



European-Israeli Military Relations during Israel's Regional Conflicts (2006-2016)

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Abstract

The study aims to answer the question of the nature of European-Israeli military relations during the time of four conflicts in the Middle East region; one with the Lebanese Hezbollah, and three in the Gaza Strip. In this view, we divided the study into three principal parts. The first part focuses on European-Israeli military relations by addressing three phases. The first phase from 1949 to 1967, i.e. from the establishment of the State of Israel to the Six-Day War; the second phase from 1967 to 1993, i.e. the period that preceded the peace agreement between the Israelis and Palestinians, the Oslo Accord; and the third phase from 1993 to 2006, which addresses the period preceding the Israeli war on Lebanon. The second part examines the justifications for the military relations between Europe and Israel through a review of Israeli and European concerns that stimulate the existence of military relations between them. The third part addresses the areas of armament and military exercises between EU countries and Israel from 2006 to 2016. The study concludes by providing several findings, most prominently, that European-Israeli military relations were not seriously affected during Israel's regional conflicts in the period of 2006-2016.

Keywords: Israel, Europe, Military Relations, Regional Conflicts, Middle East

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İsrail'in Bölgesel Çatışmaları (2006-2016) Boyunca Avrupa-İsrail Askeri İlişkileri

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Öz

Bu çalışmada 2006-2016 yılları arasında Avrupa-İsrail arasındaki askeri ilişkilerin yapısı hakkındaki sorulara cevap verilmeye çalışılmıştır. Bahsi geçen dönemde Ortadoğu'da dört savaş yaşanmıştır. Bu savaşlardan biri İsrail ve Lübnan Hizbullah'ı arasında, diğer üçü ise İsrail ve Hamas arasında Gazze Şeridinde meydana gelmiştir. Çalışma üç bölüme ayrılmıştır. Birinci bölümde Avrupa-İsrail askeri ilişkilerinin tarihi üç aşamada incelenmiştir. Birinci aşama 1949-1967 yılları arasındaki, yani İsrail'in kuruluşundan Altı Gün Savaşları'na kadar devam eden dönem. İkinci aşama, 1967-1993 yılları arasındaki, yani İsrail ve Filistin arasındaki Oslo Anlaşması'ndan önceki dönemdir. Üçüncü aşama ise 1993-2006 yılları arasındaki, yani İsrail'in Lübnan'a saldırısından önceki döneme tekabül etmektedir. Çalışmanın ikinci bölümünde Avrupa-İsrail askeri ilişkilerinin gerekçeleri incelenmiştir. Bu kısımda İsrail'in çekinceleri ile Avrupa'nın çekincelerinin yanı sıra, tarafların ortak çekinceleri ve bunun sonucunda Avrupa Birliği (AB) devletleri ile İsrail arasında askeri ilişkilerin doğuşu üzerinde durulmuştur. Üçüncü ve son kısımda ise AB ülkeleri ile İsrail arasında 2006-2016 yılları arasındaki dönemde silahlanma ve askeri eğitim alanlarındaki ilişkiler ele alınmıştır. Çalışmada Avrupa ve İsrail arasındaki askeri ilişkilerin 2006-2016 yılları arasındaki dönemde etkin ve gerçek bir şekilde yaşananlardan etkilenmediği sonucuna varılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İsrail, Avrupa, Askeri İlişkiler, Bölgesel Çatışmalar, Ortadoğu

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1. Introduction

The significance of this study lies in the fact that it highlights the role that could be played by major EU countries in the Middle East due to the cumulative impact of their economic activities there, especially when considered that they repeatedly call for an urgent need to apply international law provisions. Therefore, the European Union is qualified to play a significant role in the Middle East, noting that Iran and some Arab countries are in favor of a more influential EU in the region vis-à-vis the United States' established power and influence in the region.

The study follows a descriptive approach rather than conventional explanations in assessing Israeli-European relations. Accordingly, it reveals that European-Israeli military relations were not affected by Israeli wars in the region during the period from 2006 to 2016. That said, the language of interests, according to political realism, has prevailed over the political idealism of the European Union. The paper analyzes several reports and studies, in Hebrew, English, and Arabic, that address European-Israeli military relations both in training and armament in order to provide answers to following questions: What is the nature of Israeli-European military relations? What are the justifications for European-Israeli military relations? What are the arms deals that were concluded between the EU and Israel during the period from 2006 to 2016? What are the joint military exercises that were held by the European Union and Israel between 2006 and 2016?

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Israel remained as one of the few countries that maintained a comprehensive national military doctrine shaping every aspect of its national security. The design of buildings, hospitals, and educational institutions has been widely influenced by the Israeli military doctrine.¹ Since 1949, Israel has been in a state of general mobilization for ensuring regional military superiority in anticipation of any development that may affect its national security.²

This may help explain why Israel is one of the most warring countries of recent times. Israel fought a war against the Arab states in 1948,³ which

¹ Kenneth S. Brower, "The Israel Defense Forces, 1948-2017," *BESA Bar-Ilan university*, May 28, 2018, 6.

² *Ibid.*, 7

³ Meir Pa'il, "Israeli Wars: The War of Independence," 1998, accessed October 14, 2019, <https://lib.cet.ac.il/pages/item.asp?item=1509>.

resulted in the creation of the ‘State of Israel’, and joined France and Britain in the tripartite aggression against Egypt in 1956, in addition to the Six-Day War in 1967 and the October 1973 War.⁴ In contemporary history, Israel was involved in four regional conflicts during the period from 2006 to 2016. The first was between Israel and Lebanon, more specifically the Lebanese Hezbollah. This war on July 12, 2006, caused the death of at least 1,109 Lebanese citizens, the vast majority of whom were civilians, injured 4399, and displaced one million people. On the Israeli side, 165 were killed, and more than 100 were injured.⁵ The remaining three conflicts were between Israel and the Palestinian factions in the Gaza Strip. The first conflict was on December 27, 2008, and lasted for 21 days. Israel used about 80 warplanes and non-conventional weapons against the Palestinians, most notably air-burst white phosphorus shells and depleted-uranium munitions. More than 1,436 Palestinians, including 410 children, 104 women, and about 100 elderly were killed, and more than 5400 others, half of them children, were injured. Israeli authorities admitted that 13 Israelis, of whom 10 were soldiers, were killed, and 300 others were injured. In the second conflict, which started on November 14, 2012, and lasted for 8 days, 162 Palestinians were killed, and about 1,300 others were injured, while 20 Israelis were killed and 625 injured. Finally, the third conflict, which started on July 7, 2014, and lasted for 51 days, circa 2,322 Palestinians were killed and about 11 thousand were injured, while on the other side 68 Israeli soldiers and 4 civilians and one foreign worker, were killed, and 2,522 were injured, including 740 soldiers. The losses of the national economy in the Gaza Strip were estimated at 5 billion dollars.⁶

Some Western reports have described European-Israeli relations as rich and ambiguous. There is considerable cooperation at the geostrategic level to confront common threats such as Iran’s nuclear power. However, there is a European stance that rejects any Israeli move that could destabilize

⁴ Jacob Abadi, “Egypt’s Policy Towards Israel: The Impact of Foreign and Domestic Constraints” *Israel Affairs Journal*, (2006) vol:12, accessed January 10, 2019, doi: 10.1080/13537120500382040.

⁵ Amin Hoteit, “The 2006 War on Lebanon: Background, Performance and Results”, *Aljazeera*, August 18, 2006, accessed October 14, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.net/knowledgegate/opinions/2006/8/15>.

⁶ Alaa Atalla, “Three Israeli wars on Gaza,” *Anadolu Agency*, December 29, 2016, accessed September 29, 2019, <https://www.aa.com.tr/ar>.

the Middle East such as the crises caused by the Six-Day War in 1967, the October War in 1973, the Lebanon War in 1982, and the Gaza War in 2008 as well as the two Intifadas in 1987 and 2000 that were mainly provoked by Israel.⁷

The relations between EU countries and Israel are described as unique for two main reasons. First, because Israel enjoys a privileged position vis-à-vis Europeans despite political differences, and second because of strong cultural links and mutual understanding.⁸ However, European foreign policy can be considered controversial.⁹ It has become clear that European policy is inconsistent, after the apparent divergence in both its foreign policies and international relations.¹⁰ While EU countries have several diversified relations with Israel, their policies toward Israel can still be described as tense and contradictory.¹¹

One of the objectives of the European colonial endeavor in the Middle East region was the fulfillment of the Zionist movement's dream of establishing a state in Palestine for Jews.¹² Despite the historical and cultural rapprochement between Europeans and Israelis, large protests spread throughout Europe against the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip. Despite military and security ties between Israel and EU countries, the British Labor Party criticized the then Prime Minister David Cameron for the nature of his relations with Israel demanding a clear position on Israeli policy toward Palestinians. Also, Sayeeda Warsi, a member of the House of Lords and co-chair of the Conservative Party, resigned in protest of Britain's position on Israel's war on the Gaza Strip in 2014. French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius also criticized Israel during the same war saying that a country's right to self-defense does not justify killing children and

⁷ Caroline du Plessix, *The European Union and Israel A lasting and ambiguous "special" relationship*, trans. Judith Grumbach, Bulletin du Centre de recherche français à Jérusalem, (Jerusalem: 2011), 1.

⁸ Ibid, 2.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Mueller, "Europe's Foreign Policy," 28.

¹¹ Ibid., 31.

¹² "Israeli-European Relationship An Old Alliance and Common Goals," *Al-Bayan*, 22 December 2000, Accessed 17 June 2020. <https://www.albayan.ae/one-world/2000-12-22-1.1092115>

massacring civilians. And, Spain and Britain threatened to stop arms sales to Israel.¹³ The European policy towards Israel was not limited to official statements and widespread protests. For a large number of EU countries decided to suspend the import of Israeli products coming from Israeli settlements that were built in territories occupied since 1967. This implied that Israel should withdraw from these territories, which were considered Palestinian soil.¹⁴

The most controversial issue between Israel and the EU, and the most serious point from the Israeli perspective, is the Europeans' conviction that Judaism is merely a religion, and that Jews have no right to create a Jewish homeland,¹⁵ which led the Israeli Foreign Ministry to describe the European positions as hostile towards Israel and the statements of EU countries as pro-Palestinian.¹⁶ Therefore, we can conclude that while both the EU and Israel share a common interest in ensuring regional stability, they often disagree on the adoption of a common strategy to do so. Overall, their disagreement is related foremost to the Palestinian question.¹⁷

There are clear differences between the European Union's foreign policy principles and actual international relations. Whereas the values of the EU are closer to idealism, its relations with Israel are closer to realism aiming at the pursuit of interests. Therefore, while the foreign policy of the European Union towards Israel may vary from time to time, its international relations including military relations with Israel, have not been significantly altered. This study aims to show that thanks to arms deals between the EU and Israel and their joint military exercises the Israeli-European military relations were not seriously affected even during periods of Israeli regional wars between 2006 and 2016, and that interests prevailed over principles. Some numbers show that some EU countries are ranked right after the United States with respect to arms deals, namely France, Germany, the

¹³ Bryant Jordan, Why the US Military Puts Israel, Gaza in Europe, *Military*, 7-8-2014, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2014/08/07/why-the-us-military-puts-israel-gaza-in-europe.html>

¹⁴ Guy Harpaz, Asaf Shamis, Normative Power Europe and the State of Israel: An Illegitimate Eutopia?, *JCMS 2010* Volume 48. Number 3. pp. 579–616, p599.

¹⁵ דרפ (Freddie Ethan, "Now: Strengthen European-Israeli relations," July 2018, <https://jcpa.org.il/article/>)

¹⁶ Du Plessix, *The European Union and Israel A lasting and ambiguous "special" relationship*, 1.

¹⁷ Ibid, 8.

United Kingdom (still listed despite Brexit), Belgium, and Romania as well as other countries.¹⁸ In terms of training, Israel turned to Europe after the turbulence in relations with Turkey.¹⁹ At the level of trade relations between the EU and Israel, the EU has become Israel's leading trading partner. Trade between Israel and the EU has increased from 2 billion euros a year prior to 1975 to 36 billion euros in 2017.²⁰

2. Nature of European-Israeli Military Relations: A Historical Background

During the period before the creation of the 'State of Israel' in 1948, the European continent was at the heart of the Zionist diplomacy. Through his relations with European leaders, Theodor Herzl had sought to establish the 'State of Israel' and his idea succeeded. After the end of the First World War, the League of Nations mandated (handed over) Palestine to the rule of Great Britain which lasted until 1948. Britain issued the Balfour Declaration in 1917, which stipulated "the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine," considering Palestine a land without a people.²¹ Soon after that, Zionist armed groups trained by Britain started to wage attacks – which they codenamed them as "wars of liberation" – on Palestinian territories against indigenous people. During these raids, Zionist guerillas used European weapons, more specifically weapons purchased from Czechoslovakia.²² In order to evaluate European-Israeli relations after Israel's creation, the next section divides them into three stages as follows.

¹⁸ Dylan Macchiarini Crosson, "Arming Instability, "EU-Israel arms trade and the EU Common Position", *Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS)*, July 2020, accessed October 16, 2020, https://www.sinequanon-eu.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/SQN1_Jul20_ArmingInstability.pdf

¹⁹ Ellen Gerrish, "Summaries of the working papers of the European Foreign Policy Conference on the Palestinian Issue," *Al-Zaytouna Center for Studies and Consultations*, March 13, 2014, accessed September 28, 2019, <https://www.alzaytouna.net/2014> .

²⁰ Noah Landau, "Curse and welcome: The complicated truth about Israeli-EU relations" *Haaretz*, May 25, 2018, accessed February 12, 2019, <https://www.haaretz.co.il/news/politics/premium-1.6116035> .

²¹ Abdul Wahab Al-Kayyali, *The Modern History of Palestine*, (Beirut: Arab Foundation for Studies and Publishing, 1990), 88.

²² Emmanuel Navon, "Israel and Europe: Looking Back, Looking Ahead," *The Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security*, July 08, 2018, accessed September 15, 2019, <https://jiss.org.il/en/navon-israel-and-europe>

2.1. First Stage (1949-1967)

This stage encompasses the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 up to the Six-Day War between Israel and several Arab countries in June 1967, and the Suez Crisis in 1956.²³ The Suez Crisis erupted on October 29, 1956, when Israeli Armed Forces pushed into Egypt toward the Suez Canal after Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918-70) nationalized the canal, a valuable waterway that controlled two-thirds of the oil that went to Europe. The Israelis were soon joined by French and British forces, which nearly brought the Soviet Union into the conflict and damaged their relation with the United States. In the end, Egypt emerged victorious, and the British, French, and Israeli governments withdrew their troops in late 1956 or early 1957. This incident was a pivotal event between Cold War superpowers.²⁴ Ten years later, the Six-Day War broke out in which at the end Israel occupied the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and the Egyptian Sinai,²⁵ relying mainly on European arms. The only military and diplomatic ally of Israel in Europe in the 1950s was France,²⁶ who was among the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with Israel on May 11, 1949 and contributed actively to the consolidation of the young state.²⁷

Israel also relied on the purchase of arms from European countries, specifically the remnants of World War II, from its inception up to the Six-Day War in 1967. Between 1954 and 1967, France was the leading provider of sophisticated weapon systems to Israel after the French government and President Charles de Gaulle adopted a policy of providing extensive assistance to Israel, including the sale of Strike-master, Organ, and Mirage fighter aircraft and IMX 13 light tanks, as well as shells and light weapons.²⁸ France also provided the Israeli navy with missiles and

²³ Freddie Eitan, "Right now: Strengthen Europe-Israel relations," *The Jerusalem Center for Public and State Affairs*, July 29, 2018, accessed May 19, 2019, <http://jcpa.org.il/article/>

²⁴ "Suez Crisis," *History*, accessed October 01, 2020, <https://www.history.com/topics/cold-war/suez-crisis>

²⁵ Abadi, "Egypt's Policy Towards Israel," vol:12.

²⁶ Navon, "Israel and Europe."

²⁷ "France and Israel," *France Diplomacy*, accessed February 25, 2019, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/ar/>

²⁸ Uzi Eilam, "Israel's industrial security relationship with Europe," *The Prisoner's Center for Studies*, October 02, 2006, accessed July 22, 2019, <https://alasa.ps/ar/index.php?act=post&id=275>

sponsored the construction of the Israeli nuclear reactor in Dimona.²⁹ However, the French armament of Israel did not last long, as President De Gaulle later imposed a ban on the sale of arms to Israel³⁰ for two reasons. First, for Israel's Six-Day War against Arab countries, in which France took a neutral stance, and within the framework of a French decision to ban the sale of weapons to combat areas.³¹ Second, the war between France and Algeria had ended, and France did no longer need an ally against the Arabs.³²

Between 1965 and 1967, Israel purchased arms that were remnants of the Second World War such as the Sherman and Centurion tanks, armored personnel carriers, field guns, the British Matt Ur aircraft, and the early American Patton tanks, which were traded in Europe. Also, Britain and Israel cooperated in developing the Chieftain tank during the period from 1965 to 1967, but the project was later hindered when the British government rejected the Israeli war in 1967.³³

2.2. Second Stage (1967-1993)

The second stage extends from 1967, in the aftermath of the Six-Day War, until the signing of the Oslo Accords between Palestinians and Israelis in 1993. During this period, Israel sought to strengthen its relations with European countries beyond Britain and France. In this context, Israel conducted extensive military and security talks with Germany for the development of military technology, defense systems, and submarine construction. Israel also acquired arms deals with Italy, and Sweden cooperated with Israel in military research.³⁴ However, during the October 1973 war between Egypt and Israel, nine European countries including the UK, Germany, and Spain, refused to permit the US to use their territory and air space for transferring arms supplies to Israel, although other countries such as Portugal and the Netherlands opened their air space

²⁹ Eitan, "Right now."

³⁰ Eilam, "Israel's industrial security."

³¹ Navon, "Israel and Europe."

³² Eilam, "Israel's industrial security."

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

for these activities. Also, some European countries sought to strengthen their relations with Arab countries, especially after the 1973 oil embargo, and they supported the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in international forums. France also criticized the signing of the Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel in 1978 because of the PLO's exclusion. France succeeded through the Venice Declaration in 1980 in convincing its European Economic Committee (EEC) partners to invite the Palestine Liberation Organization to attend the summit, and the declaration called for recognition of Palestinians' right to self-government and the PLO's right to be connected to peace initiatives. However, some European countries such as the Netherlands and West Germany showed sympathy with Israel.³⁵

2.3. Third Stage (1993-2006)

This stage extends from 1993, the aftermath of the Oslo Accords, until the Israeli war on Lebanon in the summer of 2006. During this period, European-Israeli military relations became closer and more public. In 1999, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak and French Defense Minister Alain Richard signed an agreement for cooperation in security industries. Moreover, Israel appointed military attachés to France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg to discuss military cooperation. Israel also purchased naval weapons from Italy. Finland did not hesitate to be the first European country to purchase the advanced anti-tank Rafael missile from Israel. Israel, on the other hand, tried to establish a military rapprochement with Spain, Portugal, and Sweden, which helped strengthening its security relations. Besides, Israel appointed a military representative to Denmark to coordinate areas of military rapprochement with Scandinavian countries. Israel appointed a military attaché in Poland as well to enhance the promotion of arms sales. Thus, Israel's victory in its military wars against Arab countries in 1948 and 1967, together with signing a peace agreement with the Palestinians in 1993, contributed significantly to the strengthening of European-Israeli military relations, including exports, imports, military and security industry, and forensics. Even the electronic warfare systems have been present in European-Israeli military relations. Israeli military industries have become competitive with

³⁵ Navon, "Israel and Europe."

the military industries of both Britain and France on European markets.³⁶ Still, Israeli-European relations were occasionally strained, as in 2000, due to the failure of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations at Camp David and the eruption of a new Palestinian uprising in the same year.³⁷

Relations between Israel and European Union countries can be described as complicated. These relations started through economic, commercial, scientific, and cultural cooperation, and then were furthered on political, security, and military levels, especially in the light of defense cooperation. However, European-Israeli military relations have seen ups and downs due to differences in the assessment of many regional issues. EU countries are seen as supporters to reach a peaceful solution between Arab countries and Israel through granting the Palestinians a state on the 1967 borders, and opposing measures that may hinder this including Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territories, especially in the West Bank.³⁸ The main cause for an improvement of Israeli-European relations during this period is the signing of the Oslo Accords by the Palestinians and Israelis in 1993, which boosted European openness to the Middle East region in general, and toward Israel in particular.³⁹

3. Contemporary Justifications for Military Relations between Europe and Israel

It is undeniable that there are common interests between Israel and EU countries, mainly southern European countries because of their geographical proximity to Israel. This may be considered the main pillar for justifying relations between Israel and EU countries in many areas, especially in the military realm. In this context, we will try to address the

³⁶ Eilam, "Israel's industrial security."

³⁷ Oded Eran, "Israel-EU relations step forward, two back," *RAMBI*, May 2009, accessed December 14, 2018, <http://aleph.nli.org.il>

³⁸ Tsilla Hersheco, "Israel-EU Security and Defense Relations in the Context of the 'Arab Spring'," *Bulletin du Centre de recherche français à Jérusalem*, 25 | 2014, accessed March 27, 2019, <https://journals.openedition.org>

³⁹ Ayman Fat'hia, *Evolution of European Union's Foreign Policy Towards the Palestinian cause from Madrid Peace Conference in 1991 to Palestinian Legislative Elections in 2006*, (MA thesis, Birzeit University, Ibrahim Abu-Lughod Institute for International Studies, 2010), p. 139.

most significant justifications for military relations between Israel and the EU countries as follows.

3.1. Israeli Concerns

Israel's security concerns and its preparations for irregular wars are among the critical starting points of Israeli-European military rapprochement.⁴⁰ In previous defense strategy, Israel was self-reliant in conflicts with neighboring countries, especially due to the existence of Israeli nuclear weapons that Israel has been considering a deterrent weapon. Yet, contemporary Israeli strategy relies on military cooperation with EU countries, whether through NATO or bilateral military relations with European countries.⁴¹ A reason for that could be the erosion of Israel's unilateral deterrence according to assessments of the Israeli leadership. For instance, Itai Virob, an Israeli Brigadier General, who commanded the Gaza Division of the Israeli Army, said that Israel did not achieve deterrence toward Gaza in the 2014 offensive,⁴² which led to significant changes in the Israeli military establishment including the replacement of Israeli army leaders involved in that war.

In addition to these changes in the Israeli military command, the Israeli army has developed plans and strategies in anticipation of any military confrontation that may not be undertaken by regular armies such as confrontations with the Lebanese Hezbollah, Hamas, ISIS, and al-Nusra Front, against whom Israel needs security and military cooperation with many international powers, especially EU countries.⁴³

3.2. European Concerns

The European countries' most significant concerns are related to illegal migration and international terrorism. Especially in times of economic

⁴⁰ David J. Ingel, "Prospects For Closer Israeli-NATO Cooperation," (Master Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2015)

⁴¹ Ingel, "Prospects For Closer Israeli-NATO Cooperation."

⁴² Mohsen Saleh, *Palestinian Strategic Report 2014-2015*, (Beirut: Al-Zaytouna Center for Studies and Consultations, 2016), 97.

⁴³ Saleh, *Palestinian Strategic Report 2014-2015*, 100.

difficulties and security and identity crises, there has been a great stimulus for European countries to cooperate with Israel.⁴⁴ It is noteworthy that Europe suffered a great deal of economic turmoil due to the financial crisis of 2008 and after China flooded European markets with its products resulting in the closure of factories and increasing unemployment in European countries. Consequently, many internal problems occurred, which have coincided with the emergence of a popular anti-migration trend in EU countries. This has prompted European governments to cooperate with many states in the realm of security and intelligence, including Israel, to reduce mass immigration to Europe. Besides, European concerns also included the safety of energy supplies to Europe and the smuggling of drugs into the continent. The countries of southern Europe are the most affected ones by the issues of immigration, drugs, and terrorism,⁴⁵ especially considering their geographical proximity and emerging challenges from the Middle East.⁴⁶

Moreover, there are growing threats posed by jihadist organizations worldwide, in addition to the threats of cyber warfare including the disturbance of the internet infrastructure between Israel and Europe.⁴⁷ Moreover, the European governments' rapprochement with Israel in fighting terrorism and illegal migration has been recently boosted, especially after the access of far-right parties to power in many European countries.⁴⁸

3.3. Common Concerns

There are many common concerns and interests that promote military and security cooperation between Israel and European countries. Major commonalities are as follows.

⁴⁴ Toby Greene and Jonathan Rynhold, "Where Israel and Europe Go From Here, Why Economic and Strategic Cooperation Have Never Been Better," *Foreign Affairs*, July 12, 2017, accessed January 24, 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles>

⁴⁵ Hollis, "Europe and the Middle East," 25.

⁴⁶ Patrick Mueller, "Europe's Foreign Policy and the Middle East Peace Process: The Construction of EU Actorness in Conflict Resolution," *Perspectives on European Politics and Society Journal* (2013), accessed August 25, 2019, doi: 10.1080/15705854.2012.732397.

⁴⁷ Saleh, *Palestinian Strategic Report 2014-2015*, 97.

⁴⁸ Greene And Rynhold, "Where Israel and Europe Go From Here."

3.4. The Civil War in Syria

The Syrian war has become a source of concern for both European countries and Israel because they fear spilling over effects from Syria to neighboring countries, including Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey, and Israel. EU countries were also concerned about the likely expansion of the Syrian crisis to the West, especially because many young Europeans have joined rebel groups in Syria⁴⁹ in addition to the critical influx of refugees to Europe and the emergence of terrorist operations within European borders.⁵⁰ Besides, the Israeli army had been in a state of control and anticipation in Israel's northern border during 2014-2015 after Russia's military intervention in Syria, which disrupted the balance of power and reshuffled the cards in the Syrian crisis.⁵¹

3.5. The Iranian Role in the Middle East

Despite the Israeli rejection of European efforts for the nuclear agreement with Iran through the 5 + 1 format,⁵² both European countries and Israel agree that Iran should not possess a nuclear weapon and take Iran's nuclear agenda seriously.⁵³ In 2003, France, Germany, and Britain established an international alliance with the United States, Russia, and China for diplomatic and financial sanctions that should be imposed on Iran.⁵⁴ Meanwhile, Israel has been seeing the Iranian nuclear issue as an existential threat.⁵⁵ Iranian military intervention in Syria has been another source of concern for both Israel and the EU.⁵⁶ It is worth mentioning that

⁴⁹ Hershco, "Israel-EU Security and Defense Relations."

⁵⁰ Nedal Watad, "The recovery of Israeli military industries due to European crises" *The New Arab*, August 19, 2017, accessed June 15, 2019, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics>

⁵¹ Saleh, *Palestinian Strategic Report 2014-2015*, 97.

⁵² "The Iranian nuclear agreement and its impact on "Israel - Turkey - Pakistan - Afghanistan"," *Democratic Arab Center*, accessed October 5, 2019, <https://democraticac.de/?p=47160>.

⁵³ Hershco, "Israel-EU Security and Defense Relations."

⁵⁴ Du Plessix, *The European Union and Israel A lasting and ambiguous "special" relationship*, 8.

⁵⁵ Yoaz Hendel, "Iran's Nukes and Israel's Dilemma," *Middle East Forum*, Winter 2012, accessed April 24, 2019, <https://www.meforum.org/3139>.

⁵⁶ Hershco, "Israel-EU Security and Defense Relations."

Israel has informed France of the existence of an Iranian desire to carry out a collective attack against Europeans targeting European airports and aircraft, which was considered an example of Israeli-European cooperation to counter threats coming from Iran.⁵⁷

3.6. The newly discovered East-Mediterranean Gas

There is now an alliance of Israel, Egypt, Cyprus, and Greece called the “Eastern Mediterranean Alliance” for coordination and cooperation for the exploration of natural gas in Mediterranean waters and the achievement of economically feasible projects related to the utilization of natural gas reserves through mutual deals, and the extension of gas pipelines or the use of LNG platforms.⁵⁸

In this regard, Israel has been keen to use this area as a tool to boost its relations with EU countries given that the EU is an influential international player. Moreover, Israeli-European relations have proved greatly helpful in recovering Israel’s political image at the international level regarding Israeli military conduct in Palestine and the neighboring region.

4. Areas of Armament and Military Exercises between EU Countries and Israel

Israel is situated in a hot conflict zone, in particular on its northern border with the Lebanese Hezbollah and on its southern border with the Palestinian Hamas. Hamas does not only refuse to recognize Israel as a state but denies its existence, although it has lately agreed to “the creation of a Palestinian state along the 1967 borders in a gradual manner.”⁵⁹ Hamas maintains a willingness to embrace military actions against Israeli interests, and denies

⁵⁷ Eitan, “Right now.”

⁵⁸ Khaled Fouad, “Eastern Mediterranean Gas: Taking an Unpaved Road,” *Egyptian institute for studies*, January 7, 2019, accessed October 1, 2019, <https://en.eipss-eg.org/eastern-mediterranean>.

⁵⁹ Entsar Abu Jahal, “Hamas says it does not oppose a state along the 1967 borders,” *Al-Monitor*, July 31, 2019. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/07/hamas-charter-borders-israel-palestine-palestinian-state.html#ixzz6bsQlftb4>

that it may reach a permanent solution agreement with Israel,⁶⁰ which is also consistent with the policies of the Lebanese Hezbollah.⁶¹ After Israeli forces withdrew from the Gaza Strip in August 2005, Israel allowed Europe to play a role in overseeing the security at the Rafah border crossing between the Gaza Strip and Egypt as a security control force provided that they remain in direct contact with Israeli security forces.⁶² Israel also allowed the European Union to provide little military assistance to the Palestinian Authority at the end of 2005. In the aftermath of the 2006 Lebanon-Israel war, Israel sought to strengthen the presence of UNIFIL's infantry and naval forces.⁶³ Moreover, there is a common understanding in the field of defense and security between Israel and the European Union due to shared threats in the Middle East, such as the Iranian program, instability in many Arab countries, and the increasing power of several Islamist groups.⁶⁴ In 2008, the EU decided to upgrade its relations with Israel in the context of European foreign and security policy. Indeed, according to Israeli Foreign Ministry, Israel has joined the European Union's Research & Development (R&D) program and gained more access to defense policy committees. In September 2010, Israel and the European Union engaged in a dialogue on arms limitation and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the EU called for holding a conference to discuss these issues, but Israel refused to participate therein.⁶⁵ To further assess Israeli-European military relations, a brief overview of the areas of armament and military training between Israel and the EU seems necessary.

4.1. Israeli-European Arms Sales

In the military framework, the EU has gradually sought to formulate a standard defense policy and to achieve cooperation among member

⁶⁰ Shaul Mishal, Abraham Sile, *Hamas Era*, translation: Ali Badwan, (Hebron: Yediot Aharonot, 1999), p. 20.

⁶¹ Amal Gharib, *Hezbollah: Religion and Politics*, translation: Hassan Al-Hassan, 2nd edition (Beirut: Civilization Center for Development of Islamic Thought, 2009), p. 297.

⁶² Mueller, "Europe's Foreign Policy," 30.

⁶³ Oded Era, "A Reversal in Israel-EU Relations?," *Strategic Assessment*, 12, no. 1, (June 2009): <https://www.inss.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/5-1.pdf>

⁶⁴ Hershco, "Israel-EU Security and Defense Relations."

⁶⁵ Ibid.

states in the field of armaments. But this step had started so cautiously and hesitantly that the European Union did not assign this task to its existing institutions, nor did it form new institutions to undertake this task. However, the EU preferred to make use of the Western European Union (WEU), which was established in 1955.⁶⁶ An Israeli study has revealed that EU countries' purchase of Israeli weapons is increasing as the EU has become the second-largest importer of Israeli weapons over the last few years. The study published by the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), which is affiliated with the Tel Aviv University, confirmed that European countries doubled their military deals with Israel from \$ 724 million in 2014 to \$ 1.6 billion in 2015 and \$ 1.8 billion in 2016. Also, Israeli arms exports to North America reached \$ 1,265 billion, to Latin America \$ 550 million, and to Africa \$ 275 million, while Asia remained at the top of Israeli arms importers by \$ 2.6 billion.⁶⁷

Arms deals between Israel and the European Union are not new. For example, France, Germany, and other EU countries have purchased drones from Israel since the 1990s as Israeli drones have acquired a global reputation for advanced technology.⁶⁸ From 2005 to 2009, EU countries granted licenses for arms exports to Israel worth 7.47 billion euros (\$ 9.6 billion). The arms exports from the EU to Israel during 2012 amounted to 613 million euros (\$ 788 million), an increase of 290% compared to 2011. This flourishing military trade between the EU and Israel indicates the level of assistance for Israel's continuous violations of international law.⁶⁹ Among Israeli arms deals with EU member states, it is essential to mention Israel's deal with Germany to purchase six submarines, which have been delivered to Tel Aviv by 2018 despite allegations of corruption.⁷⁰

Despite the clandestine nature of many arms deals between the EU and Israel, however, by monitoring annual reports, we have put together a list of several arms deals between the two sides.

⁶⁶ Hisham Tafish, "EU position on the Palestinian issue 1993-2003" (Master Thesis, Al-Azhar University, 2010).

⁶⁷ "Study: Israel increases military exports to Europe," Aljazeera, accessed July 25, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.net>

⁶⁸ Hershco, "Israel-EU Security and Defense Relations."

⁶⁹ Michael Deas, "End 'booming military trade' between EU and Israel, say Palestinian rights groups," *The Electronic Intifada*, September 22, 2014, accessed October 23, 2019, <https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/michael-deas>.

⁷⁰ Hershco, "Israel-EU Security and Defense Relations."

Table 1: Arms Deals between the EU and Israel

Year	Details of Arms Deals
2008	Despite the impact of the economic crisis in 2008 on trade in general and the arms trade in particular, specifically Poland maintained the purchase of arms from Israel. ⁷¹
2012 2013	Israel signed an arms deal with Italy on the purchase of Italian training aircraft for the Israeli air force in exchange for Italy's purchase of Israeli weapons, including aircraft, worth \$ 1 billion. The Israeli aircraft included two air control aircraft as well as a surveillance satellite. ⁷²
2015	On May 11, 2015, Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Yaalon stated that Germany had supplied four Patriot batteries to Israel. ⁷³ On December 17, 2015, the Israeli navy received a Dolphin submarine from Germany that arrived in Haifa port in January 2016.

It is possible to say that the Israeli war on Lebanon in 2006, had affected the reputation of Israeli weapons, which led to the decline of the value of Israeli weapons on European markets.⁷⁴ Until 2008, the Israeli military remained in a state of war against Lebanon and worked on repairing its military arsenal.⁷⁵ However, Israel managed to increase its arms sales in 2006 to \$ 4 billion, according to Yossi Ben Hanan, the head of the Israeli Defense Ministry's developing countries defense assistance division, (SIBAT). Furthermore, it was noted that both India and the United States were the biggest customers of Israeli arms during that period, and the estimated purchases of each of them in 2006 amounted to more than one billion dollar. Israel has also succeeded in making essential arms deals with Nigeria worth \$ 250 million.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Mohsen Saleh, *Palestinian Strategic Report 2010*, (Beirut: Al-Zaytouna Center for Studies and Consultations, 2010), 89.

⁷² Mohsen Saleh, *Palestinian Strategic Report 2012-2013*, (Beirut: Al-Zaytouna Center for Studies and Consultations, 2014), 97.

⁷³ Mohsen Saleh, *Palestinian Strategic Report 2014-2015*, 103.

⁷⁴ Mohsen Saleh, *Palestinian Strategic Report 2007*, (Beirut: Al-Zaytouna Center for Studies and Consultations, 2010), 91.

⁷⁵ Mohsen Saleh, *Palestinian Strategic Report 2008*, (Beirut: Al-Zaytouna Center for Studies and Consultations, 2010), 93.

⁷⁶ Mohsen Saleh, *Palestinian Strategic Report 2006*, (Beirut: Al-Zaytouna Center for Studies and Consultations, 2010), 77.

4.2. European-Israeli Military Exercises

It is clear that various European countries have conducted military exercises and maneuvers with Israeli military institutions, but it should be noted that there are European-Israeli military exercises that are conducted in the context of NATO training as well.⁷⁷

We conclude this chapter by stating that the security developments in the European continent have opened new markets for Israel in Europe in general and Eastern European countries in particular. Germany has concluded large arms deals with Israel as an alternative to Israeli imports of US and British weapons following periods of somewhat strained German-American and German-British relations.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Hershco, "Israel-EU Security and Defense Relations."

⁷⁸ Watad, Nedal. "The recovery of Israeli military industries due to European crises," *The New Arab*, August 19, 2017. Accessed June 15, 2019. <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics>

Table 2: General Details of Israeli Military Exercises

Year	General Details of Exercises
2009	<p>- Media sources revealed that Israel conducted in June 2009, military maneuvers over the eastern Mediterranean and Greece, where more than 100 aircraft (F15-F16) participated.⁷⁹</p> <p>- In November 2009, Israeli fighter aircraft conducted a large maneuver jointly with the Italian Air Force over the Mediterranean Sea using an Italian airbase on the island of “Sardinia”.⁸⁰</p>
2010	<p>- In late May and mid-October 2010, the Israeli Air Force carried out aerial maneuvers with the Greek Air Force over the Aegean Sea. During this exercise, Israeli and Greek pilots trained on-air battles, foreign missions, and aerial refueling.</p> <p>- In July 2010, six Israeli officers were killed when their military helicopter crashed during joint exercises near the mountainous area of Braşov in central Romania.⁸¹</p>
2013	<p>- On 21-3-2013, the Israeli Air Force concluded a joint exercise code-named “Noble Dina” with the US and Greek naval vessels, that lasted for two weeks in the waters of the Mediterranean Sea.</p> <p>- On 1 July 2013, the Israeli Air Force carried out a three-week training in Bulgaria to counter the dangers of the S-300 missiles, in which F-16s participated.</p> <p>On 25-11-2013, the Israeli Air Force carried out international air maneuvers with the participation of Greece, Italy, and the United States.⁸²</p>
2015	<p>- In April 2015, Israel conducted a 14-day aerial military exercise with the Greek Air Force.</p> <p>- The Israeli and German armies conducted military exercises in Israel in 2015, described as the largest between the two armies, including an occupation of a city that appears to be a Palestinian city.⁸³</p>

⁷⁹ Saleh, *Palestinian Strategic Report 2009*, 102.

⁸⁰ Saleh, *Palestinian Strategic Report 2009*, 103.

⁸¹ Saleh, *Palestinian Strategic Report 2010*, 86.

⁸² Saleh, *Palestinian Strategic Report 2012-2013*, 95.

⁸³ Saleh, *Palestinian Strategic Report 2014-2015*, 102.

5. Conclusion

The European-Israeli relations have been considered getting stronger and ambiguous as well. Although plenty studies have dealt with the extensive links between Israel and EU in general, only few studies have analyzed the impacts of Israel's regional conflicts on its military relationships with EU countries. In this paper, the nature of European-Israeli military relationships, particularly during the period of four conflicts in the Middle East region with Israel, are investigated thoroughly. To accomplish this goal, a historical background of the European-Israeli military relations in the period from 1949 to 2006 was presented in detail based on three associated phases. Furthermore, the study attempted to shed light on the justifications for the military relation between Europe and Israel through three perspectives, namely, Israeli concerns, European concerns, and common concerns. Moreover, all arms trade and military exercises between EU countries and Israel during the period (2006-2016) are evaluated. The findings, despite the fact that some European countries criticized Israel's illegal and aggressive policies during its regional conflicts in the period (2006-2016), support the conclusion that European-Israeli military relations were not seriously affected by these criticisms.

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