



Turkey's Middle East Policy in the Post-Cold War Era *Soğuk Savaş Sonrası Türkiye'nin Ortadoğu Politikası*

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Abstract

The developments in the post-Cold War period made it inevitable that Turkey would have a new foreign policy vision and strategy and draw a new road map. First of all, this study will deal with the developments experienced at global and regional level after the Cold War and then, the implications of these transformations in Turkey's Middle East foreign policy. Furthermore, Turkey's bilateral relations with Iraq, Iran, Israel and Syria, will be mentioned.

Key Words: post- cold war period – security - foreign policy

Özet

Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde yaşanan gelişmeler, Türkiye'nin yeni dış politika vizyonu ve stratejisini ortaya koymasını ve yeni bir yol haritası çizmesini kaçınılmaz kılmıştır. Bu çalışmada öncelikle Soğuk Savaş döneminden sonra küresel ve bölgesel alanda yaşanan gelişmelere değinilecek, daha sonra bu değişimlerin Türkiye'nin Ortadoğu dış politikası üzerine etkileri incelenecektir. Ayrıca Türkiye'nin bölgede önemli bir etkinliği olan Irak, İran, İsrail ve Suriye devletleriyle olan ikili ilişkiler anlatılacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Soğuk savaş sonrası dönem – güvenlik - dış politika

INTRODUCTION

Turkey, which had the opportunity to widen its foreign policy horizons in the post-Cold War period, had the chance to act in a wide geography from Europe to Eurasia, including the Middle East.¹ According to Kemal Kirişçi, unlike the quiescence during the Cold war,

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¹ Büşra Ersanlı, "Çok Boyutluluğu Yeniden Keşfi: Türkiye'nin Türk Cumhuriyetleriyle İşbirliği Arayışı", *Türk Cumhuriyetleri ve Petrol Boru Hatları*, der. Aladdin Yalçınkaya, (İstanbul, Bağlam Yayınları, 1998): 225.

Turkey moved to an activist policy in the post-Cold War period.² Kirişçi divided Turkey's foreign policy activities into two, namely, solving problems within its region and attempting to achieve a stable environment at global level, and featuring Ankara as a capital city which tries to resolve problems without endangering its own integrity and avoiding unilateral oppressive measures. On the other hand, dissolution of the USSR increased the variables that affected Turkey's security and foreign policies. Sander determined that in the new period of Turkish foreign policy, regional security and cooperation replaced the global interests of the Cold War period, and that new conditions prevailed over global alliances.³ In this view, the search for an outward-oriented and proactive foreign policy emerges as an important characteristic of recent Turkish foreign policy. The European Union projects carried out in accordance with the "Strategic Depth" and "zero-problems neighborhood" policies becomes more important in this respect. At this point, taking part in regional formations does not contradict globalization. On the contrary, it is accepted that they are complementary. Taking part in the regional formations is considered as the most sound and the least costly way to protect the national interests of a country against global threats/risks.⁴

This means that Turkey attempts to be central to the formulation of world policy. In fact, Turkey which is free from the restrictions of the Cold War period now has more opportunity to have greater and different roles. Therefore, it seems inevitable for Turkey to consider and redefine its foreign policy and security policy in answer to the changes and domestic pressures in the new security environment. In this new definition, Turkey should put forward the objective of being a global power, beyond a regional power, and in this framework, it needs to draw a road map.

In this sense, it can be seen that Turkey's strategic options in the early 1990s began to be dealt with under different circumstances and in different aspects, when compared to the previous decades. Turkey, which started to question its "status-quo passive foreign policy" during the Cold War, first enunciated a new strategy by the then President Turgut Özal, and Turkey was provided with a new mission and vision. Özal, during his press conference after the Gulf War in 1991, explained that "Turkey should leave its former passive and irresolute policy and follow an active foreign policy" and in a sense, this started the new period.⁵ Thus, although this process tried to be interrupted by artificial crises in domestic policy and by military coups from time to time, this change of tendency in foreign policy was not restricted to the Özal period. The explanations of the policy-makers in for the new Turkish vision is often explained in the context of a multidirectional foreign policy and the search for new balances. "If the EU does not make the decision that Turkey wants, Turkey will not have difficulty in finding a new channel to be followed with its great potential" indicate an active process as well as the search of balance in the foreign policy.

Particularly, developments in the post-Cold War era made it inevitable for Turkey to put forward a new foreign policy vision and strategy in the context of "regions" and "global powers/power candidates". It is observed that Turkey's current road map follows a

² Mehmet Seyfettin Erol, "11 Eylül Sonrası Türk Dış Politikasında Vizyon Arayışları ve "Dört Tarz-ı Siyaset", Akademik Bakış, (Cilt 1, Sayı 1 Kış 2007): 34.

³ Oral Sander, "Yeni Bir Bölgesel Güç Olarak Türkiye'nin Dış Politika Hedefleri", *Türk Dış Politikasının Analizi*, der. Faruk Sönmezoğlu, (İstanbul, Der Yayınları, 2001): 607–608.

⁴ Hamit Ersoy and Lale Ersoy, *Küreselleşen Dünyada Bölgesel Oluşumlar ve Türkiye*, (Ankara, Siyasal Kitabevi, 2002): 200.

⁵ Ramazan Gözen, *Amerikan Kışkacında Dış Politika: Körfez Savaşı, Turgut Özal ve Sonrası*, (Ankara, Liberte Yayınları, 2000): 203.

multidirectional policy, rather than exhibiting a pro-Western outlook after the developments at regional and global level following the 1990s. In this study, first of all, Turkey's changing Middle East policy will be analyzed in two periods: 1990–2000 and post-2000. Afterwards, Turkey's relations in the Middle East will be dealt on the basis of bilateral relations with Iraq, Iran, Israel and Syria.

TURKEY'S MIDDLE EAST POLICY BETWEEN 1990–2000

The Middle East became one of the most significant regions for the Turkish foreign policy-makers both during and after the Cold War. Turkish foreign policy toward the Middle East, has witnessed many important events since early 1990s. The invasion of Kuwait by Iraq, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the problems emerging in the region, the continuing Arab-Israel peace process and the war in the Balkans deeply affected Turkey's Middle East policy.⁶ Furthermore, the connections between Turkey and the Middle Eastern societies even make the relations between Turkey and the Middle Eastern countries more complicated considering the burden of history.⁷

With the Gulf War that broke out in early 1990s, Turkey experienced transformation in its Middle East policy both generally and specifically.⁸ The most fundamental priority of the Turkish foreign policy in the post-Cold War period is the emergence of new opportunity areas. The dynamic strategic competitive environment brought by the post-Cold War period is one of the matters that need to be taken into consideration in Turkey's search of a new inter-regional strategy and shaping of its Middle East policy. The dynamic relationship, which establishes Turkey's Middle East policy between the great powers out of the region and the balances within the region, is the intersection of global and regional factors.⁹ "As the bipolar static structure of the post-Cold War era lost its influence, Turkey's near land basin policy based on the Middle East-the Caucasus-the Balkans triangle experienced radical changes."¹⁰ Today, Turkey, which tried not to get involved in the region directly after World War I and which developed a foreign policy strategy based on transboundary organizations like NATO and the EU, finds itself in the labyrinths of the internal parameters of its region.¹¹ Turkey which followed a passive policy with its neighbors after the Cold War can intervene in the regional level to the extent that the international conjuncture allows.¹²

In the post-Cold War era, the framework of security and foreign policies of the countries was determined by the general policies of the Western and Eastern blocks that they belonged to. Within this general framework, countries were flexible in bilateral relations with regard to the common and basic policies of the block that they belonged to. After the Cold War ended, a period during began in which multilateral interests and relations were increasingly becoming important in terms of economy, foreign policy and security policy. In these multilateral relations that were shaped in the uncertain environment of the Cold War period, interests of the countries began to come to the forefront. On the other hand, close cooperation started to be established between the countries which were included in different blocks during

⁶ Ramazan Gözen, *İmparatorluktan Küresel Aktörlüğe Türkiye'nin Dış Politikası*, (Palme Yayıncılık, 2009): 201.

⁷ Bülent Aras, *Ortadoğu ve Türkiye*, (Q-Matris Yayınları, İstanbul, 2003): 9.

⁸ Gözen, 2009, p. 201.

⁹ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik*, (Küre Yayınları, İstanbul, 2010): 395.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.396.

¹¹ Ibid., p.396.

¹² Tayyar Arı, "Türkiye'nin Orta Doğu Politikası ve ABD İle İlişkileri: Politik İkilem", http://www.tayyarari.com/download/TR_Ortadoğu.doc., (10.05.2010, time: 21:45): 13.

the Cold War period. Probably, one of the most important outcomes of the post Cold War period is the emergence of a conjuncture that necessitated redefinition of the inter-regional interaction areas.

Turkey's willingness to reestablish good relations with the countries of the region during the Ozal period in the 1980s manifested itself in Turkish foreign policy. Turkey pursued a policy that envisaged itself as an actor in regional issues during the Gulf War when Turgut Özal was prime minister.¹³ As a matter of fact, although it was commonly envisaged that relations would be stable with the end of the Cold War, foreign relations turned to an opposite direction due to the developments during the 1990s. Within the scope of the regional system rearranged as part of the "New World Order envisaged by the USA, Turkey performed a reflective political maneuver and entered a strategic process of convergence with Israel after it was not included in the Middle East Peace process. The policies that began to be pursued within the context of this strategy awakened Turkish-Arab tension. At the same time, mutual conflicts in parallel to these developments prompted Turkey to revise its Middle East perceptions and policies. Particularly, mutual tensions between Turkey and Syria which even led them to the verge of a war negatively affected Turkey's attitudes toward the Middle East and thus, the Arab world. The USA which began to be influential in the region as of the 1990s became a factor which has directed, rather than shaped, Turkey's Middle East policies for the last 15 years. Meanwhile, Turkey's attaching importance to the strategic partnership with Israel revealed the Turkish-Arab tension.

TURKEY'S MIDDLE EAST RELATIONS AFTER 2000

In recent years, Turkey's interest and influence in the Middle East has changed and grown. Turkey aims to make the Middle East one of the principal policy areas in foreign relations in which multilateralism will be increasingly important. During the 2000s, Turkey has begun to play a facilitatory role by advocating diplomacy as a solution of the problems in the Middle East. The bilateral relations established in accordance with the zero-problems policy with neighbors contributes to Turkey's.

Turkey's new Middle East perspective is of vital importance for Turkey as well. For many years, Turkey followed a foreign policy based on its own ideological axis.¹⁴ Domestic conditions of the period affected this situation. Today, it seems that Turkey has understood that struggles over domestic policy cannot be a matter within the context of foreign political events. Turkey thus has the opportunity to transform its own identity in its relations with the countries of the region. Turkey plays an effective role in the Israeli-Palestine problem, relations with Iran, and relations with the Kurds within the context of the Iraqi problem. In this respect, Turkey has recently followed a multilateral policy within the region.

The AKP government has made a radical change in the Turkish foreign policy as a result of the evaluation carried out in late January 2009. According to this evaluation, convergence with the Western countries and full membership to the EU are no longer the only priority of Turkey's foreign policy. Instead, the priorities that support and trigger each other become important in foreign policy. Turkish foreign policy thus has undergone a radical transformation that aims to adapt to the new multilateral global structure. In this new foreign policy approach, Middle East policy has become at least as important as EU full membership.

¹³ Ibid., p.7.

¹⁴ Gözen (2009): 104.

The role and importance of the Middle East in Turkish foreign policy increased especially for matters directly related to Iraq after 2003 operation. The changing balances in the Middle East during and after the Iraq operation began to affect Turkey's Middle East priority.

During the 2000s, the relations between Turkey and the Middle East have entered a new era as a result of changes in the world and the region. Particularly, after the AKP came to power in November 2002, Turkey's Middle East policy changed. This policy began to be shaped within the context of the occupation of Iraq by the USA in 2003 and subsequent developments. The AKP started to follow the policy of 'zero-problems' with its neighbors after this period.

The abovementioned policies are currently pursued and even developed further, as well as steps taken by Turkey's counterparts to strengthen relations improved relations. Particularly, emotional explanations and romantic initiatives that address the "Arab conscience" and political steps that impressed the Arab, especially ordinary people, accelerated the process considerably. First of all, the rejection of the "Memorandum of March 1" by the Turkish Parliament sufficed to demolish Turkey's "pro-Western" image to a great extent. At the same time, establishment of high-level relationships with Syria with which Turkey was on the verge of war only ten years earlier, and consolidation of the relations despite the intense pressures by the USA and Western countries on Syria significantly enhanced Turkey's "position" in the Arab world. Negotiations with Hamas which were approached with suspicion by the USA and many European countries and considered as a terrorist organization by Israel, the harsh attitude of Turkey toward Israel during and after the Israeli-Hezbollah War in summer 2006 and the "Operation Cast Lead", which was the last large-scale operation of Israel toward Gaza, again the harsh statements against Israel and finally, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's "One Minute" move during the 2009 Davos summit completely changed the image of Turkey which was labeled as a "friend of Israel" in the Arab world for many years and therefore, had created a psychological wall with the Arab countries. Turkey became a country that was a model and needed to be followed closely by the Arab countries.

Peace and stability in the Middle East is very important both in terms of security of the country and regional and global peace. In this respect, Turkey attaches great importance to pursuing its relations with the Arab and Muslim world in peace and friendship due to the historical and religious connections, while it maintains its relations and cooperation which will contribute to ensuring stability and welfare by also taking into account Israel and conditions of the region. Regular diplomatic relations with Israel determine course of the relations with the region. Common interests lie behind this cooperation.

III. BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH THE COUNTRIES OF THE REGION

I. Turkish-Iraqi Relations

Turkey continued to pursue its active and balanced policy during the second Gulf War when Turgut Özal was President.¹⁵ The basic elements that determined Turkey's Iraqi were the stability and territorial integrity of Iraq and its struggle against the PKK. The political and territorial integrity of Iraq is of vital importance for Turkey. The developments in Iraq have two dimensions. The first one was the existence of the PKK in the northern part of Iraq. The PKK in the northern part of Iraq infiltrate Turkey and organize terrorist attacks. The second element concerned the province of Kirkuk which has many ethnic groups. At the same time, it has important oil resources. The control of Kirkuk and its rich oil resources by any one group could lead to the disruption of the balance of power.

Thus, fragmentation of Iraq and the establishment of a de facto independent Kurdish state in the North constituted a red line for Turkey. During this period, important problems were experienced in the struggle against the PKK, especially vis-à-vis the USA and the northern Iraqi administration. Turkish-U.S. relations were already unstable. After November 2007, conciliation and cooperation with the USA, the northern Iraqi local administration and the Iraqi central administration on the struggle against the PKK improved. Since November 2007, Turkey has achieved important progress on the struggle against the PKK, which has been a focal point of its Middle East policy.

In 1991, after the first Gulf War, the administrative and legal authorization of the Iraqi central administration over the area north of the 36th parallel was abolished by the UN. The resulting military control of the area, called the Combined Task Force included and Turkey. Thanks to this arrangement, between 1991-2003, Turkey was able to organize military operations against the PKK within Iraq's borders. However, in March 2003, the USA banned flights over Iraqi airspace. For this reason, Turkey's opportunity to struggle against the PKK within Iraq's borders both by land and air was minimized and weakened.

However, the attitude of the USA on the struggle against the PKK considerably changed after the visit paid by the Turkish Prime Minister to the USA in November 2007. The USA declared the PKK a common enemy and explained that the PKK should be eliminated for the stability of both Iraq and Turkey. Furthermore, Washington decided to supply military intelligence to Turkey in its struggle against the PKK and allowed air and land operations against the PKK within Iraq's borders by opening Iraqi airspace.

This cooperation between Turkey and the USA on the struggle against the PKK provided the former with important initiatives and flexibility in terms of its Middle East policy.

Another important Turkish gain in its Iraqi policy is the general recognition of Iraq's territorial integrity. Despite the risk of fragmentation which may lead to instability, political dissolution and an internal conflict in Iraq, the USA, Iraq's neighboring countries and the UN have maintained their decisiveness on the protection of Iraq's territorial integrity and have confirmed their aims in various resolutions.

Shaping of the future of Kirkuk is another plus for Turkey on Iraq. Turkey opposes the change of demographic structure of Kirkuk and its inclusion into the Kurdish autonomous region. Turkey's position on this issue can be seen in the active role it takes in the United Nations on the Kirkuk issue. The special status to be provided for Kirkuk under the supervision of the United Nations, the facilitator role to be played by the UN in this regard and the strict observation of this status constitute Turkey's policy on Iraq. Arab countries also

¹⁵ Tayyar Arı, "Geçmişten Günümüze Türkiye'nin Orta Doğu Politikasının Analizi ve İlişkileri Belirleyen Dinamikler", 21. *Yüzyılda Türk Dış Politikası*, der. İdris Bal (Nobel Yayın evi, 2004): 681.

support this proposal. In this respect, the Kurdish administration argues that Kirkuk is a Kurdish province and it needs to be included in the Kurdish administration as a result of a referendum. Organization of a referendum on the status of Kirkuk until late 2007 (in accordance with provisional articles of the Iraqi Law) was postponed six months with the UN decision dated December 20. The USA also supported this decision. Despite the destabilizing threats of the Northern Iraqi Kurdish Administration, the process of determining the status of Kirkuk was postponed until after 2008 and most probably, it will have a special status. This development is in accordance with Turkey's position and should be evaluated as a gain that confirms Turkey's importance in the Middle East.

The main element that will determine Turkey's importance in the Middle East and accordingly, Turkish-U.S. relations, will be the future of the Kurdish administration in Northern Iraq.

The Kurdish administration of Northern Iraq maintains its idea of establishing an independent Kurdish state. The USA wants an autonomous and stable Kurdish administration which can become a powerful ally in the Northern Iraq within a flexible and federative Iraq where territorial integrity is protected and the central authority is in Baghdad. Turkey, on the other hand, supports a powerful central administrative structure within Iraq's absolute territorial integrity. It opposes any approach and that may pave the way for the independence of the Kurdish administration of the Northern Iraq.

In this respect, the USA wants Turkey to normalize relations with the Kurdish administration of Northern Iraq, to recognize and address the administration and in the short term, to act as a regional protector of the administration. Furthermore, it wants to maintain and enhance its military existence in the region (in the short term, gathering its forces in Iraq in the north) and withdraw its military from Northern Iraq and Turkey. It also wants the transfer of Northern Iraq's oil and natural gas resources to the international markets thru Turkey safely.

In the great bargain that contains these demands with the USA, the political developments to be carried out by Turkey in return for the U.S. support in the struggle against the PKK are of great importance.

The first important development expected by the USA from Turkey in the great bargain is the solution (political, economic, social etc.) of the Kurdish problem. The second one concerns relations with the Kurdish administration of the Northern Iraq. These issues are still at the negotiation stage, and their content on the Turkish side has not matured yet. These issues have become of primary importance to the Turkish. Sustaining the increasing importance of Turkey in the Middle East will depend on the policies to be pursued on this matter.

II. Turkish-Iranian Relations

Turkey follows a sensitive policy towards Iran in its Middle East policy. The general issues that determined the bilateral relations during the 1990s were the PKK problem, radical Islamist groups in Turkey, the Nagorno-Karabakh problem and Azerbaijan. Turkey suspected that the PKK used some bases in Iran.¹⁶ The tension between the two countries in 1994 emerged because of the PKK when Ankara accused Iran of supporting the PKK. However,

¹⁶ William Hale, *Türk Dış Politikası 1774-2000*, (Çeviren Petek Demir), (İstanbul 2003, Arkeoloji ve Sanat Yayınları): 335.

right after this event, Iran returned some PKK militants to the Turkish authorities in May 1994. This situation soothed the relations. With a new agreement in June 1994, Iran guaranteed that it would not allow the PKK members to pass from Iraq to Iran or from Iran to Armenia. As a part of this convergence process, Demirel paid an official visit to Tehran in June 1994. He was the first president to visit Iran since the 1979 Iran Revolution. In 1995, Turkey initiated a large-scale operation against the PKK in Northern Iraq. Iran's sheltering of the PKK militants that escaped this caused tensions to escalate.

After Erbakan came to power in February 1995, considerable progress was achieved in bilateral relations. However, the close relations with Iran led to uneasiness in Turkey. After the assassination of Uğur Mumcu in January 1993, it was claimed that Islamist organizations took part in his murder and they were connected to Iran. After this incident, relations with Iran worsened.¹⁷ On the other hand, as a result of the visit paid by Erbakan to Tehran in 1996, a natural gas pipeline agreement was signed with Iran. With this agreement, it was expected that 3.000.000.000 m³ gas would reach Turkey annually and this amount would be 10.000.000.000 m³ by 2003.¹⁸ The visit paid by Iranian President Haşimi Rafsancani to Ankara in December 1996 was an indicator of a Turkish-Iranian convergence. However, this situation caused some parts of society to have concerns. It was argued in this period that the Turkish-Iranian convergence became a factor that brought an end to the Erbakan period in 1997.

During the 2000s, the main priority of Turkey's new foreign policy has been to pursue a zero-problems policy with its neighbors. Within this framework, Turkey maintains bilateral relations with Iran in many areas. Trade volume between the two countries has increased in recently. The trade volume, which was approximately \$2.8 billion in 2004, quadrupled in 2008 and exceeded \$10 billion.¹⁹ However, there is an inconsistency between the Turkish policy toward Iran and the U.S. policy toward Iran. Iran has been the target of the USA because of its nuclear energy technology and uranium enrichment program. Decisions to implement an embargo of Iran have been taken by the UN. Despite this, Turkey carries out a balanced diplomacy based on good bilateral relations with Iran. There is a cooperative relationship between Turkey and Iran on their stance against the establishment of a Kurdish state in Northern Iraq, the struggle against the PKK-PJAK and in the area of energy.²⁰

In its relations with Iran, Turkey is an important diplomat in the Middle East. Iran wants to resolve all problems through dialogue and diplomacy. This view is also accepted and supported by the Arab and Gulf countries. In its relations with Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, the recent consultations on the solution of the problems with Iran in the Middle East Son have been an important gain for Turkey in terms of its protection of regional stability. The basic policy of Turkey in this area has been to balance Iran through dialogue and diplomacy, not confrontation and conflict.

Despite the embargo statements of the Western countries, bilateral relations between Turkey and Iran have intensified the diplomatic traffic, and Turkey has attempted to resolve problems through diplomacy. The signing of an agreement for the exchange of Iranian uranium in the summit between Turkey, Brazil and Iran on May 18, 2010, can be seen as an

¹⁷ Robert Olsan, *Türkiye-İran İlişkileri*, (Çeviren Kezban Acar) (California 2004): 12.

¹⁸ F.Stephen Larrabee. Lan O.Lesser, *Türk Dış Politikası*, (Çeviren Mustafa Yıldırım), (İstanbul 2004): 191.

¹⁹ Irina Svistunova, "Irak Faktörü'nün Türkiye'nin Ortadoğu Politikasına Etkisi (1990–2008)", *Ortadoğu Analiz*, (Şubat 2010, Cilt 2, sayı 14): 83.

²⁰ Kemal İnât, "Türkiye'nin Son Dönem İran Politikası: Barış ve Kalkınma için Karşılıklı Bağımlılık", *Ortadoğu Analiz*, (Ekim 2010, Cilt 1, sayı 10): 9.

example. This success in which Turkey played an important role has been a great diplomatic achievement for world peace. In this sense, it was a significant step in terms of overcoming the long-lasting crisis between the Western countries and Tehran due to Iran's debated nuclear program through diplomacy.²¹ With an official statement, Iran accepted the uranium exchange and credited its realization to Turkey. Turkey, thanks to its role in the nuclear exchange, became a country that fostered order in the Middle East.²²

III. Turkish-Israeli Relations

In the development of the relations between Turkey and Israel in the post-Cold War period, expectations of these two countries from each other as well as the emerging international environment played an important role. Although the Cold War ended, the security problems of Israel were not eliminated completely. As a matter of fact, after Israel considered Iran as a big threat for both the world and the region, the USA targeted Iran in the Gulf.²³ On the other hand, relations with the USA are a complementary factor that enables the Turkish-Israeli relations to be strategic. States which establish close relations with Turkey and Israel consider this relationship as a way to move closer to the USA.²⁴ The USA has an important role in shaping and developing the Turkish-Israeli relations.

Israel saw the political and military alliance with Turkey, as a Muslim country, necessary in order to protect its security and not to become isolated in the region. Particularly, the perception of terrorism as a common threat for both sides caused them to have concrete expectations from each other. Israel thought that it might decrease the boycott against it and the hostility of the Arab countries through Turkey. For its part, Turkey wanted to intimidate its unfriendly neighbors and gain military and economic assistance through the Jewish Lobby of Israel in the USA.²⁵

During the 1990s, the Turkish-Israeli relationship was strengthened by mutual visits at the state level. The signing of the agreement that confirmed the Oslo peace process in 1993²⁶ paved the way for improving bilateral relations between Turkey and Israel and for cooperating in broader areas. After this date, relations gained impetus and showed great progress in every area and led to a strategic alliance and cooperation. The two countries exchanged ambassadors for the first time in 1991. This event was followed by high-level visits. Comprehensive cooperation was achieved in the military area. Likewise, great progress was made in economic and commercial relations. David Ivry, the Israeli Minister of Defense, visited Ankara in 1993.²⁷ With the visit paid by Hikmet Çetin, Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, to Israel in the same year, an agreement on the exchange of intelligence was signed.²⁸ In 1994, Israeli President Ezer Weizmann, Shimon Perez, the Minister of Defense, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs all visited Turkey.²⁹ This was followed by the visit of Prime

²¹ Abdülhamit Bilici, İran'ın Gözünü Açan Uyarı, <http://www.zaman.com.tr/yazar.do>, (19.05.2010, 14:24)

²² Gökhan Bacık, Nükleer Takasın Anlamı(yorum), <http://www.zaman.com.tr/yazar.do>, (19.05.2010, 15:00)

²³ Tayyar Arı : "ABD-İsrail İlişkileri ve Orta Doğu Barış Süreci", *Avrasya Dosyası (İsrail Özel)*, Cilt 5, Sayı 1 (İlkbahar, 1999): 238.

²⁴ Serhat Erkmen: "Türk-İsrail İlişkilerinde Yeni Bir Dönem mi?", *ASAM Stratejik Analiz Dergisi* (Haziran, 2005):

²⁵ Recep Öztürk, *Batı Faktörünün Etkisinde Türkiye-İsrail İlişkilerinin Politikası*, (Ankara, 2004): 85.

²⁶ Kamer Kasım, "Türkiye-İsrail İlişkileri: İki Bölgesel Gücün Stratejik Ortaklığı", *21.Yüzyılda Türk Dış Politikası*, der. İdris Bal (Ankara, Ocak, 2004): 811.

²⁷ Tayyar Arı, *Geçmişten Günümüze Ortadoğu, Siyaset, Savaş ve Diplomasi*, (Mkm Yayıncılık, 2008): 624

²⁸ Ibid, 2008, p.624.

²⁹ Kasım (2008): 811.

Minister Tansu Çiller in Israel in 1994. For the modernization of fifty-four F-4 planes as a result of these visits, an agreement was signed with Israel.³⁰ Again, a “Military Training and Cooperation” agreement was signed between Turkey and Israel in 1996.³¹ The agreement which was valid for five years would be renewed in the subsequent years. The cooperation achieved in the military area manifested itself in trade as well. A free trade agreement signed in March 1996 was approved by the Turkish Parliament in April 1997. It was considered that despite these positive developments in military and trade areas, Turkish-Israeli relations would come to a halt after the coalition government of Tansu Çiller and Necmettin Erbakan came to power. However, contrary to the expected, relations were maintained.

The Turkish General Staff played a very important role in developing relations with Israel. In fact, the visit paid by İsmail Hakkı Karadayı, the Chief of the Turkish General Staff, to Israel in 1997 was the highest-level visit even by the military.³² This convergence between Turkey and Israel was approached with suspicion by the Arab countries while it was welcomed by the USA. The most significant political gain of Turkey in its political, military and economic cooperation with Israel was the consolidation of its relations with the USA. Turkish-Israeli relations were negatively affected by the Arab-Israeli problem from time to time. For instance, the visit paid by Halid Meşal, one of the leaders of the Hamas in Palestine, to Turkey on 16 February 2006 was criticized by the Israeli authorities.

It is known that Mossad, Israel’s secret intelligence service, was influential in the capture of Abdullah Öcalan, the PKK leader, in Kenya in 1999 and his transfer to Turkey. The Israeli President Shimon Perez, who paid a three-day visit to Turkey in November 2007, delivered a speech in the Turkish Parliament. It was the first speech that an Israeli president had made in a parliament of a country that was mainly Muslim.

It was observed that Turkey acted as a mediator between Israel and the Arab countries in 2008. Authorities of Israel, Syria and the Palestine National Authority, which all rejected direct negotiations, came to Turkey separately and negotiated through Turkey. While a result was expected from these negotiations in November 2008, the 2008-2009 Israeli-Gaza conflict broke out suddenly and the negotiations came to a halt. As a result of the Israeli bombings, approximately 1300 Palestinian people lost their lives. The sudden interruption of the negotiations and the Gaza operation, which resulted in the death of many civilians, negatively affected relations between Turkey and Israel. During the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, on 30 January 2009, a harsh debate between Israeli President Shimon Perez and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan erupted and ended only after Erdoğan left the meeting. Although it was argued that this tension was soothed as a result of the negotiations between the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Israel, relations did not turn to normal. Relations even became more tense due to the exclusion of Israel named “Anatolian Eagle.” Then, there were the adverse effects from the TV series named “Ayrılık” and finally, the “Seat Crisis”. However, despite these, Turkey was still considered a dependable friend. Although relations worsened, it was thought that this situation was a natural outcome of politics and that finally, relations would

³⁰ Ibid, p. 811.

³¹ Hale (2003):318.

³² Ibid, p. 627.

return to normal. Accepting that this kind of things might happen in politics, Israel gave the message that relations were good in the remaining areas.³³

The last crisis erupted between Turkey and Israel when Israeli soldiers attacked the Mavi Marmara ship, a member of the fleet carrying humanitarian aid to Gaza, in international waters on May 31, 2010. Nine people lost their lives in the Israeli military attack to the Mavi Marmara, which was carrying nationals of 32 different states as well as Turkey.³⁴ This attack escalated the tension between two countries to the ever highest level and relations nose-dived. This is the first time when Israeli Armed Forces has attacked and killed the nationals of a NATO Member State.³⁵ After this event, legitimacy of Israel has started to be questioned in terms of law and human rights, and the pressure of international public opinion has started to be felt more and more by Israel. This unacceptable attitude of Israel has got reactions from nearly all parts of the world and, Israel has been isolated due to her aggressive attitudes.

After the attack, unlike Israel's attitude, Turkey has sought her rights in the international platform in compliance with law. Moreover, rather than reflecting this attack as a Turkey-Israel problem, Turkey has pursued a right policy and turned it into international crises. By taking diplomatic steps and applying to UN, the USA and even NATO; Turkey has underlined the international dimension of the problem, the opposite of what Israel has defended.

Agreeing on establishment of an international inquiry commission to inquire this attack, Israel has renewed her expectations towards normalization process of Turkey-Israel relations. In addition, returning of three Turkish ships by Israel is a concrete example of Israel's such expectation. Although has not explained explicitly, Israel cannot risk losing Turkey. Turkey is an important actor of the Middle East peace process. On the other hand, relations with Israel are important and sensitive for Turkey as well. It is an undeniable fact that Turkey-Israel relations continue despite ups and downs. These two countries had, have and will continue to have economic, commercial and military relations. In other words, although Turkey and Israel are dependent on each other for different reasons, the result is the same: 'Continuity of Turkey-Israel relations'. It can be evaluated that the Turkish-Israeli relations may improve over time although they cannot return to its previous condition. As a matter of fact, it can be seen in many events that the deteriorated relations are in fact not as bad as it seems behind close doors.

VI. Turkish-Syrian Relations

Due to the characteristics of the Cold War period, Syrian-Turkish relations experienced ups-and-downs until the 1990s; however, there was not a radical and pronounced change in the relations during this period.³⁶ Turkey's policy toward Syria can be defined as deliberate divergence and controlled tension.³⁷ When Syrian-Turkish relations from the end of the Cold War till today are considered, the most important problems that shape Turkish-Syrian relations are the issues of Hatay province, Water and Terrorism. In addition to these problems,

³³ Ibid, p.93.

³⁴ Tuğba Aktaş, "Ortadoğu Ekseninde Türkiye-İsrail İlişkilerinde Son Durum",

<http://www.usak.org.tr/makale.asp?id=1656>, (20.11.2010)

³⁵ Yasin Altınoğlu, "İsrail Basınında 'Mavi Marmara Krizi'" <http://www.tasam.org/index.php?altid=3145>, (20.11.2010)

³⁶ <http://suriye.ihh.org.tr/turkiye/sondonem/sondonem.html>, 22.05.10, 15:48.

³⁷ Bülent Aras, "Türkiye İran İlişkilerinde Geline Nöktä", *Stratejik Yorum*, 2005, No:55 www.tasam.org.

the reaction of Syria to the cooperation between Turkey and Israel can be seen as another problem. Until the period when the terrorist leader was captured in 1999, Syria had been a country that sheltered, supported and even directed the PKK terrorist organization. It kept the Hatay issue on its agenda, showed Hatay as part of Syria and made constant demands on boundary waters. In 1998, Turkey and Syria came close to war because of Syrian support provided to the PKK. However, Syria preferred to expel Öcalan instead of facing the opposition of Turkey. After this development, Turkish-Syrian relations entered into a new phase.³⁸ The death of Enver Esat, pressure of the USA on Syria and its isolation in the region played a role in this change.

During the 2000s, bilateral relations turned to normal, and top officials at the state level have paid mutual visits. The visits paid by President Ahmet Necdet Sezer to Damascus in 2005 due to the funeral of Hafız Esad strengthened the relations between the two countries.³⁹ Similarly, the signing of "Military Training, Technical and Scientific Cooperation Agreement" and "Military Training Cooperation Agreement"⁴⁰ during the visit of the Syrian Chief of Staff to Turkey in 2002 can be considered as a development that enhanced confidence between the two countries. Both countries also took steps to improve trade relations. With the visit paid by Turkish State Minister Kürşat Tüzmen as well as many businessmen to Syria in 2004, it was decided to enhance the trade volume between the two countries.⁴¹

The 2003 Iraqi crisis periodically brings together the Turkish policy-makers and Iraq's neighbouring countries. In these meetings, Turkey and Syria cooperate in many areas. Turkey and Syria have legitimate concerns about the future of Iraq. Furthermore, they need to cooperate at every opportunity in order to contribute to the peace and stability of the region.

Mutual visits at the state level and attempts for the peaceful settlement of the Iraqi problem are considered to be positive developments in the new period. The visit paid by the Syrian President Beşir Esad to Turkey in 2004, 2007 and finally in 2010 and the interest shown for these visits became influential in the continuance of the relations between two countries. In his most recent visit, Esad stated "It is not like we have been in another country. It is the reflection of the feelings of the societies of both countries. This situation indicates the development of the deep-rooted bilateral relations in political, economic and similar aspects. This is the reflection of our historical relationships."⁴² Furthermore, Turkish President Gül remarked that there were historical, cultural and humanitarian connections as well as common interests and joint projects for the benefit of both societies. The statements of Esad and Abdullah Gül confirm that the dynamism of the relations are not just for the benefit of the state and that this dynamism is based on sound foundations and reflects the consent of both societies. As emphasized by the leaders during the recent visit by Syrian President Esad, there is a change in the perceptions which is also reflected in the discourse within the context of the mutual interaction between the two countries; though common interest is a factor that triggers the relations. This change of perception has resulted in positive steps. Thus, they aim to maintain friendly relations.

CONCLUSION:

³⁸ Arı (2008): 636.

³⁹ Ibid, p.636.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 638.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 338.

⁴² <http://www.orsam.org.tr/tr/yazigoster.aspx?ID=789>, 22.05.2010, 22:25.

The international system experienced a significant transformation after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War in early 1990s. The new environment resulting from the post-Cold War period became one of the elements that needed to be considered in Turkey's searching for a new interregional strategy and shaping its Middle East policy. It can be seen that Turkey played a principle role in its relations in the Middle East, especially in the security issue during the post-1990 period. Furthermore, it can be summarized that the concrete problems between Turkey and Iraq, Iran, Israel and Syria have been 'border security, PKK, Kurdish problem, water and convergence with Israel'. It is seen that these problems underwent the process of détente and from time to time, the process of crisis till the 2000s.

All developments in the Middle East from the Cold War period till today have affected Turkey directly or indirectly. Peace and stability in the Middle East is very important both in terms of the security of the country and regional and global peace. In this respect, Turkey attaches great importance to maintaining peaceful and friendly relations with the Arab and Muslim world due to its historical and religious connections, while it pursues its relations and cooperation which will contribute to fostering stability and welfare by also taking into account Israel and the conditions of the region.

Turkey's Middle East policy experienced ups-downs during the 1990s and 2000s. In this period, Turkey developed a pro-Western foreign policy. Particularly, the close cooperation with Israel negatively affected the relations with the other Arab countries. In Turkish foreign policy, the 2000s has been a very productive period in terms of Turkey's relations with its neighbors. In its relations with Iran and Syria, many structural problems were eliminated, and the country achieved great progress in establishing good relations. While Turkey's new approach on its relations with the neighbors gained rapid recognition in Syria, Iran acted with relative deliberation. However, in conclusion, relations have reached an unprecedented level. Particularly, within the context of the Iraq war, Turkey has followed an active diplomacy in order to enable Iraq to contribute to the solution of the problems of its neighboring countries.

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