

# **The Relations of Turkey-Israel-US and Iran's Foreign Policy**

**Fatemeh Soleimani Poorlak<sup>1</sup>**

Received Date: June 24, 2013

Accepted Date: December 30, 2013

## **Abstract**

Four years after the MV Mavi Marmara incident in May 31, 2010, Turkish-Israeli relations are in a state of semi-paralysis. By late 2012, a series of confidence-building measures came to naught. Indeed, these failed confidence building measures illustrate the extent to which restarting the relationship required continued U.S. chaperoning. As we shall see, hopes for constituting the U.S.-Turkey-Israel triangle will require active and sustained leadership from the U.S. and its top decision makers. Such role will require identifying and carrying out elements of a trilateral agenda which could rebuild confidence and cooperation between Ankara and Zionists. This paper suggests two closely intertwined considerations: first, that Turkish-Zionism relations must be considered to the security and stability of the Middle East; and second, that U.S. major role has come to play a central role in shaping—and often mediating—the Turkish-Zionism relationship. Indeed, while Israel regime and Turkey continue to face common strategic challenges and share mutual interests, the capacity to restart relations will partly depend on the readiness of U.S. leaders to help both Ankara and Jerusalem find a way back to sustained strategic cooperation.

**Key words:** Turkey; Israel; Iran; AKP; Foreign Policy

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<sup>1</sup>-Assistant Professor of International Relations, Islamic Azad University, Chaloos Branch.

Email: m.soleimani@yahoo.com

## **Introduction**

Surveying relations between Turkey and Israel regime requires explaining role US in these field. When examining the history of the relations between Turkey and Israel regime, it is important to note that relations between Ankara and Jerusalem developed gradually during the “early years” (1948-1992). Changes in the relationship during this period were mostly a result of developments in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The United States worked to enhance its ties separately with Turkey and Israel, but did not devote abundant time or resources to bringing the two countries closer together. Israel reached out to Turkey in an effort to break out of its regional isolation; Turkey’s approach to Israel regime was mostly driven by concerns that too close of a relationship with this regime would damage its relations with the Arab world, despite its clear interest in developing ties. Yet, as the Cold War came to an end and a so-called Middle East peace process began to emerge, the stage was set for full-fledged diplomatic relations between the two countries.

What followed were the “golden years” (1992-2008), during which a strategic partnership was forged between Turkey and Israel. This new relationship stemmed mainly from changes in their respective domestic arenas, with an active Middle East peace process giving the relationship the necessary tailwind it needed to fully develop. The new relationship enjoyed the strong support and cooperation of the United States. It also had the support of the Turkish General Staff and the Israeli defense establishment, both of which acted as chief proponents for enhanced collaboration. In many respects the Turkish military was the guarantor of continued close and stable relations with Zionists; as long as it was able to maintain its control over the Turkish political system, relations flourished. But at the dawn of the twenty-first century, a transformation had begun in Turkish society which would eventually prove detrimental to the Turkish-Israeli relationship. With the rise of political Islam, the secular Turkish military began to lose its grip on the domestic arena. Over the next several years, Turkey’s relationship with Israel regime became increasingly strained. The United States made some effort to slow this process of deterioration between its two allies, but was ultimately unable to stop it.

Representing Islamist strata of Turkey, AKP's seizing power not only affected Turkey's relations with Israel but also all political aspects of this country including domestic and foreign affairs. This article mainly

focuses on answering these questions: What is the impact of triangle Turkey (AKP)-Zionism-US on Iran's Foreign Policy?

### **1- Theoretical Framework: balance of threat**

The balance of threat suggests that States form Alliances to prevent stronger powers from dominating them and to protect themselves from States or Coalitions whose superior resources pose a threat to National Independence. Geographic proximity, offensive power, and aggressive intentions affect the threat level. During the Cold War, the SINO-PAK balance of threat was forged to counter the perception of Soviet and Indian Hegemony in the region. China's problems with India were exacerbated by a precarious relationship with the Soviet Union. China embarked on an enduring strategic relationship with Pakistan. Cooperation with Pakistan did effectively balance the Indian Threat and prevented India from focusing on China. China used the elements of its own national power - political, economic, military power and nuclear cooperation to influence Pakistan. This case study supports the balance of threat theory. It illustrates that the issue that drives China and Pakistan together is not India's Preponderance of power, but that by India possessing this power, coupled with its geographic proximity, Offensive Power and Aggressive Intentions, it poses a real threat (See: Walt, 1981). Why do countries make certain foreign policy decisions? In this lesson, we are going to check out one popular answer to that question and see how it holds up in real-world scenarios.

#### **Balancing Threats**

When we look throughout world history, we notice that even countries that don't always get along can quickly create strong alliances. For example, France and Britain spent centuries fighting, but in World War II became instant and inseparable allies. Why?

This has been an important question in foreign policy for many years. One answer that has become popular is the balance of threat theory. Developed by Harvard professor Stephen Walt in his 1987 book "The Origins of Alliances", the theory outlines the reasons that nations form alliances against a perceived threat. It's an intriguing idea to help explain the behavior of states throughout the world (Muscata, 2015).

### **Balance of Power v. Balance of Threat**

Walt's balance of threat theory emerged in the 1980s. At the time, the dominant model to explain states' behaviors was known as the balance of power theory. The basic idea was that states defined their goals by the power of others. In essence, countries try to build their power to match the power of the strongest state, regardless of whether or not that state is acting aggressively. By maintaining this balance of power in which no single country is drastically more powerful than all the others, everyone assures mutual security.

That's the balance of power theory. It was accepted for a long time until Stephen Walt began arguing that history didn't really support it. Instead, Walt saw countries accepting the rise of non-aggressive powers while working to balance much less powerful, but more aggressive threats. As a result, he argued that states' ideas of security were defined by perceived threat, not a need to maintain a balance of power, and the balance of threat theory was born (Walt, 1981).

### **Elements of Threat**

According to Stephen Walt, states associate their own security with perceived threats and seek to balance this through international relations. The question we now have to ask is: what defines a threat? According to Walt, there are four elements that define perceived threat. The four elements of threat are aggregate power, geographic proximity, offensive capabilities, and offensive intentions. Basically, how powerful is it, how close is it, how much military might is it capable of, and is it acting aggressively? Those are the four criteria that states use to evaluate the threat posed by other states (Muscato, 2015).

### **Assumptions**

Before we look at any examples, we do need to remember that the balance of threat theory does rely on a few basic assumptions. The most important of these is the definition of security. When Walt proposed this theory back in the 1980s, the world was focused on potential global warfare between nuclear superpowers. The relationship between these nations and the threat of nuclear war defined countries' ideas about security.

That's not the world we live in today. Terrorism and other forms of non-state based violence are playing a larger role in national and foreign policies than ever before. Our modern ideas of security are different because the threats are different. This changes the nature of the balance of

threat theory. Many scholars believe that the theory works best when applied to state-to-state relationships and state-supported aggression or violence (Muscato, 2015).

### **1. Formation of Turkey-Israel axis and US role**

Implementing identity-building components of new Turkey (doctrine of Kamalism) presented a new image of Turkey. This domestic self-made identity which triumphed over previous identity components (Ottoman Turkey), affected Turkey's domestic and international image so that it approached the well-known international norms which in turn were imposed by the West. This issue namely commitment to international (mainly Western) norms culminated in recognizing "positive sovereignty" for this state in international arena (Yazdanfam, 2008: 765). On the other hand, Turkey also commits itself to consider regulative rules such as reception and recognition of Israel as a norm of the UN in order to gain credit and legitimacy. Through recognizing Israel as an international norm, Turkey has devolved a part of its sovereignty and obliged to considering international rules which indicates the impact of international norms on Turkey's foreign policy. Thus Turkey-Israel relations are rooted in the period of Laics and army generals' rule in Turkey and "the Turkish authorities regarded 'the peaceful relations' between the states is one of the fundamental steps forward to the realization of bilateral and multilateral interests in the region." (Erdemir, 2010: 27).

In spite of that the Western umbrella had united Turkey and Israel within the framework of the threat of communism and socialist block, however, Turkey-Israel relations were not stable and was exposed to fluctuations (Nuraldin, 2004: 263-264). Turkey has had its own reasons behind its recognition of Israel. One of the reasons for the Turkish authorities to support and recognize Israel as a 'state' was, the Turkish needs for peaceful relations with the United States in particular and Western Europe in general. The Turkish recognition of Israel as a 'legitimate state' in Palestine supported to the acceptance of Turkey as a new member to the NATO by its members (Erdemir, op. cit.: 28).

The most important reasons of constituting Turkey-Israel strategic axis include: alliance with Israel and the US in order to use their influence for entering the EU; absorbing the US financial aids; providing military and information needs particularly for facing Kurdish separatism; creating balance against the regional Arabic power; controlling Islamist currents

in Turkey's domestic and abroad environment; confronting Iran's nuclear threat (Afzali, *op. cit.*: 116) and accessing Israel's market (Bir, *op. cit.*: 28).

## **2. Beginning moderate Western-Islamic policy, fragmentation of Turkey-Israel axis**

Turkish foreign policy called "Turkish Gaullism" is primarily more nationalistic and about rising Turkish self-confidence and independence (Taspinar, 2011). This is evident in the "Strategic Depth" raised by Davutoglu. He criticized Turkey's previous governments due to focusing their foreign policy only in one aspect namely the West. He acknowledged that "We will integrate Balkans, Middle East and Caucasus with Turkey as their axis and the center of world politics in future" (Saz, 2011).

The AKP seized power by emphasizing such doctrines which are nostalgically rooted in the Ottoman era. The Islamist Turkish statesmen's prospect for this kind of foreign policy is to reach Turkey to a position comparable to the Ottoman era in which a widespread influence zone is constituted. Turkey's new movements for achieving this goal include: to attempt at membership in the European Union, to try to achieve a nonpartisan position in the Middle East affairs and become a significant actors in the region, to accompany NATO in Afghanistan, to try to play an efficient role in resolving crises in Balkans and so on (Omidi and Rezayi, 2011: 234). Even presenting a moderate model of political Islam by Turkish Islamists is an attempt at acquiring a compromised stance for expanding their influence. With this prospect, Turkey entered a coherent competition with regional powers such as Iran and Saudi Arabia.

After seizing power, the AKP declared that Turkey is in a unique condition for connecting and compromising Islam, democracy and secularism. In other words, it can be said that Turkey is the only country of the Middle East that may interact with contradictory states like Iran, Israel, the US, Arabs and Europe, and this is regarded as Turkey's soft power and few countries enjoy such a potential (*ibid.*, 244). Thus affected by the adopted procedure by Islamist statesmen, Turkey has depicted a huge realm for its influence. Therefore Turkey needs to acquire such instruments as change in its foreign policy towards Israel (parallel with other efficient instruments) in order to refrain from negative stances against these policies by the public opinion of the Middle East.

On the one hand, beside this analytical space, many AKP leaders, including Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, came of age among a group of Islamist politicians who voiced intense hostility to Israel (I. C. G, 2010: 2). In fact, the Islamists who gained power on the basis of moderate Islamism had to decorate the identity of their country with both Islamic and western features which can be seen in the combined strategy of look to east and west (see: Cornell, 2012). Compared to 1990s, Turkey decreased its relations with Israel in direction of adjustment strategy. On the other hand, strategic necessities that made Turkey to establish close ties with Israel have lost their significance. One of these necessities is the kind of interaction with Iran. Turkey and Iran have reached a high level of integration regarding security issues such as the Kurdish question and separatist groups like PKK and PJAK, Iraq and the threats of Kurdistan Regional Government, Islam World issues, particularly the Palestine question (Rezazdeh, 2009: 124-138). Consequently Turkey-Syria relations have also changed because now Turkey looks at Syria and their common issues not from the West's view but from its regional and native point of view which is different from previous periods.

Beside mentioned signs, there are other signs indicating that in this period of time, the AKP's policy has been a moderate one: Erdogan's reaction to Israel's invasion on Gaza and Rafah, criticizing Israel's influence in the Kurdistan Regional Government (Raptopoulos, 2004: 11), deepening ties with Hamas, condemning Israel's attack on Lebanon in summer 2006, suspending military exercises in 2009 following Israel's repressive operation against the Gaza Strip (I. C. G., op.cit: 3). If the AKP adopted a pro-Palestine and anti-Israel policy, it would face domestic problems (questioning its legitimacy by military and laic parties) on the one hand and foreign problem (decreasing the West's economic and military aids) on the other. Thus the AKP's foreign policy has been fluctuated between pro-Palestine and pro-Israel trends.

Thus it can be said that tensions between Turkey and Israel in this period within the dominant norms of Turkish foreign policy do not mean to deny Israel's legitimacy but they mean to protest Israel's performance and to correct it. The reason for this claim is that these tensions have never culminated in a serious crisis cutting their relations. The definition of Turkey's identity on a mixed basis has caused that this state's politics be influenced by both Western and Islamic norms and manifested a character which is the result of this identity combination. In fact, Turkey's

policy based on strategic alliance with Israel and approaching Islamic countries have been accompanied by a kind of moderatism that gives Turkish Islamism a particular and unique nature in the Islam World.

Turkey-Israel relations in the examined period of time is in a vague situation but it is obvious that their relations has turned into coldness compared to pre-AKP era because Turkey's behavioral obligations has changed due to redefinition of its identity which has culminated in fragmentation of Ankara-Tel Aviv strategic axis. The most important obligations are as follows: (1) establishing balance in relations with Arabs and Israel in direction of strategic depth doctrine and multi-regionalism strategy and revitalizing Ottoman authority, (2) changing attitude towards Iran as a previously common threat, (3) changing attitude towards the Kurds in direction of interaction with domestic and abroad Kurds, (4) solving Cyprus question and improving relations with Greece in direction of zero-problem with the neighbors, (5) interaction with Arabs in order to access to their huge resources of energy and their populous consumption market. Turkey's annual trade with the Arab world now stands at US\$ 30 billion, compared to less than US\$ 2 billion a decade ago (Nibllet, 2010: 14), (6) attempting at controlling and using the regional revolutions and preventing from Iran's influence and Shiite groups such as Lebanon Hezbollah, (7) responding to public opinion.

Given these factors, it can be said that Turkey is seeking a balanced and moderate relationship with the dominant regional identities namely Arabs and Israel. In direction of preserving and reinforcing the Western component of Turkish identity and its accompanied norms, the AKP's officials have always declared that they will not cut Turkey's ties with Israel. Identity obligations are major parts of Turkey's priorities of national interests and as far as these relations are useful for Turkey, there is no reason for cutting them. In this context, the most significant reasons for not cutting the bilateral relations are as follows: using Israel as a lever for controlling Iran and Syria; persistence of the US and NATO financial and military aids; joining the European Union; preserving domestic legitimacy through accompanying Turkey's laic political system obligations.

Consequently the AKP's pattern that has accepted the Western secularism and civilization, on the one hand, and respects Islamic traditions, on the other, actually is a combination that makes peaceful coexistence with the West possible and prevents from identity crisis and



radicalism among Muslim groups. On this basis, among Muslim states, Turkey established the warmest relations with Israel. But at the same time, Turkey has a positive reputation among anti-Israel countries and groups including Hamas. Turkey invited Shimon Peres and Mahmood Abbas simultaneously for visiting Turkey and delivering lecture in Turkish parliament which indicates that the AKP emphasizes keep balance in its stances toward Arabs and Israel, and play the role of mediator, instead of being accused of supporting one of the sides.

On the other hand, Israel has always prioritized its relations with Turkey as a Muslim country and there is not much probability that Turkey's recent reactions affect Israel's tendency toward continuing these ties and cutting it, particularly given the recent revolutions of the region and losing such allies as Mubarak's Egypt and also the anti-Zionist nature of most of these revolutions, Israel's need to Turkey is more evident.

### **3. Restoring The Turkish-Israeli axis**

After several years of ongoing disputes, Israel regime and Turkey have finally reached an agreement that has restore diplomatic relations. The diplomatic break between the two countries occurred following the 2010 Israeli commando raid on the Mavi Marmara civilian ship – part of the “Gaza Freedom Flotilla – in which nine Turkish citizens and one Turkish American were killed.

According to the agreement, Turkey will prevent lawsuits against Israeli soldiers and officers, and Israel will put \$20 million into a fund to compensate the families of those killed.

The agreement could in fact have been reached years ago, as both sides' basic conditions for reconciliation were on the table in the early stages of negotiations.

The agreement is being widely ignored by the Turkish public, but has met severe criticism by right-wing Zionists, who claim that Israel has swallowed its national pride. Indeed, the agreement is far from optimal, as both sides had to compromise on key issues: Israel agreed to compensate those it perceives to be terrorists and was not able to bring back the remains of two soldiers killed during the 2014 Operation Protective Edge in Gaza, nor a prisoner held by Hamas. Turkey had to abandon its initial demand that Israel regime would lift the blockade against Gaza (Hershkovitz, 2016).

Nevertheless, the agreement serves the strategic interests of both sides. The agreement is first and foremost an expression of the attempts Sunni-Israel axis, which is aimed at countering that of Iran, Syria and the Shi'a. In light of the U.S.'s reluctance to take a prominent role in the Middle East, Turkey, Israel regime and Saudi Arabia are actively trying to reformulate the regional equation. The three countries are worried that the Syria state is increasingly strengthening its grip over Syria, and they fear Syria becoming a reinforced Iranian spearhead backed by Russia.

The struggle against ISIS is another point of shared strategic interest, as the terror group's latest defeats in Syria and Iraq will force it to change its strategy – i.e., less on-the-ground fighting, more spectacular global terror attacks. Turkey has already become one of ISIS's preferred targets (including Israelis in the country), as has Saudi Arabia. Israel regime fears not only ISIS targeting Zionists all over the world, but also of terror attacks along its borders with Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and Gaza.

Furthermore, Israel regime believes that Turkey may be able to restrain Hamas and even become a channel of communication with the organization – as well as a potential investor in Gaza's collapsing infrastructure. From Zionists's point of view, renewing bilateral relations with Ankara also serves to marginalize the Palestinian issue: Despite a very slight easing of the Gaza blockade, the agreement does not commit to new peace talks with the Palestinians, who are again observing the "party" from the sidelines. From Turkey's point of view, the agreement reinforces its image as the only protector of Palestinian interests, without forcing them to actively take action against Hamas activity on Turkish soil.

Ultimately, Ankara sees the tightening alliance between Egypt and Israel regime– as well as the discreet but warming relations between Israel, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states – and wants to join the club. At the same time, Turkey is concerned by the magnitude of military, security, political and economic cooperation between Israel, Greece and Cyprus in the Eastern Mediterranean basin.

Yet it is too early to announce a fully harmonized Sunni-Israel axis. There is still harsh resentment between Egypt and Turkey in light of the deep ideological divide between the two regimes: Turkey is dominated by a Muslim Brotherhood-oriented party (the AKP) and Egypt sees the Brotherhood as the source of all evil and as an existential threat. Egypt is also worried by the potential for Turkish involvement in Gaza to grow at

their own expense – and especially Ankara as Israel's main communication channel with Hamas. Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states are still suspicious towards the "Ottomans" and are not pleased that it is three non-Arab countries that set the regional tone.

Above all other factors and implications stands shared economic interest: Israel regime strongly desires to utilize Turkey as a client and gateway to export its huge gas reserves, as well as to expand bilateral trade (currently estimated at \$6 billion a year). Turkey is interested in reducing its energy dependence on Russia and Iran, potentially by purchasing gas from Israel regime and becoming an energy bridge for Israeli gas to the West.

All this being said, there may simply be too many ideological and political differences to expect a full restoration of the strategic alliance between the countries. It is hard to imagine, for example, significant arms deals or highly visible joint military exercises in the near future.

#### **4. Iran's preferences on Turkey-Israel-US Triangle**

Fragmentation of Ankara-Tel Aviv strategic axis and subsequently restoring it has some security-strategic implications for Iran which can be classified as follows:

##### **1-4- Israel's isolation and diminishing its maneuver power in the region**

Given its unique and nascent identity in the region, Israel has been shaped on the security bases, thus naturally it has provided a security-based definition of its identity and others' ones. In the approach based on security of environment, there are always some actors playing the role of threat and they are targeted in security policies. Promoting these policies is subjected to success at marshaling and regional alliance-building against threatening actor(s).

As a locked country among its enemies, Israel has sought to remove this isolation through adopting an peripheral strategy by establishing relations with non-Arab states like Turkey (Moshirzadeh, 2011: 248). Although Israel regards its evolution and existence as dependent on relations with the West, particularly the US, but it does not neglect the necessities and obligations related to its regional identity; an identity which is evidently contradicted with "common threat" resulted from its neighboring Arab and non-Arab surrounding. In such an objective and subjective space, Israel's most basic drive for military-security alliance

with Turkey is to marshal against Iran and Arabs. In other words, on the basis of Ankara-Tel Aviv axis, Israel made alliance with one of neighbor states against the other neighbor and prevented from making alliance against itself, on the one hand, and enjoyed upper hand against the Arabic front, particularly regarding the occupied territories, on the other. But as the result of changes at Turkey's authority level and peripheral developments such as the increase of Iran's role in Iraq since 2003 and Israel's borders since 2006 Lebanon War, and improvement of Turkish-Iranian relations, Turkey is no longer surrounded by enemies. On this basis, two main pillars of Israel-Turkish relations i.e. common threats and common understanding about the future of the region collapsed. In the shadow of these developments, Turkey has adopted a stance between "resistance front" and "moderate front" and talked on behalf of both parties, in direction of its regional role (Labbad, 2013). Therefore naturally as the result of the fragmentation of mentioned strategic axis, Israel has been isolated in entire region by both peripheral countries and Arab ones, and its maneuver power has been diminished. Israeli leaders' warnings to American statesmen regarding Iran's increasing role and influence in the region, particularly due to its cooperation with Turkey indicate Israel's strategic limitations.

#### **2-4- increasing Iran's maneuver power**

Many believe that Iran is the main winner in Turkey's changing strategy towards Israel because the subjective structure and meaning system of two states i.e. Iran and Israel are based on contradictory norms which represents them as threat against each other. Now by diminishing the position of one, the other will enjoy more security advantages. By fragmentation of Ankara-Tel Aviv axis and as the result of Israel's isolation in the region, Iran's power will increase at regional and trans-regional levels. On the one hand, Iran feels its first regional and world-level enemy which had become a neighbor due to alliance with Turkey, more remote from its borders. On the other hand, Iran goes out of conflicting competition with Turkey and mutual cooperation substitutes for it. In current situation that Iran's foreign and security policy is facing many obstacles at regional and world levels (such as nuclear crisis, regional crises of Iraq and Afghanistan, cold relations with Arabs, hostility with the US and Israel, and tension with the European Union) cooperation with Turkey may decrease these tensions. Turkey's behavior pattern in regional issues such as Iran's nuclear crisis and Palestine-Israel

crisis is a sign of upgrading identity and normative resemblance level between Iran and Turkey. If we add the political developments of the Arab World to this, we will witness many valuable opportunities in Iran's security-political environment that increase Iran's power of maneuver.

The prevailing view in the West is that new political-security and geopolitical developments including fragmentation of Ankara-Tel Aviv strategic axis, developments of Iraq and the movements of the Arab World have changed the balance in regional power and political structure in favor of Iran. Accordingly, this situation has had negative effects on the United States' strategic interests, its regional allies, particularly on Israel's position. During recent decades, preserving a balance of power policy between the regional actors has been the basis of American foreign policies in the region. This is while the recent developments have unbalanced power equations in favor of Iran (Barzegar, 2009: 28).

### **3-4- decreasing the trend and level of alliance-building against Iran**

Regional alliance-building and census-making is one of the most applied strategies of the US and Israel against Iran during past three decades. The more alliances and unifications enjoy geographical closeness, the more they are regarded as serious threats. The Turkey-Israel alliance enjoyed such a nature and function towards Iran. This alliance accelerated the trend of regional anti alliance-building because in the unsecure conditions resulted from unification and alliance of rivals and becoming a unified enemy, counter-alliance becomes the preferred strategy for targeted states. According to this rule, the counter-alliance of regional states focused on the pivot of making counter-alliances. In this direction, Tehran-Damascus axis and Arab axis were activated. It is mentionable that the Arab axis is naturally not only against Turkey-Israel ties but also has coherently targeted regional actors including Iran. While Iran is deprived of making alliance with its peripheral states, the Arab axis's alliance with the peripheral states is regarded as a security problem which is resulted from strategy and counter-strategy of alliance building in the region.

Regional conflicts appear as the result of increasing the trend and level of regional alliance and counter-alliance. Therefore by fragmentation of Ankara-Tel Aviv axis, the regional counter-alliances will lose their previous meaning and functional necessity. Thus the probability of happening multi-frontal conflicts and quarrels will diminish in the region.

#### **4-4- upgrading the level of Iran's official playing towards Israel**

By not recognizing Israel, the Islamic Republic adopted a distinctive and unique stance at the world level; a stance which has been deprived of being accompanied by the international society. The states as the formal actors of international system have not participated in the Islamic republic's radical stances against Israel. At the level of formal actors, the only exception is Syria that backed Iran's anti-Israel policies. Thus Iran's policy towards Israel has had several limited centers which except for Syria, the others are regarded as informal actors in international system. In other words, Iran's supporters against Israel include: Syria, Lebanon's Hezbollah, and Palestinian revolutionary groups. Fragmentation of Ankara-Tel Aviv strategic axis and adopting critical challenging stances towards Israel by Turkey are more consistent with Iran's regional strategy, thus they have upgraded Iran's role towards Israel. Anti-Israeli formal role-playing which is developed as the result of Turkey-Israel strategic fragmentation is having newer aspects after recent developments of the Arab World which can be understood in the framework of Islamic geo-culture.

#### **5. Iran's security and foreign policy on Israel**

The aforementioned strategy has some valuable opportunities for Iran's security-defense strategy. The appropriate use of new situation requires planning and implementing a defense strategy which is consistent with Iran's security conditions and also the region.

##### **1-5- resistance defense strategy**

Iran's most basic defense strategy towards Israel has been resistance and formation of a type of resistance identity. As pointed out before, anti-Israel resistance has been operationalized by Iran-Syria axis and regional informal actors. Resistance is a type of multi-faceted strategy. According to a simple definition "resistance culture is a kind of life and thought which is defined and determined by resistance against Israel as an occupier. In resistance discourse, all individual and social behaviors and practices are defined within the framework of "resistance" and "struggle" as master-signifier. In this culture, struggling against Israel is not only a national task but a divine and religious duty" (Dehghani Firouzabadi, 2007: 57-92).

By banishing Turkey from Israel's regional stances, fragmentation of Ankara-Tel Aviv axis caused weakening the peace and compromise discourse and dominating resistance discourse in Arab-Israel conflict. Reinforcing Islamism, spreading resistance discourse and weakening peace discourse culminated in reinforcing and upgrading the position and role of those forces and states that do not recognize Israel's existence. These developments mean that the strategic balance has been changed in favor of Israel's enemies and against Israel and the US. Consequently Iran's resistance-oriented stances which are now accompanied by Turkey have been reinforced, although Turkey's stances are more or less different from Iran's. The spread of resistance as a norm in the region has culminated in formation of a resistance identity that will trigger actors to defend their national and ideological interests. Islamic resistance is not only a defensive or aggressive military-political combat, but a combat with an ideological, religious and cultural nature. Thus defending Muslims through anti-Israel resistance which is regarded as Iran's basic strategy experiences a new era as the result of Turkey's banishing from Israel and change in regional marshal.

### **2-5- cooperationist defense strategy**

Type and quantity of similarity and dissimilarity among regional actors' security perceptions depict a spectrum of defense strategies against threat sources that include from cooperation to conflict. As an organizer of a sort of regional identity in terms of security, cooperationism is realized when the efficient regional actors enjoy similarity and resemblance in their meaning system and security perception. "In geographical spheres in which there are signs of strategic interests, rivalry among regional actors and great powers is inevitable." (Motaghi, 2010: 269). In such circumstances, the regional actors should have a similar perception towards the role and necessity of foreign great actors in the region so that they can proximate their regional and international views to each other and reach a balance point. Fragmentation of Ankara-Tel Aviv reinforced this perception that it is better to solve regional problems on the basis of regional realities and solutions. After the developments of the Arab World, this trend of regionalism has been more focused on.

The cooperationist approach of Iran and Turkey within the framework of bilateral participation has a significant role in regional multilateral

participation (security regionalism). Changing Turkey's strategic policy towards Israel indicates that Ankara has adopted a maximum-oriented look to the Middle East and Islam World in the direction of reinforcing regional identity and consequently, its own regional and world role. As the result of this change, Turkey has abandoned pro-Western camp and chosen strategic participation with Iran (Inbar, 2011: 143). Turkey's cooperation with Iran challenges Israel and the US's policies towards Iran and Iran-related issues such as its nuclear program. Turkey's current stance culminating in adopting such policies as refusing support additional sanctions against Iran (March and June 2010) allows Iran to become more immune to economic pressure and enhances Iranian power in the region (ibid.). Ankara-Tehran axis which was regarded as a threat by Arab states has faced a different regional approach as the result of 2011 developments in the political space of the region. On this basis, in the current regional situation, multilateral and bilateral participation (on the pivot of Turkey) in the shadow of regional identity leanings is Iran's most basic defense strategy against international society (led by the US and Israel) so that it can decrease its security vulnerability.

### **3-5- balance-oriented defense strategy**

Balance of power is traditional security norm in the Middle East. Iran-Iraq, Iran-Saudi Arabia and Saudi Arabia-Egypt have been the poles of this traditional system. Since 1990, by formation of Ankara-Tel Aviv strategic axis and its fragmentation since 2003, a new normative formation of power balance shaped in the region which got more complicated as the result of adding Turkey to the strategic equations. During 1990s, the region witnessed a bipolar power balance system in which each pole was consisted of two allied actors: the first was Israel-Turkey axis and the other was Iran-Syria axis (Figure 1). After the fragmentation of the first axis, a new three-polar balance of power system has emerged consisting of Turkey, Israel, and Iran-Syria (Figure 2).

Data indicates a kind of balance of power system that makes it difficult for Iran to handle security-strategic challenges. By fragmentation of Ankara-Tel Aviv axis, Turkey-Syria relations upgraded to a strategic participation. Therefore in such a situation, the traditional norm (Iran-Syria counter-alliance) loses a part of its functional necessity (Cornell, 2012: 14). Figure 2 depicts a more desirable balance of power system for Iran. Every balance of power system has its specific normative and



behavioral obligation at international relations stage and on this basis, it entails competition which is basically leaning to cooperation or conflict. Figure 1 indicates a kind of competition leaning to conflict between Iran and Turkey and Figure 2 indicates a kind of competition leaning to cooperation and participation between the two states because Turkey plays a more constructive role in the region due to deepening its relations with Iran, Syria, Iraq and supporting Palestine and it is not merely the representative of the West's interest in the region (Rahman, 2011). Of course, it should be added that after the developments of the Arab world and changing of Turkey's stances towards Syria which is in contradiction with Iran's regional approach so this kind of balance has lost its stability.

Iran regards the formation of resistance axis as its most important achievement in the Middle East in which Syria is the focal actor. This axis provides required tools and capabilities for Iran's more widespread role at regional stage and plays a deterrent role against security threats of Iran's rivals and enemies (Vaezi, 2011: 17). As one of the main poles of regional balance of power system, Israel is regarded as the main target of Iran's deterrence and balance-building in which Syria is located at the center. Therefore the contradiction of interests between Iran and Turkey over Syria may have harmful effects on regional power balance system.

## **Conclusion**

This paper suggests two closely related conclusions: Good Turkish-Israeli relations are essential to the insecurity and destabilizing of the Middle East, and U.S. leadership confronts to a problem is which to play a key role in shaping the Turkish-Israeli relationship.

Turkey carries great regional and international weight. Sliding away from the West has serious consequences for the balance of power in the Middle East and for global politics. Currently, the Middle East is divided between the ascending Islamic Iran and its allies, and the pro-Western forces, Israel and most Arab states. Until recently, Turkey seemed to belong to the pro-West camp, but it probably crossed the Rubicon when Erdoğan visited Iran in October 2009. With Turkey crossing lines, it will be more difficult for the international community to contain Iran and curb its nuclear program. In the absence of Turkish cooperation on economic sanctions against Iran, their problematic value becomes even more questionable. This enhances Iranian power in the region, which probably will prove to become Turkey's largest strategic miscalculation.

Nevertheless, Erdoğan's government views cooperation between Syria, Turkey and Iran as an important element in regional stability. The three obviously cooperate on the Kurdish issue. Moreover, Turkey's shift in foreign policy will undoubtedly strengthen Iran's grip over Syria and Lebanon. This will allow Iran to establish a "Shiite corridor" to the Mediterranean. Iran will gain an even greater influence in Shiite southern Iraq after the American departure and will strengthen its presence in the Levant by territorially linking via Iraq to Syria and Hizballah in Lebanon. Such a development will enhance Iranian capability to project power in the Eastern Mediterranean. Furthermore, it will end any illusions about snatching Syria away from the radical camp in order to strengthen the democratic forces in Lebanon or to facilitate a peace treaty between Syria and Israel. An Ankara-Tehran axis (the northern tier) will pressure the pro-Western Arab states to the south. Beyond the current tensions between Egypt and Iran, we see growing tensions with Turkey as well. While Turkey's international behavior has gained sympathy on the Arab street, the pro-Western Arab leaders seem less enchanted. They view Turkey's present foreign policy with great concern. Thus, Iran can see the chances is which them using has strategic importance for it.

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