

ALTERNATIVES

Turkish Journal Of International Relations

Volume 1 Number 1 Spring 2002

THE ACADEMIC PERCEPTIONS OF TURKISH- ISRAELI RELATIONS

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A frequently ignored or neglected component of foreign policy studies is the role of analysts in both the formulation of public policies and their attempts to legitimize or de-legitimize certain policies in the eyes of both policy makers and the public. Public policy analysts are considered to be experts, members of epistemic communities; what is important for our purposes here, however, are the transnational alliances among them. In addition to national-level efforts of epistemic communities, analysts also attempt to garner international audiences through the publication of books, articles, op-eds, media instruments, lectures, and participation in international organizations. These audiences allow them to forge transnational links that have an impact on the course of international politics. The intellectual products of public-policy analysts/critics help to redefine and redirect policy makers' expectations and perceptions, subsequently leading to policy reform or modification.

Often, a convergence of interest among different analysts motivates them to adopt the same position. The positions of analysts vary according to their worldviews, interpretation of events, and their distance from decision-makers—as well as their perceptions of the interests that are involved, including their own. The relations between analysts and state functionaries is generally unstable, subject to change depending on

the issues at stake and decision-makers' willingness to allow policy analysts to have an authentic voice or input in the formation of public policy. One well-known scholar, who has studied the relationship between foreign policy development and academia, emphasizes the gap that exists between scholars of international relations and the foreign policy establishment. He suggests that the tendency of scholars to give priority to theoretical concerns deepens the gap that exists between the two communities.¹ Generally speaking, criticism and advice on the part of academics, directed to foreign policy makers, is taken into consideration by the latter only if it is directly targeted to the articulation and justification of current policies. Some analysts, therefore, tend to be pragmatic, practical, and policy oriented, attempting to synthesize pragmatic and intellectual concerns in their intellectual contributions. Although the last word always belongs to the policy-makers, nevertheless, experts do have a considerable impact on policy formulation through the contribution of their normative and theoretical reasoning.

In no other discipline are analysts as closely involved with the state as in international relations. A rationalist account of state behavior tends to oversimplify our understanding of how the foreign policy decision making process works; this is especially true of those accounts which adopt strict statist or nationalist perspectives in analyses of the dynamics of international relations. This inclination to over-emphasize state interests tends to impede the full development of international relations as an independent discipline. Analysts' nationalistic tendencies and self-definition along the lines of specific policy paths are widespread, even in international relations education. This tends to create a vicious cycle or spiral that serves to perpetuate the generation of

nationalist/statist minded analysts. Another dimension of this direction of inquiry has to do with what is called "policy entrepreneurship" which has become a profession that is especially visible among the Washington, DC policy-making community, including research institutes, special-interest lobbies, and think-thanks. These analysts work for the enhancement and justification of certain interests and positions, and, in some cases, to block legislation that is seen as potentially detrimental to the interests in question. In some cases, they even enter into polemics and adopt hostile attitudes to those that favor or represent different interests and positions.²

Expert communities play important roles in the formation of negative and positive positions with respect to certain public policy trends and they do exercise an important influence over the process of foreign policy development. The focus of this article, is on those analysts who have taken a special interest in Turkish-Israeli relations. Our aim is to explore and elucidate the perspectives of those analysts and their input on the decision making process. These analysts hold common, as well as divergent and even confrontational views with respect to the reasons behind the course of development of Turkish-Israeli relations; therefore, they assess the impact of these relations on regional and global actors in different ways. Recently, discussions of what is seen as the declining importance of Turkish-Arab relations and a concomitant warming of Turco-Israeli relations have been very common. Traditional perceptions of who are enemies and who are allies, therefore, is increasingly being called into question in the Middle East, which calls for a reevaluation of the structural and conjunctural determinants of the foreign policies in the region.

Political analysts are, of course, well aware that Turkish-Israeli relations are not free of problems and include multiple variables that should be taken into consideration. What is clear is that these relations are an extension of the changing dynamics of the domestic politics of the two countries. Turkish-Israeli relations are an especially clear example of the way in which national identity serves to guide foreign policy decisions. A Western identity for Turkey and a Middle Eastern identity for Israel are a crucial preoccupation of the ruling establishments of these states. The rapid flux of ideological and foreign policy development, however, makes it difficult to clearly identify the roles that identity issues and *realpolitik* have played in the acceleration of relations between Turkey and Israel in the 1990s. In the discussion of the literature that follows, special attention is paid to U.S involvement and what have been seen as the negative consequences of the development of closer relations between Turkey and Israel.

The Relevance of Turco-Arab Relations

Turkish foreign policy makers have long tried their best not to become involved in either inter-Arab relations or the Arab-Israeli conflict, the latter stance sometimes being interpreted as pro-Arab. During the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli conflicts, for example, Turkey refused to give permission for the use of its military bases; it benefited from this stance during the second oil crisis caused by OPEC policy. This stance of complete neutrality has become part of history, however, after Turkey's active involvement in the second Gulf crisis and with the emergence of Turkish-Israeli axis in the region. Suha Bolukbasi, professor of international relations at Middle East Technical University, highlights the importance of this relationship, emphasizing the profound impact that Turkish-Israeli relations are having on Turkish-Arab relations. Indeed, apart

from Turkish concern that Israel would evolve into a socialist state, relations between Turkey and Israel from the 1950s to the 1990s were a direct reflection of Turkey's concerns with Arabs. By the 1950s, Turkey's unequivocal decision to support the pro-American axis in the Cold War forced decision makers in Ankara to seek closer relations with Israel. Nevertheless, Ankara has always paid considerable attention to Arab concerns and the status of its relationship with the Arab states has always been an important factor taken into consideration in the formulation of Mideast policy.

Bolukbasi sees Ankara's need for oil in the 1970s as a factor of central and critical importance, causing it to seek a multidimensional policy, especially as a result of the Johnson letter and the Cyprus question. By the 1970s and early 1980s, the lack of Arab support concerning the Cyprus issue, their lack of attention to the mistreatment of Bulgarian Turks, tensions over water rights, and differences over ASALA and PKK activities, put an end to high levels of economic and political relations between Turkey and some Arab countries. The main thrust of Bolukbasi's argument suggests that Turkish decision-makers replaced solidarity with Arabs to the strategic cooperation with Israel, gradually coming to see the Tel Aviv administration as its main partner in Middle East politics.³

My Enemy's Enemy in Regional Context

According to Mahmut Bali Aykan, lecturer at Yeditepe University in Istanbul, Turkish-Israeli relations are based on a rationale of joining hands against common enemies, so called "rogue" states, or countries that are seen as a mutual security threat.⁴ The concept of "rogue states" changes depending on the perception of the analysts; a very broad interpretation of the term, given by Daniel Pipes, former editor of Middle

East Quarterly, includes Iraq, Syria, Iran, Greek Cyprus, and the Palestinian Authority. Meliha Altunisik, another academic from METU, sees the rise of Turkish-Israeli relations in the context of redefined Turkish national interests, which give priority to the survival of the regime and the preservation of territorial integrity.⁵ Pipes and Altunisik agree that the most important security challenges to the Turkish State are the PKK's separatist activities and Islamic fundamentalism. From Israel's point of view, the threats are Islamic fundamentalism and the possibility of rogue states' acquiring weapons of mass destruction, especially nuclear weapons. Since these problems tend to emanate from Iran and Syria for Turkey and also from Iran and Iraq for Israel, these two countries entered into a security pact with the backing of the U.S.

In addition to Pipes, Aykan, and Altunisik, Don Waxman, a Ph.D. candidate at John Hopkins University, also argues that this alliance has increased the security and strategic importance of these two states in the region.⁶ Given that security is their common bond, cooperation first developed in the military realm, with respect to weaponry upgrades, military training, and intelligence sharing. As noted by Amikam Nachmani, a professor of international relations at Bar-Illan University, the early treaties that were signed remained classified information since they had strategic military importance.⁷

Another critical issue at stake in this discussion is the possibility of a counter-alliance to the Turkish-Israeli axis. Waxman considers the probability of the formation of such an alliance to be very low, however, due to the failures of Arabs to unite in the past. He contends that Arabs have far too many conflicts amongst themselves, over a variety of issues, for such a counter-alliance to develop.⁸ Pipes, however, does consider

an Iranian-Syrian alliance as a possible option. He also believes, however, that this alliance would be ineffective and probably dissolve in a short period of time. He does not see any chance of a counter-alliance developing in the region that would be capable of challenging the Turkish-Israeli-American axis. Even though Arab states have felt uneasy with the establishment of close ties between Turkey and Israel, therefore, as Pipes suggests, there is little that they can do about it.⁹ Although Waxman's pessimism concerning Arab solidarity seems justified, if one recalls Arab attitudes concerning the Palestinian issue, some level of Arab solidarity does seem to be plausible. Neither Pipes nor Waxman pay sufficient attention to the WMDs stocked by Iran, Iraq, and Syria and the possible disasters of any hot conflict in the Middle East. Pipes, in particular, appears quite preoccupied with defending the position of the most powerful bloc, and bent on humiliating the "rogue" states in the region.

The Coalition of Like-Minded States

In these analyses, there is a widely accepted idea that Turkey and Israel are the only two democratic, Western-oriented, and non-Arab states in the region, and that they are, therefore, in need of each other. These analysts offer several psychological reasons that brought these states together: "a sense of otherness,"¹⁰ "a sense of isolation,"¹¹ and "a fear of marginalization."¹² The years following the end of the Cold War created a dilemma for Turkey's Western orientation, however, in particular with respect to relations with the new European Union and the emergence of new problems with the United States. In this atmosphere, Turkish foreign policy makers' perception of Israel as a Western country served to further strengthen the development of relations between the two countries. Aykan emphasizes the fact that Turkey has serious problems with the

U.S. with respect to three highly problematic and related issues: human rights, the development of democracy, and the Kurdish issue. These issues have led to problems with the United States and the European Union with respect to Turkey's purchasing weapons. As noted by Aykan, Israel's advanced defense industry, therefore, has become an additional motivational factor for Turkey to move closer to Israel, since it serves as an alternative source of military equipment.

On the other hand, Israel gives the impression of being an isolated state, surrounded by more or less hostile Arab neighbors that do not feel very friendly to Tel Aviv administration. Turkish-Israeli cooperation has helped to divide the Islamic world in terms of developing a common anti-Israeli stance, thereby increasing Israel's sense of security. These perceptions of having common problems and orientations helped to pave the way for increasingly close ties between Turkey and Israel and has even raised the possibility of other states being included in the alliance. Barry Rubin, editor of Turkish Studies and the MERIA Journal, sees the alliance between Israel and Turkey as a natural result of the fact that they are the only two democratic, secular, Western, and non-Arab states in the region.¹³ Pipes agrees, adding that this bilateral relationships not only enhance Turkey's Western identity but also Israel's Middle Eastern identity, providing legitimacy to its existence in this region.¹⁴ This idea of strengthening Israel's Middle East identity contradicts with Pipes' earlier *realpolitik* mentality. What Pipes needs to explain is exactly how or why this high profile alliance, based largely upon the common threat of "rogue" states, could help Israel to gain further legitimacy in the region. He points to a central dilemma or contradiction facing the Israeli state: while trying to maintain an upper hand against its Arab neighbors, Israeli decision-makers

also attempt to enhance Israel's Middle East identity and to integrate itself into the region. Pipes' balance of power account of international relations might prove true with respect to Jordan's and pro-Western Gulf States' joining this new Turkish-Israeli axis in the near future, but this still falls short of providing a secure Middle East for Israel.

The Relations Through Identity Debate

It is difficult to find another example in the Middle East of how domestic politics played such a determinant and open role as it has in the development of Turkish-Israeli relations. Two conflicting region-wide views emerge concerning Turkish-Israeli relations, both of which need to be taken into account. In February 1997, the Iranian ambassador Mohammad-Reza Baqeri addressed a group of people amidst chants of God is Great (*Allah-u Ekber*), marking the anniversary of Jerusalem Day, in Sincan (a district of Ankara). Speaking beneath posters of Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hizballah leaders, Baqeri conveyed the message that those who sign agreements with the United States and Israel will, sooner or later, be penalized. This public stance of the Iranian ambassador, according to some analysts, was taken so seriously by the ruling secular elite that it became a key factor in the military's decision to bring down the government of the Islamic Welfare Party led by Necmettin Erbakan. Pipes sees this development as something unique to Turkey, arguing that only in secular Turkey could such a development happen in the Middle East. Waxman and Gil Dibner explain this policy behavior as a result of the efforts by the military to prevent the Islamization of foreign policy in this period via accelerating relations with Israel at the expense of the Welfare Party.¹⁵ Ironically, on the other hand, Nachmani quotes the spokesman of the Israeli parliament as saying that Turkey could no longer be considered to be a

democratic country after the ousting of the Welfare Party.¹⁶ Aykan notes as well how the current state of democracy in Turkey is very problematic in the eyes of European policy makers and even a source of friction between Turkey and the U.S.

M.Hakan Yavuz, professor of political science at the University of Utah, suggests that Turkish- Israeli relations should be analyzed in the context of the deepening polarization between Turkey's secular elite and the religiously oriented segments of society. He argues that the Turkish establishment perceives its primary enemies to be Kurds and Islamists and that its openly declared and intensified struggle against these threats has brought the secular establishment closer to Israel. As stated above, foreign relations, especially in this case, is largely a function of domestic politics, turning foreign policy into an internal game. As the logic goes, if the difficulties arising from Islamic and Kurdish demands constitute a domestic threat, then improving relations with Israel will help Turkey to at least maintain the facade of being a Western-style democracy, which, in turn, will help it to overcome problems at home. Yavuz bases part of his argument on M. Lutfullah Karaman, a professor of international relations at Fatih University. Karaman argues that relations with Israel represent a conscious choice of "official Turkey" and reflect its determination to suppress civil society.¹⁷ Altunisik sheds light on this issue in a different way by arguing that Turkish foreign policy makers' orientations have resulted from a redefinition of Turkish national interests by the military dominated National Security Council (NSC). The NSC updates its understanding and definition of national interests at two-year intervals. As mentioned above, "Islamic fundamentalism" and separatist activities have become the two major concerns for the secular establishment and, in this sense, enhancing relations with Israel

can be seen as an extension of the changing priorities related to the concept of national security.¹⁸

The question also needs to be dealt with of how the development of Turkish-Israeli relations have been perceived by the Turkish and Israeli people. Though there is little agreement on this issue, all analysts accept that the respective military elites have played important roles in enhancing these relations, noting, in particular, initiatives made by former General Cevik Bir. Waxman argues that agreements between Turkey and Israel have widely been perceived by the Turkish population as an agreement between generals.¹⁹ Yavuz blames Bir for leading the anti-Islamic crusade by means of *inter alia*, developing relations with Israeli hardliners. This issue remains open and is somewhat difficult to address given the way that Turkish foreign policy making is highly bureaucratic and elite dominated; generally speaking, there is little attention paid to grassroots support in the formation of foreign policy. Nevertheless, empirical research on the Turkish and Israeli populations on this issue would undoubtedly be most illuminating.

Negative Consequences and Difficulties

Turkish-Israeli relations are not free of problems, since each nation has different motivations and incentives for the development of these relations. Some analysts have also touched upon the negative consequences and difficulties that are presently faced or will be faced in the future. Bolukbasi points out the significance of Arab dissent, for example. Although Pipes sees few potential problems between the two states of the new axis which he wholeheartedly endorses, he does acknowledge that Turkish and Israeli policy makers have very different motivations. He proposes that Israeli incentives

include the enlargement of air space to train their pilots, Using Turkish territory to that watch Iran, Iraq, and Syria, while Ankara looks to Israeli for help against the PKK and favorable terms from Israel's advanced defense industry. However, as Nachmani suggests, Israeli attitudes towards Kurds are very much a question of domestic politics. Turkish foreign policy makers are unlikely to get the kind of support in this regard from a Labor government that they might have expected from the Netanyahu government.

Rubin and Aykan focus on the importance of differences over policies towards Iraq, Syria, and Iran. As Rubin put points out, Ankara is supportive of Iraq's territorial integrity and very sensitive to the possibility of a Kurdish state in northern Iraq. While the Israeli administration generally favors the status quo, it is not happy with the Turkish position supporting the integrity of Iraqi territory. In addition, Israel worries about Turkey's good neighborhood policy towards Iran. On the other hand, Ankara has tried to harden Israeli policy towards Syria since Turkish policy makers are concerned about the continuation of Israeli support following a possible Israeli-Syrian peace accord.²⁰ Another problem highlighted by Altunisik is that there is no agreement on the Cyprus issue between Ankara and Tel Aviv.²¹ Yavuz also contends that enhancing relations with Israel will not help Turkey's secular establishment to improve its relations with the U.S, as they expected. As he sees it, these unfulfilled expectations may lead to serious problems in the future. It should be added, however, that the analysts under discussion do not see these potential problems associated with Turkish-Israeli relations as especially grave, at least with the possible exception of Yavuz.

The Role for the United States

Although some analysts have suggested that the U.S. has approved and encouraged the development of these relations, there is no consensus on the issue and are even some contradictory views. Pipes sees U.S. involvement as a positive contribution in the formation of this new axis. He goes even further by describing this development as an historical opportunity for the U.S. to maintain a strong bloc in the region of pro-Western and pro-U.S. allies.²² Pipes' argument, however, is problematic. What is seen as American over-involvement in Middle East politics is often criticized by its allies, even though they benefit from the consequent stability of the region. In effect, many of the regional states are mainly security consumers, forcing the U.S. to maintain a heavy presence and involvement in the Middle East. This, however, tends to alienate indigenous populations and cause resentment against America, further exposing U.S. military bases to local aggression. Pipes tends to pay lip service to regional facts and present what may well be an overly optimistic view of further U.S. involvement in the region.

Rubin follows Pipes in considering the U.S. involvement from a positive point of view. Waxman, however, is more critical. He opposes the idea of increasing U.S. intervention as he thinks that it may aggravate the Arab side and even debilitate Turkish-Israeli relations. Aykan adds another dimension to the discussion by outlining the reluctance of Turkish officials to support further U.S. military involvement in the Middle East. He also argues that Turkey and the U.S. have different approaches with respect to Syrian policy towards the PKK.²³ The United States' support of Turkey in

the arrest of Abdullah Ocalan, head of the PKK, demonstrates, however, that Aykan's suggestion may not be well founded.

Conclusion

Will enhanced Turkish-Israeli relations lead to a more stable and peaceful Middle East? The answer to this question differs according to the perceptions of the analysts. Bolukbasi, for example, sees a tendency towards conflict, citing a Syrian official who sees increasing Turkish-Israeli ties as an anti-peace development.²⁴ Pipes accepts the short run destabilizing impact of these relations for the region. However, along with Nachmani, he projects a more stable and peaceful Middle East in the long run.²⁵ This widespread optimism about the future of the Middle East is the same with respect to the future of relations between Turkey and Israel. In Yavuz's reference to Cengiz Candar, however, a senior columnist, we are presented with an alternative view. Candar argues that enhancing Turkish-Israeli relations at the expense of Arabs will isolate Turkey in the Middle East and that Turkey should not hold its Middle East policy hostage to its relations with Israel.²⁶ The increasing number of high level visits, however, newly signed agreements and, most importantly, policy makers' declared will to continue improving relations between Turkey and Israel shows that optimistic accounts of the relationship are dominant among policy makers on both sides. The perceptions and arguments of the analysts--with a few limited deviations—are not much different than that of policy makers; in a way, the two reinforce each other. As Khan suggests, Foucaultian understandings of the relationship between power and knowledge are self evident in the foreign policy making process, given the translation of knowledge

into foreign policy.²⁷ Analysts' attempts to articulate and justify the current policy line should be understood from this perspective.

Interestingly, all analysts, with the exception of Yavuz, follow the realist school of thought, at least on this subject. Realism can be described as a *homogenizing* doctrine in international relations in the sense that—by equalizing states as unitary and functionally undifferentiated elements of the international system—it homogenizes the actors of international politics as states, having exogenously-given identities and seeking previously defined interests. The individualistic-rationalistic epistemology of the realist school²⁸ presupposes state identities and interests as already given, and adopts an *acontextual* and *unvarying* conception of the international actor. According to this conception, actor properties are intrinsic to actors themselves, and they are independent of the surrounding context.

The analysts considered here who focus on Turkish-Israeli relations considers culture and identity to be epiphenomenal, variables of secondary importance. They follow the rationale that dominated much of the Cold War, marking the geopolitical division of the Globe into two blocks, East and the West, two superpowers driven by an underlying ideological clash. The reflection of this kind of understanding as applied to the politics of the Middle East politics gives rise to rational-actor theories of strategic behavior, namely states taking sides with one of two dominant blocs. Both the actual course of international relations and the main theoretical conceptions that persisted throughout the Cold War, therefore, mutually reinforced each other with the help of international relations analysts. Our conclusion, therefore, base on our review of the scholarly articles focusing on Turkish-Israeli relations, is that the traditional role of

analysts of international relations—from various backgrounds, positions, orientations and nationalities—has not changed much. These analysts continued to see the course of international relations in polarized terms, as if they were trapped in a Cold-War mentality from which they cannot escape. What is more, these kinds of analyses tend to reinforce the actual course of international relations, continuing a process of polarization that is, in the opinion of this writer, anachronistic, and no longer becoming or suitable in a post-Cold war international order.

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Notes

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 - ² M.A. Muqtedar Khan, "Policy Entrepreneurs in Washington," *Middle East Policy*, Vol:5, No:1, (October 1997).
 - ³ Suha Bolukbasi, "Behind The Turkish- Israeli Alliance: A Turkish View," *Journal of Palestinian Studies*, Vol: 29, No: 1, (Autumn 1999), pp.28-29.
 - ⁴ Mahmut Bali Aykan, "The Turkey-US- Israel Triangle: Continuity, Change, and Implications for Turkey's post-Cold War Middle East Policy," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol: 22, No: 4, (Summer 1999), p.7.
 - ⁵ Meliha Altunisik, "The Turkish- Israeli Rapprochement in the Post- Cold War Era," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol: 36, No: 2, (April 2000), p. 178
 - ⁶ Don Waxman, "Turkey and Israel: A New Balance of Power in the Middle East," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol.22, No.1 (Winter 1999), p.29
 - ⁷ Amicam Nachmani, "The Remarkable Turkish- Israeli Tie," *Middle East Quarterly*, (June 1998), p.22
 - ⁸ Waxman, p.29
 - ⁹ Daniel Pipes, "A New Axis: The Emerging Turkish- Israeli Entente," *National Interest*, No.50 (Winter 1997/1998) pp. 38-39
 - ¹⁰ Pipes, pp.35-36

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- ¹¹ Gil Dibner, "My Enemy's Enemy: Turkey, Israel, and the Middle Eastern Balance of Power," *Harvard International Review*, Vol: 21, No.1, (Winter 1998/1999), pp.34-35; Nachmani, p.22; Waxman, p.31.
- ¹² Alan Gresh, "Turkish- Israeli- Syrian Relations and Their Impact on the Middle East," *The Middle East Journal*, Vol: 52, No:2, (Spring 1998).
- ¹³ Barry Rubin, "Article on Turkish- Israeli Relations," *MERIA News*, No.7, (July 1997), at <http://meria.biu.ac.il>; Nachmani p.19; Waxman, p.33.
- ¹⁴ Pipes, pp.36-37.
- ¹⁵ Waxman p.32; Dibner, p.39.
- ¹⁶ Nachmani, p.22.
- ¹⁷ Hakan Yavuz, "Turkish- Israeli Relations, Through The Lens of the Turkish Identity Debate," *Journal of Palestinian Studies*, Vol. 27, No:1, (Autumn 1997), p.31
- ¹⁸ Altunisik, p.181
- ¹⁹ Waxman, p.29
- ²⁰ Rubin; Aykan, pp.18-20.
- ²¹ Altunisik, p.178.
- ²² Pipes, p.39.
- ²³ Aykan, pp.12-13.
- ²⁴ Bolukbasi, p.33.
- ²⁵ Pipes, p.38.
- ²⁶ Yavuz, p.33.
- ²⁷ Khan, p.27.
- ²⁸ Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy Is What States Make of It: the Social Construction of Power Politics", *International Organization*, Vol.46, No. 2, (Spring 1992), p. 391.