

# Turkey and Israel: Reciprocal and Mutual Imagery in the Media, 1994-1999

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*"Situated at the crossroad between East and West, Turkey and Israel think of themselves as possessing a partially European identity in the 'rough neighborhood' of the Middle East. Geographic proximity and historical interactions with Europe shaped Turkey's European identity, while Israel's European identity stems from a shared demographic composition due to the influx of European immigrants."*

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In the Middle East, as in other regions of the world, the media is an important mechanism for understanding public perceptions. Whether transmitted by government-controlled, self-censored or independent media sources, imagery used to portray a "self" and an "other" as being distinct, in opposition or in cooperation, reflects, reinforces and changes opinions about neighboring countries.

This paper conducts a study of Turkish media coverage of Israel and of Israeli media coverage of Turkey. Since 1993, Turkey and Israel have embarked on a path of advancing and deepening their relations. The attentive media coverage of these developments reflects the multitude of interests, fears and biases communicated by journalists on behalf of their audiences.

The articles used for this study were collected from the *World News Connection*, more commonly known by its pre-1994 name, *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*. This CIA-sponsored news service monitors and translates media articles and television and radio broadcasts across the globe. Over 500 newspaper articles and news transcripts published between 1994 and 1999 by

primary news providers in Ankara, Istanbul, Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv were considered for this survey.

The coverage is analyzed in several ways. The first section provides preliminary observations and contextual analysis about the media coverage from 1994 to 1999. Its chief conclusion is that Turkish coverage was primarily concerned with the depth and scope of relations with Israel, while Israeli coverage conducted a cost-benefit analysis of the relationship.

The second section analyzes the imagery used by Turkey and Israel to portray one another. It discusses the two states' common identities and mutual interests as they are emphasized in the media. Elements, such as combating terrorism, alliances with the West, the separation of religion and state and living as non-Arab entities in the Middle East, are at the core of Turkey's and Israel's commonality. This section also discusses Israel's image of Turkey and Turkey's image of Israel and identifies the media's attempts to positively portray the other state to their respective publics. The last section examines the limits of the Turkish-Israeli relationship. These differences are revealed as one side repudiates an important identity held by the other. For example, Israel has exhibited skepticism about the nature of Turkey's democracy. The strains in the Turkish-Israeli relationship is also visible when one side fails to act in accordance with common interests.

The study concludes that the media's portrayal of Turkish-Israeli relations reveals that the two countries are operating in separate and seemingly isolated environments. The issues and themes evoked by Turkish reporters are often substantially different from those addressed by their Israeli counterparts. Rarely is there insight into the context within which the other country is operating. Where similar images of the two countries exist—such as the familiar notion that Turkey and Israel are the only two democracies in the Middle East—the countries' definition and understanding of that image is not necessarily the same. Thus, Turkish-Israeli cooperation does not rely on genuine understanding of the other side's frame of reference, but on a mutually beneficial relationship derived from a number of self-interests. These interests are military-, security- or power-driven, and are the forces that sustains amicable Turkish-Israeli relations.

## PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

In both countries, the coverage focuses on the development of the Turkish-Israeli relationship. Each political or military event—a joint naval exercise, a newly signed contract for Popeye missiles or a visit to Ankara by the head of a Middle Eastern state—causes a renewed cycle of assessing Turkish-Israeli relations and their impact on the regional balance of power. Several points can be made about Turkish and Israeli media coverage.

### *Turkish Coverage*

Since 1994, Turkish articles on Turkish-Israeli relations are approximately double in number and often twice the length of Israeli articles on the same topic. They occasionally utilize a reporting style that, for lack of a political science term, could be called "defensive egoism." Positive aspects of Turkey are described in superlative terms, achievements are lauded with great embellishments and shortcomings are presented as obstacles to Turkey's assumption of its rightful leadership role. When the idea of relations with Israel was first "pitched" to the Turkish public or when relations are warmest between the countries, a similar laudatory tone is adopted for Israel. For example, Israeli defense technology becomes the best in its field, the Mosad is referred to as the most feared counter-terrorism intelligence service in the world and the Israeli Defense Forces are cited as the best-equipped army. Such coverage transmits the implied message that Turkey has much to gain from befriending this state. The message becomes more pronounced and explicit when Israel's extensive network of contacts—its lobbies on Capitol Hill, its relations with Europe and the powerful connections of the "global Jewish network"—are evoked, generally without regard for the dubious nature of such statements.

Throughout the period from January 1994 to April 1999, Turkish media focused on the phenomenon of the Turkish-Israeli relationship itself. Articles repeated the debate over Turkey's vested interests in cooperating with Israel and described the difficulty of defending this policy to other governments in the region. The Turkish media responded to the Middle East's opposition with several different arguments. These ranged from outrage at the meddling of these countries in Turkey's national

interests,<sup>1</sup> to calls for a more balanced Turkish policy toward its regional neighbors, to the less common appeals for a return to the Muslim world,<sup>2</sup> and to, in the Islamist press, the rare Jewish conspiracy theory.<sup>3</sup>

Turkish-Israeli relations reached their low point in the period from 1996 to 1997, while Necmettin Erbakan was prime minister. His goal of abrogating agreements with Israel and bringing Turkey back into the fold of regional Islamic countries took him on a tour of Tehran, Cairo, Tripoli and other regional capitals, where he hoped to mend damaged ties. However, Erbakan, who envisioned a leadership role for Turkey, was humiliated during his trip and the Turkish media was outraged at the treatment displayed by his fellow Muslim leaders. Erbakan continued to undermine Turkish-Israeli relations until he was eventually supplanted by the Turkish army, which had geo-strategic interests in securing Israel as a reliable defense technology supplier.<sup>4</sup> Erbakan's Welfare-True Path coalition leadership was overpowered by the army, and he had to acquiesce to deepening ties with Israel. This led to considerable Arab and Iranian bewilderment at Turkey's two-sided policy toward the Jewish state.

This political incoherence manifested itself in a number of policy swings, such as Erbakan's May 1997 announcement that naval exercises with Israel were being cancelled, followed by his coalition partner's repudiation of that cancellation,<sup>5</sup> and his uneasy defense of Turkish-Israeli ties while on a visit to Tehran.<sup>6</sup> Another important instance of such inconsistency was Erbakan's announcement after a meeting with Iranian leaders that Turkey would be entering into defense agreements with Tehran. The Turkish media wondered how it was possible to cooperate in defense with both Israel and Iran. The army answered by stating

<sup>1</sup> "Military Said Firmly Behind Agreement With Israel," *Turkish Daily News*, Ankara, 23 May 1996.

<sup>2</sup> "Prosperity Party Official Abdullah Gül Interviewed," *Türkiye*, Istanbul, 31 July 1994, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> "U.S. Policies Support Israel, Not Middle East Peace," *Türkiye*, Istanbul, 7 August 1994, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> "More on Mordekhay Meeting With Turkish Defense Minister," *Government Press Office*, Jerusalem, 30 April 1997.

<sup>5</sup> "Turkish Army Sources: Joint Naval Manoeuvres Not Cancelled," *Israel Television Channel 1 Network*, Jerusalem, 13 May 1997.

<sup>6</sup> "U.S. Asked To Show Sensitivity to Turkey-Iran Ties," *Turkish Daily News*, Ankara, 14 August 1996.

that cooperation with Iran was not appropriate and that the agreement would not be implemented. To drive this point home, the military coordinated various gestures toward Israel, such as port visits by Turkish warships in Haifa, which were celebrated in the Israeli media,<sup>7</sup> the army's signing of far-reaching agreements with Israel without government involvement,<sup>8</sup> or the correction of rebukes of Israel following a meeting with Arab or Iranian officials by the army or Erbakan's coalition partners. In time, the military establishment was so upset by Erbakan's violation of Kemal Atatürk's state secularism, that, in 1997, he found himself banned from politics by the Turkish Constitutional Court. Thereafter, relations with Israel improved.

An article about Erbakan's delayed acquiescence to meet Israeli Foreign Minister David Levi during the signing of the Turkish-Israeli free trade agreement demonstrates how the Turkish media depicted the foreign policy ambiguity during Erbakan's term:

Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan maintained a stubborn approach but he later agreed to meet with Foreign Minister David Levi. Why did he maintain such an approach since he would agree to hold talks with him in the end? Obviously someone informed him as follows: "You are not the Welfare Party's Prime Minister. You are the Prime Minister of Turkey. So, you have to meet with him for the sake of Turkey's interests." This is essential. This is how the meeting took place. Erbakan's meeting with Levi has again brought to light the fact that Turkey's interests have priority over everything else. This has proved us to be right again. Had he avoided meeting Levi, Turkey would have lost a very strategic opportunity.<sup>9</sup>

During the entirety of the Erbakan term, the Turkish media coverage echoed this argument. The most common phrases from Turkey's media were: "Turkey has every right to act in accordance with its national interest," and, referring to the Arab states or Iran, "Cooperation between Turkey and Israel is not directed against a third country."

By the end of 1997, Turkish articles demonstrated that the real power in Turkey was held by the military. As long as Israel

<sup>7</sup> "Turkish Warships Pay 'Courtesy Call' at Haifa Port," *Israel Television Channel 1 Network*, Jerusalem, 17 June 1997.

<sup>8</sup> "Turkish Deputy COS To Israel 'Next Week' on 'Manoeuvres,'" *IDF Radio*, Tel Aviv, 30 April 1997.

<sup>9</sup> "Erbakan's Meeting With Israel's Levi Viewed," *Sabah*, Istanbul, 9 April 1997, p. 16.

could maintain its reputation with Turkey's military officers, the relationship would prevail and probably flourish.<sup>10</sup>

It is important to note that the Turkish media, while semi-private, are highly politicized and powerfully influenced, if not manipulated, by the Turkish government. Hence imagery used in the Turkish media also reveals the regime's desired message to the citizens of Turkey about Israel and the relationship between Turkey and Israel.

#### *Israeli Coverage*

Israeli coverage of Turkey often seems like a cost-benefit analysis. The Israeli media usually include a rationalized list of advantages as well as instinctive Israeli enthusiasm for the relationship. Over the surveyed period, the chief advantages identified for forming a closer relationship with Turkey were: to create a Turkish market for Israeli military contracts, to build joint Turkish-Israeli deterrence against Syria and to break Israel's regional isolation. To secure these benefits, Israel was engaged in a remarkable courtship of Turkey and was prepared to cover the costs of the effort.<sup>11</sup> The courtship persisted even when Welfare Party leader Erbakan gained power and dramatically cooled relations with Israel by making anti-Israel statements that were widely documented in the press. During this period, Israel's courtship fell on deaf political ears, but the Turkish army was listening. In direct opposition to Erbakan's policies, the military responded to Israel's gestures and imposed its will on the elected Welfare-True Path coalition government. The articles surveyed in this study indicate that Israel's courtship cooled when relations with Turkey threatened to involve it in a Turkish-Syrian war and a Turkish-Greek Cypriot conflict over Russian missiles. Only when it risked being embroiled in another regional conflict did Israel publicly retreat from its strategic cooperation with Turkey.

#### **IMAGERY**

Turkish and Israeli journalists often communicate messages to the public about the other state by evoking images and allowing

<sup>10</sup> "Turkey's Erbakan Seen Planning 'to Renegé' on Agreements," *Ma'ariv-Hayom supplement*, Tel Aviv, 30 June 1996, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> The costs consisted primarily of Israeli bank credit guarantees for Turkish military projects, the use of Israeli contacts in Washington to soften the stance of the US congress toward Turkey, utilizing Israeli networks in Europe to facilitate the adoption of a European-Turkish customs union and Israel's know-how and resources in 'search and rescue' operations.

viewers or readers to "translate" these images themselves. The image triggers a series of associations and thoughts, which provide the basis for an informed or uninformed opinion, resulting in the audience taking ownership of the message implied in the image.

In March 1995, a Turkish newspaper used imagery that prevailed for the next four years:

Our relations with Israel were cool until very recently. Like the reluctant believer caught between two mosques, we could not establish diplomatic ties with Israel because of our friends in the Muslim world, and we could not ignore it completely because of our close relationship with the United States. It was as if Israel always extended its hand but we could not shake it because we were too busy paying attention to others around us. This vicious circle is finally over. Most of the people in Turkey have overcome the 'infidel-Muslim' propaganda waged against Israel, and have stopped seeing Israel as the occupier of holy lands. Israel is a reality and we have not heard its viewpoint for many years... Israel is a reality of the Middle East no matter how much the religious fanatics deny it. We are happy to see that Turkey has enough common sense to see this reality.<sup>12</sup>

The images used to portray Turkey and Israel in both countries' media remained consistent with both countries' identities and interests from 1994 to 1999. These images fall into two categories: mutual identities and mutual interests.

#### *Mutual Identities*

In the articles from 1994 to 1999, both Turkish and Israeli media depict the two states as democratic nations in an otherwise undemocratic Middle East, thus ostensibly sharing a political culture and representing models for other Middle Eastern nations turning toward democratization. Both countries also view themselves as secular states in a region in which religion and state usually belong to the same institutions. They therefore share a history of attempting to separate these institutions and to diminish the influence of strong religious undercurrents in political life and social policies. While the degree of success in this endeavor is debatable in both countries, the principle of *laïcism* or state

<sup>12</sup> "Kurds, Economy Seen Part of Mideast 'New Order,'" *Nokia*, Istanbul, 5-11 March 1995, p. 20.

secularism is officially and popularly supported in Turkey and Israel and enjoys a prominent place in national history, identity and mythology. Turkey and Israel perceive themselves as non-Arab states both a part of, and apart from, the Arab Middle East. Located in an overwhelmingly Arab cultural region leads both countries' media to express nostalgic intimacy, mixed with suspicion, of Arab cultures.

Situated at the crossroad between East and West, Turkey and Israel think of themselves as possessing a partially European identity in the "rough neighborhood" of the Middle East. Geographic proximity and historical interactions with Europe shaped Turkey's European identity, while Israel's European identity stems from a shared demographic composition due to the influx of European immigrants. The European influence often leads to the self-perception of being more civilized than other Middle Eastern states. However, both countries experience similar frustrations with Europe in their struggles against terrorism. Both states view themselves as primary victims of international terrorism and as shields protecting the West from the front line of Islamic fundamentalism. They are often disappointed in the difficulty they have recruiting Western states to their struggle against terrorism. Their media accorded much attention to the bombings in Oklahoma and the wave of PKK embassy hold-ups in Europe, with the conviction that as a result the West may better understand the Turkish and Israeli urgency of combating terrorism.<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, both countries also enjoy a privileged status in European trade and customs agreement, and thus view each other as states that are economically linked to the European Union. Media reports about Turkish-Israeli policy coordination regarding the EU evoked a triangular EU-Turkey-Israel relationship. In 1995, Israel and Turkey decided to co-ordinate their European policies and to submit joint projects to the EU to obtain financing through an aid plan for Mediterranean countries.<sup>14</sup> This triangular EU-Turkey-Israel relationship is similar to Turkey's and Israel's relationship with the US, in that both contain attributes of client-patron relations. However, the

<sup>13</sup> "Columnist Views European Reaction to PKK Demonstrations," *Milliyet*, Istanbul, 19 February 1999.

<sup>14</sup> "Inönü, Israel's Beitlin View Iran, Iraq, Syria," *Ha'aretz*, Tel Aviv, 2 May 1995, p. A4.

relationship differs in that both countries are considerably less receptive to European intervention than to American influence in their domestic affairs. Both states are strongly allied with the US, consider the US their primary patron and provide it with similar geo-strategic, military and intelligence services. For this, both countries face criticism of being puppets of American imperialism in the Middle East, and find themselves countering accusations that they are regional watchdogs of the United States.

Another aspect of Turkey's and Israel's symbiotic relationship is that both serve as one another's conduit to other areas of the world:<sup>15</sup> Israel is Turkey's door to the West,<sup>16</sup> while Turkey serves as Israel's door to the Middle East. The following excerpt best describes an example of Israel's acts on behalf of Turkey:

One of Israel's gestures to gain Turkish favor and to tie Turkey to the West, for example, was its assistance in obtaining the European customs union agreement for Turkey. The prime minister [Peres] personally intervened to make sure that the European Parliament approve the new economic agreement with Turkey; the agreement promises uniform customs between Turkey and the EU. Peres called on all his friends, the leaders of the socialist factions in Europe, to support the agreement with Turkey. Foreign Ministry sources said yesterday that the socialists' vote tipped the scales in favor of Turkey. Israeli representatives in the European capitals pointed out to the various governments the importance of approving the economic agreement with Turkey in order to bring it closer to the West and Europe. Officials close to Peres told *Ha'aretz* that from Israel's point of view, Turkey's rapprochement with the West is of tremendous strategic importance. Peres also stressed to President Bill Clinton Turkey's importance in the regional lineup of forces aimed at curtailing fundamentalism.<sup>17</sup>

Notably absent in Turkey's and Israel's mutual identities is a common identification between the Palestinian and the Kurdish struggles for independence. Although there is a striking resemblance between the Israeli-Palestinian and Turkish-Kurdish

<sup>15</sup> "Column Urges Turkey To Select 'Important' Goals," *Sabah*, Istanbul, 11 January 1999, p. 19.

<sup>16</sup> "Mordekhai to Press for Tighter US Cooperation With Turkey," *Yedi'ot Aharonot*, Tel Aviv, 3 April 1997, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> "Peres Raises 'Strategic Partnership' in US Talks," *Ha'aretz*, Tel Aviv, 15 December 1995, p. A1.

situations, Turkish coverage fails to equate the Palestinian struggle for independence with the Kurdish struggle. While the Turkish press deems the Palestinian struggle to be warranted, and praises Israel for facing up to the legitimacy of Palestinian claims, they do not recognize the PKK as a liberation movement and do not seem to deem the Kurds as deserving the right to self-determination.

#### *Mutual Interests*

Turkey's and Israel's mutual interests are linked to their mutual identities. Both countries aim to combat terrorism from local and Iranian or Syrian-sponsored groups that seek independence, such as the PKK, Hizbullah, Islamic Jihad and Hamas. Both countries want to prevent Syria from protecting groups that they deem terrorist organizations: in Turkey's case, the group is the PKK; in Israel's, they are Hizbullah and Hamas. Combating terrorism jointly is a powerful justification for far-reaching Turkish-Israeli military cooperation and is often cited by Turkey when confronted by Arab opposition to its cooperation with Israel. The supply of field-tested counter-terrorism products from Israel, a regular vendor of such equipment, and the sharing of intelligence with experienced Israeli counter-terrorism officers are perceived as being in Turkey's national interest. This counter-terrorism image pervades the media literature—from interviews with leaders to officials' speeches during visits to articles on Syria or Iran.<sup>18</sup>

The importance of this aspect of the Turkish-Israeli relationship was apparent in early 1999, when Turkey captured PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan. It was widely assumed that Israel assisted the Turkish government in locating him. Öcalan's capture added a new element to Turkish-Israeli counter-terrorism cooperation, as rumors of Israel's participation turned Israel into a target of PKK terrorism. After a number of Kurds stormed the Israeli embassy in Berlin and were killed by its security officers, the Israeli media was replete with warnings to Israelis that they might become targets of Kurdish terrorism again in the future.

In their operations against what they perceive as terrorist groups, Israel and Turkey exhibit several common interests. Until

<sup>18</sup> "Rabinovich Expects Talks With Syria in a Few Weeks," *IDF Radio*, Tel Aviv, 23 March 1993.

recently, they maintained security zones in a neighboring country—Turkey's Kurdish security zone in northern Iraq and, until May 2000 when Israeli troops pulled out, Israel's Hizbullah security zone in southern Lebanon. By extension, both countries aim to stop or control the creation of two new states close to and partially on what they perceive as their territory: Palestine and Kurdistan. Also, both countries seek to obstruct drug trafficking in their immediate vicinity, mostly because it provides a means of income for the PKK, Hizbullah and Syria.

Along with combating terrorism, strengthening deterrence of Syria through defensive cooperation is another common goal. Additionally, for Turkey, the leverage accrued through good relations with Israel serves as a warning to Greece and Greek Cyprus, as well as Iran. In the Israeli media, Turkey is clearly and consistently depicted as a counterweight to Syria. The message is that combined Turkish and Israeli forces could successfully contain any Syrian malfeasance.

Retaining land that is claimed by Syria—the Hatay province in Turkey's case and the Golan Heights in Israel's—is equally important to both countries. Importantly, retaining water that is claimed by Syria—the Euphrates' headwaters held by Turkey and the Golan Heights-based headwaters of the Jordan River controlled by Israel—is an outgrowth of these territorial interests and is, in this water-sparse region, of great strategic importance.

Another common interest related to deterring Syria is the sharing of intelligence information and operational advice mostly in confronting Syria, Iran and terrorist groups.

The close relations recently established between Turkey and Israel have paved the ground for cooperation between the NIO and Mosad, Israel's intelligence organization. It has been ascertained that Mosad, which, as far as kidnapping, information-gathering, close surveillance, and operations against target individuals are concerned, is among the world's most well known organizations, has provided information to Turkey particularly on the activities of PKK militants in the Middle East. A special unit has been established in the NIO after the intelligence organizations of Turkey and Israel began to cooperate. Plans have been made within NIO's framework for operations against the leading members of the PKK and the other terrorist organizations. Mosad's approach will be taken as an example in that regard. The officials have said that the target of the operations will be PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan and the leading PKK cadres in

European countries. They have also said that the operations teams will demonstrate their capabilities in the near future.<sup>19</sup>

Interestingly, Turkey and Israel underwent divergent phases in publicizing the sharing of intelligence activities to their publics. While in the Israeli media in 1995, the sharing of intelligence with Turkey had a low profile,<sup>20</sup> the Turkish media cited it as a benefit of strategic cooperation. It should be noted, however, that Turkish reports about the agreements included a request to Israel not to overstate the depth of the activities to its public, lest Arab states mistake the cooperation agreement for a formal pact.<sup>21</sup>

By 1996, the Israeli media announced that intelligence cooperation agreements between Turkey and Israel allowed the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and the Israeli security forces to collect electronic intelligence and audio monitoring data on Syria and Iran from Turkish territory. A further advantage of cooperation with Israel for Turkey was the IDF's assistance in training and equipping Turkish troops on the southeastern border with Iran, Iraq and Syria. For Israel, a similar benefit was Turkey's agreement to grant sanctuary to Israeli jets in case of an emergency. Turkish and Israeli navies conducted joint exercises in the Mediterranean to illustrate the extent of their cooperation.<sup>22</sup>

The Israeli provision of intelligence to Ankara about PKK movements, as well as its advice about dealing with terrorist groups based on experience in Lebanon, were openly hailed in the Turkish media and did much to endear Israel to the Turkish public. Reports that "tips by friendly foreign intelligence services" played a key role in heavy blows delivered to the PKK were clearly referring to Israel and continued to help improve Israel's image with Turkish audiences.<sup>23</sup>

Domestically, the shared interests of Turkey and Israel are in retaining the democratic nature of their states and reining in religious segments in their societies. As the only two democracies

<sup>19</sup> "Restructuring Gives NIO Authority To Act Against Terrorists," *Hürriyet*, Istanbul, 29 June 1994, p. 17.

<sup>20</sup> "Ministry Denies Intelligence Experts Visited Turkey," *Ma'ariv*, Tel Aviv, 23 March 1995, p. 13.

<sup>21</sup> "Sungurdu Detain's Military Agreement With Israel," *Turkish Daily News*, Ankara, 12 April 1996.

<sup>22</sup> "Official on Intelligence Cooperation With Israel," *IDF Radio*, Tel Aviv, 7 April 1996.

<sup>23</sup> "Foreign Intelligence 'Helping' Ankara To Fight PKK," *Turkish Daily News*, Ankara, 11 April 1996.

in the Middle East, Turkey and Israel see themselves closely affiliated with the West and the 'civilized' world through links with NATO, the EU and the US. From 1994 to 1999, media reports addressed Turkey's and Israel's alignment under a variety of scenarios. In 1996, for example, the media extensively discussed a multilateral alliance that would include Turkey, Israel, the United States, Egypt and Jordan. By 1999, such conjectures had changed to a multilateral alliance of Turkey, Israel, Great Britain and the United States.

The limits to their affiliations with Western powers present yet another commonality between the two countries. While both countries positioned themselves as strategic assets of the US, even in the post-Cold War era, and continued to secure American aid, their goal was also to stem excessive Western influence in their domestic decisionmaking and, in particular, in their human rights practices. Turkey is adamantly opposed to American influence in its dealings with the PKK. Israel often resents American interference with its interaction with the Palestinian Authority. US influence on domestic politics is also opposed by Israeli policymakers; President Bill Clinton's voicing of a preference for candidates for Israel's prime ministerial post during the 1999 elections was seen as exceeding acceptable boundaries.

Yet obtaining or maintaining defense guarantees by NATO and free trade agreements with the United States and the European Union remains an important focus for both Turkey and Israel. In 1995, the Israeli media debated the benefits of a defense guarantee with the US, similar to the one Turkey had obtained from NATO and the US.<sup>24</sup> With Israel's assistance, Turkey obtained trade agreements with the EU similar to the ones enjoyed by Israel. In a similar vein, increasing their bilateral trade is also important for both countries. In 1994, the volume of trade between Turkey and Israel was US\$180 million per year; by the end of 1998, it had increased to over US\$600 million annually. These figures do not include high-ticket military contracts and therefore understate the total value of bilateral trade.<sup>25</sup>

Another common strategic interest is in developing new

<sup>24</sup> "US Defense Pact Said 'Worth the Limitations,'" *Ha'aretz*, Tel Aviv, 7 December 1995, p. B1.

<sup>25</sup> "Envoy Says Turkey To Continue To Develop Ties With Israel," *Vesti* (in Russian), Tel Aviv, 25 March 1998, p. 4.

technologies to increase defense against possible missile-based threats by Iran and Iraq and to combat paramilitary ground forces, such as the PKK and Hizbullah. Israel also sought to sweeten a contract to modernize Turkey's F-4 planes by including 20 Popeye missiles, specially produced to reach ground targets, as a gift.<sup>26</sup> Later developments led the US and Israel to jointly offer an Arrow anti-missile system—meant to combat Iraqi, Iranian and North Korean missiles—to Turkey, among other customers. These efforts were reinforced by a joint interest in curbing Russia as a supplier of missile and armaments technology to Iran, Syria and, in Turkey's case, Greek Cyprus.

Both countries have a vested interest in including Jordan in the Turkish-Israeli alliance. In fact, in 1995, Prime Minister Shimon Peres, while talking with the Clinton administration, discussed a proposal he received from Jordan's King Hussein to set up a strategic partnership between Israel, Jordan, Turkey and (now inconceivable) Iraq. The new Iraq, the King proposed, would become a confederation of three districts: Kurdish in the North, Shiite in the South, and Sunni in the center.<sup>27</sup> While this particular proposal was not developed further, the Israel-Turkey-Jordan triangle was often discussed. Although no formal agreement was reached, Jordan sent a senior observer to the "Sea Wolf" Turkish-Israeli naval exercises in 1998 and signed a military cooperation agreement with Turkey, two indicators that Israeli-Turkish-Jordanian axis was growing stronger.<sup>28</sup> Aside from the imagery pertaining to the mutuality of interests of the two states, Israeli and Turkish media present attractive images of the other country to make policies of close cooperation palatable to their respective publics.

#### RECIPROCAL IMAGERY: ISRAEL'S IMAGES OF TURKEY

In the Israeli media, Turkey is presented as a natural ally against Israel's most important enemies: Iran and Syria, which are seen as supporting terrorist and insurgency groups within or close to Israeli borders. Turkey is depicted as a fellow leading power in the region, non-Arab and Muslim. The implication is that the 'State of the Jews' can have good relations with a Muslim country.

<sup>26</sup> "Secret Report on Cooperation With Israel," *Milliyet*, Istanbul, 16 February 1995, p. 13.

<sup>27</sup> "Peres Raises 'Strategic Partnership' in US Talks," *Ha'aretz*, Tel Aviv, 15 December 1995, p. A1.

<sup>28</sup> "Jordan To Observe Exercises; Step Toward Defense Pact Seen," *Channel 2 Television Network*, Jerusalem, 2 January 1998.

More than the US and Europe, Turkey understands the urgency and necessity of fighting terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism in the region. From 1994 to 1999, the Israeli media supported warm relations with Ankara, despite the sobering realization that Israel's primary partners in Turkey were the military, not government officials.

The Israeli-Turkish-US joint naval exercise not far from Israel's coastline is to drill rescue missions, but its strategic importance cannot be exaggerated. It is no coincidence that the maneuver has aroused the anger of the Syrians, Iraqis, and Iranians, and that the Egyptians have voiced concern over what they called this superfluous show of strength. It is true that the ties formed between the IDF and the Turkish defense establishment do not have stable political backing in Ankara. But they have been unexpectedly strengthened due to the sharp crisis that has broken out between Turkey and the EU, which has led to a switch in Turkish orientation from ties with Europe to strengthening relations with the United States. The relationship with Israel is part of that shift, and we can only gain from it, both from strategic and economic points of view.<sup>29</sup>

Israel also views Turkey as a neighbor wealthy in water. Not only could Turkey's supplies from the Manavgat River solve Israel's water worries, but Turkey also controls strategic Syrian water resources. The year 1995 saw the beginnings of the Greater Anatolia Project, a plan to develop water resources, for which Israel received US\$300,000 to conduct a feasibility study. The following year, however, attention turned to the idea of linking Turkish water to the Israeli-Syrian peace process.<sup>30</sup> This linkage consisted of offering Turkey economic incentives for giving up its water to Syria in exchange for a Syrian signature on the peace treaty.<sup>31</sup>

While Turkey is a promising vendor of water, it is also perceived as a promising client for Israeli military contracts to upgrade Turkish hardware, install new monitoring technologies and sell defense products. Lastly, Turkey is presented as the party to break Israel's pattern of isolation. Turkey could be Israel's conduit for normalizing its relations within the region as it has official relations

<sup>29</sup> "Daily Stresses Strategic Importance of Turkish Ties," *Ma'ariv—Hayom supplement*, Tel Aviv, 6 January 1998, p. 7.

<sup>30</sup> "Water Policy Driven by US Pressure on Syria," *Türkiye*, Istanbul, 29 December 1995.

<sup>31</sup> "Israel: Baraq, U.S. Envoy Discuss Water Accord Involving Turkey, Syria," *IDF Radio*, Tel Aviv, 16 February 1996.

with countries that do not have diplomatic relations with Israel. When Israeli officials attend Turkish festivities, contacts with representatives of countries with which Israel does not have ties, such as Pakistan, are reported with enthusiasm.

#### RECIPROCAL IMAGERY: TURKEY'S IMAGES OF ISRAEL

For Islamist reporters, Israel was and remains the Jewish State, and is described in religious rather than political or strategic terms. For example, "Muslim Turkey has opened its airspace and military bases to the Israeli air force for training its combat pilots, due to the Jewish state's limited airspace."<sup>32</sup> A triangular Muslim-Christian-Jewish character was at times superimposed onto the Turkish-US-Israeli relationship.

In the non-Islamist media, Israel was presented as a more reliable friend than the Arab states and Iran, and as a more trustworthy intelligence provider and weapons vendor than Western countries, which are thought to be preoccupied with Turkey's human rights record. The following quote demonstrates this stance:

The reason for Turkey's cooperation with the famed Mosad of Israel on intelligence matters stems from Turkey's distrust of NATO intelligence. NATO has pressured Turkey on the Kurdish problem, ... that is why Turkey is not trusting the intelligence coming from NATO. Israel is the only European and Middle Eastern country that could support Turkey with its powerful intelligence organization.<sup>33</sup>

Israel's military officers were identified as experts in counter-terrorism and intelligence operations and served as consultants for Turkish military modernization efforts. In response to Turkey granting the F-4 modernization contract to Israel without a tender, the Turkish media reported that Israel was monitoring the PKK via satellite for Turkey. "With its satellite, Israel is even monitoring the breathing of PKK leader Öcalan and his gang and is constantly keeping Turkey informed of the situation."<sup>34</sup>

Israel's reliability is seen to be particularly important in securing a long-term weapons supply. Turkey has traditionally been

<sup>32</sup> "Israeli Warplanes to Train in Turkey," *Turkish Daily News*, Ankara, 4 April 1996.  
<sup>33</sup> "Plan To Reorganize MIT Reported," *Yeni Günaydın*, Istanbul, 4 July 1994, p. 14.  
<sup>34</sup> "Israel Using Satellite To Monitor PKK," *Türkiye*, Istanbul, 29 December 1995.

concerned that a future arms embargo by Western countries would leave Turkey without the ability to undertake unilateral counter-terrorist initiatives. The Turkish military decided that it was in Turkey's best interest to opt for Israeli arms. Israel has offered Turkey numerous Israeli technologies. These have included modernizing Turkey's F-4 fighters, re-equipping its F-16 fleet, providing relevant radar and monitoring devices, producing helicopters suitable for security zone maintenance, selling ground-targeting Popeye missiles, producing a marketable version of the Arrow anti-missile defense system and offering to build Israel's Merkava tank. Given Israel's similar military experiences and needs, Israeli defense equipment and knowledge has been very attractive to the Turkish army.

Israel was also seen as an economic example to Turkey in private sector-public sector interaction and currency reforms. In Turkey, it was reported with astonishment that Erbakan himself commissioned a Turkish professor to research Israel's currency reforms and apply the lessons to the Turkish economy.

While the Turkish press lamented Iran's and the Arab state's reactions to Turkey's relations with Israel, by 1997, these relations carried an implicit message that the benefits were worth the cost. In an interview with a leading Israeli newspaper *Yedi'ot Aharonot*, Turkish Foreign Minister Cem said:

There is hardly a meeting with a Middle East statesman where this question is not immediately raised. We are asked to lower our profile, the Arab media attack us, but we immediately explain: The criticism is unjustified. Despite the harsh criticism against us in the Arab world over our special relations with Israel, we have no intention of sacrificing these relations or lowering their profile.<sup>35</sup>

At a much-publicized incident on Jerusalem Day in 1997, the Iranian ambassador presented an exceedingly anti-Israeli speech that attacked those cooperating with Israel. It was subsequently reported that Turkish Under-Secretary Ali Bey summoned the Iranian ambassador and told him, "Israel is our friend, you cannot talk like this about it."<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> "Turkey's Cem—We Will Not Lower Profile of Israel Ties," *Yedi'ot Aharonot*, Tel Aviv, 7 July 1998, p. 7.

<sup>36</sup> "Iranian Envoy Discusses Staying in Post," *Türkiye*, Istanbul, 8 February 1997.

Turkey perceives Israel as a well-connected neighbor with extensive community-based contacts in Washington and in European capitals. In 1997, the Turkish government led by Erbakan met with leaders of the Anti-Defamation League, an American Jewish NGO, probably with the hope that the alleged "number one Jewish lobby in the US" would communicate a favorable view of Turkey to Capitol Hill.

From 1997 to 1999, the two countries engaged in regular official visits. Israeli President Ezer Weizman was particularly well-liked in Turkey and attended numerous festivities and events. New military officials in both Israel and Turkey made one of their first official trips a visit to their counterpart. Parliamentarian delegations, particularly since the end of Erbakan's term, have regularly traveled to Israel to attend dinners. Those familiar with Ottoman history could be amused by a Turkish general's musing during a dinner in Israel that "the organic, moral, and emotional ties between Turkey and Israel have a historical togetherness,"<sup>37</sup> and that the Turkish culture minister would find it necessary to accompany an Israeli diplomat to an exhibition of Ottoman-Turkish carpets.

#### LIMITS TO COOPERATION

Several incidents in Turkish-Israeli relations received substantial coverage in the media and demonstrated the limits to cooperation between the two countries. The manner in which they were described to the public indicated that the behavior of one of the countries was unacceptable to the other for one of two reasons: it violated either the self-perceived identity or the interests of the offended state.

#### *Violation of Self-Perceived Identities*

In September 1997, the Israeli Foreign Ministry appointed Professor Ehud Toledano, an expert on Ottoman history, to become the new Israeli ambassador to Turkey. Tensions between the two countries arose immediately after the Turkish government conducted an investigation into Professor Toledano's past and discovered that he had previously lectured on Turkey's role in

<sup>37</sup> "Turkish Chief of Staff on 'Organic, Moral' Ties With Israel," *Türkiye Radyoları Network*, Ankara, 26 February 1997.

the Armenian genocide; Turkey refused the ambassador and Israel rescinded his appointment and searched for a new candidate.<sup>38</sup> Although this incident was an issue on which Israel could easily relent, it is significant to note that Turkey stood its ground. The images used for Israel in the Turkish media emphasized that Israel differs from Western allies: it did not question Turkey's human rights record, and in fact has had similar troubles with the US and Europe regarding human rights violations.

Another example of wounded identities occurred in January 1998, when the Speaker of the Knesset, Dan Tichon, caused a diplomatic incident by stating that Turkey was not a democracy. The previous day, Erbakan's Welfare Party had been banned by the Turkish Constitutional Court, showing the imposition of the army's political will on the government. Tichon stated to a delegation of military attaches, which included a Turk, that, "until yesterday, I believed that there were two democracies in the region." Tichon shortly thereafter apologized and retracted his statement, but the insulted Turkish official insisted he would report the incident to Ankara.<sup>39</sup> This event indicated that Turkey's friendship with Israel would be restricted if Turkey's identity as a democracy—and hence as a valid member of the West—was seriously questioned by Israel.

The only comparable incident coming from Turkey and directed at Israel was a series of anti-Semitic remarks made in 1996 by Prime Minister Erbakan. These remarks included an observation that the Israeli flag symbolizes the map of Zionist expansionism from the Euphrates to the Tigris. Instead of confronting the offense, Israel decided its economic and geo-strategic interests were better served by retaining Turkish friendship, regardless of whether its prime minister was anti-Semitic or not.<sup>40</sup> Multi-million dollar defense contracts and deterrence toward Syria, two elements continually stressed by the Israeli media coverage of Israeli-Turkish relations, seem to have dictated a low profile in response to hostile statements.

A more general difference in perception between Turkish and Israeli media coverage, which does not necessarily constitute a

<sup>38</sup> "Turkey Refuses to Approve Israel's Ambassador," *Ma'ariv*, Tel Aviv, 9 September 1997, p. 18.

<sup>39</sup> "Knesset Speaker Withdraws Remarks on 'Undemocratic' Turkey," *Ma'ariv*, Tel Aviv, 20 January 1998, p. 8.

<sup>40</sup> "Turkey Stand 'Anxiously' Followed After Officials' Remarks," *IDF Radio*, Tel Aviv, 8 August 1996.

possible limit to cooperation, is a difference in terminology in Turkey and Israel when describing Muslim groups. Israeli media generously used the term "Muslim fundamentalists" or "radical extremists," whereas Turkish journalists preferred the less negative "Islamist" or "religious." The Turkish media thus protected religious groups that are a part of Turkey's heritage, even though it is a secular state. Israel uses the label "religious" to refer to its orthodox community. Turkish commentators frequently refer to this community as "Jewish fundamentalists" or "Jewish extremists." Thus, both Turkey and Israel face commentators' biases when it comes to labeling their respective religious groups, and must be careful not to offend one another with these biases.<sup>41</sup>

### *Violation of Interests*

In the category of violation of interests, Israeli coverage was clearer on limits to Turkish-Israeli relations than the Turkish coverage. As mentioned before, Israel has specific interests in its relationship with Turkey, among which the obtaining of military contracts and deterrence of Syria and Iran are most prominent. Israel has no interest in proving its friendship to Turkey by being pulled into a regional conflict. Thus, Israel diplomatically rebuked Turkey in the September 1998 "Cyprus Missile Crisis," when Turkey inquired whether Israel would support it in a possible war with Cyprus.<sup>42</sup>

A more high-profile incident of violated interests occurred in October 1998, when tensions between Turkey and Syria escalated and war seemed imminent. Israel offended Turkey by publicly disassociating itself from the conflict. Israel's unequivocal and public assuaging messages to Syria were not only perceived as offensive to Turkey, but substantially weakened the deterrence power that the strategic cooperation had built up. Turkey later suggested that Israel could have communicated the message to Syria more discreetly.<sup>43</sup> The threat of being implicated in a Turkish

<sup>41</sup> "Diplomats Criticize Claes Over Islam Remarks," *Turkish Daily News*, Ankara, 17 February 1995, pp. 1, A8; "Leader Erbakan's Image in US Viewed," *Milliyet*, Istanbul, 27 February 1995, p. 19; and "Turkey's Cem on Relations With Israel, Arabs; Islamic Issue," *Israel Television Channel 1 Network*, Jerusalem, 11 July 1998.

<sup>42</sup> "Israel Expected Not To Assist Turkey Against Cyprus," *IDF Radio*, Tel Aviv, 7 September 1998.

<sup>43</sup> "Mordekhay—Israel Not Involved in Turkey-Syria Tension," *Channel 2 Television Network*, Jerusalem, 3 October 1998; and "Israel Sends 'Soothing' Message to Syria," *Ma'ariv*, Tel Aviv, 6 October 1998, p. 7.

war with Syria brought the limits of cooperation to Israel's public attention.

The military ties between Israel and Turkey, which normally are a source of pride and even braggadocio, have suddenly become a somewhat embarrassing issue that should be played down [T]wo gloomy conclusions come to mind: First that Israel could be dragged in a blink of an eye into a war it has no interest in; Second that this war, in which Israel will be involved, harbors the potential of burgeoning into a disastrous regional conflict. This imbroglia proves that there are two sides to the strategic coin and that today's vital alliance can become tomorrow's crushing burden. Suddenly, it is not so convenient to be such close pals with Turkey. [I]t now transpires how easy it is for any Arab leader to involve Israel in any conflict with Turkey, and it is no secret that the Arabs have disputes with Turkey stretching back to the days of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>44</sup>

Israel's public dissociation from involvement in the Turkish-Syrian crisis was greeted in Turkey with astonishment and even outrage. "There is close cooperation between Israel and Turkey, and when Israel distances itself from us at such a time, it plays into the hands of those in Turkey who oppose this cooperation. They keep saying that Israel cannot be trusted to be a true ally."<sup>45</sup> A comparable incident in which Israel overstepped Turkey's interests occurred in March 1999. An Israeli NGO invited the leader of the banned Kurdish Democratic Party, Yasar Kaya, to Israel. The Israeli ambassador explained that the invitation was not official, and had nothing to do with the government's policies. However, the prospect of this visit to Israel alarmed Ankara, who explained to Israeli policymakers that it made no difference whether the invitation was governmental. The precedent of having a friendly country accord such a privileged status to a Kurdish separatist leader was unacceptable to Turkey, and the Israeli government made sure that the invitation was revoked.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>44</sup> "Alliance With Turkey Seen Endangering Israel," *Ma'ariv—Hayom supplement*, Tel Aviv, 7 October 1998, p. 7.

<sup>45</sup> "Israeli Message Reportedly Meant To Allay PKK," *Ma'ariv—Shabat supplement*, Tel Aviv, 9 October 1998, pp. 8-9.

<sup>46</sup> "Bar-Ner on Kaya Visit, Link To Terrorist Organization," *Anatolia*, Ankara, 3 March 1999.

CONCLUSIONS

"Turkey needs a safe Israel, and I believe that Israel needs a safe Turkey."—Bülent Ecevit, 13 April 1995<sup>47</sup>

The future of Turkish-Israeli ties depends on the policies undertaken by Bülent Ecevit and the Turkish military's propensity to influence Israel-related foreign policy during his term. Judging by his past statements, Ecevit will most likely continue to nurture a close relationship with Israel, but will be more active in balancing it with a relationship with the Palestinian National Authority, and will also exert moderate pressure on Israel to advance the peace process.

The media imagery studied here points to the conclusion that mutual and unilateral interests and identities caused Israel and Turkey to pursue a closer relationship, and that these factors can be expected to remain relevant in the long-term. However, when looking at the actual content of their interests and identities, it seems that there is substantial difference in their Israeli and Turkish interpretation. Turkish and Israeli interests are more self-centered than mutual: The words of commonality mainly serve to warm the hearts of the public.

The "real" Turkish-Israeli interests are more likely to be in the lucrative trade of reliable and relevant defense technologies from Israel to Turkey. The containment of Iran and Syria, the sharing of intelligence about regional dynamics and terrorist groups and the use of contacts with non-regional actors all remain highly relevant, but have differing levels of significance for Turkey and Israel. They are both democracies, but have different conceptions of democracy. Both Turkey and Israel are interested in containing and deterring Syria, but possess different plans for doing so. They use their contacts for the benefit of the other, but gain nothing themselves out of that particular transaction except enhancing their business relationship.

There exist important parallels in their experiences, such as combating Kurdish and Palestinian terrorism networks, but these structures are not necessarily connected. The Turkish-Israeli relationship is therefore based on "tit-for-tat advantages," rather than any collective interests. Unlike relations between Israel and

<sup>47</sup> "Turkish Opposition Leader Meets Leading Officials—Reviews Ties With Peres," *Davar*, Tel Aviv, 14 April 1995, p. 3

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other Middle Eastern countries, which froze with the slowing of the peace process, Israeli-Turkish relations have improved. The results of this study indicate that the Turkish-Israeli relationship will continue to grow and strengthen because it helps to fulfill the self-interests of both countries. Moreover, this relationship will continue to be presented to the public by the media through images of mutual identities and interests.