

A TRIANGULAR RELATIONSHIP: TURKISH ISRAELI COOPERATION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR GREECE ¹

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In order to fully understand the dynamics of Israel's, Turkey's and Greece's present day trilateral relationship, it is necessary to examine how this complex relationship evolved over the past 50 years.

In 1949, Turkey recognized the State of Israel, *de jure*. This was, at that time, a bold step for a Moslem country to take, and Israel was duly grateful. Israel also hoped that a deeper more productive relationship might develop between the two countries. David Ben Gurion, Israel's then Prime Minister, noted Turkey's considerable geo-physical and material assets. Particularly dazzled by Turkey's enviable birth rate, of 850,000 births per annum, he commented somewhat wistfully: «how merger and impotent we are in this field that over-rides all else.»² In light of this, Israel, perceived future Israeli Turkish relations as complementary, fusing Turkey's extensive natural resources with Israeli technical know-how and ingenuity. Such a relationship, Israel believed, would greatly benefit both sides. The Turks were less certain or enthusiastic and remained so for some time. True, interactions took place, but Ben Gurion was soon heard to complain that «[The Turks] have always treated as one treats a mistress, and not as a partner in an openly avowed marriage.»³

As the Cold War developed, Israel discovered a further advantage to courting Turkey's favor, this time strategic. As Dunkart Rustow observed: *It is Turkey's firm alliance with the West that makes possible Moscow's recurrent setbacks in Cairo, Baghdad and other Arab Capitals.... Only behind that same barrier can Israel maintain its status as a regional power and cope with continuing Arab hostilities without risking facing in the Golan*

¹ This article was written with the assistance of the BESA Centre for Strategic Studies, Bar Ilan University, Israel.

² Amikam Nachmani, *Israel Turkey and Greece: Uneasy Relations in the East Mediterranean*, (London, Frank Cass, 1987), p.75.

³ *Ibid.*

*heights not just Soviet arms supplied to Syria, but the full force of the Red army itself.*⁴

There is little doubt that the attractions Turkish friendship underlay Israel's position on the explosive Cyprus issue and its rejection of the Greek demand for *Enosis*. A memorandum, composed in 1952, explained the decision. On the one hand, Israel's «abstract and traditional acknowledgement of the right of self-determination»; and «our moral debt» to many of the Island's inhabitants who, during the British mandatory period, assisted Jewish immigration to Palestine, favored endorsement of the Greek claim. On the other hand, «Israeli-British relations, Israeli-Turkish relations, and our chilly relations with Greece», combine to overwhelmingly demand the rejection of *Enosis*.⁵

Once the two sets of arguments were weighed against each other, rejection appeared the obvious choice. Even more so once the unmistakably chilly Israeli-Greek relations were taken into account. «Consideration of our relations with Greece», the authors of the memorandum noted, «should not burden us excessively».⁶ True, Greece had recognized the State of Israel in 1949. But this was not considered a point in Greece's favor, not least because Greece refused to progress beyond *de facto* recognition. In fact, during the late 1940s Greek Israeli relations were at all time low and Israel officially named Greece a hostile enemy country. Nor did relations improve much over the next 40 years. In the 1980s, for example, Papandreou was still denouncing Israel - albeit in private - as the ugly offspring of American imperialism.⁷

Moreover according to the memorandum's authors, *Enosis* was little more than the invention of the Greek Communist Party. Should Israel, they asked, risk further alienating Ankara by supporting *Enosis* thus confirming Israel's leftist leanings? The answer was an unqualified and resounding no.⁸

This short review of the early stages of Israeli-Turkish and Israeli-Greek relations helps illuminate the development of their trilateral relationship. The consistently frosty relations between Greece and Israel and the enormous importance Israel attached to its relationship with Turkey, from the very beginning, account, in no small measure, for the current state of the three's relations today.

⁴ Dankwart A. Rustow, *Turkey: America's Forgotten Ally*, (New York, Council on Foreign Relations, 1987), pp.109-110.

⁵ Amikam Nachmani, *op.cit.*, pp.68-69.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Amikam Nachmani, *op.cit.*, p.97; non-attributable interview.

⁸ Amikam Nachmani, *op.cit.*, pp.68-69.

The Reasons Behind the Turkish Israeli Rapprochement

Why did such a good salutary relationship develop between Turkey and Israel? The answer lies, in part, in the nature of Arab-Turkish relations.

Relations between Turkey and the Arab states, following the Second World War were distinguished by a great deal discord and friction. Much of the animosity between the two nations was due to their very different understanding of regional and world affairs. Ankara, closely identified with the West, regarded communism as evil and the Soviet Union as a dangerous menace. The Arabs, by contrast, saw the West as the most serious threat to their independence and prosperity. They were particularly afraid of its two client states Israel and Turkey. As far as most Arab states are concerned, Turkey and Israel are interlopers in the region, emissaries of western imperialism intent on planting and disseminating ideas, notions and beliefs totally alien to the Middle East.⁹ It came, therefore, as no surprise to the Arab states that Turkey was prompt to recognize the State of Israel in 1949. Particularly since they believed that Turkish recognition was motivated, in part, by sheer spite. Turkey, they were convinced, was revenging itself on the Arab revolt in 1916 against the Ottoman Empire.

Throughout the Arab nations the 1950s branded Turkey a traitor to the Moslem cause. But it was during the 1960s and over Cyprus that friction between the Turkey and the Arab states reached its peak. It was then that Egypt, under Nasser, supplied the Greek Cypriots with weapons to be used, at least so Ankara believed, against the Island's Turkish population. Turkey was convinced that Arab support for the Greek Cypriots cause was solely an act of retaliation for its own recognition of the State of Israel. More than that, it was, Turkey declared, another stab in the back, a replay of the First World War when the Arabs allied themselves with Great Britain and against Turkey, when (Arab) Moslems helped Christians kill Moslems.

The following anecdote clearly illustrates the bitter, hostile relations between Turkey and the Arab states. At the end of the Gulf War the Kuwaiti government, in a lavish spread published in the *Washington Post* in March 1990, publicly thanked those countries who helped liberate Kuwait. The name Turkey was notably absent. The Turks were quick to respond. Within days, Turkish state television screened the film *Lawrence of Arabia*, a

⁹ Oya Akgönenç Mughisuddin, «Perceptions and Misconceptions in the Making of Foreign Diplomacy: A Study of Turkish Arab Attitudes Until the End of the 1970s», *Turkish Review of Middle East Studies*, (Formerly: *Studies on Turkish Arab Relations*), Annual 7, 1993, p.163. See also, Philip Robbins, *Turkey and the Middle East*, (London, The Royal Institute of International Affairs and Pinter Publishers, 1991), p.114: «Many Arabs... regard the Turks as bad Muslims, while the Turks regard the others as backward because of their fusion of the spiritual and the temporal».

reminder, if any was needed, of Arab perfidy and ingratitude during the First World War.

Arab-Turkish animosity apart, several global developments also helped advance Turkey Israel relations. For example, the fact that over the past decade Arab oil has become less and less effective as weapon employed to «persuade» consumers to adopt anti-Israeli positions. Ankara was certainly quick to realize that warmer relations with Israel would no longer produce a painful «oilless» Arab reaction. The end of the Cold War and the beginning of the Middle East peace process were equally instrumental in drawing Turkey and Israel closer. Many countries, including Turkey, became increasingly open to and willing to embark on, or develop further relations with Israel. Both developments are significant in that they reveal that zero-sum game notions are no longer a factor in Turkey's thinking *vis-à-vis* Israel.

The Concept of «Complementary Nations»

The notion of «complementary nations», which Ben Gurion considered the natural, appropriate basis for future Israeli-Turkish relations, proved somewhat problematic. Ankara greatly resented the fact that it was importing technology and industrial products from Israel and exporting less prestigious goods such as agricultural produce and raw materials. Nor was it happy with the fact that Turkish imports from Israel far outweighed its exports.

In time, this state of affairs changed and in the course of the 1990s, the balance of trade between the two countries shifted in Turkey's favor.

Year	Turkish Exports	Turkish Imports
1992	\$ 80 million	\$ 114 million
1993	\$ 92 million	\$ 134 million
1994	\$ 163 million	\$ 127 million
1995	\$ 261.5 million	\$ 179 million
1996	\$ 243 million	\$ 196 million

Since 1994, Turkish exports to Israel have far outweighed its imports. This is even more significant, given that the total volume of trade between the two countries has also risen considerably. In 1991, trade between the two countries amounted to \$100 million, in 1995 it reached the impressive figure of \$440 million. It is now, in 1999, approaching the \$1 billion, well beyond the trade figures of any other two Middle Eastern countries.

Furthermore, if in 1950s the complementary nature of the Israeli and Turkish economies stipulated an exchange of Israeli technology for Turkish

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raw materials, such is no longer the case. In the 1990s, Israel imports Turkish industrial and electrical goods, and Israeli troops train in highly sophisticated Turkish naval installations. Consequently, Turkey is no longer troubled by questions of national pride or inferiority complexes, which previously hindered the relationship.

In March 1996, Turkey and Israeli signed a free trade agreement. Accordingly, by the year 2000 or thereabouts, the volume of trade between the two countries is expected to reach \$2 billion. These figures do not include trade in military goods nor revenue earned from Israeli tourism to Turkey. In 1986, some 7,000 Israeli tourists visited Turkey, in 1992 their numbers rose to 150,000 and since 1993 have reached approximately 350,000. As, each Israeli spends, on average, about \$1000 a visit, and many are eager and frequent customers of Turkey's casinos, with an annual turnover of \$1 billion, the financial benefits of Israeli tourism should not to be taken lightly.¹⁰

All in all, Turkey no longer has any reason to feel the junior partner in the relationship. Nor does she.

Military Relations

Within the last ten years Israel and Turkey have signed over twenty military related agreements. In 1996 alone, they concluded three agreements. The first, a reciprocal air force training agreement, specified eight joint deployments per year, four in each country. The second, dealt with air to air and surface to air missile development and construction, and laid down the conditions for cooperation between Israeli and Turkish military industries. The third agreement concerned the modernization and upgrading of 54 Turkish F-4 («Phantom») jets. This project is expected to take something between six to eight years. It was decided that during the first two years Israel will issue Turkey a long term loan to help finance the project.

There have been many other wide ranging military agreements. These cover such subjects as: trade in military technology; periodic meetings to discuss and evaluate strategic, regional and global issues; naval cooperation and training; the establishment of systems designed to locate find and rescue pilots; a training program for mid-air refueling. The police accords to

¹⁰ *Ha'aretz*, (daily newspaper, Hebrew), 30 July 1996 and 23 June 1997; *Yediot Aharonot*, (daily newspaper, Hebrew), 8 April 1996; Manufactures Association of Israel, Section for Foreign Trade and International Contacts: «Considerations for Establishing a Free Trade Region between Turkey and Israel», draft B (Hebrew), (Tel Aviv, August 1993), Ihsan Gürkan, «Turkish Israeli Relations and the Middle East Peace Process», *Turkish Review of Middle East Studies*, Annual 7, 1993, p.130; Major General Alex Tal, GOC Israeli Navy, in *Yediot Aharonot*, 18 October 1996.

combat traffic in narcotics and terrorism signed in November 1994, should also be mentioned in this context. Most of the agreements are five years in duration. They can be extended for a further one year at the end of the first five-years period, and are henceforth subject to yearly extensions.¹¹

Israel and Turkey have adopted markedly different policies on the question of publicizing the agreements. Israel, on the whole, has been rather low key about the agreements, and is inclined to keep them under wraps. Not so Turkey. The Turkish army, which is famously uncommunicative and, having no spokesman, holding no press conferences is justly described as «keeping itself to itself», has been extraordinarily forthcoming about its military cooperation with Israel. Not only has it publicly acknowledged the existence of the above agreements, it has released a vast amount of information on its interactions with the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), the Israeli Defense Industries (IDI) and the Israeli Aircraft Industries (IDA). Turkey no certainly longer treats Israel «like a mistress».¹²

Turkish loquacity is, to say the very least, odd. Certainly, in view of its increasingly radicalized Moslem population and the fact that, radical Islam has long damned Israel as «Little Satan» (the US is «Big Satan»). This begs the question: how does the military explain, justify, its cooperation with Israel? One way is by frequently and forcefully calling attention to the existence – regardless of vehement Greek denials – of a Syrian-Greek military agreement. According to the Turkish press, which has discussed it in exhaustive detail, the Greek army has thanks to the agreement, obtained landing, services and training rights in Syria and the Greek navy mooring and service facilities.¹³

Israel, in contrast, has been rather reticent about the agreements with Turkey. More than that, it has made a conscious effort to downplay their agreements' significance, and stress their harmless benign nature. Topics such as military museums and archives, sports competitions, visits by the armies' entertainment units, and cooperation between their photography and film units, have received wide publicity and been the subject of several newspapers articles. Other than that not much information has been made available, or even leaked, to the press. Similarly, Israel has been careful to emphasis – despite the terms of agreements being secret, – that under no circumstances will Israeli troops training in Turkey or Israeli personnel

¹¹ *Ha'aretz*, 26 May 1996, 4 August 1996, 9 August 1996, 8 December 1996; *Hürriyet*, (daily newspaper, Turkish), 2 June 1996; *Zaman*, (daily newspaper, Turkish), 31 October 1996; *Yediot Aharonot*, 21 June 1996.

¹² *The Economist*, Survey Turkey, 8 June 1996.

¹³ *Ha'aretz*, 12 April 1996. See also, Syrian TV, 11 May 1996, 21:30: report on a meeting between the Syrian Foreign Minister A'Shara and Constantine Georgiou, Secretary General of the Greek Foreign Minister.

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visiting Turkey become involved with conflicts with third parties.¹⁴ Further, the Israeli Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary and Chief of the General Staff have all, at one time or another, affirmed that the agreements are not directed against Greece or any other third party.

Israeli-Turkish military cooperation is underpinned by extensive civil and non-military interchanges. Following the Madrid conference (October 1991) and the concurrent decision of both Turkey and Israel to raise their diplomatic representation to embassy status, the two countries signed numerous agreements and accords. These cover a wide range of subjects, including: education, science, culture, environment, telecommunications, medicine, banking and investments duplicated taxation, etc. As a result, Turkey and Israel enjoy a multi-layered relationship, based on both civil and military cooperation. This means that there are now a great many vested interests both in Israel and Turkey committed to continuing and deepening the relationship. All this serves to strengthen the relationship to the point where it might be safe to regard it as almost rock solid.

Advantages: Turkey

It is no secret that Turkey's relationship with the West is not entirely problem free. Turkey's record on human rights, the occupation of Cyprus, the Kurdish-Turkey internal strife, the ticklish question of Turkish immigrants, as well as cultural, religious and economic differences have led the United States Congress and several European countries to attempt to cut down and limit western contacts with Turkey. Not so Israel. Israel believes that ostracizing or boycotting Turkey would have disastrous results, turning Turkey into second Iran. Moreover, Israel argues that the best way to induce Turkey to mend its ways is by adopting a policy of rapprochement. Israel by pursuing precisely such a policy, provides Turkey with many of things it can not obtain from the «real West».

Turkey's relationship with Israel has also helped it overcome the problems of – albeit limited – isolation. Turkey's intensive contacts with Israel have increased US support for Turkey. In part, this is due to active Israeli and Jewish lobbying in Washington on Turkey's behalf. It is also, however, the case that Washington often finds it more politic to support Turkey indirectly – and Israel provides the ideal channel. This, as far as Turkey is concerned, is a great benefit, a calculated bonus of the relationship. Nor is Israeli pro-Turkish lobbying confined solely to Washington. Israel's former Prime

¹⁴ *Aksiyon Magazine*, 8-24 May 1996, published what appeared to be an accurate copy of the agreement signed by General Çevik Bir, the Turkish Deputy Chief of Staff and David Ivry, the General Director of the Israeli Defence Ministry.

Minister, Shimon Peres, spent much time and effort trying to persuade his European friends in the Socialist International to allow Turkey to join the European Customs Union. In January 1996 his efforts were crowned with success and Turkey became a member of the said customs union.

There is little doubt that Turkey's troublesome relationship with Syria, and especially their disputes over territory (Hatay) and water and Syrian support for the Kurdish Workers Party (P.K.K.), has provided Turkey with a strong incentive for cooperating with Israel. In this respect, the old adage «the enemy of my enemy is friend» is particularly appropriate.¹⁵ Moreover, Turkey likes the idea of a Syria «sandwiched» between Israel and Turkey. If previously, the Turkish media explicated, «we were sandwiched between Greece and Syria; now, thanks to the agreements with Israel, Syria is the filling in the sandwich», a much more satisfactory state of affairs.¹⁶ Both in this and in other respects Ankara is certain that were it not for the Israeli Syrian conflict, its relations with Syria would be far more tense than they are at present.

It is not surprising therefore that the possibility of an Israeli-Syrian rapprochement gave rise to much Turkish concern and that it has on several occasions expressed its reservations regarding the process. Turkey plainly disapproves of Israel's efforts to have Syria removed from the black list of states which support terrorism and drugs. Ankara has, repeatedly and unequivocally, warned that Turkey will not tolerate a state of affairs whereby Syria is forced to withdraw its support from Palestinian terrorist groups and the Lebanese Hezbollah, yet is free to continue to sponsor the P.K.K. In addition, Ankara has bluntly stated that as long as the policies of countries – i.e. Syria – currently negotiating with Israel remains unfriendly, there is little use in looking to Turkey to help solve the difficult water problem and so further the peace process.¹⁷ Ankara, is also, and quite understandably, worried that a peace agreement between Israel and Syria would result in the redeployment of Syrian forces along the Turkish Syrian border. Not a happy prospect.

Needless to say Ankara, greeted the suspension of the peace talks with Syria with more than a sigh of relief. Certainly, the policies of the Israeli Prime Minister, Benyamin Netanyahu, more than a little reluctant to resume negotiations with Syria, accorded well with those of Turkey.

Iran is another case of shared Turkish and Israeli concern. Turkey, like Israel, anxiously follows developments in Iran. It dislikes and is disturbed by Iran's growing influence over Turkish Moslems. It strongly objects to

¹⁵ *Ha'aretz*, 30 April 1996; 30 December 1996.

¹⁶ Quoted in *Yediot Aharonot*, 21 June 1996.

¹⁷ *Ha'aretz*, 15 January 1996, 7 February 1996, 26 May 1996.

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Iran's support for the P.K.K. It is also extremely worried about Iran's development of non-conventional weapons.

In view of the above, Thomas Friedman's claim that Shimon Peres' most important legacy to Benyamin Netanyahu was not peace with Jordan but Israel's relations with Jordan has much to commend it.¹⁸

The Advantages: Israel

As far as Israel is concerned, the appeal of the rapprochement with Turkey is self evident. The military agreements alone are of inestimable value. The contract to upgrade 54 F-14 jets will boost Israel's flagging defense industry, allowing thousands of Israelis to keep their jobs. Israel might gain access to priceless Turkish intelligence on Syrian, Iran and Iraq. The Israeli air force has rights of passage to Turkey's vast air space and has no doubt benefited greatly from being able to train in what is virtually Iran's, Iraq's and Syria's backyard. Furthermore, according to the Turkish press, Turkey has promised to grant the Israeli air force asylum in case of an emergency.¹⁹ However, it seems reasonable to assume that rather seek refuge in Turkey, Israel, should the need arise, will ask for permission to use Turkish air space to tackle targets in Syria, Iran or Iraq.

The Israeli-Turkish rapprochement has also led to joint Israeli-Turkish activity in the ex-Soviet Moslem Republics of Central Asia. The purpose of these cooperative ventures is to counterbalance and hopefully block Iran's growing influence in the area. Turkey and Israel have, with the United States' blessing if not money, been active economically in the ex-Soviet Republics, particularly in the field of developing energy resources. They have also, conversely, supported Azerbaijan's attempts to annul the Congressional amendment, passed under Armenian pressure, prohibiting US investment in Azerbaijan.²⁰ These ventures have provoked bitter Iranian resentment and hostility, evidence of the need, if not the success of the Israeli-Turkish efforts.

Arab and Moslem Reactions

The Arab world has harshly criticized Israeli-Turkish cooperation. It has also, as a result, developed new perspectives on the Arab Israeli conflict and formulated new plans for the deployment of Arab troops. Hence, Iran believes that the Israeli-Turkish axis has turned Israel into «our immediate

¹⁸ Reprinted in *Ha'aretz*, 17 June 1996.

¹⁹ Quoted in *Ha'aretz*, 7 April 1996.

²⁰ *Ha'aretz*, 28 and 31 August 1997.

neighbor»; Syria no longer considers Turkey as «neutral» in the Arab Israeli conflict; and Lebanon regards Israeli-Turkish cooperation as the most dangerous alliance in the Middle East since the First World War. The aim of both countries is to redraw the borders of the Middle East, and impose a new water and political-economic map. The new map will employ Israeli and Turkish guns and Israeli technology, and will be backed by the United States. Iran and the Arab world, Sudan (located along the Red Sea waterways) and of course Syria will find themselves squeezed between metal pliers.²¹

Arab sources have tried to explain the reasons behind Turkey's thriving relationship with Israel. Turkey's frustrating, at least as the Arabs see it, experience with the Moslem Republics of Central Asia, is one reason, having caused Turkey to change direction and look southwards. Turkey also, it is claimed, found it easier and less dangerous to escalate its relations with Syria rather than Iran. A Turkish-Iranian crisis, they noted, would be infinitely more deadly than a conflict with Syria.

These Arab sources stress that a Middle East peace is not in Turkey's interests. First, the Kurds would most likely follow the Palestinian's example and be in a much better position to achieve independence. Second, Turkey would be forced to adopt a more flexible attitude over Cyprus. Third, Iran and other Islamic actors, who oppose the peace process, would be inclined to exacerbate tensions in Turkey, which, in any case, suffers from serious secular religious problems. Finally, Istanbul's position as one of the Middle East's principal economic and financial centers would decline, its place usurped by Beirut, Haifa and Cyprus.²²

Greek-Cypriot Israeli Relations

Greece, like Turkey, recognized the State of Israel in 1949. Likewise, both countries' were represented in Tel Aviv on a lower than embassy level. Yet, while Turkey and Israel have long enjoyed a flourishing relationship, with extensive and wide ranging contacts the same cannot be said of Israel and Greece. This is largely because, as Professor Ioannis Mazis has succinctly explained, it took Greece another 40 years to fully recognize the State of Israel. According to Professor Mazis, Greece's change of heart was mostly

²¹ *Ha'aretz*, 12 September 1996, *Syrian Times*, 27 April 1996; *Al'Ousbou Al' Arabi*, (Beirut, weekly, Arabic), 15 April 1996, 29 April 1996; *Al'Shrook*, (United Arab Emirates, weekly, Arabic), no.210, 15-21 April 1996.

²² *Al' Mshahid Al' Siasi*, (London, weekly, Arabic), 21-18 May 1996; *Al'Watan Al'Arabi*, (Paris, weekly, Arabic), 17 May 1996; *Al'Siasa Al'Dowliah*, (Cairo, quarterly, Arabic), July 1996.

due to its growing concern with the burgeoning Israeli-Turkish relationship²³. Indeed, there is little doubt that the possibility of an Israeli-Turkish strategic understanding was one of the reasons which led Greece to revise its Israeli policy.

Greek-Turkish relations and their effect on Greece's internal and external affairs also account for Greece's exceptional interest in Israel's military and civil cooperation with Turkey.²⁴ Israeli assistance in upgrading and modernizing Turkish weapons, the joint Israeli-Turkish air force training programs, and the exchange of industrial technologies naturally attract Greek interest.

Greece hopes to build up its deterrent capabilities and modernize its weapons arsenal. This too has also encouraged Greece to reconsider its policy towards Israel. Israel is, after all, a primary weapons manufacturer. It certainly explains why both Greece and Cyprus took the strategic decision to upgrade relations with Israel. Nonetheless, it is evident, if somewhat ironic, that the currently warmer relations between Greece, Cyprus and Israel is primarily another by-product of the Turkish-Greek conflict.

Plans for military cooperation between Greece and Israel began well before the conclusion of the Turkish Israeli agreement of February 1996. An Israeli-Greek agreement on military affairs was signed as early as December 1994. Yet, so far neither side has taken any steps to put the agreement into effect. The Greek reasons for this are clear: Athens does not wish to antagonize the Arab world.²⁵

1995-1996 saw a marked improvement in Israeli-Greek relations. The question is what happened to pull the relationship out the dead end in which it had been mired down for the past 45 years? The Greek goal of equaling, possibly surpassing Turkey military capability has already been mentioned. Indeed, Turkey, in general, has acted as catalyst in this respect. Then there was the death in June 1996 of Andreas Papandreou, long hostile to Israel. The improvement in US-Greek relations and the Middle East peace process have also played their part. But perhaps the most important factor in this

²³ Ioannis Th. Mazis, «The Principles of Geopolitics and the Case of the Greek Space in the South Eastern Mediterranean», Athens, *Archives of Economic History*, vol., no.1-2, January-December 1996, p. 2.

²⁴ See the findings of Vamık D. Volkan and Norman Itzkowitz, *Turks and Greeks: Neighbors in Conflict*, (Huntington, Cambridgeshire, The Eothen Press), p.167. The content analysis commissioned by the Aegean Foundation in 1987 on reports and editorials in the Greek press on Turkey, in general, and on Turkish-Greek relations in particular, indicated that the Greek press discussed this subject more frequently than any other subject. On the other hand in the Turkish press Turkish-Greek relations ranked only 16th in frequency. Furthermore, news items about Turkey in the Greek press, were on average six times as long as their Turkish counterparts.

²⁵ *Ha'aretz*, 29 January 1997.

respect is the fact that Greece appears to be abandoning the zero sum game perspective which dominated and marred its attitude towards Israel in the past. A process, one can only hope will continue.

In 1995, the volume of trade between Israel and Greece reached \$350 million, double that of 1989. Towards the end of the 1990s, trade figures between the two countries are somewhere in the vicinity of \$440 million. Israel exported \$200 million worth of chemical and oil based products to Greece and imported cement, food and building materials amounting to \$150 million. Israel is currently the biggest importer of Greek products in the Middle East, approximately one quarter of all Greece's exports to the Middle East, go to Israel.²⁶ Admittedly, Israeli military exports to Greece are modest and consist mainly of defensive equipment such as bullet-proof vests etc. But, Greek military delegations have visited Israel in order to explore the possibility of purchasing Israeli military equipment. And, should the Greek government issue a public tender for the modernization of its army, part of the \$16 billion budget – to be spent until the year 2008 – could go to Israeli arms manufacturers who are well represented in Athens.

Trade relations between Israel and Cyprus have also improved. Since the early 1990's the volume of trade between the two countries has almost tripled. In 1990, the trade figures were \$40 million not counting 8,000 Israeli tourists. By 1996, they reached \$110 million and 80,000 Israeli tourists.

The rapprochement between Greece and Israel has had several important consequences. Most significantly, Greece has made no serious effort to activate its security cooperation agreement with Syria, signed hot on the heels of the Israeli-Turkish military agreement. Athens, incidentally, adamantly denies ever having signed such an agreement. There have also been rumors that Cyprus is no longer a transit point – admittedly some claim it never has been - for the transfer of materials bought by Syria for its chemical weapons industry.²⁷

Needless to say, the burgeoning contacts between Greece and Israel may complicate Israel's relations with Turkey, a fact of which Israel is well aware. True, Israel has been reassured, by Turkey's moderate reaction to its expanding contacts with Greece. On the whole, Turkey has tended to belittle the importance of Israeli-Greek relations, while emphasizing that it is «not asking for a monopoly on Israel's foreign relations».²⁸ Nonetheless, Israel still proceeds cautiously.

²⁶ Ran Curiel, the Israeli Ambassador to Greece, *Express*, (Greek), 20 July 1997. See also interview with the Ambassador in *Eleftherotypia Kyriakatiki*, (Greek), 6 July 1997.

²⁷ Athens News Agency, *Daily News Bulletin*, 3 September 1996.

²⁸ *Ha'aretz*, 29 January 1997.

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In early 1997, the Israeli Air Force Commander, Eitan Ben Eliyahou, visited Athens. In the course of his visit, Ben Eliyahou suggested that the Israeli Aircraft Industry help modernize 40 Greek F-4 «Phantom» jets and sell Greece detachable oil tanks for its F-16. Athens, pointedly ignoring the growing cooperation between the Turkish and Israeli air forces, proposed a joint Israeli-Greek air force training program. Yet, Israel, with one eye on Turkey, strove to downplay the significance of Ben Eliyahou's visit. Nor did it, in the end, bid for the tender to modernize the Greek F-14, fearing that this would have a negative effect on its relations with Turkey. Greece and Israel did agree to hold joint naval maneuvers at the end of the summer of 1997. In the event, however, these were postponed indefinitely. The Greek Navy, or so Greece claimed, was too busy stopping Albanian refugees infiltrating into Greece to spare the necessary frigate.

The arguments Turkey has employed to justify its close relations with Israel were both designed and bound to produce a overwhelming consensus in favor of the relationship. The Israeli-Turkish rapprochement, as the Turkish media argues, has allowed Turkey to successfully confront and check its three most immediate adversaries. It has helped Turkey counter Greece machinations, improved the Turkish army's ability to quell the Kurdish uprising, and enabled Turkey to resist Syrian intrigues. Not only did such persuasive arguments prompt wide spread and boundless support for the Israeli-Turkish rapprochement, but they removed the need to conceal the extent and depth of the relationship. All this, despite the growing tension between the Turkish military and Islamic politicians, tension to which the military's contacts with Israel have contributed in no small measure.

As noted, Israel believes that the Islamic radicalization of Turkey would be an unmitigated disaster. Furthermore, it holds that ostracizing Turkey would have precisely this effect. Israel also contends that «the carrot of cooperation» is a more effective way of persuading Turkey to modify the less attractive aspects of its policy, than «the stick of punishment».

There are however, several factors which have led Israel to question the relationship and have served to somewhat damp its enthusiasm. First and foremost, Israel fears that its current love affair with Turkey could end up like its affairs with South Africa, Iran and Ethiopia. Israel's relations with Iran, for example, were at their peak when the Khomeiny *régime* came to power. The possibility that Turkey will transfer Israeli know-how, weapons and technology to an unfriendly third country, serves only to compound this fear. (South Africa, for instance, has done precisely this, and appears to have transferred Israel materials and know-how to Iran). It is to assuage such anxieties that the Turkish Chief of Staff General Karadayı has only recently

assured Israel that Turkey will not share Israeli weapons or know-how with any third party.²⁹

There are other factors, which tend to undermine the relationship. Turkey considers Israeli lobbying in the US and Europe as one of the key attractions and benefits of the relationship. This was particularly true in the early 1990s, when in the wake of the Oslo Accords, Israel's international prestige rose enormously. Turkey not surprisingly regarded its friendship with Israel an immense and prized asset. Yet, Israel's former Prime Minister Netanyahu, was far from warmly regarded or respected in either the United States or Europe. He certainly was a less effective spokesman for the Turkish cause than his predecessor Mr. Peres. This might have led to a cooling off on Turkey's part. Israel's deteriorating relations with the Palestinians could also have a negative effect on its relations with Turkey. As Mr. Zvi Alpeleg, Israel's former ambassador to Turkey has warned, it may result in grass roots pressure on the Turkish government to reduce its ties with Israel, pressure that under circumstances it would find it difficult to ignore.³⁰

As for Greece, Israel tends to hold it responsible for the fact that the agreements between the two have not advanced the signature stage. To the extent that Greece still, to a degree, appears to calculate its policies in the Middle East on a zero sum basis, this charge seems justified. Certainly, some members of the Greek Foreign Office have remained as sensitive as ever to Arab reactions, which naturally prevents any real progress being made in Israeli- Greek relations. By contrast, the Greek Defense Ministry is very much in promoting and advancing Israeli-Greek relations.

In conclusion, Israel considers its close relationship with Turkey as one of its major foreign policy achievements. That Israeli-Turkish cooperation has been so harshly criticized by the Arab world is, at least according to some Israeli circles, proof of this. Turkey too, greatly values the relationship. It regards the relationship primarily as a kind of substitute for its cool, unsympathetic, uncooperative relationship with the United States and Europe. Accordingly, it would be reasonable to assume that the two countries will continue, at least in the foreseeable future, to enjoy indeed improving upon their current good, productive relations.

²⁹ *Ha'aretz*, 25 February 1997.

³⁰ *Ha'aretz*, 30 September 1997.