CODRUL COSMINULUI

Vol. XXIV, No. 2, December 2018



UNIVERSITY OF SUCEAVA PUBLISHING HOUSE

Codrul Cosminului

Vol. 24, No. 2
December 2018

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TURKEY'S NEW FOREIGN POLICY CONCEPT: THE CHALLENGES, ADVANTAGES & DISADVANTAGES TESTED BY MAVI MARMARA TAKE-OVER RAID

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Abstract: *Until Israel's foundation Turkey did not pay much attention to Palestine in the same way that its predecessor, the Ottoman Empire, had done. Nonetheless within a few decades of Israel's foundation in 1948, the Jewish state became a source of contention for Turkish-Arab relations. Turkey was one of the countries that recognized Israel soon after its proclamation of independence. During UN efforts and reports to find a way out for Arab-Israeli conflict before 1948 Turkey had supported Arab arguments opposing any kind of disintegration in Palestine lands. Turkey's foreign policy towards Israeli-Arab conflict had a neutral-active perspective which could ease the process of confidence building measures and solution of matters. For a long time, Turkey was a peace facilitator having good relations with both sides. The sharp turn came at the beginning of 2000's. Thus arguments on Turkey's intend to be "new leader of Sunni Islam" in the Middle East, particularly since 2008 escalated especially after the Israeli takeover raid. The aim of this study is to unearth and analyse the so-called new foreign policy concept and the role of Israeli takeover raid in 2010 Gaza flotilla. Turkey's shifting foreign policy concept, arguments on its post-Ottoman tendencies, leadership preferences and possible effects on its fluctuating popularity in the Arab communities considering possible challenges, advantages and disadvantages are also analysed.*

Keywords*: Turkey, Israel, Palestine, Mavi Marmara, New Foreign Policy, Arab world*

Rezumat: ***Noul concept al politicii externe a Turciei: provocările, avantajele şi dezavantajele testate prin raidul de preluare a Mavi Marmara****. Până la întemeierea statului Israel, Turcia nu a acordat prea multă atenţie Palestinei, la fel de mult precum o făcuse predecesorul său, Imperiul Otoman. Totuşi, după câteva decenii de la înfiinţarea Israelului, în anul 1948, statul evreiesc a devenit o sursă de controverse în cadrul relaţiilor turco-arabe. Turcia a fost una dintre ţările care au recunoscut Israelul la scurt timp după proclamarea independenţei acestuia. Înainte de 1948, în cadrul eforturilor şi rapoartelor ONU de a găsi o soluţie pentru conflictul arabo-israelian, Turcia a susţinut argumentele arabe care se opuneau oricărui fel de dezintegrare a teritoriilor palestiniene. Politica externă a Turciei faţă de conflictul arabo-israelian a avut o perspectivă activ-neutră, care ar fi facilitat procesul de construire a măsurilor de încredere şi de soluţionare a problemelor. Pentru o lungă perioadă de timp, Turcia a fost un facilitator de pace, având relaţii bune cu*

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ambele părți. Schimbarea bruscă s-a produs la începutul anilor 2000. Astfel, intenția Turciei de a ajunge, în special din 2008, „noul lider al islamului sunnit" în Orientul Mijlociu, a devenit tot mai evidentă, mai ales după raidul de preluare israelian. Scopul prezentului studiu este de a explora și analiza așa-numitul noul concept de politică externă și rolul raidului israelian de preluare a flotilei din Gaza în anul 2010. De asemenea, sunt analizate modificarea conceptului de politică externă a Turciei, argumentele privind tendințele post-otomane ale acesteia, preferințele pentru statutul de lider și posibilele efecte asupra popularității sale fluctuante la nivelul lumii arabe, în contextul posibilelor provocări, avantaje și dezavantaje.

Résumé : Le nouveau concept de politique étrangère de la Turquie: les défis, les avantages et les inconvénients testés par le raid de prise du Mavi Marmara. *Jusqu'à la fondation de l'Etat 'Israël, la Turquie ne prêtait pas beaucoup d'attention à la Palestine, de la même manière que son prédécesseur, L'Empire Ottoman. Néanmoins, quelques décennies après la fondation d'Israël en 1948, l'Etat juif est devenu une source de discorde pour les relations turco-arabes. La Turquie était un des pays qui a reconnu l'Israël peu après la proclamation de son indépendance. Au cours des efforts et des rapports de l'ONU pour trouver une issue au conflit israélo-arabe avant 1948, la Turquie soutint les arguments arabes opposés à toute forme de désintégration sur les terres de Palestine. La politique étrangère de la Turquie vis-à-vis du conflit israélo-arabe eut une perspective neutre-active qui pourrait faciliter le processus de mesures de renforcement de la confiance et de résolution des problèmes. La Turquie a longtemps été un facilitateur de la paix, entretenant de bonnes relations avec les deux parties. Le tournant est survenu au début des années 2000. Ainsi, l'intention de la Turquie d'être le « nouveau dirigeant de l'islam sunnite » au Moyen-Orient, depuis l'escalade de 2008, en particulier après le raid israélien est devenu plus évidente. Le but de l'étude ci-jointe est de découvrir et d'analyser le soi-disant nouveau concept de politique étrangère et le rôle du raid de prise de contrôle par Israël de la flottille de Gaza de 2010. Le concept changeant de politique étrangère de la Turquie, les arguments sur ses tendances post-ottomanes, ses préférences en matière de leadership et ses effets possibles sur sa popularité fluctuante au niveau du monde arabe, compte tenu des éventuels défis, des avantages et des inconvénients, seront également analysés.*

PALESTINE CAUSE IN THE VIEW OF TURKEY'S NEW FOREIGN POLICY CONCEPT

Turkish-Palestinian relations alike to the rest of the Arab countries have a long past. Similarly, Turkish-Jewish relations had been close since after the medieval period. During this time, it was on Ottoman soils that Jews could make their homes and practice their religion freely and were even deemed as equal citizens under Ottoman *millet system*. Turkish Republic was thus the only Muslim-majority country that had good relations with Israel from the very beginning.

Turkish foreign policy until 2003, putting Islamic references aside, mostly was leaded by secular precedencies.[1] So that, five years ago, in 1998 Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) intervened policy making to prevent the rise of Welfare Party (Refah Partisi) that had a strong Islamic discourse. But the intervention caused a kind of butterfly effect and paved the way of reverse course, the generals never planned or foreseen. When another Islamic rooted Justice and Development Party (JDP) (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) won the elections and had a rising impetus, traditional Turkish Foreign Policy towards Muslim Arabs also started to change secular preferences were put aside. Because the JDP voters are mostly so-called "nationalist-conservatives", they were ready to support new pro-active one-sided foreign policy towards "Muslim Arab comrades".

As Social Constructivists put forward, for ideological parties the foreign policy is not only a matter of national interests, but also of acceptable ideological behaviour in foreign relations. The concept of "national interests" is a kind of legitimation applied by politicians to justify their ideological policies, while hiding their actual aim.[2] In this point leaders play strategic material power games, albeit domestically constrained. Generally, all around the world ideological parties borrow the epistemic, normative and ideological understandings, rules and discourses that enable them to act upon the sphere in which they would like to reshape or have an effect on.[3] It is not clear whether that was the case at the very beginning when JDP rise to power at the end of 2002 or not. Nevertheless, when time passed and JDP felt itself strong capable to cope with secular foreign policy understanding, it was high time for a sharp change at the foreign policy making.

Moreover, the grave effect of its background, realistically it was not only the ideological preferences of ruling party JDP's shifting foreign policy. JDP has come to power 11 years after the collapse of Communist Block. Turkey's post-Cold War era pro-active policy initiatives towards Central Asia (historical Turkistan) and Balkans were not as successful as expected because of the unchallengeable existence of Russia in Turkistan and EU in the Balkans, respectively. Thus, when JDP came to power a new foreign policy approach towards Middle Eastern countries as well as ideological preferences was a severe necessity towards multi-

[1] İsmail Köse, *İngiltere'nin Arap İsyanı Tertibi (1914-1918): İsyanın Cumhuriyet Dönemi Hükümet Programlarındaki Dış Politika Yansımaları* [Britain's Plot for Arab Revolt (1914-1918): The Revolt's Reflections on Republic Era Government Programs], in "Elektronik Siyaset Bilimi Araştırmaları Dergisi", VIII, 2017, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 49-58.

[2] Jill Strans et. al, *An Introduction to International Relations Theory,* 3rd ed., London, Pearson Education Limited, 2010, pp. 186-187, 192.

[3] Walter Carlsnaes et al., *Handbook of International Relations,* London, Sage Publications, 2001, pp. 100-101, 110.

alternated foreign policy making process. Despite both were not always advantageous, it expected that historical ties and religious fraternity could ease implementation of new foreign policy approach.

When Turkey decided to relive its historical heritage, Iran by leading the Shia one of the two mainstream Islamic sects, was already in the field. Hence Turkey, historically the last-seat of Caliphate about 407 years (1517-1924) could lead Sunni Islam. But, Turkey since the foundation of Republic in 1923, by its enlightenment, westernization, gender equality, secular state structure, democracy and contemporary targets was mentally far from the Middle East. Re-entry into the political arena in the Middle East where almost all international actors more or less have interest either hegemonic or middle sized was not an easy job.

Turkey firstly should persuade Arab Society that it changed its former distanced secular foreign policy precedencies and should boldly show that it was ready to handle Palestinian cause which almost all hopes was lost for a peaceful solution protecting Muslim Palestinians' rights. Nonetheless, as it was very well argued by N. Greenwood Onuf, to implement their plans international agents face with both material and social limits.[4] Even agents are societies, when JDP and its new foreign policy approach assumed as an international agent it is easily seen that new foreign policy understanding of JDP did not have a holist freedom. Contrarily to its expectations, there were several complex structural challenges to cope with. If the social groups assumed as agents in the region, in this case the first thing to do was to attract ongoing support of masses and if could be handled possible backing of clerical class were vital in post-feudal Middle Eastern societies.

Therefore, Palestine cause ontologically became an important litmus test for Turkey's so-called new foreign policy approach towards Sunni Arab world. Akin any Muslim country on the earth, if Turkey could preserve and protect Palestinians' rights against Israel and moreover if any country including Turkey could challenge the undefeatable Israel for Arabs either on the battle field or diplomatic table it easily could be the hero of the streets and gain ground to be new leader. Such kind of great success, also definitely contributes rising support of domestic voters. As it is very well remembered, Egyptian leader Gammal Abdel Nasser had lost the battle in the field during 1956 Suez Crisis, but could achieve a diplomatic victory on the table hitherto he was hero of the Arab people until his

[4] Nicholas Greenwood Onuf, *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations,* Columbia, University of South Caroline Press, 1989. pp. 59-62; Alexander Wendt, *The Agent-Structure Problem in International Relations Theory*, in "International Organization", Vol. 41, 1987, no. 3, pp. 356-358.

death[5]. History had presented a new chance. There was a gap in Arab world for leadership, any candidate who would like to be enthroned as the new leader, it should be flagman of Palestine cause. For Turkey that kind of policy would mean confrontation with Israel. Such development more or less would pave the way of several grave side effects for traditional balanced Turkish foreign policy. Because the lands of Palestine are inalienable both for Jews and Muslims, there was almost no hope that the deadlock could be solved by peaceful means.

Until 1917, the area today called Palestine and the most part of the Arabian Peninsula had been under Ottoman rule for around four hundred years. Palestine did not exist as a unified administrative unit under the Ottoman Turks, rather the territory that later emerged as Palestine was divided among several Ottoman districts. During Ottoman period, the local Arabs were not known as Palestinians either. Today's administrative divisions emerged during the British Mandatory period (1917-1948).[6]

Jewish, Christian and Muslim believers have holy sites in Al-Quds (Jerusalem) and therefore the city has a *sui generis* position in international law bearing the title of *"corpus separatum".* Contrary to its geographically small size, Palestine hosts some of the most important religious shrines of three monotheistic religions. The Israeli rule since 1948 over the Holy Land has had complex implications, particularly for Muslim Palestinians. The blockade over Gaza imposed by Israel is one of the serious problems Muslim Palestinians faced with in the last decades. During that period Turkey regardless ruling political party was a peace facilitator that had good neutral-active relations with both Israel and Palestine.

Political parties are the purposeful actor organizations of democratic societies whose foreign policies help reproduce or transform the desired foreign policy into practice. Hence societies are made up of social relationships which common expectations and desires structure the interactions between groups.[7] As it is very well argued by Constructivists, identities are effective agents for state behaviours. Similarly, as a political party JDP has been brought together kinfolk identities and tendencies together which its voters ontologically at the very beginning more or less have been asking more active foreign policy towards Middle East countries and especially to Palestine. At this context, a concrete analyses of JDP period new Turkish foreign policy concept and future of Turkish-

[5] See Adid Davişa, *Arap Milliyetçiliği – Zaferden Umutsuzluğa* [Arab Nationalism – From Victory to Despair], Istanbul, Literatür Publishment, 2004, pp. 150-160.

[6] *Report of the High Commissioner on the Administration of Palestine, 1920-1925,* London, Printed and Published by His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1925. pp. 2-6.

[7] Wendt, *op. cit.,* pp. 337-338.

Israeli relations the takeover raid could be an excellent case study. The operation was the gravest threat in both countries' 52 years lasting diplomatic relations. Meanwhile the raid was a challenge to Turkey's new pro-active unbalanced foreign policy concept.

The sharp shift had started in 2008, especially after the leading role of Ahmet Davutoglu decided to play a much greater role in the Middle East. Therefore, Turkey's ties with Israel were the first to sacrifice as the "entry ticket" to the region. That was meant to capture hearts and minds of Arab Society in general with a PR stunt. But Turkish foreign policy makers were very well aware of the fact that, when traditional neutral-active and sometime neutral-passive foreign policy approach is considered, unbalanced and one sided foreign policy as Americanism was during the first two decades of the Cold War, would be a kind of reverse course.[8]

Alliances and hostilities are not solid in the Middle East. To cope with new threats or benefit from newly emerged opportunities, use of balanced rhythmic shuttle diplomacy is a *sine qua non* rule. *Mavi Marmara* was the milestone for Turkey to denounce or disown its undeclared leadership aspect. When the challenge came due Israeli take-over operation Turkish policy makers, in convenience with traditional foreign policy approach, decided to confront Israel diplomatically using the soft power as much as possible but nobody in Ankara thought that hard power including use of militaristic force also should be put on the table against Israel. That point also was bearing the risk for the end of hopes for Arabs who expected Turkey to be a new challenging power against Israel.[9]

HOW THE TURKISH FLOTILLA SET OUT TO PROVIDE HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO GAZA

About 19 years after its foundation, Israel – a new hybrid state type very seldom cares for universally accepted international rules or human rights – began to complete military occupation on the Gaza Strip in June 1967. As part of the peace process that started in May 1994 ("the Oslo Accords") some territories of Gaza were freed from Israeli occupation. Because of rising international pressure Israel reluctantly had promised to disengage from Gaza and the West Bank. In addition, the territorial waters of Gaza would be included in the jurisdiction of the Palestinian

[8] See *Türk Dış Politikası 1919-2000* [Turkish Foreign Policy 1919-2000], Vol. I-II, ed. Baskın Oran, İstanbul, İletişim Publication, 2013, pp. 615-648; 124-157.

[9] *Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Tutanak Dergisi* [Journal of the Minutes of Turkish Grand National Assembly (here in after JM-TGNA], Term: 23; Volume: 27; Year 4; Hearing Number: 109; Tuesday, 1 June 2010. pp. 479-492.

Authority.[10] However, the victory of Hamas in 2006 elections and Israeli hostility towards Hamas meant the Oslo agreements were never came in force.

Hamas, following the elections assumed power in 2007 where after Israel began to impose a blockade on the Gaza Strip. Ending the occupation and lifting the siege on Gaza are prerequisites for Palestinian Arabs achieving sustainable economic development. Unsurprisingly GDP growth has been steadily declining since the Gaza blockade; in 2014 the approximate GDP score was -0.5%. The unemployment rate in Palestine has increased steadily and reached 27% at the end of the same year. Meanwhile the unemployment rate in besieged Gaza is approximately 44%, meaning almost half of the population does not have the opportunity to work and feed their families. The agricultural and industrial sectors' contributions to GDP dropped from 12% in 1994 to 4% and 23% to 14% in 2014, respectively.[11] Poverty has tripled since the imposition of the blockade.[12]

The blockade is arguably illegal under international law; because article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention prohibits collective punishment of civilians under occupation, and the occupying power [Israel] has to protect at least minimum safety rights of civilians.[13] Israel's excessive treatments and blockade over Gaza, enlargement of unlawful settlements have been attracted widespread attention all around the world. Several initiatives, protests and activities were done to stop Israel and help besieged Palestinians especially people of Gaza living under a strict siege.[14] The idea of sending a humanitarian assistance flotilla to Gaza born in mind due above mentioned facts. The attempt which later will be named as *Mavi Marmara* was organized under Turkish civil assistance agencies by support and participation of different international organizations.[15]

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[10] Article 5, paragraph 1 (a, b) and paragraph 3 of *Gaza-Jericho Agreement*, http://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/fullpeace/ISR%2019940504.pdf (Accessed on 25 September 2018).

[11] Mohammad Mustafa, *The Palestinian Economy: Towards a New Approach*, in "Middle East Business Magazine & News", October 26, 2015, in http://middleeast-business.com/towards-a-new-approach/; see Ayça Eminoğlu, *Tarihsel Süreçte Türkiye Israil Ilişkilerinin Değişen Yapisi* [The Changing Structure of Turkish-Israeli Relations in Historical Process], in "Gümüşhane University Electronic Journal of the Institute of Social Sciences", Volume 7, No. 15 (2016), pp. 88-106.

[12] *UN General Assembly, Human Rights Council Report* (hereinafter **UNHRCR**), A/HRC/15/21 September 27, 2010. p. 10.

[13] *Fourth Geneva Convention,* Individual responsibility, collective penalties, pillage, reprisals, Article 33.

[14] See *Türk Dış Politikası* [Turkish Foreign Policy] *2001-2012,* ed. Baskın Oran, Vol. III, İstanbul, İletişim Publication, 2013, pp. 401-421.

[15] *Mavi Marmara* [Blue Marmara], in https://www.ihh.org.tr/mavi-marmara (Accessed on 14 December 2018).

Assistance unions were thinking that, there was enough strong legitimate ground to enter into Gaza's territorial waters and unload their humanitarian aid cargo in the city's port. Because although Israel's blockade and denial of any kind of sea usage on the Gaza Strip's territorial waters, international law states that the sea off the coast of a state is subject to that state's sovereignty. Thus, coastal states should enjoy certain rights to the seas adjoining their coasts.[16] A distinction has long been made between the freedom of the high seas - over which no claims to sovereignty can be made- and territorial waters, over which coastal states enjoy particular rights and duties. After decades of discussions the United Nations Law of Sea Convention (UNLoSC) was created in 1982 and established the limit for a coastal state's territorial waters to 12 miles from the baseline.[17]

The attack on the *Mavi Marmara* should be analysed under this context. Flagship *Mavi Marmara* and the flotilla, when attacked were 72 nautical miles far from the nearest state and thus was in neither Israel nor Gaza's jurisdiction.[18] If the flotilla could load its cargo in Gaza ports that would mean Turkey's challenge to Israel, such development would contribute Turkey's prestige in the Arab circles fostering its new leading role. Israel was very well aware of the coming fact and decided not to allow such breakthrough at any expense including breach to international law and long-lasting relations with Turkey.

According to their declaration the flotilla was carrying medical supplies, cement, iron, prefabricated houses, toys and food stuffs. The total weight of the cargo was almost 10.000 tons. The slogan of the Flotilla was: *"We are heading to Palestine; our cargo is humanitarian assistance"*. The flotilla organizing committee consisted of different organizations from all around the world. They were the International Humanitarian Help (IHH) fund from Turkey, The Greek Ship to Gaza Campaign, The Swedish Ship to Gaza, The Free Gaza Movement, The International Committee to End the Siege on Gaza, and The European Campaign to End the Siege on Gaza (ECESG). The Turkish organization IHH has been attributed to the Turkish pro-Islamist movement, namely the Welfare Party, which was headed by late Necmettin Erbakan who displayed anti-Israeli sentiment during his chairmanship. The IHH was the pioneer of the organization (three ships in the flotilla out of eight belonged to the IHH), and although it was a civil initiative, Turkish-Israeli

[16] Turkish National Commission of Inquiry, *Report on The Israeli Attack on the Humanitarian Aid Convoy to Gaza on 31 May 2010,* Ankara, 2011, pp. 50-52.

[17] Tim Hiller, *Source Book on Public International Law,* London: Gavendish Publishing Limited, 1998, pp. 380-381.

[18] The Turkel Commission, *The Public Commission to Examine the Maritime Incident of 31 May 2010*, pp. 219-220.

relations were on edge because of that leading role.[19] Meanwhile Turkey's new role in the Arab world was also on the edge of to be successful or not.

The flag states were, Turkey (1), Comoros (1), Kiribati (1), Greece (1) Togo (1) USA (2) and Cambodia (1). The number of activists on-board the *Mavi Marmara* were 546, 353 of which were Turkish nationals. The total number of activists on-board the other ships were about 120 (separation of crew and activists number is not clear) from 18 nationalities. The total number of activists was approximately 666. The number of crew members of Turkish nationality was 47. Eighty (80) Turkish and foreign journalists and fifteen (15) parliamentarians from the EU were on board. The total number of people who participated in the flotilla was 742.[20]

The flagship *Mavi Marmara* set out on May 30 from Antalya seaport at 00:30. The flotilla as a whole departed Cyprus on May 30, at 23.00 local time. The chosen course navigated international waters where any kind of Israeli action would be unlawful.[21] The first intervention by Israel was offshore Haifa. The warning transmitted by Israeli radio was that *"any attempt to break the blockade would not be allowed"*.[22] The flotilla refused to return and went ahead on its pre-determined route. While the vessels were warned to change course no request was made for the cargo to be inspected.[23] The Israeli raid came 5.5 hours after the verbal warning at 04:26 am. local time on May 31. When attacked, the flotilla was 72 nautical miles from the coast and thus far from Israeli territorial waters.[24] The use of force was so excessive that nine Turkish citizens were killed and 50 people from various nationalities were seriously injured.[25]

The operation was given the code name *"Operation Sea Breeze"* or "*Operation Sky Winds"*. Corvettes, missile boats, helicopters, surveillance aircraft and possibly even possibly two submarines were deployed for the raid.[26] The exaggerated amount of deployed weaponry was so sophisticated that, as Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) had been prepared for a general warfare.

There were two choices for Turkey. (1) To retaliate Israeli unlawful act and send warships to hot waters to protect its flotilla and citizens. Such act easily could fuel a kind of limited or unlimited clash. (2) To protest Israeli movement and force

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[19] *Report of the Secretary-General's Panel on Inquiry on the 31 May 2010 Flotilla Incident* (hereinafter UNPoI), UN, September 2011, p. 4.
[20] UNHRCR, p. 66.
[21] *Ibid,* pp. 35-36.
[22] *Ibid,* pp. 22-23.
[23] *Ibid,* pp. 35-36.
[24] *Ibid,* p. 9.
[25] See UNHRCR, *passim*.
[26] *Ibid.,* p. 22.

it to bend diplomatically. Most probably Ankara considering and avoiding any unwanted hot conflict, preferred to use diplomatic instruments. The side effect of the last choice of course would undermine prestige in the Arab Society. Use of diplomacy as a soft power instrument instead of hard power would meant that, during the last decade Turkish Foreign Policy has a strong discourse against Israel but akin the rest of the Arab countries Turkey also was not ready or volunteer to confront Israel militarily.

TURKEY'S USE OF SOFT POWER: RUPTURE IN TURKISH-ISRAELI DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

Traditionally states are actors of hard power. Post-Cold War period brought changing actors and changing goals in international relations. Contrarily to militaristic strength and use of force, soft power seeks to enlarge a state's effect peacefully. Economic aids, environmental policies, human rights, democratic culture, technological superiority are the main tools of soft power.[27] Because unchallengeable hard power struggle in the Middle East, despite its high toned sharp discourse, realistically Turkey could only use soft-power in Palestine cause. It was possible to deploy coercive power against Israel but in that case, there would be a high risk for an uncalculated armed conflict.

Before studying the regional evolution of Turkish Foreign Policy during the period up to 2018, it is important to examine the rhythmic diplomacy mostly based on westernization in a defensive approach after the proclamation of Republic and relations towards Arab countries also should be considered after WWI.[28] Since the JDP's rise to power, Turkish foreign policy had shifted towards the Cold War focus on the geostrategic importance of being an economic and militaristic power in order to establish itself as a regional role model. The new unbalanced concept was backed by economic strength and increased activity on the world stage.[29]

Sustainability of unbalanced foreign policy approach was a matter of discussion. Three important questions had arisen; (1) as a secular nation state was it possible for Turkey to track a one-sided biased foreign policy? (2) could

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[27] See Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power,* in "Foreign Policy", No. 80, Autumn 1990, pp. 161-163. According to Nye, soft power is the attractive use of politics, cultural superiority, democratic traditions so on; hard power simply is the use of force and smart power is the balanced use of both. See also Joseph Nye, *Soft Power,* USA, Public Affairs, 2009.

[28] *C.H.P. Programı* [Republican Party's Program], Mayıs 1935, Ulus Basımevi: Ankara, 1935; "TC. Resmi Gazete" [Republic of Turkey Official Gazette], 10 March 1935, no. 2950, pp. 4915-4916; "TC. Resmi Gazete", 18 March 1943, no. 5358, pp. 4693-4696.

[29] *Türk Dış Politikası* [Turkish Foreign Policy] *2001-2012,* pp. 429-434.

basic secular nation state rooted historic motives of the republic propel the country into its former neutral path, and (3) when good relations have been established with Israel, would Turkey stop supporting Palestinian cause, what the leading role would be and would Turkey practice a balanced active policy again? Answers of those questions were important but not easy, neither Turkey nor Israel could ignore each other in their turbulent geography. Admittedly, the strong anti-Israeli discourse and intended leading role was a grave problem for Turkey.

When faced with the Mavi Marmara crisis, Turkish diplomacy had started to reflect a renewed confidence with the formerly Ottoman geography. Continuing insecurity however, alongside renewed threats in the periphery, brought about considerable weaknesses and vulnerabilities. Actions always led counteractions in this new foreign policy concept. Turkey had represented itself as a legitimate democratic role model; one that must become attractive in every sense in the region as it was arguably the only country that could export a model of democracy to Muslim countries. However, Turkey's economic and militaristic capabilities still remained vulnerable and inefficient to undertake such work. The new foreign policy was formulated by Davutoglu, but his formulation was ultimately a failure as it resulted in isolationism of the state.

At the time of the *Mavi Marmara* setting out to Gaza, Turkey had since 1945 paid 12 million dollars towards assisting Palestine, with a further payment of 20 million dollars for the reconstruction of bombed and demolished infrastructure underway. In addition the Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA) had invested 50 million dollars in Palestine.[30]

In order to understand this new Turkish foreign policy concept, one needs to carefully analyse stereotypes. Until the JDP Turkish foreign policy had been shaped by diplomats reluctant to intervene in neighbouring regions. Traditional foreign policy was not to take part in any conflict among Arab countries. After his handling of almost whole stating power denouncing traditional secular formed foreign policy, Davutoglu reformulated a new approach called *"pro-active foreign policy*". He had achieved political fame through his controversial book, *"Strategic Depth"*, which repeated the old realist rhetoric and sought unreasonable ground for the improbable likelihood of unity in the Middle East.[31] This meant that new foreign policy would aspire to intervene in any development in the periphery and close leading relations would be sought with the Arab dictatorships. Another approach of Davutoglu's was paradoxically the

[30] Özgen Acar, *Doğu Akdeniz'de Saldırılar* [Raids in Eastern Mediterranean], "Cumhuriyet", June 4, 2010, p. 10.

[31] Ahmet Davudoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu* [Strategical Depth Turkey's Internatinal Position], İstanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2014.

"zero problem with neighbours", which was almost impossible to implement together with so-called "proactive foreign policy". Even in the occurrence of rising favour amongst Arab populations, Arab elites and leaders were not happy with this new foreign policy concept. The new proactive foreign policy approach was a grave change and could even be described as an axial dislocation, since the foundation of the Turkish Republic was based on Ghazi Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's phrase *"peace in the world; peace at home"*.[32]

Despite Davutoglu's sharp shift from traditional track, the decision makers of foreign policy were aware of the fact that the survival of nation state in the Middle East was not easy. This is because states in the Middle Eastern countries, somewhat anachronically, had duplicated the politics of the Medieval Europe, being fragmented by sectarian disagreements, tribal racism and endless political quarrels.[33] During this period, Turkish foreign policy makers hardly criticised Israeli illegal actions and excessiveness meanwhile a balanced policy both towards Israel and Arabs were implemented.

Considering the unlawful Israeli takeover raid, it is possible to say that despite long-lasting experiments on such disturbances Israel could not manage the crisis in its full capability. To avoid the kind of situation that resulted the operation should have been reassessed in the face of the resistance to the initial boarding attempt by the activists on the flotilla.[34] The operation created a localized humanitarian crisis because activists were treated brutally and faced wilful killing, inhuman or degrading physical or mental treatment, mutilation, misuse of handcuffs, kicking, hitting with the butts of rifles, beatings, derogatory sexual abuse, denial of access to toilets, dog biting, some were forced to kneel for hours, shooting live fire at blank range and drenching water from helicopters were just some of the ill-treatment carried out by IDF commandos.[35]

The government led Arab media mostly preferred not to support Turkey, because Turkey's response to Israeli challenge and attack was also a matter of concern for ordinary Middle Easterners. Decades of conflict and fighting had proven that there was no escaping the fact that backed by US, Israel was an unchallengeable regional player. For the last decade Turkish Foreign Policy thinking had become increasingly prominent, particularly in the Middle East. More significantly as it was mentioned above the ruling Justice and Development Party (JDP) had begun to inspire hopes for a future for Palestine State.

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[32] See Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, *Nutuk* [Discourse], İstanbul, Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1970.
[33] http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye-israil-siyasi-iliskileri.tr.mfa (accessed on 19 November, 2016).
[34] UNPoI, pp. 3-4.
[35] UNHRCR, pp. 29-31, 53.

Because Turkey decided to confront Israel diplomatically, on the first day of the raid PM Erdogan underlined Turkey's foreign policy, stating boldly that "*after now nothing would be the same as before [with Israel]",* describing the raid as *"state terrorism"*.[36] Despite some domestic critics on the ruling JDP's firm support and favour towards Hamas, there was a wide-spread general angriness across the country towards Israel's takeover operation. On the 3rd June the official response was so hard that Turkey was almost at the edge of declaring war with Israel. Most probably that was the expectation of Arab Society. But, Ankara reasonably had decided to avoid any kind of militaristic adventure at any expense. The battle would be deployed diplomatically. The Turkish parliament passed a cross-party joint resolution condemning Israeli operation. The resolution asked for an urgent apology from Israeli officials; trial and punishment of those responsible for the raid and payment of indemnity for damages and loss of life.[37] These demands would soon form the ground for the future normalization negotiations. It is a well-known fact that strong historical ties acted as peace facilitators during the re-establishment of relations. The first diplomatic response of Turkey was to bring the case to the UN and publicly condemn Israeli excessiveness. The second act was to recall the Turkish Ambassador Oğuz Çelikkol.

Due to public pressure neither part backed down on their stances; as a result, no progress could be achieved during the first two months of crisis. In the last week of July, the Gaza blockade and the demand for an apology became the deadlock preventing the normalization of relations. The Turkish side declared that if an official apology was not expressed by July 27; (1) Action would be taken to prosecute IDF commandos under international law; (2) Turkish diplomatic relations to Israel would be downgraded to chargé d'affaires or to the second secretary level and (3) Turkey would become initiate an active policy against Israel on the international stage. One year earlier on 8 June 2009, the UNSC had requested the urgent withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza and the unimpeded provision and distribution of humanitarian assistance, having determined that the blockade was unlawful.[38] But Israel never committed to full withdrawal from occupied territories. Nevertheless, UNSC resolutions concerning Israel had in the past held little weight on the world stage. Thus the Israeli government was confident that it would not be on the end of an international backlash. Due to the structure of the international justice system, it was unlikely to be possible to prosecute IDF soldiers in the same

[36] *Meclis İsrail'i Kınadı* [The Parliament Condemned Israel], in "Cumhuriyet", June 3, 2010, p. 8.
[37] *Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi* [Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) Minutes], 110th Session, June 2, 2010.
[38] UN Security Council, Resolution S/RES/1860 (2009), pp. 1-2.

way that the Slobodan Milosevic and Ratko Mladic had been.

In light of this Israel rejected any international inquiry into the raid. To placate rising international pressure, an Israeli commission was established to investigate the raid. The commission was presided by the retired Justice Jacob Türkel. Also known as the 'Türkel Report', it was published at the beginning of 2011 and justifying all actions committed by IDF soldiers.[39] The report was criticised even in Israel that it was not a neutral and judicial document; rather that it was the report of a political commission.[40]

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, sixty-two days after the raid, established a UN Panel of Inquiry (UNPoI) on 2nd August 2010. The Inquiry panel was headed by Geoffrey Palmer, former PM of New Zeeland and Alvaro Uribe, former President of Colombia. Both Israel and Turkey had one representative in the UNPoI. Turkey was represented by S. Özdem Sanberk and Israel by J. Yosef Ciechanover.[41] Participation was a difficult decision, Turkey unwittingly would contributed to the further legitimization of the blockade by agreeing to the creation of the Palmer Commission. In addition to the Palmer Commission an independent international fact-finding mission was established under the auspices of the UN. The mission commenced its work one week after the UNPoI.[42] Neither Turkey nor Israel had any representative in latter mission.

Two diplomats - Samberk and Ciechanover - began to organise a series of meetings in an attempt to begin normalization. Meanwhile US Foreign Secretary Hillary Clinton and President Barack Obama began to engage in shuttle diplomacy. At the beginning of September the UN Report was not made public but was leaked to the world press.[43] The report legalized the Israeli blockade and takeover operation. As was foreseen by the Israeli government in the first days of the crisis, there was little criticism on the excessive use of force and unreasonable takeover process. The report also represented the possible results in the international court judgments regarding the IDF soldiers. As a result, the report was a failure both for universal humanitarian law and even customary international law. It was also a disappointment for Turkey since because it weakened almost all the legal bases of the government's arguments. After the failure of resolving this issue on the international arena, the only way out for

[39] The Turkel Commission, *The Public Commission to Examine the Maritime Incident of 31 May 2010*, in https://www.gov.il/BlobFolder/generalpage/alternatefiles/he/turkel_eng_a_0.pdf (accessed on 14 December 2018).

[40] *Who needs the Turkel Committee*, in "Haaretz", January 24, 2011.

[41] UNPoI, p. 1, 4.

[42] See UNHRCR, *passim.*

[43] UNHRCR, *passim.*

Turkey was to downgrade diplomatic relations.

Whilst rising Turkish-Israeli tension in the region was an issue, 2011 also became the start of a turbulent era for several Middle Eastern countries. In Egypt the long-lasting dictatorship of Hosni Mubarak was overthrown through mass demonstrations. The same outcome had occurred to the Tunisian Ruler Bin Ali. However, both countries' political cultures were not advanced enough to allow the formation of democratic governance. Notwithstanding, the riots continued to spread to other Arab dictatorships, shaking the already fragile stability in the region. Syria was soon at the edge of a civil war, while Libyan Dictator Gaddafi was overthrown. The movement, called "Arab Spring" had a wide spread effect at the beginning. This period was soon remembered as a time of change and, in some instances, a time of unsuccessful public movements. In any case, the region had become turbulent and more vulnerable than before. Iranian escalation of the sectarian Shia conflict worsened the situation. It was one of the historical moments in which Middle Eastern countries were soon in grave need to cooperate for sustainable peace and stability in the region.

Takeover operation against Turkish Flotilla which flagship was *Mavi Marmara* in 2010 was the most serious crises both countries faced with since 1949. So that, about 10 years ago, both countries' air forces arranging joint exercises in the Turkish airspace, yet in 2010 both were at the edge of an armed conflict. From the first day of the *Mavi Marmara* crisis, Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu and his Cabinet declared on numerous occasions that, *"Israel would never apologize to Turkey".* Even Foreign Minister Lieberman said that *"it was Turkey who should apologize"*.[44] Palestine cause was the vital point for Turkey because abandonment or any act leaving the cause down would eliminate Turkey's shaken popularity in Arab Society. In that case the new foreign policy towards Arabs and leadership concept to Sunni Islam would come to a dramatic end. Thus, normalization one way or another connected with at least minimum betterment of Israel's Palestine policy. Apologize and that pre-condition as one easily could expect became deadlock.

THE NORMALIZATION NEGOTIATIONS: SIGNING OF THE RECONCILIATION AGREEMENT

In the beginning of 2011, about one year after the crisis, if Israel had agreed to apologize and lift the Gaza blockade, the normalization and restoration of

[44] *İsrail: Siz özür dileyin* [Israel: You {Turkey} should apologize], in "Cumhuriyet", July 6, 2010, pp. 1, 11.

diplomatic relations could have been underway. But before apologize Israel would like to receive positive signal from Ankara that the apology would be accepted. This is because reconciliation, monetary contribution for the victims and an expression of regret for the nine killings would have been accepted by Turkey. The main point of contention that could not be resolved however was the insistence on lifting of the blockade on Gaza and an official Israeli apology.[45] The last two items were *sine qua non* conditions for both parties and, despite meetings between senior officials, any positive result was not borne. The disagreement in the Israeli cabinet was another problem that blocked the route for a resolution.[46]

By the first anniversary of crisis Israeli politicians were still stating that Israel would not apologize. In May an Israeli based TV channel claimed that a senior Turkish envoy was sent to Israel by PM Erdoğan to negotiate with high-ranking officials including PM Netanyahu and find a common ground for normalization.[47] The US as peace facilitator had been hitherto trying to assist in the agreement of a solution. Unexpectedly on the first anniversary of the *Mavi Marmara* incident, a new flotilla was organised to head to Gaza. At the last minute however the IHH declared that the *Mavi Marmara* would not be participating.[48] Of course, its participation would have been very symbolic and inflammatory. The decision of the Turkish government not to involve was perhaps an early step towards the normalization of relations.

Neither Turkey nor Israel rejected claims of negotiations, though likewise such meetings were not made known to the public. In the Knesset a few deputies had begun to favour issuing an apology, with Ombudsman Micha Lindenstrauss having prepared a report that directed hard criticism at Netanyahu, Minister of Defence Ehud Barak and Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi, reasonably claiming they had been unable to manage the crisis during takeover operation. About two years after the raid the Israeli public, the Knesset and politicians had begun to change their stance and began to negotiate Turkey's three basic conditions for normalization. Lieberman became one of the staunch supporters of the rejection of Turkey's demands. But later he changed his mind and in mid-2012 at a press conference with Turkish media he said that "normalization needs a packet of negotiations and an apology can be one of the items".[49]

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[45] *TBMM* [TGNA], August 17, 2016, p. 37.

[46] UNPoI, *passim*.

[47] http://www.timesofisrael.com/channel-10-senior-erdogan-envoy-visits-israel/ (accessed on 17 September, 2016).

[48] *Mavi Marmara Gazze'ye Gitmiyor* [Blue Marmara will not go to Gazza], in https://www.dunya.com/gundem/mavi-marmara-gazze039ye-gitmiyor-haberi-147594 (accessed on 14 December 2018).

[49] Lieberman: Özür paketin parçası olur [Lieberman: apologize may be a part of package],

Lieberman's statement was a sharp shift that encouraged normalization talks. During the conference it became evident that secret negotiations had taken place. Israel agreed to pay indemnity and to issue a diplomatic apology. Because its new foreign policy concept and so-called leading role, the real point of contention however were Turkey's insistence on lifting the Gaza blockade. It was in fact now impossible for Turkey to drop its unyielding stance on the blockade. If Turkey did so it would be blamed for betraying the cause and possibly lose its influence among Arabs. It would also mean hard criticism domestically for the JDP. It was not easy for the JDP to accept dropping the Gaza condition because its voters are mostly conservative, right-wing voters. Even from a humanitarian view the blockade on civilians was not justifiable. Thus any progress on normalization without making reasonable ground on the Gaza blockade was unacceptable to Turkey.

But Turkey trying to re-balance its Middle East policy started to implement a kind of track-two diplomacy. Last developments both in the Middle East and at foreign policy challenges had shown that the new leadership concept was not as easy to implement as it is seen on the paper. Even Arab rulers were not happy with new foreign policy. Because Turkish pro-active movements and escalation of oppressed societies started to shake Arab leaders to take some initiatives not to endanger their dictatorships they never intended. Thus there was an undeclared resistance towards Turkey. In 2012 diplomats from both countries met secretly four times. Two meetings were in Geneva, at least one in Rome and another in Brussels.[50] The Turkish delegation was headed by Feridun Sinirlioğlu Under Secretary of the MFA, and even the Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoglu participated in one of the meetings. The Head of the Israeli delegation was J. Ciechanover. At the beginning of 2013 normalization had begun to progress, albeit slowly. The time for inflammatory statements had ended and confidence-building measures were underway. By the end of 2012 the *de jure* diplomatic relations were at the lowest level but in practice there was an accelerated rhythmic shuttle diplomacy between both countries.

Since the beginning of the crisis the US as peace facilitator had employed shuttle diplomacy to find a common ground. By 2013 however no progress had been made. Since the raid Turkey and Israel had witnessed several developments in the periphery and both noticed the value of mutual understanding and cooperation. On March 22, 2013 President Obama paid a visit to Israel. Following his visit, he called President Erdoğan and gave the phone to PM Netanyahu. It was

in "Cumhuriyet", July 24, 2012, pp. 1, 8.

[50] *İsrail ile Türkiye Anlaşma Arayışında* [Israel and Turkey Seeking a Way for Reconciliation], in http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/dunya/israil-ile-turkiye-anlasma-arayisinda-16457499 (accessed on 14 December 2018).

the first phone call between both leaders since the raid 34 months ago. The Israeli PM officially apologised for the raid and for the fatalities caused during the operation. President Erdogan accepted this apology on Turkey's behalf.[51] This was an important step forward and normalization negotiations started soon after that call. The role of the US was therefore crucial.

After this apology there were three basic problems that still needed solving; namely, the amount of indemnity that would be paid out, the Gaza blockade and judgment of the IDF commandos. The raid had been brought before the Turkish courts. Dropping all of these cases was pre-condition for Israel, while the Gaza blockade was similarly one for Turkey. Nevertheless, a few months after the beginning of normalization the *Mavi Marmara* victims went to the International Criminal Court (ICC) on this matter. By the end of the year it appeared very likely that the ICC would reject hearing the case. The year 2013 was soon filled with talks on indemnity payments and the blockade. By mid-2014 Foreign Minister Davutoglu declared considerable progress had been achieved on existing disagreements and deadlocks.[52] Meanwhile, one of the seriously wounded activists who had been hospitalised in for four years passed away. This brought the number of Turkish citizens killed due to the raid to ten.[53]

Following secret meetings in Switzerland, both sides had reached an "understanding" aimed at the full normalization of diplomatic relations by the end of 2015. Talks were slow and sometimes small crises hindered progress. There was also the issue that even if a restoration of diplomatic relations was successful, rebuilding the pre-crisis cooperation was impossible in a short span of time. The confidence building process for such joint ventures would need more time for recovery. There was however a new factor that contributed to normalization negotiations and that was energy politics. Natural gas reserves were discovered in Leviathan and Tamar gas fields and Turkey's unchallengeable geographic location for the transmission of Israeli gas to European markets presented a new area of cooperation that would benefit both sides.[54]

The first output of normalization talks came through in May 2016. Turkey lifted its long-lasting veto on Israel's demand to open a permanent office in NATO headquarters in Brussels and appoint a representative. The blockade continued to pose, at all the talks continued. On 28 June 2016, now six years after the raid

[51] *Mavi Marmara: İsrail Türkiye'den Özür Diledi* [Blue Marmara: Israel Apologised from Turkey], in https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2013/03/130322_israil_turkiye_ozur (accessed on 14 December 2018).
[52] *Abluka Manevrası* [Blockade Manoeuvre], in "Cumhuriyet", May 9, 2014, p. 18.
[53] *TBMM* [TGNA], August 17, 2016, p. 34.
[54] *Ibid.,* p. 39.

and almost five after the most serious crisis of diplomatic relations, a deal was signed between Israel and Turkey. Significantly, a few days before this deal was announced, the leader of Hamas, Halit Meşal, paid a visit to Turkey. He was likely to have been assured by Ankara that the deal with Israel did not mean Turkey had abandoned the Palestinian cause.[55]

However, the deal was met by criticism and resistance from political parties in both states. There was still strong resistance in Israeli political circles, while Turkey was accused of abandoning the Palestinian cause. Sometime assertive diplomatic rhetoric has been directed more towards the domestic audience rather than towards the realities of the world politics. In this case awareness of the limits of the current/traditional foreign policy stance may be ignored. Both countries had in recent years become in grave need to cooperate due to the radical changes occurring in the Middle East, this time it was domestic audience of both sides would be ignored. Turkish-Egyptian relations after the coup had worsened, while the Syrian crisis had fuelled the fire around Turkey and Israel. The new foreign policy concept reformulated by Davutoglu at the beginning of 2010 made no achievements in the way of the "zero problem" rhetoric, and after five years it was in reality zero good relations with neighbours. Despite hard criticism and opposition in both sides, normalization was arguably inevitable because as always, national interests were of paramount importance.

The deal specified that Israel pay $20 million towards an indemnity fund for the families of those killed in the *Mavi Marmara* takeover raid. It also allowed Turkey to provide humanitarian assistance to Gaza via Ashdod port. In exchange, Turkish legislation would end any outstanding legal claims against IDF commandos, and Turkey would be obligated to prevent Hamas from preparing attacks against Israel - including fundraising - on Turkish soil. In return Israel would prevent the PKK and Feto (Fetullah Gülen movement, which is considered a terrorist structure in Turkey) terrorist organisations to use its soil.[56] Turkey agreed to build a new power station, a water desalination plant and hospital in Gaza. Five days after the deal on 4 July Turkey sent 11.000 tons in humanitarian aid to Gaza.[57]

While lifting the blockade had been a pre-condition for Turkey, the deal only

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[55] *Halid Meşal'den Türkiye'ye Teşekkür* [Thanks from Halid Mesal to Turkey], in https://www.sabah.com.tr/dunya/2016/06/24/halid-mesalden-turkiyeye-tesekkur (accessed on 14 December 2018).

[56] *Ibid.,* pp. 17-20.

[57] *Türkiye'nin Gazze'ye Yardımları* [Turkey's Aids to Gazza], in https://www.timeturk.com/turkiye-nin-gazze-ye-yardimlari/haber-5436 (accessed on 23 December 2018).

eased Israeli restrictions on the movement of goods and persons to Gaza via Ashdod port, which remained under Israel's strict control. This achievement was poor considering Israel had been allowing the entry of civilian goods into Gaza since June 2010, as a result of international pressure. Though the deal was reached after many hard talks and negotiations, Israel continued to hold its stance against lifting the blockade. The restoration of Turkish-Israeli relations without achieving this key point of contention could be seen as Turkey's abandonment of the Palestine cause. Such a comment has some reasonable grounds; nevertheless, diplomacy is an art of negotiation and the worsening security problems in the periphery combined with national interests forced Turkey to agree to maintain some influence on Israel, which also allowed more humanitarian assistance to Gaza. Another pre-condition for normalization put forward by Turkey was indemnity payments to the families of victims.

The wording of this deal was important because the judicial word "indemnity" should have been used. Instead, the Latin word *"ex gratia"*, meaning "favour", was used. Thus the criticism on deal was that, "in recognition of loss" words are inconvenient *ex gratia* is not indemnity; rather, it is a kind of payment made freely.[58] Other critics focused on the fourth and fifth articles guarding IDF commandos from any kind of lawsuit. Detailed examination of the deal was important because when it was endorsed by the TGNA it would become an act of parliament under Article 90 of Turkish constitutional law. This would make it binding for all official institutions. There were thirty-two lawsuits in Turkey against Israel's raid, two of which (in the Kayseri and Nevsehir courts) found commandos guilty. After the reconciliation agreement was announced in June, Turkey sought to reassure the Palestinians on a number of occasions that the normalization of ties with Israel would not come at their expense, and that it would in fact benefit Gaza. About two weeks after the signing of the reconciliation agreement Turkey faced an unexpected disaster. On 15 July a US-based Feto fraction of the military commandeered tanks, helicopters and fighter jets in an attempt to topple the government. About 257 people were killed during the failed coup attempt.[59] This unfortunate event delayed the full normalization of diplomatic relations.

New ambassadors were also expected to be announced as soon as parliaments ratified the deal. Though the ratification process was complete by the

[58] *Halid Meşal'den Türkiye'ye Teşekkür,* p. 29.

[59] *15 Temmuz'da Türkiye'de Yaşanan Darbe Girişimi Hakkında Basın Açıklaması* [Press Statement on Failed Coup Attempt in Turkey in July 15, 2016], in https://www.ytb.gov.tr/haberler/15-temmuzda-turkiyede-yasanan-darbe-girisimi-hakkinda-basin-aciklamasi (accessed on 14 December 2018).

end of the August, an agreement on appointing the new ambassadors had not been reached even by November 2016.[60] Both sides had been expected to name their ambassadors on the same day and that should have been in July. Another reason for this delay was the three day visit of Mahmut Abbas' to Turkey.[61] The exchange of ambassadors had not been arranged yet the plan had been to extend an invitation from the Turkish Chargé d'Affaires Utkan to Israeli ministers. The invitations to the event were sent out by the Turkish Embassy, rather than by Utkan. This choice froze the diplomatic relations between Israel and Turkey that had only just begun to thaw.[62]

Finally, on 15 November both sides named their ambassadors. The Israeli Ambassador to Turkey, Eitan Na'eh, had served in Israel's embassy in Ankara for a number of years in 1993 after he had served Chicago in 1997 as deputy consul-general. Na'eh was ambassador to Azerbaijan from 2001-2005 and was therefore familiar with Turkish relations. The Turkish ambassador to Israel, Kemal Okem, was a foreign policy adviser to the Turkish Cabinet.[63] Thus diplomatic relations were restored and the future and speed of the rebuilding process had begun to be shaped by ordinary people and the success of the confidence-building process between both nations, particularly in relation to trade and touristic activities.

CONCLUSIONS

Challenges, advantages and disadvantages examined on the selected case study as Israeli take-over raid towards *Mavi Marmara* flotilla. Turkish-Israeli relations, the neutral-active role of Turkey as a peace facilitator, new positioning and re-positioning process of Turkish foreign policy also tackled with. Considering the international and regional dynamics the rupture and rebuilding process of diplomatic relations after the takeover operation, the difficulties and side effects Turkey faced with while maintaining its new foreign policy concept also was analysed.

Turkey, as a middle-sized actor in its region, started to pursue a well-balanced foreign policy to defend its interests in a non-confrontational way to ensure and foster its position in the Middle East. Fragile/failed states in the region collapsed and this instability in the periphery had knock-on effects on Turkey, including trans-border terrorism; immigration concerns; decreased economic

[60] "TC Resmi Gazete" [Republic of Turkey Official Gazette], no. 29818, September 1, 2016, p. 2.
[61] Herb Keinon, *Naming or Envoy to Turkey Postponed Again*, in "Jerusalem Post", October 26, 2016, p. 2.
[62] Greer Fay Cashman, *En Route to Normalization*, in "Jerusalem Post", November 2, 2016, p. 16.
[63] Herb Keinon, *Israel names new ambassador to Turkey*, in "Jerusalem Post", November 16, 2016, p. 1.

activity in crisis areas. Similar problems were faced by Israel. The result of the turbulence in the region was to aid the restoration and normalization of diplomatic relations between Turkey and Israel.

Peace facilitator role could be played without infringing Turkish neutrality. In that case peace facilitation role would ease conflict resolution process in the Middle East. It is possible to say that after 2010 Turkey's partiality in Middle East worsened the case both for Israel and Palestine. A few months later, for reasons which are not entirely reasonable, Israel bombed Gaza and employed the blockade, leaving many Palestinians with no way out and little means for survival. Neutrality became a difficult issue after this event. Contrarily, unbalanced foreign policy approach bears numerous vulnerabilities. Turkey, only secular country in the region could play a vital role for peace building. Neutrality and balanced rhythmic diplomacy were preconditions for such policy. Including Palestinians almost all sides could benefit such policy because the region in grave need for peace-building talks and confidence building measures. Turkey alone, could not solve that decades lasting problem but could ease peace making and at least could persuade parties not to escalate armed conflicts.

The question here that should be answered is whether Turkey's abandonment of Palestine caused a new axial dislocation; or is it only a return to 2007 when Turkey acted as a peace facilitator working to encourage the peaceful coexistence of Israel and Palestinians? A negative answer to this question presents a narrowly focused view of events, because it lacks of focus on historical background. National interests and security risks are always primary factors that help dictate foreign policy, and sometimes due external or internal developments priorities may be changed. Turkey did not abandon the Palestine/Gaza cause but has experienced that it could not solve the problem alone. The development after 2011, eventually forced both Turkish and Israeli decision-makers to ignore their differences and come to an agreement, is to a large extent glossed over after the emergence and failed Arab Spring and finding of gas reserves in the Mediterranean. The experiments proved that as long as challenges are stronger than the capabilities, the newly framed leading foreign policy concept needs major revision to be implemented. The case *Mavi Marmara* and rebuilding process of Turkish-Israeli relations contain clear signs of this argument.

CODRUL COSMINULUI

ISSN: 1224-032X
EISSN: 2067-5860