Analysing the Role of Turkey in Israel's Post-2011 Regional Vision through the Lens of Identity-Security: Challenger or Bystander? [1]

Ferit BELDER [2] - Nurlan MUMİNOV [3]

Abstract

Turkey's engagement in Middle Eastern politics, significantly since the Arab Uprising, has continuously changed the direction of decades-old Turkey–Israel relations. The existing literature elaborates on several aspects of destabilising or normalizing relations between these two countries, but the dimension of Israel's identity-based threat perception is yet to be revealed, despite Israel having long tried to balance identities in the region. By asking whether Turkey challenges Israel's identity-based regional vision or plays a bystander role, this study presents a two-layered analysis of Israel–Turkey relations. While discussing the cognitive essence of Israel's post-2011 regional perspective that transformed the 'identity-based threat' perceptions in an uncertain environment, it locates Turkey's engagement in the region into Israel's regional understanding. Within this aim, the paper is organized as follows. First, the current literature on Israel–Turkey relations is summarized to see not only the short history of relations but also the major trends in studying Israel–Turkey relations. Second, the changing threat perceptions of Israel after the Arab Uprisings are examined to identify the continuities and changes. The third part locates Turkey in Israel's regional vision by discussing the Egyptian and Syrian experiences of the Arab Uprisings. In the final part, the commitment policies of regional actors regarding the Palestinian issue are comparatively analysed to make sense of Israeli normalization with the Gulf States and re-normalization with Turkey. By going beyond the challenger/bystander spectrum, this study claims that Turkey's position in all cases shows the characteristics of the 'disobedient bystander'.

Keywords: *Israel, Identity-Security, Arab Uprising, Normalization, Crisis*

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[2] Marmara University Faculty Of Political Sciences Department of International Relations, **ferit.belder@marmara.edu.tr,** ORCID: 0000-0002-0724-0563

[3] Kazakh Ablai Khan University of International Relation and World Languages, **n.muminoff@gmail.com,** ORCID: 0000-0001-7824-7044

İsrail'in 2011 Sonrası Bölgesel Vizyonunda Türkiye'nin Konumunun Kimlik-Güvenlik Penceresinden Analizi: Meydan Okuyucu Mu Yoksa Seyirci Mi?

Ferit BELDER [4] - Nurlan MUMİNOV [5]

Öz

Türkiye'nin özellikle Arap Baharıyla beraber Orta Doğu siyasetine artan katılımı on yıllarca süren Türkiye–İsrail ilişkilerinin gidişatını sürekli bir şekilde değiştirmeye devam etmektedir. Mevcut literatür bu iki ülke arasındaki ilişkilerin istikrarını bozan ya da normalleştiren pek çok özelliğini detaylıca ele almakta fakat İsrail'in çok uzun süredir bölgede kimlikleri dengeleme çabasında olmasına karşın, İsrail'in kimlik bazlı tehdit anlayışı boyutu henüz açığa çıkarılmamaktadır. Bu çalışma, Türkiye'nin İsrail'in kimlik odaklı bölgesel vizyonuna bir meydan okuma mı yarattığı yoksa seyirci mi kaldığını sorarak İsrail-Türkiye ilişkilerine iki katmanlı bir analiz getirmektedir. İsrail'in 2011 sonrası belirsizlik içeren ortamında bölgesel perspektifinin 'kimlik odaklı tehdit' algılarının dönüştüren bilişsel özü tartışılırken aynı zamanda Türkiye'nin bölgeye angajmanını İsrail'in bölgesel anlayışı içerisinde konumlandırmaktadır. Bu amaçla, makale şu şekilde organize edilmiştir. İlk olarak İsrail–Türkiye ilişkileri literatürü yalnızca ikili ilişkilerin kısa tarihini değil aynı zamanda İsrail–Türkiye ilişkileri çalışmalarındaki temel eğilimleri görmek için de özetlenmektedir. İkinci olarak, İsrail'in Arap Baharı sonrası değişen tehdit anlayışları süreklilikleri ve değişiklikleri görmek için ele alınmaktadır. Üçüncü bölüm Arap Baharı'nın Mısır ve Suriye deneyimlerini tartışarak, Türkiye'yi İsrail'in bölge vizyonu içerisinde konumlandırmaktadır. Son bölümde ise Filistin meselesi üzerinden bölgesel aktörlerin bağlılık siyasetleri, İsrail'in Körfez devletleriyle normalleşmesi ve Türkiye ile yeniden normalleşmesini anlamlandırmak için karşılaştırmalı olarak analiz edilmektedir. Meydan okuyucu/seyirci kalma izgesinin ötesine geçerek bu çalışma Türkiye'nin tüm bu vakalarda 'zorlayıcı seyirci' özelliklerini gösterdiğini iddia etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *İsrail, Kimlik- Güvenlik, Arap Ayaklanmaları, Normalleşme, Kriz*

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[4] Marmara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Uluslararası İlişkiler Bölümü, **ferit.belder@marmara.edu.tr,** ORCID: 0000-0002-0724-0563
[5] Kazakh Ablai Khan University of International Relation and World Languages, **n.muminoff@gmail.com,** ORCID: 0000-0001-7824-7044

Introduction

Since the beginning of the Arab Uprisings in 2010, the foreign policy preferences of regional actors have been extensively shaped by unexpected developments that took place in many Arab countries. The multidimensional aspects of political turmoil pushed neighbouring countries to frequently update their normative and pragmatic positions. Although the premises at the beginning of the protests largely disappeared after more than a decade, the ongoing conflicts, open-ended questions about the future settlements and the involvement of multiple actors in the scene keep the region in an ambiguous environment to predict what kind of regional order will be established or how the traditional practices of sovereignty, borders, and inter-state level relations will be performed. Without defining today's Middle East as the post-Spring period, this paper prefers using the term post-2011 in order not to see the return of authoritarianism in the region as another form of Middle East exceptionalism without referring to the global backsliding of democracy.

In this complicated regional dis (order) and open-ended struggles, one must consider multiple balances in the region to understand the national foreign policy strategies of regional actors. This paper centres on two non-Arab countries that have never been independent of the consequences of the dramatic turn across the region and attempts to interpret Israel–Turkey relations through the lens of Israel's regional approach in the identity-security nexus. Within this objective, revolutionary upheavals in Syria and Egypt, ongoing and (increasing) Iranian influence in the region and decades-long Palestinian issues are taken as cases to track the dimensions of Israel–Turkey relations between 2011 and 2022. The main claim of this study is that even if Turkey has not directly challenged Israel's regional positioning in an identity-security manner, it has played a disobedient bystander role derived from its own regional perspective, which indirectly contributed to the uncertainties making Israel feel less secure. In this regard, the term disobedient bystander defines an active role that is not compatible with Israel's identity-based security needs in a changing environment, even if it does not create an existential threat. After more than ten years, Israel seemed to restore its pre-Arab Spring balance of identities based on 'moderate' and 'radical' actors. Israel's normalization wave with Arab countries led by two of the Gulf states namely the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain and re-normalization with Turkey are two examples illustrating the resilience of Israel's perception of the dichotomic axes in the region even if it is not free from future challenges.

Is There a Missing Point in Israel–Turkey Relations Literature?

In the 1990s and early 2000s, scholars started to pay significant attention to the growing relationship between Israel and Turkey (Abadi, 1995; Altunisik, 2000; Bolukbasi, 1999; Inbar, 2005; Israeli, 2001; Nachmani, 2003). It is not only because it was the golden age of partnership but also because bilateralism in relations was widely free from the restraints of Arab politics. We prefer using the term 'de-regionalization of relations' to define the rise of bilateralism in this period in a changing socio-political context that released Turkey from having covert relations with Israel, which was a profoundly decisive variable in Israel–Turkey relations during the Cold War period (Abadi, 1995). Turkish foreign policymakers constantly sought a balance between Israel and Arab states, which repeatedly led Turkey to reduce its diplomatic presence to charge d'affaires in Israel. The initiation of the Arab–Israeli Peace Process in the 1990s discarded the complications of Turkey's uneasy balancing (Altunisik, 2000, p. 174) and removed obstacles to the development of Israel–Turkey relations overtly in a variety of areas. That is why some authors intentionally chose the word 'rapprochement' to describe the relations in the early 1990s (Altunisik, 2000, p. 172; Bolukbasi, 1999, p. 30; Müftüler-Baç, 1998, p. 1).

The period of 'de-regionalization of relations' was not entirely free from restraints both domestically and regionally. Domestic constraints were mainly derived from the changing dynamics of Turkish politics in this period as there was a growing influence of the political Islamist 'Welfare Party' that had scepticism to close

relations with Israel. Regionally, the vulnerable peace process did not fully eliminate the risk of destabilising impacts of the Israeli-Palestinian question until reaching a final solution. For example, Oğuzlu shed light on the direction of the Israel–Palestine peace process as one of the structural variables for both developing or deteriorating Israel–Turkey relations in the 1990s and 2000s (Oğuzlu, 2010).

In the first decade of the 2000s, Turkey attributed herself to the role of 'mediator' in the direct talks between Israelis and Palestinians (Altunisik and Cuhadar, 2010; Avan, 2019). Avan discusses Turkey's mediating role in the Israel–Palestine conflict in the 2000s within the context of the Europeanization of Turkish foreign policy but concludes that Turkey used EU norms and values to justify its policies and relations with controversial actors like Hamas (Avan, 2019, p. 692). By enjoying the legitimacy to talk to each side, Turkey found a favourable environment to promote herself as a problem-solving soft power in the region. In this sense, the success or failure of Turkey's mediating attempts was not only going to affect the peace talks but also Turkey's self-asserted mediator image itself. In this period, Turkey hosted Israeli and Palestinian officials and conducted indirect talks between Syria and Israel (Szymański, 2011). The Turkish governments indeed adopted EU norms, values, and policies to play a mediating role as Avan underlined; however, Turkey's mediation, despite making some progress in particular periods, has been overstated by disregarding domestic challenges for Turkish decision-makers. Apart from Islamists, there are different types of pro-Palestinian rhetoric and activism in various political circles in Turkey from left to right and from secular to religious. Concerning this, rather than geostrategic rivalries or competition over resources, the main deteriorating factor for Israel–Turkey relations became the Palestinian question itself in the last decade. This study defines this as the 'commitment period'. The 2008 Operation Cast Lead eventually ruined the vulnerable bilateralism that developed in the 1990s. Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan was outraged by this operation because Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert had just visited Turkey and met Erdogan. Erdogan said Olmert had stabbed him in the back (Philipp, 2015). Erdogan's self-attributed mediator role was seriously damaged by this large-scale military operation.

Subsequent events such as the Davos Crisis in 2009 and the Mavi Marmara Incident in 2010 are still being taken as the milestones of destabilising Turkey-Israel relations in almost every piece that is written about bilateral relations(Avan, 2019; Aytürk, 2011, p. 675; Efron, 2018, pp. 8–9; Inbar, 2011, p. 132; Lindenstrauss, 2014; Sever and Almog, 2019, pp. 61–62). The flourishing literature on Israel–Turkey relations after 2009 has mainly been concerned with this dramatic shift and the multiple crises with great respect to the golden age of relations of the 90s. The title selection pattern is quite illustrative in this regard as such 'from cooperation to conflict' (Tür, 2012), 'from partnership to enmity' (Eligür, 2012), 'from strategic partnership to successive crises' (Özcan, 2011), 'a cold peace between former strategic allies' (Uzer, 2020), 'old friends, new enemies' (Alyanak, 2010) or 'once comrades now frenemies' (Ceylan, 2021).

During the Barack Obama administration, there were several failure-prone attempts to normalize relations between Israel and Turkey (including Israel's apology and compensation for the killings in the Mavi Marmara flotilla). The next couple of years witnessed the 'normalization' or 'rapprochement' themed publications (Cohen and Freilich, 2014; Huber and Tocci, 2013; Inbar, 2013). The behind-the-scenes explanations and prospects were at the centre of the analyses. Although the rapprochement deal[6], which was signed in 2016, increased promises for improvements in bilateral relations, the Turkish commitment to the Palestinian issue, unlike its previous self-ascribed mediator role, made the level of bilateral relations highly dependent on the very vulnerable Israel–Palestine relations. The Palestinian question turned into an independent variable directly affecting Israel–Turkey relations.

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[6] The full name of the deal is 'Procedural Agreement on Compensation between the Republic of Turkey and the State of Israel'

By highlighting this deadlock, later publications also emphasized the emerging geostrategic dimension as a new variable (mainly focusing on the extract and transfer of the East Mediterranean gas reserves) (Çiçekçi, 2019; Ulusoy, 2020). And, the Turkey-backed normalization process of 2022 has largely been interpreted as a result of geostrategic calculations (Berman, 2022). However, this study tends to interpret normalization by referring to a separate variable that could be defined as the decentralization of the Palestinian issue in bilateral relations at the regional level. The lack of satisfactory evidence that links the specific geostrategic impetus of Turkey and her new approach towards Israel is key to this tendency. The second reason is the need to put forward the role of discursive shift as an independent variable rather than a simple reflection of material interest-based geostrategic orientations. This is consistent with the theoretical approach adopted by the authors. On the other hand, the common ground for both the material and discursive dimensions is to approach the issue in a broader regional context rather than looking at relations exclusively in a bilateral manner. This methodological shift is also the result of the changing balance of relations in the region. Re-regionalization of relations requires further investigation of Israel and Turkey's emerging regional visions separately and makes sense of the recent normalization between the two countries. This also necessitates a constructivist outlook to identify how these states see each other and interpret one another's political and discursive moves. The literature on Neo-Ottomanism provides comprehensive knowledge of Turkey's changing regional understanding and helps us locate Israel in this vision to some extent (Albayrak and Turan, 2016; Atmaca and Torun, 2021; Mehmetcik and Belder, 2021; Volfová, 2016; Yavuz, 2022). The changing regional insight (and threat perception) of Israel, and Turkey's position within it, has largely been neglected. Israeli reinterpretation of regional states, identification and imagined schisms need to be visited in this sense. In this regard, the second chapter of this article deals with the main lines of Israel's regional visioning, its construction and reconstruction.

Identity, Threat, and Foreign Policy Outlook: Balancing Identities

Constructivist IR scholars have long considered identity in their analyses in various forms since the 1990s (Campbell, 1998; Katzenstein, 1996; Reus-Smit, 1999; Wendt, 1994). However, even after the critical charges on the state-centric explanations especially in the post-Cold War period, the national identity managed to remain "the most important form of large-scale social and political identity." (Waever et al., 1993, p. 23). The explanatory claim of post-Cold War constructivist scholars such as Alexander Wendt opened a new gate in research to analyse the foreign policy choices of countries from the identity-interest nexus by going beyond the traditional realist assumptions that were taking the state interest granted. For Wendt, "it is through reciprocal interaction, in other words, that we create and instantiate the relatively enduring social structures in terms of which we define our identities and interests." (Wendt, 1992, p. 406). Identity is created and reshaped by national biographies (Berenskoetter, 2014) and interactions between actors as well as interactions with the social structure (Wendt, 1999, p. 144).

Considering the multiple aspects of the construction of identity, academic works questioning Israeli identity have mainly prioritized domestic sources of identity formation. For example, Joanna Tidy's work, following Michael Barnett's methodological framework of narratives, frames and institutions (Barnett, 1999), inquiries about the role of the 'Holocaust' and the 'fighting Jew' images in the construction of the identity (Tidy, 2012). Christopher Schilling also stresses the historical roots of the Israeli identity by functionalizing the 'ghetto complex' argument to explain the role of the Jewish diaspora identity on the foreign policy understanding of Israel (Schilling, 2010, p. 7). Similarly, Asaf Siniver defines Israeli collective identity as a dual construct of exceptionalism and siege mentality (Siniver, 2012). Most works give credit to the historically central role of the Holocaust. Dov Waxman argues that the Holocaust collective memory created an isolationist understanding and asserted the idea that 'the entire world is against us' (Waxman, 2006, pp. 34–36). Similarly, Omer Bartov

reveals the link between the Holocaust collective memory and the national understanding of threat perception and its reflection on Israel's relations with Arab states in a way that associates Arabs with the Nazis and Nasser with Hitler (Bartov, 1998). However, in the formative years of the State of Israel, despite the Shoah (Holocaust) being acknowledged, public discourse and education put forward other events showing Jewish resistance such as the Warsaw Ghetto uprising until the Adolf Eichmann trial (Bartov, 1998, pp. 801–802). With the trial, the 'never again' motto became the cornerstone of the Israeli ethos of independence (Gutwein, 2009, p. 37). The common point of all these works is the emergence of isolationist thought and its impact on Israel's national identity. This isolationist glance, also seen in the 'Iron Wall' argument of Vladimir Jabotinsky (Jabotinsky, 1923), was often used by Israeli leaders to justify Israel's position in the Middle East (Waxman, 2006).

The international sources of identity formation are closely linked with the national narratives that were already created through the re-articulation of historical events, common backgrounds, defeats, and resistances. At this point, interpreting international politics and power relations through the lens of national self-awareness is an important part of this process. Regarding this, Yaniv Voller examines the evolution and changes in Israeli understanding of regional politics by taking domestic sources of identity formation and the interaction between the national and international aspects of identity to understand and explain Israel's foreign policy strategies (Voller, 2015). In doing so, he argues that until the 1990s, Israeli foreign policy was guided by the centre-periphery dichotomy that was based on threat-related identity forms. According to this division, the centre was composed of Israel's Arab neighbours where pan-Arabic regimes (identity) were in power and aimed to destroy the State of Israel (threat) whereas peripheral actors were non-Arab or non-Muslim regional players like Turkey, Iran, Ethiopia or the Maronites in Lebanon, which were also not comfortable with the rise of pan-Arabism (Voller, 2015, p. 509). Israel sought alliances to break its isolation in the region and balance against the central Arab powers (Guzansky, 2021).

However, the periphery understanding has changed over time due to domestic and international developments. Pluralism within Zionist thought provided alternative visions of foreign policy strategies, and different forms of Zionism offered different foreign policy outlooks (Sofer, 2007). For Barnett, it was Yitzhak Rabin's narrative that produced a new kind of discursive space for Israel to move beyond the isolationist logic and paved the way for the peace process (Barnett, 1999, p. 25). Even before the 1990s, the traditional centre-periphery understanding had already been challenged when Israel made peace with Egypt and the Iranian Islamic revolution that changed the path of the country took place in the very same year of 1979. However, direct and explicit agreements with Jordan and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) or indirect and implicit talks with Morocco and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries undermined the meaning of the centre-periphery division (Guzansky, 2021).[7] This sort of normalization configured the dichotomy between the moderate axis of the Arab states and the rejectionist front, which was composed of Iran, Hezbollah and Hamas and Islamic Jihad (Voller, 2015, p. 571). The radical axis, if we can use it by following Voller's definition of the moderate axis, underpinned the significance of relations with the moderate Arab regimes for Israeli security.

The terms 'moderate' and 'radical' do not define their domestic political governance but rather their principal approaches to the existence of the State of Israel and Israel's wars/conflicts in the region. The moderate axis countries are expected not to be part of any discursive or practical bloc against the existence of Israel and to legitimize (directly or indirectly) Israeli military operations in either way of limited condemnation, an organized silence, or criticisms of the fighting groups against Israel (Voller, 2015, p. 529). It must be noted that

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[7] In contrast, students of Israeli foreign relations argue that the 'periphery doctrine' was updated or resuscitated recently. See (Geist Pinfold and Peters, 2021; Guzansky, 2014; Kostenko, 2017; Romano and Rojhilat, 2018; Samaan, 2017)

the moderate axis countries were also problematizing those Islamist groups and concerning the rise of Iranian influence in the region (Jones and Guzansky, 2017). Critiques of Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia toward Hezbollah during the 2006 Lebanon War were good examples of this (MacFarquhar, 2006). However, it is quite important to bear in mind that this moderateness and legitimacy were primarily obtained at the elite level. This is one of the main weaknesses of Israeli perceptions of the moderate axis for at least two reasons. First, as seen in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, protesters tended to associate old regimes with Israel (Byman, 2011, pp. 125–126). Thus, the failure to build comprehensive societal support for stable relations with Israel makes the moderate axis vulnerable to power transitions in respective countries. Second and concerning the first one, national elites are not entirely independent from the pro-Palestinian (Arab or Muslim) discourse across the region. For example, just before the signing of the normalization deal (Abraham Accords), the United Arab Emirates' (UAE) opposition to the likely Israeli annexation of some parts of the West Bank with the warning 'normalization or annexation' (al-Otaiba, 2020) shows the limits of the Arab endorsement of the Israeli actions in the region when it comes to the Palestinian issue (Belder, 2020, p. 115).

The Arab Spring, the Search for the Restoration of the Moderate Axis, and Turkey's Position
The Arab Spring threatened Israel's moderate axis perception in various ways in the identity-security nexus. Regime changes in some Arab countries opened a new phase of uncertainty as Islamist groups gained significant success, such as in Egypt. The loosening of state authority in neighbouring Syria enabled the rise of non-state armed groups such as Hezbollah or other jihadist groups. Iran, as an antithesis of the moderate axis, enjoyed the power gap in Syria and found ground to increase its regional geostrategic capacity alongside its nuclearization process. Additionally, the people's turn gave momentum to the legitimization of Islamist actors like Hamas as the reflection of the people's will at the earlier stages of the uprisings. In the wake of the uprisings, an Israeli official's remark illustrates the fear of the rise of anti-Israel Islamist regimes in the region from the identity-security approach. "When some people in the West see what's happening in Egypt, they see Europe 1989. We see it as Tehran 1979" (Byman, 2011). On the contrary, Turkey found an opportunity to promote itself as a role model for banding democracy and Islam for the Arab world. In the early years of the uprisings, the 'Turkish model' discussion peaked (Özdamar et al., 2014).

When the Mubarak regime was replaced by the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), the new government began reorienting its regional policies towards Hamas and Iran, and Israel felt insecure. Muhammed Morsi's earlier anti-Israel comments over Israeli military operations against Gaza entered circulation via social media and distressed the Israeli public (Friedman, 2013; The Jerusalem Post, 2013). Although Morsi defended himself by claiming that his words were taken out of context and there was no major negative shift in terms of bilateral Israel–Egypt relations, he continued to criticize the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories in his foreign visits and sought a more balanced approach towards Iran. When Israel's military operation in 2009 did not receive a denouncement from Mubarak, in 2012 the Operation Pillar of Defence resulted in the recalling Egyptian ambassador from Israel (Ahren, 2012). While the MB played an indeterminant neighbour role for Israel, it became one of the main partners of the AKP government in Turkey to foster the Turkish model in the region. When he participated in the AKP congress in 2012, Morsi stated that the Egyptian people admired the Turkish model led by the AKP government (CNN Türk, 2012). Alongside Morsi, Khaled Mashal's speech, then the political leader of Hamas, demonstrated the emergence of a new political discourse that was creating uncertainties for Israel compared to the clear division between the moderate/radical axes. Because the combination of the intention to destroy Israel and the Islamist ideology constitutes the radical axis perception of Israel, this common language of previously moderate (Egypt) and radical (Hamas) actors blurred the existing lines. Turkey's MB opening promoted an alternative vision for the regional grouping. Erdogan's speech in the Egyptian parliament on the importance of separating the spheres of religion and state affairs or Hamas

officials' messages stating that their path was not the path of al-Qaida but the route of the AKP in Turkey were examples that proved Turkey's role of taming Islamist parties in Egypt and Palestine. In his message to the Turkish audience, Khalid Mashal praised the Turkish model and emphasized the importance of embracing universal values while denouncing the Israeli occupation of Palestine (Star, 2012). From the Israeli perspective, this emerging discourse was nothing but an absolute puzzle. By comparing to the Islamist parties gaining such legitimacy by referencing universal values, the counter-revolutionary status quo actors that had already detached themselves from engagement in the Palestinian issue were much more desirable for Israel in the identity-security nexus. Therefore, Israel welcomed the new military regime of General Abdulfettah es-Sisi in 2013 whereas Turkey ceased almost all its relations with Egypt. The limitation of Turkey in restoring democracy or reinstating MB power in Egypt has made it a disobedient bystander to Israel's post-2011 vision. However, the long-term decline of the MB across the region, the gradual legitimization of the Sisi regime at the regional and international levels, and the changing geopolitical dynamics are likely to reorient Turkey's approach towards Egypt.

Unlike Egypt, Syria was not part of Israel's moderate axis perception. The Syrian regime used to be viewed as an Iranian ally, especially after the Anglo–American invasion of Iraq in 2003 (Waxman, 2009). Israel attempted to change the dynamics of relations with Syria under Turkey's mediation, which had to cease following the Israeli military operation against Gaza in the last days of 2008. Due to the decline of state authority in Syria after the uprisings, Israel faced identity-security challenges, such as the possibility of establishing an Islamist government. The military quietness on the Israel–Syria front (despite Israeli control over the Golan Heights) and the unpredictable consequences of the potential regime change led Israeli leaders to favour the Assad regime (Panayiotides, 2012, p. 25). However, the resilience of the Assad regime was secured by enormous Iranian support (Ahmadian and Mohseni, 2019). The rise of Iranian influence and the increasing role of non-state rejectionist groups turned Israel's identity security concerns into immediate physical security threats. Unlike the emerging dilemma regarding the uncertain future paths of Egypt and Syria, there was no ambiguity about Iranian intentions toward Israel. Iran has repeatedly declared that the destruction of the Zionist regime is one of the causes of Iran in the Middle East and Israeli cross-border operations against Iranian targets in Syria have shown the main characteristics of Israeli perception towards Iran. That is to say, while the Arab Uprisings brought new challenges to the moderate axis, they also increased the intensity of the already existing threat perceptions derived from the radical axis incrementally. On the other hand, Turkey hosted the Syrian opposition in Istanbul and was highly engaged in a regime-change campaign as part of its general approach to the Arab Uprisings despite having close ties with the Assad regime on the eve of the uprisings. However, the 'emerging anarchy'[8] in Syria enabled the rise of violent non-state actors in the country, some of which were recognized by Turkey as terrorists like ISIS and YPG. Thus, the physical security concerns of both countries have shaped their foreign policy strategies regarding Syria, although none of the actors explicitly acknowledged the Asad regime's legitimacy. Turkey's long-standing anti-Assad effort seemed to reach its limits, so Turkish support for a regime change that would have a risk of bringing anti-Israel parties to power was eliminated, which eventually endorsed Turkey's disobedient bystander role in Israel's post-2011 regional vision.

Making Sense of Israeli Normalizations in Identity-Security Nexus

Although the Palestinian question has been the fault line of the Israeli regional perspective in one way or another since the centre-periphery doctrine, Israel managed to reach a non-interventionist regional order over years, especially after the signing of peace with Egypt in 1979. However, the failure of the peace process and the deepening of the territorial discontinuity of Palestinian territories in the West Bank, which reduces the

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[8] For the concept of emerging anarchy see (Melander, 1999; Posen, 1993)

possibility of reaching a meaningful Palestinian state in the future, have been major obstacles to the further integration of Israel with the Arab world. On the contrary, the ongoing pessimism about the existence of Palestinian statehood keeps alive the anti-Israeli political approaches in several countries, which eventually makes the Israeli regional vision vulnerable to the power transition (not necessarily in the form of regime change) in the region. This was the key reason Israel felt insecurities in the face of a power transition during the Arab Uprisings.

After more than ten years, the counter-revolutionary forces gained ground across the region, the moderate Islamist opposition was replaced by terror groups in some countries, and the democratic experiences of countries and the electoral successes of Islamist groups failed from Egypt to Tunisia. The anti-Iranian stance among the Arab countries (especially the Gulf countries) became more apparent, and the recent normalization process with the Gulf monarchies strengthened the moderate axis by eliminating the anti-Israel interventionist rhetoric regarding the Palestinian issue. Thus, Israel–Gulf normalization signifies the decentralization of Palestinians in broader Arab-Israeli relations in the Middle East or the end of the decades-long Arab commitment to the Palestinian cause (Belder, 2020, p. 116). The departure from the Arab 'declaration politics' has created a more dynamic Arab discourse that is more prone to acknowledge the changing realities on the ground as opposed to the restraining aspects of the static Arab commitment to declaration politics (Belder, 2020, p. 109). Although Gulf countries had already been seen as part of the Israeli moderate axis (Rosman-Stollman, 2004), the reconciliation of declarations and practices confirmed Israel's identity-based regional understanding.

This 'de-commitment' dimension is also very much illustrative to interpret Israeli–Turkish normalization and Turkey's position in Israel's regional vision. However, unlike Arab countries, Turkey was not born out of the dominance of declaration politics but constructed its commitment to the Palestinian cause by itself in the 2000s. While Turkey became the first Muslim-majority country to recognize the Jewish state in 1949, it was again Turkey that condemned the normalization approaches of the Gulf countries towards Israel in 2020 (Öztürk, 2020). The second major difference between Arab and Turkish commitments is the lack of military engagement of the latter. Although many Arab countries did not officially fight Israel, the famous Khartoum declaration of 1967 (mostly known for its 'three nos' which are no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel and no negotiation with Israel) constructed a barrier to making official ties with the State of Israel (Meital, 2000). However, Turkey's commitment neither contained a military aspect (Turkey never claimed to take military action against Israel) nor broke off relations with Israel. However, the commitment issue is also key to comparing the Israeli-backed normalization efforts that were realized after signing the reconciliation agreement in 2016 with the Turkey-backed normalization efforts of 2020. Before the first normalization, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu apologized for the killing of Turkish citizens during the Mavi Marmara incident, and Israel agreed to pay compensation to the victims' families. Despite these advances, Turkey's expulsion of Israel's ambassador over Israel's killing of Palestinian protestors in the Gaza Strip in 2018 showed that Turkey was still committed to the Palestinian cause at the expense of its relationship with Israel. However, the second normalization (Turkey-backed), which came after the Gulf–Israel normalizations, followed the path of the de-commitment efforts of the Gulf countries, which de-centralized the Palestinian issue in bilateral relations with Israel. From this perspective, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Çavuşoğlu's statement underscoring Turkey's continuous support for the Palestinians as well as Turkey's desire to develop bilateral ties (Bassist, 2022) is not an oxymoron or an expression to restore Turkey's balanced approach toward Israel–Palestinian dispute but instead a desire to turn the support of Palestinians into a separate issue from the continuity of relations with Israel. It is the expression of Turkey's desire to be a disobedient bystander in Israel–Palestine relations and to stabilize bilateral relations with Israel.

Conclusion

The Arab Uprisings challenged Israeli regional perception based on a moderate/radical axis and revealed certain points of vulnerability. The Islamist turn, the power vacuum emerged in Syria and the permanence of the Palestinian issue constituted the dimensions of Israel's 'threat' perceptions in the identity-security nexus. While the uncertainties that emerged during the first phase of the uprisings undermined Israel's dichotomic axes and led Israeli decision-makers to adopt more cautious and selective responses and handle the cases separately, Turkey adopted a more comprehensive outlook and proactive stance and located Turkey in Israel's post-2011 regional vision as a disobedient bystander. Although Israel and Turkey are often positioned on opposite sides of the uprisings in Egypt and Syria, they never confronted each other. However, the Palestinian issue became the centre of bilateral relations, especially after 2008, and the impact of the Arab Uprisings on Palestinian politics in terms of developing a new political Islamist language contributed to the emerging uncertainties in Israel's regional understanding. However, the military coup in Egypt, the resilience of the Assad regime in Syria and the failure of the new voices combining Islam and democracy and the success of counter-revolutionary actors across the region restored Israel's 'moderate axis' and helped Israeli actors to delegitimize 'radical actors' including the Palestinian groups. While Gulf–Israel normalization symbolizes this restoration dramatically, Israel–Turkey re-normalization secures Turkey's disobedient bystander role in a certain manner. However, the restoration of the moderate axis in the region still has a major drawback because of the lack of strong societal sympathy for good relations with Israel. The lack of democracy prevents people from joining the decision-making process, which directly undermines societal ownership of normalization with Israel. Moreover, the question of whether Turkey will revise its commitment will be one of the aspects that the future of Turkey–Israel relations is likely to depend on. The contribution of this study to the literature is two-fold. First, it goes beyond Israel's geostrategic concerns to understand Israel's regional vision by incorporating the ideational dimension into the analysis and questioning Israel's identity concerns in a dynamic context. Second, it revisits the regional dimension of the identity (re)formation process of countries to bring regional visions of Turkey and Israel to contribute to the literature on bilateral relations. It aims to attract further research on the role of interaction between 'the regional relocating of self' and identity formation and foreign policy behaviours.

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Genişletilmiş Özet

Amaç

Bu çalışmanın üç temel amacı bulunmaktadır. İlk olarak İsrail dış politikası çalışmalarında görülen fiziki güvenlik temelli yaklaşımın ağırlığı karşısında kimlik temelli çalışmaların potansiyelini ortaya koyarak var olan literatüre katkı sağlamak amaçlanmıştır. İkinci olarak Türkiye-İsrail ilişkilerinin devletlerin bölgesel vizyonlarını içerisinde tanımlanma ihtiyacına cevap verme amacı taşımaktadır. Her ne kadar Türkiye'nin genel olarak dış politika kavramsallaştırması ve anlayışı özel olarak ise Orta Doğu algılamaları ve bu eksende ortaya çıkan fırsat ve kısıtlar ekseninde gelişmiş bir literatür hali hazırda oluşmuş durumda olsa da İsrail'in bölge algısı ve kimlik temelli güvenlik endişeleri ekseninde Türkiye ile ilişkilerin anlamlandırılması ihtiyacı yanıt verilmeyi beklemektedir. Son olarak ise özellikle Körfez-İsrail normalleşmesi ve Türkiye-İsrail (yeniden) normalleşmesi süreçlerinin birlikte analiz edilmesini mümkün kılan kimlik temelli bir okuma getirilmesi amaçlanmıştır.

Tasarım ve Yöntem

Bu çalışma kimlik ve güvenlik ilişkisi üzerinden Türkiye- İsrail ilişkilerine odaklanmakta olduğu için iki temel literatür alanı eleştirel bir şekilde taranmıştır: Türkiye- İsrail ilişkileri ve kimlik- güvenlik- dış politika. Bunu yaparken ilk olarak Türkiye- İsrail ilişkilerine yönelik çalışmaların konu ve yaklaşım olarak tarihsel evrimi ve bu evrimin ikili ilişkiler tarihine olan temasına değinilmiş ve katkı sağlanması planlanan literatürdeki kimlik odaklı bölgesel yaklaşımın eksikliği ortaya konulmuştur. Öte yandan katkı sağlanması amaçlanan kimlik-güvenlik ekseni ise çalışmanın teorik yaklaşımına altyapı oluşturduğu için İsrail dış politikası konusunda kimlik temelli çalışmalarının tarihsel bir muhasebesini yapmaktadır. Bunu yaparken İsrail'in kimlik-temelli bölgesel vizyonundaki evrim içerisinde çevre doktrini sonrasında Türkiye bağlamının müstakil bir şekilde yer ayrılmamış olmasından (yazarların bilgisi çerçevesinde) hareket edilmiştir.

Araştırma sorusu olan İsrail'in 2011 Arap Baharı dönemi sonrası kimlik temelli güvenlik algılarında yaşanan değişim bağlamında Türkiye'nin konumu 'meydan okuma- seyirci kalma' düzleminde üç bölgesel vaka üzerinden tartışılmıştır: Mısır, Suriye ve Filistin. Buna göre;

Mısır ve Suriye Arap Baharı sonrası İsrail'in kimlik endişeleri bağlamında ele alınıp, İsrail ve Türkiye'nin Arap Baharını farklılaşan konumunun ne ölçüde İsrail'in bölgesel tehdit tanımına temas ettiği tartışılırken, Filistin ise Türkiye'nin Orta Doğu bölgesel düzleminde 'bağlılık' (commitment) politikası ekseninde ele alınmıştır.

Filistin vakası ve bağlılık kavramı aynı zamanda Türkiye- İsrail (yeniden normalleşmesi) ve İsrail- Körfez normalleşmelerini karşılaştırmalı bir çizgiden ele almayı mümkün kılmakta, bu ise Filistin özelinde İsrail'in bölgesel vizyonunda Türkiye'nin yanı sıra Körfez monarşilerinin pozisyonları da anlamlandırılmaktadır.

Bulgular

Çalışma İsrail'in Arap Baharı sonrası bölgesel düzeyde kimlik temelli bir güvensizlik yaşadığı, 2011 öncesi kurulan ve İsrail'e bir tür kimlik güvenliği sağlayıcısı rolü oynayan ılımlı Arap ekseninde görülen değişimler üzerinden ortaya konulmuştur. Müslüman Kardeşler liderliğinin retorik düzeyde de olsa Mısır'ın İsrail'e olan yaklaşımını değiştirme potansiyeli, Suriye'de İsrail karşıtı İslamcı grupların Esad sonrası dönemde etkinlik kazanma ihtimalleri ve İsrail'in var olma hakkını tanıyan ve yakın çevresinde gerçekleştirdiği askeri operasyonlara sınırlı tepki gösteren Arap rejimlerinin karşı karşıya kaldığı tehdit bu güvensizliğin ana hatlarıdır. Bu güvensizlik ortamında Türkiye'nin ise Arap Baharı sürecinde bölgeye aktif bir şekilde angaje olması ve özellikle Mısır'da Müslüman Kardeşler, Filistin'de Hamas, Suriye'de ılımlı İslamcı muhalefete desteği bu noktada Türkiye'yi İsrail'in endişe duyduğu aktörlerin yanında konumlandırmıştır. Buna ek olarak Türkiye'nin Filistin meselesinde kendisine biçtiği bölgesel vizyon ve kimlik nazarında bir tür bağlılık politikası inşa etmesi de Türkiye ve İsrail'i 2011 sonrası ilk on yılda karşı kamplara yerleştirmiştir. Ancak, her ne kadar İsrail ve Türkiye hem Mısır'da ve Suriye'de farklı yönelimlere sahip olsalar ve hem de Filistin meselesi ekseninde karşı karşıya gelseler de Türkiye'nin İsrail bölgesel vizyonu içerisinde kimlik noktasında bir tehdit olarak resmedilmediği görülmüştür. Ilımlı Arap ekseni bozulurken ve bu bozulma içerisinde Türkiye aktif bir şekilde kendini yeniden tanımlarken, İsrail'in radikal ekseni ile Türkiye arasında bir yakınlaşma olmamış, Türkiye İsrail'in kimlik temelli ikiliğinde bir meydan okuma ya da mutlak seyirci rolünün ötesine geçerek çalışmada 'zorlu seyirci' pozisyonu olarak tanımlanan ve İsrail'e kimlik güvenliği sağlayacak bir anlayışa ne doğrudan meydan okuyacak ne de onun politikalarına (askeri operasyonlarına) meşruiyet atfeden bir eğilime sahip olmadığı ortaya konulmuştur.

Sınırlılıklar

Bu çalışma İsrail'in bölgesel düzeydeki jeopolitik okumalarından kaynaklanan askeri tehditten ziyade tarihsel evrimi ve Arap Baharı ile karşı karşıya kaldığı meydan okumalar ekseninde kimlik güvenliği ile sınırlandırılmıştır. Dolayısıyla Doğu Akdeniz doğalgazı, Mısır-Güney Kıbrıs- Yunanistan eksenindeki stratejik yakınlaşmalar ve Türkiye'nin bu konulardaki konumu gibi sorular çalışmada yer almamaktadır.

Öneriler

Yazarlar, devletlerin bölgesel düzeyde kendilerine biçtikleri rolün kimliksel dayanakları ve bu dayanakların değişimi ile dış politika algıları ve davranışları arasındaki ilişkiyi ele alan farklı çalışmaların literatürdeki fiziki güvenlik odaklı çalışmalarının ağırlığı karşısında alternatif açıklamalar ve yorumlamalar ile yeni sorular ortaya çıkarabileceğini önermektedirler.

Özgün Değer

Bu çalışmada dış politika analizinde kimlik- güvenlik ekseni İsrail örneğinde tartışılmış ve Türkiye'nin rolü analiz edilmiştir. Bu açıdan hem Türkiye- İsrail ilişkileri literatürünü hem de kimlik- güvenlik- dış politika literatürünü geliştiren bir çalışma ortaya konmuştur.

Araştırmacı Katkısı: Ferit BELDER (%50), Nurlan MUMİNOV (%50).