

# ISRAELI-TURKISH RAPPROCHEMENT IN THE 1990s: WHY AN ALLIANCE?\*

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## ABSTRACT

During the 1990s Turkey-Israeli relations developed very quickly. For many, improvement of Turkey's relations with Israel is directly related to the military's role in politics in Turkey. What led Turkey to establish such intense relations with Israel in 1990s? In order to answer this question first of all evolution of Turkish-Israeli relations in 1990s is examined. In following sections, three different explanations for this rapprochement are presented. In the first approach the internal political structure of Turkey, especially role of military in foreign policy making, in the second approach Turkey-US relations, and in the third approach the international relations and balance of power in the Middle East are analyzed and their effects on Turkey-Israel rapprochement are discussed. It is argued that, the Turkish-Israeli rapprochement in 1990s took place as a result of the balance of power and complicated relation links in the Middle East.

**Key Words:** Turkey-Israel relations, military and politics, Turkish foreign policy

## 1990'LARDA İSRAİL-TÜRKİYE YAKINLAŞMASI: NEDEN BİR İTTİFAK?

### ÖZET

1990'larda Türkiye-İsrail ilişkileri hızla gelişmiştir. Çoğu kişiye göre, Türkiye'nin İsrail ile ilişkilerinin iyileşmesi doğrudan Türkiye'de ordunun siyasetteki rolü ile bağlantılıdır. Türkiye'yi 1990'larda İsrail ile böylesi yoğun ilişkiye girmeye yol açan etmenler nelerdir? Bu soruyu yanıtlamak amacıyla, öncelikle 1990'lardaki Türkiye-İsrail ilişkilerinin gelişimi incelenmiştir. Takip eden bölümlerde, söz konusu yakınlaşmayı açıklamak üzere üç farklı açıklama sunulmuştur. İlk yaklaşımda, Türkiye'nin iç siyasal yapısı, özellikle ordunun dış politika yapımındaki rolü, ikinci yaklaşımda Türkiye-ABD ilişkileri ve üçüncü yaklaşımda ise Ortadoğu'daki uluslararası ilişkiler ve güç dengesi analiz edilmiş, Türkiye-İsrail yakınlaşmasına etkileri tartışılmıştır. 1990'lardaki Türkiye-İsrail yakınlaşmasının Ortadoğu'daki güç dengesi ve karmaşık ilişkilerin neticesinde ortaya çıktığı ileri sürülmüştür.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Türkiye-İsrail ilişkileri, ordu ve siyaset, Türk dış politikası

## INTRODUCTION

Since establishment of the republic in 1923, the main goals of Turkish foreign policy have been the maintenance of national independence, the sustainment of territorial integrity, and the preservation of the country's modernist, secularist, national regime (Karpas, 1996; Aykan, 1999). The World War II era was the most important stage for achievement of these goals for Turkey. During the war Turkey followed a neutral foreign policy and could maintain this policy until February 1945. With the end of the Second World War, Turkey came across with the Soviet threat. Under those circumstances Turkey chose to align itself openly to the West and especially to the United States in order to balance the Soviet threat.

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With the end of the Cold War the international system has changed dramatically and especially some regions have been affected deeply from those changes. Political structure of some regions like the Middle East has been reshaped in the post-Cold War era. In the Middle East, with the end of the Cold War, Israel and Arab countries came together in 1991 Madrid Conference. In the aftermath, Oslo Agreement was signed between Israel and Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1993. While those significant steps were taken in Israeli-Arab conflict, some important changes were seen in Turkey-Israel relations.

Relations at the ambassadorial level were restored between Turkey and Israel in December 1991, immediately after the Madrid Conference. The two countries relations developed very fast in the following period. Apart from economic agreements concluded, during the 1990s, Turkey and Israel signed more than twenty agreements on military issues (Nachmani, 1999: 153). On several occasions the Turkish authorities claimed that Turkey's relations with Israel during the 1990s were not unique and their country had followed similar paths with many other countries. However, examining the new agreements concluded between Turkey and Israel reveal the fact that Turkey did not establish such intense relations with any other countries during that period. In addition, since the foundation of the Israeli state, Turkey did not establish such close linkages with Israel until beginning of the 1990s (Bengio and Özcan, 2000).

What led Turkey to establish such intense relations with Israel? In order to answer this question, first of all the evolution of Turkish-Israeli relations in 1990s is examined. In following sections, three different explanations for this rapprochement are presented. In the first approach the internal political structure of Turkey with special emphasize on the role of military in domestic and international policy making, in the second approach Turkey-US relations, and in the third approach the international relations and balance of power in the Middle East are examined and their effects on the Turkish-Israeli rapprochement are analyzed.

## **1. TURKISH-ISRAELI RAPPROCHEMENT**

During the 1980s there were some important attempts to improve Turkish-Israeli relations. In late 1986, Turkey and Israel started to establish close linkages. It is not surprising, at that time Turkey's already tense relations with Syria went into a more deteriorated phase due to Turkey's big step to launch the Southeast Anatolia Project (*Güneydoğu Anadolu Projesi-GAP*) and Syrian support to the PKK (*Partia Karkaren Kurdistan- Kurdistan Workers' Party*). However this attempt could not bring significant changes in Turkey-Israel relations because of the outbreak of the Palestinian uprising, intifada, in the occupied territories. Throughout the intifada, Turkey governments issued statements denouncing Israeli behavior as violation of Palestinian human rights (Bölükbaşı, 1999: 29-30).

The end of the First Gulf War in 1991 created an environment where Turkish-Israeli relations could go on a fast track. After the war, the announcement for holding a conference in Madrid to reach a permanent Arab-Israeli peace had historical impact. "On 30 October 1991, official Arab and Israeli delegates gathered together around a common table in Madrid, Spain. The Madrid Conference represented a victory for those who championed a multilateral format and a comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict" (Eisenberg and Caplan, 1998: 75). After the Madrid Conference, the Turkish government was criticized heavily by domestic political groups for normalizing relations with Israel. The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs defended its policy on the ground that "there was no reason to be more Arab than the Arabs." At

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that period, not only the PLO but also many Arab States were spending big effort to improve their relations with Israel and it seemed to be only natural for the Turkish authorities to follow a similar path (Yavuz, 1997: 27).

December 1991 was a milestone for the Turkish-Israeli relations. At that time Turkey upgraded its relations with Israel to ambassadorial level (Hale, 2000: 297). Not surprisingly, intense relations started to evolve on many areas. One of the first agreements to be concluded was on tourism and about 300,000 Israeli citizens visited Turkey every year (Bölükbaşı, 1999: 31). Soon afterward, President Chaim Herzog became the first Israeli head of state to visit Turkey, in July 1992 (Çelik, 1999: 144).

The PLO's recognition of Israel at the 1993 Oslo agreement provided a free hand to the Turkish officials to improve relations with Israel (Kramer, 2000: 129-130). Soon after the agreement, the Turkish Foreign Minister at the time Hikmet Çetin visited Israel in December 1993. With that visit, Çetin became the highest-ranking Turkish official to visit Israel. Çetin's visit had important impacts on many areas, including but not limited with economy, tourism and education. Apparently, cooperation between Turkey and Israel was going to improve even more in the following years. After his visit, in Ankara, Çetin announced that "Turco-Israeli relations will develop further in all fields. We have agreed that Turkey and Israel should cooperate in restructuring the Middle East" (Yavuz, 1997: 28). Although Turkey and Israel were about to cooperate on many issues, military issues were the ones to be the most important. Along with cooperation on military issues, intelligence services of the two countries established close linkages. After his visit to Israel, Çetin professed that "cooperation between Israel and Turkey would be more far-reaching than expected" (Bölükbaşı, 1999: 31).

High-level visits between Turkey and Israel took place in few months after Çetin's visit to Israel. Following high ranking Israeli Defense Ministry's officials' visits Ankara, in January 1994 Israeli president Ezer Weizman visited Turkey. In April 1994, Israel's Foreign Minister Shimon Peres paid a visit to Turkey and an agreement related to environmental issues was signed between two countries before his return to Israel (Yavuz, 1997: 28).

In November 1994, Tansu Çiller's visit to Israel was a historic moment. As the first Turkish prime minister to visit Israel, Çiller tried to reach a free trade agreement during that visit. Although the free trade agreement could be reached two years after the visit, Çiller returned to Ankara only after signing few agreements (Yavuz, 1997: 28) which gave boost to the two countries' rapprochement. The most striking agreement of that visit was about modernization of Turkish fighter aircrafts by Israel. That agreement provided a base for more intensive cooperation between the countries. In addition, two countries agreed on enhancing their cooperation in regard to "fighting against terrorism" (Altunışık, 2000: 177-78).

Most important steps of Israel-Turkey rapprochement on military training, defense industrial cooperation, and free trade were seen in 1996. The "Military Cooperation and Training Agreement" which was signed in February 1996 created the first military links between the Israeli state and a country with vast majority of its population is Muslim ( Pipes, 1997: 32). The agreement provided for joint training of the two countries' air forces, Israeli air force's access to Turkish airspace for training purposes, reciprocal naval visits, and the training small groups of military personnel in each other's military academies (Yavuz, 1997: 28-29). The agreement was signed just before the Turkish President Süleyman Demirel's visit to Israel in March 1996 and

was made public only two months after it was signed. In fact only a part of the agreement was made public and the remaining big part is still classified. The agreement criticized harshly at national and international levels, especially by those who are known to be linked with Islamic ideals (Altunışık, 2000: 186-87).

The Defense Industry Cooperation Agreement, signed in August, was the other important agreement in 1996. In accordance with that agreement Turkey and Israel enhanced their cooperation further by transferring technology and providing training opportunities for their experts. In addition, the agreement set the ground for holding regular meetings between the two countries' representatives for evaluation of threats and terrorism in the region. So called "strategic dialogue" of Turkey and Israel (Altunışık, 2000: 187) was intended to enhance mutual benefits through more intense cooperation

Following the Defense Industry Cooperation Agreement, Israel became a major supplier of arms and technology for Turkey. By this action Turkey aimed at overcoming sanctions imposed on it by traditional arms supplier in Western Europe and the US mostly as a result of anti-Turkish lobbying groups' activities and alleged Turkey's human rights violations during the struggle with the PKK (Eisenstadt, 1997). During this period, Turkey's fifty-four F-4 Phantom aircrafts were modernized by Israel and Turkey purchased various types of missiles from Israel in order to equip those aircrafts. Apart from F-4 fighter aircrafts, negotiations for upgrading Turkey's other military equipment, including F-5 fighter jets, were held and Israeli defense industry carried out those activities (Bölükbaşı, 1999: 32).

As an indicator of cooperation on military issues, for the first time in history, commander of the Turkish armed forces İsmail Hakkı Karadayı visited Israel in February 1997. After that visit, Karadayı's Israeli counterpart Ammon Lipkin-Shahak paid a visit to Turkey in October 1997. Apart from the chief commanders' visit, during 1997 various mutual high ranking visits took place between Turkey and Israel. Those visits include Israeli's Minister of Foreign Affairs' visit to Turkey, and the Turkish Minister of Defense's visit to Israel (Pipes, 1997: 33).

Military cooperation between Israel and Turkey entered into a new phase in 1997. Vessels from the Turkish navy visited Israeli ports in June 1997 and the two countries' military forces carried out joint air and naval maneuvers in the Mediterranean Sea. In addition, Turkey and Israel announced their intention to carry out joint naval exercises with the US (Pipes, 1997: 34). The announced exercises held off Israel's coast in January 1998 (United Press International, 1999). Although the exercises, called 'Reliant Mermaid', included only search-and-rescue maneuvers, and hence were limited in scope, the Arab countries protested them. The four-hour exercises were quite important for being a symbol of growing Turkish-Israeli cooperation (Waxman, 1999: 25-26; Altunışık, 2000: 187). From the Arab countries' perspective, those exercise were an obvious indicator of a change in Turkey's decade old policy toward Israel (Bölükbaşı, 1999: 33). In 1999, the similar exercises were held off Turkey's southwestern coast under the name of Reliant Mermaid-99.

What led Turkey to the point of such an alliance with Israel? In the next sections different explanations for the Turkish-Israeli rapprochement are presented.

## **2. INTERNAL STRUCTURE OF TURKEY: ROLE OF SOLDIERS IN POLITICS**

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The Turkish Republic which was founded under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal preferred a Western type of modernization. According to the leading elites of the new regime, Islam was the source of the backwardness experienced by the Ottomans. Since the new regime aimed at formation of a modern nationhood, Islam was perceived as an obstacle for such a comprehensive project. Secular principles were put forward in reconstruction of the new society. The ideals of secular nationhood received great support from people living in urban areas, especially those who migrated from other countries to the newly founded republic. Despite the success reached in gaining support for the new regime's ideals, Islamic practices continued to be followed by important part of the society (Vali, 1971: 60-61).

The process of 'modernization' and 'Westernization' required that the interaction with the Middle East be kept at a minimum degree. Therefore, during the 1920s and 1930s the Turkish governments implemented radical policies for 'de-Islamization' of society. "The attempt to disengage from the surrounding Islamic world considerably widened the gap between the elite and the masses" (Yavuz, 1997: 24). The extent of this gap became clear in the 1950 elections when the Democrat Party (DP-*Demokrat Parti*), promised respect for Islamic tradition, won the elections overwhelmingly against the Republican People's Party (CHP-*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*) and ended 27-year old one party regime of CHP. After the military coup in 1960 the DP was closed and in the following 1961 elections newly founded Justice Party (AP-*Adalet Partisi*) filled the gap. While moderate Islamic groups gave their support to the AP, the newly established Islamic National Salvation Party (MSP-*Milli Selamet Partisi*) of Necmettin Erbakan was supported by more extreme Islamic groups (Yavuz, 1997: ) and by gradually increasing its supporters polled nearly 12 percent in 1973 elections (Akşin, 1999: 15).

The leaders of September 1980 military coup introduced more radical measures to design domestic politics. The military regime, not only closed all political parties, but also put a ban on leading politicians' political activities. Hence, only newly founded parties which were allowed to conduct political activities could participate 1983 elections. A referendum was held in September 1987 about lifting the bans on political activities of former leading politicians and as a result they were allowed to participate in elections which were held in November 1987 (Kalaycıoğlu, 1997).

After the 1983 elections Turgut Özal's Motherland Party (ANAP-*Anavatan Partisi*) won a victory and Özal became the prime minister. Özal supported liberal policies in economy. Özal's liberal approach was not limited with economy, it was also adopted in many areas including culture, education and the media. Rising number of private TV and radio channels, educational institutions, highly influential civil society organizations brought an end to state's decades old monopoly in those areas. Some religious groups used their economic and moral power to shape politics and to provide space for their members at high bureaucratic positions (Yavuz, 1997: 25).

As Kramer (2000: 56) truly observed "Islam and the Turkish state or Turkish politics have never been as clearly separated as the Kemalist orthodox would like the public to believe". The Islamic Welfare Party (RP-*Refah Partisi*) was founded after the 1983 elections to replace National Salvation Party which was closed down along with other parties by the military regime in 1980. The RP was a strong opponent of western type secular society and argued for establishing a society based on Islamic "just order". In foreign policy, the RP was arguing for distancing Turkey from the West and establishing closer links with the Islamic world against, in their terms, 'Zionist Israel' and US conspiracies (Kalaycıoğlu, 1997).

The military regime under General Kenan Evren, the leader of the 1980 coup who was president of the republic until 1989, wanted to use Islam to reconsolidate the foundations of the Kemalist republic. In the view of the armed forces, the state had been severely shaken by leftist violence during the 1960s and 1970s. The rise of the RP's power in the 1990s was an important indicator of rising influence of political Islam in Turkey's domestic politics (Duman and Üşenmez, 2016: 271-72). Although the Prime Minister Özal did not seem to be targeting the republic's secular order, his policies which provided opportunities to Islamic groups raised concerns of the Kemalist elites (Kramer, 2000: 56-66).

As Vali (1971: 62-63) stated "The extreme secularists still regard Islam as an obstacle to Europeanization and economic development; the Muslim fanatics consider the secular state an enemy of Islam and incompatible with its tenets". In the year of 2020, almost one hundred years after its foundation, secular vs. anti-secular debate has not disappeared in Turkey and this debate became one of the most important political issues in the 1990s with the inclusion of headscarf and religious education topics. Anti-secular camp tended to portray that debate as public wishes vs. army's wishes. Although the situation in 1990s in Turkey was far more complicated than such a simplistic understanding, we have to consider the fact that the army was one of the major actors in the Turkish politics and it perceived itself as the guarantor of the secular structure of the regime. Indeed, during the 1990s the Turkish Army had also great influence over the national economy through organizations like OYAK (*Ordu Yardımlaşma Kurumu* –Turkish Armed Forces Assistance and Pension Fund).

From the military perspective, being the guarantor of modern republic requires keeping an eye on politics. Therefore, on many occasions, the Turkish military did not hesitate to interfere in politics (Khalilzad et.al., 2000: 16). Hence, the Turkish army has directly overthrown governments three times, in 1960, 1971 and 1980, and the role of military in politics is not limited with those coups. For example, during the 1990s the military directly interfered in politics on several occasions and even caused disintegration of the coalition of parties which was holding the government in 1997. The military commanders of the army are members of the National Security Council (MGK-*Milli Güvenlik Kurulu*). As a body which provides advices to the civilian government, during the 1990s it was quite risky for governments to turn a deaf ear to those advices. Before the changes made in the structure of the MGK to satisfy the European Union's demands from Turkey, the MGK included the top five military officers and five civilian officials. Although it was formed after 1960, the MGK became an important factor in politics only after the 1982 constitution, introduced following the 1980 military coup. With this constitution military got a political role and it had an effective veto power over the policies of elected governments. Cevik Bir, the dynamic and articulated deputy chief of staff, explains:

"We are acting strictly in accordance with the Turkish Constitution. Article 2 of the Constitution declares that we are a secular country, and Article 4 says that this provision can never be changed. Parliament has given us the responsibility to protect the Turkish mainland and also the Turkish Republic. In the United States or Britain it is not the job of the military to defend the political system, but in Turkey this is a mission given to us by law. We are not dealing with political issues, only carrying out our constitutional responsibility" (Quoted in Pipes, 1997: 33).

When the national elections were held in December 1995, the results were shocking for many. For the first time in the republic's history a religiously oriented political party received highest number of votes. During the election campaign speeches, the RP leader Necmettin

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Erbakan and his associates kept targeting Israel. Although the RP got the highest percentage of votes, it could not receive enough votes to form a government by itself. Negotiations for forming a coalition government lasted six months mostly due to concerns about the RP's Islamic orientation. In parallel to his promises during the election campaign, when he became Prime Minister, Erbakan took important steps to establish closer relations with the "Muslim World". The first countries to be visited by Erbakan as the prime minister were Iran and Libya, and also when he came to office he received a leader of the Muslim Brotherhood as his first foreign visitor (Yavuz, 1997: 29-30). Erbakan supported the establishment of an Islamic common market and Islamic military organization as alternatives to Turkey's alliances with the West. He also tried to develop new projects which would boost Islamic countries' economic cooperation (Kirişçi, 1997).

When Erbakan took the office, many people predicted that Turkey-Israel relations would deteriorate. But as Cengiz Çandar (Makovsky et al., 2000) stated "The military made the decision to develop Israeli-Turkish military ties without consulting civilian leaders. [...] The Turkish establishment built on its anti-fundamentalist cooperation with Israel to attack domestic Islamism." From the military perspective, establishing close relations with Israel was state policy which is perceived to be out of any governments' reach. Çevik Bir, deputy chief of staff at the time, commented about Turkey-Israel relations by stating that "The governments are like hats, they would come and go. What is permanent is the state" (Quoted in Altunışık, 2000: 183). Nevertheless, Erbakan's opposition could not interrupt the fast pace of Turkish-Israeli rapprochement (Bölükbaşı, 1999: 33). Despite his strong anti-Israel position before coming to the office, Erbakan had to bring his party in line to accept Turkish-Israeli rapprochement after becoming prime minister. Obviously these policy changes of Erbakan were the result of the military's pressure, not Erbakan's personal wishes.

When Erbakan came to office, it became very obvious that the real power in Turkey was held by the military (Lewin, 2000: 243). Erbakan was forced to sign the agreements with Israel and on 28 February 1997 the military interfered in politics openly through the MGK. At a meeting held on 28 February the MGK made alterations about main threats to the republic and Islamic fundamentalism was determined to be the most imminent danger to the state. The MGK also announced a list of measures to be implemented in order to overcome the threat (Kalaycıoğlu, 1997). The Prime Minister Erbakan, under the pressure of the military, had to sign that MGK resolution which was in fact targeting his own party. Following this resolution, pressure on Erbakan, both from his party and the military, increased and he could find no way except resigning from his post on June 18, 1997. Following this incident, a ruling of the Constitutional Court in January 1998 dissolved the RP and Erbakan and some top figures of his party were banned from politics.

### **3. ISRAEL-TURKEY RAPPROCHEMENT AS A RESULT OF THE US POLICIES**

Some well-known people in Turkey, especially from the far left and Islamic fundamentalist groups, are tended to see Israel-Turkey rapprochement as a result of the US's policies in the Middle East. According to this perspective, the Turkish foreign policy has been completely determined based on the US national interests and Turkey does not have its own independent foreign policies. In those people's perspective Turkey is the US's most committed ally and Israel-Turkey rapprochement is nothing more than a new commitment to the US from

Turkey. In order to evaluate this approach it will be useful to look at the historical background of US-Turkey relations.

Prior to the World War II, the US and Turkey did not have intense relations and interaction between the two countries remained at minimal level. During the Liberation War in early 1920s, the Turkish leaders attempted to gain the US support in order to balance Britain, but the US's isolationist policies of that time prevented development of relations with the US. Even in 1945, when Turkey was extremely worried about the Soviet Union's demands for making alterations at the Montreux Agreement, the US did not support Turkey (Kirişçi, 1998: 18).

After the end of the Second World War, the US -Turkey relations have developed very fast. Although Turkey had followed a neutral international policy until last months of the war, with end of the Second World War Turkey openly aligned itself with the West, especially with the US. The Soviet Union's threat on Turkey at the end of the war has been accepted as the main reason of the US-Turkey rapprochement. At that time Turkey was going to make a decision between the Socialist and Capitalist blocks and based on its regime's philosophy Turkey has chosen to be among Capitalist countries.

The future course of the relations between Turkey and the US was largely the result of the incidents in the relations between Turkey and the Soviet Union during the early period of the Cold War. Although the Soviet Union was devastated during the World War II by immense losses of human life, it emerged from the war as a great power. In the first months of 1945 the Soviet Union started to put pressure on the Turkish government for preparation of new convention about the Turkish straits. The Soviet government declared cancellation of the Treaty of Friendship which was in effect since 1925 between the two countries (Hale, 2000:111). Apart from the demand for renewal of 1936 Montreux Convention, at the meeting between the Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov and Selim Sarper, Turkey's ambassador in Moscow, the Soviets also demanded annexation of two northern provinces of Turkey, Kars and Ardahan, to the Soviet Union (Karpat, 1975: 83; Çelik, 1999: 35; Hale, 2000:111-113). For the Turkish leaders, those Soviet demands made clear that the Soviet Union aimed at establishing a total control over Turkey (Vali, 1971: 173).

From the Turkish policymakers' view, establishing an alliance the US was the only way of overcoming the Soviet demands. However, in early 1945 the US was quite hesitant to provide security cover to Turkey (Hale, 2000:112). Therefore the US did not oppose the Soviets' demands about that issue during the Potsdam Conference. After the conference, President Truman became highly uncomfortable with Stalin's policies. Therefore, by the beginning of 1946 Truman had been converted by Soviet actions in various parts of the world to adopt a much tougher policy against the Soviet Union than he had demonstrated at Potsdam Conference. About Turkey, in January 1946 Truman wrote that "There isn't a doubt in my mind that Russia intends an invasion of Turkey and seizure of the Black Sea straits to the Mediterranean. Unless Russia is faced with an iron fist and strong language another war is in the making" (Quoted in Hale, 2000:114). On August 15 1946 President Truman held a meeting in order to develop a policy about the Soviet demands on Turkey. At the end of this meeting it was announced that the US would not let Turkey to fall under the Soviet hegemony (Türkmen, 2000: 4). As a result of that policy, along with Greece, Turkey received military and economic assistance from the US based on 1947 Truman Doctrine.

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The military assistance agreement which was signed in July 1947 between Turkey and the US was remarkable in overcoming Turkey's security concerns. Almost five years before admission of Turkey to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), in accordance with that agreement, the US provided weapons, military equipment and training services to Turkey. In addition, plans for infrastructure construction in Turkey were carried out based on the US advice and financial sources for those spending were provided by the US (Vali, 1971: 125-126). In addition to the assistance received under the Truman Doctrine, Turkey was also included to the Marshall Plan in 1948 and received further economic assistance from the US.

Turkey left out of NATO agreement which was signed in April 1949 to form a new security organization. The Turkish government saw membership of NATO as the only way of securing the US assistance against an attack from the Soviet Union. Finally, in May 1951 President Truman officially approved a policy statement which recommended inclusion of Turkey and Greece to NATO. (Athanasopoulou, 1999: 203). After the removal of British objection against Turkey's NATO membership, in September 1951 the NATO Council of Ministers agreed on inclusion of Turkey and Greece into the alliance. In January 1952 the US Senate ratified participation of the two countries to NATO and in February 1952 officially Turkey's dream of becoming a NATO member came true (Türkmen, 2000: 16).

Due to its strategic location, Turkey became very important at NATO's security policies. Using Turkish airbases became much more important for the US after adoption of 'massive retaliation' strategy against the Soviet Union. Beginning in 1956 high-altitude U-2's were stationed in Adana at İncirlik Airbase and a series of information collection systems were set up along the Black Sea region. Based on the agreement reached in 1957, the US started stationing aircrafts equipped with nuclear weapons in Turkey (Kuniholm, 1996: 50-51). More than fifty agreements were concluded through 1964 related to the military presence of the US on the Turkish territories. In addition for military presence in Turkey, as an ally, the US wanted Turkey to have strong army. Therefore, in order to support modernization of the Turkish Armed Forces, after 1952 substantial US military aid started to flow to Turkey. The total US military aid to Turkey between 1946 and 1968 reached quite substantial figures (Vali, 1971: 123-124).

During the Cyprus crisis, between 1964 and 1975, US-Turkey relations deteriorated because of Turkey's military intervention and division of the island into two parts. Following Turkey's 1974 military intervention in Cyprus, in February 1975, the US imposed an embargo on arms shipment to Turkey. In response, Turkey abrogated 1969 Defense Cooperation Agreement and placed the US military installations within its territory under the Turkish Army's control. In September 1978 the embargo was lifted by the US and in return, the US bases in Turkey was reopened and a new Defense and Economic Cooperation Agreement was signed. After the end of the embargo, once again the US-Turkey relations improved markedly.

During the 1980s Turkey-US relations advanced further. When President Reagan came to office, the US-Soviet Union relations deteriorated and increasing tension between the two superpowers caused Turkey's security concerns to enhance. Hence, in March 1980 a new "Defense and Economic Cooperation Agreement" was signed between Turkey and the US. The agreement, in addition to establish a new framework for American military activities carried out in Turkey, it also provided defense support to Turkey. Accordingly, the US assistance to Turkey during the 1980s was totaling more than a billion dollars a year (Kuniholm, 1996: 58).

While some analysts were arguing that Turkey would be less valuable in the post-Cold War era with demise of the Soviet Union, the First Gulf War in 1991 proved them to be wrong. With the war in 1991, American policymakers were convinced that sustaining close relations with Turkey would be at their national interests even if the Cold War was over (Kramer, 2000: 225). When the Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait in August 1990, the Turkish President Turgut Özal used his power to provide support the US and Turkey became among first countries to join the United Nations' coalition against Saddam Hussein (Çelik, 1999: 77). During the Gulf War Turkey made big contributions to the anti-Iraq coalition by closing the Iraqi pipeline, permitting the allied coalition access to its military bases from which Iraqi targets were bombed, and deploying the Turkish Army along the Iraqi border. As a result of that last action Iraq had to deploy a part of its troops to the north and raised the prospect of a two-front war. In sum, as Kuniholm (1996: 62) stated "The crisis underscored the value of its Turkish alliance to the United States."

Policymakers of the US and Turkey have cooperated on a number of issues in the post-Cold War era. Both countries interests' have converged in the issues of the Middle East and Caspian Sea oil reserves. In the Middle East the US supported Turkey-Israel rapprochement. In Pipes' (1997: 37) words, "To its credit, the Clinton administration has solidly backed its two key allies in the Middle East as they form this partnership." The US had its own reasons to support that rapprochement. Since the US aimed at reducing its involvement in the Middle East without degrading stability of the region, bringing the two most powerful armies of the region, namely Turkey and Israel would just serve that goal (Waxman, 1999: 26).

The fact is that the US had many advantages from Israeli-Turkish rapprochement but this does not mean the rapprochement is completely a result of the US policies. As General Çevik Bir (1999) stated "Contrary to the beliefs of some, neither the United States nor any other third party initiated Turkish-Israeli cooperation or the 1996 military training cooperation. These were the initiatives of the Turkish leadership." Turkey and Israel improved their relations due to fact that such cooperation worked on benefits of both countries (Waxman, 1999: 31).

#### **4. POWER GAME IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND TURKISH-ISRAELI RAPPROCHEMENT**

Foundation of the republic in Turkey did not only created new borders but also enacted new psychological barriers against rest of the Middle East. As Pipes (1997: 36) correctly observed, "Turks tend to look down on Arabs as backward and emotional; Arabs return the favor by viewing Turks as rude and dour. Turks tend to dismiss Arabs as too Islamic; Arabs criticize Atatürk's experiment with secularism as a craven attempt to copy the West." From time to time Turkey and Arab states blame each other for various reasons. From the Arab nationalist perspective, centuries long Ottoman occupation on Arab lands has caused many economic, social and cultural problems. The Turkish nationalist view, on the other hand, mostly portrays the Arabs as traitors due to the Arab activities against the Ottoman State during the World War I. (Makovsky, 1999a). As I mentioned earlier, during the first years of the republic in Turkey the process of 'Westernization' became the main goal of the policy makers and it assumed that the process requires the interaction with the Middle East to be as low as possible. Therefore, during the 1920s and 1930s the Turkish governments implemented various measures to decrease influence Arab culture and Islam on the Turkish society.

## **Israeli-Turkish Rapprochement in the 1990s: Why an Alliance?**

In March 1949, less than a year after its foundation, Turkey officially recognized Israel. That decision seemed to be a radical change in Turkish foreign policy. Before foundation of Israel, Turkey sided with the Arab states and stood against the partition plan. The Turkish policymakers were quite suspicious about relations between the Soviet Union and the Zionist movement. However, after foundation of Israel, Turkey was convinced that the new state was not a Soviet puppet and started to see it as a potential ally (Bölükbaşı, 1999: 22; Şenel, 2014). Hence, Turkey became the first country whose majority of its population is Muslim to recognize the Jewish state (Baş, 2018). That decision caused long lasting effects in the Arab world. Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser put that effect quite bluntly in 1954 when he said that “Turkey because of its Israeli policy, is disliked in the Arab world” (Quoted in Waxman, 1999: 30). When Suez Crisis broke out in 1956 Turkish government recalled its ambassador from Tel-Aviv but it emphasized that action “should not be interpreted as a hostile act against the State of Israel.” (Bölükbaşı, 1999: 23)

For the most part of the 1950s and 1960s Turkey’s relations with Middle Eastern countries remained to be quite limited. While Turkey was pursuing pro-Western policies during those years, the rise of Arab nationalism accompanied with high popularity of anti-Western rhetoric in many Arab countries. Therefore, Turkey felt extremely isolated in the Middle East. In addition to Turkey’s pro-Western stance, Turkey’s relations with Syria were problematic on many grounds. Syria has never accepted annexation of Alexandretta (Hatay) to Turkey which took place in 1939. Until today, official Syrian maps show Alexandretta within Syria’s territory. In addition, especially during the 1980s, water dispute became another controversial issue in Turkey-Syria relations (Bölükbaşı, 1999: 24).

During the 1950s Cyprus was the most important issue in the Turkish foreign policy. Turkey aimed at receiving support from its allies in the West on Cyprus in order to make a desirable settlement on the island. However, Turkey could not get its Western allies’ support for Cyprus. Therefore, by 1964 Turkey had to review its relations with the US and the Middle Eastern countries. In order to get the support of the Middle Eastern countries on Cyprus, Turkey modified its relations with Israel (Karaosmanoglu, 1996: 12). Nevertheless, Turkey could get support neither from the US nor Arab countries. Turkey’s hopes were frustrated, because the Arab states mostly voted against the Turkish Cypriots in the UN and other international forums.

The Arab-Israeli war in 1967 was a critical juncture at Turkey’s Middle East policy. With that war, Turkey started to follow its own Middle East policy and provided greater support to the Palestinians. During the war Turkey did not allow the US to use the Turkish bases for resupplying Israel. In addition, after the end of the war, Turkey adopted a more pro-Arab stance. For the purpose of ending its isolation in the Middle East, Turkey took another step and decided to join various religiously affiliated organizations (Bölükbaşı, 1999: 26). In line with the policy followed in 1967 war, during the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, Turkey once again asked the US not to use military installations in Turkey to support Israel. On the other hand, the Turkish government allowed Soviet Union to cross the Turkish air space to re-supply Syria and Egypt during the same war (Karaosmanoglu, 1996: 12) and from 1974 on, Turkey consistently voted in the UN in favor of pro-Arab resolutions criticizing Israel.

The 1973 oil crisis was another factor which led Turkey to establish better relations with the Middle Eastern countries. In early 1980s, share of exports to Middle East from Turkey reached 44 percent of the total exports while Israel’s share remained below 1 percent (Bölükbaşı,

1999: 28). Turkish construction companies expanded their activities in the Middle East. Turgut Özal, who became prime minister in 1983 and president in 1989, sustained the policy of engagement with the Middle East. While assisting the Turkish companies to conclude highly profitable contracts in the region, Özal was also successful in attracting the Arab capital to Turkey. Hence, economic relations between Turkey and the Middle East developed quite well during the 1980s (Kirişçi, 1997).

Following the First Gulf War in 1991 the Turkish economic relations with the Arab countries deteriorated dramatically. Hence, in 1992 the Turkish exports to those countries were composing only 12 percent of Turkey's total exports. In the rest of the 1990s the figures remained around the same level (Waxman, 1999; Makovsky, 1999a). While Turkey's exports to the Middle Eastern countries were decreasing, volume of Israeli-Turkish trade was growing steadily. By the end of the 1990s Israel became Turkey's leading trade partner in the Middle East. This was a result of the Israeli-Turkish Free Trade Agreement signed in March 1996. In addition to foreign trade activities, hundreds of thousands Israeli tourists started to visit Turkey every year and created high sums of revenues to the Turkish tourism sector. Having a free trade agreement with Israel brought some other advantages to the Turkish companies. Since Israel also had free trade agreement with the US, an opportunity for reaching the US market showed up for the Turkish business people (Waxman, 1999: 29).

When the diplomatic relations investigated, it can be seen that in early 1980s Turkey-Israel relations deteriorated. Following the Israeli parliament's July 1980 decision to pass a law which declared that "Jerusalem united in its entirety is the capital of Israel," Turkey retaliated in August 1980 by closing its consulate in Jerusalem (Bölükbaşı, 1999: 26). It took six years for diplomatic relations to be normalized between Turkey and Israel (Israeli, 2001: 70-71). At the beginning of this paper, improvement of relations between Israel and Turkey during the 1990s was explained, but at the same time there were many other things going on between Turkey and its neighbors. For the purpose of this paper it is quite useful to briefly remember Turkey's relations with its Middle Eastern neighbors, especially Syria, Iraq, and Iran.

During the 1980s and 1990s Turkey had the most problematic relations with Syria. While water conflict and Syria's support to the PKK were the main obstacles in the two countries' relations, Hatay (Alexandretta) issue had less significance. In fact Syria is not the only party in water conflict with Turkey, Iraq is the third party at that conflict. The Euphrates and Tigris rivers are the main issue in that conflict. Those two rivers, with exception of the Nile which is not totally in the Middle East, are the two major and longest rivers in the Middle East. Both rivers originate in Turkey and cross Syria and Iraq before reaching the Persian Gulf.

The water dispute on the Euphrates and Tigris rivers has emerged from the fact that these two rivers cannot accommodate all demands of their riparian states, namely Turkey, Syria, and Iraq. The three countries need water of the two rivers not only for irrigation purposes and production of hydroelectricity but also for initiation of regional development projects. Hence, the three countries are highly dependent on the water of the two rivers and they have developed their own projects for use of these water resources. The biggest one of those projects is Turkey's Southeast Anatolia Project (*Güneydoğu Anadolu Projesi*, or GAP) which combines a series of huge irrigation and energy projects along with more than twenty dams. Especially after 1990, the year which one of the world's largest dam, Atatürk Dam, was completed, Syria and Iraq have raised their opposition to Turkey's policies about the rivers. Syria opted to support groups like

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PKK which were fighting against Turkey in order to balance Turkey's policies about water and Hatay issue.

As mentioned earlier, Syria has never officially accepted Turkey's incorporation of Hatay (Alexandretta) in 1939, which was part of Mandate Syria under the French rule in the post-World War I period. Until today, the official maps of Syria and several other Arab countries continued to show Hatay within Syrian borders. In Syria, for instance, nightly weather reports on television and school textbooks portray Hatay as a province within the Syrian national territories (Bölükbaşı, 1999: 24).

For many analysts the PKK has become the biggest threat against the Turkish state and its territorial integrity. The PKK was established in the 1970s under the leadership of Abdullah Öcalan. Originally the PKK was founded as a Marxist-Leninist organization fighting for independence of the Kurds living in Turkey. The PKK carried out its first attack against the Turkish soldiers in 1984 and by the end of 1998, according to Turkish government, around 40,000 people died in military clashes. During this time Syria continuously supported the PKK and provided military training facilities for the PKK members. In addition, from 1984 until Syria had to expel him in October 1998 as a result of military intervention threats from Turkey, Öcalan was living in Damascus, capital city of Syria (Bölükbaşı, 1999: 29; Yavuz, 1997; Altunışık, 2000).

At the end of Gulf War of 1991 the PKK found more convenient environment to increase its power due to absence of Iraqi government's control in Northern Iraq. While the PKK was enhancing its power, one of the most important benefits of alliance with Israel for Turkey was the access to information gathered by the Israeli intelligence community about the PKK. Additionally to this intelligence support, Israel also provided Turkey with military equipment and technology to fight effectively against the PKK (Altunışık, 2000).

As mentioned earlier, during the Gulf War of 1991 Turkey made big contributions to the anti-Iraq coalition by closing the Iraqi pipeline (through which Iraq exported more than half of its oil), permitting the allied coalition access to the Turkish military bases from which Iraqi targets were bombed, and deploying the Turkish Army along the Iraqi border. At the end of the war the no-fly zone which was created in the Northern Iraq to protect the Kurds living in the area, became the main concern of Turkey. In this area two strong Kurdish groups, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) led by Masud Barzani and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) led by Jلال Talabani, were fighting to gain the control over the region. Under those circumstances the PKK found it easier to ensure its presence in Northern Iraq. In May 1994 full-scale fighting broke out between the KDP and PUK. Due to ongoing internal clashes in Northern Iraq, the situation became much more complicated and by taking advantage of the situation the PKK established bases near the Turkish borders. As a response, Turkey launched several cross-border operations into Northern Iraq in order to prevent existence of the PKK in the area. During those operations Turkey cooperated with the KDP on some occasions and by 1997-98 the PKK's ability to operate from northern Iraq was significantly declined (Hale, 2000: 307-311).

Changes in domestic politics of Israel contributed to enhancing relations between Turkey and Israel. Compared to his two predecessors Yitzak Rabin and Shimon Peres, Binyamin Netanyahu who became the prime minister in Israel in May 1996 had a more hardline stance against Syria and the PKK. While Rabin and Peres hesitated in taking a position against the PKK,

Netanyahu clearly declared that he perceived the PKK as a terrorist organization and the activities for creation of an independent Kurdish state were not supported by Israel (Altunışık, 2000: 183). Cemil Bayık, one of PKK's leading figures, in an interview claimed that the PKK was a major target of the alliance between Israel and Turkey. Bayık especially stressed that Turkey was using various advanced military equipment provided by Israel at Turkish-Iraqi border and Israeli personnel played significant role at Turkey's cross-border operations into Iraq by providing assistance at planning and technological support (Olson, 1997).

After the Iran Islamic Revolution in 1979 mutual mistrust was dominant at Turkish-Iranian relations. With the exception of Erbakan and his followers, the Turkish leaders were convinced that the Iranian government was interfering into domestic affairs of Turkey during the 1990s. From the Turkish authorities' perspective, Iran was actively supporting fundamentalist religious groups which were targeting secular order in Turkey. Groups like Hezbollah were actively carrying out terrorist activities against Turkey during 1990s and the Turkish authorities were quite convinced that those groups were receiving continuous support from the Iranian regime which was aiming at transferring its Islamic order to other countries. In addition to Iran's support to the fundamentalist Islamic groups in Turkey, the PKK was another issue of disappointment for Turkey. Especially the Turkish military commanders were complaining that Iran was not putting a decisive effort to support Turkey's struggle against the PKK. Despite various agreements between Iran and Turkey, the PKK were setting camps on the Iranian side of the border and receiving logistical support from those regions (Kramer, 2000: 141-144).

## CONCLUSION

The main goal of this paper is to analyze the main reasons which led Turkey to form an alliance with Israel in the 1990s. In formation of this alliance policy changes have been in Turkish side, because as Pipes (1997: 35) stated, "as far as the basic Israeli motive concerned, there has been no essential change; since David Ben-Gurion's time, Jerusalem has always sought better relations with Turkey as a wedge to break the hostile ring of Arabic neighbors." From Israeli perspective, as a non-Arab secular state with Muslim population, Turkey was the best candidate for an alliance in the region.

At the beginning of this paper it is stated that the main Turkish foreign policy goals have been the maintenance of national independence, the protection of territorial integrity, and the preservation of the country's modernist, secularist, national regime. In evaluation of the three alternative approaches presented in previous pages, it is very useful to keep those Turkish foreign policy goals in mind in order to understand accurately Turkey's reasons for formation of an alliance with Israel.

The first approach claims that the Israeli-Turkish rapprochement is a pure result of the Turkish army's power in politics. According to this approach the Turkish Army stepped in the politics to take much more effective actions against Islamic fundamentalist movements which were increasing their powers in Turkey during the 1990s. Based on this approach the military commanders see themselves as the protector of the state's secular system and in order to curve Islamic groups' increasing influences in Turkey, those commanders had chosen to go on an alliance with a non-Muslim powerful state in the Middle East, Israel. This approach is very limited one and tries to explain Israeli-Turkish rapprochement based on Turkey's internal structure. The fact is that, the army had big influence in politics in Turkey during the 1980s and

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1990s, but this cannot explain the real reasons of the rapprochement. The army's role in politics may have contributed to enhance the speed of this alliance but the army did not create this alliance by itself.

When we examine the second approach which presents the Israeli-Turkish rapprochement as a result of the US's influences on Turkey, we should remember that Turkey has its own foreign policy goals. As I tried to indicate, the US-Turkey relations have developed during the periods which both countries had similar interests and deteriorated when these interests were diverged, as in the case of Cyprus crisis. Therefore we should expect Turkey-US relations to develop further when common interests and common perceptions and priorities regarding those interests exist (Duman, 2011). Obviously, the US has supported the alliance between Israel and Turkey and benefited from it, but this does not mean that the rapprochement was pure result of the US's wishes. The US has always supported Israel but the Turkish-Israeli rapprochement was seen only after the beginning of the 1990s. If the US influence on Turkey was the only reason to the Israeli-Turkish rapprochement, this rapprochement should have taken place much earlier. From here we can conclude that the alliance was not totally a result of the US's policies.

As Makovsky (1999b) stated, "strategic considerations dominated Turkey's thinking in building ties to Israel. The primary objective was to put pressure on Syria for its support of anti-Turkish terrorist groups, primarily the PKK." In 1998 by putting pressure on Syria, Turkey gained what it wanted and the PKK leader was expelled from Syria. Turkey's rapprochement with Israel was a crucial factor for Syrian government to take steps backwards from escalation with Turkey. Another important factor which led Turkey to establish alliance with Israel was purpose of gaining technological support in military affairs. Since Turkey was experiencing various problems in receiving such support from the Western countries, Israel's support was quite important. From the Turkish perspective, an alliance with Israel would be also quite helpful in getting the Jewish lobby's support in the US and that would help Turkey to balance activities of the Greek, Armenian and other anti-Turkish lobbies in the US (Makovsky, 1999b).

During the 1990s Israel had serious problems with states which also Turkey had problems in the Middle East, namely Syria, Iraq, and Iran. If we follow 'my enemy's enemy is my friend' approach, at that time, for Turkey, Israel was the best candidate for forming an alliance, and vice versa. As one Turkish military staff stated "We are surrounded on all sides by trouble. We are in hot seat. It is crucial for us to jump outside this circle of chaos and find friends in the region. Israel was the perfect choice" (Quoted in Bengio and Özcan, 2000).

We should remember that at the time which Turkey established the alliance with Israel, the most important national interest of Turkey, territorial integrity, was under serious threat because of rising power of the PKK. Syria was supporting the PKK, the water was getting to be an important source of conflict and hence, Turkey's relations with Syria were worsening. On the other hand, after the Gulf War the PKK increased its power in the Northern Iraq and Turkish relations with Iran were also deteriorated. From the economic standpoint, while Turkey's economic relations with the Arab states were deteriorating, relations with Israel continuously improved during the 1990s (Sariaslan, 2019).

The Turkish-Israeli rapprochement in the 1990s came out of this great picture, as a result of the balance of power and complicated relation links in the Middle East. Although, Turkey and Israel have had series of disagreements and some serious conflicts like the "*Mavi Marmara*"

incident over the last two decades, they sustained cooperation on various areas. Therefore, it is highly possible that the Turkish-Israeli relations will continue to be important as long as they help to fulfill the national interests of both countries.

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## GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

### 1990'LARDA İSRAİL-TÜRKİYE YAKINLAŞMASI: NEDEN BİR İTTİFAK?

Türkiye-İsrail ilişkilerinde 1990'larda hızla gelişme görülmüştür. İki ülke arasında daha önce görülmemiş düzeyde yakınlaşmanın kısa sürede görülmesinin arkasında yatan sebepler konusunda oldukça farklı açıklamalar yapılmıştır. Çoğu kişiye göre, Türkiye'nin İsrail'le ilişkilerinin iyileşmesi doğrudan Türkiye'de ordunun siyasetteki rolü ile bağlantılıdır. Ancak bu açıklama, çalışmada açıklandığı üzere, iki ülkenin ilişkilerinin gelişiminde kısmen etkili olsa da, tek başına süreci açıklamakta yetersiz kalmaktadır. Bu çalışmada esas üzerinde durulan soru Türkiye'yi 1990'larda İsrail ile böylesi yoğun ilişkiye girmeye yol açan etmenlerin neler olduğunu olduğu ortaya koymaktır.

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Çalışmanın esas sorusunu yanıtlayabilmek amacıyla, öncelikle 1990'lardaki Türkiye-İsrail ilişkilerinin gelişimi incelenmiştir. Türkiye'nin özellikle 1980'lerde ivme kazanan Güneydoğu Anadolu Projesi'nin etkisiyle Suriye ile ilişkilerinin iyice gergin hale gelmiş, buna karşılık da Suriye'nin PKK'ya olan desteğini arttırmıştır. Bu ortamda, 1986 yılında Türkiye ile İsrail arasında ilk önemli temaslar kurulurken intifada hareketinin başlaması ve Türkiye'nin Filistinlilere yönelik desteği nedeniyle iki ülke ilişkileri bu dönemde daha fazla gelişmemiştir. 1991'de Birinci Körfez Savaşı'nın sona ermesi Türkiye-İsrail ilişkilerinin gelişebileceği koşulların ortaya çıkmasını sağlamıştır. 1991 Madrid Konferansı'nda Filistin Kurtuluş Örgütü ve çok sayıda Arap ülkesinin İsrail ile barış anlaşması imzalamasıyla Türkiye açısından İsrail ile ilişkileri geliştirmenin önünde herhangi bir engel kalmamış oldu. Aynı yılın sonunda Türkiye İsrail'deki diplomatik temsilciliğini büyükelçilik seviyesine yükseltirken iki ülkenin ilişkileri hızlı bir gelişme dönemine girmiş oldu. 1992'de ilk defa İsrail devlet başkanı Türkiye'yi ziyaret ederken Türkiye'den de İsrail'e devletin en üst kademelerinden ziyaretler bunu takip etti. Bu dönemde iki ülke arasında turizmden ekonomiye, dış ilişkilerden savunma endüstrilerine kadar çok çeşitli alanlarda çok sayıda anlaşma imzalandı. İki ülke arasında söz konusu dönemde özellikle askeri alanda yapılan anlaşmalar ve yaşanan işbirliği oldukça dikkat çekmiş, dünya kamuoyunun gündemine oturmuştur.

Çalışmada Türkiye ile İsrail arasında 1990'lardaki yakınlaşmayı açıklamak üzere üç farklı açıklama sunulmuştur. İlk yaklaşımda, Türkiye'nin iç siyasal yapısı, özellikle ordunun dış politika yapımındaki rolü üzerinde durulmuştur. Türkiye'de cumhuriyetin kuruluşundan 1990'ların sonlarına kadar ordunun siyasetteki konumu dikkate alınarak dış politikada son derece etkili olduğu göz önünde bulundurulmuştur. Böylesi bir yapı içerisinde orduya rağmen dış politikada radikal değişikliklerin pek mümkün olmadığı ve ordunun İsrail ile yakınlaşma konusunda ciddi destek verdiği belirtilmiştir.

İkinci olarak, Türkiye-İsrail ilişkilerinin ABD'nin politikaları nedeniyle geliştiğine dair yaklaşım üzerinde durulmuştur. Türkiye'de farklı dünya görüşüne sahip önde gelen çok sayıda kişi Türkiye-İsrail ilişkilerinin gelişiminin esas sebebinin ABD'nin Ortadoğu politikaları olduğu ileri sürmüş ve bu söylem oldukça taraftar bulmuştur. Bu bakış açısına göre, Türkiye'nin kendi bağımsız dış politikası bulunmamakta, tamamen ABD tarafından belirlenmektedir. Ancak Türkiye ile ABD arasındaki ilişkiler incelendiğinde bu yaklaşım çok da geçerli görünmemektedir. Nitekim, İkinci Dünya Savaşı sonrasında, özellikle Sovyet tehdidi nedeniyle hızla gelişen ve NATO şemsiyesi altında bir ittifak halini alan Türkiye-ABD ilişkileri tarihsel süreçte çeşitli iniş çıkışlara maruz kalmış, Türkiye çıkarları örtüştüğü zaman ABD ile hareket ederken, Kıbrıs krizinde olduğu gibi, zaman zaman ABD'ye rağmen kendi dış politika kararlarını hayata geçirmiştir.

Türkiye-İsrail ilişkilerinin 1990'larda gelişmesine dair üzerinde durulan son yaklaşımda ise Ortadoğu'daki uluslararası ilişkiler ve güç dengesi analiz edilmiş, Türkiye-İsrail yakınlaşmasına etkileri tartışılmıştır. Türkiye'de cumhuriyetin kuruluşundan itibaren karar alıcılar, yeni ülkeyi modern hale getirme çabalarının önemli bir parçası olarak, dış ilişkilerde Arap ülkeleri ile araya mesafe koymaya çalışılırken Batılı devletler ile yakınlaşmaya çaba göstermiştir. Türkiye, Mart 1949'da kuruluşunun üzerinden henüz bir yıl geçmeden İsrail'in resmi olarak tanıdığı ve böylelikle nüfusunun çoğunluğu Müslüman olup İsrail devletini tanıyan ilk devlet olmuştur. 1950'ler ve 1960'ların önemli bir kısmında, Batı yanlısı politikaları benimsemesi nedeniyle Türkiye'nin Ortadoğu ilişkileri oldukça sınırlı kalmıştır. 1964'te Kıbrıs

krizi nedeniyle dış politikada destek arayışına giren Türkiye bu nedenle Ortadoğu ile ilişkilerini geliştirmeye çalışmıştır. 1967 Arap-İsrail savaşı Türkiye'nin Ortadoğu politikasında önemli dönüm noktalarında biri olmuştur. Bu savaş sırasında ABD'nin İsrail'i desteklemek amacıyla Türkiye'deki üsleri kullanmasına izin verilmezken, savaşın ardından Türkiye Arap yanlısı politika izlemeye başlamıştır. Benzer biçimde, 1973'teki Arap-İsrail savaşında da Türkiye ABD'nin üslerini kullanmasına izin vermezken, Sovyetler Birliği'nin Türkiye'nin hava sahasını kullanıp Suriye ve Mısır'a destek sağlamasına müsaade etmiştir. İlave olarak, 1974'ten itibaren Türkiye Birleşmiş Milletler'de İsrail'i kınayan Arap yanlısı kararlara destek vermiştir. Özellikle Turgut Özal döneminde Türkiye Ortadoğu ile ekonomik ilişkilerini geliştirmiştir. 1991 Birinci Körfez Savaşı'nın ardından ise Türkiye'nin Ortadoğu ülkeleri ile ekonomik ilişkileri kötüleşirken İsrail ile ilişkiler hızlı bir gelişme dönemine girmiştir. Her yıl yüzbinlerce İsraili turist Türkiye'yi ziyaret etmeye başlamış, İsrail Türkiye'nin Ortadoğu'daki en önde gelen ticaret ortağı haline gelmiştir. 1990'larda Türkiye, komşuları Suriye ve Irak ile dış politikada su sorunu, terör dahil olmak üzere önemli sorunlar yaşarken, İran ile de çeşitli problemler yaşamaktaydı. Bu ortamda İsrail ile yakınlaşmak Türkiye için oldukça önemli avantajları beraberinde getirmekteydi.

Sonuç olarak, 1990'lardaki Türkiye-İsrail yakınlaşmasında, üzerinde durulan faktörler başta olmak üzere, diğer önemli hususların katkı yaptığı söylemek mümkündür. Ancak bu çalışma, iki ülkenin 1990'lardaki yakınlaşmasının ardında yatan esas sebebin Ortadoğu'daki güç dengesi ve karmaşık ilişkiler olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır.