



REGIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE ISRAELI-TURKISH STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

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This article evaluates the strategic character of the Israel-Turkey entente and its regional implications. It assesses the potential consequences of Israeli-Turkish military cooperation and reviews the reactions in the region to the alignment. The article ends with an analysis of how the Israel-Turkish partnership affects U.S. interests in the region.

In the 1990s, relations between Israel and Turkey greatly expanded and reached an unprecedented degree of closeness. This Israel-Turkey entente has become an important element in the politics of the Middle East and eastern Mediterranean areas. Turkey and Israel are powerful actors but their status quo orientation limits the impact of their cooperation.

This article evaluates the regional implications of the Israel-Turkey entente. First, it notes the strategic character of the bilateral relationship. Second, it assesses the potential consequences of Israeli-Turkish military cooperation. Third, it reviews the reactions in the region to the alignment and analyzes the Syrian attempt to organize a counter-alliance. Finally, the article considers how the Israel-Turkish partnership affects U.S. interests in the region.

THE NATURE OF THE ENTENTE

The new close cooperation between Ankara and Jerusalem began at the end of 1991, when Turkey decided to upgrade its diplomatic relations with Israel to ambassadorial level. Since then, the two states have exchanged many high-level state visits and bilateral trade has grown significantly, with widespread expectations for additional growth. This commercial economic benefit was an

important cause for better relations. In addition, the volume of civilian exchanges (tourist, academic, professional, sporting and cultural) increased dramatically. Most striking and indicative of the emergence of a special relationship, the two states have also signed a series of military agreements that led to cooperation in many areas. There is also growing interaction between their respective defense industries.⁽¹⁾ This cooperation in the national security sphere lent the relationship a strategic quality.

The entente between the two capitals is clearly not a military alliance in the traditional sense; the two countries have not defined a *casus foederis*, the situation that will activate military action on behalf of the other. There is no commitment to mutual defense or formal military coordination for future contingencies. They both fear entrapment in crises of limited relevance to their own national security and neither expects the other to participate actively in its wars.

Nevertheless, the current relationship between Turkey and Israel can be called a strategic partnership since it reflects a convergence of views on a wide range of global and regional issues. The two countries share similar regional concerns regarding Syria, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the challenge of Islamic

radicalism, concerns over potentially aggressive policies from Iran or Iraq, and the geopolitical destiny of Central Asia.

At the global level, they display a strong pro-American orientation in their foreign policy, have a problematic relationship with Europe, and are suspicious of Russian schemes.⁽²⁾ The two states also publicize their high-level strategic dialogue. Moreover, the current level of military cooperation has created an infrastructure for common action in the future. Joint exercises, mutual visits, staff-to-staff coordination, and intelligence exchanges increase interoperability. This potential enhances deterrence, facilitates coercive diplomacy and is the core for the entente's strategic implications. So far, Turkey and Israel have reaped strategic dividends separately simply by being grouped together in the eyes of other regional players and by rendering limited security services to each other.

The prevalent reading of interstate relations in the region focuses on the military component in Israeli-Turkish ties. In both countries, as well as in the rest of the Middle East, military prowess is largely perceived as a crucial element of national power and the most important currency of regional influence.⁽³⁾ In the Middle East, the dominant prism for understanding international relations is power politics and informal alliances are at least as important as formal-explicit coalitions.⁽⁴⁾ Thus, the conceptual framework for assessing Israeli-Turkish relations is alliance politics, especially because each of the two states is involved in regional conflicts with a potential for armed confrontation.

An alternative paradigm for explaining regional dynamics, one stressing identity and culture, would still suggest that the Arabs would see Turkish-Israeli closeness as some sort of alliance since both are non-Arab states.⁽⁵⁾ Moreover, the liberal vision of international politics, propagated by

Shimon Peres, of a New Middle East, which regards the use of force as no longer relevant and suggests instead that economics become the dominant factor in international politics, was never accepted by other leaders in the region.⁽⁶⁾ Therefore, the numerous Turkish and Israeli declarations that their alignment was not directed against any third party were usually not accepted at face value.

Moreover, the statements of Israeli and Turkish officials indicate that the two parties have ascribed regional significance to their entente. Upon his return from a visit to Israel in November 1993, Foreign Minister Hikmet Cetin announced that Turkish-Israeli relations would develop further in all fields and that the two states will cooperate "in restructuring the Middle East."⁽⁷⁾ In August 1997, Prime Minister Yilmaz said that the Turkish-Israeli cooperation "is necessary to the balance of power" in the region.⁽⁸⁾ Israel's Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, similarly concluded in 1998 that Turkey and Israel were obliged to work together in view of the volatile international security picture emerging after the downfall of the Soviet empire. In his view, such regional security arrangements were needed "to induce stability where instability prevails."⁽⁹⁾ Israel's Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai, described the significance of the entente: "When we lock hands, we form a powerful fist...our relationship is a strategic one."⁽¹⁰⁾

While not a formal alliance, the present level of Israeli-Turkish security and political cooperation and the sheer economic, political and military weight of the two states combined, then, create a new alignment of power in the Middle East. The separate conventional military might of Turkey and Israel is unsurpassed by any competitor in the region and their defense expenditures are the highest among the main powers of the region. Israel is also considered to

possess nuclear weapons and a way of delivering them.

Apart from their conventional might, Israel and Turkey have the strongest and the most advanced economies in the region. Their combined GDP is much larger than the combined GDP of all other major military powers in the region. Additional criteria for measuring the level of modernization, such as literacy, the use of telephones and energy consumption also indicate that the two, with the highest scores in the region, have the largest potential for further growth in a globalized economy (see Table 1).

preserve the regional status quo.⁽¹¹⁾ The two countries are content with their borders and have no ambitions for expansion. In contrast, both face revisionist states such as Syria and Iraq that make territorial claims on their neighbors. Revolutionary Iran, despite a strong reformist movement and more moderate rhetoric, is still revisionist in its advocacy of the replacement of secular regimes by Islamic ones and its territorial grievances in the Gulf.

Moreover, Iran and Iraq have attempted to produce the whole spectrum of WMD, chemical, biological and nuclear, while Syria concentrated on

Table 1						
Major Powers in the Region (1998-99)						
	Turkey	Israel	Egypt	Iran	Syria	Iraq
Population (mil)	65.6	5.7	67.3	65	16.5	22
GDP (bn\$)	425	101.9	188	339.7	41.7	52.3
GDP/cap (\$)	6,600	18,100	2,850	5,000	2,500	2,400
Def. Exp. (bn\$)	8.4	11.3	2.8	5.8	2.7	1.3
Combat aircraft	440	460	583	304	589	310
Tanks	4205	3800	3595	1345	4650	2200
Literacy (% of Population)	82.3	95	51.4	72.1	70.8	58
% of people with phones	28.2	45.6	4.7	12	3.1	2.9
Electricity consumption per capita (kwh)	1389	4864	684	1223	877	1254
Sources: <i>The Military Balance – 1999-2000</i> (London: Oxford University Press for IISS, 1999); CIA Fact book, 1999 at < http://www.odco.gov/cia/publications/factbook >.						

The strategic partnership between Turkey and Israel is not a classic balance of power act as the two countries are militarily stronger than any combination of regional states. This partnership is characteristic of two satisfied (non-revisionist) powers cooperating primarily to fend off common threats and to

chemical and biological warheads. The combination of missile and WMD capabilities with revisionist policies is very threatening to all in their vicinity. Israel also faces a Palestinian entity with a potential for irredentist claims and for becoming a haven for terrorist organizations.⁽¹²⁾ The common security

prism on international relations in general, and on the Middle East, in particular, reinforces the balance of power perspective that brings Turkey and Israel together.

THE STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS OF THE ENTENTE

With all its importance, the Israeli-Turkish entente cannot change the rules of the game in the Middle East. Jordan's putative participation in the entente extends the strategic reach of Ankara and Jerusalem but does not change the basic picture. The status quo orientation of Israel and Turkey limits its strategic impact on the regional balance of power. Yet the Israeli-Turkish entente strengthens each state separately, enhancing its regional status. Moreover, their aggregate power and its potential use influences the strategic calculus in various capitals of the region. Though not a formal military alliance, the Israeli-Turkish alignment fulfils several important strategic functions, primarily in enhancing each country's defensive posture.

Enhancing Deterrence

Israel needed to enhance its deterrence in the wake of the 1991 Gulf War, WMD developments in the region, and the evolving peace process.⁽¹³⁾ The entente can provide Israel with more deterrence. States that entertain the use of force against Turkey and Israel must take into consideration their combined might. For example, Syria became less likely to enter into a military adventure against either of its two neighbors, after the establishment of the Israeli-Turkish entente. Yet, modes of violent confrontation short of a full-scale war, such as a war of attrition or some other form of low-intensity conflict remain available to Syria, though the Ankara-Jerusalem ties could moderate the Syrian predilection to use these options.

Similarly, the fact that Israeli combat air planes fly near Iraqi and Iranian borders could enhance Israeli deterrence against missile attacks from these countries. The chances of the Israeli air force dealing effectively with such weapons are better when the distances involved in the air strikes are smaller. The Israeli air force could possibly, in times of crisis, use Turkish air space for refueling or air bases from which to fly to Iraq or Iran, thus having more time to spend over the targets.

Indeed, during the Iraqi crisis of February 1998, the Turkish ambassador to the United States stated that Turkey would consider allowing Israel to use Turkish airspace for retaliation should Iraq launch missile attacks on Israel. The access to Turkish territory could also be useful for rescuing downed pilots, for the deployment of commando forces, and for damaged Israeli aircraft to land. Turkish deterrence against missile attacks from Iraq and/or Iran would also be augmented by the presence of the Israeli air force on its territory.

The possible naval implications of growing ties between Israel and Turkey should also be considered. For Israel, the sea has traditionally been a secondary theatre, though this seems to be changing with the reduction in terrain gained in the 1967 War. Indeed, Israel's navy is acquiring a greater role in Israel's evolving defense concept than in the past. The sea could become Israel's launching arena for long-range strategic strikes. Moreover, Turkish ports and waters could become a safe haven for Israel's putative submarine-based second-strike capability, which might have deterrent value against a nuclear attack on Israel.

An additional component of deterrence is early warning. The intelligence cooperation between the two countries lessens the chances for their opponents to carry out a successful conventional or missile surprise attack.

The Turkish geographic location and the significant Israeli electronic eavesdropping capabilities create an impressive synergy in data collection. The mere fact that rivals know they are under surveillance is an inhibiting factor in preparing a surprise attack. This adds to strategic stability.

The intelligence collaboration with Turkey is useful also in deterring and fighting international terror with which both are afflicted. In an era of globalization, with more freedom of movement, there is a greater need for cooperation in the area of intelligence in order to engage in effective counter-terror policies. Speedy exchange of information enhances prevention of terrorist acts. One manifestation of the Israeli-Turkish co-operation became known in June 2000. Iran complained that Turkey demanded to be informed about the cargo of Iranian aircraft transiting Turkish airspace en-route to Syria, obviously a reference to Iranian military equipment being sent to Hizballah.(14)

Extended Deterrence

The strategic partnership between Israel and Turkey could also enhance the deterrence of their tacit partner, Jordan, should Syria and/or Iraq attempt to invade it. It also allows Jordan a somewhat freer hand in dealing with domestic challenges from Palestinian nationalists or Islamic radicals, having less to worry about foreign military threats or subversion from Damascus, Baghdad or Tehran.

Offensive Potential

Defensive capabilities also have offensive potential in terms of compellence or coercive diplomacy. According to Gen. Cevik Bir, the military agreement signed between Turkey and Israel paved the way for resolution of the Turkish-Syrian crisis of autumn 1998.(15) Similarly, Turkey's

threats to eliminate the Russian-made S-300 SAMs if deployed in Cyprus were credible, partly because of its Israeli connection.(16) Israel, however, has been reluctant to capitalize on this factor, due to the growing aversion on part of the Israeli leadership to use large doses of military force. Moreover, Israel was more cautious than Turkey because it was engaged in a peace process with its neighbors and preferred not to project a threatening image in order to correct Arab conceptions of Israel as aggressive and expansionist in the context of advancing the peace negotiations.(17) For example, calls in Israel to threaten Syria with military action against Syrian targets in Lebanon in order to curtail its support for the Hizballah remained unheeded for a long time (until April 2001).(18) Israel refrained from emulating Turkish behavior versus Syria, despite the fact that its partnership with Turkey allowed greater freedom of action toward Damascus.

Another coercive diplomatic option that was not followed by the two states was demanding the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon. A particularly opportune time for attempting to restore Lebanese independence was the Israeli unilateral withdrawal from South Lebanon in May 2000, which elicited a vocal Lebanese demand for an end to the Syrian occupation. This shows the reluctance on the part of both status quo powers to use the coercive potential of the alignment. The two states could cooperate in exercising leverage to discourage the building or use--or some day launching pre-emptive strikes against--missile and WMD installations in Iran, Iraq or Syria. Yet so far, Turkey and Israel have refrained from issuing any threats mentioning military cooperation in such contingencies, which also indicates the defensive emphasis in the strategic partnership.

REGIONAL PUBLIC REACTIONS

In light of the Israeli-Turkish leverage and the perceptions of these two actors held by others in the region, the negative reactions to the entente are not surprising. The Israeli and Turkish standard response that their bilateral relations were not directed against any third party did not allay any fears. Arab states and Iran share the Israeli and Turkish perspective on international affairs--the power politics prism. This is precisely why the Israeli-Turkish ties are seen in such a threatening way in several Arab capitals, particularly after the 1996 military agreement. Jordan allowed its press to criticize the entente, but the government was conspicuously absent from such statements. A general evaluation of Arab public reactions follows, as well as a review of the major external powers' declarations on the subject.

The relationship was on the agenda of the Cairo Arab summit of June 1996. Syria's proposed resolution condemning Turkey was softened and the summit issued a statement calling for Ankara to reconsider "the pact" and to preclude "any encroachment on the Arab countries." (19) The Arab League continuously expressed concerns over the Turkish-Israeli accords and called on Jordan to refrain from joining this alignment. (20) The secular Iraqi, Libyan and Syrian press often depicted the alliance as an extension of an American attempt to impose its hegemony over the area. The Islamists perceived relations between secular Turkey and Jewish Israel as an "unholy alliance" designed to buttress a regional order dominated by the West and its regional allies. There was no consensus in the Arab world on how to react and policy prescriptions varied between warming up relations with Turkey to isolation and containment of it. Some suggested inserting a wedge between the Turkish Muslim masses and

the secular government by appealing to Islamic solidarity. High hopes for Turkish disengagement from Israel were disappointed during the tenure of Islamic politician Necmettin Erbakan as prime minister. (21)

Generally, Arab countries feel uneasy about an active role of non-Arab Turkey in the Middle East. Such anxieties predate the Israeli-Turkish alignment. Turkey's self-image as a secular democratic state and a staunch Western ally--suggesting this model could be emulated by the Islamic world--diverged considerably from the Arab deferential attitude towards Islam and ingrained suspicions of the West. Remembering Ottoman rule, Turkey's activism in the 1990s was perceived in many Arab quarters as the return of a colonial power. In Arab political discourse, Turkey's return to the Middle East was often referred to as "new Ottomanism," "new Turkish imperialism," or "pan-Turanism." (22) Indeed, the Arabs were even reluctant to accept Turkey's proposal, first aired in 1986, for a "peace pipeline" to transport Turkish waters south to the arid areas of the Middle East. Similarly, Arab countries were mostly distrustful about Turkey's offers to play a facilitating role in Arab-Israeli peace talks. Turkey and Israel (as well as Iran) are still viewed in many Arab quarters as outsiders to an Arab Middle East. According to an Egyptian strategist "both states share the characteristics of alien origin, race and culture." (23)

The degree of unease evinced by many Arab countries toward the Turkish-Israel alignment, however, is the greatest measure of this arrangement's power to protect the two partners' interests and to deter threats.

Syria

Syria, the country most affected by the new arrangement, portrayed the alignment in its official organs as being

"directed against the Arab nation and its interests, as well as against the anti-Israel Islamic states." (24) According to Syrian Vice-President Abd al-Halim Khaddam, the Israeli-Turkish partnership was "the greatest threat to the Arabs since 1948" (25) and the U.S.-Turkish-Israeli nexus was "the most dangerous alliance we [have] witnessed since the Second World War." (26) Syria's Information Minister Muhammad Salman regarded the January 1998 American-Israeli-Turkish naval exercise a show of force, bringing back the atmosphere of war in the region. (27) The Syrian government blamed Israeli-Turkish cooperation for Turkish incursions into North Iraq, as well as for the October 1998 escalation of Turkish pressure on Syria that led to its capitulation to the Turkish demands. (28)

Egypt

The initial reaction of Egypt to Turkish-Israeli military ties "was a big alarm." (29) Osama al-Baz, an advisor to President Husni Mubarak, warned that this military cooperation "would lead to instability and possibly war in the Middle East." He said the alignment "threatens the interests of the Arab states." (30)

Egypt termed the military accords as "dangerous and a threat to regional security." (31) At the end of 1997, Mubarak condemned the planned Turkish-Israeli naval exercise, since it meant "that an Arab party would be targeted. It is known that Syria is located between Turkey and Israel." (32) Despite its peace treaty with Israel, Egypt continues to see Israel as a regional rival and does not preclude a military encounter. (33) Egypt fears that Israel's military superiority in the region is being complemented by a potential Israeli economic dominance, factors that are both reinforced by the Turkish dimension. Cairo felt its regional leadership status threatened, particularly

at a time when Syria and Iraq, its potential competitors, were isolated and weak. Having difficulties in overcoming its economic problems, Egypt feared its marginalization in the region it aspires to lead when confronting the much stronger Turkish-Israeli military and economic bloc.

Iraq

Iraq joined the Arab collective outcry at the Turkish-Israeli relationship. For example, Iraqi Foreign Minister Muhammad Said al-Sahaf condemned the January 1998 naval maneuvers as "a provocative act against the Arab nation." (34) Iraqi spokesmen criticized Turkey's relations with Israel and asked Ankara not to serve the interests of "the U.S.-Zionist alliance." (35) Iraq has for years feared Turkish expansionism to take the oil-rich Mosul region and has had a complex and charged relationship with Turkey.

Iran

The Islamic Republic of Iran also disliked the entente between Ankara and Jerusalem, notably given its uncompromising hostility towards Israel and its alliance with Syria. It opposed any country's improving relations with Israel, particularly if it were Muslim. Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayeti declared in April 1996: "I have openly told Turkish officials that we had to stop factors that gave Israel further strength." (36) Foreign Ministry officials offered the view that the planned January 1998 American-Turkish-Israeli naval exercise "will increase the chances of a crisis in the region" and was aimed at enhancing Israel's influence. (37) President Khatami condemned Turkish closeness to Israel, which "provokes the feelings of the Islamic world." (38) Turkey's alignment with Israel has thus become an additional strain in the Ankara-Teheran relations.

ATTEMPTS AT FORMING A COUNTER-ALLIANCE

Syria has been most active in rallying Arab criticism of the Israeli-Turkish ties and in attempting to organize a counter-alliance. For example, in June 1997, the Damascus Declaration forum (Egypt, Syria and the Gulf States)(39) met in Syria and issued a statement demanding Turkey be careful in its contacts with Israel and "to resume contacts with its Arab neighbors." (40)

Hafez Asad also overcame his long-held animosity to Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi branch of the Ba'th party, and improved relations with Iraq. In 1997, Syria opened its borders with Iraq for the first time since 1980. The two countries exchanged trade delegations, opened a bus service between the two capitals, and closed radio stations that broadcast anti-regime propaganda. Damascus hosted a bilateral committee on the waters of the Tigris and Euphrates to coordinate action against Turkish water policies, which harmed the interests of Syria and Iraq. Syria has also become a transit route for Iraq's external trade. In October 1999, Syria allowed the opening of an Iraqi interest office in its capital, the lowest diplomatic level but still politically significant.

The secular Ba'th regime in Syria also sought to mobilize Islam against the Jerusalem-Ankara alignment. In the 1990s, Syria sought the alliance of many non-Syrian Islamist movements in order to enhance its regional standing, gain leverage in Arab countries and neutralize the Islamist opposition at home.(41) Syria used the summit of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), held in Tehran in December 1997, to isolate Turkey. The conference's draft resolution condemning ties with Israel was toned down by OIC foreign ministers in order not to alienate Turkey, but not enough to prevent the Turkish

President Suleiman Demirel from leaving in anger.

The Turkish-Israeli alignment also reinforced the strategic partnership between Damascus and Tehran, which originated in the early 1980s in reaction to the Iraqi invasion of Iran. Since then, Syria and Iran coordinated policy in regional matters. For example, Damascus closed the oil pipeline from Iraq that runs through its territory, and permitted Iranian presence in Lebanon and support for Hizbullah. Both wanted to curb U.S. influence in the Middle East following its victory in the 1991 Gulf War.(42)

Egypt supported the Syrian positions vis-a-vis Israel, and shared Syrian apprehensions at Turkey's water policies since it, too, was a downstream riparian state, given its location on the Nile river. Moreover, a thaw in Egypt-Iran relations took place. In the past, Egypt gave refuge to the Shah after being ousted by the Islamic revolution, while Islamic Iran broke off diplomatic ties with Egypt because of its peace treaty with Israel. Teheran attacked the Egyptian pro-American orientation, while Cairo faced a difficult domestic battle against radical Islamists who saw Iran as their model. The chill in the relations ended in May 1997, when Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati made a historic visit to Cairo and Mubarak announced his intention to attend the OIC summit in Teheran later that year.

The thaw in relations, also related to the more moderate rhetoric of Iran's new President Muhammad Khatami, allowed the two countries to prepare a schedule for the repayment of the Egyptian debt to Iran, incurred before the Islamic revolution. In June 2000, Egypt also supported the Iranian application to join the G-15 (a group of Third World countries). The Egyptian moves were paralleled by a Saudi-Iranian rapprochement, which was mainly motivated by an attempt to use Iran to

balance Iraq in the Gulf. The rationale of balancing the Turkish-Israel alignment was also used.

Yet, a regional counter-alliance failed to materialize. The conflicting interests between Iraq and Iran and the scars of the long war between the two (1980-88), as well as Syrian-Iraqi competition, have prevented the establishment of any anti-Turkish military alliance, and have even placed serious limits on coordinated action against the Turkish-Israeli partnership.

This alignment has been only of secondary concern for Iran and Iraq. Israel remained an enemy strengthened by its links to Ankara, but relations with Turkey have been less clear. The foremost issue on Iraq's agenda was to break out of the post-Gulf War restraints. It succeeded in getting rid of UN inspections and, for all practical purposes, it has also eliminated UN limits on oil sales. Iraq still demands more water from the Euphrates and objects to the Turkish military incursions in the north to chase PKK personnel. Iraqi WMD programs have also become more threatening for Turkey. Yet, Iraq has an incentive not to antagonize Turkey too much because Ankara supports the extension of Iraqi sovereignty to the Kurdish areas in its north. Moreover, Ankara, in order to restore lucrative economic transactions, supports the lifting of the international sanctions on Iraq if it complies with UN conditions.

Iran also preferred to prevent an escalation in its relations with Turkey, despite some strain when Turkey accused Iran of supporting its own Islamic radicals and allowing the Kurdish PKK to use Iranian territory, which even led to violent border incidents (July 1999). Moreover, Iran's foreign policy is increasingly concerned with developments eastward, in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Thus, Syria cannot expect any external military aid in a confrontation with Turkey, although Iran and several Arab countries would render diplomatic support. The Turkish-Israeli partnership led Syria to foster better relations with Armenia and Greece (both harbor historic grudges against Turkey) and to link them to Iran. By the end of the 1990s, Greece and Armenia shifted policies, however, looking for better relations with Turkey and Israel.

Egypt is also constrained in joining an anti-Turkish alliance by its need for U.S. support, which would be threatened by too active an opposition to other U.S. allies in the region. Indeed, Cairo refrained from siding with Damascus in the October 1998 crisis, trying to play a mediating role. In practice, Egypt has come to the realization that the alignment is not a direct threat to its own national security, but wants to discourage it since that arrangement reduces Egypt's own regional power and its allies. For this reason, Egypt wants to keep both Israel and Turkey out of regional security arrangements, which it prefers to be purely Arab in composition.

JORDAN'S LINKS TO THE ENTENTE

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is the one Arab state that seemed to have joined, albeit not formally, the Israeli-Turkish partnership. Jordan's geographic location and fear of its neighbors have forced its rulers to engage in a constant pursuit of alternating alliances with regional powers.⁽⁴³⁾ Common elements in the security predicament of Jordan and Israel have long required a *modus vivendi* between them. Historically, both have feared the destabilizing consequences of Arab radicalism and Palestinian nationalism. For the Jewish state, the Palestinian claim to its perceived

homeland has been the cause of a protracted conflict. For Jordan, the Palestinian origin of the majority of its population undermines its allegiance to the Hashemite dynasty. Despite the lip service to the Palestinian cause, Jordan continues to see the Palestinian issue as an internal challenge that requires careful domestic and foreign policy moves.

While Israel wanted a viable Jordan able to withstand pressures from stronger neighbors, such as Iraq and Syria, which wanted to conquer it, to station troops on its land, and/or to meddle in its affairs. Amman saw Israel as a counter to the pressure of bigger Arab states, while Jordan turned into Israel's eastern buffer.⁽⁴⁴⁾ One formative event was when Israeli threats deterred a September 1970 Syrian invasion of Jordan that would have helped Palestinian armed groups overthrow King Hussein. Syria and Jordan also experienced a near military confrontation at the end of 1980. Mutual suspicion remained an important element in their bilateral relationship, a sentiment shared by Israel and Turkey towards Syria. The 1994 Israel-Jordan peace treaty and the strong ties of both countries with the United States are further important elements in their good relationship.

The fact that pro-Western Jordan had good relations with Turkey for decades also eased its acceptance of the Turkish-Israeli alignment in the 1990s. Jordan's Ambassador to the UN, Adnan Abu Odeh cited Turkey as a Middle Eastern country and welcomed its involvement in regional affairs.⁽⁴⁵⁾ For Jordan, a Middle East that excluded "Turkey and Israel from the identity of this geographical unit" was unfeasible.⁽⁴⁶⁾ In contrast to the prevalent Arab position, Jordanian Foreign Minister Jawad Anani said that Turkey could play an important mediating role in the Middle East peace process.⁽⁴⁷⁾ Jordan's new king, Abdullah

II, stated in March 2000 that Turkey has an important role in the region.⁽⁴⁸⁾

Parallel to growing Turkish-Israeli military ties, cooperation between Turkey and Jordan in the military sphere also intensified in the 1990s, including regular reciprocal high-level military visits, hot line telecommunications between military commanders, exchanges of troops for training, and the use each other's airspace for training and joint maneuvers.⁽⁴⁹⁾ Jordanian pilots flying U.S.-made F-16s receive partial training in Turkey. In 1998, the two armies staged a ground-force exercise in Jordan. King Hussein awarded the Medal of Merit to Gen. Bir for his contributions to developing those links.⁽⁵⁰⁾ Bir was also a chief player in Israeli-Turkish defense co-operation.

In the mid-1990s, trilateral military contacts were initiated. In June 1996, the Jordanian Air Force commander stated in Ankara that his country wanted to join military exercises with Turkey and with Israel.⁽⁵¹⁾ Jordan sent an observer to the U.S.-Turkish-Israeli naval exercises in January 1998 and in December 1999 (but not the one in January 2001), despite domestic opposition and pressures from Arab quarters and Iran to desist from doing so. It also participated in the biannual strategic discussions held in Israel. Moreover, there is growing cooperation among the three armies at various levels. In May 2000, IDF observers were invited to an exercise, where a Turkish and a Jordanian force underwent combat training. The three ground forces also engaged in a trilateral headquarters exercise, officially defined as "peacekeeping operations."⁽⁵²⁾

Amman, like Ankara, hoped to see Israel deploy batteries of the Arrow system, underscoring shared concerns about missile proliferation. Like Turkey, Jordan cooperates with Israel in the area of counter-terror intelligence and has close relations with various Israeli

defense agencies. Turkey and Jordan also exchange information in their efforts to contain Teheran-backed Islamic extremist groups.(53)

In order to lessen opposition to its participation in the Israeli-Turkish alignment, abroad and at home, Amman preferred a low profile in the trilateral relations. Jordan also tried to mute the Arab and Islamic criticism of Turkey's rapprochement with Israel in Arab and Islamic meetings. Despite general Arab displeasure, Jordan's links to Israel and Turkey continue.

ADDITIONAL REGIONAL RAMIFICATIONS OF THE ENTENTE

Generally, Turkey's relations with Israel strengthened its links to the Middle East and enhanced its assertiveness in this region. The bilateral relations have several additional regional implications.

Strengthening the Peace Process
The Turkish-Israeli relationship reinforced the Arab-Israeli peace process, which amounts to a reluctant acceptance of Israel as a regional actor by most Arab states. This historic process, started in the 1970s by Egypt, following successive military defeats (1948, 1956, 1973), is primarily the result of a growing realization on part of the Arab political leadership that Israel is a fait accompli, too strong to be eliminated in the foreseeable future.(54) The sustained conventional military strength of Israel over several decades, as well as its nuclear option, have infused greater realism in Arab political thinking, which in turn channeled the armed conflict to the negotiating table. The emergence of the United States, Israel's ally, as the victor in the Cold War further strengthened Israel versus the Arabs.

Yet, the improvement in relations between Israel and its Arab neighbors is not a deterministic historic process. Events have shown how easily progress

can be stopped and the trend is even reversible should the power equation change. The new links between Jerusalem and Ankara in the latter part of the 1990s reinforced the notion that Israel was militarily strong and could not easily be removed from the map. The Turkish-Israeli economic and military ties have united the two strongest states in the region, which further buttressed the position of Israel as a powerful regional actor. If this relationship continues, it will have a moderating effect on the Arab ambitions and revanchism toward Israel still very much alive in the area. In this respect, the entente between Ankara and Jerusalem adds to the peace process and to regional stability.

The friendship between the Jewish state and an important country with so many Muslims, such as Turkey, also diminishes the Islamic dimension of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Israel's relations with Indonesia, Nigeria, and states in the Maghreb, the Gulf, and the Caspian Basin improved in during the 1990s. The Turkish example makes relations with Israel more acceptable in Muslim states in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Energy Security

Turkey is at the edge of the Persian Gulf region and Caspian Basin areas where 70 percent of the world's proven oil and over 40 percent of its natural gas reserves are concentrated.(55) The bulk of this energy-rich area is within 1,000km of Incirlik--a Turkish base used by U.S. forces.(56) Projecting force from the Eastern Mediterranean to Baghdad, rather than from Saudi Arabia has many advantages. The so-called "northern strategy" for the defense of the Persian Gulf could bring the US, Turkey, Jordan and Israel even closer.(57) Some Gulf States, such as Qatar and Oman, do not object to a Turkish and Israeli role to

counter the weight of Iraq, Iran and Saudi Arabia.(58)

Generally, Turkey's growing presence in the Middle East and a greater long-term acceptance of Israel as a regular actor in the region, due to the peace process, offer Gulf States additional alternatives in the balancing act they have performed for years. Jordan had also improved its relations with the Arab Gulf states, making a Turkish-Israeli-Jordan triangle less objectionable to them.

While the true importance of the Caspian energy resources is not yet fully clear, Turkey still plans to become the hub of energy routes from Central Asia to the West. Specifically, it wants to see the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline built, which will carry Azeri oil to the Turkish Mediterranean port of Ceyhan, and the Trans-Caspian natural gas pipeline that will transport Turkmen gas directly to Turkey. The planned routes of both pipelines exclude Russian territory. Turkish objections to increased oil traffic in the already crowded Bosphorus straits reinforce the rationale for excluding Russia from transit arrangements for the Caspian energy. The ecological and the economic considerations are only secondary, however, as Turkey sees the pipelines primarily in geopolitical terms - acquiring a dominant position in the region.(59)

The implementation of these large-scale energy projects would diminish the dependence of Central Asian republics on Moscow and Tehran, which oppose Ankara's energy aspirations. Israel and its lobby have been convinced of the strategic logic of the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline and have supported Ankara's positions in Washington. The location of the pipelines will be largely determined by uncertain economic calculations, but also by the political atmosphere in Washington.

The East Mediterranean

Israel and Turkey border on the East Mediterranean and their strategic partnership influences security in this region too, specifically vis-à-vis Greece and Cyprus. Greece, historically at odds with Turkey on a variety of issues, did not approve of the strengthening of Turkey due to its military relations with Israel. Greece, traditionally pro-Arab, itself only agreed to full diplomatic relations with Israel in May 1990, and preferred closer relations with Syria and Iran.(60) In February 1998, Greek Foreign Minister, Theodoros Pangalos, dubbed the Turkish-Israeli relationship "an alliance of wrongdoers" and "a threat to the security of the region."(61) In September 1998, Pangalos participated in a trilateral summit of the foreign ministers of Greece, Iran and Armenia in Tehran. Cyprus was also afraid of the Turkish-Israeli alignment.

If there was a Greek strategy of encirclement against Turkey, however, it failed. Syria bowed to superior Turkish power and determination in October 1998. Greece and Cyprus were similarly intimidated into not deploying the S-300 missiles two months later.

These developments, among others, led to a new strategic appraisal in Athens. As Turkey and Greece were both struck by fatal earthquakes, respectively in August and September 1999, each country sent aid to the other, signaling a new period in their relationship. The premise of the new approach, spearheaded by Greek Foreign Minister George Papandreou, was the realization that anchoring Turkey in Europe served Greece's national interest. Greece dropped its longstanding opposition to Turkey's membership in the EU, which named Turkey an official candidate for membership in December 1999, generating a much better atmosphere between the two states. In January 2000, Foreign Minister Papandreou made a historic visit to Ankara - the first Greek

foreign minister to do so since 1962. The two sides discussed a variety of possibilities for cooperation. In June 2000, NATO held an exercise, Dynamic Mix, on Greek territory where a Turkish military contingent participated for the first time.

Part of the new Greek policy toward Turkey is to seek better relations with Israel. In an apparent reversal of the historic coolness that has characterized ties between Athens and Jerusalem, Greece is now calling upon Israel to embark upon a new era of cooperation, including a security partnership designed to maintain regional stability. There are indications that Greek suspicions about the aims of Turkish-Israeli ties were replaced by a more sophisticated approach, accepting this relationship.(62) In May 2000, Greek President Constantinos Stephanopoulos paid a first official visit to Israel and expressed hope for an increase in military cooperation and for an improvement in the economic and cultural ties.(63) Papandreou did not even rule out a strategic triangle between Greece, Israel and Turkey.(64)

The prospects for cooperation between Greece, Turkey, and Israel--even if conducted in separate bilateral channels--would help NATO extend its reach in the East Mediterranean, an area of increasing interest for that organization.(65) Turkey and Israel obviously have an interest in a greater NATO role in the Mediterranean. Israel is also interested in a Greco-Turkish understanding on Cyprus which would lead to the incorporation of the island into the EU and possibly into NATO, bringing Europe closer to Israel.(66)

The Impact on US Regional Fortunes

The US did not initiate the growing cooperation between its two allies. As General Bir correctly noted, "These were initiatives of the Turkish leadership."(67) Still, U.S. policymakers found the rapprochement appealing.

While the Arab world expressed concern at the February 1996 bilateral military accord, the United States welcomed it as "helpful for stability in the area" and as "good to enforce security in the region." (68) In May 1997, the U.S. State Department referred to Israeli-Turkish ties as an American "strategic objective" and added, "If certain other Arab countries don't like that, that's just tough."(69)

Turkey and Israel are the strongest, most reliable U.S. allies in the Middle East and their partnership benefits U.S. strategic interests, including such goals as containing Iran and Iraq, as well as preserving a pro-Western Jordan. Separately and combined, they are useful in checking aggression in their immediate neighborhood, a goal shared by the United States. The new alignment also opens up possibilities for wider regional cooperation on a range of strategic issues, including the establishment of a shield against long-range missiles.(70) Thus, U.S. Secretary of Defense, William Cohen, said he would "continue to stress the need for greater cooperation between Israel, Turkey and Jordan, and basically talk about enhancing the level of security arrangements in the region."(71)

Turkey's link with Israel and its Washington lobby have limited the domestic constraints on U.S. support to Turkey. Moreover, Turkey can enhance its military capabilities with Israeli-made equipment, should Congress bar American arms transfers. Israeli weapons are largely compatible with American weapons and are partly based upon American technologies. In turn, the entente that contributed to diminishing Israel's regional isolation made the American support for Israel easier in regional terms.

Potentially, the US could muster the military capabilities of Turkey and Israel for coercive diplomacy against

Iran, Iraq and Syria. Yet, only a joint Israeli and Turkish willingness to get involved in conflicts not directly related to their own security concerns could be a base for new American-sponsored security architecture. So far, both states, Israel in particular, have not been prepared to play the role of the regional policeman, even if backed by Washington. Moreover, although they might consider a change in their orientation in order to enhance their position in Washington, the domestic backing for such a posture is not strong enough yet.

The United States is similarly reluctant to adopt such a strategy. It did not take advantage of the entente to press Syria to adopt a more conciliatory position in the peace talks with Israel, to stop sponsoring terrorism, or to withdraw from Lebanon. One major reason is that Washington has important interests in countries such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia, which are highly suspicious of the Israeli-Turkish entente and does not want to aggravate anti-American feelings in the Arab world.⁽⁷²⁾ Still, a different approach remains available in a crisis situation or as an indirect tactic.

Indirectly, the Israeli-Turkish entente may also encourage democratization and the liberalization of the economies in the region, two goals the United States advocates. Turkey and Israel refrain from interfering in the domestic affairs of their neighbors and are fully aware that the ripening of the socio-political conditions necessary for the emergence of democratic regimes may take some time. Yet, the success of their societies in achieving far more freedom and prosperity than any other country in the Middle East is a constant reminder that democracy is not a feature found exclusively in Western Europe and North America. This fuels the hope that such an experience can be emulated by their neighbors.

CONCLUSION

The Turkish-Israeli entente acquired a strategic dimension, which has generated much concern in the region. Despite the improvement in Israel's relations with its neighbors, it is still not fully accepted in the region, while Turkey is viewed with considerable mistrust because of its imperial past. The pro-Western orientation of both countries is regarded with suspicion in many Arab countries and in Iran.

Still, the alignment has achieved a great deal of success at virtually no cost. Jordan joined, however, the strategic partnership, whose implications are limited because of the status quo orientation of its participants. Revisionist Syria failed to organize a counter-alliance, which would in all probability be also anti-American. Generally, the Turkish-Israeli strategic nexus and its regional implications enhance the U.S. position in the region. The strategic partnership also keeps open the option for a more assertive American regional strategy in dealing with energy security and the WMD challenge.

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NOTES

This article is based on parts of my monograph *The Turkish-Israeli Entente* (London: King's College Mediterranean Studies, forthcoming). I am most indebted to Mustafa Aydin, Mats Berdal, Stuart A. Cohen, Thanos Dokos, Hillel Frisch, William Hale, Gareth Jenkins, Mustafa Kibaroglu, Kemal Kirisci, Avi Kober, Jacob Landau, Alan Makovsky, Barry Rubin, Umut Cizre Sakallioğlu, Shmuel Sandler, Yezid Sayigh, and Kenneth Weisbrode for their comments on my monograph. I acknowledge the efforts of Damla Aras, Yechiam Brott,

Elisheva Brown, Banu Eligur, Ozgul Erdemli, Hava Koen-Waxman, and Amir Rom in assisting me in this research. I thank the participants of the Program on International Political Economy and Security (PIPES) Seminar at the University of Chicago, and Kier Lieber in particular, for their useful comments on an early draft. The Ihel Foundation and the Research Authority at Bar-Ilan University supported research for this paper.

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