

Book Review/ Kitap Tanıtımı

Ekavi Athanassopoulou, *Turkey's Relations with Israel: The First Sixty-Two Years, 1948–2010*, London: Routledge, 2025

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Ekavi Athanassopoulou's new monograph, *Turkey's Relations with Israel*, offers a detailed and timely examination of a critical bilateral relationship that has captured the attention of scholars and policymakers for decades. It outlines the intricate and often volatile diplomatic, military, and economic ties between Ankara and Jerusalem from the founding of the State of Israel in 1948 up until the year 2010. Athanassopoulou's central thesis is that, while often portrayed as a monolithic strategic alliance in its early decades, the relationship was in fact characterized by a series of fluctuating cycles of cooperation and

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tension, driven by both domestic political shifts and regional geopolitical dynamics.

Athanassopoulou has structured her work chronologically, which has allowed her to trace the evolution of this complex partnership. The main body consists of nine chapters organised into three parts. Part One (chapters 1-5) covers the tentative cooperation between the two countries during the Cold War (1947-1980s), exploring Turkey's role as one of the first Muslim-majority states to recognize Israel and the subsequent development of a discreet, though significant, security alliance. Part Two (Chapters 6-8) deals with the 1990s, a decade in which Turkey raised its relations with Israel to the highest level and took on the role of strategic partner, with encouragement from the United States. It also touches upon the dilemmas that Turkey faced at home and in the international arena because of these relations. In Part Three (Chapter 9), Athanasopoulos turns her attention to the new millennium and the rise to power of the Justice and Development Party (JDP) in 2002, culminating in the Mavi Marmara incident of 2010, following which the bilateral relations experienced a breakdown. Using this historical narrative, she highlights effectively the key drivers behind the Turkish-Israeli alliance, including shared security concerns regarding regional rivals and the desire for Western alignment.

A breakdown of the chapters can be given as follows:

The Introduction lays the ground for the study of Turkey-Israel relations by offering a broad overview and situating the topic within the wider regional context. It introduces the central research question, outlines the study's aims and limitations, and explains the foundational concepts of role theory, which serve as the analytical lens. The chapter also previews the structure and content of the subsequent chapters.

Chapter One ("At the beginning: 1947–1949") explores the reasons behind Turkey's opposition to the partition of Palestine and its reluctant recognition of Israel in 1949. It argues that Turkey's foreign policy was shaped by its self-perception as an independent actor, its historical ties to the Middle East, the desire to maintain favourable relations with Arab states, and its alliance with Britain. As the Cold War intensified and the United States assumed leadership of the Western bloc, Turkey's

stance on Israel began to align more closely with American expectations.

Chapter Two ("Ebb and flow: The 1950s") focuses on the Adnan Menderes administration and examines the dual nature of Turkey's policy towards Israel—cordial in private but critical in public. It attributes this approach to Turkey's simultaneous enactment of three roles: loyal US ally, regional guardian and collaborator, and Arab-friendly actor. The chapter contends that Menderes' innovative role strategies prompted the US to recalibrate its expectations, influencing Turkey's behaviour towards Israel.

Chapter Three (In bold relief: 1960–1965) analyses Turkish-Israeli relations during the early 1960s, under the provisional government and İsmet İnönü's coalition leadership. It highlights the factors that initially kept the relationship stagnant and later contributed to its decline. The discussion includes the role perceptions of Turkey's new political elite and Israel's inability to meet Turkish expectations on issues such as Cyprus and Kurdish unrest in Iraq.

Chapter Four ("End of an era: 1965–1969") examines the second half of the 1960s, showing how earlier foreign policy trends became more pronounced and directly impacted bilateral ties. The chapter emphasizes the growing role of Islam in Turkey's identity and foreign policy. It also investigates the reasons behind the cessation of intelligence cooperation with Israel and the effects of the Six-Day War on Turkey's position regarding Israeli concerns.

The final chapter of Part One, Chapter Five ("From cold to warm: The 1970s and 1980s") covers the 1970s and 1980s and traces Turkey's increasingly assertive regional role enactment, which often conflicted with Israeli interests. It discusses the paradox of Turkey downgrading ties with Israel in 1980 despite deepening strategic cooperation with the US. The chapter also explores the gradual warming of relations in the 1980s and the motivations behind Turkey's closer engagement with Israel.

Chapter Six ("A chronicle of striking developments") opens Part Two of the volume and details the evolution of Turkish-Israeli relations in the 1990s, beginning with Ankara's decision to upgrade diplomatic ties in

1991. It outlines the phases of growing cooperation and provides a thorough account of key areas of mutual interest and collaboration.

In Chapter Seven (“The alignment decision under the microscope”), Turkey’s strategic partnership with Israel is analysed within the context of internal and external pressures, challenges, and opportunities. The chapter highlights the US’s role in promoting Turkey’s strategic alignment with Israel and examines the 1998 Syria crisis from the perspective of Turkey’s regional role. It also addresses Israel’s support for Turkey’s military development despite concerns over the rise of political Islam.

Concluding Part Two, Chapter Eight (“Push and pull”) chapter investigates Turkey’s role-making and role-taking as Israel’s strategic partner, focusing on internal debates among policymakers regarding the extent of commitment to this role. It also discusses internal opposition to the strategic alignment and concludes that Turkey eventually set limits on its engagement, explaining the rationale behind this decision.

The sole chapter of Part Three, Chapter Nine (“The JDP in power: The first eight years of bilateral relations, 2002–2010”) covers the first eight years of the Justice and Development Party (JDP) rule (2002–2010). It summarises key developments in the bilateral relationship. It explores the JDP’s vision of Turkey’s role in the Middle East and analyses the deterioration of ties in late 2009. The chapter also notes a significant shift in the attitudes of younger Israeli officials toward Turkey.

The Conclusion synthesizes the study’s findings, emphasizing the alignment between Turkey’s national role conceptions and its foreign policy behaviour toward Israel. It critiques simplistic interpretations of the relationship and advocates for a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics involved. The chapter concludes with reflections on how Turkey’s self-perceptions and external expectations have shaped its conduct and offers insights into the future course of Turkish-Israeli relations.

The bulk of the book is dedicated to analyzing the periods of closer collaboration in the 1990s and the subsequent, rapid deterioration of relations in the 2000s, a period that culminated in the 2010 Mavi

Marmara incident. Athanassopoulou navigates this politically charged landscape with a clear, analytical lens, detailing how the rise of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey, combined with shifting regional priorities and public sentiment, transformed a once-robust alliance into a relationship marked by open hostility. The author's strength lies in her ability to synthesize a vast array of primary and secondary sources, offering a nuanced account that goes beyond simplistic narratives of friendship or enmity.

A significant strength of the book is its comprehensive scope and its contribution to the scholarly understanding of Middle Eastern diplomacy. By providing a detailed, chronological account, Athanassopoulou offers a valuable resource for researchers. The writing is clear and accessible, making the book suitable not only for specialists but also for graduate students seeking a deeper understanding of the subject.

One limitation of the book could be its hard cutoff date of 2010. While this provides a logical endpoint, the past fifteen years have been arguably the most transformative for the Turkey-Israel relationship, with periods of complete diplomatic rupture followed by attempts at normalization. The events since 2010, particularly the Abraham Accords and the evolving architecture of regional security, offer crucial context that would have enriched the book's analysis. Having said that, omission of these details is understandable given that the current monograph was completed before these events unfolded.

On the whole, *Turkey's Relations with Israel: The First Sixty-Two Years* stands as a definitive historical account of this period. Athanassopoulou's detailed and balanced analysis makes this an essential read for anyone interested in the foreign policy of Turkey, Israel, or the broader dynamics of the Middle East. It is a work of serious scholarship that will serve as a foundational text for future studies on the subject.