

# Israel and Turkey: From Covert to Overt Relations

by  
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## INTRODUCTION

Diplomatic relations between Israel and Turkey have existed since the Jewish state came into being in 1948, however, they have remained covert until recently. Contacts between the two countries have continued despite Turkey's condemnation of Israel in the UN and other official bodies. Frequent statements made by Turkish officials regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian dilemma give the impression that Turco-Israeli relations have been far more hostile than is actually the case. Such an image is quite misleading, for throughout the years political, commercial, cultural and even military contacts have been maintained between the two countries. The purpose of this article is to show the extent of cooperation between the two countries and to demonstrate how domestic as well as external constraints have affected the diplomatic ties between them. It will be argued that during the first forty years of Israel's existence relations between the two countries remained cordial. Both sides kept a low profile and did not reveal the nature of these ties. It was only toward the end of the 1980s, when the international political climate underwent a major upheaval, that the ties between the two countries became official and overt.

Whereas relations with Israel constituted a major problem in Turkish diplomacy, Israeli foreign policy was relatively free from hesitations and constraints. For Israeli foreign policy makers it was always desirable to establish normal relations with Turkey, whose location on the periphery of the Middle East gave it great strategic importance. Turkey, on the other hand, until the end of the Cold War was forced to take into consideration various factors which limited its freedom in foreign policy. As a Muslim state it was obliged to demonstrate solidarity with the Arab states. Consequently, its policy toward Israel was in large measure determined by the twists and turns of the Arab-Israeli conflict. As the conflict intensified Turkey was forced to distance itself from Israel, and relations did not improve until the conflict subsided and contacts between Israel and the Palestinians began. Turkey's foreign policy was also affected by its political alignment with the United States and NATO during the Cold War era. This association pulled it away from the Soviet orbit, and allowed Turkish relations with Israel to remain friendly. So intense was Turkey's aversion to communism that Israel's political orientation in which left-wing parties were perceived to be dominant was regarded with suspicion. From Turkey's point of view rapprochement with Israel was risky because it was liable to prevent it from benefiting from Arab political and economic cooperation, which became increasingly important in the beginning of the 1960s when Turkey became involved in a conflict with Greece over Cyprus. Consequently, Turkish foreign policy remained low-key and covert, until the Arabs themselves were ready to reconcile with Israel.

## THE EARLY YEARS:

### TURKEY BETWEEN THE HAMMER AND THE ANVIL

Israel's location in the heart of a hostile Arab world left it little choice but to attempt to escape isolation by establishing relations with the states on the periphery of the Middle East. Of all these countries, Turkey and Iran had more in common with Israel than others,<sup>1</sup> and of these two, Turkey had more reasons to maintain normal relations with Israel. This was primarily because of its proximity to Europe — with which both countries had cultural affinities — and the role that it fulfilled in the alliances of the Cold War. Friendly relations between them were possible also because neither Turkey nor Israel harbored mutual hatred. Secularism, one of Kemal Ataturk's principles and a key feature in Turkey's policies until recent decades, distanced Turkey from its Arab neighbors. Ataturk's determination to introduce Western ideas and practices is still admired in Israel. Also, while Jews in Arab countries were victims of persecution and were often used as hostages, their Turkish brethren enjoyed political freedom. Turkey's Jewish population prospered under Ataturk's regime and continued to thrive thereafter. More than 24,000 Jews still live in Turkey and of the 120,000 Turkish Jews living in Israel many travel frequently to Turkey. Asked by Reuven Kashani (one of the

leading activists of the Federation of Sephardic Jews in Israel) to describe Turkish treatment of Jews, Turkey's Chief Rabbi, David Asseo said:

The regime's attitude is benign. There is no anti-Semitism. There is complete freedom, of course, within the boundaries of a law that was granted to all other citizens. There are no manifestations of discrimination against us. We enjoy both civil and religious rights. Throughout all these years there has been immigration to Israel from all Turkish cities, and we did not encounter any hindrance on the part of the authorities to do so. Every Jew who is a Turkish citizen and asks to immigrate to Israel obtains permission to do so, and as you are well aware, many had arrived and settled in all parts of the country.<sup>2</sup>

Turkey's attitude toward the Jews helped smooth the way to normal relations between the two countries. Israeli tourists who were barred from visiting their neighboring Arab countries could always travel to Turkey. Unrestricted travel to Turkey was especially significant for the Israelis whose country's isolation led them to develop a strong siege mentality. However, the Turkish government could not establish cordial relations with Israel as a matter of course. There was a need to strike a balance between two objectives: first, to develop normal relations with Israel as Turkey's alliance with the United States required, and second, to maintain normal ties with the Arab states, as Turkey's connection to the Islamic world and its economic needs demanded.<sup>3</sup> Foreign relations required caution, skill and clever diplomatic maneuvering, because Turkey is a Muslim country. Although its distant location on the periphery of the Arab world gave it a certain degree of immunity, its leaders often found themselves unable to ignore the tide of pan-Arabism.

Initially, the idea of a Jewish state in the heart of the Middle East seemed frightening to Turkish leaders who preferred British presence in the area over the prospects of the Soviet Union using the newly established state as a base of operations in the area.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, Turkey's initial negative reaction stemmed as much from aversion to communism as from fear of alienating the Arabs and the rest of the Muslim world. When the UN General Assembly voted on a partition plan for Palestine in November 1947, Turkey opposed the resolution: but when the Arab states protested that the UN recommendation was contrary to the provisions of its Charter, Turkey made no comment.<sup>5</sup> It remained neutral during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and actually prevented Turkish volunteers from joining the Arab forces. Turkey's contribution to the Arab cause was meager. A small training team was dispatched to Syria and some supplies were shipped to the Palestinians.<sup>6</sup> Turkey did not grant official recognition to the newly established Jewish state until 28 March 1949, and when Israel applied for membership in the United Nations, Turkey abstained.<sup>7</sup> Turkey's Foreign Minister Necmettin Sadak deemed it necessary to defend his country's stand by saying that Israel was a reality which more than thirty countries had already recognized, and that the Arabs themselves were conducting negotiations with Israel on Rhodes.<sup>8</sup>

Turkey's tendency to maintain good relations with Israel was due largely to its alignment with the West. Israel's victory in the War of Independence bolstered Turkey's confidence that its rapprochement with Israel would not lead to retribution from the Arabs. Therefore, Ankara took overt steps aimed at normalizing its relations with Israel. In January 1950, Seyfullah Esin, a Turkish *charge d'affaires*, was sent to Tel-Aviv, and in 1952, both sides appointed ministers. This was a part of a pro-Western policy aimed at enabling Turkey to achieve full membership in NATO.<sup>9</sup> The cooperation between the two countries gradually expanded. They struck commercial and military deals, and Israel began to provide Turkey with technical training and intelligence.<sup>10</sup> The Mossad had operated an intelligence station in Turkey since the early 1950s.<sup>11</sup> This, however, was not sufficient to allay Turkish suspicions and uncertainties. Despite the fact that Israel's Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion declared his country's commitment to nonalignment, the existence of strong left-wing parties left doubt regarding the country's political orientation. The ruling Mapai party was clearly socialist in character. Achdut Ha'avoda, an activist faction of the Labor Party, had a socialist platform and some of its members were inspired by Marxist ideas. The more radical Mapam party called for "some identification" with the Soviet Union.<sup>12</sup> The Turkish government expected Israel to remain pro-Western and protested against such "Bolshevik" trends.<sup>13</sup> Mapam's sympathetic attitude toward the Soviet Union lingered until the mid 1950s when Moscow began to adopt a clear pro-Nasser policy and armed the Egyptian army.<sup>14</sup> As for the communist party, its members were busy debating whether to support the Soviet Union or China, and when communism would spread to the Middle East.<sup>15</sup> Party leaders, such as Moshe Sneh, regarded the Soviet Union as a model for the society they wished to establish in Israel, while more

radical communists like Meir Wilner called for the formation of a communist society under the auspices of the Soviet Union.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to this suspicion the early Soviet support for the establishment of a Jewish state was still fresh in the minds of Turkish statesmen. There was little wonder therefore, that the Turkish government remained uncertain regarding Israel's foreign policy orientation, and even Ben-Gurion's decision to support the United States during the Korean War did not automatically end these suspicions. Ben-Gurion was aware of the issue and convincing the Turkish government that Israel was not pro-communist became a high priority on his government's agenda.<sup>17</sup> In addition, there was fear that the Jewish minority in Turkey would tend to be loyal to Israel rather than to its country of residence.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the natural competition between the two countries caused tension and suspicion. Israel's technological know-how and the temerity evinced by its businessmen was a source of admiration and envy at the same time. Throughout all this time Arab pressure did not subside, leaving the Turkish government with no choice but to maintain only covert relations with the Jewish state.

The Arabs did not conceal their disappointment whenever it was obvious that Turkish policy was becoming pro-Israeli. In 1951, Turkey joined the West in protesting Egypt's decision to deny Israeli ships passage through the Suez Canal. This caused a serious crisis in Turco-Egyptian relations.<sup>19</sup> Arab pressure compelled Turkey not only to cool its relations with Israel but also to recall its ambassador shortly after he was sent there.<sup>20</sup> Commercial contacts with Israel continued nevertheless, but they were not made public.<sup>21</sup> Turkey enabled Jewish immigrants to pass through its territory on their way to Israel. The two countries maintained contact in the UN, and Israel informed Turkey about Israeli political contacts with the West.

This state of affairs continued throughout the 1950s, and Turkey often assumed the role of an honest broker in the Arab-Israeli dispute. Thus for example, in June 1954, Turkey's Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, who was visiting Washington, called upon the Arabs to recognize Israel. Shortly afterwards, Egyptian President Gamal Abd al-Nasser denounced Turkey's pro-Israeli policy, saying that it led to Turkey being "disliked in the Arab world."<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, Turco-Israeli relations remained cordial and even Nasser's fiery speeches did not cause a serious rupture between the two countries. This was largely because Turkey began discussing security arrangements with the West. Turkey's objective was to be part of a defense pact which the Western countries were planning for the Middle East. Turkey's participation in these negotiations was contingent upon normal relations with Israel. Caught between the need to maintain normal relations with Israel and the desire to avoid Arab criticism, Ankara was forced to adopt a low-key policy toward Israel. While diplomatic ties were not severed, official foreign policy communiqués were pro-Arab. However, at the same time covert military cooperation and commercial contacts continued between the two countries.

When *A// - France* decided to provide service from Tel-Aviv to Teheran, with connections to Pakistan and the Far East, Turkey did not prohibit flights over its territory.<sup>23</sup> The Arab League Boycott Office reprimanded Turkey and other Arab states who dealt with Israel by using Cyprus as an entrepot.<sup>24</sup> Trade was becoming an increasingly important element in Turco-Israeli relations. Both countries wished to increase their foreign exchange. Each had commodities which the other could benefit from. Israel imported large quantities of cotton, wheat, oils and other agricultural products. Turkey received various manufactured products, such as kitchen appliances, fertilizers and pharmaceuticals. From Turkey's viewpoint, Israel fulfilled another important function; it could supply Turkey with commodities which were not easily accessible through the normal channels. Turkey's pro-West orientation left it incapable of benefiting from the markets of the Soviet Bloc. Thus Israel became engaged in three-way covert deals, supplying Turkey with goods from Eastern European countries and reexporting Turkish goods to them.<sup>25</sup> In addition to this commercial interchange, military collaboration continued, and Mossad experts began to train the Turkish secret services.<sup>26</sup> Apart from such illicit economic cooperation no significant political contacts developed between Turkey and Israel until the late 1950s. The diplomatic representatives sent by the two countries never reached higher than *charge d'affaires*.

Clearly, Turco-Israeli relations were determined more by pragmatic considerations than by ideology. Israel's desire to escape isolation led her to seek the friendship of countries surrounding her hostile Arab neighbors. Ben-Gurion aspired to join a Western alliance despite the fact that he spoke about his country's commitment to non-alignment. As early as 1950, he proposed that the United States help Israel by providing

arms and equipment to an Israeli force of 250,000 men who would eagerly aid the Western countries and Turkey to resist Soviet aggression.<sup>21</sup> When the negotiations regarding the formation of a regional defense organization began, it became clear to him that the states of the region would object to Israel's participation. Indeed, neither Greece nor Turkey welcomed Israeli participation in the Middle East Command which the Western powers were attempting to establish. Reacting to Ben-Gurion's attempt to join the Middle East Command the Turkish representative to Israel expressed his country's hope that Israel adopt what he termed, a "realistic attitude." and refrain from joining the organization before all Arab states did.<sup>28</sup>

Turkey's cautious attitude persisted throughout the negotiations leading to the formation of the Baghdad Pact. Unwilling to antagonize the Muslim members of the pact, Turkey felt compelled to prevent the possibility that Israel be included in it, and did so by appealing to Israel to return to its 1947 borders.<sup>29</sup> From Ben-Gurion's point of view this demand was unrealistic. Nevertheless, he did his utmost to obtain Turkey's friendship and regarded it as one of the most important states in the periphery of the Arab world with which it was essential to form an alliance. The stormy events of the mid-1950s forced him to take Turkey into consideration. The fact that Israel was not called upon to play a role in the Baghdad Pact, and the rising tide of Arab nationalism which intensified Israel's isolation, led Ben-Gurion to consider other alternatives. In the meantime, the Anglo-Egyptian agreement of 1954, which stated that a British withdrawal was imminent, caused concern in Israel. Ben Gurion's attempt to delay the retreat by impairing Anglo-Egyptian relations led to a major fiasco which became known as the Lavon Affair.<sup>30</sup>

Although Turkey did not sever its relations with Israel, its desire to incorporate Iraq into the Baghdad Pact compelled it to adopt some anti-Israeli measures. Consequently, its policy toward Israel became more confused and inconsistent. It continued to exchange diplomats with Israel, yet at the same time refused to officially recognize its sovereignty and territorial integrity. It also supported an addendum to the pact stating that the articles relating to military assistance in time of crisis would be valid only if they were specifically related to the Palestine problem. The Israeli government was outraged and voiced its resentment.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, the Turkish government continued to display a friendly attitude until the Suez Affair. When anti-Greek mobs plundered Jewish property in Istanbul during the Cyprus crisis in the autumn of 1955, the Turkish government found it appropriate to apologize and to reassure Israel that it had "no intention or inclination to prejudice in any way the security or the rights of the Jews of Turkey."<sup>32</sup>

The Suez Affair of 1956 forced the Turkish government to issue a public statement condemning Israel as an aggressor and to withdraw its representative from Tel-Aviv, stating that he would not resume his duties "until the Palestine question is solved in a just and lasting manner in accordance with the United Nations resolutions."<sup>33</sup> The Turkish representation was downgraded to a legation level. This formal denunciation of Israel was little more than lip service to Arab pressure. Although technically the representatives of the two countries remained no higher than *charge d'affaires*, the diplomatic exchange remained as active as it was in the past, and the diplomats as skillful as they had always been.<sup>34</sup> There was nothing unusual or radical about the new Turkish stand since Israel was condemned by Western countries as well. The Israelis seem to have understood Turkey's predicament, but did expect it to moderate its criticism, which Israel regarded as surrendering to Arab pressure.

As it turned out, however, Turkey's new policy raised false hopes in the Arab world. The Turkish government was not ready, or capable of complete departure from its pro-Israeli policy. Its alignment with the West continued to discourage it from being overly hostile to the Jewish state. Turkey's main concern at that point was to prevent the Soviet Union from gaining greater influence in the Middle East by capitalizing on Arab discontent. The Turkish government voiced its concern that the Soviet Union was determined to increase its influence in the area at all costs. Turkey's Foreign Minister Fatin Zorlu's argument that the Soviet Bloc was "resorting to large-scale propaganda and infiltration aimed at the countries of the Middle East and Africa,"<sup>33</sup> reflected Turkish fears at that time, and convinced Ankara to continue relying on the West. This ensured that Turco-Israeli relations would remain friendly despite the major upheavals in the region.

## **THE ASCENDANCY OF NASSER AND THE PERIPHERAL ALLIANCE**

The intensification of the Arab-Israeli conflict, which came as a result of the Lavon Affair and the subsequent Suez crisis, led Ben-Gurion to consider the possibility of forming an alliance with Turkey, Iran

and Ethiopia. In December 1957, Menderes met Eliyahu Sasson, a representative sent by the Israeli government, and agreed that intelligence officials from the two nations would meet in June 1958. The meeting was also attended by Reuven Shiloah, the originator of the idea of a defense pact with the countries on the periphery of the Middle East. After a series of secret and lengthy negotiations Ben-Gurion signed the pact that became known as the "Peripheral Alliance."

The purpose of the Periphery Doctrine was to prove an argument long held by Israeli politicians, that the Middle East was far from being exclusively Arab or Islamic. The essence of this argument, according to Ben-Gurion, was that the Turks, the Persians and the Jews were more numerous than the Arabs in the Middle East, and that "through contacts with the peoples of the outer zone area we shall achieve friendship with the peoples of the inner zone, who are our immediate neighbors."<sup>36</sup> This idea was expressed by other Israeli politicians as well. Long before he became Israel's Foreign Minister, Abba Eban wrote:

The Middle East is not exclusive Arab domain .... There are nearly as many non-Arabs as Arabs in the Middle East (the combined population of Israel, Iran, Ethiopia, Somalia, Turkey and Cyprus is 80,000,000); and the dream of a united Arab domain from the Atlantic to the Persian Gulf offends the region's essential diversity.<sup>37</sup>

The attempt to claim that the Middle East was the home of other nations and to leap over the Arab states surrounding Israel was the result of pragmatic considerations. As Gideon Rafael, a former senior Foreign Office official, explained:

When Israel's policy-makers realized that attempts at breaking the wall of Arab hostility were doomed to failure, they turned their sights elsewhere. Beyond the wall there were important countries in the Middle East and Africa which were accessible to Israel. The two most important of them, Iran and Turkey, though predominantly Moslem, were guided in the conduct of their foreign policy by political rather than religious considerations.<sup>38</sup>

Neither Turkey nor Iran were anxious to see the Middle East become dominated by another charismatic leader like Nasser, and therefore responded favorably to Ben Gurion's initiative.<sup>39</sup> Turkey, like Iran and Ethiopia, regarded Nasser as a dangerous leader and sought to coordinate their political activities with Israel. Consequently, Turkey and Iran held secret meetings with Israel, which led to the first alliance that opened the Muslim world to Israel.<sup>40</sup>

Recognizing its location on the northern border with Syria, Ben-Gurion attached great importance to Israel's ties with Turkey. In a letter written to President Eisenhower on 24 July 1958, he said: "The domination of the Arab Middle East by Nasser with the support of the vast power of the Soviet Union would have certain grave consequences for the western world .... I need not dwell on what such a course of developments would entail for Israel and Turkey." He went on to describe Israel's actions:

Having watched this danger develop for some years, and having seen the failure of attempts to bring about peace between Israel and Egypt, as you, Mr. President, attempted to do two years ago, we have begun to strengthen our links with four neighboring countries on the outer ring of the Middle East — Iran, Sudan, Ethiopia and Turkey — with the object of establishing a strong dam against the Nasserist-Soviet torrent. I am able to record with satisfaction that the first steps taken in this direction have been successful .... Recently, our links with the Government of Turkey have grown more intimate in secret channels, apart from and beyond our regular diplomatic relations.<sup>41</sup>

When Israel's Foreign Minister Golda Meir visited Paris in August 1958, she met with Zorlu and they agreed that a high-level meeting should take place between the two countries. Ben-Gurion, Meir, Shiloah and the IDF chief of staff flew to Ankara where they met Menderes and other senior Turkish officials. The official excuse given in the Arab world for the presence of the Israeli EL AL airliner on Turkish soil was that mechanical problems had forced its landing.<sup>42</sup> In order to conceal the true nature of these contacts they announced that they had decided to establish cultural ties. In fact, it was secretly agreed that the Mossad and the Turkish National Security Service would exchange intelligence information, if and when the changes in the region required such collaboration.<sup>43</sup> It was later revealed that they agreed to collaborate against Soviet aggression and radicalism in the Middle East.<sup>44</sup> Israel was to receive information regarding Syrian and Egyptian activities in return for its monitoring of Soviet behavior in the area.<sup>45</sup> A similar pact was reached with

the Iranian SAVAK, and by the end of 1958, the three agencies had agreed to cooperate on a project called Trident and held joint meetings periodically.<sup>46</sup> Turkey helped the Mossad by sharing information gathered by its agents who operated in Syria and the Mossad trained Turkish agents in counter-intelligence techniques and in the use of electronic devices.<sup>47</sup>

These arrangements led to a significant improvement in the relations between the two countries. Nevertheless, Turkey's decision to leave its formal representation in Tel-Aviv at the legation level reflected its determination to maintain low-key relations with Israel. This was a time of intense pan-Arab sentiment and Nasser's propaganda continued to affect the Middle East. From Ankara's point of view, full diplomatic relations with Israel could be only harmful.

The United States, whose policy was to support all moderate Islamic regimes in the area, did not stand in the way as it often did in Israel's relations with other countries.<sup>48</sup> In fact, political developments in the region led the Americans to regard the Turco-Israeli rapprochement favorably. Dangers seemed to be lurking everywhere. Under Nasser's leadership pan-Arabism reached a crescendo. The pro-Western Iraqi regime of Nuri al-Said was overthrown in 1958. With General Qasim at the helm, Western interests seemed to be in jeopardy. Jordan's King Hussein was always regarded as a feeble leader, hardly capable of protecting Western interests, and unrest in Jordan led to British intervention in 1958. In the same year, civil war erupted in Lebanon and the United States deemed it necessary to dispatch American forces to prop up Camille Shamoun's regime. Turkey agreed to the American request to use bases on its soil in order to carry out the invasion of Lebanon.<sup>49</sup> Like Iran and Pakistan, Turkey expressed its gratitude to President Eisenhower for his decision to intervene in Lebanon.<sup>50</sup> This event reinforced Turkey's alignment with the United States and the Western allies. Under these conditions, Israel and Turkey could collaborate without American pressure.

Relations between Israel and Turkey expanded to include non-security matters. According to Moshe Dayan, the Minister of Agriculture at that time, Turkey was one of the states which sought to benefit from Israel's expertise in agriculture.<sup>51</sup> By the end of 1959, the Israelis were asked to provide technical assistance. The Israeli Foreign Office responded positively and the Israeli embassy in Ankara was instructed to find out what Turkey's needs were.<sup>52</sup> Turkish officials were eager to maintain friendly relations with Israel, and some became even convinced that their country's connection to the Arab world had prevented it from making more rapid progress.<sup>53</sup>

## **TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY BETWEEN THE 1960S AND 1980S**

Cooperation between the two countries continued until the Turkish military coup in May 1960. The demise of Menderes and the easing of Soviet pressure made it simpler for the Turkish government to maneuver between the Arabs and Israelis. Moreover, the anti-Turkish attitude of the United States during the Cyprus crisis that erupted in 1964, left the Turkish government disillusioned. Turkish officials began to realize that an alliance with the United States was no panacea for all of Turkey's foreign policy problems. Consequently, they felt less obligated to maintain good relations with Israel and Turkish foreign policy began to shift toward the Arabs and the Third World.<sup>54</sup> Even the attempt by Prime Minister Levi Eshkol to improve relations at his meeting with Ismet Inonu in Paris in July 1964 did not produce significant results. However, despite the fact that political relations had cooled, Turkey, like many other countries, had learned to appreciate the technical expertise of the Israelis and wished to continue to benefit from it.

Nasser's attempt to harness pan-Islamic support to the Arab cause made it difficult for any Islamic country to maintain overt relations with Israel. He made it abundantly clear that his country played a pivotal role in Arab, Islamic and African circles.<sup>55</sup> Consequently, Turkish foreign policy continued to operate under severe constraints. The Six-Day War of 1967 and subsequent events that intensified the Arab-Israeli conflict made it even more difficult for the Turkish government to identify with Israel. When Nasser blocked the Straits of Tiran, shortly before the war, maritime powers demanded that the Gulf of Aqaba be reopened to Israeli ships. To avoid criticism by Nasser, Turkey refrained from joining them. Furthermore, Turkey exchanged information with the Arabs regarding Israeli intentions. According to the testimony of senior Jordanian government officials, Turkey's ambassador visited King Hussein on 3 June 1967, and informed him that Israel would start its offensive on 5 or 6 of June with an air strike on Egypt's air bases.<sup>56</sup> The events that unfolded in early June confirmed the veracity of the ambassador's information.

Turkey's official attitude was similar to what it had been after the Suez Affair. Following the Six-Day

War it deplored the occupation of Arab land and supported the UN Resolution 242, which called for Israeli withdrawal from territories conquered during the war, but also asserted that all states in the region had the right to live within secure and recognized boundaries. Furthermore, Turkey urged Israel to allow the Palestinians to return to their homeland, and refused to recognize any change in the status of the Arab-Israeli borders, including Jerusalem.<sup>57</sup> In a joint communique of 11 September 1967, Turkish Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel and King Hussein, who visited Turkey at that time, stated that Israel should withdraw from all occupied territories and implement the UN resolutions on Jerusalem.<sup>38</sup>

Several days later, Demirel visited the Soviet Union where he affirmed Turkey's opposition to the occupation of land by force, and called for an immediate withdrawal of Israeli forces from all occupied territories.<sup>59</sup> He made a similar statement the following month during a visit to Iraq.<sup>60</sup> This was a period in which Turkey managed to play the role of an honest broker without seriously offending Israel or the Arabs.<sup>61</sup> This was partially because UN Resolution 242 was supported by most world leaders, even those who were friendly to Israel. On his visit to Tunis in the autumn of 1968 Turkey's Foreign Minister Ihsan Sabri Caglayangil found it convenient to join his counterpart, Al-Habib Bourguiba Jr. in a joint statement regarding the need to solve the Middle East conflict according to the UN Resolution 242.<sup>62</sup> Expressed by a Turkish statesman on a visit to a country that the Israeli government considered moderate, such a statement did not have grave consequences for Turco-Israeli relations.

This policy of "benevolent neutrality" was short-lived. In a banquet held in honor of Iraq's Vice President Ammash, Demirel restated his country's opposition to occupation of land by force, and its support of the UN Resolution 242.<sup>63</sup> The Turkish government was under pressure not only from the Arab states but also from radical groups inside Turkey. These groups pushed the government to pursue anti-Western and anti-Israeli policies. In May 1971, the Israeli Consul General Ephraim Elron was captured by the Turkish People's Liberation Front.<sup>64</sup> Under such pressure the Turkish government did not have the desire to upgrade its relations with Israel.

The impasse in the Israeli-Arab conflict during the early 1970s, when Golda Meir was in power, had adverse effects on relations with Turkey. Arab pressure mounted to such an extent that during the Yom Kippur War of 1973 Turkey, whose economy was heavily dependent on oil supplied by OPEC, actually allowed Soviet aircraft to overfly its territory, while barring the Americans from using their bases to help Israel.<sup>65</sup> Turkey's dependence on oil did not allow her to ignore OPEC's demand to sever its relations with Israel. Moreover, Turkey did not wish to be denied any economic opportunities that were opening up in the oil producing Arab countries. By denying the United States permission to use its airfields, the Turkish government angered both Israel and the United States.<sup>66</sup>

Although Turkey's Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit continued to argue that his country's policy was to maintain what he called "positive neutrality." Turco-Israeli relations continued to remain cold and even deteriorated when Turkey continuously supported Arab sponsored resolutions in the UN, including the one equating Zionism and racism which was adopted by the General Assembly in November 1975.<sup>67</sup> Several months earlier Turkey had recognized the PLO as the legitimate body representing the Palestinian people. Nevertheless, Turkey never failed to appreciate Israel's technical expertise. Turkey began purchasing arms from Israel when relations between the two countries seemed tense on the surface. In 1975, Turkey purchased Israeli-made Shafir air-to-air missiles, Hetz anti-tank shells, Uzi submachine guns and ammunition. There were also unconfirmed reports that Israel collaborated with Turkey in the invasion of Cyprus by providing arms and technical know-how.<sup>68</sup>

Economic considerations increasingly determined Turkish foreign policy. The Turkish government welcomed trade relations with Israel, but not at the expense of losing the Arab markets. This becomes clear when one follows Turkish official statements. In the fall of 1978, Ecevit wrote:

Turkey can be an ideal partner for establishing industries that would not only appeal to Turkey, not only meet the requirements of Turkey's own development, but can also appeal to other countries of the world, particularly those of the Middle East.<sup>69</sup>

Despite the fact that the 1979 Camp David peace accord between Israel and Egypt caused disunity in the Arab camp, Turkish policy remained pro-Arab. Witnessing Egypt's predicament as a pariah in the Arab world, Turkey did not wish to incur Arab wrath and become the target of criticism by Syria and Iraq. In

October 1979, the PLO was allowed to open an office in Ankara and the Turkish government denounced Israel's decision to annex east Jerusalem. Demirel claimed that such a step would be contrary to international law.<sup>70</sup> As well, strong pressure from Turkish right-wing groups, especially the National Salvation Party, forced the government to intensify its anti-Israeli rhetoric. Finally, Turkey's pro-Arab position was due largely to its continuing dependence on Arab oil, which was compounded when the Iranian revolution resulted in reduced production and higher prices. To make matters worse, the Turkish economy was in a state of near collapse in 1979. The lack of hard currency resulted in a desperate need to seek affordable oil. This state of affairs forced the Turkish government to turn to Arab oil producing countries. Fearful of another harsh winter, the military government of Bulent Ulusu decided to increase its oil purchases from the Arab states. In 1980, Turkey purchased 5 million tons of oil from Iraq, 3.4 million tons from Iran, 2 million tons from Libya and 1 million tons from Saudi Arabia." The Saudis gave Turkey an additional 2 million tons of oil and \$75 million in economic assistance. The Turks were expected to reciprocate by severing their relations with Israel.<sup>72</sup> By the end of 1980, the Saudis increased the pressure on the Turkish government by providing a loan of \$250 million.<sup>73</sup> Therefore, the Turkish government decided to withdraw its legation personnel from Tel-Aviv, once again putting the relationship on the *charge d'affaires* level.<sup>74</sup> Islamic sentiment continued to play a significant role in keeping Turkey and Israel apart.<sup>75</sup> This remained the case, despite the fact that pan-Arabism has weakened considerably since the Camp David accords between Egypt and Israel. Arab solidarity continued to suffer setbacks throughout the 1980s, and Iraq's invasion of Kuwait accelerated this process.<sup>76</sup>

The stormy events in Lebanon again altered the relationship, leading to closer intelligence ties between Turkey and Israel. While Palestinian groups operated from Lebanon against Israel, radical anti-Turkish forces used the Bekaa Valley as a base of operations against Turkey.<sup>77</sup> In 1982, there were reports of secret cooperation between the Turkish and Israeli security services in the search for Armenian terrorists who had operated from Palestinian bases in Beirut and later were caught by the IDF.<sup>78</sup> Additional factors could have helped to improve relations between Turkey and Israel. PLO leader Yasser Arafat's visit to Cairo in December 1983 made Turkey's rapprochement with Israel more easily acceptable in the Arab world. Moreover, the reduction in oil prices during the mid 1980s reduced the risk of an oil embargo against Turkey, which became less dependent on the Arab oil markets. Consequently, the contacts between the two countries intensified. Turkish parliament members met Likud Prime Minister Itzhak Shamir in September 1984.<sup>79</sup> This was followed by another important meeting on 4 April 1985, when Turkey's Foreign Minister Vahit Halefoglu met with Israel's ambassador Meir Rosenne in Washington. The Turks were impressed by Israel's influence in Washington and wished to use it in order to obtain American aid.<sup>80</sup> The Turkish government wanted to enlist the support of the Jewish lobby who was regarded as capable of neutralizing the impact of pro-Greek and pro-Armenian pressure groups in the American Congress.<sup>81</sup> This attempt was crowned with success largely due to the Israeli embassy in Washington whose personnel used their influence in order to convince the Jewish lobby members that Israel and Turkey had identical interests.

However, despite these positive developments, Turkish diplomacy could not change dramatically in favor of overt relations with Israel. Jewish lobbying efforts in Washington were not alone enough to drastically change Turkey's attitude toward Israel. The Turkish government still needed Arab diplomatic support for its claim to Cyprus and therefore refrained from openly supporting Israel.<sup>82</sup> It was politically inconceivable for the Turkish government not to recognize the Palestine Liberation Organization, which was gaining recognition from many Third World and European countries. For this reason Turco-Israeli relations suffered as a result of the Palestinian uprising (*intifada*), which erupted in the occupied territories in December 1987. Israel's denunciation by world leaders, including those friendly to Israel, left the Turkish government in a quandry. Not to condemn the *intifada* would have been regarded as a betrayal of the PLO, which by then was regarded by most nations as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Turkey's support of the Palestinians continued throughout the 1980s and even the fact that the Turkish government became more overt in its dealings with Israel did not change its pro-Palestinian policy. As late as January 1991, Turkish President Turgut Ozal had explicitly stated his country's support for the Palestinians.<sup>83</sup>

Both Israel and Turkey were interested in maintaining good relations. Israel, however, took the initiative on most occasions.<sup>84</sup> In its attempts to establish an atmosphere of cordial relations, Israel had always taken special care to respond to Turkey's needs. Although Israel expressed disappointment over Turkey's official

stand, criticism from Jerusalem remained restrained. Israel never mentioned the negative aspects of Turkish policy. Thus for example, the Turkish massacre of the Armenians and other minorities in the beginning of the century was never mentioned in the Israeli press. Likewise, Israeli sources refrained from commenting on Turkey's water project and the building of the Ataturk Dam.

The events of the late 1980s eased the tension in the Middle East. The Cold War ended and thus the specter of the Soviet threat had vanished. Turkish leaders no longer felt compelled to be tied to a Western alliance. However, it was still necessary to seek the support of the United States which remained the only great power in the area. Turkish diplomacy became much less constrained since it was relatively free from Arab pressure. The onset of the Middle East peace talks allowed Turkish diplomacy to be more overt. Gone were the days of pan-Arabism when any contact with Israel was regarded as a betrayal of the Arab cause. To those who denounced its association with Israel, Turkey could always claim that the Arabs themselves had already come to terms with Israel. This state of affairs allowed Turkey to maneuver more freely between Israel and the Arabs. The conciliatory attitude taken by the Palestine National Council in 1988 paved the way for a dialogue with Israel since the PLO, after a long period of bitter disagreement with Yasser Arafat,<sup>85</sup> accepted the UN Resolution 242, agreeing to the principle of land for peace and renouncing terrorism.

No account of Turco-Israeli relations can be complete without considering the tension in relations between Turkey and Syria. This state of affairs led the Turkish government to maintain interest in a strong Israeli state. An attempt to explore this topic will be made in the following section.

#### THE IMPACT OF THE SYRIAN THREAT

Turco-Syrian relations add an important dimension without which Turkey's ties with the Jewish state cannot be properly understood. Therefore, they deserve special attention. Turkey's policy toward Israel was determined not only by fear of pan-Arabism and Nasser's ambition, but also by Syria's aggressive behavior. The bone of contention between the two countries has been the province of Iskanderun (Alexandretta) which according to Ataturk's National Pact was to remain part of new Turkey's homeland. However, French occupation of the area during peace negotiations at Lausanne delayed its incorporation into Turkey. The Franco-Turkish Treaty of 20 October 1921 stipulated that the area should remain Turkish. In a plebiscite held in the province in 1939 the overwhelming majority opted for reunion with Turkey, and the French ceded the province to Turkey. Syria gained independence from France in 1946 and since then this issue has continued to poison the relations between the two countries.

The loss of Iskanderun was one of the main reasons for the success of the radical left-wing Ba'ath party in Syria. Among the first to organize resistance to the Turks in Iskanderun was Zaki al-Arsuzi who also founded a movement called *al-Ba'ith al-Arabi* in 1940. This movement was short-lived, but most of its members joined the main Ba'ath party which was being formed at that time by Michel Aflaq and Salah al-Bitar.<sup>86</sup> In addition to his resentment over Iskanderun, al-Arsuzi belonged to the Alawi minority whose members were defeated and persecuted by the Turks for centuries.<sup>87</sup> Arsuzi brought with him many Alawi members and thus injected into the Ba'ath party nationalistic and mystical content.<sup>88</sup> Resentment over Iskanderun loomed large in the Ba'ath party propaganda. Turks were constantly reminded of it, and the fear of Syrian revenge did not dissipate. The fact that Iskanderun was not mentioned in the meeting between the Syrian and Turkish foreign ministers in Ankara in March 1991 did not eliminate Turkish fear.

The fear of losing Iskanderun was one of the factors that led Turkey to cultivate its relations with Israel. From Turkey's point of view a strong Israeli state capable of keeping Syria at bay was an advantage.<sup>89</sup> Although Turkish officials repeatedly announced that they supported the peace process, a successful conclusion to the Israeli-Syrian dialogue raised the specter that Syrian forces would be freed to challenge Turkey and to settle the account over Iskanderun. Such a scenario was not very appealing to the Turkish government. In addition, Syria wanted to have a larger share of the water from the Euphrates River and resented the fact that the newly constructed Ataturk Dam gave Turkey the ability to cut off Syria's water supplies.<sup>90</sup>

Syria's traditional role as haven for anti-Turkish terrorists constituted an additional source of animosity. Turkey's pro-Western orientation was never to Syria's liking. Syria had given shelter and encouragement to radical groups of Turks and Kurds and to political movements, such as the Armenian Marxist terrorist organization ASALA. These groups continued to operate from the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon

and most of them were in contact with the PLO and other Palestinian groups. The radical Turkish organization known as Apocus, whose aim is to establish a Marxist state in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia, collaborated with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. One of group members, Mehmet Girgin who was caught by the Turkish security forces, gave the following confession:

They took us to Damascus. Then we crossed the border into Lebanon and arrived in their camps there. We have been trained in this military training camp in Palestine on the usage of various weapons, handling explosives and bombs and styles of attack and defense. In the meantime, we have also been trained for fighting at close quarters with bayonets just like men of a regular army. After staying in this training camp for three months, we were taken to the Shattul Shavim, also called the Lebanon Organization. They took us from here to the Armenian Secret Army for Liberation. We were trained in this camp on bomb manufacture and types of explosives. While we were in this camp, we knew that a group of 50 to 60 people from Turkey were receiving military training in the camps of the Habbash organization

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Although Turkey officially continued to support the Palestinians, this association strained its relations with the PLO. Anxious to smear the PLO's reputation, Israel had taken the opportunity to inform Ankara about these contacts.<sup>92</sup> Neither the water problem nor the Kurdish issue are essential for Syria whose leaders tend to use them against Turkey whenever they deem it convenient. On 8 January 1990, a group of militants from the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), tried to penetrate Turkey from Syrian territory. The infiltrators, who were caught and killed by the Turkish security forces, carried Syrian identity cards.<sup>93</sup> Turkey's dissatisfaction with Syrian behavior reached a point of crisis by the end of 1993. In an exclusive interview with a *Jerusalem Post* correspondent, Foreign Minister Hikmet Cetin openly accused Damascus of not keeping its promise to stop supporting the Kurdish terrorists. He said that both his country and Israel were being harassed by Syrian-backed terrorists operating from the Bekaa Valley which was under Syrian control.<sup>94</sup> These terrorists, he said, included the Islamic Jihad which attacks Israel, and the PKK. Military sources in Turkey were convinced that PKK terrorists were flying from Syria to Armenia then going through Iranian territory into Turkey. Cetin went as far as asking Israel to enter in a joint battle against terrorism. He said. "We don't think that just and lasting peace can be achieved unless we get rid of terrorist activity in the region .... We will not be able to reach real peace in the area if 10 or 20 terrorist groups find a comfortable place in the Bekaa Valley."<sup>95</sup>

Unwilling to provoke Syria and thus bring the Middle East peace talks to a standstill. Israeli officials responded by saying. "We are not interested in making enemies .... The PKK has never hurt us. We don't have any interest in antagonizing Syria."<sup>96</sup> In the same interview Cetin called for a free trade agreement with Israel. The Israelis remained willing to increase trade with Turkey, although major concerns remain. Israeli clothes manufacturers fear that such an agreement would bring a flood of cheap garments from Turkey. Nevertheless, economic cooperation between the countries continues. Micha Harish, Israel's Trade and Industry Minister regards Turkey as a market with great potential. Israel is planning to build a fully equipped hospital in Istanbul and has embarked on a \$21 billion regional development project in Southeast Turkey.<sup>97</sup> The Turkish government of the post-Ozal era is in a quandary. Expressing a desire for Arab-Israeli dialogue always seemed good politics; however, as the peace negotiations between Israel and Syria develop the fear and confusion in Ankara increases.<sup>98</sup>

## **EPILOGUE: TOWARD OVERT RELATIONS**

Events in the late 1980s were bound to have an effect on Turco-Israeli relations since the constraints on Turkish foreign policy were no longer as formidable as they had been in earlier times. The end of the Cold War caused changes which could not fail to affect the Middle East. Now Turkish officials could argue that maintaining normal relations with Israel should not come as a surprise to the Arabs who are gradually coming to terms with the Jewish state. Moreover, Turkish foreign policy was impeccably even-handed. The Turks immediately recognized the state of Palestine as proclaimed by the Palestine National Council on November 1988. This recognition was consistent with the Turkish position that the PLO was the sole representative of the Palestinian people, and that the best way to resolve the Middle East conflict was to accept UN Resolution 242.

Although the Israelis protested against the speed with which Turkey gave its recognition to the Palestinian declaration, they were not surprised. The Turkish position did not seem unreasonable or one-sided. Moreover, the Turkish government did not let its relations with Israel suffer as a result of its pro-Palestinian gesture. The peace process had often been mentioned in the Turkish press, and when Shamir proposed his autonomy plan in May 1989, it was welcomed by Ankara. In an attempt to demonstrate its impartiality, the Turkish government gave its immediate endorsement to another plan proposed by Egypt's President Husni Mubarak in the autumn of 1989.

The improvement in Israel's relations with the states of Eastern Europe and especially the establishment of full diplomatic relations between Greece and Israel reassured the Turkish government that rapprochement with Israel was not as risky as it has been in the past." Now there was no danger that the Muslim world would stand behind Greece and condemn Turkey for its decision to normalize relations with Israel. From the Turkish government's point of view, tarrying on this issue was tantamount to letting Greece and the Balkan states take the lead in the diplomatic game. Turkey intensified its contacts with Israel and began reconsidering the possibility of establishing full diplomatic relations. In spring 1990, Turkey agreed to supply water to Israel, but intense Arab pressure forced it to withdraw its offer.

In the early 1990s Israel was scoring diplomatic victories everywhere. Asia's most populated countries, such as India and China, established diplomatic relations with Israel, and others followed their example. At last, in December 1991, the political climate seemed appropriate and the Turkish government decided, to establish full diplomatic relations with Israel. A bilateral trade agreement was signed in March 1993.<sup>100</sup> An editorial in the daily *Ha'aretz* revealed that Rabin had called upon the United States to support Turkey in order to counter Iranian influence in the Middle East.<sup>101</sup> Ozal's death raised Israeli fears that relations with Turkey might suffer.<sup>102</sup> However, contacts between the two countries reached a crescendo by the end of 1993, when Cetin arrived in Israel where he met President Ezer Weizman, Peres and other officials. The meeting concluded with the signing of a "Strategic Cooperation Agreement" between the two countries. It included the following accords: cooperation in international and regional affairs in order to promote peace; cooperation in military technology transfers between the armed forces of the two countries; joint educational and cultural programs; and agreements to facilitate trade and investments. Cetin stressed his government's resolve to promote peace in the region, and pledged a \$2 million grant for infrastructure development in the Gaza Strip and Jericho and a \$50 million soft loan upon the successful conclusion of the peace negotiations. Both Weizman and Peres accepted Cetin's invitation to visit Turkey in the beginning of 1994.<sup>103</sup> Nevertheless, despite his positive attitude toward Israel, Cetin still insisted that a long-lasting peace in the Middle East must be based on the "land for peace" principle enshrined in UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.<sup>104</sup>

Both Weizman and Peres visited Turkey in the beginning of 1994. They met with Demirel and senior Turkish officials, and agreed to strive for peace and to cooperate in joint projects.<sup>105</sup> The Israelis showed interest in the "Magnavat Spring Project" which could supply them large quantities of water.<sup>106</sup> On 1 September 1994, both sides began negotiations on free trade.<sup>107</sup> Turkish leaders continued to maintain the image of impartiality in the Arab-Israeli conflict. On 16 September 1994, Prime Minister Tansu Ciller and Demirel met Arafat in Ankara. Ciller agreed to Arafat's request to contribute Turkish troops to an international peacekeeping force to be deployed in the Palestinian self rule areas.<sup>108</sup> Turkey also expressed its willingness to embark on joint ventures in Gaza.<sup>109</sup> Ciller's sympathy for the Palestinians caused a temporary crisis in Turkey's relations with Israel. In November 1994, when Ciller paid a visit to Israel, Rabin announced that the two countries had concluded cooperation agreements in such areas as drug smuggling, terrorism and even spoke about collaboration in the water project.<sup>110</sup> This euphoric atmosphere was clouded, however, by Ciller's decision to visit Orient House, the headquarters of the Palestinian delegation in East Jerusalem. This decision was not coordinated with Israel and caused considerable anger in government circles. Rabin angrily responded that Israel was "tricked."<sup>111</sup> However, he did not wish to allow the incident to poison Israel's relations with Turkey. He stated that the decision was harmful, but he added that "despite the visit, Israel's relations with Turkey will not worsen."<sup>112</sup> He explained that Turkey could play a major role in the peace process and that it was a valuable supplier of water to Israel.<sup>113</sup> Also, Ciller's agreement to cooperate with the Mossad and the CIA in combating terrorism was greatly appreciated by the Israelis, who were determined not to let this incident cloud their relations with Turkey.<sup>114</sup> In addition, Turkey agreed to coordinate its commercial ventures in Central Asia with Israel and the United States.<sup>115</sup> All these

were compelling reasons for normal relations between the two countries, and so far both sides seem determined to overcome all obstacles that might hinder mutual understanding.

## CONCLUSION

Throughout the entire period that has been examined here Turco-Israeli relations remained cordial. Cooperation between the two countries never ceased. What kept these contacts going was Turkey's basic attitude that it had more in common with Israel than with the Arab states. This mentality was reinforced by Turkey's cultural transformation which began in the Ataturk era, and seems to have had a significant impact on Turkish foreign policy orientation. However, pragmatic considerations played an important role as well. Israel's ability to provide technical assistance in many fields, including the military, was appreciated in Ankara. Turkey entered the Peripheral Agreement with Israel because it did not wish to confront a Middle East dominated by Nasser and the forces of Arab nationalism. Relations with Israel were regarded also as a way to improve Ankara's image in the eyes of the Jewish lobby whose members were perceived as capable of manipulating US foreign policy.

Even when the tide of pan-Arabism subsided and the Egyptian threat was eliminated, Turkey had compelling reasons to maintain good relations with Israel. Its pro-Western orientation and hatred of communism distanced Turkey from the Arab states who were regarded as Moscow's clients. But even more compelling was the Syrian threat which intensified as a result of the controversy over Iskanderun and Damascus' assistance to the PKK. Turkey's official stand was that a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict should be found. However, how happy the Turkish government would be if and when Israel and Syria sign a peace treaty is open to question, particularly if Israeli forces withdraw from the Golan Heights. It is obvious that such a scenario is not to Ankara's liking.

However, despite the obvious need for good relations with Israel, pragmatic considerations sometimes pulled in the other direction. It was important that Turkey not be seen as a collaborator with the Zionist state which in the Arab propaganda was perceived as being a tool of Western imperialism. Turkey's economic needs dictated reliance on the Arab markets, especially for oil. In addition, Turkey needed Saudi financial assistance. In the political sphere Turkey sought to obtain Arab support during the Cyprus crisis. Overt relations with Israel could cost Turkey the loss of support from the numerous Muslim members in the UN.

Throughout the entire period Turkey attempted with some success to obtain the good will of both sides. The Turkish government was attacked by both sides. Whereas the Arabs criticized it for siding with Israel behind their backs, the Israelis reprimanded Turkey for its official anti-Israeli declarations. Arab criticism was harsher and more frequent. The Israelis seem to have understood Ankara's predicament and their protests remained mild. It was rarely possible for the Turkish government to pursue an even-handed policy. Nevertheless, throughout the entire period under investigation Turkish policy was quite successful. This was particularly true during the late 1960s, when Turkey was capable of demonstrating sympathy with the Arab states by condemning Israeli aggression in the Six-Day War, without offending Israel, and during the late 1980s when it was able to denounce the Israeli suppression of the *intifada* without recriminations.

The Israeli-Palestinian dialogue allowed Turkish foreign policy toward Israel to surface. Overt relations became a possibility when Israel's foreign policy succeeded in leading many Asian and African nations into granting official recognition. When the Balkan states and Greece in particular began establishing diplomatic relations with Israel, Turkey could no longer hesitate. Israel seems to have become a "desirable bride."

What will the future of Turco-Israeli relations be? As long as the Arab-Israeli conflict persists, Turkey is likely to maintain a low-key posture in foreign affairs, particularly in the aftermath of the bloody Hebron massacre in February 1994, which led to intense rage in the Muslim world. Turco-Israeli relations are not likely to be seriously affected by incidents like this, and even the recent political events in Turkey are not likely to change the country's foreign policy orientation. Recent local elections in Turkey indicate that the Islamic Welfare Party has become more popular. Led by Necmettin Erbakan, the party is determined to establish stronger links with the Islamic world. Spokesmen for the party have indicated on many occasions that they challenge Ataturk's doctrine that tied their country's destiny to the West."<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, the Islamic party is far from being able to achieve victory in the national elections. Ciller's True Path Party did not fare well at the polls, but its main opponent, the conservative Motherland Party did not do well either. The

coalition between the True Path Party and the Social Democratic People's Party gives Ciller's government control over 36 percent of the votes. Although this is less than the 40 percent that President Demirel had declared to be a benchmark for electoral victory, Ciller's position seems secure for now.

Turkey's attitude is more likely to be determined by external events reaching beyond the region. The demise of the Soviet Union, which left the United States as the only superpower in the area, provides a certain guarantee that closer relations with Israel will continue to be in Turkey's best interests for the foreseeable future. Turkey's participation in European organizations and its dependence on American financial support makes it difficult for Ankara to sever its relations with Israel. Furthermore, the abundance of reasonably priced oil in the world market makes it unlikely that Turkey will have to radically alter its foreign policy orientation in favor of the Arab states. Also, Israel and Turkey seem to be cooperating in the scramble for Central Asia. From Ankara's point of view, its dangerous rival in the area is not Israel but Russia.<sup>117</sup> The Israelis regard collaboration with Turkey in Central Asia as a blessing. Harish believes that cooperation between the two countries helps make Turkey "a bridge to the Muslim world."<sup>118</sup> A significant part of the Turkish intellectual elite favors good relations with Israel. Israeli technical and scientific assistance and the growing volume of trade between the two countries makes it unlikely that relations would take a turn for the worse. Finally, if the Israeli-Palestinian dialogue continues Turkey will benefit from its ability to act as an honest broker and its relations with Israel would be likely to remain friendly.

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