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The Turkish – Israeli Relations in 2013: Modest Expectations

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Özet

Türk-İsrail ilişkileri tarih boyunca hiçbir zaman tam bir istikrara ulaşmamıştır, ve bazı uçlar arasındaki dalgalanma her zaman için ayırt edici bir faktör olmuştur. Ancak filo olayı Türk vatandaşlarının ölümünden kaynaklanan bir anomaliye yol açmış, ve ilişkilere önemli ölçüde zarar vermiştir. Hem Türkiye hem de İsrail'in demokratik siyasi sistemleri ikili ilişkilerde kamuoyunu çok önemli bir unsur olarak görmekte, ve bariz bir (ikili ilişkileri) yeniden yapılandırma teşebbüsü kamu desteğini güvence altına almalıdır, bu ise durumu karmaşık hâle getirmektedir. Öte yandan, bölgedeki mevcut güvenlik ortamı 2010 yılındaki ortamla aynı değildir. Kısacası, filo olayı meydana geldiği sırada Buazizi Tunus'taki zorlu yaşam koşullarına karşı mücadele veriyordu. İki yıl içinde Arap dünyasında diktatörler devrildi, ve Suriye'de ise iç savaş devam ediyor. Dolayısıyla, yeniden yapılandırmaya ilişkin kısıtlamalara rağmen, Türkiye ve İsrail arasında sınırlı düzeyde bir güvenlik işbirliğine ihtiyaç duyulabilir. Askeri güçler son savaşa hazırlanırken, stratejistler ise son statükoyu, yani 1990'lardaki Türk-İsrail anlaşması, çerçevesinde düşünme eğilimindedirler. Ne var ki, bu çalışma 2013 yılındaki Türk-İsrail ilişkileri eksenine dair başka bir senaryo öne sürmektedir; tarihin derinliklerinde bulunan başka bir işbirliği modeli, 1958 Çevresel Paktı...

In sum, we have negative factors that hinder prospects of a major restoration, and some positive factors showing that Turkey and Israel have reached the limits of their crisis. Thus, now it would be accurate to assess the changing security environment which these two actors will have to face in 2013.

Abstract

The Turkish – Israeli relations have never been perfectly stable throughout the history, and fluctuation between certain extremes has always been a characteristic factor. However, the flotilla incident caused an anomaly by inflicting deaths of Turkish citizens, and harming people to people relations significantly. The democratic political systems of both Turkey and Israel makes public opinion a crucial parameter of bilateral ties, and any open restoration attempts should secure public support that makes it complicated. On the other hand, current regional security environment is not the same with that of 2010. Put simply, Bouazizi was struggling for his hard life in Tunis when the flotilla incident happened. Within two years, we have dictators fallen in the Arab world, and a civil war is ongoing in Syria. Thus, despite the constraints of restoration, there might be a need for limited security cooperation between Turkey and Israel. As militaries prepare for the last battle, strategists tend to think within the framework of the last status quo, namely, the Turkish – Israeli entente in the 1990s. However, this study suggests another scenario for a forecast on the trajectory of the Turkish – Israeli relations in 2013; another cooperation model that could be found deep in history, the Peripheral Pact of 1958...

Keywords: *Peripheral Pact, Turkish-Israeli Relations, Flotilla, Syria, Chemical Weapons, Iran, Ballistic Missiles*

Introduction

Starting from the Operation Cast Lead in 2008, which hindered Turkey's mediation efforts between Syria and Israel at that time, the Turkish – Israeli relations have deteriorated gradually. It was in May-June 2010, by the flotilla incident, when the downtrend was dramatically accelerated by an anomaly, and the bilateral ties fell to historical low. Since then, no major restoration attempts were made by either of the two parties, and domestic political factors rule out any concessions.

On the other hand, in parallel with the drastic shift in the relations, regional security environment was shaken by the turbulence in the Arab world that dragged Syria, a common border nation of Turkey and Israel, into a chaotic civil war.

Under these circumstances, this study makes a slightly modified reference to Charles Dickens' famous *Great Expectations*, and suggests "modest expectations" when depicting possible trajectory of the Turkish – Israeli relations in 2013. In fact, also Dickens preferred a modest and ambiguous ending for the relationship between his main characters, *Pip* and *Estella*; an ending that is far away from their glamorous days and open-ended that reader would never be sure about what might happen ever after.

This article firstly lays out trends in 2012's security environment that would shape prospects and merits of the Turkish – Israeli relations in the forthcoming year. Then, domestic political equa-

tion, which is argued to be a crucial factor, would be analyzed in order to show what couldn't be achieved. As the limits of rapprochement will be defined at that point, then this article's main thesis, namely the strategic forecast assessing that Turkey and Israel might probably develop a narrow, limited security cooperation, which would look like the Peripheral Pact of 1958 rather than the over strategic partnership of the 1990s, will be elaborated. Within this context, the paper examines Syrian WMD capability as an imminent threat, and Iran's rising political-military profile as a menacing trend that might pave the ground for a limited, security-focused restoration.

1. The Turkish – Israeli Crisis Reached Its Limits

Following the downtrend period of 2008 – 2011 in the Turkish – Israeli relations, it would be fair to say that 2012 was “tense as usual”, but nothing has gone worse significantly. Although political and diplomatic deterioration has continued, trade relations remained resilient. From 2010 to 2011, there was an increase about 30.7 percent, and despite the slight decrease in 2012, the trade profile was still above the pre-flotilla level.¹ Another positive factor is that the two countries have not clashed in the Eastern Mediterranean up until now. In fact, all parameters were pointing out prospects of further tensions, and even a military challenge in this sea basin. First, hydrocarbon resources off the island Cyprus is an important factor for more power struggle. Second, given the Turkish Foreign Minister Prof. Ahmet Davutoglu's “navigation security” emphasis in September 2011, Turkey's high naval profile along with its strong military presence in Northern Cyprus, and the Israeli escalation practice during the flotilla crisis; it would be accurate to say that the armed potential was there waiting for a miscalculation. And third, in May 2012, when Turkish officials from Ankara and Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) indicated that an Israeli jet has violated the TRNC airspace; many experts, including the author of this

article, have forecasted emergence of a situation that might have been similar to Turkish – Greek tensions in the Aegean. Fortunately, such a serious military escalation did not happen. And finally, several press sources reported that there were some very early contacts between Turkish and Israeli officials, recently in Switzerland.²

On the other hand, factors that cause more pessimism about prospects of restoration of the relations are still solid, and don't seem to change in a near future. First, as it will be elaborated in subsequent sections, Ankara would not step back from its pre-conditions to normalize the relations; and Israel is not likely to make a major concession. Second, despite the resilience of trade relations, defense cooperation, the most important aspect of the bilateral ties, has dropped like a rock. And third, following the flotilla incident, people to people relations were harmed to a certain level.

In sum, we have negative factors that hinder prospects of a major restoration, and some positive factors showing that Turkey and Israel have reached the limits of their crisis. Thus, now it would be accurate to assess the changing security environment which these two actors will have to face in 2013.

1.1. Regional Security Environment in 2012 and Trends for 2013: Not the Best Times for Turkey and Israel

As indicated before, this study anticipates that in short term, a comprehensive restoration of the Turkish – Israeli relations were unlikely to a certain extent, but at the same time, limited security cooperation could be possible. Within this context, this section lays out the possible trajectory of regional security environment in 2013, and key outcomes of 2012.

Following the Operation Cast Lead (OCL) in 2008, Israel Defense Forces (IDF) has recently



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conducted a major military effort in Gaza, the Operation Pillar of Defense (OPD). Unlike the OCL, IDF hasn't initiated a ground incursion this time, and the OPD came to an end by some 1,500 air strikes in total, along with targeted-killings against several senior operatives of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, such as Ahmed Jabari, the head of Hamas' military wing.³

The threat landscape that paved the ground for OPD is more important than the military technical details of the operation. For the first time, militant groups in Gaza reached rocket capability to threaten the Israeli heartland through Fajr-5s with 70 – 75 kms of range. In 2008, Fajr-3s were able to cover 40-45 kms of range, and the 30kms of difference between Fajr-3 and Fajr-5 has changed course of the conflict by enabling Gazan militants to hit Israel's center of gravity.

Within this context, two issues loom large in the Israeli security environment. First, security of Sinai and political instability in Egypt present a severe danger to Israel, as obviously the naval blockade wasn't able to prevent Hamas and Islamic Jihad from enhancing their military capabilities. In fact, since the fall of Mubarak, many reports have pointed out the growing danger in this strategic buffer peninsula, Sinai, and current situation shouldn't be a surprise.⁴ Apart from the threat against Israeli energy security that has already gained importance, the recent Fajr-5 issue revealed a serious power vacuum, probably starting from Sudan and moves through Sinai into the Philadelphia route, and finally reaches Gaza. Moreover, Iran's Revolutionary Guards publicly admitted their support to Gazan militant groups following the OPD.⁵ Thereby, Gaza issue is becoming a more troublesome headache

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for Israel, and Iranian military involvement is a crucial risk factor, especially given the outcome of the Lebanon experience in 2006.

Apart from Gaza, the turbulence in the Arab world, which is called *Arab Spring* by many, has created a complicated situation for both Turkey and Israel. Israeli right-wing experts tend to see the situation in a pessimistic way, indicating that the turbulence in the Arab world has hindered Israel's deterrence, created more security risks, and has brought about strategic surprises.⁶ On Turkey's side, the expectations were high at its outset, as "the Turkish model", which can be defined as the combination of conservatism, democracy, and liberal economy, could have become an inspiring example for the new Arab regimes. However, as the "spring" reached Bahrain and Syria, it turned into a sectarian struggle, and triggered more Iranian involvement that created an unfavorable situation for Ankara. This new strategic equation has had serious repercussions particularly in Syria and Iraq; and, it is argued, a power struggle between Ankara and Tehran is still ongoing.

Furthermore, the trajectory of events in Syria has also triggered a Kurdish secessionist aspect that might create bigger problems for Turkey in a near future. Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) terrorist organization's presence in northern plains of Syria, from Qamishli to Afrin, is structurally different than its presence in Northern Iraq. In Northern Iraq, PKK has tactical and operational-level terror sites, and a so-called "command & control" body in Iran – Iraq border, Qandil

Mountains. On the other hand, in Kurdish-populated areas of Syria the terrorist organization has political proxies (i.e. PYD), and this development overlaps with the Syrian-Kurdish dominance in PKK's notorious terror apparatus, HPG. Thus, following Assad's probable demise, possible emergence of a second Kurdish autonomy, right in the Turkish border and in contact with KRG, would bring about a very complicated threat landscape against Turkey's national security. In geopolitical terms, Turkey might have over 1000kms border with two Kurdish autonomies where PKK operates intensely. Furthermore, should pro-PKK elements in Syria manage to secure sea access, the Kurdish secessionist movement and separatist terrorism would overcome its historical land-locked character.⁷ Such an improvement might change the geopolitical course of defending Turkey against the separatist terrorism threat.

In sum, this study argues that the year 2013's "strategic legacy" from 2012 has presented an ambiguous security environment and a troublesome threat landscape for both Turkey and Israel. In some crucial aspects, which will be elaborated in following sections, Turkish and Israeli decision-makers have been facing some overlapping threats. Thus, the intersections in the two national security agendas form the basis of this article's argument that forecasts limited security cooperation in 2013. In parallel, domestic political parameters block the way for a comprehensive restoration and make the limited security cooperation the only way forward option.

1.2. “Between Two Democracies”: Domestic Political Constraints of Restoring the Turkish – Israeli Relations in 2013

The Turkish – Israeli relations’ last 4 years were definitely not the best of bilateral ties’ record throughout the history. Road to the flotilla incident was elaborated in many studies with different perspectives. Above all, the bottom line is; by the flotilla raid, for the first time, civilian casualties became a part of downtrend in the relations.

Turkish–Israeli partnership in a troublesome security environment has not only been cooperation between the two most important military powers of the Middle East, but also a consolidation between two western democracies in a region of tyrannies and dictatorships. In other words, for theoretically explaining the Turkish – Israeli ties, there should be relevant interest and power struggle-based realist calculus, along with identity-based constructivism, and even liberal analytical frameworks (*i.e. democratic peace theory*).

This overall depiction about the nature of the relations points out a complex system. Clearly, strategic partnership with Turkey has provided Israel strategic depth, ability to contain Syria, Iran and Iraq from north; and also the legitimacy of being strategic partners with a secular, Muslim nation that is an important member of NATO, and the successor of Ottoman Empire, one of the most powerful Islamic actors in the history that has held caliphate and ruled Palestine for centuries.

On the other hand, this complex character of the relations makes any restoration attempts harder at the same time. Put simply, domestic political parameters of the Turkish – Israeli ties are very different than Israel’s relations with Jordan’s Hashemite house. Both Turkey and Israel are democracies in which governments have to get voters’ support for political legitimacy, and simply, for the next term. Turkey will have 3 elections in 2014 and 2015; namely municipality and presidential elections in 2014, and parliamentary

elections in 2015. Following the *Mavi Marmara* raid, Ankara has stipulated three pre-conditions to restore the relations; an official public apology, full compensation for the victims of the incident, and removal of the blockade in Gaza.⁸ Stepping back from these preconditions would have serious repercussions in domestic politics, and such a concession is not likely. On the other hand, Israel is holding elections in January 2013 and Netanyahu-Liberman (*Likud Israel Beiteinu*) bloc seems to be able to secure the leading position.

In sum, we have more or less similar domestic political pictures in Turkey and Israel: Two powerful and popular PMs at both sides, who have been able to secure conservative, right, and center-right votes, and who have been easily competing with fragmented political oppositions that are away from offering attractive political alternatives to people. Both of the countries have strong militaries that are able to protect national borders. Following the last decades’ developments in Ankara, both Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) and IDF are under civil oversight, and there is no more paternalist military guardianship in Turkey that shaped the 1990s’ Turkish – Israeli partnership’s domestic political dynamics.

In the light of points discussed hitherto, this article tried to lay out what cannot be achieved, along with the major trends in the security environment in which the Turkish – Israeli relations might find a way forward in 2013. From now on, the piece will focus on the “alternative restoration model”, or Peripheral Pact, and its correlation with the present strategic parameters.

2. Geopolitical Grounds of the “1958 Model” and the Current Conjuncture: Does anyone has a Time Machine?

Main handicap when assessing the prospects of rapprochement between Turkey and Israel is to limit the analytical framework with the 1990s case in the Turkish – Israeli relations. Apart from the open strategic partnership that culminated in 1996, the two countries have another

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cooperation record, or model, that depends on “Peripheral Pact” signed by Turkey’s conservative PM at that time, Adnan Menderes, and his Israeli counterpart, David Ben Gurion in 1958.

Unlike the overt strategic partnership of the 1990s, the Turkish- Israeli covert security cooperation had dealt with a narrow military and intelligence agenda during the late 1950s and mid/early 1960s. Moreover, at both sides, only top political decision-makers and key figures of military and intelligence apparatuses were involved in these covert security ties. Even PM Ben Gurion’s visit to Turkey in August 1958 was kept secret.⁹

The main geopolitical ground of 1958’s covert pact was the worsening security environment in Syria and Iraq. Both parties perceived the Iraqi July 14 “revolution” as a threat, and the United Arab Republic era in Syria was another matter of concern among both of the strategic communities. It is known that in 1959, even Turkish and Israeli general staffs at that time had prepared a joint operation plan against Syria.¹⁰

At present, considering the rising Tehran influence in the region and Iranian military trend; along with the mounting imminent threat in Syria, it would be fair to say that the current security environment has been showing harbingers of a potential convergence between Turkish and Israeli threat perceptions. These two countries are now in a situation in which the restoration of relations publicly has domestic political repercussions for either of the actors depending on con-

cessions. However, lack of security cooperation might also have unfavorable outcomes. Furthermore, Turkey’s soft power initiative under Prof. Davutoglu’s foreign policy doctrine, which aims to consolidate socio-cultural bridges between Turkey and Muslim streets, could be rendered abortive by a “very close and intimate picture” with Israel. Thus, due to domestic political reasons and keeping its soft power capacity effective, Ankara cannot re-form its ties with Israel depending on the 1990s’ model. On the other hand, Turkey and Israel cannot stay indifferent to their overlapping threat perceptions. The next section will examine convergence factors that might enable a limited security cooperation that wouldn’t be necessarily conducted under spotlights.

3. Assessing the Convergence Factors in Turkish – Israeli Common Threat Landscape

As the covert Peripheral Pact was based on intersecting threat perceptions, sort of repetition of this model is expected follow the same track. Given the security environment surrounding Turkey and Israel, next two sections lay out an imminent threat, the Syrian WMD arsenal, and a mid-term trend, Iran, as two convergence factors that might pave the ground for limited, narrow security cooperation.

3.1. The Imminent Threat or Window of Opportunity: Syrian WMD Arsenal

Syria, which is not a party to the Chemical Weapons Convention, holds a notorious chemi-

cal arsenal, and allegedly, has been running a biological weapons program too. In its dangerous inventory, the Baathist regime keeps a significant amount of sarin and tabun nerve gasses and VX, along with mustard blister agents. Furthermore, Syria's dispersion capability is also a serious threat. Apart from of aerial bombs and artillery assets, a combination of ballistic missiles and chemical warheads provides Assad's forces the ability to threaten its neighbors from depth of the country.¹¹ Under the Missile Command, Syrian Armed Forces has three surface-to-surface missile (SSM) brigades of which, at least one of them, is capable of launching SCUD types and variants short-range ballistic missiles (SRBM). This SRBM inventory enables the regime to cover an area from 300kms (*via SCUD B*) to 700-800 kms (*via SCUD C about 500-600kms, and via SCUD D –North Korean No Dong– variant up to 700-800kms*) depending on several factors like type, modifications, and warhead.¹² Thus, an important proportion of Turkey's territory, and entire Israeli lands fall under the Assad's forces' chemical warhead-ballistic missile range. As a matter of fact, in November 2012, Turkish President Abdullah Gul raised his concerns about a possible "madness" of the Baathist regime¹³. And eventually, Ankara has officially requested the deployment of missile defense systems from NATO on 21st November 2012.¹⁴ Likewise Ankara's threat perception, also PM Benjamin Netanyahu recently indicated that Israel has been monitoring events related with the Syrian chemical threat carefully. Nonetheless, Israel Defense Forces (IDF) has effective missile defense coverage at several altitudes, and Turkey is coming under NATO protection soon, with at least 6 Patriot batteries being deployed on Turkish soil.

Assad's chemical inventory presents threat in two aspects. The first aspect is a state-led aggression. In case of an uncontrolled fall of the regime, some rogue and radical elements within the Baathist circles might say *après moi le deluge*. Given the 1982 notorious crackdown conducted by Hafez al Assad, when he used cyanide gas for massacring more than 18.000 Sunnis, possibility of state-led aggression scenario should be taken into consideration.¹⁵ Second, even assum-

ing that Assad clan either will not be able to use its WMD arsenal, or step down upon a gradual transition; securing the chemical and biological agents will be a vital issue for Turkey and Israel. Both states have been facing asymmetric threats related with Syria for a long time.

On Turkey's side, PKK's reach to chemical and biological agents would be a nightmare scenario that would give a true terror weapon into the hands of a dangerous terrorist organization that seeks to commit sensational attacks in urban areas. Furthermore, given the Syrian-Kurdish elements' mounting influence in HPG, the so called "armed wing" of PKK; and also considering PKK-aligned actors' rise in Syria, Ankara would definitely want to secure all chemical and biological agents to the last piece. In parallel, transfer of chemical warheads and biological agents to Hezbollah is a red line for Israel.

In military terms, securing a WMD arsenal in a hostile and troublesome territory is one of the hardest missions for armed forces. It requires precise and perfect military intelligence to fully detect all sites, specialized teams to secure deadly agents without causing contamination, and combat assets to provide operational security. Recently, Pentagon estimated that it would require some 75.000 troops to seize the Syrian WMD sites.¹⁶ Without a doubt, Turkish and Israeli intelligences are among the most experienced and focused in Syrian affairs, and their militaries would be effective given their geographical familiarities and logistical support. Thus, this study argues that the urgent and critical need for securing the Syrian chemical and biological arsenal following Assad's possible demise, and also the issue of ballistic missile-chemical warhead threat might create a window of opportunity that would bring about a limited but vital cooperation between Turkey and Israel.

3.2. Iranian Military Trend and Political Influence: Could Turkey and Israel be on the Same Page?

At the beginning of the Justice and Development Party era, the Turkish – Iranian relations seemed

promising. Under the positive atmosphere, some claimed an axis-shift for Turkey, and even some related the alleged axis-shift with the rising conservatism in Ankara. However, as the biggest political and economic success story of conservatism in Turkey, AK Party has always attached utmost importance to Ottoman Empire's political-military legacy, and Iran stands nowhere near being a historical Ottoman ally, but a true geopolitical archrival. In fact, as Ankara started to pursue a more assertive agenda in the Middle East, Tehran has raised its voice more, many times through a harsh rhetoric. Especially starting from 2011, top Iranian figures have begun to play more open when threatening Turkey. For instance, in October 2011, Major General Yahya Rahim Safavi, the top adviser of the Supreme Leader, stressed in a menacing way that Turkey had to rethink its policies in Syria, NATO missile shield, and promoting secularism in the Arab world.¹⁷ Other top officials have also kept threatening Ankara about NATO assets in Turkey, by hitting them in case of a preventive operation against Iranian rogue nuclear program.

At present, Tehran's stance is going a step further by opposing the PAC-3 deployment which is a defensive weapons system. Recently, Iran's military Chief of Staff, Gen. Hassan Firouzabadi, said that Patriot deployment could lead to a "world war".¹⁸ In fact, Tehran's reaction to improvement of Turkey's missile defense capability might give a hint about merits of Iranian military trend.

One of the most important trends that might cause a limited rapprochement between Turkey and Israel is Iran's assertive missile program. For instance, in May 2009, Iran has tested its new solid-propellant, two-stage ballistic missile, the Sejil-2. Following this test, Tehran reached the range over 2,000kms that enables it to cover the Turkish capital, as well as the major population and industrial centers of the Marmara region. Although we don't know how much of the Sejil-2 capability is deployed in missile bridges, this was an important indicator showing the Iranian military modernization trend.¹⁹ On Israel's side, development of the Sejil-2 did not mean a dras-

tic change in range as Iran could already cover Israeli territory with Shahab-3, the first Medium Range Ballistic Missile (MRBM) of Tehran. However, the solid-propellant system of Sejil-2 shortened the launch cycle, and increased operational effectiveness.²⁰ Thus, the ongoing Iranian military modernization, especially developments in missile capability, has been creating a common threat perception for Turkey and Israel. As a matter of fact, Turkish press reported that in December 2011 PM Erdogan has asked four-star generals of Turkey's Supreme Military Council (SMC) about Iranian missile range, in comparison with Turkey's capabilities in that field. And, after getting an answer that stated an unacceptable gap, the PM, as the chair of the SMC and also the under secretariat for Defense Industries, has ordered improvement of the Turkish missile capability.²¹

Without a doubt, another common national security interest of Turkey and Israel is to prevent Iran's ongoing nuclearization. Unlike the Israeli reaction, which hasn't excluded preventive strike option up until now, Ankara has embraced a calm and consistent stance that opposed nuclear weapons in the Middle East, and also an operation against Iran at the same time. However, the Iranian nuclear program can be depicted as a mathematical countdown system in which Tehran has successfully used negotiations and peaceful solution initiatives as opportunities of buying time so far.

From the Israeli point of view; the Iranian nuclear threat is tantamount to a combination of ideological challenge to the very existence of a Jewish State, possibility of WMD capability at the hands of a radical and revolutionary regime, and finally, a constant threat that can be triggered in case of miscalculation or irrationality.²² On the other hand, a nuclear Iran would mean collapse of over 5-centuries long balance of power between Turkey and Iran that could be traced back to the Battle of Chaldiran in 1514.

Furthermore, there is a strong connection between the Iranian nuclear program and the Revo-

lutionary Guards (IRGC) that also controls most of the surface-to-surface missile capability, along with chemical, biological, radiological (CBN) assets.²³ The recent Iranian attack at a U.S. drone in November 2012 is important to understand operational culture and aggression limits of the IRGC. The close air support plane that was commissioned in that operation, a SU-25, is the only high-performance aircraft that IRGC uses apart from the regular Iranian air force, thus, this shows that the operation was probably conducted by them.²⁴ Thereby, given the fact that most probably IRGC will also control future nuclear capability, should Iran succeed to reach it, Turkey and Israel cannot rely on level of cautiousness in Tehran.

Along with the rising Iranian ballistic missile threat, and nuclear program; Tehran's political influence in Iraq, Gaza, Syria, Lebanon as well as Qud's Forces intelligence capabilities in those areas, are also likely to promote convergence in threat perceptions of Turkey and Israel. Recently, Ankara has seen that rising Iranian influence in Baghdad could threaten the Turkish military presence in Northern Iraq, and hinder Turkish companies' interests in lucrative energy deals. Given Maliki administration's aggressive shift against Turkey, and regarding the Baathist regime's foreign support from Tehran in the Syrian turmoil; it would be fair to say that Iran has been standing right in the way of Turkey's regional leadership agenda.

Clearly, rising Iranian political-military profile might put Turkey and Israel on the same page. Though, there are two different level of threat perceptions. For Israel, Iran poses an existential threat while Ankara would see Tehran as a regional competitor. Furthermore, this paper depicts Syrian WMD issue as an imminent threat, but the Iranian factor as a trend. Nonetheless, although it doesn't necessitate urgent security cooperation like the mission of securing Syrian terror arsenal would require; IRGC's aggressive breakthrough attempts can definitely pave the way for narrow and limited security cooperation between Turkey and Israel in 2013.

Conclusion

Fluctuation within acceptable limits is more than a half a century-long characteristic of the Turkish – Israeli relations. However, the flotilla incident was an anomaly that has made it enormously harder to restore the bilateral ties. For the first time, Turkey suffered civilian casualties due to an Israeli operation, and Israel has lost its only non-Arab, secular, Muslim ally. Following the Islamic revolution of Iran in 1979, this was the second biggest strategic loss of Israeli decision-makers in the region.

When Turkey and Israel faced this crisis, Bouazizi was still alive, struggling for his life in Tunisia. He hadn't set himself on fire at that time, and Turkey was enjoying its rising soft power capacity while Ankara and Damascus were holding joint cabinet meetings. Yet, at that time Iranian officials hadn't threatened Turkey by hitting NATO assets on Turkish soil.

Then, all calculus started to change, and now, Tunis seems relatively stable, while there is an ongoing civil war in Syria, and PKK terrorist organization strives to extend its control over Turkey's southern borders. Furthermore, Sinai has turned into a hostile environment for Israel, and by Iran's military assistance, Hamas managed to fire rockets at Tel Aviv metropolitan area, and Jerusalem. All happened fast, just within two years after the flotilla incident.

This study concludes possible trajectory of the Turkish – Israeli relations in 2013 considering the *tour d'horizon* given above. On the other hand, domestic political factors constrain an open partnership. At this point, the Peripheral Pact of 1958 could be a good start for finding a viable model in order to weather the storm in the region without being discredited in voters' eyes.

The 1958 Peripheral Pact was a political decision under the absolute oversight of Prime Minister Adnan Menderes. On the other hand, during the 1990s, strategic partnership was more or less imposed to political decision-makers by the

paternalist military elite at that time. Under the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) era, starting from November 2002, Turkish Armed Forces has gradually transformed from its political guardianship role into a capable national defense body. This trend has put an end to decades' long double-headed political fragmentation of the Turkish decision-making system, and has initiated a robust government control on military affairs. Thus, at any restoration attempts, Israeli officials now have to negotiate with the Turkish government.

Moreover, "the 1958 model" offers a narrow framework that would be limited with security issues. And it does not necessitate PMs shaking hands before cameras. It would focus solely on military and intelligence issues.

In sum, 2013 might bring about "modest expectations" with some important security outcomes for the Turkish – Israeli relations. For further "great expectations", we should wait for the next year's developments.

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ENDNOTES

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