US influence. While Turkey had supported the foundation of an independent Arab state, officially recognized Israel 9 months after its foundation and gave the necessary*

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<sup>32</sup>Mesut Özcan, "Filistin-İsrail Barış Süreci ve Türkiye", in Ahmet Davutoğlu (ed.), *Filistin Çıkmazdan Çözümüne*, Küre Publishing, İstanbul, 2003, p.67.

<sup>33</sup>Türel Yılmaz, *Türkiye-İsrail Yakınlaşması*, İmaj Publishing, Ankara, 2001, p.5.

*permissions that allowed its Jewish citizens to immigrate to Israel.*<sup>34</sup>

This attitude, however, laid the foundations of lasting unfriendly relations between the Arab countries and Turkey.<sup>35</sup>

Similarly, according to Davutođlu, the most important global parameter that had impact on the initiation of Turkish-Israeli relations was the convergence between the international axis of power which provided Israel with its own state after the Second World War and the bloc choice that Turkey made due to perceptions of Soviet threat in the same time frame. The emergence of the State of Israel as a regional power was basically a result of the support it had from the Atlantic axis. Turkey, on the other hand, coped with the Soviet threat after the Second World War by making a strategic choice in favor of the same axis of power. The convergence between the global axes made Turkey an inevitable regional partner for Israel, while Turkey has always taken into consideration the global connections of Israel, when constituting its regional foreign policy, especially its impact on the US circles.<sup>36</sup>

On November 1, 1949, Turkish President İnönü declared, in his parliamantery opening speech, that:

*The political relations with the newly born state of Israel have been initiated. We hope that the state of Israel will be a part of the peace and stability in the Near East region.*<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Hüseyin Bađcı, *Türk Dış Politikasında...*, p.9. Between 15/8/1948 and 31/9/1949 30.657 Jews immigrated to Israel from Turkey. For further discussion about the Turkish Jews immigrated to Israel see, Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, *Türkiye ve Balkan Yahudileri Tarihi*, İletişim Publishing, İstanbul, 2001.

<sup>35</sup>Hüseyin Bađcı, *Türk Dış Politikasında...*, p.9.

<sup>36</sup>Ahmet Davutođlu, *Stratejik Derinlik...*, pp.417-418.

<sup>37</sup>Erhan Yazar, *Tarihsel Dönüşüm...*, p.256.

According to Özcan the factors underlying the recognition of Israel are as follows:

1. *Turkish political elites' concerns about Turkey's participation in Western security umbrella, in particular in NATO.*
2. *The need to compensate the negative effects of Turkish governmental acts, regarding the minority regime such as the "Varlık Vergisi", on the US and UK public opinions. (By showing that Turkey has never been an anti-semitic country and will never be one.)*
3. *The poor performance of the Israeli Communist Party in the elections held on 25 January 1949.*
4. *The expectation of the support of the Jewish lobby in the US for the financial loans that had been negotiated between Turkey and the US.*<sup>38</sup>

Erhan and Kürkçüoğlu add another factor, this time internal, contributing to the recognition of Israel by Turkey which is the fact that the statist and elitist intellectuals in Turkey had so long criticized the pro-Arab policies of their government and according to them, Israel had been founded by warring against the Arabs who have stabbed the Turks in the back during the First World War. Thus, Turkey and Israel should forge close ties since in international relations "my enemy's enemy is my friend" rule is accepted.<sup>39</sup>

When assessed the above-mentioned points together, Turkey's recognition of newly born State of Israel at the expense of worsening its relations with the Arab countries with whom it had cultural and historical ties seems to be closely related to its perceptions regarding its position in the international system that emerged after the Second World War. Turkey had to conduct concerted policies towards the region since it perceived enormous threat which it was impossible to deal alone from its northern neighbour within a Cold War environment. For Turkey, it was necessary to take part in the Western security

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<sup>38</sup>Gencer Özcan, "Türkiye İsrail İlişkilerinde Dönüşüm:Güvenliğin Ötesi", *TESEV Analysis of Foreign Policy No:1*, İstanbul, 2005, p.16.

<sup>39</sup>Çağrı Erhan, Ömer Kürkçüoğlu, *Filistin Sorunu...*, p.640.

system in order to meet the threat from the Soviet Union. As a result, Turkey needed to act in harmony with the Western states and to develop relations with Israel since this way of action seemed as an indirect way to secure its own position in the Western security system.

Although Turkey was the first Muslim country to recognize Israel officially, it was one of the last countries in Europe to do so.<sup>40</sup> The state of Israel was declared on 14 May, 1948 and eleven minutes later the US and three days later the Soviet Union recognized Israel.<sup>41</sup> The Arab states, on the other hand, reacted against the Turkish decision of recognition of Israel and blamed Turkey for acting together with the Western countries. In spite of the common reaction, no Arab state cut diplomatic ties with Turkey for this reason.<sup>42</sup> Turkey, facing opposition from the Arab states, abstained for the membership of Israel in the UN.<sup>43</sup> Israel, nevertheless, has been granted membership of UN.<sup>44</sup>

Israel was duly grateful for this step taken by Turkey. As the Cold War developed, Israel discovered a strategic advantage to courting Turkey's favor. As Dunkart Rustow observed:

*It is Turkey's firm alliance with the West that makes possible Moscow's recurrent setbacks in Cairo, Baghdad and other Arab capitals... Only behind that same barrier can Israel maintain its status as a regional power and cope with continuing Arab hostilities without risking facing in the Golan Heights not just Soviet arms supplied to Syria, but the full force of the Red Army itself.<sup>45</sup>*

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<sup>40</sup>Bülent Aras, *Palestinian-Israeli Peace Process...*, p.115.

<sup>41</sup>Erhan Yarar, *Tarihsel Dönüşüm...*, p.213.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.* p.252.

<sup>43</sup>Recep Öztürk, *Batı Faktörünün Etkisinde...*, p.133.

<sup>44</sup>Erhan Yarar, *Tarihsel Dönüşüm...*, p.255.

<sup>45</sup>Amikam Nachmani, "A Triangular Relationship: Turkish Israeli Cooperation and Its Implications for Greece", BESA Centre for Strategic Studies in Bar Ilan University, 1999, p.2.

Indeed, for Israel, recognition by Turkey was considered as a political victory. In Israel's point of view, recognition by Turkey, who was a full member of the UN, had close relations with the West, and who was a crucial country within the region with its historical and socio-cultural structure, had very important ramifications.<sup>46</sup> Commencing in 1949 after the foundation of NATO, Turkey launched an orchestrated effort to join this organization, to conclude a Balkan pact with Greece and Yugoslavia, and to forge an alliance with Pakistan. By 1954, Turkey was the only country which participated in three separate defence treaties. Later that year, Turkey launched negotiations with Iraq for another mutual agreement, which was finally signed in 1955. This unique status put Turkey into a political and military centre of the first order, a fact which did not escape the attention of Israel's policy-makers.<sup>47</sup>

Upon the recognition of Israel by Turkish government, Eliyahu Sasson and Seyfullah Esin were appointed as ministers by their respective governments.<sup>48</sup> While Israeli diplomat started his mission in December 1949 his counterpart, Seyfullah Esin, arrived Tel Aviv on 7 January, 1950.<sup>49</sup> The establishment of an Israeli legation in Ankara appeared urgent enough to require Eliyahu Sasson to relinquish his post as chief Israeli negotiator with King Abdullah of Jordan and undertake the new assignment. Negotiations with Jordan would evidently suffer, but Israeli-Turkish relations were given much more priority.<sup>50</sup>

Turkey, taking into consideration both the international developments and the consolidation of the State of Israel within the international

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<sup>46</sup>Erhan Yarar, *Tarihsel Dönüşüm...*, p.241.

<sup>47</sup>Amikam Nachmani, *Israel, Turkey...*, p.55.

<sup>48</sup>Erhan Yarar, *Tarihsel Dönüşüm...*, p.257.

<sup>49</sup>Gencer Özcan, *Türkiye İsrail İlişkilerinde Dönüşüm...*, p.17.

<sup>50</sup>Amikam Nachmani, *Israel, Turkey...*, p.55.

arena, and most important its own national interests, decided to upgrade the level of its recognition from *de facto* to *de jure* in 6 March, 1950.<sup>51</sup> In 1952, Israel and Turkey upgraded relations by exchanging ambassadors.<sup>52</sup>

In the aftermath of the recognition and initiation of the diplomatic relations, relations between Israel and Turkey developed progressively in a variety of ways, some of them substantial, others not. Turkish and Israeli soccer teams (Fenerbahçe and Hapoel) exchanged visits. In the presence of Israel's president, the Hebrew University in Jerusalem celebrated 500 years of Turkish rule in Istanbul. A forest was planted on Mount Carmel to commemorate Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and trees were donated to be planted at his tomb in Turkey.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, a trade agreement was signed, even military cooperation started.<sup>54</sup> In this period, Turkish policy makers realized the influence of Jewish lobby over American government, so tried to make benefit from this influence. In particular, Turkish government expected the support from Israel regarding its acceptance to the membership of NATO, the Cyprus cause of Turkey and receiving financial aid from the United States.<sup>55</sup> In the aftermath of the establishment of the diplomatic relations between the two countries, growing economic relations that had historical legacy had been the main focus. On 4 July 1950, the two countries concluded a free trade agreement and an agreement on payments in addition to a Modus Vivendi including the most favored nation clauses.<sup>56</sup> Thanks to

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<sup>51</sup>Erhan Yazar, *Tarihsel Dönüşüm...*, p.266.

<sup>52</sup>Philip Robins, *Suits and Uniforms; Turkish Foreign Policy Since The Cold War*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 2003, p.241.

<sup>53</sup>Amikam Nachmani, *Israel, Turkey...*, p.57.

<sup>54</sup>Gencer Özcan, *Türkiye İsrail İlişkileri...*, p.330. According to Özcan, in 1951, 1952, 1953 joint training activities were conducted with respect to naval forces and Israeli military troops participated in the military ceremonies in Turkey.

<sup>55</sup>Türel Yılmaz, *Türkiye-İsrail Yakınlaşması...*, p.8.

<sup>56</sup>Malike Bileydi Koç, *İsrail Devleti'nin Kuruluşu ve Bölgesel Etkileri: 1948-2006*, Günizi Publishing, İstanbul, 2006, pp.410-421.



these agreements, agricultural demands of Israel, who had not realized the agricultural take-off in the 1950s yet, was met by Turkey to a great extent.<sup>57</sup> As a consequence of these initiatives, the trade volume between Israel and Turkey had undergone a rapid upward trend in the 1950s. Turkey became a vital source for Israeli economy since the Arab embargo of 1946 inhibited the import of foods and fundamental goods into Palestine.<sup>58</sup>

Indeed, the progress in political relations could not catch up with the rapid grow in economic and cultural areas at the outset of the relations. After the diplomatic legations had arrived in the respective capitals, Turkish-Israeli relations did not undergo an immediate and fully-fledged upward trend as far as the political relations concerned. It was claimed, however, that the early linkages were established with respect to the military and intelligence services. Although issues regarding intelligence are highly secret, Israel informed Turkey that it appointed Uriel Shay as military attaché, one of four in world capitals, to its legation in Ankara on 28 October 1950. Meanwhile, General Moshe Dayan visited Ankara and met with Fuad Köprülü, Turkish Foreign Minister. Köprülü had to announce, because of the reaction emerging from the Arab world, that "*the visit was solely personal and any issue such as military alliance between the two countries was exactly not handled in the meeting.*"<sup>59</sup> In the diplomatic level, at the United Nations, Israel and Turkey concluded voting agreements. Israel was among the states which actively lobbied South American representatives to support Turkey's election to the Security Council.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>Çağrı Erhan, Ömer Kürkçüoğlu, *Filistin Sorunu...*, p.643.

<sup>58</sup>Erhan Yarar, *Tarihsel Dönüşüm...*, p.283.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid*, p.289.

<sup>60</sup>Amikam Nachmani, *Israel, Turkey...*, p.57.

Turkey's relations with the Arab states deteriorated as a result of its relations with Israel and of tension with the Soviet Union. Because of the perception of a Soviet threat in the region, Turkey participated in the Baghdad Pact, welcomed the Eisenhower Doctrine, had trouble with Iraq after the 1958 coup and opened the NATO Air Base in Incirlik to US during the 1958 Lebanon crisis, and all these developments worsened its relations with the Arab states of the region.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, as a result of Turkey's recognition of Israel, Muslim Brotherhood newspaper El-Dawa labeled Turkey as a "second Israel" and called for its destruction.<sup>62</sup> This reaction, however, was not solely a result of Turkey's act. The main reason behind this exaggerated attack on Turkey was the radicalization of the Arab countries, in particular of Egypt.<sup>63</sup>

### **2.2.3 The Formation of the Baghdad Pact and the Suez Crisis**

As far as the underlying motivations concerned, Turkey's participation in Baghdad Pact in 1955 is quite similar to its initiation of early relations with Israel. The quest for harmonization of Turkish foreign policy with that of its allies in NATO has been the very first motivation in both foreign policy behaviour. As for the Baghdad Pact, an additional objective of Turkish foreign policy makers was to reinforce its geostrategic importance and its role in ensuring security for the alliance, and as a result to increase the economic and military aid that it received from Western countries by showing its geopolitical magnitude to the members of the alliance.

Turkey's inclusion in NATO in 1952 fundamentally changed the geographic area of the alliance and Turkey's own geographic

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<sup>61</sup>Mesut Özcan, *Filistin-İsrail Barış Süreci...*, p.68.

<sup>62</sup>Kemal H. Karpat, *Ortadoğu'da Osmanlı Mirası ve Ulusçuluk*, İmge Publishing, Ankara, 2001, p.171.

<sup>63</sup>Bülent Aras, *Palestinian-Israeli Peace Process...*, p.116.

orientation. In contrast to previous British efforts to link Turkey into a Middle Eastern security alliance, the United States linked Turkey into the European centerpiece of collective defence security against the Soviet Union. From a US Cold War point of view, the frontline status of Turkey as the southern flank of NATO did not prevent linking it to Western efforts at creating some type of a Middle East defence network to fight with the spread of communism in the region. In fact, US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles began to concentrate on a Middle East defence network centered on the countries bordering the Soviet Union. By linking these pro-Western border states into some kind of an alliance, a geographic barrier "extending like an arc around the Soviet Union"<sup>64</sup> would enable the United States to effectively contain the threat of communism from the Middle East region. This was the Northern Tier policy, involving Greece, Iran, Turkey, and Pakistan, with Iraq acting as the alliance's anchor in the Arab world.<sup>65</sup>

The basis of the Northern Tier alliance was established in April 1954 with the signing of a Turkish-Pakistani defence treaty and the conclusion of a US-Iraqi arms agreement. As a result of consistent British and US efforts to solidify the Northern Tier, the Baghdad Pact was born. This security treaty was signed in 1955 between Northern Tier members Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Pakistan, with the addition of Great Britain.<sup>66</sup>

It is beyond the scope of this study to enter into the details of the formation of the Baghdad Pact.<sup>67</sup> Suffice it to say that, it had far-reaching political and strategic ramifications, the most important of

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<sup>64</sup>Joshua Walker, "Turkey and Israel's Relationship in the Middle East", *Mediterranean Quarterly*, 17:4, 2006, p.65.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid*, p.65.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid*, p.67.

<sup>67</sup>For further discussion of the Baghdad Pact see Ara Sanjian, "The Formation of the Baghdad Pact", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.33, No:2, April 1997, pp.226-266.

which was the certain Arab countries' increasing frustration against Turkey. Another point worth mentioning in this regard is the the fact that, as Karpap pointed out:

*There is hardly any other alliance in the recent history of foreign affairs as unnecessary, ineffectual and harmful to all parties as the Baghdad Pact. Indeed, it caused immense harm to the Western interests in the area, it precipitated the Arab countries' alignment with the Soviet Union, and it stimulated the rise of radical ideologies, and cast Turks in the image of docile tool of Western power.<sup>68</sup>*

During this period, the main disagreement between Turkey and Israel arose over the formation of the Baghdad Pact. When Turkey and Iraq had signed the Turkish-Iraqi Joint Declaration, which was one of the fundamental documents of the Baghdad Pact, in January 1955, Israelis doubted about the agreement to some extent since there were provisions which could create troubles for Israel, in particular with respect to Israeli-Palestinian conflict. With this declaration, the Turkish side undertook to help militarily to Iraq if Israel and Iraq went to war. Meanwhile, the extra letter exchange between Nuri El-Said and Adnan Menderes stated that, the parties would work on a solution regarding the Palestinian question on the basis of the UN Resolutions. Although the letters were not incorporated into the agreement, they turned out to be enough to have negative impact on Turkish-Israeli relations. While economic relations were relatively stable, political relations between the two countries had been quite volatile because of the Turkish undertakings with regards to the Pact.<sup>69</sup> The fact that, according to the 5<sup>th</sup> article of the agreement (13 January Communiqué concluded between Iraq and Turkey), only the states which were

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<sup>68</sup>Kemal Karpap, "Turkish and Arab-Israeli Relations", in Kemal Karpap (ed.) *Turkey's Foreign Policy in Transition:1950-1974*, Leiden, 1975, p.116.

<sup>69</sup>Ayşegül Sever, *Soğuk Savaş Kuşatmasında Türkiye...*, p.129.

recognized by the Arab states could participate in the Pact exacerbated the situation in regard to Israel.<sup>70</sup>

Article 5 specified that, "*any state concerned with security and peace in this region that wanted to accede to the treaty must be fully recognized by both of the High Contracting Parties*", a clear indication that Israel (which was not recognized by Iraq) could not accede to the treaty.<sup>71</sup> This provision definitely excluded Israel from the new defence organization in the Middle East. The reference in the 13 January communiqué to resisting any aggression from inside the Middle East region had given rise to some discomfort in Israel. Israeli diplomats did not agree with the theory that any Turkish-Arab rapprochement would bring benefits to their respective countries. On the contrary, they feared that Arabs would influence Turkey away from friendly relations with Israel.<sup>72</sup> Thus, Israel perceived the Baghdad Pact as a belligerent action against itself. In the final analysis, however, Dulles had told Abba Eban, the Israeli ambassador in Washington, "that he considered the Turkish-Iraqi pact would tend to weaken the solidarity of the Arab League against Israel and was confident that, as things developed, Israel would realise that this trend was to its benefit."<sup>73</sup>

In addition to Karpat, some other observers, such as Philip Robins, argued that the Baghdad Pact has resulted in a sense of discomfort or even threat in the more radical and less West-oriented Arab regimes, thus had negative outcomes for Turkey much more than being a fruitful and successful foreign policy initiative. According to Robins;

*Turkey consistently failed to appreciate that for the Arabs Britain and France were colonial powers, from which other Arab*

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<sup>70</sup>Türel Yılmaz, *Türkiye-İsrail Yakınlaşması...*, p.12.

<sup>71</sup>Ara Sanjian, *The Formation of the...*, p.254.

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid*, p.254.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid*, p.255.

*territories were, in the 1950s, still attempting to gain their independence. Ankara also failed to understand that the US was seen as the chief guarantor of the state of Israel and was becoming increasingly unpopular as it replaced Britain as the most influential Western power in the region.*<sup>74</sup>

Frankly speaking, the Pact did not result in the prospected positive consequences, rather it reinforced the negative image of Turkey as an agent of Western imperialism in the eyes of the regional countries and it indeed resulted in the growing nationalism and solidarity in the Arab countries. Turkey, however, did aim a similar objective when playing an active role in the formation of the Baghdad Pact. As mentioned before, the objective of Turkish foreign policy makers was to reinforce its geostrategic importance and its role in ensuring security for the alliance, and as a result to increase the economic and military aid that it received from Western countries by showing its geopolitical magnitude to the members of the alliance. As for the Turkish foreign policy makers, the Baghdad Pact was compatible with its above mentioned objectives since it resulted in the radicalization of the Arab countries and their rapprochement with the Soviet Union. In this context, the radicalization of the Arab countries and their rapprochement with the Soviet Union was evaluated by the Turkish leaders as an opportunity to prove their geopolitical and geostrategic importance and as a factor augmenting the alliance's need to Turkey for ensuring the regional security. This situation clearly shows how Turkey assessed the bipolar international system and the Cold War and how it tried to benefit from this system as a leverage to increase its importance in the eyes of its NATO allies.

In the midst of all these developments, in a surprising move, Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal Company on 26 July, 1956. The immediate response to this act was a French, British and Israeli joint attack on

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<sup>74</sup>Philip Robins, "Turkey and the Middle East", *Royal Institute for International Affairs, Chatham House Papers*, 1991, p. 25.

Egypt.<sup>75</sup> Although Turkey had no interest in the company, Ankara acted together with the Western countries in both First and Second London Conferences convened to cope with the crisis. Furthermore, Turkey's support enabled Britain to stay in Baghdad Pact. If Turkey had not supported Britain, Britain would have been expelled from the Pact.<sup>76</sup> Turkey, along with other members of the Baghdad Pact, except Britain, condemned the attack on Egypt. Turkey recalled its ambassador in Tel Aviv until the Palestinian problem was settled in fair sense and in accordance with the UN Resolutions, making clear, however, that this diplomatic act was made to strengthen the Baghdad Pact and was not a hostile attempt against Israel.<sup>77</sup> After Suez Crisis, Turkey pursued its diplomatic relations with Israel at the level of *chargé d'affaires*, though they generally were prominent and experienced diplomats. Nevertheless, Turkey did not completely break the diplomatic ties with Israel, as Ankara did not want to be deprived of the support of Jewish lobby in the United States.<sup>78</sup>

#### **2.2.4 The Peripheral Alliance or the Phantom Pact**

The Turkish elite distanced themselves from the Islamic countries of the Middle East due to both its preferences regarding its founding ideology and identity which was made in the 1920s and the current problems with these countries. The reflection of these developments on the elite-dominated character of Turkish foreign policy was surfaced with its cooperation attempts with Israel, particularly at the end of the 1950s. Israel was the only democratic and secular country in the region and its successful development attempts further impressed the Turkish elite. In sum, this era became a favorable period in Turkish-Israeli

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<sup>75</sup>Bülent Aras, *Palestinian-Israeli Peace Process...*, p.117.

<sup>76</sup>Hüseyin Bağcı, *Türk Dış Politikasında...*, p.81.

<sup>77</sup>Bülent Aras, *Palestinian-Israeli Peace Process...*, p.117, and Türel Yılmaz, *Türkiye-İsrail Yakınlaşması...*, p.15.

<sup>78</sup>Hüseyin Bağcı, *Türk Dış Politikasında...*, p.82.

relations.<sup>79</sup> The second half of 1950s emerged as the golden years of two countries although the level of diplomatic representation was low due to the Suez crisis. These two states with Iran constituted an unofficial alliance in order to prevent Soviet Union to intrude into the region and provoke Arab nationalism.<sup>80</sup>

According to Bengio, Turkey's change of heart towards Israel went through three phases: the first was Iraq's vote against Turkey over Cyprus at the United Nations in December 1957; the second, the establishment of the United Arab Republic (UAR) between Egypt and Syria in February 1958; and the third, the fall of the monarchy in Iraq in July 1958.<sup>81</sup> Bengio adds that:

*Another silent player who seemed to have contributed, first to the cooling of relations, then to rapprochement between Turkey and Israel, and ultimately to the formation of a peripheral alliance was the United States.*<sup>82</sup>

Given Turkey's preoccupation with its other Middle Eastern involvements during the 1950s, the first significant attempt at forging a Turkish-Israeli alliance after Turkey's initial recognition of Israel in 1949 came in 1958 on the heels of the collapsed Baghdad Pact.<sup>83</sup> The secret Israeli initiative, led by Prime Minister David Ben Gurion, attempted to break the ring of hostile Arab neighbors by allying Israel with the non-Arab periphery countries of the Middle East. Resting on the corners of Turkey, Iran, and Ethiopia, the most significant eventual secret agreements reached were with the two regional powers Turkey

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<sup>79</sup>Bülent Aras, *Palestinian-Israeli Peace Process...*, p.117.

<sup>80</sup>Meliha Benli Altunışık, "Soğuk Savaş Sonrası Dönemde Türkiye İsrail İlişkileri", in Meliha Benli Altunışık (ed.), *Türkiye ve Ortadoğu: Tarih, Kimlik, Güvenlik*, Boyut Publishing, İstanbul, 1999, p. 183.

<sup>81</sup>Ofra Bengio, *The Turkish-Israeli Relationship, Changing Ties of Middle Eastern Outsiders*, Palgrave-Macmillan, 2004, p.37.

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid*, p.39.

<sup>83</sup>Joshua Walker, *Turkey and Israel's Relationship...*, p.70.



and Iran. Despite the fact that both Turkey and Iran were involved, the alliances were established in a bilateral, as opposed a trilateral, way, thereby placing Israel strategically at the middle of the agreements.<sup>84</sup>

Ankara, despite its early acknowledgement of Israel representing a potential democratic pro-Western ally and strategic asset in the Middle East, was hesitant to improve relations with Israel at least overtly. This reluctance was due primarily to not wanting to inflame Arab public opinion, and particularly centered on Turkey's relations with Iraq. As a result of these sensitivities in the region, from the beginning of the Turkish-Israeli relationship, secrecy and subtlety were crucial. Given the highly inflammable nature of the Middle East and the ethnic tensions between and within neighboring Arab states and Turkey and Israel, each nation for its own reasons followed a self-imposed policy of confidentiality when dealing with the other.<sup>85</sup>

In addition to the aforementioned tensions that took place between Turkey and the Arab states in the second half of the 1950s, the overthrow of the regime in 1958 in Iraq and the establishment of United Arab Republic by Egypt and Syria added a further destabilizing element in the region. In particular, 1958 Iraqi revolution ushered in fundamental changes in Turkey's policy toward the region.<sup>86</sup> These conditions forced Turkey and Israel closer to each other. Israel's aim was, as mentioned, to establish relations with the countries beyond the Arab zone, namely with Turkey, Iran, and Ethiopia.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup>*Ibid*, p.70.

<sup>85</sup>*Ibid*, p.70.

<sup>86</sup>Gencer Özcan, *Türkiye İsrail İlişkilerinde Dönüşüm...*, p.21.

<sup>87</sup>Bülent Aras, *Palestinian-Israeli Peace Process...*, p.117, Mesut Özcan, *Filistin-İsrail Barış Süreci...*, p.69. and Gencer Özcan, *Türkiye İsrail İlişkileri...*, p. 332.

In 1958, Israel and Turkey forged a top secret alliance known as the "*peripheral alliance*" or the "*Phantom Pact*."<sup>88</sup> We learn from Bengio that, the concept of the peripheral alliance was first launched by a man who would later be a member of the Liberal Party in the Israeli Knesset, Baruch Uziel, in a series of lectures delivered before the establishment of the state of Israel. Uziel analyzed the fragile geopolitical situation of the embryonic state and suggested ways to consolidate it. He argued that the greatest danger to the Jewish state was the imperialistic idea behind the Arab countries, aimed at forming a large "*Arab confederation*" that would not tolerate the state of Israel in the middle of the Arab lands. To counter this danger, he said:

*Israel must develop a political orientation that would last for many years to come, and would seek allies among ethnic groups that lived under the same political conditions and faced the same dangers as Israel.*<sup>89</sup>

The idea was to forge "*a peripheral and minorities' alliance*" that would include "*the Jews in the land of Israel, the Maronites in Lebanon, the Alawis in Syria, Turks, Greeks, Armenians, the people of al-Jazira, Kurds, Assyrians and Persians.*"<sup>90</sup> All these peoples, who equaled the Arabs in number, and some of whom were even superior to them in their culture and military power could form an alliance that would be much stronger than the Arabs.

The Pact was brought to the agenda during an unannounced visit of Israeli leaders- Prime Minister Ben Gurion, Chief of Staff Zvi Zur, Foreign Minister Golda Meir and Undersecretary of Foreign Ministry Shimon Perez- on August 29 1958 to Turkey. The fact that the visit took place less than two months after the upheaval in Iraq proved how threatening the situation looked to Ankara, and demonstrated its

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<sup>88</sup>Ofra Bengio, *The Turkish-Israeli Relationship...*, p.33.

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid*, p.34.

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid*, p.34.

willingness to draw a line between its relations with the Arab world, especially with Iraq, and improve its relationship with Israel, with the latter gaining a greater share, although through secret channels.<sup>91</sup>

Ben Gurion-Menderes meeting was preceded by almost a year of intensive secret meetings and contacts between Israeli and Turkish officials in Turkey, Europe, and Washington. The leading Israeli negotiators were Foreign Minister Golda Meir, the political adviser to the Foreign Ministry, Reuven Shiloah, and the Israeli ambassador to Rome, Eliyahu Sasson. Although now based in Rome, Sasson had retained close ties with high-ranking Turkish officials from his time in Ankara and was instrumental in bringing about the rapprochement. He met Menderes in Paris at the end of 1957 and later sent him a letter that emphasized the importance of cooperation with Israel, as well as the need for Turkey to stand against anti-Israeli decisions in the Baghdad Pact. Interestingly, in early January 1958, Sasson met the Turkish Chief of Staff İbrahim Feyzi Mengüç in Rome, who encouraged him to pursue his efforts and promised his support for the rapprochement. Subsequently, Foreign Minister Meir visited Turkey secretly in the spring and met with the Turkish Foreign Minister Fatin Rüştü Zorlu. On August 2, she again met him secretly, this time in Zurich. Eventually, Israel was the initiator of these meetings, but in times of emergency, such as the period following the July 14 coup in Baghdad, the Turkish Foreign Minister approached Israel for consultation and asked for further information on the event, since she considered Israel to have good sources in the Arab world.<sup>92</sup>

The Periphery Pact, basically, in addition to the scientific and economic cooperation, set forth the cooperation of the member states against pan-Arab and communist movements in the region. However, the most

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<sup>91</sup>*Ibid*, p.42.

<sup>92</sup>*Ibid*, p.43.

prominent aspect of the Pact came out to be the network of intelligence named *Trident* established between the intelligence services of Turkey, Israel and Iran.<sup>93</sup> While almost fifty years have passed since the Phantom Pact was forged, there is still no consensus on the exact nature of the alliance. Given that the peripheral alliance was secret and has remained so until this day, there are no open archives or signed documents outlining the scope of the alliance. The Turkish point of view is minimalist. The minimalist Turkish version maintained that there were no written documents on the meeting; that Turkey did not commit itself to anything; that no regular high level talks were held between the two parties following the August 29 meeting; and that there was merely an understanding between them. It was conceded, however, that the meeting formed an important turning point for the exchange of intelligence between the two countries.<sup>94</sup> In contrast, Sezai Orkunt, the head of military intelligence between 1964 and 1966, maintained that there was an agreement regarding a joint operation of which only ten military and civilian officials knew about and he also mentions that the English version of the agreement could be found in the Turkish military archives.<sup>95</sup> The tight secrecy that Turkey maintained until this day about the alliance can be seen as an indication of its extreme sensitivity toward the Arab states and its fear of antagonizing them.<sup>96</sup>

The picture becomes much clearer when we approach the matter from the Israeli side which is not as minimalist as Turkish version. We learn from Bengio that, the agreement included cooperation on diplomatic, military and economic levels. In the diplomatic sphere it included joint public relations campaigns aimed at both governments and public

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<sup>93</sup>Çağrı Erhan, Ömer Kürkçüoğlu, *Filistin Sorunu...*, p.647.

<sup>94</sup>Ofra Bengio, *The Turkish-Israeli Relationship...*, p.43.

<sup>95</sup>Sezai Orkunt, *Türkiye ABD İlişkileri*, Milliyet Publishing, 1978, p.384.

<sup>96</sup>Ofra Bengio, *The Turkish-Israeli Relationship...*, p.44.

opinion. On the economic level, the two parties agreed on cooperation, particularly in regard to industrial development in Turkey and increased trade between the two countries. On the military level, agreements were reached for the exchange of intelligence, information, and joint planning for mutual aid in emergencies. For Israeli's perspective, the agreement was bilateral and that at least from the Israeli side it was viewed and referred to in top secret documents as an alliance and not as agreement.<sup>97</sup>

It is at least clear that, with respect to Turkish-Israeli relations the Pact envisaged an implicit cooperation between Turkey and Israel regarding military, security and diplomacy issues.<sup>98</sup> According to a report prepared by CIA, thanks to this cooperation, Israel could watch the Soviet Union through Turkey, and Turkey, in return, would be informed by the Israelis about the Arab League, in particular about Syria.<sup>99</sup> Soon after, another agreement was signed between the delegations of two parties about the mutual trade and agricultural issues. Subsequently, the military delegations started to convene regularly, and they prepared draft agreement on military issues which was known in detail by only ten high ranking agents from each party, as mentioned earlier. According to the agreement, it is understood that a joint "operation plan" was prepared.<sup>100</sup>

Issues regarding the military and security matters were the most important aspect of the alliance, since it was common strategic threats that had brought the two countries together. The Turkish military was eager to develop these relations, and on the whole its attitude towards

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<sup>97</sup>Ofra Bengio, *The Turkish-Israeli Relationship...*, p.44.

<sup>98</sup>Mesut Özcan, *Filistin-İsrail Barış Süreci...*, p.69.

<sup>99</sup>Türel Yılmaz, *Türkiye-İsrail Yakınlaşması...*, p.23.

<sup>100</sup>Gencer Özcan, *Türkiye İsrail İlişkileri...*, p.333.

Israel was far more positive than other sectors of the Turkish elite.<sup>101</sup> Military cooperation with Turkey, which in Israel was given the code name Merkava, was unique, being the only case of a military agreement between Israel and another country. Regular meetings were held every six months, alternately in each country, between the heads of military intelligence and possibly at times the chiefs of staff. The military cooperation included exchange of intelligence, views, and information; coordination and cooperation on various military issues; exchange of know-how in the field of military industry, and probably a lot more that is still classified.<sup>102</sup> Other forms of cooperation and coordination included a joint enterprise to manufacture mortars for Germany, Israel's sale of parachutes to the Turkish Air Force, its training of Turkish armed forces in various domains, and permission to the Israeli Air Force to train on Turkish territory, as well as the use of Turkish airspace for lifting military supplies to Iran and on to the Kurds of Iraq. It should also be mentioned that at one point Turkey showed interest in Israel's development of nuclear energy, but Israel was reserved about sharing information on this subject.<sup>103</sup>

The exploration of Turkey and Israel's Cold War attempt at forging a secret alliance reveals an interesting point. The structure of the international system within the framework of the Cold War made an overt Turkish-Israeli alliance politically impossible. Within the context of the Cold War, an overt alliance between Turkey and Israel would have certainly provoked a pro-Soviet counter-alliance, which would have brought a greater degree of Soviet influence into the region. Indeed, Turkey's own national interests dictated the need for flexibility

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<sup>101</sup>Ofra Bengio, *The Turkish-Israeli Relationship...*, p.51.

<sup>102</sup>*Ibid*, p.52.

<sup>103</sup>*Ibid*, p.53.

when dealing with its Arab neighbors and for being able to decouple its own relationship with Israel from other Arab states.<sup>104</sup>

Although close military links were established and Israel's desires to declare the relations to the international community, relations between Israel and Turkey remained, to a great extent, secret due to the fact that Turks wanted to avoid Arab reaction.<sup>105</sup> As a result, throughout the Cold War, while Turkey and Israel were able to secretly engage in military and intelligence cooperation, overt political alliances were out of the question, at least as long as there was no Arab-Israeli peace process.

The Turkish-Israeli axis of the peripheral alliance lasted formally for eight years and experienced many ups and downs. As time went on, the Arab factor gained greater importance in the Turkish-Israeli agenda, and added new multilateral dimensions beyond the bilateral one. The strategic threats that led Turkey to form the alliance with Israel began to lose their priority. By the end of 1963, Turkey started to improve relations with four potential sources of threat: the Soviet Union, Iraq, Syria and Egypt as a result of adopting a more multi-dimensional foreign policy to cope with the international challenges that Turkey face in a less strained Cold War environment.

### **2.3 Multi-Dimensional Foreign Policy**

The ten years from 1965 to 1975 marked a deep transformation of the bipolar international system of the Cold War. In this period, the international environment changed as a result of détente, and the hostilities between the two blocs were rather subsided. Some scholars argued that the international system could be described as a "loose

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<sup>104</sup>Joshua Walker, *Turkey and Israel's Relationship...*, p.72.

<sup>105</sup>Gencer Özcan, *Türkiye İsrail İlişkilerinde Dönüşüm...*, p.21.

bipolar system" in this time frame.<sup>106</sup> In this loose system the room for manoeuvre of the member states of the two blocks in foreign policy making significantly increased and they had the opportunity to adopt policies out of the bloc politics.

Thanks to the détente process, Turkey had also greater "relative autonomy" when composing its foreign policy and relations with the other countries.<sup>107</sup> The relative autonomy provided Turkey with greater room for manoeuvre in foreign policy and the western influence on Turkish foreign policy diminished. In particular, Turkey had the opportunity to act independently when dealing with the Cyprus issue and with the relations with the United States during the second half of the 1960s and the 1970s. Considerable rapprochement has been achieved with the Soviet Union and the non-aligned countries. As far as the relations with the Middle East region were concerned, Turkey followed a more flexible foreign policy and there has been a shift in its attitude in favour of the Arab countries. This autonomy has been so seriously perceived by the Western bloc that in 1967, the US ambassador in Ankara needed to ask Prime Minister whether Turkey was "*changing the axis*" or not.<sup>108</sup> William Hale defines this relative autonomy and the multi-dimensional character in Turkish foreign policy perceptions during the 1960s as "*partial disengagement*" which will then turn out to be a "*re-engagement*" in 1980s. In effect, Turkey now had more room for manoeuvre than it had during the earlier phase of the Cold War. In particular, it could take the risk of improving its relations with the Soviet Union and the non-aligned nations without endangering its national security.<sup>109</sup> The change in the global and the

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<sup>106</sup>Tayyar Arı, *Uluslararası İlişkiler ve Dış Politika*, Alfa Publishing, İstanbul, 2004, p.155.

<sup>107</sup>Baskın Oran, "Dönemin Bilançosu (1960-1980)", in Baskın Oran (ed.) *Türk Dış...*, p. 657.

<sup>108</sup>*Ibid*, p. 676.

<sup>109</sup>William Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy...*, p.146.



regional conditions led first to a "restoration" and then a "rapprochement" between Turkey and the Muslim Middle East.<sup>110</sup> It was inevitable that this restoration and rapprochement had its effect on the Turkish-Israeli relations. In the final analysis, while relations between Turkey and the Muslim Middle East have been experiencing a restoration and rapprochement, relations with Israel, on the other hand, has been low profile during this time period.

### **2.3.1 Policy Shift in Turkey and the End of the Affair**

The loosening of the tensions between the blocs gave Turkey the opportunity to diversify its foreign policy. From the mid-1960s onwards, besides the increasing economic conditions, Turkey started to pursue a multi-dimensional foreign policy in order to provide international support regarding the Cyprus cause. After the military coup in Turkey in 1960, the new leaders began to question the one-dimensional, western-dominated foreign policy because of the impact created by two external events. The first was the removal of Jupiter missiles from Turkey in order to solve the Cuban missile crisis. The second was the June 1964 Johnson letter incident. US President Johnson expressed his reluctance to support Turkey in the crisis over Cyprus and reminded Turkey not to use American weapons in operations other than NATO related ones.<sup>111</sup> Turkish foreign policy makers perceived the developments related to these two events as an example of how a superpower, when the need arose, could overlook the concerns and interests of a small ally.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup>Ramazan Gözen, *Amerikan Kiskacında Dış Politika...*, p.10.

<sup>111</sup>For further discussion regarding Johnson letter incident and crisis over Cyprus see, Süha Bölükbaşı, *Barışçı Çözumsuzlük; Ankara'nın ABD ve BM ile Kıbrıs Macerası*, İmge Publishing, Ankara, 2001.

<sup>112</sup>Bülent Aras, *Palestinian-Israeli Peace Process...*, p.118.

The Cyprus crisis, which erupted in December 1963 after three years of independent statehood for the island, had far-reaching implications for Turkey's worldview, priorities, foreign policy perceptions and relations with the outside world, including Israel. Israeli officials and scholars agree that the Cyprus problem was a turning point in Turkish-Israeli relations.<sup>113</sup> Almost immediately after the Johnson letter, the İnönü government decided to reduce reliance on the West and adopt a multi-dimensional foreign policy.<sup>114</sup> Similar to İnönü, Süleyman Demirel, who won the 1965 elections and came to power in Turkey, continued the multi-dimensional foreign policy concept. The Demirel version of multi-dimensional foreign policy concept included four tenets:

1. *Security of Turkey should be strengthened via diplomatic initiatives.*
2. *Turkey needs additional economic resources in order to continue its development.*
3. *Turkey should develop friendly relations with its neighbours regardless of their political regimes.*
4. *Turkey should seek support for its Cyprus cause in the international arena.*<sup>115</sup>

According to the program of ruling (1965-1971) Justice Party, Turkey left the bloc-politics which meant that Turkey should act in line with its Western allies and NATO. Rather, Turkey started to pursue friendly policies towards the neighbouring countries, especially the ones with which Turkey had religious and moral bonds.<sup>116</sup> Similarly, as a result of leaving the bloc-politics, enhancing the relations with the socialist countries was one of the objectives of the new government in Turkey.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>113</sup>Ofra Bengio, *The Turkish-Israeli Relationship...*, p.57.

<sup>114</sup>Süha Bölükbaşı, "Behind the Turkish-Israeli Alliance: A Turkish View", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol.29, No.1. Autumn 1999, p.25.

<sup>115</sup>Süha Bölükbaşı, *Barışçı Çözumsuzlük...*, p.158.

<sup>116</sup>Tanju Cılızoğlu, *Çağlayangil'in Anıları*, Bilgi Publishing, Ankara, 2007, p.181.

<sup>117</sup>*Ibid*, p.254.

In practice, it meant that Ankara wanted to improve relations with former foes, including the Soviet Union and the nationalist Arab states. Turkey's frustration by the US led it make new overtures to the Soviet Union, implying that the Soviet danger that had once united Turkey and Israel was now reduced significantly.<sup>118</sup> The improvement of relations with the Soviet Union took the form of closer economic ties. In March 1967, Ankara and Moscow signed the most far-reaching industrial assistance agreement Turkey had ever concluded with any state. The Soviet Union agreed to build a number of industrial plants in Turkey, including a steel mill, an aluminum smelter, and an oil refinery. By the end of the 1960s, Turkey had become the recipient of more Soviet economic assistance per year than any other country out of the Warsaw Pact.<sup>119</sup> These developments were so significant that, as mentioned before, in 1967 the US ambassador in Ankara needed to ask prime minister Demirel whether the Republic of Turkey had been changing axis or not.

The multi-dimensional foreign policy influenced Turkey's Middle East policy as well. As far as Turkish foreign policy was concerned, the western-oriented, aggressive policies towards Middle East during the 1950s that claimed leadership in the region, shifted towards a more neutral and Arab-friendly policies which depended on mutual respect between the Arab states and Turkey.<sup>120</sup> In these years, Turkey developed its relations not only with the Soviet Union and the East European states, but also with the non-Aligned movement and the Islamic Conference Organization to provide itself a multi-dimensional foreign affairs perspective.

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<sup>118</sup>Ofra Bengio, *The Turkish-Israeli Relationship...*, p.56.

<sup>119</sup>Süha Bölükbaşı, *Behind the Turkish-Israeli...*, p.26.

<sup>120</sup>Gencer Özcan, *Türkiye İsrail İlişkileri...*, p.333.

The change in Turkish-Western relations, however, was not a radical turning point in Turkey's pro-western foreign and security policies. It paved the way for an effort to generate a rapprochement of relations with the Arab countries but not at the expense of rupturing relations with Israel. Turkish foreign policy makers took a balanced approach towards the Arab-Israeli conflict. Their aim was to adopt a more independent, flexible and diversified approach in determining Turkey's Middle Eastern foreign policy in general. In this regard, Turkey tried to avoid appearing as a Western player in the region. In this new foreign policy line, Turkey would not initiate any pact nor would join in divisive political pacts.<sup>121</sup> Turkey, in its pursuit of diplomatic support at the UN over Cyprus, began to take the newly emerging developing world of states more seriously. For Ankara, the numbers game began to matter, and the Arabs offered more potential votes than solitary Israel.<sup>122</sup>

Aware of Turkey's vulnerability, the Arab countries began pressuring Ankara on the issue of its relations with Israel, making their support on the Cyprus issue conditional upon Turkey's severing ties with Israel. Representatives of the Arab countries in Ankara had started to coordinate their activities by early 1964, when relations between Turkey and Israel reached their peak. While warning Turkey of the negative impact that rapprochement with Israel might have on the Arab vote on Cyprus at the United Nations, they launched a political, diplomatic and popular campaign to explain their own point of view. Then in 1965, they offered to mobilize all 13 Arab countries to vote for Turkey at the United Nations if Ankara would completely break off diplomatic relations with Israel.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup>Bülent Aras, *Palestinian-Israeli Peace Process...*, p.118.

<sup>122</sup>Philip Robins, *Suits and Uniforms...*, p.242.

<sup>123</sup>Ofra Bengio, *The Turkish-Israeli Relationship...*, p.56.

By mid 1965 Turkey did adopt new guidelines in its Middle East policy, which were not favorable to Israel and aimed to:

1. *Maximizing efforts for achieving rapprochement with the Arabs.*
2. *Limiting relations with Israel to the minimum possible.*
3. *Not giving in to Arab pressures beyond this minimum.*
4. *Not permitting relations with Israel to obstruct rapprochement with the Arabs.*<sup>124</sup>

The Greek Cypriots, meanwhile, concerted their efforts to convince Israel to cut relations with Turkey. After the Turkish bombardment of Greek Cypriot positions in August 1964, Archbishop Makarios sent a circular to heads of state, including Israel's president Zalman Shazar, in which he referred to the "*barbaric*" Turkish action and "*the unprovoked and indiscriminate attacks*" in which hundreds were killed, and appealed to the international community to put an end to this crime against humanity. After consultation with Israel's prime minister and foreign minister, President Shazar sent Makarios a message in which he expressed sorrow on a "*humanitarian basis*" and explored the possibilities of sending aid. The circular and the reply, which were published in the Israeli media, triggered a wave of frustration and criticism from Turkish officials, the Turkish media, and the public at large. Prime Minister İnönü sent a message to Levi Eshkol saying that: "*we were dissapointed to see that this message was interpreted as a sign of support for the Archbishop*" and expressing the hope that relations between Turkey and Israel would be further strengthened by "*a close cooperation on the problem of Cyprus as well.*"<sup>125</sup> According to Turkish perspective, Turkey was the only Muslim country that had recognized and had close relations with Israel and had faced with the Arab reaction because of Israel, whereas Greece did not recognize

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<sup>124</sup>*Ibid*, p.57.

<sup>125</sup>*Ibid*, p.58.

Israel *de jure*, while Makarios, for his part, was improving relations with Israel's enemy, Egypt.

The Cyprus crisis left Israel on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, it did not wish to take sides in the conflict and tried to remain neutral. On the other, it knew very well, and made clear to Turkey, that its interests lay with the Turks for various historical, ideological, and political reasons, and, most important, because of their close association in the peripheral alliance.<sup>126</sup>

By the turn of 1964-65, the Foreign Ministry and all the political parties in Turkey came closer to the Arab side. The fundamental reason, as has been mentioned, was the "*bitter lesson*" of the Cyprus issue and the need to devise a new foreign policy that would be much more flexible, multi-dimensional and proactive, so as to appeal to countries or groups of countries with which Turkey had not always been on good terms, while the government of Cyprus was. These were the Soviet Union, the Arab states, and the Third World or the non-Aligned groups. These conditions, Bengio argues, together with the need of Turkish politicians and parties to cater to the more traditional and Islamist part of the population at home, and Israel's neutrality on the Cyprus issue, turned the Jewish state into more of a liability than an asset, and put an end to Jerusalem's hopes of upgrading relations, as it now had to fight against a reduction or freezing them altogether.<sup>127</sup>

The shift in Turkish foreign policy that occurred in the mid-1960s resulted in the attempts of Turkey to reconsider its relations with the Arab states. In 1966, the military cooperation with Israel was suspended unilaterally by the Turkish side, since the new rapprochement with the Arab world created a paradoxical situation with

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<sup>126</sup>*Ibid*, p.59.

<sup>127</sup>*Ibid*, p.61.

the military cooperation with Israel.<sup>128</sup> On 27 April 1966 the Turkish director of Military Intelligence, Sezai Orkunt, conveyed to the Israeli military attaché Turkey's decision to freeze relations, or as the Chief of Staff later put it, to "*dissolve the intelligence connection*".<sup>129</sup> This move was significant, because it put a formal end to the military aspect of the peripheral alliance.

### 2.3.2 Turkey's Tilt toward the Arab States

Along with this new foreign policy line, the most conspicuous approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict came during the 1967 war. According to Robins, Turkey's most successful approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict came around the 1967 war and illustrated a "*more independent, flexible, dynamic and diversified approach to the conduct of Turkish foreign policy*" and this period was one of the "*benevolent neutrality*", a philosophy which was to serve Turkey well as a model during the longer Iran-Iraq war.<sup>130</sup> Turkey not only did not allow the US to use the Incirlik Military Base in support of Israel in 1967, but also did not accumulate troops at the Syrian border which could be considered as the first signs of the shifting Turkish policy.<sup>131</sup> Turkish Foreign Minister İhsan Sabri Çağlayangil made the following statement in order to assure the Arabs: "*The military bases in Turkey were not going to be used against the Arabs by way of a fait accompli*". Later, when the Israeli occupation of large amounts of Arab lands became clear, he announced that "*Turkey was against territorial gains made by the use of force*".<sup>132</sup> In addition, Turkey became actively involved in

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<sup>128</sup>Gencer Özcan, *Türkiye İsrail İlişkileri...*, p.333.

<sup>129</sup>Ofra Bengio, *The Turkish-Israeli Relationship...*, p.64.

<sup>130</sup>Philip Robins, *Turkey and the Middle...*, p.78.

<sup>131</sup>Gencer Özcan, *Türkiye İsrail İlişkileri...*, p.334.

<sup>132</sup>Bülent Aras, *Palestinian-Israeli Peace Process...*, p.119.

humanitarian aid projects to the Arab countries. Ankara sent food, clothings and medicine to alleviate the sufferings of war.<sup>133</sup>

Furthermore, when the war was over, Turkey declared that Ankara was against territorial gains made by the use of force and sided with the Arab states in the adoption of UNSC Resolution 242.<sup>134</sup> After the war, Ankara adopted a decisively more pro-Arab stance. On June 22 1967, Çağlayangil addressed the UN General Assembly and called for "*the withdrawal of the Israeli forces from the territories they occupied.*"<sup>135</sup>

Turkey, however, stressed its respect for the right of all regional states to live within secure boundaries and avoided from labeling Israel as an aggressor state. Turkey's attempts were welcomed by the Arab states and it was exempted from the oil embargo following the 1967 War. Nevertheless, Turkey always drew the line between being a critic of Israel when necessary and being a supporter of destruction of Israel completely. For example, in September 1969 at Rabat meeting of Organization of the Islamic Conference (ICO), as an observer Turkey, with Iran, refused to join a decision which called for all the participants to break diplomatic relations with Israel.<sup>136</sup>

In consistence with the policy shift, Turkey re-evaluated its economic relations with the region in this period. In 1968, The Economic Council of Arab League put forward that the Arab countries should become partners in trade with Turkey, so Turkey would no more need trade with Israel. Next day, Turkish Foreign Minister Çağlayangil declared that he and his country would be pleased to develop closer economic

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<sup>133</sup>*Ibid.* p.119.

<sup>134</sup>Gencer Özcan, *Türkiye İsrail İlişkileri...*, p.334.

<sup>135</sup>Süha Bölükbaşı, *Behind the Turkish-Israeli...*, p.26.

<sup>136</sup>Gencer Özcan, *Türkiye İsrail İlişkileri...*, p.334.



ties with the Arab countries. In this context, in April 1969, Turkey cancelled the trade agreement with Israel.<sup>137</sup>

The fact that the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) appeared on the scene with respect to the Palestinian resistance against Israeli occupation during and after the Six Day War of 1967, had important ramifications for the bilateral relations. Following October 1968, many leftist youths in Turkey had been recruited into the camps in order to participate in the Palestinian cause and to get guerilla training. Israel, has always reminded Turkey of the close relations between the Palestinians and the illegal organizations that aimed to instabilize Turkey, namely, Kurdish or Armenian ones.<sup>138</sup>

Turkey pursued similar policies during the Yom Kippur War of 1973, of whose basic feature is to be at the same distance to the parties of conflict. Syria and Egypt asked for political support from Turkey during the crisis. The spokesman of the Turkish Foreign Ministry stated that *"Turkey does not approve of Arab lands being forcefully occupied by the Israelis and that it feels a lasting peace settlement is contingent upon the satisfaction of the legitimate demands of the Arab nations on this matter."*<sup>139</sup> In accordance with this policy, Turkey did not allow the US to use Incirlik Military Base to aid Israel. However, Turkey was blamed by US for allowing arms transfer from the Soviet Union to the Arab states. That is to say, Turkey supported the Arabs in a diplomatic sense during the 1973 War and acted together with the Arab states in the UN.<sup>140</sup> Thanks to this balanced attitude Turkey was again exempted from the oil embargo of 1973-74.

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<sup>137</sup>Meliha Benli Altunışık, *Soğuk Savaş Sonrası Dönemde...*, p.185.

<sup>138</sup>Gencer Özcan, *Türkiye İsrail İlişkilerinde Dönüşüm...*, p.29.

<sup>139</sup>Bülent Aras, *Palestinian-Israeli Peace Process...*, p.119.

<sup>140</sup>Meliha Benli Altunışık, *Soğuk Savaş Sonrası Dönemde...*, p.185.

After the 1973 War, rapprochement between the Turkey and the Arab states further developed at the expense of the relations with Israel. The Cyprus dispute and the oil crisis were the accelerators of this process. The policy of "*benevolent neutrality*" has changed during the 1970s and Turkey routinely supported Arab resolutions at the UN General Assembly. In addition to the Johnson letter, the arms embargo imposed by the US following Turkish intervention in Cyprus created further doubts in the minds of Turkish policy makers with respect to the pro-Western policies. Turkey felt itself isolated and gave pace to the multi-dimensional policy initiative. Especially the international political response that emerged after the Cyprus crisis in 1974, deepened the isolation feeling, and Turkish policy makers speeded up their attempts to gain international support for Cyprus cause, especially from the Muslim countries. Consequently, in January 1975 Turkey recognized the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinians, and in November 1975, voted for the UN General Assembly Resolution that equated Zionism with racism.<sup>141</sup>

The re-evaluation in Turkish foreign policy behavior also led to the re-formulating of official Turkish attitude towards the PLO. It is possible to argue that Turkey had maintained a decisive stance on the Question of Palestine since the end of the 1940s. The events of the year 1974 constituted a major turning point in the problem of the Palestinian people. The PLO and Arafat received international recognition from the international community and obtained observer status in the UN. The PLO was also recognized as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Turkey voted in favor of the Palestinians in all resolutions that came to the UN agenda in 1974. This stance was a shift from its earlier attitude to act with the Western bloc towards the question of Palestine. The independent Turkish attitude, namely that of support, was first expressed in 1975. Although Turkey had expressed reservations about the PLO during its early days, Ankara established

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<sup>141</sup>Philip Robins, *Suits and Uniforms...*, p.243.

contact with it through the Turkish embassy in Cairo in January 1975. The 1974 Arab Summit meeting seems to have influenced this "verbal" recognition of the PLO.<sup>142</sup>

Turkey believed, from the early 1950s onwards, that the recognition of the legitimate rights of the Palestinians including their right to establish their own state and self-determination was the only formula for the solution of the Question of Palestine. Following this recognition, two important figures from the Political Bureau of the PLO arrived in Turkey respectively in 1975 and in 1976 to discuss developing relations between Turkey and the PLO and setting up a PLO office in Ankara. The verbal recognition finally formalized by the decision of the Ecevit government to give the PLO diplomatic status. Arafat, the leader of the PLO, came to Turkey to open the office in Ankara in October 1979.<sup>143</sup>

The unprecedented increase in oil prices worsened Turkish-EC economic and political relations, compounded deterioration of Turkish-American relations (because of Turkey's military intervention in Cyprus) were the important developments related to the Turkish foreign policy in the aftermath of 1973 war. A combination of these factors contributed to the departure from a monotrack foreign policy and to further rapprochement with Arab states through growing economic ties with the region.<sup>144</sup>

Due to this new multi-dimensional policy approach, Turkey reconsidered its economic relations with the Arab states and sought to expand trade opportunities with these countries. In this context, as mentioned above, Turkey nullified the trade agreement with Israel in

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<sup>142</sup>Bülent Aras, *Palestinian-Israeli Peace Process...*, p.121.

<sup>143</sup>*Ibid*, p.121.

<sup>144</sup>*Ibid*, p.120.

1969.<sup>145</sup> The percentage of Middle Eastern countries in Turkey's exports increased from %10.9 in 1977 to %37.6 in 1982. In the same period Israel's percentage dropped from %0.4 to %0.1. Meanwhile, the Iraq-Turkey crude oil pipeline started to operate and provide Turkey for 400 million dollars revenue annually. Financial relations also developed between the Arab states and Turkey in this period. In particular, Turkey got loans from Arab financial institutions worth 350 million dollar in 1986.<sup>146</sup>

To sum up, one must keep in mind that Turkey's closer relations with the Arab states mostly stemmed from the deteriorating economic conditions of Ankara and the need for support for the Cyprus conflict. In addition to economic conditions and the need for support for the Cyprus cause, Sander correctly stresses one simpler external factor ushered in the normalization of the Turkish-Arab relations: the deteriorating relations between Turkey and the United States.<sup>147</sup> According to Altunışık, the two important reasons of the shifting foreign policy of Turkey towards the Arab states that emerged in the mid 1960s were the need for international support of Turkish foreign policy in the international arena in particular in UN regarding its Cyprus cause, and the increasing economic expectations of Turkish side from the oil rich Arab countries. In addition, the structural changes that took place in the international politics such as the *détente* period further created convenient conditions for the Turkish foreign policy makers to embark on good relations with the pro-Soviet Arab states. This development, to some extent, gave room for manoeuvre for the countries such as Turkey, to conduct more flexible policies in order to pursue national interests rather than pursuing inter-bloc policies. Finally, the structural changes in the Middle East itself further created

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<sup>145</sup>Meliha Benli Altunışık, *Soğuk Savaş Sonrası Dönemde...*, p.185.

<sup>146</sup>*Ibid*, p.185.

<sup>147</sup>Oral Sander, *Türkiye'nin Dış Politikası*, İmge Publishing, Ankara, 2000, p.233.

convenient conditions for Turkey to develop good relations with the region. The fall of the radical states, and, on the other hand, the rise of the conservative nations, put an end to the so called Arab Cold War and enabled Turkey to develop its relations with the Arab states.<sup>148</sup>

However, these neutral, or maybe pro-Arab, policies did not yield any corps for Turkey in terms of international political support on Ankara's vital issues. The facts that Turkish leftist militants were receiving armed training in PLO camps in Lebanon, that the PLO's welcoming of the Kurdish terrorism in Turkey, and the Greek Cypriot position that calls for the Turkish withdrawal from the island, all made the Turkish policy makers to reconsider the rapprochement with the Arab countries in expense of the relations with Israel. Despite these hostile acts of the Arab states, meanwhile, according to the Israelis, *Enosis* was an unacceptable claim. A memorandum composed in Israel explained the position of Israelis on the Cyprus dispute. On the one hand, Israel's "abstract and traditional acknowledgement of the right of self-determination"; and "moral debt" to many of island's inhabitants who, during the British mandatory period, assisted Jewish immigration to Palestine, favored endorsement of the Greek claim. On the other hand, Israeli-British relations, Israeli-Turkish relations, and Israel's chilly relations with Greece, combine to overwhelmingly demand the rejection of *Enosis*:<sup>149</sup>

*Once the two set of arguments were weighed against each other, rejection appear the obvious choice. Even more so once the unmistakably chilly Israeli-Greek relations were taken into account... The consistently frosty relations between Greece and Israel and the enormous importance Israel attached to its relations with Turkey made the point clear.*<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>148</sup>Meliha Benli Altunışık, *Soğuk Savaş Sonrası Dönemde...*, p.189.

<sup>149</sup>Amikam Nachmani, *A Triangular Relationship...*, p.2.

<sup>150</sup>*Ibid*, p.2.

That is to say, with respect to the most vital foreign policy issue of Turkey, while Arab states were supporting the Greek thesis despite the neutral or pro-Arab policy of Turkey starting from 1960s, the Israelis did not seem to jeopardize their relations with Turkey and so supported the Turkish thesis.

### **2.3.3 Relations during the 1980s**

By the end of 1970s, the interaction of the Soviet acts (Soviet interventions in Angola, Ethiopia and Afghanistan) and the US political trends (The rightward trend in American domestic politics) confirmed the view that the Cold War still persisted and detente could not last. As a result, the hostility between the superpowers came back and the winds of Cold War started to blow again. Leftist Sandinist movement's achievements in Nicaragua in 1979, the Iranian Revolution in February 1979 and the consequent loss of a loyal ally in the region, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 and the consequent Soviet threat to the Middle East led the US policymakers to revise their foreign policy towards the Middle East region. In this context, in the 1980s, the US replaced Carter Doctrine with a more assertive Reagan Doctrine. Especially the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iranian Revolution increased the concerns of US and led it develop new strategic and political projects regarding the Middle East region. Seeking regional allies in order to launch the Rapid Deployment Force (RDF) in the region the US needed the support of the regional countries, in particular Saudi Arabia and Turkey. As a consequence, the US administration revised its policy towards Turkey and thanks to the conclusion of the Defence and Economic Cooperation Agreement (DECA) in 1980 the arms embargo has been lifted and Turkey once again started to receive great amount of military and economic aid from the United States.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>151</sup>Ramazan Gözen, *Amerikan Kıskaçında Dış Politika...*, p.19.

The room for manoeuvre and the opportunity to act autonomously from the bloc politics of the member states of the blocs, in particular Turkey, in foreign policymaking diminished since the Cold War increased its severity once again in the 1980s. This shift in the structure of international system and the initiation of the so called "Second Cold War" had its impact on Turkey and contributed to its re-rapprochement with the West, in particular with the US. Indeed, the US re-invented Turkey's geopolitical importance thanks to the Second Cold War and Turkey did accept its role within this context.

In addition to the developments in the structure of the international system and its impact on the Middle East region, developments that took place inside Turkey also contributed to its perceptions towards the region in the 1980s. Turkey welcomed the 1980s with a military coup in September 1980, a new constitution in 1982 and a new Prime Minister Turgut Özal who was pro-Western. Besides Özal, the new President of Turkey, General Kenan Evren was also a pro-Western politician and tried hard to develop close relations with the countries in the Middle East region. All these developments ushered in a rapprochement between Turkey and the Middle Eastern countries after a restoration process that took place since the second half of the 1960s.<sup>152</sup>

As mentioned above, Turgut Özal came to power in Turkey in 1983. Özal was seen by some observers as the right person who could evaluate thoroughly the new developments in the world and in the region and implement the policies which were compatible with the conditions that had been imposed on Turkey and on the region by the new structure of the international system. Turgut Özal, the prime minister between 1983 and 1989 and President between 1989-1993 of Turkey, brought an increasingly activist and internationalist approach to Turkish foreign policy. Özal made efforts to persuade the West that Turkey's geopolitical importance has not diminished in the post-Cold

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<sup>152</sup>*Ibid*, p.18.

War era. Especially after 1989, Özal felt himself free from military dominance in Turkish internal politics and from international isolation that Turkey had faced because of the 1980 military coup. Özal, thus, has been able to apply his principles thoroughly to foreign policy between 1989 and 1993 since the military's effect on politics decreased. The foreign policy perceptions of the military leaders took up power in 1980 was nevertheless not contradictory with that of Özal's. Another fundamental reason underlying Özal's activism was the new environment that Turkey faced after the end of the Cold War and the way Özal prescribed the new environment. Özal saw the end of the Cold War as an opportunity for Turkey. From his perspective, the collapse of the communist bloc freed the Turkish republics and dissolved the system in neighbouring region, which had prevented Turkey from developing good relations with these regions. Together with the Turkish republics and the Balkan countries, the Arab Middle East emerged as one of the opportunities that Turkish foreign policy could benefit.

During the 1980s, Turkish foreign policy was composed in parallel with the United States and similar to the era of Menderes, a harmonized foreign policy was adopted, in particular towards the Middle East. In this regard, the consent given to the Greece's return to the NATO's military section without receiving anything in return according to the Rogers Plan and the agreements concluded with the US regarding the RDF are worth mentioning.

As far as the Middle East region concerned, one of the most important developments affecting Turkey's relations with the region in the 1980s has been the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war. The War created great economic opportunities for Turkey and compensated the trade loss with the European countries stemmed from their reluctance to pursue good relations with a country who had undergone a military administration and broke the fundamental rules of human rights. US, on the other



hand, was eager to restore its relations with Turkey because of the above-mentioned reasons. In sum, in 1980s, Turkey on the one hand, had close relations with the Middle East region in economic, cultural and political terms. On the other hand, economic, political and military relations with the US were very close as well. The DECA signed in 29 March 1980 had been the legal and political framework of these close relations that had ever been witnessed since the 1950s.<sup>153</sup>

The US was also encouraging Turkey for developing the relations with the Middle East. According to the US foreign policy perceptions in the 1980s, the notion of Islam which is anti-Soviet was seen as a natural ally against the Soviet Union. Thus, there was an assumption that the harmonized Islam and the interest of the United States converged.<sup>154</sup> It is obvious that Islam referred here is the one which did not have an anti-Western character such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Pakistan and Turkey. In this context, the close relations between Turkey and the Middle East countries which are pro-Western and controllable like Turkey was compatible with the US interests in the region. Therefore, the United States supported and even encouraged the rapprochement between Turkey and the pro-Western Muslim countries. Alexander Haig admitted in a speech in 1985 that he had efforts in Turkey to encourage the rapprochement between Turkey and pro-Western Muslim countries.<sup>155</sup> Like Turkey, these anti-Soviet countries were supported by the US without taking into consideration their political regime or the level of their democracy. Being the worldwide proponent of democracy

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<sup>153</sup>*Ibid*, p.19.

<sup>154</sup>Ufuk Güldemir, *Çevik Kuvvetin Gölgesinde Türkiye: 1980-1984*, Tekin Publishing, 1986, p.22. According to Güldemir, the champion and the most enthusiastic proponent of this argument in Carter administration was the National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski.

<sup>155</sup>*Ibid*, p.70 and 71.

and the human rights, the US supported its antidemocratic allies at the expense of contradicting with its own principles.<sup>156</sup>

The rapprochement with the Arab states as a result of the above-mentioned international and regional circumstances had its impact on the Turkish-Israeli relations as well. Thus, during the 1980s, relations between Israel and Turkey were inevitably low-profile and shadowed by the Arab tilt of Turkey. As a consequence, Ankara's pro-Arab tilt seemed to continue throughout the first half of the 1980s, with Turkish prime ministers and foreign ministers periodically declaring that peace in the Middle East required Israeli withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967 and recognition of the Palestinian legitimate rights.<sup>157</sup> In fact, the military regime in Turkey which came to power in 1980 represented a slowdown in multi-dimensional policy efforts and like 1950s Turkish foreign policy became, to a great extent, dependant on Washington.<sup>158</sup> The fact that Turkish President Kenan Evren had his visits mainly to Muslim countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Gulf States, Egypt, Tunisia and Pakistan, can be explained by US encouragements aimed at Turkey taking its role in Wohlsetter Doctrine.<sup>159</sup> According to this Doctrine, in order to thwart the Soviet Union from taking advantages of the crisis in the Gulf region, the US should establish a *Muslim Tier* from Turkey to Pakistan in which the included states have good relations among themselves.<sup>160</sup> Turkish-American relations at the

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<sup>156</sup>During the 1980s the US Administration justified this paradoxical situation by adopting the views of Jeane Kirkpatrick. Jeane Kirkpatrick wrote an article 1979 named "Dictatorships and Double Standarts". In this article it is advised to the US Administration that the US should support its allies without taking into consideration their political regimes and should not force them to liberalize their regime. For further discussion about this point see James Mann, *Şahinlerin Yükselişi, Bush'un Savaş Kabinesinin Gerçek Hikayesi*, İlk Publishing, İstanbul, 2004, pp.131-134.

<sup>157</sup>Süha Bölükbaşı, *Behind the Turkish-Israeli...*, p.28.

<sup>158</sup>Burcu Bostanoğlu, *Türkiye-ABD İlişkilerinin Politikası*, İmge Publishing, Ankara, 1999, p.353.

<sup>159</sup>For further discussion about "Wholsetter Doctrine" and its impact on Turkish foreign policy during the 1980s see Ufuk Güldemir, *Çevik Kuvvetin Gölgesinde...*, pp.40-48.

<sup>160</sup>Burcu Bostanoğlu, *Türkiye-ABD İlişkilerinin...*, p.358.

beginning of 1980s, thus, as Rubin points out, entered its closest era that had ever been between the two countries.<sup>161</sup>

Meanwhile, in this time frame, the Turkish policy makers realized that they would gain no support for their Cyprus cause from the Arab states, or for any other foreign policy issue such as the oppression policies conducted by the Bulgarians over the Turkish minority. However, economically, Turkey was still, to some extent, dependant on the Middle East. Especially after the fall of the Iranian Shah, with the increasing oil prices, Turkey underwent hard economic conditions. That is to say, one of the two aforementioned fundamental bases -politically, the need of international support regarding the Cyprus issue, and economically the hope to benefit from the oil rich Arab countries-underlying the Turkish-Arab rapprochement had obviously failed, but the other one was still valid, so Turkey had to wait for the mid-1980s to develop closer ties with Israel at the expense of the Arab states. Meanwhile, at the beginning of the 1980s, the fact that the Knesset enacted a basic law declaring the annexation of Jerusalem as the immutable capital of the state of Israel attracted Turkey's reaction and added further reasons for Turkey to wait to develop closer ties with Israel the mid-1980s. Turkey protested Israeli law declaring that Ankara would not accept this *fait accompli*.<sup>162</sup> Besides this, Turkey shut down its consulate in Jerusalem and reorganized the diplomatic relations with Israel decreasing the level of representation from *chargé d'affaires* level to second secretariat level. Furthermore, in this regard, Turkish Airlines cancelled its Istanbul-Tel Aviv flights.<sup>163</sup> Turkish President Kenan Evren, while visiting the Arab states in 1982, stated that the instability in the region stems from Israel. According to some observers, the Saudi's promise of a \$250 million loan and further

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<sup>161</sup>*Ibid*, p.359.

<sup>162</sup>Bülent Aras, *Palestinian-Israeli Peace Process...*, p.123.

<sup>163</sup>Türel Yılmaz, *Türkiye-İsrail Yakınlaşması...*, p.18.

development of the mutual trade contributed to Turkey's decision.<sup>164</sup> Turkey's such policy also worried the United States, and 61 members of Senate wrote a letter to the Turkish ambassador in Washington warning that Turkey's tough policy towards Israel could worsen the Turkish-American relations as well.<sup>165</sup> As a result, this period of the Turkish-Israeli relations, labeled as the period of slowdown.<sup>166</sup>

The occupation of Lebanon by Israel in 1982, while attracting Turkey's reaction, paradoxically started a new era in Turkish-Israeli relations. The headquarters and main training camps of two Armenian militia groups, ASALA (Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia) and JCAG (Justice Commandos of the Armenian Genocide), were located in Lebanon. During the occupation, Tel Aviv asked for cooperation in destroying these camps together, and Turkey welcomed this offer. Subsequently, these camps were destroyed completely by the Israeli troops together with Turkish agents and the leader of JCGA, among with the other terrorists were killed.<sup>167</sup> As a result of the joint operations the Israelis submitted a report to their Turkish counterparts regarding the documents that they obtained during the operations. The most shocking part of the report was its revealing of the fact that how the leader of PFLP (Front for the Liberation of Palestine), George Habbash, whose organization was considered as a friendly one, provided support to the ASALA terrorists.<sup>168</sup>

The appointment of Yehuda Millo as the *chargé d'affaires* to Ankara, and subsequently the appointment of Ekrem Güvendiren, who is a

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<sup>164</sup>Süha Bölükbaşı, "Türkiye ve İsrail: Mesafeli Yakınlıktan Stratejik Ortaklığa", in Şaban Çalış, İhsan Dağı, Ramazan Gözen (eds.), *Türkiye'nin Dış Politika Gündemi: Kimlik, Demokrasi, Güvenlik*, Liberte Publishing, Ankara, 2001, p.255.

<sup>165</sup>Türel Yılmaz, *Türkiye-İsrail Yakınlaşması...*, p.20.

<sup>166</sup>Meliha Benli Altunışık, *Soğuk Savaş Sonrası Dönemde...*, p.188.

<sup>167</sup>Çağrı Erhan, Ömer Kürkçüoğlu, "Arap Olmayan Devletler İle İlişkiler", in Baskın Oran (ed.) *Türk Dış Politikası, Volume II...*, p.151.

<sup>168</sup>Türel Yılmaz, *Türkiye-İsrail Yakınlaşması...*, p.28.

senior diplomat, to Tel Aviv increased the level of diplomatic relations *de facto*. This fact is assessed as the speeding up the rapprochement between the countries.<sup>169</sup> When the Palestinian state was declared on 15 November 1988, Turkey immediately recognized the new state. Beside this decision, Turkey did not change the level of the Palestinian representative in Ankara in order to pursue its policy of balance between Israel and the PLO.<sup>170</sup>

The remainder of the 1980s was a period of incremental improvement in bilateral relations between the two countries. In 1986, the Turkish national airline company, Turkish Airlines, re-started direct flights between Israel and Turkey. In the same year the Israelis added a second diplomat to their mission in Ankara. In 1987, the two countries resumed meetings of their foreign ministers in New York at the UN General Assembly. A political dialogue was initiated in 1986. The two sides built up the nature of the exchanges in terms of venue, agenda and levels of representation over a two-year period. At first, the meetings took place on neutral territory in Geneva, were confined to bilateral issues and were limited in terms of participation to the respective Foreign Ministry research centers. Meetings later moved in stages to İstanbul and then to Ankara; participation was expanded to involve junior diplomats, then directors-general, rising finally to be headed by deputy foreign ministers. As a result of this process, a nucleus of a strategic dialogue had commenced with a long agenda which ranged over the panorama of regional issues and included Russian policy towards the Middle East.<sup>171</sup>

In spite of the incremental improvement in ties in the second half of the 1980s, these remained essentially subterranean. Senior Israelis

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<sup>169</sup>Gencer Özcan, *Türkiye İsrail İlişkileri...*, p.339.

<sup>170</sup>*Ibid*, p.339.

<sup>171</sup>Philip Robins, *Suits and Uniforms...*, p.246.

realized that bilateral relations with Turkey were mortgaged to the Arab-Israeli dispute, and care was shown in ensuring that Turkey was not pressured or embarrassed. Consequently, Israel contented itself with discreetly improving bilateral ties, while enticing Turkey in the direction of better relations, notably through indicating its potential usefulness to Turkey in Washington. In Washinton, Israel came increasingly to assist Turkey between 1987 and 1989, though this was mostly performed indirectly rather than through direct advocacy. Arguably, the greatest achievement in Washington for Turkey during this period was the alteration of the traditionally pro-Greek stance of the Israeli lobby to a position of neutrality between Greece and Turkey. In turn, Israel also increasingly urged Jewish groups in the United States not to support the Armenian lobby in its pursuit of Turkey for the mass deaths of Armenians in Anatolia during the First World War. The pro-Israel lobby is even said to have played a role in actively assisting Turkey in the narrow defeat of Armenian inspired draft resolution to the Senate in 1989 denouncing the massacres, although the influence of the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee in this activity should not be exaggerated.<sup>172</sup>

This cooperation could initiate the intensified cooperation of 1990s in that years, but the *Intifada*, started in 1987, delayed this process. As proof of the vulnerability of relations to the developments in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the emergence of the *Intifada* brought a new face to the bilateral relations of Turkey, both with the Israelis and the Palestinians. The uprising succeeded in enlisting the sympathies of the Turkish people. The struggle between heavily armed groups and unarmed civilians, seen in the media, increased the support of Palestinians in Turkey. Intifada interrupted the improvements in the relations with Israel since the mid-1980s.<sup>173</sup> The *Intifada* made the Palestinians the central focus of the Arab-Israeli issue for Turkey. In its

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<sup>172</sup>*Ibid*, p.247.

<sup>173</sup>Bülent Aras, *Palestinian-Israeli Peace Process...*, p.126.

approach towards Israel and the Palestinians, Ankara tried to retain balance, and to use its endorsement as an inducement to encourage the PLO to moderate its policy.

**CHAPTER 3**  
**RELATIONS DURING THE POST-COLD WAR**  
**AND POST-GULF WAR ERA**

**3.1 General**

The bipolar structure of the international system that survived during the Cold War period has dramatically changed after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the Warsaw Pact. In the beginning of the 1990s, this change has been called by the US President George Bush as the "New World Order". As a matter of fact, President Bush was not the first US president referring the concept of the new world order. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the aftermath of both the first and the second world wars US presidents referred the new international system as the new world order since the structure of the international system changed dramatically after these two world wars as well. Similarly, when President Bush talked about the new world order, the structure of the international political system was transforming. In the aftermath of 45 years of Cold War period, the entire world has witnessed a strange political atmosphere in which the bipolarity has collapsed and the US emerged as the only global superpower. In many regions in the world such as the Balkans, the Middle East, the Central Asia or the Caucasus the political and strategic landscape has transformed enormously and power vacuums have occurred. In order to fill these power vacuums many states which previously acted as loyal members of the blocs needed, from now on ,

These fundamental changes that emerged in the structure of the international system had its impact on the Middle East region as well. First of all the Soviet Union, the main supporter and supplier of the anti-Western Arab countries, no longer had the power and ability to support its satellites in the region. Bipolarity was over and from now



on, the US was the only superpower that had the intention and the ability to interfere into the regional politics.

The invasion of Kuwait by Iraq on 2 August 1990 was undoubtedly the most important event which had the potential to change the balance of power in the region. After the invasion, a US led coalition was set up which had its impact on the military, diplomatic and international law spheres and ultimately Iraq was forced to retreat from Kuwaiti territories. The Gulf War had serious ramifications for the region. First of all, it was clearly understood by the entire world that the Western bloc led by the US was unrivalled both politically and militarily and was determined to preserve this new order by war when necessary. In other words, it was proved that the two fundamental pillars of the new world order, human rights and the market economy, would be protected by war.<sup>174</sup> As far as the regional balance of power was concerned, after the war the military capabilities of Iraq was destroyed and as a result the balance of power was protected in favour of the pro-Western countries against the anti-Western countries who could interrupt the continuous flow of oil into the Western markets with reasonable prices and threaten the security of Israel. In the final analysis, as mentioned above, the Gulf War proved that the US was the only leader of the world after the Cold War and it could preserve its leadership and the new world order by its military capabilities.

Another development that had been witnessed in the Middle East after the Cold War was the peace process between Israel and the Arab countries. The peace process in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has taken shape over the years, despite the ongoing violence in the Middle East and an "all or nothing" attitude about a lasting peace, which prevailed for most of the twentieth century. Since the 1970s there has been a parallel effort made to find terms upon which peace can be agreed to in both the Arab-Israeli conflict and in the Palestinian-Israeli

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<sup>174</sup>Baskın Oran, "Dönemin Bilançosu (1990-2001)", in Baskın Oran (ed.) *Türk Dış...*, p.210.

conflict. Some countries have signed peace treaties, such as the Egypt-Israel (1979) and Jordan-Israel (1994) treaties, whereas some have not yet found a mutual basis to do so like Syria. By 1990s, thanks to the peace process Israel got rid of the regional isolation that it had been prone to since its foundation in 1948.<sup>175</sup>

The newly emerging international system and the regional developments had their impact on the foreign policy perceptions of Turkey as well. It is even argued that "*with the exception of Germany, surely no other Western state has been much affected by the recent changes in the international system such as Turkey*".<sup>176</sup> These developments drastically altered Turkey's foreign policy environment, creating opportunities to expand its role while also presenting new risks and challenges.

First of all, the peace process that began in Madrid in 1991 opened up a new foreign policy opportunity for Turkey. This process freed Turkey from the difficulty of balancing between Arab countries and Israel. The peace process also "*removed the last barrier to the betterment of the relations between Turkey and Israel*".<sup>177</sup> In addition, seeing that the Arab states were normalizing relations with Israel and even concluding peace treaties lifted the Arab embargo, if there has been one, on the Turkish-Israeli relations to a great extent. Turkey felt free to develop relations with Israel without taking into consideration the reactions of the Arab countries. It is worth mentioning here that the tensions between Israel and the Arab countries and Israel's attitude towards the

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<sup>175</sup>For a comprehensive analysis of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the peace process see, Mark Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, Indiana University Press, 1994 and Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*, Norton, 2001.

<sup>176</sup>Philip Robins, *Suits and Uniforms...*, p.11.

<sup>177</sup>Meliha Benli Altunışık, "Turkish Policy Toward Israel" in Alan Makovsky and Sabri Sayari (eds.), *Turkey's New World: Changing Dynamics in Turkish Foreign Policy*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2000, p.60.

Palestinian civilians had always their impact on Turkish perceptions and attitudes regarding Israel.

Second, the fundamental threat to Turkey's security emanating from the north, the Soviet Union, was collapsed. This had significant impact on Turkish foreign policy. First, it was thought that the geopolitical and geostrategic importance of Turkey and as a result the economic and the military aid that it received from the West would be diminished.<sup>178</sup> Second, the dissolution of the Soviet Union enabled Turkey to adopt a more activist and self-confident foreign policy towards the regions which the Soviet Union retreated, especially the Turkic republics that became independent after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Some groups in Turkey started to emphasize the beginning of a new era where Turkey's power and influence would increase "from the Adriatic Sea to the Chinese Wall". In addition, with the end of the Cold War, the foreign policy opportunities of Turkey's out of bloc politics was expected to expand. This expansion was realized to some extent. The fear of diminishing geopolitical importance, however, led the Turkish policymakers to limit their room for manoeuvre in foreign policy voluntarily in order to show that the Western countries still needed Turkey when dealing with the Middle East region.

Last but not least, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait presented Turkey with some inescapable problems. First, in view of its proximity to the area in general and Iraq in particular, the regional balance of power was of critical interest to Turkey. The question was how best to go about curbing Iraqi power without upsetting the precarious balance in other directions. Second, the geostrategic importance of Turkey in Iraq's supply lines meant that Ankara came under immediate pressure to act

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<sup>178</sup>Indeed, Robins states that "Turkey has gone from being a peripheral player in a global, bipolar conflict to being a central actor in a raft of actual or potential regional conflicts; as a state, it has literally gone from flank to front." For further discussion regarding the Turkish foreign policy during 1990s see Philip Robins, *Suits and Uniforms; Turkish Foreign Policy Since The Cold War*, University of Washington Press, Seattle 2003.

against Iraq. Turkey was, together with Saudi Arabia and to a lesser extent with Jordan, fundamental to any attempt to impose an economic embargo upon Baghdad. Together with Saudi Arabia, Turkey had a crucial role to play if Iraq was to be deprived of its ability to export crude oil. Third was the question of Turkey's long term relations with the Middle East and the Arabs in particular. The invasion of Kuwait was so profound a development that Turkey could not remain disinterested. Fourth, the swift involvement of the US and certain of its immediate European allies in the crisis meant that Turkey's actions in the context of the crisis would also help to mould its future relations with the West in general and the Americans in particular.<sup>179</sup>

As far as the Middle East region is concerned, in addition to the above-mentioned international and regional environment the internal developments took place in Turkey in 1990s also pulled Turkey into the region. The northern threat to Turkish security (the Soviet Union) was replaced by the southern one. The instable and insecure situation that emerged in the neighboring Middle East after the Gulf War coincided with the Kurdish and the political Islam questions in Turkey. This situation altered the threat perception of Turkey and the Soviet Union was replaced by the neighboring Middle East. As a result, a regional threat perception that is clearly linked with internal problems determined the Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East region during the 1990s. In this context, the tensions between Turkey and the anti-Western countries of the region such as Iran and Syria, who had conflicts with Israel too, contributed to the rapprochement between Israel and Turkey in the 1990s.

In the final analysis, the new structure of the international system, the collapse of bipolarity, and its impact on the regional developments and Turkish foreign and security policies helped the relations between Israel and Turkey reaching a strategic cooperation or strategic partnership

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<sup>179</sup>Philip Robins, *Turkey and the Middle...*, p.68.

level. However, regarding the new character of the bilateral relations between Israel and Turkey, the first thing that must be understood about the relationship is that, for a very long time, "*Israel was eager to develop it, and Turkey was reticent.*"<sup>180</sup> However, as mentioned before, Turkey had constraints as a Muslim country having historical ties with the Middle East. During the 1990s, these types of concerns had been outstripped by the concerns of security.<sup>181</sup> Thus, with the end of the Cold War Turkey came to a position to re-evaluate its ties with Israel. So, as Bengio puts it;

*If the peripheral alliance of the late 1950s was initiated, activated, and cultivated by mainly one side-Israel, the strategic alignment of the 1990s can be considered more as a joint project, in which the two partners contributed equally to its formation and succes.*<sup>182</sup>

Infact, in addition to above-mentioned statement, when compared to the late 1950s peripheral alliance, 1990s strategic partnership has several differences. First of all, whereas the peripheral alliance came into being to adress threats of communism and pan-Arabism, the new agreement adressed the threats emanating from radical Islam and individual states. Similarly, in 1950s Iran had been a leading partner in the Israeli-Turkish-Iranian triangle (until the Islamic Revolution in 1979), by 1990s it was considered to be a potential threat to both Turkey and Israel, thus adding another motive for the new strategic partnership. Moreover, Turkey in the 1990s felt confident enough to proceed on its own with a rapprochement with Israel, without needing an additional Muslim partner (as seen in the 1950s with Iran), to provide legitimization to an unholy alliance with the Jewish state.

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<sup>180</sup>Çevik Bir and Martin Sherman, "Formula for Stability: Turkey plus Israel", *Middle East Quarterly*, Fall 2002, p.23.

<sup>181</sup>George Gruen argues that Turkey's relations with Israel have been governed by the concept of "ambivalence" for decades until the alignment of 1990s. See George E. Gruen, *Turkey, Israel and the Palestine Question, 1948-1960: A Study in the Diplomacy of Ambivalence*, Columbia University, 1970.

<sup>182</sup>Ofra Bengio, *The Turkish-Israeli Relationship...*, p.71.

Infact, it was Israel that initiated the additional involvement in the strategic partnership of its long-time tacit ally in the Arab world-Jordan. Most important, unlike the peripheral alliance, which was and still considered highly secret by both Turkey and Israel, the new agreement has been public from the start. The explanation for this change needs to be sought in Turkish side, and not in Israel, which has always been very keen to develop strong and open relations with Ankara. As a result, as Bağcı clearly puts it; *"1990s can be described as the "golden age" in Turkish-Israeli relations in terms of political, economic as well as military relations."*<sup>183</sup>

### **3.2 The Contours of Turkish Foreign Policy in the 1990s**

Turkey, during the 1990s, had to take into consideration and direct its strategic priorities towards the developments in the Middle East region which were considered as the main source of threat. Turkish policymakers have been much more occupied with the problems emanating from Iran, Iraq, Syria, and the PKK. The centerpiece of the policy was to preserve territorial integrity against the Kurdish questions.<sup>184</sup> According to a White Paper published by Defence Ministry the potential threats to Turkish Republic during the 1990s can be listed as follows:<sup>185</sup>

1. *Radicalism and religious fundamentalism which provokes anti-Western ideology,*
2. *Terrorism,*
3. *Ethnic nationalism,*
4. *WMD and nuclear weapons,*
5. *Regional competition and conflicts which have historical roots,*
6. *Desires of certain countries to have hegemony in the region,*

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<sup>183</sup>Hüseyin Bağcı, "Israel: A Strategic Partner for Turkey?", *Turkish Daily News*, October 28, 1999.

<sup>184</sup>Nasuh Uslu, *Türk Dış Politikası Yol Ayrımında; Soğuk Savaş Sonrasında Yeni Sorunlar, Yeni İmkanlar ve Yeni Arayışlar*, Anka Publishing, İstanbul, 2006, p.16.

<sup>185</sup>*Ibid*, p.16.

7. *Increase in the number of conflicts in the region due to the intervention of the global powers,*
8. *The possibility of instability that might emanate from local conflicts and mass migration,*
9. *Erosion of the credibility of the international institutions due to the intensity of the conflicts and struggles,*
10. *Avert of flow of Middle Eastern oil towards the international markets.*

In addition to these serious threats and dangers, possible alliances and co-operation regarding the defence matters among the regional rivals and enemies of Turkey worried Turkish policymakers to a great extent. In particular, Greece turned out to be ready for containing Turkey by establishing bilateral and multilateral relations which Ankara could not overlook. These efforts were as follows: signing an agreement with Bulgaria regarding joint military exercises at the beginning of 1990s; forging close ties with Iran in 1991; signing military agreements with Syria and Russia in 1995; and signing a military protocol with Armenia in 1996. All these efforts were directed at forging a close regional co-operation among the states whose common point was being anti-Turkish, especially Armenia, Greece, and Iran. It seemed for Ankara as inevitable to take necessary measures and seek for offsetting alternatives against these initiatives.<sup>186</sup>

One response given by Ankara to increasing threats coming from its immediate Middle Eastern neighbours was to emphasize the security aspect of Turkish-Israeli relations that had been normalizing since the beginning of the 1990s mainly as a result of the Arab-Israeli peace process.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>186</sup>*Ibid*, p.17.

<sup>187</sup>Meliha Benli Altunışık, "Redefinition of Turkish Security Policies in the Middle East After the Cold War", in eds. Ali L. Karaosmanoğlu and Seyfi Taşhan, *The Europeanization of Turkey's Security Policy: Prospects and Pitfalls*, Foreign Policy Institute, Ankara, 2004, p.218.

### 3.3 The Strategic Partnership Between Turkey and Israel in the 1990s

The development of the Turkish-Israeli relations during the 1990s is considered as one of the most interesting issues in the region with respect to its effects not only on the bilateral relations between the two countries but also on the regional relations as a whole. In fact, Israel has always considered Turkey as one of the most important countries in the region with its population, area, economy and the military power, and thus has always wanted to establish good relations with Turkey. However, because of the constraints of Turkey's Middle Eastern policy, Turkey could not satisfy the expectations of Israel until 1990s.<sup>188</sup>

During the 1990s, it seemed to some observers that Turkey was abandoning its traditional policy of neutrality in the Arab-Israeli conflict, by developing an strategic partnership with Israel. Regional and global changes helped to explain this in Turkey's foreign policy. As discussed above, on the one hand, the removal of the Soviet Union as an important player in Middle Eastern politics left the radical Arab states, especially Syria, in a more isolated position, and meant that tensions with the Arab countries would not impact on Turkey's relations with Moscow, as they had done during the Cold War period. There was widespread dissatisfaction in Turkish public opinion with the Arab countries, which had failed to support Turkish cause over Cyprus and, in the case of Syria, gave support to the PKK. The beginning of the Arab-Israeli peace process in 1991 in Madrid, followed by the signing of the "Declaration of Principles" by Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat in September 1993, made it possible for Turkey to develop much closer relations with Israel without provoking a rupture in its relations with the PLO and the main Arab states.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>188</sup>Gencer Özcan, "İsrail Güvenlik Anlayışında Dönüşüm: Ufuk Ötesi Tehditler ve Türkiye", in Mustafa Türkeş, İlhan Üzgel (eds.), *Türkiye'nin Komşuları...*, p.214.

<sup>189</sup>William Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy...*, p.297.



The new trend in Turkish policy began in December 1991, when the Demirel government upgraded its relations with both Israel and the PLO to ambassadorial level. Still, it was a step that should be evaluated as necessity than warmth, since it was a *de facto* requirement for participation in the multilateral track of the Middle East. Moreover, rival Greece's recognition of Israel some months earlier-an action pressed upon Athens by its EU partners-had left Turkey in an embarrassing spotlight as the only NATO state without an ambassador in Israel.<sup>190</sup>

### 3.3.1 Common Security Concerns

The initial impetus for Ankara to build close ties with Israel was a desire to strengthen its deterrence against Syria, which borders both Turkey and Israel and long supported the Kurdish separatist PKK and other anti-Turkish terrorist groups. This objective was largely achieved in October 1998, when Syria expelled PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan, whom it had hosted in Damascus for nearly two decades. At the time, Hafiz al-Asad apparently feared that a fight with Turkey would bring in Israel as well, and decided that expelling Öcalan was a wiser course of action than taking the risk of encountering two tough neighbors. The expulsion and then capture of Öcalan marked a crucial turning point in Turkey's triumph over the PKK and, in it, seemingly validated the wisdom of Ankara's initiative to build close ties with Israel.<sup>191</sup>

On the other hand, Syria has supported the terrorist organizations not only fighting against Turkey but also against Israel. With respect to Israel, Syria's terrorist activities in Lebanon had long disturbed Israel,

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<sup>190</sup>Alan Makovsky, "Israeli-Turkish Relations, A Turkish Periphery Strategy", in ed. Henry J. Barkey, *Reluctant Neighbor, Turkey's Role in the Middle East* US Institute of Peace, 1996, p.151.

<sup>191</sup>Alan Makovsky, "Turkish-Israeli Ties in the Context of Israeli-Arab Tension", *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, Policy Watch #502, 2000, p.1.

and several times Israeli military intervened Lebanese territory. Turkey did not much oppose these interventions since Syria hosts and supports the Islamic terrorist groups such as Hamas (the Islamic Resistance Movement- Hareket El Mukavvama El Islamiyye), Islamic Jihad etc.

In addition to Syria's support for the terrorist groups, there were also territorial disputes between Syria-Turkey and Syria-Israel. Syria claims territorial rights over Hatay province of Turkey and Golan Heights which the Israelis occupied in 1967 and annexed in 1982. As a result, the revisionist Syria had to be controlled and its support for terrorism had to be prevented. While Turkey is not comfortable with the Syria-Greece rapprochement, the Israelis were worried about the Syria-Iran rapprochement.<sup>192</sup>

Within this context, the peace negotiations between Israel and Syria created some concerns for Turkey. Turkish policy makers worried about the conclusion of a peace treaty between Syria and Israel since in that case Syria could challenge Turkey more forcefully regarding to its support for terrorist organizations and territorial claims. Moreover, Syria could launch its troops at the northern border since Damascus would have secured its southern border thanks to a possible peace treaty with Israel.<sup>193</sup> However, Damascus continued to pursue tougher policies during the negotiations with Israel and, helped to Ankara and Israel to come closer. On the other hand, as Shlaim argued, "*If there had been any prospect of Syria coming to terms with Israel, the Turkish-Israeli agreement in February 1996 would have ended it.*"<sup>194</sup>

According to the perceptions of the two countries, fundamentalist Islam should be controlled. With respect to Turkey, Turkey always considered

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<sup>192</sup>Efraim Inbar, *Türk-İsrail Stratejik Ortaklığı*, ASAM Publishing, Ankara, 2001, p.43.

<sup>193</sup>*Ibid*, p.44.

<sup>194</sup>Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*, Norton, New York, 2000, p.558.

itself as a secular, modern country which could be an example for the newly independent Turkish states. As an alternative model, Iran has always tried to import its Islamic regime to the region. Turkish secular elite, especially the military, worried about Iran's, and to some extent Saudi Arabia's, efforts to support Islamic movements in Turkey. Hezbollah's activities in Turkey and assassination of secular intellectuals such as Uğur Mumcu, further raised doubts and anger about Iran. In the second half of the 1990s, Turkey witnessed the rise of Islamic political parties such as Refah Party on the political arena. These developments resulted in the National Security Strategy Paper in 1997, labeling the Islamic fundamentalism as the first and the most dangerous threat to Turkish state.

On the other hand, from the very beginning of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Israelis have always perceived the radical Islam as the most important threat to their survival. With Rabin's words:

*Iran became the most dangerous enemy of the State of Israel since Tehran represents the radical Islamic anger against the Jewish State and has the Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) to materialize its objectives.*<sup>195</sup>

Israel needed strategic relations with Turkey because it had lost some of its strategic importance to the US during the Gulf War. Israel now sought to compensate for this loss by forming a loose triangle of relations with Turkey and the US, to counterbalance the three radical countries in its neighborhood, Syria, Iraq and Iran.

Coming after the structural reasons, the second most important reason is about the industry of Israel. Turkey, in fact, announced a very ambitious military expansion and modernization program, in which it was planned to spend about 150 billion dollars on armaments over 20

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<sup>195</sup>Efraim Inbar, *Türk-İsrail Stratejik...*, p.48.

to 25 years.<sup>196</sup> However, at that time it was becoming more and more difficult to obtain this technology and hardware from its Western allies because of concern over Turkey's human rights record. Israel, on the other hand, had the technology and the arms and unlike the Europeans and the West was ready to share them with Turkey.<sup>197</sup> As a consequence, the military expenditures of Turkey, while 5502 million dollars in 1990, raised to 9588 million dollars in 1999.<sup>198</sup> Turkey's goal was to achieve an arms relationship with a technologically advanced, Western-oriented, inventory-compatible state free of anti-Turkish lobbies.<sup>199</sup> This goal appears to have been achieved. Israel has upgraded Turkish F-4 and F-5 jet fighters, selling Turkey its sophisticated Popeye air-to-ground missiles, co-producing Popeye II missiles, bidding to sell Turkey attack helicopters and other armaments and sharing its know-how in joint training efforts.<sup>200</sup> On the other hand, for Israeli industry, the Turkish market is a very valuable customer for its products with a high purchasing power.

Ankara's another key goal in building closer cooperation with Israel was, and always has been, to win support of the American Jewish community to ease the problems it encounters in the US Congress from pro-Greek, pro-Armenian, pro-Kurdish and human rights lobbies. Some observers go further and describe the partnership between Israel and Turkey as the "*Turkey-Israel and the American Jewish Alliance.*"<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>196</sup>For further discussion about Turkish military structure and its impact on Turkish foreign policy during 1990s see, Gökhan Koçer, "1990'lı Yıllarda Askeri Yapı ve Türk Dış Politikası", *ODTÜ Gelişme Dergisi*, 29(1-2), 2002, pp.123-158.

<sup>197</sup>Meliha Benli Altunışık, *Redefinition of Turkish Security...*, p.218.

<sup>198</sup>Gökhan Koçer, *1990'lı Yıllarda...*, p.126.

<sup>199</sup>Alan Makovsky, "The New Activism in Turkish Foreign Policy", *SAIS Review*, Winter-Spring, 1999, p.5.

<sup>200</sup>*Ibid*, p.5.

<sup>201</sup>Robert Olson, *Türkiye'nin Suriye, İsrail ve Rusya'yla İlişkileri: 1979-2001*, Orient Publishing, Ankara, 2005, p.29.

With respect to Israel's perspective, in addition to the structural reasons and the efforts to create friendly relations with the non-Arab countries in the region, three additional and complementary considerations could be viewed. First of all, as an energy terminal Turkey could provide Israel for the Caspian oil and gas from the Mediterranean port of Ceyhan. Plans have been carried out to transport Russian gas and Azeri oil from Ceyhan to Israel. It is a very important issue for Israel that is surrounded by the oil rich Arab states. The second issue is about the water. It was the former Turkish President Turgut Özal who first proposed the idea of exporting water to the Middle East from the Seyhan and Ceyhan rivers in the southeastern part of Turkey in 1987, in what was called the "*Peace Pipeline Project*." This scheme did not materialize because of the political turmoil at the time, as well as Özal's unexpected death in April 1993.<sup>202</sup> After years, the idea of exporting Turkish water from the Manavgat River to Israel appeared when Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak visited Turkey in 1999, a time when Israel was in the midst of a serious drought. According to the project, Israel would purchase 50 mcm (million cubic meters) of water per year from Turkey.<sup>203</sup> As water is a strategic asset in this dry region, Turkey's water supplies could contribute to reducing the tension over this politically sensitive region. To the extent that the Manavgat water improves water availability in Israel, it may be possible for Israel to share more water with the Palestinians and possibly Jordan, especially in the context of an overall political settlement in the region.<sup>204</sup>

At another level, Israel had hoped to use Turkey's good offices to reach into two areas where it had little access: the Muslim world and Central Asia. These states are also the targets of Iran and Saudi Arabia and

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<sup>202</sup>Ayça Arıyörük, "Turkish Water to Israel?", *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, Policy Watch #782, 2003, p.2.

<sup>203</sup>*Ibid*, p.2.

<sup>204</sup>*Ibid*, p.3.

there is a great power struggle on these states. For the Iranian's and Saudi's interests, these states are potential regimes that can be affected by the radical Islam. On the other hand, according to Ankara and Tel Aviv, in return of the technologies exported to these countries from Israel, these countries would support Israel politically who is the strategic partner of their historical ally, Turkey.<sup>205</sup> With the words of Aras:

*Israel hopes to benefit from Turkey's friendly relations with the newly independent Central Asian states to contribute Tel Aviv's grand strategy of expanding its influence beyond the Middle East in order to be a global player in the world affairs.*<sup>206</sup>

As a Muslim nation, Turkey was expected to be a conduit of goodwill between Israel and Muslim countries, either in promoting bilateral relations with individual countries, such as Pakistan and Indonesia, or in moderating anti-Israel decisions in Islamic forums. One Israeli official told Bengio that, "Turkey was using its influence to promote Israel's relations with Bangladesh, a country with which Jerusalem had no diplomatic relations."<sup>207</sup>

In addition to the bilateral common perceptions in the region, the United States' encouragement created further incentives for the Turkish-Israeli cooperation. According to Inbar,

*Turkey and Israel are the strongest, most reliable US allies in the Middle East and their partnership benefits US strategic interests, including such goals as containing Iran and Iraq, as well as preserving a pro-Western Jordan. Although the US did not initiate the growing cooperation between its two allies, it found the rapprochement appealing. While the Arab world expressed concern at the February 1996 bilateral military accord, the United States welcomed it as "helpful for stability in the area" and as*

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<sup>205</sup>Robert Olson, *Türkiye'nin Suriye...*, p.63.

<sup>206</sup>*Ibid*, p.63.

<sup>207</sup>Ofra Bengio, *The Turkish-Israeli Relationship...*, p.96.

*"good to enforce security in the region." In May 1997, the US State Department referred to Israeli-Turkish ties as an American "strategic objective" and added, "If certain other Arab countries do not like that, that's just tough."<sup>208</sup>*

As far as the military sales concerned, however, there is a paradoxical situation from the standpoint of Washington:

*Although the United States has invariably encouraged cooperation between Ankara and Tel Aviv, US companies are increasingly wary of more contracts going to Israeli contenders than to themselves.<sup>209</sup>*

### **3.3.2 The Development of the Relations**

As mentioned before briefly, the first apparent manifestation of improving relations came in December 1991, when Turkey upgraded its diplomatic relations with Israel, and as well as with the PLO, to ambassadorial level.<sup>210</sup> This was followed by exceptionally frequent high level visits between the two countries as aforementioned. To go further in detail, in 1992, Turkish Tourism Minister Abdulkadir Ateş made the first cabinet-level visit to Israel in some two decades. In July 1993, Israeli Tourism Minister reciprocated his counterpart's visit. During the former, a tourism agreement was signed, the first bilateral accord for many years, which helped to facilitate air charter traffic.<sup>211</sup> A private visit by Israeli President Chaim Herzog in summer 1992 had the quality of an official visit. On that occasion, a gala party was held to commemorate the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival on Ottoman Empire of Sephardim Jews following their expulsion from Spain. Herzog was

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<sup>208</sup>Efraim İnbar, "Regional Implications of the Israeli-Turkish Strategic Partnership", *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Volume 5, No. 2, June 2001. p.11.

<sup>209</sup>Turkish Daily News, *Ankara Rediscovering Israeli Weapons*, 10 May 2005.

<sup>210</sup>Meliha Benli Altunışık, "The Turkish-Israeli Rapprochement in the Post-Cold War Era", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.36, No:2, 2000, p.175.

<sup>211</sup>Philip Robins, *Suits and Uniforms...*, p.250.

the guest of honor and the President Turgut Özal, Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel and other members of the Turkish establishment attended the party.<sup>212</sup>

The signing of the Israel-PLO Declaration of Principles on 13 September 1993 turned the page to a new era of Israeli-Turkish relations. Israel's recognition of the PLO-and the PLO's of Israel- meant that Ankara no longer had to restrain its ties with Jerusalem in order to impress the Arab world. A series of firsts then ensued: Çetin's visit to Israel in November 1993;<sup>213</sup> Israeli President Ezer Weizman's visit to Turkey in January 1994; Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Perez's visit to Turkey in April 1994; and Turkish Prime Minister Tansu Çiller's visit to Isarel in November 1994.<sup>214</sup> She spoke warmly about Israel's accomplishments and favorably of David Ben Gurion, Isarel's founding father, noting that:

*Both Isarel and Turkey had been "blessed with unique and courageous founding fathers-Atatürk and Ben Gurion- whose best achievements continue as guideposts for our respective nations today, leaders whose reputations have stood up in history."<sup>215</sup>*

Finally, President Demirel went to Israel in March 1996, the first ever trip to Israel by a serving Turkish president, the earlier date for the trip the previous November having been postponed owing to the Rabin assassination.<sup>216</sup> In addition, there was considerable high level traffic

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<sup>212</sup>Alan Makovsky, *Israeli-Turkish Relations...*, p.161.

<sup>213</sup>Two earlier proposed trips both of them During Çetin's period as foreign minister were postponed. On the second occasion, the Foreign Ministry axed the Israeli leg of a regional tour at the last minute when Çetin was already in Jordan, in response to and in protest at Israel's Operation Accountability in south Lebanon. See Philip Robins, *Suits and Uniforms...*, p.250.

<sup>214</sup>Alan Makovsky, *Israeli-Turkish Relations...*, p.161.

<sup>215</sup>Alan Makovsky, *Israeli-Turkish Relations...*, p.152.

<sup>216</sup>According to Makovsky, "it is noteworthy that the scheduling of Demirel's 1996 trip was finalized only after Refah's succes in the December 1995 parliamentary elections. In addition, Deputy Foreign Minister Onur Öymen visited Isarel in January 1996. Together, these facts suggest that the Turkish foreign policy establishment does not



among officials and technical experts. Included among the numerous accords and agreements signed were a cultural agreement and Memorandum of Understanding during the Weizman's visit; an environmental protection agreement during the Peres' trip; an accord against drug trafficking, terrorism and organized crime in early 1995; wide ranging economic agreements during Demirel's trip.<sup>217</sup>

With respect to Israeli point of view, Turkish foreign minister Hikmet Çetin's visit to Israel in November 1993 was a turning point.<sup>218</sup> This was the first time that a Turkish foreign minister was visiting Israel. Afterwards, in November 1994 Prime Minister Çiller visited Israel. At a deeper level, Çiller's visit was a first sign of the changing nature of relations between the two countries. During this visit several agreements were signed. The most interesting among them was an agreement that would allow the Israeli aviation industry to modernize Turkish Phantom jets. This was the beginning of a series of military deals that were going to be discussed between the two countries. Moreover, the Turkish side also made it clear that they were also eager to develop close ties as regards to fighting against terrorism. In fact, in general one could argue that Prime Minister Çiller played some role in facilitating security cooperation with Israel. Especially her more hawkish attitude towards the PKK and closer ties to the US seemed to have contributed to her eagerness to develop closer ties in security matters with Israel.<sup>219</sup> President Süleyman Demirel's visits in March 1996 and July 1999, Minister of Defense Turhan Tayan's visit in April-May 1997, Prime Minister Mesut Yılmaz's visit in September 1998; and from the Israeli side, President Haim Herzog's visit in July 1992,

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*intend to let the election results deter it from vigorously pursuing ties with Isarel, at least as long as Refah is not part of the government." See, Alan Makovsky, Israeli-Turkish Relations..., p.161.*

<sup>217</sup>Philip Robins, *Suits and Uniforms...*, p.252.

<sup>218</sup>Efraim Inbar, *Türk-İsrail Stratejik...*, p.23.

<sup>219</sup>Meliha Benli Altunışık, *The Turkish-Israeli Rapprochement...*, p.178.

President Ezer Weizmann's visits in 1994, 1996, 1998, and 1999, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres' visits in 1994 and 2001, Foreign Minister David Levy's visit in April 1997, and Prime Minister Ehud Barak's visits in 1999 and 2000, further enhanced the relations between Israel and Turkey and resulted in cooperation in military-security and economic-trade areas.<sup>220</sup>

### **3.3.3 The Major Tenets of the Relations**

As mentioned, one of the distinguishing characteristics of Turkish-Israeli rapprochement in the 1990s has been its multi-dimensional character. In fact, despite the emphasis on security aspect, unlike the 1950s, the relations between the two countries this time spanned over a variety of areas.

#### **3.3.3.1 Economic and Social Relations**

During President Demirel's visit to Israel between 11-14 March 1996 agreements on free trade, preserving and promotion of bilateral investments and preventing double taxation were signed. The huge volume of Israeli tourism to Turkey has long been acknowledged, but in areas such as investment, construction, manufacturing, environment, water and land conservation, technical cooperation, and joint enterprises, ties have expanded more recently. According to the Free Trade Agreement, custom duties would gradually decline over the next few years. This agreement would be significant in the diversification of relations between the two countries and in creating constituencies that go beyond the state level in the relations between the two countries in the coming years. From a nearly \$54 million in 1987, thanks to the Free Trade Agreement trade grew to more than \$1 billion by the end of the 1990s and was expected to reach \$2 billion by 2001. In addition, fourteen agreements were signed between Turkey and Israel regarding

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<sup>220</sup>Efraim Inbar, *Türk-İsrail Stratejik...*, p.23.

free trade, investments, preventing double taxation, agriculture, tourism, and culture.<sup>221</sup> Among them the most important has been the Free Trade Agreement that was signed in March 1996. This agreement was seen as vital by Turkish businessmen not only to have access to the Israeli market, but also to use this market as a jumping ground for other markets, such as the American, Palestinian, and Jordanian ones. What is more significant from the perspective of Turkey is that since 1994 the volume of trade has been in Turkey's favour.<sup>222</sup>

As shown in Table 1, the trade volume between the two countries increased constantly. While it was 156 million dollars in 1991, it reached nearly 2.3 billion dollars in 2006, increasing fifteen times. In 1991 Turkish exports to Israel and imports from Israel were equal. By 2006, however, the volume of trade was in favour of Turkey with a 718 million dollar surplus. Between 2006 and 2007, Turkey's imports from Israel increased by %38 while total imports of Turkey increased by %21,5. Similarly, between 2006 and 2007, Turkey's exports to Israel increased by %10,5 while total exports of Turkey increased by %25. As far as the overall trade volume concerned, between 2006 and 2007, trade volume between Turkey and Israel increased by %20 while Turkey's total foreign trade volume increased by %23. As can be seen in Table 1 that Turkey's imports from Israel is growing faster than its exports, thus in the future Turkey may lose its advantageous position in terms of bilateral trade balance.

As far as the investments concerned, there has been relatively less development in this area partly due to lack of an institutional base and a legal framework. Israel's possession of high agricultural technology created possibilities of cooperation especially in Turkey's agricultural projects in southeastern Turkey.<sup>223</sup> In this regard, Israeli Industry and

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<sup>221</sup>Türel Yılmaz, *Türkiye-İsrail Yakınlaşması...*, p.88.

<sup>222</sup>Meliha Benli Altunışık, *The Turkish-Israeli Rapprochement...*, p.186.

<sup>223</sup>*Ibid*, p.186.

Trade Association declared that, six projects including dam and irrigation facilities have been taken over by the Israeli companies in 2000.<sup>224</sup>

TABLE 1 TURKISH-ISRAELI BILATERAL TRADE (\$ 1.000)

YEAR	EXPORT	IMPORT	VOLUME
1989	31.000	60.000	91.000
1990	46.000	62.000	108.000
1991	78.000	78.000	156.000
1992	90.000	97.000	187.000
1993	80.000	122.000	202.000
1994	178.000	126.000	304.000
1995	240.000	166.000	406.000
1996	254.000	192.000	446.000
1997	391.000	230.000	621.000
1998	480.000	280.000	760.000
1999	585.000	300.000	885.000
2000	650.000	505.000	1.155.000
2001	805.000	530.000	1.335.000
2002	860.000	544.000	1.404.000
2003	1.000.000	460.000	1.460.000
2004	1.300.000	714.000	2.014.000
2005	1.400.000	804.000	2.204.000
2006	1.500.000	782.000	2.282.000
2007	1.660.000	1.080.000	2.740.000

Source: From 1989 to 1997, Meliha Benli Altunışık, *The Turkish-Israeli Rapprochement...*, p.176.; from 1998 to 2007, Turkish Statistical Institute (TUİK). [www.tuik.gov.tr](http://www.tuik.gov.tr)

In trade terms, reciprocity grew, with Turkey exporting even more than it imported from Israel, but the same cannot be said of tourism. Thanks

<sup>224</sup>Türel Yılmaz, *Türkiye-İsrail Yakınlaşması...*, p.93.

to the "Cooperation Agreement on Tourism" signed in June 1992, the number of Israeli tourists visiting Turkey increased considerably.<sup>225</sup> As far as tourism concerned, Israeli tourists far outnumbered their Turkish counterparts. In 1995, one of the peak years, Israelis visiting Turkey reached 287.000, while only 11.767 Turkish tourists came to Israel. The reason for this imbalance is that Israelis flocked to Turkey because it was nearby and cheap by Israeli standards. Gambling was also an attraction when this was permitted in Turkey. For Turks, Israel was both expensive and not as easy to reach. For example, the need to fly Israel made it much less attractive than Europe. Other reasons were security problems and Israel's lack of tourist promotion in Turkey. Consequently, people-to-people relations had a greater chance of developing in Turkey than in Israel.<sup>226</sup>

Parallel to increased economic cooperation, cultural and educational relations flourished as well during the 1990s. Cultural and scientific exchanges increased to a great extent, including exhibitions, concerts, and student exchanges. A particularly important contribution was made by the Süleyman Demirel program, which was established at the Moshe Dayan Center at Tel Aviv University in 1999 and endowed with annually by the Turkish Council of Higher Education, a figure matched by Tel Aviv University.<sup>227</sup>

Israel had two other important opportunities to demonstrate its goodwill to the Turkish public opinion. The first was in early July 1997, when a large fire broke out in an ammunition factory in the Turkish town of Kırıkkale. There was a danger that the blast would spread to the main ammunition storage, where hundreds of bombs were kept. Turkey approached Israel's air force to send special helicopters to help put out the fire. Initially the air force was reluctant, because to do so

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<sup>225</sup>*Ibid*, p.90.

<sup>226</sup>Ofra Bengio, *The Turkish-Israeli Relationship...*, p.122.

<sup>227</sup><http://www.dayan.org/activity.htm>

risked leaving Israel without extra helicopters in case of emergency. At that point, Minister Yitzhak Mordechai decided to take the risk and send a message to Çevik Bir to this effect. According to Mordechai's military secretary, Israel's prompt support helped lift relations to new level, because it proved that Israel was willing to stand by Turkey at a high cost. This also contrasted sharply with the reaction of the US and other countries, which failed to respond to Turkey's appeal.<sup>228</sup>

The second opportunity, also considered a landmark in the relationship, came after the severe earthquake in Turkey in August 1999. The spontaneous outpouring of concern and assistance from Israelis, coupled with the subsequent rescue efforts by the IDF (Israeli Defense Forces) and Israel's construction of a village at Adapazarı to house the homeless, were reportedly "*praised and appreciated by all*" and boosted Israel's image in the eyes of the Turks. The village, which cost 6 million dollars included 312 houses for 2500 people and was given the name "Turkey-Israel". Prime Minister Barak, who came to Turkey to inaugurate it, was received by Ecevit's warm words: "*You give us an outstanding human lesson. The Turkish people will never forget your deeds.*"<sup>229</sup>

### **3.3.3.2 Military Training and Co-operation**

The 1990s witnessed the growth of the role of the military in Turkish domestic politics. The challenge posed by the PKK issue and the growing Islamic radicalism enhanced the role of the military in politics. This was also true for the foreign policy and the role of the military in foreign policy making, especially in the case of Turkey's relations with the Middle East. Therefore, a policy strongly advocated by the military in Turkey will almost certainly be implemented; a policy strongly

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<sup>228</sup>Ofra Bengio, *The Turkish-Israeli Relationship...*, p.123.

<sup>229</sup>*Ibid*, p.123.

opposed by the military almost certainly will not. Thus, the securitization of Turkish foreign policy increased the military's power in the country. This point is important when considering that the driving force behind the Turkish-Israeli strategic partnership was the military.<sup>230</sup> The Israeli position was not much more different as Alon Liel commented in October 1998 that; "*the handling of Israeli-Turkish relations should be transferred from the generals to the diplomats.*"<sup>231</sup>

However, despite the occasional mention of political and security cooperation, especially the Turkish side was reluctant to talk about the security and military aspect of the relationship, at least openly. Asked about the rumours of strategic cooperation and political consultation between the two countries in 1992, Turkish military and diplomatic sources were denying the existence of such relations.<sup>232</sup>

Military relations between Turkey and Israel took a great leap forward in 1992, when Defense Ministry Director General David Ivri signed a military co-operation agreement between the Israeli and Turkish military industries.<sup>233</sup> A secret security agreement was signed on 31 March 1994 dealing with the diversion of military technology to third countries. This established the ground rules for future co-operation, and was followed by an unpublished accord on training exercises in 1995. A strategic dialogue between the Ministries of, but with senior diplomats also involved, on political and military affairs then followed, with the first meeting taking place in September 1995.<sup>234</sup> Within the last ten years, Turkey and Israel have signed over twenty military

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<sup>230</sup>*Ibid*, p.7.

<sup>231</sup>Ofra Bengio, *The Turkish-Israeli Relationship...*, p.94.

<sup>232</sup>Meliha Benli Altunışık, *The Turkish-Israeli Rapprochement...*, p.176.

<sup>233</sup>Ofra Bengio, *The Turkish-Israeli Relationship...*, p.106.

<sup>234</sup>Philip Robins, *Suits and Uniforms...*, p.258.

related agreements.<sup>235</sup> The most important one was the Military Training and Co-operation Agreement (AEIA) which was signed in 21-23 February 1996. The agreement was made public only two months after it was signed and created severe criticism in the Middle East. The published parts of this agreement list areas of co-operation like the exchange of information in military training, exchanges of visits between military academies, joint training, the invitation of observers to other training exercises, port visits, and the exchanges between military establishments.<sup>236</sup>

As far as the military co-operation was concerned, two leading motivators on the Israeli side were Prime Minister Rabin and David Ivri, who worked closely and harmoniously together. On the Turkish side, the four principal motivators and catalysts were the Chief of General Staff İsmail Karadayı and three generals- Çevik Bir, Deputy Chief of General Staff, Halis Burhan, commander of the air force, and Güven Erkaya, commander of the navy. For the outside world, the main event that put Turkish-Israeli relations on the agenda was the agreement signed on February 23, 1996. In fact, it was just the culmination of above-mentioned earlier developments. According to Bengio, its contents were not as dramatic as might have been assumed from the reactions to it, especially in the Arab world.<sup>237</sup> Its stated objective was, "*to achieve co-operation in military training between the countries,*" as follows<sup>238</sup>:

- 1) *Achieving co-operation on various levels on the basis of the exchange of personnel and their expertise.*
- 2) *Exchanging visits between military academies, units, and camps.*
- 3) *Application of training and exercises.*

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<sup>235</sup>Amikam Nachmani, *A Triangular Relationship...*, p.5.

<sup>236</sup>Meliha Benli Altunışık, *The Turkish-Israeli Rapprochement...*, p.187.

<sup>237</sup>Ofra Bengio, *The Turkish-Israeli Relationship...*, p.108.

<sup>238</sup>*Ibid*, p.108.



- 4) *Sending observers to follow up military exercises in the two countries.*
- 5) *Exchanging officials to collect and share information, especially in social and cultural fields that included military history, military museums, and military archives.*
- 6) *Exchange of visits by military naval vessels.*

Under the accord, both sides agreed to hold air exercises eight times a year, four in each state. The agreement included provisions for ground staff training. It also granted Israel emergency landing rights in Turkey, thereby facilitating its ability to conduct aerial missions further afield. While Turkey would benefit from Israeli expertise and experience, Israel would have an opportunity to train in a large air space over land.<sup>239</sup>

Among other important points in five-page document was "*confidentiality of classified security information,*" which stated that: "*all information and expertise exchanged by the two parties to this agreement are governed by the secret security agreement signed on 31<sup>st</sup> March 1994.*"<sup>240</sup> The exact contents of the 1994 agreement have never been public, but apparently it committed the parties to preserving the secrecy of their exchanges.<sup>241</sup>

In particular, the military cooperation between Turkey and Israel was a response to the announcement of *Cupertino* agreement between Syria and Greece and to Turkey's increasing perception of threat coming from the region. Although this was not an alliance, it is obvious that Turkish political and military elite decided that the agreement would provide benefits for Turkey in its fight against the PKK and could also be a deterrent against Syria.<sup>242</sup> Indeed, the main feature and the

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<sup>239</sup>Philip Robins, *Suits and Uniforms...*, p.259.

<sup>240</sup>Ofra Bengio, *The Turkish-Israeli Relationship...*, p.108.

<sup>241</sup>*Ibid*, p.108.

<sup>242</sup>Meliha Benli Altunışık, *The Turkish-Israeli Rapprochement...*, p.187.

objective of this cooperation was to create “*enhanced deterrence, enhanced coercive diplomacy and enhanced standing in Washington*” against hostile countries.<sup>243</sup> Bir and Sherman explain the enhanced deterrence as follows:

*Israeli-Turkish military cooperation has undoubtedly enhanced the deterrence postures of both parties and so reduced the chances of violence being instigated against either one of them. States considering the use of force against either Turkey or Israel must take into consideration their combined might. Eventhough the precise parameters of Israeli-Turkish mutual obligation are uncertain, that very uncertainty is an asset to both countries in deterring challengers.*<sup>244</sup>

The second agreement regarding co-operation in the defense industry field was signed on 28 August 1996, Defense Industry Co-operation Agreement (SSIA). The accord, which proved the culmination of two years’ worth of effort, established the framework for wide-ranging co-operation over defence industry matters.<sup>245</sup> This agreement among other things provided for technology transfer and training of technicians and researchers. This was, in fact, a framework agreement which also called for intelligence sharing and holding of regular meetings between the security establishments of the two countries for the evaluation of regional threats and regional terrorism. This was called “*strategic dialogue.*”<sup>246</sup> The deal approved in December 1996 and worth 630 million dollars involved Israel’s upgrading Turkey’s fleet of fifty-four F-4 Phantoms. The first twenty-six jet fighters would be upgraded at Israeli Aircraft Industries (IAI), and the remaining twenty-eight at the Air Force Repair and Maintenance Plant in Eskişehir, Turkey. The F-4 deal represented the biggest foreign contract ever for IAI. Smaller deals also made headlines. The Israeli electronic company

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<sup>243</sup>Çevik Bir and Martin Sherman, *Formula for Stability...*, p.30.

<sup>244</sup>*Ibid*, p.30.

<sup>245</sup>Philip Robins, *Suits and Uniforms...*, p.263.

<sup>246</sup>Meliha Benli Altunışık, *The Turkish-Israeli Rapprochement...*, p.187.

Tadiran was awarded a 3.3 million dollars contract in 1996 to supply ARS-700 airborne search-and-rescue systems for the Turkish air force and a 5 million dollars contract in 1998 for supplying additional ARS-700s. The Turkish ministry purchased the Innovative Ground Penetration Radar System from Elta Electronics Industries to detect plastic and conventional mines at a cost of approximately 3 million dollars. An Israeli-Singapore consortium won a 75 million dollars contract at the end of 1997 to modernize Turkey's forty-eight US-made F-5A/B fighter aircraft. Most of the upgrading would be performed in Eskişehir.<sup>247</sup> Another agreement was for the joint production of Popeye 1 and Popeye 2 air-to-ground missiles, signed in August 1996 and 1997 and valued at 150 million dollars and 200 million dollars respectively.<sup>248</sup>

In addition there were talks for deals for the modernization of tanks and other aircraft. Recently in May 2005, an Israeli consortium won the long-delayed contract for the supply of three unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) systems to the Turkish military, a deal worth \$183 million.<sup>249</sup> On March 29, 2002, Turkey signed a secret agreement with Israel Military Industries for the modernization of 170 M-60A1 Turkish tanks, at a cost of 668 million dollars. It was signed after long debates and delays, and was of special interest because it was concluded in the middle of the ongoing Second Intifada. In a Defence Industry Executive Committee meeting on March 8, 2002, at which the decision was taken, Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit raised doubts about the wisdom of such a move at that particular time. However, Chief of General Staff Hüseyin Kivrikoğlu put an end to the discussions by stating: "*our armed forces are in urgent need of tanks.*"<sup>250</sup> In other words, as on previous

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<sup>247</sup>Efraim Inbar, "The Strategic Glue in the Israeli-Turkish Alignment", in Barry Rubin and Kemal Kirişçi (eds.), *World Politics...*, p.120.

<sup>248</sup>Ofra Bengio, *The Turkish-Israeli Relationship...*, p.114.

<sup>249</sup>Turkish Daily News, *Ankara Rediscovering...*, 10 May 2005.

<sup>250</sup>Ertuğrul Özkök, *O Soruyu Asker 8 Mart'ta Cevapladi*, *Hürriyet*, 03 April 2002.

occasions, it was the military that held the upper hand on security issues. The deal has leaked to press immediately after its signing and aroused harsh criticism from some parties in the Turkish Parliament, who called for it to be scrapped, or at least delayed. Perhaps to silence his critics, Ecevit then offset Turkey's acquiescence to the agreement by stating two days later that Israel was carrying out "a genocide" against the Palestinian people before the eyes of the world.<sup>251</sup>

Indeed, these procurements of military equipments were the culminations of the ambitious military modernization program, mainly comprised of procuring high-technology equipment and upgrading older systems that had been announced by Turkey officially in 1996. The program, central to Turkey's long-term political-military strategy, was allocated \$25-30 billion for the first eight to ten years and is expected to total \$150 billion within the next 30 years. One of the bilateral relationships most obviously affected by the modernization program is Turkey's strategic partnership with Israel, whose cornerstone has been industrial cooperation. It is no coincidence that the military modernization program was announced at the same time that the cooperation agreements with Israel were signed in 1996 (These agreements were initially exclusively of a military nature and were aimed at fulfilling Turkey's modernization requirements).

So thanks to the military cooperation with Israel, Turkey would be able to avoid the arm embargos that were imposed by the Western governments due to political reasons or due to the fact that the balance between Turkey and Greece should be kept with respect to military power. Turkey had the opportunity to offset such kind of embargos or constraints by its contracts with Israel.<sup>252</sup> The improving of closer defence relations in turn saw Turkey raise the number of its military

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<sup>251</sup>Ofra Bengio, *The Turkish-Israeli Relationship...*, p.116.

<sup>252</sup>Gencer Özcan, *İsrail Güvenlik Anlayışında...*, p.223.

attachés in Tel Aviv from one to three in July 1998, adding naval and army men to join the air force officer in residence. Other than in Israel, only in its embassies in the US, Germany, and France, Turkey's main defence trading partners, does Ankara have three military attachés.<sup>253</sup> In the 1960s, Ankara had shown interest in Israel's nuclear technology, but Israel was reluctant to provide the necessary information regarding the nuclear technology. Now, asked again about the possibility of sharing Israel's technical expertise in nuclear technology, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu stated: "*we have strict regulations in this regard. There cannot be any question of us exporting or transferring nuclear technology to any country including Turkey.*"<sup>254</sup> In fact, a certain divergence between Turkey and Israel might well have emerged over nuclear weapons, as Turkey would like to see the region free of this non-conventional WMD, while Israel keeps its policy opaque on the issue.<sup>255</sup>

In the context of joint training activities, the Israeli jet fighters have made training flights in Turkish airspace especially, over Konya, and on the other hand Turkish pilots have flown over the Negev Desert. In addition, within the framework of security cooperation between the two countries, a joint naval operation was materialized, including the US and Jordan, named "Operation Reliant Mermaid." This exercise became a stark symbol of deepening strategic partnership between Turkey and Israel. Declared as a search and rescue operation and thus not directed against anyone, the exercise drew angry protests from Iran and some Arab countries.<sup>256</sup> This joint exercise have been conducted several

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<sup>253</sup>Philip Robins, *Suits and Uniforms...*, p.266.

<sup>254</sup>Ofra Bengio, *The Turkish-Israeli Relationship...*, p.115.

<sup>255</sup>*Ibid*, p.115.

<sup>256</sup>Meliha Benli Altunışık, *The Turkish-Israeli Rapprochement...*, p.187.

times, the last one was in 2001.<sup>257</sup> According to Şükrü Elekadağ, a former ambassador of Turkey<sup>258</sup>:

*The fundamental feature of the Turkish-Israeli relations is security. Turkey realized the immediate shift in the regional balance of power in its favour soon after the rapprochement. Turkey's air force had the opportunity to fly over Israel territory and to use the Israeli military airports and this opportunity contributed Turkey's operational capabilities in the region. Turkey enhanced its position in East Mediterranean with regard to both air forces and naval forces. Moreover, the exchange of information contributed Turkey's fight against the PKK.*

### **3.3.4 Regional Implications of the Strategic Partnership**

Although the agreements between Turkey and Israel was never officially declared to be a formal alliance and was emphasized that it was not intended against a third party, it led to an uproar in the Arab world. Syria's al-Ba'th wrote that; *"the unannounced alliance aims not only at burying the peace process but also at achieving new gains at the expense of the Arabs and their legitimate rights"*.<sup>259</sup> The alliance was portrayed as an attempt to oppress the Arabs and Turkey once again acting as the gendarmerie of the Western interests in the region.

In the light of Israeli-Turkish leverage and the perceptions of these two actors held by others in the region, the negative reactions to the strategic partnership are not surprising. The Israeli and Turkish standard response that their bilateral relations were not directed against any third party did not allay any fears. The Arab states perceived the Turkish-Israeli strategic partnership as the second

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<sup>257</sup>Gencer Özcan, *İsrail Güvenlik Anlayışında...*, p.225.

<sup>258</sup>Şükrü Elekadağ, *İsrail'le İlişkiler*, Milliyet, 12 January 1998.

<sup>259</sup>Süha Bölükbaşı, *Behind the Turkish-Israeli...*, p.32.

betrayal of Turkey to the Islamic solidarity; the first was the recognition of Israel by Turkey in 1949.<sup>260</sup>

The relationship was on the agenda of the Cairo Arab Summit of June 1996. Syria's proposed resolution condemning Turkey was softened and the Summit issued a statement calling for Ankara to reconsider "*the pact*" and to preclude "*any encroachment on the Arab countries.*"<sup>261</sup> The Arab League continuously expressed concerns over the Turkish-Israeli accords and called on Jordan to refrain from joining this strategic partnership. The Islamists perceived the relations between secular Turkey and Jewish Israel as an "*unholy alliance*" designed to buttress a regional order dominated by the West and its regional allies.<sup>262</sup>

No country saw itself more directly affected by the emerging Israeli-Turkish military axis than Syria. Damascus was particularly concerned about the problems that Israeli-Turkish military cooperation could pose in the event of a war with Israel. Though the agreements signed did not contain provisions for joint contingency planning or warfighting, the possibility that Turkey could assist Israel in wartime is a complicating factor Syria has to consider.<sup>263</sup> According to Syrian Vice-President Abd al-Halim Khaddam, the Israeli-Turkish partnership was "*the greatest threat to the Arabs since 1948*" and the US-Turkish-Israeli nexus was "*the most dangerous alliance we have witnessed since the Second World War.*"<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>260</sup>Efraim Inbar, *Türk-İsrail Stratejik...*, p.23.

<sup>261</sup>Efraim Inbar, *Regional Implications...*, p.5.

<sup>262</sup>*Ibid*, p.5.

<sup>263</sup>Micheal Eisenstadt, "Turkish-Israeli Military Cooperation: An Assessment", *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, Policy Watch #262, 1997, p.2.

<sup>264</sup>Efraim Inbar, *Regional Implications...*, p.6.

According to the Iranian sources, Turkish-Israeli military cooperation has brought Israel to its border. Israel has established intelligence listening posts at the Iranian-Turkish border and Turkish cooperation would greatly facilitate Israeli air strikes on Iran's non-conventional weapons infrastructure, much of which is located near Tehran.<sup>265</sup> President Khatami condemned Turkish closeness to Israel, which "*provokes the feelings of the Islamic world.*"<sup>266</sup> The possibility of this relationship to expand through Azerbaijan further worried the Iranians.<sup>267</sup>

The initial reaction of Egypt to Turkish-Israeli military ties was a big alarm. Osama al-Baz, an advisor to President Husni Mubarak, warned that this military cooperation "*would lead to instability and possibility of war in the Middle East.*"<sup>268</sup> At the end of 1997, Mubarak condemned the planned Turkish-Israeli naval exercise, since it meant "*that an Arab party would be targeted. It is known that Syria is located between Turkey and Israel.*"<sup>269</sup>

The strategic partnership between Turkey and Israel, however, survived the first possible challenge to it from the Arab world and Iran: it neither collapsed nor triggered a counter-alliance. In addition, rather than weakening Turkey's position against the Arabs, the strategic partnership strengthened it even further. Not only did Syria give in on the PKK, the most important card in its hands against Ankara, but Arab states, in particular Egypt, began to try to mend fences with Turkey.

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<sup>265</sup>Micheal Eisenstadt, *Turkish-Israeli Military...*, p.2.

<sup>266</sup>Efraim Inbar, *Regional Implications...*, p.6.

<sup>267</sup>Türel Yılmaz, *Türkiye-İsrail Yakınlaşması...*, p.68.

<sup>268</sup>Efraim Inbar, *Regional Implications...*, p.6.

<sup>269</sup>*Ibid*, p.6.



### 3.3.5 Potential Obstacles

As we have seen, the rapprochement between Israel and Turkey has been established on a series of regional and international developments, and several convergent perceptions. The end of the Cold War, the strategic power vacuum that occurred in the region, common threat perceptions emanating from certain countries, the military establishments as the driving forces, the room for manoeuvre that created by the peace process, and the strategic needs of the two countries, all ushered in a rapprochement. Opposite way of thinking, however, may lead someone to test the robustness of the relationship. The relationship had the opportunity to test some of the parameters in the last years of 1990s, while some would be tested in the first half of the 2000s.

First of all, Turkish-Israeli relations have been affected from the developments in Turkey's foreign policy towards the Middle East after 1998. After 1998, Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East region underwent a normalization process.

Another potential obstacle to Turkish-Israel relations is the PKK issue. The PKK issue constitutes a particularly thorny problem for Turkish-Israeli relations. In spite of reports about Israel's support to Turkey in its conflict with the PKK, there were suspicions both on popular and governmental levels in Turkey that Israel was assisting or supporting the PKK and the Kurds in northern Iraq. These stemmed from the existence of a Jewish Kurdish community in Israel sympathetic to the Kurdish cause, as well as from Israel's support of the Kurds of Iraq in the 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>270</sup>Ofra Bengio, *The Turkish-Israeli Relationship...*, p.124. For further discussion about the Israeli and the US support for the Iraqi Kurds, see, Tuncay Özkan, *CIA Kürtleri; Kürt Devletinin Gizli Tarihi* Alfa Publishing, İstanbul, 2004, and Şalom Nakdimon, *Irak ve Ortadoğu'da MOSSAD*, Elips Publishing, Ankara, 2004.

The extent to which Israel was willing to defer to Turkish sensitivities could be seen in a minor incident. We learn from Bengio that, Yaşar Kaya, one of the leaders of the banned Kurdish Democratic Party (DEP) and speaker of the "Kurdish Parliament in Exile" was invited to Israel by a local non-governmental group. Turkey's immediate message of its "*sensitivity on the invitation*" caused the invitation be withdrawn. The incident proved that for Israel, the Kurdish issue could be two-edged sword, and that, in regard to terrorism, Israel needed to take into account Turkey's sensitivities, even though this was not reciprocated by Turkey on the Palestinian issue. On the contrary, Turkey did not consider breaking off relations with the Palestinians for their terrorist attacks against Israel.<sup>271</sup>

For Turkey, the major restraint on developing bilateral relations with Israel is domestic; the rising popularity of the pro-Islamist politics. The first round had been played during the era when Refah was in power in Turkey, in 1996-1997, and the winner was the ones who supported the strategic partnership, in particular the military. After 2002, however, the military's power has declined in Turkish politics when compared to the 1990s, and political Islam, on the other hand, is in office with a more decisive public support and parliamentary superiority, while the Al-Aqsa Intifada was on the scene full steam ahead.

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<sup>271</sup>Ofra Bengio, *The Turkish-Israeli Relationship...*, p.125.

**CHAPTER 4**  
**RELATIONS DURING THE JUSTICE AND**  
**DEVELOPMENT PARTY ERA**

**4.1 General**

From the outset of 2000 and onwards, the fundamental incident that affected the structure of the international system has been undoubtedly the 9/11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington. Shocked with the attacks, the US and its Western allies launched a campaign against terrorism immediately after the attacks of which battlefield turned out to be the Muslim countries. For the allied powers, the international terrorism stemmed from the radical Islamic movements is being harboured especially by the Muslim countries, in particular by the Middle Eastern states. Thus, it was necessary to hinder their existence by not allowing the Middle Eastern countries to provide safe havens to such extreme groups. As a result, the Muslim Middle East turned out to be the target of the allied powers in their campaign against radical Islam. The campaign, in a broader sense, was named as the Greater Middle East Initiative. Justified with their war on terrorism, the allied powers occupied Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. Subsequently, the efforts on isolating and containing Iran and Syria became the focus of the western allies.

Greater Middle East Initiative declared that democracy and human rights regime will be promoted in the Middle East region and the maps of the countries concerned will be re-drawn. That is, promotion of the democratic regimes in the region is considered as the cure for the radical Islam and the expansion of political rights and political

participation in the Muslim world is meant to combat the appeal of Islamist extremism. Recognizing that external pressure for internal political change is always a difficult proposition the US has sought the support of European and other Western countries for its project of region-wide democracy promotion. Turkey had been one of the most enthusiastic proponents of the US-led Greater Middle East Initiative.

The offensive and humiliating acts the Muslim world faced since 2001 together with the occupations and the death of thousands of Muslims ushered in a strong reaction in these societies. As a result, anti-Western, especially anti-US sentiments grew in these societies. Furthermore the reaction found itself room for action in domestic politics as well and the political Islam gained power and impetus in these countries. In this context, the election victories of Ahmedinejad in Iran against the reformists, Hamas in Palestine against the El Fatah, which was supported by the West, are noteworthy. The coming to power of the AKP in Turkey can also be understood within this framework. While Ahmedinejad and Hamas are obviously anti-Western, the AKP in Turkey was purely pro-Western.

In Turkey, the AKP government adopted evidently a pro-Western and pro-US foreign policy. The political opposition against AKP, on the other hand, asserted that the US dictated Turkey a "moderate Islam" role in the region and the AKP government accede to this imposition without any objection or resistance. The discussions regarding the "moderate Islam" role had an impact on the domestic politics in Turkey as well and the AKP government was accused of eroding secularism which is one of the fundamental principles of Turkish Republic. The argument here is that, the AKP government mainly tried to use foreign policy and relations as leverage against the legitimacy question that it was facing domestically.<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>272</sup>One of the most concrete examples of this effort has been witnessed while these lines are being written. Facing with a law suit that can result in the closure of the party, AKP executives immediately initiated the process of revising the 301th article of the

Together with these developments taking place in Turkey, the Second Intifada, also known as the al-Aqsa Intifada began in September 2000 and the war on Iraq in 2003 were the developments that had their impact on regional politics after 2000. The new structure of the international system that emerged after 9/11 terrorist attacks and the consequent Greater Middle East Initiative, the invasion of Iraq by the US-led coalition, the rise of political Islam in the region, and in particular Turkey, the uprising in Palestine and the harsh response of the Israeli army against the Palestinians have been the factors that shaped the Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East and in particular, Israel after 2000.

#### **4.2 The Second Intifada and the End of the Peace Process**

After the collapse of the peace process at Camp David, the hope for peace disappeared. Subsequently, when a symbolic man, visited a symbolic place on 28 September 2000, it was perceived by the Palestinians as a challenge and led to the Second Intifada. The visited place was the Haram al Sharif, and the visitor was the head of the Likud Party Ariel Sharon, who aslo was seen as responsible of Sabra and Shatila massacres in Lebanon in 1982. The following day of the challenging visit was Friday and after the Friday praying the uprising set off. The rioting spread throughout Jerusalem. The following day, throughout West Bank and Gaza, the demonstrators clashed with Israeli troops at roadblocks and positions on the edges of the Palestinian-ruled towns and along Israeli-patrolled roads.<sup>273</sup>

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Turkish Penal Code which the European Union had been pressuring but being held over by the AKP government for a long time. At the same time, the statements of the EU officials putting forward the fact that, closure of a political party which secured %46 of the overall votes in the elections was incompatible with the democratic criteria of the EU and risks the full membership of Turkey in the EU. This incident shows that how the AKP government use Turkey's foreign relations when dealing with its domestic troubles.  
<sup>273</sup>Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims*, Vintage, 2001, p.660.

The development of the Second Intifada created a situation of anarchy in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The Israeli response to the uprising was so severe and harsh that on October 7 the UN Security Council voted "to condemn the excessive use of force against Palestinians."<sup>274</sup> Formal Palestinian Authority (PA) institutions, on the other hand, lost power to the extremist groups like Hamas and Islamic Jihad. In some cases, actions against Israeli targets became an arena of the competition of these groups.

The subsequent efforts to stop violence, summits in Sharm el Sheikh and Taba, had little to result in fruitful consequences. The Israeli elections held on 6 February 2001, carried Ariel Sharon to power in Israel. Since he was the man who triggered the Second Intifada and known to be one of the most hawkish politicians in Israel, the hopes for halting the violence decreased. In June, in order to retaliate the severe terrorist attacks conducted by the Palestinian groups, Israeli Defense Forces re-occupied the PA-controlled territories. Furthermore, on 17 October 2001, the assassination of the minister of tourism Rehavam Zeevi by Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine also triggered the Israeli retaliations.

For Israelis, the 9/11 terrorist attacks in Washington and New York constituted a very suitable environment, that they claimed they were fighting their own war on terrorism. Sharon secured the unconditional support of the newly elected President of US, George W. Bush who was meanwhile declaring his own war against terrorism and pursued tough policies toward the Palestinians and especially and personally toward Arafat. In this context, the perspectives of the Likud Party in Israel and the neo-cons of US converged against terrorism and their reaction was so strict.

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<sup>274</sup>*Ibid*, p.665.

The fact that the peace process of 1990s had been replaced by the rising tensions and conflicts in the West Bank and Gaza inevitably had its ramifications on the countries of the region, in particular on Turkish public opinion. As a result, the opposition against Israel in the Turkish public opinion gained greater ground and the reactions to Israeli attacks against the Palestinian civilians increased the sensitivity in ordinary Turkish people. Under these circumstances, the room for manoeuvre of Turkish foreign policy in Israeli-Palestinian conflict diminished to a great extent while Turkey had the opportunity to pursue policies towards Israel independently from the Arab countries' and from its own public opinion within a peace process environment. As aforementioned, there was a positive correlation between the Turkish-Israeli relations and the tensions in the Arab-Israeli conflict. That is, the Second Intifada resulted in the growing tensions and the misery in the Palestinian territories so one of the motivations that gave pace to the growing relations between Turkey and Israel during the 1990s, which was the peace process, waned. Turkey, therefore, on the outset of the new Millennium was deprived of the positive contribution of the peace process while developing relations its relations with Israel during the 1990s.

#### **4.3 Major Tenets of Justice and Development Party's (AKP) Foreign Policy**

The 3 November 2002 elections resulted with a remarkable electoral victory of AKP (Justice and Development Party). According to the election results, AKP gained 34.28 % of the total votes and secured 363 of 550 seats in the Parliament, so it formed the new government as a single party. CHP (Republican People's Party) that was not able to enter the Parliament in the 18 April 1999 elections, ranked second in 3 November 2002 elections with 19.39 % and this time was able to enter the Parliament with 178 parliamentarians. As the Party leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was banned from politics, the 58<sup>th</sup> Turkish government

was formed under Abdullah Gül's premiership. Six months later Erdoğan became the prime minister and formed the 59<sup>th</sup> government.

Many of the leaders of the new party began their political careers in the pro-Islamist Welfare Party, which was closed down by the Turkish courts for allegedly violating the principle of the separation of religion and state. Some of them then joined its successor, the Virtue Party, which also soon ran afoul of the authorities. Although the AKP was formed as a breakaway group from the outlawed Islamic-leaning Virtue Party, in the 2002 elections its party list included candidates representing the entire spectrum of the center-right of Turkish politics, ranging from liberal to nationalist to conservative and traditionally religious. Prime Minister Erdoğan has professed to have modified his Islamist views and insisted that the AKP is a center-right political party whose traditional Islamic religious values make it no less democratic and secular than the Christian Democratic parties in Germany and other Western European democracies.<sup>275</sup>

As the AKP Government came to power in 2002, there has been a noticeable change in Turkish foreign policy behaviour and the dynamics under which this change took place and how these dynamics had their effect on Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East and Israel is worth analyzing. Turkish foreign policy actors have been generally following a *status quo* approach in major foreign policy issues of the country such as the Armenian issue, Cyprus conflict, Turkish- Greek relations, and relations with the EU and the Middle East, issues which were causing major obstacles in Turkey's integration with the international community. However, it can be claimed that with the current AKP Government, Turkish foreign policy underwent a shift in the above listed traditionally sensitive foreign policy issues. Beginning with the Program of the 58<sup>th</sup> Government AKP has employed a different tone regarding foreign policy: reaffirming the full membership to the

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<sup>275</sup>George E. Gruen, "Turkey's Strategic Mideast Regional Initiatives", *American Foreign Policy Interests*, No:26, 2004, p. 435.



EU as Turkey's main goal AKP underlined its decisiveness for fulfilling the conditions and opening of accession negotiations. Concerning the relations with Greece, AKP assured continuing to build ground for the resolution of political conflicts. Most notably, the Government Program called for finding a solution of the Cyprus conflict by all means. In this framework, policy initiatives have been taken such as the full support to the Annan Plan in Cyprus. Although AKP made no special reference to the Armenian issue in its Program, in practice, it again showed a problem solving approach by offering to the international community unlimited access to Turkish historical resources for investigation of Armenian allegations. Thus, the foreign policy orientation of AKP deviated considerably from its predecessors.<sup>276</sup>

It is noteworthy here that, within a historical perspective, any political establishment prone to legitimacy questions in the domestic sphere in Turkey has mostly been tended to seek its legitimacy abroad. As far as the military regimes concerned, this proposition has greater validity. The military regimes that do not have domestic legitimacy since they overthrow the democratically elected governments by force generally sought legitimacy in their foreign relations. Both the first announcements of 27 May 1960 Coup declaring their loyalty to NATO and CENTO and the adoption of the Rogers Plan by the 12 September 1980 military regime are the clear examples of these propositions. That is, it can be concluded that, the domestic question of legitimacy resulted in a greater dependency on foreign relations.

In addition to the military regimes, the democratically elected governments seek legitimacy in their foreign relations when faced with legitimacy questions domestically. Democrat Party and the AKP are the

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<sup>276</sup>Ayşe Kesler, *Dimensions of Foreign Policy Change In Turkey: A Comparative Analysis of AKP Government and DSP-MHP-ANAP Coalition*, MA Thesis, Sabancı University September 2005, p.12. for further discussion about the problem solving and cooperative features of AKP foreign policy see Zeynep Dağı, "Giriş", Zeynep Dağı (ed.), *Doğudan Batıya Dış Politika: AK Partili Yıllar*, Orion Publishing, Ankara, 2005, pp. 7-14.

clear examples of these situations. Having severe disputes with the state establishment domestically in Turkey, it was impossible for AKP to adopt a confrontational foreign policy. As a result, the AKP government tried to use Turkey's foreign relations as an economic and political leverage against its disagreements and disputes with state establishment. Using Turkey's foreign relations as an economic and political leverage against the domestic questions of legitimacy, in turn, naturally weakens Turkey's bargaining power in the negotiations with its foreign partners such as US, EU or the IMF.

#### **4.4 The Strategic Depth Doctrine and AKP's Foreign Policy towards the Middle East**

As mentioned above, since the end of the Cold War, Turkish foreign policy, which had been firmly anchored upon the verities of Kemalism for 70 years, has also undergone a transformation. This transformation hinges upon a growing embrace of the philosophy of neo-Ottomanism.<sup>277</sup> If this philosophy originally was employed as a response to the domestic challenge of ethno-national conflict with the Kurdish separatists led by the PKK, it later organically infused the foreign policy thinking of contemporary Turkish policy makers. Turgut Özal, the first president of Turkey in the post-Cold War era laid the foundations of this new foreign policy concept. However, a new doctrine took its more mature and comprehensive shape under AKP led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. This doctrine, known as the "*Strategic Depth Doctrine*", found particular resonance among the AKP leadership and its core electorate.<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>277</sup>For a critical approach to political neo-Ottomanism in Turkey in a historical perspective see Cengiz Özakıncı, *Türkiye'nin Siyasi İntiharı Yeni-Osmanlı Tuzağı*, Otopsi Publishing, İstanbul, 2007.

<sup>278</sup>Alexander Murinson, "The Strategic Depth Doctrine of Turkish Foreign Policy", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 42, No:6, November 2006, p. 946. For a comprehensive analysis of the Strategic Depth Doctrine of Turkish foreign policy see book of the composer of the Doctrine, Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu*, Küre Publishing, İstanbul, 2001.

In terms of foreign policy making practice, AKP seems to take the Özal era as an example. With respect to foreign policy making process, the AKP Government relied upon the consultants who are originally businessmen by profession together with the bureaucratic mechanisms and sometimes bypassing the latter reminding many of the pragmatism of the Özal era. Foreign policy advisers such as Şaban Dişli, Cüneyt Zapsu and Ömer Çelik have had direct impact on the foreign policy making procedures.<sup>279</sup>

As Soner Çağaptay clearly puts it, in Turkish foreign policy, "*the AKP has moved mountains.*"<sup>280</sup> When Erdoğan became the prime minister in March 2003, as a result of the overwhelming victory of his AKP in November 2002 elections, he assumed an activist prime-ministerial role in Turkish foreign policy. Prime Minister Erdoğan elevated the office of Ahmet Davutoğlu, the prime minister's chief advisor on foreign policy, from the traditional status of a small bureau, which provides day-to-day counseling to the prime minister, to the source of strategic thinking and ideological support for the new foreign policy. Since becoming the chief foreign policy advisor, Ahmet Davutoğlu has utilized the concept of *strategic depth* to guide the foreign Policy of Erdoğan's government.

Ahmet Davutoğlu argues that Turkey should not only adopt a foreign policy approach which depends only on its strategic importance but also an approach relying upon historical and geographical depth of Turkey. This concept is eponymous with the title of Davutoğlu's book, "Strategic Depth". The main thesis of this doctrine is that strategic depth is predicated on geographical depth and historical depth. Consequently, Turkey, as a result of its historical legacy of the Ottoman

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<sup>279</sup>İlhan Uzgel, "Dış Politikada AKP: Stratejik Konumdan Stratejik Modele", *Mülkiye Dergisi*, Fall/2006, Cilt:XXX, p.69.

<sup>280</sup>Soner Çağaptay, "Secularism and Foreign Policy in Turkey; New Elections, Troubling Trends", *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, Policy Focus #67, April 2007, p.1.

Empire, possesses great geographical depth. According to Davutoğlu, "this geographical depth places Turkey right at the centre of many geopolitical areas of influence." The strategic depth doctrine calls for an activist engagement with all regional systems in Turkey's neighborhood.<sup>281</sup>

The strategic depth theory maintains that Turkey sits in between a number of "geocultural basins," such as the Middle East and the Muslim world (which the theory considers to be identical), the West (Europe and the United States), and Central Asia. Turkey can emerge as a regional power only if it would establish good ties with all these basins and hence all its neighbors.<sup>282</sup>

The pillars of this policy are; zero problem with the neighbours, multi-dimensional foreign policy and the perception that Turkey has a regional responsibility emanating from its geography and history.<sup>283</sup> One should admit that Turkey had fewer problems with its neighbours when compared to the previous eras. However, Uzgel states that this process had started before AKP came to power. First of all it is argued that the capture of Abdullah Öcalan in Kenya in 1999 and the consequent period provided Turkish foreign policy a greater room for manoeuvre.

The AKP government pursued intense relations with the United States although there have been ups and downs and the "March 1st" incident. The cooperation in Afghanistan continued, the government allowed transit passes in İncirlik by issuing a decree in 23 June 2003, the agreement of the procurement of four Awacs from US was signed immediately after the government had been founded, agreement on

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<sup>281</sup> Alexander Murinson, *The Strategic Depth Doctrine of...*, p.948.

<sup>282</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik...*, p.132.

<sup>283</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Türkiye Merkez Ülke Olmalı*, Radikal, 26 February 2004.

procurement of 30 F-16 aircrafts and new generation F-35 (in 2014) had been concluded, the US aircrafts used by CIA in interrogating the people suspected to be terrorists have been allowed to fly over Turkish airspace, and in 2005 a joint military exercise has been carried out together with US and Israel in the sea area close to the Syrian coastline. As a consequence, the US considered Erdoğan as a second Özal and has been in close cooperation regarding the Greater Middle East Initiative. The AKP government created no hindrance to US regarding the Iraqi issue after the "*March 1st*" incident and a "*Strategic Vision Document*" was signed between the two countries as a result of the insistence of the Turkish side.<sup>284</sup>

In practice, the strategic depth doctrine sheds light on the future of Turkish foreign policy. In his interview in a television program Davutoğlu outlined the role of Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East as "*setting up order and providing stability.*" He summarized four fundamental pillars of this policy as: 1) security for everyone, 2) using political dialogue in order to cope with the crisis, 3) creating interdependent economies, and 4) cultural togetherness and pluralism.<sup>285</sup> For instance, he asserts that Turkey will emerge as a regional power only by pursuing robust ties with the "*Muslim/Middle Eastern geocultural basin*" in addition to the West. In implementing this concept, Turkish foreign policy has been expressing affinity towards Muslim countries and showing solidarity with their causes. The AKP's policies toward Hamas demonstrate this stance well. In 2006, AKP leaders met with the leader of Hamas' military wing, Khaled Mashal, in Ankara, despite criticism from the West and pro-Western Turks. The AKP continues to defend the visit, keep contacts with Mashal, and generally oppose Western efforts to isolate Hamas. Whereas Egypt and Jordan consider the Muslim Brotherhood as a serious internal threat

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<sup>284</sup>İlhan Uzgel, *Dış Politikada AKP...*, p.73.

<sup>285</sup>Ahmet Davutoğlu, *CNN TURK*, 02/01/2008.

and are loath to engage the new Hamas government, with its pro-Hamas policies, the AKP has demonstrated a courteous disposition toward the Ikhwan and its Palestinian extension, Hamas.<sup>286</sup>

As for Syria, the gradual improvement in Turkish-Syrian relations which had begun after Syria ended its active support for PKK accelerated when AKP came to power in November 2002. During 2003, Foreign Minister Gül, who also held the title of deputy prime minister, visited Damascus in April; his Syrian counterpart, long time Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sha'ara, went to Turkey in January, followed by Syrian Prime Minister Mohammed Mustafa Miro, who went to Ankara in July. They paved the way for a historic visit by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to Turkey early in January 2004. This was the first time a Syrian head of state had paid an official visit to Turkey since the establishment of the Turkish republic. The diplomatic ice had been broken some three years earlier when Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer went to Damascus to attend the funeral of Hafez al-Assad, Bashar's long ruling father.<sup>287</sup> In Ankara in July 2003 the two countries signed a significant number of bilateral agreements in the Sixth Turkish-Syrian Protocol, which covers the economic sphere, duty-free trade, tourism and educational exchange.

The Turkish-Syrian rapprochement had an immediate impact in the relations of Turkey with the rest of the Arab states in the region. Relations with Egypt and Lebanon also flourished in this period. The Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, accompanied by an important delegation made up of three ministers and the chief of the Egyptian intelligence, paid an official visit to Ankara on February 2004.<sup>288</sup> The impact of the Turkish-Syrian rapprochement is more apparent in the

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<sup>286</sup>Soner Çağaptay, *Secularism and ...*, p.3.

<sup>287</sup>George E. Gruen, *Turkey's Strategic...*, p. 437.

<sup>288</sup>Nikolaos Raptopoulos, "Rediscovering Its Arab Neighbours? The AKP Imprint on Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East", *Les Cahiers du RMES No:1* July 2004, p.9.

relations with Lebanon. The Lebanese Foreign Affairs Minister Jean Obeid and the Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri paid an official visit to Turkey in the beginning of April and May 2004, respectively. The two countries signed a series of bilateral agreements upon the Lebanese Prime Minister's visit.<sup>289</sup>

The AKP government also attempted to open a new era in Turkish-Iranian relations.<sup>290</sup> During the AKP government this relationship experienced a turnaround. After the Second Gulf War, Turkey and Iran found a common enemy in the Kurdish terrorism, in particular the PKK, which found a safe haven in Kurdish-dominated northern Iraq, in July 2004. Prime Minister Erdoğan visited Tehran and signed a multi-dimensional cooperation scheme that included a joint commitment to security cooperation with Iran in the struggle against the PKK and a series of economic agreements. Economic cooperation involved agreements about deliveries of Iranian gas to Europe through Turkish territory and of a pricing dispute over natural gas supplied by Iran to Turkey.<sup>291</sup> There were four high level visits of Turkish officials to Iran, including two by Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül, and six from Iran to Turkey, including one by Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi. There were also advances in bilateral relations in the cultural sphere. In December 2003, the two countries signed a treaty on educational co-operation.<sup>292</sup> In February 2006, Turkish and Iranian security forces signed a memorandum of understanding to cooperate on counter-insurgency issues to promote further coordination and security measures against the PKK.<sup>293</sup>

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<sup>289</sup>Nikolaos Raptopoulos, *Rediscovering its...*, p.10.

<sup>290</sup>For further discussion about Turkish-Iranian relations see Robert Olson, *Türkiye-İran İlişkileri 1979-2004: Devrim, İdeoloji, Savaş, Darbeler ve Jeopolitik*, Babil Publishing, Ankara, 2005.

<sup>291</sup>Alexander Murinson, *The Strategic Depth Doctrine of...*, p. 957.

<sup>292</sup>George E. Gruen, *Turkey's Strategic...*, p. 438.

<sup>293</sup>Alexander Murinson, *The Strategic Depth Doctrine of...*, p.958. The Iranian branch of the terrorist PKK is called as PJAK.

#### 4.5 War on Iraq

The most serious test of Turkish foreign policy in the 2000s has been undoubtedly the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. Historically, Turkey had three priorities when composing its foreign policy towards Iraq. First the prevention of a possible independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq, second the protection of the rights of the Turcomens living in northern Iraq, in particular in the city of Kirkuk, and finally to avert the PKK in using the region as a safe haven.<sup>294</sup> At the outset of 2000s, Turkey had to make concessions regarding its above mentioned priorities and re-evaluated and revised its foreign policy towards Iraq according to the newly emerged circumstances.

Underlining the fact that Turkey was one of the most affected countries from the First Gulf War, AKP Government made it clear from the beginning that they are in favour of avoiding of a second war on Iraq and for the resolution of the conflict under the UN framework. Turkey followed an active diplomacy to prevent a US-led war in neighboring Iraq: Prime Minister Gül made a tour to Middle East countries Syria, Egypt and Jordan, and Kürşat Tüzmen, State Minister in charge of foreign trade, led a Turkish business delegation to Baghdad, as a sign of Turkey's opposition to any war in neighboring Iraq. Furthermore, the foreign ministers of Iraq's neighbors Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Syria met in İstanbul on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2003 to discuss ways to avert a potentially destabilizing US-led war on Iraq. They urged Saddam Hussein to co-operate fully with UN arms inspectors to avoid a conflict that would have devastating ramifications on the countries of the region.<sup>295</sup> As for the Turkish foreign policy makers, the conclusion of the İstanbul Summit was that the war was inevitable so Ankara

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<sup>294</sup>For further discussion about the Turkish foreign policy towards Iraq see, Bilal, N. Şimşir, *Türk-Irak İlişkilerinde Türkmenler*, Bilgi Publishing, Ankara, 2004. For a comprehensive analysis regarding the cultural, political and ethnic identity of the city of Kirkük see Mahir Nakip, *Kerkük'ün Kimliği*, Bilgi Publishing, Ankara, 2007.

<sup>295</sup>Milliyet, 24 January 2003.



faced decisions have to be taken immediately regarding the demands about the inspections carried out in the airports and the harbours by the US experts.<sup>296</sup> Meanwhile, Iraq warned Turkey to refuse US requests for military support in any attack on Baghdad. In the same period and almost contradictorily, upon AKP Government's approval, US inspectors began arriving in Turkey to explore military bases and ports in Turkey for a possible war against neighboring Iraq; and the Turkish military began shipping additional military supplies to units along the Iraqi border to reinforce them for a possible US operation on Iraq. In a key decision on 6 February 2003, the Turkish Parliament voted to allow the US to begin renovating military bases and ports for a possible Iraqi war, a first step towards allowing US combat troops into the country, and on 8 February 2003, Turkey and the US signed an agreement laying out the legal and financial framework for US plans to renovate Turkish bases ahead of a possible war in Iraq which satisfied the US demands as for the initial preparations for the war on Iraq.<sup>297</sup>

On 25 February 2003, AKP Government asked Parliament to authorize the deployment of US troops and to authorize the deployment of Turkish troops abroad. On 1 March 2003, in a shocking reversal that could undermine US war plans and seriously strain ties with Washington, Turkish Parliament failed to approve the bill allowing the US combat troops to open a northern front against Iraq on the Turkish territory.<sup>298</sup> Signaling impatience with the Turkish government, the United States began moving its navy out of the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea, where they could launch long-range cruise missiles on a path to Iraq that would not go over Turkey, and US Secretary of State Colin Powell warned Turkey to keep its forces out of Iraq during any

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<sup>296</sup>Fikret Bila, *İstanbul'dan Sonra*, Milliyet, 24 January 2003.

<sup>297</sup>Yasemin Çongar, *ABD Döner Kapı İçin Bastırıyor*, Milliyet, 8 February 2003.

<sup>298</sup>For further discussion about the the bill see Murat Yetkin, *Tezkere*, Remzi Publishing, İstanbul, 2004, and Fikret Bila, *Ankara'da Irak Savaşları*, Güncel Publishing, İstanbul, 2007.

US-led military action because of the concerns of a possible conflict with the Kurds.

On 19 March 2003, the AKP Government asked the Turkish Parliament to grant the US military permission to use Turkish airspace in an Iraq war, and in a long-delayed decision to give partial support to the US to open a northern front against Iraq. Parliament finally voted to pass a government motion allowing the US to use Turkey's airspace for attacks against Iraq.<sup>299</sup> Foreign Minister Gül declared that, Turkey was determined to send its troops across the border into northern Iraq to contain a possible refugee flow and prevent any attempt by Iraqi Kurds to break away from Iraq and declare their own statehood. However, both EU leaders and US Administration warned Turkey not to lead to further complications by sending any troops to northern Iraq.

As a consequence, during the AKP Government, the war in the neighboring Iraq occupied Turkey's agenda for a very long time. Although Turkey was affected by the war in many ways, particularly related to the Kurds in Northern Iraq, the war itself had no impact on other major foreign policy issues of the country such as the Cyprus conflict or Turkey-EU relations. In sum, AKP government used the "strategic depth discourse" in projecting the image of a just and impartial arbiter in foreign policy towards the Middle East. In particular, Turkey extended new diplomatic efforts to bringing peaceful resolutions to the Syrian-Israeli and Israeli-Palestinian conflicts. Turkey has undertaken bold steps to mediate regional conflicts in the Middle East. The new Turkish government demonstrated its willingness to reconcile its relations with the Muslim world. In particular, the Erdoğan government took an activist approach in its relations with its neighbours to the east (Iran) and South (Iraq and Syria), while the bilateral relations with Israel entered a cooler period. It is worth analysing that whether this intensification of political and economic

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<sup>299</sup>Milliyet, 20 March 2003.

relations with the Middle East, especially with Iran and Syria, would jeopardise the existing good relations of Turkey with Israel.

#### **4.6 Lebanon Crisis**

Another regional crisis which tested the Turkish foreign policy in this era has been the Lebanon War which was a result of the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers by Hezbollah and the consequent attack of the Israeli Defence Forces to the Lebanese territories. The 2000s, after the Israeli withdrawal, brought two important discussions in Lebanon: Syria's presence in the country and Hezbollah's arms.

Hezbollah justified its armed presence first, until 2000, to the Israeli occupation in southern Lebanon and then, after 2000, to the Israeli presence in Seba farms. While Hezbollah has continued its armed presence and justified it with the above-mentioned Israeli occupation, it, at the same time, has been operating in the political sphere receiving full support from Iran and Syria. Hezbollah was acting against the US and the Israeli interests by being in an axis together with Iran and Syria of which relations were severely full of tensions with the US and Israel during 2000s. In 2000, Israel had decided to withdraw from southern Lebanon and the international pressure on Syria to withdraw its presence from Lebanon greatly increased. Pressures on Syria ushered in the Syrian withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 27 April 2005.

Within the above-mentioned context, the Lebanese War of 2006 between Israel and Hezbollah ought to be assessed within a broader evaluation. Israel, when fighting against Hezbollah, was thought to be sending its bullets to Iran and Syria indeed. That is, according to Israel, Iran and Syria was behind Hezbollah and Hezbollah has been

supported and armed by these two “rogue states”.<sup>300</sup> Hezbollah, on the other hand, was trying to prove that it could resist and thwart the US and Israeli projects regarding the Middle East region, namely the Greater Middle East Project. In sum, the war turned out to be a war of attrition since the conflicting parties assessed the war in broader perspective. In the vague result of the war, the ceasefire was announced in 11 August 2006 according to the UNSC Resolution 1701 and UNIFIL II (The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon) was established and launched in the region which was a revised version of UNIFIL created in 1978.<sup>301</sup>

The Lebanon crisis has turned out to be another testing issue for Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East during the 2000s. Turkey was interested in the the Lebanon crisis in two ways. First of all, Turkey decided to participate in the UNIFIL II in 5 September 2006. Turkey’s participation in the expanded UNIFIL mission resulted in the direct exposure of Turkey to the regional developments to a greater extent.<sup>302</sup> On the other hand, since Lebanon has been a chessboard of power struggle in the region, and the developments and instabilities taking place in Lebanon had the potential to affect the region as a whole, it was inevitably impossible for Turkey to stay aloof from the developments in Lebanon.

Turkey, thus, tried to emerge as a “third party” when dealing with regional issues especially from 2000 and onwards. When evaluated in this context, the participation of Turkey in the UNIFIL II mission has been assessed as compatible with the overall perceptions of Turkish

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<sup>300</sup>Meliha Benli Altunışık, *Lübnan Krizi: Nedenleri ve Sonuçları*, TESEV Publishing, 2007, p.13.

<sup>301</sup>*Ibid*, p.15.

<sup>302</sup>*Ibid*, p.24.

foreign policy of 2000s and as an act increasing the influence of Turkey in the region.<sup>303</sup>

#### **4.7 Turkish-Israeli Relations in the AKP Era and the Question of Robustness**

The major tenets of the strategic depth doctrine and the close relations between Turkey and neighbouring Middle East had their impact on the Turkish-Israeli relations as well. As we mentioned several times throughout this study, Turkish foreign policy towards Israel has been closely related to Turkey's enthusiasm towards its Western connection. It should be reiterated here that the AKP Government and the strategic depth doctrine are evidently pro-Western, in particular pro-US. AKP government's foreign policy decisions in this era, such as the 1<sup>st</sup> March bill and the consecutive bill, welcoming the Greater Middle East Project, sending troops to Lebanon, carrying Washington's messages to Iraq and Syria and especially to Hamas, have all been parallel to that of Washington's. Therefore, while Turkey's enthusiasm towards its Western connection grew in the AKP era, its relations with Israel have not undergone fundamental upheavals although there has been superficial tensions in the political sphere.

##### **4.7.1 The Perspectives of the AKP Executives**

The continuing positive development of Turkey's strategic ties with the state of Israel in 2003 underscores the observation that a pragmatic assessment of Turkey's national interests, rather than any pan-Islamic sentiment among some of its grassroots supporters, has been the key factor in the formulation of the AKP government's relations with other countries, in particular with Israel. Indeed, Murat Mercan, an AKP founding member and one of its chief spokesmen, explained after the November 2002 electoral victory why the AKP government would

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<sup>303</sup>*Ibid*, p.25.

maintain Turkey's close ties with Israel: *"Turkish foreign policy is not dependent on political parties; it is dependent on Turkish national interests. So long as the relationship between the two countries is mutually beneficial, there is no reason to divert the course of the relationship."*<sup>304</sup> Mercan also denounced anti-Semitism and said; *"People living in Islamic countries should be able to regard Jews without prejudices. I believe that anti-Semitism harms most the anti-Semites themselves."*<sup>305</sup>

Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül, in his address to the joint meeting of the American Turkish Society and the National Committee on American Foreign Policy, along similar lines, emphasized that because Turkey benefits from the traditionally good relations with both parties in the Arab-Israeli conflict, Turkey *"has more to offer to the service of the peace process."* He added that, Ankara was *"eager to consult and cooperate with the United States and others to help achieve a lasting peace and stability in the region,"*<sup>306</sup> But there was one significant passage in his speech to the ATS (The American Turkish Society) and NCAFP (The National Committee on American Foreign Policy) members:

*Talking about the Middle East, I should also underscore the importance we attach to our relationship with Israel. Our ties with Israel are traditional, special, and strong. Indeed, cooperation between Turkey and Israel, the two democracies in the region, has important implications for the peace and stability of the entire region. In this context, the friendship between the Turkish and Jewish peoples has served as a sound basis upon which Turkey and Israel have developed close relations. At present, we are keen on further strengthening our cooperation in every field.*<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>304</sup>George E. Gruen, *Turkey's Strategic...*, p.444.

<sup>305</sup>*Ibid*, p.445.

<sup>306</sup>*Ibid*, p.452.

<sup>307</sup>*Ibid*, p.453.

However, the tensions between Israel and the newly elected Turkish government emerged and could be explained by the desire of the Erdoğan government to come closer with the Arab states. Erdoğan's statement that described the killing of Sheikh Yassin, the Hamas leader, in 19 May 2004, as "*state terrorism*" and bore a resemblance between the fate of the 15<sup>th</sup> Jews and the fate of the Palestinian people had negative effects on the Israeli-Turkish relations which had been high-profile since 1996. The rejection of Olmert and Sharon's demand to visit Turkey in order to meet Erdoğan and cure the relations without any excuse further increased the tension. In addition, Israel's growing presence in Northern Iraq and the allegation that Israelis provide military and intelligence training to Kurdish peshmergas in Northern Iraq also increased the tensions.<sup>308</sup> According to Kibaroglu, Israel's so called presence in Northern Iraq drives Turkish-Israeli strategic partnership to a crossroads.<sup>309</sup>

The rumours regarding Israeli presence in Northern Iraq constituted an important hindrance in Turkish-Israeli relations. Regarding the Israeli presence in Northern Iraq and the assistance of the Israelis to the Kurds, Seymour Hersh, in his article published in New Yorker, wrote that the Israeli secret forces have been operating in Northern Iraq since the War has started and even before that and they were helping and preparing the Kurds towards an independent statehood. The idea that Israel would prefer an independent, secular, Western oriented Kurdish state that it can ally itself in the region against Iran and Syria is considered unacceptable for Turkey. The Israeli decision to seek a bigger foothold in Kurdistan—characterized by the former Israeli

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<sup>308</sup>Özlem Tür, "Türkiye ve Orta Doğu: Gerilimden İşbirliğine", in Zeynep Dağı (ed.), *Doğudan Batıya Dış Politika...*, p.159.

<sup>309</sup>Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Clash of Interest over Northern Iraq Drives Turkish-Israeli Alliance to a Crossroads", *Middle East Journal*, Vol.59, No:2, Spring 2005, pp. 1-19.

intelligence officer as “Plan B”—has also raised tensions between Israel and Turkey.<sup>310</sup>

While such rumours were continuing, the killing of Sheikh Yassin added another strain on the Turkish-Israeli relations. In June 2004, Erdoğan’s remarks of Israeli state terror as a reaction to the killing of Sheikh Yassin included:

*The killing of a person who was in your prisons then released because he could not control two-thirds of his body (Sheikh Yassin) is intolerable. What is going on in Rafah refugee camp is intolerable. All of this wounds me and my people deeply. We are a country that opened our arms to the Jews when they were driven out of Spain in 15<sup>th</sup> century. Now, the same thing is being done to the Palestinian people. We must find a way out. We do not want what has happened to ruin our relations with Israel. We feel the need to warn you [...] there is individual, institutional and state terrorism going on in the Middle East.*<sup>311</sup>

#### **4.7.2 The Bilateral Relations**

Although tension began in the relations, calls for cooperation at different levels continued. First of all, as shown in Table 1, the bilateral trade continued to grow. Inclusion of research and development projects in private sector and industry besides scientific cooperation was thought to facilitate in creating a common research and development fund and providing finance.

During 2003 and 2004, Turkey continued its active involvement in efforts to end the cycle of Palestinian-Israeli violence, as well as to achieve a comprehensive settlement of the broader Arab-Israeli conflict. On June 8, 2003, Ankara announced that Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan had spoken with its Israeli and Palestinian

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<sup>310</sup>Seymour Hersh, *Plan B*, The New Yorker, 28 June 2004.

<sup>311</sup>Milliyet, 8 June 2004.



counterparts, offering Ankara's aid in pursuing the multilateral "Road Map"<sup>312</sup> to peace. In telephone talks with Israeli Premier Ariel Sharon and Palestinian Authority Premier Mahmud Abbas, Erdoğan said that Turkey was "*determined to contribute to efforts to reach a settlement that established two states with internationally recognized borders between Israeli and Palestinian lands.*"<sup>313</sup> Prime Minister Erdoğan stressed that progress in the region's peace process was contingent on a halt to terrorism, and he expressed sadness at the deaths of four Israeli soldiers, shot dead at a checkpoint earlier that day.<sup>314</sup>

Frequent high-level contacts between Turkish and Israeli diplomats, on the other hand, continued including a visit to Ankara by Israeli Minister Shaul Mofaz in May 2003. He negotiated an anti-terrorism cooperation agreement, and General Hilmi Özkök, the Turkish military's chief of staff, went to Israel at the end of June. This was the first such high-level military visit to Israel since 1997. It resulted in several agreements to enhance cooperation in various ways, including augmenting the level of the two countries' annual air and sea exercises. The growing strategic relationship was crowned with an official visit of Israeli President Moshe Katsav to Turkey in July. After laying a wreath at the Atatürk Memorial in Ankara, Katsav met with Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer on July 8. At a joint press conference following their meeting, President Sezer declared that Turkey was prepared to aid the Middle East peace process in all ways possible and reiterated that Turkey supported the Road Map. Sezer pointed out that Turkey was prepared that host an international conference if necessary to aid the Middle East peace efforts. The Israeli head of state also met with

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<sup>312</sup>The "Road Map"-drawn up by the European Union, Russia, the United Nations and the United States- outlines a three-phase process leading to a durable peace that would include the creation of a Palestinian state by 2005.

<sup>313</sup>George E. Gruen, *Turkey's Strategic...*, p.445.

<sup>314</sup>*Ibid*, p.445.

Prime Minister Erdoğan and with Bülent Arınç,<sup>315</sup> the speaker of the Turkish Parliament.<sup>316</sup>

Turkish-Israeli relations in various other fields also continued to develop in spite of the change in Turkish foreign policy perceptions due to the strategic depth doctrine. For example, the spokesman for the IDF announced on July 31 2003 that, as part of their annual exercise schedule, the navies of Turkey, Israel, and the United States would conduct their sixth combined search-and-rescue exercise in international waters south of the Turkish coast in August 2003. Several warships and aircraft participated in the trilateral exercise. Although in the past some Arab states and Iran had protested against what they declared were the secret hostile intentions of the three countries, an IDF spokesman emphasized the humanitarian nature of the joint effort:

*The objective of this exercise is to practice coordinated emergency search and rescue procedures in order to save lives in times of distress at sea. By familiarizing themselves with one another's capabilities and working together, elements of the three naval forces which regularly operate in the Mediterranean Sea will be able to provide humanitarian aid and more effective responses to actual maritime emergencies.*<sup>317</sup>

The interview of Ha'aretz correspondent Hanoch Marmari with Prime Minister Erdoğan in June 2004 is worth mentioning in regard to his perceptions about Israel. In this interview Marmari, noting that Turkey and Israel are bound by strong and ongoing relations, asked whether the prime minister believed there has been a recent change in attitude on the Turkish side or by the Turkish government with regard to Israel and Erdoğan replied:

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<sup>315</sup>It should be recalled that the traditionally Islamist Arınç had aroused a storm of controversy among Turkey's secular political elite the previous year, when he escorted his headscarfed wife to an official reception. He also was one of the most vocal and enthusiastic Turkish critics of Israel after IDF entered Jenin to combat suspected Palestinian terrorists.

<sup>316</sup>George E. Gruen, *Turkey's Strategic...*, p.445.

<sup>317</sup>*Ibid*, p.446.

*First of all, regarding our relations with Israel, they must be understood on several different fronts. One is the relationship between the governments, and the other is between the peoples. And another way of looking at our relations would be through our political, economic, trade and social ties. When we look at relations on the level of the peoples, we can not even conceive of any problems. As far as the Turkish side is concerned, there are no problems here. It is not even on our agenda. There might be different evaluations by some individuals or some marginal groups, but as far as the Turkish government is concerned, our view with regard to Israel is very objective. ... But at the level of the government, we are in favor of the peace process being regenerated, and the government of Israel has not contributed to our efforts to do so. Why am I saying this? I would have wished that a government, a cabinet, would not decide to carry out an assassination, because governments should never put aside the law.<sup>318</sup>*

In a reversal of his earlier rejection of the invitation to visit Israel and an attempt to improve the climate of US-Turkish relations, Erdoğan made his first official visit to Israel with a large delegation of state ministers and businessmen on 1 May 2005. He discussed with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon a possible participation of Turkey in the solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the regional situation in the Middle East and an agreement on Turkish air force modernization by the Israeli military industry. Another important discussion was a joint Turkish-Israeli project to build a pipeline to deliver Russian gas to Israel through Turkish territory and under Mediterranean waters. Sharon offered to convene an international peace conference in Turkey at a future date, and offered to allow Erdoğan a role in the Gaza Strip's economic development after the Israeli pullout. Erdoğan and Sharon made a commitment to strengthen Turkish-Israeli intelligence cooperation to combat terrorism. The establishment of a hot line between the two leaders to discuss urgent regional developments was the highlight of the visit.<sup>319</sup> Turkey's efforts regarding its participation in the peace negotiations could be assessed as the neo-Ottomanist

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<sup>318</sup>*Ibid*, p.447. He was referring to Israel's campaign of targeted assassinations of Hamas and other terrorist organizations' leaders.

<sup>319</sup>Alexander Murinson, *The Strategic Depth Doctrine of...*, p. 959.

foreign policy approach towards the region which undertakes responsibility in solving the regional disputes.

Despite the stress in the relations at the political and diplomatic level, Israeli pilots continued to practice in the Turkish airspace and trade continued to improve. Although Israel did not participate in the regular military exercise called Anatolian Eagle in 2004 due to the straining of relations, cooperation in military issues continued. Joint exercises on Find and Rescue have been carried out and top military officials have met several times. Foreign trade has reached 2 billion dollars in 2004 and 2.7 billion dollars in 2007 and this worked to Turkey's benefit. Officials say that Foreign Minister Gül's visit to Israel on 3-5 January 2005 has been a turning point in the relations. In the same month a military dialogue meeting was held under the leadership of then Commander of Land Forces İlker Başbuğ. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of February Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas visited Turkey. The same day Israeli Head of General Staff Moshe Yaalon visited Ankara. Also Turkey sent Minister of Justice Cemil Çiçek to the opening of the Holocaust museum to Israel and his statements had been important.

Economic relations continued to grow under the tensions in the political relations. Turkish firms began to renew the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv railway, Israeli firms working in Turkey reached around 2500, and the number of tourists visiting Turkey annually continued to be around 300,000. Also one way of attracting further EU investment seems to depend on diversifying Turkish economy. Israel could also be helpful at this aspect. These developments show that the relations went further than politician-to-politician and military-to-military relations.

After all the tensions on the political level, Erdoğan government decided to mend fences with Israel. This was mainly because Turkey could not risk alienating both Israel and US at the same time. Relations with US had already been strained due to the rejection 1<sup>st</sup> March bill in

Turkish Parliament and the Suleymaniya crisis. Besides, assurances of the Israeli side that they would not do anything to harm relations with Turkey seem to have worked. The idea of playing a more active role in the region, as mediator between Israel and Syria also seems to play a part in this. Alienating Israel at this stage would also not be wise for the developments in northern Iraq as Turkey would risk losing all its chances of having any influence and power over the future of that country.

High level visits continued in this era as well. Prime Minister Erdoğan sent four MPs to Israel. Later, Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül's visited Israel. The most important event was Erdoğan's visit to Israel in this context. Erdoğan visit had been influential in decreasing the amount of pressure in the relations and had been of utmost importance in "normalizing" the relations between the two countries.

In many areas, bilateral relations continued to grow during the AKP era such as the GAP projects and research and development issues between the countries. Within the context of agreements signed in 1997, Turkey agreed to give some projects to Israel in the GAP region. There were six projects which 20 Israeli companies had participated with a Turkish partner. From the \$700 million, most was thought to go to Turkey and some to Israel. However, after these initial meetings, the projects got stuck. Another recent large deal, signed in Ankara on May 25, 2004, is an \$800 million contract between Israeli Dorad Energies Ltd. and Turkey's Zorlu Holding to construct three natural gas power stations in Israel.<sup>320</sup>

The bilateral relations in some areas, however, have not grown and exhausted its potential such as the project of selling water to Israel from Manavgat River. The decision now lies with the Turkish side and the technical issues regarding how to carry the water is left to Turkey.

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<sup>320</sup>George E. Gruen, *Turkey's Strategic...*, p.446.

Israeli side says that they are ready to go along with the decision of the Turkish side and will comply with the proposals but Turkey is not moving on the issue and this is also stuck. Cooperation in Research and Development also is not moving because apparently Turkey is not moving with the necessary procedural structure.

In an interview that was given in a television program by Namık Tan, Turkish Ambassador in Tel Aviv stated firmly that Turkish-Israeli relations are in a mood of great maturity and in spite of the ups and downs these relations relied upon a strong basis. He argued that rather than being annoyed, Israel has been comfortable with the new activism in Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East, in particular towards Iran and Syria. With respect to the rumours regarding the Israeli presence in Northern Iraq, Tan argued that there is hardly any problem of confidence between Turkey and Israel and he stated that they have never encountered any suspectible policy or attitude of the Israeli policymakers within the political and official platforms.<sup>321</sup>

Shortly before this interview, Mr. Ambassador's Government's Minister of Energy, Hilmi Güler, announced that cooperation on energy issues between Israel and Turkey has been full steam ahead. Güler met with Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, the Israeli Minister of Energy and Infrastructure, in Ankara and stated that there has been a "multiple pipeline project" between Israel and Turkey including oil, natural gas, electricity, water and fiber optic cables. He mentioned that the natural gas pipeline project providing Israel with Russian natural gas will be a supplementary facility to the Blue Stream and Samsun-Ceyhan natural gas pipeline project that carries Russian natural gas to Turkey.<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>321</sup>HaberTürk Weekend, *Interview with Namık Tan*, 23 December 2007.

<sup>322</sup>Enerji Dünyası, *Türkiye ve İsrail Enerjide İşbirliğine Gidiyor*, Vol. 57, November 2007, p.16.

### 4.7.3 Hamas

After the election victory of Hamas<sup>323</sup> of January 2006 in the Palestinian territories, Israel faced the prospect of the Palestinian leadership composed of the members of the Palestinian Islamist organization openly committed to the destruction of the Jewish state. Netanyahu expressed his unrest by saying that "*A Hamasistan has been founded in front of our eyes*".<sup>324</sup> The first task of Hamas was to find international recognition, especially because it was designated as a terrorist organization by the United States and the EU. The Turkish leadership made an unexpected manoeuvre by inviting Khaled Mashal, the official representative of Hamas in Damascus, to visit Turkey for a meeting with Turkish officials, including Abdullah Gül. The goal of Turkey was to mediate between Israel and the Hamas leadership. But this attempt at unsolicited mediation was seen as hostile and deleterious to Turkish-Israeli relations. Israel was deeply concerned by Turkey's holding talks with Hamas as this provided Hamas with undeserved legitimacy. Raanan Gissin, the spokesman of the Israeli Prime Minister's Office, commented during an interview on Turkish television; "*It is a serious mistake; this visit could have consequences for our links that could be hard to repair.*" He asked what the Turkish reaction would be if Tel Aviv had invited Abdullah Öcalan, the now imprisoned leader of the pro-Kurdish terrorist group the PKK, to Israel for talks. The Turkish Foreign Ministry described the comparison as "*completely groundless and wrong*".<sup>325</sup> Turkish officials explained that in their talks they urged Hamas to renounce violence and adopt a conciliatory attitude towards Israel. Turkish Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül said the meeting with Hamas "*fulfilled the government's international responsibilities in trying*

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<sup>323</sup>For further discussion about the structure, historical background and coming to power of Hamas in Palestine see Bora Bayraktar, *Hamas*, Karakutu Publishing, İstanbul, 2007.

<sup>324</sup>Bora Bayraktar, *Hamas*, p.13.

<sup>325</sup>Alexander Murinson, *The Strategic Depth Doctrine of...*, p.959.

*to steer the Palestinians towards peace*".<sup>326</sup> The meeting by Turkish officials with a Hamas representative ushered in anger not only in the Israeli circles, it also created concerns in the Bush administration. Indeed Turkish side had informed the Americans and the Israelis about the visit before it took place.<sup>327</sup> The host was the AKP administration as a political party rather than the government itself. During the visit Erdoğan did not meet with the Hamas delegation but Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül participated in the hosting group which was headed by Deputy General Director of the AKP Dengir Mir Mehmet Firat.

After the visit Mashal evaluated his visit by saying:

*We received beneficial advices. They are important for us. We asked for support for our projects and we got support from Turkey like our Arab friends. We will continue our ties with Turkey in order to establish the real peace and get back the occupied territories. We consider the achievements of Turkish Government as a guide for ours*".<sup>328</sup>

After all, the main objective of Turkey was to provide legitimacy for Hamas within the international sphere. Ahmet Davutoğlu explained the background of the visit in a television interview as follows:

*Hamas won the elections and came to power. We wanted to contribute to legalize it like the PLO. If we hadn't done this, Hamas would have fallen into the influence of Iran-Syria-Hezbollah triangle which was our main concern. We thought that the meetings should not be held in the prime ministriel level. Hamas is a political party, so we are. The meetings could be held in this level. We informed both the US and the Israeli Ambassadors about the visit. We told them that we would tell the demands of the international community to Hamas. Both Ambassadors told us that it would be very beneficial.*<sup>329</sup>

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<sup>326</sup>*Ibid*, p.959.

<sup>327</sup>Bora Bayraktar, *Hamas...*, p.196.

<sup>328</sup>*Ibid*, p.196.

<sup>329</sup>*Ibid*, p.198.



The visit of Hamas also reduced the room for manoeuvre of Turkey in its struggle with PKK terrorism. According to Çağaptay, the AKP government has invited the leader of a terrorist group to Ankara at a time when Turkey needs all the help it can get from the West to defeat the PKK's relentless terror campaign. He stated that:

*Mashal's visit indicates that far from taking Turkey's strategic interests into account, the AKP's Middle East policy is guided by a cultural desire to help other Muslim governments and even Islamist terrorist groups, regardless of the nature of these governments and groups and irrespective of how their interests may be at odds with Turkey's.*<sup>330</sup>

In sum, it is obvious that Turkey's foreign policy towards Israel has not undergone fundamental changes although a political party, AKP, which had political Islamic background, came to power in Turkey in 2002. The reason underlying is that the AKP Government and the strategic depth doctrine are evidently pro-Western, in particular pro-US. Therefore, parallel with the increase in Turkey's enthusiasm towards its Western connection, relations with Israel have not undergone fundamental changes.

It is the fact even AKP has a different vision of foreign policy compared to its predecessors which is mostly compromising. The compromising attitudes of AKP foreign policy impedes the probable conflicts with the countries that Turkey has good relations, while it leads Turkey to mend the fences with the countries which Turkey had disputes historically. The very first reason of this compromising attitude is the fact that, as stressed above, AKP's search for legitimacy in its foreign relations and efforts to avoid external conflicts while it had internal ones at the same time. Briefly speaking, AKP government tries to benefit from its foreign relations as a leverage in order to cope with its domestic question of legitimacy.

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<sup>330</sup>Soner Çağaptay, "Hamas Visits Ankara: The AKP Shifts Turkey's Role in the Middle East", *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, Policy Watch No:1081, 2007.

The question is how long will it take? In other words, how long the AKP Government will pursue compromising policies that is contrary to its political Islamic background towards the Western countries, especially Israel. The answer is closely related to the domestic legitimacy problems of AKP. The fact that the AKP Government deals with its domestic legitimacy problems by using its foreign relations as a leverage enables it to consolidate its internal legitimacy in the mid and long term, however, the consolidation itself will probably usher in an increase in the room for manoeuvre in foreign policy. As far as the relations with Israel concerned, the more the AKP Government copes with the internal question of legitimacy successfully and consolidates its position vis-à-vis the established powers in Turkish politics, the more the opportunity to re-evaluate its foreign policy towards Israel in accordance with its political Islamic background will increase. Another contributing factor will probably be the tensions taking place between the Israelis and the Palestinians and the misery that the Palestinian people have experienced. As mentioned several times, there is a positive correlation between the Turkish-Israeli relations and ease in Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The vital question here is that whether the ramifications of the use as a leverage of foreign relations will allow the AKP foreign policy concept to re-evaluate its foreign policy towards Israel in accordance with its political Islamic background or whether the AKP governed Turkey will be able to revise its foreign policy given the political and economic conditions that survive in that future time period.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

The focus of this study has been the main principles and the driving forces of Turkish foreign policy towards the State of Israel in a historical perspective. Analyzing the impact of the structure of the international system and the changes in this structure on Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East region, and Israel in particular, has been the main objective. It is argued in this study that, within a given international system, Turkish foreign policy has been determined by Turkey's Western connection and its role in this system. The recognition of Israel, the early relations, the alliance of 1950s and the cooling of relations after the second half of the 1960s can all be attributed to the changes in the structure of the international system and the Western connection of Turkish Republic within that given international system.

The growing relations between the two countries in the 1990s should be assessed in this perspective as well. In this context, despite severe criticism from Turkey's Middle Eastern neighbors, Turkey's post-Cold War strategy has witnessed an important partnership with Israel. This partnership was filled with the military training agreement and with the defense industry cooperation accord in 1996. Turkey could make a significant contribution should Israel try to strike at Iran's non-conventional weapons infrastructure, or find itself involved in war with Syria. On the other hand, it provided a close ally in the region for Turkey, in order to cope with the "two and a half war strategy". Most important, perhaps, is the psychological impact of the emerging Israel-Turkish axis, which introduces an element of uncertainty into the military calculations of Syria and Iran. It is, as mentioned, the most

effective feature of the entente that it provides enhanced deterrence for Israel and Turkey against Iran and Syria who were perceived as hostile states in the 1990s.

Of course, Turkey as a secular country with an overwhelming majority of Muslim population is sensitive to some conflicts with Islamic communities in the world, and the Palestinian conflict does not ease matters. However, despite the tensions in the Palestinian conflict, this has not a strategic effect, since Turkish strategy takes into account the real interests, which I discussed in Chapter Three. They have been more dominant in the formation of foreign policy. The rules existing till now and the relationship used to be such that neither Turkey nor Israel expects the other side to fight on behalf of each other. This policy was declared several times. But both are ready to collaborate with the United States in its wars, especially in the global war against terrorism. On the other hand, indirect assistance is very welcome, like intelligence, technologies, and so forth.

The Western connection of Turkey and the structure of the international system continued to have its decisive impact on Turkish foreign policy towards Israel during the 2000s. In this study, the foreign policy perceptions of a political movement that came to power in Turkey in 2002 having Islamic roots have been evaluated. As far as the this political movement, the AKP, concerned, the main argument of this study has been the fact that the AKP Government has a foreign policy perception which is not similar when compared to its predecessors, which is mostly compromising. It should be admitted that since AKP became the party of the government with the dominant position in the Turkish parliament in November 2002, a new paradigm and a new activism emerged in Turkish foreign policy. Using the Islamist discourse, this new doctrine, namely "strategic depth doctrine" set forth a new vision of Turkey as playing a decisive role as a participant in an emerging multi-dimensional world order, being still in a positive

relationship with the United States and Israel, but also an active player in Europe, in the Middle East and in Central Asia. Neo-ottomanism, as manifested in the strategic depth doctrine, has become a significant feature of Turkish foreign policy. In this context, the AKP government and the strategic depth doctrine are evidently pro-Western, in particular pro-US.

To summarize the basic tenets of AKP foreign policy towards the Middle East region, it is possible to argue that the AKP government has been following a distinct foreign policy which is multi-dimensional and activist. The Turkish-Syrian political rapprochement of January 2004 led to the Turkish-Arab rapprochement at the regional level. The successful high-level discussions held with the occasion of the official visit of Syrian President to Turkey followed up by several meetings treating "low-level" politics. These discussions had a positive impact on the Turkish-Lebanese and the traditionally warm Turkish-Egyptian relations. The perspectives on this overall political rapprochement have been broadened since it was accompanied by an important cooperation at economic level to the satisfaction of the AKP foreign affairs strategists. The leadership of the neighbouring Arab states has pointed out in several occasions to their Turkish counterparts that they are able to ensure Ankara a safe and profitable access to the Arab, African and Asian markets. The Turkish government clearly committed itself to close political and economic relations with the neighbouring Arab states. This is of course only a narrow picture of the reality. To complete the puzzle the growing bilateral relations with prominent Muslim countries such as Pakistan, Iran and Saudi Arabia, have to be taken into account too.

With regard to Turkish-Israeli relations, the AKP government has displayed a different manner than did former Islamist political parties. From the beginning, it has not resorted to anti-Semitic discourses and worked hard to disencumber itself from the ideological burdens they

inherited. Addressing the Organization of Islamic Countries' summit in Malaysia in October 2003, Foreign Minister Gül criticized anti-Semitism in his talk. The AKP government has cultivated good relations with the Jewish lobby in the United States. The relations with Israel, in particular, were another area that the AKP has displayed a spirit of compromise and reconciliation. When AKP came to power, Erdoğan expressed that the present level of relations with Israel was far from being satisfactory and thus to be improved. However, at the outset of 2008, Turkish President Abdullah Gül was warned by the Chairman of B'nai Brith, about their concerns regarding the anti-semitic opinions taking place in the Islamic press in Turkey.<sup>331</sup>

The Turkish-Israeli partnership has managed to overcome substantial hurdles since flourishing in the 1990s. It should be clearly noted that Turkish-Israeli relations, especially people-to-people ones, greatly depend on the fate of the Palestinian people and vulnerable to the developments in West Bank and Gaza. Most of tensions took place between Israel and Turkey are related to the mistreatment of Israel towards the Palestinian people. The relations, thus, flourished hand in hand with the peace process during 1990s, while tensions took place within the Intifada years. As a consequence, it would not be an exaggeration to conclude that the Palestinian issue will have its impact, to some extent, on the Turkish-Israeli relations.

It is widely discussed in this thesis that the continuing of close relations with Israel has powerful supporters in the military and the traditional ruling elite in Turkey. Indeed, military and the traditional elite has been the composer of the entente in the Turkish side, of which influential posts have been replaced by the so called "periphery" in Turkey. As argued in this thesis AKP has a problem of legitimacy within the Turkish

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<sup>331</sup> B'nai B'rith is an international Jewish organization committed to the security and continuity of the Jewish people, defending human rights, combating anti-Semitism, bigotry and ignorance, and providing service to the community on the broadest principles of humanity.

sphere of internal politics. In order to cope with this legitimacy problem, AKP policymakers try to benefit from the international ties of Turkish Republic, such as EU and Israel, as a leverage. It can be said that since AKP government faces resistance within internal sphere of politics in Turkey, such as from the military or the traditional political and bureaucratic elites, they need the external support of the foreign ties of Turkey since it is necessary in continuing their rule. As a result they refrain from international challenges which could jeopardize their political post in power and the win-win approach that they adopted let the third parties win in international arena, while AKP itself mostly wins in the national arena. In fact, only this kind of liberal and compromising perspective could allow AKP to survive and carry out the so called necessary transformation in Turkish politics. It is concluded in this study that, the compromising foreign policy perception of AKP government is closely linked with its problem of domestic legitimacy. And it is also concluded that the AKP government uses the foreign relations of Turkey as a leverage for easing its domestic tensions which usher in a compromising foreign policy. As a result, the AKP government, in its relations with Israel, although their Islamic roots require the opposite course of action, continues the ties that established in the 1990s, and avoid breaking the relations.

In sum, from a strategic depth perspective, new political paradigm best serves AKP's both internal and external objectives. While the policy of "zero problem with the neighbouring countries" provide a friendly environment to the government, compromising attitudes regarding the relations with US, Israel and the EU, on the other hand, contribute to the international support for AKP government. On the other hand, the Islamist sentiments that the AKP people have may have long term ramifications as well. Especially, if the AKP, one day, will be able to eliminate the traditional circles who harshly oppose the AKP, and have their hands free from local pressure, its policy objectives towards the Middle East and the Islamic countries may overstrip the ones towards

the Western countries, in particular Israel. However, it is seen more likely that the geopolitical and geostrategic developments in the region will lead, at least in the short term, the strategic depth policy to survive. In the long term, on the contrary, the new balance of power in the region that have been created after the war on Iraq and the changing geopolitical perceptions also have the potential to contribute to the changing mindsets of the AKP leaders. It is possible for Turkey that, further cooperation will be needed with the Muslim countries of the Middle East. Together with the policymaking capacity of AKP internally, the new geopolitics in the region may result in a divorce between Turkey and Israel in the long term.

It is hoped that these discussions in total will provide a broad and coherent picture of Turkish-Israeli relations and Turkish foreign policy towards Israel in a historical perspective and contribute to other studies regarding similar subjects with its inclusion of the soonest developments in the relations and of its discussion of the new foreign policy doctrine and its impacts on the Turkish-Israeli relations.



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