

REFLECTIONS ON TURKISH-ISRAELI RELATIONS

A Master Thesis

by

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JULY 2000

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**To my lovely brothers,
ALi and AHMET**

REFLECTIONS ON TURKISH-ISRAELI RELATIONS

**The Institute of Economics and Social Sciences
of
Bilkent University**

by

MEHMET ALİ DOĞAN

**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

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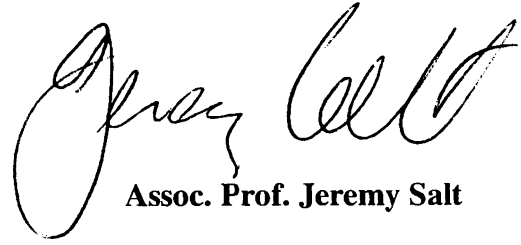
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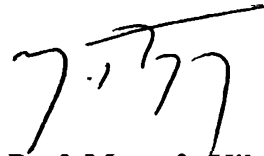
A. Z. Kevan

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



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Dr. Pinar Bilgin

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to present a brief history of Turkish-Israeli relations, to display the essence and motives of these relations, and to explain the repercussions of the rapprochement between the two countries in the Middle East. The first chapter of this thesis presents information pertaining to Turkish-Israeli relations before and after the 1990s. Following an account of the relations between Turks and Jews in history, this chapter includes a brief history of the Turkish-Israeli relations from the establishment of Israel. It also analyses the important changes in the 1990s and gives details about high level visits between the two countries. The second chapter shows that there are several advantages that both Jerusalem and Ankara gain as a result of their growing closeness. This chapter focuses on the reasons why Israel and Turkey signed military agreements and cooperated in various areas. It also includes the essence of the relations and what the components of this relationship are. The third chapter presents an analysis of the repercussions of the developing relations between Turkey and Israel. It analyses how this rapprochement affected the course of Middle Eastern politics at the end of the twentieth century. This chapter also provides information about the reactions of some regional states to Turkish-Israeli rapprochement. Finally, the conclusion part of the study includes an overview of the ideas employed within the previous chapters and it also predicts what the future holds for this relationship.

ÖZET

Bu tezin amacı Türk-İsrail ilişkilerinin kısa bir tarihçesini sunmak, gelişen ilişkilerin nedenlerini ve esaslarını göstermek ve iki ülke arasındaki yakınlaşmanın Ortadoğu'daki yankılarını açıklamaktır. Tezin ilk bölümü 1990 yılı öncesi ve sonrası Türk-İsrail ilişkileri hakkında bilgi vermektedir. Bu bölümde tarihte Türkler ve Yahudiler arasındaki ilişkiler kısaca anlatıldıktan sonra İsrail Devletinin kurulmasından sonraki Türk-İsrail ilişkileri özetlenmiştir. Bu bölümde ayrıca 1990 sonrası dünyadaki önemli gelişmeler ve iki ülke arasındaki ziyaretler de yer almaktadır. İkinci bölümde Ankara ve Tel Aviv arasındaki gelişen ilişkilerden iki ülkenin ne gibi avantajlar elde ettiği gösterilmiştir. Bu bölümde ayrıca Türkiye ve İsrail'in neden birçok alanda dayanışmaya gittiği ve askeri anlaşmalar imzaladığı konuları üzerinde durulmuştur. Bu bölüm ayrıca ilişkilerin nedenlerini ve esaslarını da içermektedir. Üçüncü bölümde Türkiye ve İsrail arasındaki gelişen ilişkilerin bölgedeki yankılarının bir analizi yer almaktadır. Bu bölüm Türk-İsrail yakınlaşmasının yirminci yüzyılın sonunda Ortadoğu politikalarını nasıl etkilediğini analiz eder ve ayrıca bazı bölge ülkelerinin yakınlaşmaya verdiği tepkiler hakkında bilgi içerir. Çalışmanın bitiş bölümü daha önceki bölümlerde yer alan fikirlerin özetini ve ilişkilerin geleceği konusundaki tahminleri içerir.

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INTRODUCTION

The dissolution of the Soviet Union created a unipolar world and this led to significant changes in the international structure. This major shift in the balance of international power also altered the regional balance of power in the Middle East. In addition to this, the Gulf War of 1991 and the Middle East peace process that followed the war affected the course of Middle Eastern politics and changed the balance of interests within the region.

Foreign policy behavior of any country is influenced by regional and global changes.¹ Therefore, under these structural changes in the 1990s, Turkey and Israel sought closer relations in order to increase their own security and capabilities in the region and in the international system. The past few years have witnessed major developments between the two countries with regard to cooperation on military issues, intelligence-sharing, economic affairs, culture, tourism, and, in the wake of the disastrous 17 August earthquake, humanitarian assistance. Turkey and Israel have repeatedly stressed that their developing ties are not an alliance requiring either country to defend the other, the Arab countries are dubious about it. This relationship has induced regional states to become more active in regional politics.

¹ Michael Brecher, *The Foreign Policy System of Israel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972) p.23.

The purpose of this thesis is to present a brief history of Turkish-Israeli relations, to display the essence and motives of these relations, and to explain the repercussions of the rapprochement between the two countries in the Middle East. The sources of the thesis are books, academic journal articles, periodicals, news agencies, and web sites that deal with Turkish-Israeli relations and Middle East Studies.

This research was motivated by the increasing involvement of Turkey into Middle East politics in the post-Cold War era. The writer of this thesis visited Jordan, Syria, and Egypt to attend an Arabic course during summer 1997, and observed that the increasingly deep relationship between Turkey and Israel disturbed some of their neighbors in the region. Moreover, the writer also observed that the Arab media's overemphasis, exaggeration, and in fact disinformation on the military relations between Turkey and Israel has created the wrong image and perception of the relations between the two countries.² Therefore, by writing this thesis, the writer wants to find what the reasons for increasing ties between Turkey and Israel are, what the essence of Turkish-Israeli relations is, and the most important, how this relationship affected the Middle East.

The first chapter of this thesis presents information pertaining to Turkish-Israeli relations before and after the 1990s. Following an account of the relations between Turks and Jews in history, this chapter includes a brief history of the Turkish-Israeli relations from the establishment of Israel. It also analyses the

² See *Dış Basında Türkiye-İsrail Askeri İşbirliği Anlaşmasına Tepkiler (5 Nisan-6 Mayıs 1996)*, Ankara: TC Başbakanlık Basın-Yayın ve Enformasyon Genel Müdürlüğü, 1996.

important changes in the 1990s and gives details about high level visits between the two countries.

An analysis of the Turkish-Israeli rapprochement requires an account of the essence of the relations and a description of the motives behind. The second chapter shows that there are several advantages that both Jerusalem and Ankara gain as a result of their growing closeness. This chapter focuses on the reasons why Israel and Turkey signed military agreements and cooperated in various areas. It also includes the essence of the relations and what the components of this relationship are.

The scale and the pace of the development between Turkey and Israel have meant that the repercussions of the Turkish-Israeli relations have not only been felt in Jerusalem and Ankara but also in the Middle East and beyond. The third chapter presents an analysis of the repercussions of the developing relations between Turkey and Israel. It analyses how this rapprochement affected the course of Middle Eastern politics at the end of the twentieth century. This chapter also provides information about the reactions of some regional states to Turkish-Israeli rapprochement.

Finally, the conclusion part of the study includes an overview of the ideas employed within the previous chapters and it also predicts what the future holds for this relationship.

CHAPTER I

TURKISH-ISRAELI RELATIONS BEFORE AND AFTER 1990s

The Middle East has been one of the most volatile regions in the world especially in the twentieth century. Coups d'etat, wars, rapid shifts in alliances and alignments, numerous intra-Arab, intrastate, and region-wide conflicts, and constant intervention by outside powers have wrecked the region. In the post-Cold War era, there were fundamental changes in the geopolitics of the Middle East: The Gulf War, Arab-Israeli peace process, and the rapprochement between Turkey and Israel. This chapter presents a brief history of Turkish-Israeli relations and gives details about high level visits between the two countries in the 1990s.

1.1. Turks and Jews

The relations between Turks and Jews have never been violent in history. For centuries, the Ottoman Empire was a principal source of refuge and prosperity for Jews fleeing from persecution in Europe. After the conquest of Istanbul in 1453, Mehmet the Conqueror invited many Jewish families from Europe to Istanbul.³ The Ottoman Empire also welcomed the Jews from Spain fleeing from the oppression of the Inquisition in 1492. The Ottoman Jewish community was in close touch with

³ For more information about the Turkish-Jewish relations in history See, Halil İnalçık, "Turkish-Jewish Relations in the Ottoman Empire," A United Turkish-American (UTA) Publication, Chicago, November 1982.

relatives and friends located throughout Europe, and they served as international links for the Empire. Jews made important contributions to the Ottoman administration, economy, science, culture, and entertainment. Moreover, during the World War II, Turkey helped the Jews who fled from Nazi Europe. After the war and the creation of Israel, many of Turkey's Jews also emigrated to Israel. The number of Jews who emigrated from Turkey and live in Israel is estimated at 120,000, and most of them located in the coastal city of Bat Yam. This community is very active as a lobby on Turkey's behalf because their sense of Turkish identity is very important to them.⁴

1.2. Turkish-Israeli Relations until 1990s

On 14 May 1948, the Jews in Palestine declared the establishment of the State of Israel.⁵ After the Western powers recognized Israel, Turkey also recognized this state on 28 March 1949 and established diplomatic relations in the next year.⁶ Turkey was the first Muslim state to recognize Israel officially and Arab states criticized Turkey for legitimizing the state of Israel.

Turkish-Israeli relations experienced ups and downs in the next decades with the events of the region and of the world. With the exchange of ambassadors in 1952⁷, Turkish-Israeli relations showed significant progress but Turkey recalled its

⁴ Philip Robins, *Turkey and the Middle East*, (London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1991), p.85.

⁵ Walter Laquer and Barry Rubin (eds), *The Israel-Arab Reader: A Documentary History of the Middle East Conflict* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), p.125.

⁶ İsmail Soysal, *Türk Dış Politikası İncelemeleri İçin Kılavuz (1919-1993)*, (İstanbul: Ortadoğu ve Balkan İncelemeleri Vakfı (OBİV) Yayınları, 1993), p.65 and M. Hakan Yavuz and Mujeeb R. Khan, "Turkish Foreign Policy Toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict: Duality and the Development," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol.14 No:4 (Fall 1992), p.72.

⁷ İsmail Soysal, "Seventy Years of Turkish-Arab Relations and an Analysis of Turkish-Iraqi Relations 1920-1990," *Annual 1991 Foundation for Studies on Turkish-Arab Relations*, İstanbul, 1991, p.49

ambassador in November 1956⁸ from Tel Aviv because of the Suez Crisis erupted in 1956. Britain, France and Israel attacked Egypt in October 1956 because of the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company by Gamal Abdal Nasser of Egypt. Britain was a member of the Baghdad Pact that was established with the contributions from Britain, Turkey, Iraq, and Pakistan against the Soviet threat in 1955. Therefore, Turkey recalled its ambassador to save Baghdad Pact and Turkey's credibility in the eyes of Arab states. However, Şevket İstinyeli, Turkish Ambassador to Israel, told the Israeli officials in the Israeli Foreign Ministry that this diplomatic act should not be interpreted as a hostile act to the State of Israel⁹.

Turkish-Israeli relations may have seemed distant on the surface, but in reality, cooperation has been continuous. After the overthrow of the Hashamite monarchy in Iraq in July 1958, Turkey and Israel agreed on a secret pact which was concluded during an unannounced visit to Ankara of David Ben Gurion, the Israeli prime minister in August 1958.¹⁰ This was to become known as the 'peripheral pact' and Israel's aim was a pact that embraced Iran, Turkey, Ethiopia, and Israel, even extending to certain Christian parts of Sudan.¹¹ However, most of the 1958 agreements never fully materialized and after the 1960 military coup, Turkey's Middle East strategy was built on reducing friction with the Arab states.¹²

⁸ Süha Bölükbaşı, "Behind the Turkish-Israeli Alliance: A Turkish View," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol.29 No:1, (Autumn 1999), p.23.

⁹ Mehmet Gönlübol and Ömer Kürkçüoğlu, "1965-1973 Yılları," in Mehmet Gönlübol and et al. *Olaylarla Türk Dış Politikası 1919-1973* (Ankara: Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Yayın No:279, 1975)

¹⁰ İhsan Gürkan, "Turkish-Israeli Relations and the Middle East Peace Process," *Turkish Review of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.7 (1993), p.103; Amikam Nachmani, *Israel, Turkey and Greece: Uneasy Relations in the Middle East Mediterranean* (London: Frank Cass, 1987), pp.74-76; and Philip Robins, *Turkey and the Middle East*, (London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1991), p.77.

¹¹ Nachmani, p.74.

The Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestine issue have widely affected Turkish-Israeli relations. Turkey adopted a balanced approach towards the Arab-Israeli conflict from the beginning of the 1960s until the mid-1970s. For example, on the one hand, Turkey did not allow using the İncirlik military base by the USA in support for Israel in the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli wars.¹³ On the other hand, Turkey also opposed a resolution called for all the participants to break diplomatic relations with Israel at the Rabat Conference of the Islamic Conference Organization in 1969.¹⁴

The Cyprus issue, the US arms embargo, and the need for diplomatic support induced Turkey to improve relations with the Arab countries in the 1970s. The energy crisis in the 1970s was another reason for Turkey being drawn towards the Arab states. Turkey's developing economic relations with the Arab world was at the expense of Israel. Because of the world oil crisis in the mid-1970s, the importance of the Gulf oil in the economic development of Turkey grew¹⁵, and this affected Turkish-Israeli relations.

Before 1979, Turkey's support for Palestinian self-determination was only verbal. Although Turkey allowed the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) to establish a diplomatic mission in Ankara in 1979, the head of the PLO office was recognized with the rank of charge d'affaires as the Israeli representative in Ankara

¹² Bülent Aras, *Palestinian Israeli Peace Process and Turkey*, (New York: Nova Science Publisher, 1998), p.118.

¹³ Ömer Kürkçüoğlu, "The Evolution of Turkish-Arab Relations," in *The Middle East in Turkish-American Relations*, ed. G.S.Harris (Washington: The Heritage Foundation, 1984), p.47 and Aras, p.118.

¹⁴ Ramazan Gözen, "Patterns in Turkish Foreign Policy Behavior Towards the Middle East," *Foreign Policy* (Ankara), Vol:19 No.1-2 (1995), p.75.

¹⁵ İhsan Gürkan, "Turkish-Israeli Relations and the Middle East Peace Process," *Turkish Review of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.7 (1993), p.109.

had. In August 1980, Turkey protested the Israeli law declaring that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel¹⁶ and reduced the level of diplomatic representation in Israel to the second secretary level.

After the military intervention in September 1980, Turkish-Arab relations flourished but the relations with Israel were never cut completely. Although Turkey increased bilateral trade with the regional countries, Ankara abstained from voting on a UN resolution condemning Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights in February 1982.¹⁷

The commercial relations between Turkey and Israel started to show good signals in the mid 1980s.¹⁸ Ankara appointed a senior diplomat to Tel-Aviv in September 1986 and indicated the intention to upgrade its relations with Israel.¹⁹ As the Prime Minister Turgut Özal said, contacts with Israel were necessary "as a window on future events." He claimed that for Turkey "to play a role in solving the problems of the Middle East, that window must be kept open".²⁰ Israel responded to this upgrading of relations by sending a high level diplomat to Ankara.

In 1988, Turkey voted against a resolution which called for the rejection of Israeli diplomatic credentials at the UN. On the other hand, in the same year, Turkey recognized the Palestine state although Israel expressed disappointment.²¹ However,

¹⁶ Mahmut Bali Aykan, "The Palestinian Question in Turkish Foreign Policy from the 1950s to the 1990s," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.25 (February 1993).

¹⁷ Gözen, p.78.

¹⁸ Aras, p.125.

¹⁹ Gürkan, p.114.

²⁰ Aykan, p.103.

²¹ The PNC (Palestine National Council), the PLO's parliament in exile, proclaimed the establishment of the Independent Palestine State in Algiers on 15 November 1988. Turkey recognized this new state

Turkish-Israeli relations have steadily improved and the trade between the two states jumped from \$29 million in 1986 to \$140 million in 1990.²²

1.3. Important Changes in the 1990s

From the beginning of the 1990s onwards, there have been important changes in the international structure. The end of the Cold War, the Gulf War, and the Arab-Israeli peace process were important developments of the early 1990s that shaped the future pace of the relations between Ankara and Jerusalem.

1.3.1. The Collapse of the Soviet Union

The end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union have brought drastic changes in the international system. The bipolar characteristic of the world has disappeared and this created a new environment in the Middle East especially for Turkey and Israel. The end of bipolarity has meant a change in the nature of both countries' relationship with the United States. Therefore, both needed to follow different foreign policies to protect their interests. Both Turkey and Israel obtained more room for maneuver in the region with the changing geopolitical circumstances surrounding them.

The collapse of the Soviet Union opened up new horizons for Turkey. The potential significance of the changes brought about by the end of Cold War was summarized by Mustafa Akşin, then Turkey's ambassador to the United Nations, in an address at the University of Columbia in the Fall of 1992: "With the collapse of

within six hours. See Süha Bölükbaşı, "Behind the Turkish-Israeli Alliance: A Turkish View," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol.29 No:1, (Autumn 1999), p.28.

²²M. Hakan Yavuz and Mujeeb R. Khan, "Turkish Foreign Policy Toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict: Duality and the Development," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol.14 No:4, (Fall 1992), p.80.

communism we now have the luxury of adding an Eastern European, Balkan, Black Sea, Caucasus, Central Asian, and Middle Eastern dimension to our traditional Western Europe oriented diplomacy.” Turkey’s strategic role had changed “from being a dike holding back Soviet expansion,” he said, to becoming “a bridge to a new, emerging world and the crossroads where three continents and two seas meet.”²³

1.3.2. The Gulf War

The second important change that occurred in the early 1990s was the Gulf War whose impact was profound in the Middle East. Turkey abandoned the neutrality towards the Middle East region. As Bülent Aras pointed out:

Turkey, Israel and the US sided together against an Arab country; this was more than a simple diplomatic coalition or a joint maneuvering plan. This situation paved the way for the improvement of relations between Turkey and Israel. The increasing strain on Turkish-Arab relations, for several reasons, contributed to this situation. The main problems with some of the Arab countries were Syrian support of Kurdish separatist activities in southeastern Anatolia, the disputed waters of the Euphrates, Turkey’s increasing relations with Israel and the West, and the lack of support from the Arab world during the migration of the Turkish minority from Bulgaria. All these worsened Arab’s image in Turkish public and made a positive contribution to Turkish-Israeli relations.²⁴

As a result of the end of the Cold War, the role of Israel in the Middle East against the Soviet Union changed. The Gulf War, as well as the Iran-Iraq War before it, also changed Israel’s position in the regional conflicts; therefore, as Dan Tschirgi

²³ George E. Gruen, “Turkey and the Middle East after Oslo I,” in *The Middle East and the Peace Process* edited by Robert O. Freedman, (Florida: University Press of Florida, 1998) p.181

²⁴ Aras, p.128.

points out that the US pursued a slightly less favorable policy toward Israel without jeopardizing either its own interests or Israel's security.²⁵

The Gulf War confirmed Washington's political and military dominance in the region and highlighted the crucial role that the United States will have in determining the region's political future. The Gulf War also increased Arab countries' dependence on the United States but the Arab-Israeli conflict continues to potentially threaten a solid US sphere of influence.

1.3.3. The Middle East Peace Process

The third important change in the 1990s as far as the Middle East was concerned is the beginning of a peace process between Israel and the Arab states. The Arab-Israeli peace process opened up a new foreign policy opportunity for Turkey. After signing a joint Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles by the two parties in September 1993, Turkey was released from the onerous difficulty of balancing between Israel and the Arab world. As Ali Karaosmanoğlu argued that "the success of Arab-Israeli talks would certainly eliminate some of the stumbling blocs and it could pave the way for improved Turkish-Israeli relations."²⁶ From 1993 onwards, Ankara have tried to deepen its relations with Tel Aviv.

²⁵ Dan Kschirgi, ed. *The Arab World Today* (Boulder : Lynne Rienner, 1994).

²⁶ Ali Karaosmanoğlu, "A Turkish View of Bilateral Relations with Israel," *Actual Situation and Prospects of Turkey's Bilateral Relations with Israel : Potential and Opportunities*, (TES-AR Yayınları: Ankara, 1992) p.5.

1.4. Relations between Turkey and Israel in the 1990s

In 1990s, Turkey got involved in Middle East affairs more actively and Turkish-Israeli relations have constantly developed. In December 1991, Turkey abstained from a UN General Assembly vote that repealed the resolution equating Zionism with racism. Three days after the UN vote, Ankara upgraded its diplomatic missions to Israel and the PLO to the ambassadorial level. Turkey also raised the level of its representation in Tel Aviv to ambassador²⁷. In June 1992, Turkish Minister of Tourism Abdülkadir Ateş went to Israel and concluded a tourism cooperation agreement.²⁸ This was the first official visit to Israel by a Turkish cabinet member in more than twenty years.

Turkish-Israeli relations reached a new height when the Israeli President Chaim Herzog came to Istanbul in mid-July 1992.²⁹ At a joint press conference, Prime Minister Demirel noted that Turkish-Israeli relations were gradually improving and declared that further development of bilateral relations would be in the interests of the region and of the world. He added that participation of all regional countries in the Middle East peace conference might lead to better results.³⁰ For his part, Herzog underscored that Turkey was an important country in the region and stressed that it could play a role in the Middle East peace conference.

In 1992, Turkish General Staff stated that “in the light of the realities of the Middle East, Turkey, which is an Islamic and secular country, is careful to balance

²⁷ İhsan Gürkan, “Turkish-Israeli Relations and the Middle East Peace Process,” *Turkish Review of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.7 (1993), p. 114.

²⁸ The text of the tourism agreement was published in Resmi Gazete (*the Official Gazette*) on 11 September 1992.

²⁹ Cumhuriyet, 18 July 1992.

³⁰ Milliyet, 18 July 1992 and Hürriyet 18 July 1992.

its relations with Israel and the Arab world.”³¹ However, there is no question that the Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles opened the way for a marked shift in Turkish foreign policy towards Israel. A month later, in November 1993, Turkish Foreign Minister Hikmet Çetin visited Israel. This was the first official visit by a Turkish foreign minister since Israel’s creation in 1948.

1.4.1. Çetin’s visit

Çetin had twice postponed his visit, which was originally scheduled for June. The first delay was attributed to Turkish domestic politics and the second was because of Israeli attack into southern Lebanon. Sensitive to Arab reaction and domestic public opinion, Çetin decided at the last minute to cancel his visit to Israel although he arrived in neighboring Jordan. The two postponements of Çetin’s visit illustrate the extent to which Turkish-Israeli relations can be affected by domestic developments in Turkey and by the Arab-Israel conflict.

According to Foreign Minister Çetin, a new order was emerging in the Middle East. Although it was not possible to predict accurately what form it would take, he said, “we are resolved to collaborate in the creation of a new Middle Eastern order.”³² During Çetin’s visit to Israel, an agreement outlining the framework of bilateral relations and a cultural agreement were signed, and work was begun on various economic cooperation agreements, including one dealing with the elimination of double taxation, another on encouragement and protection of investments, as well as an agreement in principle on a free trade agreement. These

³¹ *Middle East International*, 23 October 1992, p.3

³² *Newspot*, 18 November 1993

were finally signed during President Demirel's visit in March 1996. The Turkish-Israeli Business Council was also established in 1993.

1.4.2. Israelis' visits

Turkish-Israeli Relations were described as inevitable and natural by diplomats of both countries and developed rapidly. In January 1994, after Israeli Defense Ministry director-general David Ivry's visit, the Israeli President Ezer Weizman came to Ankara and met with the Turkish President Süleyman Demirel where they agreed on extending dialogue and ties. Weizman said that Israel needed to develop better relations with Syria and asked Turkey to play the role of an intermediary.

At a joint press conference in Ankara with visiting Foreign Minister Shimon Peres on April 11, 1994, Hikmet Çetin announced that "Turkey has agreed with Israel to shoulder the leadership"³³ in setting up the Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Middle East (CSCME). Turkey and Israel hope to draw in Jordan, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, and other moderate Arab states which see the terrorism of radical groups as a major threat to regional stability. The idea of a CSCME has long been championed by Erdal İnönü. In 1994, İnönü, as chairman of the Grand National Assembly's foreign relations committee, led a multiparty Turkish parliamentary delegation to Israel. At the invitation of the Knesset, they discussed on regional cooperation with his Israeli counterparts.³⁴

³³ *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, ME/1972, 15 April 1994.

³⁴ George E. Gruen, "Turkey's Growing Regional Role," *Near East Report*, 27 June 1994, pp.115-116.

Turkish-Israeli economic cooperation was also expanding. In early June 1994, Shimon Shetret (the Israeli Minister of Economic and Planning) led a seventy-person delegation of Israeli business representatives to explore investment opportunities in Turkey's defense, transport, irrigation, and security sectors.³⁵

1.4.3. Tansu Çiller's visit

Prime minister Tansu Çiller's official visit to Tel-Aviv in November 1994 represented a further advance in the relations. She characterized the Turkish-Israeli cooperation as a "strategic relationship".³⁶ During this visit a series of agreements were signed including fighting against drug smuggling, terrorism and other criminal acts; cooperation in the telecommunications and postal services. An agreement that would allow the Israeli Aviation Industries to modernize Turkish Phantom jets was important because this was the beginning of a series of military deals. Çiller also talked about a list of possible Turkish-Israeli bilateral projects, including improved fiber optic communications; allocation of a Turkish communications satellite channel to Israel; Mersin and İskenderun port development to streamline handling of perishable fruits and vegetables; formation of multinational air and maritime companies; cooperation on power station construction; cooperation in expanding tourist facilities in Turkey; connection of Israel to the international electricity grid; establishment of joint construction companies; and investment by Israel in agricultural, industrial, and community development projects in Turkey's

³⁵ *President and Prime Ministers*, Vol.3 Iss.5, September/October 1994, p.20.

³⁶ Süha Bölükbaşı, "Behind the Turkish-Israeli Alliance: A Turkish View," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol.29 No:1, (Autumn 1999), p.31.

Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP).³⁷ Çiller also gave special emphasis to cooperation with Israel on various water-related projects.

On 27 June 1995, Israeli Minister of Agriculture Ya'acov Tsur and Turkish Minister of Agriculture and Rural Affairs Refaettin Şahin signed a cooperation agreement in the agricultural field. According to a Financial Times special report on Turkey in June 1996, Israeli technical assistance was beginning to have a positive impact on farming in the newly irrigated Harran plains of the GAP region. "Pilot projects by Israeli experts produce nearly twice as much cotton per hectare with the half the water that local farmers use"³⁸ In Turkey, because of farmers' inadequate irrigation methods, there is a shortage in water in some parts of the country. Therefore, Turkish-Israeli technical cooperation in the agricultural field may improve agricultural productivity.

1.4.4. Military Agreements

In February 1996, the Turkish Military's Deputy Chief of Staff, Çevik Bir, visited Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres in Israel. On February 23, 1996 Çevik Bir and General David Ivry (the adviser to the Israeli Defense Minister) signed a Military Education and Cooperation Agreement that foresaw the exchange of aircraft, exchange of military personnel, and granted the right to visit and to use ports and air bases in each other's countries. The Accord also addressed intelligence sharing and counter-terrorism. This agreement itself would remain secret; however, it

³⁷ *İç Basında Başbakan Prof. Dr. Tansu Çiller'in İsrail ve Mısır Ziyareti (Tansu Çiller's visit to Israel and Egypt in the Turkish Press)*, Ankara: TC Başbakanlık Basın-Yayın ve Enformasyon Genel Müdürlüğü, 1994 and *Dış Basında Başbakan Prof. Dr. Tansu Çiller'in İsrail, Filistin özerk Yönetimi ve Mısır Arap Cumhuriyeti Ziyaretleri (Tansu Çiller's visit to Israel, Palestinian National Authority and Egypt Arab Republic in the Foreign Press)*, Ankara: TC Başbakanlık Basın-Yayın ve Enformasyon Genel Müdürlüğü, 1994.

was revealed after leaks to the Israeli and Turkish press announced its existence and certain of its clauses.³⁹

On August 28, 1996 General Ivry and Turkish Undersecretary of Defense Tuncer Kılınç signed a second defense agreement (Military Education Agreement), which dealt with primarily with the exchange of technical expertise and knowledge. This accord was largely expected to pave the way for implementing the deal to upgrade Turkey's F-4 Phantom jets⁴⁰, although the details of the deal were considered secret.⁴¹ This pact included a five-year deal to upgrade fighter-bombers, to install avionic and navigation systems, radar and electronic warfare.⁴² In December 1996, Turkey and Israel also agreed on joint air and naval operations, concluding the pacts that opened each other's airspace to military operations.

In the wake of Arab and Iranian criticism of the agreement, the Turkish government emphasized that the agreement was not aimed any third party and said that Israeli planes would not be allowed to carry arms or intelligence-gathering equipment in Turkey. Israeli media reports claim that the agreement also includes

³⁸ "The Southern Anatolia Project: Irrigation transforms area's prospects," *Financial Times Survey* (Turkey), 3 June 1996, p.4.

³⁹ Dibner, Gil. "My Enemy's Enemy: Turkey, Israel, and the Middle Eastern Balance of Power," *Harvard International Review* 21:1 (Winter 98/99).

⁴⁰ Efraim Inbar claims that "the two sides initialled an agreement on the upgrading of the Turkish F-4s in 1987. Yet, the Palestinian uprising (Intifada), which started in December 1987, created for Turkey a very problematic diplomatic atmosphere for engaging in a high profile military link with Israel. Subsequently, the Phantom deal was shelved for several years to await more auspicious international circumstances for realisation in the 1990s." See Efraim Inbar, "The Turkish-Israeli Entente: The New Power Alignment in the Middle East," *Adelphi Papers*, forthcoming.

⁴¹ Arie O'Sullivan, "Turkey, Israel Sign Delayed Defense Industry Pact," *The Jerusalem Post*, 29 August 1997.

⁴² Meltem Müftüleri-Baç, "Turkey and Israel: An Evolving Partnership," Paper presented at the Bi-National Conference on Cooperation and Conflict in the Middle East with Special Reference to Water, 20-21 April 1998, Bilkent University, Turkey.

provisions for intelligence cooperation aimed at Iran and for Israeli help for Turkish anti-terrorists-infiltration efforts.⁴³

A major turning point in the relations came during Turkish President Süleyman Demirel's official visit to Israel between 11-14 March 1996. Four agreements on economic cooperation, the promotion and protection of bilateral investments, free trade, and preventing double taxation were signed. Turkey was eager to benefit from Israel's free trade agreements with the European Union and with the United States.

Near the end of May, Turkish Naval Commander, Admiral Güven Erkaya, arrived in Israel as a guest of the Israeli Naval Chief, Alex Tal, for a four-day visit. The formation of a Turkish government in late June 1996 led by Necmettin Erbakan, leader of the Welfare (Refah) Party, did not alter in any way the growing cooperation between Turkey and Israel. Although Erbakan often described Israel as a cancer in the heart of the Arab and Muslim world, the high level visits continued. At the beginning of June, the IDF's (Israeli Defense Forces) Deputy Chief of Staff, Matan Vilnai, flew to Turkey.⁴⁴ Erbakan met Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy in Ankara on April 8, 1997.

⁴³ Alan Makovsky, "Turkish-Israeli Cooperation, the Peace Process, and the Region," *Policywatch*, No:195, 26 April 1996.

⁴⁴ Gil Sedan, "News Analysis: Tension Thaw as Israel, Turkey Build New Relations," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, 18 April 1997.

1.4.5. The Turkish Chief of Staff's visit

The Turkish Chief of Staff İsmail Hakkı Karadayı visited Israel in February 1997 and met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Israeli Chief of Staff Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, and the Prime Minister's military secretary General Ze'ev Livne. In the meeting Netanyahu said that "we appreciate Turkey and its military, and I believe that cooperation between us is a very important item in assuring the aspiration for peace and stability in the Middle East, an area which contains many extremist elements." Karadayı, on the other hand, thanked the Israeli Prime Minister and added that he "certainly appreciates the importance of dialogue between Israel and Turkey."⁴⁵ By this meeting, İsmail Hakkı Karadayı became the first Chief of the General Staff of the Turkish Armed Forces to visit Israel.

1.4.6. Turhan Tayan's Visit

In May 1997, Turkish Defense Minister Turhan Tayan visited Israel, and toured the Lebanese-Syrian borders, and the Golan Heights. During the conversation with his Turkish colleague, Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai raised the idea of tri-partite defense training between Israeli, Turkish, and American forces. Tayan noted, "Turkish-Israeli cooperation is not directed against any third party. Turkey ascribes great importance to these relations, and I believe that cooperation between us will contribute to regional stability and advance the peace process."⁴⁶ Both ministers also expressed concern over the arms race in the Middle East and the efforts to develop surface-to-surface missiles and non-conventional weapons.

⁴⁵ "Summary of Meeting between Prime Minister Netanyahu and Turkish Chief of Staff İsmail Hakkı Karadayı," *The Web Site of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel*, 27 February 1997, <<http://www.mfa.gov.il>> (18 January 1998).

⁴⁶ "Summary of Meeting between Minister of Defence Yitzhak Mordechai and Turkish Defence Minister Turhan Tayan," *The Web Site of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel*, 30 April 1997, <<http://www.mfa.gov.il>> (25 February 1998).

1.4.7. Mordechai's visit and the OIC Summit

In December 1997, while Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai was visiting Turkey, Iran hosted an Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) summit. In the conference, a resolution passed for reconsideration of military cooperation with Israel.⁴⁷ Although Turkey was not named in the resolution, it is the only Muslim state that cooperates with Israel militarily. As a result, Turkish president left the summit earlier than expected.

Mordechai's visit to Turkey was the first by an Israeli Defense Minister. Before meeting Mordechai, Turkish Defense Minister İsmet Sezgin said "this resolution does not bind us, we will continue our cooperation with Israel because we believe regional peace can only be achieved through such activities."⁴⁸ In addition, Turkish Chief of General Staff General İsmail Hakkı Karadayı told Mordechai "There will always be nations against our cooperation, but we are interested in deepening and strengthening it. " He added, "We are surrounded by regimes with various problems. Israel and Turkey are two islands of stability which must be preserved together."⁴⁹ Karadayı also pointed out that Turkey is fully satisfied with the military and defense industry cooperation between Turkey and Israel. Mordechai, on the other hand, summed up the Israeli aim of the relationship with Turkey by saying "when we lock hands we will form a powerful fist. These relations will help us defend ourselves against any threat and help establish peace in the region."⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Michele L. Kjarlien, "Relations with Israel (Relationship of Israel with other Countries)," *Journal of Palestine Studies* Vol.27 No.3 (Spring 1998), p.130.

⁴⁸ "Israel Defence Minister in Turkey," *UPI*, 8 December 1997

⁴⁹ Arie O'Sullivan, "Israel and Turkey Meet to Bolster Defense Ties," *Jerusalem Post*, 12 December 1997.

⁵⁰ *Haaretz*, 9 December 1997.

1.4.8. Reliant Mermaid

Turkey and Israel held for the first time a joint naval exercise, named “Reliant Mermaid” on January 7, 1998. Jordan sent an observer and the United States also participated in the search and rescue operation. This exercise drew a storm of protest from the Arab states⁵¹ and Iran, seeming to confirm fears that the Turkish-Israeli relations had reached strategic proportions. The exercise involved an American destroyer from the Sixth Fleet, two Turkish frigates, two Israeli Saar missile boats, a number of Israeli helicopters and maritime patrol aircraft, and approximately 1000 sailors.⁵²

These exercises were originally scheduled to take place in the summer of 1997, but were postponed until November of that year, and then were postponed again until January 1998. Reliant Mermaid was said to be an innocent search-and-rescue mission; however, it was described by the Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai, as having a ‘security aspect’.⁵³ Egypt ignored an invitation to send an official observer. Commenting on the maneuvers, Amr Musa, Egypt’s Foreign Minister said, “The timing was unfortunate in view of the freezing of the Arab-Israeli peace process because of the Israeli government’s inflexibility, and the instability

⁵¹ For example, the Beirut based *Al-Nahar* daily wrote that the US-Israel-Turkey joint military maneuver in the Mediterranean Sea is an official announcement of the formation of Ankara-Tel Aviv coalition under direct supervision of the United States. Another daily *Al-Safir* said that holding of such maneuvers is a preparatory measure that paves the way for the establishment of a multilateral coalition in the Middle East. The daily also warned that such coalition not only threatens the Middle East but also endanger the Central Asian countries. *Al-Nahar and Al-Safir*, 3 January 1998.

⁵² *Middle East Security Report*, No:50, 8 January 1998 and “US, Israel, and Turkey To Participate in Exercise Reliant Mermaid,” *DefenseLINK News*, No.230, 22 December 1997.

⁵³ Nadia E. El-Shazly, “Arab Anger at New Axis,” *The World Today*, Vol.55, No.1, January 1999, p.26.

this is causing in the area.”⁵⁴ Libya accused Turkey of betraying its identity and historic ties to Muslims and Arabs, “defying the beliefs of its people and licking the boots of the Americans and Israelis.”⁵⁵

1.4.9. Mesut Yılmaz’s visit

With the Turkish Prime Minister Mesut Yılmaz’s official visit to Israel, which closely followed the trip by Foreign Minister İsmail Cem in July 1998, Turkey’s relations with Israel went one step further. Although both leaders tried to emphasize the economic nature of the relations, Syria, which sees itself as the main target of this cooperation, reacted angrily against the developing relations between Turkey and Israel. The official al-Ba’th newspaper described Yılmaz’s tour as “a hostile move” and urged Arab and Muslim countries to “confront it and firmly contain its results.”⁵⁶ Yılmaz countered with accusations against Damascus. “Frankly, I do not care how Syria comments on my visit,” he said. “Anyone who speaks of hostility in the region should focus on the policies of the Syrian government which encourage separatist terrorism on Turkey.”⁵⁷ The support extended by Syria to the PKK terrorists was a source of major strain between Ankara and Damascus.

After Yılmaz’s visit, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel again claimed that “Israeli-Turkish cooperation is not designed to harm any state; on the contrary, it

⁵⁴ “Iranian Security Considerations in the Wake of Joint Manouveres of Turkey, US and Israel,” *Tehran Times*, 13 January 1998.

⁵⁵ “Iran, Arabs, Greece, Russia, Libya Lambast Turkish-Israeli Maneuver,” *Tehran Times*, 8 January 1998.

⁵⁶ Nicole Pope, “Yılmaz Welcomed in Israel,” *Middle East International*, 18 September 1998, p.9.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p.9.

is intended to help states in the region.”⁵⁸ The model that they would like to present as an example is the Council of Security and Cooperation, which was established between Western and Eastern Europe after the Cold War. The Council was not aimed against any party, and was rather designed to help all sides. Yoav Biran, from the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said, “we are referring to the building of cooperation that will hopefully include Egypt, Jordan, and other states in the region—not against any party, but rather for the good of all.”⁵⁹

The capture of two Israelis on suspicion of spying on a military installation in Cyprus in November 1998 has aggravated regional tensions about the ties between Israel and Turkey.⁶⁰ Arab governments have become increasingly wary of the Turkish-Israeli military and intelligence links. In October 1998, the Turkish Sabah newspaper reported that Turkey and Israel signed a military accord to build a new type of ground-to-air missiles for \$80 million.⁶¹ In December 1999, Turkey, Israel, and the US carried out a second search and rescue maneuvers in Aksaz, called Reliant Mermaid 99, with Jordan as an observer.

1.4.10. Demirel's visit

At July 1999 visit of President Demirel to Israel, water was a major discussion topic. Turkey has showed a marked interest in selling water to Israel.⁶² A joint committee was set up to discuss the feasibility of Turkey's offer to sell 180

⁵⁸ “Excerpts from Interview with Yoav Biran, Senior Deputy Director General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs,” *The Web Site of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel*, 10 September 1998, <<http://www.mfa.gov.il>> (19 January 1999).

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Israel denied the two arrested men were involved in any secret mission involving Cyprus' relationship with Turkey. See Uzi Mahnaimi, “Mossad Mocked in Cyprus Spy Farce,” *The Sunday Times*, 15 November 1998.

⁶¹ Sabah, 24 October 1998.

million cubic meters of water per year to Israel. During an informal talk in Jerusalem, Demirel told the journalists:

We should look at Israel closely. This is an interesting laboratory for transforming the desert into a civilized country with legendary results: a per capita income of \$16000, a foreign trade volume of \$72 billion and a gross national product of over \$100 billion. There are many lessons Turkey could learn from this. Closer cooperation and more frequent contacts are needed in all areas.⁶³

The extraordinary flurry of high-level visits between Turkey and Israel has resulted in numerous agreements on cooperation in the domains of culture, science and education; health and agriculture; encouragement and protection of financial investments; the prevention of drug smuggling; the environment and nature protection; avoidance of dual taxation; mail and telecommunications; regulation of custom duties; economic and technical affairs. The essence of these agreements and both Turkish and Israeli motives to improve the relations will be explained in the next chapter.

⁶² "Manavgat ayı'ndan İsrail'e Su Satışı Konusunda Açıklama," *Dışışleri Gncesi*, 7 September 1999, p.22.

⁶³ Sami Kohen, "Ortadoęu'da Daha Aktif Bir Politika (A More Active Policy in the Middle East)," *Milliyet*, 18 July 1999.

CHAPTER II

THE ESSENCE AND THE MOTIVES OF THE RELATIONS

An analysis of the Turkish-Israeli rapprochement requires presenting the essence of the relations and a description of the motives behind. This chapter focuses on the reasons why Israel and Turkey signed military agreements and cooperated in various areas. It also presents the essence of the relations and what the components of this relationship are.

2.1. The Essence of the Relations

Although some analysts claim that Turkish-Israeli relations are based on military affairs solely, there are actually other supporting aspects of the relations, including cultural, financial, environmental, tourism, crime-fighting, and economic affairs. Because of these non-military aspects of the relations in addition to military dimensions, the relations between Israel and Turkey have a strategic quality.

2.1.1. Military

Turkish-Israeli military relationship touches upon many domains: air, sea, land, intelligence, and the manufacturing of aircraft, armaments, and missiles. The February agreement started an era of military cooperation between Israel and Turkey. The parties agreed to allow for members of each state's air force to fly training exercises within the other country's borders. Turkish Foreign Ministry stated that

“the Israeli and Turkish armed forces use the same type of aircraft, with the same specifications, makes technological cooperation both necessary and useful.”⁶⁴

This first military agreement became the forerunner of a number of military agreements, ranging from naval training exercises to joint missile production. The military training program was inaugurated on April 16, 1996, when eight Israeli F-16 fighter-bombers and their crews arrived at an air base outside Ankara (Akıncı) for a week of training. This exercise was of great benefit to Israel, since Turkey’s much larger area and mountainous terrain provide for more opportunity than is available in a small country such as Israel.⁶⁵ Turkish F-16 pilots went to Israel for training later in that year and had the opportunity to benefit from Israel’s systems of training in advanced technological warfare.

Although the International Institute for Strategic Studies believes that the flights of Israeli aircrafts in Turkey almost certainly included reconnaissance missions aimed at Syria and Iraq,⁶⁶ Turkish Foreign Ministry announced that the aircrafts, whether in Turkish or Israeli territory, have not been using either ammunition or electronic listening devices.⁶⁷

Israel’s aviation industries are benefiting from Turkey’s attempt to reduce its dependence on arms bought from America. Israel won a \$75-million contract for upgrading forty-eight F-5 jets. Israel also offered to sell Turkey Israeli Phalcon early

⁶⁴ “Statement from Turkish Foreign Ministry,” *The Web Site of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey*, 10 April 1996, <<http://www.mfa.gov.tr>> (9 September 1999).

⁶⁵ Michael Eisenstadt, “Turkish-Israeli Military Cooperation: An Assessment,” *Policywatch*, No:262, 24 July 1997.

⁶⁶ Stephen Kinzer, “The Mideast’s New Friendship,” *The New York Times*, 14 April 1997.

warning aircraft, and to modernize Turkey's three hundred US-made M-60 tanks.⁶⁸ F-4 modernization started in February 1997. In accordance with the agreement with Israel, a total of 54 F-4 planes will be modernized and Israel will hand over a modernized plane in every month.⁶⁹ The modernization of 26 of those planes will be made at the Israel Aircraft Industry's facilities in Tel Aviv, and 28 of those planes will be upgraded at the Turkish Air Force facilities in Eskişehir. The modernization of the F-4s will be concluded in 2003.⁷⁰

Another aspect of air force cooperation lies in the establishment of a radar network to be used to pinpoint and identify migration routes of predatory birds in fall and spring. Naval exercises were also stipulated, as well as allowing the Israeli navy to train at Turkish diving facilities for lesser costs.

Cooperation in Defence Industries

At the beginning of October 1997, evidence of a further deepening of military relations was provided with Amnon Shahak's visit, the Israeli Chief of Staff. As a result of the talks on cooperation in the defense industries, it was agreed that both countries would consider joint manufacture of the jet-propelled, 400-km.-range Delilah cruise missile.⁷¹ In addition to the fact that Turkey had already purchased fifty Popeye I missiles, in May 1997, Israel and Turkey announced that they agreed to jointly produce the Popeye II air-to-ground missile in a \$100 million deal.⁷²

⁶⁷“Statement from Turkish Foreign Ministry,” *The Web Site of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey*, 10 April 1996, <<http://www.mfa.gov.tr>> (9 September 1999).

⁶⁸ Turkish Probe, 14 March 1997.

⁶⁹ “Modernization of F-4 Planes,” *Anatolian News Agency*, 27 January 2000.

⁷⁰ “Turkey Takes Delivery of Two Warplanes Modernized in Israel,” *BBC Worldwide Monitoring*, 27 January 2000.

On the other hand, in February 1998, the commander of the Turkish Air Force visited Israel to finalize an agreement to manufacture the Israeli "Arrow" missile in Turkey.⁷³ However, the agreement was not signed. Turkey and Israel could hold only unofficial meetings about the issue as the USA was opposed to it although Turkey has showed great interest in Arrow system for three years. Turkey and Israel have started to hold official contacts on the issue when the US shed green light for the installation of the system in Turkey. The two states held their first official meeting on the US-Israeli joint production Arrow missile system in Tel Aviv on 31 March 2000.⁷⁴ A delegation from the Turkish General Staff went to Tel Aviv and met with Israeli officials. The meeting was defined as a first step taken for the purchase of Arrow system by Turkey. The Turkish delegation also made observations about the latest trials of Arrow II system in Israel.⁷⁵ Arrow missiles destroy long-range nuclear or conventional missiles in the air.

Intelligence Sharing

Israel and Turkey have shared intelligence on various matters for a number of years and this cooperation has reportedly been expanded. Intelligence cooperation comprises the exchange of information, routine briefings, and analysis of data. The two governments watch for the developments of weapons of mass destruction, for terrorism, for threats to energy sources, and for developments in the Central Asia.⁷⁶

⁷¹ *Turkish Daily News*, 14 October 1997.

⁷² Arieh O'Sullivan, "Israel, Turkey to Make Popeye Missiles," *The Jerusalem Post*, 18 May 1997.

⁷³ "Israel, Turkey Hold Talks on Arrow Missile Defense System Purchase," *BBC Worldwide Monitoring*, 31 March 2000.

⁷⁴ "Arrow Missile Defense System Talks between Turkey and Israel," *BBC Worldwide Monitoring*, 1 April 2000.

⁷⁵ "Turkish-Israeli Talks on Arrow Missile Defense System Purchase," *BBC Worldwide Monitoring*, 31 March 2000.

Along with intelligence sharing, Israel had also advised Turkey on antiterrorism methods. However, Israeli governments have avoided taking a direct and active role in Turkey's war with the PKK (Kurdish Workers Party), Abdullah Öcalan's separatist Kurdish movement. "Israel does not want to open a new front with terrorism, because we have enough problems already,"⁷⁷ said Yossi Melman, an Israeli journalist who has written a book on Israel's intelligence agencies. In 1999, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also drew a distinction between antiterrorism assistance to Turkey and Turkey's capture of Abdullah Öcalan. "Israel's activity does not include any role in the struggle against Öcalan, and we did not cooperate with any element in apprehending Öcalan," Netanyahu told a news conference. "We always fight terrorism, and we will always fight terrorism, but we certainly had no part in the capture of Öcalan."⁷⁸ Although Netanyahu denied any Israeli role, PKK apparently chose Israel as its target in response to rumors that Mossad, the Israeli secret service, had played a role in Turkey's capture of their leader. PKK started Europe wide protests and 3 PKK militants shot dead by Israeli guards when some PKK militants tried to enter the Israeli consulate in Berlin.⁷⁹

2.1.2. Civilian Cooperation

Turkish-Israeli alignment is not merely limited to security and military concerns. Alongside close-military ties, there is extensive cooperation in the civilian domain that creates the basis for further expansion in the relationship between Israel and Turkey. These include interaction in the domains of culture, education and

⁷⁶ Amikam Nachmani, "The Remarkable Turkish-Israeli Tie," *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol.5, No.2, June 1998.

⁷⁷ Joel Greenberg, "Israel Denies Role but Fears Reprisal for Ties to Turkey," *The New York Times*, 18 February 1999.

⁷⁸ Roger Cohen, "3 Kurds Shot Dead by Israeli Guards at Berlin Protest," *The New York Times*, 18 February 1999.

science; avoidance of dual taxation; regulation of trade free of customs duties; technical and economic cooperation; encouragement and protection of financial investments; health and agriculture; mail and telecommunications; efforts to stop the smuggling of drugs and narcotic substances; and the environment and nature protection.⁸⁰

Economy

An Israeli official pointed out that both countries had market-oriented economies that were complementary in nature.⁸¹ The conclusion of a free trade area agreement on 16 March 1996 opened new possibilities for economic relations between Turkey and Israel.⁸² This agreement reflected the continuation of the deepening economic ties between the two countries by making existing trade cheaper and attracting potential new trade. Turkish-Israeli bilateral trade is today the largest between any two countries in the Middle East.⁸³

The economic component of the relations has been important for Turkish economy. Turkish exports to Israel have increased thirteen-fold since 1989, from \$30 million that year to \$390 million in 1997. Overall trade volume has grown seven-fold during this period, from \$90 million to \$260 million.⁸⁴ By 1998, Israel was Turkey's largest market in the Middle East and North Africa.

⁷⁹ "Israelis Kill Four in Mob," *Turkish Daily News*, 18 February 1999.

⁸⁰ Amikam Nachmani, "The Remarkable Turkish-Israeli Tie," *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol.5, No.2, June 1998

⁸¹ "Turkey, Israel to Scrap Barriers," *Financial Times*, 12 March 1996.

⁸² Neill Lochery, "Israel and Turkey: Deepening Ties and Strategic Implications, 1995-98," *Israel Affairs* Vol.5 No.1 (Fall 1998), p.48.

⁸³ Alan Makovsky, "The New Activism in Turkish Foreign Policy," *SAIS Review* (Winter-Spring 1999), p.102.

⁸⁴ Özlenen Sezer and H. Tülay Güzel, *İsrail Ülke Etüdü* (İstanbul: İstanbul Ticaret Odası Yayın No22, 1997) and Alan Makovsky, "The New Activism in Turkish Foreign Policy," *Insight Turkey*, Vol.1, No.2, April-June 1999, p.14.

In February 2000, Turkish-Israeli Joint Economic Commission (JEC) met in Tel Aviv and a memorandum of understanding was signed between Turkish State Minister Hasan Gemici and Israeli Minister of Trade and Industry Ron Cohen in a reception held by Ahmet Üzümcü, Turkish Ambassador to Israel. The memorandum aims at increasing the existing trade volume between the two countries, which is 900 million dollars to 2 billion dollars.⁸⁵ The two ministers said that they will reach this goal soon and the document signed opens a new stage in the relations of the two countries.

There were three major issues in the JEC meeting; prospect of Israel's purchase of Manavgat water, Israeli participation in Turkey's Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP) and formation of a free-trade zone.⁸⁶ The main results of the JEC meeting, which also was reflected in the memorandum of understanding, are as follows:

Manavgat water: Turkey once again reiterated that it is ready to sell water from Manavgat brook to meet the water shortage in Israel. Israel said that it would give a response to Turkey as soon as possible.

Free trade zones: The two countries declared the establishment of free trade zones which will enable Turkey and Israel to export goods to the US without custom duties and quotas. Israeli officials promised that they would launch efforts to get the support of the US for the zones planned to be set up in Turkey.

⁸⁵ "Turkey Keen on Economic Cooperation with Israel," *Xinhua News Agency*, 6 February 2000.

⁸⁶ "State Minister Gemici Due To Israel," *Anadolu News Agency*, 5 February 2000.

GAP projects: It was decided to examine the participation of Israeli firms in the irrigation project in Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP). However, Turkey did not give a commitment to give these projects to Israeli firms. Turkey wants to win certain tenders of Israel in return to GAP projects. No result was taken about giving the construction project of Ashdod part to Turkish firms. The two countries also reached a consensus about undertaking investments together in third countries.⁸⁷

Tourism

In addition to these relations, Israeli tourism to Turkey has grown enormously. For example, more than a quarter of a million Israelis have visited Turkey during 1997 and became an integral part of Turkey's tourist trade. Erkan Mumcu, Tourism Minister of Turkey, went to Israel on a four-day official visit in November 1999 and met with Israeli Tourism Minister Amnon Lipkin Sahak.⁸⁸ Mumcu said Turkey and Israel were developing a model titled "East Mediterranean" and were getting ready to present this to world tourism market. He and his Israeli counterpart agreed on a travel route that will start in Athens, pass through Istanbul, Ephesus, Antalya, Haifa, and end in Jerusalem. Israel and Turkey will also cooperate in the restoration of historical sites, Mumcu added.⁸⁹

In May 2000, Turkish-Israeli Tourism Delegations' Meeting was held in Istanbul with the participation of representatives of Turkish and Israeli private sectors. The two sides decided to encourage joint investments in the tourism sector

⁸⁷ "Turkish-Israeli Economic Committee Signs Memorandum on Free Tradezone," *BBC Monitoring Service*, 17 February 2000.

⁸⁸ "Tourism Minister Meets with Israeli Counterpart," *IPR Strategic Business Information Database*, 28 November 1999.

and a joint declaration was issued at the end of the meeting. The declaration emphasized that promotion activities would be accelerated to enable third countries to join tourism cooperation between Turkey and Israel.⁹⁰ After the meeting, responding to questions of journalists, Mumcu said that every year 150 thousand to 500 thousand Israeli tourists come to Turkey to spend their holidays. In his part, Israeli Tourism Minister underlined the importance of religious belief tourism to mark the 2000th anniversary of Jesus Christ's birth.⁹¹

Promotions also started in the US to start a tourist exchange programme between Turkey and Israel. "Tourists who come from overseas countries have special interests in religion, sports and culture. They generally stay longer than ten days and want to visit cultural and religious sites. These religious centers are mostly gathered in Anatolia and Israel. Egypt can also be a part of this programme with its old civilization," Mumcu explained.⁹²

2.2. Motives

The Middle East can be described as a region filled with antagonism, enmity, and armed conflict. In such a region, the driving force behind the growing Turkish-Israeli relations can be found in the relations of these two countries with their regional neighbors. One of the most important aims of the Turkish-Israeli rapprochement is to deter other states from taking hostile actions against either Israel or Turkey.

⁸⁹ "Turkey and Israel to Cooperate in Tourism," *Anadolu News Agency*, 20 December 1999.

⁹⁰ "Turkish-Israeli Tourism Delegations' Meeting Ends," *Anadolu News Agency*, 19 May 2000.

⁹¹ "Turkish-Israeli Tourism Delegations Meeting," *Anadolu News Agency*, 18 May 2000.

⁹² "Turkey and Israel to Cooperate in Tourism," *Anadolu News Agency*, 20 December 1999.

2.2.1. Turkey's Motivations

As one senior Turkish military official stated “we are surrounded on all sides by trouble. We are in the hot seat. It is critical for us to jump outside this circle of chaos and find friends in the region. Israel was the perfect choice.”⁹³ Simply, Turkey was looking for an ally in the region and as Daniel Pipes asks “what better ally than Israel?”⁹⁴

Following the signing of a military cooperation agreement in April 1996, a Turkish Foreign Ministry statement said “we believe that Turkish-Israeli cooperation will contribute to regional peace, stability, as well as to the furthering on the Middle East peace process.”⁹⁵ Domestic terrorism, territorial conflicts, natural resource disputes, clashing interests, and historical enmities: all play a central role in Turkey and Israel's calculations in terms of their regional policies.

According to General Çevik Bir, former deputy chief of the Turkish General Staff,

Turkey and Israel inhabit a region troubled by security concerns that include religious fundamentalism, terrorism, illicit trafficking of arms and drugs, transfer of weapons of mass destruction, proliferation of nuclear weapons, and mass movements of refugees. These two states thus have overlapping security interests as well as political and economic interests.⁹⁶

For Turkey, Israel was a natural ally, both because of a shared distrust of Arab states and to counterbalance a threat from an anti-Turkish strategic alliance such as between Greece and Syria.

⁹³ John Pomfret, “Turkey Strengthens Ties to Israel,” *The Washington Post*, 2 June 1996.

⁹⁴ Daniel Pipes, “The Real New Middle East,” *Commentary* Vol.106 No.5 (November 1998) and “A New Axis: The Emerging Turkish-Israeli Entente,” *The National Interest* Vol.50 (Winter 1997/98).

⁹⁵ Statement from Turkey's Foreign Ministry, 10 April 1996.

⁹⁶ On 26 October 1999, General Çevik Bir (ret.), former deputy chief of the Turkish General Staff, addressed The Washington Institute's Policy Forum on Turkish-Israeli relations and Turkish security

Israel is a natural partner to Turkey's strategic concerns—namely, fear of expanding radical, extremist Islamic, and Russian influence. Radical Iraq, long-range missile proliferation, and weapons of mass destruction are further issues of concern in Ankara and Jerusalem. As Efraim Inbar argues, “the dangers of missile and nuclear proliferation have generated greater openness to exploration of alternative cooperative and regional security arrangements.”⁹⁷ Both countries have parallel disputes with Syria, a country that encourages terror and has historic territorial claims against its neighbors.

From the Turkish perspective, close relations with Israel may provide easier access to Israeli technology and know-how. For Turkey, the Israelis have provided the military equipment that requires modernizing its army at very competitive prices. Cooperation with Israel also brings Turkey a regional ally to cope with regional insecurities. According to Hasan Tahsin, an Arab journalist, it allows Turkey to acquire a friend, something Turkey is lacking in international politics.⁹⁸ As another reason for the Turkish rapprochement, Dietrich Jung and Wolfango Piccoli offer that “the enhanced cooperation in civilian domains [between Turkey and Israel] serves the interests of Turkey's Kemalist elite well in demonstrating Ankara's continued orientation towards the West and its commitment to secularism.”⁹⁹

in the region. See “Special Policy Forum Report: Reflections on Turkish-Israeli Relations and Turkish Security,” *Policywatch*, No:422, 5 November 1999.

⁹⁷ Efraim Inbar, “Contours of Israel's New Strategic Thinking,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Spring 1996, p.59.

⁹⁸ Hasan Tahsin, “The Cost of Turkey's Israeli Connection,” *Saudi Gazette*, Jeddah, 24 September 1998.

⁹⁹ Dietrich Jung and Wolfango Piccoli, “The Turkish-Israeli Alignment,” *Security Dialogue*, Vol.31, No.1, March 2000.

Turkey also expects that the Israeli government and lobbies will work on its behalf in Washington. Turkey has always been well aware of Israel's strong support in the US. For example, according to the Israeli newspapers, Evren Gündiren, then the head of the Turkish mission to Israel, expressed Turkey's appreciation of Israeli opposition to pro-Armenian bill in the US Senate when he met with Foreign Minister Moshe Arens on 22 May 1990.¹⁰⁰

As Şükrü Elekdağ explains that "The Israeli lobby in the US is far superior to all other ethnic lobbies put together. Whenever this lobby has worked for us, Turkish interests have been perfectly protected against the fools in the US. The development of Turkish-Israeli relations and the formalization of their de facto alliance will place this lobby permanently on our side."¹⁰¹

2.2.2. Israel's Motivations

Israel is a tiny country, greatly outnumbered by the surrounding Arab states. In an atmosphere of growing suspicion and distrust of the peace process and an accumulation of missiles by Israel's enemies, Israel sought out a military relationship with Turkey. As Alvin Rubinstein explains "the perennial shadow cast by proximate Arab military forces means that any territorial concessions made by Israel concerning Golan and the West Bank would result in far less favorable lines of defense, established nearer to its center of population and industry, and in circumstances that would complicate defensive dispositions in the event of a simultaneous attack from

¹⁰⁰ The Jerusalem Post, 29 May 1990

¹⁰¹ *Milliyet*, 14 December 1994.

several directions.”¹⁰² The rapprochement with Turkey is a method to reduce these vulnerabilities and to compensate for this lack in strategic depth.

On the other hand, quest for security has been a part of Israel’s political and military doctrine since its establishment. Although the US has preserved Israel’s security for decades, Tel Aviv also needs regional friends to balance its hostile enemies in the region. Efraim Inbar and Shmuel Sandler claim that Israel cannot rely on its own efforts to withstand the new challenges emerging in the Middle East.¹⁰³ Therefore, it can be said that the developing relations with Turkey is also a natural outcome of Israel’s quest for security in the Middle East.

From the Israeli perspective, cooperation with Turkey may accelerate its geo-cultural integration in the region. Additionally, it may help Israel to penetrate into the markets of the ex-Soviet republics. For Israel, a developing relationship with Turkey serves the purpose of gaining a regional ally in the face of continued Arab hostility. Indeed, Israel and Turkey share a ‘common sense of otherness’ in a region dominated by Arabs and non-democratic regimes.¹⁰⁴

Israel has also financially benefited from sales to Turkey of arms and weapon technology transfers. Over the next twenty-five years, Turkey plans to spend \$150 billion to modernize its military and Israel wants to sell as much as it can. Israel’s position as the world’s fifth arms producer fits with Turkish plans for arms

¹⁰² Alvin Rubinstein, “Transformation: External Determinant,” in *The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Perspectives*, ed. Alvin Rubinstein, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991), p.63

¹⁰³ Efraim Inbar and Shmuel Sandler, “The Changing Israeli Strategic Equation: Toward a Security Regime,” BESA Security and Policy Studies No.23, June 1995.

modernization. This also allows Turkey to obtain weapons and technology that Turkey would not be able to get in Europe or the USA, because of its human rights record and its dispute with Greece. As Efraim Inbar pointed out that “the United States as well as other Western powers are not always reliable weapons suppliers for political and various reasons.”¹⁰⁵ Therefore, Turkey’s search for a guaranteed supply and upgrading of modernized and updated technological weaponry can be fulfilled through its military relationship with Israel.

Although both Israel and Turkey hope to achieve certain goals by maintaining a close relationship, the reasons and motivations behind the Turkish-Israeli rapprochement can also be found in their relations with their regional neighbors. Since both Israel and Turkey have substantial disagreements and disputes with Syria, Iraq, and Iran; it can be understood why the two have initiated closer relations.

All of these factors provide for a strong basis for continuation and strengthening of the Turkish-Israeli relations. However, increasing ties between Turkey and Israel have important implications not just for those two countries but also for the Middle East as a whole. Most of the other countries in the region viewed Turkish-Israeli rapprochement as a threat to their interests. The repercussions of the Turkish-Israeli relations will be explained in detail in the next chapter.

¹⁰⁴ Alan Makovsky, “Israeli-Turkish Relations: A Turkish Periphery Strategy?” in *Reluctant Neighbour: Turkey’s Role in the Middle East*, ed. Henri Barkey (Washington DC: The United States Institute of Peace, 1996), p.169

¹⁰⁵ Efraim Inbar, “The Turkish-Israeli Strategic Partnership,” Lecture at the Woodrow Wilson Center, Washington DC, 16 September 1998.

CHAPTER III

REFLECTIONS ON TURKISH-ISRAELI RELATIONS

The scale and the pace of the development between Turkey and Israel have meant that the reflections of the Turkish-Israeli relations have not only been felt in Jerusalem and Ankara but also in the Middle East and beyond. Indeed, this rapprochement has affected the course of the Middle Eastern politics at the end of the twentieth century to a great degree. It forced many states to change their strategic outlooks.

3.1. General Views on Turkish-Israeli Relations

Many Arab countries see the Turkish-Israeli relations as a “renewed Baghdad Pact”¹⁰⁶. Although Turkey and Israel have stated that the rapprochement between the two countries is not aimed any third party, many Arab states viewed it as Turkey’s second betrayal of the Arabs in fifty years.¹⁰⁷ The Arab League, meeting on September 16, 1998, harshly criticized the Turkish-Israeli ties and claimed that it “exposes Arab national interests to real danger and brings the region back to the policy of axes and alliances.”¹⁰⁸ In this meeting Arab foreign ministers called on

¹⁰⁶ Ofra Bengio and Gencer Özcan, “Changing Relations: Turkish-Israeli-Arab Triangle,” *Perceptions*, March-May 2000, p.138.

¹⁰⁷ According to Arab states, the first one was the recognition of Israel by Turkey in 1949. See, *Ha'aretz*, 3 June 1997.

¹⁰⁸ “The Turkish-Israeli Affair,” *The Economist*, 19 September 1998 and Jennifer Washburn, “Power Bloc: Turkey and Israel Lock Arms,” *The Progressive Magazine*, December 1998.

Turkey to end its military relationship with Israel “due to the danger it entails to the security of Arab countries.”¹⁰⁹

The Arab states and Iran hold deep-seated suspicions of Turkey, for several reasons: “first, it is the former imperial power in the region; second, it is too closely allied with the West; and third, it has abandoned the teachings of Islam for the sake of creating a Western secular, modern state.”¹¹⁰ Furthermore, “Turkish foreign policy has always been designed so as to give priority to relations with the West rather than the Middle East, and Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East has always been considered an extension of the Western-oriented Turkish foreign policy.”¹¹¹

Although Arab states dislike the Turkish-Israeli relationship, General Çevik Bir, former deputy chief of the Turkish General Staff, claimed, “Turkish-Israeli military cooperation was initiated to promote peace and stability in the Middle East. It is not an alliance, however. Because of their leading roles in the region, Turkey and Israel have a responsibility to establish a model for relations among regional countries.”¹¹²

According to Ofra Bengio and Gencer Özcan, about the Turkish-Israeli relations, the Arab fear was

“That the alignment would increase the strategic threat to the Arab countries in general and the more vulnerable ones in particular, namely Syria and Iraq,

¹⁰⁹ Foreign Broadcast Information Service, “Egypt: Arab League Issues Resolution,” *FBIS-NES-98-260*, 17 September 1998.

¹¹⁰ Meltem Müftüler-Baç, *Turkey's Relations with a Changing Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p.38.

¹¹¹ Nur Bilge Criss and Pinar Bilgin, “Turkish Foreign Policy Toward the Middle East,” *The Middle East Review of International Affairs Journal*, issue.1, January 1997, p.2.

That it would further fragment the Arab world by bringing to the alignment an Arab country, namely Jordan, and

That it would jeopardize the Arab-Israeli peace process or at least weaken the Arab partners' bargaining power by providing Israel with new strategic depth, as it were, and thus strengthen its hand, and its intransigence at the negotiating table."¹¹³

"Turkey's efforts to allay Arab and Muslim fears have not worked."¹¹⁴ Having received strong and uniform criticism from the Arab states for the Turkish intention, Turkey announced that this rapprochement is not against any country in the region.¹¹⁵ However, this statement did not persuade Arab countries who say that "such a statement does not reflect the fact that all military alliances are born because of a perceived need and threat from an enemy or a potential enemy. Therefore Turkish assertions about the alliance with Israel, a country hostile to the Arab states, are not very credible."¹¹⁶

3.2. Arab Media

Arab media's overemphasis, exaggeration, and in fact disinformation on the military relations between Turkey and Israel has created the wrong image and perception of the relations between the two countries. Radical Arabs labeled the Turkish-Israeli cooperation as a "satanic alliance"¹¹⁷ although Turkey points out that

¹¹² "Special Policy Forum Report: Reflections on Turkish-Israeli Relations and Turkish Security," *Policywatch*, No:422, 5 November 1999.

¹¹³ Ofra Bengio and Gencer Özcan, "Changing Relations: Turkish-Israeli-Arab Triangle," *Perceptions*, March-May 2000, p.135.

¹¹⁴ Jeremy Salt, "Turkey's Military Democracy," *Current History*, Vol.98 Iss.625 (February 1999), p78.

¹¹⁵ "Turkey Says Ties with Israel Are No Threat to Iran," *AP*, 18 January 2000.

¹¹⁶ "Turkey-Israel Alliance and Arab Policy Towards Turkey," *Arabic News*, 15 September 1998, <<http://www.arabicnews.com/ansub/Daily/Day/980915/1998091528.html>> (5 May 1999).

¹¹⁷ The writer of this thesis travelled Egypt, Syria, and Jordan in summer 1997 and saw this phrase in some newspapers and magazines. See also *Dış Basında Türkiye-İsrail Askeri İşbirliği Anlaşmasına*

the Turkish-Israeli military agreements are similar to ones that Turkey has signed with various countries¹¹⁸, including a number of Arab states.

Some newspapers and magazines in the Arab countries depicted the relationship among Turkey, Israel and the USA as a “satanic triangle”.¹¹⁹ According to Arabic media, the dangers of the Turkish-Israeli developing ties are clear and the ramifications are long term. They claimed that once such an alliance takes hold, it would do untold damage to Arab states' interests. More money and resources will have to be wasted (as usual) on buying weapons to deal with this new threat, which will slow down the rate of political, social, and economic progress for the Arab states as a whole. One journalist also added that “some Arab states may find temporary benefits from this alliance as the US dangles economic carrots to some in the hope that they will turn a blind eye, buying time for the alliance to develop. But the threat is clear.”¹²⁰

Some radicals in Arab media also claimed that the US ‘dual containment’ policy against Iraq and Iran failed and that the US needs to maintain a balance of power in the region that is favorable to its goals. The Turkish-Israeli alliance, they say, has served the US interests by squeezing Iran, Iraq, Syria and other regional countries.¹²¹

Tepkiler (5 Nisan-6 Mayıs 1996), Ankara: TC Başbakanlık Basın-Yayın ve Enformasyon Genel Müdürlüğü, 1996.

¹¹⁸ Osman Metin Öztürk, “Türkiye-İsrail Askeri İşbirliği Üzerine,” *Avrasya Dosyası* Vol.5 No.1 (Spring 1999), p.255.

¹¹⁹ Some of these magazines were published in Southern Cyprus. See *Dış Basında Türkiye-İsrail Askeri İşbirliği Anlaşmasına Tepkiler (5 Nisan-6 Mayıs 1996)*, Ankara: TC Başbakanlık Basın-Yayın ve Enformasyon Genel Müdürlüğü, 1996.

¹²⁰ Hasan Tahsin, “The Cost of Turkey’s Israeli Connection,” *Saudi Gazette*, Jeddah, 24 September 1998.

From this radical Arab viewpoint, the Turkish-Israeli military agreements have larger geopolitical and geostrategic objectives, and its regional implications are quite serious. Since the exercises of Israel and Turkey enable both air forces to become familiar with the procedures and tactics used by their counterparts, this could greatly facilitate cooperation in wartime.¹²² Therefore, this 'alliance' must not be allowed to develop, and a comprehensive strategy should be developed to deal with it. Most Arabs think that if this alliance is not prevented in an effective matter from developing, the Arab states may face a monster¹²³ that will once again attempt to prevent their development.

3.3. Reflections in the Middle East

"Theoretically speaking the Arabs had three different ways of fighting what they called the alliance: forming a counter alliance, bringing Turkey into an alliance with them to the exclusion of Israel, or bringing pressures to bear on Turkey to break off its alliance with Israel. None of these has succeeded or even seriously followed."¹²⁴ The Turkish-Israeli relations have generated new rapprochements in the Middle East. Syrian-Iraqi relations have improved; Iran signed a series of trade agreements with Syria; and Iran's relations with Egypt improved.¹²⁵ Despite these steps, "the Middle Eastern response to Turkish-Israeli relations features much verbosity but very little action."¹²⁶

¹²¹ "Turkey-Israel Alliance and Arab Policy Towards Turkey," *Arabic News*, 15 September 1998.

¹²² Dietrich Jung and Wolfango Piccoli, "The Turkish-Israeli Alignment," *Security Dialogue*, Vol.31, No.1, March 2000, p.96.

¹²³ Engin Arıkan, "Arap Basınında Türkiye Aleyhtarı Tepkiler (1 Ocak-31 Temmuz 1997)," *Uluslararası İlişkilerde Olaylar ve Yorumlar* 7:28 (Spring 1997).

¹²⁴ Ofra Bengio and Gencer Özcan, "Changing Relations: Turkish-Israeli-Arab Triangle," *Perceptions*, March-May 2000, p.146

¹²⁵ "Syrian-Iraqi-Iranian Rapprochement in Light of Israeli-Turkish Alliance Viewed," *SWB ME/2951 MED/3* No.5, 21 June 1997.

¹²⁶ Amikam Nachmani, "The Remarkable Turkish-Israeli Tie," *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol.5, No.2, June 1998.

The Israeli-Turkish relationship has contributed to potential change in the region and the effects of these developing ties can be seen across the Middle East. The regional states most critical of Turkish-Israeli relations are Syria, Iran, and Iraq. These states are also the three regional countries with whom Israel is most concerned. Turkey's Middle Eastern relations are also centered on its political, ideological, territorial, and geographical disputes with these three states.

3.3.1. Syria

Syria has lost its superpower patron after the end of Cold War and its economy is in need of support. In addition, as Şükrü Elekdağ pointed out "Turkey has a clear superiority over Syria as regards a comparison of the two countries armed forces."¹²⁷

Syria opposed the rapprochement between Israel and Turkey because its impact was both on its northern and southern fronts. According to Syria, Turkish-Israeli cooperation was "not only against Syria alone, but against the entire Arab world"¹²⁸ or all the Muslims.¹²⁹ The Syrian Vice President, Abdülhalim Haddam, described the Turkish-Israeli rapprochement as "the greatest threat to the Arabs since 1948".¹³⁰ After the Military Education and Cooperation Agreement of 1996, Syria's Al-Ba'th newspaper claimed "the unannounced alliance aims not only at burying the

¹²⁷ Şükrü Elekdağ, "2 ½ War Strategy," *Perceptions*, Vol.1 No.1, March-May 1996, p.51

¹²⁸ "Syrian Official Says Turkish-Israeli Alliance Has Serious Effects in the Region," *SWB ME/2945 MED/11* No.29, 14 June 1997.

¹²⁹ "Syrian Paper Stresses Coordination with Iran against Turkish-Israeli Alliance," *SWB ME/2950 MED/3* No.6, 20 June 1997.

¹³⁰ Ha'aretz, 3 June 1997.

peace process but also at achieving new gains at the expense of the Arabs and their legitimate rights.”¹³¹

Syria initiated diplomatic contacts with Iraq and Iran to counterbalance Turkey in mid-1997. It opened borders with Iraq, and signed a military cooperation agreement with Iran.¹³² Iraq also expressed its willingness to ally itself strategically to Syria. The rapprochement among Syria, Iraq, and Iran was approved by Russia, too.¹³³ In September 1997 Turkey undertook an operation in Northern Iraq and this was simultaneously protested by Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Russia. Although Turkish operations in Northern Iraq started before Turkish-Israeli cooperation came to the fore, they were perceived as an Israeli phenomenon that takes its roots from the Israeli operations in Lebanon. The Syrian, Iraqi, and the Iranian governments linked Turkish operations in Northern Iraq to the Turkish-Israeli rapprochement.¹³⁴

In July 1998, Syria’s military Chief of Staff Ali Aslan said that the “Turkish-Israeli alliance is aimed at controlling the Arab nation, threatening its national security and exerting pressure on Arabs in general and Syria in particular to accept expansionist Israeli plans.”¹³⁵ From the Syrian point of view, encirclement of Syria lies at the heart of this growing alliance.

In May 1998, Turkish President Süleyman Demirel declared that Syria was agitating other Arab and Muslim capitals against Turkish-Israeli ties, although he

¹³¹ Turkish Probe, 16 May 1997, p.13.

¹³² “Israeli Radio Comments on Syrian Vice-presidents visit to Iran,” *SWB ME/2950 MED/3* No.7, 20 June 1997.

¹³³ “Syrian-Iraqi-Iranian Rapprochement in Light of Israeli-Turkish Alliance Viewed,” *SWB ME/2951 MED/3* No.5, 21 June 1997.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

added that such actions would not affect the relationship between Turkey and Israel.¹³⁶ Mainly at Syrian instigation, Arab League gatherings in recent years have often denounced Turkish-Israeli relations, Turkish water policy¹³⁷, and Turkish operations in Northern Iraq. Although Syria led the campaigns for condemnation of Turkey, other Arab states tried to tone down the wording of the condemnations to avoid break with Ankara.¹³⁸

As long as Syria makes territorial claims on Turkey and its support continues at any form, it is apparent that it will be difficult to improve Turkish-Syrian relations. For example, Syrian Foreign Minister Faruk Al-Shara complained, "Israel and Turkey insist on defining resistance movements as terrorists as well. In citing excuses such as the PKK and the opposition movement in Southern Lebanon, respectively, Israel and Turkey attempt to present all armed movements as terrorism. Syria cannot accept this."¹³⁹ Therefore, terrorism linked to Syria remains an important factor blocking the peace in the Middle East.

As a close neighbor, Turkey has observed the evolution of the Middle East peace process with interest because an Israeli-Syrian peace would entail dramatic changes to the strategic picture of the Middle East. Çevik Bir claimed, "If there is a peace agreement between Israel and Syria, it would be a result of the agreement

¹³⁵ Alan Makovsky, "Turkey, Syria, and the Kurdish Dilemma: Defusing the Turkish-Syrian Crisis, Whose Triumph?" *Middle East Insight*, January-February 1999, p.16.

¹³⁶ Turkish Press Review, 7 May 1998.

¹³⁷ Formal Declaration of the Arab League summits accuse Turkey of "using water as a weapon" against the Arabs. See Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Turkey's Quest for Peaceful Nuclear Power," *The Nonproliferation Review* (Spring-Summer 1997), p.40.

¹³⁸ *Suriye Krizi ve Dünya Basını* (Ankara, TC Başbakanlık Basın-Yayın ve Enformasyon Genel Müdürlüğü, 1998).

¹³⁹ Interview in *El-Safir* (Lebanon), 20 November 1995.

between Turkey and Israel.”¹⁴⁰ However, it can be predicted that an Israeli-Syrian peace will affect the Turkish-Israeli relations and the developing atmosphere of friendship and cooperation between the two countries because an Israeli-Syrian peace will negate at least some of Israel’s reasons for military ties with Turkey. On the other hand, given the historical context of Israel’s relations with the regional states, it will be a long time before any type of warm peace developments between Syria and Israel.

The Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon and its impact on the Syrian-Israeli negotiations became a heated debate. Before the death of Syrian President Hafez al-Asad, his son Bashar al-Assad stated that Israel is committing a mistake if it thinks its unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon is equivalent to peace with Syria. Although he welcomed Israel’s intention to withdraw from south Lebanon, he warned Israel that its withdrawal would not hide the many problems which are still pending in the peace process, especially the Syrian demand that Israel has to return back the whole of the Syrian Golan.¹⁴¹

Without Syrian acquiescence, Israel can never become fully integrated into the Middle East. In addition to this, Israel’s relationship with Syria is very important for the security of Israel because it shares a border with Israel. Syria has historically been able to do most physical damage to the Jewish state. There is a mistrustful atmosphere between these two states and there have always been tensions in the border. Although Syria is implacable enemy of Israel, the military balance of power

¹⁴⁰ “Special Policy Forum Report: Reflections on Turkish-Israeli Relations and Turkish Security,” *Policywatch*, No:422, 5 November 1999.

¹⁴¹ “Bashar al-Assad to WSJ: Israel is mistaken if it thinks its withdrawal from Lebanon is equivalent to peace with Syria.” *Arabic News*, 29 April 2000.

is in favor of Tel Aviv.¹⁴² Syrians are very much aware the fact that their military hardware is outmoded and old. Syrians also thinks that the Turkish-Israeli rapprochement is a means of putting pressure on Syria. Damascus fears that Israel may have the use of Turkish territory in any armed conflict with Syria.

In short, in terms of its relevance to Syria, Turkish-Israeli rapprochement is meant to warn Damascus to avoid any regional adventures. It serves as a deterrent to any hostile action from Syria. As Çevik Bir argues, the military agreement signed between Turkey and Israel “paved the way for the resolution of the Turkish-Syrian crisis of Autumn 1998. Syria’s more responsive attitude toward Turkey since then proves that the Turkish-Israeli agreement works.”¹⁴³

3.3.2. Iran

Turkey has had uneasy relations with the fundamentalist regime in Iran, which it suspects of supporting terrorists inside Turkey¹⁴⁴ and from which it has experienced political rivalry in Central Asia. The principal problem Turkey has with Iran is its hostility toward secularism, which Turkey sees as a threat to its own secular establishment.

Iran has shown no signs of joining in the peace process, and is continuing to support terrorist groups that are fighting against Israel.¹⁴⁵ On the other hand, Tel Aviv and Ankara are greatly concerned about Iran’s potential to produce weapons of

¹⁴² The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1998-1999* (London: Oxford University Press, 1998).

¹⁴³ “Special Policy Forum Report: Reflections on Turkish-Israeli Relations and Turkish Security,” *Policywatch*, No:422, 5 November 1999.

¹⁴⁴ James Wylie, “What Future for the Turco-Israeli Alliance,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, August 1996.

mass destruction. The exact size of Iran's ballistic missile arsenal remains unknown and Iran is in the process of attempting to acquire long-range ballistic missiles. Iran is also widely believed to be pursuing a nuclear weapons programme.¹⁴⁶

Iran's reaction to the 1996 Military Training Cooperation Agreement was very negative, at all levels. It was denounced as an American-Israeli attempt to encircle Iran. In addition, during the Eight Summit of the Organization of the Islamic Conference in Tehran, 9-11 December 1997, Hashemi Rafsanjani condemned Ankara's behavior as hostile to Arab and Muslim interests in his speech.¹⁴⁷

Iran and Syria hoped to deepen their strategic ties against Turkish-Israeli ties. Syrian President Hafez al-Asad visited Tehran on 31 July-1 August 1997. This illustrated the importance to Syria of such ties because it was Asad's second such visit since the Iranian revolution. (The first one was after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in September 1990.)¹⁴⁸ Syria needs close relations with Iran and this visit confirmed the depth of the relations between the two countries.

Iran strongly reacted to the joint maneuvers conducted by Turkey, US and Israel in the Mediterranean Sea in January 1998. A newspaper article claimed, "Turkey which has turned its back towards its Muslim brothers and neighbors has opted for cooperation with Israel, thereby endorsing the Zionist aggression and their

¹⁴⁵ The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Strategic Survey 1997/98* (London: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.168.

¹⁴⁶ The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1995/96* (London: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp.122 and 125; "Russia: Specialists to Train Iranians for Bushehr Nuclear Plant," *FBIS-SOV-96-057*, 22 March 1996, p.14.

¹⁴⁷ *Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB)*, ME/3112 MED/17, 30 December 1997.

¹⁴⁸ Alain Gresh, "Turkish-Israeli-Syrian Relations and Their Impact on the Middle East," *Middle East Journal* Vol.52 No.2 (Spring 1998).

hostilities against the Palestinians in particular and the Muslim world in general.”¹⁴⁹ About the Reliant Mermaid 99, Iranian media said that “Joint maneuvers with the Zionist regime will bring no benefit to the nations of the region except instability, threat to the region and creation of an atmosphere of mistrust.”¹⁵⁰ They thought that the USA was using the maneuvers as a means to bring Turkey and Israel closer together while trying to calm the Islamic world's fears by portraying them as a sea rescue operation.¹⁵¹ Iranian media also claimed that the active military cooperation between Israel and Turkey is a predetermined move to subdue the countries of the region.

From the Iranian point of view, no Muslim country should have ties with the Jewish state. Tehran has had deep concerns over Ankara's growing ties with Israel and believed that Turkish-Israeli relations are carried out under the guidance and direction of the United States. Naturally, Iran views the rapprochement negatively, and this has served to enhance Iranian suspicions of Turkey. Although Turkish Foreign Minister İsmail Cem assured his Iranian counterpart Kamal Kharrazi that “it is not possible for any foreign force, including Israel, to adopt any hostile acts toward any of our neighbors from our territory,”¹⁵² Tehran fears that Turkish-Israeli cooperation has brought Israel to its border and the Jewish state can use the Turkish territory to attack her.

¹⁴⁹ “Iranian Security Considerations in the Wake of Joint Manouveres of Turkey, US and Israel,” *Tehran Times*, 13 January 1998.

¹⁵⁰ “Turkish-Israeli Maneuvres Threaten Region, Iranian Media,” BBC Worldwide Monitoring, 15 December 1999.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² “Turkey Says Ties with Israel Are No Threat to Iran,” *AP*, 18 January 2000.

3.3.3. Iraq

Iraq is clearly no friend of Israel. Both Turkey and Israel supported the anti-Iraq coalition in the Gulf War. During the war, Iraq opened the second front by sending its Scud missiles to Israeli territory. The Gulf War destructed Iraq's military but Saddam's desires continue to play a major role in the region's political future. Therefore, Saddam poses a threat to both countries. Iraq believes that Israel is a foreign presence in the Middle East and has rejected the peace process with Israel.

Muhammad Said al-Sahaf, Iraqi Foreign Minister, condemned the Reliant Mermaid maneuvers as "a provocative act against the Arab nation."¹⁵³ Before the manoeuvres, Babel (a daily run by Saddam's elder son Uday) urged Arab states to take a firm stand against Turkey over its military cooperation with Israel and their joint naval exercises.¹⁵⁴

Iraq has also used the OIC (Organization of the Islamic Conference) as a platform to raise grievances against Turkey. A draft resolution was presented before the Eight Summit of the OIC in Tahrán, 9-11 December 1997. It stressed the need to "respect the territorial integrity of Iraq,"¹⁵⁵ in a reference to frequent Turkish cross-border operations.

According to Ofra Bengio and Gencer Özcan, "Iraq vehemently attacked Turkey for its centuries-old hostility to the Arabs and Arabism. More tangibly, it warned of the strategic depth Israel has gained in Turkey, thus enabling it to attack

¹⁵³ *Turkish Probe*, 5 September 1997.

¹⁵⁴ "Iraq Urges Arab States to Take Firm Stand Against Turkey," *Tehran Times*, 5 January 1998.

Iraq and complete the strategic encirclement of Syria.”¹⁵⁶ Iraq also perceived the Turkish-Israeli rapprochement as having direct bearing on the situation in Northern Iraq.

3.3.4. Egypt

Egypt’s reaction to the Turkish-Israeli rapprochement has been moderate in bilateral talks with Ankara, but negative in multilateral Arab and Muslim forums. Egypt is skeptical about Turkey’s regional intentions and unhappy to see Israel ease its regional isolation.

After the Military Education and Cooperation Agreement in February 1996, Amr Musa, Egypt’s Foreign Minister, came to Ankara to inquire about the details of the accord.¹⁵⁷ In 1998, when it was announced by Israel that an invitation would be extended to Egypt to join the sea and air maneuvers, Amr Musa responded angrily: “There has been no invitation and there had better not be one. We regard this as untimely, negative and unhelpful to efforts to revive the peace process.”¹⁵⁸ He also added that “there was no need to conduct them, this is not a positive step, and should have been postponed or abandoned altogether. The development of the Turkish-Israeli axis increases regional tensions and complicates the situation, and could fuel a serious arms race in the area.”¹⁵⁹ After the maneuvers, Egypt also claimed that any Turkish alliance with Israel would trigger the establishment of a counter-alliance in the region.

¹⁵⁵ “Turkey Criticized Over Military Cooperation with Israel,” *The Middle East Times*, Issue.50

¹⁵⁶ Ofra Bengio and Gencer Özcan, “Changing Relations: Turkish-Israeli-Arab Triangle,” *Perceptions* (March-May 2000), p.143.

¹⁵⁷ *Middle East Economic Digest*, 17 May 1996, p.8

¹⁵⁸ “The Turkish-Israeli Affair,” *The Economist*, 19 September 1998.

¹⁵⁹ Nadia E. El-Shazly, “Arab Anger at New Axis,” *The World Today*, Vol.55, No.1, January 1999, p.26

Egypt did not involve itself in an operational effort to counter Turkish-Israeli rapprochement because it did not feel directly threatened. However, Cairo expressed concern about the emergence of a non-Arab axis in the Middle East to affirm its role as the Arab world leader. Although Turkey insistently declared that Turkish relations with Israel are not against third countries, Egyptian President Mubarak stated that his country “was still not satisfied that the Turkish-Israeli military accord was a mere training agreement and had innocent motives.”¹⁶⁰

On the other hand, Israeli-Egyptian relations are not distanced contrary to popular perception. Especially when compared with Egypt’s ties to other neighboring states, Egyptian-Israeli relations are quite normal. For example, Egypt receives considerable Israeli investments; and Israel is Egypt’s second largest trading partner in the region. Egypt is also eager to do business with Israel on selling natural gas to that country. Egyptian officials were quoted recently as saying that natural gas reserves in Egypt could amount to 120 trillion cubic feet (about 3.24 trillion cubic meters), enough to meet the country’s domestic needs for 100 years.¹⁶¹ The Egyptian-Israeli talks on the project are contingent upon the progress of the Middle Eastern peace process. The pipeline is designed to provide gas to the Palestinian self-rule areas, Jordan, and in the future possibly to Lebanon, Syria, and Turkey.¹⁶² About Israeli-Egyptian relations, in January 1995, Mubarak reiterated that pragmatism motivates Egypt’s relationship with Israel and said, “if I cooperate strategically with Israel or anyone else, then it is because I have an interest.”¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ *Turkish Probe*, 7 June 1996, p.3

¹⁶¹ “Israel to Revive Talks on Importing Egypt Natural Gas,” *Xinhua News Agency*, 4 April 2000.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ “Remarks by Egyptian President Husni Mubarak,” *FBIS NESAS*, 31 January 1995.

U.S. support is an important issue in Israeli-Egyptian relations. Both are firmly committed to avoid any friction that would threaten continued US aid.¹⁶⁴ About 92 percent of the annual US expenditure for security assistance goes to Israel and Egypt. Since security aid constitutes about 45 percent of the entire US foreign assistance budget, it is a sizable sum.¹⁶⁵ Israel has received annually at least \$3 billion and Egypt has received yearly amounts of about \$2.1 billion in security aid.¹⁶⁶ However, Egypt's special status -Washington's most trusted Arab ally- has slipped as other Arab states and the Palestinians build their relations with the United States.¹⁶⁷ In addition to this, after the rapprochement between Turkey and Israel, Egypt fears that there may be a decline in US aid.

3.3.5. Jordan

In January 1998, although Reliant Mermaid sparked concern and anger among Arab states, Jordan sent an observer (Naval Brigadier Hussein Khasawnah) to the exercises. The only Arab state not to condemn the exercise was Jordan. "We are sending an observer, we are not participating in maneuvers, this is totally different," said Jordanian Foreign Minister Fayez al-Tarawnah and added, "If there are other parties with different views we respect this, but they have to read and understand why we are attending."¹⁶⁸ Tarawnah also said the Turkish invitation to Jordan to attend as an observer meant that others were being invited to come and see the

¹⁶⁴ Kenneth W. Stein, "Egyptian-Israeli Relations," *The Middle East Review of International Affairs Journal*, Vol.1 Iss.3 (September 1997).

¹⁶⁵ Duncan L. Clarke, "US Security Assistance to Egypt and Israel: Politically Untouchable," *The Middle East Journal*, Vol.51 No.2 (Spring 1997), p.200.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, p.201 and Fawaz A. Gerges, "Egyptian-Israeli Relations Turn Sour," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.74 No.3 (May-June 1995), p.78.

¹⁶⁷ Kenneth W. Stein, "Egyptian-Israeli Relations," *The Middle East Review of International Affairs Journal*, Vol.1 Iss.3 (September 1997).

objectives of the exercises. Iran and Syria publicly condemned Jordanian statements and Syrian official papers described them as strange and violating Arab and Islamic decisions.¹⁶⁹

On the other hand, opposition parties in Jordan criticized the government on the grounds that “such a step is a partnership step in military, imperialist alliances hostile to the Arab and Islamist nations.”¹⁷⁰ “These maneuvers give the moral, political, and military support to the Zionist entity (Israel) and the Jordanian participation, whatever its size or shape, contradicts the principles of our Arab and Islamic nation,”¹⁷¹ the parties said.

King Abdullah, the son of King Hussein, has adopted a policy of ‘peace abroad’. He seems to have pursued strategy of ‘no allies, no enemies’. While maintaining the 1994 peace treaty with Israel, King Abdullah seemed to want to build his credentials in the Arab world so that he has the room to maneuver in the future. He did not want to begin his reign with the label of ‘Arab Zionist’, as his father was widely perceived in the Arab world. About the Jordan-Israeli relations he hopes “Israelis see that their interests are best served when Jordan improves its relations with Arab states, as Israeli’s gateway to the Arab world could be through Amman.”¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ Suleyman al-Khalidi, “Jordan to be Observer at Israel-Turkey Exercises,” *Reuters World Report*, 5 January 1998.

¹⁶⁹ For example, Syrian official newspaper *Ath-Thawra* said that Amman’s decision was strange because the maneuvers are directed against Arabs and Muslims. Therefore any form of participation in these manoeuvres is undesirable. *Ath-Thawra*, 3 January 1998.

¹⁷⁰ Suleyman al-Khalidi, “Jordan to be Observer at Israel-Turkey Exercises,” *Reuters World Report*, 5 January 1998.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² Jeffrey Goldberg and Robert Satloff, “Jordan Under Abdullah: A One-year Review,” *Policywatch*, Special Policy Forum Report, No.438, 8 February 2000.

Eager to receive financial and military aid from the West, Jordan can gain much from its approving posture regarding the Turkish-Israeli relationship. Although Arab capitals were displeased with her position¹⁷³, both Turkey and Israel have expressed their appreciation for his moderate stance on Turkish-Israeli relations.

3.3.6. Others

While Turkish-Israeli links are shrouded with mystery and have enraged many Arabs, there are also some Arabs who realize the need to come to terms with such important neighbors, Turkey and Israel. For example, some Arabs admitted that all Arab countries failed to support Turkey's efforts to ensure the rights of the Turkish community in Cyprus and did not recognize the establishment of a new state in Northern Cyprus. According to them, both Turkey and the Arabs can work jointly to rectify the erroneous image and reach common understanding. A Yemen journalist, for example, points out that both Turks and Arabs may focus on the things they share, rather than on the issues in which they have differences. She believes that "we have lots of opportunities to make or break Arab-Turkish relations" and concludes "lets make them, not break them."¹⁷⁴

Not all Arab states are critical on the Turkish-Israeli cooperation. In addition to Jordan, the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) states have been mostly mum. Kuwait and the UAE (United Arab Emirates) are sufficiently content with Ankara to host Turkish submarine visits in January 1998. Al-Ahram Strategic Report 1997, a widely read strategic document in the Arab world, came to the conclusion that the Turkish-Israeli military agreement has not reached the level of a strategic alliance.

¹⁷³ "US, Israel, and Turkey To Participate in Exercise Reliant Mermaid," *DefenseLINK News* No.230, 22 December 1997.

Ismail Cem, Turkish Foreign Minister, quoted this conclusion in negotiations with Egyptian officials in March 1998.¹⁷⁵

However, Turkey's rapprochement with Israel has inevitably generated considerable suspicion amongst Muslim states. The resolutions passed at the Organization of Islamic Conference meeting in Tehran on 9-11 December 1997 demonstrated that Muslim states were far from convinced by Turkey's insistence that ties with Israel would not affect its relations with other states in the region. However,

Once the alignment became a *fait accompli*, Syria, Iraq, Egypt, and others sought to manipulate it for their own purposes: Egypt, for promoting its role as a mediator between Turkey and the Arab countries; Syria, for reducing the Turkish threat and strengthening Arab backing for its tough stand vis-à-vis the Arab-Israeli peace process, and Iraq for mobilizing all-Arab support to its cause and breaking out of its isolation. Stressing the Turkish-Israeli challenge, it was hoped, could become an important means for reconciliation between long-standing enemies or rivals such as Syria and Iraq, or Iraq and Iran or even Iran and Egypt.¹⁷⁶

3.4. Reflections in Greece, the USA, Russia, and Central Asia

3.4.1. Greece

Relations with Greece constitute one of the most important aspects of Turkish Foreign Policy. Both neighboring countries are NATO allies, associates in the EU, share the same geography and the common democratic values of the Western world. Despite these realities, the improvement of the Turkish-Greek relations has been hostage to the longstanding bilateral problems for a long time.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Aneesa Ghanim, "Opportunities for Arab-Turkish Relations," *Yemen Times*, 13-19 April 1998.

¹⁷⁵ Nadia E. El-Shazly, "Arab Anger at New Axis," *The World Today*, Vol.55, No.1, January 1999, p.26

¹⁷⁶ Ofra Bengio and Gencer Özcan, "Changing Relations: Turkish-Israeli-Arab Triangle," *Perceptions*, March-May 2000, p.145.

¹⁷⁷ "Turkish-Greek Relations," *The Web Page of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey*, <<http://www.mfa.gov.tr/grupa/ad/ade/adea/default.htm>> (2 March 1999).

It can be claimed that before the Turkish-Israeli rapprochement there was a Greek policy of encircling Turkey. Greece signed an agreement with Syria in July 1995, giving the Greek armed forces to Syrian air and naval bases.¹⁷⁸ In 1996, Greek Defense Minister Gerasimos Arsenis reportedly called upon his government to boost ties with Turkey's neighbors for the sake of coordinating anti-Turkish policies. After the military agreements between Turkey and Israel, Greek president, foreign minister and defense minister visited Armenia in June 1996. During the visit, agreements on health, transports and public order were signed as well as another one on defense cooperation.¹⁷⁹ A cooperation group among Greece, Armenia and Iran -countries having similar principles as described by Greek foreign minister Pangalos- was discussed. Greek Defense Minister Arsenis commented on this agreement as a part of Greece's "programme of military diplomacy and cooperation with countries in the wider region."¹⁸⁰

In June 1997, Greece and Armenia signed another agreement "regarding the exchange of military intelligence and expanding a joint operation program."¹⁸¹ In December 1997, Iran, Greece, and Armenia signed a Memorandum of Understanding intended to pave the way for long-term cooperation in economic and commercial areas.¹⁸² On 28 June 1999, the Greek Defense Minister visited Tehran and he claimed

¹⁷⁸ Malik Mufti, "Daring and Caution in Turkish Foreign Policy," *Middle East Journal*, Vol.52, No:1, Winter 1998, p.35.

¹⁷⁹ "Greece and Armenia Sign Cooperation Agreements," *SWB SU/2643 F/5* No.11, 20 June 1996.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ "Turkey Keeping Close Watch on Armenia-Greece Military Agreement," *SWB EE/2954 B/10* No.30, 25 June 1997.

¹⁸² Vahe Khachaturian, "Iran, Armenia, Greece to Expand Multilateral Regional Cooperation," *Armenian News Network*, 16 December 1997.

that a defense agreement was going to be finalized between the two countries.¹⁸³ Two weeks later, the Deputy Foreign Ministers of Greece and Iran met in Athens with their counterpart from Armenia for one in a series of annual meetings.¹⁸⁴ In September 1999, the three foreign ministers met in Athens to sign agreements on a number of economic topics.¹⁸⁵

During the 'Reliant Mermaid', twelve Arab ambassadors in Athens urged Greece not to participate in a joint military exercise with Israel. Greek Foreign Minister Theodoros Pangalos said that the maneuvers were openly provocative and added that he had intimated the concern of his government to Washington about those naval operations.¹⁸⁶

In September 1998, Greek National Defense Minister Akis Tsohatzopoulos said Ankara and Jerusalem's axis policy was worrying Greece, and underlined the necessity to set up a regional security system with participation of all Eastern Mediterranean countries.¹⁸⁷ "We have nothing against Turkey-Israel economic relations, despite the fact that these include the supply of armaments", the Greek Defense Minister told the German newspaper "Suddeutsche Zeitung".¹⁸⁸ He added that when Israel's advanced technology is made available to Turkey, with Ankara's objective being to use it aggressively, then this goes beyond the limits.

¹⁸³ Andrew I. Killgore and John P. Nordin. "Consequences of the Israeli-Turkey Alliance," *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* Vol.19 Iss.2 (March 2000).

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ "Greece, Armenia, and Iran Sign Cooperation Memorandum," *Embassy of Greece Press Office (in the US)*, 9 September 1999.

¹⁸⁶ "Iran, Greece Concerned over Turkey-Zionist Maneuvers," *Tehran Times*, 10 January 1998.

¹⁸⁷ "Tsohatzopoulos voices concern over nature of Turkey-Israel military cooperation," *Embassy of Greece Press Office, Athens News Agency*, 10 September 1998.

¹⁸⁸ *Suddeutsche Zeitung*, Bonn, 9 September 1998.

Tsohatzopoulos also claims that Israeli fighter jets together with Turkish warplanes have repeatedly flown above Cyprus.

Greek military is no match for the Turkish army¹⁸⁹ and the military agreements between Turkey and Israel help ensure the Turkey's military superiority over Greece. Greece is concerned that the Turkish-Israeli military and intelligence ties might eventually be used against it. Greece's difficult bilateral relations with Turkey are largely responsible for its negative reaction to the Turkish-Israeli relations. Although Greek-Israeli relations have never been warm, Tel Aviv has no quarrel with Greece.

3.4.2. The USA

The United States has welcomed the rapprochement between the two democracies in the Middle East. The United States has been supportive stating that enhanced relations between Turkey and Israel contribute to regional peace and security. "We think that Israel's integration into the region is part and parcel of what we think needs to happen in order for there to be an overall settlement of the Middle East problem. So that is something that obviously we have been encouraging for quite some time now,"¹⁹⁰ State Department spokesman James Fully said. At a US State Department briefing in June 1997, spokesman Nicholas Burns stated that the United States fully supports the efforts of Turkey and Israel to become friends.

¹⁸⁹ Şükrü Elekdağ, "2 ½ War Strategy," *Perceptions*, March-May 1996, p.39 and The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1998-1999* (London: Oxford University Press, 1998).

¹⁹⁰ Arieh O'Sullivan, "Israel and Turkey Meet to Bolster Defense Ties," *Jerusalem Post*, 12 December 1997.

The United States cannot be unhappy with the Turkish-Israeli developing ties, as the dominant external power in the Middle East. Both Turkey and Israel have close relationships with the United States. With this rapprochement, Israel did not intend to replace the United States and Europe in their relationship to Turkey, and Turkey is not looking to substitute itself in place of the US in terms of American-Israeli relations. Closeness between Turkey and Israel allows for both countries to supply much of each other's needs without necessarily giving up any goals.

Although the United States officially denies that it played any direct role in bringing these two states together, Eqbal Ahmad, emeritus professor of Middle East Studies at Hampshire College, claims, "It seems an impossibility that two principle US allies could form a bilateral alliance without the US playing a matchmaking role. There is a long history of the US trying to find strategic allies in the Middle East who would play deputy to American power."¹⁹¹ Jennifer Washburn claims that Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai explicitly confirmed the US role by saying "I certainly describe the relationship between us and the Turks as the development of a strategic relationship. All this with the backing and coordination of the US."¹⁹²

The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles is also of concern for the United States.¹⁹³ A strong Turkish-Israeli relationship could serve as a vehicle through which American concerns might be safeguarded in that subject.

¹⁹¹ Jennifer Washburn, "Power Bloc: Turkey and Israel Lock Arms," *The Progressive Magazine*, December 1998.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Strategic Survey 1997/98* (London: Oxford University Press, 1998) and The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1995/96* (London: Oxford University Press, 1995).

3.4.3. Russia

After the 'Reliant Mermaid', Russians said the maneuvers could aggravate mistrust and handicap efforts to bring stability to the region. According to Russians, the exercises would undermine the Middle East peace process and pave the way to reciprocal polarization in the region. Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Gennady Tarasov said, "The exercises are a step towards establishing a Turco-Israeli axis against the interests of the Arab countries in the region."¹⁹⁴ He added that "carrying out such an exercise in such a sensitive region as the eastern Mediterranean would further widen the confidence gap and cripple efforts for overcoming the deadlock in the Mideast peace process."¹⁹⁵ In response to these maneuvers, Russians called for joint exercises between themselves, Iran and Syria.

The Russian presence and influence in the Middle East have declined dramatically in the past ten years. Today, Russia's main interest is in making money by selling arms in the region. Although economic constraints prevent Russia from challenging the US hegemony in the region, Russia responded to the Turkish-Israeli rapprochement by itself developing closer relations with Iran and Syria.

3.4.4. Central Asia and the Caucasus

In the 1990s, Central Asia has been witnessing an increased interest from both the political and business communities of the world. Israel also wants to develop economic and political ties with these countries. Israel's role in the Caucasus

¹⁹⁴ "Turco-Israeli-US Exercise Continues Successfully as Criticisms Persist," *Turkish Daily News*, 7 January 1998.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

and Central Asia is more important than most analyses would normally acknowledge.

While the Caucasus region has turned into a gamble because of its rich energy sources, Israel and Turkey have established close relations with two key Caucasian states, Georgia and Azerbaijan. While Georgia is a strategic neighbor to Turkey and there is a military training agreement between Azerbaijan and Turkey, Israel was the biggest foreign investor in Georgia in 1998.¹⁹⁶ Azerbaijan opened an embassy in Israel and even cooperation in the field of intelligence has taken place between Israel and Azerbaijan. Economically Azerbaijan is interested in Israel's technological expertise, while Israel hopes that Azeri oil could reach Israel through an underwater pipeline from Ceyhan once the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline is realised.¹⁹⁷ On the other hand, Iran has repeatedly warned Azerbaijan against pursuing and developing its ties to Israel.

All Central Asian and Caucasian states are positively inclined towards furthering their links to the West. This has brought certain Caucasus and Central Asian states closer to Israel because of its closer relationship with the US. Although Israel viewed Turkey as a gateway to these republics, this part of the Turkish-Israeli rapprochement has not been as successful Israel had hoped.

¹⁹⁶ Israel invested more than \$18 million in 1998 while Turkey was the fifth foreign investor by \$12 million. See "Gürcistan'da Yatırım Yapan Başlıca Ülkeler," *Avrasya Dosyası*, No.114, February 1999, p.3.

CONCLUSION

“Our geography makes our history,” one intellectual once said. Surrounded by three seas and bridging Europe and Asia, Turkey occupies a unique and strategically important location. By virtue of this geopolitical setting, Turkey belongs to many regions at the same time and Middle East constitutes one of them.

The Middle East remains a turbulent area where the use of force is still considered an option by state leaders. There is a proliferation of missiles and several states are in the process of attempting to acquire unconventional weapons of mass destruction. The region also contains serious interstate competition and potential internal instability which could produce war and crises. This does not seem likely to change in the near future, and therefore the increasingly strong links between Israel and Turkey do not seem likely to change either. The relations would keep on their current promising course and provide security and stability for both states.

Turkey and Israel share a sense of alienation from the Arab world. These two countries are also the owners of the region’s most dynamic economies and share similar western-oriented liberal, democratic regimes. Turks have also historically enjoyed better relations with Jews than with the Arabs. For both Turkey and Israel, friendship means that they are no longer alone in a hostile region. This factor provide for a basis for the continuation and strengthening of the Turkish-Israeli relations.

¹⁹⁷ Bülent Aras, “Post-Cold War Realities: Israel’s Strategy in Azerbaijan and Central Asia,” *Middle East Policy*, Vol.5 No.4, January 1998, p.74. See also *Turkish Daily News*, 11 March 1998 and 16 March 1998.

Your friend could be my friend, but your enemy need not be my enemy. That is the philosophy that Turkey and Israel applies to their relations with all the countries in the region. Israel does not wish to place its relations with other countries under the bondage of its ties with Turkey. In the international arena, Tel Aviv would certainly continue to give first priority to its own interests and Israel have no wish to sacrifice one thing for the other.

The Turkish-Israeli initiative was pragmatic. The main driving force behind the relationship emanates from their relations with their regional neighbors. Although both Turkey and Israel repeatedly stressed that the cooperation between the two countries was not directed at any third party, one of the most important aims of the Turkish-Israeli rapprochement is to deter other states (mainly Syria, Iraq, and Iran) from taking hostile actions against either Israel or Turkey. On the other hand, Turkish-Israeli relationship strengthened the Arab-Israeli peace process, which amounts to a reluctant acceptance of Israel as a regional actor by most Arab states.

Turkey is keen to affirm that military cooperation with Israel is only one aspect of broader relations between them. According to Ankara and Tel Aviv, mutual efforts to further develop and enhance Turkish-Israeli relations should not be seen as an action against any other country. However, the official Arab and Muslim reaction against Ankara's growing ties with Israel has generally been negative. Both Israel and Turkey use their developing ties to put pressure on their enemies to think twice about any hostile actions. This certainly has caught the attention of Damascus,

Tehran and Baghdad. Syria, Iran and Iraq reconsidered their political and military strategies.

While initially Ankara was concerned that improved relations with Israel would damage its links with the Arab world, Barry Rubin claims that “at present heightened Turkey-Israel relations seem to have little real cost in terms of Turkey-Arab relations.”¹⁹⁸ As long as regional conditions continue to impart strategic benefit to Turkish-Israeli cooperation, these relations are likely to continue. Turkey and Israel may be able to play more effective and constructive role in the region and may help bring about a more stable and prosperous Middle East. Efraim Inbar argues that Turkish-Israeli rapprochement may have also an indirect effect: “encouraging democratisation and the liberalisation of the economies in the region.”¹⁹⁹ He also claims that

With all its importance, the Israeli-Turkish entente cannot change the strategic map of the Greater Middle East or change dramatically the balance of power and the rules of the regional game of international politics. The Middle East will remain a tough neighbourhood.²⁰⁰

High-level visits between Turkey and Israel continued during last year. In November 1999, Turkish Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, İsmail Cem, met with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak at the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) Summit in İstanbul and an important step concerning the sale of water from Turkey to Israel was taken.²⁰¹ On 27 December 1999, the annual meetings between Turkey and Israel started in Tel

¹⁹⁸ Barry Rubin, “Notes on Turkey-Israel Relations,” *The Middle East Review of International Affairs* 7, Discussion Paper for MERIA Seminar, July 1997.

¹⁹⁹ Efraim Inbar, “The Turkish-Israeli Entente: The New Power Alignment in the Middle East,” *Adelphi Papers*, forthcoming.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

Aviv. The Turkish delegation was led by Deputy Chief of General Staff Edip Başer, while the Israeli delegation was headed by Defense Ministry Director Amos Yoran.²⁰² On 27 January 2000, two F-4 planes, which were upgraded by Israel, were handed over to the Turkish Air Force with a ceremony in Eskişehir Province. Addressing the ceremony, Chief of General Staff Hüseyin Kıvrıkoğlu said the instabilities in the region necessitate sufficient power and capability to get rid of internal and external threats against Turkey.²⁰³ Between March 12 and 15, Turkish Health Minister Osman Durmuş visited Israel as the guest of his Israeli counterpart Solomo Benizri to develop Turkish-Israeli cooperation in the field of health.²⁰⁴ On 27 March 2000, Admiral Yedidia Ya'ari, the Israeli Naval Forces Commander, visited Admiral İlhami Erdil, the Naval Forces Commander. Erdil said that the Turkish and Israeli naval forces continue their relations in training and technical fields.²⁰⁵

In addition to this official visits, famous Turkish pop singer and composer Sezen Aksu gave a concert in Israel which was organized by the Turkish-Israeli Friendship Association in January 2000. The income that was gained from the concert was spent in constructing schools in the earthquake struck region of Turkey.²⁰⁶

Notwithstanding these positive developments, the relations between the two countries became strained after two Israeli ministers (Education Minister Yossi Sarid

²⁰¹ "Israel and Turkey Discuss Water," *IPR Strategic Business Information Database*, 29 November 1999.

²⁰² "Turkey-Israel Annual Meetings Start," *Anatolia News Agency*, 27 December 1999.

²⁰³ "Turkish army chief hails arrival of two fighter jets upgraded by Israel," *BBC Worldwide Monitoring*, 28 January 2000.

²⁰⁴ "Health Minister Durmuş Returns to Turkey," *Anatolia News Agency*, 16 March 2000.

²⁰⁵ "Israeli Naval Forces Commander Ya'ari Visits Erdil, Naval Forces Commander," *Anatolia News Agency*, 27 March 2000.

²⁰⁶ "Sezen Aksu Gives Concert in Israel," *Anatolia News Agency*, 14 January 2000.

and Justice Minister Yossi Beilin) said that “Turkey should admit the fact that Armenians were massacred ethnically by Turks during the First World War.”²⁰⁷ In a radio broadcast, Yossi Sarid proposed including accounts of this incident in the Israeli high school curriculum. Moreover, Israeli Justice Minister Yossi Beilin said the incident in the Ottoman Empire involving Armenians could be called nothing but “genocide”.²⁰⁸ The Jewish people living in the U.S. condemned Yossi Sarid. Releasing a statement, the Association of American Jewish Friends of Turkey (AAJFT) said that Sarid who was defined as an irresponsible person, should be dismissed. The statement stressed that all of Muslim, Christian and Jewish people suffered grave pains in an atmosphere of war in the Eastern Anatolia Region in the last period of Ottoman Empire. The statement also noted that the situation in Eastern Anatolia Region had no connection with the genocide.²⁰⁹ Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy delivered a letter to his Turkish counterpart Ismail Cem in an effort to make clear Israeli position on the alleged Armenian genocide. Levy reiterated in the letter that the Israeli government is clinging to its policy that the alleged Armenian Genocide should be discussed by historians, not by politicians or diplomats.²¹⁰ Levy also stressed that the two ministers' statements on the issue in no way reflected the Israeli government's position.²¹¹

On 21 June 2000, Cumhur Ersümer, Minister of Energy and Natural Resources of Turkey, declared that Turkey and Israel reached accord over signing an agreement pertaining to Israel's purchase of the Manavgat water. Ram Aviram,

²⁰⁷ “Turkey, Israel Set to Ease Tensions over Armenian Genocide,” *Xinhua News Agency*, 18 May 2000.

²⁰⁸ “Turkey, Israel at Odds Over Alleged Armenian Genocide,” *Reuters*, 11 May 2000.

²⁰⁹ “Jewish People living in the USA...,” *Reuters*, 29 April 2000.

²¹⁰ “Levy Clarifies Israeli Policy on Alleged Armenian Genocide,” *Reuters*, 25 May 2000.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

Israeli Foreign Ministry's Waterworks Department Chief, said that the planned water purchase consisted of three stages, and added that three stages were "the purchase of water from Turkey, its transportation and its transfer to the installations in Israel".²¹² On the same day, Uri Bar-Ner, Israel's ambassador in Ankara, pointed out that Israel was extra sensitive about the water issue, and added that such a sensitive issue could only be discussed between good friends.²¹³ The Israelis prefer a port-to-port shipping line to a pipeline to be laid under sea.²¹⁴

²¹² "An Israeli delegation Due in Turkey," *Anatolia News Agency*, 13 June 2000 and "Turkish Minister Says Accord Reached with Israel on Sale of Water," *BBC Worldwide Monitoring*, 21 June 2000.

²¹³ "Turkish Minister Says Accord Reached with Israel on Sale of Water," *BBC Worldwide Monitoring*, 21 June 2000.

²¹⁴ "Turkey, Israel Reportedly Ready on Water Deal," *Xinhua News Agency*, 8 April 2000.

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