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## Two Sides of the Same Coin in Russia-Israel Relations: Conflict and Cooperation

*Rusya-İsrail İlişkilerinde Madalyonun İki Yüzü: Çatışma ve İşbirliği*

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### Abstract

One of the important components of Russian foreign policy is its relations with Israel. Since the establishment of Israel in 1948, Russia has attached great importance to its relations with this country. There are various areas of cooperation and conflict in the relations between the two countries. It is a reflection of the Kremlin's traditional pragmatist policy that Russia strives to maintain cooperation with Israel despite having different interests in many areas. The aim of this study is to examine the ongoing conflict and cooperation in Russia's relations with Israel and to answer the question of how Moscow has managed to maintain both forms of relations in the same period. In this context, the study examines the parameters around which conflict and cooperation initiatives have developed in bilateral relations. Moscow's Iran and Palestine policies "despite Israel", as well as its links with Hamas and Hezbollah, represent the conflict dimension of bilateral relations. The other side of the coin is the areas of cooperation between the two countries. An important factor that catalyzes cooperation, especially in security-oriented policies, is the Russian diaspora in Israel. In this direction, content analysis, one of the scientific research methods, was used in this study, and discourse analysis was also used from time to time. In addition to academic publications examining the issue in question, the study draws on leaders statements, historical records and official foreign policy documents.

**Keywords:** Russia, Israel, Conflict, Cooperation, Hamas, Diaspora.

### Öz

Rus dış politikasının önemli bileşenlerinden biri de İsrail ile olan ilişkileridir. İsrail'in kurulduğu 1948 yılından bu yana Rusya bu ülke ile ilişkilerine büyük önem vermektedir. İki ülke arasındaki ilişkilerde çeşitli işbirliği ve çatışma alanları bulunmaktadır. Rusya'nın birçok alanda farklı çıkarlara sahip olmasına rağmen İsrail ile işbirliğini sürdürmeye çalışması Kremlin'in geleneksel pragmatist politikasının bir yansımasıdır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Rusya'nın İsrail ile ilişkilerinde süregelen çatışma ve işbirliğini incelemek ve Moskova'nın aynı dönemde her iki ilişki biçimini de sürdürmeyi nasıl başardığı sorusuna yanıt aramaktır. Bu bağlamda çalışma, ikili ilişkilerde çatışma ve işbirliği girişimlerinin hangi parametreler etrafında geliştiğini incelemektedir. Moskova'nın "İsrail'e rağmen" İran ve Filistin politikaları ile Hamas ve Hizbullah'la olan bağlantıları ikili ilişkilerin çatışma boyutunu temsil etmektedir. Madalyonun diğer yüzü ise iki ülke arasındaki işbirliği alanlarıdır. Özellikle güvenlik odaklı politikalarda iş birliğini hızlandıran önemli bir faktör İsrail'deki Rus diasporasıdır. Bu doğrultuda çalışmada bilimsel araştırma yöntemlerinden içerik analizi kullanılmış, zaman zaman söylem analizine de başvurulmuştur. Çalışmada, söz konusu konuyu inceleyen akademik yayınların yanı sıra liderlerin açıklamaları, tarihi kayıtlar ve resmi dış politika belgelerinden de yararlanılmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Rusya, İsrail, Çatışma, İş birliği, Hamas, Diaspora.

**Araştırma & Yayın Etiği/** Bu makale en az iki hakem tarafından incelenmiştir. Yayın etiği ihlalleri yazarın sorumluluğundadır.

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## Introduction

Russian-Israeli relations have historically had ups and downs. Although the USSR was the first country to recognize Israel, diplomatic relations between the two countries ended in 1967. After the collapse of the USSR, Russia sought to repair its relations with Israel and diplomatic relations were re-established between the two countries. After Putin came to power in the early 2000s, Israel became an important country in Russian foreign policy. Although there is not enough research on Russia's Israel policy in the literature, these studies are generally dominated by debates on whether Russia and Israel are "strategic partners", the existence and functionality of a Russian diaspora in Israel, and how realistic Putin's pro-Israel stance in his Middle East policy is. While some argue that Israel is a strategic ally of Russia, others argue that relations between the two countries are not strategic and are fraught with risks. Indeed, Megan Bailey, in her study "A Strategic Alliance: An Exploration of Israeli Russian Relations", emphasizes that Russia shares some common security concerns with Israel and therefore considers Israel as its strategic partner.

On the other side of the strategic partnership debate in Russian-Israeli relations, there is the view that the relations between the two countries are not strategic but serve Russia's interests. Tatyana Karasova, describes Russian-Israeli relations as "cautious optimism" rather than a strategic partnership for Russia (Karasova, 2013: 56). In fact, it can be said that this view has a counterpart in Israel. Indeed, Vladimir (Zeev) Khanin states that the perception of Russia in Israel is shaped as "Kremlin optimists" and "Kremlin pessimists" (Khanin, 2013: 69).

There are those who believe that the security factor as well as other factors are the main components of Russia's policy towards Israel. Lidia Averbukh and Margarete Klein, emphasize that Russia's Israel policy is also influenced by economic and diaspora factors (Averbukh and Klein, 2018: 7). However, these factors cannot be considered independent of the security policies between the two countries. Averbukh and Klein limit the security dimension of Russia's Israel policy to the Iranian factor. Russia's relations with Hezbollah, which is directly linked to Iran, are also important in this regard. At the same time, Russia's relations with Hamas are another important element of the security dimension of Russia's Israel policy. Those who argue that Russian-Israeli relations are not strategic, but rather highly pragmatic and based on delicate balances argue that the source of the problem is again related to security policy.

The conflictual nature of international relations is an important validation for realist theories. However, the question of how both conflict and cooperation can coexist has been on the agenda of international relations theorists since the late 1990s. Neoclassical realists were the ones who answered the question by staying within the realist framework. Katherine Barbieri and Jack S. Levy argued that both forms of relations can exist between countries. Barbieri and Levy characterized this as 'trading with the enemy' (Barbieri and Levy, 1999: 476). According to them, one of the main reasons why 'trade with the enemy' can be sustained is that stopping trade with countries that political leaders perceive as security threats would result in the loss of a partner to a third party or the alienation of neutral countries.

It was Jennifer Sterling-Folker who systematically theorized the coexistence of conflict and cooperation. Based on the China-US example, Sterling-Folker demonstrated that two countries can simultaneously pursue both conflict and cooperation (Sterling-Folker, 2009:115). Indeed, Sterling-Folker's arguments are also valid in Russia-Israel relations. In

this context, while Russia continues to clash with Israel over various incidents, there are also a dozen examples of cooperation between the two countries.

## **1. Areas of Conflict in Relations Between Moscow and Tel-Aviv**

### **1.1. Russia-Iran Friendship**

One of the main factors in determining Russia's Israel policy in the Putin era is Russia's relations with Iran. Russia's relations with Iran historically predate the establishment of Israel. Russia's stance towards the Iranian nuclear issue, Russia-Hezbollah relations, Russian-Iranian coordination in Syria, and the arms trade between Russia and Iran can be characterized as obstacles to Moscow's Israel policy.

Russia regards Iran as a traditional partner and a good neighbor and is committed to further strengthening friendly relations with Tehran to strengthen security and mutual understanding in the region for the benefit of the Russian and Iranian peoples. At the time of the nuclear talks between the P5+1 and Iran, Russia argued that Iran has the right to enrich uranium for the nuclear fuel cycle, with the International Atomic Energy Agency verifying the peaceful nature of its nuclear program (Russian Approaches Towards the Iranian Nuclear Programme, n.d). While Russia is not opposed in principle to Iran's uranium enrichment, it supports the idea that this policy is not in Iran's interest and therefore alternative solutions should be explored. At the same time, Moscow has proposed a formula in which Iran could supply its own nuclear fuel. Russia wants to be actively involved in Iran's nuclear work and to have a say in all aspects of Iran's nuclear program (Köse, 2008:48).

Although Russia does not support Iran's complete independence in the fuel processing of uranium, this has not prevented Moscow from formulating a practical policy towards Iran. The main issue in the Kremlin's relations with Tehran is what parameters can be tolerated when pressuring Iran on the fuel cycle. Unlike the United States (U.S.), Russia has major political and economic interests with Iran, and Iran is also one of the main recipients of Russian peaceful nuclear technology and arms exports. Moreover, for Russia, Iran is seen as a geopolitical counterweight to the expanding influence of Turkey, the U.S. and Wahhabism in the South and North Caucasus and Central Asia (Arbatov, 2006). For this reason, the Russian Federation, contrary to US policy, announced in 1995 that it had signed an \$800 million deal with Iran to complete one of the reactors at Bushehr within 4 years and the reactor was completed in 2010 (Jane, 2017). Periodically, Russia's approach to the Iranian nuclear issue has varied, and Russia has pursued a pragmatist policy rather than a principled one. In 2005, Russia reached an agreement with Iran on the conversion and reprocessing of nuclear fuel from the Bushehr nuclear power plant. Moscow also tried to persuade Tehran to launch a joint attempt on an international uranium enrichment center on Russian territory, which would provide a reliable supply of low-enriched uranium for Iran's nuclear energy industry (Arbatov, 2006).

### **1.2. Russia-Hezbollah Relations**

One of the main parameters determining Russia's policy towards Israel is the Iranian-backed Hezbollah. Hezbollah was established in 1982 as a vanguard against the US and Israeli presence in Lebanon, following the Israeli invasion of South Lebanon in the First Lebanon War (Ynetnews, 2006). The organization, which was founded with the support of religious leader Sheikh Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah and pledged allegiance to Iranian religious leader Khomeini with the manifesto it officially published in 1985, has been in close cooperation with Iran since its establishment (Gambill & Abdelnour, 2002). In

contrast to Israel's stance, Russia also displays its pragmatist approach towards Hezbollah. Indeed, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov stated at a press conference in October 2015 that Russia does not consider Hezbollah a terrorist organization and that they maintain contacts and relations with it (The Moscow Times, 2015).

The Russian Deputy Foreign Minister also stated that Hezbollah is both democratically elected and a legitimate political and social force. According to Bogdanov, one of the reasons why Russia does not consider Hezbollah a terrorist organization is that Hezbollah has not committed any terrorist acts against the Russian Federation (The Moscow Times, 2015). Another reason for Russia's attitude towards Hezbollah is the organization's relations with Iran and the Assad regime. The development of Russia-Hezbollah relations accelerated with Hezbollah siding with the Assad regime and Russia's intervention in Syria. As a matter of fact, some Hezbollah commanders have stated in their statements that Russia is their strategic ally and that Russia has even supplied Hezbollah with weapons (Rosenfeld, 2017). Israeli analysts have sometimes accused Russia of directly or indirectly cooperating with Hezbollah, stressing that Russia has trained its fighters in Syria in Russian technologies (Issacharoff, 2016).

### 1.3. The Kremlin's Palestine Policy

The Russian Federation's approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East has varied periodically within the framework of pragmatist foreign policy. For nearly 60 years, Moscow has sometimes sided with Israel and sometimes with Palestine. Some experts argue that recently the Kremlin has pursued a neutral and balanced foreign policy in favor of a peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. In its foreign policy doctrine, Russia has stated that it will strive for the quickest resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state living in peace with Israel (Dosbolov, 2014). However, Israel has from time to time expressed its dissatisfaction with this Russian doctrine. After the end of the Cold War, the Middle East partially lost its characteristic of being an area of competition between Russia and the West. However, the restoration of diplomatic relations between the USSR and Israel in October 1991 signaled Russia's return to the Middle East.<sup>1</sup>

In the second half of the 1990s, the peace process began to slow down. In 1996, with the appointment of Middle East expert Yevgeni Primakov as Foreign Minister, the official return of the Russian Federation to the Middle East began. During his visits to Middle Eastern countries in 1996-1997, Primakov argued that in order to end the crisis in the region, violence should stop and the process of peace negotiations based on the principle of "peace for land" should be accelerated. Although Primakov said that the Russian Federation would now be more active in the Middle East peace process, Israel has stated that it does not want Russia to participate in the peace process. Russia argues that the Jerusalem issue in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should be left to the final stage of the peace process. According to Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, Jerusalem should be divided in two, with West Jerusalem in Israeli hands and East Jerusalem in Palestinian hands (Dosbolov, 2014).

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<sup>1</sup> The USSR broke off diplomatic relations with Israel on June 10, 1967. On June 18, 1967, the entire staff of the embassy, led by the USSR Ambassador to Israel, D. Sergey Dmitriyevich Chuvakhin, evacuated the embassy building in Haifa and the USSR ended diplomatic relations with Israel.

## **1.4. Russia-Hamas Relations**

Russia's Hamas policy is of great importance as Hamas is considered a terrorist organization in the US and Europe. Despite US and Israeli opposition to the close relationship between Moscow and Hamas, Russia-Hamas relations have been developing since their establishment. Russia-Hamas relations were established during the second term of Putin's presidency. In 2006, Hamas' victory in the Palestinian parliamentary elections gave Russia the opportunity to enter into dialogue with Hamas. In a press conference, Putin described Hamas' victory in the Palestinian elections as a heavy blow to US diplomacy in the Middle East (TASAM, 2006). Russia's dialog with all actors in the Middle East strengthens its mediation role. Therefore, Russia plans to play a mediating role between the Arabs and Israel by establishing relations with Hamas. One of Russia's other goals in establishing relations with Hamas is to minimize the Chechen problem in the eyes of the international community. On the other hand, Moscow's approach to Hamas has had a negative impact on Russian-Israeli relations. Already in 2006, Vladimir Putin said that he did not consider Hamas a terrorist organization and invited Hamas leaders to Moscow (Cohen, 2006). Although the Western media interpreted Moscow's relations with Hamas as Russia's struggle for influence with the West, Putin wants to have a say in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by establishing relations with Hamas. This attitude of the Kremlin undoubtedly increases Russia's prestige in the Arab world. On the one hand, relations with Hamas may lead to some insecurity in relations with Israel, but this move also expands Russia's room for maneuver in the Middle East (Kamalov, 2012).

## **2. Areas of Cooperation Between Moscow and Tel-Aviv**

### **2.1. Solidarity in Islamophobia: The Intifada and Chechnya Wars**

One of the underlying reasons behind Russia's quest to re-establish close relations with Israel is the perception of a common threat. In the early 2000s, the perception of "radical Islam" as a common threat to Russia and Israel was voiced not only by the academic circles in these countries but also by the state summit. Indeed, during his visit to Moscow in 2000, then Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak stated that operational cooperation against "radical Islam" was a common agenda of Israel and Russia (Avineri, 2001).

On September 28, 2000, Ariel Sharon, the leader of the main opposition Likud party in Israel, visited the Al-Aqsa Mosque with nearly a thousand soldiers and made a speech in which he stated that Jerusalem would remain under Israel's control forever led to the Second Intifada (Turan, 2018). The resistance movement, also known as the Al-Aqsa Intifada, continued until 2005, when Israel withdrew from Gaza (Israeli Missions Around the World, 2005). In 2000, at the beginning of the Second Intifada, Yasser Arafat visited Moscow and Russia told Arafat that it could mediate between Israel and Palestine. Russia also made it clear in this meeting that while Russia supports the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, it will not support a unilateral declaration of Palestinian independence that would escalate the level of violence (Aharonson, 2018). The positive impact of the Second Intifada on Russian-Israeli relations is in line with Israel's approach to the Russian-Chechen war. On March 13, 2002, Sergey Mironov, the head of the Council of the Russian Federation, who visited Israel, emphasized that the source of the attacks in Afghanistan, Chechnya and Israel were the same and refused to meet with the Palestinian Authority (Супонина & Максимов, 2002). As the Second Intifada deepened, Moscow started to pursue a pro-Israel policy and considered the Intifada the same as the Chechen resistance. When Israeli President Moshe Katzav visited Moscow on January 23-25, 2001, he and Putin emphasized that "there can be no negotiations with terrorists", indicating

that the two had the same approach in the face of a common threat perception (Katz, 2005). Likewise, during his visit to Moscow in September 2001, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon likened the Second Intifada to the Russian situation in Chechnya and expressed his expectation of Russian understanding of Israel's actions (VOA, 2009).

The second Russian-Chechen war was ignited on 7<sup>th</sup> August, 1999 when militants from the Chechnya region under the command of Shamil Basayev and Ibn al-Khattab entered Dagestan (Cayias, 2012). On September 23, 1999, the war officially began with a decree of the Russian President on "Measures to Improve the Effectiveness of Anti-Terrorist Operations in the North Caucasus Region of the Russian Federation" (Конфликты Между РФ И Чеченской Республикой В 1994-1996/1999-2009 Годы, 2011). The Second Russo-Chechen War, which began on September 23 when the Russian air force bombed Chechnya's capital and its surroundings, ended on April 16, 2009 when Russia ended what it described as a "counter-terrorist operation" (РИА Новости, 2009). Israel's perception of "radical Islam" as a common threat with Russia has been one of the most important factors determining its stance in the Russian-Chechen War. Israel's support for Russia's actions in Chechnya is remarkable for both Russia and Israel in terms of relations between the two countries. In the summer of 2000, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, who visited Russia, stated (Avineri, 2001) that Chechnya was a domestic issue for Russia arising from a national dispute, which led to a significant change in Russia's perception of Israel. Israel's support in Russia's struggle against Chechnya has not only remained at the level of rhetoric, but has also assisted Russia by sending medical supplies and treating wounded Russian soldiers and victims of the September 1999 apartment bombing in Moscow, allegedly carried out by Chechens (Freedman, 2001). Israel's support for Russia during the Second Russo-Chechen War is closely related to the rhetoric of the Chechen separatists. Indeed, Shamil Basayev addressed the world public opinion in Grozny on August 31, 1999 as follows: "This war will continue until all Muslims from the Volga to the Don are liberated. I will continue this jihad even if the whole world goes up in flames. All Muslims in the world are waking up. The war may last 20-25 years. All of Russia will be the battlefield. Our ultimate goal is the liberation of Jerusalem." (İMKANDER, 2013). As can be seen, the principle of 'fighting until Jerusalem is liberated', which forms the basis of the Chechen jihad, has been one of the most important reasons behind Israel's support for Russia in the Russian-Chechen War.

## **2.2. Military-Technical Cooperation**

Russia-Israel military cooperation dates back to the 1990s. The first step towards the establishment of military ties was taken by Russia in 1995. In December 1995, the visit of General Pavel Grachev, the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation, with a military Delegation has resulted in the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on military cooperation between Russia and Israel. The memorandum of understanding accelerated military and technical cooperation initiatives between the two countries. One of the first examples of military-technical cooperation between Moscow and Tel-Aviv was the Ka-50-2 attack helicopter developed in 1997. Developed in accordance with the tactical and technical requirements of Turkish and NATO standards, the Ka-50-2 is the result of the joint efforts of the Russian helicopter company Kamov, state-owned Rosvooruzhenie and Israeli aircraft manufacturer IAI (Israel Aerospace Industries). In a joint project of military technological cooperation, Russia produced the Ka-50-2 itself, while Israel equipped the helicopter with avionics and missile armament (Shulman, 2013).

With Putin's coming to power, Russia's prioritization of Israel in its foreign policy has accelerated developments in the field of military technical cooperation. Another

important partnership project of Russia and Israel in this field was the development and supply of three Falcon early warning systems in line with India's request. Under a \$1.1 billion contract signed in 2004, Falcon airborne radar stations from Elta, part of the Israel Aerospace Industries Corporation, were installed on Russian IL-76TD aircraft (Shulman, 2013). Russia's interest in Israeli-made UAVs has added a new dimension to the military technical cooperation initiatives between the two countries.

### **2.3. Drone Contracts**

Russia's need for drones arose from the Russian military's lack of reliable intelligence during the war with Georgia in August 2008. In November 2008, Russia's Chief of General Staff announced that Russia did not have drones and would purchase such weapons from Israel within 2-3 years (Вести.Ру, 2008). In this context, Vladimir Popovkin, Russia's deputy defense minister for military procurement, announced on 10 April 2009 that the Russian Defense Ministry had signed an agreement with IAI for the purchase of multiple unmanned aerial vehicles (Sputnik International, 2009). The \$53 million deal involved Russia's purchase from Israel of 2 Bird Eye 400 worth \$4 million, 8 I Mk 150 (Mark 150)<sup>2</sup> tactical UAVs worth \$37 million, and 2 Searcher Mk II medium-range UAVs worth \$12 million (Gorenburg, 2011). With this agreement, Israel became the only country except for France to export arms to Russia after the Second World War (ACRPS, 2012).

In July 2010, the two sides agreed to a \$100 million deal for an additional 36 Israeli UAVs (Gorenburg, 2011). On October 13, 2010, Oboronprom, Russia's authorized agency for the production of UAVs, and IAI signed a \$400 million agreement allowing the Bird Eye 400 (Zastava) and Searcher Mk II drones to be assembled under one license (Palestine Chronicle, 2010). This agreement meant that the UAV technologies that Russia had failed to produce would be produced together with a country that has an important position in this field in the world. Russia's search for UAVs, which became even more important with the 2008 Georgian War, has come to an end thanks to its agreements with Israel. With these agreements, Moscow was able not only to purchase advanced technologies but also to co-produce them. The cooperation that started with drone production and development has led to joint projects in areas such as space studies, nanotechnology and modernization of military technologies.

### **2.4. Modernization of Russian Military Technologies**

Russia's attempts to cooperate with Israel in the modernization of its military technologies date back to the years before Putin came to power. The Russian Federation, which attaches importance to relations with Israel in the security and economic fields, has needed Israel for the modernization of military technologies. As mentioned above, the 1995 agreement between Russia and Israel on the development of mutual relations in the defense industry is very important in this context (Razoux, 2008). Indeed, in 1997, Boris Kuzyk, then Deputy President of the Russian Federation, characterized the signing of a contract between Russia and Israel for the production of the A-50 long-range radar detection aircraft (DRLO) as the beginning of practical military-technical cooperation between the two countries (Козюлин, 2003).

Russia has emphasized both in the press and at important high-level meetings that the need to increase its efforts in the spare parts market and modernize Soviet (Russian) military hardware is an important task and that it seeks to establish cooperation with

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<sup>2</sup> Mark is a military naming system, short for the word mark. It is used for naming military equipment such as navy, mines, guns, missiles, etc.

Israel in the field of modernization. One of the important problems that Israeli officials was trying to solve with Russian partners has been joint cooperation in the program of modernization and development of the approximately 3,500 MiG-21 fighters that the former Soviet Union sold to customers around the world. The problem arose when technical problems with MiG-21s sold to Romania led to the loss of 14 aircraft and eight pilots. Russia claimed that these technical problems experienced by Romania were the result of the unsuccessful intervention of its Israeli partner Elbit in the construction of the aircraft and held its partner Elbit responsible. Nevertheless, the Russian side remained hopeful for a compromise solution to the problem. In this context, at the end of September 2002, during the visit of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to Moscow, Israel offered Russia to conclude an agreement that would allow Russia to regulate future relations in the field of modernization of Soviet-made aircraft by Israeli companies (Козюлин, 2003).

## 2.5. Cooperation Initiatives in Energy

Moscow's political economy towards Tel-Aviv cannot be considered independent from its energy policy. The importance of Israel in the energy policy of Russia, which articulates energy into its foreign policy, has changed periodically. This change can be attributed to the discovery of energy resources in Israel's immediate neighborhood. Israel has been dependent on energy imports for a long time. Until 2004, Israel's position in Russia's energy policy was only at the supply-demand level and in the form of gas supply from Russia to Israel, but with the discovery of natural gas reserves in Israel, Russia started to cooperate with Israel.

In June 2005, a working meeting between Alexey Miller, Chairman of Gazprom's Board of Directors, and Ehud Olmert, Minister of Industry, Trade and Employment of the State of Israel, took place at Gazprom headquarters. The meeting discussed areas of Russian-Israeli cooperation in the oil and gas sector, including the supply of Russian natural gas to Israel, planning, construction and management of gas and oil exploration and underground gas storage facilities, creation of main transportation and gas distribution systems, Gazprom's participation in Israel's energy and petrochemical industry. Such meetings between the two countries have become increasingly important over time. In February 2007 and June 2008, Alexey Miller and Israeli Minister of Industry and Trade Benjamin Ben Eliezer held working meetings to discuss the possibilities of organizing the supply of Russian gas to Israel, Gazprom's participation in the design and construction of gas networks in the country, as well as cooperation in the fields of electricity, gas storage and processing (Газпром Пресс-Центр, 2005).

## 2.6. Diaspora as a Driving Force

Attempts by Russian Jews to create a Russian Diaspora in Israel date back to the 1990s. In this context, a seminar was held in Jerusalem on November 10-11, 1994 to develop a strategy for creating a "Russian lobby" in Israeli politics. The seminar brought together leaders of various Russian Jewish trade unions, journalists, "Russian" activists of Israeli parties, intellectuals, publishers and many Russian Jewish communities. Among the participants in the seminar were many names that would later remember notoriously in Israeli politics. The seminar brought together prominent representatives of Israel's Russian-Jewish community, including Natan Sharansky, Julius and Tatiana Edelstein, Julius Kosharovskiy, Zeev Geisel, Pinhas Polonsky, Boris Devyatov, Edward Kuznetsov, Larisa Gershtein, Yuri Stern and Betsalel Shif. At the end of the seminar, Sharansky and other forum leaders initiated a broad discussion about the political strategy of the "Russian community". In these discussions, some (I. Mendelevich, Z. Geisel and L. Gershtein)



insisted on the integration of Russian Jews into the mainstream Israeli parties, while others (Bronfman Kosharovskiy-Frenkel), on the contrary, expressed the need to develop “Russian” political autonomy. The Russian Jewish diaspora has also played an important role in political life and has been a decisive factor in some elections. In 1996, Russian Jews played an important role in the election victory of Benjamin Netanyahu, the leader of the Likud Party (Ханин, 2003).

Today, the diaspora of Russian Jews is more active. The diaspora of Russian Jews who emigrated to Israel between 1990 and 1992, consisting of approximately 83,000 engineers, 13,000 scientists, more than 20,000 doctors, dentists and nurses, 40,000 teachers and university professors, 13,000 musicians and music teachers (Русский Мир, 2012) has also gained an important place in political life and has been a decisive factor in some elections. For social, economic and political reasons, Russian Jewish voters have sometimes favored left-wing and sometimes right-wing parties in Israeli politics. With the increasing immigration from the Russian Federation to Israel, the votes of Russian Jews were an important factor in the election of Ariel Sharon as Prime Minister in 2001 and the re-election of the Likud Party in 2003 (Khanin, 2015).

## **Conclusion**

With Putin coming to power in the early 2000s, Russia’s special place for Israel in its foreign policy has been important in the development of relations between the two countries. The pragmatist foreign policy approach that dominated the Putin era in general was visible in Russia’s relations with all countries. This pragmatic attitude has also manifested itself in Russia-Israel relations. In the early 2000s, Russia and Israel adopted a common stance against “radicalism” and subsequently turned to cooperation projects in the military-technical field. Israel’s significant progress, especially in the field of UAVs, and Russia’s need for it, resulted in the two countries taking part in joint military projects.

Russia’s Israel policy is generally shaped around the parameters of security, military cooperation, energy and diaspora influence. The diaspora of the Russian-speaking community living in Israel has a facilitating role in both maintaining relations and improving the Russian image in the US and other Western countries. However, within these parameters, the security factor, which is also closely interconnected, occupies a special position. The unstable situation in the Middle East with the emergence of the Arab uprisings, which turned into a civil war in Syria, has also gained weight in the Israeli leg of Putin’s Russia’s security-oriented Middle East policy. As the civil war gradually became a threat to Moscow’s interests in the Middle East, it resulted in Russia’s intervention in Syria. Russia’s active Syria policy has made cooperation with other actors in the region even more important. However, Russia’s relations with Iran, Hezbollah and Hamas, which Israel sees as a threat to its existence, have led to the questioning of the “trust” in Russian-Israeli relations. Russia’s unwillingness to recognize Hezbollah and Hamas as terrorist organizations has also been one of the obstacles to Israeli policy. Nevertheless, Russia maintained its relations with the actors in the region.

One of Russia’s motivations in developing its relations with Israel is to distance Israel from the U.S. as much as possible. However, Israel has repeatedly stated that Russia cannot be an alternative to the U.S., no matter how many important projects it has been involved in with Moscow. Nevertheless, Russia’s emphasis on its relations with Israel is also important in terms of Russia’s willingness to co-produce advanced military technologies with Israel. The fact that some of the drones used by Russia during its air campaign in Syria were co-produced by Russia and Israel is one of the important reasons why pragmatist Russian

foreign policy prefers Israel to other actors in the region. However, despite the significant cooperation projects between Russia and Israel, the Tel Aviv leadership has always had a trust problem with Moscow.

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