

BILKENT UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTE OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

TURKISH-ISRAELI RELATIONS IN THE  
POST COLD WAR ERA

BY  
TUNCAY KARDAŞ

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF  
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN PARTIAL  
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF  
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

SEPTEMBER 1999  
ANKARA

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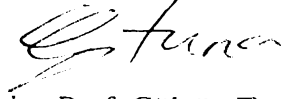
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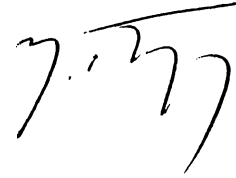
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I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of International Relations.


  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The end of the cold war resulted in the emergence of the new threats and the sources of instability in the Middle Eastern region. Turkey and Israel, in this context, needed to reassess their security environment, in which, they, relatively enjoyed the “cold war stability” until December 1991, the collapse of the bipolar system. This need, beginning from the mid-1990s transformed itself to a new strategic partnership between the two countries that was built on the bases of commonly perceived threats, military and economic cooperations. This master thesis strives to explain this strategic partnership with its grounds. The effect of this new partnership upon the regional states is also examined. It is also concluded that the strategic partnership is bound to have certain ramifications such as changes in the strategic calculations of the regional states and counter alignments.

## ÖZET

Soğuk savaşın bitmesi Ortadoğu bölgesi için yeni tehditlerin ve istikrarsızlık kaynağı yeni gelişmelerin ortaya çıkmasına neden olmuştur. Türkiye ve İsrail soğuk savaş dönemi boyunca faydalandıkları görece güvenlik ortamını yeniden değerlendirme ihtiyacı duymuşlardır. Bu ihtiyaç, 1990'ların ortalarından itibaren ortak tehdit algılamaları, askeri ve ekonomik işbirliği temelleri üzerine kurulan bir stratejik ortaklık haline dönüşmüştür. Bu yüksek lisans tezinde, yeni ortaklığın ortaya çıkışı, nedenleri ile birlikte araştırılmıştır. Bu yeni ortaklığın bölge ülkeleri üzerindeki etkileri de incelenmeye çalışılmıştır. Ayrıca bu ortaklığın bölge devletlerinin stratejik durumlarında değişiklikler ve karşı ortaklıklar gibi kaçınılmaz sonuçları olacağı belirtilmiştir.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This master thesis owes its greatest debt to Assist. Prof. Mustafa Kibaroglu for his encouragement and guidance as my supervisor. Also I would like to express my gratitude to Assist. Prof. Gülgün Tuna for her patience and support. Lastly, I thank to my family for their encouragement and endless support.



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## INTRODUCTION

After the collapse of the bipolar system in 1991 and the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, the predictions about a possible “new order” were so bold as to mean that the international system took a huge deflection and affected many regions including the Middle East; the world would face a new Middle East which could serve as a center for “political reconciliation” and social, cultural and economic benefits for all the parties. However, the worst fears were realized: for more than three years the peace-process was stalled, the tension between Lebanon and Israel continues, the power vacuum in Northern Iraq still waits to be filled. Also there exists increasing resentment among the Arab world against the US stemming from its inability to force Israeli government to obey the Oslo Accords and the United Nations (UN) resolutions on the Palestinian territories while successfully maintaining its “relentless” blockade on Iraq.<sup>1</sup> The spread of weapons of mass destruction is high on the agenda. Arab intransigence toward Israel still reigns supreme. New rogue regimes come to the surface in countries such as Sudan and Afghanistan. The logic of “my enemy’s enemy is my friend” prevails,<sup>2</sup> it also leads to new-group forming in the Middle East that carries the potential to override the powerful factors in the social scene such as ideology or religion (it causes no surprise to see Christian Greek “Democrats” allying themselves within Muslim “despotic” Syrians.)

The military cooperation between Turkey and Israel began to take shape after the Israeli agreement with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in September

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<sup>1</sup> See Martin Indyk, “Symposium on Dual Containment,” Middle East Policy, Vol.3, No.1, (January 1994), pp. 1-27 and Alon Ben-Meir, “The Dual Containment Strategy is no Longer Viable,” Middle East Policy, Vol.4, No.3, (March 1996), pp. 58-72.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with the retired ambassador Şükrü Elekdağ, 15 February 1999, Ankara.

1993. Facilitating factors such as both nations being non-Arab, democratic, secular, western-oriented with a sense of alienation from “others”, all helped them to maintain sustainable relations for decades.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, they both have special relations with the US and have tried to hold out by the huge military powers. For each, terrorism poses a great threat and both put their relations with Syria and Iran before others.

In addition to the agreements of 1993 when Turkey signed the declaration for strategic cooperation with Israel and 1994 when then Prime Ministers: Tansu Çiller of Turkey and Yitzhak Rabin of Israel articulated the vision for enhanced cooperation between the two countries; specifically, in February 1996, Israel and Turkey have concluded a historic military training agreement which was followed by an “Arms Industry Cooperation Pact” in August 1996. These have paved the way for increasing economic and military ties that enabled both sides to fly and train in one another’s airspace, share sophisticated intelligence, information, cooperate on joint security and weapons projects and enjoy extensive trade relations.

The end of the cold war was another important factor that has led Turkey to ally itself with Israel. After the “Soviet threat” ceased to weigh heavily against Turkey, the military and bureaucratic elites due to the fear of being marginalized, began to employ new foreign policy initiatives with regard to the perilous state of the Middle Eastern region.<sup>4</sup> Also Turkey has always been mindful of the strong support of Israel in the US, particularly through the pro-Israeli lobbies which are essential inner-political actors of the US that can strengthen Turkey’s lobbying presence in Washington.

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<sup>3</sup> See Alan Makovsky, “Israeli-Turkish Relations: A Turkish periphery-strategy”?, in Reluctant Neighbor: Turkey’s Role in the Middle East, edited by Henri J. Barkey, Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 1996, pp. 147-70.

<sup>4</sup> Alain Greish, “Turkish-Israeli-Syrian Relations and Their Impact on the Middle East, “Middle East Journal, Vol.62, No.3 (Spring 1998), p.191.

From the Israeli point of view, it is obvious that, Israel, facing the isolation in the Middle East, following the rise of the Netanyahu government to the power in 1996, was in an urgent need of support from a non-Arab Muslim power in the region, although the newly elected Prime Minister Ehud Barak launched a new initiative in the peace-process with the Arab world. The support Israeli government needed was provided by a state, namely Turkey, which is a westernized, secular and democratic country maintaining a free-market economy. This support makes Israeli supremacy possible against Iraq, Iran and Syria. Israel also welcomes a potential 65 million Turkish customer market. The coming revenue from arms sales, the opportunity to conduct exercises for its air force and the joint military exercises would be essential for Israel to establish a strategic power in the Middle East,<sup>5</sup> retain its overwhelming military superiority, its security arrangements and a “peace founded on strength.”<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, Israel strives for a new foreign policy initiative in the Central Asian republics, which would provide a “sphere of influence” in the region by creating an “economic hinterland.”<sup>7</sup>

The rapprochement is likely to have widespread ramifications in the region including the possibility of counter-power blocs.

Therefore, with this in mind, the thesis aims at presenting an understanding of and depicting the process of developing strategic partnership between Israel and Turkey after the cold war.

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<sup>5</sup> The Turkish Daily News, (7 September 1998).

<sup>6</sup> See Benjamin Netanyahu's Speech at the National Defense College, 14 August 1997 (<http://www.israel-mfa.gov.il>).

<sup>7</sup> See Bülent Aras, “Post Cold War Realities: Israel's strategy in Azerbaijan and Central Asia (The Caspian Region),” Middle East Policy, Vol.5, No.4, (January 1998), pp. 68-82.

The thesis comprises 4 chapters. Following the introduction, the first chapter starts with the post-cold war developments in the Turkish-US, Turkish-European and Turkish Middle East relations as the foundation for the strategic partnership, between Turkey and Israel.

The second chapter lays the emphasis on the historical background of the relations that Turkey had with the Middle Eastern states and the Israeli State, prior to the end of the cold war.

The third chapter strives to base some important Turkish and Israeli motives for the rapprochement.

The fourth chapter brings the 1990's improving relations into focus. It also provides a chronology of the important aspects of the developing relations.

# **CHAPTER I**

## **POST COLD WAR DEVELOPMENTS**

### **1.1. Introductory Remarks**

The 1990s witnessed lots of factors of instability: In the Middle East the cessation of the Soviet threat and the end of the Gulf war have altered the patterns of security considerations; at least for Turkey. After becoming a “front-line” state in North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Turkey is now uneasy about its location. Namely, the ethnic diversity and the conflicts in general and some potential problems such as; terrorism, immigration, the locked peace process and military imbalances are all posing threats to Turkey’s security.

### **1.2. Turkish-US Relations after the Cold War**

As a “model” for the Middle-Eastern countries in the eyes of the US, in addition to its NATO membership, Turkey played an important role in the strategic calculations of the US after the cold war era.

By and large, Turkey and the US had more or less a unified vision in the perception of the threats in the region, whereas their approach towards the issues differentiated.

Particularly after 1991, Turkey began to act together with the US on a case by case basis rather than in a unified mode.

Generally speaking, Turkey is in need of the US support when bearing in mind the fact that it is surrounded by a region with great instability; ranging from Greece to Syria; each of which has certain profound problems with the Turkish republic. Owing a lot to the different understanding of the rudiments of the “Kurdish Question”, the UN embargo against Iraq and lastly the Clinton administration’s economic embargo against Iran; Turkey strived to initiate its own policy formulations.

Specifically, Turkey, in regard to the so-called “Kurdish Question” wanted to employ its own methods towards Northern Iraq as to lessen the negative impacts stemming largely from the internationalization of the question. In that respect it had taken the initiative to have meetings with Iran and Iraq, discussing the existing status of Northern Iraq, starting from 1992.<sup>8</sup> After that, in August 1994, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared that it would control its borders to check the flow of people to Northern Iraq. Additionally, Turkey had signed an economic agreement with Iran including a 23-year natural gas agreement in August 1996.

These were the signs of the desire of Turkey to place some limitations on American plans and projects over the region.

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<sup>8</sup> Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Western Europe (FBIS-WEU) (16 November 1992).



Turkey deemed the above measures necessary; however, it was aware of something that it could not go on so far due to the fact that it is still in the interest of the country not to be at odds with the US. Particularly, the US military industry was a key factor in its fight against the “Kurdish Workers’ Party” (PKK). Since it was hardly possible to change the whole standards of its weapons, it had felt the cruciality of the US technology very keenly.

In August 1994, the US president Clinton signed a “foreign aid bill” which was passed by the US Congress, for the 1995 fiscal year, containing a special provision suspending 10 percent of the \$ 453 million from the US military aid to Turkey, because of the “unsatisfaction with Turkey’s progress on the human rights issue and Cyprus Question.”<sup>9</sup> What’s more, the US also issued a cutback in its weapons and equipment program which was essential for the fight against the PKK. Although the Turkish government of that time rejected this “conditional portion” of the aid; it did not carry this attitude too far. This sort of confrontations between Turkey and the US (and Europe) went on occasionally where Europe and US have criticized the Turkish military’s “undemocratic methods” used against the Kurds.<sup>10</sup>

It became apparent that as Turkey set its own course in its foreign policy in the region, it was highly likely that the tension would grow between Turkey and the US.

Turkey’s importance in the post cold war era is that it is geographically well located to have some influence over the Balkans, the “newly independent states” (the NIS) and the Middle East. The Turkish state model, which is characterized by its secular

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<sup>9</sup> FBIS-WEU, (29 August 1994).

<sup>10</sup> FBIS-WEU, (29 August 1994).

structure, free-market economy and the parliamentary democracy was perceived by the US as an essential example for the development of democratic and secular Muslim states in Central Asia, Caucasus and the Middle East. It was also seen as a balancing actor against Russian power by limiting its effects upon the NIS countries.

Considering the Balkans, the US administration expected Turkey to serve as a buffer against a Serbian push Southward into Macedonia and encouraged developing ties to Albania as well.<sup>11</sup>

Turkey's answer fell short of the US expectations in the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Balkans as in the Middle East: to make it more specific; Turkey, rather, wanted Iraq not to be a playground, also, it realized that it is beyond its capacity to go along with the requirements of the US administration. In effect, Turkey opposed a divided and/or destroyed Iraq due to the possibility that this could lead to a balance of power shift in favor of Iran and a possible Kurdish state that would weaken the territorial integrity. In particular, when the "Kurdish Democratic Party" (the KDP) and the "Patriotic Union of Kurdistan" (the PUK) met in Washington, compromising the contractual issues and progressing in the political and military issues which they had decided to start in July 1994 in Paris,<sup>12</sup> as a counter act to this, Turkey tightened its borders with Northern Iraq and decided to take some measures against the economic and political isolation of Iraq.<sup>13</sup> This, in turn, prompted an uneasiness in Washington and as a last minute effort, Undersecretary of State Peter Tarnott was in

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<sup>11</sup> Obrad Kesic, "US-Turkish Relations at a Crossroads, "Mediterranean Quarterly, No.1, (Winter 1995), p.99.

<sup>12</sup> The Washington Post, (1 October 1994).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

Ankara to reflect Washington's displeasure of Turkey's position.<sup>14</sup> The US Congress echoed its dissatisfaction as well.

### **1.3. Turkey and the Europe in the New Era**

The Cold War era shaped Turkish foreign policy in three directions 1) Turkey's place in the bipolar balance system, 2) Turkey's position in the Middle Eastern subsystem, 3) Relations with Greece.<sup>15</sup> In the post-Cold War era, Turkey in an attempt to secure its position in the Western world for which the Soviet threat ceased to exist; strived for gaining the status of membership in the European Union (the EU). In this new era, with the newly democratic states of Eastern Europe taking the first lines in the queue to become members of the EU, Turkey realized that it ought to find out new foreign policy tools that could validate its existence as a security partner of the West. In so doing, it turned towards the East with the Gulf war.<sup>16</sup>

However, as the Gulf war ended, the domestic problems began to come to the surface with the help of the new foreign policy objectives. The new policy formulations carried the potential to serve just in the opposite way because Turkey was a country that embedded with internal conflictual aspect. As a result, its stabilizing, regional actor character becomes ineffective.

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<sup>14</sup> The US News, (3 October 1994).

<sup>15</sup> Ali Karaosmanoğlu, "Turkey's Security and the Middle East," Foreign Affairs, 62, No.1, (Fall 1983), p. 157.

<sup>16</sup> Meltem Müftüler, "Turkey: A New Player in the Middle East," Mediterranean Quarterly, No.4, (Fall 1995), p.111.

Some linked Turkey's domestic problems directly to its stabilizing country character: "The persistence of a violent domestic conflict will undermine Turkey's role as a stabilizing country in the regions in which its interests and those of its Western allies coincide."<sup>17</sup>

Besides, Turkey's military interventions, which began with "operation steel" on 25 March 1995, into Northern Iraq that aimed at rooting out the PKK camps and preventing them from infiltrations; hindered the relations between Turkey and the European states: The European Parliament rejected to ratify the Customs Union agreement of the EU which was to be ratified in September 1995. In addition, Germany, Norway and Holland abandoned to sell arms as a reaction to the intervention. Moreover, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe declared that Turkey had two months to withdraw from Northern Iraq, and to pass reforms on the "Kurdish problem" or its membership would be suspended.<sup>18</sup>

#### **1.4. Turkey and The Middle East after the Cold War**

When answering the question why Turkey has begun taking rather an "active interest" in Middle Eastern politics in the post-Cold War era (which contrasting with its relatively low profile role during the Cold War) the role it envisioned itself and the state of the region should not be omitted.

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<sup>17</sup> Henry Barkey, "Turkey's Kurdish Dilemma," *Survival* (35), No.4, (1993), p.66.

<sup>18</sup> Müftüler, p.119.

Turkey's relations with the region in the 1990s can hardly be exempted from the political and social uncertainties it faced, in addition to the altering nature of the domestic context of the foreign policy making process and the new issues coming to the center, hence, becoming integral parts of the foreign policy. It appears that, Turkey, after a period of disengagement, is becoming a more active player in the region. The examples of the new situation cannot be confined to the developments in Northern Iraq and to Ankara's more "active" policy over Damascus that aims to curb its support to the PKK.<sup>19</sup>

Another aspect of Turkey's involvement came into the scene with the Islamist party, namely, "Refah" that got the control of governmental power with the help of a coalition with the center-right "True Path" party in June 1996. There was no doubt that the Refah experience would have important implications for the relations with the Middle East.<sup>20</sup>

The end of the Cold War also had a profound effect on Turkey in such a way that it sparked off a discussion as to what would happen to its role in the Western alliance.<sup>21</sup> The first sign of a more active policy in the region was the Gulf war experience in 1990-1991. By its support to the allied coalition, Turkey's act, represented a radical departure from the established policy of noninvolvement in regional conflicts and wars.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> See Philip Robins, "The Overlord State: Turkish Policy and the Kurdish Issue," International Affairs, No.4, (October 1993), pp. 657-676.

<sup>20</sup> Christian Science Monitor, 13 June 1996.

<sup>21</sup> See Sabri Sayarı, "The Changing European Security Environment and the Gulf Crisis," Middle East Journal, No.1, (Winter 1992), pp. 9-22.

<sup>22</sup> The New York Times, (22 January 1991).

The aim was to expand its influence and political role in the region, to gain leverage regarding bilateral defense and trade issues, and to be a full member in the EU and to increase its trade and business opportunities in the Middle East.<sup>23</sup>

Considering the result of this strategy one can conclude that they are not promising; regarding Turkey's export to the Middle East, there was no significant rise, also, the UN economic sanctions imposed on Iraq cost Turkey dear and it went on to lose above \$20 billion between 1990 and 1994 due to the cut of the pipeline that passed through Turkish soils.<sup>24</sup> According to Demirel, the Turkish president, Turkey received just about \$3 to \$4 billion worth of compensation from "our friends in the Gulf."<sup>25</sup>

With regard to the new regional role in the early 1990s; the occurrences of the expectations of Turkey were at poor rates, particularly with respect to tangible political and economic gains. Another consequence of Turkey's new involvement in the Middle Eastern affairs was that it raised concerns in the Arab World about the possibility of a Turkish dominance in the region.<sup>26</sup>

#### **1.4.1. The "Kurdish Issue"**

The "Kurdish Problem" was complicated with the failure of the allied coalition to oust the Saddam' regime and with the unsuccessful Kurdish rebellions that resulted in the inflow of tens of thousands of Kurdish refugees in March and April 1991 into Turkey.

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<sup>23</sup> Sabri Sayari, "Turkey and the Middle East in the 1990's" *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 26, No.3, (Spring 1997), p.47.

<sup>24</sup> *Milliyet*, (17 January 1995).

<sup>25</sup> *The Washington Post*, (5 June 1994).

<sup>26</sup> Sayari, p.47.

Ankara's decision to agree to host an alliance force "Operation Provide Comfort" (the OPC) including Turkey itself, at Incirlik airbase, Adana, which was formed to protect Iraqi Kurds above the 36<sup>th</sup> parallel from attacks by the Iraqi military forces, was a decision whose main thrust was to prevent further waves of Kurdish refugees. Surprisingly, to many (while conspicuously to some) this humanitarian act was producing an "unexpected" outcome: a new "Kurdish political entity" under the protection of the Western powers beyond Iraqi control.

Turkey, without doubt, seeing it as an opening gambit, opposes an independent "Kurdish state" which will be near its borders. This is due to the potential that such an entity may have an effect as inciting the ethnic Kurdish national sentiments within Turkey. Despite the above argument, Turkey reluctantly accepted this newly emerging entity that was dependent on the OPC.<sup>27</sup> The terrorist organization PKK was not late to take advantage of the absence of authority in Northern Iraq, especially to establish bases close to the Turkish borders. Apart from the internationalization of the problem and strengthening of the position of the PKK, the post-Cold War developments underscored the ethnic consciousness among Turkey's Kurdish citizens, particularly those living in the country's southeastern region.<sup>28</sup>

After the PKK's challenge to Turkey's political order and territorial integrity became the foremost security issue on both domestic and foreign policy agendas, the Turkish military forces' response to this challenge came intensely. Although Turkey was secure in the knowledge that most of its own Kurdish population by no means wanted to

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<sup>27</sup> FBIS-WEU, (12 November 1992).

<sup>28</sup> See Graham E. Fuller "Turkey in the New International Security Environment" Foreign Policy, Vol.16, No.'s 3-4, (1992), pp. 29-44.

separate itself from the mainland, the cost of suppressing the PKK's violent activities was very high, not only in terms of fatalities which were more than 30.000, but it also caused a rise in the large scale social and economic uneasiness in southeastern Turkey, because economic sources were diverted to combating the PKK. In short, the situation in the Northern Iraq has intensified Turkey's own "Kurdish problem."

At the international level, Turkey had to sort it out from other sources of conflicts with its neighbors, namely, Iraq and Syria. In regard to Iraq, Turkey strived to normalize its relations with Saddam's government hoping to help the preservation of the unity of Iraq and to the reestablishment of stability along the borders.<sup>29</sup> Turkey also endeavored to remove the UN economic sanctions on Iraq through the diplomatic channels.<sup>30</sup> Considering the "hot-pursuit" agreement between Baghdad and Ankara signed in 1984, Turkey faced with no legal limitation in regard to its incursions into the Northern Iraq during the 1980s.<sup>31</sup> After the Gulf war Turkey subsisted the policy of incursions to put the PKK on the defensive and to hinder it from using the border area as a refuge for its militants. For instance Ankara sent 40,000 troops across the Iraqi border for a six-week military operation to terminate the PKK bases and its logistical infrastructure in March 1995. Also in 1996 Turkish officials declared that they intended to establish a "security zone" inside Iraq along the border which attracted heavy criticism from Baghdad and other Arab countries. It was also not welcomed by the West. All of these reactions led Turkey to refrain from the implementation of the plan.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> The Washington Post, (24 September 1996).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Sayari, p. 47.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.



Regarding Turkey's reaction to Syria, whose support to the PKK was known very well, it was with the help of the media and politicians when it began to denounce Syria and force the government to take more effective and forceful measures to curb its support to the Kurdish rebels.<sup>33</sup>

Although Ankara held that Syria was the principal source of external logistical support and training for the PKK it did not generally carry this criticism too far hitherto the escalation of the PKK activities in the 1990s. Turkey was even aware of Syrian involvement in its domestic political problems since the mid 1970s.<sup>34</sup> In fact, Turkey and Syria had signed a "security protocol" to coordinate their actions against all terrorist groups, including the PKK.<sup>35</sup> What's more, Turkish, Syrian and Iranian foreign ministers got together in Damascus in August 1994 to discuss the regional problems, particularly the security implications of the Kurdish issue.<sup>36</sup>

However, Syrians' rude attitudes in turn, made Turkish governments increasingly feel apprehensive and mistrustful of their policies. Syria, in the meantime, has increased its criticism of Turkey's use of water from the Euphrates river and tried to mobilize other Arab States against Turkey. Syria and Iraq are standing against Turkey's plan to divert water from the Euphrates for its massive irrigation project, called the Great Anatolian Project (GAP). Syrian and Iraqi governments oppose the project on the ground that it would reduce their share of water. Turkey rejects their claims including the one called

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<sup>33</sup> Yeni Yüzyıl, (13 January 1997).

<sup>34</sup> See Şükrü Elekdağ, "Two and a Half War Strategy, "Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs, No.1, (March-May 1996), pp.33-57.

<sup>35</sup> Newspot (Ankara), (2 December 1993).

<sup>36</sup> Hürriyet, (24 August 1994).

“acquired rights.” Ankara claims that the allocation should be based on technical and scientific criteria that try to achieve a maximum equitable utilization of water resources in the region.<sup>37</sup> Although there existed an unwillingness to admit a linkage between Syrian support for Kurdish separatism and the water issue, many officials are, now, publicly denouncing the Syrian side that it is using the PKK to get concessions from Ankara over the supply of water to downstream countries.

Syrian efforts to rally support from the Arab states bore fruits in the form of an issue which came after the January 1996 meeting in Damascus of the foreign ministers of seven Arab countries criticizing Turkey and calling for a permanent water-sharing agreement to replace the provisional accord under which Ankara accepts to allow the flow of 500 cubic meters of water per second to Syria.<sup>38</sup> Thus, it is no coincidence that the worsening of the relations with Syria overlapped with the new military training and education agreement that Turkey signed with Israel in February 1996.

Turkey’s official reactions were finely tuned to the tug of war between Arab states and Turkey. They endeavored to do so by playing down the strategic implications of the agreement and by emphasizing that it is not directed or intended against any third party and also not a formal alliance between Israel and Turkey.<sup>39</sup> Turkey, also, underlined the point that it is similar to the military agreement and education agreements that Turkey had with other countries.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ayşegül Kibaroglu, Fırat-Dicle Havzasında Su Sorununa Kapsamlı Bir Bakış, Manisa Celal Bayar Üniversitesi Yüksek Öğretim Vakfı Yayını, (1) Manisa, 1997, p.7 (footnote).

<sup>38</sup> Hürriyet, 2 January 1996

<sup>39</sup> Christian Science Monitor, (29 August 1996)

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

Neighboring countries' reactions were severe. Arab countries and Iran criticized it with varying degrees of reactions. The Egyptian reaction, amongst them, was the weakest, they officially asked for an explanation about its nature and purpose.<sup>41</sup>

A solid warning came from a two-day summit in June 1996 in Damascus where the leaders of Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Syria issued a joint statement expressing their concern and demanding for a reconsideration of the agreement by Turkey. A similar call was issued at the Arab summit meeting in Cairo later that month where Syria failed to gain an outright condemnation against Turkey due to the strong opposition from Jordan.<sup>42</sup>

#### **1.4.2. Turkey and the Peace-Process**

Turkey supports the peace process on the ground that it will increase regional economic cooperation, base a new ground for the opportunities for trade and investment and be an important step toward regional stability. Turkey, in short, has been a supporter of the Middle East peace process since the historic breakthrough in Israeli-Palestinian relations.<sup>43</sup>

Additionally, Turkey also reckons on the outcome of the peace process such that it will release Turkey from the task of offsetting between its commitment to having diplomatic and political ties with Israel against its efforts to be in close terms with the

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<sup>41</sup> With Egypt, Turkey has had relatively "good" relations during the last decade.

<sup>42</sup> Turkish Probe, (28 June 1996).

<sup>43</sup> See Kemal Kirişçi, "Turkey in Search of Security in the Middle East" Perceptions, No.1; (March-May 1996), pp. 151-168.

Islamic world, in the Arab-Israeli conflict, which, by and large, is tied to concrete economic and security interests in the region.<sup>44</sup>

Turkey, which although sometimes failed to meet these two goals and took criticism from the Arab world; tried to participate in the multilateral working groups related to the peace process in the issues of water, economic development and arms control issues.<sup>45</sup>

Turkey also supported the new Palestinian government, being one of the first countries to do so, in November 1988.<sup>46</sup> After December 1991, Turkey upgraded its relations with the PLO that was followed by visits, increasing economic and political ties offering them to help with their housing and other infra structure projects. Palestinian authority, in turn, helped tune down the criticism to Turkey. Yaser Arafat, for instance, has opposed strong Arab criticism of Turkey about the Israeli-Turkish agreement.<sup>47</sup>

There is one aspect of the peace process that concerns Turkey: its possible ramifications on Syria's military and strategic posture. To be more specific, Turkish officials fear that when an agreement is signed up between Syria and Israel, then Syria will relatively be in a better position militarily vis-a-vis Turkey and hence pushing Turkey for answering its claims about the water issue and Hatay province.

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<sup>44</sup> M.H. Yavuz "Turkish Foreign Policy Toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict: Quality and the Development (1950-1991)", Arab Studies Quarterly, Vol.74, No.4, (Fall 1992), p.73.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> M. Bali Baykan, "The Palestinian Question in Turkish Foreign Policy From the 1950's to the 1990's", "International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies", No.1, (February 1993), pp.91-110.

<sup>47</sup> Sayarı, p.49.

Damascus can also be expected to pursue its objectives much more actively which could lead strong tensions in Turkish-Syrian relations. Turkey also fears uncomfortable about the US position in that regard. The US is seen as not being fully supportive of Turkey's criticism of Syria's ties with the PKK, since the importance of Syria in the peace process is clear to the US.<sup>48</sup>

#### **1.4.3. Domestic Constraints of Turkey's Middle East Policy**

The most visible aspect in that respect is the role that the political Islam can play. The Refah experience (June 1996- June 1997) highlights the increasing domestic strength of political Islam. After Refah Party came to power, the challenge to the country's secular form of government and the "identity crisis" were once more on the agenda.<sup>49</sup> The ruling elite, showing solidarity with the legacy of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the modern Turkey, has endeavored to instill a sense of Westernization into the country rather than identifying itself with the Islamic world and the Middle East. Atatürk also emphasized this pro-western identity while employing his strategy of modernization and social change. Despite this, Islamists thought that Turkey should identify itself as a part of the Islamic community, and seclude from western political military and economic organizations.<sup>50</sup>

Regarding the public reaction to the above argument, some public opinion polls underline a division among the Turks on the issue, for instance according to the

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<sup>48</sup> See Suat Parlar, "Ortadoğu'da Barış Yamılsaması," Avrasya Dosyası, Cilt.5, Sayı.1, (İlkbahar 1999), ss. 102-110.

<sup>49</sup> Melissa Morris, "Walking the line," Harvard International Review, Vol.20, Issue.2, (Spring 1998), p.15.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p.15.

opinion polls which were conducted for “the US Information Agency” in 1996, 47 percent of the Turks see Turkey as part of the Muslim community, whereas 27 percent views it as belonging to Europe and 15 percent says that it is a part of “both”.<sup>51</sup>

The Refah party experience also underscored a stark reality that the army, the guardian of Atatürk’s legacy, will hardly consent to the elements that are incompatible with the foundations of the Turkish republic.<sup>52</sup> Necmettin Erbakan, the leader of the former Refah Party, was challenging these foundations by his official trips. The first was to Iran where he signed a \$23 billion natural gas agreement,<sup>53</sup> which was strongly criticized by the US government.<sup>54</sup> Erbakan’s next trip was designed to Libya where he hoped to accomplish his aim of forming solidarity among the Muslim world while paying no heed to the warnings from the domestic political scene. He returned with nothing but a rude shock, resulting from Libya’s leader Kaddafi’s criticism of Turkey’s Kurdish policy and Turkey’s ties with the US, ‘contemptuously’.<sup>55</sup> Kaddafi’s statements that were beneath contempt, prompted a growing unease among the public and the media.<sup>56</sup>

Refah officials, in direct contravention of the established position of the Turkish state against the PKK and Syria, claimed that Turkey might follow a “more accommodating” policy over the water dispute with the Arab neighbors.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Sayarı, p.55.

<sup>52</sup> Christopher De Bellaigue, “Turkey: Into the Abyss?” The Washington Quarterly, Vol. 21, No.3, (Summer 1998), p.137.

<sup>53</sup> The New York Times, (13 August 1996).

<sup>54</sup> The Washington Post, (13 August 1996).

<sup>55</sup> The Washington Post, (8 October 1996).

<sup>56</sup> Sedat Ergin, “Erbakan’ın Türkiye Cumhuriyetine Ayıbı”, Hürriyet, (10 October 1996).1

<sup>57</sup> Hürriyet, (9 August 1996).

All of these developments were the indirect signs of the strategic partnership between Israel and Turkey. To be more specific, by and large, there exists various and essential constraints on any domestic party's efforts to achieve their foreign policy objectives which comprise major shifts in Turkey's relations with the Middle East. To begin with, the views of the military should be taken into account. The Turkish military itself is a military embedded with cardinal realignments in Turkey's foreign and defense policies. Specifically, it is committed to Turkey's membership in NATO. There are regional constraints as well, such as, long-lasting negative historical legacies of the Turco-Arab relations, the ill-fated idea of having solidarity and cooperation among Muslim countries in the Middle East. Arab regimes concerns of any possible tie of militant Islamic groups in their countries with the groups in Turkey's political sphere are other sources of the conflict. In effect, this was the case for the Refah party; it was believed that the party had close relations with the militant Islamic groups, for instance, Hamas, Egypt's Muslim brotherhood and representatives of other groups were present at the party's annual congress held in Ankara in August 1996.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Yeni Yüzyıl, (14 October 1996).

## CHAPTER II

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF TURKISH-ISRAELI RELATIONS

#### 2.1. Turkey and the Middle East

To some scholars, Turkey is a torn country because its “state elites” try to fulfill a variety of rules to gain a Western country status while its cultures and traditions are non-western.<sup>59</sup> Whereas some others believe that Turkey is a bridge that links NATO to the Middle East and the Southwest Asia.

In effect, Turkey, in the post cold war security environment felt that it was provided with the role of being a regional power in the central Asia, Caucasus and the Persian Gulf.

In regard to the Middle East, Turkey pays heed to the political activities due to some reasons: such as, 1) Historical legacy, 2) “Kurdish Problem”, 3) Security concerns of access to oil, 4) Water politics, 5) Palestinian Question and 6) Islam. The amalgam of these factors contributed greatly to Turkey’s position in the region.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Samuel Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations”, Foreign Affairs (72), No. 3, (1953) p.42.

<sup>60</sup> Müftüler, p.119.



To be more open, a blueprint of Turkey's relations with the region throughout the history is often perceived something hard to produce. The effort to list the general characteristics for the conduct of the relations can hardly be wholly successful. To begin with, from 16<sup>th</sup> century to the Arab revolution during the World War I, the Ottomans ruled most of the region Turkish republic developed a formal complex, and sometimes differentiated relation pattern with the Middle Eastern states.<sup>61</sup> After the Turkish republic established, Turkey had rather a limited involvement in the region, except from the Baghdad Pact in the mid 1950's.

Turkey developed rather loose connections with the regional states until 1964. This was the year of the Cyprus Crisis. The crisis made Turkish officials feel the importance of the possible support that the region's states might have given. Starting with the mid-1960s, Turkey's foreign policy orientations included new directions. Soviet Union and the Middle Eastern countries were remembered again and Turkey sought to tackle the obstacles on its way to develop relations with these countries. In the 1970s Turkey deemed it absolutely necessary to reestablish the relations with the said countries; particularly because the oil crises and the 1974 US embargo (which continued to affect Turkey until 1979.)<sup>62</sup> exacerbated the difficulties that Turkey was faced with. In the 1980s these new orientations gained new momentum. The main reasons for that were the need for capital flow and the legitimacy seeking policies of the generals of the 1980 coup d'état. As regards Turkey's approach to the Arab-Israeli relations, it was not stable in the sense that it changed over the years with respect to the special conditions. As an example; although Turkey voted against the partition of Palestine in

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<sup>61</sup> Philip Robins, Turkey and the Middle East, London: Printer, 1991, p.17.

<sup>62</sup> Yavuz, p. 75.

November 1947, it became the first among the Muslim countries in recognizing Israel, which in turn produced a backlash from the Arab countries.

The PLO was recognized as the representative of the rights of the Palestinian people in 1976 and allowed to form a diplomatic mission in Ankara in 1979.<sup>63</sup> The peace treaty between Egypt and Israel in 1979 was welcomed by Turkey, expecting that this treaty would ease the troubled situation within the Islamic world, thus giving the opportunity to carry on its relations with Israel.<sup>64</sup>

The peace process of the 1990s is seen as a key element in that, if it ends up successfully, friendship and solidarity are expected to flourish among the region's countries, which could, in turn, contribute to Turkey's efforts to "reside in the region in peace and attain more fruitful cooperation with her neighbors in the area."<sup>65</sup>

Concerning the water issue, Turkey has tried to approach the issue by peaceful, diplomatic activities, which illustrate Turkey's goodwill. The problem, particularly stemming from the waters of Euphrates and Tigris rivers, emerged as a source of regional conflict.<sup>66</sup>

To scholars, the riparians' development projects are the main source of the problem that began in the early 1970s. Turkey's approach towards the issue is the one, which favors the use of water courses of the basin in terms of "optimum, equitable and

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<sup>63</sup> Yavuz, p. 71.

<sup>64</sup> İsmail Soysal, "The Middle East Peace Process and Turkey," The Turkish Review of Middle East Studies, Annual 94-95, p.70.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p.74.

<sup>66</sup> Turkey being the upstream, Syria the mid stream of Tigris and Iraq the downstream riparian countries.

reasonable utilization” as an alternative to Iraqi-Syrian argument of sharing the water in a simple mathematical manner.<sup>67</sup>

The said plan is seen as a unique initiative in the literature as it is not only helpful for gathering data and information about the land and water resources but a step in the regime formation as well.<sup>68</sup>

Another project of the 1990s is the peace-pipeline project which aims to supply the Arab peninsula with water from Turkey’s two rivers, namely the Ceyhan and Seyhan rivers. It would export nearly 6 million m<sup>3</sup> (cubic meters) a day to the Middle East. Turkey ascribes to the project the aim of making the Middle-Eastern countries dependent on itself for water and gain an upper hand as being a considerable regional power.

## **2.2. Turkish-Israeli Relations in Focus**

The relatively new shape of the relations between Turkey and Israel necessitates to redo some of its relations with other countries. But to examine the relations between Israel and Turkey, one should firstly, dwell on the foreign policy conduct of the Turkish Republic. Various factors lead Turkey to pursue a “rationalistic” path in its foreign policy making. It is a secular country and hence religious considerations are not very much on the agenda. Its national interests are strived to be realized in its troubled location:

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<sup>67</sup> Ayşegül Kibaroglu, “Prospects for Cooperation in the Euphrates-Tigris River Basin.” *Turkish Review of Middle East Studies*, Annual 1994/95, No:8, p. 140.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p.141

“Turkey is encircled in a geographical location by the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Middle East and hence open to infra and inter state conflicts in these regions.”<sup>69</sup> The founder of the republic, Atatürk, “provided a secular and dynamic framework for Turkish foreign policy makers.”<sup>70</sup>

In regard to international factors that contributed to Turkey’s conduct of its relations with Israel; Turkey’s Israeli policy was affected by external factors such as security concerns during the years 1946-1964; the Cyprus Question after 1964 and the economic constraints stemming from the oil crisis between the years 1977-1983.<sup>71</sup>

Internal factors in the conduct of Israeli policies have rather limited roles.<sup>72</sup> From 1945 to 1964, Turkey formulated its main policy objectives according to the Soviet threat. To gain more recognition and respect from the Western world, it tried to improve its relations with the Western World. In that period, Turkish politics towards the Middle East was, to a large extent, a function of its relations with the West.

After 1964, with the rise of the Cyprus crisis, following the US letter of June 5, 1964, Western countries did not support Turkey’s stand-points in different platforms. In effect, they left Turkey isolated at the UN on this issue, which, in turn, forced Ankara to seek new alternatives.

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<sup>69</sup> Mustafa Kibaroglu, “Turkey”, in Europe and Nuclear Disarmament: Debates and Political Attitudes in 16 European Countries, edited by Harald Müller, Frankfurt PRIF, European University Press, 1998, p.184.

<sup>70</sup> Yavuz, p.42.

<sup>71</sup> İhsan Gürkan, “Turkish Israeli Relations and the Middle East Peace Process Foreign Policy (Ankara), 1993, p.113.

<sup>72</sup> Concerning the internal factors, it can be said that although internal factors have an influence upon the conduct of the Israeli relations; such as the religious attitudes of political parties, it has a rather limited role, Islamic reactions are seen as the means along with other domestic factors.

The oil crisis in 1973 also facilitated the multi-dimensional foreign policy orientations as a result of which, for example, Turkey increased its economic ties with the Arab countries and tried to play a more active role in the organization of the Islamic Conference. All of these prompted a critical stand towards Israel.<sup>73</sup>

After the Israeli parliament Knesset declared Jerusalem as “united” and a “permanent capital” of Israel on July 30, 1980, Turkey responded with the closure of the Turkish consulate on August 28, 1980 and formally downgrading the relations on December 2, 1980. Although these decisions seemed to be taken with an Islamic tone, they were rather out of economic necessity especially in the years 1978-1981, the economy needed foreign currency and oil. The depletion of hard currency; decline in the amount of remittances from Turkish workers abroad; the US embargo and the absence of the economic aid until 1979, all exacerbated the economic hardship, Turkey faced with. In early 1980's Turkey downgraded its relations with Israel. The military regime did so formally on 2 December 1980, which to a large extent was viewed much as an attempt to have internal and external Islamic credibility. This decision did not intend to break off the relations with Israel, by downgrading the relations, Turkey was acting, hence, not in direct contravention of the US and European positions on Israel. In so doing, Turkey was thinking of the military and financial aid from the US and also wanted to maintain its active positions in the European institutions.<sup>74</sup>

After the Camp David Accords, the Arab pressure on Turkey's relations with Israel began to decrease. In 1986, there emerged a new momentum in the relations; Mr. Ekrem Güvëndiren, a senior diplomat was appointed to the head of legation in Tel-

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<sup>73</sup> Turkish Daily News, (7 September 1998).

<sup>74</sup> Yavuz, p.79.

Aviv; Israel, in turn, by sending Mr. Yehuda Milo to Ankara responded positively to this upgrading attempt. Also, in 1988, at the UN, Turkey voted against an Arab resolution, which called for the rejection of Israeli diplomatic credentials. Moreover, the trade volume has jumped from \$ 29 million in 1986, to \$ 140 million in 1990.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **THE IMPETUS TO THE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP**

There are some factors, which can be seen as the main motivations of the decision makers of Turkey and Israel in the formation of the strategic partnership in post-Cold War era.

#### **3.1. Turkish Motivations**

1) The Kurdish insurgency, after the Gulf-War exacerbated Turkey's not only internal economic and social conditions but its relations with the other states. Turkey, to respond to the PKK's brutal tactics, needed to employ the necessary combatting tools that comprised various social, political measures which attracted severe criticism, mainly from the Western world. As an example, in 1995, Germany, Norway and Belgium decided to halt the arms sales to Turkey as a result of their public pressure, that stemmed from the PKK's sympathizers' activities and appeals to the public in the European countries for support. Regarding the US reaction, Washington, particularly after the 1980 military takeover in Turkey, has almost always sided with Turkey and helped Turkey to gain necessary weapons and military assistance. Turkey was America's most favored arms client just behind Israel and Egypt. (The weaponry flow totaled \$ 6 billion in the 1984-1993 time span.) By and large, this was a result of the strategy of protecting the US interests

from the Soviet threat and Islamic militancy. Consequently, Turkey had a huge source of weaponry which were, to a great extent, subsidized by the US treasury or conveyed free of charge.<sup>76</sup> These weapons were essential in Turkey's fight against the PKK.

However, from 1996 onwards, this flow has been cut down, resulting from the lobbying activities of different ethnic and human rights groups, which included the State Department's human rights bureau.<sup>77</sup>

Turkey, in turn, felt increasingly in a state of unease and strived to develop its own arms industry which paved the way for better relations with Israel. Turkey had chosen Israel, since it needed a country which is a technologically advanced country in its sophisticated weapon production and more importantly, a country that can come to Turkey's assistance without putting any reserve or attach human rights conditions to its weapons sales.

- 2) Another facilitating factor was the relations of Turkey and Israel with and within the Arab World. Turkey began to have a declining trend in trade relations with the Arab world in the 1990s. Turkey's exports to Arab countries fell from 47 percent of its total exports in 1982 to 12 percent in 1994; politically, the Gulf War made it explicit that the fragmentation of the Arab world is very much on the agenda that forced the Turkish officials to believe that the notion of an "Arab bloc" is rather a rhetoric.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> John Tirman "Improving Turkey's Bad Neighborhood: Pressing Ankara for Rights and Democracy," World Policy Journal, Vol.15, No.1, p.62.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Gürkan, p.123.



Additionally the peace agreements between the PLO and Israel in 1993 and Jordan and Israel in 1994, provided a solid ground that protected them from both Arab criticism and domestic reactions. In this regard, for instance, some argue that if there were no peace-process, the rapprochement between Turkey and Israel could hardly be imagined.<sup>79</sup> Also, the ministry of foreign affairs, made a statement which aimed at responding to domestic opposition to normalizing relations with Israel, the statement read that there was no reason to be more Arab than the Arabs, that is, it would be meaningless to act reluctantly to seek to develop the relations with Israel.<sup>80</sup>

- 3) Turkey's ruling elite might also think that it could get Washington's support via Israel's "good offices." Israeli support through their lobbying activities could also help to circumvent the US and European arms embargoes which, Turkey believes, come along as a result of anti-Turkish ethnic lobbies' efforts. To be more specific, it is stressed that one of the main lucrative outcome of the strategic partnership is that its connection with Israel enables Turkey to bypass US and European arms embargoes. The human rights criticism of the US and the Europe served as a main impediment to the access to weapons it needed. In recent years, the groups such as, "Amnesty International U.S.A." carried campaigns to block any American sale, because of the possibility of using those weapons in Turkey's fight against the "Kurdish civilians". Also, in December 1997, prime minister Yılmaz met with Clinton and faced with Clinton administrations refusal on the sales of the weapons. President Clinton also made it clear that:

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<sup>79</sup> Interview with Duygu Bazoğlu Sezer, in Milliyet, (21 July 1997).

<sup>80</sup> Yavuz, p.27.

“no final US export licence would be approved unless Turkey could demonstrate improvements in human rights.”<sup>81</sup> Another example was the blocking of two Cobra helicopters and frigates’ sales in 1996. All of these forced Turkey to be open to the alternatives.

- 4) The rapprochement, also, enabled some Turkish interests to be on the agendas of groups like the “Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA),” (a Washington based think tank) and the American Israel Public Action (AIPAC) (an influential pro-Israeli group). For instance, JINSA has sided with Turkey and spoken out against foreign aid cuts toward Turkey and also served as a mediator between US military figures and their Turkish counterparts.<sup>82</sup>

Additionally, the American-Turkish Association of Ankara, requested for a possible help from a number of Jewish Groups like American Jewish Congress, B’nai Brith and AIPAC. Israel, in turn, responds to the requests of Turkey, Israeli defense minister Yitzhak Mordechai has confirmed these activities and said: “Israel is assisting Turkey on the American political scene and encouraging Jewish organizations to follow this example.”<sup>83</sup> The efforts of these groups can help Turkey to offset the harmful activities of Greek and Armenian lobbying groups.

- 5) Although Israel denies that it has helped to make Syria bow to Turkey’s certain interests<sup>84</sup> it is believed, that Ankara through its security cooperation may have

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<sup>81</sup> Jennifer Washburn, “Power Bloc,” *The Progressive*, 20 (1), December 1998, p.3.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p.6.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Uri Gordon, (Ambassador), “Israeli-Turkish Relations,” Bilkent University Seminar Series, 16 March 1999, Bilkent University, Ankara.

wanted to send a signal to Damascus by giving the impression that it is surrounded.<sup>85</sup>

- 6) Turkey needed to give a response to Greece's policy of encircling it by military agreements with Syria in July 1995.
- 7) Another source of concern that might have led Turkey to tend toward Israel is its fear about the potential for proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in its neighborhood, namely in Iraq and Iran. Turkey, in this regard, reckons on the opportunity to collaborate with the Israelis on deterrents such as theater missile defense. (Turkey does not "perceive" any threat from Israel's nuclear arsenal.)<sup>86</sup>
- 8) Some argue that Turkey's policy toward Israel is also designated as an attempt to impede the "Kurdish State" project of both Israel and some Jewish lobbies in the US which use Washington's influence and power.<sup>87</sup>
- 9) Turkey's military, whose influences on foreign policy decisions are increasingly felt, is believed to have an upper hand in improving the relations with Israel. It is stressed that the aim was also to send a message to the pro-Islamic government (Refah) by exposing its powerlessness to prevent the strategic partnership, before it had openly opposed.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Interview with Retired Ambassador Şükrü Elekdağ, 15 February 1999, Ankara.

<sup>86</sup> Vural Altay, (speaker from the Turkish foreign ministry) "A Two Day Conference on Proliferation of Weapons of Moss Destruction And Its Implications For Regional And Global Security And Stability," 04-05 Feb. 1999 Bilkent University, Ankara.

<sup>87</sup> Ümit Özdağ, "İsrail'in Kuzey Irak Politikası," *Avrasya Dosyası*, Cilt 5, Sayı.1, (İlkbahar 1999), s.231.

<sup>88</sup> Interview with Prof. Meliha Altunışık (Department of International Relations, Middle Eastern Technical University), 10 May 1999, METU, Ankara.

### 3.2. Israeli Motivations

- 1) Establishing warming relations with Arab and Muslim nations, as a part of the vision of a “New Middle East”, (by former Israeli foreign and prime minister Shimon Peres), has been a general framework of the relations of the Israeli state with the regional states. In this regard, it is stressed that Turkey might serve as a bridge to other Muslim countries. Although with the Netanyahu administration the nature of the relations with the Arab world has been deteriorated, the emphasis upon Turkey’s role in the peace-process has always been put.
- 2) With the frustration that the Israeli government might have had with the peace talks with Syria by 1996, it could think that Turkey may serve to exert pressure on Syria, in that regard.<sup>89</sup>
- 3) Israel believes that it has a more lasting commonality with Turkey on anti-terrorism and in military and civilian trade than other countries. The former Israeli prime minister Netanyahu, echoed Turkey’s criticism of Syrian support for terrorism, including both Hizbullah and the PKK in May 1997.
- 4) Israel is concerned about Iran’s potential to produce weapons of mass destruction, in addition to the attempts of Iraqi government. Many people believe that the Turkish connection enabled Israel to gather intelligence on Iraq, Iran and Syria

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<sup>89</sup> Uri Gordon said that Israeli officials think that they [Israelis] should speak Turkish when they have problems with Syria (indicating Turkey’s success to force Syrian authority to send Abdullah Öcalan, the head of the PKK, packing).

through the opportunity of flying in the Turkish airspace that was provided by the security cooperation between Israel and Turkey in 1996.

5) Despite the fact that Israeli-Turkish security cooperation does not foresee any partners' commitment to come to the defense of the other in case of a war, it leads Israel to augment its strategic superiority in the region.<sup>90</sup>

6) It is also stressed that Israel would be in a position to benefit from Syria's, Iran's, Iraq's and others' "having to consider" the possibility of Turkey's help with respect to the necessary intelligence and other "non-combat assistance" in case of a confrontation. It is seen as a "psychological connection" that scared the neighbors.<sup>91</sup>

7) Bearing in mind the fact that for the next twenty-five years, Turkey plans to spend a \$ 150 billion to modernize its military, it can be said that Israel's defense industry has been boosted by the contracts for military sales and modernization projects of Turkish state. It is emphasized that the "bad shape" of Israeli Aircraft Industry is now changing and shaped up by the help of Turkish F-4 and F-5 contracts and other Turkish deals.

8) A reevaluation of Israeli foreign-policy strategy in the 1990s may explain the framework of relations with Turkey, which has been described as follows:

♦ Solving the border conflicts and forming a security belt within the peace process,

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<sup>90</sup> Turkish Daily News, (26 August 1998).

<sup>91</sup> Christian Science Monitor, (27 February 1998).

- ◆ Concluding the process of integration and recognition as a legitimate and equal state in its region in this security belt,
- ◆ Gaining diplomatic flexibility in manipulating the interstate conflicts of the Middle Eastern countries,
- ◆ Exploiting the resources of the region and introducing multi-country projects with the support of international Jewish communities,
- ◆ Opening up Asia and then developing its diplomatic and economic relations with more southern countries,
- ◆ Using the opportunities created by the complex web of relations to reach an influential position in the formation of global strategies and to escape from the confines of the Middle East to establish a greater global presence.<sup>92</sup>

9) Another factor is related to the economic relations of both Turkey and Israel with the US and EU. Israel's declining trend in trade relations with the US and EU, in addition to the GAP project of Turkey, which could serve as a nearby-field, for feeding Israeli people and as a huge market for Israeli high-technology products; based on farming, all, might have led Israel to tend toward Turkey.<sup>93</sup>

10) Israel's new initiatives, that gained momentum with the end of the Cold War, in the Central Asian republics, can be seen as another factor in the developing relations of Turkey and Israel. Israel strives to have a firm hand in Central Asia through the good offices of Turkey. Considering the Arab states and particularly Iran's role in the said region, it can be said that they try to create a sphere of

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<sup>92</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Yahudi Meselesinin Tarihi Dönüşümü ve İsrail'in Yeni Stratejisi, "Avrasya Dosyası, Cilt 1, Sayı.3, (Sonbahar 1994) ss. 66-67.

<sup>93</sup> Osman M. Öztürk, "Türkiye-İsrail Askeri İşbirliği Üzerine, "Avrasya Dosyası, Cilt 5, Sayı.1, (İlkbahar 1999) s.252.

influence by providing the regions' states with financial aid and investment in certain areas, leave aside their "cultural" activities. However, when comparing those activities with Israeli ones, which comprised the attempts to improve the telecommunication sectors of the Central Asian states, it can be seen that Israel is in a unique position with its necessary expertise that can well upset the others' apple cart. In this stage, Israel, in addition to use the Washington's support, wants to have Turkey's help, since it could both "neutralize" some problems of penetration into the markets of the former Soviet republics and serve as an ally in Israel's struggle against Iran.<sup>94</sup>

The strategic importance of Central Asia for Israel can hardly be confined to the economic gains. The existence of nuclear expertise and technology in the region also forces Israel to be mindful of the need for discretionary measures. To be more specific; Moscow's declaration to sell two peaceful nuclear reactors to Iran is an uncomfortable reminder of what sort of threat Israel may face, particularly, from the possibility of the transfer of the nuclear expertise or technology from the central Asian states, to Iran and other states.

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<sup>94</sup> Bülent Aras, "Post-Cold War Realities," Middle East Policy, Vol.5, No.4 (Jan, 1998) p.71.

## CHAPTER IV

### TURKISH ISRAELI RELATIONS IN THE 1990s

#### 4.1. The Changing Nature of Bilateral Relations

Turkey's lingering policy of balance between the Arab countries and the Israeli state began to alter after the Gulf War.

To begin with, the relatively new rapprochement between Turkey and Israel can be said to have started by the visit of the Turkish tourism minister Abdülkadir Ateş in June 1992 to Israel, which was to be the first by a Turkish minister in twenty-seven years; whose fruits included the signing of a treaty facilitating tourism between the two countries.<sup>95</sup> As of 13 September 1993, the first signs of the drastic shift in the relations began to appear. This was the date of the Israel-PLO Declaration of Principles. On 14 October 1993 came the visit of then Turkish foreign minister Hikmet Çetin. It is marked as the first highest ranking Turkish officials' visit since the creation of the Israeli state in 1948. On the agenda were mainly, the economic issues ranging from the Israeli desire to penetrate deep into central Asia via Turkey to Turkey's request of Israeli support in obtaining US backing for the oil pipelines' routes from the Caspian Sea to its port of Iskenderun. The visit's outcome was the signatures on the

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<sup>95</sup> See M. Hakan Yavuz, Turkish-Israeli Relations Through the Lens of the Turkish Identity Debate," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol.27, No.1 (Autumn 1997), pp.22-38.



documents which were designed to be the framework agreements on economic cooperation, tourism and educational exchange programs.

The first official declaration of the newly emerging rapprochement came from Çetin that was presented as a “New-Era in Turco-Israeli relations,” which was reaffirmed by Çetin’s words “Turco-Israeli relations will develop in all fields, we have agreed that Turkey and Israel should co-operate in restructuring the Middle East”.<sup>96</sup>

Israeli visits followed to underscore the strategic implications of Çetin’s visit. Israeli Defense Minister Director-General David Ivry headed a delegation of senior officials and generals to Ankara to examine the potential areas of cooperation. Then came the Israeli President Ezer Weizman’s visit on 25-27 January 1994. It was the first presidential visit between Turkey and Israel that marked an important step forward for regional developments, he met with Turkey’s political, economic and business leaders. In his meeting with Turkish President Süleyman Demirel said:

“We want the door to peace to be further opened. Our efforts are aiming at creating a Middle East where people spend their energy and money on development rather than on arms. It makes us excited to see that or hopes can come true.”<sup>97</sup>

After these talks president Weizman underlined Turkey’s significance and importance for regional stability. He said:

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

“Turkey, one of the regional powers in the Middle East, can be very effective in the peace process. I think that the Turkish authorities are interested in the development of the Middle East. Turkey is of prime importance because it is an Islamic country which is both secular and democratic and has a dialogue with all countries in the region.”<sup>98</sup>

Ezer Weizman’s visit was followed by Foreign Minister Shimon Peres’s official visit on 11 April 1994 to Ankara where he met with the Turkish foreign minister. The outcome was an agreement on the environment, there was also discussions of opportunities to further the newly established bilateral relations with Çetin. Political, economic and cultural ties were included. According to Çetin, the crux of the discussions were related to “mutually profitable trade and economic relations and the opening of Israel to the Turkish-speaking countries of the former USSR.” He also laid a stress on Turkey’s unique position as a “link between the Western and Islamic worlds.” Another aspect of the discussions was about the Israeli desire for Turkey to adopt a “more active role” in the Middle East peace-process. Israeli foreign Minister Shimon Peres tried to encourage Turkey to take the initiative in the formation of a “Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Middle East a regional organization similar to the European one.”<sup>99</sup>

The next visit was from Turkish prime minister Tansu Çiller to Israel on 3-4 November 1994 which also marked a new phase in Turkish-Israeli relations. Çiller, during the visit, pressed for a free-trade agreement (which would be signed on 14 March 1996 and ratified in April 1997) although it was unsuccessful in that respect, she concluded a cooperation agreement in various fields, ranging from

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<sup>98</sup> Presidents and Prime Ministers, Vol.3, issue 4, July/August 1994, p.36

<sup>99</sup> Presidents and Prime Ministers, Vol.3, issue.5, September/October 1994, p.34

telecommunications, postal services to combating drug trafficking. In fact, the importance of the visit lay in elsewhere, namely, in the political sphere; Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin thanked Çiller “of taking a step no other Turkish prime Ministers ever dared to make; to visit Israel.”<sup>100</sup> In addition to that, Çiller praised Zionism and compared Ben-Gurion with Atatürk.<sup>101</sup> The Israeli side read the visit as a symbolic action that marked a major political change in the region.<sup>102</sup>

On June 3, 1994 Israeli economics and planning minister Shimas Shetreet signed an agreement in his visit to Turkey, that brings private and public organizations together to promote trade between the two countries to make efforts to get Israeli, Palestinian, and Turkish organizations together by using Turkish funds.<sup>103</sup>

On 23 February 1996 a Turkish-Israeli Military Cooperation and Training agreement has been signed which was learned in April 1996.<sup>104</sup> Despite the contents of the agreement have not been officially released, the press reported that it was about a joint training agreement with the Israeli air force and navy.<sup>105</sup> Also, according to the reports, there will be exchanges of military personnel and visiting rights at each other bases and Israel will be allowed to conduct electronic surveillance flights along Turkey’s borders with Iran, Iraq and Syria.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Milliyet, (7 November 1994).

<sup>101</sup> Cumhuriyet, (7 November 1994).

<sup>102</sup> The Jerusalem Post, (6 November 1994).

<sup>103</sup> President and Prime Ministers, Vol.3, Issue 5, Sep/Oct 1994, p.20.

<sup>104</sup> The Wall Street Journal, (30 May 1996).

<sup>105</sup> M.A. Birand, “Türkiye İsrail ile Uzaklara Gidecek, Ancak,” Sabah, 27 May 1997.

<sup>106</sup> Avner Gidnan “Turkey’s Treaty”, World Press Review, Vol. 43, issue 6, (June 1996), p.25.

Meanwhile, Erbakan wanted to change the course of the “alliance” he, later, has even vowed to “annul Turkey’s pact with Israel and withdraw from NATO.”<sup>107</sup>

The new agreement was a turning point in that, a de-facto military agreement was coming to life which indicated a significant strategic realignment in the Middle East,<sup>108</sup> and although Turkish officials strived to play down the significance of it by claiming that it was “routine”, Israeli side admitted that the relationship has a strategic significance.<sup>109</sup>

The Arab world and Iran, see it as a threat: “It is dangerous because the Jews want to extend their reach to other Muslim nations like Iraq, Iran and Syria,” says Moustafa Mashour, the head of the Islamic fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood in Cairo.<sup>110</sup>

The leaders of Syria, Iraq and Iran were critical that its principal aim is to check their influence in the region, for instance, Al-Baath, the organ of Syria’s ruling party views the agreement with Israel as a major escalation of Turkey’s “anti-Arab” policy, saying that “Turkey has no right to imperil the security and stability of the region in order to appease word Zionism and NATO.”<sup>111</sup> A commentator; Salaheddin Hafez of Egypt a writer in the Saudi owned Al-Hayat of London characterizes the agreement as part of Israel’s plans for a new Middle-Eastern order and says: “This would reduce and perhaps cancel out entirely the roles of Egypt and Syria.”<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Christian Science Monitor, (29 July 1996).

<sup>108</sup> Christian Science Monitor, (29 August 1996).

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Avner Gidon, “Turkey’s Treaty” World Press Review, Vol.43, issue 6, (June 1996) p.25.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

The official Syrian Newspaper Tishreen writes: “no matter how hard the Turkish government tries to cover up and market this agreement, it poses a threat to the security of Syria and all Islamic countries,”<sup>113</sup>

The agreement came at a time when Syria was in need of friends, especially considering the further isolation by Washington for “snubbing” secretary of State Warren Christopher in early 1996. It was in this framework that President Assad met with Yasser Arafat, the leader of the Palestinian authority in Damascus and reportedly, he also met with Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein in secret near the border with Iraq.<sup>114</sup>

Iran has also begun to make overtures to Syria by having a collegial high level meeting between Syrian and Iranian leaders in Teheran in August 1996.

Back to the relations of Turkey and Israel, the following cooperation was in the field of military. A \$ 59 million deal of modernization of Turkey’s fleet of F-4 Phantom fighters with high-tech equipment was concluded. The task was given to the Israeli Aircraft Industries (IAI). A Turkish General Çevik Bir viewed this as representing the first step toward military cooperation. According to the reports, Prime Minister Erbakan signed the deal under “pressure” from the Turkish military on 8 December 1996.<sup>115</sup>

Turkey also purchased fifty “Popeye I” missiles, also, the two sides agreed to invest \$ 150 millions in the production of “Popeye II air-to-ground” missiles jointly by a consortium to be established by two Turkish firms and Rafael.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Christian Science Monitor, (29 August 1996).

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> The Jerusalem Post, (8 December 1996).

<sup>116</sup> The Jerusalem Post, (18 May 1997).

The free-trade pact signed in March 1996 has the aim of a fourfold increase in annual trade between the two countries in three years, that is from \$ 450 millions to \$ 2 Billions at the end of 1999. The agreement became effective in May 1997. Turkey expects to benefit from the accord through Israel's free-trade agreement with the US (in 1986) which enables it to have ties with Canada and Mexico as well. In addition trade barriers and tariff are to be lifted gradually except agricultural products.<sup>117</sup> David Levy, Israeli Foreign Minister in his two-day visit to Turkey in April 1997 planned to push for the implementation of the free-trade agreement.<sup>118</sup>

The joint projects can hardly be confined to these above areas the two countries are also working on different sectors such as, electricity production, commercial satellites and cargo transport. Israeli tourists often visit Turkey. In 1996 the number was nearly 300.000, the money the spent was about \$ 3 billions. By the year 2000, this number of tourists is expected to reach 350.000. Turkish airlines is the second largest carrier in and out of Tel-Aviv, following Israel's El-Al.<sup>119</sup>

There were also the reports of the purchase of unmanned aerial vehicles for reconnaissance, attack and communications.<sup>120</sup> Turkey declared its plan to purchase airborne early warning and control aircraft in addition to the "falcon early warning aircraft systems which is plastic and conventional radar system for detecting the mines and radars. The candidates of the deal included; Boeing's E-3 AWACS, the Nuthop

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<sup>117</sup> The New York Times, (20 July 1997).

<sup>118</sup> Journal of Commerce, (4 November 1997).

<sup>119</sup> Daniel Prpes, "A Nex Axis: The Emerging Turkish-Israeli Entente," The National Interest, (Winter 97-98), p.35.

<sup>120</sup> Metehan Demir, "Turkish-Israeli Military Ties Shake Middle East," Aviation Weeks and Space Technology, Vol.146, issue. 26, (June 1997) p.35.

Grummon E-2C Hawkeye, an airborne early warning version of Lockheed Martin's C-130's and Israeli Air-Craft Industry's Phalcon.<sup>121</sup> Israel is also planning to supply Turkey with 1000 "Merkava Mark III's which are main battle tanks, at a cost of \$ 5 billions.<sup>122</sup>

As a part of the February 1996 agreement, the pilots spend their times in each others' countries, eight times a year. The training aspect of the agreement is also important. Turkey stands to benefit from the opportunities of learning about the electronic warfare in Israel. What Israelis get from is that they could have the access to the Anatolian plateaus which provide them with having practice of long-range flying over a mountainous land that alters from flying over waters, (that can serve as a necessary practice for "possible missions" against Iran and for gathering valuable information about Iraq and Syria).<sup>123</sup>

Considering joint naval and air maneuvers in the Mediterranean Sea in June 1997, which aim at coordinating "search-and-rescue" activities in the international waters close to Syria coast. Earlier, the two countries declared that it would be a three-way and five day naval exercises including the US, called "Operation Reliant Mermaid I" and scheduled to be held in mid-November 1997. But because it stirred up discontent among to region's states, they were postponed twice.

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<sup>121</sup> Paul Proctor, "Turkey wants AEW", Aviation Week and Space Technology, Vol.146, issue.12 (March 1997) p.13.

<sup>122</sup> Pipes, p.34.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

## 4.2. An Overview of the Relations in the 1990's

The most significant element of the developing relations between the two countries in the 1990's has been in the military field. The famous landmark agreement was on the military cooperation in April 1996. Through the means of February 1996 agreement, the cooperation included; military training exercises, exchange of military observes at each others' exercises, reciprocal port access for naval vessels, reciprocal training of unarmed military aircraft in each other's air spaces.

Regarding the military industry cooperation, arms sales, the ongoing modernization of Turkish F-4's and F-5's with Israeli know-how, joint-production of Israeli "Popeye-I and Popeye-II" air to ground missiles, the purchase of F-16 fuel tanks from Israel, the Israeli proposal to upgrade Turkish M-69 tanks in addition to the proposal to sell "Merkava" tanks to Turkey, the sale of Turkish-built armored cars to Israel and also the agreement on building long range Arrow anti-craft missiles were all made possible in the context of the developing relations in the 1990's.<sup>124</sup>

Considering the civilian agreements; the "Free Trade Agreement" in 1996, (which is seen as the main component of the commercial relations.) "Customs Agreement" in December 1996 and the "Trade Agreement" in June 1996, all of these contributed a lot to the developing relations, for instance the "Trade Agreement" (on 16 June 1996) provided the followings:

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<sup>124</sup> The Turkish Probe, (30 August 1998).



- 1) Each will lower the customs and import taxes for materials and products to be exhibited,
- 2) Each will facilitate the passage of others trade with the third countries (in this context, Turkey is believed to be capable of reaching to the US market),
- 3) Each will cooperate in technical and scientific fields to encourage economic development,
- 4) Each will cooperate comprehensively in exchanging research data,
- 5) Both will exchange scientific specialists technicians,
- 6) Both will share information regarding scientific and technical research in the industrial and agricultural sectors.

Other aspects of the civilian relations are multifarious; to state some of them; an agricultural protocol was provided for Israel in order to train Turkish technicians from Turkey's huge "Southeast Anatolian Project" (GAP) and to establish a "demonstration farm" in the region, for Israel. The cooperation in the health sector can also be mentioned, in addition to the educational exchanges, which is an ongoing process.<sup>125</sup>

Israel is also trying to make of the access to oil and gas from Turkey. In case Turkey's aim to become a major pipeline route for energy resources from the Caucasus and Central Asia, comes along; Israel could make use of it by undergoing many joint-projects with Turkey.

#### **4.3. The Impact of Turkish-Israeli Relations on Turkish-Syrian Relations**

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<sup>125</sup> Israil'den Haberler, Issue.17, (March-July 1998), pp.15-16.

Syrian support for the PKK historic hostility stemming from the status of Hatay the former Sanjak of Alexandretta, annexed by Turkey in 1939 following a referendum; Turkey's GAP project with its dams on the Euphrates are the sources of the ill nature of the relations between Syria and Turkey. Turkey's policy of "hot-pursuit" deep into Iraqi soils also makes Syria anxious, and lead their leaders believe that Ankara still holds the "ambitions to control the oil-rich Iraqi provinces of Mosul and Kerkuk."<sup>126</sup>

With regard to one of the most problematic aspect of the relations that is the Syrian support for the PKK, Turkey waited until 1995 to make this issue the main criterion of any bilateral relations, despite the clarity of Syrian backing of the PKK and its leader: Abdullah Öcalan. In early 1996, Turkey decided to suspend all official contacts with Syria after Damascus refused to extradite the head of the PKK, albeit Turkey's official request.<sup>127</sup>

Considering the Syrian situation, although the officials of both Turkey and Israel generally and commonly state that their relations are not directed to any third party, Syria is likely to be affected by the rapprochement. Some Israeli officials underline this nature of the relations as well; for instance:

"Although Turkey has never taken a part in a war alongside us, it is a positive factor for Israel that Syria has an enemy on its northern frontiers. Syria will never attack Turkey, but it cannot exclude the reverse. Turkey has a long experience of fighting

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<sup>126</sup> Greish, p.195.

<sup>127</sup> Milliyet, (19 February 1996).

outside its borders in particular, in the north of Iraq”, says Uri Or, a reserve general and former joint minister of defense in the Peres government.<sup>128</sup>

Particularly after Likud Party came to power in Israel, the anti-Syrian aspect of the Israeli-Turkish rapprochement became apparent. On April 30, 1997, Turhan Tayan, then Turkish defense minister paid an official visit to Israel, where he, also, visited the Israeli occupied Golan Heights.<sup>129</sup>

Netanyahu’s condemnations of the PKK for the first time came a few days after Tayan’s trip to Golan. This was hardly a coincidence. Netanyahu, rejecting the idea of a “Kurdish State” in his statement went further by saying:

"Turkey has suffered from terrorist attacks from the PKK and we see no difference between the terrorism of the PKK and one Israel suffers."<sup>130</sup>

The departure of Abdullah Öcalan from Syria, after Turkey’s threats, in October 1998, is believed to be a decision taken by Syrian officials as a result of the security cooperation between Turkey and Israel.

By the strategic partnership of Turkey and Israel, Syria’s unsubstantiated agreement with Greece in July 1995, which opens Syrian air and naval bases to Greece, hence was balanced. Syrian, in turn, tried to rally the Arab world and Iran to its side.

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<sup>128</sup> In Greish, p.192.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, p.191.

<sup>130</sup> Ha'aretz, (27 May 1997).

After the efforts to mobilize Iraqi support, Syria also tended with Iran, its close ally since 1979. Having common foes, namely Israel, they opposed the security cooperation between Israel (a “Zionist-entity” for them) and Turkey which is seen as a “challenging” NATO member on their borders. Some Arab nations are angered at the Turkish-Israeli bloc with the fear of possible use of Turkish air space to “spy on” Syria, Iraq and Iran by Israel. In addition to these countries, some other Arab countries, to a large extent, view this bloc as a “betrayal” by Turkey.<sup>131</sup>

Syria and Iran, being the forerunners of this “opposing bloc” wanted to include other countries such as; Iraq, Greece, and Armenia as well.

To mention the name of some states, that have the “capability” to stay out of these blocs are Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Saudi Arabia is said to have managed to stray from the blocs by enjoying strong ties with the US and Syria. Egypt represents a rather different case since it has the potential to side with the both blocs. It could join the Turkish-Israeli bloc, because it is a country that has developed close diplomatic ties with Israel since 1979. On the other hand, it could be caught of the balance by the drawbacks to the peace process its human-rights violations and nuclear proliferation which may result in its sliding with Syrian and Iranian bloc as well. Egypt is also mindful of the possibility that in case Turkish-Israeli bloc develops, its importance and status in the region may wane.<sup>132</sup> Back to the Syrian reaction, Syria sees itself as the “unstated target” of the Turkish-Israeli strategic partnership. Leading the opposition, it managed to issue a resolution calling on Turkey to reconsider its military accord with

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<sup>131</sup> Nadia El-Shazly, “Arab Argerat New Axis,” The World Today, (55), No.1 (January 1999), pp. 25-28.

<sup>132</sup> Interview with Şükrü Elekdağ, 15 February 1999, Ankara.

Israel in June 1996 Arab summit Syrian foreign minister Faruq Al-Shara claimed that the agreement was a “very dangerous development.” Vice president Abd Al-Halim Khaddam called it a “satanic alliance”. In 1998, Syria has softened its rhetoric and begun a process of dialogue with Turkey. Syrian and Turkish foreign ministers met on the OIC meeting, which did not issue a statement on Turkish-Israeli Cooperation for the first time since 1996.

Regarding the Iranian reaction, Iran hosted an “Organization of the Islamic Conference” summit in December 1997, where a resolution called for “reconsideration” of military cooperation with Israel.

Apparently, there seems to be not so much things that Syria and Iran share or have in common. The national interests of both countries are forcing both countries to get together on certain issues. Although the mullahs of Iran question whether Hafez-Al-Assad is even a Muslim, the Iranian governments send both oil and tourists to Syria. Syria, in turn, gives a blank check to Iran to operate in Syrian-controlled Lebanon.<sup>133</sup>

Turkish-Israeli relations are different while, generally, Iranian and Syrian relations lack “substantive” and operational links, Turkey and Israel are developing their relations almost in all fields. In regard to the non-military aspect of the partnership, Turkish-Israeli relations are superior in various terms. The free-trade zone and related institutions, such as, the Turkish-Israeli business council facilitate the trade between the two countries. Turkey became the first destination for the Israeli tourists. Both countries are rid of double taxation; there are plans to export fresh water to Israel

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<sup>133</sup> Daniel Pipes, “The Real Middle East,” Commentary, Vol.106, No.5, (November 1998), p.29.

through huge bags; academic exchanges; special exhibits in the Museums; mutual visits by religious leaders all of these became routine.<sup>134</sup>

#### **4.4. The Impact of Turkish-Israeli Relations on Other Countries in the Region**

##### **4.4.1. Egypt**

Despite the fact, that Egypt, as the “leader of the Arab world” has been disapproving of the strategic partnership. Egyptian officials have seemingly been satisfied with Turkey’s explanations of ties with Israel in bilateral meetings with Turkish military and civilian leaders. Egypt tries for a balance in its relations with both Turkish-Israeli bloc and Arab bloc led by Syria and Iran. While playing down its strategic importance, Egypt appears to have sympathy to the concerns of Syria. Egyptian foreign minister Amr Musa said that the Turkish Israeli relations would have negative consequences on the strategic situation in the region.

##### **4.4.2. Greece**

Greece has taken a strong stand on the security cooperation and had a negative reaction to the developing relations. In February 1998, then foreign minister Pangalos, described it as “an alliance of wrongdoers that brings us to a cold-war situation.” He also emphasized upon the possibility that Israel would provide Turkey with intelligence and technology that could be turned against Greece then defense minister

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<sup>134</sup> Israil'den Haberler, Issue. 15, (May-June 1997), p.16.

Akis Tsohatzopolous characterized Israel's choice of Turkey as "wrongheaded" and urged Israel to tend toward the European Union instead.

#### **4.4.3. Greek Cyprus**

Although Israel officially remains neutral in regard to the dispute between Turkey and Greek Cyprus, it attracts reactions from Greek Cypriot media. Israel, they report, may gather intelligence for Turkey on their new air base at Paphos and use its technology to jam their radar when a possible Turkish attack on Russian S-300 missiles occurs.

#### **4.4.4. Jordan**

Turkey and Israel are developing their relations with Jordan as well. Turkey and Jordan have had beneficial relations since 1920's. Today both countries' military pilots train both countries; the chiefs of staff meet regularly; the two governments form high level formal groups to discuss the threats posed to the both countries. They, also, invited other neighbors to join a "Neighborhood forum" on these issues. The relations are perceived to be so important that Turkey's ambassador to Amman says:

"Security cooperation [between Turkey and Jordan] has reached to the point where Turkish and Jordanian military forces are integrated into one."<sup>135</sup> The improving military and economic ties also had an impact on the relations with Jordan. The Jordanian and Turkish governments agreed to convene a meeting of the "Higher Turkish-Jordanian Committee," which has not met since 1992.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Pipes, "The Real Middle East," p.25.

<sup>136</sup> SWB, (09 September 1998).

Having signed the second peace agreement with Jordan, Israel has sought out a more comprehensive peace in the region.

With respect to the security cooperation between Israel and Turkey; Jordan strives to make a stand against the idea of its involvement into the “axis”. In a conference with then Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz, the Jordanian Prime Minister said:

“the bilateral agreement between Turkey and Israel is something with which we do not interfere.”<sup>137</sup> Rather the Crown Prince Hasan, the regent, called for a “comprehensive system” that includes all the countries in the region. He, also, described the notion that Jordan Turkey and Israel were entering into military alliance as “baseless.”<sup>138</sup>

#### **4.4.5. Lebanon**

Lebanon takes a tough stand on the Turkish-Israeli-“Jordanian” connection, the Lebanese foreign minister says:

“It is a pliers-like three way alliance to put the squeeze, [on my country and Syria.]”<sup>139</sup>

#### **4.5. The US Reaction**

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Pipes “The New Real Middle East,” p.30.



## 5. The US Reaction

The US is welcoming the new partnership while not playing around with it. In effect, the US officially supports and even encourages it. Then the State Department Spokesman Nicholas Burns said:

“It makes sense to US that Israel and Turkey wants to be friends. If certain other Arab countries don’t like that, that’s just tough.”<sup>140</sup>

The US also criticizes the Greek reaction to the rapprochement.<sup>141</sup> Some circles, however, held a different understanding in the way that the strategic partnership generates “potentially problematic realignments” in domestic American politics. For instance, as a “counter act” the Greek Americans have pulled away from the Jewish state after the Jewish lobbying groups began to side with Turkish interests. In addition, in April 1998, 81 senators signed a letter calling on the Clinton administration to stop “using public pressure against Israel” whereas a Greek American Paul Sarbones of Maryland, a long time supporter of Israeli state, strayed from joining them.<sup>142</sup>

It can be said that the US is also fearful of a possible reemergence of the “cold war logic” where it would tend toward one side and Russia toward the other. While already involved in various contentious issues, ranging from economic sanctions against Iraq to the shipment of the Russian arms to Greek Cyprus, the US does not deem it beneficial to act directly against Russia. The Arab states concern the US government as well. For instance, in regard to the Turkish-Israeli-US maritime maneuvers or joint-naval exercise called the “reliant mermaid,” the US raised the

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<sup>140</sup> Turkish Daily News, (11 May 1997).

<sup>141</sup> The US ambassador to Greece, Nicholas Burns said that the Greek reaction to the rapprochement between Israel and Turkey, is too offensive; Personal correspondence with Nicholas Burns 20 July 1999, Athens.

<sup>142</sup> Pipes, p.30.

question of timing (notwithstanding Israeli objection) and postponing the exercise to early 1998, because of the protests of the Arab world and its insistence on the presence of an Arab country as an observer. Washington achieved its objectives, that is, the postponement of the maneuvers and the presence of the commander of the Jordanian navy.<sup>143</sup>

#### **4.6. The Repercussions of the Rapprochement**

It is highly likely that the strategic cooperation between Israel and Turkey is bound to have certain repercussions. To begin with, the diffusion of the strategic partnership into other fields may bring about various results that could have multifarious effects on Turkey's and Israel's relations with the "third-parties."

For Turkey, some crises began to have a different face. The latest S-300 crisis is a clear sign for that. The Russian insistence to sell the missiles to Greek Cyprus in November 1998, forced Turkey to vow to prevent their deployment by any means necessary, since the missiles posed a threat to its soils as well.<sup>144</sup> Athens warned, in turn, that if Turkey attempts to destroy the missiles, it will provide help to the Greek Cypriots in accordance with the mutual defense treaty between Greek Cyprus and Greece. So far, there may seem nothing related to the rapprochement between Israel and Turkey. The difference was in the "involvement" of the Israel into the crisis: according to the reports, Turkish foreign minister has asked the prime minister Netanyahu for a possible help to curb the transportation of the missiles. The arrest of

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<sup>143</sup> Greish, p.190.

<sup>144</sup> Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Cyprus S-300 Missile Plan Puts Turkey Under the Gun," Defence News, August 3-9, 1998, Vol.13, No.31, Springfield, Virginia, P.19.

the two members of the Israeli secret intelligence service, namely; Mossad in Greek Cyprus for spying on a missile base revealed the “involvement” as well; the missile base was targeting weapons of Turkey.<sup>145</sup> Also there were reports about the threat that the installation of Russian S-300 surface-to-air Missiles in Greek Cyprus may pose to the Israeli “freedom of action” in the eastern Mediterranean. Hence, the result of the crisis was an overlap between the actions of Israel and Turkey. The US and Azerbaijan were also said to have joined Turkey and Israel to prevent the transportation by providing Turkey with the necessary intelligence in regard to the possible routes of the missiles in their way to Greek Cyprus.<sup>146</sup>

#### 4.7. General Critics against the Developing Relations

Turkey’s security cooperation with Israel marks important changes. The military and economic ties are developing in a “healthy way”.

However there are certain circles or groups, which direct critics at the strategic partnership that Turkey and Israel have. There are also questions raised concerning the prospects for Arab-Israeli peace process; the stability of the Middle East and the future of the regional arms control efforts. As an example, some human-rights groups claim that the massive build-up of Turkey’s military strength through the agreements with Israel, without being conditioned by “human right concerns,” can be harmful for the human right progress in Turkey.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> The Sunday Times, (15 November 1998) The arrest came along during a state visit to the Island by Israeli president Ezer Weizman in November 1998 where twenty other officers had participated on intelligence operation on Cyprus.

<sup>146</sup> Turkish Daily News, (4 September 1998).

<sup>147</sup> Tirman, p.60.

Arms control advocates are concerned that Turkey's acquisition of the Israeli weapons could undermine the arms race between Greece and Turkey through upsetting the military parity that the US tries to maintain, which would exacerbate tensions over their dispute over Cyprus, in addition to its harmful effects on the international pressures over Turkey to democratize and employ a "political solution" to the "Kurdish problem".<sup>148</sup> Some states also fear that it could lead to a new arms race in the region.

It is also mentioned that the security cooperation could reduce Israel's perceived need to try for a peace settlement and lead Syria less willingly involve itself into the peace process of force Syrian authorities to find out "alternative ways" to push the peace process back.

Another source of the concern is that. Turkish Israeli cooperation may lead other states in the region to form counter blocks.<sup>149</sup> To be more specific, there are signs of improvements in the relations between Iraq and Syria; for instance, in May and June 1997 Syrian and Iraqi borders were opened for the first time in 16 years; a trade delegation from Syria visited Baghdad; ministerial visits took place; oil pipelines from Iraq to Syria were reopened in July 1998, all of these were giving the impression that a regional counter bloc may emerge.<sup>150</sup>

There are also domestic criticism both in Turkey and Israel as regards the security cooperation. In Turkey, some circles are emphasizing the negative effects of appearing

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Syrian leader Asad's current overture to Russia to conclude a \$2 billion arms deal, which overlapped Iraqi officials visit to Russia, on 5 July 1999 raised concerns in that respect <http://www.ntv.com.tr>.

<sup>150</sup> Interview with Şükrü Elekdağ, 15 February 1999, Ankara.

too pro-Israel, which could deteriorate the relations with the Arab world. Turkey's Jewish community's reaction vary from full support to cautious approaches. Those, who favor a cautious evaluation, stress the dangers of raising their profile through the relations. If, they fear, the drawbacks occur they will be in bad terms with the popular Islamist feelings in Turkey.

In Israel, there are alternative voices with regard to the strategic partnership as well. The skeptical voices in Israel, underscores that it will be a great mistake if the Israeli state supports the "anti-Kurdish" policies of Turkey.<sup>151</sup> Some also argue that it may reverse the process of Israeli struggle against the Pan-Arabian bloc within itself, to the old tactics of the "periphery strategy."<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Stuart Cohen, "Türkiye'yi Konuşma zamanı," Avrasya Dosyası, Cilt.5, Sayı 1, (İlkbahar-1999), s.190.

<sup>152</sup> The Jerusalem Post, (23 October 1998).

## CONCLUSION

The thesis tries to evaluate an understanding of the strategic partnership between Turkey and Israel that flourished in the 1990's. It also depicts the process of the developing relations in the post cold war era.

From the early 1990's, the relations between Israel and Turkey began to get a new shape; which reflected itself as a strategic partnership in the coming years. Turkey's relatively low-profile approach to the Middle Eastern affairs shifted to have a more involved, risk-taking character. Turkey, also, began to act as the initiator in certain issues. Turkey's alienation from Europe and the effects of the end of the Cold-War on its strategic importance in the calculations of the US; forced the political and military leadership to reexamine Turkey's security and defense policies in its region. These changes resulted in Turkey's siding with Israel.

Turkey and Israel have concluded various agreements in the 1990's, most of which bore strategic importance. Amongst them, the "Military Cooperation and Training Agreement" that was signed on 23 February 1996 is seen as the bulwark of the strategic partnership. The new alignment comprised military cooperation, joint training exercises, intelligence sharing, economic and cultural ties.

Turkey's push for such an alignment was related to several factors such as the need for support in its fight against Kurdish separatism that imposed certain direct or indirect

negative results on its security (e.g. a de facto-embargo of US arms sale to Turkey.<sup>153</sup>) the supports of the Jewish lobbies in the US , taking counter-measures against Greek-Syrian alliance and the ruling elites' desire to place an emphasis upon the unchangeable patterns of the state structure, such as; the secular character.

Israel, on the other hand, feeling relatively isolated on certain issues, tried to ally itself with Turkey, hoping to realize some of its security objectives with the help of Turkey. Turkey's strong stand against Syria and its suitable position as regards the "reconnaissance missions" that are aimed at Syria, Iraq and Iran from Turkish air bases<sup>154</sup>; the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Syria, Iraq and Iran contributes a lot to the tension between Israel and the said countries in a way that Israel deems it beneficial to get Turkey's support against them. Israel's declining trend in trade relations with the US and EU; it's efforts to have a sphere of influence in the Central Asia;<sup>155</sup> and the economic market feature of Turkey for Israel are other reasons for the fervent desire to side with Turkey.

The US supports this alignment on the ground that the two countries, along with Jordan and possibly Egypt, are the key actors in the region to help the US led "regional security regime" to come along.<sup>156</sup> Although the rapprochement attracted severe criticism from some Arab countries and even encouraged some (e.g. Iran Syria, Iraq and Greece) to form "counter alignments", the extent and the depth of the strategic partnership that Turkey and Israel have, indicate that it will remain robust. Bearing in mind the fact that the strategic partnership between the two countries is

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<sup>153</sup> Gill Dibner, "My Enemy's Enemy," Harvard International Review, winter 1998-1999, p.35.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid, p.37.

<sup>155</sup> Interview with Melina Altunışık, 10 May 1999, Ankara.

<sup>156</sup> Dibner, p.38.

realized despite certain cultural and religious differences, it can be said that as long as regional conditions continue to reign that offer strategic benefits to the both countries, it will operate to maintain a solid ground to be efficient and long-lasting.



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