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## TURKEY-ISRAEL RELATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SYRIAN CRISIS

### **LAS RELACIONES TURQUÍA-ISRAEL EN EL CONTEXTO DE LA CRISIS EN SIRIA**

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#### ABSTRACT

The protests in Syria, which started in 2011, first turned into a civil war and then into a global issue, and still continues to have regional and global effects. The crisis has caused deep concerns for many countries, including Turkey and Israel. The crisis has had deep impact on the relations of Turkey and Israel. Historically, Turkey-Israel relations have followed a course of ups and downs in the context of their national interests. The major question of this study is whether the Syrian civil war, which is a neighbour of the two countries, has had an impact on the shaky relations between Turkey and Israel. The relations between the two countries have entered a normalization process due to the common interests in the Syria region. The 'Syrian crisis' has a strategic collaborative potential in terms of improving Turkey-Israel relations. The ongoing Syrian crisis maintains its currency and importance as a determining factor for the future development of relations between Turkey and Israel. The main purpose of the study is to evaluate Turkey-Israel relations in the context of the Syrian crisis.

**Keywords:** Syrian civil war, Turkey, Israel, national security, regional cooperation.

#### RESUMEN

Las protestas en Siria, que comenzaron en 2011, primero se convirtieron en una guerra civil y luego en un problema global, y aún continúan teniendo efectos regionales y globales. La crisis ha causado profundas preocupaciones en muchos países, incluidos Turquía e Israel. La crisis ha tenido un profundo impacto en las relaciones de Turquía e Israel. Históricamente, las relaciones entre Turquía e Israel han seguido un curso de altibajos en el contexto de sus intereses nacionales. La pregunta principal de este estudio es si la guerra civil siria, que es vecina de los dos países, ha tenido un impacto en las inestables relaciones entre Turquía e Israel. Las relaciones entre los dos países han entrado en un proceso de normalización debido a los intereses comunes en la región de Siria. La 'crisis siria' tiene un potencial estratégico de colaboración en términos de mejorar las relaciones entre Turquía e Israel. La actual crisis siria mantiene su vigencia e importancia como factor determinante para el futuro desarrollo de las relaciones entre Turquía e Israel. El objetivo principal del estudio es evaluar las relaciones entre Turquía e Israel en el contexto de la crisis siria.

**Palabras clave:** Guerra civil siria, Turquía, Israel, seguridad nacional, cooperación regional.

## INTRODUCTION

The protests against the government in Syria, which started in March 2011, gradually turned into a civil war. The problem has gained a global dimension with the entry of terrorist organizations such as “the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria” (ISIS), Hezbollah and the PKK into the region and the interventions of regional and international actors (Riera, et al., 2020). The relations between Turkey and Israel, which were involved in this process, were also affected by this crisis. The Syrian state has frequently been a determining factor in the formation, shaping, and even deterioration of relations between Turkey and Israel in the past and this can be explained as a means of deterring the Syrian regime from hostile actions against them by erecting a bulwark on its southwest and northern borders (Ülgül, 2019).

Although Turkey-Israel relations have experienced periodic crises, when evaluated in general, it would be correct to describe the two countries as allies, especially in military terms, since the 1990s (Duman, 2020). Oran (2013), assesses Turkey-Israel relations in the context of Middle East trends, claiming that if Turkey has good connections with Arab countries, relations with Israel deteriorate, and vice versa. Despite recurrent crises in relations between Turkey and Israel, the two nations have been allies since the 1990s, especially in terms of military cooperation.

Since the policies of Turkey and Israel in the Syrian crisis are mostly focused on national interest and national security, relations can be evaluated from a neo-realist perspective. Both have common interests in the region and cooperation seems possible (Akgün, et al., 2014). In this respect, the Syrian crisis seems to have a restorative effect on the normalization of relations between Turkey and Israel.

However, since the results of the not-so-warm relations between Turkey and Israel after the 2000s still affect the existing relations of the two countries (Nasi, 2020), the desired and intended reconciliation between Turkey and Israel could not be achieved and the Syrian crisis did not contribute to the normalization of the relations between the two countries (Ülgül, 2019).

The main aim of this research is to see how much Turkey and Israel, which are neighbours to Syria, share a similar denominator when it comes to Syria and how much their policies differ. In line with this, the processes and regional and global developments that were effective in the development of relations between Turkey and Israel during the Syrian crisis will be systematically addressed and analysed.

In the first part of the study, the historical development of Turkey-Israel relations and the theoretical framework of the relations were drawn. In this context, firstly, historically, Turkey's relations since recognizing Israel were examined. Then, the policies followed by the two countries during the Syrian crisis and the basis of these policies were emphasized.

In the second part of the study, the effects of the Syrian crisis on Turkey-Israel relations will be discussed. The sources and results of these effects will be determined and a general analysis will be made on the subject.

International relations theory, similarly to other theories in social sciences, has three main objectives: description, explanation, and prediction. Failure to accomplish any of these objectives does not invalidate the whole theory. It has been generally accepted that the primary objective of a theory is to provide explanation for the discipline it is used (Singer, 1962). *“Theories provide a way of packaging patterns from the past in such a way as to make them usable in the present as guides to the future.”* (Gaddis, 1992, p. 6)

Although international relations theory after the Second World War continued to include liberal and some non-realistic approaches it was and still is dominated by the realist approach. End of the Cold War caused serious critics about appropriateness and effectiveness of the realist approach in international relations. These critics mostly came from the liberal authors and they offer liberal approach as an alternative to the realist approach in international relations theory.

Realist approach in international relations theory accepts states as key actors and the structure of the international system as anarchical. In this anarchical environment states are rational, autonomous, and unitary actors and they are mainly concerned about their security. At that point, we see the difference between the neo-realist and classical realist perspectives. This security oriented perspective is neo-realist approach that developed by Waltz (1993). In classical realist approach states are seen as power oriented actors. According to neo-realist approach *“uncertainty is synonym for life, and nowhere is uncertainty greater than in international politics... Concern over relative gains continues to be the natural preoccupation of states”* (Waltz, 1993, p. 58) In Waltz's words (1993, p. 62), *“states have always competed for wealth and security, and the competition has often led to conflict. Why should the future be different from the past?”*

Turkey-Israel relations started in March 1949 when Turkey officially recognized Israel. Turkey became the first Muslim majority country to recognize Israel in 1949, even though

it opposes the United Nations' (UN) decision to divide the Palestinian territories into two regions between the Jews and the Palestinians. In the following decades, Turkey and Israel had cooperated on various fields and signed bilateral agreements on military, economy, and diplomacy. Within the framework of the developments in the Middle East and the national interests of the two countries, relations have followed a fluctuating course. The developments in the Middle East have brought the two countries closer or further apart from time to time (Duman, 2020).

Turkey limited its diplomatic relations with Israel to charge d'affaires in 1956. The cause of this was Israel's takeover of Egypt's Sinai Peninsula as a result of the Suez Canal crisis (Akgün, et al., 2014). Due to its religious affiliation, Turkey supported Egypt and was seriously disturbed by this move of Israel. Relations began to improve only after Israel withdrew from Egyptian territory.

1967 Arab-Israeli war was crucial in transformation of 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). During the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, Turkey requested that the US not deploy military installations in Turkey to support Israel, as it had done during the 1967 war. During the same battle, the Turkish government enabled the Soviet Union to penetrate Turkish airspace to resupply Syria and Egypt and Turkey has routinely voted in support of pro-Arab resolutions denouncing Israel at the UN since 1974.

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). 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.

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. 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).

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). It took several years for diplomatic relations to be normalized between Turkey and Israel.

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.

As it has been for many years, the main issue of tension between Turkey and Israel, is still the Palestinian issue. Turkey officially recognized the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1975 and then allowed the PLO to open a representative office in Ankara in 1976 (Akgün, et al., 2014). Despite the tension on the Palestinian issue, cooperation between the two countries in the field of security continued. For example, Israel shared the information it obtained about the PKK with Turkey during its occupation of Lebanon.

After the Gulf War in 1991, due to the establishment of terrorist organizations in the territory of its close neighbours such as Iraq, Syria and Iran, Turkey has turned to a security-oriented foreign policy. During this period, relations with

Israel, which shared the same security concerns, entered a period of softening. In 1993, relations between the two countries were brought back to the level of embassy and Turkey opened its Consulate General in East Jerusalem back (Oran, 2017). One of the most important reasons for the softening in relations has been the Oslo and Madrid Peace processes, which were initiated to ensure peace between Palestine and Israel (Boran, 2020). Another reason for the improvement of Turkish-Israeli relations was the Framework Agreement for Military Training and Technical Cooperation signed between the two in 1996. The EU and the US stopped arms sales to Turkey, accusing Turkey of human rights violations within the country, causing Turkey to turn its face to Israel. Thus, Israel has become an important arms supplier for Turkey.

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. Apart from military cooperation, positive developments continued in the economic field as well. A Free Trade Agreement was signed between Turkey and Israel in 1996 (Oran, 2017). Due to the earthquake in Turkey in 1999, Israel provided economic aid to Turkey.

In the 2000s, Turkey's rapprochement with Arab countries, especially Syria, disturbed Israel. From this period onwards, relations began to experience periodic tensions. Turkey's harsh criticism of Israel's violence against the Palestinian people in the international arena has turned to be the last straw.

Within the framework of the AKP's 'zero problems with neighbours' policy, Turkey has also tried to establish close relations with Arab states. In this context, Turkey first tended to improve its relations with Syria, where it experienced crises such as the PKK and the Water problem (Oran, 2013). Apart from this, Free Trade and Movement Agreements were signed between Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. Turkey-Israeli relations started to cool again with Turkey's rapprochement with Arab countries and criticism of Israel's operations in Palestine and Lebanon. Turkey's support of Hamas, which was elected to the Palestinian Authority in 2006, was met with great reactions in Israel. The already tense relations broke out with Israel's military operations in Gaza in 2008. Turkey harshly criticized this operation and condemned Israel (Akgün, et al., 2014). After this date, there have been consecutive crises between the two countries. Relations have deteriorated due to tensions such as the Davos crisis (New Point, 2012), the Low Seat crisis, the Mavi Marmara crisis, and

the critical rhetoric of the two countries (Kanat & Hannon, 2017; Sönmez & Batu, 2020).

After a heated exchange at the Davos Summit in 2009 between then-Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and then-Israeli President Shimon Peres, Erdoğan walked out of the conversation to protest the panel moderator, who refused to let him speak. This crisis was called as a 'One Minute Crisis' because of Erdoğan's speech against Peres (Boran, 2020).

The 'Lower Chair Crisis' between Turkey and Israel occurred in 2010 (Askerov, 2017). In response to the portrayal of MOSSAD (Israel's National Intelligence Agency) agents as child smugglers in Turkey's popular TV series "Kurtlar Vadisi," Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon moved Turkey's Ambassador to Tel Aviv, Oğuz Çelikkol, to the lower seat in the meeting (Akgün, et al., 2014).

The event that brought Turkey-Israeli relations to the extreme was the 'Mavi Marmara Crisis'. In 2010, Turkey's Mavi Marmara ship, which was carrying aid to the Palestinians living in the blockade in Gaza, was stopped by Israel in international waters and Turkish citizens were killed (Kanat & Hannon, 2017). As a result of this incident arousing strong reactions from the Turkish public, the Turkish ambassador to Tel Aviv was recalled and relations were reduced to the lowest level. However, Turkey has ensured the publication of a UN declaration condemning Israel for the Mavi Marmara incident and containing the decision to lift the blockade on Gaza. Ongoing projects between the two countries were stopped and military agreements were suspended. However, despite these developments, mutual economic and commercial relations between the two countries continued and were the least affected area by political crises (Sariaslan, 2019).

The normalization agreement, which was signed after a long negotiation from 2013 to 2016, could not achieve the desired rapprochement between the two countries. In 2018, Turkey recalled its ambassador in Israel in protest of the US recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and moving its embassy to Jerusalem (Nasi, 2020). Although there are regional strategic interests between the two countries, full security has not been established in the relations. This is because; For Turkey, the continuation of the embargo in Gaza means the support of Hamas, which Israel considers a terrorist organization, by Ankara. The Palestinian problem continues to this day and continues to be a subject of tension between the two countries. In this context, relations between the two countries still continue to be shaped by regional developments.

As stated before, Syria has a decisive role in Turkey-Israeli relations as it is neighbour to both countries. Apart from

this, although Turkey was the first country to recognize Israel, it took a long time to address the relations between the two countries at the highest level due to the developments in the Middle East. The Arab-Israeli conflicts that took place during the Cold War, the Palestinian problem and the domestic political problems in Turkey caused fluctuations in the relations between the two countries. Ülgül (2019), states that the relations between the two countries started in the 1950s, partly as a result of Israel's desire to use Turkey's common borders with many Arab countries, and that this was not possible until the 1990s, but strategic relations began when both countries were threatened by the Syrian regime.

With the end of the Cold War, the disappearance of the great power behind Syria and the problems that started with the two border neighbours, the Golan Heights with Israel, the Euphrates River with Turkey, opened the way for Syria to turn to different channels, and this situation has been caused the two countries to engage in more counter-terrorism activities (Ülgül, 2019). Although this situation leads to an increase in relations between the two countries, different factors also have an effect on the development of relations between Turkey and Israel. Showing its declining importance to the Western world after the Cold War and making use of the Israel lobby in Washington are among these factors, but the opening of the Israel-Palestine line can also be shown as an important development (Kanat & Hannon: 2017).

Together with the military cooperation and training agreement signed between Turkey and Israel in 1996, they signed the most comprehensive cooperation agreement in the Middle East, and according to this agreement, through a series of measures including joint air force training, naval visits, exchange of military personnel and joint training in military academies, and "facilitating cooperation in military training between countries" have been accepted (Sayari, 1997).

Although the February 28 process in Turkey caused the deepening of the internal political crisis, Turkey did not turn its direction from the West. At the same time, relations with Israel were tried to be improved. Although the PKK's increasing attacks and Syria's support for the PKK increased during this period, an agreement was signed with Syria on the PKK issue in 1998, with the pressure of Turkey.

In the 2000s, Turkey built cordial relations with Syria and began to function as a mediator for the development of relations between Israel and Syria, owing to the creation of a new administration in Turkey and shifting geopolitical events across the world. Within the context of the concept

of "zero problems with neighbours," the AKP attempted to establish a multifaceted foreign policy focused on collaboration. In this setting, Turkey, Greece, Armenia, Syria, and other countries have worked to mend relations with countries with which they have long had issues. Turkey-Syria ties improved dramatically at this time. In 2004, Syrian President Bashar Assad visited Turkey for the first time since the country's founding (Oran, 2013). The Prime Minister of Turkey at the time, Erdoğan, refused the invitation of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon because of the events of the Second Intifada and instead visited Syria. However, Turkey has not completely severed its ties with Israel. Turkey mediated the Syrian-Israeli peace talks. However, this attempt was interrupted by Israel's 'Operation Cast Lead' against Gaza.

Another development in Syria, the civil war that broke out in 2011, has brought Turkey and Israel closer to each other. New areas of cooperation have emerged between the two countries. The international dimension of the Syrian crisis and it's getting worse and worse have caused the USA and Israel to be worried. With the mediation of the USA, Israel tried to improve its relations with Turkey, which it saw as a strategic partner due to its geopolitical position. Prime Minister of Israel at the time, Netanyahu, apologized from Turkey for the attack on the Mavi Marmara ship. Netanyahu justified this move with the developments in Syria. The Syrian civil war has a direct impact on the normalization process between Turkey and Israel (Turan & Örki, 2017).

The protests of the Syrian people against the Assad regime in March 2011 have once again changed the dynamics of Turkey-Israel relations. Terrorist organizations infiltrating the region by taking advantage of the turmoil in Syria have created a separate security risk for the states in the region. Terrorism and security issues are of vital importance for both Turkey and Israel. In this process, Turkey's attitude towards Israel has changed. Erdoğan called for Bashar Assad to make political and social reforms in his country. Unable to get any results from this, Turkey started to get closer with Israel, which had the same stance against Assad. Both are Egypt, Tunisia etc. They expected that Assad would be overthrown as the leaders in Arab countries were overthrown. However, the expectations of the two countries were in vain because Syria started to resist more bloodily with the support of Iran and Russia.

The civil war in Syria has affected the security of neighbouring countries. Although the increasing refugee influx towards Turkey was seen as a situation to be eliminated, the Kurdish region, which was tried to be created by the PYD/YPG, an extension of the PKK, on the southern border stood out as a major problem. At the same time, although

the security of the Golan Heights comes to the fore as a problem for Israel, the real danger is seen as Iran, which is trying to carry out an effective policy in Syria to support the Assad administration. The possibility of Iran's attacking Israel by supporting terrorist organizations in the region was being followed carefully by Israel.

The fact that Iraq and Syria became the home of terrorist organizations due to the civil war naturally threatened both neighbouring states. Even though the crises experienced in 2010 caused a rift between Turkey and Israel, the existence of a common threat made it necessary to come together. In light of these factors, Israel took the first step toward rapprochement with Turkey in 2013, thanks to US diplomacy. Netanyahu expressed regret to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan for the deaths of Turkish civilians during the Mavi Marmara Crisis. Due to the developments in Syria, both countries agreed to compromise during this process. The advent of ISIS as a new player in Syria, the PKK's growing influence in Northern Syria, Iran's growing influence in the region, and so on despite warnings, Turkey and Israel were only able to achieve an agreement after three years of talks (Ülgül, 2019).

After the normalization was signed between the two countries in 2016, the two reappointed their ambassadors to each other's capitals. In 2016, Turkey carried out Operation Euphrates Shield to create a safe zone to return millions of refugees to their countries. Israel has declared that it supports this operation (Turan & Öрки, 2017). However, despite these positive developments, Israel continued to distrust Turkey. However, with the rise of populism, Islamophobia and xenophobia in Israel, some Israeli politicians made negative comments about the Turkish government from time to time, which could not take the relations back to the 1990s-2000s, which is described as the 'golden period'. The Turkish side has not completely destroyed its distrust of Israel. The Turkish government also criticized Israel's Palestine policy from time to time and expressed its discomfort with negative rhetoric. In response to these rhetoric, Israel emphasized that Turkey should look at its own human rights records before criticizing Israel. Negative polemics like this have always manifested themselves in relationships and have continued continuously. These statements, in which the two countries exchanged with each other, revealed that Syria is a weak factor that provides a return to rapprochement and good relations.

In 2017, US President Donald Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and the move of the US embassy to Jerusalem created another tension in bilateral relations. A bill of Turkey criticizing this decision was accepted at the UN (Sönmez & Batu, 2020). At this point, Turkish-Israeli relations continued to progress negatively.

Israel's disproportionate intervention in Gaza in 2018 received a strong reaction from Turkey and the embassies of the two countries were temporarily withdrawn again.

The recognition of Israel's sovereignty in the Golan Heights by the US in 2019 caused another problem in Turkey-Israel relations. Turkey described this move as unofficial, basing it on UN Resolution 497 and Syria's territorial integrity (Sönmez & Batu, 2020). Erdoğan criticized Israel's air strikes against Syria and accused Israel of attacking Syria's sovereignty and "creating fear" in the Middle East (Ülgül, 2019). Israel's close relations with the United States and its decisions regarding the Palestine crisis, especially during the Donald Trump era, seriously disturbed Turkey. Israel reacted harshly to Turkey's Operation Peace Spring in 2019. Netanyahu claimed that Turkey is carrying out ethnic cleansing in the region (Sönmez & Batu, 2020). Along with the increasing Iranian influence in Syria, Israel has taken an opposing attitude towards the increase of Turkey's influence in the region. Since 2014, Israel has openly stated its support for the Kurds in Northern Iraq. Netanyahu said that the Kurds deserved their independence. Additionally, Israel has criticized Turkish military operations in Northern Syria. These have reinforced the deep disagreement between Turkey and Israel.

There are several effects of the Syrian crisis in Turkish-Israeli relations today. Both countries have common interests, such as restoring the anarchic situation in the region, ensuring security, and reducing terrorist organizations and Iranian influence. The real question, however, is how close these regional interests bring states to one another.

In Syria, the absence of effective government authority has resulted in the proliferation of actors. As a result, radical terrorist organizations such as ISIS and PYD/YPG have invaded the region, the efficacy of the Kurds in Northern Syria has increased, Iran's influence has grown, and regional and global actors have intervened, among other developments. As a result of these causes, the Syrian civil war has become a global issue over the past eight years, and a bleeding wound in the international arena.

There are some mutual threats for Turkey and Israel in this process. While the main threat for Turkey is a terrorist state that may be formed on its southern border, the threat for Israel is that Iran's influence in Syria is increasing and threatening its own security. Although the military operations carried out by Turkey within the borders of Syria were carried out to prevent this, the possibility of Israel's military action against Iran does not seem realistic in this conjuncture. At the same time, although some steps have been taken between Turkey and Israel as of 2013, the increasing global competition, Israel's support for

the YPG/PYD and the activities carried out in the Eastern Mediterranean show that the relations between the two countries will not return to before 2010.

However, the common goal of both Israel and Turkey in the Syrian region is to prevent the increasing influence of Hezbollah and Iran. Iran's nuclear program has made the threat more visible in terms of the security of the two countries. In terms of Israel, Iran's increasing influence in Syria is perceived as the most important threat to Israel's security (Çağlar & Aksu, 2019). In this regard, Israel sees Turkey as a potential strategic partner. This is one reason why Israel normalized its relations with Turkey in 2016. In this context, Israel welcomed Turkey's 'Operation Spring Shield' and its operations against Iran-backed Shiite militias (Sönmez & Batu, 2020). Turkey's primary aim in the region is to fight the YPG within the scope of the fight against terrorism and to prevent the establishment of the Kurdish administration (Çağlar & Aksu, 2019). In addition to this, removing Iran from the region is one of Turkey's important goals. Turkey, which is committed to democratic values; While it is in favor of a change in the Syrian administration (Oran, 2013), Iran supports the Syrian administration through the channels of the Shiite militant organization "Hezbollah". Turkey is afraid of the possible influence of Iran, which is against its democratic values in its own country, and that Iran settles under its nose. In 2017, Turkish politicians accused Iran of destabilizing the region and following sectarianism. In response, Iran criticized Turkey's policies in Syria and Iraq. In line with all these, the 'Syrian crisis' has shown that it has a strategic collaborative potential in terms of improving the cold peace relations between Turkey and Israel. A Turkish politician even suggested that Turkey seek ways to form an anti-Iran alliance with Israel (Ülgül, 2019).

On the other hand, during his visit to Turkey in 2017, Iranian Chief of General Staff M. Bagheri pointed out that Iran and Turkey have common interests in Syria. Donald Trump's policies, which have recently threatened both Iran's and Turkey's national security stobes, have further contributed to the necessity of dialogue and cooperation between the two countries. In the conjuncture of these developments, Turkey started to see Iran as an important partner in the fight against the Kurdish threat. Therefore, Iran's policies in Syria do not disturb Turkey as before, and in this respect, Turkey is not willing to cooperate with Israel against Iran for now. Especially in order to balance Iran, Israel's seeking new allies and supporting the Kurds around Iran was another factor in Turkey's rapprochement with Russia and Iran (Ülgül, 2019). Thus, the security measures of one side conflict with the national interests of the other side, making Turkish-Israeli cooperation in Syria

difficult. In addition, Trump's extremely pro-Israeli policies and policies supporting the YPG have aroused great distrust and hostility towards the US and Israel in Turkey. This development causes Turkey to rely more on Russia and Iran, again eliminating the possibility of Turkish-Israeli cooperation.

The developments in the domestic politics of the two states also affected Turkey-Israel relations during the Syrian crisis. In the 2000s, conservative parties came to power in both countries (Ülgül, 2019). In Turkey, the Erdoğan government was extremely sensitive to the Palestinian crisis and always harshly criticized Israel's harsh policies towards Palestine. In Israel, the most right-wing government in Israeli history had come to power and was unwilling to make any concessions on Palestine. As a result, tensions such as the Palestinian crisis, the US recognition of Jerusalem, and the anti-Israeli demonstrations in Istanbul pose serious obstacles to the development of Turkey-Israel relations and their cooperation in Syria.

## CONCLUSIONS

The developments in the Middle East have always directly affected Turkey's foreign policy. Although it was the first country to recognize Israel during the Cold War, relations with Israel were at the lowest level until the 1990s, and an anti-Israeli position was always taken regarding the Arab-Israeli wars and Palestine. When evaluated within this framework, the Syria issue has also necessarily affected Turkey-Israel relations. Being neighbour to both states has caused Syria to have one of the decisive roles in Turkey-Israel relations.

Although Syria, with its support to terrorist organizations after 1990, the PKK and Hezbollah caused more extensive cooperation between the two countries, it affected relations from a different perspective with the 2011 civil war. The Syrian crisis, which started in 2011, also has some regional effects on the shaping of Turkey-Israel relations. Turkey and Israel, which supported each other in attempts against terrorist organizations until the events in 2010, started to take part in different fronts with the 2011 Syrian civil war. Although it was understood that relations would not return to the previous level with the Davos Crisis and finally the Mavi Marmara crisis in 2010, Israel started not to give the support it gave to Turkey on the PKK issue after 2010 on the PYD/YPG issue. Although relations were tried to be improved through the USA in 2013, it is possible to say that the relations have not developed until today, on the contrary, they continue in a stable and cold way. Again, in 2014, Netanyahu's words about the establishment of a Kurdish state in Iraq show that the relations

between the two countries will not or will not return to the previous level, either through intermediaries.

These cold relations will continue as long as the two countries do not solve the problems they cannot agree on. In order to ensure proactive relations between Turkey and Israel, these problems must be eliminated first. However, if the two states follow more national interest and security-oriented policies, cooperation will be easier. For example, the Turkish military presence in Syria is important for Israel, which is uncomfortable with Iran's Shiite militias. Therefore, Israel should review this as well. The importance of relations for Turkey stems from Israel's role as a stabilizing factor in the region and Israel's influence on the United States.

The ongoing Syrian crisis remains to be the determining factor for the future development of relations between Turkey and Israel. The real question to be asked here is what will be Israel's new policy if Iran increases its influence in Syria more? In this context, whether Turkey and Israel will take the stage again with the same cards will be determined by the moves of the leaders of the two countries.

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