
THE TURKISH-ISRAELI RELATIONS UNDER THE DAVUTOĐLU DOCTRINE IN TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY

TÜRK DIŐ POLİTİKASINDA DAVUTOĐLU DOKTRİNİ ALTINDA TÜRK-İSRAİL İLİŐKİLERİ

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Summary

Diplomatic relations between the Republic of Turkey and the State of Israel are at an historic low. Though the trajectory of the relationship over the last half century is characterized by consistent fluctuations, never has the shift been so steep and so sudden. Although the "flotilla crisis" (Mavi Marmara) of May / June 2010, when Israel did a tragic mistake by targeting Turkish civilians, was the catalyst for the breakdown in relations, a nuanced understanding of Turkish foreign policy development will demonstrate that diplomatic bifurcation was inevitable. This paper will make the case that the rise of Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutođlu, and his unique foreign policy paradigm, which this paper describes as *the Davutođlu doctrine*, is an important factor in the reorientation of the Turkish foreign policy within the dramatic reorientation due to identity debates which caused an extraordinary shift in the Turkish – Israeli relations.

Key Words: Davutođlu doctrine, Mavi Marmara, Arab Spring, the Turkish – Israeli Relations.

Özet

Türkiye Cumhuriyeti ve İsrail Devleti arasındaki diplomatik ilişkiler tarihsel bir düşüş yaşamaktadır. Söz konusu ilişkilerin seyri yaklaşık yarım yüzyıldır sürekli dalgalanmalar gösteren bir nitelikte olsa da, ilişkilerde yaşanan önceki düşüşlerin günümüzde yaşandığı denli hızlı ve kesin olduğunu söylemek güçtür. Her ne kadar İsrail'in ilişkiler açısından trajik bir hata yaparak sivilleri hedef aldığı Mayıs / Haziran 2010'da vuku bulan Mavi Marmara krizi bu hususta bir katalizör görevi görmüş olsa da, Türk dış politikasında yaşanan yol ayrımları ilişkilerdeki gerilemenin kaçınılmaz olduğuna işaret edebilmektedir. Bu makale, Türk – İsrail ilişkilerinin son dönemdeki seyrini Dışişleri Bakanı Prof. Ahmet Davutođlu'nun ismi ile anılan *Davutođlu Doktrini'nin* kimlik temelli okumaları ve Türkiye için öngördüğü bölgesel vizyon ile açıklamaya çalışmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Davutođlu doktrini, Mavi Marmara, Arap Baharı, Türk – İsrail ilişkileri

1. DEFINING THE DAVUTOĐLU DOCTRINE IN TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY

Unlike traditional foreign policy doctrines, *the Davutođlu doctrine* does not simply offer a change in concepts or strategies dealing with diplomacy and political course of action. It is an all-encompassing, amorphous, and idealistic, for some semi-

utopic, vision which far exceeds the conventional international relations debates. The first of its components stresses a strong correlation between Turkey's political identity and its foreign policy. A practical result of this thinking has been Turkey's sudden embrace of the Palestinian cause. The second component offers an original geopolitical and geostrategic reading, known as "geocultural integrity." This concept is manifested in Turkey's abandonment of pure *realpolitik* in favor of greater emphasis on historico-cultural affinities. For example, in recent years, Turkey has dramatically increased its profile and participation in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. Also, the famous policy of "Zero problems with neighbors" can be traced back to Prof. Davutoglu's notion of post-nation state integration in the Middle East. The third and fourth components include a new interpretation of Turkey's national capacity, and emphasize the projection of soft power based on historico-cultural affinities. Indeed, the scholar foreign minister of Turkey offers not using the country's geopolitical position for Turkey's defensive strategic purposes of Cold War but rather as a stepping stone to regional and global influence respectively. The intellectual shift represented in the *Davutođlu doctrine* has shown its results in both Ankara's strategic interest prioritization and self-assertion. Furthermore, the doctrine has a regional and even global ambition with a reference to the *golden age* nostalgia to restore Turkish dominance in the historical Ottoman territories and with the aim of projecting influence in global affairs. As a matter of fact, in June 2010 at the Turkish-Arab Economic Forum, Foreign Minister Davutođlu stated before his 17 Arab counterparts that, "we will soon practice in Al Aqsa when Jerusalem becomes 'a capital' ".¹ Actually, this rhetoric was a good example of the shifting self-perception on identity under the new Turkish foreign policy doctrine. Because, Turks can already practice in one of the holiest places of Islam, Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, as they are able to visit Israel. However, if one takes the pronoun "we" as Turkish-Arab common identity under post Ottoman imperial-religious references, then the sentence becomes relevant, and consequently Israel becomes "the other identity" in terms of political psychology. In fact, due to the new foreign policy doctrine one can witness the redefinition of the nation's political identity rather than a solely redefinition of its foreign policy priorities. Indeed, this aspect makes *the Davutođlu doctrine* unique among other foreign policy readings. Put simply, this understanding considers foreign policy as a result or derivation of perpetual motion of socio-political factors rather than elites' decision-making systems. As a matter of fact, the two concepts of the new doctrine, *the geocultural integrity* and reinterpretation of Turkey's national capacity, have set the main parameters of the Turkish - Israeli relations in the recent years.

1.1. THE GEOCULTURAL INTEGRITY CONCEPT OF THE DAVUTOĐLU DOCTRINE

FM Davutoglu's famous book, *the Strategic Depth (Stratejik Derinlik)*, largely dwells on the concept of redefining Turkish foreign policy's new priorities. Notably,

¹ Aslı Aydıntaşbaş, "Davutođlu 'Bir Gün Mescid-i Aksa'da Namaz Kılacağız'", *Milliyet*, 13 June 2010.

Davutoğlu uses this expression under the subtitle of “*an Unavoidable Hinterland: Middle East*” and mentions that the Middle East region has been (and should be) defined well beyond the geopolitical unity but within the *geocultural integrity* which has been fostered by the Islamic civilization. Davutoğlu expresses the concept as cited below:

“Rule of the Islamic Civilization in the Middle East has brought about geocultural integrity to the region which exceeded its geographic integrity. From the past to the present, the Middle East region has been assumed as the field of dominance of the Islamic civilization. Thus, enlargements and constrictions in this field of dominance have caused changes in the definition of the Middle East.”²

The quoted passage denotes that the new Turkish strategic thought attaches importance to religious and historico–cultural affairs apart from the context of simply political Islamism or neo–Ottomanism. Furthermore, the importance of identity in foreign policy is strongly endorsed by the new approach. In fact, historical and religious values have started to be considered as critical assets of Turkish foreign policy and soft power. Thus, Ankara aimed to improve political influence on Turkey’s historical hinterland. Prof. Bülent Aras, head of Strategic Researches Center of Turkish Foreign Ministry and a close associate of the current Turkish Foreign Minister, indicates that the Davutoğlu doctrine aims to make territorial borders around Turkey “*de facto meaningless*”. Thus the new Turkish foreign policy would not consider political Islamism or restoring Ottoman Empire as a viable political model for Turkey, but as tools of referencing “*historico – cultural affinities*” in order to provide “*an advantage to Turkey in its involvement in neighboring regions*”.³ In accordance with making borders *de facto meaningless* Ankara strived to boost its trade ties with the Middle Eastern nations, pursued economic integration through free trade zones, and cancelled visas to provide mass cultural interaction and mobility. This was a major move to transform Turkey from a “military state” into a “trading state”.⁴

Actually, *Davutoğlu doctrine* aimed to transform the historical Ottoman territories in the Greater Middle East into a free trade zone with high cultural interaction and free movement without visas. In parallel with this project, Turkey wanted to play the actor who solves the West’s security problems using its cultural affiliations, soft power, and political negotiation capacity. In other words, the new foreign policy doctrine seeks to pursue a more proactive course and seeks to solve the West’s problems with actors of the Muslim world through Turkey’s mediation capacity. This is true to the extent that the JDP’s election plank booklet for 2011 had a special section with the title of “*the reliable mediator: Turkey*”.⁵ Indeed, Ankara has initiated the “Mediation for Peace” program in the 65th General Assembly of UN with

² Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik*, Küre Yayınları, İstanbul, 2010, p. 132.

³ Bülent Aras, *Davutoğlu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy*, SETA Policy Brief, Ankara, 2009, p. 7.

⁴ Kemal Kirişçi, “Turkey’s ‘Demonstrative Effect’ and the Transformation of the Middle East”, *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 13 No. 2, 2011, pp. 33 – 55.

⁵ Justice and Development Party (Ak Parti), *Türkiye Hazır Hedef 2023*, Booklet for Parliamentary Elections in Turkey, 2011, p. 148.

the co – participation of Finland.⁶ Recently, the Istanbul Mediation Conference took place on 24th–25th of February 2012 with the “*Enhancing Peace through Mediation*” theme. At the conference, FM Davutoğlu rated the concept as one of the most important tools for establishing peace.⁷ It should also be emphasized that the Middle East peace process and Iranian nuclear program are the top two points of Turkey’s mediation agenda. Clearly, those efforts were designed to place Turkey in the very center of every key security and foreign policy dispute in the region. By such a move, the new paradigm expected Ankara to have a stronger voice in establishing the Middle Eastern political–military agenda and will be able to enjoy a higher profile.

Being engaged to Middle Eastern affairs to a large extent was tantamount to abandoning Turkey’s traditional foreign policy approach which aimed to remain distant from the region. This tradition not only constrained Turkey’s profile in the Middle East, but also caused Turkish identity to be defined as apart from the Middle Eastern references. In other words, Turkey’s classic isolationism from the region has eroded the nation’s historical and cultural ties with the Middle Eastern streets before the 2000s. Right at this point, the concept of *geocultural integrity* mainly states the link between Turkey’s political identity and her place in the Middle East politics. Notably, Davutoğlu refers to David Laing’s classical anti-psychiatry movement work, *The Divided Self*, in order to explain Turkey’s identity debates and foreign policy direction. He draws attention to the notions of *inner self* and *embodied self* and the assumption of a person’s embracing a *false self* due to alienation. Davutoğlu argues that if a nation becomes alienated from its historical / geographical attitudes, then it might embrace a *false self* too. Within this context, “Turkey’s identity depressions” are claimed to be the result of the “*differentiation of her inner self and embodied self*”.⁸ In other words, the author argues that Turkey’s “embodied” identity has not matched her “inner identity”, which consists of historico – geographic elements. The new Turkish foreign policy doctrine argues that Turkey was alienated with the region and thereby destroyed cultural bridges between Turkey and the Middle Eastern societies and Muslim intellectual elite. Therefore, Turkey’s foreign policy direction is assumed to have deviated from the course on which it ought to be and the *Davutoğlu doctrine* aims to “fix” this problem.

The doctrine regards the Turkish – Israeli partnership as an alienation factor in determining Turkey’s political identity. In *the Strategic Depth*, Davutoğlu focuses on “*the new alienation process*” concerning the Turkish – Israeli ties. The “*new alienation*” is claimed to be the result of “*Turkey’s image of dependence, despite her 500 years of hegemony record, to Israel’s strategies which has only 50 years of history in the region*”.⁹

Furthermore, it should be mentioned that the term “alienation” is very critical about *Geocultural Integrity* concept’s success. When Turkey had been pursuing the

⁶ Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs [web], <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/istanbul-arabuluculuk-konferansi.tr.mfa>, Accessed: 04 March 2012.

⁷ Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs [web], <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakani-davutoglu-arabuluculuk-barisin-en-onemli-araclarindan-biridir.tr.mfa>, Accessed: 04 March 2012.

⁸ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik*, pp. 59 – 61.

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 57.

realpolitik approach in the 1990s, being alienated to the Middle East or Turkey's historico – cultural environment wouldn't mean much to Ankara's strategic interests. However, the current *geocultural integrity* notion and soft power strategies, which aim to win the hearts and minds of the Muslim street, can easily become inoperative if Ankara fails to show a relevant political identity to her “target audiences”. In a greater context, it is the result of Ankara's changing stance to the Muslim world.¹⁰

1.2. REINTERPRETATION OF TURKEY'S NATIONAL CAPACITY

Notably, *the Davutoğlu doctrine* includes its own geopolitical and geostrategic reading. This understanding significantly differs from its predecessors and points a fundamental shift in Turkish strategic thought which is important for Turkish–Israeli relations.

Starting from the Cold War period, Ankara has embraced three different geostrategic approaches in order to interpret its geopolitical functions and potential. Each of the interpretations had different impacts on Israeli–Turkish ties. Particularly, the latest geostrategic approach under Turkish foreign policy's reorientation has been playing an important role in the deterioration of the relations.

The first interpretation was the static Cold War paradigm which saw Turkey as a defensive military zone between communist expansionism and the free West. During the Cold War, Turkey's geostrategic importance was directly related to the Soviet threat through militarization and bipolarization of international relations. Within this context, by tying down over 20 Soviet divisions and being positioned at the center of NATO's intelligence activities, Turkey had played an important role in shouldering the security burden of Europe.¹¹ However, during the Cold War, Turkey's strategic importance used to be defined *as status quo* oriented and static. Ankara's main security function was to stop a potential Soviet military expansion in order to create time for the North Atlantic alliance to prepare a response. Thus, the Turkish geostrategic paradigm up to the 1990s interpreted Turkey's geopolitical importance by directly referring to the Soviet threat in a defensive manner.

After the collapse of the USSR, the Turkish national security agenda was shaken by the chaotic strategic landscape of the neighboring regions and mounting PKK terrorism. In accordance with dominance of the *realpolitik* approach in the Turkish strategic community, Ankara's strategists in the 1990s saw themselves “get caught in a bad neighborhood” surrounded by fragile or failed states of post Cold War period. Within this context, the surrounding regions of the Balkans, Middle East, and Caucasus were perceived as sources of ambiguous threats and uncertain security environment.¹² Such a geostrategic landscape and threat perception brought about large military modernization programs and procurements as well as the dominance of the armed forces in the decision making system. As a result, the second

¹⁰ Özdem Sanberk, *Regionalization of the Turkish Foreign Policy*, Bilgesam, 2010, p. 2.

¹¹ Stephen Larrabee, *Turkey as a U.S. Security Partner*, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, 2008, pp. 1 – 2.

¹² Michael Robert Hickok, “Hegemon Rising: The Gap Between Turkish Strategy and Military Modernization”, *Parameters*, Summer 2000, pp. 105 – 119.

interpretation was conceptualized in the mid 1990s. Furthermore, during this period Turkish military elites sought a non-Islamic partner with Western identity and high military potential. In addition, this actor would ideally counterbalance states like Syria, Iran, and Iraq from which Ankara perceives threat. Naturally, Israel appeared as the one and only address of this search.

The strategic partnership with Israel has taken place in this troublesome junction. Notably, since 1958, Turkish and Israeli strategic thinking had become more aligned. The Israeli strategic community perceives its region as the primary source of hostility. The Israelis have therefore developed a unique strategic depth paradigm which depends on containing hostile actors along with other peripheral elements. In fact, this perception is one of the main elements which have dominated the national security culture since the first day of the State of Israel.¹³ In parallel, during the 1990s, the Turkish elite had started to feel the threat perception of being surrounded by hostile actors in an ambiguous environment. Thus, Ankara's geostrategic paradigm brought about an accord between Turkish and Israeli geostrategic approach which paved the ground for further cooperation. Eventually, under the dominance of the post Cold War trend, Turkish-Israeli relations turned into a strategic partnership with a strong military emphasis and intensive security agenda in hard power terms. In essence, the Israeli-Turkish accord was an important component and a towering result of the second geostrategic reality.

Within the second geostrategic trend period, Turkey used gunboat diplomacy against Greece, Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus and Syria in order to solve military-political conflicts, such as S-300 missiles crisis with Greek Cypriot administration in 1997 / 1998 period, and the expel of terrorist Abdullah Ocalan from Syria in 1998. As a matter of fact, under the leadership of TAF Chief of Staff General Huseyin Kivrikoglu's (1998 – 2002), Turkey developed its first post Cold War military strategic concept in 1998. The strategic concept was based on the framework of *active deterrence*. Through *forward engagement – forward defence* principles, the strategic concept sought to use Turkey's military potential actively as a tool of foreign policy.¹⁴ In essence, the second geostrategic approach was highly militarized and proactive in concept but it was still status quo oriented and defensive in grand strategy. Therefore, when comparing Ankara's first and second geostrategic interpretations; one can claim evidence of a strategic reorientation but not a major paradigm shift between the Cold War era and the 1990s. Crucially, the second approach did not cause a dramatic change in identity discussions. Turkey continued to be a part of the West as it was during the Cold War. Despite this, its European allies let Ankara down when dealing with the PKK problem. Turkish decision makers reinforced the nation's Western political identity by fostering Trans- Atlantic relations and strategic partnership with the only democracy of the Middle East - Israel.

¹³ Ofra Bengio, *Türkiye İsrail: Hayalet İttifaktan Stratejik İşbirliğine*, (Trans. Filiz Kaynak Dışkaya), Erguvan Yayınevi, İstanbul, 2009, pp. 59 – 60.

¹⁴ Michael Robert Hickok, "Hegemon Rising: The Gap Between Turkish Strategy and Military Modernization", pp. 105 – 109.

Eventually, after Justice and Development Party (JDP) assumed power in November 2002 and especially since Davutoğlu became Turkey's highest diplomat in 2009, Ankara has conceptualized a new geostrategic interpretation. Unlike former trends during the Cold War and in the 1990s, the third approach can be labeled as a real paradigm shift in Turkish strategic thought with a strong emphasize to identity factor in foreign policy. Interestingly, the new geostrategic perspective played a major role in the Turkish–Israeli relations downgrading in the 2000s.

An important chapter in Prof. Davutoğlu's *Strategic Depth* begins with the subtitle of "reinterpretation of Turkey's national capacity elements". The author insists that Turkey needs a "dynamic interpretation" of the stable elements of her national capacity (geography and history) through developing strong theoretical and institutional infrastructures.¹⁵ Furthermore, Davutoğlu strongly criticizes former geopolitical schools of the Turkish strategic community by indicating that those efforts saw Turkey's geopolitical position as a tool for simply defending the status quo instead of an asset for opening up to the world. According to this view, Turkey's geopolitical potential needs a "dynamic interpretation" and this understanding should foster Ankara's global influence.¹⁶

Conceptually, the new *dynamic reinterpretation* of Turkey's geopolitical potential in *the Davutoğlu doctrine* depends on three main pillars:

- Shunning status quo oriented, defensive and static mentalities in geopolitical analysis. Instead, adopting a new geostrategic paradigm which would consider Turkey's geopolitical position as a stepping stone to regional hegemony and global influence.

- Leaving the rigid sovereignty conception which is a legacy of Ottoman Empire's historical experience and depends on either "absolute hegemony" or "absolute abandonment" when dealing with its territorial changes. Instead, generating "intermediary solutions" between those two extremes.¹⁷ Of great importance is the establishment and improvement of Ankara's influence and dominance in the areas which are not officially contemporary Turkish territory but with high historico – cultural ties due to Ottoman past. Openly, this pillar is tantamount to restoring the "Ottoman effect" in Turkish foreign policy to an extent which could be formulized as *re-Ottomanisation* of the foreign policy doctrine.

- Forming alterable relations with several power centers. Determining hinterlands in which Turkey should foster its economic, political, and cultural ties and foster multi-dimensional efforts in those hinterlands¹⁸.

In brief, under Turkey's third geostrategic thought, Turkish – Israeli relations have diverged. In geopolitical dimension, the core reason behind the divergence is mainly the relinquishing of *realpolitik* paradigm which dominated both Cold War and

¹⁵ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik*, pp. 45 – 49.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 115–118.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 53–55.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 118.

the post Cold War trends. Furthermore, Davutoğlu's foreign policy doctrine sees in the Middle East an integration and domination opportunity rather than a hostile neighborhood. Thus, close relations with Israel is no longer a tool to be leveraged but a burden on Turkish soft power capacity. Finally, the new foreign policy doctrine perceives Turkey's geopolitical location as a stepping stone for more ambitious geostrategic moves in a romanticized historical sense. Through this doctrine, Turkey was preparing one of its biggest tests in the Middle East, confrontation with Israel.

2. THE ROAD TO THE FLOTILLA CRISIS AND AFTERWARDS

The nature of Israeli – Turkish ties has consistently been one of instability. The relationship has been characterized by constant fluctuation between extremes of covert and open partnerships (i.e. 1958 Periphery Pact and 1996 Security Agreement) and downgraded diplomatic representation levels (i.e. downgrade in 1956 after the Suez Crisis, in 1966, 1981 Jerusalem Law, or after 1987 *Intifada*, etc.). Despite the incessantly changing nature of the partnership, and no point did the two states come to direct blows, that is until recent developments. Starting with the Davos incident, the nature of the relations began to change fundamentally.

Basically, it is argued, the Davos outrage of PM Erdogan was a reaction against Operation Cast Lead of 2008. Notably, Operation Cast Lead was initiated right after Israeli PM Olmert's Ankara visit and in the midst of Turkish efforts on mediation between Syria and Israel, as well as the rapprochement with Hamas. Therefore, the main reason for the outburst against President Peres was well beyond the Turkish administration's "Palestinian sensibility" or anti-Israel conduct. Ankara was angry about the operation because it rendered the Turkish expectations of mediation between Syria and Israel abortive.

Thus the operation naturally brought about two results. First, the Turkish administration felt humiliated and politically betrayed by their Israeli counterparts, because Erdogan wasn't informed before. Second, the operation overshadowed Turkey's mediation credibility in Syria's and other actors' eyes because Ankara was not able to anticipate or stop the military operation in the midst of the Syria talks. Therefore, such a development caused more complicated problems for the new Turkish foreign policy concepts.

Subsequent to Operation Cast Lead, two events, which were obviously contrary to diplomatic customs, further worsened the relations. First, PM Erdogan's outrage against President Peres at Davos was a boost for his domestic popularity in Turkey as well as Muslim streets. But in Israeli public opinion Peres is a widely respected veteran politician and it is likely that Erdogan's impulsive behavior was perceived as an insult to national pride for an average Israeli citizen. On the other hand, in February 2010 Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon caused increased tension, which is known as the "low chair crisis" in Turkey, by making derogatory remarks and gestures against Turkish Ambassador Oguz Celikkol. This time Turkish public opinion felt humiliated by seeing their ambassador degraded.

Therefore, for the first time, the deterioration in relations has not happened strictly among the governments but among the people as well.

2.1. DROPPING LIKE A ROCK: THE FLOTILLA CRISIS IN THE TURKISH – ISRAELI RELATIONS

Despite all the negative factors given hitherto, it is argued that until 31 May 2010 the Israeli – Turkish relations were not irreparable. Even the Davos and “low chair” crises did not prevent Defense Minister Ehud Barak’s visit to Turkey in January 2010. However, the flotilla incident has put the relations under a new label. Within more than half a century record of Turkish – Israeli relations, it was the first time that there was an armed intervention and caused civilian casualties. Therefore, the incident was not a part of the natural fluctuations characteristic of the relationship. Prof. Ümit Özdağ and Şanlı Bahadır Koç, from the nationalist – leaning think tank of Turkey, *21. Yüzyıl Türkiye Enstitüsü*, have a telling interpretation of the flotilla crisis. In their article, the authors surmised that recent Turkish foreign policy has diverged from the traditional course of keeping away from the Middle East, and decided to be an influential actor in the region. Consequently, Israel responded with, “*Welcome to the neighborhood, but watch out, here is a dangerous place*”.¹⁹ Following the crisis, Turkish strategists and the press were divided by two main opinions. The majority strongly criticized the Israeli intervention and idealized the Gaza issue through a humanitarian cause and demonized Israeli leadership.²⁰ The second opinion also criticized Israeli intervention but stressed that Palestinian problem and especially Hamas-Gaza affairs should not be Turkey’s priority, and Ankara consciously desired the crisis for populist purposes.²¹ Some Turkish pens argued that the motivation of the activists was jihadist and the flotilla was in accordance with Turkey’s new foreign policy paradigm rather than solely humanitarian aid.²² On the other hand, some other Turkish columnists labeled Israel “a terrorist state” after the incident, and praised the flotilla as the ship of conscience.²³ In contrast, the Israeli side considers the Mavi Marmara flotilla as a deliberate provocation.

Following the raid, Turkey made normalization of relations conditional on three demands: (1) An official public apology about the event; (2) compensation for the victims of the incident; (3) removal of the blockade on Gaza.²⁴ Turkey’s first two demands involve the lives of Turkish citizens. However, the last demand is about a third party, Gazans and their Hamas leaders. Thus, it is tantamount to linking the Turkish – Israeli relationship to the Palestinian issue. According to Uzer, İnsani Yardım

¹⁹ Ümit Özdağ and Şanlı Bahadır Koç, “Mahalleyle Hoş geldin: Türkiye’nin Orta Doğu’da İlk Günü”, *21. Yüzyıl Türkiye Enstitüsü* [web], <http://www.21yyte.org/tr/yazi.aspx?ID=4571&kat=27>, 20 December 2011. Accessed: 20 March 2012.

²⁰ Yasin Aktay, “Allah’ın Enstrümanları” *Yenişafak*, 05 June 2010.

²¹ Kadri Gürsel, “Türkiye’nin Seçtiği Kriz”, *Milliyet*, 10 June 2010.

²² Kadri Gürsel, “Yallah, Başka Kapıya”, *Milliyet*, 05 June 2010.

²³ Salih Tuna, “Yalandın İsrail Hep Yalan Kalacaktır”, *Yenişafak*, 01 June 2010.

²⁴ Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs [web], <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/sorular.tr.mfa>, Accessed: 04 March 2012; Ufuk Ulutaş, *Turkey and Israel in the Aftermath of the Flotilla Crisis*, SETA Policy Brief No: 043, 2010, p. 9.

Vakfi (IHH), the Islamist foundation which organized the flotilla movement, “sabotaged the relations between the two states by its attempt to test Israel’s use of force seriousness”.²⁵

Clearly, the Palestinian issue or the blockade on Gaza is not one of the first and foremost points of Turkish national security and strategic interest agenda in realistic terms. Furthermore, Turkey has no official guarantor position on Palestinians by an international regulation, as she has on Turkish Cypriots due to Zurich – London Treaties of 1959 and 1960. Besides, as a sovereign state, Turkey can declare her opposing vision and position regarding the Gaza blockade. Nevertheless, Turkey linked removal of the blockade to normalization of relations. Admittedly, this was a move which exceeded even most Arab states’ conducts about the Palestinian issues. Therefore, even if Israel issues an official apology and pays compensation in the future, which seems unlikely under current circumstances, Turkey’s demand about removal of the blockade on Gaza is obstructing the way out. Also it should be noted that from the *Davutoğlu doctrine’s* ambitious perspective, Turkey’s position is seen as the natural guardian of the Palestinians and other Muslim Middle Eastern entities in the region. Thus, Turkey’s high handed interference with the Palestinian and particularly Gaza issues came as no surprise to close observers. However, this foreign policy doctrine is as naïve and unrealistic to some extent as it is ambitious. As a matter of fact, when the flotilla set to out to sea, Davutoğlu expressed that he was not expecting tensions between Israel and the activists.²⁶

On the other hand, Israeli military intervention with the flotilla caused civilian casualties for the first time in the history of the bilateral relations. Thus, in every possible restoration attempt in the future, be it by a conservative or secularist government, the opposition party will try to take advantage by playing on the incident. In other words, through the military intervention, Israel has consolidated its determination about the blockade and its stance against Hamas, but created a persistent anti-Israel argument in Turkish politics which might be used by any political party, left wing or right.

Contrary to current conventional wisdom in Israel, sensitivity to the Palestinian cause was not always an Islamist tradition in Turkey. Before the 1980 coup d’état in Turkey, it was the radical leftist factions who participated in Palestinian armed movements and romantically idealized the “resistance”. It should also be noted that after the second *Intifada*, Turkey’s left wing PM, Bulent Ecevit, and ultra-secularist President Ahmet Necdet Sezer have also criticized Israel about its conducts against Palestinians. Even former PM Ecevit used the term “*genocide*” in April 2002 which caused outrage in Israel, and attracted protests from AIPAC.²⁷ However, by declaring the removal of the blockade to Gaza as a precondition, Ankara has turned the sensibility about the Palestinian issue into Turkey’s official commitment. Moreover

²⁵ Umut Uzer, “Türkiye – İsrail İlişkilerinde Bunalım”, *Orta Doğu Etüdleri*, Vol. 2 No. 2, 2011, p. 157.

²⁶ “Davutoğlu: Gazze’den Abluka Kalkmalı”, TRT (web), 25 May 2010. <http://www.trt.net.tr/haber/HaberDetay.aspx?HaberKodu=16e09b99-5407-470c-a2bc-4ea95d99f257>

²⁷ Umut Uzer, “Türkiye – İsrail İlişkilerinde Bunalım”, p. 152.

Hamas' political position is a challenge and denial to Israel's very existence. Therefore, by linking the Turkish – Israeli ties to the blockade in Gaza, Ankara's move turned the radical organization into an important determinant of the bilateral relationship between the two democracies of the Middle East.

Furthermore, following the flotilla incident, the uprising in Syria has accelerated the rapprochement between Hamas and Turkey. In fact, since Hamas left Damascus, Turkey is considered one of the possible addresses for the new political office. Although such a move can play into Ankara's hands by increasing its soft power capability and political influence in the Muslim streets, if Hamas opens a political office in Turkey that would make Turkish administration a party of the Palestinian cause and disqualify it as a neutral mediator. Additionally, Hamas' alignment with Turkey would not be a matter of concern only for Israel but also Arab actors like Jordan, Egypt and even Fatah.²⁸

In sum, as *Davutoğlu doctrine* aimed, the flotilla incident made Turkey a real player in the Middle Eastern games. However, the Middle Eastern security environment is not as naive as conceptualized in the new Turkish foreign policy doctrine, and the incident showed that reality to the Turkish strategists in a costly way. A soft power approach is important and Turkey made considerable moves depending on PM Erdogan's charismatic reputation in Muslim streets. However, soft power itself is not sufficient to be a major player in the region. Actually, one needs to have an effective *smart power* capability which combines soft power and hard power means into a winning strategy.²⁹ Notably, Davutoğlu's *Strategic Depth* covers a wide array of issues such as Turkey's political identity and historico-cultural background, socio economic integration patterns and public diplomacy capacity. However, the book does not attempt to conceptualize issues like Turkey's military power projection strategies, proxy war options, enhanced missile delivery capacity etc. Put simply, dominance in the Middle East demands a combination of the two categories of soft and hard power, and Turkish foreign policy has been trying to fly with one wing. For instance, Iran has soft power leverages like *Guardianship of Jurist* on the Shiite communities as well as associated armed groups such as Hezbollah to wage proxy wars on behalf of Tehran. Turkey cannot balance such an actor simply depending on anti-Israel and pro-Palestinian (or pro-Hamas) rhetoric and some popular support in Muslim streets.

The flotilla incident therefore came as a shock for Ankara and as a reminder of the strategic requirements of Middle Eastern politics showed key weaknesses of *Davutoğlu doctrine*, hard power calculus and realistic thinking. Turkish policy makers learned three lessons as a result. First, they realized that pursuing escalation strategies against actors like Israel does not possess the same pattern with dog fights and gunboat diplomacy against Greeks in the Aegean. The Middle Eastern actors

²⁸ Mehmet Ali Birand, "Hamas Türkiye'ye Ne Getirir Ne Götürür", *Posta*, 01 February 2012.

²⁹ For more detailed smart power conceptualization, see Richard L. Armitage and Joseph S. Nye, *CSIS Commission on Smart: Power A Smarter, More Secure America*, CSIS Smart Power Commission Report, 2007, CSIS, Washington D.C.

have been much more accustomed to war and threat of war in political conflicts, and their will about use of force should not be tested recklessly. Second, anti-Israel rhetoric can garner the support of the Muslim streets, but the Middle Eastern regimes, even the Islamic ones, generally act due to the requirements of *realpolitik* rather than normative perspectives. Thus, following the incident, Ankara has received many anti-Israel responses, which criticized the operation against the Mavi Marmara and declared “support” for the struggle of the Turks, but none of those states consented to an open escalation or crisis with Israel for the sake of Turkey. Third, Turkish decision makers painfully learned that Turkey’s diplomatic capacity or vehement speeches before Arab figures are not as deterrent as Iran’s proxy war against Israel via Hezbollah. In other words, dealing with Middle Eastern actors is much more complicated and bitter than traditional international politics. For instance, right after the flotilla crisis, Davutoğlu stated that Israel *must* apologize, otherwise Turkey’s response will be “severe”. Nearly one year after the incident, Fatih Altaylı, the top executive of Turkish mainstream *Habertürk* daily, addressed Davutoğlu in his column by saying “*I know you hate me and I don’t care because you are not doing your job well. However, I should ask about your empty threats against Israel. Did they apologize, and if not, what is your plan from now on?*”³⁰ Consequently, the tension with Israel was a harbinger of the growing gap between “Turkish foreign policy on paper and Turkish foreign policy on action”. Clearly, under the *Davutoğlu doctrine* Turkey’s high profile in rhetoric could not be matched with practice and the flotilla incident took place as an evidence for this argument.

Right after the flotilla crisis, the Turkish – Israeli relations under *the Davutoğlu doctrine* were to face another turbulence which is called *the Arab Spring* by the most including Ankara, or the *Islamic Winter*, for the right-wing Israeli strategists and politicians.

3. REGIONAL TURBULENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE POSSIBLE TRAJECTORY OF THE TURKISH – ISRAELI RELATIONS

In order to understand possible alienations and accords between Israel and Turkey on the *Arab Spring*, first, perceptions of those two actors about the ongoing turbulent political change should be interpreted.

Like many others, Turkish decision makers were caught off guard when the *Arab Spring* was ignited in Tunisia. Even in Libya, Turkey’s first attitude was opposing the NATO option to stop Gadhafi’s bloody crackdown. Later on, Turkish foreign policy concepts were reoriented gradually towards the change, and Ankara has found a wide cooperation zone with Washington. It is important to understand that *Davutoğlu doctrine* regards the revolutionary wave as a “late arrival” of the post – Cold War period to the Middle East.³¹ Therefore, the political change of Arab societies depending on grassroots movements is perceived as an opportunity by Turkey, rather than a threat, as the new foreign policy doctrine has essentially aimed to

³⁰ Fatih Altaylı, “2. Seferin Tam Zamanı”, *Habertürk*, 15 May 2011.

³¹ Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs [web], <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/sorular.tr.mfa>, Accessed: 09 March 2012

charm streets. Furthermore, the drastic change in the Arab states possess interesting characteristics which is quite different than “democratization of Iraq or Afghanistan”. In other words, for the first time the Middle Eastern Arab societies are able to rule their countries depending on their own native ideologies apart from socialism, western democratic liberalism, etc.

3.1. THE DAVUTOĞLU DOCTRINE AND THE ARAB SPRING: GREAT EXPECTATIONS

In order to understand the Turkish perspective on the *Arab Spring* one should analyze the gap between Ankara’s foreign policy ambitions and the actual outcomes. Within the initial momentum of the turbulent change, days before the fall of the Tunisian government, Turkish Foreign Ministry held the third Ambassadors Conference. The Ambassadors Conference is a wide-ranging forum of Turkish ambassadors around the world along with the participation of top bureaucratic and political figures. The conference has been held since 2008, and reflects Turkey’s new foreign policy ambitions. In January 2011, Foreign Minister Davutoğlu stated before nearly 200 Turkish ambassadors that Turkey’s objective was to be the *wise state* of the international system which solves regional and global disputes depending its dynamic diplomacy, historical background as well as soft power capacity. Within this perspective Turkey’s role is designed as “glue among the new international culture”.³² Indeed, the foreign minister’s speech openly revealed the ambition of being a global power. In parallel, Turkish experts, who are in favor of the new foreign policy paradigm and *the Turkish model*, labeled Turkey’s role in the *Arab Spring* as being “the moral leader and source of inspiration” for the change in the region.³³ According to this view, due to declining American military presence and influence in the Middle East and rising expectations of change, Turkey’s Muslim-democratic identity would meet demands of the immense socio-political shift.

Considering Davutoğlu’s stance and normative political rhetoric used by pro-*Turkish model* figures, it is understood that Turkey’s main hope from the drastic change in the Arab World was becoming the shining star of the Muslim streets and filling the power vacuum which will be left by the overthrown regimes. Following the rise of the Islamists to power in the new-coming regimes, high hopes of Turkish circles has been depended on the analysis that as those regimes will be in search of legitimacy, *the Turkish model* would rise as a combination of Muslim society, conservative government and democratic political system.³⁴ In other words, JDP circles perceived the opportunity to form the new ideology for the new Middle East. Furthermore, U.S. withdrawal from Iraq and declining American profile in the Middle

³² The Speech of Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu in the 3rd Ambassadors Conference, Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs [web], http://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakani-sayin-ahmet-davutoglu_nun-3_-buyukelciler-konferansi_nin-acilisinda-yaptigi-konusma_-03-ocak-2011.tr.mfa, Accessed: 23 April 2012.

³³ Sedat Laçiner, “Türkiye Arap Baharı’nın Lideri”, *Star*, 15 September 2011.

³⁴ Bedir Sala, “Arap Baharı ve İslamcılığın Seyri Üzerine”, *Stratejik Düşünce*, January 2012, pp. 50–51.

East made Turkish strategists to anticipate more space for the regional actors.³⁵ Even among the Turkey's skeptical voices on the *Arab Spring*, the turbulent shift was believed to cause radical changes in national territories of the region.³⁶

Thus, in search of a way forward, which should combine Islamic values and will of people, Turkish top figures were optimistic about the relevance of their model. More importantly, Davutoğlu foreign policy doctrine assumes that the collapse of Ottoman Empire caused an unnatural decomposition of the societies which formed the empire. After the first and the second World Wars, anti – democratic minority rules in the region has fostered this decomposition. Finally, Cold War polarization and Turkey's classic Kemalist isolationism from the Middle East consolidated the alienation between the Middle Eastern streets and Turkish public. Therefore, Turkey seemed in a major cross road with the combination of JDP government in Ankara, a foreign minister who attaches importance to Ottoman nostalgia, and mass uprisings against the Cold War remnant regimes in the Middle Eastern squares and streets.

However, the ongoing trajectory of the *Arab Spring*, especially the developments in Syria, has turned into a clash of power with sectarian references rather than the democratic demands of the grassroots movements. This imposed the role of "Sunni power" on Turkey rather than a surrounding model or imperial leader for the Islamic world. An important article, which was co-authored by a prestigious Turkish think-tank's (SETA) director of Washington branch and a researcher from the same foundation, uses the expression of "Syrian quagmire" in its title. According to the paper, the escalation with Damascus, and growing tensions between Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan and his Iraqi counterpart, Nuri al Maliki, can be perceived as a sectarian struggle. Thus, by taking advantage of this perception, Syrian propaganda is labeling Turkey's foreign policy as Sunni oriented and "neo-Ottomanist" in nature.³⁷ In parallel, even some Turkish experts go a step further and indicate that Turkey is actually pursuing a completely sectarian, Sunni-centric policy in the region.³⁸ Regarding *Davutoğlu doctrine's* identity emphasizes, one cannot explain Turkey's pro-Sunni positioning by solely realistic nationalist interest calculus. On the contrary, Ankara's repositioning reflects the reconstruction of Turkey's new self.

Consequently, there is a gap between Turkey's high hopes from the *Arab Spring* and actual outcomes, especially between the ideal of far reaching "*Turkish model*" and the ongoing sectarian polarization. Nevertheless, the rise of the Islamists through electoral processes is still promising for Ankara in mid-term. However, Syrian

³⁵ Mustafa Kibaroglu, "2012 Baharında Türkiye'nin Orta Doğu'daki Güvenlik Çevresine Bir Bakış", *Orta Doğu Analiz*, Vol. 4 No. 40, April 2012, p. 76.

³⁶ Ümit Özdağ, "Arap Baharının Rüzgarı Nereden Esiyor?", 21. Yüzyıl Türkiye Enstitüsü[web], http://www.21yyte.org/tr/yazi6307-Arap_Baharinin_Ruzgari_Nereden_Esiyor.html, 22 September 2011, Accessed: 20 April 2012.

³⁷ Erol Cebeci and Kadir Üstün, "The Syrian Quagmire: What is Holding Turkey Back", *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 14 No. 2, Spring 2012, pp. 18–19.

³⁸ Ümit Özdağ, "Davutoğlu'nun Radikal Sünni Merkezli Orta Doğu Politikası", 21. Yüzyıl Türkiye Enstitüsü [web], http://www.21yyte.org/tr/yazi6532Davutoglu_nun_Radikal_Sunni_Merkezli_Ortadogu_Politikasi_.html, 16 March 2012, Accessed: 23 April 2012.

and Iraqi tensions have been taking place right in Turkey's borders with a Sunni / Shiite divide and Turkish–Iranian competition. Nonetheless, some Turkish foreign policy analysts argue, Ankara's stance against the pro-Tehran regimes and its NATO membership consolidates Turkey's position in the West as the Western states back Sunni players such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar, while Russia is in favor of Iran and its allies.³⁹ Therefore, despite the sectarian polarization naturally boosts religion's weigh in politics, Ankara's Sunni-centric perspective and its competition with defiant Iran are keeping Turkey in the West.

3.2. ISRAELI STANCE TOWARDS THE ARAB SPRING: THE ISLAMIC WINTER?

On the other hand, Israel seems sober and even concerned about the *Arab Spring*, or *Islamic winter* for many Israeli analysts. For Israel, there are three main points which loom large by causing concerns. First, Israeli experience with the "Cedar revolution" and free election in Palestinian territory has resulted with Hezbollah's and Hamas' rules.⁴⁰ Thus, there are growing worries about a possible hijacking of democratic processes in the Arab world. Actually, the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and decline of the armed forces can be rated as a harbinger of the serious "hijacking" risk. Second, Israel concerns about the revolutionary regimes' revisionist and warlike character at their first years.⁴¹ In that case, Israel can easily be targeted by the new regimes in order to gain popular support for their legitimacies. And third, Israel simply concerns about the uncertainty in its security environment. As a matter of fact, the worsening situation in Sinai Peninsula right after Mubarak's fall make it harder for Israeli strategists to be optimistic about the "Spring".

In sum, there is a far reaching diversification in Israel's and Turkey's perceptions on the turbulence in the Arab world. Even in the Syrian case, Turkey's national interest necessitates a pro-Ankara Sunni rule in Damascus, and Israel seems to be stuck up between two bad options, the incumbent Baathist rule and a possible Islamist takeover. On the other hand, by having reached to Syria, the *Arab Spring* is no more a democratic demand of the streets as it was at its outset in Tunisia. At present, the word "spring" in Bahrain or Syria has different connotations in Ankara and Tehran. Furthermore, the word "spring" does not have any connotation among the Israeli strategists given the rise of Islamists on one side, and the rise of Shiite revolutionary movements on the other side. Therefore, the next section analyzes the sectarian polarization in the Islamic world as a determinant of future Turkish–Israeli relations.

3.3. THE IRAN FACTOR IN THE TURKISH – ISRAELI RELATIONS UNDER THE NEW TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY DOCTRINE

In order to get a grip on the Sunni / Shiite divide, one should define the separation in the Islamic world. Given the Syria and Iraq cases and even Bahrain, the

³⁹ Semih İdiz, "Maliki'nin Çıkışının Arkasında Yatanlar", *Milliyet*, 23 April 2012.

⁴⁰ Efraim Inbar, *The 2011 Arab Uprisings and Israel's National Security*, p. 2.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* p.3.

Muslim world has been facing an important division with sectarian basis. Essentially, this division does not result from a new wave of theological debate on Islam, but a military–political rivalry between the Sunni and Shiite blocs. On the Sunni bloc, under *Davutođlu doctrine's* “imperial effect” Turkey strives to lead the Gulf States due to its regional hegemony agenda and growing national capacity. On the other hand, the Shiite bloc’s natural leader is Iran, and the rivalry between Ankara and Tehran is expected to directly affect Turkish – Israeli relations.

In order to explain merits of the sectarian polarization, let’s begin with a thought provocative question: Should the uprising in Syria be assessed as an extension of the Arab Spring, or as a power struggle between Tehran – led Shiite bloc and the Sunni bloc of Turkey and the Gulf States? And, let’s give a hint for answering the question: Iran rated the Arab Spring as an inspiration from Khomeini and Islamic Revolution at the very outset of the protests in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. However, when it comes to Syria, Tehran reversed its stance radically, and has been backing its most important ally diligently. On the other hand, Turkey did not back the uprising in Bahrain in practice, but at present, Ankara is one of the most important protectors of the Syrian political and armed oppositions.

Although Turkish–Iranian relations seemed quite good at the beginning of JDP era, the past events in the region show a significant paradigm shift. In October 2011, Maj. Gen. Yahya Safavi, the military advisor to Supreme Leader Khamaney, openly threatened Turkey by accusing its deployment of NATO radars in Malatya, stance against Damascus, and attempts of promoting secular Islam in Arab states.⁴² Furthermore, the arrest decision of Iraq’s pro–Ankara, Sunni Vice President Tarek Hashemi overlaps with the uprising in Syria. Tarek Hashemi was taken “refuge” in the Kurdish regional government territory, and for some experts, the arrest decision was a part of an intimidation policy followed by Shiites under PM Maliki.⁴³ Notably, PM Erdoğan reacted angrily to the arrest decision, and there is a growing tension between Ankara and Shiite dominated Baghdad. Moreover, as the Free Syrian Army gains ground against the Baathist tyranny of Damascus, which is the closest ally of Tehran without a doubt, top Iranian figures now do not refrain from openly threatening Turkey.

Considering Turkey’s historico–cultural emphasizes to Ottoman Empire in its new foreign policy doctrine, it should also be mentioned that Iranian Safawi Dynasty’s shahs were major rivals of the Ottoman sultans. Interestingly, Soner Cagaptay from Washington Institute for Near East Policy draws attention to this fact, and indicates that “*in the Middle East, there is room for one shah or one sultan, but not both a shah and a sultan*”.⁴⁴

⁴² “İran’dan Türkiye’ye Ağır Sözler”, *Hürriyet*, 08 October 2011, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/planet/18935094.asp>, Accessed 10 March 2012.

⁴³ Cengiz Çandar, “Türkiye – Kürtler – Sünniler Ekseni Olur mu” *Hürriyet*, 21 December 2011.

⁴⁴ Soner Cagaptay, “Next Up: Turkey vs. Iran”, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC06.php?CID=1821>, 14 February 2012, Accessed: 10 March 2012.

For Israel, the Iranian nuclear program and Tehran's revolutionary, aggressive Islamic approach are major threats. Especially, Tehran's support to Syria and Hezbollah, the rise of principlists (fundamentalists) and Revolutionary Guard in Ahmadinejad era are fostering Israel's threat perceptions.⁴⁵ Therefore, although there is no ideological accord between Israel and the Sunni bloc, the Shiite bloc possesses the imminent threat to Israel's very existence considering nuclear program and Hezbollah factors.

At this point, Turkey's reactions against the Iran's nuclear program hold key importance about the future of Turkish–Israeli relations. As yet, Turkey did not voice a major criticism about Tehran's nuclear ambitions. On the contrary, Ankara refused to join EU sanctions, and openly opposed the military option against Iran.⁴⁶ However, Ankara's hesitant conduct does not mean that Turkey follows a pro–Iran axis. Speaking in terms of strategy theory, Ankara is following an indirect approach against Iran by striving to cripple its influence in Syria and Iraq, but avoiding direct confrontation. Second, Turkey's energy dependency to Iranian supply is complicating the situation. And third, *Davutoğlu doctrine* seeks to force mediation options, and hopefully gain high prestige by convincing Iran for a peaceful solution. Turkey's vote against the sanctions in 2010 UNSC meeting was mostly a result of this mediation concept.

However, Iranian nuclear program needs time to delay an intervention for reaching nuclear immunization. Therefore, Tehran would favor all negotiation efforts in order to play for time, and Turkey's stance is expected to ultimately change against the nuclearization sooner or later. Otherwise Turkey would neglect the strategic balance with Iran which has been the remnant of Ottoman Empire. From the Turkish point of view, Iranian nuclear program is a threat to traditional strategic balance between Ankara and Tehran. The current Turkish – Iranian border was determined in 1639 by *Kasr-i Şirin Treaty*, and did not change since the 17th century. However, the "everlasting" peace hasn't resulted from full harmonization of both sides' interests. On the contrary, none of those two actors reached the capability to pursue revisionist strategies over each other. However, at present Shiite / Sunni divide overlaps with Iranian nuclear program. Therefore, as *the Davutoğlu doctrine* anticipates a breaking point in the international system, which would open Turkey's way for being a global power, such a breaking point may occur in favor of Iran by nuclearization which would make things absolutely difficult for Ankara.

Besides, within the Middle Eastern geopolitical imperatives, unmatched military capacities bring about political asymmetries immediately. As a matter of fact, nowadays some Turkish experts started to voice more decisive critiques on the nuclear program by indicating that such a development would break the balance of

⁴⁵ Dalia Dassa Kaye et. al. *Israel and Iran A Dangerous Rivalry*, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, 2011, p. 3.

⁴⁶ Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA), "Turkey does not Cooperate with Europe in its Sanctions against Iran", 29 January 2012.

⁴⁷ Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA), "Turkish FM: "Iran – Turkey Border, Border of Everlasting Peace", 25 January 2012.

power between Tehran and Ankara, and nuclear imbalance between two states is tantamount to the imbalance between “somebody with a gun against an unarmed one”. Furthermore, if Iran passes the threshold Ankara will not be able to pursue its own nuclear program to counterbalance Tehran, due to Turkey’s commitments to the West.⁴⁸

The sectarian tension in the region started to show its direct implications. Notably, after Turkey boosted its support to Syrian opposition, there has been a meaningful uptrend in PKK terrorism. PKK is not a monolithic entity, and there are many wings which are under influence and control of several actors. About ¼ of the PKK militants are of Syrian Kurdish origin, and there is a strong Syrian influence in the HPG, the armed wing of PKK. Like Syria, Iran also has leverages in PKK. Moreover according to some analysts, Iran’s Quds Forces is in direct connection with PKK for targeting Turkey.⁴⁹

Within the political–religious aspect of the sectarian polarization, two Islamic schools compete with each other in order to gain popular support from Muslim streets. The Iranian led Shiite school represents the revolutionary political Islam, which is anti–Israel both in rhetoric and practice, and covers a dangerous axis consist of Lebanese Hezbollah, Quds Forces, Qom’s clergy, Revolutionary Guards, Iranian fundamentalists, etc. The Sunni school represents a conservative approach with an imperial reference in Turkey, along with harmonization of Islam with secularism and democracy. In the Gulf States, Sunni school’s main reflection is pro–Western but monarchic regimes with open economies and wealthy sources. Members of Sunni school embrace an anti–Israel stance in rhetoric, but due to Turkey’s and Gulf States’ strong ties to Washington, this approach cannot be completely anti–Israel in practice. Therefore, although Israeli strategists would prefer an absolute secular option in the Islamic world, the Sunni bloc seems more suitable to Israel’s regional interests.

Although *the Davutoğlu doctrine* does not doubt Ankara’s position as the leader of Sunni bloc, the Salafists’ conducts can be a game changer for Turkish ambitions as the Gulf Arab–Turkish cooperation depends on temporary accords of interest, not an ideological or identity overlap. Clearly, Gulf States’ support to Turkey is not resulting from a far reaching match in world views, but from the Gulf States’ will to use Turkish military leverage to topple the Baathist rule and counterbalance Iran. Thus, in a pragmatic way Arab monarchies can exclude Turkey from further cooperation and integration in a near future. As a matter of fact, Ankara had no voice in the recent merger efforts between Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. This development shows that although *the Davutoğlu doctrine* sees Turkey as the undisputed leader of the Sunni bloc and the change in the Middle East, Gulf States have their own agendas apart from Turkey’s ambitions. In parallel with Gulf region, the recent developments in Egypt should be watched closely. Although *the Turkish model* appeals to some Egyptian Islamist, the Salafist and Muslim Brotherhood tradition of Egypt cannot be

⁴⁸ Ümit Özdağ, “Nükleer bir İran ve Türkiye–İran Dengesinin Bozulması”, *Yeniçağ*, 19 April 2012.

⁴⁹ Soner Cagaptay, “Next Up: Turkey vs. Iran”.

taken under Ankara’s influence completely. Therefore, the Turkish model of *the Davutoğlu doctrine* is already in danger of either becoming irrelevant or representing a model for only Tunisia where dominance of conservatism and middle class is more or less similar to Turkey.

CONCLUSION

While the JDP is conservative with some Islamist elements, it also maintains a far reaching alliance with Washington, and particularly with the Obama administration, which restrains it when dealing with Israel. Furthermore, if a political party would repair the Turkish – Israeli relations, at least to an acceptable level in the medium term, it would be a popular one which can claim high public representation for legitimacy. Otherwise, any restoration efforts will be seen by the Turkish public as a top–down, paternalist, and even “Jacobin” effort. Thus, in terms of structural repair of people to people ties and public diplomacy, ironically, it would have to happen under the JDP. Finally, given the rising Iranian threat, Turkey and Israel might find some common ground which would necessitate at least a low profile dialogue in military strategy, intelligence, and national defence affairs. However, it should be emphasized that for any restoration attempts, which would be open to public eyes, JDP might tacitly step back from the precondition of removal of the blockade on Gaza, but it would still demand a clear apology and compensation for the victims of *Mavi Marmara* from the Israeli leadership.

However, any restoration attempts are highly unlikely under *the Davutoğlu doctrine* in Turkish foreign policy. First, its pledge for the removal of the Gaza blockade and its commitment to Hamas make it impossible for Israel to come to an agreement. Second, the doctrine is quite normative and constructivist. Thus identity debates stand in the forefront rather than national interests and *realpolitik* calculations. From the “identity perspective” of the doctrine, cooperation with Israel is an “alienation” factor for Turkey’s *geocultural integrity* with the region, and an albatross to reaching the Muslim streets. And finally, the idealistic attitude of the doctrine sees Turkey at the very center and rising star of the *Arab Spring*. Indeed, Foreign Minister Davutoğlu stated in April 2012 before the members of Turkish Parliament that “Turkey will lead the change in the Middle East as its master and the servant”.⁵⁰ From such a point of view, the doctrine would evaluate any efforts on Israel as useless regarding the ultra–optimistic perception about Ankara’s “inevitably rising influence” in the region.

Considering the regional threat landscape, the Iran factor might pave the way for a limited cooperation between Turkey and Israel. The current Syrian turmoil is less predictable with regards to Israeli-Turkish relations. Considering the ongoing crisis in Syria and the regional ambitions of the *Davutoğlu doctrine*, this study anticipates a forthcoming “Syrian dilemma” for Israel in its security environment and relations with Turkey. In case of Assad’s fall and the end of the Baathist dictatorship, likely following

⁵⁰ “Hem sahip hem hizmetkar”, *Radikal [web]*, 27 April 2012. <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalDetayV3&ArticleID=1086194&CategoryID=81>, Accessed: 16 May 2012.

a Turkish intervention, the successor regime (most probably a pro-Turkey, Sunni regime) will firstly try to consolidate its legitimacy in the multi – ethnic country. The Golan dispute and ending the Israeli “occupation” is expected to be in the top of the agenda. With a combination of opposition to blockade on Gaza and Israeli rule in Golan Heights, the *Davutođlu doctrine* would find an important leverage of spearheading an anti– Israel campaign in a wide spectrum and foster its soft power capacity in the Muslim streets. On the other hand, if Assad stays in power the Baathist dictatorship will probably follow a more pro–Tehran stance and Iran will keep its gate to Lebanese Hezbollah. This dilemma offers different dominance opportunities to Ankara and Tehran respectively, but leaves no good options for Israel, but only the bad and the worse ones.

In sum, it would be much better to have stopped the Turkish – Israeli divergence at “Davos or low chair crisis levels”, because the *Mavi Marmara*, or the flotilla, crisis obviously put oil on fire through civilian casualties and officially declared preconditions.