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**Turkish-Israeli Relations.  
The Deterioration of Alliance Between 2003  
and 2013: implication on the politics of the  
Middle East**

*Diplomová práce*

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## **Bibliografický záznam**

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## **Abstrakt**

Vztahy mezi Tureckem a Izraelem reprezentují jeden z nejméně fascinujících fenoménů ve Středním Východě. Turecko bylo prvním muslimským státem, jenž uznal existenci Izraele v roce 1949. Od této doby se za poslední století budovalo partnerství vedoucí ke vzniku mnoha strategických aliancí, které však na základě mnoha vlivů slábnou.

Obecně platí, že hlavním faktorem oslabení turecko-izraelských vztahů se stal útok Izraele na okupované území Gazy. Operace Lité Olovo, izraelská ofenziva, trvala po dobu tří týdnů od prosince 2008 do ledna 2009. Tato diplomová práce si dává za cíl prozkoumat tuto otázku z širší, tím pádem i komplexnější perspektivy, a dále také stanovit rozhodující příčiny rozpadu vzájemného partnerství. Práce identifikuje hlavní příčiny úpadku vztahů ze specifického pohledu geopolitických okolností v průběhu let 2003 až 2013.

## **Klíčová slova**

Aliance; Neorealismus; Turecko-Izraelské vztahy; zahraniční politika; Turecko; Izrael; AKP; geopolitika; Blízký východ

## **Abstract**

The relationship between Turkey and Israel represents one of the most fascinating phenomena in the Middle East. Turkey was the first Muslim state recognising the existence of the state of Israel in 1949. Since then the partnership has been developing throughout the past century, leading to the establishment of a strategic alliance.

There is a general understanding that the major decline in Turkish-Israeli relations was caused by the Israeli attack on the occupied territory of Gaza. Operation Cast Lead was a three weeks Israeli offensive starting in December 2008 until January 2009. This thesis aims to examine the issue from a broader, and hence more complex, perspective and assesses the decisive causes leading to the break of the partnership. The master thesis will identify the main causes behind the deterioration with a specific focus on the evolving geopolitical circumstances during the years between 2003 and 2013.

## **Keywords**

Alliance; Neorealism; Turkish-Israeli relations; Foreign policy; Turkey; Israel; AKP; geopolitics; Middle East

**Rozsah práce: 108,773 znaků**

## **Prohlášení**

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V Praze dne 11.5.2015

Judita Horváthová

## **Poděkování**

Na tomto místě bych rád poděkoval Mgr. Samuelovi Božkovi za souhlas s vedením práce a za vstřícný přístup při konzultacích.

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## INTRODUCTION

The relationship between Turkey and Israel represents one of the most fascinating phenomena in the Middle East. Turkey was the first Muslim state recognising the existence of the state of Israel in 1949. Since then the partnership has been developing throughout the past century, leading to the establishment of a strategic alliance.

The strengths of the Turkish-Israeli relationship included the democratic state system of both countries, the importance of regional stability, and their orientation towards the West. In early 2000s the two states dominated the region from the perspective of economic productivity, as well as military strength.<sup>1</sup> From the second half of the 2000s, however, the international community started to realize that the once close relationship between Israel and Turkey began a steep decline. There is a general understanding that the major decline in Turkish-Israeli relations was caused by the Israeli attack on the occupied territory of Gaza. Operation Cast Lead was a three weeks Israeli offensive starting in December 2008 until January 2009. This thesis aims to examine the issue from a broader, and hence more complex, perspective and assesses the decisive causes leading to the break of the partnership. This means including a review of domestic political factors as well as the influence of geopolitics.

The existence of a common strategic program strengthened the Turkish-Israeli alliance. The international system is fluctuating and states are following their own interests. The Middle East is a turbulent region where inter-state relations are influencing national interest and vice versa. The character of the Turkish-Israeli relationship needs to be understood from a number of angles. These include common identities and interests, as well as threat perceptions.

The topic of this thesis was chosen from my personal interest in the politics of Turkey's Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi – AKP) and its effect on Turkish domestic politics, the Turkish society and Turkey's foreign policy.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Burris 2003.

<sup>2</sup> In 2009 and 2010 I spent a year as an exchange student at the Department of International Relations of Fatih University, Istanbul. The main reason behind my decision for this particular higher education institution was to deepen my knowledge about Turkish political history and the evolution of Turkish politics under the AKP in particular.



The research topic of this writing is the relationship of Turkey and Israel during the ten years between 2003 and 2013. More specifically, the master thesis will examine the deterioration of the Turkish-Israeli alliance. The thesis aims to identify the main causes behind the deterioration with a specific focus on the evolving geopolitical circumstances during the years between 2003 and 2013.

The thesis will answer the following two research questions:

1. What were the domestic policy factors leading to the deterioration of the alliance between Turkey and Israel? The thesis particularly aims to find the answer what role did the Justice and Development Party (AKP) play in the process of worsening relations between Turkey and Israel?
2. What are the geopolitical factors leading to the worsening of Turkish-Israeli relations?

The master thesis is composed as follows:

The first chapter provides a definition to the theoretical framework of the thesis. The broader theoretical framework is Foreign Policy Analysis. Within the foreign policy analysis, the thesis will work with the Neorealist school of thought. Neorealism has been chosen as a theoretical framework for the research because it enables the examination of the states' international behavior. It derives from the assumption that the states are functioning in a self-help system, which explains their choice on entering or exiting an alliance. In order to reveal the causes of the deterioration of Turkish-Israeli relations, Stephen M. Walt's study on alliances is applied. Furthermore, the second part of the first chapter justifies the relevancy of the theoretical framework for case study of the Turkish-Israeli relationship

The second chapter focuses on the methodological approach being applied for the research. It explains how the processed empirical data enables the verification of the hypothesis and sounds as it follows: *The political interest of the Turkish governing party AKP is the key reason the deterioration of Turkish-Israeli alliance.*

Thirdly, the thesis looks at the background of the Turkish-Israeli relationship. Understanding the roots of their partnership is essential to enrich and achieve the research objective. The third chapter is divided into two parts; firstly, the timeline from 1949 until 1990, marking the beginnings of Israel's relations with Turkey. Secondly, it is looking at the period between 1990 and 2002. During this latter decade, the partnership developed into a strategic alliance and was flourishing in terms of military, economic and political cooperation too. The historical overview ends in the year 2002,

marking the most significant change in Turkey's domestic politics – the year when AKP got elected.

The fourth chapter represents the core of the research concluded on three levels. Firstly, the alliance is being examined in the context of geopolitics and threat perception. From the neorealist point of view, states decide to ally against a certain external threat. This approach also indicates that an alliance might dissolve if there is a change of perception of the threat. The geopolitical relations of Turkey and Israel with Syria, Iran, Iraq and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will be examined. Given the actuality of the Arab Spring the influence of these uprisings on the region's geopolitics will be also discussed. When examining the effect of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on Turkish-Israeli relations the thesis will focus on the timeframe starting in 2003. The year 2003 is important because it marks the Israeli parliamentary elections and the consequent establishment of a new Israeli government. On the other hand it more or less coincides with the beginning of the AKP government. The chapter on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict provides a brief overview on its history too.

The second part of the thesis' fourth chapter will focus on the variable of domestic politics. This is divided into two levels with particular focus on both countries. There were two elections in each country during this period that eventually played an important role in the progress of Turkish-Israeli relations (in Turkey – 2011, and Israel 2013). I will look at the impact of these two elections on the countries relationship.

The third part reviews the role of public opinion in each country as it played a meaningful role in the deterioration of the alliance. Therefore, the evolution of public opinion is examined. Lastly, the context of ideological divisions is being researched.

The fifth, being last chapter of the thesis, gives an insight to the reasons behind the deterioration of Turkish-Israeli relations.

The thesis is relying on secondary sources and to a certain extent on the studies of scholars of international relations. The primary sources that were used for the research are approached with caution given the motives of each diplomatic representation. The verification of the hypothesis and evidence is conducted by focusing on political events (such as the Gaza War, Davos incident, and the attack on the Mavi Marmara flotilla).

# 1 Theoretical Framework

## 1.1 Definition

The broader theoretical framework of the thesis is Foreign policy analysis. The primary goal of foreign policy analysis is to provide clarification on the reasons behind the foreign policy behavior of states. Foreign policy analysis involves gathering data on the state behavior, event counts, and it conducts separate levels of analysis. It also includes societal characteristics and behavioral modes. Foreign policy analysis is based on a concept consisting of four basic levels:

1. The international system level
2. The level of states
3. The level of domestic influences
4. Individual level.<sup>3</sup>

The thesis will be focused on the level of states and will be examining the relations between Turkey and Israel. Within the framework of foreign policy analysis the research will be conducted with the focus on neorealism. Neorealism concentrates on clarifying common forms of international behavior over time. Above all, neorealist theory deals with major issues in international politics such as, the causes of war and issues of cooperation or alliance forming.<sup>4</sup> While classical realism is predominantly focused on the foundations and practices of national power and their effect on international politics, neorealism examines the foreign policy decision-making procedures more thoroughly.

The nature of the international system is anarchic, therefore, it lacks the existence of world government or a higher authority. Consequently, individual states function in a so named self-help system.<sup>5</sup> According to the neorealist theory of Kenneth Waltz (1979), the autonomous states follow their interests with the aim to guarantee their own survival. Because each state disposes with different strengths this distinguishes their path in remaining powerful entities in the international arena.<sup>6</sup> The

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<sup>3</sup> Neack, Hey, and Haney 1995, 3-10.

<sup>4</sup> Lobell, Ripsman, Norris and Taliaferro 2009, 14.

<sup>5</sup> In Waltz's point of view, in an anarchic system, those states "who do not help themselves, or who do so less effectively than others, will fail to prosper, will lay themselves open to danger, will suffer." (Lobell, Ripsman, Norris and Taliaferro 2009, 18.)

<sup>6</sup> Waltz 1979, 28-30.

national decisions are influenced by domestic and international factors. Each state behaves in reaction to the rules of their surrounding structure.

In Stephen M. Walt's definition an alliance is either a formal or informal agreement ensuring security cooperation. The agreement may be established between two or more state entities. In order to fulfill the definition of alliance the states have to be committed to joint military support against the possibility of external danger.<sup>7</sup> Because the international system is anarchic, states follow their own interests without coordinating these interests with other states. Subsequently the durability of alliances depends on the national interest of each partner in the alliance.<sup>8</sup> Based on Waltz's theory, the extent and duration of Turkish-Israeli alliance depends on the national interest of each. The theory of alliances relates to the self-help system introduced by the neorealist school of thought. Since the security of states in such a system is not guaranteed, the states have to cooperate. In this context establishing an alliance is a form of cooperation.

Therefore Waltz's neorealist theory is more accurate (than classical realism) as it centers: "*on the properties and constraints imposed by the international system on all states and abstracts from the internal characteristics of individual states.*"<sup>9</sup> The change of international circumstances affects the course of foreign policy of the state. It might also have a changing power on national interest. National interests are determined on a domestic level and are affected by the socio-political changes. Thus the examination of the alliance between Turkey and Israel has to be approached from both international and domestic perspective.

It has to be pointed out that most of the literature on alliances is looking at the imminent threats and protection against them, whether there is a likelihood of war, etc. According to Walt these studies do not comprehend sufficiently the question of alliances as such. On the grounds of his opinion this thesis justifies the research of the Turkish-Israeli alliance based on his theory. As said by Walt: "*case studies on individual alliances can provide more reliable evidence*" in research and vice versa.<sup>10</sup>

The second inevitable aspect is the internal characteristics of allied states. At this point the domestic politics and ideology of the government is the most decisive

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<sup>7</sup> Walt 1997, 156-179.

<sup>8</sup> Walt 1997, 156-179.

<sup>9</sup> Lobell, Ripsman, Norris and Taliaferro 2009, 17.

<sup>10</sup> Walt 1983, 14.

factor affecting the survival of an alliance.<sup>11</sup> What is the role of the foreign policy and propaganda in influencing alliances?

From the classical realist school of thought Morgenthau already argued on the personal influence on foreign policy formation. According to Morgenthau's Six Principles of Political Realism: "*Politics is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature.*" In Morgenthau's opinion the nature of a statesman also plays a decisive role in defining national interests.<sup>12</sup>

Walt claims that states usually ally to balance threat. When examining Turkish-Israeli relations the threats coming from the direct geopolitical area are necessary to look at.

A different aspect to look at alliances is from the perspective of utility theory. In the view of utility theorists: "*states form alliances to increase their utility, measured in terms of security, risk or welfare.*"<sup>13</sup> The thesis also considers these factors in the context of changing relations between Turkey and Israel.

The research will not deal with Walt's perception of game theory. This part of international theory does not consider the influence of domestic perceptions, geography or ideology. Therefore it would not provide a sufficient explanation on this topic. In Walt's opinion relying on statistical sample complicates the research when studying alliances.

## **1.2 Application of the research to Turkish-Israeli relations between 2003-2013**

Walt's theory on alliances applied in this thesis is based on the presumption that the forces driving together countries are also responsible for them dividing apart. Therefore, when examining an alliance the factors play a decisive role in their survival.

In his book *The Origins of Alliances*, Walt points out the importance of understanding the causes of alliances.<sup>14</sup> The first part of the thesis focuses on the background of the Turkish-Israeli alliance. The timeline of the alliance is divided into two parts:

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<sup>11</sup> Walt 1983, 38-39.

<sup>12</sup> Morgenthau 1973, 4.

<sup>13</sup> Walt 1983, 1-49.

<sup>14</sup> Walt 1983, 1-49.

- The origins of their relations starting with 1949.
- The change of the character of the alliance starting in 1990.

Understanding the origins of the Turkish-Israeli relationship enables researching its further development. I have chosen to research this alliance for its strategic importance. The majority of researches are focused on states that either were or still are great international powers. The particular case of Turkey and Israel provides a new field for the application of this theory. The thesis derives from the assumption that international cooperation is based on the specific foreign policy inclination of the cooperating (allied) states.

In order to fulfill the research objective of the thesis I will compare the foreign policy of Turkey and Israel. The empirical data enables the comparison of the fundamentals of the theories.

To test the hypothesis a thoroughgoing analysis of Turkey's foreign policy change is being conducted. The supposition of the thesis is that the change in foreign policy orientation was the main cause behind the deterioration of the Turkish-Israeli relationship. There are two basic changes that can occur in the foreign policy orientation of country: a minor adjustment change or a fundamental change. Whichever the change, it is coming from domestic politics. The fundamental change in foreign policy represents a serious redirection of a state's foreign policy. These changes usually represent powerful consequences for other states. In the words of Hermann: *"these dramatic changes occur when new governments with different perceptions of the environment and new agendas come to power"*.<sup>15</sup> In line with Hermann's research it can be argued that there has been a major foreign policy change in Turkey. The changes adopted by the AKP correspond with the definition of a major foreign policy change, ie. *"change that occurs when the existing government elects to move in a different policy direction."*<sup>16</sup>

Therefore with the aim of identifying the fundamental aspects influencing the deterioration of Turkish-Israeli relations there are three variables applied:

- **geopolitics (threat perception)**

Geopolitics includes the realist school of thought's main theories of fundamental change. Geopolitics can be explained as "power politics between states". It incorporates the most important aspects dividing the states in the interstate

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<sup>15</sup> Hermann 1990.

<sup>16</sup> Hermann 1990.

organization.<sup>17</sup> By comparing the geopolitical situation in the 1990s and in the 2000s the thesis sheds light on the shared aims of the two countries.

- **domestic politics**

It is crucial to examine the variable of domestic politics when looking at the state's foreign policy actions.

- **ideological divisions.**

In connection with the variables applied in this thesis one has to look at Charles F. Hermann's study of foreign policy inclination. As establishing what comprises fundamental foreign policy carries several disputes I will distinguish between 3 different meanings introduced by Hermann:

- Program change
- Problem/goal change
- International orientation change.<sup>18</sup>

Hermann's research on foreign policy changes also underlies the statement that domestic politics may affect foreign policy in several aspects. Hermann argues that if the attitudes or beliefs of the government undergo a change this could shift its foreign policy decisions.

Hermann also deals with leader driven foreign policy changes. He defined leader driven change as a change resulting from "*the determined efforts of an authoritative policy-maker, frequently head of government, who imposes his own vision of the basic redirection necessary in foreign policy.*"<sup>19</sup> Based on the empirical data provided on the course of deteriorating Turkish-Israeli relations this definition is in line with Erdogan's and Davutoglu's policies towards Israel.<sup>20</sup> The thesis will be providing evidence on both domestic and geopolitical motivations and perceptions. This thesis argues that building relations with a number of Muslim countries is a direct consequence of the AKP leadership.

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<sup>17</sup> Deudney 1997, 94-96.

<sup>18</sup> Hermann 1990.

<sup>19</sup> Hermann 1990.

<sup>20</sup> "*Whatever the deep structural forces at work, foreign policy decisions always require determined efforts of policy-makers who impose their own vision on basic redirection necessary in foreign policy. Major shifts in the international system or in the configuration of domestic balances of power can either open new avenues or set boundaries for action, but the perceptions and belief systems of policymakers with respect to their internal and external environment are significant variables in accounting for foreign policy change.*" Bulent and Gorener 2010.

## **2 Methodology**

The methodology of the thesis derives from the empirical analytical paradigm and is in the form of an intrinsic case study. An intrinsic case study is undertaken because one wants better understanding of a particular case. The purpose is to understand the Turkish-Israeli relations, and more particularly its deterioration. From an epistemological point of view an explanatory approach will be applied. It enables to enlighten and identify the causal relations between the examined parts.

Philip Robins observes that most of the thoroughgoing studies on Turkish foreign policy are single-country studies, indicating that there is a lack of comparative researches. He also points out that with the lack of focus on the nature of the governing AKP the examination of the Turkish case is not sufficient.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, it is inevitable to focus on the role of AKP in this context.

The thesis works with three variables being the geopolitics on the Middle East, the variable of domestic politics, and the variable of ideological divisions.

Considering the first variable the thesis will approach the relationship from the perspective of their regional environment by discussing the background and importance of geopolitical aspects influencing the bilateral ties. Since coming to power the AKP has applied a significantly different foreign policy approach. With the application of the variables on empirical data the structural division between the foreign policy directions of the two states will be explained.

## **3 The background of the Turkish-Israeli relationship**

### **3.1 Turkish-Israeli relations between 1949 and 1990**

The establishment of relations between Turkey and Israel goes back to the 28<sup>th</sup> of March 1949 when Turkey recognized the existence of Israel as a state.<sup>22</sup> Turkey was the first Muslim country to do so and diplomatic ties soon followed. It is true, however, the common history of the Turkish and Jewish people traces back to early history connected to the Ottoman Empire.<sup>23</sup> Unlike many European countries, Israel's ties with Turkey do not have a history of persecution. In the Ottoman Empire Jews were granted

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<sup>21</sup> Robins 2006.

<sup>22</sup> Bolukbasi 1999.

<sup>23</sup> One of the first traces of friendly relations go back to 1492 when the Ottoman Empire took in the Jews after being expelled from Spain. Pipes 1998.



both religious and communal autonomy. Also, tolerance for Jews has been present in the politics of modern Turkey.<sup>24</sup>

Turkey's recognition of Israel as a state represented one of the most important regional developments in the Middle East.<sup>25</sup> The recognition occurred despite the reality that Turkey was originally opposing the separation of Palestine in 1947 fearing a communist rise in power there.<sup>i</sup> Turkey's approach towards Israel in this period was a direct reflection of its concerns of the surrounding Arabic states.<sup>26</sup> When looking at the very beginning of their relationship it is obvious that both parties needed each other if they were aiming to strengthen their international position.

In 1958 Turkish Prime Minister (PM), Adnan Menderes, and Israeli PM, David Ben Gurion, established first regular contacts between their countries. According to Ulutas it was the beginning of the "strategic alliance". The alliance was based on the "peripheral doctrine" recommending collaboration in military technology and in exchanging intelligence information.<sup>272829</sup>

Even though it was a positive start for the newly created Israel the relations between the two countries stayed at a minimum level for years. On the other hand steps such as commercial activities, establishing regular sea and air connections, as well as common cultural or sporting events helped to improve relations.<sup>30</sup> In the period between 1949 and 1963 Turkey viewed Israel as a country that managed to develop in a modern and progressive direction despite the underdevelopment of its area. The Turkish press even often compared the success of Israel with the failures of those of the Arabic countries.<sup>31</sup> Turkey therefore was highly supportive of Israel in the eyes of the international community. On the other hand it was not keen to publicly discuss the extent of their mutual cooperation.

Israel was trying to publicize their relationship as much as possible whereas Turkey rather kept the details secret and not visible for the public in general. Turkey

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<sup>24</sup> Eran 2011; Inbar 2005.

<sup>25</sup> Walker 2006.

<sup>26</sup> Ovali and Bozdaglioglu 2012; Aras 2002.

<sup>27</sup> Ulutas 2010.

<sup>28</sup> The contacts established in 1958 was a strictly confidential alliance also carrying the name "Phantom Pact". This alliance can be considered the antecedent of the strategic alignment forged in 1996. Bengio 2010, 34.

<sup>29</sup> It has to be noted that the alliance formed in 1958 included Iran as a third party however from a strategic point of view it was closer to a bilateral than a trilateral agreement. The softening of relations between Israel and Iran came first than the one between Turkey and Israel, and its most relevant attributes have been never revealed. Bengio 2010, p. 36.

<sup>30</sup> Bolukbasi 1999.

<sup>31</sup> Ovali and Bozdaglioglu 2012.

preferred to be discrete about the economic connections and was expecting the same from Israel. Even though it was looking for an ally like Israel in the region it did not want to damage its economic interests in the Arab world.<sup>32</sup>

Also, there was a solid consensus within Israel on seeking a partnership with Turkey. In the same time the Turkish government had to deal with anti-Israel feelings in the traditional Islamic layers of the Turkish public.<sup>33</sup> More than a decade after establishing the first cooperation the ties between the two states deepened. At the beginning of 1965 the annual volume of bilateral trade between Turkey and Israel reached USD 30.000.000. Besides the initial fields of cooperation this sum involved joint agriculture and research projects, industrial projects, as well as tourism.<sup>34</sup>

During the Cold War era Turkey's foreign policy was based on three main principles:

1. Pro-Western Orientation
2. Preserving the Status Quo
3. Protecting the role of the power elites both domestically and internationally.<sup>35</sup>

After the second half the 1960s Turkey adopted a "multidimensional" foreign policy with an aim to reduce its reliance on the West. It is important to mention the change towards this new concept in Turkish foreign policy as it had influence on the country's Middle East policy too.<sup>36</sup> It should be noted that even though Turkey was pursuing a pro-Western policy, this policy was not necessarily pro-Israeli.

In the aftermath of the Arab-Israeli war (or Six-Day War) in 1967 Turkey started to distance itself from the Middle East policy of the US. This represented constantly increasing support to Palestine.<sup>37</sup> Turkey also condemned Israel for its territorial gains during the war. The shift towards a more pro-Palestinian position was partially caused by domestic political pressures – including the growing influence of Islam in Turkish politics.<sup>38</sup> These were the first signs of Turkey's sympathy for the Palestinians residing in the occupied territories. However, this had nothing to do with the public opinion. This factor has not represented an influential power on Turkish domestic politics yet. It had more to do with increasing economic ties with Middle Eastern countries other than Israel.

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<sup>32</sup> Bengio 2010, 51.

<sup>33</sup> Bengio 2010, 46.

<sup>34</sup> Csicsmann and Rozsa 2013.

<sup>35</sup> Szymanski 2009.

<sup>36</sup> Uzer 2013.

<sup>37</sup> Bolukbasi 1999.

<sup>38</sup> Sayari 1997.

The Yom Kippur War in October 1973 brought with it more tension into Turkey's foreign policy towards Israel. The cargo planes carrying supplies from the US to Israel did not receive the right of passage through Turkey's airspace. The planes were also denied to use its landing facilities.<sup>39</sup> Turkey's support for the Arabic part deepened with opening a representative office of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). This representative office received a quasi-diplomatic status. Thereat the head of the PLO office had the same rank as the Israeli representative to Turkey – the rank of chargé d'affaires.<sup>40</sup> By giving the same diplomatic statues to a Palestinian representative the Turkish-Israeli collaboration reached its first minor crisis.

During the Cold War Turkey tried to stay uninvolved in regional conflicts such as the Iran-Iraq war, inter-Arab conflicts and most importantly the Arab-Israeli conflict.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, Turkey's relations with Israel became closer. The pro-Arab policy of Turkey as well as the Arabic pressure on the country during the 1970s and the 1980s were not sufficient to eliminate the relations with Israel. It is true however that Turkey several times publicly condemned the Israeli behavior towards the Palestinians. Turkey also voted alongside of the Arabic countries at the United Nations. However none of these actions were strong enough to destroy the relations between Turkey and Israel.<sup>42</sup> The spectrum of common interests that brought the two states together includes the establishment of joint military exercises, economic interest as well as diplomatic reasons.<sup>43</sup> After the middle of the 1990s Turkey became a leading Israeli tourist destination for almost two decades. Between 1993 and 2004 the annual trade between the two countries increased from USD 200 million to USD 2 billion.<sup>44</sup>

According to Sevket and Bozdaglioglu: *“A shared Western identity based on democratic values and secularism and the feeling of being “others” in the Muslim Middle East paved the way for intimate relations between Turkey and Israel.”*<sup>45</sup> The Kemalist political elite was supporting the orientation towards Israel and in the same time the reorientation from the countries of the Middle East. For many years to come it was undoubtedly a mutually beneficial relationship.

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<sup>39</sup> Ulutas 2010.

<sup>40</sup> Bolukbasi 1999.

<sup>41</sup> Sayari 1997.

<sup>42</sup> Ovali and Bozdaglioglu 2012.

<sup>43</sup> Burris 2003.

<sup>44</sup> Inbar 2005.

<sup>45</sup> Ovali and Bozdaglioglu 2012.

At the time of the strengthening of the Turkish-Israeli partnership Turkey's relations with the rest of the countries of the Middle East were not developing at the same speed. In the view of Joshua Walker, both countries were facing: "*an increasingly hostile neighborhood that viewed each with suspicion with.*"<sup>46</sup> Despite the existing Israeli-Palestinian process Turkey and Israel managed to grow closer to each other over the course of the years. This happened thanks to the shared democratic experiences and their pro-Western orientation.

### **3.2 Turkish-Israeli relations between 1990 and 2002**

Despite the collapse of the Soviet Union carrying hopes for Turkey becoming a regional superpower these expectations were not fulfilled. Turkey returned to the power politics with a focus on the close geopolitical situation. The traditional security-focused foreign policy was replaced by an economy-oriented realistic attitude. With the Cold War reaching its end the orientation of Turkish foreign policy began to change.

The new geostrategic conditions led to increased Turkish involvement in the greater Middle East. This occurred initially, under the government of Turgut Ozal - who was the Prime Minister from 1983 until 1989, and president of the republic from 1989 until 1993.<sup>47</sup> According to Ofra Bengio, the Turkish-Israeli alignment built in the 1990s proved to be a historical precedent. The agreement between the two states showed that when they join forces they are able to overcome the possible danger of political instability within countries in the region.<sup>48</sup> Since the middle of the 1990s the Israeli political representation has expressed their support to the partnership. Netanyahu while being in the position of the PM from 1996 until 1999, "*announced his commitment to intensifying it and viewed the entente as the main axis for a regional security framework*".<sup>49</sup> From the early 1990s onwards the relationship between Turkey and Israel transformed into an alliance in neorealist point of view.

The strategic reasons leading to the deepening relations overlapped with the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference, as well as with the Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation

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<sup>46</sup> Walker 2006.

<sup>47</sup> Taspinar 2008.

<sup>48</sup> Bengio 2010, 57.

<sup>49</sup> Inbar 2005.

efforts in 1993.<sup>50</sup>

In 1995 a memorandum incorporating the training of Turkish pilots by the Israeli air force was signed. Furthermore the memorandum provided permission for Israeli planes to use Turkish airspace.<sup>51</sup> The defense industry agreement of 1996 led to a large amount of arms sales – mostly from Israel to Turkey – and provided Turkish companies with a significant amount of work.<sup>52</sup> In February 1996 a new military and education agreement between Turkey and Israel was signed. The goal of the agreement was collaboration of military education in a form of naval visits, air force training, exchanges in military personnel and trainings in military academies.<sup>53</sup> Moreover the agreement allowed the transfer and sale of military technology and arms between the two states.

Sayari found that: *“Turkish officials have sought to play down the strategic implications of the agreement with Israel and repeatedly have emphasized that it is not a formal alliance, nor is it intended against any third party.”*<sup>54</sup>

The 1990s Turkish-Israeli alignment served a number of Israeli ends. Primarily, it addressed possible threats from other neighbouring countries. Furthermore, it was meant to enhance the peace process with the Arab states. Adding an ally from the region was perceived positively in international politics and increased Israel’s credibility.<sup>55</sup> <sup>56</sup> Also, the diplomatic support provided by Turkey was of crucial importance if Israel wanted to end its isolation.<sup>57</sup> While it is true that the alliance was beneficial for Israel, Jung and Piccoli found that it was mainly serving Turkish interests.<sup>58</sup> Turkey managed to fight the criticism against her in the field of human rights, and it improved its relationship with the US (not just only with the help of Israel itself, but with the assistance of the pro-Israeli lobby in the Congress).<sup>59</sup> For that reason the above claim might be true. This means that from the perspective of the international

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<sup>50</sup> Uzer 2013.

<sup>51</sup> Kanat 2013.

<sup>52</sup> Jung and Piccoli 2000.

<sup>53</sup> Sayari 1997.

<sup>54</sup> Sayari 1997.

<sup>55</sup> Bengio 2010, 69.

<sup>56</sup> This is true despite the fact that the initial motivation leading to the alliance did not so much come from Israel, but rather from Turkey. Jung and Piccoli 2000.

<sup>57</sup> Cohen and Freilich 2014.

<sup>58</sup> Jung and Piccoli 2000.

<sup>59</sup> Cohen and Freilich 2014.

environment Turkey gained more from the alliance. However based on the benefits<sup>60</sup> there was a mutual interest in closer Turkish-Israeli cooperation.

At the start of the 2000s a power vacuum surfaced in the Middle East and the region had to deal with new security threats. Turkey was searching for new markets for its evolving economy. Also, the support from the EU provided the necessary self-confidence for Turkey in order to become a regional power.<sup>61</sup> In 2002 the general view of international relations expert was: *“the declining importance of Turkish-Arab relations and a concomitant warming of Turco-Israeli relations have been very common.”*<sup>62</sup> It should be mentioned that the political representatives of the direct geopolitical environment of Turkey and Israel were skeptical about the alignment. Those states who felt threatened by it – Syria, Iran, and Iraq (before 2003) - were often criticizing the relationship Turkey and Israel built together.<sup>63</sup> Even though it is only a small Jewish community in Turkey (in 2005 it was estimated to be around 25,000 members) they also significantly benefitted from the good relations between Turkey and Israel.<sup>64</sup> This is also a noteworthy aspect for Israel’s interest in maintaining positive ties with its ally.

One year after the AKP winning the elections Turkey hosted an official visit from the Israeli President Moshe Katsav.<sup>65</sup> The high-profile visit indicated no change in the Turkish stance towards its ally. Also, from the perspective of economic collaboration, in 2004 a significant water deal was concluded between the AKP government and Israel. The deal’s duration was for 20 years and according to the agreement 50 million cubic meters of drinking water per year was to be shipped to several Israeli ports.<sup>66</sup> This deal further clarified the strength of the relations at that time.

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<sup>60</sup> The amount of Turkish-Israeli trade between 1996 and 2011 increased from USD 449 million to USD 4.44 billion. Cohen and Freilich 2014.

<sup>61</sup> Almuedo 2011.

<sup>62</sup> Aras 2002.

<sup>63</sup> Burris 2003.

<sup>64</sup> The Jewish Telegraphic Agency 2003.

<sup>65</sup> Inbar 2005.

<sup>66</sup> Inbar 2005.

## 4 The development of Turkish-Israeli relations between 2002 and 2013

### 4.1 Turkish-Israeli relations in the context of geopolitics and threat perception

#### Syria

At the establishment of their mutual partnership the two states had analogous concerns in connection with Syria. These concerns included the problem of rising Islamic radicalism, the geopolitical future of the countries of Central Asia, as well the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The end of the Cold War led to the intensification of these mutual interests. This was mainly because the two revisionist states in the region – Syria and Iran – gained bigger freedom of action.<sup>67</sup> It can be said the rise of Arab nationalism in Egypt, Syria and Iraq created the background for the Turkish-Israeli partnership.<sup>68</sup> During the 1990s from all of its neighbours Turkey's most problematic relations in the Middle Eastern (ME) region were with Syria. The two had strained relations as Syria was in support of the separatist Kurdish movement. Also, Syria tried to internationalize the water problem that was complicating relations between Syria and Turkey. Moreover, Syria had an agreement with Greece for Greek planes to use Syrian airspace should Greece ever have problems with Turkey.<sup>69</sup>

The 1996 Turkish military agreement with Israel led to a further deterioration of Turkey's relations with Syria, and it was criticized by other Arab states and Iran.<sup>70</sup> Inbar further says: "*Turkey capitalized on its strategic partnership with Israel when it coerced Syria in 1998 to expel the PKK leader, Abdullah Ocalan.*"<sup>71</sup> <sup>72</sup> It was a vital step for reinforcing Turkish national security and it could not have been achieved

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<sup>67</sup> Csicsmann and Rozsa 2013.

<sup>68</sup> Eran 2011.

<sup>69</sup> Usul and Ozcan 2010.

<sup>70</sup> Sayari 1997.

<sup>71</sup> Inbar 2005.

<sup>72</sup> The Kurds are a nation of 22 million. It is biggest nation in the world without having its own independent state. Kurdistan is not legally recognized and it does not have official political borders. The Kurds share about 450 square kilometers on several territories including Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan. There are about 10 to 12 million Kurds living in Turkey (forming 20% of the population), 5 to 6 million Kurds in Iran (10% of the population), about 4 million Kurds in Iraq (23% of the population).

without Israel's backing. Following the 1998 Adana agreement<sup>73</sup> the relations between Turkey and Syria started to normalize. It should be pointed out that the countries have solved most of their issues (in 1999) before the AKP gaining power.

Turkey and Syria reached an agreement during an official visit to Syria. The negotiations also brought a solution to the problem of lack of water in Syria. Turkey offered technical assistance to pump water from the Tigris, as well on the construction of a dam over the River Asi). Thanks to this agreement Syria has renounced all claims to the area of Hatay (Antakya).<sup>74</sup> After the AKP gaining power the number of state visits between the two states increased.

In 2002 an agreement of military cooperation between the two countries of Syria and Turkey was signed. In December 2004 an agreement on trade and investment cooperation followed.<sup>75</sup> This could be interpreted from two main perspectives:

- Assad's son, Bashar took over power and was keen on normalizing relations with the neighboring Turkey.
- AKP's policy to improve relations with Arabic neighbors.

The context of the 2003 war on Iraq also brought Turkey and Syria closer to each other. They both objected the invasion of Iraq.

Until the end of 2008 Turkey was acting as a mediator in the Israeli-Syrian dispute. It was an important help for Israel aiming to improve relations in the region. Simultaneously, by Turkey offering its good offices for the two countries it boosted Turkey's image as a key regional player.<sup>76</sup>

In 2008 Assad announced that Israel had offered its withdrawal from the Golan Heights in exchange for a peace treaty between Syria and Israel. After the announcement Turkey was further mediating between the two states. The Israeli attacks on Gaza in December 2008, however, made Syria withdraw from the negotiations. Nonetheless, three months later Assad was ready to negotiate again – notwithstanding the character of the future Israeli government.<sup>77</sup>

Despite Syria's offer to continue with the peace talks, by May 2009 it was Israel

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<sup>73</sup> The Adana Agreement was signed on the 20<sup>th</sup> of October 1998. It is defined as a turning point in the relationship between Syria and Turkey. It marks the establishment of collaboration on tackling the PKK. Following the successful implementation of the agreement the relationship between Turkey and Syria improved significantly.

Republic of Turkey. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Relations between Turkey–Syria [Internet].

<sup>74</sup> Sen and Celik 2004.

<sup>75</sup> Cohen and Freilich 2014; Sen and Celik 2004.

<sup>76</sup> Eran 2011.

<sup>77</sup> Hale 2009.



who was withdrawing from re-establishing the negotiations. The reason lies behind the fragmented Israeli coalition. Even though Netanyahu was the PM, Foreign Minister Lieberman opposed to negotiate with Syria because of Syria supporting both Hamas and Hezbollah. On the other hand, Ehud Barak (in the position of Defense Minister) was keen on establishing peace with both the Palestinians and Syrians. Later on Netanyahu said that the peace treaty with Syria is not worth it to give away the Golan Heights.<sup>78</sup>

In the meantime, despite Turkey trying to mediate between Israel and Syria, it also built better relations with the latter. In 2009 Turkey and Syria held its first joint military exercises (these were repeated in the following years). Also a visa waiver agreement was signed between the two.<sup>79</sup> The year 2011 brought with it the signature of an agreement on the construction of dams in the Hatay district. This project was, however, delayed for technical reasons. The plans of the two governments also included the creation of a high-speed train between the Syrian Aleppo Syrian and Turkish Gaziantep. Moreover, Turkey and Syria wanted to connect their natural gas networks by the end of the year. On the top of that the plans included the establishment of a common bank.<sup>80</sup>

The Turkish-Syrian relations - particularly in the years before the "Arab Spring" – reached their highest positive level. Between Bashar al-Assad and Recep Tayyip Erdogan a good personal relationship unfolded. The Syrian public perception of Turkey's disconnection from Israel in the aftermath of 2010 Gaza incident was viewed particularly positively. The Syrian citizens themselves were benefitting from this process. In 2010, Turkey, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon signed a four-party agreement with the aim to establish closer economic and cultural relationships and introduce visa-free travel in the region. These four countries were connected by a free-trade agreement mainly providing a distribution platform for Turkish products. Using the advantages of the visa-waiver program during 2010 there were 750.000 Syrians visiting Turkey, and 1.350.000 Turks visiting Syria.<sup>81</sup>

The relationship was damaged by the Syrian uprisings starting in 2011.

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<sup>78</sup> Hale 2009.

<sup>79</sup> The High Level Strategic Cooperation Council Agreement was signed on 16 September 2009. With this agreement, Turkey and Syria created a joint meeting of cabinets with the attendance of several ministers from both governments on 13 October 2009. Consequently the representatives signed a number of agreements in the areas of education, commerce, transportation and irrigation. (Usul and Ozcan 2010).

<sup>80</sup> Hurriyet Daily News – Online and Agence France-Presse 2011.

<sup>81</sup> Csicsmann and Rozsa 2013; Republic of Turkey. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Relations between Turkey–Syria [Internet].

During the 2012 AKP congress, Erdogan confirmed Turkey's logistical support to the Syrian opposition and that they will continue with supporting Syrian refugees. He referred to Assad's regime as a "killer of its own people". Furthermore, Erdogan called on Russia, China and Iran to reevaluate their stance on the Syrian situation.<sup>82</sup>

The main point of contention between Israel and Syria goes back to the year of 1967. During the war Israel annexed the territory of the Golan Heights from Syria.<sup>83</sup> Even though during the 1990s there were several talks aiming to resolve the territorial dispute that over the course of the years grew into a political conflict. The two states could not reach a solution. At the beginning, both Israel and Syria appreciated Turkey's help in mediating between them. However, the Israeli domestic political situation and the consequences of the Operation Cast Lead did not allow them to reach a point of agreement.

The war between Israel and Lebanon in 2006 had a negative impact. Following the war Turkey stop mediating the Israeli-Syrian talks. There is a consensus between Israel and Syria when considering the Arab Spring. None of them would like to see the extremist parties taking over power in Syria.

## **Iran**

The relationship between Turkey and Iran could be considered calm even before the AKP taking over the Turkish government. The two main issues connecting them were trade relations and the issue of Kurdistan. Therefore it can be characterized as dependent on mutual understanding and interests.<sup>84</sup> During the AKP power, relations between the two countries strengthened. After the visit of Turkish president Ahmet Necdet Sezer to Iran in 2002 the two states significantly improved their relationship. In 2004 Erdogan visited Iran, and in 2008 Ahmadinejad visited Turkey. The previous issues were pushed into background as the real politic and economic interests proved to be more important for both states.

Similarly to Iraq, the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime deepened their cooperation in the fight against the ambitions of Kurdish separatists.

In 2005 the representatives of the two states signed an agreement on mutual

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<sup>82</sup> Nouredine 2012.

<sup>83</sup> The Economist 2007.

<sup>84</sup> Usul and Ozcan 2010.

promotion and protection of investments; an agreement to avoid double taxation; and an agreement on cooperation in the field of tourism.<sup>85</sup> In 2007 Turkey and Iran gave their signature to build a gas pipeline. This was highly criticized by the US. By 2010 Iran was one of Turkey's top 10 export countries. In addition to the improving economic collaboration, their relations were evolving on the political and military level too.<sup>86</sup> Iran had problems with the Kurdish minority living at its borders. Likewise Turkey feared a destabilization of Iraq and a creation of an independent Kurdish state.

In 2008 Turkey and Iran signed an agreement for establishing security cooperation. This was primarily aimed at Kurdish terrorists and resulted in joint military actions and exchange of intelligence.<sup>87</sup> Iranian President Ahmadinejad visited Turkey in August 2008 and Turkish President Gül visited Tehran in March 2009. The agenda of these visits was mainly their bilateral relations however they also discussed possible developments in the ME region as a whole.<sup>88</sup>

Turkey on the international level acted as a mediator in the dispute around the Iranian nuclear program.<sup>89</sup> The sanctions introduced against Iran by the international community made the Iranian investors shift towards Turkey. According to a study in 2010 there were 1470 Iranian companies in the territory of Turkey. The fact Turkey did not agree with applying to sanctions introduced by the US and the EU created a new economic opportunity for the country.

Turkey's approach towards the "front of resistance" was strongly influenced by economic goals. Between 1996 and 2012 there were 14 important agreements signed between Iran and Turkey. Most of the cooperation was established in the field of telecommunication, healthcare, banking, car industry and most importantly in the energy sector. In 2011 Iran was supplying 30% of Turkey's oil import.<sup>90</sup> The economic interdependence created in this last decade also explains Turkey's attitude towards Iran.

The political changes caused by the Arab Spring overall had a negative effect on

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<sup>85</sup> Republic of Turkey. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Turkey's Commercial and Economic Relations with Iran [Internet].

<sup>86</sup> In 2000 the trade volume between Iran and Turkey was around USD 1 billion. By 2008 this increased to over USD 10.2 billion. Hale 2009.

<sup>87</sup> Hale 2009; Cohen and Freilich 2014.

<sup>88</sup> Usul and Ozcan 2010.

<sup>89</sup> In May 2010 the representatives of Turkey, Brazil and Iran signed a nuclear agreement. According to the agreement the low-enriched uranium produced in Iran would be transported and stored in Turkey. In exchange of this Iran would receive nuclear fuel for its research reactor based in Tehran. The agreement stated that this would make the uranium enrichment process unnecessary. The United States and the European Union did not support the Turkish - Brazilian initiative and voted further economic sanctions against Iran. Turkey strongly rejected these sanctions. Csicsmann and Rozsa 2013.

<sup>90</sup> Csicsmann and Rozsa 2013.

Turkish-Iranian relations. Particularly in connection with Syria - while Turkey is against the Assad regime, Iran is supporting it. For geopolitical reasons the fall of the Syrian regime would represent a serious change in balance of power. This represents a sharp tension between the two neighboring states.

In 2011 Iran still represents the most serious strategic danger to Israel. Firstly, it is because of Iran's nuclear program. Secondly, Iran has several times threatened Israel to "wipe the State of Israel out of the map". Lastly, Iran has been providing arms and financial support to Hamas and Hezbollah. Also, there was evidence that Iran was providing training to Palestinian soldiers.<sup>91</sup>

The reality that Turkey was tightening its relations with Iran during the time of Turkish-Israeli collaboration created tension on the Israeli side.<sup>92</sup>

In 2011, Iranian president Ahmadinejad welcomed a delegation from the Mavi Marmara. This was a clear sign of common anti-Israeli policy.<sup>93</sup>

The relationship between Israel and Iran reached a low point after the change of the regime in the latter. The main issues in the period of 2003 and 2013 included the Iranian funding of Hamas and Hezbollah, the nuclear program of Iran, Israel's possession of nuclear weapons and several Iranian threats to wipe out Israel from the map, and the territory of Israel belong to the Palestinian people.

Israel has considered Iran as the biggest state threat especially since the 1991 Gulf War. There has been strong rhetoric from Israel against Iran and vice versa. In the wake of the war in Iraq the Israeli government expressed its desire for Iran to be the next country that should be overthrown.<sup>94</sup> Regardless of the negative relations between the two there is a certain history of Iran-Israeli relations. During the cold war the two countries cooperated in geostrategic terms involving security and intelligence collaboration.<sup>95</sup> On the other hand in the wake of the strained relations Israel has been skeptical about the cooperation between Turkey and Iran.

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<sup>91</sup> Najslova and Baskin 2011.

<sup>92</sup> The decision of Turkey to tighten relations with both Syria and Iran was viewed as an act of anti-Israeli sentiment.

<sup>93</sup> According to Bekdil: "*The difference between the rhetoric of Ahmadinejad and Davutoglu is that the Iran was talking about "no Israel" in plain language while Davutoglu was talking about a "smaller Israel" in subtle language.*" Bekdil 2014.

<sup>94</sup> Cook 2008, 40-43.

<sup>95</sup> Hassibi 2014.

## Iraq

In 1998 Turkey had unresolved territorial disputes with Syria and Iraq, and these two countries were also longstanding enemies of Israel.<sup>96</sup> The 2003 US intervention had a decisive influence on Turkey's relations with Iraq. The fact that Turkey denied the use of its military bases as well as Turkish territory for needs of the US interventions significantly diminished its relations with the US. The US and Turkey repaired relations later on and seemed to reach a new high in 2009 after Obama's visit to Turkey.<sup>97</sup> The reluctance of Turkey to participate in the war can be justified by its concerns over the stability and security in the region. More precisely, Turkey was afraid of the strengthening Kurdish separatism that could eventually lead to an establishment of an independent Kurdish state. Indeed, Turkey's Kurdish problem is the dominating political reason of its relationship with Iraq.

Israel was not directly connected to the War in Iraq and the decision to get involved in it was seen as Israel's own. On the other hand the Israeli political leadership saw its country as a victim of the circumstances, yet at the same time also as a dynamic partner of the US.<sup>98</sup> Therefore, Israel stood by the side of the US during the war in Iraq. Jonathan Cook<sup>99</sup> states that in February 2002 Ariel Sharon visited the White House and was advising President Bush on Iraqi strike plans. Few months later Sharon declared in the Knesset that Iraq represents a major threat to Israel.<sup>100</sup>

Following the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime the PKK managed to re-establish its basis in northern Iraq. It represented a significant threat to Turkey's security as from this strategic position the PKK was now able to launch direct terrorist attacks on Turkey. Even though the PKK did not succeed in further growing its power (partly thanks to the joint Turkish-US-Iraqi counter operations) the Kurdish separatist remained an imminent threat.<sup>101</sup>

These fears further increased after the Iraqi elections (2005). The elections

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<sup>96</sup> Pipes 1998.

<sup>97</sup> Bulent and Gorener 2010.

<sup>98</sup> Warschawski 2003.

<sup>99</sup> Jonathan Cook is an award-winning British writer and journalist reporting on the Middle East, with a special focus on the Israel-Palestine conflict.

<sup>100</sup> Cook 2008, 33.

<sup>101</sup> Hale 2009.

resulted in the win by Jalal Talabani<sup>102</sup> who has Kurdish roots. In the following years, however, the fears about the new president proven to be unjustified and Iraq established good diplomatic relations with Turkey.

The 2008 Baghdad agreement was a key agreement (10<sup>th</sup> of July, 2008) creating a strategic agenda between the two countries. The agreement was covering political, economic, water, energy, as well as security and military issues. However, it did not involve the establishment of political cooperation between the two. The political cooperation happened between the frameworks of NATO and the UN. These frameworks were dealing with the cooperation activities of Iraq with its neighboring countries. Turkey, however, offered additional economic assistance for rebuilding Iraq in a form of energy supplies as well as humanitarian aid. In addition, it opened its education system to exchanging students and teachers.<sup>103</sup>

In the year of 2007 and 2008 there were armed actions deployed against the PKK. These, together with the political benefits of the ongoing collaboration between Iraq and Turkey, led to the practical elimination of the Kurdish threat. The economic cooperation between Turkey and Iraq was developing at a fast pace.

In 2009 Talabani visited Turkey and officially confirmed that his government is against the idea of an independent Kurdish state, or any union between the Kurds living in Iraq, Turkey and Iran. A few weeks later, Abdullah Gul paid a visit to Iraq, becoming the first Turkish president visiting Baghdad since Saddam Hussein's government.<sup>104</sup> Another significant development between Turkey and Iraq occurred on the 1<sup>st</sup> of June 2009 - Iraqi Kurds began crude oil exports via Turkey.<sup>105 106</sup>

According to Siret Hursoy<sup>107</sup>, in 2011 Turkey's approach to Iraq was based on consolidating economic and diplomatic relations with the central government, as well as with the Iraqi sectarian groups with the aim of strengthening the territorial integrity of Iraq.<sup>108</sup>

Iraq and Israel still has not established formal diplomatic relations given the reality that Iraq refuses to recognize the State of Israel. Turkey growing closer with Iraq

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<sup>102</sup> Talabani was the first non-Arab president of Iraq.

<sup>103</sup> Republic of Turkey. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Turkey's Contributions to Iraq [Internet].

<sup>104</sup> Hale 2009.

<sup>105</sup> Usul and Ozcan 2010.

<sup>106</sup> Since 2002 trade with the not just the Arab Middle East but with North Africa as whole has grown markedly. Turkey's biggest focus was Iran, Syria and Iraq. Kohen 2012.

<sup>107</sup> Siret Hursoy is a professor of International Relations at the EGE University in Izmir, Turkey.

<sup>108</sup> Hursoy 2011.

in the period between 2003 and 2013 did have a negative influence Turkish-Israeli relations however are not of vital importance. Israel, even though not officially, acknowledges Turkey's security concerns resulting from the Kurdish insurgent movements.

## **Palestine (Israeli-Palestinian Conflict)**

The territory of Palestine itself cannot be considered as a geopolitical factor in connection with the Turkish-Israeli relations. On the other hand, the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict should be looked at. The relationship between Israel and Palestine is undoubtedly a key regional influence.

Because the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is perceived differently in each country this has been a source of tension from the very beginning of Turkish-Israeli relationship. Depending on the status of the conflict, the international perception of it and on the current domestic representation the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been swaying the relations between Israel and Turkey.

To begin with, in the aftermath of the 1956 Suez War the relations between Israel and Turkey were relegated. In 1980, after the Israeli parliament adopted the Jerusalem Law, Turkey downgraded again its representation in Israel. The Israel military raids on the Palestinians were unacceptable for Turkey.<sup>109</sup>

In 2004, during the Second Intifada Yasser Arafat, the chairman of the PLO and Palestinian President died. His death directly led to the strengthening of his political opponents. One of the main political rivals was the Palestinian Islamic Organization, Hamas. In the leadership of the PLO, Arafat's position was taken over by Mahmoud Abbas.<sup>110</sup> The strengthening of Hamas together with other internal political developments in Palestine led to the election of Hamas in the territory of Gaza in 2005. One year later, Hamas came out as a winner in the second Palestinian parliamentary elections.<sup>111</sup> These results were shocking for not just the international community as such, but for many Palestinians themselves. Israel together with other countries did not acknowledge the election results and considered Hamas as a terrorist organization. In

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<sup>109</sup> Uzer 2013.

<sup>110</sup> Čejka 2013, 249.

<sup>111</sup> The strengthening of Hamas and weakening of PLO (respectively Fatah) is connected to the death of Arafat and the consequent corruption scandals of Fatah.

the following years the situation did not change and Israel refused to establish any sort of communication with Hamas. The main line of conflict is not only Hamas being a terrorist organization in the eyes of Israel, but that the group does not recognize the existence of Israel as a state.

In 2005 the Israeli government decided to evacuate the Jewish settlements from Gaza. This led to the solidification of Hamas's power in the area resulting in increased tension between Israel and Palestine. Officially, Hamas and Israel were neither willing nor able to set up any sort of communication between them. The radical militants from Hamas were attacking the Israeli territories around Gaza. Israel reacted with harsh military retaliation.<sup>112</sup>

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict was further escalating during the years 2007 and 2008. This was partly caused by the uncertain domestic political situation in Israel as well by the growing influence of Hamas in Gaza. Despite the West Bank, controlled by Fatah, remaining relatively calm, Hamas was still launching several attacks from Gaza on the Jewish settlements. Moreover, in 2008 Hamas launched several terrorist attacks on Jerusalem as well. Israel evacuated several territories but it was not sufficient. Another factor worsening Israel's relations with Palestine was the setback of the peace talks, in particular the Road Map. Hamas strengthened its rocket attacks on the Israeli territory. In response to Hamas's rocket attacks the Israel retaliated with Operation Cast Lead, starting on the 28<sup>th</sup> of December 2008. Operation Cast Lead was officially aimed on ending Hamas's rocket attacks. The 2008-2009 Operation Cast Lead was a disproportionate attack in the Gaza Strip resulting in 1417 Palestinian casualties, 926 being civilians. During the three week offensive, 10 Israeli soldiers died, and Israel was firing white phosphorus over heavily populated areas of Gaza.<sup>113</sup>

The "Gaza Freedom Flotilla" left Turkey in May 2010 and consisted of six ships (originally eight ships but two could not sail out due to technical issues). The aim of the Freedom Flotilla was to break the Israeli embargo and deliver humanitarian support to Gaza. In addition to the Turks, the passengers included Americans, Arabs, British and German activists. Also, there were five Israeli citizens on the ship.<sup>114</sup> No weapons were found on the ship. This justified the international community's reaction to Israeli aggression on the flotilla.

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<sup>112</sup> Čejka 2013, 278.

<sup>113</sup> Kosebalaban 2010.

<sup>114</sup> Uzer 2013.



## Arab Spring

The Arab Spring began with a number of uprisings in December 2010 and it fundamentally affected the Turkish foreign policy. It was not possible to maintain its previous approach to the Arabic states any longer. The AKP rapprochement towards the Arab world was conditioned by the authoritarian regimes staying in power. This represented a serious dilemma for Turkey. Turkey did not have unified response to the Arab spring events.

As the events of the Arab Spring have led to the creation of new sources of conflict, it made it impossible for Turkey to follow the concept of “zero problems with neighbours.”<sup>115</sup>

By 2011 Tunisia’s President Ben Ali, the president of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak and Muammar Gaddafi the president of Libya were removed from power.

The Changes taking place in the context of the Arab Spring did not result in a significant shift in the tense Turkish-Israeli relationship. By the summer of 2012 the civil war in Syria represented a risk for a regional escalation. Therefore, for pragmatic reasons Turkey and Israel was brought closer to each other to a certain extent. Both countries were endangered by the possible acceleration of the conflict. Both Turkey and Israel were avoiding military intervention however were working on the Assad’s regime isolation.

The changes in the strategic balance of power induced by the Arab Spring ought to lead to the normalization of Turkish-Israeli relations. The government of Benjamin Netanyahu, however, still rejected the apology from Turkey. He did so despite going against the Israeli public opinion. The consequences of the Arab Spring had a negative influence on Turkey’s perception as a mediator in the Palestinian question. In 2012 the Israeli army launched a military operation in Gaza (Operation Pillar of Defense). Operation Pillar of Defense was sharply criticized by the Turkish government. According to Csicsmann Laszlo and N. Rozsa Erzsebet, Erdogan choose a condemnatory rhetoric – calling Israel a “terrorist state” and the military operation in Gaza as “ethnic cleansing” to win over Arabic public opinion.<sup>116</sup> Despite this Erdogan

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<sup>115</sup> Hursoy 2011.

<sup>116</sup> Csicsmann and Rozsa 2013.

did not contribute to the ending of the military action in November 2012. It was Egypt's newly elected Islamic president Mohamed Morsi who negotiated the ceasefire.

Both Turkey and Israel were in need of a stable Middle East. The uprisings in several countries - Arab Spring – threaten this desire. Therefore this could work as factor in bringing the two countries together.

According to Hale, of these four countries – Iraq, Iran, Syria and Palestine – Iraq is the most important for Turkey. On one hand because of the Kurdish situation as well as their economic interconnectedness. It is in Turkey's interest to have a balanced Iraqi government in order to keep the balance of power in the region.<sup>117</sup>

From the economic perspective Iraq represented one of Turkey's most crucial export markets. In 2008 the Iraqi market was worth almost USD 4 billion.<sup>118</sup> The relation between Turkey and Israel/Palestine are *“unusually for a foreign policy question, they are quite deeply affected by a fairly sharp divide within domestic opinion.”*<sup>119</sup>

After Turkey's relations with the Arab neighbours improved, its relations with Israel started to decline. This trend is being looked at from two different perspectives:

- A result of declining security threats against Turkey (therefore decreasing need for Israel's support in the Middle East)
- Islamization of Turkish politics.<sup>120</sup>

When comparing the trade volume between 1999 and 2008, the trade amount between Turkey and Iran is ten, Turkey and Iraq is four, and between Turkey and Syria is three times higher.<sup>121</sup> Moreover, since the AKP government Turkey became an important foreign direct investor on several infrastructure developments in the region.

There is a growing tendency of Turkish foreign policy turning to countries with Arab Islamist Causes. Besides, Syria and Iran the AKP government developed closer relations with Sudan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia as well as with Hezbollah and Hamas. The high level visits to these countries indicate that Turkey was refocusing not only from Israel, but also from the Caucasus and the Balkans.<sup>122</sup> Since October 2011 Turkey – together with Qatar and Saudi Arabia - was financially and militarily supporting the Syrian rebels groups. In 2012 there were several military agreements signed between

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<sup>117</sup> Hale 2009.

<sup>118</sup> Uzer 2013.

<sup>119</sup> Hale 2009.

<sup>120</sup> Ayturk 2011.

<sup>121</sup> Renda 2011.

<sup>122</sup> Cagaptay 2009.

Turkey and these two Gulf states. These agreements go far beyond settling the Syrian issue. The arrangements set out joint military exercises and training of military personnel, military collaboration between the academia and so on.

## **4.2 Turkish-Israeli relations in the context of domestic politics level<sup>123</sup>**

K. J. Holsti, in his study, reaches a conclusion that domestic politics could be a source of foreign policy changes. Holsti claims that domestic politics have the ability to influence foreign policy through various inclinations. Holsti further researched foreign policy changes in eight different states and indicated that seven out of eight cases could be explained by the leader's orientation.<sup>124</sup>

Domestic politics played a determinant role in the development of relations between Turkey and Israel. To the domestic level of the partnership belonged the historic and cultural relations between the Ottoman Empire and the Jews.

### **4.2.1 Domestic Politics of Turkey (AKP)**

In 2002 the AKP became the largest single political party in the The Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA). The TGNA is Turkey's unicameral parliament and has 550 members.<sup>125</sup><sup>126</sup> The party won the elections in 2002, 2007 and 2011.<sup>127</sup>

In Turkey there is a 10% election threshold that essentially makes it impossible for smaller parties to enter the parliament.<sup>128</sup> Due to this, and to the fact that the secular parties are fragmented, AKP enjoyed disproportionate support in the 2007 elections. On the to other hand, the party is still disposes with the strongest electoral base but it stands far from the majority support of the Turkish electorate.

The problems of the Kurdish insurgent activities represented a major domestic

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<sup>123</sup> The fundamentals of Davutoglu's "strategic depth" lay within the new transnational geopolitical forces. The principle offers a new geopolitical picture of Turkey. It embodies a secularized form of Islamic politics focused towards increasing the power of Turkey in the regions of the Ottoman Empire. Yalvac 2012.

<sup>124</sup> Holsti 1982.

<sup>125</sup> The AKP won with 34.3% delivering it 66% of all the seats in TGNA, receiving 363 mandates. The strongest opposition party was the secularist Republican People's Party (CHP) receiving 19.4% in the elections and 178 mandates in the parliament. Robins 2003.

<sup>126</sup> Erdogan did not take office as a result of past conviction and he served four months in prison. He was also forced to resign from the position of the Mayor of Istanbul. Robins 2003.

<sup>127</sup> In 2007 Turkey hold both Presidential in April-May and Parliamentary elections in November.

<sup>128</sup> Cagaptay 2007.

political issue that had to be tackled with the assistance of foreign policy decisions. After the establishment of the AKP government the two main foreign policy issues dominating between the two states was the 2003 Iraqi invasion and Iran's nuclear program.<sup>129</sup> Despite Turkey not expressing support for the nuclear activities it did not choose to directly confront its neighbour on this matter. The Kurdish problem had a larger importance for Turkey than to sabotage its cooperation with Iran over Iran's nuclear ambitions. Domestic politics clearly implicated Turkey's foreign policy decisions.

According to Philip Robins, Turkey between December 2002 and March 2003 (the start of the invasion of Iraq) underwent "*the most extraordinary reversal in its foreign relations.*"<sup>130</sup> The reversal's source was the abovementioned Kurdish problem that the newly elected government wanted to find a definitive solution to. Secondly, the reversal was coming from the "strategic depth doctrine" according to which Turkey's domestic development was directly linked to the improvement of its relations in the region.

Turkey's increased involvement with the Arab and Islamic world was confirmed with gaining its observer status in the Arab League. Turkey is being represented in the international organization on an ambassadorial level, and the Arab League has opened its office in Ankara. In 2004, Professor Ekmeleddin Mehmet Ihsanoglu was elected as a Secretary General of the OIC. He served in this position for ten years, until 2014.<sup>131</sup> According to Uzer: "*Turkey's participation in the OIC before the AKP government was rather restricted, due to the fact that it wanted to preserve a neutral position in the inter-Arab conflict, as well as between Arabs and Israelis.*"<sup>132</sup>

During the September 2009 Arab League summit of foreign ministers Davutoglu stated that there is an interconnection between every conflict in the region. He further stated that Palestine and its ongoing conflict with Israel is Turkey's responsibility.<sup>133</sup>

In 2010 the AKP organized a constitutional referendum. They accepted constitutional changes provided the government with additional authorities and controls.

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<sup>129</sup> Usul and Ozcan 2010.

<sup>130</sup> Robins 2003. Philip Robins is the founder of the Middle East Program at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, and Oxford University Reader in Politics and International Relations focusing on the Middle East.

<sup>131</sup> Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. Official Web [Internet].

<sup>132</sup> Uzer 2013.

<sup>133</sup> Uzer 2013.

It was the first constitutional change since 1980. The final results indicated that 58% of the votes was in favor of the changes. The judicial system was altered. From there on the president and the parliament have larger share on the appointment of senior judges and prosecutors. The competences of the judicial court got also extended.<sup>134</sup> The referendum took place after the Mavi Marmara attacks when the government was enjoying widespread support given its stance on the issue. Most of the Turks approved the government's policy in criticizing Israel and standing up for the human rights of the Palestinians.

The supremacy of the AKP over executive and legislative powers, such as the president not being able to veto a legislation – led to the weakening of Turkish democracy.<sup>135</sup> Until its second government, the balance of power was carried out – given the absence of constructive opposition in the parliament- by institutions like courts and the military.

Decreasing the military's role was the first step in establishing AKP itself as the only constructive political power. The military became controlled by the civilian powers.<sup>136</sup> As downgrading the military's influence was also a condition set by the EU this political step was not viewed as a threat either domestically either internationally.

The fact that the military lost its power in Turkish politics might have an important effect on the Turkish-Israeli relationship. Given that most of the cooperation and the establishment of the alliance was in military aspects it influenced the further development of the partnership.

In September 2012 the AKP organized the Fourth Ordinary Congress in Ankara. Between the hosts was the leader of Hamas - Khaled Meshaal, Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi and the head of the Tunisian Enahda Movement, Rachid Ghannouchi. The Muslim presence was associated mostly to the Muslim Brotherhood. Erdogan made references to the previous leaders of the Turkish Islamic movement including Turgut Ozal and Necmettin Erbakan. Khaleed Meshaal delivered a speech on the congress where he declared his trust in Erdogan's ability to become a leader of the whole Muslim world.<sup>137</sup>

During the last decade the Turkish economy has markedly developed. In 2011

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<sup>134</sup> The Economist 2010.

<sup>135</sup> Cagaptay 2007.

<sup>136</sup> Cohen and Freilich 2014.

<sup>137</sup> Nouredine 2012.

Turkey was the 16<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world, and 6<sup>th</sup> largest European economy. The improvement of the economy has had an important effect on Turkey's foreign policy. With the economic development a new middle class emerged, which was dominated by Islamic business groups. The influence of these groups was an important aspect of Turkey's orientation towards the states of the Gulf, and other ME countries that Turkey had not been engaging in business activities with before.<sup>138</sup> Hence the government's reorientation towards the ME cannot be viewed only from ideological or geopolitical aspects. The Islamic business groups benefitting from these connections have had a significant over the government.

Turkey was aiming for an important role in the political arena by trying to act as a mediator on the discussions about the nuclear program of Iran. On one hand, Turkey was calling for the creation of a Middle Eastern region where none of the states posses nuclear weapons. On the other hand, however, Turkey stood up against economic sanctions. According to the representation of the Turkish republic, the issues should be solved solely by diplomatic efforts.<sup>139</sup> This is interpreted as Turkey's increased orientation towards Iran. It was against the Western interests.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of May of 2010 Iran, Turkey and Brazil signed the Teheran Declaration. The declaration set out the conditions for exchanging uranium fuel for Iran's reactors.<sup>140</sup> Furthermore Turkey voted against the Security Council's decision imposing sanctions on Iran. Turkey argued that the Teheran Declaration allows it to conduct further diplomatic relations.

Pointing to a shared history, Erdogan declared that: *"Turks, Arabs and other ethnic groups in the region fought together and died together"* against the Crusaders, Christian knights from western Europe who fought for control of parts of Turkey and the Middle East in the Middle Ages.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Hursoy 2011.

<sup>139</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey. Iran's Nuclear Program. The Turkish Perspective [Internet].

<sup>140</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey. Iran's Nuclear Program. The Turkish Perspective [Internet].

<sup>141</sup> Hurriyet Daily News – Online, Agence France-Presse 2011.

#### 4.2.2 Domestic Politics of Israel

Israeli domestics have always been highly fragmented. The government is usually formed by a coalition of several parties.<sup>142</sup> Therefore, domestic calculations have a big impact on the foreign policy making instrument. These calculations have affected the Israel's relations with Turkey too. In the period between 2003 and 2013 the Israeli political representation remained homogenous in comparison to that of Turkey's. In Israel there has not been such a momentous turn as the one in Turkey. Then again the fluctuation of governments and their particular reaction to Turkey's foreign policy activities were highly influential in the development of their bilateral ties.

In order to comprehend Israeli domestic politics it needs to be highlighted that the Israeli society is deeply divided. The main lines of division are the national cleavage, the religious cleavage and the ethnic cleavage. From these three, ethnicity and religion are affecting the voting behavior of the Israelis the most.<sup>143</sup> Therefore, the political parties tend to represent the values important for these groups.

The Israeli domestic politics are divided between the Hawks (right-wing parties) and Doves (left-wing parties).<sup>144</sup>

Despite Israeli politics being highly fragmented there are no obvious long-term changes. Religious voters tend to vote for right wing parties, and highly religious voters prefer voting smaller, peripheral right wing parties than Likud.

At the end of January 2003 Israel was holding early elections to the Knesset.<sup>145</sup> Likud, with the leadership of Ariel Sharon, ended up winning the elections receiving 38 seats in the parliament. On the other hand, the opposition party Labor received its worst election results in the history. Labor was led by Shimon Peres and was in favor of the peace process. The politics of Labor did not appeal to the voters and received not more

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<sup>142</sup> Thanks to the Israeli electoral system the Israeli politics are an extreme case of representative democracy. The combination of the party-list proportional system and the 1.5 % threshold there is high a number of political parties in the Knesset. The character of the electoral system and the scope of social division in the Israeli society, the parliament is fragmented (a high number of political parties, many of them being small parties) and there are severe problems of governability. The fact that the PM is being elected by direct and popular vote further adds to the fragmentation of the Israeli politics. Andersen and Yaish 2001.

<sup>143</sup> Andersen and Yaish 2001.

<sup>144</sup> Andersen and Yaish 2001.

<sup>145</sup> The parliamentary elections were organized few months ahead of the regular date during the Second Intifada. It happened after Labour pulled out of Ariel Sharon's unity government in October 2002. Warschawski 2003.

than 19 seats in the Knesset. Labor has been lacking a charismatic leader what was negatively influencing its electoral support.<sup>146</sup> It needs to be pointed out that the support to Labor has been gradually declining since 1995 when Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated. Instead of trying to punish his murderer Labor lost control over its political program to Likud. The left part allowed Likud to create the space for political discourse. Later, Ehud Barak was elected to the leadership of Labor, which further marginalized the party.<sup>147</sup> In the aftermath of the elections a coalition government of right wing, nationalistic character was established.<sup>148</sup> The Israeli-Palestinian conflict was highly influencing the stability of the Israeli government and that of its domestic politics as such.

In 2005 the Israeli government evacuated the Jewish settlements in Gaza. It was the first time Israel forced Jewish communities to leave form the territories under occupation since 1967. The decision was part of Ariel Sharon's plan of disengagement.<sup>149</sup> The evacuation of Jewish settlements led to tension in Israeli domestic politics. Consequently it resulted in the fission in the governing party Likud, as well as in Labor. Ariel Sharon, together with Ehud Olmert and Tzipi Livni formed Kadima, a new political party in support of the evacuation of the settlements. Kadima was joined by a number of Labor politicians including Shimon Peres.<sup>150</sup> The elections to the 17<sup>th</sup> Knesset were held in March 2006. The strongest party was Kadima with 22% of the votes, second was Labor with 15% and Likud gained only 9%. It was historically the worst election result for the party.<sup>151</sup> Except Likud, however, the right wing parties were successful in the 2006 elections. The radical right wing party Yisrael Beytenu (Israel, is Our Home) under the leadership of Avigdor Lieberman gained 9%. The other radical right win parties succeeding in the elections were the coalition of ultra right wing parties of Mafdal (National Religious Party) and National Union.<sup>152</sup>

The years 2007 and 2008 were characteristic with several issues on the level of Israeli domestic politics. Firstly, Shimon Peres took over the presidency from Moshe Katsav. Katsav was sentenced to prison for charges of rape and sexual harassment.

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<sup>146</sup> Čejka 2013, 242.

<sup>147</sup> Warschawski 2003.

<sup>148</sup> Čejka 2013, 242.

<sup>149</sup> The Guardian 2005.

<sup>150</sup> While Sharon was preparing Kadima for the upcoming elections scheduled for January 2006 he got sick and unable to maintain his function. Subsequently, Ehud Olmert took over the leadership of Kadima.

<sup>151</sup> Čejka 2013, 276-277.

<sup>152</sup> Election in Israel - Israel Foreign Ministry [Internet].



Ehud Olmert had to resign from the function of PM following a corruption scandal. As a result, Tzipi Livni took over the leadership of Kadima, and later of the government too. But as Livni was not able to establish a government coalition, Israel was facing early parliamentary elections in February 2009. The unstable Israeli political situation was negatively affecting the relationship with Palestine too.<sup>153</sup>

In 2009-2010 there were three different attitudes towards Turkey within the Israeli government:

- PM Netanyahu representing a group disgruntled with the criticism on Israel but still trying to save the relationship
- Ehud Barak – the Turkish partnership is very important for him and is keen to repair the ties in spite of the Israeli criticism. For him domestic calculations are not a priority and rather prefers to have a partner in the volatile ME region.
- Lieberman – does not view Turkey as a strategic partner and Ulutas suggest that *“may not believe that Israel needs good relations with Turkey at all”*.<sup>154</sup>

These contradictory attitudes towards Turkey should be understood in the sense of internal struggle for power.

A priori to the Operation Cast Lead in December 2008, Prime Minister Olmert, was on an official visit in Turkey. The Israeli political representation did not mention their intention on retaliating the recent Hamar rocket strikes on Israeli territories. This and the extent of the Israeli offensive led to a major break point in the relationship of Turkey and Israel.

In the view of the Israeli government PM Olmert did not need to inform Erdogan about the planned attacks. Moreover, Israel expected Turkey to understand the need for these attacks in order to maintain Israel's security. The Israeli side did not consider this as a failure as the war plans of each state are considered to be an internal issue.<sup>155</sup> In February 2009 the Parliamentary elections resulted in the supremacy of the centrist Kadima. The party with the leadership of Tzipi Livni won with one seat over the right-wing Likud.<sup>156</sup> Kadima, however, did not succeed in establishing a coalition government. In March 2009, Israeli president Shimon Peres entrusted Netanyahu with the formation of a government. Subsequently Netanyahu became the PM whose new

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<sup>153</sup> Čejka 2013, 283-284.

<sup>154</sup> Ulutas 2010.

<sup>155</sup> Najšlova and Baskin 2011.

<sup>156</sup> The voter turnout was 65.2%, all together 12 political parties entering the 18<sup>th</sup> Knesset. Kadima won 28 seats, Likud won 27 seats, Yisrael Beytenu 15 seats, Labour 13 seats, and Shas 11.

coalition was formed from right wing and orthodox parties. Avigdor Lieberman, from the ultra right wing Yisrael Beytenu received the post of the new Minister of Foreign affairs.<sup>157</sup> After the “long chair crisis” Turkey successfully obtained an apology from Israel. When the Turkish Radio and Television launched its Arabic speaking channel called el-Turkiyya, Erdogan described Israel as the main threat in the ME region.<sup>158</sup> In reaction to Erdogan telling the French newspaper, Le Figaro, that Israel is not keen on the peace in the region, Israeli Foreign Minister Lieberman compared Erdogan to Muammar Gaddafi and Hugo Chavez. Lieberman further stated that the problem in the relationship between the two states it is not Turkey but Erdogan.<sup>159</sup>

Between March 2010 and March 2011 Likud was enjoying wide support from its coalition (63 members) an additional 28 members of Kadima (the opposition party)<sup>160</sup> to not reach out to Turkey and to not apologize for the Mavi Marmara attack. The general view in Israel (including the political representation and the public opinion as well) was that Turkey has decided to side with Hamas. This was unacceptable for the Israelis. Moreover, because of Turkey’s close connection with Hamas, the sending of Mavi Marmara was an act of terrorism. Israel at one point was of the view that Turkey should apologize because for sending the ship.<sup>161</sup>

Both the Israeli government and Israeli public viewed the Davos incident as humiliating as it indicated Turkey’s support to Hamas. Therefore, the incident was not only an attack on Shimon Peres and the government as such, but on the public too. Israel did not share the view of the Turkish government in regards to Mavi Marmara. According to the Israeli government Turkey was directly accountable for “supporting an act of terrorism against the State of Israel”. Israel did not claim responsibility for the death of the Mavi Marmara passengers. After the Davos incident Israel did not consider Turkey for a neutral party anymore.

Some of the Israeli political parties made several attempts for reconciliation. Because of internal politics these attempts were not successful. In June 2010, there was a meeting organized by the Israeli Ministry of Industry and Trade together with Defense Minister Barak (apparently with Netanyahu’s support) a meeting with Davutoglu. A month later Israel agreed to some form of an apology with the compensation for the

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<sup>157</sup> Božek 2010.

<sup>158</sup> Kosebalaban 2010.

<sup>159</sup> Hurriyet Daily News Online 2010.

<sup>160</sup> The Knesset has 120 members.

<sup>161</sup> Uzer 2013.

killed passenger's families. After the news on these talks got leaked by the media, Netanyahu declared that the Israeli government had nothing to do with them and that were not official.<sup>162</sup> A similar situation happened in 2011. When the Israeli leaders reached a mutually acceptable form of apology, Netanyahu refused to give his approval at the last minute. This was because Lieberman claimed that in case of apologizing to Turkey his party would leave the government coalition. The fact that Lieberman was not present in the governing coalition allowed the Israeli government the apology.<sup>163</sup>

In 2010 the official Israeli standpoint was the following: not taking responsibility over Mavi Marmara however hoping for improving its relations with Turkey.

Israeli officials were of the view that the continued deterioration of Turkish-Israeli relations was the direct consequence of Turkish approach towards Israel. Davutoglu in his article "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007" did not mention the country's relationship with Israel even once. He states that Turkey has been successful in ensuring its national security and protecting civil liberties. In spite the turbulent political situation of its neighbors. He is also proud of Turkey taking part in negotiations with the Arab League or OIC.

In September 2011, during his official visit to Egypt Erdogan noted, "*unfortunately Turkey recognized Israel in 1949.*"<sup>164</sup>

Turkish and Israeli domestic politics involved decisions that negatively influenced the mutual relationship between the states. Aras confirms that their relations are an extension of the changing domestic politics of both. He further states that the Israeli-Turkish relationship is a well-defined example of the effect of national identity on foreign policy choices.<sup>165</sup>

#### **4.2.3 Public opinion in Turkey**

Israel's attack of the Jenin refugee camp in April 2002 resulted in the outrage of the Turkish public opinion. However the main event that started the change in the

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<sup>162</sup> Najslova and Baskin 2011.

<sup>163</sup> Cohen and Freilich 2013.

<sup>164</sup> Uzer 2013.

<sup>165</sup> Aras 2002.

realms of public opinion was the 2003 War in Iraq. Turkish public was opposing the war and stood against, and also its main ally in the Middle East, Israel.<sup>166</sup>

It is relevant to look on the development of public opinion on Turkey in the Arab countries. A study conducted in seven Arab countries conducted in July 2009 found that 75% of respondents had a positive view of Turkey. The same survey from 2010 (including Iran) found that 80% of the participants had a positive view of Turkey.<sup>167</sup> In 2004 there was a massive protest against Israel as a reaction to Israel's attack and killing of Hamas's spiritual leader Ahmad Yassin, and also the assassination of his successor Abdulaziz al-Rantisi.<sup>168</sup>

In 2009 as well as in 2010 Israel was perceived as the region's biggest threat.<sup>169</sup> *"The Turkish people's interest in the Palestinian question is not one-sided and there is considerable attention to Turkish politics and foreign policy in the Middle East. The Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat is a close follower of Turkish politics and knows about Turkish society's sensitivity of the Palestinian question."*<sup>170</sup> According to a poll conducted in October 2000 the big majority (71 percent) of the Turkish society showed interest in the Palestinian subject. Also, 60 percent was asking for an increased Turkish role on behalf of the Palestinians. A public opinion poll conducted in 2002 indicated that Palestine in the fourth rank in Turk's perception of friendship in international relations. The trust to Palestine is well above of that to Israel or the US.<sup>171</sup> This proves the strength of public opinion in the government formulating its foreign policy. Previous governments did not pay that much attention to the public opinion on the Palestinian issue. That is why the Al-Aqsa intifada (2000) did not receive widespread criticism from Turkey and therefore it did not lead to worsened Turkey-Israeli relations.

Based on the findings of the Transatlantic Trends Survey, in 2006 Turkish people felt two times warmer towards Iran than to the US. Another survey conducted in the same year found that 72% of Turkey blamed Lebanon for the 2006 war with Israel. Moreover, according to the survey 44% rather sympathized with Hezbollah than Israel (only 10% sympathized with Israel).<sup>172</sup>

In 2011, from all NATO member Turks were the least worried about Iran

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<sup>166</sup> Kosebalaban 2010.

<sup>167</sup> Akgun, Senyucel Gundogar, Levack and Percinoglu 2011.

<sup>168</sup> Kosebalaban 2010.

<sup>169</sup> Akgun, Senyucel Gundogar, Levack and Percinoglu 2011.

<sup>170</sup> Bulent 2002.

<sup>171</sup> Bulent 2009.

<sup>172</sup> Bekdil 2014.

acquiring a nuclear weapon.

At this point the public opinion is intertwining with the factor of domestic politics. In order to receive electoral support, the AKP could not change its standpoint towards Israel. Especially in the face of the 2011 elections when after 8 years being in power the party already lost popularity. This declining support was from the side of the secular society who did not view positively the AKP's Islamic leaning and introducing religious procedures to the public life. Therefore, standing up for the suffering Palestinians and protecting the Turkish nation from Israel served as an excellent pre election strategy.

Erdogan several times justified the AKP's Israeli policy by referring to the public opinion. He often claimed that by downgrading relations with the State of Israel he is respecting the will of the Turkish nation.<sup>173</sup> A 2007 public opinion poll organized by TESEV<sup>174</sup> there is a 10% increase in the number of Turks considering themselves Muslims since in the period between 2002 and 2007. The share of Turkish people identifying themselves as Islamists also rose to 48.5%.<sup>175</sup>

#### **4.2.4 Public opinion in Israel**

The main factor driving public opinion in Israel, it should be realized, is the security of Israel. There is a sense of constant danger, Israel feels exposed and misjudged. The security of the state is a continuous feature in Israeli public opinion.

In 2012 Israeli polls indicated that the public support to improve the Turkish-Israeli relationship is increasing.<sup>176</sup> The poll conducted by Israel's Regional Foreign Policies Institute (MITVIM) that 79% of Israelis wanted to normalize relations with Turkey. 54% of the public agreed with Israel apologizing to Turkey.<sup>177</sup> With regard to the deterioration of the alliance and the effect of Israeli public opinion on it one three important aspects have to be taken into account. Firstly, Israeli public opinion never reached a level of escalation as was the case of the Turkish public opinion. This could be explained by the role of Palestine and attacks on Palestine. Secondly, given the

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<sup>173</sup> Cohen and Freilich 2014.

<sup>174</sup> TESEV - The Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation is an Istanbul based NGO, specializing on political, social and economical issues.

<sup>175</sup> Cagaptay 2007.

<sup>176</sup> Ildiz 2012.

<sup>177</sup> Kohen 2012.

proportionality of the Israeli political system the public was able to express their standpoint by electing political parties representing their leaning. This also justifies the lack of public society movements on the topic of Turkish relations. Thirdly, similar to the Israeli state itself, for the Israeli public the main concern has been the question of Israeli security. Provided that their main interest is security as long as their imminent security was not endangered the public did not feel the need to articulate their opinion on the question of the Turkish-Israeli alliance.

### **4.3 Turkish-Israeli relations in the context of ideological divisions**

When looking at the connection between ideology and alliance formation the term ideological solidarity needs to be explained. Ideological solidarity relates to alliances that are created between states sharing political, cultural, or other straits.<sup>178</sup> If an alliance is created upon ideological solidarity the motivation is neither balancing, neither bandwagoning. According to this definition the Turkish-Israeli alliance was founded on the basis of ideological solidarity. From the very beginning of their partnership the two neighbouring states shared a similar look on the functioning of the international system.

Ideology plays a significant role in alliance forming when defense is a dominant goal of the allying states. Therefore, the similarity of domestic ideology of the states influences their tendency to ally. According to Walt ideology plays a decisive role in a survival of an alliance too. *“The impact of ideology on the choice of alliance partner will be exaggerated; statesmen will overestimate the degree of ideological agreement among both their allies and their adversaries.”* The more economic dependence the tighter the alliance will be.<sup>179</sup> This presupposition explains the successful collaboration between Turkey and Israel from the 1950s.

On the global level Israel and Turkey at the start of their partnership had a similar approach to world politics:

- Strong pro-American orientation

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<sup>178</sup> Walt 1983, 38-39.

<sup>179</sup> Walt 1983, 39.

- Problems with Europe.<sup>180 181</sup>

This ideological solidarity towards the international system represented a fundamental connection between Israel and Turkey. Furthermore, from an ideological point of view the Turkish-Israeli alliance was formed on the basis of a “common sense of otherness”. This derived as much from the geopolitical situation as well as from the character of the state. Turkey and Israel found each other in a region where there is Arab domination. Like Israel, Turkey have been going through the difficulties of coexisting with Arab states in the Middle Eastern region. Both being non-Arabic countries, the democratic character of their state organization, as well as a liberal economic approach (compared to the countries of the ME) also justifies their collaborative efforts towards each other.

The political and cultural attachment to the West should also be taken into consideration when looking at the relationship between Israel and Turkey.<sup>182 183</sup> It is true that the decline of Israeli-Turkish alliance became visible at the second part of the 2000s. The worsening of the relationship was happening within a longer process starting with the alteration of Turkey’s foreign policy inclination.

With the AKP accessing the power in 2002 the political strength of the Kemalists started decreasing. The senior leaders of the party were associated with the previously governing RP.<sup>184185</sup> The absolute victory of the AKP in the elections of 2002 and 2007 elections has provided the party with unchallenged authority to form the country’s foreign policy according to their own perception. During this period the party

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<sup>180</sup> Inbar 2005.

<sup>181</sup> Turkey has been a strong partner of the US, especially after joining NATO in 1955. Regarding Europe, Turkey has attempted several times to join the EU but without success. Israel’s tightest foreign state relationship is with US. Generally speaking there is a strong anti-Israeli sentiment coming from Europe. This is caused by the support of Palestine and the Palestinians as such.

<sup>182</sup> Inbar 2005.

<sup>183</sup> Despite the abovementioned commonalities there are scholars who defined the relationship as the most controversial facet in Turkish foreign policy during the Cold War period. Bacik 2001.

<sup>184</sup> PM Erdogan was previously a mayor of Istanbul as a part of RP. Moreover Abdullah Gul who has since 2002 served as a foreign minister, Prime Minister and the President as well was also a member of RP. Burris 2003.

<sup>185</sup> When examining the development of the Turkish-Israeli partnership we need to look at the issues emerging during this period. In 1995 the Islamist Refah or Welfare Party (RP) gained control over the government with no more than 21% of the votes. The head of RP was Necmettin Erbakan who became the PM of Turkey. He became Turkey’s first Islamic PM and he was calling for the creation of an Islamic equivalent of main international institutions such as the so called “Islamic United Nations”, or an Islamic version of the NATO and the G7. In 1996 the Israeli right wing Likud party gained power and Benjamin Netanyahu established his first government. Despite the tensions deriving from the character of the new Turkish government Turkish-Israeli relations did not reach a low point. The Turkish military was pressuring Erbakan. Nonetheless the Islamist propaganda was continued after the 1996 military agreement. There has been Islamist tendency during the previous course of the years and the propaganda has shown not only anti-Israel but anti-Semitic tendencies as well. In 1997 Erbakan was forced to resign. Burris 2003; Čejka 2013; Gruen 1995.

was receiving significant support from the members of society and the AKP's foreign policy orientation was viewed as beneficial from both the regional and international perspective.<sup>186</sup> The judiciary and the institutions of higher education were the defenders of Turkish secularism.<sup>187</sup> The courts have been responsible for the revision of secular laws concerning the everyday life of the society. It needs to be pointed out that in 2007 the courts still ban the wearing of hijab at universities. The policies of religious character have been introduced gradually.

By dominating three consecutive elections the AKP leaders became capable of eliminating the influence of the Kemalist elite. This included the elimination of the military which is now powerless in both making both domestic and foreign policy.<sup>188</sup> In 2007 the Constitutional Court prepared an indictment to close down the party as it was accused from Islamizing Turkey and for violating the principles of secularism. However in the consequent year the court did not find sufficient evidence to do so: Turkey was still expressing interest in joining the EU and the AKP's pro EU policies were interpreted as keeping the secular character of the state.<sup>189</sup>

Almuedo refers to a number of authors highlighting the ideological perceptions of AKP as the main cause of changing foreign policy orientation. According to them the activities of the governing Islamist AKP can be explained by ideological-Islamist reasons.<sup>190</sup>

The government has focused attention on Turkey's national identity and the place within it of 'Islamic values'. It is certainly the case that the AKP government has brought in changes that might be interpreted as 'Islam-leaning'. Recent political developments in Turkey have widely been interpreted as reflective of a fundamental power struggle between 'secularists' and 'Islamists'.<sup>191</sup> <sup>192</sup> Cohen and Freilich also found that the AKP's domestic and foreign policies clearly shows its Islamist leanings. Even though there is a debate on how "Islamist" the party is by its second government the international community did not have doubts about its Islamist agenda.<sup>193</sup>

Under the leadership of PM Erdogan and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu

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<sup>186</sup> Bulent and Gorener 2010.

<sup>187</sup> Cagaptay 2007.

<sup>188</sup> Ovali and Bozdoglioglu 2012.

<sup>189</sup> Gol 2009.

<sup>190</sup> Almuedo 2011.

<sup>191</sup> Haynes 2010.

<sup>192</sup> According to Gol: "Islam has evoked widespread national and international concern as a source of political tensions since the AKP came to power in Turkey in November 2002." Gol 2009.

<sup>193</sup> Cohen and Freilich 2014.



Turkey has extended its engagement in Middle Eastern affairs. According to international scholars the AKP's anti-Israeli leaning was already proven in 2006. The fact that Hamas leader, Khaled Meshaal, received an invitation to Turkey<sup>194</sup> as well as the recognition of the 2007 Palestinian results led to tensions that Israel could not ignore.

In July 2007 an early election was declared by the AKP. It was the direct consequence of the conflict between the secular institution and the government after the latter announced the presidential candidacy of the former foreign minister, Abdullah Gul. The elections resulted in the landslide victory of the governing party. In the same time, AKP removed the ban on wearing the hijab (headscarves) at universities and public institutions.<sup>195</sup><sup>196</sup> These two actions represented a challenge to the secular establishment and were clear indicators of the Islamisation of Turkish domestic politics.

In the period between 2003-2007 the number of Islamist newspapers increased considerably. While in 2001 there number of readers of Islamic press was 441,200, during the first AKP government this number increased to 1.1 million.<sup>197</sup> Soner Cagaptay further says that the AKP's Islamic leaning is proven by the reality that its leadership consists of people who received their education in religious schools, and many of them have completed their degrees in Muslim countries.<sup>198</sup> It is a fact that Turkey's foreign policy orientation changed after the AKP taking over the government. It started being formed by the "strategic depth doctrine". The "strategic depth doctrine" suggests a foreign policy grounded on the heritage of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>199</sup> One of the principles of the new foreign policy doctrine is the "geographical depth", placing Turkey in the center of several geopolitical influences.<sup>200</sup> There are a number of foreign policy actions in the Middle East since the AKP became the head of the Turkish government. These actions indicate a clear difference from the established policy.<sup>201</sup> One of the major initiatives that differ from the previous Turkish foreign policy

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<sup>194</sup> Nasr 2005.

<sup>195</sup> Gol 2009.

<sup>196</sup> Up to this point there was only one higher education institution allowing wearing the hijab for its female students. It was the privately funded Fatih University having close ties with AKP members. Moreover, the majority of Fatih University graduates received employment in government functions.

<sup>197</sup> Cagaptay 2007.

<sup>198</sup> Cagaptay 2009.

<sup>199</sup> The Ottoman Empire existed between 1299 and 1922. It was one of the largest and most powerful empires in the area of the Mediterranean Sea. Its territory encompassed areas of Asia Minor or Anatolia, the Balkans, the Black Sea, the Middle East and North Africa. Shaw 2010.

<sup>200</sup> Szymanski 2011.

<sup>201</sup> Bulent and Gorener 2010.

orientation is engaging with Hamas. The Palestinian question received a new role as a direct consequence of Hamas's victory in 2005 (local elections) and 2006 (Parliamentary Elections).<sup>202</sup> Hamas has been reluctant to recognize the state of Israel. Turkey was aiming to play a role of mediator and started diplomatically engaging with Hamas. This was in line with AKP's conviction to respect democratic principles by accepting the election results.<sup>203</sup> The AKP was trying to develop better relations with its Arabic neighbours in two ways. Firstly, it started working on the improvement of bilateral relations with the neighbouring states. Secondly, it began actively using the platforms of regional and international organizations such the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). Usul and Ozcan also find that there has been a qualitative change in foreign policy expressed in the reorientation from the West towards the Middle East.<sup>204</sup> Robin also found that: *"political sentiments are changing in line with the AK Party's arguments and society believes that their interests lie with other Muslim majority countries. It is argued that not only has the foreign policy of Turkey changed toward Muslim countries and issues, but the public has also become much more sympathetic to these kinds of political messages."*<sup>205</sup>

The new political elite claimed that in the past Turkey was looked at as an isolated country having difficult relations with its Middle Eastern neighbours. The AKP was determined to increase Turkey's self-confidence in foreign policy. They further claim that the country's isolation created a perception that is surrounded by enemies – which inevitably led to security-focused foreign policy solutions.<sup>206</sup> The shift in Turkish foreign policy is being explained by the ideological identity of the AKP. The AKP is sometimes being regarded as an Islamist party with a hidden agenda.<sup>207</sup>

When analyzing the Islamic leaning of the AKP it has be acknowledged that Turkey has not abandoned its NATO membership and the procedures to join the EU have not been cancelled either. The commitment to the EU remains the part of the

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<sup>202</sup> Čejka 2013, 274-278.

<sup>203</sup> Čejka 2013, 274-278.

<sup>204</sup> Usul and Ozcan 2010.

<sup>205</sup> Robins 2007.

<sup>206</sup> Larrabee 2010.

<sup>207</sup> A research conducted by Faruk Yalvac at the Middle East Technical University in Ankara states the following: The AKP built its strategic importance not only on its geographical position, but on a foreign policy understanding based on the reconciliation of Islam with the system. The significance of this process was to democratize Turkey, redefine state-society relations, reduce the roles of the state and the traditional military-bureaucratic elite. The AKP chose to politically define itself as a conservative democracy in which Islam does not form its political agenda as such, however it is part of socio-cultural identity of the state. This is a form of pragmatic populism aiming to bring together all existing social classes and establish a political party that serves the "whole nation". Yalvac 2012.

party's political ideology.<sup>208</sup> The main crisis between Israel and Turkey occurred after the Operation Cast Lead and the following attack on the Mavi Marmara flotilla carrying humanitarian aid to the occupied territories of Gaza. According to Ildiz Israeli officials believed *"that Erdogan will not give up his anti-Israel position even if all Turkish conditions are met. This conviction is based on the belief that both Erdogan and Foreign Minister Davutoglu are anti-Israel because of their ideological inclinations."*<sup>209</sup>

The alteration in Turkey's ideological stance has had a decisive influence on its foreign policy inclination. By distancing itself from democratic values, introducing laws in favor of the religious part of the society, and building relationship with Israel's enemies it gradually distanced itself from its ally. The ideological stance had an impact on its economic relations with new partners and in the same time the existing economic ties with Israel lost their importance.

## **5 The reasons behind the deterioration of Turkish-Israeli relations**

The first serious issue in the relationship occurred in early 2003. It was deriving from the discussion over the Iraqi war and the decision of the US to eliminate Saddam Hussein. Turkish public opinion was opposing the war and the AKP did not grant permission to the forces of US to use Turkish territory for the war. On the other hand, Israeli politics as well as the public was supportive of the war.<sup>210 211</sup> Notwithstanding, after Saddam's removal the Turkish-Israeli relationship was immediately reaffirmed in a form of high-level diplomatic visits. According to Burris, however, this meant a significant disagreement over a key strategic in the Middle Eastern region.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Robins 2007.

<sup>209</sup> Ildiz 2012.

<sup>210</sup> Burris 2003.

<sup>211</sup> John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt in their research (that was later published as a book) *The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy* found that pressure from Israel and in particular from the Israeli Lobby in the US Congress played a key element in the US decision to attack Iraq. Despite many believing that attacking Iraq was a "war for oil" they did not find sufficient evidence to support this claim. Instead the war and the consequent removal of Saddam Hussein was serving Israel's protection. Mearsheimer and Walt 2008, 29.

<sup>212</sup> Burris 2003.

Mearsheimer and Walt further found that besides Kuwait (being conquered by Iraq in 1990) it was only Israel that was supportive of the US invasion of Iraq.<sup>213</sup> At this stage the main incentives to continue cooperation between Israel and Turkey were:

- Shared approaches to the security predicament in the ME.
- Overlapping security challenges.
- Common political and economic interests.<sup>214</sup>

For Turkey there was another interest in maintaining positive bilateral relations with Israel. Israel was being considered helpful in neutralizing the negative lobby from Greek and Armenian lobbyists in the White House. On the other hand, Israel needed Turkey to show its acceptance by a Muslim country even without having to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.<sup>215</sup> Having the Israeli lobby's support was a highly strategic aim. No other lobby or interest group has as much influence on the formation of US foreign policy than the Israeli.

After the AKP gaining power in 2002 it started putting much more emphasis on creating and maintaining good relationships with the Arabic countries. This was one of the key policy issues of the party's foreign policy doctrine.<sup>216</sup> Turkey expanding ties with Hamas, Hezbollah, Iran and Syria was viewed by Israel as provocation. Also, Israel was of the point of view that if Turkey needed to enhance its relations with these Middle Eastern countries it could have done so without eliminating its connections with Israel.<sup>217</sup>

Despite many developments suggesting the opposite, Turkish and Israeli strategic moves were not completely in sync even before 2008. The alliance managed to overcome the reality of Turkish relations with Iran and Syria.<sup>218</sup> Still in 2005 the relationship could be described as largely detached from the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.<sup>219</sup>

Turkey establishing contacts with Hamas was a source of tension in the Turkish-Israeli relations too. One of the major problems was the fact that Turkish foreign policy was open towards the Iranian "front of resistance" including members like Syria, the

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<sup>213</sup> Mearsheimer and Walt 2008, 30.

<sup>214</sup> Inbar 2005.

<sup>215</sup> Szymanski 2011; Inbar 2005.

<sup>216</sup> Republic of Turkey. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Turkey's Relation with the Arab Countries [Internet].

<sup>217</sup> Cohen and Freilich 2014.

<sup>218</sup> Eran 2011.

<sup>219</sup> Inbar 2005.

Hezbollah (Lebanon) and the Palestinian Hamas. This meant that Turkey was not approaching only Hamas but the more radical organizations as well. The stance of Turkish policy makers on connections with Hamas was that: *“Hamas was in search of allies in the Middle East to put an end to the economic and political blockade it was facing from the international system.”*<sup>220</sup>

In the summer of 2006 a war erupted between Israel and Hezbollah. As a reaction to the war Erdogan condemned Israel for attempting to wipe out the Palestinians living in Lebanon. The connection with Hezbollah also proved AKP’s double standards in its foreign policy. It ignores the analogous connection between the PKK and Hezbollah both being terrorist groups attacking international integrity.<sup>221</sup> The fact that Hezbollah does not endanger the borders of Turkey but that of Israel and southern Lebanon explains the approach of the AKP.

It is a common understanding that the decisive break in Turkish-Israeli relations occurred in the aftermath of the 2008 Israeli attack on the Gaza strip. However, signs of alienation already manifested themselves during the 2006 Lebanon war. The problems between the two states became increasingly visible after Erdogan began his second term at the office. Following the Operation Cast Lead, Turkey took stance on the side of the Palestinians. This and the Davos incident in 2009 was perceived positively by the Turkish public. (Not only the Turkish, but the Arabic public opinion was appreciative too).<sup>222</sup> During the Gaza War Erdogan suggested that it was Israel who violated the ceasefire with Hamas, and that Hamas’s rocket attacks are not killing anyone on the Israeli side.<sup>223</sup>

Indeed, following the 2008-2009 Gaza war the relationship between Turkey and Israel seriously deteriorated. The fact that at the time of the Operation Cast Lead Turkey had friendly relations with Hamas also complicated the consequences of the attacks.<sup>224</sup> At the beginning of 2009 of Turkish prosecutors declared that they were conducting an investigation whether Israeli leaders should be prosecuted for crimes against humanity over Operation Cast lead.<sup>225</sup>

In October 2009, TRT started airing a documentary style program on Israeli

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<sup>220</sup> Bulent 2009.

<sup>221</sup> Cagaptay 2007.

<sup>222</sup> Csicsmann and Rózsa 2013.

<sup>223</sup> Cagaptay 2009.

<sup>224</sup> Eran 2011.

<sup>225</sup> It was the initiative of Mazlum-Der, an Islamic-leaning human rights organization. Israel perceived this as Mazlum-Der enjoying direct government support. Najslova and Baskin 2010.

soldiers and their actions against the Palestinians. The state owned television was broadcasting “Separation”. The actors playing Israeli soldiers are shown brutally killing Palestinian civilians and children.<sup>226</sup> Israel viewed it as provocation and did not hold back from questioning Turkey on this matter. In 2010, the Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon convened with the Turkish Ambassador to discuss the topic of the TRT series. He raised a complaint that the documentary is a speculation and it creates an impression of the Israeli soldiers (IDF – Israel Defense Forces) being child murderers.<sup>227</sup> Nevertheless this meeting further deteriorated the already existing crisis. The Turkish ambassador was offered a lower chair an Israeli flag was placed in front of him. The Israeli media photographed and published this and Turkey viewed the incident as a deep humiliation.<sup>228</sup> Even though Israel apologized it was not enough to ease tensions.

According to Najslova and Baskin this was viewed in Israel as: “*a state guided deliberate policy of incitement against the Jewish people and the State of Israel*”.<sup>229</sup>

The consequences of the 2010 Gaza flotilla incident further aggravated the Turkish - Israeli relationship. The Palmer Investigative Committee (the official body investigating the incident) found the Israeli blockade legitimate. On the other hand the report found the actions of Israeli army disproportionate and excessive. The Turkish government rejected the report and demanded an apology and compensation from Israel. The Israeli Commission Report (Turkel Report) described IHH (Humanitarian Relief Foundation) as a humanitarian group having radical-Islamic leaning and backing the activities of Hamas.

In Israel’s point of view, the Mavi Marmara flotilla was one of AKP’s attempt to damage Israel’s reputation. Also, it was an offense against its state security.<sup>230</sup> The Israeli government maintained a view that flotilla passengers were a violent, armed group of Islamic militants supported by the Turkish government.<sup>231</sup> There was a substantial criticism coming from Israeli newspapers in reaction to the crisis. Turkey was criticized for its anti Israeli rhetoric and for not acting neutrally.

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<sup>226</sup> Kosebalaban 2010.

<sup>227</sup> Cohen and Freilich 2014.

<sup>228</sup> Haaretz Online 2010.

<sup>229</sup> Najslova and Baskin 2010.

<sup>230</sup> Cohen and Freilich 2014.

<sup>231</sup> Uzer 2013.

Officially, Turkey had three conditions for re-establishing ties with Israel:

- Public apology for the Mavi Marmara attacks
- Israeli compensation to the families of the victims
- Lifting of the Gaza blockade.<sup>232</sup>

After Israel decided to ignore these demands, Turkey expelled the accredited Israeli ambassador and suspended all existing military cooperation.<sup>233</sup> The Turkish-Israeli diplomatic relations reached their lowest level.

The AKP introducing a new political-military strategy is partly responsible for the worsening relations with Israel. Given its strengthened position Turkey does not need Israel for protection.<sup>234</sup> Davutoglu, who has been appointed Foreign Minister of Turkey in 2009, opposes the claims that Turkey is guilty in changing its foreign policy. He further states that Turkey is following an integrated foreign policy and the new relations with its neighbours are necessary for the further development of Turkey.<sup>235</sup>

Another component of the deterioration is Turkey applying double standards towards its neighbours. The reality that other partners such as Iran, Sudan or Libya are also extensively violating human rights does not receive far as much criticism from the Turkish government as Israel has also created a gap between Israel and Turkey.<sup>236</sup> During the consequent years of the AKP government there were several other agreements signed with Iran and therefore strengthened relations.

Cohen finds that: *“Policy splits over Iran and relations with other Middle Eastern countries now reflect Turkey’s emergence as a self-confident, relatively prosperous regional power, with ambitions to care out an independent sphere of influence.”*<sup>237</sup>

In the aftermath of the Mavi Marmara incident the military cooperation has got significantly smaller and Turkey gradually eradicated them. Notwithstanding the abovementioned changes, Israel still represents an important economic partner to Turkey. Business is an area that was not damaged to such big extent but on the other hand to tourism was. Israeli tourists stopped visiting Turkey.

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<sup>232</sup> Kohen 2012.

<sup>233</sup> Turkey also attempted to stop Israel’s participation on international forums. Furthermore, the AKP declared the Mavi Marmara incident as a possible cause for war. Cohen and Freilich 2014.

<sup>234</sup> Renda 2011.

<sup>235</sup> Bulent 2009.

<sup>236</sup> Najslava and Baskin 2010.

<sup>237</sup> Cohen 2011.

Both Israeli officials and academics agree that an improvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could have a constructive effect on the Turkish-Israeli relations.<sup>238</sup> Israel's aggressive attitude towards the question of Palestine does not outrage the Turkish political representation only, but the public in general too.

Following the eradication of the Turkish-Israeli cooperation, Turkey was invited to the 2010 summit of the Arab League, in Libya. The Arab states expressed their appreciation of Turkey cutting relations with Israel in 2011. The Prime Minister received an invitation to the Arab League Foreign Minister's meeting held in Cairo.<sup>239</sup> In the view of its deteriorating partnership with Turkey, Israel has reached out to several other countries such as Greece, Cyprus, South Sudan, Azerbaijan and Romania. The latter has been allowing Israeli warplanes to use its airspace for training purposes.<sup>240</sup> However the strategic value of these connections does not even go close to the strategic alliance that existed between Turkey and Israel.

In the wake of the Syrian crisis Israel made several attempts to establish dialogue with Turkey. Israel was hoping for better relations. The turbulent ME region underlined the importance of their partnership. However, it did not agree to the Turkish conditions.<sup>241</sup>

It should be taken into account that the cooperation was not completely ceased and Israel has provided assistance to Turkey during the devastating earthquake of 2011. Turkey also helped Israel in fighting the Mount Carmel forest fires that hit the country in 2010.<sup>242</sup>

In February 2013, Netanyahu apologised to Turkish PM Erdogan in a phone call. This was the first time the two governments officially communicated since the Mavi Marmara incident. The PM's agreed to normalise relations, and Netanyahu agreed to provide compensation to the victim's families. It needs to be pointed out that the conversation was organised with the help of President Obama.<sup>243</sup> At the end of April 2013 the first Israeli delegation visited Turkey, led by the security advisor of the Israeli government, Yaakov Amidror. The delegation together with its Turkish counterpart drafted a protocol that would make a start to the stabilization of relations.<sup>244 245</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Najslova and Baskin 2011.

<sup>239</sup> Csicsmann & Rózsa 2013.

<sup>240</sup> Uzer 2013.

<sup>241</sup> Ildiz 2012.

<sup>242</sup> Cohen and Freilich 2014.

<sup>243</sup> Keinon 2013.

<sup>244</sup> Kartoglu 2013.



Najslova and Baskin identified six key areas that carry high importance for the improvement of Turkish-Israeli relations:

1. Palestinian issue – the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is vital for the Turkish political representation, as well as for the Turkish public.
2. Palestinian Government - An agreement between the Palestinian Authority on the West Bank and the territory under the leadership of Hamas.
3. Israeli-Syrian relations – improved relations between the two could be helpful for the Turkish-Israeli relationship. Given the Syrian conflict<sup>246</sup> this factor does not apply any longer.
4. Israel and the NATO – Israel has to stay out from the NATO's approach towards Turkey. Israel had appealed to NATO to be careful with Turkey and that it should not share information with the latter.
5. Turkish Government (AKP) – judging Israel for killing Palestinians but not commenting on the similar activities of Iran, Syria or Libya.
6. Politics of ideology and religion – exclude anti-Israeli (anti-Jewish) and anti-Turkish (anti-Muslim) rhetoric.<sup>247</sup>

There is significant lack in civil-society collaboration between the two neighbours. Several researches on the topic found that the AKP acted constantly to downgrade relations. This includes all verbal assaults and diplomatic practices too.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> According to Clovis Maksoud, a former ambassador and permanent observer of the League of Arab States at the UN: *"It should be realized that Turkey's acceptance of the apology does not at all change its firm commitment to Palestinian self-determination, recognition of a Palestinian state and the removal of the Gaza blockade. Furthermore, Erdogan's plans to visit Gaza signals that Turkey is committed to Palestinian national and human rights and to the reality of Gaza being an integral part of the Palestinian state."* Maksoud 2013.

<sup>246</sup> The fact that both Israel, and later Turkey cut ties with the Syrian government in the consequence of the civil war eliminates the importance of Syria in solving the Turkish-Israeli relationship.

<sup>247</sup> Najslova and Baskin 2010.

<sup>248</sup> Cohen and Freilich 2014.

## CONCLUSION

The master thesis set out two research questions:

1. What were the domestic policy factors leading to the deterioration of alliance between Turkey and Israel – the role of the AKP in the process of worsening relations between Turkey and Israel?
2. What are the geopolitical factors leading to the worsening of Turkish-Israeli relations?

I found that the AKP coming to power contributed to the deterioration of the Turkish-Israeli relationship for the following reasons. The domestic policy factors leading to the deterioration of Turkish-Israeli alliance included the establishment of a majority government lacking a constructive opposition in the Turkish parliament. This provided the AKP to conduct its domestic and foreign policy based on their own beliefs. After taking over the government the party introduced a completely new foreign policy doctrine called the “Strategic Depth Doctrine”. On the foundations of these newly established foreign policy guidelines Turkey started building better relations with its imminent neighbours. I found that by moving closer to Iran, Syria, and Iraq, Turkey not only distanced itself from Israel but it damaged their mutual partnership too. Firstly, by increasing economic cooperation with the abovementioned states the amount of trade with Israel has decreased. Therefore the two countries’ connection has been losing from its significance. Secondly, the fact that Israel considers these countries as its enemies also damaged the value of Turkish-Israeli alliance.

Furthermore by the elimination of the power of the military and the judicial system the Turkish domestic politics system has lost its checks and balances. This is particularly true when looking at the foreign policy decisions. Before the AKP, the military was serving as a controlling body over the government and was supporting the partnership with Israel. The thesis also pointed out that the most important area of the Turkish-Israeli alliance was no other than the military.

The increased role of Middle East and Islam being a fundamental principle of the AKP represent a major cause of the deterioration of Turkish-Israeli relations. Under the AKP government Turkey intensified its involvement in the Arab League and the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

The general view on the deterioration of the Turkish-Israeli relations is that it started after the 2008-2009 Gaza War or Operation Cast Lead. In the consequence of the aggressive military attack on the Palestinians Turkey has turned away from Israel and the relations further deteriorated after the Mavi Marmara flotilla incident. However the thesis finds that the disaffection of the two countries started earlier. Directly after the 2006 Palestinian elections Turkey began to cooperate with Hamas. This was aimed to win over the Arab countries' public opinion and the isolation of Israel. In order to pursue its foreign policy goals the AKP could not distance itself from the Palestinian question completely. It is true that the Palestinian question played a decisive role in the worsening relations but the AKP was pursuing its own foreign policy perspective.

In connection with the Palestinian question I found that the role of domestic politics and public opinion was also important. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has always represented a sensitive topic for the Turkish public. The AKP contributed to the anti-Israeli public sentiment by speeches condemning Israel and pointing out the suffering of the Palestinian people. It also used the state television to broadcast a television series picturing Israel and Israeli soldiers as brutal aggressors. Recep Tayyip Erdogan tended to explain the stance of the government referring to the public opinion. Meanwhile, the Turkish public opinion polls appreciated Erdogan's incentives against Israel.

Moreover the AKP introduced constitutional changes assuring that no other political party can question its authority.

The last domestic factor contributing to the deterioration of the alliance was the ideological factor. The AKP has demonstrated its Islamic leaning throughout its government.

The second research question was to identify the geopolitical factors that contributed to the deterioration of the relationship. The war in Iraq altered the Middle Eastern region. Turkey's relationship with Iraq has significantly improved and this lowered the importance of the Israeli partnership. By improving its relationship with Syria, Turkey's security improved as well. Even though Syria remained a threat for Israel, Turkey and Israel did not share the same security threat from this third party anymore.

The other geopolitical factor was Turkey's increased cooperation with Iran. Iran represents the biggest threat for Israel's existence. The fact that Turkey extended the areas of cooperation with Iran created tension between Turkey and Israel. The other

geopolitical factor that played role in the worsening of Turkish-Israeli relations was the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. More precisely it was Israel's aggression towards the Palestinians between 2003 and 2013. This involved military operations on the Palestinian territories and the attack on the Mavi Marmara flotilla. The attack on the Mavi Marmara brought the Turkish-Israeli relations to their lowest level in decades. Consequently both Israeli and Turkish domestic politics made it more difficult for the two states to maintain good relations. Therefore the thesis found that geopolitical factors ultimately determined the foreign policies of the two states.

The hypothesis of the research was: *The political interest of the Turkish governing party AKP is the key reason the deterioration of Turkish-Israeli alliance.*

My research indicates that the AKP coming into power in 2002 was not the sole reason behind the collapse of the Turkish-Israeli partnership. The analysis proves that Turkish-Israeli alliance did not worsen as a direct consequence of AKP government. After 2002 on the other hand the relationship was further developing. It is the second government and its approach towards the neighbors, and the consequent geopolitical influences that affected their partnership.



## **SUMMARY**

After 2008 the relations between Turkey and Israel started to decline. Operation Cast Lead and the Mavi Marmara incident are the most important foreign policy factors causing this decline. The case study on the Turkish-Israeli relations identified the exact role of the Turkish AKP government during the deterioration of relations. The thesis also shed light on the effect of the imminent geopolitical region on Turkish-Israeli relations. The conclusion of the thesis is that Turkish domestic politics played a more decisive role in cutting ties with Israel. On the other hand the worsening relations between 2003 and 2013 were not the sole responsibility of Turkey. Israel's anti-Palestine policies also contributed to this decline.

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# **Master Thesis Project Proposal**

Charles University in Prague

Faculty of Social Sciences

Department of International Relations

## **Turkish-Israeli Relations. The Deterioration of Alliance between 2003 and 2013: implication on the politics of the Middle East**

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The traces of Turkish-Israeli relations go back to the very beginning of the creation of the Israeli state. After the formalization of Turkish-Israeli relation in March 28, 1949, the first Muslim state recognizing the state of Israel was no other than Turkey. Despite this reality the relations between the two states were minimal for many years. Until the early 1990s the relations can be described as unsteady and fragile. However, from the late 1990s the two states have increased cooperation, leading to the creation of alliance between the two. A strategic alliance of military and economic character was born representing cooperation on the field of military, increased trade exchange and tourist traffic.

After not much more than a decade however the partnership of the states has started to decline. The reasons involve changing domestic politics and the implications of international relations.

The first milestone was the 2003 Iraq War the geopolitics since which the area has been in constant change, with repercussions on the Turkish-Israeli alliance.

It is a general perception in international studies that the main transition in Turkish-Israeli relations was caused by the Israeli attack on the Gaza Strip in 2008, a.k.a. "Operation Cast Lead". However the issue is more complex - the thesis aims to assess the most decisive reasons behind the deterioration of this alliance involving both domestic political factors and the effects of geopolitical factors during the period between 2003 and 2013. Consequently there was a militarization in Turkish foreign policy and a more aggressive approach towards Israel. This demonstrated itself in the reality, that Turkey has joined the anti-israeli coalition of Arabic states.

I have decided for this timeline as the year of 2013 marks the first attempt of improving their relations by the official Israeli apology for the "Mavi Marmara" incident, ie. the Israeli attack on the Turkish vessel Mavi Marvara carrying humanitarian aid to Gaza.

### **The topic area of the thesis**

The research area of this thesis is the relations between Turkey and Israel between the year of 2003 and 2013.

## **The research objective of the thesis**

The research objective of the thesis is the examination of how the political acts of Turkey and Israel has transformed their mutual relations. In order to achieve this the following research questions will be answered:

1. What were the domestic policy factors leading to the deterioration of alliance between Turkey and Israel - the role of the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi – AKP) in the process of worsening relations between Turkey and Israel?
2. What are the geopolitical factors leading to the worsening of Turkish-Israeli relations?

## **Theory and methodology**

The research will be a comparative case study of Turkish-Israeli relations in the context of AKP's policies and differing interests of both countries in Middle East.

The thesis will have a form of an intrinsic case study with the goal identify how Turkey's and Israel's foreign policy behavior transformed their relationship towards each other. The secondary goal of the case study is to shed light on the implications of the geopolitics of the Middle Eastern region on their relationship. The master thesis also aims to shed light on all the factors that led to the change of foreign policy relations between the two countries.

Considering the goal of the thesis perceiving it as an intrinsic case study is the most suitable. An intrinsic case study is undertaken because one wants better understanding of a particular case. Given the particularity of the Turkish-Israeli foreign policy issue, this case itself is of interest. The purpose is to understand the case itself. (Stake 1994)

As the majority of thoroughgoing studies on Turkish foreign policy are single-country studies – indicating that there is lack of comparative researches, I believe that the comparative study of the relations between Turkey and Israel will be beneficial in examining the complexity of foreign policy issues of these two states. From an

epistemological point of view an explanatory approach will be applied, as it helps to discover and identify causal relations between the examined parts.

The thesis will test the following hypothesis: The political interest of the Turkish governing party AKP is the key reason behind the deterioration of Turkish-Israeli alliance.

In connection to the Turkish-Israeli relation neorealism provides a manifestation of the decentralized nature of the international structure. In the case of this alliance it also applies that the members are seeking their own interest and rather follow their own path to survive in international relations as such (Waltz 1979).

Therefore this thesis will base its theoretical framework in line with Waltz's neorealist understanding – that international political system is a self-help system, where the security of the states is not guaranteed (Waltz 1979).

This indicates their motive for survival beyond which the goals of each state may be different in conjunction with their alignment in the structure of international politics and their individual political motives.

According to Waltz the motivations of states within a given structure – in this case the structure of alliance between Turkey and Israel - may vary according to the rules of the structure. This means that in order to reach their ends this varies according to

*“their positioning in the arrangement of order and to their capabilities”*. (Waltz, 1979)

In order to reveal the causes of downfall in Turkish-Israeli relations I will apply Stephen M. Walt's study on alliances. According to Waltz an alliance is “a formal or informal commitment for security cooperation between two or more states” (Walt, 1997). Walt examines the reasons why alliances reach an end and I will apply the variables accordingly.

### **Conceptualization and operationalization**

The purpose of operationalization is to define the path from abstract concepts to specific data, and vice versa, from the data to concepts (Drulák, 2008). In connection to my thesis operationalization means the identification of fundamental factors leading to the change in relations between Turkey and Israel. In order to achieve this the thesis will apply following variables:

- **geopolitics in the Middle East**

Geopolitics examines the effects of geography on state's policies and the effects on the power of state actors in a particular geographic area. Geopolitics belongs to the group of methods in foreign policy analysis and its goal is to investigate international political actions.

Geopolitics on the Middle East in connection with this thesis is related to the existence of Israel and the effects on the aftermath on the international relations in the region.

The geopolitical factors play an essential role in the survival of alliances. According to Walt *"Alliances will tend to be less robust in a multipolar world, because the major powers will possess more options as their numbers increase, and because shifts in the distribution of capabilities will be more frequent."* (Walt 1997)

- **the perception of threat**

Threat perception is central to the study of alliances - respectively the absence of common regional threat. From the neorealist point of view states decide to join forces to balance against a certain external threat. That means that alliances will dissolve if there is a change of perception of this external threat, and the change in balance of power for each member of the alliance.

**From the Turkish perspective** this change involves the 1998 rapprochement with Syria, as well as the improved relations between Turkey and Greece.

**From the Israeli perspective** I will be focusing on the threat caused by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, respectively the role of Hamas in creating this threat.

- **domestic politics**

Domestic politics include all the legal, governmental and administrative issues of the public policy of a state within the state's territory. It involves the decisions made and adopted by the political representatives of the state therefore it does vary depending on the political representation. In the context of Turkish-Israeli relations by domestic politics will be understood the decisions and approaches of the Turkish AKP and the Israeli Likud party. Also, it has to be pointed out that the party politics of each are to certain extent connected with domestic public opinion.



- **ideological divisions**

Ideology in a political context represents the values, ideas and beliefs of states affecting the formation of foreign policy doctrines. Ideology affects the allocation of power and the domestic and foreign policy behavior of states. In this thesis the ideological divisions between Turkey and Israel and what they represent towards the following three middle-eastern states – Syria, Iran and Palestine will be applied.

**Review of the Sources**

The MA thesis will be based on both primary and secondary sources. The primary data will be the foreign policy directories of both countries, official statements of the ministry of foreign affairs of both Turkey and Israel.

The secondary data comes in particular from three sources: books, research studies and articles.

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