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Turkish-Israeli Relations in Crisis: Living with the Gordian Knot¹

Gencer Özcan*

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article s'attache à la crise profonde des relations turco-israéliennes résultant de l'opération mortelle, le 31 mai de l'année précédente, contre la flottille venue apporter de l'aide aux Palestiniens et dirigée par le navire turc *Mavi Marmara*, au cours de laquelle huit citoyens turcs et un turco-américain sont morts. En outre l'article va tenter de mettre en évidence les raisons qui ont conduit le gouvernement du *Parti de justice et de développement [JDP]* à délaissier les relations avec Israël, et fait valoir que, si les perceptions politiques en vigueur envers Israël ne sont pas profondément changées, il sera difficile de mettre fin à la présente impasse.

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the deep crisis the Turkish-Israeli relations entered, in the wake of the deadly assault on May 31st previous year on the aid flotilla led by the Turkish ship *Mavi Marmara* during which eight Turkish citizens and a Turkish-American died. Furthermore the article will attempt to highlight the reasons that led the current *Justice and Development Party [JDP]* government to downgrade relations with Israel, and argue that unless prevailing political perceptions of Israel are profoundly changed, it would be difficult to end the stalemate.

In the wake of the deadly assault on May 31st previous year on the aid flotilla led by the Turkish ship *Mavi Marmara* during which eight Turkish citizens and a Turkish-American died, Turkish-Israeli relations entered a deep crisis. Turkey withdrew its ambassador declaring that he will not return to Tel Aviv unless Israel offers its apologies and pays compensation to the relatives of the victims. The Israeli Foreign Ministry although on several occasions it came close to striking a deal with Ankara, refused to accept the conditions Turkey put forward for the normalization of the relations between the two countries.²

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The controversy stiffened and reignited in the aftermath of an exchange of harsh messages between the two countries when the *Palmer Report* was leaked. The Israeli obstinacy to extend a formal apology led Turkey to downgrade the diplomatic representation to the lowest level. Prospects of breaking the deadlock now seem to have been further away. In a stark contrast to the nineties when Turkey's relations with Israel were to a large degree excluded from internal politics and came to be regarded somehow an untouchable affair, since the early 2009 the relationship has been internalized and turned into a domestic battleground on which all parties blame each other of not doing enough against Israel. Thus, in addition to regional parameters, stalemate is hardened by political discourse geared for domestic needs. Being the part of domestic debates in Turkey, relations with Israel seem to fall prey to domestic politics, and an improvement in the foreseeable future is not within the realms of possibility. This paper will attempt to highlight the reasons that led the current *Justice and Development Party [JDP]* government to downgrade relations with Israel, and argue that unless prevailing political perceptions of Israel are profoundly changed, it would be difficult to end the stalemate.

Although unique in the history of bilateral relations, the current crisis was the last of several mini crises reflecting the changing mood in both capitals. The relations had been exposed to a new set of internal and external dynamics that were different than those that shaped the alignment almost twenty years ago. The pressure brought by regional developments, which gained momentum after the second intifada, was already strangling the relations. Despite the suffocating pressures, the alignment sailed through these mini crises. Until the *Freedom Flotilla Raid*, the alignment seemed to have developed a sort of immunity to these challenges and miraculously survived these crises.³ However, the *Freedom Flotilla Raid* had an impact of unprecedented magnitude.⁴ First and foremost, having caused civilian casualties, the crisis left deep scars in the minds and hearts of people in both countries. The crisis also shook the very foundations on which the alignment has been standing. Despite the fact that the relations had always been buttressed by the strongest institutions in respective countries, i.e. the militaries and ministries of foreign affairs, the Israeli Defense Forces [*IDF*] came to the fore as the main actor which precipitated the crisis. The multidimensional regional dynamics that surrounded and reinforced the relationship were transcended by a unilateral intervention carried out by the IDF. The irony was that it was Israeli Minister of Defense, Ehud Barak, who had played a key role in begetting and cultivating the alignment throughout the nineties who eventually took the

final decision to use fire arms against those on board.⁵ Furthermore, in the aftermath of the crisis, the constituencies that previously bolstered the alignment were ostracized.

Alignment with Israel was devised to meet a number of strategic requirements that Turkey aimed to satisfy at the turn of the nineties.⁶ In the nineties Turkey's regional outlook in the Middle East was overwhelmed by its struggle with the Kurdish separatist movement that used Northern Iraq as a rear base and received support from Syria and Iran. Therefore, the regionalization of Kurdish separatism compelled Ankara to formulate an assertive policy for which Israel appeared to be a suitable partner. Furthermore, Israeli readiness to respond to Turkey's procurement of military supplies served as another element in the making of the alignment. Intelligence sharing and cooperation on other security related issues were key elements of the rapprochement and therefore major actors who played a key role in the making of the alignment came from the security establishments. However, in the 2000s, the US occupation of Iraq began to change the strategic landscape in the region and therefore decision makers in Ankara started seeing Turkey's vicinity through different lenses than those used in the nineties. Coping with a multi variable regional context emerged after the occupation of Iraq; Ankara's foreign policy has increasingly become more multi focal and diversified.

As of the beginning of the 21st Century, Turkey transformed itself from being a sort of introverted country strained by manifold internal problems, from ongoing political strife to occasional financial crises, into an outward looking one with more diversified regional prospects. First and foremost, Turkey's relations with its neighbors are steered by economic motivations rather than security considerations. Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu laid the foundations of Turkey's new foreign policy dubbed as "*Zero Problems with the Neighbors Policy*". The new policy emphasized "intense economic interdependence" as the major mechanism through which Turkey can cultivate "a substantial trust in its relations with its neighbors".⁷ Therefore, many observers branded the change as one of transformation from a national security state to a trading state. The JDP governments instigated official contacts with neighboring countries involving all levels and devised various frames of cooperation to increase mutual trade with the neighboring countries. Reflecting Turkey's growing self-confidence, lifting visa requirements with many neighbors is also related with this transformation. In a marked contrast to the situation during the period of tight visa regimes of the nineties, now figures of incoming and outgoing tourists from and to the neighboring

countries are in steady increase. Moreover, Arab markets are flooded with Turkish goods while Turkish TV serials are becoming popular across the Middle East.⁸

Another tendency that became conspicuous in Turkish foreign policy was Ankara's growing engagement with sub state actors. JDP governments were extremely diligent in cultivating good relations with local parties and organizations such as *Hamas*, *Hizbullah*, *Ihvan* or Iraqi groups.⁹ Therefore, many sub-state actors seeking Turkish diplomats' good offices for the local crises they try to cope with, turned Ankara into a sort of diplomatic *Mecca*. Ankara's name was spelled among the destinations that *Hamas* considered moving its basis from Damascus after the riots went out of control in Syria. Turkey's engagement policy reached to an unprecedented scale when Ankara decided to support, at least some elements of *Free Syrian Army* fighting to oust the Assad regime. The JDP government played active role to get the Syrian opposition united, set refugee camps along the border and hosted the second conference of the *Friends of Syria* in Istanbul.¹⁰

The change in foreign policy discourse in Turkey is also remarkable. While threats to use force or of "drawing red lines" were part and parcel of the official discourse in the nineties, Ankara de-securitized its language of foreign policy. In order to complement the policy of *zero problems with the neighbors*, the JDP governments attached special importance to soften the official foreign policy discourse. Even the discourse used in documents such as *National Security Document* was desecuritized through cleansing all clauses of animosity towards neighbors.¹¹ This was also true at the level of actors. While the military were enjoying a powerful position in foreign policy decision-making process until the end of the 1990s, it paled into insignificance by the mid 2000s.¹² Last but not least, the military, the major institution that propped the alignment up has no longer called the tune in conducting Ankara's relations with Tel Aviv.¹³ The new perspective is reflected in the new *Law on the Duties and Organization of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs* that laid a new set of principles which Turkey's foreign policy should comply with. Furthermore, the law founded a department within the Ministry, *Directorate on Global and Humanitarian Issues*, duty of which is to deal with human rights violations in other countries, an unprecedented duty to be performed by Turkish diplomats.¹⁴ The new responsibility marks a sharp contrast with the duties the diplomats of earlier generations of eighties who used to spend much of their time in fending off criticisms of human rights violations committed in Turkey.¹⁵

Having diversified its content, Turkey's policies appear to correspond better to the changing realities of the Middle East. As many observers noted, the

recent Arab uprisings vindicated JDP's endeavors to diversify its foreign policy towards the Arab Middle East. To put this into perspective, it is helpful to take a closer look at Turkey's policy towards the Kurds of Iraq that made a dramatic *volte-face* after 2005. Since Iraq remained in a state of quagmire in the nineties, Turkey's policy in Northern Iraq had focused on the suppression of the PKK activities there. The Turkish Armed Forces' continual cross border operations in Northern Iraq were the embodiment of Ankara's policies there. Notwithstanding limited occasional deals with KDP and PUK, Ankara deliberately refrained from recognizing the *Regional Government of Kurdistan* [RGK]. Yet after 2005, Ankara improved its relations with the Kurdish groups and ended its policy of enmity towards the RGK. Beyond Iraqi Kurdistan, Ankara cultivated and retained good relations with all political groups active on the ground and offered its good offices for them if and when necessary. In the 2005 elections in Iraq, Ankara played key role in convincing the Sunni parties not to turn their back to the political process. The visit to Iraq by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan that took place in late March 2011 displayed the changing content of Turkey's foreign policy. He became the first Turkish Prime Minister to pay an official visit to Iraqi Kurdistan as well as Shiite shrines in Najaf including Imam Ali's shrine, and to held talks with Great Ayatollah Sistani there. In a clear departure from earlier state centered diplomatic practices, the visit indicated Turkey's determination to diversify its regional policy. However, it does not necessarily mean that the Ankara's active engagement policy in the Middle East would attain its declared goals. In changing power configuration around the Gulf seems to perplex all actors including Turkey, Iran and Iraq. In spite of intensive efforts to cultivate good relations with all parties involved, JDP leaders' close engagement with the domestic developments in Iraq appears to have run into trouble in the wake of the withdrawal of the US troops in December 2011. All actors active in the Iraqi politics have now become susceptible to increasing Iranian influence there. The stalemate between the Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and vice president Hashimi, who were respectively supported by Iran and Turkey, illustrates the extent of difficulties that Ankara is to face in Baghdad. Despite Ankara's strong backing, Hashimi was forced to flee Baghdad when an arrest warrant on terrorism charges was issued. The ensuing exchange of harsh statements between Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki and Prime Minister Erdoğan made it clear that both leaders will walk a tightrope in the foreseeable future.

Against the background of Ankara's changing policy, now we can move to making some observations that are relevant to understand the ongoing crisis in Turkish-Israeli relations. It goes without saying that every aspect of the

transformation that Turkish foreign policy has undergone has its bearing on the Turkish-Israeli alignment. While Turkey's trade with regional countries rose to an unprecedented degree, trade with Israel became relatively less significant. Accordingly, Turkey's need for military rapprochement with Israel to counterbalance regional rivals shrunk. As was the case with engaging *Hamas*, in spite of Israeli reprimands, Ankara maintained its contacts with influential sub state actors. Ankara's growing interest in diversification of its relations with all players of varying degree of influence and activity is not confined to *Hamas* and *Hizbullah*. The crisis in Syria has also witnessed an unprecedented Turkish intervention that armed opposition groups which were fighting against the regime were welcomed and given sanctuary within Turkey. This single example alone indicates the sea change in Turkey's position *vis-a-vis* Syria.

The inevitable implication of Turkey's increasing regional activity is the relative decline of Israel's weight in Ankara's policy configurations. However, the decline is also attributable to the changing perceptions prevailing in Turkey of Israel's relations with the United States. Since many in Turkey began to perceive the United States as a sunset power, they anticipate that Israel's pivotal position in the Middle East would also be eclipsed. Furthermore, Israel is now considered to be a security consuming country that fails to produce relevant policies to address regional problems. Such perceptions are of significance since they indicate that Israel has lost its position in the eyes of many Turks as a country of military prowess. One of the events that led to a sharp decline of Israeli image was the infamous "armchair crisis" in January 2010. Since Israeli diplomats attempted to humiliate the Turkish ambassador Oğuz Çelikkol by seating him on a lower armchair, Turkish public opinion was shocked and the media qualified the act as "a medieval practice".

The bilateral relations are soured as a result of consecutive regional crises. When we remember the last decade, it is remarkable that three major wars broke out in the region -the occupation of Iraq in 2003, the war in Lebanon in 2006 and in Gaza in 2008- while the Palestinian-Israeli peace process could not come out of the coma. The crises of the 2000s stand in stark contrast to those we had in the nineties. First and foremost, neither the civilian casualties nor political complications they caused were by any means comparable with those that took place in the nineties. In the 2000s, each crisis decreased the public's support for the alignment; created loss of trust on both sides; weakened other social actors that supported the bilateral relations.

Nevertheless, despite these regional dynamics, bilateral relations remained on a cooperative basis and were successful in coping with the fallouts of the

mini crises that broke out during the 2000s. During the process of foundation, the *JDP* leaders had made it clear that they would cultivate good relations with Israel.¹⁶ After the bombings of two Istanbul synagogues in November 2004 which killed scores of Muslims and Jews, the Foreign Ministers of Turkey and Israel stood side-by-side and vowed to fight terrorists together. Turkey appointed its best diplomats as ambassadors to Tel Aviv. Ankara overlooked the use of Turkish airspace by Israeli fighters when they bombed Syrian nuclear facilities in September 2007. Until the Gaza War, Israel joined the *Anatolian Eagle* drills carried out in Konya. Even more strikingly, even after the Davos incident, the *JDP* government made special legal arrangements to grant the bill for Israeli companies to demine the large land strip along the Syrian border. Despite strong opposition against the bill, both from within and without the Party, the government insisted that demining work should be given the Israeli companies without a public tender. Only after strong public reaction and nullification of the bill by the Court of State, demining issue was shelved.¹⁷

Right before the Flotilla crisis broke out; Turkey in May 2010 did not veto Israel's admission into the *OECD*.¹⁸ Cooperation on security affairs went on even after the Flotilla Raid. Turkish Armed Forces kept receiving training for *Heron* UAV's, and used them in Northern Iraq. Diplomats of both countries worked hard to contain the crisis. With the exception of some remarks by Prime Minister Erdoğan, party officials deliberately refrained from making provocative remarks; therefore cautiously avoided further escalation. Another important point was that the *JDP* did not let its supporters demonstrate after the Raid. The government's spokesperson Hüseyin Çelik claimed that Prime Minister's harsh reactions were geared towards the people that the government's reactions were strong enough so that they need not to demonstrate on streets.¹⁹ Only a week after the raid, the warnings that State Minister Bülent Arınç gave indicated how the extent of the damage wrought by the incident worried the party's top brass.

There is a need for a reliable country to contribute to the better orientation of the State of Israel, whose existence, no matter we like or dislike, has been recognized by the World. Now, they say: "Abolish everything! Do not leave any agreement! Expel the Ambassador! Easy to get divorced for a bachelor! Should you abandon all, you end up in mess. I do not want to put myself as example, yet it takes a statesman to rule the state in sobriety, rationality and patience. Even in my own milieu, there may be those who prefer to strike, fight and punish them by delivering what they deserve. I, too, emotionally and wholeheartedly support them. But we need to see

realpolitik in the World, so that we can continue our own way. I want to reach hearts of those who say “Let’s set out the second, the third, and the fifth ship”, and ask: do you have enough power to stop them if such an event [the raid] occurs again? Do you have enough wisdom to repair the damage caused by such an event? Did you make a calculation of the cost that you have to compensate? You need to bring the wisdom to the fore.²⁰

For a long period, high level contacts were sustained and many channels were kept open until the downgrading. Turkey assisted Israel by sending two planes to extinguish the forest fire that broke out in *Mount Carmel*. There were also other signals that both sides are careful not to let the relations slide any further. Furthermore, some other overtures made by the government are also remarkable. Despite the severe reprimands by both sides following the Flotilla crisis, diplomatic relations were not downgraded or broken for long. In January 2011, the first *Holocaust Day* was commemorated in Istanbul. The government sent messages and the governor of Istanbul alongside some *JDP* members were present in the commemoration. The absence of *JDP* representatives in the welcoming ceremony given on the occasion of the return of the flagship *Mavi Marmara* to Istanbul was also noticeable. In the wake of the military operations in Gaza and the suicide bomb attack in Jerusalem in March 2011, the Foreign Ministry notably took a balanced approach condemning both incidents.

We are deeply concerned with the re-escalation of violence in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the past days. In this context, we condemn the disproportionate and indiscriminate attacks launched by the Israeli military on 22 March 2011 against the Gaza Strip, in which civilians, including children, lost their lives and many others were injured. Furthermore, we also condemn the bomb attack on 23 March in Jerusalem against passenger buses, which, according to initial reports, caused the death of one person and the injury of more than 30 persons.²¹

Even after the *Palmer Report* was leaked, Ankara preferred downgrading rather than breaking diplomatic relations. Although the diplomatic staffs, save second secretaries, were reciprocally withdrawn from respective embassies, the staff working in the consulates of Istanbul and Jerusalem remained intact. Although its diplomatic status significantly differs from that of Istanbul, the Turkish consulate in Jerusalem keeps functioning as was before. Given the importance of both cities, it is significant that the level of representation in these consulates was maintained. Another significant development also needs to be highlighted. Despite some announcements that a new flotilla would be

sent to Gaza, the initiative was not allowed to take place. Ankara commemorated the *Holocaust Day* again in 2012. On 27 January 2012, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a statement on the *United Nations International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust* that Turkey remembered and honoured the memory of more than 6 million Jews and members of other minorities, who lost their lives during this human tragedy.” The statement also underlined the 67th Anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, emphasizing it as “an occasion to reminisce on this unprecedented cataclysm of human history and strengthen the efforts to raise the awareness of the new generations.”²²

The JDP government displays great deal of sensitivity lest anti-Semitism go rampant in the country. Two events need to be elucidated to understand the government’s sensitivity on this issue. As mentioned above, in February 2012 when Turkey officially observed *International Holocaust Remembrance Day* in Istanbul, Turkish official broadcasting agency *TRT* aired Claude Lanzmann’s 1985 biographical film of the Holocaust era, *Shoah*. The nine-hour film was aired to help build understanding between Muslims and Jews, and to combat denials that the Holocaust occurred. Lanzmann said that the broadcast marked the first time a predominantly Muslim country has shown his film.²³ The official broadcasting institution, *Turkish Radio and Television Institution (TRT)* nominated Can Bonomo, young Turkish singer Jewish by origin, as the country’s representative in the 2012 Eurovision Song Contest. Instead of holding a national competition, *TRT*’s decision to nominate Bonomo has been perceived as a careful step to indicate that the government stands against anti-Semitism in Turkey.

Last but not least, the bilateral trade, despite all the negative factors, kept its upsurge and reached to the highest levels after the financial crisis of 2008 and reached USD 3.5 billion in 2010. It is also interesting that “Turkey’s exports to Israel have steadily followed an upward trend, exceeding the \$2 billion mark for the first time in 2010.”²⁴

Notwithstanding these signs, it is obvious that the current deadlock will remain insurmountable as long as the given political circumstances prevail in both countries. There is no room for creative solutions. Both sides keep their initial positions on the issue making any significant concession impossible. Unless a sort of unconditional apology and reasonable compensation is offered by Israel, Turkey will not accept returning to the *status quo ante*. Israeli Foreign Ministry, on the other hand wrecked at least two initiatives that came near to yielding a sort of compromise. It is therefore difficult to strike a balance between the two parties in the foreseeable future. There are other reasons

that make any compromise difficult, if not impossible. Turkey benefits from protracting the crisis. As an observer commented, for the government the crisis turned into “a hen that laid golden eggs”.²⁵ This is particularly true that the more Turkey lambasts Israel, the more its prestige rises in the Arab street where nowadays the heart of the Arab politics beats.

In order to salvage the relations, a strong external intervention is required. There were and still are two actors that are able to break the deadlock: the United States and the European Union. The latter failed to exert influence during the crisis. On the European Union’s part, there has been no determined initiative of any kind. Being embroiled in their problems, the leading European countries saw the affair as an out of area contingency, and by the same token, turned a blind eye to the crisis. In stark contrast to European indifference, Washington was alarmed with the flotilla incident and displayed decisive leadership during the initial phases of the crisis.²⁶ The Obama administration played a crucial role in securing the return of the bodies of victims as well as safe passage for those who survived the raid. Furthermore, Washington probably intervened through back channels and used its influence on *Fethullah Gülen*, the leader of an influential Islamic community in Turkey who currently lives in Pennsylvania. In a carefully given interview, *Gülen* criticized the IHH and told an American journalist that those who organized the Freedom Flotilla should have struck a deal with Israel beforehand. It was also important to see that *Gülen* criticized the activists who “disobeyed the authorities”, alluding to the Israeli Navy, stressing that such behavior would do no good.²⁷ The only actor that has significant leverage and political will, Washington, can and should spare more time and energy to convince Tel Aviv to meet the conditions that Ankara put for the normalization.

However, should there be a compromise ending the crisis, there is still little room for optimism. Even if Turkey is offered the apology; the regional dynamics that undermined the alignment will continue to be at work. The strategic landscape in the Middle East which had been shaped by the Gulf War has been changing by the Arab uprisings. The regional center of gravity has been moving towards the Gulf. Domestic social and political dynamics unleashed after the Arab uprisings undermined the regional order that had been formed and maintained by Israel after the 1967 War. The Camp David Accords, the corner stone of the current *status quo* are increasingly challenged by new political groups that are getting closer to power in respective Arab countries. As was the case with *Ihvan* in Egypt, new groups have already made it clear that the political price that Israel will have to pay for Egyptian

compliance will be higher. The same argument will be valid for Jordan and Syria. It is still difficult to foresee parameters of the new regional context in which the bilateral relations will be formed; it is obvious that the new conditions will not be conducive to create a favorable setting for the amelioration of bilateral relations. The new regimes will still keep demonizing Israel for all bad things happening in their country.

As far as the perceptions of Israel is concerned, domestic scenery in Turkey is no exception. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan already discovered the high dividends of getting criticizing Israel in public. “*One-minute*” has become a motto or trade mark that Erdoğan seems to get benefit of it for years to come. In the 2011 Elections, “*One minute!*” was used extensively as one of the pivotal slogans in party brochures, propaganda leaflets and billboards. In the election manifesto, under the title of “Turkey said ‘no!’ to the injustice”, the Davos incident was depicted as an event marking the rise of Erdoğan as an international leader. “When our Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan rightfully pronounced the Palestinian question, the bleeding wound for many years, he captivated public attention across the World. “*One Minute!*”, our Prime Minister, who already became the voice in the international arena for those who had been silenced and intimidated for years, launched an international social campaign that became the symbol of peace and brotherhood in the East and in the West.”²⁸

The JDP government also moved the Palestinian question to the centre of the mundane political discourse and portrayed the plight of Palestinians in Gaza as an internal issue.²⁹ The identification with the Palestinians became increasingly evident in speeches that Erdoğan delivered during his campaign for the general elections of June 2011. One of the remarkable speeches that he gave in *Konya* on the eve of the elections indicates the degree of internalization of the Palestinian problem:

*Now once again I give utterances from Konya to the entire Turkey and to the entire World; the fate of Jerusalem is not separated from the fate of Istanbul. The fate of Gaza is not separated from the fate of Ankara. The fate of Ramallah, of Nablus, Rafah, Jenin, Bethlehem is never separated from the fate of Konya. Even if the entire World remained silent, we shall not be so. Even if the whole World closed its eyes to it, we shall not do so. If the World merely spectates to the bloodshed, we shall not merely watch and remain indifferent to what is happening. If the World turns its back to Palestine, we shall not do so to the Palestinian people, to Gaza, to Jerusalem.*³⁰

By the same token, demonization of Israel gathered speed after the *Freedom Flotilla Raid*. Prime Minister Erdoğan's polemical speeches illustrate the extent of demonization and the way Israel is attached to Turkey's domestic politics. Prime Minister often lambasted Israel and, if and when he was criticized by the opposition for not being tough enough with Israel, he branded them as Israel's advocates or simply pro-Israeli. During the JDP's campaign for the 2011 elections, references to the Palestinian problem gained a remarkable frequency. In a speech he gave in *Kayseri* in January 2011 he blamed Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, leader of the main opposition party, Republican People's Party, [RPP] of advocating Israel. "RPP Chairman had received the attorneyship of Israel. Is it your business? Leave it! There are already many [in Israel] who want to hit Turkey. Are you doing the same? Do you think that your votes will increase when you advocate Israel? Do you think that this is going to make you stronger?"³¹ In September 2011, another rhetorical quarrel broke out when the *IHH* announced that preparations to send the second *Freedom Flotilla* to Gaza were underway. When RPP's leader Kılıçdaroğlu declared that "should there another flotilla or torpid boats be sent to Gaza, he will congratulate PM Erdoğan by kissing him on the forehead." Prime Minister Erdoğan's response was despising: "Save your dirty lips for Israel! I won't let your dirty lips touch onto my clean forehead!" Furthermore, he added: "When the opposition parties look at Gaza or Kayseri, they look through neither our eyes nor martyr *Furkan's* eyes. They do view Gaza, Somalia, Syria, Libya, Turkey and the whole world through glasses made in Tel Aviv or ideas of 1940s. That is the difference between them and us! They miss no opportunity to belittle Turkey. While we defend the rights of *Mavi Marmara*, of Gaza, of Hama, of Somalia, they are busy to unveil statues in *Kuşadası*."³² Even after the elections, Israel and the plight of Gazans continue to be subjects of bitter quarrels between the *JDP* and other parties. When writer Paul Auster announced that he will decline visiting Turkey in protest for journalists detained on flimsy charges, Prime Minister Erdoğan criticized Auster for having previously visited Israel. "Supposedly Israel is a democratic, secular country, a country where freedom of expression and individual rights and freedoms are limitless. What an ignorant man you are! Aren't they are the ones that rained bombs down on Gaza? They launched phosphorus bombs and used chemical weapons. How can you not see this?"³³ When RPP leader Kılıçdaroğlu invited Auster in protest against Prime Minister's reaction, Erdoğan continued his critics: "If he [Auster] does come to Turkey, they [Auster and Kılıçdaroğlu] should also go to Israel together afterwards. Otherwise that visit will be incomplete. They should have a picnic on a hill overlooking Gaza. They should repeat that there are no jailed journalists in Israel."³⁴

Two intertwined dynamics, the Arab uprisings and increasing Iranian influence in the Gulf, will likely bring out different sets of impact on the Turkish Israeli relations. Although invoked by different social and political motivations varying from one Arab country to another, uprisings paved the way for underprivileged sociopolitical groups aspiring to play more significant role in politics. Under such regional circumstances, the JDP's "*One Minute*" policies correspond with what is dubbed as the Arab street. Under the given regional political climate, the prospects that the two countries would dovetail their regional policies look grim. However, given the changing strategic landscape in the region, the need for balanced relations between Turkey and Israel is becoming more conspicuous. First and foremost, the regional context after the US withdrawal from Iraq has been becoming more conducive for the normalization of the relations. The NATO's missile radar facilities installed in Malatya is an embodiment of increasing need for better relations between Turkey and Israel. Despite the statements made by Turkish authorities that Turkey would not let Israel get intelligence from the *Kürecik* radar, the installation will serve the interests of both countries. Therefore, it is likely that the strategic necessity highlighted by the radar installation will continue to exist in the foreseeable future. However, since the bilateral problems between the two countries have now been perceived through the lenses of domestic politics and became part of the mundane political discourse in Turkey, these dynamics will not permit the relations to go back to what they used to be in the early 2000s. Therefore, unless the JDP government starts paying attention to the changing strategic landscape, it would be profoundly difficult to end the stalemate.

NOTES

1. The article was adapted from the paper titled "Turkish-Israeli Relations in Crisis: How to Cut the Gordian Knot?" presented at the conference titled "The Impact of Turkey-Israel Relations on EU Policies in the Mediterranean", organized by *Israeli European Policy Network* and *Fundació CIDOB* in Barcelona, 11-12 April 2011.
2. Turkey's initial demands were as follows: "Israel must apologize to the international community and to the families of those who have been killed and wounded in the attack; an urgent inquiry must be undertaken; appropriate international legal action must immediately be taken against the authorities responsible for and perpetrators of this aggression; a severe sense of disappointment and warning must be issued by the United Nations. Israel must be

- urged to abide by international law and basic human rights; the countries concerned must be allowed to retrieve their deceased and wounded immediately; the ships must be expressly released and allowed to deliver the humanitarian assistance to its destination; the families of the deceased, wounded, NGO's and shipping companies concerned must be compensated to the full extent; the blockade of Gaza must be ended immediately and all humanitarian assistance must be allowed in; Gaza must be made an example by swiftly developing it, to make it a region of peace. The international community must be invited to contribute." Address by H.E. Ahmet Davutoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey at the United Nations Security Council, 31 May 2010, New York, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/anasayfa-3105-un.en.mfa>, [Accessed on 28 March 2011]
3. İlker Aytürk, "Between Crisis and Cooperation: The Future of Turkish-Israeli Relations", *Insight Turkey*, Vol.11, No.3, 2009, pp. 66-71.
 4. "Dışişleri Bakanı Davutoğlu: İsrail'in Saldırısı Bizim 11 Eylülümüz", *Milliyet*, 7 June 2010.
 5. "Barak İsrail Köyünü Açtı," *Cumhuriyet*, 26 October 1999; "En Büyük Yardım İsrail'den Geldi," *Cumhuriyet*, 19 August 1999.
 6. Yasemin Çongar, "Üç Silahşörler' Hazır", *Milliyet*, 7 May 1997.
 7. Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007", *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 10, No.1, 2008, p. 80.
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