
Turkey And Israel : Windows Opening To Harmony Or A Chaos?

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1. Introduction:

As globalization is fueled up, the Westphalia Treaty is forgotten which also mean the decline of nation-states' importance. Borders are also like the states but they change meaning. They are protections but at the same time circles of mine. They are the security but also the Bermuda triangle. They are lines that bring together but also separate. Borders are hopeful; borders are disappointments. Borders are reasons for peace since they are the causes of wars. Turkey having seven borders, it acts as a country of the Balkans, the Europe, the Eurasia, the Turkic world and a more conflictual region; the Middle East. As a Middle Eastern country the harsh job of Turkey got more essential, since in the Middle East, there is a rising but never declining turmoil especially after the invasion of Iraq. That's why today, in the Middle East, any conflict can have influences immediately on other parties, like Israel and Turkey. In this paper, I will recommend policies for Turkey to the main problems of Turkey and Israel Palestine conflict, Iraq and Kurdish issue and to improve Turkish-Israeli relations.

They are the two rare countries which are separated from the other Middle Eastern countries in terms of having political legitimacy, warm relations with the US and western-oriented lifestyles. Since they are the allies of the US in Middle East, they both share some threats from Al-Qaeda like Turkey witnessed Istanbul Synagogue bombings, and Egypt witnessed Sharm al-Seyh bombings where the target was mainly the Jewish. On the one hand Turkey and Israel have military cooperation agreement, Aegean Commerce Agreement, and allied operations such as capturing of Ocalan. However, on the other hand the alliance is facing some conflictual problems, too.

2. Problems in Israeli and Turkish Relations:

a. Palestine Conflict: Besides the strategic alliance of Turkey and Israel, they face some problems, too. Indeed, according to the Israeli ambassador in Turkey named Maurice Fisher, Turkey's relations with Israel are based on fragile grounds. He emphasized in 1953 that,

"Our relations with Turkey have been extremely good of late... (but) these good relations could deteriorate overnight, and we should learn from the bitter experience of others [...] For them, there exists one sole principle: in any conflict with a foreigner, whether a private individual, a company or a state, the Turk is always right."[1]

One of the most prominent problems of Turkey and Israel relations is the division between the attitudes of both parties towards the Palestine conflict. Turkey's attitude towards the Palestine and Israeli conflict was changed according to the external powers and pressures. For instance, Turkey's short-lived support of the Palestinians started in 1947, when it voted against the division of

Palestine at UN. However in 1949, while Turkey's foreign policy was to preserve its neutrality, it recognized Israel.[2]

After the 6 days war in 1967, Turkey's attitude towards Israel policies changed. One of the reasons for this change was the Cyprus issue. Turkey couldn't find what it expected from the West. But there was a more important reason that would affect its relations with Israel for a long time. The reason was not to frustrate the Arabs, whom it had economic relations with, mainly in the oil sector. The Saudi government was supporting Islamists activities in Turkey not to support Israel. [3] This policy showed itself in the Israeli-Palestine conflict, too. Turkey's policy in this issue is a strategy of pleasing the both parties. [4]

In an interview in Cumhuriyet on the 17th of February 1974, the Foreign Minister Turan Guneş emphasized that "Turkey would conduct its policy vis-a-vis Israel in the light of international law and UN resolutions rather than fluctuating economic and political circumstances." At last, Turkey recognized the Palestine Liberation Organization as the representative of Palestine.[5] Turkey got closer to the Arabs mainly the Palestinians because of Israel's declaration of Jerusalem Law in 1980, which was emphasizing that Jerusalem was a united, indivisible and eternal capital of Israel. [6] After the declaration of the law, Turkish PM Demirel said that Israel's move was "unwise, wrong, and contrary to international law and fundamental justice." [7] This law irritated not only the government but also the Turkish people, for instance on the 27th of July, in Cumhuriyet it was written that "no relations with it whatsoever". Although Turkey recalled its charge from Tel Aviv, after the Jerusalem Law became a Basic Law of Israel, Turkey was traumatized by the attitude of Iraq which attempted to stop oil shipments and loans to Turkey, unless Turkey changed its attitude towards Israel. [8] During the Iraq-Iran War in 1980, Turkey recalled its diplomatic staff from Israel, and Turkey received \$250 million loan from Saudi Arabia.[9]

Another situation that downgraded the relations with Israel was Israel's decision to occupy the Golan Heights in 1981. Moreover the fire in Al-Aqsa Mosque in 1969, the Lebanon War and the massacre in Palestinian refugee camps near Sidon in 1982, Israel Turkish relations were at a lower point. However in 1984 four MPs from the opposition party visited Israel but this visit resulted with the Interior Minister Yılmaz's critique of them that they harmed Turkey's political goals by visiting Israel. In 1987, with the Palestinian upsurge; Intifada Turkey's support to Palestinians increased [10] and in 1988, Turkey recognized the state of Palestine. Although Israel emphasized its disappointments in the attempt of Turkey, Turkey mentioned that the states in the Middle East have the right to exist as a state with certain borders peacefully. Moreover, Turkey also accepted the Israeli former PM Shamir's peace plan in 1989 which was suggesting elections in the occupied regions of Palestine.[11] During the visit of Tansu Ciller to Israel, she made an official visit to the autonomous region of Palestine and to the Eastern Jerusalem to meet with the officials of Palestine and examined the problems of Palestine people.[12]

Today, Turkey's attitude is almost the same; supporting both Palestine and Israel. On the 8th of May in 2005, during the Sharm el-Seyh Summit Israeli PM Ariel Sharon and Palestine PM Mahmud Abbas declared a truce. According to the office of PM directorate general press and information, after the summit, Erdoğan's speech is showing his support; Turkey was pleased with both the efforts of Israel

and Palestine which put an end to the fighting. Turkey's support to Palestine was refreshed by the visit of Erdoğan to Palestine on the 1-2 May. Erdoğan opened the Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency's Program Coordination Office in Ramallah.

Moreover, the Turkish PM attended a meeting of Turkish Palestinian businessmen.[13] Furthermore, according to Barry Rubin's article "Turkey-Israel Relations", today the potential problem can arise from Turkey's closeness to the Labor Party of Israel, not to the PM Netanyahu. Rubin emphasizes that Turkey supports the UN Security Council Resolutions that benefit both Israel and Palestine. However, Israel is not in favor of a Resolution that benefits Palestine, too.[14]

b. Iraq and Kurdish Problem: c.

The second prominent problem between Turkey and Israel is their differing attitudes towards Iraq's unity. Turkey is supporting a loose Iraq for a long time, since by the end of the Gulf War in 1991 the autonomous Kurdish entity was giving its signals to be founded.

So that in 1996; the former PM Tansu Ciller emphasized that "We shall not allow an independent Kurdish enclave in Northern Iraq. Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity are important to Turkey."

[15]Turkey's policy of Iraq after 2003 did not change. For Turkey, Iraq should be a centralized and strong country which protects its territorial integrity. In contrast, Israel is in favor of a loose and decentralized Iraq.

The world was informed by the BBC News that Israel was alleged that it was training Kurds in the Northern Iraq. Although the claim is not accepted by the Israeli government not to injure the relations with Turkey, the pleaded news is supported by Turkish and American experts that Israel is training the PKK in Northern Iraq. For instance according to Seymour Hersh's article called "Plan B-The Kurdish Gambit", a former official from Israel's intelligence said that Israel has been training the Kurdish commandos with the same effectiveness as the Israel's most secretive commando units, the Mastaravim. Moreover, he added that this was a more efficient way to make an insurgency. An American official from the intelligence said that the Israeli's tie to Kurds "would be of greater value than their growing alliance with Turkey." [16]

Turkish side's response to the claim was that; on the 26th of May, in a news conference in Ankara, Abdullah Gul said that "presenting us with a choice, that is not a real choice, between survival and alliance." [17]

However, Turkey and Israel was hand in hand in combating terrorism.

According to the 1996 Agreement of Military Cooperation, the first principle was; "Cooperation against terrorism requires both parties to exchange information and experience." [18] Moreover, according to Mustafa Kibaröđlu's article called "Turkey and Israel Strategize"; each country can deploy or temporarily station its land, air and naval force units in the other country's territory. For that purpose, they can use one another's air space, airports and naval ports. [19] In addition to that, on the 22nd of May in 1996, according to the Cumhuriyet Newspaper, Israel was going to supply an electronic fencebordering the Southeastern part of Turkey; Iran, Syria and Iraq.

This would perceive the sound waves to capture the PKK terrorists.

[20] The extent to which the allegations are true is discussed by many experts.

Taking these into consideration, Turkey does not support what Israel seeks for, a united Iraq, mainly because of the possibility of increasing terrorist attacks of Kurds, since a federation in Northern Iraq means a strong Kurdish population. However, the result of a loose Iraq can be a threat to Israel, too. In an interview made by the International Crisis Group, on the 27th of October in 2004, with a Turkish official; he stated that "If Iraq falls apart, the Kurds will fight for power, causing instability in the north, while in the south, the Shiites will then set up a theocratic state that, by osmosis, will move closer to Iran; this, in turn, will resurrect Iranian rhetoric about spreading revolution among Shiite populations in the Gulf. This would be a problem for Israel, and all of this will lead to chaos. For both Israel and Turkey, it is better to keep Iraq whole".[21] To find a logical solution to Israel's strategy over Northern Iraq can be, according to Ephraim Inbar's book Turkish-Israeli Strategic Alliance, allying with non-Arabs that include the Turks and the Kurds.

3. Policy Recommendations

Middle East where there are catastrophic wars and conflicts for centuries. That's why everyone living in the Middle East needs a miracle to stabilize the region. However, at least foreign policies can help to take a step towards the miracle to occur; to stabilize the region. In this respect Turkey can imply policies which generally benefit both parties using its lobbying and campaigning tactics and make diplomacy through its cultural activities, trading opportunities.

a. For the Israel-Palestine Conflict:

-Water Routes: A policy recommendation for the conflict that could not solve but help to reduce the problem is water supply from Manavgat to Palestine and Israel. This project was suggested by many Middle Eastern experts for instance, Military of Turkey suggested a water route from Turkey to Israel and Palestine. [22] Today, the water project is being negotiated, but it could be accelerated. Water routes project is important since there is a scarcity of water in Israel. By supplying water to Israel and Palestine, one of the problems of the two countries can be solved.

-Turkish Investment in Palestine:

Another policy recommendation for the conflict between Israel and Palestine is Turkish investment in Palestine. Since unemployment raises conflicts and since the financial well-being is less in Palestine than it is in Israel, investment in Palestine could reduce unemployment. Turkey can make investments in Palestine in sectors such as electronics, since Israel imports most of its electronics from Turkey. Another area for investment can be food. Since Turkey exports high amounts of food products to Israel, a food company can operate in Palestine.

-Conflict Solution Contest:

Another policy recommendation can be a Conflict Solution Contest which

has a money prize of \$100,000 for the winner. The foreign ministry of Turkey can initiate this project with sponsors from all around the world; including states, business groups; to find solutions to the unsolved problems of the world. Everyone who seeks for peace can join the contest. This is so, to embrace all kinds of ideas. The prize can be increased according to the number of states who join the project for sponsoring. The amount of the prize can be increased since this is a difficult contest that the participant should come up with an idea that could persuade the three parties; the USA, Israel and Palestine.

b. For the Kurdish Problem:

-Turkish intelligence and freezing of some agreements: As a policy recommendation for Israel's training program of Kurds in Northern Iraq Turkey can freeze some of its military agreements with Israel. According to the Agreement of Military Cooperation signed in 1996, the first principle was; "Cooperation against terrorism requires both parties to exchange information and experience." [23] However, because of Israel's actions in Northern Iraq, Turkey can stop sharing information and experience; because for Turkey, Kurdish terror is the most prominent area to solve. Turkey could freeze economic agreements and cooperation with Israel; but then it could be disadvantageous for Turkey, too. So that blocking the information and experience flow from Turkey would be a better option to choose.

However, before freezing the agreements, Turkey should be certain that Israel is training the Kurds. If the CIA knew Israel's activities in Northern Iraq, Turkish secret service should know it, too. [24] But if not, Turkey can implement a policy such as; it can integrate its own officials from the intelligence to the Northern Iraq as Kurds. It can train the selected group of officials, teach them Kurdish and make them learn if Israelis really train the Kurds, there.

- Resemblance to Jewish of Kurds' activities: Another policy recommendation to implement against Israel's training operations of Kurds is that Turkey can resemble the bad memories of the Jewish and Kurds to rather the Jewish lobby or through media to the world. After the capture of Ocalan, Israel was one of the states that Kurds blamed for helping Turkey to capture him. To protest Israel, Kurds tried to enter the consulate of Israel in Berlin in 1999, but three of them were shot by Israeli security guards and the upsurge was suppressed. [25] Moreover, Turkey can argue that how can the Jewish support PKK which is also supported by the Syrian government. Since Syria is one of the countries which does not get along with Israel. Since the Jewish lobby and Turkey have good relations, Jewish lobby could be effective through the American government or through the Israeli to impede the support of Israel to Kurds. Moreover, Jewish lobby can be a good option to resemble these memories, because there is an active Kurdish lobby in the US that can influence the Jewish lobby easily. To suppress that, Turkey or Turkish lobby could facilitate this policy. Moreover, Turkey can spread these memories of Jewish and Kurds through media, to blame the Kurds. Through media, Israel can be criticized for helping the Kurds or at least Israeli people can question the actions of Israel.

-Investment in Southeast of Turkey: The last policy recommendation for Israel's training operations of Kurds, Turkey can implement financial policies in the Southeast Turkey. Since, investment increases welfare and brings high living standards; Turkey can make profitable investments in the Southeast of Turkey such as building dams, outlet centers, hotels and casinos in cooperation with Israel

government or offer these investments to the Jewish lobby to build them together. Building dams is a need for the Southeast to solve the water problem. An outlet center can also be profitable since it can attract customers from Syria, Iraq, Iran and other Middle Eastern countries. Hotels and casinos can be built together in only one city to make that city headquarter of entertainment in the Middle East. It could attract many oil-rich customers since there is a small number of such cities in the Middle East. These investments can help the Southeast region to develop and the Kurdish residents to get richer; but never richer than the owners of these investments; Turkey and Israel. This investment policy should only target the low-income Kurds to make them feel pleasant of living inside the borders of Turkey. Since the city will be a touristy place the economy of the Southeast region would develop.

Alternatives to improve Turkish-Israeli Relations: -Establishment of an NGO: A policy recommendation for Turkey to improve Turkish-Israeli relations can be to establish an NGO that uses media, art and sports to lobby and influence the countries and also its own citizens. The NGO can work with various agencies; such as the Ministry of Culture and Tourism get policy recommendations; the business groups to get financial support and the universities to get ideas from the academicians. This would be separate from the state because it should work faster and more efficiently than the state. When there is a problem that the NGO can handle, it should find solutions and implement them. It should deal with some problems which are at state level and target the public to change their opinion. For instance the NGO can produce films to correct the ill-informed sources by showing the realities about the so-called Armenian Genocide and to develop relations with Jewish. It can give the message of Jewish and Turkish friendship; or it can arrange concerts of Jewish-Turkish-Arabic music to give the message that "We are together and we get along peacefully." It may also arrange a peace cup in the field of sports such as football. Football can be an attractive activity since Israeli people know Turkish football well. This NGO can make the same activities for other countries who are seeking for its own advertisement for instance Palestine and also Israel. In this way, it can earn money and use it for the lobbying and the process of advertisement of Turkey.

-Exchange Programs: Besides the media policy, Israel and Turkey can operate exchange programs between the two countries. The universities in Turkey can add Israel option for their exchange programs, specifically targeting the business and international relations students. The exchange program should include only the universities which are mostly in the Western part of Israel, because the students should not abstain from living in Israel. Moreover, the students should have the option of staying with a host family to know the Jewish culture. For business students, Israel can be an attracting choice since Jewish are famous with the image of genius businessmen. Moreover, for international relations, who basically want to study the Middle Eastern policies, Israel would be a great opportunity. Since Turkey, Israel and Middle East are related conflictual issues, a Turk studying in Israel or an Israeli studying in Turkey could be a good experience.

4. Conclusion: Taking all these into consideration, Turkey and Israel is in between the windows which are opened to a harmonious and a chaotic environment. Since the timeline that the Middle East witnessed a peaceful atmosphere is quite short, the policy makers are more experienced. So, they can come up with better solutions. However,

like Israel's so-called secret trainings for the Kurds, there can be curtains which impede the policymakers to know the real situation.

That's why, Turkish intelligence should be developed and the policy makers should be persuasive to implement the strategies that benefit the all parties. To get close to the peaceful environment, Turkey can play a big role.

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