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## Israeli-Turkish Relations

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### **ABSTRACT**

This report provides an overview of unprecedented developments in the relations between two important U.S. allies, Israel and Turkey. It details both the significant military and growing civilian dimensions of the ties, summarizes the history of the ties, and analyzes each government's complex motivations to reach out to the other. It describes the mild domestic and generally harsh regional criticism of this growing association. The implications for other U.S. policies concerning Israel, Turkey, and the region, particularly the Arab-Israeli peace process, are assessed. Congressional interest is noted as is the relevance of the U.S.-Israeli Free Trade Agreement (P.L. 99-47, June 11, 1985) and the Arms Export Control Act (P.L. 90-629, October 22, 1968). This report will not be updated unless changes in the bilateral relationship or U.S. policy so warrant.

# Israeli-Turkish Relations

## Summary

Agreements reached in the Arab-Israeli peace process from 1993 until 1995 made relations between Israel and its Arab and Muslim neighbors more acceptable in the latter circles. Israeli-Turkish ties are the most portentous development in this area, and they have not been impeded by subsequent difficulties in the peace process.

The main dimension of Turkish-Israeli relations is military. Landmark agreements on military cooperation in February 1996 and on military industrial cooperation in April 1996 have produced unprecedented military exercises and training, arms sales, and strategic talks. The civilian dimension of the new partnership is expanding rapidly, spurred by a 1996 Free Trade Agreement and resulting increases in non-military trade.

Israeli-Turkish relations are founded on historical cordiality between Turks and Jews, and are motivated by the self-interest of each side. Turkey had been concerned about what it viewed as detrimental repercussions from a possible Israeli-Syrian peace agreement and wanted to be consulted. It also sought to send a cautionary message to Damascus about its aid to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which has been waging a guerrilla war in southeast Turkey since 1984, and about unresolved disputes over water and territory. Moreover, Turkey needed a response to Greece's policy of encircling it with military agreements, including an unsubstantiated arrangement with Syria. Finally, the Israeli connection enables Turkey to circumvent U.S. and European arms embargos and what it believes to be the influence of anti-Turkish ethnic lobbies in Congress. Purchase of Israeli arms allows Turkey to avoid the strictures of politically conditioned European and U.S. sales, and possibly to mitigate the anti-Turkish policies of governments competing with Israel to sell arms to Turkey. For its part, Israel initially perceived Turkey as a bridge to the Arab and Muslim worlds, but also may have wanted to vent its frustrations over what it views as Syria's intransigence in peace talks. Israel has found a more lasting commonality with Turkey on anti-terrorism and in military and civilian trade.

There is only mild domestic dissent in Turkey and Israel over enhanced relations. Some governments in the region have reacted more forcefully. Syria, viewing itself as the unstated target of the new allies, has mobilized Arab and Islamic condemnation, reached out to Baghdad to indicate possibilities of a counter-bloc, but eventually opened a dialogue with Turkey. Egypt's reaction has been moderate in bilateral talks with Ankara, but negative in multilateral Arab and Muslim forums. Jordan has attended some Turkish-Israeli events, but has pointedly noted that its actions were in response to invitations from Ankara, not Israel, while the peace talks are stalled. Greek officials and some in Cyprus are concerned that Israeli military and intelligence assistance to Turkey might eventually be used against them, and direct their criticism to Jerusalem.

The U.S. government views Israeli-Turkish relations positively, as contributing to regional peace and stability. Possible effects on other U.S. policy priorities in the region are not yet clear. The U.S.-Israeli Free Trade Agreement and the Arms Export Control Act may be implicated in individual Israeli-Turkish deals.

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# Israeli-Turkish Relations

## Introduction

During the past few years, a new international “romance” has been blossoming in the public eye as Israeli-Turkish relations have developed in unprecedented ways. This report is an overview of the change, and begins with a detailed examination of the military and civilian dimensions of the relationship. Bilateral military ties, in particular, have generated much controversy in the region. An understanding of the dimensions of the bond provides the foundation for an analysis of each party’s motivations and of some regional criticism. The report concludes with the outlook for U.S. policy in light of the Israeli-Turkish connection. Policy implications may not be as positive as U.S. officials, who have applauded enhanced ties between two close U.S. allies as contributing to regional peace and security, have suggested. Yet, the Israeli-Turkish link may have a negative impact on the Arab-Israeli peace process, on U.S. influence with the Ankara regime, and on other policies of importance to U.S. interests in the region.

## Dimensions of the Relationship

### Military

The most significant component of the Turkish-Israeli relationship thus far has been military. The architects are Deputy Chief of the Turkish General Staff General Cevik Bir and Senior Advisor to the Israeli Minister of Defense Retired Major General David Ivri. On February 23, 1996, Israel and Turkey signed a military cooperation agreement<sup>1</sup> providing for the exchange of military information, experience, and personnel. It called, *inter alia*, for joint training exercises, exchange of military observers at each other’s exercises, and reciprocal port access for naval vessels. Each country’s unarmed planes exercise in the other’s airspace for one week four times a year. Eight Israeli F-16 fighter aircraft first trained in Turkish airspace in April 1996. That June, 12 Turkish planes flew in Israel. Exercises have since occurred regularly. Israeli pilots are afforded the opportunity to fly in Turkey’s expansive airspace, while Turkish pilots benefit from access to Israel’s air combat maneuvering instrumentation range in the Negev and training on early warning systems. All airmen gain experience flying over different terrain. High level Turkish military and Israeli Defense Ministry officials hold “strategic talks” twice yearly. Turkish officials described the military cooperation accord as comparable to those

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<sup>1</sup>Kemal Balci, Sungurlu Details Military Agreement with Israel, *Turkish Daily News*, April 12, 1996, translation carried by Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) online, May 1, 1996; also ‘Text’ of Turkish-Israeli Military Accord, *Al-Safir*, July 24, 1996, p. 13, translated by FBIS, July 30, 1996, p. 24.

Turkey has concluded with many countries. Other agreements, however, have been far less publicized and controversial, and lack comparable “strategic” significance.

In April 1996, Israel and Turkey initialed an agreement on military industry cooperation that has led to an extraordinary range of actual and possible arms sales overwhelmingly from Israel to Turkey.<sup>2</sup> Israel won several major contracts that are part of Turkey’s 25-year, \$150 billion military modernization program. The largest so far is a \$632 million contract to upgrade 32 of Turkey’s F-4 fighter aircraft in Israel and another 22 in Turkey. The upgrades will include radar, Popeye I air-to-surface missiles, and avionics. Israel then won a \$75 million contract to do the same for Turkey’s F-5’s. In August 1996, Israel and Turkey agreed to co-produce Popeye I missiles. Turkey purchased larger fuel tanks for its F-16’s from Israel to increase the aircraft’s range. In May 1997, Turkey and Israel agreed to co-produce Popeye II missiles. Israel is bidding to have its Merkava chosen as Turkey’s new main battle tank. Reportedly, this would be the first time that Israel would allow another country to purchase and manufacture the Merkava.<sup>3</sup> Israel also proposes to upgrade Turkey’s M-60 tanks to extend their lives, and to sell Turkey unmanned aerial vehicles (used for aerial surveillance) and early warning aircraft (used to detect the launch or approach of unknown weapons or weapons carriers). Israel is participating in a joint venture with the Russian Kamov helicopter company and in a similar arrangement with the competing Italian Agusta helicopter company, both bidding to sell combat helicopters to Turkey. Israel would provide the avionics, while its partner would provide the chassis. Several U.S. companies also are participating in the competition. In 1998, Israel and Turkey reportedly agreed to cooperate on the production of a new medium range anti-ballistic missile similar to the Arrow missile that Israel has developed with considerable U.S. funding.<sup>4</sup> Turkey has bought other high tech military equipment from Israel, including night vision equipment and early warning devices. For its part, Israel has purchased about 50 armored vehicles from Turkey for about \$5 million.

## Civilian

The civilian side of the relationship is thriving. Total Israeli-Turkish non-military trade quadrupled between 1992 and 1996 to about \$450 million a year. In 1996, the two governments signed a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and projected that their trade would grow to \$1 billion annually by 2000. In 1997, it jumped to \$620 million a year. Turkish exports to Israel include textiles, other manufactured goods, electronics, food products and grain; while Israel ships chemicals, plastics, computers, telecommunications and irrigation equipment, etc. to Turkey. It is sometimes assumed that Israel is the main beneficiary of the commercial relationship. Yet, the trade balance favors Turkey. In the first year of the FTA, Turkey sent \$391

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<sup>2</sup>See Implications for the United States, Legislation, below.

<sup>3</sup>Arye O’Sullivan, Shahaq to Turkey to Discuss Arms Sales, Joint Maneuvers, *The Jerusalem Post*, October 12, 1997, p. 1, carried by FBIS online, October 15, 1997.

<sup>4</sup>Cevik Bir to Travel to Israel, *Milliyet*, May 23, 1998, translation carried by FBIS online, May 25, 1998; Metehan Demir, Turkey, Israel To Discuss New Missile in Tel Aviv, *Turkish Daily News*, May 25, 1998, online.

million in exports to Israel, while importing \$229 million in goods.<sup>5</sup> At a December 1997 Israeli-Turkish Business Council meeting, some 90 Turkish companies were represented, compared to 40 Israeli ones. Small and mid-size Turkish enterprises are embarking on joint ventures with Israeli counterparts.

In other fields, an agricultural protocol provided for Israel to train technicians from Turkey's huge Southeast Anatolia Project (GAP) and for Israel to establish a demonstration farm in that region. Educational exchanges are increasing, while cooperation in health is anticipated. Israel also is interested in access to oil and gas from Turkey should Turkey's ambition to become a major pipeline route for energy resources from the Caucasus and Central Asia be realized.

High and low level official visits are no longer extraordinary. Prime Minister Tansu Ciller became the first Turkish Prime Minister to visit Israel in 1994. In April 1996, Turkish President Suleyman Demirel visited Israel and in June 1996, Israeli President Ezer Weizman visited Turkey. Defense Ministers, Foreign Ministers, other cabinet members, Chiefs of Staff, and Speakers of Parliament have all exchanged visits in the last several years.

## History

From the time of the Babylonian exile through the Spanish Inquisition and beyond, the land that is now Turkey provided a haven for Jews.<sup>6</sup> This history bequeathed a strong foundation for the development of bilateral Israeli-Turkish relations in modern times. Turkey was the first Muslim, albeit officially secular, country to recognize the independent State of Israel in 1948. Over the years, the relationship was a quiet one. David Ben Gurion, Israel's first Prime Minister, advocated stronger ties with peripheral nations such as Turkey, Iran and Ethiopia, geographically situated just beyond Israel's antagonistic Arab neighbors. The idea was never fully implemented. Turkey withdrew its ambassador from Israel at the time of the Suez crisis in 1956, but did not break relations. Not until after the Persian Gulf war were Turkey and Israel drawn to each other again.

The Madrid Peace Conference of 1991, where Israel and its erstwhile Arab Muslim enemies sat at the same negotiating table, made it more acceptable for Muslim countries to develop ties with Israel. In December 1991, Turkey upgraded its relations with both Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization to ambassadorial level. Israel and Turkey agreed on principles for cooperation in 1992. After the Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles (Oslo I) of September 1993, Turkish-Israeli contacts increased. In 1994 and 1995, the two governments reached preliminary understandings on a military training accord, which laid the ground for their 1996 agreement.

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<sup>5</sup>Reuters, March 23, 1998.

<sup>6</sup> Jews were subject to some discriminatory legislation in Turkey in the mid-1940s, but their overall treatment there has been superior over many years to that elsewhere in Europe.

History may help explain why Turkish-Israeli ties have survived despite the impasse in the Arab-Israeli peace process since 1996 and why some Arab criticism has been both so scathing and without effect. To some extent, Turkish-Arab relations have been more antagonistic than friendly. Turkey used to be the core of the Ottoman Empire, ruler of Arab domains, and there is residual Arab resentment of this overlordship. Some Arabs hold the Ottomans responsible for failing to stop the growth of the Jewish community in Palestine and thus for bestowing the Zionist presence and Arab-Israeli conflict on the region. As a Muslim brother, modern day Turkey has nonetheless expressed solidarity for the Arab states in their conflicts with Israel and in votes at the United Nations. It believes, however, that the Arabs and Iran have not reciprocated on issues that Ankara considers vital national interests: Cyprus, the Turkish Muslims in the Greek region of Thrace, and the Armenian conquest of territory of Turkic Azerbaijan.

## Motivations

### Turkey

Turkey, like Israel, has pursued the relationship out of self interest. Ankara likely wanted to avoid having its interests ignored by an Israeli-Syrian peace accord, to strike back at Damascus for supporting Turkish Kurdish insurgents, and to make Greece, Iraq, and Iran more circumspect in their military plans. Furthermore, Ankara found the idea of arms purchases from Israel an especially attractive way to circumvent impediments to acquisitions from the United States and some European countries. Simultaneously, Turkey looked to Israel to assist in easing Turkish relations with the U.S. Congress, which had created some of those same impediments.<sup>7</sup>

Turkey had been worriedly observing the Israeli-Syrian peace talks. First, it was concerned that a possible redeployment of Syrian troops from the vicinity of the Golan Heights might result in a Syrian military build up along the Turkish border. Second, an agreement between Israel and Syria might lead to greater Syrian control over activities of the Lebanese Shi'a Hizbollah guerrillas in southern Lebanon. This, Turkey feared, could prompt the United States to remove Syria from the U.S. State Department list of states supporting terrorism before Syria ended its support for the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).<sup>8</sup> The PKK has waged a guerrilla war against Turkey since 1984, and the United States is one of Turkey's few allies to agree unwaveringly with Ankara that the PKK is a terrorist organization. Finally, there was some unease that Turkey's abundant water resources might be considered in calculations to facilitate an agreement over water resources in the Golan. Turkey

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<sup>7</sup>Alparslan Esmer, Ankara's Balancing Act between Israel and Arabs: Walking the Tightrope, *Turkish Daily News*, January 26, 1998, online.

<sup>8</sup>U.S. State Department, *Patterns of Global Terrorism*, April 1998, online.



wanted to ensure that it would be consulted regarding all of these aspects of a possible Israeli-Syrian accord.<sup>9</sup>

The stalemate in the Arab-Israeli peace talks since February/March 1996 has not vitiated Turkey's interest in Israel. Aside from the numerous tangible benefits derived from the military accords noted above, Ankara had become frustrated with Damascus and may have wanted to send it a strong signal by making it feel surrounded by antagonists. The Turkish-Syrian relationship has many irritants, preeminently Syria's support for the PKK. Other Turkish grievances include Syrian use of Arab fora in lieu of bilateral negotiations to vent its complaints over Euphrates water-sharing, and pique at Syrian maps which continue to depict the Turkish province of Hatay as part of Syria six decades after France, as the mandatory power in Syria, ceded what was then Alexandretta to Turkey.

Turkey's military cooperation with Israel also has been justified as an attempt to balance what many Turks believed was a similar arrangement between Syria and Greece. Turkish-Greek bilateral relations are extremely troubled.<sup>10</sup> Former Greek Defense Minister Yerasimos Arsenis had proposed that Greece encircle Turkey by concluding military accords with many of Turkey's neighbors: Armenia, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Bulgaria. Arsenis and other Defense Ministry officials claimed that a July 1995 military cooperation agreement gave the Greek armed forces access to Syrian air and naval bases.<sup>11</sup> The Syrian and Greek governments subsequently have denied that base rights were part of an accord and this report not been otherwise substantiated. Turkish Foreign Minister Emre Gonensay stated on Turkish television that Syrian officials maintained that such an agreement did not exist.<sup>12</sup> Arsenis lost the defense portfolio after the September 1996 national election. His successor, Akis Tsohatzopoulos, articulates the policy of encirclement less dramatically, but he has not abandoned it. Foreign Minister Theodoros Pangalos said in Israel that Greece had not signed a military cooperation agreement with Syria, contending that Greece cooperated with Syria in many areas, but not militarily.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, belief in the existence of an accord and of base rights has enjoyed a life of its own among many Turks, disinclined to trust either Syrian or Greek denials. Turkish policymakers may have found added incentive for collaborating with Israel in any remaining or convenient uncertainty about the nature of Greece's relations with Syria.

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<sup>9</sup>Turkey participated in the multilateral peace talks, including those on water issues, only inconspicuously and not as a major actor.

<sup>10</sup>See for example, CRS Report 97-799F, *Greece and Turkey: Aegean Issues — Background and Recent Developments*, August 21, 1997, by (name redacted).

<sup>11</sup>Sergios Zambouros, Greece and Israel: Troubled Friendship. *Middle East International*, January 16, 1998, pp. 12-13.

<sup>12</sup>Syria Denies Granting Military Facilities to Greece, *Turkish Daily News*, April 4, 1996, online; also Foreign Minister Gonensay on Greek-Armenian Accord, TRT Television network, June 20, 1996, translation carried by FBIS online, June 20, 1996.

<sup>13</sup>Yosi Melman, Greece's Pangalos on Israeli-Turkish Military Cooperation, *Ha'aretz*, May 20, 1997, translation carried by FBIS online, May 21, 1997.

Turkey has other reasons to court Israel. Turkey has been subject to various actual and de facto arms embargos by the United States<sup>14</sup> and by some European governments because of its record of human rights violations, policy toward its Kurdish population, bilateral disputes with Greece, or the unresolved Cyprus issue. Israel does not take what it views as domestic Turkish concerns or these issues into account in its arms sales policy. In particular, purchases from Israel may enable Turkey to circumvent U.S. conditions, such as those requiring a balance of forces between Turkey and Greece, or restricting the transfer of specific arms when they might be used in the abuse of human rights, i.e. in the war in the southeast. Turkish and Israeli arms are overwhelmingly American and some weapons produced by Israel's indigenous defense industry appear to be copies of U.S.-manufactured arms. These arms might, therefore, be familiar to the Turkish military and require less training. Moreover, Israel has made improvements to some U.S. weapons purchased over the years, a development that probably led to the contracts to upgrade Turkey's U.S.-manufactured aircraft.

Turkey believes that its access to U.S. arms has been impeded by the U.S. Congress because of powerful Greek- and Armenian-American, and pro-Kurdish lobbies. It does not face comparable obstacles in Israel. Moreover, it hopes that the Israeli government and pro-Israel lobbies will work on its behalf and counter other ethnic lobbies in Congress. Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai confirmed that Israel is assisting Turkey on the American political scene and encouraging Jewish organizations to follow this example.<sup>15</sup> Ankara has cultivated pro-Israel lobbies, and vice versa. For example, the B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation League feted Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz during his December 1997 visit to Washington, and Yilmaz reciprocated by hosting a luncheon in Ankara for 65 members of the U.S. Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations in March 1998.

The December 1997 European Union decision not to include Turkey on a list with 11 prospective members led Turkey to feel isolated and to place a greater value on its other "Western" friends, notably the United States and Israel. The EU move also created antipathy in Turkey toward arms deals with European countries known to oppose Turkey's EU accession. The French National Assembly's May 29, 1998, recognition of the Armenian genocide generated ill-will toward France in Turkey, prompting Turkey to suspend talks over a \$441 million contract for anti-tank missiles. Finally, Turkey views Russia's decision to sell S-300 anti-aircraft missiles to Cyprus as contributing to a security threat to Turkey and Turkish-Cypriots. Although Turkey was the first NATO country to buy Russian arms, it now may be less enthusiastic about that alternative. In sum, Israeli arms do not appear to have the political burdens that beset many of their competitors.

The accessibility of Israel's weaponry is matched by its willingness to enter joint production arrangements. Turkey has put a high priority on developing its domestic defense industry and co-production enables it to pursue this goal.

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<sup>14</sup>See CRS Issue Brief 86065, *Greece and Turkey: Current Foreign Aid Issues*, updated regularly by (name redacted).

<sup>15</sup>Ron Ben-Yishay, Mordechai to Press for Tighter U.S. Cooperation with Turkey, *Yedi'ot Aharonot*, April 3, 1997, translation carried by FBIS online, April 4, 1997.

Finally, Turkey increasingly has expressed concern about the potential for proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in its neighborhood, notably in Iraq and Iran.<sup>16</sup> It welcomes the opportunity to collaborate with the Israelis on deterrents such as theater missile defense.

## Israel

Israel's motivations to improve relations with Turkey are similarly varied, but changed somewhat with the government turnover in June 1996. Establishing and warming relations with Arab and Muslim nations had been a cornerstone of former Israeli Foreign/Prime Minister Shimon Peres' vision of a "New Middle East."<sup>17</sup> Peres appreciated Turkey's importance in the region and thought that it might serve as a bridge to other Muslim countries, even though Turkey is officially a secular state. By 1996, the Israeli government also may have become frustrated with its peace talks with Syria and wanted to exert pressure on Syria from another perspective. It is widely believed that the late Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin would have relinquished most of the Golan Heights, but Syrian President Hafez Asad never made the compromises sought by Israel that would have led to an agreement. Additionally, Israel was troubled by Syria's continuing support for the Hizbollah guerrillas who operate against Israel's Lebanese allies in southern Lebanon and against northern Israel, as well as its facilitating the transfer of Iranian aid to Hizbollah. The current Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, echoes Turkey's criticism of Syrian support for terrorism, expressly including both Hizbollah and the PKK. However, Netanyahu denigrates the idea of a New Middle East and does not consider Turkey as a bridge to other countries, except geographically to the energy resources and markets of Azerbaijan and Central Asia. For him, the Turkish-Israeli tie stands alone, with its own intrinsic value. He has viewed most governments in the region as hostile, unchanging, entrenched authoritarian regimes, and is skeptical of the possibility of reaching lasting agreements with them.<sup>18</sup> Netanyahu contrastingly refers to Turkey as the only other democracy in the region.<sup>19</sup>

Israel also is greatly concerned about Iran's potential to produce weapons of mass destruction. Turkey borders on Iran and many assume that Israeli planes flying in Turkish airspace gather intelligence on Iran, Iraq, and Syria. It is uncertain if Turkey would allow Israel to use Turkish airspace for a strike on Iran's non-conventional weapons infrastructure similar to the Israeli attack on Iraq's Osiraq nuclear facility in 1981. Turkey and Iran have enjoyed peaceful relations for over 300 years, despite passing irritations. Possibly relevant, however, is the former Turkish Ambassador to Washington's statement during a February 1998 crisis with

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<sup>16</sup>General Cevik Bir, Turkey's Role in the New World Order, *Strategic Forum*, No. 135, February 1998, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup>Shimon Peres, *The New Middle East*, New York, Henry Holt, 1993.

<sup>18</sup>This is a common Netanyahu theme. See for example, Benjamin Netanyahu, *A Place Among Nations*, New York, Bantam Books, 1993, pp. 341-2.

<sup>19</sup>Israeli diplomats in Ankara on the other hand recognize that the generals, not the civilians, hold power in Turkey, indicating that they know it is a flawed democracy. Interview by the author in Ankara, December 1997.

Iraq that Turkey would consider allowing Israel to use Turkish airspace to retaliate for a possible Iraqi missile attack on Israel.<sup>20</sup> Israel benefits from Syria, Iran, and others having to consider the possibility of Turkey providing Israel with intelligence and other non-combat assistance in the event of a confrontation.<sup>21</sup> Even though the Israeli-Turkish relationship is not one in which either partner is committed to come to the defense of the other in case of war, it enables Israel to augment its strategic superiority in the region

Finally, the contracts for military sales have boosted Israel's defense industry. Israeli Aircraft Industry had been in particularly bad shape before the F-4 and F-5 contracts, but has been rebuilt largely on the strength of the Turkish deals.

## Criticism

### Domestic

Some Turkish politicians are wary of appearing too pro-Israel and traditionally are very sympathetic to the Palestinians.<sup>22</sup> They are troubled by the impasse in Israeli-Palestinian peace talks and by some of Israel's actions regarding Jerusalem and the West Bank. Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit and cabinet members from his Democratic Left Party (DSP) articulate this view. Turkish civilian leaders usually visit with Palestinian Authority officials after they visit Israel; the military do not.<sup>23</sup> The intensity of Arab criticism of Turkish-Israeli relations (see below), however, even prompted the powerful Turkish General Staff, the preeminent advocate of ties with Israel, to intercede with some Arab governments, if only to prevent the censure from developing into a real constraint. For example, Chief of the General Staff General Ismail Hakki Karadayi visited Cairo in December 1997 to reassure Egyptian President Mubarak about the nature of the Turkish-Israeli relationship.

There are minority voices of dissent in Turkey and Israel about the relationship. In Turkey, the small (25,000) Jewish community is ambivalent. Most Turkish Jews are supportive. Israeli Defense Minister Mordechai was the guest of honor at an enthusiastic community dinner in Istanbul during his January 1998 visit to Turkey. Some, however, are apprehensive about the dangers of raising their profile through the relationship in the event that it goes wrong, especially given popular Islamist feelings in Turkey. Some non-Jewish Turkish commentators quietly express concern

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<sup>20</sup>Tom Doggett, Turkey Would Consider Israel Request to Bomb Iraq, Reuters, February 19, 1998.

<sup>21</sup>Michael Eisenstadt, *Turkish-Israeli Military Cooperation: An Assessment*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policywatch, July 25, 1997.

<sup>22</sup>The attempted assassination of Turkish President Suleyman Demirel in May 1996, allegedly to protest the Turkish-Israeli military accord, had no effect on policy.

<sup>23</sup>The Palestinian Authority has security forces, but not armed forces which would be the counterparts of Turkey's and which might justify reciprocal official visits.

that the relationship is developing artificially fast and cannot be sustained.<sup>24</sup> They are guarded in their comments, lest the Turkish military react.

A few Israeli voices are skeptical. One cautioned against providing Turkey with missiles, fearing that they might ultimately be used against Israel should Turkey be taken over by a fundamentalist regime. He also did not want Israel to “legitimize turning the Middle East into a region bristling with missiles.”<sup>25</sup> The respected military commentator Ze’ev Schiff opined that the relationship has been “characterized by recklessness when it comes to public relations.” He recognized that the tie is of strategic importance, but did not want Israel to get involved in Greek-Turkish disputes over the Aegean Sea or in Turkey’s conflict with the PKK.<sup>26</sup> Some in the Israeli Foreign Ministry reportedly are concerned about the Defense Ministry’s pace of improving ties with Turkey and disregard of adverse regional reactions.<sup>27</sup>

## Regional

Turkey, not Israel, has been the predominant target of Arab and Iranian opposition to the Turkish-Israeli romance. As noted above, history has bequeathed some antagonism to Arab-Turkish relations. Due in part to this legacy, reaction in the region to the Turkish-Israeli relationship has been largely negative. The Arab and Iranian backlash also exhibits acute awareness of how the regional balance of power might be skewed by a Turkish-Israeli military alliance.

In general, Turks care little about Arab opinion relating to its developing ties with Israel, with some civilian politicians more concerned than the military proponents of the relationship.

Reactions of some individual governments in the region follow.

*Syria* Reflecting its position as an unstated target of the Turkish-Israeli collaboration, Syria has taken the lead in voicing opposition and in marshaling regional concern. It engineered a June 1996 Arab summit resolution calling on Turkey to reconsider its military accord with Israel. In December 1997, Syria’s ally Iran hosted an Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) summit, where a resolution called for reconsideration of military cooperation with Israel. Turkey was not named in the resolution, but it is the only Muslim country that cooperates with Israel militarily. President Suleyman Demirel departed from the summit early.

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<sup>24</sup>Interviews conducted by the author in Turkey, December 1997.

<sup>25</sup>Me’ir Stiglitz, Don’t Give Them Missiles, *Yedi’ot Aharonot*, December 25, 1997, translation carried by FBIS online, December 30, 1997.

<sup>26</sup>Ze’ev Schiff, Keeping the Romance Quiet, *Ha’aretz*, January 2, 1998, p. 9, translation carried by FBIS online, January 5, 1998.

<sup>27</sup>Amnon Barzilay, The Turkish Connection, *Ha’aretz*, April 26, 1998, p. 1, 3, translation carried online by FBIS, April 29, 1998. However, Netanyahu strongly supports ties with Turkey, is his own Foreign Minister, and often ignores the Foreign Ministry bureaucracy.

Summit attendees reportedly were appalled that Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai was visiting Turkey at the same time as their meeting.

Syrian officials describe Israeli-Turkish (and U.S.) ties harshly. Foreign Minister Faruq al-Shar' charged that the agreement was "a very dangerous development."<sup>28</sup> He told some Arab foreign ministers in June 1997 that the Turkish-Israeli military cooperation "constitutes a threat to the security of Arab countries and stability in the Middle East." Vice President 'Abd al-Halim Khaddam called it a "satanic alliance" aimed at giving Israel and Turkey regional hegemony under U.S. cover.<sup>29</sup> He argued that the planned January 1998 Israeli-Turkish-U.S. search and rescue exercise only encouraged Israel to continue its aggression and was a conspiracy against Arab and Islamic states, mainly Syria, Iraq, and Iran. Syrian and other Arab officials and commentators categorically rejected assurances that the exercise was not a war game.

Turkish-Israeli ties probably are among the reasons for improved relations between Syria and Iraq.<sup>30</sup> In May and June 1997, Damascus made overtures to Baghdad to give the impression that a regional counterbloc to the Turkish-Israeli connection was conceivable. Borders between Syria and Iraq were opened for the first time in 16 years, a Syrian trade delegation visited Baghdad, ministerial visits were exchanged, and discussions led to a July 1998 decision to reopen oil pipelines from Iraq to Syria and Lebanon. Al-Shar' said that commercial steps "may be followed by other steps related to the regional and international situation," obliquely referring to the Turkish-Israeli connection.<sup>31</sup> Syria also has not allowed Ankara to fill a vacancy in the position of Turkish military attache in Damascus since August 1997, presumably because of Turkey's military ties to Israel.

In 1998, Syria has shifted its approach, softened its rhetoric slightly, and begun a dialogue with Turkey. In February, Damascus received a Turkish Foreign Ministry official. In March, the Syrian and Turkish foreign ministers met on the sidelines of an OIC meeting, which did not issue a statement on Turkish-Israeli cooperation for the first time since 1996. In May, there were unconfirmed reports that Syria had closed down a PKK camp near Damascus<sup>32</sup> as a goodwill gesture. In July, the Undersecretary of the Syrian Foreign Ministry visited Ankara ostensibly to prepare for a visit by Turkish Foreign Minister Ismail Cem to Damascus. Syrian media said that Syria had conditioned talks on outstanding issues such as the PKK and Euphrates

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<sup>28</sup>Al-Shar' on 32nd Day. Show TV, July 2, 1996, translated by FBIS, July 3, 1996, p. 38.

<sup>29</sup>FBIS Foreign Media Note, October 28, 1997.

<sup>30</sup>See also, CRS Report 97-808, *Iraq: Erosion of International Isolation*, by (name redacted) and Alfred Prados, August 20, 1997, which notes that Syria's outreach to Iraq also was prompted by the impasse in peace talks with Israel and Syria's perceived need for strategic depth.

<sup>31</sup>Interview on Radio Monte Carlo, June 21, 1997, translation carried by FBIS online June 24, 1997.

<sup>32</sup>Syria Closed Down PKK Camp, *Radikal*, May 22, 1998, translation carried by FBIS, May 26, 1998.

River water-sharing, and on Turkey delaying military cooperation with Israel.<sup>33</sup> That cooperation may be so important to Turkey now, however, that it will probably continue to stymie a productive dialogue with Damascus. After the Syrian official's visit, Cem noted that the atmosphere had not yet been created for him to visit Damascus. During a July 7 visit to Israel, Cem declared, "Despite the harsh criticism against us in the Arab world over our special relations with Israel, we have no intention of sacrificing these relations or lowering their profile."<sup>34</sup>

*Egypt* Egyptian officials have accepted Turkish explanations of ties with Israel in bilateral meetings with Turkish military and civilian leaders. During his July 1996 visit to Ankara, for example, President Hosni Mubarak said that the various Turkish-Israeli agreements are not threatening. During a reciprocal visit by Turkish President Suleyman Demirel to Alexandria in September 1997, Mubarak noted that Egyptian-Turkish relations were good and accepted Demirel's explanation of the planned Turkish-Israeli-U.S. search and rescue exercise. In pan-Arab conclaves or when not in the company of Turks, however, Egypt, as leader of the Arab world, has been more disapproving of Israeli-Turkish relations and sympathetic to the concerns of its Arab brother, Syria. Foreign Minister 'Amr Musa has said that the Turkish-Israeli relationship "will have negative consequences on the strategic situation in the region."<sup>35</sup>

*Jordan* Jordan has a peace treaty with Israel and friendly ties with Turkey. It sent an observer to the Israel-Turkey-U.S. search and rescue exercise in January 1998. But Jordanian officials pointedly noted that an invitation from Ankara had been accepted in order to withhold credit from Israel, which Amman considers responsible for the stalemate in the Arab-Israeli peace process. Jordan and Turkey conducted joint military training exercises in April 1998. A high-ranking Jordanian military officer attended the semiannual Israeli-Turkish strategic talks in May 1998. The extent to which Jordan lends its presence to such activities gives the developing Israeli-Turkish relationship a broader regional gloss and lends credence to those who say it could be a force for regional peace and stability.

*Palestinian Authority* Turkey has enjoyed good relations with the Palestinians for a long time. Palestinian officials have stated their lack of opposition to intensified Turkish-Israeli ties, but also have indicated that they would like Ankara to use its influence with Israel to advance the peace process. Turkish civilian politicians who visit Israel almost always call on the PA as well, and have expressed dismay over Israeli actions regarding Jerusalem and delays in Israel's redeployment from the West Bank.

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<sup>33</sup>Syria Sets Conditions for Official Visit to Ankara, *Al-Hayah*, June 15, 1998, p. 1, translation carried by FBIS online, June 16, 1998.

<sup>34</sup>Turkey's Cem — We Will Not Lower Profile of Israel Ties, *Yedi'ot Aharonot*, July 7, 1998, p. 7, translation carried by FBIS online, July 8, 1998.

<sup>35</sup>Cairo, ESC TV, December 9, 1997, translation carried by FBIS online, December 10, 1997.

*Greece*<sup>36</sup> Greece's difficult bilateral relationship with Turkey is largely responsible for its negative reaction to developing Turkish-Israeli ties. Unlike the Arabs, Greece has focused its displeasure on Israel as much as on Turkey. Foreign Minister Pangalos initially put it diplomatically, noting that he did not want Turkey to exploit its military cooperation with Israel to "create a certain impression."<sup>37</sup> By February 1998, however, Pangalos was describing the Israeli-Turkish relationship "an alliance of wrongdoers that brings us to a cold war situation."<sup>38</sup> He later registered unease that Israel would provide Turkey with intelligence and technology that could be turned against Greece. This is the core of Greek distress with Israeli-Turkish relations. Greece's Defense Minister Akis Tsohatzopoulos seems to characterize Israel's choice of Turkey as wrong-headed and urges Israel to look toward the European Union instead. During a visit to Washington in July 1998, he revealed that he had invited Israeli Defense Minister Mordechai to visit Athens, perhaps to convince him of the regional ramifications of an alliance with Ankara and to change course.

*Cyprus* Cyprus and Israel have cordial relations. Since the Israeli-Turkish accords, Cypriot officials have made "friendly representations" to Israel concerning Israeli violations of Cypriot airspace, but have accepted Israel's explanations that violations are unintended. Some in the Cypriot media, however, charge that Israeli planes may gather intelligence for Turkey on the new Cypriot air base at Paphos, that Israeli technology will be used to jam Cypriot radar in the event of a Turkish attack on Cyprus's Russian S-300 missiles, now scheduled for delivery in November 1998,<sup>39</sup> that Turkish planes are training in Israel for an attack on the S-300s, or that Israel will share with Turkey imagery taken by the Ofeq spy satellite over southern Cyprus. Israel officially takes no position with regard to the dispute between Turkey and Cyprus and has denied what it considers the most offensive charges such as helping Turkey train to attack Cyprus.

## **Implications for the United States**

### **Policy**

The United States government officially approves of its two close allies bettering their ties. The State Department has been supportive, stating that enhanced relations between Israel and Turkey contribute to regional peace and security. It considers the rapprochement helpful to both parties and to the United States. For its part, the Defense Department actively participated in the January 1998 trilateral

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<sup>36</sup>Greece's own 1994 military cooperation accord with Israel has never been fully implemented. Joint naval exercises were said to be postponed because of Arab pressure. Arab Pressure Foiled Greek Military Agreement with Israel, *Jerusalem Post*, September 26, 1997, p. 24, carried on FBIS online, September 29, 1997.

<sup>37</sup>*Ha'aretz*, May 20, 1997, above.

<sup>38</sup>*Athens News*, February 24, 1998, p. 1, carried by FBIS online, March 1, 1998.

<sup>39</sup>Marios Leonidhas, Cyprus and Israel: Lingering Suspicion, *The Cyprus Weekly*, June 12, 1998, p. 4.



Reliant Mermaid search and rescue exercise with Turkey and Israel at which Jordan was an official observer, and depicted the exercise as routine. DOD also may see Turkey's relations with Israel as a way to help it justify to Congress arms transfers to Turkey.

Israeli-Turkish ties could change the regional context and have implications for other U.S. policies and interests. The U.S. State Department has devoted considerable time and effort trying to achieve a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace. Yet, the Arabs' generally negative view of the Turkish-Israeli association and how it changes the regional strategic balance could have a potentially adverse impact on the peace process. Israeli-Turkish relations serve to emphasize their differences from and with Arab neighbors, rather than common goals. A *Washington Post* editorial suggested that the Turkish-Israeli connection immeasurably strengthens Israel's security and could reduce Israel's perceived need to negotiate a settlement with the Palestinians and Syria.<sup>40</sup> Such a result could frustrate U.S. mediation efforts. Furthermore, since the end of the Persian Gulf war, the United States has sought to contain the Iraqi regime of Saddam Husayn. If Turkish-Israeli cooperation seriously motivates Syria to reach out to Baghdad, then continued containment of Iraq might be undermined.

Finally, if Turkish-Israeli relations adversely affected the United States' ability to influence the Israeli government, they might have a similar effect on Washington's dealings with Ankara. U.S. policy leverage with Ankara is derived from a special U.S.-Turkish bilateral relationship, and from the extent to which Turkey looks to the United States, as the remaining superpower, to influence other governments and international institutions on its behalf. Some U.S. policy priorities are probably lower on Israel's scale of priorities regarding its relations with Turkey. Thus, Turkey's alliance with Israel might eventually lead to a diminishing of Turkey's deference to U.S. views on issues such as improving Greek-Turkish bilateral relations, resolving the Cyprus issue, correcting Turkey's human rights record, and promoting Turkish democratization. This is not to say that the United States policies would benefit from Turkey's isolation. For example, the United States has encouraged Turkey's relations with the European Union, which often reinforces U.S. policy perspectives on issues.

## Legislation

Congress has shown interest in evolving Israeli-Turkish relations, but the Israeli-Turkish tie has not been specifically addressed in legislation.

However, several U.S. laws may have to be taken into account by Israel and Turkey as their relationship grows. Turkish businesses may seek to use the Israel-Turkey Free Trade Agreement to gain access to the U.S. market via the U.S.-Israel Free Trade Agreement (P.L. 99-47, June 11, 1985). Most of Turkey's exports to the United States already are subject to low tariffs because of Turkey's Most-Favored Nation trade status. Therefore, only a few high tariff products might benefit from any tie in with the U.S.-Israel FTA. Moreover, among other provisions, the U.S.-Israel

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<sup>40</sup>The Turkish-Israeli Connection, *Washington Post*, December 24, 1997, p. A12.

FTA stipulates a rule of origin, whereby articles must be of Israeli origin or substantially transformed in Israel. It would be difficult, therefore, for Turkish businesses to secure economic benefit from the U.S.-Israel trade regime.

The Arms Export Control Act (P.L. 90-629, Section 3, October 22, 1968), and regulations pursuant to it (22 CFR 120), require U.S. prior consent to all transfers of U.S. munitions list items to a third party. Congressional approval is required for the transfer of items valued over \$14 million. The U.S. munitions list includes military hardware and software, as well as technological knowledge, manuals, etc. The Act, therefore, applies to all U.S. munitions list items that the United States has ever transferred to Israel and that Israel might transfer to Turkey. Israel has reportedly demonstrated the largely U.S.-funded Arrow missile technology to the Turks, and was said to have made a preliminary inquiry to the Pentagon about a possible sale to Turkey. The Department of Defense informed the Israelis, due to concern over technology transfer, that it would prefer them not to sell the Arrow to Turkey. Israeli officials deny that the formal step of a Memorandum of Understanding with Turkey for the Arrow was ever taken.<sup>41</sup> The DOD spokesman appeared to confirm that when he said that no formal Israeli request to sell the Arrow to Turkey had been made.<sup>42</sup> The Turks are considering collaborating with the Israelis in the development of other anti-missile systems as well as purchasing U.S. Patriot missiles. The prospect of the latter sale may have been a factor in U.S. disapproval of an Israeli-Turkish deal involving the Arrow. The Turks, however, may simply want a proven weapon and not one still in trials like Arrow. U.S. permission also will be required for Israel to transfer technology to Turkey for co-production of the Popeye II missile. Unlike the Arrow, Administration officials reportedly are considering approval for the Popeye II. As in the past, they may be concerned about possible objections by Greece and in Congress. U.S. officials are offering other missiles for sale to Greece.<sup>43</sup> This might offset opposition and maintain the regional balance of power.

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<sup>41</sup> Amnon Barzilay, Israel and Turkey Agree to Study Joint Missile Project, *Ha'aretz*, April 23, 1998, p. 1, translation carried by FBIS online, April 25, 1998 .

<sup>42</sup>U.S. Department of Defense daily briefing, May 21, 1998, Reuters.

<sup>43</sup>Greek Defense Minister Akis Tsohatzopoulos, address at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, July 7, 1998.

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