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Turkey-Israel: A Fluctuating Alliance

Ufuk Ulutaş



ABSTRACT

When Turkish-Israeli relations were formalized in March 28, 1949, Turkey became the first Muslim state to recognize the state of Israel; however, relations were kept at a minimum level for decades. From 1949 to the early 1990s, relations were very fragile and followed a fluctuating pattern. This pattern was replaced by the “honeymoon years” starting from the late 1990’s. The late 1990s marked by the soft coup of 1997, also known as the “February 28 Process,” constituted an exception in the pattern and level of relations between Turkey and Israel. Since 2000, relations regained its historically fluctuating pattern and this continues to characterize the nature of relations between Turkey and Israel today.

The Israeli attack on the Gaza Strip in 2008 is a turning point in Turkish-Israeli relations. During the period from the Gaza attack to Ehud Barak’s recent Turkey visit, Turkey’s Israel policy has been consistent and well-organized, while Israeli policies toward Turkey can be characterized as chaotic and disorganized. The *mise-en-scène* of the most recent “chair crisis” is a clear indicator of this disorganization and chaos.

The bigger picture of the crisis between Turkey and Israel suggests a structural difference between the two countries’ foreign policy orientations and visions regarding the future of the Middle East. The Turkish-Israeli relations would continue to fluctuate without Israel’s willingness to deal decisively with the key issues of peace in the Middle East, such as the settlements, status of Jerusalem, and Lebanese and Syrian tracks, and most urgently, the improvement of humanitarian conditions in Gaza.



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Ufuk Ulutaş*

Background

When Turkish-Israeli relations were formalized in March 28, 1949, Turkey became the first Muslim state to recognize the state of Israel; however, relations were kept at a minimum level for decades. From 1949 to the early 1990s, relations were very fragile and followed a fluctuating pattern. This pattern was replaced by the “honeymoon years” starting from the late 1990’s. Since 2000, relations regained its historically fluctuating pattern and this continues to characterize the nature of relations between Turkey and Israel today.

First diplomatic strain between the two countries emerged in 1956 during the Suez crisis. As a result, Turkey downgraded its diplomatic representation in Israel. Arab countries’ pressure was influential in this decision, although Turkey refused to sever its ties with Israel completely. The downward trend of relations came to an end in 1958, when the first regular contacts between the two states were established at the hands of Turkish Prime Minister Adnan Menderes and the Prime Minister of Israel, David Ben-Gurion. The two leaders secretly laid down the framework for a “strategic alliance” based on the “peripheral doctrine,” which proposed exchanges of intelligence information and cooperation in military technology between the two countries.

In 1967, tensions ran high with the outbreak of the Six-Day War, as Turkey condemned Israel for its territorial gains in the war. During the Yom Kippur War of October 1973, Turkey refused to grant the right of passage through its airspace and use of its landing facilities to American cargo planes that carried urgent supplies to Israel.¹ In November 1980, Turkey reduced its diplomatic relations with Israel to the level of junior *chargés d’affaires* due to the Knesset’s decision to apply Israeli law to the eastern parts of Jerusalem, which had been occupied by Israel since the 1967 War.

* Middle East Program Coordinator, The SETA Foundation, Washington D.C., uulutas@setad.org.

1. Amikam Nachmani, “Turkey,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Eds. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. Vol. 20. 2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007, pp. 195-203.

It is not a coincidence, therefore, that the zenith years of the Turkish-Israeli relations (the late 1990s) are characterized by heavy military involvement in Turkish politics, which reached its peak with the so-called soft coup of February 28, 1997; the bilateral relations were unusually intensified at the hands of the military officials.

Starting from the early 1990s, the cold relationship between Turkey and Israel started to thaw as a result of several regional and global developments, including the collapse of communism and the relative progress in the Middle East peace process. Israeli withdrawal from much of southern Lebanon in 1985, the Madrid Conference in 1991, the Oslo accords in 1993, and the peace agreement between Israel and Jordan in 1994 helped open a new page for Turkish-Israeli relations.² Diplomatic relations were elevated for the first time to ambassadorial level in December 1991.

The end of the Cold War, especially, gave a new *raison d'être* for improved relations. Beginning in the early 1990s, several economic, military, and educational treaties were signed between the two states. A military agreement, signed in February 1996, brought extensive cooperation between the armies, navies, air forces, and weapons industries of the two countries. Interaction between the two states was bolstered by shared views on the Middle East,³ and the perception of common enemies: Syria, Iraq, and Iran. Turkish-Israeli relations reached the level of a strategic partnership. The fact that both states considered that they were surrounded by the same hostile “rogue” states motivated both Israel and Turkey into accepting one another as valuable strategic partners in a perceived hostile political environment.⁴

An Exceptional Period for the Turkish-Israeli Relations: The February 28 Process

Military aspect of the Turkish-Israeli relations has usually been superior to the civilian aspect, although the volume of military trade constituted only a quarter of the overall trade between the two countries. This is partly due to both countries' dire needs for military cooperation after the end of the Cold War. Israel provided a much-needed source of technologically advanced military equipment to Turkey, which the latter could not get from other Western sources then. Turkey, on the other hand, offered geostrategic depth to Israel, which has had narrow territorial dimensions.⁵ It is not a coincidence, therefore, that the zenith years of the Turkish-Israeli relations (the late 1990s) are characterized by heavy military involvement in Turkish politics, which reached its peak with the so-called soft coup of February 28, 1997; the bilateral relations were unusually intensified at the hands of the military officials. It is again noteworthy that General Çevik Bir,⁶ who was one of the main architects of the Turkish-Israeli “strategic alliance,” was also one of the leaders of the soft coup in 1997.

The late 1990s marked by the soft coup of 1997, also known as the “February 28 Process,” constituted an exception in the pattern and level of relations between Turkey and

2. Ibid.

3. See Efraim Inbar, ‘The Resilience of Israeli-Turkish Relations,’ *Israel Studies*, Vol. 11, No.4, October 2005, pp. 591-607.

4. Ufuk Ulutas, ‘The 2009 Israeli Elections and Turkish-Israeli Relations,’ SETA Policy Brief, February 2009, No. 31, p.8

5. Çevik Bir and Martin Sherman, ‘Formula for Stability: Turkey plus Israel,’ *The Middle East Quarterly*, Fall 2002, Vol. IX, No.4.

6. Then-Turkish deputy chief of staff [Gen.] Çevik Bir received the international leader award by the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA) in 1999 for his “contributions to cooperation with Israel.

Israel. Israel almost totally ignored the democratically elected government in Turkey led by Necmettin Erbakan, and maintained high-level relations with the Turkish military. The Turkish military, in turn, kept the Welfare Party government's policies in check, and intervened whenever they deemed it necessary. Turkish-Israeli relations were among the issues for which the military put pressure on the government at the time. As Çevik Bir says in an article he co-authored with Martin Sherman in 2002, "the army made it clear to Erbakan that it would not sit by idly and watch Turkey turn toward Islam or allow Israeli-Turkish military relations to be jeopardized."⁷

Israel's exclusive relations with the Turkish military and poor relations with its civilian government molded and conditioned the then-exceptionally high-level of relations between the two countries. When the Turkish military officials involved in the soft coup of 1997, who had close contacts with their Israeli counterparts, reached retirement⁸ and Turkey's democratization process accelerated, Turkish-Israeli relations fell back into its normal pattern.

Relations started to fluctuate again by the early 2000s, although these fluctuations did not harm military cooperation and trade and business, including tourism, between the two countries. The general tone of the bilateral relations, once again, started to be set by Israel's treatment of the Palestinians and its military operations in the Occupied Territories. The Second Intifada, in this sense, strained the relations and harsh statements were issued by several Turkish state officials. Bulent Ecevit, the Prime Minister at the time, protested very strongly Israel's treatment of Yasir Arafat in 2001 and the Battle of Jenin in 2002, which he believed was tantamount to "genocide."⁹

The Justice and Development Party's (JDP) rise to power in November 2002 did not, therefore, change Turkey's Israel policies substantially. It would be correct to argue that the honeymoon years for the Turkish-Israeli relations had already started to wane shortly before the AK Party's rise to power. The JDP government continued to criticize Israel over political issues and Israel's military operations in a similar fashion as the previous Turkish governments. Along these lines, Turkey voted affirmative at the UN to condemn Israel's separation wall in 2003; Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan denounced the killing of Sheikh Ahmed Yasin in 2004 as a "terrorist act" and actively protested Israeli military actions in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories in 2006.

Turkish-Israeli relations were not marked only by strains and tensions. For example, relations improved in 2005 and 2008. Israel's unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in 2005 was one key factor. In the same year, Turkey brokered the first public, official talks

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7. Çevik Bir and Martin Sherman, "Formula for Stability: Turkey plus Israel", *The Middle East Quarterly*, Fall 2002, Vol. IX, No.4.

8. Avni Ozgurel illustrates the level of close relations between Çevik Bir and his Israeli counterparts in an article he published on Radikal Daily. He mentions an e-mail message found in Bir's office computer sent to his Israeli counterpart. Bir says that "I may go to Istanbul [as the First Army Commander] this August. Otherwise, it is not possible to be in charge in Ankara [as the Commander of Turkish Armed Forces]. There will be active lobbying after wards. They may ask my retirement one year after. I made plans according to both possibilities. If they ask my retirement, I am planning to be the President." (*Radikal*, June 24, 2009)

9. (BBC News, April 4, 2002)

The first and the most explicit form of criticism by Turkey came on January 29, 2009 when Prime Minister Erdogan walked off the stage after an angry exchange with Israeli President, Shimon Peres, during a panel at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

between Pakistan and Israel, and Erdogan's official visit to Israel was an indicator of the level of good relations between the two countries.

During the period from May 21, 2008 to the beginning of Israeli offensive in Gaza on December 27, 2008, Turkey hosted five rounds of indirect talks between Israel and Syria. After an eight year break, on May 21, 2008, Damascus and Tel Aviv announced simultaneously the resumption of peace talks under the sponsorship of Turkey.¹⁰ Several Israeli officials, including Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, visited Turkey for indirect talks. Turkish officials, in turn, visited Israel several times.¹¹ The cordial relations which were maintained throughout 2008 were undermined by the Israeli attack on Gaza on December 28, 2009.

2009: A Year of Tension

The Israeli attack on the Gaza Strip, a.k.a. "Operation Cast Lead," is a turning point in Turkish-Israeli relations. The attack, which was initiated at a time when Turkey was working laboriously to bring Israel and Syria to the negotiation table, hampered the relations that had yet to be repaired. The year 2009 became one of the worst periods for the bilateral relations; and a series of incidents brought the crisis to new heights.

The Israeli attack on Gaza sparked a series of incidents that shaped Turkish-Israeli relations throughout 2009. The immediate response to the attack was the suspension of Israeli-Syrian peace talks by Syria, and harsh criticism directed by Turkey against Israel for its belligerence that undermined Turkey's peace efforts.¹² The first and the most explicit form of criticism by Turkey came on January 29, 2009 when Prime Minister Erdogan walked off the stage after an angry exchange with Israeli President, Shimon Peres, during a panel at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. Erdogan's fury was initially directed against the format of the panel, which did not allocate enough and balanced time slots for each panelists and did not give Erdogan the right to reply. The root cause of Erdogan's outburst, however, was Peres's refusal to recognize the humanitarian toll,¹³ which was the result of the Israeli attacks on Gaza and his defense of Israel as a state exercising its legitimate right of self-defense.

The Davos incident publicized the crisis between Turkey and Israel to the world; and placed Gaza at the center of the dispute. Turkish public and the international commentators applauded what they considered as "Erdogan's standing up to Israel" with

10. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Syria and Israel Start Peace Talks" (May 21, 2008) <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Communiques/2008/Syria+and+Israel+start+peace+talks+21-May-2008.htm> & "(SANA News Agency, May 21, 2008)

11. See Ufuk Ulutas, *Reclaiming Israeli-Syrian Peace Talks*, SETA Report, November 2009, No. 2.

12. (NTVMSNBC, December 29, 2008)

13. There are conflicting reports on the casualties. The Palestinian Health Ministry said 1,314 Gazans were killed in the conflict, more than 900 of them civilians. 5,300 Gazans were also injured. (*BBC News*, January 28, 2009) Israeli Defense Forces, on the other hand, contested the reports by the Palestinians and human rights groups, claiming that a total of 1,166 Palestinians were killed in the operation. 709 were Hamas militants, while 295 were civilians, including 89 minors and 49 women. (*Haaretz*, March 26, 2009)

great approval. Erdogan received a hero's welcome back home in Turkey because his remarks were supported by public opinion and his popularity reached its peak in the Arab world.

For Israel, it was understandably harder to get over such a public critique from a "friendly nation." Although Israel is somewhat accustomed to Turkey's occasional outcry on the Palestinian problem, the Davos incident made it clear to Israel that Turkish-Israeli relations would not be returning back to the honeymoon days of the late 1990s any time soon. Since that incident, Israel's policy towards Turkey has been shaped by what one may call "the Davos syndrome." This syndrome combines Israel's initial shock as a result of the Davos incident, its shaken trust in Turkey, its further isolation in the region, and Israel's perception of an increasingly critical attitude of the international community vis-à-vis Israel's policies towards the Palestinians. The syndrome is also aggravated by Israel's misreading of Turkey's foreign policy transformations over the course of the last decade.

During the period from the Gaza attack in 2008 to Ehud Barak's Turkey visit on January 10, 2010, Israeli policies toward Turkey can be characterized as chaotic and disorganized, while Turkey's Israel policy has been consistent and well-organized. Since the beginning of the Gaza attack, Turkey has been consistently criticizing Israel for using disproportionate violence; calling Israel to end the siege of Gaza, to let the humanitarian aid in the city, to freeze the settlement activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and to renew the peace talks with Syria. In return, Israel has been following a reactive policy toward Turkey coupled with domestic turmoil and fragmentation.

One of the indicators of the chaotic nature of Israel's Turkey policies is the contradictory statements made by Israeli statesmen on such issues as Turkey's mediation for Israeli-Syrian peace talks. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu said, for example, that Turkey could not be an impartial mediator in talks between Syria and Israel;¹⁴ while the Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon, who humiliated Turkey's ambassador to Israel because of the TV drama episode, had said in November 2008 that "some people questioned Turkey's impartiality, but I think this is behind us. If there is progress in the future, Turkey will be first to come to mind to help."¹⁵ While Israel's Trade, Industry and Labor Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer argued that Turkey is regaining its status as a mediator in indirect peace talks between Israel and Syria on December 5, 2009,¹⁶ Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman said that Turkey could not resume mediating Israel-Syria peace talks as long as he is in the office.¹⁷

The reason for Israel's most recent criticism of Turkey on a highly diplomatic level has its explanation from two fictional TV dramas broadcast on Turkish TV channels, *Ayrılık* and *Kurtlar Vadisi Pusu*, as well as the general anti-Israeli sentiment in Turkey. While TV

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14. (Ynet, November 15, 2009)

15. (Hurriyet Daily News, January 8, 2010)

16. (Haaretz, December 5, 2009)

17. (Ynet, December 27, 2009)

Transformation of Turkish foreign policy from isolationism to pro-active and multi-dimensional diplomacy and the increased cooperation between Turkey and regional countries contrast with Israel's fragmented domestic politics and its preoccupation with security leading to controversial military operations, the deadlock in the peace process, and the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

programs with anti-Israeli content, including BBC's *Spooks* in which a team of terrorists posing as Al-Qa'eda turns out to be Mossad agents, attracted no attention from high level Israeli diplomats; Israel's strong response¹⁸ and the uncommon involvements and reactions of top level Israeli officials (the Foreign Minister and the Deputy Foreign Minister) with regards to the Turkish TV dramas can only be explained by the abovementioned syndrome.

The *mise-en-scène* of the most recent "chair crisis"¹⁹ is also another indicator of the disorganization and chaos that Israel has been suffering from concerning its relations with Turkey. According to some Israeli sources, summoning the Turkish ambassador to convey Israel's criticism over the TV drama was Netanyahu's plan. Lieberman wanted Ayalon to have the ambassador sit on a lower chair to humiliate him; and it was Ayalon's initiative that the cameras were called in to record the physical and verbal humiliation.

As for Turkey's Israel policies, one can see a more organized and uniform approach within the government. Furthermore, one could argue that the government, the military and the opposition parties are somewhat on the same page as far as Turkey's sensitivities over the Palestinian problem and the general approach to Israel. Exclusion of Israel from the air-drill, Anatolian Eagle, which was to take place in Turkey from October 12 to 23, 2009, was a clear sign of this consensus between various state agencies, most notably the government and the military. It is critical to understand that Turkey now considers its relations with Israel, and other Middle Eastern countries, within the context of "peace in the Middle East." One should note that since the early 2000s, as was the case prior to the close relations during the late 1990s, all armed conflicts between Israel and its neighbors and Palestinians have undermined the bilateral relations. Meanwhile, any substantial progress in the Middle East peace process has translated into cordial relations between Turkey and Israel. Good relations in 2004-2005 and Erdogan's official visit to Israel in 2005, for example, coincided with Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip; while the close relations during 2008 was made possible by the Turkish mediation for Israeli-Syrian indirect talks and the progress in the Israeli-Syrian peace track.

The bigger picture of the tensions between Turkey and Israel suggests a structural difference between the two countries' foreign policy orientations and visions regarding the future of the Middle East. Several domestic, regional and global factors nurture this structural difference. Transformation of Turkish foreign policy from isolationism to pro-active and multi-dimensional diplomacy and the increased cooperation between Turkey and regional countries contrast with Israel's fragmented domestic politics and its preoccupation with security leading to controversial military operations, the dead-

18. Israel's Deputy FM, Danny Ayalon, deliberately humiliated the Turkish ambassador to Israel, by having him sit on a low couch and removing the Turkish flag from the table in a meeting called to protest a Turkish TV Drama. Ayalon said in Hebrew to the Israeli cameramen who had been called in to record the humiliation: "Pay attention that he is sitting in a lower chair, that there is only an Israeli flag on the table, and that we are not smiling."

19. See footnote 18.

lock in the peace process, and the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Changing international dynamics in the Middle East as well as the shift in United States' position on the Middle East with the new Obama administration make it imperative that a peace-oriented approach should be privileged.

Israel: Fragmented at Home, Isolated in the Region

An undisputable fact about Israel is that its domestic politics is highly fragmented; and in countries like Israel, where coalition governments are almost the rule, it is expected that the foreign policy making mechanism is highly influenced by domestic calculations. These calculations have had several implications for Israel's relations with its neighboring countries, including Turkey. This state of affairs hinders uniformity within the Israeli government and undermines the possibility of good relations between Turkey and Israel.

One can discern three different approaches vis-à-vis Turkey within the current Israeli government. Netanyahu seems to represent the group that is discontent with Turkey's criticism of Israel, but realistic enough to value the relations with Turkey while not willing to salvage it at all costs. As the leader of a coalition government, Netanyahu must also take into consideration the key party of the current coalition, the ultra-nationalist Israel Beitenu. The second approach is exemplified by politicians such as Ehud Barak who sees Turkey as a valuable partner in the region, and seems willing to repair the relations despite much criticism from within Israel. Put aside his domestic political calculations, he has a better reading of the shifting dynamics in the Middle East and Turkey's position in it; and his calls to avoid hostility toward Turkey at all costs²⁰ is demonstrative of this reading. Lieberman, and his deputy minister Ayalon, on the other hand, do not see Turkey as a strategic partner, and may not actually believe that Israel needs good relations with Turkey at all. It seems that Lieberman sees no need for regional partners thanks to extensive US support for Israel.²¹ Israeli foreign ministry sources argue that Lieberman wants to maintain Turkey-Israel tensions in order to prevent Turkey from resuming its role as mediator in Israel's peace talks with Syria.²²

These conflicting approaches vis-à-vis Turkey can also be understood by the struggle for power and prestige among the abovementioned leaders, especially between Barak and Lieberman. Lieberman's preoccupation with maintaining the rift between Turkey and Israel and preventing Barak's leading role may also be seen as Lieberman's strategy to reclaim his post as the Foreign Minister which has been occasionally filled by Barak and Netanyahu in the past.

One would argue that Barak's one-day trip to Ankara on January 17, 2009 was made despite Lieberman, but in coordination with Netanyahu, since the latter has the final

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20. (Ynet, October 12, 2009)

21. Lieberman said in an interview that U.S. will accept any Israeli policy decision. (*Haaretz*, April 23, 2009) Interestingly, he also sparked outrage in Egypt, one of the two Arab countries which Israel maintains diplomatic relations with, when he said during a speech in the Knesset that "Mubarak could go to hell" over the latter's refusal to make an official state visit to Israel.

22. (*Haaretz*, January 19, 2010)

With the adoption of new Turkish foreign policy, the Turkish-Israeli “strategic partnership” has lost much from its *raison d’être*, and the strategic partnership lost its basic motivation as the perception of a common enemy has disappeared for the Turkish side and the two countries’ views about the Middle East have started to differ considerably.

say in foreign affairs. The trip would have the potential to repair ties only if Tel Aviv responds positively to Ankara’s demands. It is very clear that Ankara valued Barak’s visit and showed its willingness to repair ties with Israel through responsive Israeli leaders, i.e. Barak and Netanyahu.²³ Erdogan apparently wants to bypass Lieberman and Ayalon, who, he thinks, stepped out of their roles,²⁴ and deal with the more moderate voices within the Israeli government.

Turkey in the New Middle East

The recent rift between Turkey and Israel should also be examined in the light of the new Turkish foreign policy. Since the early 2000s, Turkish foreign policy has been experiencing a fundamental transformation and Turkey’s regional and global position, its relations with its neighboring countries, and its long lasting international disputes have been redefined in accordance with the “zero-problem-with-neighbors” policy.

Turkey’s recent foreign policy initiatives are a clear indication of Turkey’s commitment to regional peace and represent the implementation of this new approach the Turkish state has pursued since the early 2000s. Through this policy, Turkey has established cordial relations with neighboring countries, such as Syria, Iraq, Iran, Georgia, and Russia, created extensive cooperation mechanisms with Syria and Iraq, signed historic protocols with Armenia (ending an almost century-long animosity between the two countries), ratified overtures toward the resolution of the Cyprus issue, substantially increased the volume of trade with neighboring countries, and abolished visa requirements reciprocally with Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Albania, and Qatar.

In an effort to mend ties with its neighbors and contribute to regional peace, Turkey undertook serious mediation efforts between Israel and Syria during 2008. Turkey has been urging Israel as well as the other parties to take steps toward regional peace. It took concrete steps to resolve the Black Sea crisis during the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008. The Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, visited Russia and Georgia as part of Turkey’s diplomatic efforts to reach common ground. This effort culminated in the creation of the Caucasus Cooperation and Stability Platform, which brought together countries from both sides.

The “zero-problem-with-neighbors” policy of Turkey so far paid off by creating new diplomatic and economic venues for Turkey. It strengthened Turkey’s regional and global standing considerably, and helped Turkey to get a more active role in world affairs through its non-permanent membership in the UN Security Council and membership in the G-20. With the adoption of new Turkish foreign policy, the Turkish-Israeli “strategic partnership” has lost much from its *raison d’être*, and the strategic partnership lost its basic motivation as the perception of a common enemy has disappeared for the Turkish side and the two countries’ views about the Middle East have started to differ considerably.

23. (NTVMSNBC, January 17, 2010)

24. *ibid*

As a matter of fact, the Middle East itself and Turkey's position in it have also changed. There is a regional power vacuum in the absence of strong Arab countries, especially Iraq and Egypt. More importantly, American influence has dropped coinciding with Turkey's diplomatic and economic rise in the Middle East. Turkey has established itself as a key regional power in the new Middle East, as well as in surrounding regions. In the new Middle East, according to the Turkish foreign policy vision, regional countries should enjoy a high level of economic,²⁵ social, and diplomatic cooperation, and avoid any form of armed conflicts. In this sense, Israel is one of the most problematic countries in the region due to its entanglements with its neighbors and needs to adapt to the new realities of the Middle East. The Israeli politicians and diplomats who appreciate these new realities will need to step up and demonstrate their willingness for regional peace. This would not only prevent Israel from further isolation but also achieve Israel's security in real terms.

Concluding Remarks

Turkey has voiced its willingness to resume mediation between Syria and Israel on several occasions, including during Barak's most recent visit to Ankara. Syria has also declared their preference for Turkish mediation to resume the peace talks. Israel seems to be divided and hesitant with regards to Turkish mediation, but a thaw of tensions between Turkey and Israel may bring the latter back to the negotiation table under the former's mediation. At this point, no other country could run the peace talks between Syria and Israel more effectively than Turkey and the United States. Therefore, Turkey should leave the door of mediation open for the Israeli-Syrian talks regardless of negative statements by some politicians in Israel against Turkey's mediation role. A renewed Turkish mediation would certainly help mend relations with Israel.

During Barak's recent visit, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu asked Barak to allow shipments of Turkish aid to Gaza via Israel and repeated Turkey's offer to resume mediation.²⁶ Turkey has conditioned the relations with Israel on Israel's determination for peace in the Middle East in general, and improvement of life in Gaza in particular. Israeli administration should understand that Turkish-Israeli relations would continue to fluctuate without Israel's willingness to deal decisively with the key issues of peace in the Middle East, such as the settlements, status of Jerusalem, and Lebanese and Syrian tracks, and most urgently, the improvement of humanitarian conditions in Gaza. Even small steps taken by Israel to improve the living conditions in Gaza would have an immediate impact on easing the tensions considerably between the two countries.

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25. For example, it is remarkable that Turkey's exports to the Middle East and North Africa has increased sevenfold during the last 7 years. (*The Economist*, October 29, 2009)

26. (*Haaretz*, January 19, 2010)

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The Israeli attack on the Gaza Strip in 2008 is a turning point in Turkish-Israeli relations. During the period from the Gaza attack to Ehud Barak’s recent Turkey visit, Turkey’s Israel policy has been consistent and well-organized, while Israeli policies toward Turkey can be characterized as chaotic and disorganized. The mise-en-scène of the most recent “chair crisis” is a clear indicator of this disorganization and chaos.

The bigger picture of the crisis between Turkey and Israel suggests a structural difference between the two countries’ foreign policy orientations and visions regarding the future of the Middle East. The Turkish-Israeli relations would continue to fluctuate without Israel’s willingness to deal decisively with the key issues of peace in the Middle East, such as the settlements, status of Jerusalem, and Lebanese and Syrian tracks, and most urgently, the improvement of humanitarian conditions in Gaza.

Ufuk ULUTAŞ

Mr. Ulutaş is the Middle East Program Coordinator of the SETA Foundation, Washington D.C. He is published on Israeli politics, the Arab-Israeli Peace Process, Turkish-Israeli relations, Jewish history and culture, and Turkish politics, among others. He has taught classes on world history at Ohio State University. He worked as a Graduate Research Associate at the Merhson Center for International Security Studies. He previously held the Samuel M. Melton Fellowship in Jewish Studies, and is the current holder of the George M. & Renée K. Levine Fellowship by the Melton Center for Jewish Studies. He received his B.A., magna cum laude, in Political Science and Public Administration from Bilkent University in Ankara, and his M.A. in modern Middle Eastern history from Ohio State University. He also studied at Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He is currently pursuing his Ph.D. at Ohio State University and is finishing his dissertation on the immigration of Turkish Jews to Israel during the inter-war years. His research languages include Turkish, Hebrew, Arabic, and French.

SETA | FOUNDATION FOR POLITICAL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH

Reşit Galip Cd. Hereke Sokak No: 10
GOP Çankaya 06700 Ankara TÜRKİYE
Ph: +90 312.405 61 51 | Fax : +90 312.405 69 03
www.setav.org | info@setav.org

SETA | Washington D.C. Office

1025 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 1106
Washington, D.C., 20036
Ph: 202-223-9885 | Fax: 202-223-6099
www.setadc.org | info@setadc.org