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TURKISH - ISRAELI REGIONAL COOPERATION DURING 1990s

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ABSTRACT

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This study, based on previous studies and research conducted by Arab, Turkish, Israeli and western analysts, discusses Turkish - Israeli regional cooperation during the 1990s. It concludes that there have been some political, and military factors urging both Turkey and Israel to play a major role regionally. The conclusions take into account international events such as the Gulf war 1990-1991, the collapse of the Soviet Union that resulted in the cessation of the cold war between the east and west, and the Arab – Israeli negotiations that began in Madrid in 1991.

Both Israel and Turkey, supported by the United States, were seeking to maintain security and stability in the Middle East and Central Asia. This included fighting terrorism, confronting Islamic fundamentalism and preventing the accessibility to advanced military technology. In addition, both countries introduced military, economic and security proposals that would suit their own interests in order to become the region's primary influential states. Both nations have accomplished tangible success in this regard in spite of the emergence of the neighboring competing states and their own internal problems.

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TURKISH - ISRAELI REGIONAL COOPERATION DURING 1990s

The period between 1990-1992 witnessed political, economical and military developments at both regional and international levels. The Gulf war of 1990-1991, the disintegration of the USSR, the initiation of the Arab-Israeli negotiation in Madrid 1991, and the normalization of the Turkish-Israeli relations 1991-1992, altered significantly the landscape of the regional relationships in the Middle East.

Relations between Israel and Turkey have evolved into strategic alliance with negative political, economic and military effects on the entire region of the Middle East. However, both countries have their own interests in this alliance. The object of the alliance between Turkey and Israel is to cooperate regionally and promote stability. This is a subject which deserves in-depth investigation, particularly by regional researchers. This study specifically focuses on this aspect.

BACKGROUND

In November 1947 when the UN General Assembly met to vote on the partition plan for Palestine, Turkey opposed the resolution and initially refused to recognize the state of Israel¹. Subsequently on 28 March 1949, Turkey became the first Muslim state to recognize Israel². Diplomatic missions were opened in 1950 at the legation level³. During the first half of the 1950s, Turkey began to place greater importance on its emerging relationship with Israel. This was partly because Israel gradually demonstrated its commitment to combating international communism. Ankara also hoped to improve cooperative but cool relations with the U.S. by appealing to the American Jewish community⁴. Turkey's diplomatic relation with Israel fluctuated during the military crises of 1967 and 1973 Wars. This deviation can be related to Turkey desire to maintain favorable relations with both Israel and Arab countries. The Islamic and Arabic aspects were and are important to Turkey because of shared history and religion, and it was important to Turkey to keep good relations with neighboring countries. On the economic level, Turkey urgently needed to benefit from Arab economic power, especially petroleum, in the 1970s and 1980s⁵. Turkey reduced the level of its diplomatic representation after the Israeli Knesset's 1980 vote to annex East Jerusalem a setback to cooperation⁶. Turkish-Israeli relations began to improve in the fall of 1986, when Turkey appointed a senior diplomat as its charge d'affaires in Tel-Aviv⁷. In the wake of the Madrid conference in October 1991, relations were upgraded to ambassadorial rank⁸.

Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East between 1948-1990 was established upon the concept of balance between Arab states and Israel. Israel is important to Turkey because Israel is an additional gate (besides NATO) for Turkey to enter the military and economic establishments of the West, especially the United States.

NEW ERA OF ISRAELI-TURKISH RELATIONS

The latest era of improved relations is marked by changes following the Madrid conference⁹. Since that time Turkey has changed its foreign policy approach and started to strengthen its political, economic, social and military relations with Israel at the expense of its relations with the Arab and Islamic worlds¹⁰. There are Turkish Arab-Islamic and Israeli factors that helped to foster these relations with Turkey and Israel¹¹. Turkey faced internal as well as external political and economical problems. The internal problems were two fold: first the increase of Islamic fundamentalism and the negative consequences resulting from the Kurds issue and specifically the Kurdistan Labor Party; second, internal economic difficulties. These issues are considered a hazard and a threat to Turkey's secular institutions, coming at a difficult time due to the presence of internal economic problems and Turkey's need to develop its military forces¹². The external problems lie in the tense relations with its neighboring states, namely Syria, Greece, Iraq and Iran¹³. Thus, Turkey found itself living in a hostile and opposing environment, with neighbors that could offer little in assistance. This made it difficult to find solutions except through strengthening relations with Israel since the latter has political, economic and military expertise that may contribute to finding even partial solutions to the problems of Turkey¹⁴. In addition, Israel is Turkey's second gate to western economic and military institutions because Israel's influence on those institutions¹⁵. The Turkish Jewish community has an impact both within Turkey and within Israel. The Jews in Turkey, concentrated in Istanbul, number around 24,000 but are disproportionately influential because of the wealth of their community and their prominent commercial position held since the Ottoman Empire. Turkey is likely being increasingly protective towards its Jewish community because of its influence on the Jewish lobby in the United States and Israel. The number of Turkish Jews living in Israel is estimated to be 120,000. Most of them emigrated during the 1960s and 1970s to escape the economic chaos and violence prevailing in Turkey at that time. Their recent arrival means that their Turkish identity is still important to them and they are also very active as a lobby on Turkey's behalf¹⁶.

The Arab Islamic factors from the Turkish perspective lie in Arabs and Muslims not siding with Turkey on issues like Cyprus, especially at times when Turkey thought that it supported and adopted their issues such as the Palestinian issue¹⁷. The economic dependence of Turkey on the Arab world was reduced because Turkey strengthened its economic relations with the West. Thus, Turkey can now find alternative resources for Arab petrol and markets from Islamic states in Central Asia. Hence, Turkey can strengthen its relations with Israel without being subjected to significant Arab pressure. More so, because Arab countries remain fragmented and have no collective stance¹⁸.

Turkish – Israeli relations passed through two phases during the nineties. The first phase extended from 1991 to 1995 and can be called the normalization stage. The second phase extended from 1996 – 1999, and represents the strategic alliance stage¹⁹. Normalization of relations began when Turkey upgraded the level of diplomatic representation with Israel in 1991 from a secretary to an ambassador²⁰. In June of 1992, the former Turkish tourism minister, Abdulkadir Ates, visited Israel. It was the first visit by a Turkish minister in 27 years. During the visit, an agreement to facilitate tourism between the two states was signed and mutual visits by official and nonofficial representatives of different fields and levels followed. One important visit was Ezer Weizman's visit, the Israeli president, to Turkey in January of 1994. Another important visit was made by Tansu Cillers, the former Turkish prime minister, to Israel in November that same year. This visit was considered a turning point in the Turkish-Israeli relations. This visit resulted in signing an agreement covering communications, postal services, and drug control²¹.

The second phase, 1996 -1999, witnessed a significant development in Turkish-Israeli relations that was characterized by strategic partnership in military and security fields²². The two countries signed a military cooperation agreement in February 1996. The agreement covered subjects of joint training for the army, air force and navy, in addition to exchanging military envoys. Both nations also agreed to allow Israel to use the Turkish land to electronically observe the neighboring countries of Iran, Syria, and Iraq. Military agreements continued between the two countries and included allowing Israel to renovate the Turkish forces, particularly the air force, and tanks. In addition, both states established joint military projects to manufacture missiles of various purposes such as long range, air to air, surface to air, and unmanned aerial vehicles for electronic surveillance²³. The two countries also signed a security agreement aiming at confronting the Labor Kurdistan Party where by Israel provides Turkey with expertise and technology to restrict the operations of that party. The joint efforts of the two countries resulted in the capture of Abdullah Ocalan, the Party leader in February 1999²⁴.

Cooperation between the two countries during this period extended into economic areas. Turkey sought to develop its economy and find solutions to its sagging economy. Israeli-Turkish trade increased steadily through the 1990s, reaching almost a billion dollars in 1999²⁵. There had been a rapid increase in the number of Israeli tourists visiting Turkey. By the end of 1995 those Israeli tourists were estimated to have spent US \$ 300 million. Nearly 3000 Turks worked in Israel as migrant laborers, as Israel sought to diversify its casual labor needs away from the Palestinian population of the occupied territories²⁶. Today Israel is Turkey's chief Middle Eastern export market²⁷.

Turkish-Israeli cooperation during the nineties however would negatively influence Arab National security and jeopardize neighboring Arab countries, in the military and security arenas.

INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL EVENTS THAT CONTRIBUTED TOWARDS GREATER TURKEY - ISRAEL COOPERATION

THE COLLAPSE OF THE SOVIET UNION

The end of the Cold War has brought drastic changes to the dynamics of the Middle East. Most importantly, the pro-Soviet states of the region stepped into a profound transformation process. This process has been accompanied by an unprecedented degree of instability and uncertainty. Turkey found herself in the midst of this profound transformation process, and has faced the instabilities that have emerged. The result has been a shift in Turkey's place in the international arena as well as on Turkish foreign policy behavior²⁸.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the decreasing importance of Turkey for the west facing the Russian threat, Turkey began to look at extending its regional influence in the Central Asian and Caucasian region²⁹.

Some of the factors that assist Turkey to wield influence in Islamic republics in Central Asia are: full coordination and cooperation with US and Israel, its location, and its cultural and historical ties with the population of these republics. Most nations in Central Asia are originally Turkish. In addition Turkey has sought to be the bridge that connects the Middle East with the rest of Asia politically, socially, culturally, and economically³⁰. From the Israeli perspective, cooperation with Turkey may accelerate her geo-cultural integration into the region. Additionally, cooperation with Turkey may help to avoid some problems in Israel's attempts to penetrate into the markets of the ex-Soviet Union republics³¹.

THE GULF WAR 1990-1991

The impact of the Gulf crisis forced Turkey to abandon her preferred neutrality towards the Middle East which had been, pursued during the early decades. This meant a change in principle of non-intervention in intra-Arab conflicts and Turkey sided with the Western world³². This war contributed to showing Turkey's regional importance when it supported the coalition led by the US against Iraq³³. Turkey provided the coalition forces with very important military assistance. One of its most important contributions was approving the use of Turkish bases to launch air strikes against Iraq. Turkey also participated in imposing economic sanctions on Iraq by cutting out oil flowing through the two pipes that export Iraqi oil through Turkey³⁴.

The point of view of the ex-Turkish president Turgut Ozal (1989-1993) was that Turkey's participation in the Gulf war would achieve many goals. Some of these goals were: increasing its political influence in the region, getting military and economic aid from the US and the Gulf Arab countries, getting the support of the all Arab countries to gain full membership of the European union, and increasing its economic cooperation with the Arab countries in the Gulf³⁵. Turgut Ozal seems to have regarded the crisis as a chance to prove Turkey's strategic regional importance to the US. There was also deepening concern within Turkey over Iraq's growing military and willingness to use it. Turgut Ozal willingly accepted the US and British agenda for the Gulf crisis³⁶.

The Gulf war highlighted the importance of Turkey geographically in the region, and this was recognized by the US and Britain. Even today Turkey provides air bases for aircraft imposing no fly zones on Iraq³⁷. Turkey's geostrategic stock soared with its role in the Gulf War and in post-war U.S. efforts to contain Saddam Hussein's Baghdad regime, once again Turkey was crucial to a high-priority U.S. foreign policy objective³⁸.

The Gulf war also helped Israel to achieve one of its goals in destroying regional military force which may endanger Israel's security. Furthermore, Israel improved its relations with the US economically and militarily. The US supplied Israel with the most technically advanced military equipment, especially Patriot missiles³⁹.

The Gulf War emphasized to the US and the West the importance of Turkey's strategic location and its beneficial role in the coalition. It also maintained Israel as a regional military power.

THE ARAB-ISRAELI PEACE PROCESS

Before the start of peace talks with some Arab nations, Israel did not have the opportunity to contribute in regional projects because of the state of hostile relation between Israel and these countries. The start of the negotiation process in the late 80s, the Madrid conference in 1991, the signing of the Oslo agreement with the Palestinians in 1993, and the peace treaty with Jordan in 1994, resulted in diplomatic ties between Israel and Arab states in the gulf and North Africa. This gave Israel a valuable chance to contribute to security, economic and regional projects⁴⁰. Turgut Ozal declared in March of 1991 that Turkey desired to host the peace talks. During the peace talks, Turkey's position was: "peace and stability can not be achieved in the region unless the Palestinian problem is solved in a way that Israel accepts the principle of land for peace"⁴¹. Turkish Prime Minister Ciller's statement on the peace process outlined Turkey's role, " by taking maximum advantage of close historical and traditional ties with brotherly Arabic countries and the people of Palestine, as well as good relations with Israel, Turkey shall continue to contribute to the success of the peace process"⁴². Turkey participated in bilateral regional talks that were conducted in Moscow in January 1992. Turkey participated in five specialized groups dealing with refugee issues as well as issues of stability, security, water sources, environment, economical developments, and armament censorship⁴³.

There is a clear connection between the peace process and the progress in Turkish-Israeli cooperation: it gives Turkey a good opportunity to play a greater role in the Middle East. Turkey, has taken advantage of start of the Israeli – Arab negotiation process to prove its regional importance through its participation in this process. The peace process has created new prospects to improve Israeli – Turkish relations.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE TURKISH- ISRAELI REGIONAL ROLE

ISRAEL

Israel can be said to have three sources of power in the region: military power, economic power, and its distinguished relations with the western countries, the US in particular. There are several indications of Israeli military power. The defense budget totals \$7.2 billion, or 15.4 percent of the total Middle East countries budget. This places Israel second only to Saudi Arabia in defense spending⁴⁴. Israel has an Army of 172,000 soldiers and a reserve of 430,000 soldiers. The total Israeli Army may reach 602,000 soldiers. All Israeli citizens with few exceptions are required to serve in the military⁴⁵. Israel also possesses the most advanced

weaponry in the world, and has a very advanced military industry of conventional and non-conventional weapons. Israel maintains a position as the world's fifth arms producer⁴⁶. With regard to non-conventional weapons, Israel has chemical biological and nuclear weapons with an estimated 200 warheads⁴⁷.

The GDP of Israel is \$78 billion, the third highest in the Middle East after Turkey and Saudi Arabia. This figure represents 11.2 percent of the total Middle East nations GDP⁴⁸. The Israeli economy is technology dependent and is refined such that Israeli goods are accepted world wide. This includes the manufacture of laser medical equipment, robotics used in research and development of civil and military industries, and agricultural technological industries such as modernized harvesting and advanced irrigation systems. Israel is also one of the leading countries in computer technology. Exports of this industry amounted to \$ 5.5 billion in 1995⁴⁹. The third factor that enables Israel to play its regional role is its intimate and special relationship with the US, the sole dominant power in the world. The US considers Israel as a special relationship in various military economic and political areas, a matter that is evident in Israel's absolute dependence on the American economic and military support. Israel's current military expenditures and force structure have been made possible only through US aid. Israel receives \$ 3 billion annual package of military and economic grant aid⁵⁰.

TURKEY

Turkey seeks to be a regional power dependant on five major factors: its historical heritage, geo – political factors, economic power, military power, and its good relationship with United States.

With regard to the first factor, Turkey is the heir of the Ottoman Empire that ruled vast areas of Europe, Asia and North Africa. This fact motivates Turkey to play a significant role in regional policy⁵¹.

The geo-political factor, on the other hand, lies in the fact that Turkey occupies the 34th position in the world in terms of size, which is almost 779.500 Km² and the 19th position in terms of population. In the mid 1990s the population reached 63.5 millions people⁵². Their strategic location controls the Turkish Straits (Bosphorus, Sea of Marmora, Dardanelle's) that link the Black and Aegean Seas and Mount Ararat, the legendary landing place of Noah's Ark, is in the far eastern portion of the country⁵³.

Turkey's position near the Caspian Sea oil fields gives it a new political and strategic importance after the collapse of the Soviet Union⁵⁴. The economic power of Turkey lies in the

high rate of its GDP (\$167 billion) which is 24 per cent of the total Middle Eastern GDP and by far the highest in the region⁵⁵. It is among the few countries in the region that enjoys a huge water surplus through which it can find solutions to the water problem that affects the region. In addition to that, it controls the water resources of both its neighbors Syria and Iraq. Turkey is ambitious to be “the food basket of the Middle east” based on the huge water projects it undertakes, particularly the projects of Greater Anatolian Project(GAP) in southeastern Turkey, which is set to exploit the water of Tigris and Euphrates. It is expected that this project, with an estimated cost of \$20 billion, will provide water to 20% of the agricultural land in Turkey, produce 27, 738 kilowatts of electricity annually, and provide 1.6 million job opportunities. These factors alone make Turkey a strong and influential nation that is universally recognized⁵⁶.

Turkey has one of the largest armed forces in the region with 639,000 active duty soldiers. Three services are large and equipped with relatively modern material, and the defense budget is \$6 billion which accounts for 12 percent of the total Middle Eastern defense spending ⁵⁷.

The fifth factor is Turkey has unique relations with the US which makes Turkey a valuable instrument to implement US policy in the Middle East and Central Asia. In addition, Turkey is a member of NATO. A NATO command is resident at Izmir and NATO ammunition and weapon depots are on Turkish soil. Turkey is also an Islamic country, and a member of the Islamic Conference Organization which to some extent gives Turkey some influence coordinating between the western and Islamic World organizations⁵⁸. The US position moved closer to Turkey's views on the plight of Bosnian Muslims, and the uncertainty of Russia's long-term stability and regional intentions. The US also embraced the idea that Turkey should be the outlet for an "east-west energy corridor" transporting the energy riches of the Caspian Sea via a route that would exclude Russia and Iran. This enhances the independence of states like Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, and linking them more closely with the West⁵⁹.

Turkey hopes that its cooperation with Israel and the US will support its regional role through the economic, military and security projects in coordination with Israel and the US. So it is clear that there are economic, military, geographical and political qualifications together with American direct support enable both Turkey and Israel overwhelm the region in absence of any united Arab coordination.

REGIONAL DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR TURKEY AND ISRAEL

The US vested its regional allies, Turkey and Israel, a set of duties and responsibilities that serve their interests in the Middle East and central Asia. The following is a brief discussion of these regional responsibilities.

ACHIEVING SECURITY AND STABILITY

Turkey and Israel cooperate with the US to maintain security and stability in the Middle East and Central Asia (the independent Islamic countries), and to support related concepts and terms such as fight against terror, fight Muslim fundamentalists, maintain regional balance, and reconstruct the Middle East⁶⁰. The statements of Israeli and Turkish officials indicate that the two parties have ascribed regional significance to their entente. Upon his return from a visit to Israel in November 1993, Turkish Foreign Minister Hikmet Cetin announced that Turkish-Israeli relations would develop further in all fields and that the two states will cooperate "in restructuring the Middle East". In August 1997, Turkish Prime Minister Yilmaz said that the Turkish-Israeli cooperation "is necessary to the balance of power" in the region. Israel's Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu similarly concluded in 1998 that Turkey and Israel were obliged to work together in view of the volatile international security picture emerging after the downfall of the Soviet empire. In his view, such regional security arrangements were needed "to induce stability where instability prevails". Israel's Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai, described the significance of the entente: "When we lock hands, we form a powerful fist...our relationship is a strategic one"⁶¹.

Terrorism is represented, according to Turkish-Israeli concepts, in the military, political, and religious organizations that endanger their interests especially the Kurdistan labor party in Turkey (PKK), Hizbullah in Lebanon, Hamas and Al-jihad Islamic movement in Palestine. In this regard; Turkish-Israeli cooperation appears through security coordination, holding treaties, agreements, and exchanging information about their activities⁶².

Turkey and Israel share similar regional concerns regarding Syria: proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the challenge of Islamic radicalism, concerns over potentially aggressive policies from Iran or Iraq, and the geopolitical destiny of Central Asia⁶³.

Two agreements, of which some clauses remain secret, were signed in February and August 1996 between Israel and Turkey. They provide for joint air and naval exercises, access to port facilities and the opportunity for the Israeli air force to train over the Anatolian plateau. The experience of flying over mountainous regions could be useful to Israel in case it needed to carry out an operation against Iran, an idea that is discussed in Israel with increasing frequency⁶⁴.

Israel and Turkey promoted the idea that nonconventional weapons are in great numbers in the Middle East. The regional cooperation between Turkey and Israel along with the

cooperation of the US, intended to counter the danger posed by the increase in military capabilities of Islamic countries especially Syria, Iraq and Iran⁶⁵.

Iraqi power was a source of concern (before the Gulf war in 1990 and 1991) for the US and the western countries because of chemical and biological weapons, as well as developing a nuclear program, which was viewed as a threat to the US and Israel. The military in Turkey considered the Iraqi military efforts a potential threat to Turkish national security. Israel in turn considered the Iraqi threat targeted toward Israel. Israel supported this claim with Saddam's declaration in 1990 that Iraq had the power and the weapons to burn half of Israel⁶⁶.

Both Israel and Turkey cooperated with the United States regarding security concerns towards Iraq. Israel monitors the situations and views Iraqi nuclear activities from Turkish lands. Israel succeeded in gaining important information about Iraq's nuclear program and personnel especially the augmentation of the Iraqi military power, and resultant threat to Israel and Turkey. These factors contributed to rationale for destroying Iraqi military and economical infrastructure during the Gulf war and afterwards⁶⁷.

There is a Turkish – Israeli fear from Iran's military capability particularly in manufacturing long range missiles such as the Shehab 1, 2, 3, and 4. The Shehab 4 is considered the best of Iranian industries with a range of 2000 km, which can hit targets deep in Israel and Turkey. Benjamin Netanyahu, the former Israel prime Minister, expressed his fear in 1998 when he said the Islamic revolution in Iran represents real danger to the security and stability in the region. He also said that Iraq is improving ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons freely and without any interference or pressure from the world⁶⁸.

Both Turkey and Israel closely watch the military developments in Syria which attempts to achieve strategic balance with military power, and chemical and biological weapons⁶⁹.

Both Turkey and Israel cooperated to reduce and eliminate the Islamic influence in Turkey during the 1990s especially during 1996 and 1997 when the Alrafah party, led by ErbaKan, won the elections and became the prime minister of Turkey. Turkey and Israel exerted tremendous pressure on ErbaKan to show that he is incapable of keeping his promises especially the ones concerning the stopping of diplomatic ties with Israel. On the other hand, Erbakan did the opposite and met with Israeli officials and signed some agreements with them which negatively influenced his popularity. He was later forced to resign under the pressure of the Israeli and the Turkish military⁷⁰.

Indeed, the coordination between Turkey, Israel and the US is beneficial in deterring rogue states such as Iraq, Syria and Iran (all bordering Turkey). Such coordination is necessary

for acquiring better options in dealing with weapons of mass destruction programs of these states⁷¹.

Within the previous framework, the US has commissioned Turkey as well as Israel to implement a double containment policy of Iran and Iraq so as to weaken the opposing countries. This will help the United States accomplish the peace process between the Arabs and Israel.

TURKISH – ISRAELI REGIONAL PROJECTS

Ideal conditions developed for both Turkey and Israel to advance their economic and security projects in the Middle East. Turkey emphasized the importance of economic solutions to problems in the region, and in particular the water shortage problem. Akram Ghonderan, the Turkish ambassador to Israel said, “Turkey owns the rarest natural resources in the Middle East; water.” Water is considered a powerful factor in any country. He stated that Turkey knows that well and it builds its policy accordingly⁷².

Turkey suggested the establishment of “a peace pipe” to transfer the abundance of water from the two Ceyhan and Seyhan rivers in Turkey to the Asian Arab countries including Israel⁷³. However, the pipeline project had to be dropped. Over and above the fact that it was cost-ineffective, the major obstacle had to do with regional politics. Syria did not want Israel to gain; Saudi and Kuwaiti officials feared giving the Turks a role in and possible control over their water sovereignty. Other fears were related to the potential use of the pipelines for political blackmail or sabotage. Precedents of pipeline sabotage and stoppages in the Middle East are numerous⁷⁴. Turkey has tried, because of its large water reserve to propose the establishment of large scale water projects⁷⁵.

Turkey has been an enthusiastic backer of the multilateral negotiations component of the Middle East peace process, as well as such associated activities as the Middle East/North Africa Economic Summits held in Casablanca in 1994 and Amman in 1995. Prime Minister Ciller was one of the few heads of government to attend the landmark Casablanca summit. In her speech there, she set forth Turkey’s vision of a regional peace based on security-related confidence-building measures and regional “ economic interdependencies”⁷⁶. Ciller indicated that pursuing the peace process depends mainly on successful economic cooperation. This approach reflected that Turkey feels it has the solutions for the economic difficulties that face the Middle East and it wishes to advance its agenda and role. Turkey has demonstrated the potential and desire to develop and construct a “new” Middle East. It has been feared that both Turkey and Israel might demand making use of Arab countries’ oil capabilities in exchange for their projects claiming that this lies within the framework of regional cooperation⁷⁷.

In the 1990s, Ankara also actively engaged in regional multilateral efforts as an important participant in the Arms Control and Regional Security group in the Middle East multilateral peace process, and as the creator and implementer of ideas such as “a Balkan peace-keeping force” and “a Black Sea Economic Cooperation Zone”⁷⁸. Israel and Turkey remain engaged on joint projects involving commercial satellites, cargo transport, electricity production, and joint arms manufacturing⁷⁹.

Turkey and Israel are both attempting to advance their regional roles by offering economic projects, advancing their interests, demonstrating leadership, and showcasing their economic capabilities needed to find a solution for regional economic woes.

OBSTACLES FACING THE REGIONAL ROLE OF TURKEY AND ISRAEL

Despite the political, geographic, economic, and military capabilities resident in Israel and Turkey, and American support to assume regional leadership in the Middle East and Central Asia, there are still some obstacles facing them achieving their ambitions.

The first obstacle is the existence of competitive regional forces facing Turkey and Israel. Iran, Egypt, Syria and Iraq, compete with Turkey and Israel on the regional level. What makes these countries capable of competition is that they all own important economic resources such as oil, agriculture, population, and military forces recognized regionally and internationally. In addition there are indicators showing that there is some coordination and cooperation which might later become an alliance between Syria and Iran.

The second obstacle is the internal problems resident in both Turkey and Israel. Turkey and Israel have suffered from internal problems, which had a negative impact on their regional roles. Turkey has faced political, economic, and military problems. In addition, Turkey has faced the expansion of Kurdish problems, and its effect upon Turkey economically, socially, and militarily. Israel itself suffers from many internal problems regarding its security and economy. Regarding security, it has seen many military operations launched by Hezbollah from Lebanon and Aljehad and Hamas from Palestine. These operations have caused security instability in Israel. On the other hand the Israeli economy has undergone a deficit, despite its reception of US annual financial aid.

The final obstacle is the impact of the relationship with neighboring countries to Turkey and Israel. Both nations are enemies of Syria and share borders with her. Also, both nations perceive Iran and Iraq to be threats. The countries that surround them are intending to oppose Israeli - Turkish regional ambitions to prevent any regional hegemony.

REGIONAL PUBLIC REACTIONS

The Turkish-Israeli alignment is criticized by the Arab states and Iran⁸⁰. In Arab political discourse, Turkey's return to the Middle East was often referred to as "new Ottomanism," "new Turkish imperialism," or "Pan-turanism"⁸¹. After a two-day summit in June 1996 in Damascus, the leaders of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Syria issued a joint statement expressing their concern and demanding that Turkey reconsider the agreement⁸². Some Gulf States, such as Qatar and Oman, do not object to a Turkish and Israeli presence to counter the weight of Iraq, Iran and Saudi Arabia⁸³.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Muhammad Said al-Sahaf condemned the January 1998 American-Israeli-Turkish naval exercise a show of force as "a provocative act against the Arab nation"⁸⁴. Iraqi spokesmen criticized Turkey's relations with Israel and asked Ankara not to serve the interests of "the U.S.-Zionist alliance." Iraq has for years feared Turkish expansionism to take the oil-rich Mosul region, and has had a complex and charged relationship with Turkey⁸⁵.

Jordan has had good relations with Turkey for decades, which has also eased its acceptance of the Turkish-Israeli alignment in the 1990s. Jordan's Ambassador to the UN, Adnan Abu Odeh, cited Turkey as a Middle Eastern country and welcomed its involvement in regional affairs. For Jordan, a Middle East that excluded "Turkey and Israel from the identity of this geographical unit" was unfeasible⁸⁶.

Vice-President 'Abed al-Halim Khaddam of Syria, the country perhaps most affected by the Israeli-Turkish partnership, warned that it was "the greatest threat to the Arabs since 1948," and that U.S.-Turkish-Israeli ties were "the most dangerous alliance witnessed since the Second World War"⁸⁷.

The Islamic Republic of Iran also disliked the entente notably given its uncompromising hostility towards Israel⁸⁸. Iranian president Muhammad Khatami declared that the Turkish-Israeli entente "provokes the feelings of the Islamic world"⁸⁹. Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayeti declared in April 1996 "I have openly told Turkish officials that we had to stop factors that gave Israel further strength". Foreign Ministry officials offered the view that the planned January 1998 American-Turkish-Israeli naval exercise "will increase the chances of a crisis in the region" and was aimed at enhancing Israel's influence⁹⁰. The threat that Israel may attack Iran from bases in Turkey remains explicit⁹¹. Iran is disturbed by the defense pact and sees it, rightly as being aimed at itself in the long term.

Turkish-Israeli cooperation, especially developing defense alliance, in order to ensure their military supremacy in the region has had a negative regional public reaction.

THE IMPACT ON US REGIONAL INTERESTS

The United States welcomed the cooperation between Turkey and Israel as “helpful for stability in the area” and as “good to enforce security in the region”⁹². The Clinton administration describes the growing ties between Israel and Turkey as fulfillment of “a strategic objective of the United States that Turkey and Israel ought to enhance their military cooperation and their political relations”⁹³. It seems unlikely that these two nations could form a bilateral alliance without the approval of the United States, and this was confirmed by the Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai when he said that the pact between Israel and Turkey was hammered with the backing of the United States⁹⁴. “I always felt that the Americans love the relationship between them,” a senior pro-Israel lobbyist said⁹⁵. In 1995, Richard Holbrooke, then assistant secretary of state for Europe, said that “Turkey stands at the crossroads of almost every issue of importance to the U.S. on the Eurasian continent-including NATO, the Balkans, Cyprus, the Aegean, Iraq sanctions, Russian relations in the Caucasus and Central Asia, and transit routes for Caspian oil and gas. Our policy reflects the continuity of shared security interests and intensive security cooperation.” As a result, Washington’s lavish gifts of military assistance to Ankara places Turkey just behind Israel and Egypt as America’s most-favored arms client⁹⁶. Cooperation between Turkey and Israel creates a synergy that increases their importance to the United States⁹⁷.

Turkey and Israel were able to increase their status as the strongest, most reliable pro U.S. nations in the Middle East and their partnership benefits U.S. strategic interests, including such goals as containing Iran and Iraq. Turkey and Israel will no doubt enhance their military capability through the United State military assistance.

CONCLUSION

Turkey and Israel have political, economic, and military capabilities which enabled both to feature on the regional level. Thus, their regional role depends on continued power in these areas since the Arab nations around them suffer from fragmentation and a less united approach. Turkey and Israel established them selves as regional leaders, a role that depends on maintaining of stability and security in the Middle East and Central Asia. Turkey and Israel will do whatever necessary to achieve that goal, and will adopt US developed principles such as “fighting terrorism” and “encountering Muslim’s Fundamentalists” as well as other economic and political projects to faster their interests without paying any consideration to Arab-Islamic interests.

In spite of all military and economic capabilities for both Turkey and Israel, there have been some indications to limit their regional role such as: the availability of other regional competitive powers. They both have neighboring countries which oppose their regional influence, in addition, there are internal problems that would obfuscate that influence. The Turkish – Israeli cooperation is a strategic alliance with a specific regional objective. It has received the blessing and encouragement of the United States, always looking to advance American policy objectives in the Middle East and Central Asia.

The United States vital interest in the Middle East, security and stability will not be realized through the Turkish – Israeli strategic alliance. This alliance will create the opposite effect as others organize a counter alliance, enhancing an arms race instead of arms control. Hence, the United States should influence and support the peace process, encourage good relations with potential economic cooperation between all countries in the region, and find a solution for the water problem.

WORD COUNT = 6,101

ENDNOTES

¹ Moustapha H. Sleiman, *The Turkish Middle East Role: Between The Arab and Israel*, Strategy Research Project (Carlisle Barracks:US. Army War College, 10 April 2002), 8.

² Mahmut Bali Aykan, "The Palestinian Question in Turkish Foreign Policy from the 1950s to the 1990s," *International Journal of the Middle East Studies*, 25 (February 1993): 107.

³ Çevik Bir, and Martin Sherman, "Formula for Stability: Turkey Plus Israel," *Middle East Quarterly*, Fall 2002; available from <<http://www.meforum.org/article/511>>; Internet; accessed 25 January 2003.

⁴ Sleiman, 9.

⁵ Hesham Fawzi, "The Turkish Israeli Cooperation," *Almanar Journal*, no 1 (2000): 141.

⁶ Geoffrey Aronson, "The Demise of the 'New Middle East' Review and Analysis," Autumn 1998; available from <<http://www.fmep.org/reports/sr9811.html>>; Internet; accessed 23 January 2003.

⁷ Sleiman, 11.

⁸ Aronson, 4.

⁹ Efraim Inbar, "Regional Implications of the Israeli-Turkish Strategic Partnership," *Turkish Studies*, (Autumn 2002): 21.

¹⁰ Fawzi, 141.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹² M.Hakan Yavuz, "Turkish-Israeli Relations through the Lens of the Turkish Identity Debate," *Journal of Palestine Studies* (Autumn 1997): 26.

¹³ Fawzi, 142.

¹⁴ Yavuz, 26.

¹⁵ Fawzi, 142.

¹⁶ Philip Robins, Turkey and the Middle East (New York: Royal Institute International Affairs, 1991), 84-85.

¹⁷ Yavuz, 24.

¹⁸ Fawzi, 142.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Inbar, "Regional Implications of the Israeli-Turkish Strategic Partnership," 21.

²¹ Yavuz, 28.

²² Fawzi, 144.

²³ Yavuz, 29.

²⁴ Central Intelligence Agency, The World Fact Book: Turkey, 2002, available from <<http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/tu.htm>>; accessed 22 February 2003.

²⁵ Bir and Sherman.

²⁶ Philip Robins, Turkish-Israeli Relations: From the Periphery to the Center (Abu Dhabi: The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 2001), 5.

²⁷ Bir and Sherman.

²⁸ Bulent Aras, Palestinian Israeli Peace Process and Turkey (New York: Nova Science Publisher, 1998), 127.

²⁹ Ibid, 129.

³⁰ Fawzi, 154.

³¹ Barry Rubin, "Four Questions On Recent Turkish Politics And Foreign Policy," MERIA Seminar On Turkey, Middle East Review of International Affairs Journal, March 1998; available

from <<http://www.biu.ac.il/Besa/meria/journal/1998/issue1/jv2n1a6.htm>>. Internet. accessed 23 January 2003.

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³³ Henri J. Bakery, ed , Reluctant Neighbor: Turkey's Role in the Middle East (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996), 8.

³⁴ Harry G. Summers, Persian Gulf War Almanac (New York: Facts On File, 1995), 249.

³⁵ Fawzi,152.

³⁶ Robins, Turkey And The Middle East, 71.

³⁷ Alan Makovsky, and Sabri Sayari, "Turkey's New World: Changing Dynamics in Turkish Foreign Policy," 2000; available from <<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/pubs/intro/turkintro.htm>>; Internet; accessed 20 January 2003.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Fawzi, 153.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 155.

⁴¹ Aras,130.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Fawzi,155.

⁴⁴ Ewan W. Anderson, The Middle East: Geography and Geopolitics (New York: Routledge, 2000), 226.

⁴⁵ Anthony H. Cordesman, Peace and War (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), 174-178.

⁴⁶ Sleiman, 15.

⁴⁷ Richard Butler, The Greatest Threat (New York: Public Affairs, 2001), 238.

⁴⁸ Anderson, 226.

⁴⁹ Fawzi,146.

⁵⁰ Anthony H. Cordesman, After the Storm (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), 245.

⁵¹ Bakery, 22-23.

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⁵³ Central Intelligence Agency.

⁵⁴ M.C. Geokas, "The Turkish -Israeli Axis, Greece, and the Middle East," Washington Report on Middle East Affairs 14 October 1999; available from <<http://www.econ.ccsu.edu/Papathanasis/Research/herald.htm>>; Internet; accessed 21 January 2003.

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⁵⁶ Fawzi,149.

⁵⁷ Anderson, 255.

⁵⁸ Fawzi,150.

⁵⁹ Makovsky and Sayari.

⁶⁰ Fawzi,156.

⁶¹ Inbar, "Regional Implications of the Israeli-Turkish Strategic Partnership",23.

⁶² Bakery,155.

⁶³ Efraim Inbar, "The Israeli-Turkish Entente," The Internet Jerusalem Post 9 July 2001; available from < http://www.biu.ac.il/Spokesman/Stories/jul_09_2001.htm>; Internet; accessed 23 January 2003.

⁶⁴ Alain Gresh, "Turkish – Israeli – Syrian Relation and their Impact on the Middle East," The Middle East Journal Spring 1998; available from ProQuest; accessed 13January 2003.

⁶⁵ Inbar, "Regional Implications of the Israeli-Turkish Strategic Partnership," 24-26.

⁶⁶ Fawzi, 159.

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⁶⁹ Inbar, "Regional Implications of the Israeli-Turkish Strategic Partnership", 24.

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⁷⁵ Fawzi, 164.

⁷⁶ Bakery, 167.

⁷⁷ Fawzi, 166.

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⁷⁹ Yavuz, 32.

⁸⁰ Sabri Sayari, "Turkey and the Middle East in the 1990s," Journal of Palestine Studies (Spring 1997), 49.

⁸¹ Bir and Sherman.

⁸² Sayari, 49-50.

⁸³ Inbar, "The Israeli-Turkish Entente."

⁸⁴ Efraim Inbar, "Regional Implications of the Israeli-Turkish Strategic Partnership," Middle East Review of International Affairs Journal, June 2001; available from <<http://www.biu.ac.il/Besa/meria/journal/2001/issue2/jv5n2a5.html>>; Internet; accessed 20 January 2003.

⁸⁵ Inbar, "The Israeli-Turkish Entente."

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Bir and Sherman.

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⁹¹ Robert Olson, "The Turkey – Israeli Agreement and the Kurdish Question," Middle East International (24 May 1996), 18.

⁹² Inbar, "Regional Implications of the Israeli-Turkish Strategic Partnership," 38.

⁹³ Aronson, 5.

⁹⁴ Geokas.

⁹⁵ Aronson, 8.

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