

To my uncle, Bayazıt Erdem

GEOPOLITICAL DISCOURSE MATTERS:  
TURKEY AND ISRAEL

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## ABSTRACT

### GEOPOLITICAL DISCOURSE MATTERS: TURKEY AND ISRAEL

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In this thesis it is argued that geopolitical discourse matters in shaping the practices of foreign policy. The perspective of Critical Geopolitics approach is adopted as the theoretical framework and in conformity with this framework; this study focuses on the geopolitical discourse of the political elites. With reference to the geopolitical discourses of the political elites in Israel and Turkey, it is discussed that geopolitical discourse makes certain foreign policy options possible while marginalizing some others. Firstly, the main components of the geopolitical discourses in those countries, which are ‘exceptionalism’, ‘Jewishness’, ‘security’ in Israel and ‘geographical determinism’ and ‘Westernness/Europeanness’ in Turkey’, are identified. Then, the case of Oslo Peace Accords and the case of Turkey-EU relations are used in order to illustrate how different framings of these components matter in terms of foreign policy practices.

Keywords: Critical Geopolitics, geopolitical discourse, Israel, Turkey

## ÖZET

### JEOPOLİTİK SÖYLEM FARK YARATIR: İSRAİL VE TÜRKİYE

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Bu tezde jeopolitik söylemin dış politika eylemlerini şekillendirmedeki fark yaratan rolü tartışılmıştır. Teorik çerçeve olarak Eleştirel Jeopolitik yaklaşımının perspektifi benimsenmiştir ve bu teorik çerçeveye uygun olarak da siyasi elitin jeopolitik söylemi üzerine odaklanılmıştır. İsrail ve Türkiye’deki siyasi elitin jeopolitik söylemine atıflarda bulunularak jeopolitik söylemin bazı dış politika seçeneklerini marjinalize ederken bazı seçenekleri mümkün kıldığı tartışılmıştır. Önce bu ülkelerdeki jeopolitik söylemin ana bileşenleri—ki bunlar İsrail’de ‘diğerlerinden farklı olma (exceptionalism)’, ‘Yahudilik (Jewishness)’, ‘güvenlik (security)’ ve Türkiye’de ‘coğrafyanın belirleyiciliği (geographical determinism)’ ve ‘Batılılık/Avrupalılık (Westernness/Europeanness)’tır—belirlenmiştir. Daha sonra da Oslo Barış Anlaşması ve Türkiye-AB ilişkileri örnekleri kullanılarak, bu bileşenlerin farklı şekillerde çerçevelenmesinin dış politika eylemleri açısından nasıl bir fark yarattığı gösterilmeye çalışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Eleştirel Jeopolitik, jeopolitik söylem, İsrail, Türkiye.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The focus of this work will be how geopolitical discourse matters in shaping the practices of foreign policy. Foreign policy practices of governments make use of various geographical assumptions in order to “narrate geopolitical events and legitimize a particular course of action” (Allen, 2003: 102) while marginalizing alternative courses of action. Critical theorists consider language a means used to create and strengthen certain value systems. The role language plays in shaping beliefs that affect people’s behaviors, motivations, desires, fears, and in establishing certain forms of knowledge as ‘common sense’ is viewed as crucial. Discourse is not seen merely as speeches and texts but also the contexts in which these ‘things’ are shaped (Agnew and Corbridge, 1995: 48). Geopolitical discourse can be defined as an implicit theory that shapes the practices of (especially foreign and security) policy-makers, academicians and writers.

Geopolitical discourse is not simply about describing particular foreign policy situations. Geopolitical discourse enables/legitimizes certain foreign policy actions and marginalizes some others by establishing a representation. Geopolitical discourse, as any other discourse privileges *certain* forms of practice. It *empowers*

certain practices. Foucault (1980) argues that all discursive formations articulate power. Geopolitical discourse articulates power as well. The geopolitical discourse that is dominant at the time excludes other possible discourses from serious consideration. Once it becomes dominant, it appears unproblematic (Dalby, 1990: 28). This is why “to expose power/knowledge relations embedded in geopolitical discourses is perhaps the single most important methodological objective of the critical geopolitical approach” (Hakli, 1998: 336).

Critical examination of the workings of geopolitical discourse and the analysis of international politics as a set of discursive practices were initially developed by critical theorists of International Relations “who were inspired by poststructuralist interpretations of knowledge and its role in politics” (Ashley cited in Hakli, 1998: 334). Poststructuralist thinking does not see the ideas expressed by practicing politicians “as false accounts of a true reality. Rather they are seen as ideas which make certain things become real” (Painter, 1998: 146 cited in Hakli, 1998: 335).

These ideas have inspired some political geographers to establish a new approach, namely: Critical Geopolitics. Critical geopoliticians have explicitly adopted critical perspectives to develop a new approach to the study of geography. History has been the academic discipline concerned with ‘time’. Geography has been the academic discipline concerned with ‘space’. While history is quickly associated with complex theories, geography has remained largely unproblematic (Heffernan, 2000: 350). Thus, “[s]pace still continues to hold a geometric meaning,

evoking the idea of an empty area, waiting to be filled with meaningful objects” in our minds (Natter, 2000: 354).

The term ‘geopolitics’ has been variously defined. John Agnew (1998: 4) defines geopolitics as “examination of the geographical assumptions, designations and understandings that enter into the making of world politics.” Simon Dalby (1990: 33) argues that the term geopolitics has many meanings often merging one into another but all have in common a general concern with the interrelationships of space and power. He also draws attention to the fact that although the relationships of space and power are central to the discussions of geopolitics, many of them are not spelt out in numerous geopolitical texts (Dalby, 1990: 33). Indeed, geopolitics is usually defined as the study of how geography affects politics. This affect of geography on politics is mostly understood as a deterministic relationship. Therefore, ‘geographical determinism’ has become the main premise of geopolitical discourse.

Klaus Dodds (2001: 470-1) identifies four different tracks of research undertaken by Critical Geopolitics. The first one is concerned with geopolitical practices and tries to understand geographical and political reasoning and how they shape the practices of international politics. The second one is concerned with the geopolitical tradition. The third one deals with the relationships between geopolitics and popular culture. And the last one—named as structural geopolitics—is concerned with the linkage between the practices of statecraft and structural forces such as globalization and/or information networks.

The reason why the Critical Geopolitics approach is adopted in this thesis is because this approach allows the researcher to consider how claims about ‘scientific objectivity’ can obscure the role geographical knowledge plays in reproducing the world s/he lives in. Critical theorists ask, “how the philosophical presuppositions of the policy debates shape and limit what is possible to do and say within the established institutional patterns and structures of political discourse” (Dalby, 1990: 4). This questioning leads them to search for alternatives.

An important question to ask when studying discourse is which discourse or whose discourse to study. A significant number of geopoliticians argue that it should be the official discourse—discourse used by the state/government. Their argument is rooted in the idea that there would be no geopolitics at all were there no state. Denis Retaille (2000: 35) maintains that “[t]here is actually no geopolitics unless the state is involved either as an actor or as an aim, with the state having a significant geographical component through the institutionalization of territory”. When coined by French philosopher Turgot in 1750, the term “political geography” corresponded to a branch of knowledge for the government (Agnew et al., 2003: 3). Yves Lacoste (1976) also sees geographical knowledge as essentially strategic and military in nature. For Neil Smith, “Geopolitics was and is a text for national leaders” (Smith, 2000: 367). Peter Taylor maintains that political geography plays the role of a “creator of knowledge on relations between political power and geographical space” (Taylor, 2003: 50).

Critical geopoliticians (Dalby, 1990, 1991; Dodds and Sidaway, 1994; O Tuathail, Dalby and Routledge, 1998) have also argued that the primarily ‘dominant

discourse' should be studied. What they refer to, as 'the dominant' is the official discourse. As Hakli (1998: 337) argues, "official discourses may well dominate, even colonize the popular ones". Agnew (1998: 6) defines state discourse as a powerful and well-established conventional wisdom. Official/state discourses enjoy more "societal weight" than others (Hakli, 1998: 340). Hakli (1998: 340) explains this relation between power and knowledge as follows:

[r]epresentations' capability to manifest truth derives from their institutional weight rather than correspondence with the "external reality". Thus governmentally produced representations have more authority than those produced within non-institutional settings—a basic tenet in a Foucauldian understanding of discourse.

Official discourses are mainly produced within the state bureaucracy by state officials. When examining the case of the United States of America, Weldes and Saco (1996) explain why state officials have the power to produce the official discourse. They maintain that state officials are authorized to speak for 'the United States' meaning that "they are formally charged with defining the threats facing 'the United States', deciding on the actions to be taken by 'the United States', and implementing the policies of 'the United States'" (Weldes and Saco, 1996: 377).

Official discourses may be produced outside the government by different institutions such as the academia (Hakli, 1998: 344). These actors are labeled as 'intellectuals of statecraft' by Critical geopoliticians. The term 'intellectuals of statecraft' refers to those who assist state officials in decision-making because of the 'expertise' they have, such as academicians, retired bureaucrats, researchers (Weldes et al., 1999: 18; O Tuathail and Dalby, 1998: 9). Intellectuals of statecraft can be less or more influential than state officials but what matters here is that both groups are privileged in articulating their ideas on foreign policy (Weldes et al., 1999: 18; O

Tuathail and Dalby, 1998: 9) and have the authority to mobilize geographical understanding “in such a way that its ‘obviousness’ is there for all to see” (Allen, 2003: 102).

In the attempt to show how geopolitical discourse matters in shaping practices of foreign policy, the thesis will focus on the discourses of state officials and ‘intellectuals of statecraft’ in Israel and Turkey. Agnew and Corbridge (1995: 48) describe ‘political elites’ as the “whole community of government officials, political leaders, foreign-policy experts, and advisors ... who conduct, influence and comment upon the activities of ‘statecraft’”. Throughout the thesis the term ‘political elites’ will be used to cover both the state officials and the ‘intellectuals of statecraft’.

This study is composed of five chapters. Chapter II sets up an overall perspective for the rest of the study by bringing forward the main arguments of Critical Geopolitics and the study of geopolitical discourse. It is divided into two subsections. The first section deals with the arguments developed by the Critical Geopolitics approach. The second section focuses on the history of geopolitical thought in the West. This historical account is based on a key assumption built by the Critical geopoliticians. This section does not merely present a history of ideas but the aim is to show how the dominant geopolitical imaginations of the European-American experience were incorporated in the field of political geography and these imaginations were “projected onto the rest of the world and into the future” (Agnew, 1998: 1).

Modern world politics has been structured by practices based on a set of understandings about “the way the world works” that together constitute the

elements of the modern geopolitical imagination. It is Eurocentric because Europe and its offshoots (such as Russia and the United States) came to dominate the world. Political elites around the world adjusted to and adapted understandings and practices emanating from Europe. [...] From Brasilia to Seoul and from Cairo to Beijing the dominant model is still that invented originally in Europe (Agnew, 1998: 6).

Critical scholars point to the domination of the Western thought in the field of geopolitics. Therefore, the history of the Western geopolitical thought emerges as an important subject to study in order to understand the roots of the geopolitical discourses elsewhere around the world. This critical account of the development of geopolitical discourse in the West will also be used as a stepping-stone for the next two chapters where geopolitical thought in Israel and Turkey will be studied by looking at the discourses of political elites in these countries.

Chapter III presents an illustration of the argument that ‘discourse matters’ by looking at how geopolitical discourse matters in Israel. ‘Exceptionalism’, ‘Jewishness’ and ‘security’ are identified as the main components of the Israeli geopolitical discourse. These components were mostly used in order to explain why peace was an ‘impossible’ choice for Israel until the realization of the Oslo Peace Accords in 1993. The example of Oslo Accords will be used to demonstrate how these same components were framed in a different way making peace a foreign policy option.

Chapter IV presents an illustration of the same argument by looking at Turkey’s case. ‘Geographical determinism’ and ‘Westernness’ are the main components of Turkish geopolitical discourse. The example of Turkey-EU relations will be used to illustrate how different framing of these components presents

Turkey's geographical location in different ways as providing a ground for different arguments about the EU.

In the web pages of their Ministry of Foreign Affairs, both Israel and Turkey are designated as lying at the crossroads of three continents, Asia, Africa and Europe and therefore as having an exceptional geopolitical location.<sup>1</sup> Yet, this designation is unwarranted because there are other countries with similar geopolitical locations—such as Syria. Moreover, there are countries with dissimilar geopolitical locations but with similar claims to exceptionalism in their geopolitical discourse—such as Spain (Sidaway, 2000: 121). There are a number of studies in the literature on Israel from a Critical geopolitics perspective (see Barnett, 1996, 1999, 2002; Newman 2002a, 2002b; Valerie, 2002; Yiftachel 2002). Chapter III will mainly use the arguments developed by David Newman (2002a, 2002b) and Michael Barnett (1996, 1999, 2002) because their approach to the subject has been widely adopted by other Critical scholars studying Israeli geopolitics. Unlike the Israeli case, the Turkish case is studied by a few (Belge, 1993; Bilgin, 2003, 2004a, 2004b). This has led me to make use of primary sources mostly. Since, there are a few sources to rely on about the Turkish case, I found it useful to use the academic work on Israeli geopolitical discourse in order to set a basis for analyzing the Turkish case.

Saying that geopolitical discourse matters does not mean that no other factors matter. Geopolitical phenomena are both material and discursive (Hakli, 1998: 334; Weldes and Saco, 1996: 395). Geographical knowledge embedded in the material practices of government; global economy, development and war-making shape

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<sup>1</sup> See <[www.mfa.gov.il](http://www.mfa.gov.il)> for Israel and <<http://www.mfa.gov.tr/grupg/gb/default.htm>> for Turkey.



geopolitical phenomena and, in turn, are shaped by them (O Tuathail and Agnew, 1992 cited in Hakli, 1998: 334). A critical geopolitical analysis of geopolitical phenomena seeks to expose the “politics of the geographical specification of politics” (Dalby, 1991: 274 cited in Hakli, 1998: 334). This, in turn, “involves reflexivity with regard to the dominant texts produced by intellectuals and practitioners of statecraft, but also with regard to the material contexts within which the dominant discourses have historically emerged” (Hakli, 1998: 334).

Give the limits of time, it was not possible to study the relationship between material factors and geopolitical discourse in this thesis. There is a need for extensive studies about different/competing geopolitical imaginations/representations, and competing identities of Turkey and their relation to processes of social and economic change. The concluding chapter will summarize the thesis and reflect upon the limits of my findings.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **CRITICAL GEOPOLITICS**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

It is through [geopolitical] discourse that leaders act, through the mobilization of certain simple geographical understandings that foreign-policy actions are explained and through ready-made geographically infused reasoning that wars are rendered meaningful (O Tuathail and Agnew, 1998: 78).

The main premise of Critical Geopolitics is described as “the contention that geography is a social and historical discourse which is always intimately bound up with question of politics and ideology” (Foucault cited in O Tuathail and Agnew, 1998: 79). Geopolitical discourses are power structures in themselves. They are constructed by particular institutions and political forces in order to maintain their power or gain more power in world politics (O Tuathail and Agnew, 1998: 79-80). These discourses shape the minds not only of the geopoliticians but also of academicians, students, writers and common people and serve as justifications for some foreign policy actions. They also serve to represent and, when necessary, reconstruct the meaning of the past, present and future (O Tuathail, 2000:126). This reconstruction allows people to specify geographies/spaces in particular ways, which enable policy-makers to act in specific modes with certain political consequences (Dalby, 1990: i).

Geographical definitions and concepts are important component parts of states' strategic doctrines, policy-making processes and academic discussions of world affairs. These definitions and conceptualizations enable certain foreign policy actions while marginalizing alternative courses of action. For example, conventional geographical categorization names different areas as 'advanced' or 'primitive', 'modern' or 'backward', 'democratic' or 'undemocratic'. While "Europe and some of its political-cultural offspring (such as United States)" (Agnew, 1998: 8) are seen as representing modernity and democracy, "other parts of the world only figure in terms of how they appear relative to Europe's past" (Agnew, 1998: 8). Defining Europe and America as 'modern', and the rest of the world as 'backward' make political intervention into other parts of the world possible while marginalizing alternative courses of action. Describing an area as 'democratic' or 'undemocratic' is not only describing it, but also describing "the type of foreign policy its 'nature' demands" (Agnew and Corbridge, 1995:48; also see O Tuathail, 2000). Irrespective of whether its purveyors are academicians, practitioners of statecraft or media persons, defining areas as 'developed' or 'developing', 'Western' or 'Islamic' is a geopolitical discourse (Agnew and Corbridge, 1995: 49). Once this geopolitical discourse is constituted, it stamps itself to people's minds to the extent that even challenges to it must conform to the terms of debate as laid down by the dominant discourse (Agnew and Corbridge, 1995: 49).

State action is legitimized by making use of 'geopolitics'; this is why the role of geopolitical discourse as a useful tool emerges. Nicholas Spkyman, one of

the key figures of traditional geopolitical thought, wrote that “[g]eography does not argue. It just is.” Following Simon Dalby (1990: 14), “states are understood here as politically created practices and their claims to legitimacy ought to be the subject of critical investigation rather than the point of departure for analysis.” Gearoid O Tuathail (1996:21) argues that geopolitics is simply about politics, and matters of politics and discourse intersect. Thus, studying discourse might contribute a lot to a critical reevaluation of political theories and practices (Milliken, 1999:225-29).

## **2.2 Critical Geopolitics**

Critical Geopolitics emerged as an alternative approach to mainstream geopolitical thinking. Critical Geopolitics scholars maintain that “geopolitics is not a discrete and relatively contained activity confined only to a small group of ‘wise men’ that speak in the language of classical geopolitics” (O Tuathail: 1996, 60). Geopolitics is about politics.

Critical Geopolitics studies seek to reveal the power/knowledge relations in both the study and practices of geopolitics. The institutional power and disciplinary power/knowledge apparatuses centered in the United States overwhelmingly shape the rules governing world order (O Tuathail, Dalby and Routledge, 1998: 5-10). Critical Geopolitics identifies the structure of the production of geopolitical knowledge. Experts, institutions and ideology create the ‘necessary’ geographical knowledge and present it to policy-makers in an ‘advice to the prince’ manner (O Tuathail, Dalby and Routledge, 1998: 8). The term ‘geopolitics’ seems to hold an objective rather than subjective (or

ideological), and visual rather than verbal meaning (O Tuathail, Dalby and Routledge, 1998). Yet, Critical Geopolitics argues that this is not the case. Associated with national security, geopolitics becomes a way to justify the exercise of power (O Tuathail, Dalby and Routledge, 1998: 3-4).

Critical Geopolitics does not only seek to uncover the power play but also engages itself with understanding how it might be possible to imagine different geopolitical arrangements. Critical geopoliticians (O Tuathail: 1996, 1998; Agnew and Corbridge, 1995; Agnew, 1998; Dodds, 2000; Dalby, 1990, 1996) are aware of the language of geopolitics that is used in foreign policy making (Dijkink, 1996:5). Inspired by the works of figures such as Michel Foucault (1980) and Edward Said (1977), they identify discourse as a ‘matrix of reasoning’, an ‘ensemble of ideas and concepts’ or a “regime of truth that functions as a power/knowledge system, constituting, representing and interpreting the ‘real’” (O Tuathail, 2000:126).

In *The Geopolitics Reader*, O Tuathail, Dalby and Routledge present us with a collection of geopolitical texts that shaped the geopolitical thinking and foreign-policy decisions in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as Halford Mackinder’s “The Geographical Pivot of History” or George Kennan’s “The Sources of Soviet Conduct” or Samuel Huntington’s “The Clash of Civilizations”. What they seek to show is that geopolitical texts are not ‘neutral’ writings from some detached position outside politics, history or geography, but they are a part of political decision-making and the exercise of power by some actors. Reading these texts

shows how the political significance of particular geographies and even geographies themselves can change.

Critical geopoliticians use critical discourse analysis as a method to research on the subject. Critical discourse analysis can be described as a way of thinking about a problem rather than providing a method to the researcher. Discourse analysis is not a research method in this respect but a way of questioning the ontological and epistemological assumptions behind a statement. Discourse analysis enables the researcher to interpret texts and contexts; it enables the researcher to reveal the implicit assumptions behind them and behind a choice of a particular option for action. Critical discourse analysis is the application of critical thought to life and the unveiling of 'the dominant' through an interpretative reading. Most Critical geopoliticians draw upon Foucault's work,

In Foucault's terms discourses are much more than linguistic performances, they are also plays of power which mobilize rules, codes and procedures to assert a particular understanding through the construction of knowledge within these rules, codes and procedures. Because they organize reality in specific ways through understanding and knowing in ways that involve particular epistemological claims, they provide legitimacy, and provide the intellectual conditions of possibility of particular institutional and political arrangements (Dalby, 1990:5).

The acquisition of power and the enforcement of political beliefs can be achieved in a number of ways. Physical coercion/imposition is one way. Other kinds of coercion can be implemented by different political regimes through their legal systems. Another effective way may be to persuade the people to act voluntarily in the way you want; that is, to exercise power through the construction of consent or agreement (Thomas and Wareing, 1999: 34; Dalby, 1990: 8). Using

the ‘right’ language can make certain ideas or options appear as ‘common sense’, which, in turn, makes it difficult to question them.

Political discourse relies on the principle that people’s perception of politics is influenced by language. Language shelters implicit assumptions that cannot be found in what is actually said. This feature of language affect people in a way that they take something for granted which is actually open to debate (Thomas and Wareing, 1999: 35). Writers such as Foucault, Said, and Derrida investigated this feature of language and wrote about “how discourses operate to foreclose political possibilities and eliminate from consideration a multiplicity of possible worlds” (Dalby, 1990: 5-6).

### **2.3 The Foundations of Traditional Geopolitics**

During the twentieth century, when geopolitics was born and flourished, it was a sort of ‘specialized discourse’. It was a scientific and technical field and its ‘political’ aspect was cast aside. Today mainstream geopoliticians follow the same tradition when they try to invoke technical expertise in order to provide a scientific source of information for policy makers. This ‘expert discourse’ they use renders political discussion about the subject unnecessary (Dalby, 1990:11).

However, as Foucault writes, “territory is no doubt a geographical notion, but it is first of all a juridico-political one: the area controlled by a certain kind of power” (Foucault, 1980: 68). Mainstream geopolitics dehistoricizes geography/territory by reducing it to a ‘fact’. Yet, as Said argues, geographies are ‘man-made’ (cited in Dalby, 1990: 25). They are historic creations and they could have been otherwise. Here, what is meant by ‘geography’ is the kind of

geography mainstream geopolitics deals with. Mainstream geopolitics does not deal with mountains, rivers or plateaus as natural formations but it looks into why and how those mountains and rivers could be used for some political ends. It is concerned with the relations of space and power. It is concerned with boundaries and control. Boundaries are not 'natural' in the way that mountains or rivers are natural. They are not 'natural' formations. Throughout history people formed them; they are 'man-made.' Geography does not act; it is people who act in the name of geographies. Thus, we can ask: "How would a geography that is not political act?" (Natter, 2000: 357).

Thinking about matters in this way requires a reconceptualization of the history of geopolitics, which means that a historical study focusing on geopolitical discursive practices should be made (Dalby, 1990: 14). John Agnew makes a critical contribution in this respect. Agnew (1995, 1998) argues that geopolitical discourses provide "the rhetorical understandings and dominant meanings through which geopolitical order have been realized in foreign and economic policies" (Agnew and Corbridge, 1995: 76). He identifies three different geopolitical orders: civilisational, naturalized and ideological geopolitics, which followed each other chronologically; each stemming from the remnants of the previous one (Agnew and Corbridge, 1995: 46-77; Agnew, 1998: 86-127). 'Civilisational geopolitics' (Agnew and Corbridge, 1995: 52-56; Agnew, 1998: 87-94) refers to the Eurocentric understanding of the world as defined by the Europeans themselves. Although Russia and the United States also contributed to this understanding, the main premise of civilisational geopolitics was that 'Europe' was seen as a unique civilization with a unique history. This assumption of uniqueness provided Europe with a general ordering principle—



which is civilization—and formed a strong European identity. Agnew considers the peak of civilisational geopolitics as the first half of the nineteenth century.

The following geopolitical order was ‘naturalized geopolitics’. This new understanding of geography was the basis of geopolitical knowledge between 1875 and 1945, Agnew argues. In naturalized geopolitics states were seen as ‘natural’ entities (Agnew and Corbridge, 1995: 56-65; Agnew, 1998: 94-105). They are seen as living organisms that have natural boundaries (mountains or rivers form natural boundaries for states). According to this understanding, once born like other living organisms, states will ‘naturally’ grow. The idea of state as a living organism was a reflection of the Darwinist theory about the survival of the fittest. According to this Darwinist interpretation of geopolitics, powerful states have a ‘natural’ right to extend their power at the expense of others in order to survive. Relatively weak states would be eliminated and stronger ones will go on their struggles for ‘healthy’ development. A clear articulation of this understanding can be seen in Nazi geopolitics. Nazi geopolitics was organized around the doctrine of *Lebensraum* (living space). According to that doctrine, it was Germany’s ‘natural’ right to expand its territories at the expense of other states because Germany needed more territory for its healthy development.

The last type of geopolitical order identified by Agnew is ‘ideological geopolitics’ (Agnew and Corbridge, 1995: 65-76; Agnew, 1998: 105-119). After the Second World War, the world was divided into three (both geographically and ideologically): the East, the West and the Third World. The principal characteristic of ideological geopolitics was that there was a central ideological

and systemic conflict over territory. The USSR and the USA were rivals in extending their influence over other areas of the world.

Agnew's analysis is a valuable contribution in historicizing and contextualizing geopolitical discourse. Agnew (1998: 86-7) explains that his study of the past geopolitical orders reveals the continuities in geopolitical thought throughout history as well. He maintains that, by examining the evolution of geopolitical orders one can unveil the affects of the past on today's geopolitical imagination (Agnew, 1998: 86). In this respect, he points to state-centricity and geographical determinism as the key elements of today's geopolitical imagination inherited from the past (Agnew, 1998: 86, 127). Another key element of today's geopolitical imagination he identifies is the claim to 'view from nowhere'; that is, the scientific claim to objectivity (Agnew, 1998: 8). A closer look to the main approaches to traditional geopolitics will demonstrate that these elements are also central to the dominant geopolitical discourse today.

## **2.4 Traditional Geopolitics**

Traditional geopolitical thought summarized in this section represents a tradition of designating geography as tool of statecraft. Traditional theories share the assumption that geography plays a determining role on a country's well-being and security. This assumption is formulated as a 'scientific fact' by these traditional theories, and is not opened to debate.

The late nineteenth century and early twentieth century geopolitical theories considered expansionism as a necessary means for maintaining security. It was

within this imperialist context that geopolitics first emerged as a concept and practice (O Tuathail, 1998: 4). Before the term ‘geopolitics’ was coined, there were intellectuals writing about the importance of geography over political strategy. For example, American naval historian Alfred Mahan published his work *The Influence of Seapower upon History* in 1890. It was Rudolf Kjellen who coined the term ‘geopolitics’ in 1899 for the first time. He was a Swedish political scientist who was trying to make political geography more ‘scientific’ (in the positivist sense of the term). He adopted Friedrich Ratzel’s Darwinist idea of the state as ‘a living organism’ and sought to analyze the state in all its dimensions, terming ‘geopolitics’ as one dimension of state activity. His ideas on geopolitics, including the term itself, strongly influenced German geopolitics, the thinking of Karl Haushofer in particular (O Tuathail, Dalby and Routledge, 1998: 4-5).

Friedrich Ratzel, whose ideas influenced twentieth century geopolitics, was an important figure for the development of political geography in the nineteenth century. For Ratzel, states (nation-states) were living organisms and were subject to the same rules as other living organisms. Like all organisms, nations required land and space for survival. It was Ratzel who first coined the term *lebensraum* (living space) in 1897 (O Tuathail, Dalby and Routledge, 1998: 4).

Halford Mackinder, another important figure in political geography, in his article, “The Geographical Pivot of History” published in 1904, put forward his famous “heartland theory”. For Mackinder, heartland is the pivotal area that has fundamental strategic and historical significance. The heartland he was talking about was located in the European areas of Russia including Central Asia. He argued that

if the people and resources were properly organized with efficient government and fully developed industrialization, the heartland was geographically situated to dominate the entire 'world island', the entire Eurasia, the whole region from Western Europe to the Pacific, and then the entire world (O Tuathail, Dalby and Routledge, 1998: 17-18). According to Mackinder, Russia, given its geographical location, would likely dominate the world. Many geopoliticians have adopted his mapping of the world—the emphasis on the geopolitical power of Russia and the land on which Russia was situated—during the Cold War.

Mackinder's ideas affected the school of German militarist geographers such as Karl Haushofer (O Tuathail, 1998: 18). Haushofer had served as a general in the German army during the First World War but moved into academic life after the war. His geopolitical theory brought together the ideas of Ratzel, Kjellen and Mackinder. He thought that a major reason for Germany's defeat in the First World War was a lack of geographical knowledge and geopolitical awareness. Haushofer's studies that came out in the 1930s and during the Second World War provided many geopolitical ideas for the Nazis, which, in turn, reduced the credibility of 'geopolitics' in the aftermath of the Second World War (O Tuathail, 1998: 20-21). However, contrary to Nazis' racist approach, Haushofer's geopolitics prioritized 'space' over 'race' (O Tuathail, 1998: 23). Following Mackinder's heartland theory, Haushofer argued that Germany's best course was to ally herself, or at least not to become enemies, with Russia (the heartland power). He thought that Germany had lost the First World War because its leaders did not study geopolitics and distanced Germany from Russia (O Tuathail, 1998: 20). If they had studied geopolitics, argued

Haushofer, they would have known that being in conflict with the heartland power was wrong strategically.

Another traditional geopolitician who applied Mackinder's thoughts to his geopolitical work is Nicholas Spykman. Contrary to Mackinder, he argued that the 'rimland', the land surrounding the heartland, was of central importance for controlling the 'world island'. For Spykman, the state controlling the rimland can control Eurasia, and control the fate of the world (Tarakçı, 2003: 82).

One can find the key components of today's geopolitical imagination such as state-centricism and geographical determinism in these traditional studies on geopolitics. These studies all share the assumption that geography has a determining role on history and politics. No matter where they place the heartland or the rimland, these traditional studies are implicated in imperialist policies as they present territorial expansion as necessary for the well being of aspiring powers.

#### **2.4.1 Cold War Geopolitics**

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the content of *German Geopolitik*, based primarily on Haushofer's ideas, was considered as the central component of Nazi ideology. This resulted in the rejection of geopolitical theory after the War (Starr, 1992: 2). During the Cold War, geopolitical analysis meant geostrategic analysis in order to fight the 'war' more effectively (Parker, 1997: 43). Geopolitics continued to exist under different labels during this period. Both superpowers waged 'hot' wars in different areas of the world using geopolitical justifications. For example, the

Vietnam War was started by the USA in order to stop perceived Soviet territorial and ideological expansionism (O Tuathail, 1998: 53). Geopolitics became a way of defining the world according to the strategic priorities of the superpowers. Terms such as 'geopolitics' or 'geopolitical' were rarely pronounced but the order established was mainly geopolitical. The determining role of geography over a state's fate was still central to geopolitical thought.

George Kennan's 'Long Telegram' (1946) from Moscow, also known as the 'X Article' (published in *Foreign Affairs*) is of crucial importance to understand the geopolitical reasoning of the Cold War from US perspective. Kennan presented two important arguments. First, he said that the Soviet state was historically and inherently expansionist and thus a firm policy of containment was needed. Second, Soviet communists were 'fanatics' and there was no way for diplomacy and negotiation with them (O Tuathail, 1998: 49-50).

The Truman Doctrine (1947) was a speech delivered to the US Congress by the President Truman to convince the Americans about the necessity of financial aid to the Greeks fighting against the left-wing forces in Greece. This was another important component of Cold War geopolitical thought. In his speech Truman divided the world into two: totalitarianism and freedom. "It must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures" he said (cited in O Tuathail, 1998: 48-9). Truman did not set any geographical limits for US foreign policy because the totalitarian threat against the freedom was perceived to be unlimited (O Tuathail, 1998: 50).

It is claimed that Mackinder's thesis was a major influence in American geopolitical thought (O Tuathail, 1998: 47-56; Retaille, 2000: 42). It is argued that his theory helped to provide the basis for the theory of containment because Mackinder was also talking about forming a ring around the periphery of the 'world island'. This ring was needed in order to prevent the power of the heartland from dominating the world. It was in this context that the 'domino theory' became such prominent. Dean Acheson, Secretary of State in the Truman administration, formulated a theory in which he designated the Southeast Asian countries as a row of dominoes that can fall to the side of communism one by one (O Tuathail, 1998: 52).

These arguments that were developed by US officials soon provoked the reaction of the USSR. A Soviet 'intellectual of the statecraft' Andrei Zhdanov best explained the Soviet perspective on the Cold War in 1947. He divided the world into two camps, an 'imperialist and anti-democratic camp' led by the USA and its allies at one side and an 'anti-imperialist and democratic camp' led by the Soviet Union and the 'new democracies' in Eastern Europe (O Tuathail, 1998: 50). These new democracies were in fact Soviet controlled regimes that could not take part in the Marshall Plan (O Tuathail, 1998: 50).

The Brezhnev Doctrine of 1968, which was published as an article in the official Soviet Communist newspaper by Politbureau leader, Leonid Brezhnev, in order to justify the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, is another very important component of the geopolitical reasoning of the Cold War years. Brezhnev stated that the countries in Eastern Europe must not damage socialism in their country or the fundamental interests of the other socialist countries or the worldwide communist

movement. If a country is doing so then it is serving to the world imperialism and imperialism could not be accepted (O Tuathail, 1998: 52-3).

These ideas played important roles in the construction of Cold War geopolitical discourses. These theories made possible the American involvement in civil wars in Vietnam and Korea, which are thousands of miles away from the United States (O Tuathail, 1998: 52). At the same time, they legitimized the representation of 'Great Powers' as the main actors that can influence the course of world politics (Agnew, 1998: 86).

#### **2.4.2 Post-Cold War Geopolitics**

The end of the Cold War led to uncertainty and unpredictability. Western intellectuals tried to develop new arguments to explain the dynamics of the new system. Fukuyama declared the 'end of history'. According to Fukuyama, the post-Cold War era would witness a transformation of regions such as Eastern Europe from state-managed communism to liberal democracy and market economics. Geography or territorial hegemony was not important for him, it was the global hegemony of liberal democracy and market economics that was important and the Cold War ended with their victory (O Tuathail, 1998: 104). Samuel Huntington in his "Clash of Civilizations" article argued that the new global order would be characterized by the interaction of large civilizations (O Tuathail, 1998: 110-1). Unlike Fukuyama, he did not consider the West as politically and culturally dominant but claimed that the new world order would witness the growing influence of Islamic, East Asian and Chinese civilizations (Dodds, 2000: 12). Both arguments



about the end of the Cold War are geopolitical in the sense that they shared a concern with the mapping of global political space (Dodds, 2002: 15).

The Gulf War constitutes a good example for understanding the discourse of Post-Cold War geopolitics. How USA did justify its intervention in a dispute between Iraq and Kuwait? The ideological justifications of the Cold War era were no longer meaningful during this period given changes in Soviet (later Russian) policy. US policy-makers overcame this problem by defining a 'new world order' (O Tuathail, 1998: 109). In this new world order, there were serious threats to America's interests, which were 'rogue states' representing uncontrolled violence. US interests were presented as the universal interests of the mankind, so America had to fight for the good of all humankind. Cold-War style reasoning continued to dominate US strategic thought after the Cold War because America always constitutes its response to foreign crises on perceiving threat from any "evil" otherness (cited in O Tuathail, 1998: 108-9). The new evil others were rogue/torn/failed states.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

From a critical perspective, "the study of geopolitics is the study of spatialization of international politics by core powers and hegemonic states" (O Tuathail and Agnew, 1998: 80). The tradition of geopolitical thinking presented above helps us "to outline a re-conceptualization of geopolitics in terms of discourse" (O Tuathail and Agnew, 1998: 78). Twentieth century geopolitical thinking continues to provide a 'tool-box' for the conduct of foreign policies of states. It was through the geopolitical discourse rooted in this tradition of geopolitical thought that many foreign policy actions of

states became possible and/or justified. This tradition of thought represents international politics “as a ‘world’ characterized by particular types of places, peoples and dramas” (O Tuathail and Agnew, 1998: 82). It considers geopolitics as the base of international politics around which the play of events unfolds (O Tuathail and Agnew, 1998: 79).

As discussed in Chapter I, geopolitical ideas produced in Europe and America has formed the backbone of geopolitical thinking because they have been reflected on the rest of the world (Agnew, 1998: 1). The following two chapters on Israel and Turkey, besides illustrating how geopolitical discourse matters, will also show how the main assumptions of European and American traditional geopolitical thought, namely geographical determinism, have also been adopted by the Israeli and Turkish political elites.

## CHAPTER III

### HOW GEOPOLITICAL DISCOURSE MATTERS IN ISRAEL

#### 3.1 Introduction

On 14 May 1948, Israel proclaimed its independence. Less than 24 hours later, the regular armies of Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq invaded the country, *forcing* Israel to defend the sovereignty it had regained in its *ancestral* homeland.<sup>2</sup>

Since its foundation in 1948 until today, Israel got involved in several wars, conflicts and territorial disputes with its neighbors. The War of Independence in 1948 was followed by the 1956 Sinai Campaign, 1967 Six Days War, 1968-70 War of Attrition, 1973 Yom Kippur War, 1982 Lebanon War and the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon, and Iraq's missile attack during the 1991 Gulf War. Issues of war and peace have always been central to Israeli politics. Dan Horowitz (1982: 11) explains this as follows: In the absence of peace with its Arab neighbors, Israel faces the military challenge for survival; during times of peace with its Arab neighbors Israel is in a perpetual state of 'dormant war'.

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<sup>2</sup> Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "The State of Israel".  
<<http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/history/history%20of%20israel/HISTORY-%20The%20State%20of%20Israel>> accessed on 09.06.2004. Emphasis added.

Territorial issues have been in the focus of Israeli politics in relation to the dynamics of Israel's experiences of war and peace (Yiftachel, 2002). Israel expanded its territories after the Six Day War in 1967; it later withdrew from some of these territories after the Israel-Egypt peace agreement in 1978. The next territorial expansion was Israel's occupation of Southern Lebanon in 1982, from which it withdrew after 18 years in 2000. The Oslo Peace Accords also resulted in transfer of some territory to the Palestinian Authority. If attempts to reach a peace settlement can be realized, that would bring further territorial change (Newman, 2002: 634-635).

Since issues such as war, peace and territory are at the center of Israeli politics, 'geopolitics' has been an important field of study in Israel. Israeli geopolitical discourse has various components; this chapter will focus on three of them: 'exceptionalism', 'Jewishness' and 'security'. All three are interrelated: 'Jewishness' is also a basis for the sense of 'exceptionalism'<sup>3</sup>, and 'security' takes its departure point from both 'exceptionalism' and 'Jewishness'.

"A discursive account highlights relations of constitution by exposing the way in which a particular discourse both constrains and enables the production of particular understandings" (Weldes and Saco, 1996: 373) of war, of peace, of territory and of the relations between them. This is not to suggest that material or non-linguistic conditions do not matter. They do; but looking at these discursive

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<sup>3</sup> Jewishness can be taken as a source for every kind of discourse in Israel.

practices one sees that linguistic practices also matter. “[S]tate action is, at least in part, a discursive, and thus also a linguistic artifact” (Weldes and Saco, 1996: 395).

Geopolitical maneuverings of state elites are crucial in making different courses of action possible. Geopolitical positioning of states can change because this positioning is tied to the “internal discourse of identity of that country’s citizens” (Newman, 2002b: 303). Political elites shape the country’s definition of national interest (Newman, 2002b: 303). This, in turn, is done through elites’ manipulation of representations of Israel’s geopolitical position. According to Newman, Israel is “an interesting case study whose geopolitical positioning is diverse and has undergone change over time” (Newman, 2002b: 304).

In this chapter, first these three interrelated elements of Israel’s geopolitical discourse will be outlined. Next to illustrate how geopolitical discourse matters in foreign policy practices, the case of Oslo Peace Accords (1993) will be examined. For decades, a peace agreement with the Palestinians was considered impossible because of the ongoing violence and territorial disputes between the two peoples. Yet, the leaders of both sides agreed to make a peace accord in 1993. It is argued that what made peace possible for Israel was the reframing of the components of geopolitical discourse in a way that allowed for peace and territorial change. Israel’s framing of its geopolitics was also changed later with the failure of Oslo accords to reach a conclusion.

### **3.2 Exceptionalism: Israel as an Exceptional State**

In the dominant discourse, Jewish peoples' religion, history and culture are presented in a way that makes Israel an exceptional state. This exceptionalism refers to positive aspects, such as being 'chosen' and negative aspects, such as being under 'existential threat'. As Newman (2002b: 309) maintains "geopolitical discourse in Israel has almost always evolved around notions of security and collective safety focusing on the existential threat, real or perceived, facing Israel from hostile neighbors". Whether Israel is 'really' exceptional or not will not be discussed here. What is important for the purpose of this thesis is that its political elites represent Israel as an exceptional country and this representation of Israel forms a pillar of the dominant geopolitical discourse in Israel. Representations of Israel as an exceptional country facing exceptional threats make possible certain security and foreign policies while marginalizing other options.

As noted above, the dominant discourse presents Israel as an exceptional country, which is under constant existential threat (Barnett, 1996; Merom, 1999; Murden, 2000; Newman, 2002). Exceptionalism refers to Israel's unique characteristics, which are also its vulnerabilities. Consider the words of Former Defense Minister of Israel:

The establishment of Israel was a modern miracle; an exceptional event in human history. Her survival, while constantly struggling against Arab aggression and terror in the hostile environment of the Middle East, seemed to me no less miraculous. Surely, there is no parallel in history for such casualties, courage and energy of a small people that faces such overwhelming threats (cited in Merom, 1999: 410).

Members of social groups build their collective identity on two kinds of perceptions: perceptions of shared characteristics within the group and the perceptions of the

difference between these characteristics and those of other groups. Images of identity and difference tie individuals into an imagined social whole and create a sense of exceptionalism (Merom, 1999: 409). A significant part of Israeli society—namely religious Jews and supporters of Zionism—present Israel as a unique state and leaders seem convinced that the Jewish people, their historical experiences and the security problems they face are exceptional (Dror, 1996: 247; Kook, 1996: 199-225; Merom, 1999: 410; Newman, 2000: 319-27). Merom (1999: 410) links this Israeli sense of exceptionalism to its cultural and historical background. Biblical notions, diaspora life, early national calamities, anti-Semitism, and the Holocaust are the components of this cultural and historical background (Merom, 1999: 412-3).

Cultural foundations of this exceptionalism stemming from Biblical narratives represent the Jewish people as ‘divinely’ chosen: God spoke to Abraham, “go forth from your native land and from your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation” (cited in Kamm, 1999: 7). Indications of these cultural foundations can be traced in the words of David Ben-Gurion, the first prime minister of Israel: “We do not fit the general path of humanity: Others say because we are flawed. I think because the general pattern is flawed, and we neither accept it nor adapt to it” (cited in Merom, 1999: 142). Similarly, in another speech he delivered he said:

You [...] know that we were always a small people, always surrounded by big nations with whom we engaged in a struggle; political as well as spiritual; that we created things that they did not accept; that we were exceptional [...]. Our survival-secret during these thousands of years [...] has one source: Our supreme quality, our intellectual and moral advantage, which singles us out even today, as it did throughout the generations (cited in Merom, 1999: 354).

This belief in being chosen and exceptional can also be found in the words of Yitzhak Rabin's assassin: "Rabin had no right to relinquish any part of Jewish historical and *God-given* homeland. He is therefore a traitor who deserves death" (cited in Yiftachel, 2002: 238. emphasis added).

An important consequence of Israeli exceptionalism for security and foreign policy making has been that Israeli actors have sought to confront the high and intense level of threats they face with complex military strategic solutions (Merom, 1999: 416). The following words of Ben Gurion represent this line of thinking best:

We [Israelis] will not solve [our security problems] by means of simple answers, drawn from our past or adopted from other people. Whatever [solution] was adequate in the past, and for others—will not be adequate for us, since our security problem is one of a kind... We will not withstand the [trying hour] unless we perceive our situation and needs in their geographic and historical singularity, and construct a security method adequate for that uniqueness" (cited in Merom, 1999: 416-17).

Ariel Sharon also shares the assumption of uniqueness of Israel's security problems and the need for unique solutions to these problems: "Israel faces unconventional problems, and in order to continue to survive [it] must be able to devise unconventional solutions" (cited in Merom, 1999: 417).

The assumption of uniqueness in the dominant discourse, in turn, has helped to maintain threat perceptions. During the Lebanon War, for example, General Rafael Eitan, the chief of General Staff, rebuked journalists who questioned the image of Israel as a "Goliath" struggling against an Arab "David" (Merom, 1999: 415). Disregarding the overwhelming Israeli military advantage, he argued, "the



truth is that it is the other way round...they [the Arabs] are Goliath” (cited in Merom, 1999: 415).<sup>4</sup>

One implication of this search for complex military strategic solutions to Israel’s ‘unique’ security problems has been territorial expansion. Israeli geopolitical discourse has presented the continued occupation of the West Bank and the Golan Heights as a vital necessity in order to protect the survival of the state with reference to Israeli exceptionalism (Newman, 2002b: 311). Israel is presented as weak because it is under constant threat. Since it is structurally weak, it has to be militarily strong (Newman, 2002b: 311). This security identity and the geopolitical imagination, which it shapes, have instrumentalized the historical fact that the Jewish people have faced aggression in the past (Newman, 2002b: 311). Israeli geopolitical discourse has used this exceptionalism narrative to claim that Israel is excluded from the rest of the world—as if this is totally uncalled for.

Yet, one question remains unasked: If Israel is an exceptional country faced with constant existential threat, what has made it possible for Israel to change its war/peace policies? In other words, if Israel’s exceptional geopolitical position and unique characteristics are ‘determinants’ of Israeli security policy, then what makes it possible for Israel to make peace? This is where a critical analysis of geopolitical discourse comes into the picture. Such an analysis looks at the discursive conditions of possibility for state action (Weldes and Saco 1996: 363; see also Barnett 1992, 2002; Newman (2002a, 2002b).

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<sup>4</sup> The story of David and Goliath is an oft-cited one. It is the story of Israelite David, a shepherd, who killed the giant Goliath with a sling shot and a stone.

Exceptionalism is not the only component of Israeli geopolitical discourse. But it is a significant component as it feeds the other two components, namely: ‘Jewishness’ and ‘security’. The next two sections will look at these two components respectively.

### **3.3 Jewishness: Israel as a Jewish State**

The Jewish people were called Israeli, about one thousand years, the sons or descendents of Israel, the people of Israel. One hears the expression “Jew” for the first time during the Babylonian exile after the destruction of the First Temple. The birthplace of the Jewish people is Israel: the land is called Eretz Yisrael, the land of Israel; the people are called Am Yisrael, the people of Israel. In asking ourselves what is the relationship between Jew and Israeli, the answer is that the Israeli is the total Jew, the whole Jew meaning the Jew who is leaving in a total, all-embracing Jewish reality, on Jewish land, where the diverse components of life (culture, economy, government etc.) are all Jewish (Yehoshua, 2002).<sup>5</sup>

David Newman argues that an Israeli as a citizen and Israel as a state have various competing identities and each of these identities reflects different geopolitical imaginations (Newman, 2002b: 307). Different national identity perceptions of various actors generate different geopolitical imaginations (Newman, 2002b: 314). As a consequence, Israel is located, “at one and the same time, in a number of diverse locations, not all of which are geographically contiguous” (Newman, 2002b: 314). These different locations are the products of different geopolitical imaginations of different groups’ different identity perceptions.

When considering geopolitical imaginations, Critical geopoliticians do not merely look at the physical/geographic location and size of the country but look at

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<sup>5</sup> Avraham Yehoshua is one of Israel’s famous writers/novelists. He is also a playwright and essayist.

the subjective interpretation of the space (Newman, 2002: 327). Different geopolitical imaginations stemming from different identity perceptions can only be understood “by reference to the discursive narratives of the different groups themselves and the extent to which they are redefined at local, regional and global levels” (Newman, 2002: 328). For example, Zionist identity has its origins in Central and Eastern Europe (Newman, 2002b: 315), so those Israel’s elites who identify themselves as Zionists “have always seen themselves as being part of the western world, with a highly technological, post-industrial economy and with a highly educated and literate workforce” (Newman, 2002b: 315). Also in terms of cultural aspirations, they locate themselves in Europe (Newman, 2002b: 318).

The focus of this section of the chapter will be the identity perceptions of the political elites of Israel. In the name of the Israeli State, political elites have defined Israel as a Jewish and a Zionist state.<sup>6</sup> This is in conformity with the legal and customary regulations in Israel. In Israel, Arabs do not serve in the armed forces, and in Israeli political culture, and it is not acceptable for a governing coalition to rely on the support of Arab political parties (Arian, 1995: 5).

The term ‘Zionism’ was coined in the 1890s. It takes its name from Zion, the name of a hill in Jerusalem, which, after the capture of that city by the Israelites, became the royal residence of David and his successors. The fact that “Zionism, rather than Jewish nationalism, was chosen as the name of the national movement was itself an indication of the strong territorial focus on a particular piece of territory” (Newman, 2002b: 320).

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<sup>6</sup> In the web page of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Israel is presented as such. In addition, In 1995, the Knesset passed a law defining Israel as a state belonging to Jews.

Throughout history, Zionism has “encouraged Jews to immigrate to the remembered Land of Israel as a form of collective survival” (Yiftachel, 2002: 224-226). Zionism promotes the idea that two thousand years of Jewish history, which is marked with expulsion, exile and massacre has made it compulsory for Jews to found their own state (Slater, 1997: 675). A state “within which they could build normal lives, free from the murderous attacks that had periodically destroyed Jewish communities throughout Europe” (Slater, 1997: 675).

Especially after the Holocaust, the ‘vital’ necessity for a Jewish state was confirmed among the Zionists. The land of Israel emerged as the best place for the establishment of Jewish people’s national homeland (Slater, 1997: 675). Once Israel was established, representations of Jewish history were used to provide a setting for the practices of territorial expansion (Yiftachel, 2002: 224).

The country “was represented as an empty land awaiting its Jewish redemption after centuries of ‘neglect’” (Yiftachel, 2002: 224). Zionism used the well-known idiom: ‘a people without land to a land without people’ (Yiftachel, 2002: 224). This strategy of denying the existence of the Arab population remains effective (Yiftachel, 2002: 224). Therefore, defining Israel as a state of its citizens (meaning that the citizens who are not Jewish will also share equal rights with Jews) is seen by the political elites “as a negation of the state formation process and as being anti-Zionist in its orientation” (Newman, 2002b: 308).

Zionism, as a part of a broader Jewish discourse, has been represented in different ways in order to facilitate or marginalize certain policies. For example, for some Zionists making peace with the Arab neighbors, which would mean territorial extraction, is an anti-Zionist act because of the strong territorial focus on a specific piece of territory, the land of Israel. Whereas for some, trying to control the occupied territories constitutes a betrayal to Zionism because it risks securing the future for Israel and the Jews (Newman, 2002b: 306). Mainly, Zionism works as a discourse that makes expansionist Jewish rule possible by the help of ‘survival’ and ‘security’ rhetoric incorporated in it. It is significant to note that it denies the “relevance of same ‘security’ and ‘survival’ considerations for the Palestinians” (cited in Yiftachel, 2002: 236). Violation of other people’s rights is normalized through a discourse of ‘normalcy’ while Jewish peoples’ rights are prioritized by a discourse of ‘exceptionalism’ (Yiftachel, 2002: 242-3). For instance, Yitzhak Shamir stated in the Knesset:

This is our goal: territorial wholeness. It should not be encroached or fragmented. This is an a priori principle; it is beyond argument. You should not ask why. Why this land is ours requires no explanation. Is there any other nation that argues about its homeland, its size and dimensions, about territories, territorial compromise, or anything to that effect” (cited in Yiftachel, 2002: 234).

Along with exceptionalism, Jewishness, as having a strong territorial focus and as a component of Israeli geopolitical discourse, provides a basis for another crucial component of Israeli geopolitical discourse: security.

### **3.4 Security**

Security emerges as another important component of geopolitical discourse. It is interrelated both with ‘exceptionalism’ and ‘Jewishness’. The issue of the settlement

establishments illustrates this interrelationship well. Establishing the settlements “to extend territorial control and ownership has constituted one of the most discussed political geographical themes of the Arab-Israel conflict in general” (Newman, 2002: 635). The motives of Jewish survival were used every time to justify new settlement projects in the name of enhancing national security (Yiftachel, 2002: 231). The “geographical Judaisation program was premised on a hegemonic myth cultivated since the rise of Zionism and buttressed by the ‘nation-state’ myth that ‘the land’ belongs to the Jews and to them only”. While doing this the land’s Palestinian past was marginalized (Yiftachel, 2002: 228). According to Yiftachel (2002: 239), this understanding was the reason behind the failure of the Camp David peace negotiations, which was an attempt to revive Oslo Peace Accords in 2000. The Israeli side presented their existence on the land as ‘natural’ and just, so transferring the territory to the Palestinians “was represented as ‘Israeli generosity’ (Yiftachel, 2002: 239). In the Israeli discourse, the situation was presented as such that Israel had to ‘sacrifice’ some territory for the sake of peace (Yiftachel, 2002: 240).

The establishment of settlements was made possible by the dominant geopolitical discourse by making use of the motives of religion and survival. These motives represented settlements as strengthening and ensuring Israel’s security. This representation in turn has helped to maintain the dominant geopolitical discourse because they enabled future claims to sovereignty over national territory (Newman, 2002: 635-6).

Imbued with political significance by governments, all boundaries are artificial and can be changed at will, through agreement or force. However, they remain essentially as human constructs even when they use natural features such as rivers or mountain ridges as convenient demarcation lines. However, once created, boundaries become almost mythical, inasmuch as

they determine the sovereign and inviolable limits of the state, not to be transgressed by external powers (Newman, 2002: 636).

‘Exceptionalism’ and ‘Jewishness’ are elements of this third component of Israeli geopolitical discourse, which is ‘security’. Israel traditionally represents itself as alone and isolated (Newman, 2002b: 309). Israel also represents itself as isolated and excluded from the broader international community, for instance the United Nations “where vote after vote condemns the country for its continued occupation of the West Bank” (Newman, 2002b: 310). The 1975 vote, which defined Zionism as a kind of racism,<sup>7</sup> further contributed to this perception of isolation.

The policy implications of this self perceived isolation are that the country can only rely on itself, through a strong military posture, and that it must maintain an independent foreign policy without external intervention (including that of the USA) in its security decision-making (Newman, 2002b: 310).

In addition, the events such as the *Intifada*, or the Gulf War have strengthened this understanding (Newman, 2002b: 311-2). These events did not constitute a kind of threat that could “wipe Israel out of existence but reminded the Israeli people of the threat environment within which they live” (Newman, 2002b: 312). The small size of the country, demography, water geopolitics is often used in strengthening this security discourse (Newman, 2002b: 311-3).

Israel’s national security objectives are usually expressed through negative slogans such as ‘never again’, referring to the Holocaust or “Masada shall not fall again”.<sup>8</sup> Even this repetition of the word ‘again’ is a proof to the common belief that Jewish people have always lived under existential threats. This discourse affects people’s understanding of themselves in a way. It does so by representing Israel as a

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<sup>7</sup> This UN resolution was later rescinded.

<sup>8</sup> Masada is the name of the place (and the event) where the last Israelites in the Holy Land committed mass suicide in order not to surrender to the Roman Empire soldiers.

country, which should always be ready to fight and win wars because any failure would mean the termination of the Jews as a people as well as the end of Israeli state. This representation creates constant threat perceptions in Israel and enables offensive foreign policies. These exaggerated threat perceptions also promote the idea that politics should be subordinate to military affairs (Horowitz, 1992: 11-16). It also enables military-centric foreign and security policies. For example, Israel has excessively focused on Arab military capabilities and allowed a narrow margin for improving its relations with its neighbors in its foreign policy (Slater, 1997: 688).

The examples used so far have illustrated how geopolitical discourse was used for making conflictual and military-centric policies become possible. Geopolitical discourse has taken its bearing from the assumption of ‘geographical determinism’. Yet, although these components of geopolitical discourse have remained the same, peace became possible albeit for a brief moment between 1993 and 2000. I will seek to illustrate how these components of Israeli geopolitical discourse made Oslo Peace Accords—a dramatic change in Israeli policy—possible.

### **3.5 Oslo Peace Accords**

“For some, Israel’s unique identity is dependent on it remaining different and isolated from all other countries, while for others state normalcy within an international system can only be achieved by becoming part of that system” (Newman, 2002b: 307). For the Oslo Peace Accords case, ‘normalcy’ was chosen instead of exceptionalism in order to represent Israel as a member of the modern democratic Western world.



According to Michael Barnett (1999, 2002) the signing of the Oslo Accords would have not been possible if it had not been for some cultural preconditions present in the political elite's discourse. Barnett claims that what allowed Israel to sign the 1993 Oslo Accords was Yitzhak Rabin's successful framing of Israeli identity. Barnett (1999: 8-9; 2002) uses three key concepts in order to explain foreign policy change in Israel: identity, narratives and frames. What Barnett calls 'framing narratives upon a choice of particular identity' is what has been referred to as 'discourse' so far in this study. Specific framing of the existing narratives and the corresponding identities in order to reach to some political ends matches with the definition of discourse adopted in the thesis. According to Barnett, Israel has four competing identities and each of them has different political implications: the religious identity, Israel as a Jewish state; the nationalist identity, Zionism; the Holocaust's 'legacy'; and the liberal, democratic identity, Israel as a part of the Western world (Barnett, 1999: 8-10). In the case of the Oslo Accords, for instance, the liberal Western identity came to the fore (Barnett, 1999: 10) and main assumption about the 'determinacy' of geography lost its effect. Barnett (1999: 14) describes narratives coming from the past as very important variables for political action: narratives of national identities are social constructs and can be reconstructed by actors according to their future policy orientations. Frames are some certain symbols and representations that are used in order to mobilize political action for a specific objective (Barnett, 1999: 15).

Barnett maintains that in addition to these three concepts that explain the discursive dimension of the policy-making in Israel, there is a crucial institutional context, that of electoral, coalition and party politics, that has made the Oslo Peace

Accords possible. His argument supports the suggestion above that both discourse and material conditions matter. Israel's proportional representative system does not allow a single party to gain majority. Small parties can also be elected to the parliament and as a result, governments are usually coalition governments. The politics of coalition formation and maintenance affects the policies of political parties and since different parties represent different dimensions of the national identity, policy options may vary.

Barnett identifies four interrelated policy options for the political parties in Israel: maintaining Israel as a Jewish state; securing peace; maintaining Israel as a liberal democratic state; maintaining Greater Israel. In the Oslo Accords case, there was a preference of democracy and Zionism over Greater Israel, he says, but this was not a readily available option. It was Yitzhak Rabin and his Labor Party in coalition with the leftist Meretz and several small parties that created this possibility through the framing of cultural and symbolic assets. That is to say, they prioritized Israel's Western identity over its Jewish identity. They prioritized Israel's common history with the 'democratic' West over its 'exceptional' history as an isolated state. Components of the geopolitical discourse were reframed. Certainly, some brute facts like the end of the Cold War and the end of the 'special relationship' between the USA and Israel, the Gulf War and the changing Arab perception on Israel also helped them in altering the assumption that their history and geography determined their fate. However, without Rabin's redefining and reframing the dominant narrative by emphasizing Israel's secular and humanistic tradition and locating Israel in the West's historical narrative of democracy, peace would not have become possible.

Rabin and his political allies offered a narrative that visualized Israel's future as a part of the international community. This was a break from the assumption of exceptionalism. Some intellectual and cultural movements, such as the 'new historians', who were questioning many 'myths' of Israel's beginnings, also nourished this move towards a new narrative. Finally, Rabin and his allies framed their policies by saying that a peace process would enhance security and development because it would have allowed a reallocation of the budget from defense to social welfare and would have encouraged foreign direct investment and Israel's integration to the world economy. 'Security' was defined in terms of economic welfare instead of being defined in terms of religious motives and 'survival'.

Here, the concept of frame is crucial for understanding the adaptation of discursive assets to relevant foreign policy action. Framing may take place at both the elite and popular levels but even in a state such as Israel where the public is engaged in security issues more than many other countries, elite framing is particularly important for shifts in national security policy (Kaye, 2002: 563-4). The relationship between Israel's national identity, historical narrative and specific frame on peace and security converged in her decision to recognize the Palestine Liberation Organization and sign the Declaration of Principle in 1993, in Oslo. This was the end of a decades-long conflict between Israel and PLO.

There is a traditional argument of some Israeli political elites, which defend the creation of a Palestinian state because it is a necessary price for peace. Instead of

seeing it as a price to pay for peace, it was represented as a way of enhancing security in the Oslo Peace Accords case. The ‘security’ component of Israeli geopolitical discourse was reintroduced. Different elements of security were stressed and Oslo Peace Accords were made possible. In the dominant discourse, peace and security were being taken as alternatives to each other rather than being complementary elements enhancing each others’ capabilities. Rabin’s framing changed this understanding and enabled an alternative foreign policy option –the Oslo Peace Accords.<sup>9</sup> ‘Peace with security’ discourse gave way to ‘peace is my security’ (Bilgin, 2004a: 28) discourse during this period. The case of Oslo Peace Accords is a case that illustrates how discourse matters.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

Different ways of framing within the same geopolitical discourse can make seemingly impossible policies or actions possible. This can be taken as a proof that it is not merely geography that matters in the making of security and foreign policy but the (elements of) geopolitical discourse that matters. There are other examples in Israeli political history that represents how geopolitical discourse matters. Israel’s withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000 is another such example. The Israeli state’s traditional discourse that “Israel had no choice but to occupy southern Lebanon in order to protect the north,” was reframed in a way, which maintained that, the “security zone has been an unnecessary cost to Israel since the north can be protected without it” (Kaye, 2002: 569-571). The framing of the ‘security’ element of the geopolitical discourse has changed and made the withdrawal possible.

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<sup>9</sup> In contradiction with this argument, Newman (2002b:313) maintains that the Oslo peace process paradoxically brought a decreased sense of security and reinforced the traditional security discourse because of the suicide bombings occurring after the accords (2002b:313).

A similar example is the Jordan Valley, which was deemed very crucial for the Israeli security since it provided Israel with a defense from minor attacks and a better control of the West Bank. Yet, one day, Ehud Barak caught the Military by surprise when he declared that “Israel had no longer needed the Jordan Valley to ensure security in the region” (Leon, 2002). During the Camp David Summit of 2000, Israel agreed to transfer some pieces of territories to the Palestinian Authority, which was previously seen as non-negotiable because of their strategic importance and security reasons (Newman, 2002: 639). The role of geopolitical discourse in making these actions possible was crucial.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **HOW GEOPOLITICAL DISCOURSE MATTERS IN TURKEY**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

Geopolitical discourse is about specifying geographical reality in a way that makes certain practices possible for a state while rendering some others seemingly impossible. Geopoliticians were historically, “intellectuals of statecraft who emphasized the role of geographical constraints and opportunities on the conduct of foreign policy” (O Tuathail, Dalby and Routledge, 1998: 9). Thus, geopolitical discourse has always been a very crucial component of foreign and security policies of states. Turkey is no exception to those other countries where a number of geopolitical theorists and former practitioners write ‘how to’ books (Dalby, O Tuathail and Routledge, 1998: 8) about the security and foreign policy of the country. This also refers to the ‘advice to the prince’ nature of geopolitics, which makes geopolitics a ‘problem-solving’ and a pro-*status quo* field (Dalby, O Tuathail and Routledge, 1998: 8-9).

In this chapter, geopolitical discourse of the political elites—of the intellectuals of statecraft and state officials—will be examined by looking at the

speeches delivered, and essays, books and articles written by them. Looking at the texts produced by military officials such as (retired) generals (Çakar, 1998; Başbuğ, 2004; Büyükanıt, 2003; Ergüvenç, 1998; Erkaya, 1991; İlhan, 1989, 1999, 2003; Özbek, 2004; Torumtay 1991), state officials such as (retired) diplomats, advisers or foreign ministers (Cem, 1999, 2001; Ecevit, 1999; Loğoğlu, 2000; Türkmen, 1998; Yılmaz, 1998, 2002) and some other influential figures such as academicians and journalists (Bağcı and Kardaş, 2003; Davutoğlu, 2004; Köni, 2000, 2001; Tarakçı, 2003). Most of these figures hold various positions thus have overlapping roles. For example, Davutoğlu is an academician but also a senior advisor to the prime-minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Köni is an academician and works for the Center for Eurasian Strategic Studies Research (ASAM). He also lectures at the National Security Academy and the National Police Academy.

By examining the texts produced by these ‘political elites’, the aim is to point to the conventional approach, to the dominant geopolitical discourse in Turkey, which represents geography as a given reality that cannot be changed and as the main determining factor of a country’s fate (Bilgin, 2003a: 210). As will be seen below these texts also reveal how different representations of the same geographical ‘reality’ can change the so-called ‘unchangeable’ geographic factors.

This chapter will present the two main components of Turkish geopolitical discourse, namely: ‘geographical determinism’ and ‘Westernness/Europeanness’. Geographical determinism is a component of geopolitical discourse almost everywhere in the world and in Turkey it appears as the most important component. After outlining these two components, the next step will be using that of the case of

Turkey-EU relations in order to illustrate how these components shape policies. The core of the argument here is that in the dominant Turkish geopolitical discourse Turkey's membership to the European Union is presented as the only 'viable' foreign policy option. Yet, there are some key figures that frame the components of geopolitical discourse in different ways and suggest alternative ways for action as well (see İlhan, 2002, 2003). This helps to show that same geography can be represented in different ways using the same components of the geopolitical discourse and enable different policy outcomes. This, in turn, would invalidate the assumption of 'geographical determinism' which is the key component of geopolitical discourse.

#### **4.2 Geographical Determinism in Turkish Geopolitical Discourse**

Bilgin (2003: 210) identifies 'geographical determinism' as one of the central elements of Turkish security culture. Geographical determinism refers to the assumed determining power of the geography on politics (especially security and foreign policies). Bilgin (2003a: 210) argues that Turkey's geographical location is used as a means of framing security and foreign policies by the political elites. The following ideas of the political elites further substantiate this point.

İlter Türkmen (1998: 3) quotes Napoleon in a conference presentation: "being acquainted with the geography of a country is being acquainted with its foreign policy". Türkmen says that for centuries political geography has been a key element of a country's international relations. He states that the fate of the Ottoman Empire was largely determined by its geographical location and also today the challenges Turkey faces and the opportunities it has are because of its geopolitical



location (Türkmen, 1998:2). Köni also argues that the most important factor affecting foreign policy decisions is the geographical location (Köni, 2001: 80). Ahmet Davutoğlu (2004: 17, 46) shares the same line of thinking by defining geography as one of the constant elements of foreign policy making.

Suat İlhan is a key figure in the field of geopolitics in Turkey. He is a retired general of Turkish Armed Forces; his books (1989, 1999) are used as textbooks in military schools and he also taught in military academies. His writings reveal how the assumption of ‘geographical determinism’ lies at the heart of Turkish geopolitical discourse. Consider this quote from a key text, *Geopolitical Sensitivity*, which is used as a textbook in the military academy:

Turkey is the hinge on the world’s biggest land piece composed of Asia, Europe and Africa, the world island in geopolitical terms. Turkey is both the lock and the key to this hinge. Turkey’s geography has always effectively played its role as the lock and the key because for a long while it was the world island that was known as the only land piece on earth. All of the fundamental civilizations and religions renowned so far developed around the intersection point of these three continents because of its geographical location (İlhan, 1989: 56; 2003:34).

İlhan’s strong attachment to the assumption of geographical determinism can be seen in his words. Deputy Chief of the Head of the General Staff also confirms the occurrence of such an assumption of ‘geographical determinism’: “If we look at the history of Anatolian geography, on which Turkey is situated, we can conclude that on this geography only strong states could survive, and the weak ones were wiped out of history” (Başbuğ, 2004). His argument acknowledges the determining role of geography on the fate of the states and at the same time sets a legitimate basis for Turkey’s quest for power. The same argument is shared by Nejat Tarakçı. He

maintains that “weak societies have no chance to survive in Turkey’s geography” (Tarakçı: 2003: 146).

The assumption of geopolitical determinism has important policy implications. In Turkish political elite’s discourse, Turkey’s geography is represented as pre-given and unchangeable. Yet this understanding is groundless when the same geography is represented/framed differently in order to explain different policies (Bilgin, 2003a: 209). An example in this respect can be found in what happened after the Johnson Letter. This letter from the then president of the USA, Lyndon Johnson was warning that Turkey in case of a Turkish intervention to Cyprus, if Turkey is faced with Soviet threat, NATO could not have been willing to defend Turkey. This was leaving Turkey out of the Cold War Western Alliance. İsmet İnönü who was Turkey’s president at that time, replied to this ‘warning’ by saying: “Then another world will be established and Turkey will take its place in it”. His words were simply telling that Turkey was not bound with allying itself with the USA and it had other options.

Moreover, the same geographical location is framed in different ways enabling both active and passive foreign policies. An active policy is supported by a discourse of ‘Turkey’s strategic importance’ (and its role as an important strategic actor) is represented as determined by its geographical location; whereas a passive policy option is explained by ‘Turkey’s geographic vulnerabilities’, again, represented as determined by its geographical location (Bilgin, 2003a: 210). For example, Turkey’s passive attitude concerning the democratization process during the 1990s was sought to be legitimized by designating democratization as a process that should be slowed down due to Turkey’s vulnerable geographical location

(Bilgin, 2003a: 209). A similar argument can be found in Murat Belge (1993: 241). He states that there has always been a geopolitical discourse in Turkey, which has been used by statespersons in order to legitimize Turkey's political regime. The geographical location we live in is shown as the cause of the political regime in Turkey. Belge quotes a person who presents himself as a 'colonel': "In a country like Austria, socialism can be an alternative but with the geopolitical location Turkey has, it is impossible" because Turkey is surrounded by severe enemies (Belge, 1993: 241). When 'the colonel' made this comment it was 1972. Belge wrote in 1993 that the situation got worse because of the events in the Balkans, the Kurdish problem, and the worsening of the situation in the Middle East. So if the same man was here to speak, he was likely to say "In a country like Austria, democracy is an alternative but with the geographical location Turkey has, it is impossible" (Belge, 1993: 242). This point is well supported with the remarks of the ex- prime minister of Turkey, Bülent Ecevit, who said: "Turkey's geography requires a special type of democracy" (cited in Bilgin, 2003a: 209).

Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East is another example that helps to show the invalidity of the idea of 'geographical determinism'. Turkish foreign policy towards the West has almost always been prior to its foreign policy towards the Middle East. Moreover, "Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East has always been considered an extension of the Western-oriented Turkish foreign policy" (Criss and Bilgin, 1997). Yet, during the 1960s, problems in the relations with the West, particularly with the USA, helped for the generation of an active and multi-dimensional foreign policy understanding in Turkey. Concerning the issues such as Cyprus and use of air bases in its territory, Turkey could not come into terms with its Western allies. This lent a hand to the making of an active foreign policy

towards the Middle East. For instance, in 1964, Turkey took the initiative to create the organization of Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD) with Iran and Pakistan (Criss and Bilgin, 1997). Turkey's active foreign policy towards the Middle East during the 1960s helps to show that it is possible for Turkey to make alternative foreign policy choices. It helps to show that its foreign policy options are not determined and dictated by its geographical location.

Geographical determinism is not the only component of Turkish geopolitical discourse. 'Westernness/Europeanness' is another crucial component in the making of Turkish geopolitics. Next section will outline the premises of this component.

#### **4.3 Westernness/ Europeanness in Turkish Geopolitical Discourse**

There is a mutually constitutive relationship between geographical representations, geopolitical discourse and the foreign and security policy discourse and practices (Bilgin 2003, 2004a, 2004b). This means that representing geography in a specific way is also describing and enabling the possible foreign policy actions for this geography. In turn, these foreign policy actions form a basis for representing the same geography. Geopolitical discourse "is not simply a separate activity or rather identification of specific geographical influences upon a particular foreign-policy action" (Agnew and Corbridge, 1995: 48). Usage of words such as 'foreign' or 'West' constitute an important element of geopolitical discourse as well, because these words call upon certain understandings, narratives, meanings in our minds. When somebody uses these words, those invoked understandings and meanings will inevitably be associated with certain policy options (Agnew and Corbridge, 1995:

48). For example, the word ‘West’ is largely associated with prosperity, welfare, peace and democracy.

Turkey’s Westernization process was set by Atatürk and adopted by political elites firmly since 1920s. In conformity with this Westernization process, membership to NATO and EU has always been a crucial element of Turkish foreign policy. As a retired diplomat states anybody who has worked for the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs during their careers had at least once become a part of the integration with the West debate (Tezok, 2002: 7).

Representations of history is an important component of Turkey’s claim for Westernness. Political elites make use of this component in every opportunity. For example, Ambassador Loğoğlu (2000) maintains that

Turkey has shared Europe's geography, and although it was sometimes on the opposite side, Europe's history. Since the first political reforms have been made in the Ottomon Empire, Turkey took its place in the European integration movement. It was crowned with the new Republican regime in its quest to reach the level of modern civilizations. The Turkish Republic since its foundation until now has seen modernization as its main principal and participated in European institutions that symbolized this modernization.

Ex-minister İsmail Cem (1999) concluded that: “Turkey has been European for seven centuries. We do not feel the need for registering this with any countries or institutions”.

Another important premise of Turkey’s political elites’ claim to being European comes from the role Turkey played in NATO during the Cold War (Bilgin, 2004b: 12). After the 1997 Luxembourg Summit, which did not declare Turkey as a

candidate for membership to the EU, this line of thinking was expressed by general (Ret.) Nezihi Çakar<sup>10</sup>:

The Luxembourg Summit in 1997 erroneously did not include Turkey [...] After making great sacrifices in fulfilling its responsibilities within NATO for the security of the Western community for more than 45 years, Turkey does not want further delays of its membership nor can it wait behind other candidates, the bulk of which cannot compete with Turkey. It is highly irrational to accept former Warsaw Pact adversaries as candidates to become full EU members and exclude Turkey, a staunch NATO ally. Turkey's exclusion from the political and economic integration of the EU is unjustified and in no way constitutes a healthy condition, not for Turkey nor for other Western countries (Çakar, 1998).

After the Luxembourg Summit, politicians and diplomats were asking themselves had Turkey been invaded by the Soviet Union and had become a member of a Warsaw pact during the Cold War, would it have been considered as a candidate for membership to the EU, like Poland or Hungary (Yetkin, 2002: 14). This thinking reveals the 'resentment' (Bilgin, 2004b: 17) of Turkish policy-makers. They believe that since Turkey was a firm ally of the West during the Cold War, it deserved to be accepted as a candidate. Resentment can also be found in Çakar's words:

Turkey's commitment to the European ideal has always been put forward clearly and decisively. Turkey's views and expectations for a united and democratic Europe have been expressed to our European friends on every occasion. It was stated that Turkey served as a bulwark for democratic values in this critical part of the world, and struggled resolutely to defend them when they were threatened. Today Turkey is a bridge conveying these values to new geopolitical regions. However, the decisions taken at the Luxembourg Summit indicate some leaders of the EU member states have unfortunately not understood Turkey's rightful concerns and expectations (Çakar, 1998).

Turkey's Westernness is always prioritized in its foreign policy agenda. Even the discourse on Turkey's diverse geopolitical imaginations and positionings are used to support its 'Westernness'. Consider this quote from Mesut Yılmaz (2003):

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<sup>10</sup> He was then Senior Advisor to the President of Turkey.

Turkey's one half is European. It shares European values and is working on institutionalizing these values. But with its other half it is the representative of alternative cultures and civilizations to Europe. It is Central Asian, Middle Eastern, Caucasian, Islamic (Yılmaz, 2003).

In Yılmaz's words, Turkey's one half is reserved for its Europeaness while four other alternatives (being Central Asian, Middle Eastern, Caucasian and Islamic) have to share the other half. His words present Turkey's alternative identities as a complementing Turkey's Europeaness.

Turkey's diverse geopolitical imaginations can be found in the statements made in the web site of the Ministry of National Defense: "Turkey, which has a very important geostrategic location, connects three continents to each other, is at the same time a European, Asian, Balkan, Caucasian, Middle Eastern, Mediterranean and Black Sea country"; and also in the statements in the web site of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

She lies at a strategic crossroads where two continents, Europe and Asia meet, and also where cultures and civilizations come together. This unique position gives her European, Balkan, Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, Caucasian and Asian identities all at the same time.<sup>11</sup>

However, these diverse imaginations are used to reinforce Turkey's Western identity instead of generating diverse foreign policy options and are represented as an asset enhancing Turkey's value for its Western allies, such as the EU (Bilgin, 2004b: 15-16). Because "Turkish policy makers' 'preferred geopolitical location' for Turkey" is a "Turkey in Europe" (Bilgin, 2004b: 8). As Türkmen (1998: 5) maintains: "There is no other regional community with which Turkey can naturally join, considering its intensity of bilateral relations, its geographical location and its historical progress".

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<sup>11</sup> <<http://www.mfa.gov.tr/grupg/gb/default.htm>> accessed on 21.06.2004.

While defining membership to European Union not a barrier to Turkey's active role in other Middle Eastern, or Black Sea or Central Asian organizations, Türkmen (1998: 5) at the same time emphasizes that none of these organizations can be an alternative to Europe. Former foreign minister İsmail Cem was also among the ones whose preferred geographical location for Turkey is the West:

[t]he post-Cold War political framework witnessed the appearance or the confirmation of several independent states. Out of the multitude of those "new" states, almost all -in the Balkans, in the Caucasus or in Central Asia- are those with whom Turkey shares a common history or a common language and cultural affinity. This provides Turkey with a new international environment of historical, political and economic dimensions. Turkey thus becomes a "center" for the emerging Eurasian reality and constitutes Western Europe's major historical, cultural and economic opening to Eastern horizons (Cem, 2001).

Here he presents Turkey's diverse positioning as a contribution to its positioning in the West. The Deputy Chief of Staff of the Turkish General Staff Yaşar Büyükanıt (2003) also maintains, "Turkey when it becomes a full member to the European Union will contribute to the geostrategic depth of the union and to the enrichment of the union in cultural terms". In Yılmaz's words, the two components of Turkish geopolitical discourse, 'geographic determinism' and 'Westernness/Europeanness' merges into one another.

We believe that Turkey is European as much as it is Middle Eastern, Caucasian, Balkanian and Asian, maybe it is more like European. Turkey's being European is a certain judgement of history and geography and we do not need any confirmation from our European friends to accept this fact (Yılmaz , 1998).

It is significant to note that this prioritization of Westernness in the political discourse has also constrained Turkish foreign policy in many ways. For, active foreign policy towards the Middle East or regions different than the West became



possible only when Turkey felt excluded from the West. For example, after the 1964 Johnson Letter or 1997 Luxembourg Summit.<sup>12</sup>

Tarakçı (2003), Davutoğlu (2004), İlhan (2003) have all argued that Turkey's prioritization of Westernness and prioritization of membership to the European Union have constrained its policies towards The Middle East and the Central Asia. İlhan (2003) maintains that without being a member to the European Union, Turkey would be freer in order to pursue its national interests in the other regions of the world. Davutoğlu(2004) and Tarakçı (2003) identify many alternatives to Turkey's membership to the European Union. Studying these alternatives is beyond the scope of this study. But it should be noted that, whether they support Turkey's membership to the European Union or not, these writers acknowledge Turkey's Western identity, but they do not prioritize it over other alternatives. İlhan furthers his claims that "Europe needs Turkey more than Turkey needs Europe. But both sides are not aware of this fact yet" (İlhan, 2003: 114).

#### **4.4 Turkey and EU in Geopolitical Perspective**

In the dominant geopolitical discourse, the main components of Turkish geopolitical discourse, which are 'geographical determinism' and 'Westernness', are framed in such a way that Turkey's membership to the European Union is represented as the only foreign policy option. This section will try to illustrate how this framing works by looking at 'how to' books, articles and speeches in Turkey (see for example Davutoğlu, 2001; İlhan, 1989, 1999, 2002, 2003; Özbek, 2004; Tarakçı, 2003) point

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<sup>12</sup> European enlargement left Turkey out .Turkey was not declared as a candidate for membership to the European Union.

to the key issue with which geopolitical discourse is concerned with in Turkey. This key issue is Turkey's Western identity and Turkey's alliances with the West, namely NATO and the EU memberships. Both NATO and EU, either implicitly or explicitly, are taken as geopolitical entities in these books. According to Suat İlhan (1989: 119, 124; 1999: 13-14; 2003: 25) both NATO and European Union are geopolitical events:

European Union is not merely an economic event. EU should be examined from a geopolitical perspective. The political, social and even military consequences of the integration process initiated by Europe can be observed. These events are based on geographic platform and their immense affects are geopolitical [...] NATO is also a geopolitical event (İlhan, 1999: 13).

İlhan also states that Turkey's geographical location is the determining factor of its memberships in important alliances such as NATO (İlhan, 1989: 119) and the European Union. It is argued that since Turkey's unique geography constitutes crucial cultural, economic and strategic assets, it is difficult to exclude Turkey from such alliances (Tarakçı, 2003: 141-6, 153-4).

Turkey's membership to the European Union is described as a "geopolitical and geostrategic obligation" and a necessity of Turkey's Westernization—a target set by Atatürk—by the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Turkish General Staff Yaşar Büyükanıt (2003). Geopolitical discourse in Turkey presents Turkey's Westernness/Europeanness (both in terms of membership to the EU and in terms of geography) as a geopolitical necessity as well as presenting Turkey's geographical position as a necessity for Europe (Bilgin, 2003b: 346):

The importance of anchoring Turkey to the West and incorporating the future of an undivided European continent with the strong presence of a geopolitical and geo-strategic crossroads between the East and West is self-explanatory. Turkey definitely belongs to Europe (Çakar, 1998).

The Cold War years witnessed Turkish policy makers' eager participation "in European institutions, membership in which was viewed as evidence of Turkey's claim to belong to the Western civilization" (Bilgin, 2004b: 10). In the geopolitical discourse, Turkey was represented as a country whose geostrategic importance was crucial to the Western bloc. The common belief, "they cannot ignore us [...] because we are strategically important" (Bağcı and Kardaş, 2003) was strong during the Cold War. However, after the Cold War, the political elites' opinions on Turkey's strategic importance changed along with the opinion of the EU. As Türkmen maintains, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and with the disappearance of the Soviet threat, Turkey lost its strategic importance for Europe (Türkmen, 1998: 4). Köni makes a similar argument (see also Bilgin, 2004b) by stating that:

[r]egardless of its essential contribution to dealing with security threats in Iraq and the Balkans, Turkey was viewed only in the context of its former role on the periphery of the Soviet Union, and was thus marginalized by the West at the beginning of the post-Cold War era (Köni, 2000).

Turkey has been located on the same piece of land since 1923 but the meanings attached to this location have varied over time. The same geography has been represented in different ways: positive and negative (Bilgin, 2004b: 15). In positive terms, it provides exceptional opportunities such as being a bridge between Europe and Asia, and representing a rich cultural mosaic. For example, the following argument chooses to emphasize Turkey's geostrategic strength:

[T]urkey has been an important country because of its geographic location between Europe, the Middle East and Asia, which gives it easy access to strategically important regions and major energy resources. Moreover, thanks to its character as a modern Muslim country, culturally, Turkey stands as a bridge between Western and Islamic civilizations. The conventional importance attributed to Turkey's strategic value became more visible following the events of September 11 (Bağcı and Kardaş, 2003).

Bülent Ecevit (1999), ex-prime minister of Turkey, was among those who chose to stress the positive sides of Turkey's geographic location:

Bosphorus Bridge does not only connect two sides of İstanbul, it also connects Europe and Asia... Not only in geographical sense but also in political and cultural sense...Turks have been European almost for six centuries... But they are not only European, they are also Asian, Caucasian and Middle Eastern ...Turkey is not only a bridge between Europe and Asia but also a bridge between Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

Ecevit's words incorporate the component of 'Westernness/ Europeanness' in the geopolitical discourse that frames Turkey's geographic location as an asset for its foreign policy. Still, Turkey as a bridge between different cultures and countries can be represented as generating vulnerabilities:

Turkey's geographical location makes it a border state. Anatolia is Asia's European border and Thrace is Europe's Asian border. We live in the borders between Islam and Christianity [...], eastern and western cultures, liberal and statist economies. It is difficult to be a border country. It requires very strong economic, social, political and military structures (İlhan, 2003: 35).

This line of thinking is shared and formulated by Tarakçı (2003: 146) as well. This thinking promotes the idea that Turkey's military should be strong in order to be able to deal with the difficulties posed by its geographical location. As stated by a retired general: "The sensitive geopolitical situation of the country will compel it to maintain a sound defense posture"(Erkaya, 1991: 34). General (Ret.) Ergüvenç makes a similar remark:

Such [Turkey's] geography might be considered a privilege were it not to create a reciprocal sensitivity which in turn necessitates vigilance and obliges Turkey to keep a strong defence. This is to say that, from a different aspect, Turkey is seen squeezed on the margins of several regions. Commensurably, in some way, Turkey is surrounded by differences. There are 13 countries around Turkey, with 11 different ethnic nationalities, each with a different historical experience and aspiration, speaking ten different languages and practising six different religions. At the same time, chronic trouble spots, instabilities, weak democracies and totalitarian regimes encircle Turkey (Ergüvenç, 1998).

Its geopolitical position renders Turkey both strong and vulnerable according to these texts. Turkey's vulnerability can come to the fore while framing passive policies and Turkey's geostrategic strength can be prevailing in the discourse while pursuing active policies.

Also, Turkey's ability to cope with these geopolitical vulnerabilities is represented as its geopolitical strengths. An example of this kind of a representation can be found in the web page of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs:<sup>13</sup> “'Peace at home, peace in the world' [policy doctrine that was formulated by Atatürk] has not been an easy task given the history and geographical location of Turkey”. Here, Turkey's geographical location is represented as being in a turbulent neighbourhood. But, Turkey is represented as a strong country that can turn its geopolitical disadvantages into advantages. Another example:

Turkey lives in a geography, which is as extensive as its problems, conflicts and instabilities. However, Turkey has demonstrated success in preserving the attribute of being an island of peace and stability in such a region. Turkey is one of the rare democracies located in vast geography extending from Europe to the Pacific Ocean and to the Middle East.<sup>14</sup>

Turkish state is again represented as a strong state that has succeeded in overcoming the vulnerabilities posed by its geography. It is also represented as not belonging to the turbulent neighborhood in which it is situated. The word 'island' is used in order to distinct Turkey as a peaceful country among a bunch of violent 'others'.

In conclusion, Turkish political elites have represented Turkey as a country, which has specific strengths and vulnerabilities due to its geographical location. In

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<sup>13</sup> See <<http://www.mfa.gov.tr/grupg/gb/default.htm>> accessed on 21.06.2004.

<sup>14</sup> See< <http://www.msb.gov.tr/Birimler/GnPPD/pdf/p1c2.pdf>> accessed on 13.05.2003.

the case of Turkey-EU relations, both these strengths and vulnerabilities are used to support Turkey's membership to the European Union.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

Geographical determinism and Westernness are key components of Turkish geopolitical discourse. In the dominant discourse, the geographical location of Turkey is represented using these two components. The case of Turkey-EU relations is used in this chapter to illustrate how these two components operates through the geopolitical discourse and prioritizes Turkey's membership to the European Union as a foreign policy action while at the same time shaping domestic politics towards 'cautious' democratization.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **CONCLUSION**

“[S]ometimes places are bombed and sometimes they are demonized” (Dodds, 2001: 475). Geopolitical discourse matters in understanding how. Studying geopolitical discourse helps to see “how the Earth was made into the World” (Agnew, 1998: 7) because it enables us to see that we attach certain meanings to geographies. Geographies are things that are imbued with meanings that are attached to them. These meanings create broader geographical imaginations and representations and make a difference in policy-making (as it does in every sphere of life). As Weldes and Saco put it:

A discursive approach opens up an additional set of questions, about the discursive conditions of possibility enabling particular state actions, which are also of importance in the attempt to understand international politics. For this reason, discursive analyses should be added to the stock of tools deployed for the study of international relations and foreign policy (Weldes and Saco, 1996: 395).

“Once geopolitics is recognized as operating as a discourse, as a scripting of the world”, as a source of power and practical knowledge, then it is open for contextualization, deconstruction and reconstruction (Sidaway, 2000: 118). This reconstruction would allow for an explicitly normative choice in the making of

foreign policy. It will allow for peace in the Israeli case and it will further democratization in Turkey.

Geopolitical knowledge as provided in textbooks, or ‘how to’ books operates as a discourse shaping policy makers’, intellectuals’ and other people’s minds. This thesis has tried to show, by looking at Israel and Turkey examples, that geopolitical discourse matters. It matters because it makes some imaginations and representations of the world available to us while marginalizing some other imaginations and representations. This, in turn makes some policy actions possible while marginalizing some others. This study tried to show “how certain geopolitical understandings about geographical representations serve to underwrite specific ‘policies’ and ‘practices’” (Agnew, 1998: 3).

In Chapter II, the main arguments of the theoretical perspective of this study, the arguments of Critical Geopolitics approach was outlined. Critical Geopolitics seeks to understand “how global space is incessantly reimagined and rewritten by centers of power and authority” (O Tuathail, 1996: 249). O Tuathail defines this power of reimagining and rewriting as ‘geo-power’. Dominant representations and practices making the modern geopolitical imagination have been mainly “those of the political elites of the Great Powers, those states and empires most capable of imposing themselves and their views on the rest of the world” (Agnew, 1998: 6). Accordingly, the main geopolitical ideas adopted by Turkish and Israeli elites have been those that were developed by European/American males from upper and middle class (Agnew et al., 2003: 4). An account of these central geopolitical ideas is made at the end of Chapter II as well. These ideas have guided the thesis trying to



understand how geopolitical discourse matters in Israeli and Turkish geopolitics. For example, the main line of thinking in Israeli and Turkish geopolitics is based upon the traditional geopolitical thought that sees geography as the main determining factor on a country's fate.

Chapter III and Chapter IV were designed as illustrations of how geopolitical discourse matters. These chapters laid out the components of geopolitical discourse in each country before turning to look at how geopolitical discourse matters. As discussed earlier, Critical Geopolitics argues that political elites are 'knowledge-bearing groups' and work in 'knowledge-generating institutions'. Therefore, in both chapters, the geopolitical discourses of political elites were examined. In Chapter III, the main components of Israeli geopolitical discourse were examined. These were 'exceptionalism', 'Jewishness' and 'security'. These are interrelated components since 'Jewishness' constitutes a basis for 'exceptionalism' and 'security', and also 'exceptionalism' constitutes a basis for 'security'. 'Exceptionalism' refers to the idea that Jewish peoples' history and religion makes Israel an exceptional state. 'Jewishness' refers to the strong nationalist and religious discourse in Israeli geopolitics. 'Security' refers to the 'existential threat' perceptions of Israel. The example of Oslo Peace Accords was used to illustrate how these various components have worked to make peace possible. Until the Oslo Peace Accords, the same components were being used in order to explain the impossibility of peace, but different prioritizations and reframing of those components made peace possible in Oslo.

In Chapter IV, Turkish geopolitical discourse and its major components were outlined and the example of Turkey's membership to European Union is discussed in order to show how geopolitical discourse shapes Turkey's foreign policy. The major components of Turkish geopolitical discourse are 'geographical determinism' and 'Westernness'. 'Geographical determinism' refers to assumed determining role of Turkey's geographical location on its foreign politics. 'Westernness' refers to the prioritization of Turkey's Western identity in Turkish geopolitical discourse. The example of Turkey-EU relations was used in order to show how these two components of geopolitical discourse operate in the making of Turkish security and foreign policy. The dominant geopolitical discourse in Turkey presents Turkey's foreign policy towards Europe and the West as the only option.

Given the limits of time and limits of sources available on this subject matter, my findings in this study are limited. A study on the relationships between material factors and geopolitical discourse would further develop this thesis. It would help to answer the question to what extent discourse matters and to what extent material factors matter. For Critical Geopolitics, as well as the analysis of textual production, the analysis of material contexts and practices within which these textual productions emerge and become meaningful is crucial (cited in Hakli, 1998: 336). The term discourse covers "the weaving together of thought and action, text and practice, image and interest, truth and power" (Hakli, 1998: 337). Newman suggests another dimension of the relationship between the material factors and geopolitical discourse:

As geographical realities change, they feed into the next stage of decision making as facts that cannot be ignored by the negotiators, regardless of how long they have been part of the landscape or whether their initial formation was justified on moral or legal grounds (Newman, 2002: 631).

A study about the alternative geopolitical discourses existing in Israel and Turkey would also improve the arguments of this study. There are some academic works on Israel's competing identities and how these identities produce alternative geopolitical imaginations and discourses (and in turn are reproduced by these discourses), but I was not able to find one about Turkey. This kind of a study would be a lot stronger in order to show how the dominant geopolitical discourses limit our understanding of the world. But such a work would require an extensive study on different groups in the society that represent and promote these alternative identities and geopolitical discourses. As formulated by Critical geopoliticians, critical analysis must also pay close attention to the unequal relations of power between dominant elite discourses and the geographies produced and made meaningful in everyday social life (see also Dalby, 1991, 1993; Dodds and Sidaway, 1994). As Hakli maintains, popular geographies can be just as 'geopolitical' as are their institutionally produced counterparts (Hakli, 1998: 338).

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